

St. Luke's Evangelical Lutheran Church -- Watertown, WI
Pastor Mark Gartner
Sermon for Epiphany 3 -- January 24th and 27th, 2008

1 Corinthians 1:10-17

“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. My brothers, 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, “I follow Apollos”; another, “I follow Cephas”; still another, “I follow Christ.”

Is Christ divided? Was Paul crucified for you? Were you baptized into the name of Paul? I am thankful that I did not baptize any of you except Crispus and Gaius, so no one can say that you were baptized into my name. (Yes, I also baptized the household of Stephanas; beyond that, I don’t remember if I baptized anyone else.) For Christ did not send me to baptize, but to preach the gospel—not with words of human wisdom, lest the cross of Christ be emptied of its power.

Dear children who are called and saved by God’s grace alone. Amen

United We Stand. We see it everywhere on banners, bumper stickers, TV, commemorative coins, t-shirts. You and I know what it means. The United States of America is *united* behind a common purpose, defeating terrorism. It is nice to be united, especially after our nation has experienced the divisions of the past ages. America united.

It is inspiring to be united, patriotically. St. Paul calls upon Christians everywhere to be united *spiritually*. He doesn’t beat around the bush. He gets to a difficult issue in only the tenth verse of his letter. Paul is concerned for this troubled congregation in Corinth. And we can learn from his counsel as well. We are to stay away from useless divisions. We are to be of one mind in Christ. We are to agree in Christ’s truth. And sometimes divisions will persist or be caused by those who can’t abide by Christ’s truth, but we want to remember:

Sermon Theme: Be United in Jesus’ Gospel

- 1. It unites us in his love**
- 2. It ends all divisions**
- 3. It shows us true wisdom**

Today’s text is the 2nd in a series of seven consecutive texts taken from 1st Corinthians. Paul’s purpose in writing this letter was to fix the errors that had appeared in this congregation. Paul had spent nearly two years in Corinth. Paul had witnessed firsthand how the gospel was working in the hearts of the Gentile Christians, but he was worried about the future of his friends in Christ and he wanted to point out to them what their errors were and what the truth of God’s Word is. In our text for today, we can see that Paul wanted to point out a very dangerous error. It is the error of making groups or factions inside of a Church. Each group or faction thought that they were better or more enlightened. These groups seemed to be named after some of the great teachers of the early Church, like Paul, Peter, Apollos and Jesus Christ. Instead of being filled with humility and concern for others, they were filled with their own egos and their own ambitions.

As we go through life, we are bombarded with this type of thinking. From the world we live in we are taught from little on that our own goals are more important than the group goals. There is only one way to succeed and that is making sure that you are taking care of yourself first. There are all kinds of

divisions in this world. There are divisions based upon the color of your skin. There are divisions based upon how much money you make. There are divisions based upon what party you want to vote for in the presidential elections. Divisions are all around us and it is also very easy to see that divisions can and do occur even in our church and churches throughout the world. Paul in our text is not concerned with division in the world, rather he is concerned with divisions in our churches.

“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. My brothers, 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, “I follow Apollos”; another, “I follow Cephas”; still another, “I follow Christ.” Is Christ divided? Was Paul crucified for you? Were you baptized into the name of Paul? To understand these words, you need to recognize that Paul is talking to believers who were in the church in Corinth. These were people that Paul knew personally and had instructed in God’s Word. Paul was concerned for the faith of these Christians and he would do anything to make sure that their faith was safe. This meant he would use all the crushing power of God’s Law and all the soothing comfort of God’s Gospel. Paul wanted these fellow Christians to see that there was bigger picture that they needed to see. **“I appeal to you, brothers, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.”** Isn’t that the heart of the issue right there? The name of our Lord Jesus Christ is the thing that needs to bring us all together. The message of Jesus’ death on the cross is the one thing that is important.

What does this exactly mean? It means that Paul was warning them and all Christians to remember what is most important. The most important thing to remember is that the Gospel message of our Lord Jesus Christ is the one thing that never changes. The love of Christ which Paul preached to the people in Corinth and the love of Christ Jesus which we hear week in and week out is the most important thing that we as sinful people need to hear. It doesn’t matter who is preaching it, but rather the message that is being proclaimed. The power is in the word and not the messenger.

St. Paul isn’t one to follow idle gossip. Chloe, in Corinth has informed him that divisions are a problem at the church in Corinth. Factions and cliques were disturbing the unity of the body of Christ. There’s the Paul group, the Apollos group, the group who follows Peter, Cephas. And finally, a fourth group that said, we follow Christ. Rhetorical questions show how ridiculous Paul thinks their divisions are. Is Christ divided? No, Christ is not divided. Was Paul crucified for you? Of course not! Christ was crucified for us all. Or were you baptized in the name of Paul? No. They were baptized into one name, In the name of the Father and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. They were baptized into the one body of Christ.

Paul appeals for unity in the name of Jesus Christ. What is the basis of this unity? He urges them to agree and that there be no divisions among you, but that you be united in the same mind and the same judgment. What does this mean? It means that in searching the Scriptures they have found Christ’s truth, Christ’s mind, Christ’s judgment. That is the basis for their unity. They are to be united in Christ Jesus. Don’t all Christians believe in Jesus? How can you say all Christians aren’t united in Jesus? Good questions. As long as those who wish to be called part of the Body of Christ hold fast to the Jesus we find revealed in the Scriptures, we can rejoice in one another as Christians.

