

February 3, 2018 - 1 Corinthians 1:10-17

“The Body of Christ (3): The Appeal of Unity”

Inspired by the Holy Spirit, Paul writes in I Corinthians 1:10, **“I appeal to you, brothers, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that all of you agree with one another so that there may be no divisions among you and that you may be perfectly united in mind and thought.”** The truth of the matter is, in life in general, but especially in the Christian life, we need one another ... we need one another.

About a week or two ago I had a great conversation over the phone with Christine Gilbert. And she has given me permission to share with you an experience she had. One morning Christine was really having a struggle with six-year-old Abby in trying her to get ready to go to school. The struggle went back and forth, until Abby finally blurted out, “I’m staying home with God!”

... A lot of people nowadays are making that decision ... I’m staying home with God ... I’ve had it with people ... I’ve had it with Church ... I believe in God, mind you ... but I don’t need anyone else to have a relationship with God ... it can be just me and God ... I’m staying home with God.

But the truth is, for us to have an authentic life with God, to have a biblical relationship with God ... that necessarily has to be lived out in community. Truth is, we aren’t meant to go it alone. So Paul writes here in vs.10, **“I appeal to you, brothers and sisters, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that all of you agree with one another so that there may be no divisions among you and that you may be perfectly united in mind and thought.”** Like a great quartet, this verse divides beautifully into four parts.

And the first part is simply this: Paul says, **“I appeal to you, brothers and sisters”** Literally, “I appeal to you, *adelphoi* ... I appeal to you brothers...”. “Sisters” is quite obviously implied ... everybody back then understood that *adelphoi* refers to both men and women, boys and girls in the community. But Paul uses a warm term of endearment. He speaks in

terms of *family*. He doesn't speak to them in corporate, business terms, nor in military terms, but in terms of *family ... the family of faith*.

And he's not about to tell them off. He's not about to dress them down. Instead, he writes, "*I appeal to you ...*". Isn't that beautiful? It's not, *I'm telling you ... nor, you listen, and you listen good!* It's simply, *I appeal to you ...*. There is something so winsome, so attractive about the inherent humility of an appeal.

In his great book on servanthood Warren Wiersbe writes, "When in 1650 the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland opposed Oliver Cromwell and declared Charles II their king, Cromwell wrote them a letter of earnest appeal in which he said, among other things, 'I beseech you, in the bowels of Christ, think it possible you may be mistaken.'" To which Wiersbe wisely comments, *Appeal must precede attack if we are to act like Christians*. (W. Wiersbe, *On being a Servant of God*, pg.56)

Too often, even in the church, in our arrogance, we lead with our elbows ... we take a strip off one another ... we throw our weight around. Paul was and is arguably one of history's top five strongest, most influential leaders. And here, he doesn't throw his weight around. He simply writes, *Brothers and sisters, I appeal to you ...*. It reminds me of what he writes to the Thessalonians. In the second chapter of that letter he writes, "**As apostles we could have been a burden to you, but we were gentle among you, like a mother caring for her little children.**" (I Thessalonians 2:7) *I appeal to you ...* I submit we could learn a lot from the gentleness and humility of that approach.

And then, returning back to I Corinthians 1:10, secondly, Paul writes, "... **in the Name of our Lord Jesus Christ ...**" If you are a Christ-follower, if you call yourself a Christian, *everything you and I do is in the Name of our Lord Jesus Christ ... everything*. And by our lives, by our conduct, through our attitudes towards others, we are either *attracting* others to Jesus, or we are *repelling* others from Jesus. Speaking of attitudes, God's Word says in Philippians 2, "**Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus: Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, but made Himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. And being**

found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself and became obedient to death—even death on a Cross!” (Phil. 2:5-8)

Can you imagine? Can you and I imagine the greatness, and yet *the love* of Jesus? He was *and is* God! You're not God! I'm not God! Saw a very disturbing documentary this past week on the Branch Davidians and the massacre in Waco Texas back in '93—David Karesh is not God! But Jesus was *AND HE IS!* Philippians 2 tells us that Jesus was in *very nature God*. And yet, Jesus, in being very nature God, *made Himself nothing, became made in human likeness, and became obedient—not just obedient, but obedient TO DEATH! EVEN DEATH ON A CROSS! WHY? Why would He DO THAT? Have all the riches, all of the glory, all of the wonder of BEING GOD, then give that all up to become obedient, even obedient TO DEATH! WHY WOULD JESUS DO THAT!?! ...* the Bible tells us why: John 3:16. **“For God so loved the world that He gave His only Son** (and Philippians 2 tells us He went willingly, obediently to the Cross) **that whosoever believes in Him will not perish, but will have eternal life.”** Why would He do all that? Because He's God. Because He is in lock step with God the Father's will. ... And He did all that ... being in very nature God ... making Himself nothing ... becoming obedient ... becoming obedient *to death* on a Cross ... because He loves you ... because He loves me ... because He loves the world ... He did it ... all for love.

