

Christ Community Covenant Church
A Spirit Filled Life in a Fallen World: Christian Unity and the Cross
Pastor Dave Scherrer - August 21, 2016

What a joy to sing and fellowship and to study together. In this country it is easy to take this privilege for granted. Saudi Arabia, Maldives, Yemen, Somalia – in dozens of other nations Christians risk their lives to gather. Muslims in countries predominantly Islamic often severely persecute public conversions to Christianity. It is not only the convert who suffers but the Islamic family of the convert as well. When we gather together with the intention of worshiping and setting our hearts and minds upon Jesus Christ for this hour, we bring joy to the Father and glory to the Father. He smiles on us and delights in us.

It is for the love of Scripture that I am your pastor.

For the love of Scripture

I love how scripture has changed my life, how it has transformed me. Not that I have attained the prize, but I do press on and I am more like my Savior for the love of scripture. I love that you pay me to study this book. I love how at peace I am when I read the word. I love it when you share with me what you have learned recently in your own personal studies. I invite you to stop me in the hall or to send me an email and tell what you have learned. It will delight me and you and God to testify of the transforming power of this book. Remember how John the disciple called Jesus the word made flesh. This is the word made flesh as well. When we set our minds together on the scriptures, the Word of God, God is revealed to us. The Truth is introduced into our hearts. Last week I told you that we live in a world of lies. The ONLY way to fight back against these lies is to have a steady diet of the truth. ONLY by knowing these truths and using these scriptures as our sword of the spirit (Eph. 6) can we fight back against the liar.

John 8:31-32

³¹ So Jesus said to the Jews who had believed him, “If you abide in my word, you are truly my disciples, ³² and you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free.”

The words found in the letters of Corinthians will help to set us free as a church. They give us a firm foundation by which to live in community as believers. And living in community as believers is often tough. Unity in the church is critical and some churches never have it.

This where we find ourselves this morning; right away in this first letter Paul addresses the first thing on his mind that concerns him about the fledgling church in Corinth; Unity!

How do you know unity when you see it?

Perhaps you heard it said: “If two people totally agree, one of them is unnecessary.” I think I first heard this saying when I was in high school 40 years ago. I can remember thinking that it was clever but wrong. But in the 60’s dissent was a religion in and of itself. Disagreeing was a form of standing out. I still think it’s wrong. As several of us said in your discussion, unity is not so much about agreeing on everything as it is the pursuit of truth in humility with the hope of finding core or fundamental agreement on direction or purpose.

If total agreement between two persons makes one of them unnecessary, then God the Son is unnecessary to God the Father and the fellowship of the Trinity is boring. Not only that, if total agreement between persons is boring, then heaven will be boring, and my perfected fellowship with Christ will be boring, and the camaraderie of like-minded friends in this world is boring, and the sweetest moments of blended minds in marriage are boring. In fact there is a deep sweetness in Christian unity

The Sweetness of Christian Unity

Psalm 133:1-3

Behold, how good and pleasant it is
when brothers dwell in unity!
² It is like the precious oil on the head,
running down on the beard,
on the beard of Aaron,
running down on the collar of his robes!
³ It is like the dew of Hermon,
which falls on the mountains of Zion!
For there the LORD has commanded the blessing,
life forevermore.

And unity in the church is important to Jesus. In his death bed discourse and High Priestly prayer He prayed for 4Cs that Thursday night when he was betrayed.

John 17:20-23 (The Message)

I'm praying not only for them, but also for those who will believe in me because of them and their witness about me. The goal is for all of them to become one heart and mind—
Just as you, Father, are in me and I in you, so they might be one heart and mind with us.
Then the world might believe that you, in fact, sent me. The same glory you gave me, I gave them, so they'll be as unified and together as we are—I in them and you in me.
Then they'll be mature in this oneness, and give the godless world evidence that you've sent me and loved them in the same way you've loved me.

Some theologians see Paul's letter to Corinth broken into two parts; one where he is addressing concerns he heard about from Chloe's people and that continues to chapter 4. Then in Chapter 5 and beyond he is addressing points and questions one by one from that letter – a Q & A format.

