



I want to start this morning by getting you involved a little bit. I want you to weigh in on something. I'm going to put some images on the screens and I want you to tell me who or what you identify with more; one or the other. We'll start with a few easy ones: Giants or A's? PC or Mac? Starbucks or Peets? Manning or Brady? Now let's do a few that have to do our faith: Peter or Paul? Luther or Calvin? Billy Graham or Jerry Falwell? Millbrae (Rob Hall) or Foster City (Mark Mitchell)?

You might wonder why I did that. I did it because I wanted you to see that all of us tend to identify ourselves with certain groups or individuals and we gain a certain amount of identity and value from that. And part of that is we feel whoever we identify ourselves with not only sets us apart but makes us better than others. I think the media is partly to blame for this. The media is constantly holding up people who are well known. We call them celebrities. Let's face it, it's easy to feel like a nobody in a world where well-known people are constantly paraded before us. So the way millions of us satisfy the desire to be somebody is to line up behind someone who **is** somebody. It's like a vicarious ego trip. Teenagers put posters of him or her on their walls. We read all their books, even download all their sermons. We take their classes. We hang out with people who have the same obsession. And of course anyone who isn't on the same bandwagon is generally looked down upon. Now if this kind of thing happens within a community of people the result is the emergence of factions or schisms or splits with each person lining up behind their leader.

Imagine this happening in a church. This kind of thing happens in churches all the time. What might surprise you though is this is nothing new. This was a major problem for the 1st century church at Corinth. Turn with me to 1 Corinthians 1:10-17.

The command against divisions

After a very positive start to this letter where he thanks God for the believers in Corinth and all the grace they've received, Paul goes straight for the proverbial jugular.

Now I exhort you, brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you all agree and that there be no divisions among you, but that you be made complete in the same mind and in the same judgment (v. 10).

Before we look at what he tells them to do, notice the way he does it. He says, **"I exhort you, brethren.."** This isn't a demand

placed upon subordinates, but rather an appeal made to brothers and sisters in Christ. Even as an apostle, Paul refused to throw his weight around. Be careful of Christian leaders who do that. Instead, the weight behind his appeal lies in the name of Jesus. So he says, **"I exhort you, brethren, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ..."** The weight behind this isn't in Paul, but it's in Christ. This appeal is really being made by him.

The appeal he makes is threefold: First, **"that you all agree..."** Literally that means you all say the same thing. Second, **"that there be no divisions among you..."** The word "division" is the Greek word *schismata* from which we get our word schism. Third, **"that you be made complete in the same mind and the same judgment."** That word "made complete" means to "knit together." It was used to describe the mending of fishing nets that are torn. Notice the word "same" is used three times in this one verse: we're to say the same thing and we're to be knit together in the same mind and same judgment.

By the way, this doesn't mean that believers have to agree on everything. It doesn't mean we have to be the same in every aspect of our lives. If we skip ahead to chapter 12 we see Paul says we're a body. Just as a body is one but has different parts that function in different ways, so we're all different yet we're still one. We're not clones. We don't all have to dress the same, or talk the same, or vote the same, or educate our kids the same way. I've been to some churches where it feels like that. They're like clones. And honestly, it's not very attractive; it's just creepy! That's not unity; that's uniformity. It's okay to have different opinions on certain aspects of our faith, it's okay to be the unique "you." You can do all that but still be united in faith with other believers. Remember the saying, "In essentials unity, in nonessentials liberty, in all things charity."

This appeal to unity itself is an essential. Ps 133:1, **"Behold, how good and how pleasant it is for brothers to dwell together in unity!"** What was the last thing on Jesus' mind before he was arrested? We know from the content of his prayer in John 17. He prays to his Father for us and says, **"I have given them the glory that you gave me, that they may be one as we are one: I in them and you in me. May they be brought to complete unity to let the world know that you sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me"** (Jn 17:22-23). It grieves the heart of God and damages our witness in the world when churches are divided and Christians bicker and hold on to deep resentments toward

one another. On the other hand it thrills the heart of God when wrongs are confessed and forgiveness is extended and relationships are restored.

The divisions are based on loyalty to human leaders

The next thing Paul does is explain in more detail how these divisions have come about. Look at verses 11-12.

For I have been informed concerning you, my brethren, by Chloe's people, that there are quarrels among you. Now I mean this, that each one of you is saying, "I am of Paul," and "I of Apollos," and "I of Cephas," and "I of Christ."

