

Christ Reformation Church

Tillamook, Oregon

You Must be Born Again!

“The habit of preachers today is to address their people as though they were all Christians and just need instruction...men and women are being treated as saved who never knew they were lost.”

www.sermonaudio.com/crc

www.unholycharade.com (blog)

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One Lord, One Faith, One Baptism – Paul’s First Epistle to the Corinthians

*Part 4 - When is Separation Right
and When is it Sinful?*

March 3, 2024

Sermon Text: 1 Cor 1:10-17

Scripture Reading: Ephesians
4:1-16

I believe in God, the Father
Almighty,
Maker of heaven and earth.

And in Jesus Christ,
His only begotten Son, our Lord;
who was conceived by the Holy

Spirit,
born of the Virgin Mary,
suffered under Pontius Pilate,
was crucified, died, and was
buried.
He descended into hell.
On the third day he rose from the
dead;
He ascended into heaven,
and sits at the right hand of God
the Father Almighty;
from there he shall come again to
judge the living and the dead.

I believe in the Holy Spirit,
the holy catholic church,
the communion of saints,
the forgiveness of sins,
the resurrection of the body,
and the life everlasting.
AMEN.

.....

1Co 1:10-17 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? (14) I thank God that I baptized none of you except Crispus and Gaius, (15) so that no one may say that you were baptized in my name. (16) (I did baptize also the household of Stephanas. Beyond that, I do not know whether I baptized anyone else.) (17) 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.

Our text this morning is one in which the Apostle Paul is dealing with a great evil which is far too common in the church. It had already raised its ugly head at Corinth where Paul had spent *18 months* among them preaching and teaching and establishing them soundly in the faith. And yet, he receives this report of a sad state of affairs. There was division. A party spirit. And, as we saw last time, its root was one of this terrible matter of *pride*.

This entire letter and even his subsequent letter (2 Corinthians) is largely written to expose and correct this sin of pride which was so prevalent among the Corinthian believers. It characterized the world culture there at Corinth and these Corinthian believers were "acting like mere men" rather than like the new creatures in Christ who they were.

(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."

What was this thing? Well, it was the sin of arrogantly and selfishly *dividing over personalities*. It was a kind of identification with a chosen celebrity – does that sound all too familiar for our own day? Some said “Paul is the one. He had that amazing experience on the road to Damascus. He is the one who came here to Corinth and brought us the gospel. We prefer him.”

Other said, “No, no, no. Paul isn’t even impressive in his personal appearance or oratory. Now, take Apollos! There is a man who can preach! He’s the one for us.”

Still others pointed to Peter. “He’s the Rock, you know. He was personally with Jesus. We prefer him.”

And then there was that curious other group. “We follow Christ.” That sounds commendable, but given the fact that Paul lists them with these other groups and does so in a critical way, we can conclude that these “Christ only followers” were also guilty of this division.

You have it today – people who are red-letter Bible edition people. Only the words of Jesus for us!”

And so there was this terrible division and pride and self and the seeds of forming 4 little churches. Such a thing is the work of the devil and it neutralizes the effectiveness of our witness for Christ to this world:

Joh 17:20-21 “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.**

The preservation of this unity which the Holy Spirit produces among Christ’s people requires *humility and love*:

Eph 4:1-3 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.

But this terrible thing – this *pride* had infected the Corinthians as it threatens to infect us today. There was division instead of unity and the Church’s witness to the world is always greatly harmed.

“Why should we listen to you Christians? You can’t even agree among yourselves. Look at all the scores of different brands of churches and the arguing and separation seen in them all.”

Little wonder then that Satan pours so much of his energy into promoting this pride and its result division. “Schism” is another word for all of this.

Sometimes We Must Separate

Now, before we proceed in considering this matter of *sinful schism* which is so sadly common among Christians, we must carefully consider *when separation is necessary and when remaining*

joined is sin.

