

Division in the Church

1 Cor. 1:10-17

Story: I heard a story this week of a single man who lived next to one of the prestigious churches in his city. He was divorced, struggling to make ends meet and as a result his yard was being neglected. Really neglected.

It was so bad that the pastor of the church called the city to complain. As a result, the city began to fine the man until he cleaned up the yard but due to his work schedule and some health issues he wasn't able to get it done and the fines began to stack up.

It had gotten so bad that it came to the attention of a local charity organization. This group brought together several volunteers and the proper equipment to clean up the man's yard.

They came in on a Tuesday morning with a heavy-duty commercial lawn mower, weed wipers and even one of those cutting machines which clean up the edge of a sidewalk.

They were so busy with equipment, and the wind was blowing the grass and dust around that the pastor of the prestigious church noticed the noise and dust and promptly stormed over to the property to demand they stop the ruckus.

The wise leader of the volunteer group responded to the pastor with a simple question, "Doesn't your church teach that you should love your neighbor?"

At this the pastor stormed back to his office.

Intro: When the church treats someone outside the church this poorly we all see how poorly it reflects the values of the church, but how does it reflect on the church when we treat others in the church poorly? That is what Paul addresses in his letter to the church in Corinth in today's passage.

In a church with many issues Paul selects the first issue he would deal with as being the lack of unity in the Corinthian church.

People fight! The Vikings fight the Packers, friends fight one another, husbands & wives fight, coworkers fight, PTA members fight, politicians fight, businesses fight, cities fight, states fight, nations fight.

All because humanity is depraved, egotistic, and selfish. We are told to look out for number one, which is simply selfishness. At the very heart of sin is the ego.

In 1956 one of the best science fiction movies of all time was released. You may not know, but scifi is my favorite genre of reading and movies.

The movie was Forbidden Planet starring Walter Pidgeon, the beautiful Anne Francis and a very young Leslie Nielsen.

Dr. Morbius, played by Walter Pigeon and his daughter, Altaira, played by Anne Francis, were the only survivors of a scientific mission to the planet Altair IV. All other members of the mission had been killed by some mysterious force.

Commander Adams, played by Leslie Nielsen, and his crew were sent to discover what had happened to the expedition. Here they found Morbius and his discovery of the remains of an ancient civilization, which was far more advanced than humanity.

And just like the mystery of the death of the entire expedition was the mystery of what had happened to the Krell civilization.

OK, plug your ears if you don't want the spoiler. The Krell had invented a machine that could create anything by thought. But they, like humans had an "id", the deep-down buried ego, the sin nature.

The Krell were destroyed by their own hidden desires and when Dr. Morbius used the machine his id destroyed his own expedition who had wanted to leave the planet.

You see, we, just like the Krell, just like Dr Morbius, have an ego that can destroy just like the great machine of Altair IV.

At the heart of sin is our ego.

James 4:1-2, "What causes fights and quarrels among you? Don't they come from your desires that battle within you? 2 You desire but do not have, so you kill. You covet but you

cannot get what you want, so you quarrel and fight. You do not have because you do not ask God."

So, let's turn to 1 Corinthians 1 beginning at verse 10.

1 Corinthians 1:10, "I appeal to you, brothers and sisters, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that all of you agree with one another in what you say and that there be no divisions among you, but that you be perfectly united in mind and thought."

This word, "appeal" that Paul uses has the idea of walking along side in order to help. That is what Paul is doing here in this letter.

Then when he tells them to agree with one another it is a call to not only unity, but a call to doctrinal unity. They, as a church, are called to agree, to believe the same thing. We see this today in the local church by how we congregate together in likeminded bodies of believers.

By this I mean we are an Evangelical Free church. Those simple words have great meaning. Evangelical identifies that we believe that salvation comes by grace alone through Jesus alone. It is the foundation of what we believe. The Free part identifies that each local body of the EFCA is independent in their governance. The EFCA doesn't tell us or give us a list of rules we must use to govern ourselves.

