

Division in the Church
Acts 18:1-4; 1 Corinthians 1:10-18; Mark 9:33-37

Dear friends in Christ: Grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Amen

Let us pray -- Prepare our hearts, Lord, to receive your word. Silence in us any voice but your own, that in hearing we may believe, and in believing we may obey your will revealed to us in Jesus Christ. Amen.

In our lessons for today, we see that Paul has made his way to Corinth, which is a wealthy city that is an important city at this time. Paul's mission is to try to bring unity in the beliefs of the people who live there. It states in our lessons that when he got to Corinth, he met a Jewish man and his wife who had just arrived there as well. They had been sent out of Italy as they were Jews and the Jewish people were told to leave Rome. It was also very interesting because both of them were of the same trade as tentmakers. This had to make Paul feel good as he moved to a new town.

Now, not everything was good when Paul went to Corinth. If you remember we mentioned that his mission was to bring the people together in their beliefs. There were two main groups of people in Corinth: Jews and Greeks. So on Sabbath days, he went to the synagogue and began to preach the word of God. There were mixed reactions, some believed what he taught, others were not so convinced. He also realized that not all people believed the same teachings.

In the bible, the words that are used by Paul are "argue" and try to "convince".

God has taught many times throughout the bible that unity in belief by the church body is important. Does that mean that every thought and discussion will be in unity with every person in the church? No. But it does mean that the core beliefs of the church are the same, that God is the Ruler of all, that Jesus Christ was sent to earth to save God's people from the power of sin and that the Holy Spirit remains within us.

Division in any group or organization can bring pain and fighting with minimal chances for resolution. This is what Paul is attempting to stop from happening in Corinth. He is looking to bring the beliefs together of the people so division does not drive them apart. Unfortunately, eventually he leaves without being able to complete what he set out to accomplish.

In our lesson from Corinthians, we hear a statement from Paul where he says: "For Christ did not send me to baptize but to proclaim the gospel" (1 Cor 17 NRSV). This is a powerful statement. So Paul states that he was sent to proclaim (or preach) the gospel. And in a twist he adds: "...and not with eloquent wisdom, so that the cross of Christ might not be emptied of its power" (1 Cor 17 NRSV). Wow, so what does that mean? Paul is stating that although we can proclaim or preach the word of God, we do not have the perfect knowledge and understanding of the word. That we must unite as a body of Christ to learn and believe together. That a single individual cannot, and should not, claim to understand the full meaning and scope of the sacrifice that God made through his Son Jesus Christ.

Going one step further, he notes that he does not want it to empty the Cross of its power. That is an interesting addition to this verse as Paul is stating that if one tries to preach the word in such a way that makes themselves out to be the authority of the word, that it actually takes away from the meaning of the sacrifice on the cross. It empties the cross of its power. God and Christ Jesus are the Power in the Cross, not just the words that are spoken.

In John 3:16, it states: "For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life." (John 3:16 NRSV). The depth of this love and sacrifice is far beyond the comprehension of the human spirit. Paul does not want to preach in such a way that any of his words or actions takes anything away from the true meaning of the sacrifice given on the Cross.

All of our lessons for today have the theme that unity is very important in the teachings of the Savior. Division in the church hurts all who are a part of the body of Christ.

Can you remember a time where there was division in a church that you attended? It could have been over a service that was being planned, or some music that was being chosen, or maybe over a picnic or an event being planned. Pause the sermon for just a minute and think about the situation and then come back Ok. Pause....

Welcome back. Now that you have a situation in mind, consider the feelings of the people in that situation. Was there Anger? Disagreement? Unhappiness? Maybe even some Verbal Fighting? There is a big difference between disagreement and Division. A disagreement is where two or more people must work through some differing opinions to get to a resolution that hopefully can become a Win-Win for all parties. A Division is when differing parties have "Dug in" to their side of the situation and no compromise or agreement is likely to be made.

We should also consider what the body of Christ is. Is it all who believe in Jesus Christ as our Savior and Lord? Does that mean Lutherans, Catholics, Baptists and all the other religious affiliations that center their belief on God and His son Jesus Christ are really one body? This is really what is being taught in these lessons. Those who believe in the Trinity of God, Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit are really one in the body of Christ.

Although there may be differences in the specifics of what is believed, we are really one body of Christ in the core of what we believe. God wants to see union in our beliefs, not divisions that drive a wedge between the people of God.

In our Gospel for today, we heard another form of this same meaning in Mark: [Then they came to Capernaum; and when he was in the house he asked them, "What were you arguing about on the way?" But they kept quiet because on the way they had argued about who was the greatest. Sitting down, Jesus called the Twelve and said, "Anyone who wants to be first must be the very last, and the servant of all." \(Mark 33-35 NRSV\)](#)

In the Gospel, the 12 disciples had been arguing about who was the greatest. This was not pleasing to Jesus, so he sat them down and had a "teaching moment" with them. There are many variations on this statement:

"The first must be the very last and servant of all"

"The first must be last and the last will be first"

"He who wants to be first must be last"

God wants his disciples to understand that much like Jesus, they are to be humble and servants to all. A servant is one who brings others together; much like Paul attempted to do in Corinth. Or what any member of the church body can do when involved in a disagreement. The servant will try to bring a resolution BEFORE a division begins to injure the relationships of the people.

Jesus goes on to say in verses 36-37 [Then he took a little child and put it among them; and taking it in his arms, he said to them, "Whoever welcomes one such child in my name welcomes me, and whoever welcomes me welcomes not me but the one who sent me. "So, the question for you today is: When will you be a servant? Will you be last so others can be first? \(Mark 36-37 NRSV\)](#)

Not sure how we could express this better. Jesus says to his disciples that those who welcome others in His name welcome Him and those who welcome Jesus welcome the father.

The next time you see someone in need (and it does not seem hard to find people in need these days), welcome that person in and share the love of God with them. Be last - so that others can be first. Be selfless and caring in all you meet at this time. Be there for others and be a candle glowing brightly in a time when people NEED a light to follow. Any may God lead you in all of these efforts and support you with His love.

To God be the Glory. Amen.