“A Call to Unity”

1 Corinthians 1:10-17       June 29, 2014

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Introduction:

There is an old hymn written by Joseph C. Ludgate titled “Friendship with Jesus.” In this hymn the refrains sings out the sweetness of being in fellowship with the Savior:

“Friendship with Jesus!
Fellowship divine!
Oh, what blessed, sweet communion!
Jesus is a Friend of mine.”

But, what of our fellowship with one another? How oft have the hands of division ripped away the core foundation of our Christian faith by seeking to tear asunder what Christ has established: fellowship among those who are recognized as being of Him; that blessed, sweet communion with one another?

Unity among the body of believers was so important that Jesus prayed, “That they all may be one; as thou, Father, art in me, and I in thee, that they also may be one in us: that the world may believe that thou hast sent me,” (John 17:21). Jesus knew that if His disciples would ban together as one they could impact the world in a positive way, making many believe in Him. Vice versa, if divisions and
contentions prevailed it would not work to draw people to Himself, to His kingdom message; rather, it would repel.

Even in the Old Testament, David recognized the importance of unity among the brethren. He wrote:

“Behold, how good and how pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity! It is like precious ointment upon the head, that ran down upon the beard, even Aaron’s beard: that went down to the skirts of his garments; As the dew of Hermon, and as the dew that descended upon the mountains of Zion: for there the LORD commanded the blessing, even life for evermore,” (Psalm 133).

In this particular Psalm we see David describe unity as being good and pleasant which would mean the opposite of unity would bring the opposite results: bad and displeasing, either of which one would not want God to describe them as. Rather, in this Psalm we see that unity brings the “blessing” of the Lord.

In today’s lesson Paul received news of great division going on in the Corinthian church. This division was affecting not only their oneness in Christ, but it was making a negative impact on others who watch the dissentions that steadily rise from this congregation. Paul, seeking to nip this problem in the bud, as the founding father of their church, he addresses the congregation about the matter at hand.

1 Corinthians 1:10 “Now I beseech you, brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that ye all speak the same thing, and that there be no divisions among you; but that ye be perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment.”

During his second missionary journey, Paul headed to Corinth to spread the gospel after leaving Athens, Acts 18:1. While there he established a camaraderie Aquila and Priscilla and worked with them being that they were all tentmakers, Acts 18:1-2. And, “He reasoned in the synagogue ever sabbath, and persuaded the Jews and the Greeks,” (Acts 18:4).
Herein the church in Corinth was born and established. But like any organization, church or group, when the leader is absent physically it tends to open the door to intruders to come in and disrupt the flow of things. Though Corinth had many problems to deal with, and Paul will address those later in his letter, here in today’s lesson the division over different factions the people seem to have set up in and of themselves is the controversy Paul is addressing in this portion of his letter to the Corinthians.

Being the church family they are Paul first addresses them as “brethren.” In the verse prior to this Paul reminds them of the faithfulness of God and establishes that they “were called unto the fellowship of his Son Jesus Christ our Lord,” (1 Corinthians 1:9). They were united to God through Jesus Christ and united to one another through that very same bond. They were a “spiritual family” and as such he addressed them as “brethren.”

As a spiritual family, people who share the bond of oneness with Christ and with each other, Paul encourages them to “all speak the same thing, and that there be no divisions among you;” to be unified.

Think about the word division and how we use it in terms of math. It’s just a glorified way to say we are taking away from; of dividing or splitting up a whole into many sections. When a whole is divided it then becomes the opposite of what it originally was. Instead of one strong force it becomes many little ones. While this may be beneficial in assuring that everyone gets an even amount of pie for an after dinner treat, when one does this in an organization such as a church, it can birth dissentions, competitions and the like. Each would be more concerned and focused with his/her section, losing sight of the bigger picture of being beneficial to the whole.

This is what was happening here. They lost sight that they are members of a greater whole and everything they say and do is to be for the purpose of the whole. The whole here is the body of Christ. With that, Paul teaches them that they “be perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment.”
When one thinks about the word “same;” which we see over and over again in this verse, it gives the idea of more than oneness, it really exemplifies that among the body of believers there should be no difference. On matters of their faith, there should be no difference in the way they “speak,” on the way they operate as a “perfectly joined” body or in their “judgment.” Their mindset should be focused on the Christ they serve instead of feeding into things that would seek to bring “divisions.”

1 Corinthians 1:11 “For it hath been declared unto me of you, my brethren, by them which are of the house of Chloe, that there are contentions among you.”

A report had gone out from the “house of Chloe, that there are contentions among you.” In other words, there was no secret that there were problems going on in this church. The arguments or quarrels with one another had become so that someone felt it prudent to bring it to Paul’s attention. If left unchecked the problems would persist disrupting the worship and fellowship among the body of believers in Corinth.