Sadly, some don’t trust the Word, or at least some parts of it. Whatever they don’t like is rejected. Some have different ideas from outside the Scriptures. We all believe in Jesus? O.K, which Jesus? Many deny His physical Resurrection. Many deny His virgin birth. One denomination sees Him as an angry Judge and therefore we must go through His loving mother. A few groups say Jesus is not God. Another group says He is God, but not the same God as the Father or the Holy Spirit. Some claim Jesus grew up in

India and was really Buddhist or Hindu. Others say He made an appearance in the Americas. And let us not forget those who see Jesus merely as a good example, or a good moral teacher. It is one thing to say we all believe in Jesus. It is quite another for all of us to agree to believe in the Jesus presented by the New Testament.

“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.” Contrast this advice to what happens today. The popular reaction is just to agree to disagree, even within some Christian churches and Church bodies. In 1997, the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America made agreements to share pastors and Holy Communion with the United Church of Christ, the Presbyterian Church in the USA, and the Reformed Church in America. Since then, two other similar agreements were reached with the Episcopal Church and the Moravians. Similar discussions are now under way with the United Methodists. An honest reading of each of these documents of agreement show very little agreement at all in Biblical truth. There is instead, Let's just agree to disagree and tolerate all views.

Is this what our Lord or St. Paul had in mind? No. That's because Truth matters! St. Paul has more to share later in this letter, in chapter 11:17-19 **“In the following directives I have no praise for you, for your meetings do more harm than good. In the first place, I hear that when you come together as a church, there are divisions among you, and to some extent I believe it. No doubt there have to be differences among you to show which of you have God's approval.”** Paul appeals for no divisions in chapter one. In chapter 11, he says that there ultimately must be divisions. Paul's words are far from contradictory. He has the same goal, the same purpose in mind as he writes both chapter 1 and chapter 11. In both, he is concerned with unity in the Truth. God recognizes one truth His.

We see this in chapter one as Paul urges them, in the name of Jesus Christ, to agree and be of the same mind and judgment. He says, Agree in Jesus truth and you will all be of the same mind and judgment, Christ's. We see Paul's concern for unity in the truth in chapter eleven when he concedes that there must be factions among you in order that those who are genuine among you may be recognized. He says, you are to be in agreement in Christ's truth. Some, sadly, won't go along. There will be divisions because some will reject truth. You are to remain faithful, holding on to genuine truth.

Two thousand years haven't invalidated this divine counsel. St. Luke's Evangelical Lutheran Church is called to unity in Christ, in Christ's Biblical truth. The Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod is called to unity in Christ, in Christ's Biblical truth. All Christians and denominations that wish to be truly Christian are called to unity in Christ, in Christ's Biblical truth. We are not to be united with those who deny Christ's Biblical truth.

Sadly, there are divisions. Divisions based merely on ethnicity, language, or origin are not to be tolerated. Others are necessary, those that show honest differences in teaching, some holding to genuine truth, others deviating from Christ's Word. Some Christians and so-called Christian denominations reject part or all of what the Bible has to say. That can be helpful for someone who is searching for a church that stands firm on the Scriptures, preaches Christ, centers on the forgiveness of sins, and makes use of all of the beneficial treasures of the history of Christendom. Yes, we are called Lutheran, but we are Christian first. We are Lutheran because Luther restored the focus of the Church about Christ and His forgiveness for you.

Search the Scriptures daily to find such words of comfort. Pray and share your faith with the members of your household. Make time for fellowship with other Christians during the week. Prioritize truth and your hearing of it on Sunday mornings. Become active in a group Bible class during the week.

Divisions are to be healed by agreeing in the truth of the Scriptures. We cannot agree on the truth of the Scriptures if we haven't read and pondered the truth of the Scriptures. It is impossible to say, I follow Jesus if one doesn't know all that Jesus has given us.

‘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.” Is Christ divided? Was Paul crucified for you? Were you baptized into the name of Paul? I am thankful that I did not baptize any of you except Crispus and Gaius, so no one can say that you were baptized into my name. (Yes, I also baptized the household of Stephanas; beyond that, I don't remember if I baptized anyone else.) For Christ did not send me to baptize, but to preach the gospel—not with words of human wisdom, lest the cross of Christ be emptied of its power.’ In these remaining verses of our text St. Paul is not despising or downplaying Holy Baptism. Far from it! By not baptizing, he, the ever-traveling evangelist apostle shows how he is but an instrument, a tool used by God. He didn't want anyone to think he or she was better just because Paul baptized them. He wanted no one to misunderstand. A baptism by one Christian pastor is not superior to that of another Christian pastor. God Himself does the baptizing, using the instrument of the Christian pastor, when he, on behalf of a Christian congregation baptizes with water in the one Triune name: In the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

“For Christ did not send me to baptize, but to preach the gospel—not with words of human wisdom, lest the cross of Christ be emptied of its power.” Based on these words, Paul's call document was undoubtedly different than the one you sent me. In the Office to which you called me, I am to preach and teach the Word, administer the Sacraments according to Christ's institution and mandate, visit the sick and infirm, admonish the erring, and care for the congregation. Paul is doing the work of the Office of the Holy Ministry, but not everything within the Office has been given for him to do.

Paul's example reminds us that all Christian pastors are God's servants, His instruments. A baptism, confirmation, marriage, or communion is not more valid or effective or powerful just because a famous, well-known, or favorite pastor does it. All are tools in the hands of the Almighty. Different men in the Office of the Holy Ministry have different strengths and weaknesses. All pastors are in need of the forgiveness they themselves preach. You were not were not baptized in the name of Pastor Uetzmann, Vomhof, Schultz or Gartner. You were baptized into Christ, In the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Now you are one with us in the body of Christ, united in the faith, waiting for us as individuals and as a congregation to share with them all that Jesus has entrusted to us.

Let us rejoice in our God-given unity in teaching and practice as we receive from the Lord His true gospel message which unites each of us to one another. United *we* stand. Amen.