

1 Corinthians 1:10-17 Preserve Church Harmony Falls Ch. AM 1/7/2024

We expect the water department to have water. We expect a firehouse to not burn down – that the firemen would put out a fire in their own building. We expect our Olympic team to have strong people who enjoy representing the USA.

We expect churches maintain unity and harmony. Not musically, although that is nice. Relational unity and spiritual harmony. It is expected.

It is ironic if the water department runs out of water. It is just as ironic if a church runs out of harmony.

Our Lord Jesus taught in Matthew 12:25, “...*no city or house divided against itself will stand.*”

When did Paul decide to write 1 Corinthians? Perhaps it was when Paul first heard that there were divisions in the church. Perhaps it was at that moment, that Paul knew that Paul had to write to the church this letter of reminder. Harmony was the first topic that Paul brings up in this letter! After Paul got past the traditional opening of the letter, and all the reminders about grace and God’s faithfulness, Paul was ready to bring up the first item in his list of corrections needed in the church in Corinth. First topic? Church Harmony. Paul’s answer?

Christ calls us to preserve church harmony, by the power of His cross.

1. No divisions. (v.10)

Paul comes right out and requests all of the people to agree. Listen to his passionate and loving dive into this topic in verse 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 (or purpose).*”

Paul literally wrote “*I CALL to you...*” That is significant because of how often Paul has already used that word Calling. Back in verse 1, Paul wrote that Paul Himself had been CALLED by God to be an apostle. Verse 2, the church members were CALLED to be saints, or summoned to walk close to God. Verse 2b, the believers in every place were the ones who were to CALL upon the name of our Lord Jesus. Verse 9, all of the Sons of God were CALLED into the fellowship of God’s Son Jesus.

Okay, we see that by using the word calling for the fifth time in ten verses, that Paul was showing them that calling was a theme. What does it mean? Called to do what? In verse 10, they were called to agree.

The opposite of agree was to possess divisions.

Paul was saying the same thing in two ways, both positively and negatively. Positively, everyone agree. Negatively, have no divisions among you.

Divisions is a word for splits, rifts, tears, schisms, or discord. Cliques. Parties. Groups. Factions.

How would a church know whether it has divisions or not? One way to tell

that divisions are being threatened: when quarreling has begun. Thankfully, in Corinth, those quarrels had not yet resulted in divisions. Paul wrote that they had to do something about it. What must they do? Verse 10, God's Word instructs that they had to 'be united.' To 'become united.' Yes, but how? The word itself actually contains within it the instruction for how to do it. The word means literally 'to line back up again.' To align. An excellent English word for this verb is our word 'to arrange.' Paul is saying – O quarreling groups! Arrange yourselves! Adjust yourselves. Prepare yourselves for the good order and full completion of the goal. What is the goal?

Not divisions. But rather the goal is to be mended back into what – or - fitted/arranged back into what? What was it that signaled the reverse of quarrels?

Here it is in verse 10 – in the same mind, and in the same judgment/purpose. Having the same thinking and the same decisions.

The same perspective and the same intentions.

The same disposition of heart, and the same resolve.

How could people who have been torn apart into opposing and arguing parties, come back into that sort of unified arrangement again?

It does not mean they both had to have the same opinion. No! Instead, that we agree to maintain a warm congeniality toward each other that is genuine and heart-felt, even though we do not share the same opinion. That is preserving harmony. That is what Christ, through His apostle, was calling the church to do.

SI – my illustration is hot dogs. I say put ketchup on hot dogs, and mustard and onions and relish. One person in my family says hold the relish. Another says hold relish and the onions. Another says hold the relish onions and mustard – so that is just ketchup only. If you are counting, that is four members of my family, and we have six people. One says Bar-B-Que sauce. The other says plain hot dog, and no bun either. So if on any given Saturday Eileen announces, how about hot dogs for lunch, everyone says yes, and we have harmony. In the church, we don't have to have the same opinion. To demand the same opinion is to cause divisions. Rather, we have the same mind, the same heart. That is, we see ourselves as the family of God, even while we have varying opinions.

Paul already wrote the family unity earlier in verse 10, "...*by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.*"

Paul previously wrote the family unity in verse 9, "...*you were called into the fellowship of God's Son.*"

Paul will write of family unity again in verse 17, by the cross of Christ, and by its power.

Harmony? One mind? Yes, Paul seems to stay on this topic for 2 chapters, because the last verse of chapter 2, "...*we have the mind of Christ!*" Paul was making the point at the end of chapter two that believers are not the ones who hold

together the mind of Christ, but rather it is the mind of Christ that holds us all together!

The mind of Christ. The one unified mind of our Lord Jesus Christ!

Whenever churches experience arguments on their way toward divisions, the first step back towards unity is to ask ourselves and to ask each other – what is the mind of the Lord Jesus Christ on this matter? What does our God say about our debates?