Listen once more to the Lord Jesus’ statement in His high priestly prayer:

Joh 17:20-22 “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,

These words of our Lord have been and continue to be either misunderstood or outright sinfully twisted in their meaning. I believe I have told you how a liberal pastor cited this very passage once when I told him I would not participate with him in a joint ministry he was proposing. He told me I was disobeying Jesus’ words that “*they may all be one.*” But he was a false Christian. He denied that the Bible was the inerrant Word of God (and as a result if I had investigated him

further I would have found that he rejected other vital doctrines of Scripture).

But clearly, Jesus did not mean here that we are to join forces with everyone who claims to be a Christian. Jesus rebuked several of the 7 churches of Asia for not putting certain false teachers out of the church and He commended others for doing so.

No, it is *the unity of the Spirit, the oneness Jesus was praying for is "that they may be one even as we (Father and Son and Spirit) are one."* This is not a unity produced by everyone who claims to be a Christian banding together with no regard to sound doctrine and creating "unity." No, it is a oneness which is the body of Christ. A unity produced by the Lord, not by us. A unity which is *spiritual and a living, organic oneness as the 3 Persons of the trinity are one.*

This true unity, this bond as members of one body, exists wherever real Christians are and it is a unity in which the fundamental doctrines of the gospel are believed

and preached.

Martyn Lloyd-Jones has two great sermons on this subject which you can listen to at the online mlj-trust, entitled "Schism." They are part of his series on spiritual warfare in his Ephesians 6:10-13 sermons. (The print copy of those 2 sermons do not appear in the Ephesians sermons 8-volume set, but they are available in audio to listen to at the mlj-trust).

In those messages, and I believe in the two previous ones in that series, he emphasizes that the two times *we must separate and failure to do so would be sinful*, is in respect to *heresy and apostasy*.

- Heresy – a false gospel. False doctrine. Denial of the fundamentals of the Christian faith. Liberalism and its denial of anything supernatural such as Christ's resurrection, is an example.
- Apostasy – a falling away from the truth. In ways this is more deceiving than heresy because it is exercised by

people who once appeared to be sound in the faith, but now they have drifted away.

These are things we must separate from and to do so is NOT to be schismatic. The Romans Catholics are always quick to accuse Protestants of being guilty of sinful schism because at the Reformation the Reformers separated from Rome. But clearly it is Rome who is guilty of schism because her gospel is a false gospel and she is a false church.

We will not join with people who claim to be Christians who, for example,

- Deny the historicity of the early chapters of Genesis. They deny the account of the creation and of the Fall and of the flood. We will not work with them. They are not Christians.
- Deny the substitutionary atonement doctrine of the Cross.
- Believe that abortion, the murder of babies, is a right

and good thing

- Teach that a one-world globalism is something every Christian and every local church must be striving for.

These things and more are outright denials of God's Word and we maintain that anyone who embraces and promotes them is a counterfeit Christian. We will not join with them nor let them join with us.

There, then, it is clear. Separation from heresy and apostasy is commanded by God and to refuse to separate from it is a great sin.

2Jn 1:10-11 If anyone comes to you and does not bring this teaching, do not receive him into your house or give him any greeting, (11) for whoever greets him takes part in his wicked works.

Let's turn now to the schism which had infected Corinth and which is a sinful separation which we must always be on guard against.

Sinful Schism and Separation

What is *sinful schism*. Well, simply put, it is division or separation between *genuine believers* when there is no valid, biblical grounds for that separation. It is rooted in a sinful mindset – a prideful arrogance which promotes oneself and one’s own position on what is often called “matters indifferent.” Let’s consider some examples – sadly, they are not difficult to think of:

“The controversy over the correct date for Easter began in Early Christianity as early as the 2nd century AD. Discussion and disagreement over the best method of computing the date of Easter Sunday has been ongoing ever since and remains unresolved. Different Christian denominations continue to celebrate Easter on different dates, with Eastern and Western Christian churches being a notable example.” [Wikipedia]

This is sin. For Christians to separate over the calculation of the date of Easter – is sin.

NOTE: In these cases we must carefully note that when we say “Church” we are speaking of the visible church which does not consist necessarily of genuine, regenerate believers.

What are more sadly typical issues in which professing Christians are guilty of sinful schism?