That isn't the only distinctive. For example, since we are Evangelical Free you don't see the practice of what are called

sign gifts in our services like you might see in an Assembly of God church.

That doesn't mean the Assembly of God is wrong, it's simply a difference of style.

Now, Paul is teaching us about divisions here and he uses a word in Greek that is the root for the English word 'schism'. This word literally means 'to tear or rip.' That's what division does.

Rather than being divided, Paul tells them that they should be perfectly united and the concept of what he is saying is similar to the idea of a broken bone being set properly. What has been broken needs to be perfectly realigned, fixed.

The final thought Paul has here is that the perfect alignment is in mind and thought. When we are aligned in mind and thought we can't hold a grudge, can we?

1 Corinthians 1:11-12, "My brothers and sisters, some from Chloe's household have informed me that there are quarrels among you. 12 What I mean is this: One of you says, 'I follow Paul'; another, 'I follow Apollos'; another, 'I follow Cephas'; still another, 'I follow Christ.'"

Paul begins to lay out his argument against the misplaced priorities and values we develop as believers when we turn away from Christ as center.

We see divisions when theological views rival one another as it does with Calvinist and Armenians. Or when we have a

favorite 'famous' pastor. Some prefer Chuck Swindoll while others prefer David Jeremiah.

When our loyalty is for a man or a theology over Christ, we have fallen into the same trap that has the Corinthians.

Now we get to the heart of the matter:

1 Corinthians 1:13, "Is Christ divided? Was Paul crucified for you? Were you baptized in the name of Paul?"

Hang on tight, listen to what Scripture says about our oneness with Christ and one another.

1 Corinthians 6:17, "But whoever is united with the Lord is one with him in spirit."

1 Corinthians 12:12-13, "Just as a body, though one, has many parts, but all its many parts form one body, so it is with Christ. 13 For we were all baptized by one Spirit so as to form one body—whether Jews or Gentiles, slave or free—and we were all given the one Spirit to drink."

Romans 12:5, "so in Christ we, though many, form one body, and each member belongs to all the others."

Ephesians 4:4-6, "There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called to one hope when you were called; 5 one Lord, one faith, one baptism; 6 one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all."

And from Jesus' prayer for His disciples:

John 17:21-22, “that all of them may be one, Father, just as you are in me and I am in you. May they also be in us so that the world may believe that you have sent me. 22 I have given them the glory that you gave me, that they may be one as we are one”

When the church is united, it is so because we as followers of Jesus are following Him. We have yielded our wills and are walking with the Spirit.

This unity reflects the relationship Jesus has with the Father and it's beautiful. When we have this unity, it is a beacon to a lost world.

Unfortunately, when we have division in the church our witness is hurt. We've all seen it, a church splits and it is the talk of the community.

1 Corinthians 1:14-17, “I thank God that I did not baptize any of you except Crispus and Gaius, 15 so no one can say that you were baptized in my name. 16 (Yes, I also baptized the household of Stephanas; beyond that, I don't remember if I baptized anyone else.) 17 For Christ did not send me to baptize, but to preach the gospel—not with wisdom and eloquence, lest the cross of Christ be emptied of its power.”

Ouch, that one must have hurt, “I thank God that I did not baptize any of you...”

There was so much division, so much competition to be the top dog in this church that they were using their own baptisms as some type of advantage in the church.

Last Sunday after service I baptized 4 young adults. Now imagine those 4 coming into church today being told they aren't as good as others who were baptized by Pastor Harvey or by Pastor Fred. This was the level that Corinth had sunk too.

The example that Paul sets for us is that he stayed focused on the mission Jesus gave him. Paul stayed crystal clear on his mission which was to preach the gospel of Jesus Christ.

He preached to the Jew first and also to the Gentile. Over and over, he told people of the saving grace of Jesus and His death burial and resurrection.

When we stay on task for what God has called each one of us, when we walk in the Spirit, when we seek to please our heavenly Father, we will stay united as a body of believers.

We will serve the Lord in truth and unity.