We know Paul was in Ephesus when he wrote this letter. It seems that while he was there some folks connected to a woman named Chloe had come to Paul and told him what was going on in Corinth. No one knows exactly who Chloe was. Some say she was a part of the Corinthian church, others say she was part of the Ephesian church, still others say she wasn't a Christian at all. Most scholars believe she was a well-to-do business woman who had agents traveling between Ephesus and Corinth. Some of them were Christians and visited the church in Corinth when they were there. They saw the problems firsthand so when they came to Ephesus on business they told Paul. By the way, as a footnote, be careful what you do with second-hand information. I've come to believe that hearsay is the devil's highway, especially among Christians. So when you hear something from someone about someone else, be careful. Don't overreact. Don't shoot off an e-mail in haste. Make sure you get your facts right. Paul did. When he says "*I have been informed...*" he uses a word that indicates he wasn't left in any doubt about what was going on.

What he heard was there was "quarrels" among them and those quarrels revolved around the particular Christian leader they identified themselves with. And it effected the entire church. He says "*each one of you is saying...*" Each person in the church had lined up behind someone. By the way, this wasn't an indictment of the leader himself. There is no reason to think from this passage that the leaders themselves did anything to encourage this. Paul mentions four leaders. He places himself first on the list. Paul was really the founder of the church at Corinth. Most of the people in that church had heard about Jesus and come to faith through Paul. It's no surprise that some of them said, "I am of Paul."

The second leader he mentions is Apollos. It's likely that most people at Corinth were lined up either behind Paul or Apollos because later in the letter Paul focuses mainly on the two of them. Who was Apollos? Acts 18 tells us he was a Jew who had become a Christian. He was an Alexandrian by birth, meaning he was from Egypt. Acts tells us he was "an eloquent man" who was also "mighty in the Scriptures" and "fervent in spirit." It's interesting

that Alexandria was the home of a great Jewish philosopher by the name of Philo and it's likely that Apollos trained under him. So this was an impressive guy; a brilliant Christian; a highly educated and mesmerizing speaker. So after Paul left Corinth and Apollos showed up and started to teach it's no wonder that some of them said, "Enough of Paul. Have you heard Apollos? Man, that guy can preach. Paul was a lightweight compared to this guy. I just got milk from Paul; Apollos feeds me meat."

But that's not all. A few others said, "I am of Cephas." That's the Aramaic name for Peter. Maybe they thought, "I want to go right back to the source. Peter was one of the very first disciples of Jesus. He walked and talked with Jesus. Jesus himself said to him, 'You are Peter and on this rock I will build my church.' That's good enough for me. You can have Paul. You can have Apollos. I'm going back to the foundation. I'm sticking with Peter."

But the next one's my favorite. "I am of Christ! You can have Paul. You can have Apollos and Peter, but we follow Christ." How do you argue with that? The thing to remember is they all thought they were following Christ, but this group thought they had a corner on Christ. I call these the "spiritual elites." Have you ever known people like this? They don't read books or listen to sermons because Jesus speaks to them—directly. They don't need any teachers; they have Jesus.

Now understand that God has given us both teachers and leaders in the church. Teaching, preaching and leadership are spiritual gifts. The church needs both gifted teachers and gifted leaders. And it's entirely appropriate for you to appreciate those people and support those people and invite them to play-off games and all that kind of stuff. Most of you know I have men who have influenced me greatly: Ray Stedman, Haddon Robinson and others. I'm grateful for these men. I've needed these men. In many ways I imitate these men. But as soon as they become for me a source of pride and a way of separating myself from others, something has gone wrong. As soon as I fail to see that they're just men, then I've crossed a line.

You see, if your Christian identity revolves around a particular individual, what happens if that individual falls? What happens when he has to come in front of the church and resign because he's been unfaithful to his wife, or he's pilfered church funds, or he has a drinking problem? How many young Christians have fallen away from the faith because a leader they deeply admired fell into sin? When you're overly invested in a man not only does that divide you from other believers but it sets you up for a fall because people are people and sooner or later that person will disappoint you.

The solution is to focus on Christ and not on men

There is only One who won't disappoint you. In the next section Paul shows us the solution to this problem is to focus on Christ and not on men. Look at verses 13-17.

Has Christ been divided? Paul was not crucified for you, was he? Or were you baptized in the name of Paul? I thank God that I baptized none of you except Crispus and Gaius, so that no one would say you were baptized in my name. Now I did baptize also the household of Stephanas; beyond that, I do not know whether I baptized any other. For Christ did not send me to baptize, but to preach the gospel, not in cleverness of speech, so that the cross of Christ would not be made void.

Paul says four things here that are the antidote to factionalism.

Christ cannot be divided up

He is one. He's not an apple pie. You can't slice him up into pieces and apportion him out to five or six little groups. He's one and his body is one. Remember, the church is the body of Christ and you can't dismember the body! You can't separate the fingers from the wrist and expect to have anything left of value. Christ is a whole; his body is a whole.

