

Responding to God in Faithful Living

Series: 1 Corinthians

Text: 1 Corinthians 1:10-17

Message 2 (January 15, 2012)

DIVIDED FELLOWSHIP

Introduction

1. God always intended the church to be a diverse unity. That may at first sound contradictory, but that was His intent. The church is to be one, but represented by every tribe and tongue and nation. Thus there will be cultural differences and racial differences and language differences. There will even be acceptable differences of opinion about certain amoral things.
2. Several months back when we studied the epistle to the Romans we learned that Paul did not expect the strong and the weak Christians to agree on various matters, which in his day included things like meat and drink and the setting apart of special days. But Paul did teach them that regardless of their views on these amoral issues, they were to live for the glory of God and as people of grace even with such disagreements. So when we read 1 Corinthians 1:10 - ***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,*** we should not assume this to mean that everybody must agree about everything in the church. That is not what Paul meant and that is not going to happen.
3. But there was a call to live to the glory of God and that would only happen if the members of the church learned to graciously get along with each other. And that was not happening in the Corinthian church.
4. According to verse 11, Chloe's people were on the first century's equivalent to Facebook and the message got back to Paul that there were problems at the First Church of Corinth! There was quarreling in the assembly and it wasn't pretty. And the tragedy was that it was hindering the witness of the body to adequately declare the glory of God in the Gospel.
5. When believers fight, the Gospel suffers. That is always true. Paul makes it clear that the cross of Christ (which is his way here of describing the Gospel) is the

power of God unto salvation. But when believers are divided, the cross of Christ is emptied of its power. That is not good. Now the power of the Gospel is not actually diminished, but the effect of it is, because division in the body turns off a watching world. They write off the message as without value because the messengers do not appear authentic.

6. What were the reasons behind this spreading problem? We could summarize it in two responses from the Corinthian people toward one another. The first could be stated...

I. “MY TEACHER IS BETTER THAN YOUR TEACHER” (To take a couple of statements from Jesus – out of context – in His teaching on discipleship recorded in Matthew 10, I can illustrate what was happening).

A. “A disciple is not above his teacher”

1. Evidently in the church at Corinth the people were starting to polarize behind their favorite teacher. They considered particular qualifications or strengths of their favorite teacher and began to brag about those characteristics to the point that they developed a sense of superiority by being associated with that teacher.
2. How does that work? If I have been discipled by a certain teacher that is at the top of his/her field or has celebrity status or some special notoriety, and you have been discipled by a teacher who is not as brilliant or recognized or idolized, then I can claim what amounts to a having an arrogant edge over you. My association with my teacher looks better on me than your association with your teacher looks on you! And when such a line is drawn, an ugly division has occurred.
3. Can you imagine this claim to significance? “I follow Paul.” Paul was a big deal. He was well known. He, after all, was the founder of the church at Corinth. He had been the original missionary to them. He had special credentials as an apostle of Christ, though granted he was not one of the original twelve. Others would counter, “But I follow Apollos.” Apollos was a newcomer on the scene. He was a very articulate, growing star in the evangelical movement of the first century. He was the new generation guy. “Paul is just so fifties. Get with it! I follow Apollos!” Others would say, “No, no!

We follow Cephas (Peter). He's the real deal. He walked with Jesus. He has the inside scoop. You can't get closer to Jesus than Peter – and he's our guy!" And then some really pious people come forward from the 5 AM Bible study group and they declare, "Well you all have set your affections far too low looking only at mere humans. We follow Christ!" What is wrong with that? So, is game over? Not quite! Here is Jesus' second statement...

B. "It is enough for a disciple to be like his teacher"

1. The issue is not about what they were learning or how they were growing – what God was doing in their lives. The issue was how all of this looked on them. If I am a disciple of the number one teacher, then that looks really good on me. And in the end that is what this was all about for the Corinthians.
2. Believers have long struggled with pride and humility – pride in terms of putting it aside and humility in terms of maintaining it. Remember that even Jesus' disciples were caught arguing over who was greatest in the kingdom – and that in the shadow of Jesus washing their feet and dying for their sin!
3. Even the ones here in our text that claimed to follow Christ were doing so in an effort to one up the others. Anytime I try to establish my superiority over another person, regardless of the claim, I am going to create division and strife. It matters more about what you are learning and how you are growing than with whom you know or with whom you are associated. And as if "My teacher is better than your teacher" was not enough, "My experience is better than your experience" is added to the argument!

