

INTRODUCTION - UNITY AND THE HOLY SPIRIT

Psalm 133 speaks of the beauty of unity, in its brief 3 verses.

***Psalm 133** Behold, how good and how pleasant it is for brothers to dwell together in unity! It is like the precious oil upon the head, coming down upon the beard, even Aaron's beard, coming down upon the edge of his robes. It is like the dew of Hermon coming down upon the mountains of Zion; for there the Lord commanded the blessing – life forever.*

Here unity is pictured both as oil flowing down the high priests' head upon his beard, and as dew falling upon Mount Hermon where life was promised. Both oil and flowing water have always been Biblical symbols for the Holy Spirit and the unity He brings. Thus, the Holy Spirit flowing through the open and willing channels of human lives is the key to Biblical unity.

Every church I have ever attended has either claimed unity or prayed for it to come upon its people. Unity is a precious blessing for any church, but an elusive one, just as elusive as the flowing of the Holy Spirit through its people. It can rightly be said that where the Holy Spirit is flowing there is unity, and where there is resistance to His flowing there is disunity.

Many of us grew up in church singing a little chorus written in 1973 by Stephen Adams entitled “Where the Spirit of the Lord Is.” If you know it, sing it with me.

*Where the Spirit of the Lord is there is peace
Where the Spirit of the Lord is there is love
There is comfort in life's darkest hour, there is light and life,
There is help and power in the Spirit, in the Spirit of the Lord*

Now you might say this chorus speaks of the Spirit bringing peace, love, light, life, help and power, but not unity. But I would point out that unity is the “shalom” of God – the “shalom,” or peace, that Israel has prayed for incessantly for centuries but has never attained in any sense of fullness. It is that oneness with God that is only possible when the Holy Spirit comes to both dwell in and flow through a believer in Christ as Savior and Lord.

The “dwelling in” part happens at the moment of salvation, when a seeker comes to understand his or her need for a new start and receives the balm of Jesus as Savior in the receiving of spiritual life. The “flowing through” part happens when that believer allows Jesus to be Lord and yields to the Spirit within rather than to self. The “dwelling in” of the Spirit never changes, for the believer is ever a child of God. But the “flowing through” of the Spirit can come and go as the believer yields to the leading of the Spirit. And when a church – leadership and congregation - is yielding to the leading of the Spirit there is blessed unity. And when a church is not yielding, there comes disunity and troubles such as the Corinthian church experienced which led the apostle Paul to write his letter of correction, which we know as 1 Corinthians.

OUR TEXT

1 Corinthians 1:10-17 *Now I exhort you, brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you all agree and that there be no divisions among you, but that you be made complete in the same mind and in the same judgment. For I have been informed concerning you, my brethren, by Chloe's people, that there are quarrels among you. Now I mean this, that each one of you is saying, "I am of Paul," and "I of Apollos," and "I of Cephas," and "I of Christ."*

Has Christ been divided? Paul was not crucified for you, was he? 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 would say you were baptized in my name. Now I did baptize also the household of Stephanas; beyond that, I do not know whether I baptized any other. For Christ did not send me to baptize, but to preach the gospel, not in cleverness of speech, so that the cross of Christ would not be made void.

THE WISDOM OF UNITY

Here will be our simple outline as we work our way through the teaching of this Scripture:

1. THE APPEAL FOR UNITY
2. THE BARRIER TO UNITY
3. THE ENTRY TO UNITY

THE APPEAL FOR UNITY (v. 10)

Paul has opened the letter with a wise encouragement, as we saw last week. Now he is ready to gently but firmly rebuke and correct. He begins "now I exhort." To exhort is "to strongly encourage or urge someone to do something," according to the dictionary. And what Paul is strongly encouraging the Corinthians to is UNITY. Note the 7-fold appeal.

1. To "brothers" or members of a family
2. To those who claim the name of the Lord Jesus Christ
3. For all to "agree"
4. For there to be "no divisions"
5. That all be "made complete"
6. That all have "the same mind"
7. That all be "in the same judgment"

On the personal and emotional level Paul appeals to them as brothers, or members of a family unit. How often we like to refer to ourselves at Oaks as a "family." God is our Father and we His children, therefore "family" is an appropriate designation, and a motivation to strive to live together in unity. We are bound by the same blood of Jesus' sacrifice flowing through our spiritual veins. And we are bound by the choice we have made to "know, grow and go" together under the vision of this specific church body.

Furthermore, we all claim the name of Jesus Christ as our Lord – the motivating factor of our lives. This too should bind us. When world views collide, divisions occur. But

when world views coincide, specifically the Lordship of Jesus, unity is far more probable.

To “agree” with “no divisions” and “the same mind” is not meant to say that we become “cookie cutter” robots with no differing opinions. Though we all have the same Spirit, He flows through our individual personalities. Our differing gifts, talents, inclinations and personalities actually make us stronger. It is in the working together with our different strengths that our ability to produce for God is greater than the sum of our individual parts – the very definition of synergy. “Agreeing” is working together for a common goal.

