

July 30, 2017
Sunday Morning Service
Series: Peace in Chaos
Community Baptist Church
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PEACE IN THE BODY OF CHRIST
1 Corinthians 14:33; 2 Corinthians 13:11

God delights to create unity while working through diversity. A simple illustration of that is seen in God's creation of the universe. Consider for a moment the vast array and variations of stars, planets, moons, solar systems, and galaxies in which this tiny earth floats. Then consider also us who live on this planet, and more precisely us in this assembly. No two of us are exactly alike, and yet it is God's plan for us to work together for His glory.

In contrast, Satan and his world demand uniformity. Your world, being under the complete influence of God's enemy, demands that everyone think alike, and generally like the same kind of entertainment, fashion, and gadgetry. One ruler over all religion and over all world government is Satan's dream. His followers often share the same desire of uniformity. It is much easier to control people who are uniform.

And so we are not surprised by the diversity of personalities represented in this group of people we call Community Baptist Church. Obviously, there are a lot of differences in our appearance. But we are also different in our temperaments. Some of you are very active people who like to be moving all the time, who relish an exciting situation. Others are like Pat and me who are quiet people. Two of our daughters-in-law were a bit amused at how quiet we are when they were first introduced to the family. One of them was born and reared in a family where the standard for conversation was simply talk more and talk louder. We are not like that.

That brings us to this very interesting issue about peace that might even generate debate. What constitutes a peaceful family? Would your family prefer a day at Six Flags or a hike along a

mountain stream? Is your idea of a vacation a trip to Mardi Gras or a week on a secluded beach? Would you rather join the crowd at Fall for Greenville or stay home and read a book? Which of these options would you consider to be a peaceful situation?

Now take that debate to the local church. What did God mean when He had Paul write that God is not a God of confusion but of peace? To grasp the difference between confusion and peace we will need to decide what constitutes each of those conditions. Then also, why did God have Paul write that His plan for relationships within the Body of Christ is peace? The idea of peace there is pretty well explained by the preceding goals of *rejoicing, restoration, comfort, and agreement*. All of those traits are the opposite of conflict.

That God desires peace in the local assembly is not debatable. What constitutes that peace might seem to be arguable but actually is not as debatable as it might seem. How to establish and maintain that peace is also pretty clear.

Peace in Worship (1Co 14:33)

The Apostle Paul dealt with a difficult situation in the church in Corinth—a situation not unlike similar conflicts American churches face. On a positive note, the Christians in Corinth were very gifted. As a local church body, it would appear that Christ had given many capacities to the people so they could serve Him. Paul acknowledged this fact when he wrote, *I give thanks to my God always for you because of the grace of God that was given you in Christ Jesus, that in every way you were enriched in him in all speech and all knowledge – even as the testimony about Christ was confirmed among you – so that you are not lacking in any spiritual gift, as you wait for the revealing of our Lord Jesus Christ (1 Corinthians 1:4-7)*.

We really do not know how many different kinds of spiritual gifts there are. In fact, God can invent new ones anytime He chooses. We do know that God the Holy Spirit distributes all manner of capacities to serve Christ as we serve each other. Paul taught in the above context, *Now there are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit; and there are varieties of service, but the same Lord; and there are varieties of activities, but it is the same God who empowers them all in everyone. To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the*

common good (1 Corinthians 12:4-7). Therefore, we also know that the distribution of these abilities is an expression of God's will. *All these are empowered by one and the same Spirit, who apportions to each one individually as he wills. 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 (1 Corinthians 12:11-12).*

Therefore, we must conclude that God had given the individual Christians in the church at Corinth many abilities to minister and serve. Was that odd or unusual? It might be profitable to compare the amazing grace that God has poured out on Community Baptist Church. Many of us have the spiritual capacity for helping others. There is evidence of gifts like mercy, helps, administration, faith, and other abilities that come into view through interpersonal ministry. We have many who are able to teach, preach, and share truth verbally. Ministering in music is a type of speaking gift to encourage or challenge others. Music can also be a special capacity to serve through pleasant melodies that uniquely focus our attention on God. Probably there are many spiritual gifts resident in our community that the owners have not yet identified.