So the thing that he simply had to address first was this terrible concern raised by Chloe's friends. It was about broken unity in the church.

1 Corinthians 1:10-17

¹⁰ I appeal to you, brothers, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that all of you agree, and that there be no divisions among you, but that you be united in the same mind and the same judgment. ¹¹ For it has been reported to me by Chloe's people that there is quarreling among you, my brothers.
¹² What I mean is that each one of you says, "I follow Paul," or "I follow Apollos," or "I follow Cephas," or "I follow Christ." ¹³ Is Christ divided? Was Paul crucified for you? Or were you baptized in the name of Paul?
¹⁴ I thank God that I baptized none of you except Crispus and Gaius, ¹⁵ so that no one may say that you were baptized in my name. ¹⁶ (I did baptize also the household of Stephanas. Beyond that, I do not know whether I baptized anyone else.) ¹⁷ For Christ did not send me to baptize but to preach the gospel, and not with words of eloquent wisdom, lest the cross of Christ be emptied of its power.

**1. Identifying the Nature of the Disunity
2. Undermining Disunity and Building Unity**

The Greek word for what Paul is referring to as 'division' in the text is "*Schisma*" from what we get the term schism. *Schisma* is usually used in extra-biblical Greek literature to refer to a tear in fabric. In Mark chapter 2, when Jesus tells the little parable about using new cloth as a patch on an old piece of fabric and when that new cloth shrinks it will cause an even greater schism or tear.

It is important to remember that in the first century, usually only rich people had more than one or two sets of clothes. Working clothes and maybe something used for more polite or public occasions. If you got a tear in the fabric of your clothes, it meant the beginning of the end for that cloth. That was a big deal. So when referring to a tear in the New Testament times, that was actually kinda a big deal. We think very little of it, we may repair it or we may just throw it away, but a schism in the first century meant big troubles.

The nature of this schism or tear in the church of Corinth was that people were bragging and comparing themselves to each other based on who had led them to knowledge of Christ or who had performed the baptism over them. Evidently what is happening in the church at Corinth is that the people were beginning to polarize behind their favorite teacher. They isolated particular qualifications or strengths of their favorite teacher and began to brag about them. They elevated these characteristics to the point where they derived some sense of superiority from claiming this particular teacher as their own. Evidently they were playing one-upmanship with each other. Saying, "I follow Paul," or "I follow Apollos," or "I follow Cephas," or the ultimate put down - "I follow Christ" - was evidence of a divisive status system of social competition kicking into existence in the church. And that was creating disunity. Divisions with then 'insiders' and 'outsiders.' It was the worst possible thing that could happen to a young church.

The nature of disunity is pride. It is not the difference of opinion and this subject is still relevant today as much as it was then. I see broken and torn churches and the collateral damage that happens to young believers especially in these circumstances. People will leave the church forever because of these terrible prideful episodes. Pastors are run out of the church. Sadly too many of these are fueled by prideful pastors - pastors who think that this is 'my church' and then that pride causes terrible things to happen.

[Not at 4Cs! Our history and our current functioning]

Building unity is through God's wisdom and the work of the cross

Power and Weakness – Wisdom and Folly

1 Corinthians 1:18-25

¹⁸ For the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God. ¹⁹ For it is written:

"I will destroy the wisdom of the wise;
the intelligence of the intelligent I will frustrate."

²⁰ Where is the wise person? Where is the teacher of the law? Where is the philosopher of this age? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of the world? ²¹ For since in the wisdom of God the world through its wisdom did not know him, God was pleased through the foolishness of what was preached to save those who believe.

²² Jews demand signs and Greeks look for wisdom, ²³ but we preach Christ crucified: a stumbling block to Jews and foolishness to Gentiles, ²⁴ but to those whom God has called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God. ²⁵ For the foolishness of God is wiser than human wisdom, and the weakness of God is stronger than human strength.