- Differing opinions regarding particular Bible translations. There are local churches and denominations which insist that the King James Bible is the only true Bible, the rest being corrupted by ungodly translators. Such groups often separate over this issue. They regard Christians who use another translation to be “liberal” and unbelieving. I have run into these kind of people more than once.

- Differing conclusions about eschatology. Premillennial, Postmillennial, Amillennial. And Christians have so often been guilty of schism in this regard. This is sin. To come to different positions is not sin – but to separate as a result is.

I appreciated Lloyd-Jones putting it this way – *separation from one another over matters that cannot be proven with certainty is sin.*

As confident that we might be that the amillennial position concerning Christ's return which most Reformed Christians hold, *we cannot prove it with certainty. It is our conclusion from Scripture and we believe we are correct, but we cannot prove it.* Neither can the Pre- or Post- position be proven.

- Then as we have mentioned before, there is this matter of the practice of baptism. Immersion. Sprinkling. Believers only or believers and their children?

Once more, the ordinance of baptism is another issue which

Christians have often wrongly separated over. Now, I do not believe that it is sinful schism for Christians who share a common position on baptism to group together in a local church or denomination. That is to say, to be a Baptist church or a Presbyterian church for instance. *But we must never sin in arrogance and effect a separation which rejects others.* [Remember, we are not talking about practices of baptism which are heretical, such as the Roman Catholic doctrine that baptism effects justification].

As certain as we might be of our position, neither the Baptist nor the Presbyterian can *prove* their position on baptism absolutely.

What are other examples of sinful schism which are of the same spirit as the sin at Corinth?

- Identifying with a particular personality, preacher, or famous church leader (past or present) and rejecting believers who do not.

I am sure that men like Spurgeon were plagued with this problem. People coming on a Sunday simply because he was famous and looking down upon other Christians who might be in another local church with a different pastor. To such people Paul would say:

1Co 1:13 Is Christ divided? Was Paul crucified for you? Or were you baptized in the name of Paul?

This division over a personality cult in the church is a terrible sin which quenches the Spirit and hurts our ability to show Christ to the world.

“I attend John MacArthur’s church. I attend R.C. Sproul’s church.” My church is the largest one in Tillamook.” You see it? This evil is an arrogant division from and rejection of other real Christians. But what is the real question? *Am I born again? Am I really in Christ’s church? Do I know Him? Does he know me?*

Paul is going to keep hammering on this issue and he is still at it in chapter 3 -

1Co 3:4-7 For when one says, “I follow Paul,” and another, “I follow Apollos,” are you not being merely human? (5) What then is Apollos? What is Paul? Servants through whom you believed, as the Lord assigned to each. (6) I planted, Apollos watered, but God gave the growth. (7) So neither he who plants nor he who waters is anything, but only God who gives the growth.

And here then is a related question for your consideration -

- What about naming churches after an apostle or some “saint”? St. Andrews, St. Mark’s, St. Peter’s.... Or a denomination- Luther-an?

What do you suppose Paul would say about this?

And then there is schism over this next issue-

- Form of church government. Wars have been fought over this one. Presbyterian, Episcopalian, Congregational.

Elders? Bishops? Congregational? Can either system be proven? No, not absolutely to the exclusion of any other. Schism over such things is sin.

We must look to ourselves carefully and examine ourselves in these things. Every one of us is susceptible to this arrogant pride which leads to sinful schism. We must never become this kind of person:

Rom 16:17-18 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.

Over the years we have

unfortunately had to deal with more of these kind than we would want to and ultimately their bigotry, as Lloyd-Jones calls it, forced us to put them out of the church.

I recently had an email from a fellow who asked me for advice regarding a person in the church he attends. This person has been causing all kinds of divisions and the way this fellow put it was very descriptive. He said “this person *manufactures conflicts*.” That is exactly what Paul says – “*who create obstacles*” and cause divisions.

What motivates such people? Sin. Arrogant, prideful sin. Their position on matters indifferent is the RIGHT and ONLY position and others must conform or get out!

Notice one final point. Paul says that these schismatics are motivated by their own sinful lusts for self-glory and who *by smooth talk and flattery deceive the hearts of the naive*. We must not be naive. This is a tactic of Satan and we must not fall for it.