That we or the Christians in Corinth have multiple abilities to serve Christ is not the problem. The attitude that motivates the use of the gifts or that is expressed during the application of the gifts is where the problem came in Corinth. The problem was that the Christians in Corinth were very fleshly. The word "fleshly" does not imply that the Christians were overweight as in the word "fleshy." Rather, the people in the church were setting their minds on the passing things and the desires of the flesh, the natural desires.

Those Christians were on the wrong side of the contrast we studied last week (Romans 8:5-8). *For those who live according to the flesh set their minds on the things of the flesh, but those who live according to the Spirit set their minds on the things of the Spirit (Romans 8:5).* Though they were born again, and though God had graciously given them ability to serve, their thoughts were in line with the sins of the natural unsaved condition.

What did that look like in "church"? We might assume that the people approached the work of ministry with natural sinful attitudes. Maybe when asked to do something for the good of the assembly their first question might be, "What is this going to cost me?" Or they

might wonder, "What can I gain by doing this?" Or "Will this activity make me look important or spiritual or Christlike?" Or, as too often is the case, "I'm the one who needs to be served, not the one who is supposed to serve others."

Suddenly, we should realize how easily the old, sinful characteristics rise up and disrupt our Christlikeness even in opportunities to serve Christ. When traits of the old self infect our service or ministry, there will be conflict, jealousy, envy, disappointment, hurt feelings—all of which often lead to the conclusion, "Okay, then I'll just quit." That kind of chaos has impacted the people and the pastors of most churches throughout history. Chaos in His Body is not the plan the beneficent Christ has for those to whom He has given opportunities and abilities to serve Him. How do we fix the problem?

The solution to the conflicts caused by wrong attitudes in the Lord's work is given in verse thirty-three. *For God is not a God of confusion but of peace. As in all the churches of the saints (1 Corinthians 14:33).* How interesting that the apostle has to remind us what God is like. Maybe if we could learn who and what God is, we who claim to be His people would serve Him differently. The key is to know God, and in knowing God we learn what God is not. Paul reminded us that God is not a God of confusion. That seems self-evident.

The Greek word behind the English word *confusion* means to lead, to conduct, or to lay out a plan that influences someone. It carries the idea of appointing leaders or putting someone in charge so that the organization or group will work smoothly. Jesus used the word when He asked, *"Who then is the faithful and wise servant, whom his master has set over his household, to give them their food at the proper time?" (Matthew 24:45).* God appoints faithful leaders to keep confusion from happening.

In this same way, God revealed His plan for the early church to appoint deacons to take care of important ministry needs in the church. *"Therefore, brothers, pick out from among you seven men of good repute, full of the Spirit and of wisdom, whom we will appoint to this duty" (Acts 6:3).*

Therefore, as we come to know God, we learn that His plan is orderliness which comes from recognizing His appointments, His

organizational chart for the Church, and even life in general. Why does the Bible give us so much information about God appointing governing officials, husbands, parents, and pastors as leaders? The answer to that question is always the same: “So that everyone can live orderly, peaceful lives.” Paul taught that important lesson to Pastor Timothy. *First of all, then, I urge that supplications, prayers, intercessions, and thanksgivings be made for all people, for kings and all who are in high positions, that we may lead a peaceful and quiet life, godly and dignified in every way (1 Timothy 2:1-2).*

Now back to our text where we discover an important truth. In our text the word for appointing leaders who are to maintain order is turned into a negative by adding the prefix, “a.” It means, God does not do things haphazardly, spontaneously, sporadically, or unpredictably. God has a plan and He is working His plan. He is not a God of confusion, because where there is confusion there is no peace.

Positively, we learn here that God is peaceful. Maybe there is a good reason why God repeatedly pictures the Holy Spirit as a peaceful dove and not a flitting hummingbird. If you have ever watched a hummingbird, you might conclude that they are hyper-active as they flit around. Conversely, the soft cooing of a dove should make anyone feel more restful.

Even when the Holy Spirit is pictured as a purifying, burning flame, the response in the people He indwelt was not shouting, jumping, laughing, or rolling around. Rather the recipients clearly declared God’s message of salvation in foreign languages so that each person in that eclectic gathering at Pentecost in Jerusalem heard the Good News in their own language. Orderliness is evident even in the pictures of God the Spirit.