We must be very careful with this first step. If we are divided, and we ask the wrong question, we cause more problems. For example, if a church asks, “Whose side is God on?” that does not help. God is on the side of His children, and we are all God’s children. Instead, appealing to God that both sides would view the situation the way God views the situation is what unites us!

2. No quarrels. (v.11-13a)

Verse 11, “...*it has been reported to me by Chloe's people that there is quarreling among you, my brothers.*”

I have to laugh at the Greek word order – to the English person reading the Greek it sounds like Yoda from the Star Wars movie – STRIFE AMONG YOU THERE IS!

It had begun. Quarreling was already in the church. That was the pathway to divisions.

‘Quarreling’ = rivalries, contention, discord, it is in the plural quarrels. You know, the issues that keep on coming up. Special rivalries exist between the Brewers baseball team and the Cubs. Between the Packers football team and the Bears. Just as predictable in the church are certain issues, certain rivalries.

Paul wrote, “*there is quarreling among you, my brothers.*”

SI – when our children were young and fought with each other, it was the hardest thing for us as parents. I used to say to my sons – I would do anything to protect my daughters. I would stand up to any robber, any enemy, no matter how strong. And when the enemy turns out to be her own brother, a son of mine, it puts me in a bind. I am supposed to protect my son also! So, my sons and my daughters, you are all supposed to stop fighting and adopt my view of things.

One wants this toy, the other wants the same toy. Later in life, same problem - one wants the remote control, and the other wants the remote control.

The parents’ perspective is for us all to be thankful for the home and all the toys in it, and to share like siblings.

The mind of the parent is what unites the house.

The mind of Christ is what unites the body of Christ.

Divisions? Paul has the antidote – be of one mind. Be of Christ’s mind.

It is actually a very serious matter. Quarrels, my brothers?

Paul can hardly believe it is so. How could rivalries develop among your

own brothers and sisters in Christ? Christ is the one who helped us pull down the barrier between Jews and Gentiles! What could possibly come between us now?

Paul went on to explain what Paul meant by quarreling. Verses 12 and into verse 13, “*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.” Is Christ divided? Was Paul crucified for you? ...*”

Paul had been fully informed about the quarrels in Corinth Church. Paul was saying – okay, now let’s get down to the issue why I wrote this letter. The church has created mini-churches, and those mini-churches each have their own favorite person. The irony was that these persons would not want quarrels to start around them. Paul did not want personal followers of Paul. Apollos did not ask for groupies. Cephas (or Peter) did not start up his own splinter group. No one announced the start-up of his own little team of followers.

Paul was a great writer, but apparently not as great of a preacher in person. Apollos was an eloquent preacher, and did not write any circulating books that became books of the Bible. But Paul the great writer and Apollos the great preacher did not see themselves as competitors but rather as teammates. In the same way, Peter was highly respected, and he probably visited the city of Corinth and the church there. All three - Paul, Apollos, and Peter - were fellow workers in the kingdom. All members of the church in Corinth were supposed to be followers of Christ, so what sort of group was that? One that refused to start quarrels.

So, Paul asked questions that addressed this matter of how the quarrels got started in the first place. Verse 13, first question: *Is Christ divided?* Obvious answer: No, of course not. Then how could the people of Christ divide themselves against each other? Apparently, the Corinthians were acting as if Christ had been divided into various groups! Verse 13, second question – Was Paul crucified for you? Obvious answer: no, of course not. So, why ask it? This was a stark question designed to jar them out of their absurd thinking, by showing them the absurd logical misstep of their quarreling. Even those who were acting like groupies and followers of Paul, would have to admit that Paul ought not to be the one that they followed, because Paul was not the one who died on a cross to deliver them from sin. So, it logically follows that no one should say, “I am of Paul.” Rather, everyone agrees to say, “I am of Christ.” What unifies?

This is the way that all quarreling could come to an end. At the cross of Christ. Which brings us to our third point.

3. No disagreements, especially about the basics. (v.13b-17)

Sadly, in the church in Corinth, the very symbols of unity were being used to divide! There ought not to be divisions anywhere, but especially not divisions about signs of agreement! We have three – baptism, preaching, and the cross.

a. baptism unites us!

First is baptism. If we asked the watching world what is the one thing that causes disharmony in the church – some might say baptism! That is sad indeed.

Baptism unites us. Moving on in verse 13, Paul’s next question was, “...were you baptized in the name of Paul?” Answer: No, of course not. Already when the early believers in that day received the sacrament of baptism, they were baptized into the name of the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Spirit of God. Baptism implied that the person being baptized now completely identified with the person into whose name he or she had been baptized. Baptism was an action at one point in time, but it carried significance forward.

I am a fan of Adele’s voice. If you became a fan of Adele, like I am, you now move forward in time remaining a fan of Adele. If there was an Adele fan club meeting, each could say, “I am a fan of Adele.” Next? “Yes, I am a fan of Adele.” Each person must be, to be in the fan club.