II. **"MY EXPERIENCE IS BETTER THAN YOUR EXPERIENCE"** - The issue Paul uses here to make his point is baptism. *(Is Christ divided? Was Paul crucified for you? Or were you baptized in the name of Paul? I thank God that I baptized none of you except Crispus and Gaius, so that no one may say that you were baptized in my name. (I did baptize also the household of Stephanas. Beyond that, I do not know whether I baptized anyone else). For Christ did not send me to baptize but to preach the gospel, and not with words of eloquent wisdom, lest the cross of Christ be emptied of its power).*

A. What the experience of baptism was to be

1. The experience of many of us growing up included an altar call at the

conclusion of almost every service. The "invitation" was to answer the call of God and come forward to receive Christ. It was sometimes unclear whether we were going to the altar to receive Christ or whether we were going as a testimony or public confession or profession of our faith in Christ, but that was the experience for many of you.

2. I have no plans this morning to argue the merits and demerits of such a system, but I will say that the Bible does reveal God's intention for a public declaration of faith in Christ. It was not in coming forward, but in baptism.
3. Baptism was and is a big deal. It was a way to proclaim publicly one's allegiance to Christ. To be baptized was to show identification with Christ in His death, burial and resurrection. It is a picture of the Gospel. We are declaring among other things death to the old way of life and possession of a brand new life in Christ. We are illustrating our need of cleansing from sin and the washing of God's forgiveness in granting to us new life. Baptism was practiced in the early church and involved both Jewish and Gentile converts. One who is saved ought to acknowledge Christ in this way. If you are saved, you ought to be baptized!
4. There are various views of baptism. There are differences of opinion concerning the mode of baptism – sprinkling, pouring and immersion. Some baptize once backwards. The seminary I attended practiced baptism three times forward (once for each member of the Trinity). Presbyterians and Methodists and others practice infant baptism. Some see this as in some way cleansing from original sin (the Roman Catholic view). Others see baptism as a covenant sign applied to an infant to be accepted by that child later in life. Some see baptism as exclusively for believers – that is baptism is to follow conversion. That is our tradition. Some, I believe erroneously, heretically, believe that baptism is a necessary element of salvation. In other words, if you are not baptized, you are not saved regardless of your faith in Christ. Salvation doesn't take until you get in the water.
5. Paul was not saying that baptism was of no particular value. He was reacting to what it had become. This important ordinance of the church had developed into a divisive issue.

B. What the experience of baptism had become

1. Just like the teacher issue, “I follow Paul...” we have here the “I was baptized by...” issue. And like the first issue, this had become a matter of spiritual pride. It is amazing how we take spiritual issues and turn them into carnal challenges.
2. I have baptized a couple of people in Israel in the Jordan River. Does that make those two people more special than those who have been baptized in the Lakeview baptistery? Does that give Jordan River people opportunity to boast? Perhaps you were baptized by Billy Graham or John MacArthur or Charles Stanley or some other well-known, well-respected pastor or evangelist. Are you a cut above the rest? And some of you poor people were baptized here by me! There is no claim to fame in that! I was baptized by the Rev. Charles DeHaven in a river in south central Indiana. Does that allow me more reason to brag because I was baptized in a river and not an indoor baptistery? Nathan Moser baptized one of the young people (Colleen Harlan) in a lake at winter retreat. Does she win the prize for “really showing her allegiance to Christ? It is not about the experience!
3. Paul quit baptizing people, not because it was unimportant, but so that this would not become a potential issue for division. He simply had his associates baptize those who had trusted Christ. “I thank God that I baptized none of you...” That is an amazing statement! Again, it was not because baptism was unimportant. It was because people were using it as an opportunity to cause disunity in the body.
4. Instead of rejoicing in the wonder of God's glorious salvation, there was arguing and “one-upping” on the experience of baptism. Christ no longer was the object of joy and rejoicing. The focus was on the experience – not the reality of what the experience was to show.

Conclusion

1. Paul tried hard not to do anything that would take attention away from the Lord Jesus Christ and from the power of the cross (1:17). I assume that he discovered early in his ministry that when he baptized his own converts, they were tempted to boast about the experience. So he left almost all the baptizing for his associates in order to direct attention away from himself and toward Christ.

2. Verse 17 is very important. When our salvation is about the teachers involved in the communication of the message or the personal experience of the one who has trusted Christ, the power of the Gospel, the power of the cross is neutralized. Sometimes when we hear the testimonies of those who have trusted Christ, the storyline is not the wonder of God's grace, but in the experience of the person, usually prior to coming to faith. That which was intended to bless and encourage may detract from the Lord and lead to division in the church. John MacArthur writes, "Spirituality produces humility and unity; carnality produces pride and division. The only cure for quarreling and division is renewed spirituality."
3. If we are struggling with this, it is time to confess our pride and ask God to give us grace that we might grow up in Him. I read earlier in the service Philippians 2:1-18. Listen to that again.
4. We have more to consider before we get to the end of the chapter, but Paul's final words of chapter 1 are, "Let the one who boasts, boast in the Lord." Regardless of your teachers or your experience, if you are boasting in the Lord and regardless of my teachers and my experience, if I am boasting in the Lord, we are on the same page and God gets the glory and we are walking together! And in the end, that is what this is all about!