But what about the work of the Holy Spirit in the early church? Miracles had to create a somewhat unpeaceful setting. When God does miracles, the unexpected, it is to arrest people’s attention. Sometimes, according to Bible history, God has done astonishing things like destroying every living creature on earth with a flood. Or there were those miracles of healing and tongues in the founding of the Church. Those were exciting times, but also lead to disruption and chaos as fleshly people tried to misuse and fake miracles.

But the normal operation of God in His Church is peace as opposed to conflict and chaos. It is very difficult for American people to grasp this idea. So much of our culture is about activity, excitement, bright lights, loud music. I notice a trend in some of my grandchildren to be loud. When all nine of them are together, and things get exciting, there is a tendency for a couple of them in particular to scream like they are being hurt. I stopped them one time and asked, “Why do you need to scream?” They replied, “That’s what they do on T.V.” I contend that Hollywood’s plan is for noise, conflict, excitement, and general confusion.

God’s plan in contrast to Hollywood is peace. God desires for there to be no conflicts because of selfish ambition, pride, jealousy, envy. Those were all issues in the church at Corinth, and those issues disrupted the peace God intended for the church.

If we know what God is like, then it is necessary for us to act like God. Knowing that God is not like confusion and that His plan is peace, we should demonstrate that character in our church relationships. That only stands to reason because right attitudes and right actions flow from godly wisdom. James taught, *“Who is wise and understanding among you? By his good conduct let him show his works in the meekness of wisdom. But if you have bitter jealousy and selfish ambition in your hearts, do not boast and be false to the truth. This is not the wisdom that comes down from above, but is earthly, unspiritual, demonic” (James 3:13-15).*

We should be alert to how easy it is to attempt to do “ministry” and “worship” with an attitude of jealousy and selfish ambition. What does that look like? Any attempt to attract attention to self is the very opposite of acting like God. It is an attempt to rob God of His glory. Selfish ambition and jealousy will result in confusion and the destruction of the peace God desires in the assembly.

Acting like God is God’s plan for all churches. Having established the fact that God is a God of peace and not confusion, Paul wrote, *As in all the churches of the saints.* On one hand, we can conclude that this statement expresses God’s “norm” for all local churches. While we are quick to admit that even within God’s norm there is room for diversity, we are also quick to admit that there is no room for confusion and lack of peace.

Having said that, we also need to admit that maybe God's norm for the churches that Paul mentioned here is not about the precise issue of peace and confusion. Maybe this phrase should be attached to an example of what causes confusion and lack of peace. There has for many years been some good discussion about whether this statement should be attached as the standard regarding peace in all the churches or if it should be attached as the standard regarding verse 34: "*As in all the churches of the saints the women should keep silent in the churches. For they are not permitted to speak, but should be in submission, as the Law also says.*" Either way, we still conclude that God desires peace in His church.

Peace in Relationships (2 Corinthians 13:11).

The aim of the instruction in 2 Corinthians is stated thus: *Finally, brothers, rejoice. Aim for restoration, comfort one another, agree with one another, live in peace (2 Corinthians 13:11a).* Notice that this is one command after another and all of the commands are addressed to *brothers*. True, the instruction is good for all people because God desires for everyone to live in peace. That is why God has established governing authorities and requires us to submit to them. That is why God requires His people to pray for rulers. Peace in society is what God desires, but sin-infected people generally do not submit to God's desires.

But thinking especially about God's special people, there is no doubt at all that God desires for us to live in peace. God's plan for peace among His chosen, born again people is not negotiable. That is why this instruction is addressed to "brothers," those who are fellow members of God's family. The instruction that follows will not only be ignored by non-Christians but generally they are incapable of doing what is required.

The question is, "How does God plan for us to maintain peace in the local church?" Generally, God's plan can be stated in these three commands: rejoice, work at your relationships, and work at living in peace.

Rejoice seems easy enough to do. We all like being happy. Right? But finding happiness in external circumstances never lasts, and it is not what God requires of us. True joy and rejoicing requires

determination and discipline, which in and of themselves does not sound very joyful. It is the opposite of what we probably will be if we let go and allow our fleshly nature to be in charge. In other words, if you are satisfied to be what you naturally want to be, you won't be rejoicing. Left to our natural sinful condition, we will be critical, judgmental, angry, arrogant, selfish, complaining, dissatisfied, dismissive, and generally just hard to get along with.

