

## ***LET THERE BE NO DIVISIONS***

Quote: *“Behold, how good and pleasant it is when brothers dwell in unity! 2) It is like the precious oil on the head, running down on the beard, on the beard of Aaron, running down on the collar of his robes! 3) It is like the dew of Hermon, which falls on the mountains of Zion! For there the LORD has commanded the blessing, life forevermore.”* Psalms 133:1-3

*“Behold, how good and pleasant it is when brothers dwell in unity!”*

Our lesson today is going to be on unity; the unity that is to prevail in the church. It is a lesson based on the text found in **1 Corinthians 1**, which in the course of our New Testament Studies, we began this week. Let me again admonish you, if you have yet to really get with us, please join us as we read and study our way through the entire New Testament this year. Thus far we have read and studied the gospel of Luke, the book of Acts, the gospel of Mark, and we have just finished Romans, and are now moving into the book of 1 Corinthians. Even if you haven't yet joined us in this study, I would encourage you to start now. It is not too late to begin and if you do I can assure you that you are going to be richly blessed.

As you begin reading this first epistle to the Corinthians, from Paul's introduction in the first nine verses, you have no idea of the number and complexity of the issues that are going to be coming up in its verses. The church in Corinth was established when Paul went there on his second missionary journey. The city itself was a sprawling metropolitan area, with a bustling seaport, and a city that had earned for itself a reputation for being a very wicked city. Nevertheless, a congregation of the church was established there, and began to flourish. Paul worked with them for about eighteen months, and **Acts 18:8** reports that *“And many of the Corinthians hearing Paul believed and were baptized.”*

Sometime later, after leaving Corinth, and returning to Antioch of Syria, from where he had begun, and also going once again to Jerusalem, Paul began a third mission effort. It was while he was on that trip; during a three year period spent in Ephesus, that Paul began to hear disturbing reports about things that were troubling the church in Corinth. He ends up writing several letters to them, of which we have two. This one that we call First Corinthians was actually his second letter and in it he addresses a number of the things that were threatening the unity and well-being of that church.

Now, as I said, you wouldn't know that from reading Paul's opening thoughts contained in the first nine verses. We do note, however, that Paul begins by reminding them of his call to be an apostle of Christ. Even so, Paul addresses this letter to *“the church of God that is in Corinth.”* From the things that Paul is going to address as this letter unfolds, one has to wonder how it could, in fact, be the church of God, but we can assume that Paul knew the facts of the case and that he was not confused. These are people he can call “saints.” They have been sanctified; that is, they have been made holy by the blood of Jesus, set apart for God's purpose. They are among those who can now be found all over the world who call on the name of the Lord Jesus

Christ. His prayer and hope for them is that they might continue to enjoy God's grace and peace. Paul is thankful for these brethren (verse 4) because of the grace that they have already received, and how that they had already been enriched by the word they had been taught, which was verified among them by the signs that took place in their midst. He is thinking also—verse 7—of the fact that they too are not lacking in any spiritual gift, those miraculous gifts of the Holy Spirit that Paul will have more to say in chapters 12, 13 & 14. They are primed and ready and now just waiting for the second coming of Christ, and he reminds them—verse 9—that God is faithful, the one who called them into the fellowship of His Son. They don't have to worry about Him, whether or not He will do what He has promised.

So, having read all of that, we are hardly prepared for what comes next, and what comes early in this letter. Please, if you have done so already, open your Bibles to **1 Corinthians, chapter 1**, and begin reading with me in **verse 10**.

*10) I appeal to you, brothers, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that all of you agree, and that there be no divisions among you, but that you be united in the same mind and the same judgment. 11) For it has been reported to me by Chloe's people that there is quarreling among you, my brothers. 12) What I mean is that each one of you says, "I follow Paul," or "I follow Apollos," or "I follow Cephas," or "I follow Christ." 13) Is Christ divided? Was Paul crucified for you? Or were you baptized in the name of Paul?*

You can't help but notice how Paul begins to address this matter, which obviously is an urgent matter. Even so, Paul writes, "*I appeal to you brothers.*" Other versions use the word "plead," or "beseech," or "exhort." The point is that Paul does not use his authority as an apostle to command them. From what he has heard, and based on what he experienced while with them in Corinth, Paul knows that this is a matter that must be handled carefully and not roughly.