Division is such a deadly thing to the church that’s why it has to be continually dealt with. In Romans 16:17 Paul taught, “Now I beseech you, brethren, mark them which cause divisions and offences contrary to the doctrine which ye have learned; and avoid them.” When you “avoid” them, you “avoid” the division they seek to bring (see also 2 Timothy 2:23 and Titus 3:9-10).

Even Jesus taught, “And if a house be divided against itself, that house cannot stand,” (Mark 3:25). Division takes away support. Once the support of any structure or organization is diminished it no longer has the strength to stand. It will crumble. Paul had to deal with this problem immediately.

1 Corinthians 1:12-13 “Now this I say, that every one of you saith, I am of Paul; and I of Apollos; and I of Cephas; and I of Christ. Is Christ divided? was Paul crucified for you? or were ye baptized in the name of Paul?

Here is the crux of their divisions and arguments: people. Not that the people named caused the division, but each group had their preference of who they
wanted or claimed to follow as their leader and so great dissentions arose amongst the congregation due to this.

“Now this I say, that every one of you saith, I am of Paul; and I of Apollos; and I of Cephas; and I of Christ.” Paul was the great missionary and founding father of the church in Corinth and in many other cities on his missionary journeys.

Apollos is “an eloquent man, and mighty in the scriptures,” (Acts 18:24). He is also known for being “fervent in spirit, he spake and taught diligently the things of the Lord,” (Acts 18:25).

And, of course, Cephas is who we know as Peter. He is the one to whom Jesus said, “Blessed art thou, Simon Bar-jona: for flesh and blood hath not revealed it unto thee, but my Father which is in heaven. And I say also unto thee, That thou art Peter, and upon this rock I will build my church; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it,” (Matthew 16:17-18).

Each faction has pledged their allegiance to one of these leaders. Still another group said, “and I of Christ.” This is where all their allegiances should have been placed without bringing with it a division and in-fighting.

With that, Paul asked a very important question, “Is Christ divided?” All that are in the body of Christ are one and are under one, which is Christ alone. Paul wrote in Ephesians 4:3-6:

“Endeavoring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. There is one body, and one Spirit, even as ye are called in one hope of your calling; One Lord, one faith, one baptism, One God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in you all.”

After approaching the subject of “unity in the Spirit,” in these verses, the word “one” shows up seven times. Oneness in the church cannot be over emphasized enough. “One” exudes the singleness of mind and heart they are to exhibit amongst themselves. Ephesians 4:5 says it best, “One Lord, one faith, one baptism.” There is no division or separation in the “one.”
1 Corinthians 1:14-17 “I thank God that I baptized none of you, but Crispus and Gaius; Lest any should say that I had baptized in mine own name. And I baptized also the household of Stephanas: besides, I know not whether I baptized any other. For Christ sent me not to baptize, but to preach the gospel: not with wisdom of words, lest the cross of Christ should be made of none effect.”

To squash any further disagreements and disputes over this matter, Paul declared, “I thank God that I baptized none of you, but Crispus and Gaius; Lest any should say that I had baptized in mine own name.” He didn’t want anything, including the issue of baptism, to cause dissention in the church. Were some saying he had an ulterior motive? Was there some stating that he baptized people in his name to be a part of his clique? We don’t know. But the issue was real enough for Paul to address it in this manner, and address it he did.

He stated, “For Christ sent me not to baptize, but to preach the gospel.” Simply put, Paul, in his letter, let them know that the gist of his ministry didn’t rest in the realm of baptism. His ministry was focused on preaching the gospel. Maybe this was more important to some, but not to Paul. The heart and soul of the work he was doing for the Lord revolved around spreading The Good News to as many as would hear it. This was his personal purpose.

And, he would not do it for any form or fashion to appease men; “not with wisdom of words, lest the cross of Christ should be made of none effect.” Paul was a highly-educated man who was “yet brought up in this city at the feet of Gamaliel, and taught according to the perfect manner of the law of the fathers,” (Acts 22:3). He was also known for being a world traveler, a man of several languages. He could have boasted in these and in the “wisdom” he had obtained.

Yet, in Philippians 3:8 of all his accolades he states, “Yea doubtless, and I count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord: for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and do count them but dung, that I may win Christ.” The “cross of Christ” and the message it carries is what mattered most to Paul. He didn’t want anything he says or does to contradict or
take away from that primary message making it “of none effect.” Paul was against division just as Christ was.

**Conclusion:**

Anything that brings division in the church hurts the body of Christ.

For more information check out a recent article titled “Why Are We Fighting One Another?” ([www.wordforlifesays.com](http://www.wordforlifesays.com), June 16, 2014).