When Paul uses the appeal of being “made complete” he uses the same language of Colossians 2:10.

Colossians 2:10 *And in Him [Jesus Christ] you have been made complete, and He is the head over all rule and authority.*

From this verse we see that Paul’s understanding of being “made complete” was understanding that Christ was the head of all, including the church, worthy of all rule and authority. Therefore, the one giving Christ all authority would be one in unity with another who was giving Christ that same authority. Paul is teaching that the mutual authority of Christ should bind believers in unity.

Lastly, I comment on Paul’s appeal to the “same judgment.” Is Paul expecting all Spirit-led, “complete in Christ” Christians to always come to the same conclusions? I think not, otherwise all dissenting votes should be judged as coming from the devil to divide the unity. Rather, it makes sense that he is appealing to all to support and uphold the decision of the majority and of the leadership once decision is made.

Can you imagine how our US Congress would function if they followed this approach? We might actually have positive movement in our legislature and approval ratings of Congress rise to new heights!

THE BARRIER TO UNITY (v. 11-16)

As we can clearly see, the Corinthians church was besieged by factions. Verse 7 says that Paul received this information about quarreling factions second hand, from “Chloe” and “her people.” Now Paul was writing from Ephesus where there apparently was a Chloe (a woman’s name) – very possibly a business woman of some kind – who had “people” – very possible servants, or slaves - who had possibly journeyed to Corinth on her behalf and experienced firsthand the quarreling of the Corinthian church, reporting back to Chloe, who reported to Paul. Paul’s appeal to Chloe as a source implied that the Corinthians would have respected her opinion and assessment of the problem.

As application, we might infer that when we have only second-hand information we should (1) be sure that our source is highly credible and (2) that our source would be respected by the one to whom we report that source. This must have been the case with Paul and Chloe.

In verse 12 note the four factions mentioned: those who were (1) “of Paul”, (2) “of Apollos” and (3) “of Cephas” (Jewish name for Peter) and (4) “of Christ.” First note that the last of those might not have been a faction at all, as the Greek wording would equally allow for a translation of “but I of Christ” which would make it Paul’s statement

of rebuke that he was of the non-faction of Christ, as they all should have been.

But assuming that there were these four factions, what might they have amounted to?

1. Paul, always appealing to the spiritual freedom by grace in Christ, and as messenger to the Gentiles, might well have inspired Gentile Corinthians to wrongly appeal to their spiritual freedom allowing them to act as they pleased.
2. Apollos, as an “eloquent man,” “mighty in the Scriptures” and “fervent in Spirit” – as Acts 18:24-25 describes him - might have appealed to the intellectual Corinthian who wanted more philosophy and excellence of preaching, thinking himself to be more learned than others.
3. Cephas (Peter), as a long time Jew with a strong ministry to the Jews might have appealed to the Corinthian who wanted more law and order in religion, following the traditions of Judaism.
4. Followers of Christ might have been those who considered themselves as “fundamental followers” of the true faith, perhaps legalistic and convinced of their superiority spiritually.

Of course, we don't know this for sure from the text, but it is a reasonable supposition. Either way, the Corinthians were following after their own human preferences rather than after Jesus. Causes can become our “surrogate savior” or the “patron” of our affections.

We become fierce evangelists for political parties, diets, methods of parenting and education, etc. These things give us a sense of identity and purpose insofar as they make us different than or distinct from other people. Our patron-based identities necessarily build walls that destroy the shalom that we are seeking.
Stephen Um, from “1 Corinthians, The Word of the Cross”

Our identity must come from our attachment to Jesus, and not from a favorite preference, activity or cause. And this is just as important in a church. Our identity must not come from our ministry, our talent, our length of church service or from our spiritual maturity, lest we too become part of a divisive spirit within the church. When our identity is rooted alone in our relationship with Christ, we are sure to be a part of the unifying spirit within the church.

THE ENTRY TO UNITY (v. 17)

Finally, note the important message of verse 17 where Paul reveals his two emphases in preaching:

1. the gospel – the good news of Jesus death and resurrection to restore people's relationship to God through faith by grace alone

John 3:16 *For God so loved the world that he gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish, but have eternal life.*

2. the cross – the critical point in history when Jesus became the Savior for all who would receive

2 Corinthians 5:21 *He [the Father] made Him [Jesus the Son] who knew no sin to be sin on our behalf, so that we might become the righteousness of God in Him.*

I call these emphases on the gospel and the cross as the entry to unity. When one has

these as focus of life, the Holy Spirit is set free to flow and cause the shalom of God – the unity of believers.

Behold, how good and how pleasant it is for brothers to dwell together in unity! And how wise! Amen!