**Unity in Christ**

Based on [1 Corinthians 1:10-18](http://biblia.com/books/esv/1Co1.10-18)

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The central message of Paul’s first Letter to the Corinthians is unity. In the first chapter, Paul confronts the problem straight out…that the church in Corinth is a divided congregation, and teaches them that they shouldn’t be. He teaches them their unity is found in Christ. This is manifest when Christians have unity in what they believe and what they do. It is expressed in having the same ministry and teaching. And unity in Christ is expressed in unity in the cross.

(1) Unity in Christ means having agreement in what they believe and what they do. Paul encourages the Corinthian congregation, “**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.**” Christians are supposed to agree in all things, and if there is disagreement, dissent, rivalries, this is not okay.

Within the church in Christ, it is not okay to “agree to disagree” in doctrine or in practice. Scripture says we are all to agree. And the issues that divided the Corinthian congregation two thousand years ago are the same issues as today. **There were dissentions concerning sexuality and marriage, Food laws, spiritual gifts and the role of women in worship and in the home.** The message of the freedom we have in Christ was abused within the congregation so that people acted as though they could do and believe whatever they want on these and other matters so long as they are all a part of the same church, and contribute to the same offering plate, mouth the same prayers, speak the same liturgy. This is a false, external unity that is not a mark of the true Christian church.

This happens today in many Christian churches, and is embraced as the way the church is supposed to be. Diversity is preached as a value in itself, but that’s not the way we are taught Christ. Between about four-fifty and five hundred years ago, our church, the Evangelical Lutheran Church, was being opposed on all sides. **And so it began to draft and subscribe to confessions, doctrinal writings that expressed the agreement, a unity of mind and judgment in areas of Christian Doctrine.** These are the Symbolical Books of the Lutheran Church, the Lutheran Confession that every LCC Lutheran Church must subscribe to. In 1580, this was compiled into the Book of Concord. Concord means literally “Hearts together” or “With one heart”, because Christ is not divided. If we truly have the same Christ, then we will have the same mind and judgment, the same faith and the same heart.

(2) Second, Unity in Christ is expressed in having the same ministry and teaching. Paul writes, “**For it has been reported to me by Chloe’s people that there is quarreling among you, my brothers. 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.” Is Christ divided? Was Paul crucified for you? Or were you baptized in the name of Paul?**” These are rhetorical questions. The answer is no, none of them were baptized into Paul, and none of them ought to be following anyone but Christ.

The preference of some ministers over others is another area fraught with division in the church. There ought to be no cause to exalt certain ministers over others. But in Corinth, as is sometimes the case today, individuals were forming factions, cliques based on certain personalities. “I follow Paul, I follow Apollo’s, I follow Cephas.” **What’s so wrong with this picture is that Paul, Appollos and Cephas were all equally ministers of Christ, they preached the same message, they served the same Lord**.

The US just experienced a very partisan election and continues to be a divided nation. People gather around their favorite party, fancy themselves conservative or liberal, and rally together against the other in order to gather, gain and exert political influence over the other side.

In the church there are not supposed political parties within the body of Christ, because Christ is not divided. On the cross, his seamless garment was not torn , nor was a single bone bone of his broken. Christ divides people, but not into political parties, but into sheep and goats, and that’s it. He says “**Whoever is not for me is against me; whoever does not gather together, scatters**.” Within the our church body right now, some congregations fancy themselves to be more conservative, others are more liberal. Some use the hymnal, others make up their own worship every week. Some divide the body of Christ into offering different styles of worship at different times “traditional” worship for those who prefer it, others “contemporary.”

To divide the body of Christ based on something as superficial and selfish as “style” is anti-unity and anti-Christ. A good illustration is the family dinner table. **The dinner table is often the one time and place where the family comes together regularly throughout the week.** Mom makes one meal for dinner and the whole family comes and eats it together, even if it’s not everyone’s favorite thing. Can you imagine a family where, each person refused to eat unless what *they* preferred was served? That is not freedom, that is selfishness, holding everyone else hostage to your preferences rather than humbling yourself for the sake of unity.

So too, when people refuse to come to church because their favorite preacher isn’t preaching, or their favourite songs aren’t being sung, that too is selfish and not the way of Christ. No one should say, “**I’m an New Testament Christian, and don’t care for the Old Testament**” because both are equally the word of God and both testify to Christ. Either a church teaches Christ and the whole council of God, or it doesn’t, nothing else matters. For where Christ and all his commands are taught, He is present, the church has all things.

(3) Finally, Unity in Christ is expressed in unity in the cross. Our scripture ends with Paul teaching thusly: “**For Christ sent me to preach the gospel, and not with words of eloquent wisdom, lest the cross of Christ be emptied of its power. For the word of the cross is folly to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved, it is the power of God.**” There is a division within humanity as it stands before the almighty creator, there are those who are perishing, and those who are being saved.

To those who are perishing, the message of Jesus Christ dying for the world in order to forgive sins and give eternal life is foolishness. **And it doesn’t matter how much you try to fitness such a one into faith, they won’t believe, because their hearts are hardened and the cares of the world have choked their spirit and left them blind to the things of God.** But today we are tempted to blame superficial things for the churches decline. If only we had padded pews, a better sound system; if only we had a youth group, if only the music were more upbeat, if the sermon was more entertaining and eloquent…

In the Gospel lesson today, Jesus calls certain disciples saying, “Follow me, and I will make you fishers of men.” What is crucial to remember here is that these men were not bait fishermen. They didn’t catch fish by hiding a hook under bait or with a lure to catch them. They were net fishermen. So when Christ called them to be fishers of men, it was not to lure them into the faith by appealing to their flesh. Rather they were to cast the net of the Gospel and whatever harvest they reap is not because of their clever trickery, lure or temptation, but because of the provision of God who gave his sheep ears to hear, so that when Christ is lifted up in the preaching of Him crucified, he would draw all men to himself (John 12:32).

Nobody denies Christ and ignores their relationship with God because the music wasn’t to their liking, or because the church is too uncomfortable or inconvenient. **People ignore God, and the means of salvation because, to them, the cross is foolish and has no power.** Do not pander to them; pity them and preach Christ.

To us who are being saved, the cross is the power of God. We come to church, and congregate as the body of Christ, not to be entertained or pandered to, but because where two or three are gathered, there Christ is among us. Where his body and blood--killed on the cross and raised in the tomb--are given to us under bread and wine for forgiveness and life at this altar, there we know the power of God, made perfect in our weakness, and manifest in the unity of the church in Christ. “**The cup of blessing that we bless, is it not a participation in the blood of Christ? The bread that we break, is it not a participation in the body of Christ. Because there is one bread, we who are many are one body, for we all partake of the one bread.**” (1 Cor 10:16-17).

Jesus said, “**I am the bread of life; whoever comes to me shall not hunger, and whoever believes in me shall never thirst**.”