Rejoicing takes work. We must decide it is right because it is God's will. We must determine to think about reasons to rejoice (and God gives us plenty of reasons). We must be watchful to identify when we are not rejoicing. And having said all that, at the same time, rejoicing should not be a difficult goal to achieve for people whose sins Christ has forgiven and in whom the Holy Spirit dwells.

And yes, genuine rejoicing in God will appear out of the norm to most people. I think of Paul and Silas singing hymns in prison at midnight. They were beaten and bruised. They were illegally and unethically thrown in a really bad prison without air conditioning, televisions, game rooms, exercise equipment, plumbing, or good food. But instead of planning on how they were going to sue the authorities in Philippi, they were singing praise to God. Surely the fellow prisoners wondered, "What is wrong with those guys?" They probably wondered what Paul and Silas had been smoking. But Paul and Silas could rejoice in even such terrible physical and emotional circumstances because they had that spring of refreshing water that Jesus promised, springing up within their souls (John 4:14).

In a similar example, we might honestly wonder how Jesus could look forward to the suffering of the cross with joy? *Looking to Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God (Hebrews 12:2).* He trusted our Heavenly Father to complete His promise – and so can we.

Such an eternal focus is likely to result in genuine, deep joy. Not flippancy. Not foolishness. Not denial. Rather, to know God and focus on God the Eternal is to know that God is in control. It is knowing that life and its circumstances are passing away. It is knowing that we are safe and resting in the care of our Heavenly Father. Rejoicing in the knowledge we have about God and His plan will give us reason to rejoice and will establish peace in our hearts.

Second, we discover here three commands that teach us that we must work on relationships. First, it is necessary for us to *aim for restoration*. This command to restore (or more accurately to be restored) indicates that people in the church fall into sin. We need to encourage them to confess their sins to God. We need to embrace them and help them get over the fall, the shame, the tendency to fall again.

Very simply this word means to put back in order. Therefore, it can apply to the need for us to tell sinners the good news of salvation so that the sinner can repent, be saved and put into a right relationship with his or her Creator. It can obviously apply to helping Christians who have allowed sin into their lives, which puts them out of order, which disrupts the peace. But then too, the tense and voice of this verb actually commands each of us to be put back in order, to be made complete. That is a good step toward peace.

Second, peace is found when we *comfort one another*. This command requires that we call others alongside. It can mean that we challenge others to keep the faith, to live a life that honors God by calling them alongside the standard of God's Word. It can also mean that we call others alongside ourselves so that we can speak encouraging words, do encouraging deeds in order to buoy up those who are struggling spiritually. It is obviously the act of getting alongside people who are being tested and helping them to the finish line. Some of the great videos on the internet show runners stopping to help a weakened competitor get across the finish line. That should be the picture of the church. Again, this command requires that all of us be drawn alongside some for help.

Third, peace is maintained in the church when we *agree with one another*. That certainly makes sense. This command is actually two words that literally mean "think the same." Failure to do this is possibly the greatest disruption of peace in the Body of Christ. Most of us are just proud enough and stubborn enough to believe that our opinion is not only right but is the only possible interpretation of truth. Pride keeps us from realizing the difference between preference and doctrine. We can change or at least back off on preferences in order to think alike.

Finally, there is the command for us to live in peace with each other. That means that peace is the result of individuals working to

that end. Peace in this case is absence of strife. The people in the church at Corinth had plenty of strife by nature. They, like us, were commanded to stop it by learning to live in peace. As we have seen, peace is the result of orderliness in life and the church. Peace is the confidence that our brothers and sisters in the church are also God's children. It is something we work at as the writer to the Hebrew Christians taught. *Strive for peace with everyone, and for the holiness without which no one will see the Lord (Hebrews 12:14)*.

The anticipated result of obedience to these commands is that *the God of love and peace will be with you (v.11b)*. God, who is in control, is love and peace. Love is His essential character. Peace is His nature. Those traits ought to be obvious among His people especially when we meet together. When we are doing that, God promised to reside with us. God who is peace and love is not comfortable in the midst of His people feuding. We claim that He is meeting with us today. Then we should also be experiencing peace.

The text clearly teaches that God's plan for His church is peace. He has given us the plan for structure and orderliness to establish that peace. He has commanded us regarding our responsibilities toward each other so that we can enjoy peace. Therefore, we should be able to do a self-analysis to determine if we are enjoying the peace that God prescribes for us. If we are not, then there is work to be done in our lives.