And so he is appealing to them, and what is it that he is appealing to them to do? He is appealing to them that they might all agree, and *that there be no divisions among* them; but instead, that they might *be united in the same mind and the same judgment*.

Now, is there any doubt in anyone's mind this morning that this is what God wants of all His children, all of the time? No, I'm sure we all would agree that this is what God wants. It is what He wanted in the Corinthian church, and it is what He wants of the church here in Ponca City, and in every place. Why is it that He wants that? Why is it that He insists upon that? Because God is one! That much is clear from the prayer for unity prayed by Christ as recorded in **John 17**. There Christ prayed, "

*"I do not ask for these only, but also for those who will believe in me through their word, 21) that they may all be one, just as you, Father, are in me, and I in you, that they also may be in us, so that the world may believe that you have sent me. 22) The glory that you have given me I have given to them, that they may be one even as we are one, 23) I in them and you in me, that they may become perfectly one, so that the world may know that you sent me and loved them even as you loved me."*

Furthermore, the oneness of God is clearly the basis for the kind of Christian unity, or oneness Paul calls for in **Ephesians 4**. Beginning in **verse 1**, Paul says,

*"I therefore, a prisoner for the Lord, urge you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling to which you have been called, 2) with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love, 3) eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. 4) There is one body and one Spirit--just as you were called to the one hope that belongs to your call-- 5) one Lord, one faith, one baptism, 6) one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all."*

Do you see? DO you understand? Because there is one God, one Lord, and one Spirit, there is but one faith that leads to one baptism that results in people being added to one body and having the same hope.

That's why God did not want any divisions in the church at Corinth, or Jerusalem, or Antioch, or Rome, or in Ponca City.

Well, if that is what God wants, why doesn't He get what He wants, especially from His people? Remember, Paul was writing to the church of God that is in Corinth. These were His people and yet somehow, they were on the verge of destroying the unity of the Spirit. I doubt they knew or understood that. I doubt if that is what they were trying to do, but they were doing it nonetheless. The bond of peace was being shredded.

Paul said, *"For it has been reported to me by Chloe's people that there is quarreling among you, my brothers.* Quarreling! Think about what that word implies for a moment. It implies disagreement, doesn't it? And yet Paul said, *"I want you to all agree."* Some people say that is impossible, and maybe they are right, but if so, why did Paul say that? Why did he tell them that he wanted them to all agree? If I tell my children, I want them to all get along, have I asked something impossible of them? No, they may not do it, but it isn't something impossible.

Quarrelling also implies people being pitted against one another. When a husband and wife are quarrelling, are they working together, or working against each other? Are they building their relationship up, or tearing it down? Do children enjoy watching their parents quarrel? Well, of course not! Do parents enjoy watching their children quarrel? Of course not! No good is going to come from brothers and sisters in Christ being pitted against one another. And Paul said, *"I appeal to your brothers, let's not have any of that!"* Let's not pull apart into little camps, with this group following this person, and another group following someone else.

Sometimes, however, a stand must be taken when there are those who disregard the unity of the body and insist on their own way. I am sure you also noticed in this week's reading what Paul had to say to the Christians in Rome, there in **16:17, 18**. After telling them, *"Greet one another with a holy kiss. All the churches of Christ greet you,"* Paul went on to say:

*"I appeal to you, brothers, to watch out for those who cause divisions and create obstacles contrary to the doctrine that you have been taught; avoid them. 18) For such persons do not serve our Lord Christ, but their own appetites, and by smooth talk and flattery they deceive the hearts of the naive."*

Now, such people as pictured in this passage may or may not be fellow Christians. In some ways it is worse when they are, but either way, Paul makes it clear, "*such persons do not serve our Lord Christ, but their own appetites.*" Understand when this kind of thing is happening, something very evil is occurring. I want you to think about that word, divisions that is found in Romans 16:17. That word is found in this passage and in just one other place in the NT; in **Galatians 5:20**. Do you know what is under consideration in Galatians 5? It is what Paul calls the "*works of the flesh.*" Listen as I read this verse in its context:

*"Now the works of the flesh are evident: sexual immorality, impurity, sensuality, 20) idolatry, sorcery, enmity, strife, jealousy, fits of anger, rivalries, dissensions, divisions, 21) envy, drunkenness, orgies, and things like these. I warn you, as I warned you before, that those who do such things will not inherit the kingdom of God."*

Divisions are not in very good company are they? They are associated with enmity and strife and jealousy, and rivalries, and dissensions. Furthermore, they are in the same category as sexual immorality, drunkenness, orgies and even sorcery! Paul says, those who do such things will not inherit the kingdom of God. God does not hold guiltless those who disturb the unity of His Son's church. In fact, in **1 Corinthians 3:16, 17** Paul says, "*Do you not know that you are God's temple and that God's Spirit dwells in you? 17) If anyone destroys God's temple, God will destroy him. For God's temple is holy, and you are that temple.*"

So yes, there are times when stands must be taken. Elders, especially, are charged with the responsibility to take these stands. In **Acts 20** Paul made that clear to the elders of the church in Ephesus. He said,

*"Pay careful attention to yourselves and to all the flock, in which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to care for the church of God, which he obtained with his own blood. 29) I know that after my departure fierce wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock; 30) and from among your own selves will arise men speaking twisted things, to draw away the disciples after them."*

In another passage, in **Titus 1**, Paul teaches that an elder must have a firm grasp of the truth and this is because there are times when he must "*give instruction in sound doctrine*" and there are times when he must "*rebuke those who contradict it.*" And then he goes on to say, "*For there are many who are insubordinate, empty talkers and deceivers, especially those of the circumcision party. 11) They must be silenced, since they are upsetting whole families by teaching for shameful gain what they ought not to teach.*"

Of course, it is not just the elder's responsibility. It is the responsibility of all those who love God and love the truth of His Word.

Finally, let there be no divisions because those who cause such divisions, and those who give support to those who do, are doing the very thing which the Lord hates. I am sure you remember the words of **Proverbs 6:16-19**. There we are reminded that even under the first covenant, those who caused divisions were guilty of a heinous crime. Solomon wrote:

*There are six things that the LORD hates, seven that are an abomination to him: 17) haughty eyes, a lying tongue, and hands that shed innocent blood, 18) a heart that devises wicked plans, feet that make haste to run to evil, 19) a false witness who breathes out lies, and one who sows discord among brothers.*

It is no wonder then that David said: *"Behold, how good and pleasant it is when brothers dwell in unity!"* And let us not forget, as Paul wrote, that love is what makes unity possible. Peace is its fruit, but love is its glue. **Colossian 3:12-15** says:

*"Put on then, as God's chosen ones, holy and beloved, compassionate hearts, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience, 13) bearing with one another and, if one has a complaint against another, forgiving each other; as the Lord has forgiven you, so you also must forgive. 14) And above all these put on love, which binds everything together in perfect harmony.*

Let there be no divisions, and let those who would cause divisions be forewarned that they will pay a terrible price for their pride and disregard for the body of Christ. Let all envy, and enmity and strife and jealousy, and dissensions and rivalries be forever banned from both our hearts and from our church. Solomon said, *"The beginning of strife is like letting out water, so abandon the quarrel before it breaks out."* Prov. 17:14

Let there be no divisions, and let us live by this rule, as given by Paul in **Colossians 3:15**: *"let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, to which indeed you were called in one body. And be thankful."*

That's the lesson this morning, I trust you found it in harmony with the Word of God, and if not I trust you will bring any deviation to my attention. I also trust that if this lesson has convicted you in any way that you will not simply reject it out of anger, but that you will let the Word of God have its way in your heart and repent of any and every deviation that has manifested itself in your heart or life. We are going to sing a song now to encourage those who might wish to respond to the Word of God. Please come while we stand and sing!