And it is *in His Name ... in the great, powerful, saving Name of Jesus... that Paul makes his appeal*. Charles Spurgeon was a great preacher of Jesus and His gospel in the nineteenth century. And one of my favorite Charles Spurgeon illustrations involves a friend of his, named Dr. Newman Hall, who wrote a book called *Come to Jesus*. Another preacher wrote a scathing article against Dr. Hall, and when that article gained popularity, Hall wrote an even more blistering letter of protest—I mean, he really let him have it. But before he sent it off, Hall took it to Spurgeon for his opinion. He read it carefully, agreed it was a good letter, and it's target certainly had it coming. “But,” Spurgeon said, “it just lacks one thing. Underneath your signature you ought to write, ‘Author of *Come to Jesus*.’” The two men looked at one another for a moment—and Newman Hall tore the letter to shreds. (source unknown)

Which leads us to our third point, and the main point of this message: Paul makes his appeal. He makes that appeal in the Name of Jesus. And then he writes this: **“... that all of you agree with one another so that there may be no divisions among you... .”** The divisions in the church Paul was writing to, Corinth, were deep, they were entrenched, and they were nasty. We get a taste of those divisions in vs.11-12: **“My brothers, some from Chloe’s household have informed me that there are quarrels among you.”** (And I would like for us to just kind of mentally highlight that word “quarrels”—we’re going to get back to it in a moment or so ... he goes on ...) **... some from Chloe’s household have informed me that there are quarrels among you. What I mean is this: One of you says, ‘I follow Paul’; another says ‘I follow Apollos’; another, ‘I follow Cephas’ (that’s Peter, by the way, Jesus’ second in command in the gospels); still another, ‘I follow Christ.’”**

So what Paul is doing here is that he is now identifying one, two, three, four groups of people who have all broken off into four different factions, four different groups. And in my studies for this message I read all about some of the theories of what each one of these groups were all about—but we haven’t the time to get in to all that. But the point is, the church in Corinth had split off into four different factions, four different groups. Now, someone might say, *Big deal. There was a church split. Church splits happen all the time.*

But here *is* the deal: *It was a big deal to Paul. And it really should be a big deal to us as well!* So Paul goes on to say in vs.13, **“Is Christ divided?** (That’s a rhetorical question, by the way, the answer being, *No, of course not! It’s impossible for Jesus to be divided!* ... Paul goes on ...) **Was Paul crucified for you?** (Again, another rhetorical question, *Of course Paul wasn’t crucified for us, Jesus was, not Paul!*) **Were you baptized into the name of Paul?** (By now you’re getting the gist of things ... that’s *another* rhetorical question!) And then, in vs.14-16 Paul flips and then he flops and then he flips again and he gets all tangled up over who he hasn’t and who he has baptized ... and I think vs.14-16 is there in God’s Word just to encourage preachers, like me, who get confused in their notes and lost in their message.

... but let's just go back to that little word, "quarrels" in vs.11—because it gets to the heart of why church splits and divisions *are* a big deal ... they are a big deal for two reasons:

#1 is the meaning of the word "quarrels" and the generally *bad direction* quarrels and quarrelling takes us. The word translated "quarrels" here in the Greek can also be translated "divisions" or "dissentions". And in another of Paul's letters, in the letter to the Galatians, in Galatians 5 actually, God's Word there lumps "quarrels" or "divisions" with "the works of the flesh". That's not good. Galatians 5 pits "the works of the flesh"—which is not good, it's not the direction you & I should be going in—with "the fruit of the Spirit"—which *is* good, it *is* the direction you and I should be going in. So, we've talked a lot about the fruit of the Spirit in the past—which is, of course, the fruit of the *Holy Spirit*, the fruit of *God's Spirit*. Galatians 5:22-23 tells us, **"But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self control. Against such things there is no law."** That's the fruit of the Holy Spirit. That's the direction we *should* be going in—that's the direction *God wants us to go in*.

The works of the flesh—of which quarrelling or divisions is one of them—is the direction *we should not be going in—that's the direction God does NOT want us to go in!* So in Galatians 5:19-21 says this: **"The acts of the sinful nature** (that can be translated "the works of the flesh"; "the works of the flesh" *are* "the acts of the sinful nature") **are obvious: sexual immorality, impurity and debauchery, idolatry and witchcraft; hatred, discord, jealousy, fits of rage, selfish ambition, dissentions** (if I'm not mistaken, that's our word for the day—it can be translated "divisions" or "quarrels"), **factions and envy; drunkenness, orgies, and the like. I warn you** (still reading from Galatians 5, by the way), **as I did before, that those who live like that will not inherit the kingdom of God."**

Isn't that amazing? Quarrelling or divisions are lumped right into the same list that has stuff like sexual immorality, idolatry and fits of rage. ... See, quarrelling, divisions, ... they may not be a big deal to us ... but they're a big deal to God.

And here's why—which brings us to the second reason divisions are such a big deal—divisions place all the emphasis on human beings, and they take all of the emphasis off of Jesus.