By asking this question – were you baptized in the name of Paul, Paul was showing the wrong thinking in the one group whose members each are claiming “I am of Paul.” Next person? Yes, I am of Paul. Each person must be of Paul, to be in the Paul fan club. But it is based on a lie. The truth is that they were baptized into Christ through His death and resurrection. Baptism into Christ was the sign and seal of Corinthian Christians, not baptism into the name of Paul!

You think this is silly talk? Paul spent 3 more verses unpacking this! Verse 14, Paul remarked how thankful he was that he had only baptized a few people, so that this unique group of those actually baptized by Paul could not possibly have become a wide-spread problem. In verse 15, Paul said that no one in Corinth should be able to say that they were baptized by Paul or baptized in Paul’s name. In verse 16, Paul gave the full accounting, best that he could remember at the moment of writing, of those that Paul himself had baptized.

The point was clear – Christ wanted the believers to focus on the Christ who redeemed them, instead of the person who baptized them. Christ wanted them to focus on the Christ who saved them, and not the person who preached to them. Christ wanted them to follow Christ, and not the brightest and best Bible teacher that we they could find to write, to preach, or to shepherd them. So, if you come to a modern church and say that you were baptized by the son of R.C. Sproul, and someone else says that she was baptized by R. C. Sproul himself, we will all turn to those two and say – with all due respect - so what? Because both of those ministers would have baptized you into the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, and both of those men would have wanted you to never mention the human pastor at all. Rather, just say that you were baptized with a Christian baptism. We are all in the church because of Christ being crucified for us, and we are all baptized into Christ, and no one else. Baptism unites us.

b. gospel preaching unites us!

In verse 17, Paul emphasized that Paul was not sent to baptize. Instead, Paul was sent to preach Christ and the gospel of Christ. The central point was not the sacrament of baptism, but rather the message of grace. Baptism included explaining its meaning, and sprinkling with water. Preaching, however, required Paul's vast training by God's providence, his Spirit-filled wisdom, his skills at teaching, his knowledge of the Scriptures. While baptism was a privilege to conduct, it required no training. Preaching was a constant labor of expounding the Scriptures, of calling sinners to repent, to believe, to live and to grow in Christ. Baptism was a one-time action per person, but preaching continued to happen every Sunday in Corinth and around Asia Minor and around the world.

Paul was not denigrating baptism. Paul saw great value in baptism. After all, Christ commanded that we baptize! However, the central calling of Paul was in preaching and proclaiming the cross of Christ. Jesus called disciples to become fishers of men who catch other men through the act of preaching, the foolishness of preaching he will go on to write in the next verse. Preaching brings believers together. All the preachers were saying the same thing – Apollos and Paul and Peter – that preaching unites us by the grace of Christ. It was not the preachers' ability with words. The more clever, the more fancy, the more passionate, the more emotional. No. It was the message itself. It was not in the delivery. Instead it was in the content. Think about it - you could have an amazing delivery, but not get the gospel message! Or, you can have poor delivery, and be encouraged and fed by the gospel content of that message.

How do we know if the preacher's content is right? Aha. Now Paul was getting down to the meat of this letter! They would know if the preacher's content is right, if he preached the power of the cross of Christ!

c. the cross unites us!

This was Paul's last point, his clinching statement at the end of verse 17. The cross has power to unify us. The cross of Christ must not be emptied of its power regarding any divisions, quarrels, disagreements about who baptizes us, about who is preaching for us now. The power resides in the truth that the cross really was a place where Jesus Christ hung for us and died. The power to unite the believers in Corinth was in the simple basic announcing of that truth again and again, Sunday by Sunday.

Conclusion:

When a car is built in an automobile factory, and no one any changes to it, that is called a factory car. The car remains just as it came from the factory. However, if you add something – such as shiny wheels - it is called tricking out the car. You don't need a tricked-out car to ride down the road.

Paul was saying that the gospel is simple, as it came to us from the cross. They didn't need to add stuff to it. If they tricked-out the gospel with fancy

preaching or mini-church groups, or following a certain author or even being united by a group of people all having being baptized by the same person, they eviscerate the gospel. The gospel is simple.

In fact, the gospel must be stated in plain terms, or we empty it of its power.

We were dead. Jesus died for us and rose again. Now we are alive in Him.

Do you know how to preserve church harmony?

Preach like Jesus and His apostles preached – plain and simple.

Preach what Jesus and His apostles preached – the cross.

All we need, is the cross of Christ, and a simple preacher, a factory-parts preacher - to just point us back to that cross. In that is all the power to unite those quarreling, to break down divisions, and to bring together the body of Christ, and to shine the light to a dark generation.

Philippians 2, “(v.5)*Have this mind among yourselves which is yours in Christ Jesus, (v.7)who emptied Himself...(v.8)humbled Himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross. (v.9) Therefore God has highly exalted Him...*”