Only Christ was crucified for you

Paul inserts his own name here just so they know he's not any different than any of the other leaders. But Paul is saying there is only one Savior. Some noble man might come along and die for you. That happens. But no one could do what Christ did. No one could allow his own sinless body to be nailed to a tree so that his death was a payment in full for every sin you will ever commit.

You were baptized only into Christ's name

Again, he inserts his own name here but it could have been Apollos or Peter. It was understood back then when you were baptized in someone's name you owed your allegiance to that person. You were becoming their disciple. You were pledging your life to them. When we're baptized we're baptized into the name of Jesus Christ. The problem was the Corinthians were acting like they were baptized into the name of a human leader.

Then Paul goes on and explains this is why he didn't baptize a lot of people. I love how human Paul is about this. He says, "I baptized Crispus and Gaius, that's all. Oh, I also baptized the household of Stephanus. And if I baptized anyone else, I can't remember." I love that about Paul. And I can relate! I must tell you this happens to me all the time. Someone comes up to me and says, "Hi I'm Sally. Remember you baptized me ten years ago in the lagoon." I have no idea who Sally is. This is even happens to me with people I marry and people I bury! It's embarrassing but I'm so glad I'm in good company here! Paul didn't remember either.

Paul took it one step further. He decided he basically wouldn't baptize people because he didn't want people making the mistake of putting him on a pedestal instead of Christ. It obviously doesn't matter to Paul who baptizes you. What matters is your faith in Christ. There isn't anything wrong with Paul or

anyone else baptizing someone. But as a Christian leader Paul won't do anything that might be misinterpreted, especially in a way that makes him the center and not Christ. That's a good example for leaders today. The church would be a lot better off with leaders like that today. Hudson Armerding once wrote, "I'm persuaded that much of the confusion and conflict which besets the Christian church today isn't due to great issues of theology. Instead, it's because brilliant leaders haven't been willing to act with meekness. Instead, they've gained a following and then, to maintain this following, have felt obliged to discredit those who would oppose them."

Don't get this wrong. Baptism is important. Jesus commanded it. It symbolizes to all the watching world that you belong to Christ. But who baptizes you is irrelevant. Last Sunday we baptized about 20 people at our Outdoor Service. I knew I was going to have to teach on this passage so I didn't baptize anyone. Our other pastors—Sandy, Shawn, Ben and Steve—did all the baptizing. We even had some parents get into the water with their kids and do the baptizing. But it doesn't matter. I didn't hear anyone going around saying "I'm better than you. I was baptized by Steve rather than Sandy, or Shawn rather than Ben." It doesn't matter.

The cross of Christ is antithetical to the eloquence of man

Notice the last thing Paul says here. "*For Christ did not send me to baptize, but to preach the gospel, not in cleverness of speech, so that the cross of Christ would not be made void*" (v.17). When he says "*not in cleverness of speech*" he means "not in words of human wisdom." A little background might help. Corinth prided itself on being a center of intellectual life. "Wisdom" was a very important concept to them. You know how in some places like San Francisco you might have a visiting ballet or orchestra or play. And many people go out to see it and many people, especially sophisticated people, will talk about it and compare it with other plays they've heard. In Paul's day, a city like Corinth would do that with visiting intellectual teachers of wisdom, men with a reputation as philosophers. Many of them practiced very skillful rhetoric and they'd be the talk of the town. Many of them traveled from city to city and were very keen on making their own disciples and their followers would often fight over which teacher was the greatest speaker.

This is exactly what the Corinthians were doing with Paul and Apollos. So Paul said, "Listen, I'm not playing that game. I'm not here to baptize; I'm here to preach the gospel. And I will not prance around and try to show off my oratorical skills. Why? Because as soon as I do that, the power of the cross is made void." You see, you can't have both. The cross empties us of ourselves. The cross strips us naked. You can't have the power of the cross and depend on the eloquence of man.

Once again, we need balance here. The Lord gives people the ability to speak and we benefit from that. But when the speaker

begins to depend on and focus on his own skill then the message of the cross will be obscured and its power nullified. So be careful. If you're a speaker, keep it simple and focus on Christ and his cross. It's not about you. It's about him. If you're a listener, don't evaluate your teachers by purely human standards. Does their message bring more attention to Christ or to their own impressive ability to speak?

Conclusion

So there are four antidotes to this problem of rival factions within a church. Did you notice what they all have in common? All of them point us to the centrality of Christ. Christ can't be divided. Christ is the only one who died for you. You were baptized in Christ's name alone. You must not nullify the cross of Christ.

This manuscript represents the bulk of what was preached at CPC. For further detail, please refer to the audio recording of this sermon.