And that actually very naturally takes us into the fourth great part of our text, I Corinthians 1:10. Paul says, you'll remember, **"I appeal to you, brothers and sisters (that was the first part), in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ (that was the second part), that all of you agree with on another so that there may be no divisions among you (that was the third part, and then Paul goes on to write, ...) and that you may be perfectly united in mind and thought."**

Now ... talk about getting lost in a message ... we're on to our fourth part of our beautiful quartet of unity—**"that you may be perfectly united in mind and thought"**—*and*, just for fun, we're *also* continuing to talk about the second great reason why divisions are such a big deal to God since they take all of the emphasis off of Jesus and place it all on human beings. And the *goal* is **"that you may be perfectly united in mind and thought"**—that's the goal, that should be our goal in Christ, that should be one of our key goals as a church—**"that you may be perfectly united in mind and thought"**.

So the question becomes ... how do we reach that goal? How do we reach unity? How *do* we become **"perfectly united in mind and thought"** like Paul is telling the Corinthians they should be and like I believe God's Word is telling us *we* should be? How do you *do* that? *How do we get there?*

I can't *make* you get there. The temptation for a guy like me in my position is to just *lose it*. You know? Just start *yelling*. *You guys should be perfectly united in mind and thought!!!* But ... that wouldn't be making an appeal ... that wouldn't be, I believe, in the Name and the manner of Jesus. I can't *make* you. I can't yell at you. I love you guys. And it's counter-intuitive, anyways. It's like the parent in the supermarket who starts yelling at their kid to be quiet. Ever seen that before? ... *would you JUST BE QUIET!?! ... well, you're not exactly MODELLING that right now to your child, are you?*

You can't *legislate* being *perfectly united in mind and thought*. So how do we get there? I believe our Bible passage this morning provides the answer.

... But before we get to our answer, there is an observation that has to be made. From what I have observed, Parry Sound, and the churches in Parry Sound, *have long been plagued by divisions*. Often, those divisions center around personalities and groups—and at other times those divisions have centered around *style—especially styles of worship*. I could go on and on and name the different personalities and groups and styles ... but you're pretty sharp group of people ... and I think you know what I'm talking about.

... So what's the answer? ... I believe the answer ... the key to achieving real unity, the key to actually being "**perfectly united in thought and heart**" is this: we take all of the emphasis off ourselves, all of the emphasis off of human personalities and styles and we *focus all our energies on Jesus and the Good News found in Him*.

Paul puts it like this in vs.17: "**For Christ did not send me to baptize, but to preach the gospel** (that's the Good News of Jesus, the saving News of God's love poured out for us on and in and through the Cross)—**not with words of human wisdom, lest the cross be emptied of its power.**" Isn't that beautiful? Not only is it beautiful ... I submit that that's the key to achieving perfect unity in thought and heart. "**... to preach the gospel, lest the cross be emptied of its power.**"

What's Paul saying here? He's saying, *It's not about me. It's not about me at all. It's all about Jesus! It's all about that Good News that says that God so loved the world that whosoever believes in Him will not perish, but will have eternal life*. Paul's saying, in effect, *It's not about me. It's not about any merely human personality. It's not about human wisdom at all. It's all about Jesus! If it EVER becomes all about me or ANY OTHER MERELY HUMAN WISDOM THEN THE CROSS OF JESUS IS EMPTIED OF ALL OF ITS POWER! MAY THAT NEVER, EVER BE!!!*

And therein lies the true *wickedness* of divisiveness—it all becomes about me. It all becomes about you. It's all just at this human level ... and the

message of the cross gets emptied of all of its power. May that never, ever happen!

Warren Wiersbe tells of a quotation that he has of Thomas Merton on a small sign he has on wall of his office. And the quotation is this: *To consider persons and events and situations only in the light of their effect upon myself is to live on the doorstep of hell.* (Wiersbe, pg.57)

And do you know what God's Word is telling us here in I Corinthians 1? Don't go there. It isn't all about you. It isn't all about me. It's all about Jesus. It's all about His Good News. I've taken enough time this morning. But please just try this on for size: *We are meant to proclaim the Good News of Jesus in unity and in community ... we need one another to do that faithfully and well ... it's not about me ... it's not about you ... it's not about ANY merely human personality or group or style ... IT IS ALL ABOUT JESUS!*

... And I think we really have a responsibility ... we have a responsibility to so conduct ourselves, to so design and conduct our worship and our programs here at St. Andrews in order to get that message out about Jesus *to as many people as we possibly can. We are meant to proclaim the Good News of Jesus in unity and in community ... and we need one another to do that faithfully and well.* Could that mean changes in program and style of worship down the road? It may well. But it isn't about you. And it isn't about me. It is all about Jesus and getting His saving message out.

Chuck Swindoll put it well when he put it like this: "Our challenge is to stay with the time, to serve our generation, yet in no way alter the truths of His Word. Styles and methods change and must be kept up to date. But truth? It is timeless. Not subject to change ... *We are to be willing to leave the familiar without disturbing the essentials.* To minister effectively the church must wake up to what changes... and what doesn't... The church that sits around frowning at the future, doing little more than polishing yesterday's apples, will become a church lacking in relevance and excitement. At the same time, the church that softens its stand theologically and alters Scripture to fit the future's style, will lose its power." (Quoted in *Tale of the Tardy Ox Cart*, pg.93)