The Cross is the great equalizer. Paul is confronting two great realities of that time. The Greeks were thinkers – wisdom was everything. Philosophy, rhetoric, the university – these were the criteria of wisdom and truth. It didn't really matter what the content was as long as you delivered it with skill and passion. In Corinth was a temple to the goddess of wisdom Sophia. Greeks had little respect for the uneducated masses, the blue collar worker. Jesus would not have held their attention, not because he wasn't intelligent and an amazing teacher, he would never have had the chance, he did have the right credentials to get an audience.

On the other hand the Jews demanded signs. Do you remember the Pharisees and King Herod demanding Jesus to perform on their timetable for their purposes? Jesus showed time and again that he was master of disease, nature, demons and even death. But he would not perform like a circus attraction. He did what was asked of the Father. Jesus was killed and hung on a tree, cursed in the eyes of Jews. He too couldn't get an audience with the Jewish power brokers.

Paul is saying that at the foot of the cross all of us are humble. All of us have fallen short. All of us have sinned and deserve the punishment that the wages of sin earn – death. And in the shadow of the cross none are taller than another. There is no bragging, unless we brag of Jesus Christ and Him crucified. Christ the power of God – Christ the wisdom of God.

Christ Is Not Divided; He Is One Paul Wasn't Crucified for You; Christ Was

You Were Baptized into Christ's Name God Should Get All the Glory, Not Man

Verse 13: "Is Christ divided?" The answer is obviously NO! Soon Paul will tell us in chapter 12 of this letter we are the body of Christ! 1 Corinthians 12:12 says, **"For just as the body is one and has many members, and all the members of the body, though many, are one body, so it is with Christ. For by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body."**

Christ's body is not dismembered. It is whole. If we try to puff ourselves up over the other members of the body it would be a contradiction of Christ. The body is one and every member of the body important and there by design. The fingers on the right hand would be foolish to boast over the fingers on the left hand because their leader is the right wrist and not the left.

Continuing here in verse 13, Paul asks the seemingly foolish question "Was Paul crucified for you?" Of course the answer is that Paul was not crucified for you; Christ was.

Paul is doing something very tactful here: he is zeroing in on the splinter group that made him their hero. Had he attacked the Apollos party first, he would have played right into the hands of the Paul group. So he tries right off the bat to destroy himself as a ground for boasting. "I was not crucified for you! Christ was! And Christ alone!"

Then Paul points out again verse 13: "Were you baptized into the name of Paul?" Answer: NO! You were baptized into the name of Christ! Evidently, one of the boasts of the Paul party was that they had been among the first converts who had actually come to Christ under Paul's preaching. In other words, it's no big deal who baptizes you. The issue is what name was solemnly and prayerfully pronounced over you as you were baptized. Did you identify with Christ at that moment or did you identify with a preacher? You contradict the meaning of your baptism when you brag about the man who put you under the water. He is nothing compared to Christ.

When someone says, "I belong to Paul," and another, "I belong to Apollos," What then is Apollos? What is Paul? Servants through whom you believed, as the Lord assigned to each. I planted, Apollos watered, but God gave the growth. God should get the glory for the results of all ministerial labor, not man.

The wisdom and power of Christ begins and ends with the crucifixion. No one on earth could ever have anticipated God Himself paying the ransom for our sin on the scandalous figure of a cross. Of course it makes sense that only an eternal sacrifice could pay for eternal sins. But God's foolishness shatters our human wisdom like a window in a hurricane. Jesus' power seems impotent against the Jewish authorities who whip him and put a king's robe on him to mock his seeming powerlessness only to discover that on the 3rd day, the power of the resurrection has raised Christ to life. There is nothing on the earth, under the earth or above earth that will not someday bow and say Jesus Christ is King of kings and Lord of Lord's to the Glory of the Father.

The Mystery of the Cross – the Joy of Humanity!

I invite you before the throne. I invite you into the unity of the Church. I invite you into the Glory of the Father.

1 Corinthians 2:6-7

⁶We do, however, speak a message of wisdom among the mature, but not the wisdom of this age or of the rulers of this age, who are coming to nothing. ⁷No, we declare God's wisdom, a mystery that has been hidden and that God destined for our glory before time began.