

Unity Takes Humility

Brynmawr Family Church Sermon
Stuart Wheatman, Sunday 23rd Oct 2010

Intro-

- Last time we looked at Paul's introduction to a letter to the Church at Corinth and noted that although there were various pastoral problems to address he started off on a positive note reminding them about the good things God has done in their lives.
- This week we will look at the first pastoral situation that Paul addresses in his letter- that of division within the Church. In so doing we will bring out some key concepts we can live out to promote unity in our congregation.

Read 1Cor 1:10-16

Unity is more important than personal preference- v12 & 13

- In order to understand what's going on here in Corinth it's necessary to know a little bit of the background. The culture of the time was heavily influenced by Greek culture. In Greece, philosophy was very popular, as was the art of rhetoric. Rhetoric is the art of using language to communicate effectively and persuasively (wikipedia). It was (and still is) vital in politics, but was also relevant to other areas. Sophists were gifted teachers who travelled to different places and taught people wisdom- Pythagoras was a famous sophist. They were trained in rhetoric and spoke skillfully and persuasively. Plato criticized the Sophists for using rhetoric as a means of deceit instead of discovering truth- just as today in some high level American court cases people have been left wondering whether the superstar was actually innocent, or got off because of the skills of their lawyers. Corinth was not influenced by Television as we are today, but as a city was heavily influenced by people who were skilled in public speaking- they were respected and admired.
- The situation in the Church at Corinth was that there was a split in opinion particularly concerning the preaching of Paul and that of Apollos. Paul was trained under a Jewish Rabbi, Gamaliel (Acts 22:3) and was an excellent scholar, and powerful preacher, but didn't come from a background of training in the art of rhetoric. Apollos, according to Acts 18:24 was an eloquent speaker, which probably means that he had a background of training in rhetoric (even though he needed to be shown the finer points in theology by Aquila and Priscilla- Acts 18:26!). He came from a centre of learning- Alexandria, where there was the famous world-famed library was. In 2Cor 10:10 Paul defends himself against people who say his letters are weighty, but not his public speaking which they described as 'contemptible'. At Athens in Acts 17:18 when certain philosophers hear him speaking they say 'what does this babber want to say?'
- What about us? We are bound to have our favourite preachers. We like their style. We feel 'fed' when they speak. Vote for favourite style of music between- Rock, Classical, Country, Folk, Funk. We could do a similar thing with T.D Jakes, Nicky Gumbel, David Pawson, Bill Johnson, Terry Virgo. Whatever our favourite preachers are there will be people who disagree. We could do the same with our favourite worship leaders Reuben Morgan, Darlene Zschech, Tim Hughes, Stuart Townsend, Graham Kendrick. We could do the same in our local church. Reuben Morgan appreciation Churches, Nicky Gumbel appreciation Churches. There are approximately 38,000 Christian denominations in the world (Christianity Today). Let's decide today not to allow our personal preferences to divide us.
- Sometimes the phrase 'I belong to ...(whatever god)' was inscribed into objects and

left in temples. At Corinth in archaeological digs a bronze dedication had the statement 'I belong to Aphrodite', and in the Asklepieion (healing temple) archaeologists found bowl with the inscription 'I belong to Apollo'. Perhaps Paul was hinting at this language when he quoted them as saying 'I am of Apollos'- they were basically getting into hero worship. When we do the same with our favourite Christian ministries at the expense of others we also are becoming worshippers of people rather than realising they are just servants. Paul concludes in 1Cor 4:1 that we should look at all ministers as purely servants- the focus is to be Jesus. Isn't it better to have the attitude- 'I'm going to worship God no matter who is leading' or 'I'm going to listen to what God has to say to me no matter who it is though'?

Read 1Cor 1:17-25

Unity is rooted in the simple message of the cross- v23 & 24

- It wasn't just the style of preaching that was dividing this Church, it was also the content. People were saying that Apollos' teaching was a lot 'deeper' than Paul's.
- Paul had to correct this by making it clear that he was only laying a foundation and giving them the basics of the gospel (feeding them milk, because they weren't ready for solid food- 1Cor 3:2), but that Apollos was building upon the foundation laid (bringing more complex teaching- 1Cor 3:10). However, the division amongst them indicated that although they were eager for the 'deeper' teaching they needed to go back to the basics of how to love one another (1Cor 3:2-3).
- Our foundation for unity is that we have accepted the simple message of the cross- something many others cannot do. Children can understand the message of the gospel. Cults wander away from the simplicity of the message of grace with all sorts of 'deep' and complex teaching which sounds amazing ('you need to know this'), but is in reality clap-trap. God wants us to grow in knowledge and anointing, but never at the expense of letting go of the basic gospel truths. That's why we regularly do communion.
- The message of the cross is for all people groups no matter how irrelevant they may think it is, in reality it is the single most important revelation that all mankind needs to get a hold of. Paul uses 2 illustrative examples of people groups and what each group are looking for. On the surface the message might appear irrelevant, but the opposite is true.
- **The Jews look for a display of power-** a sign and a wonder to prove that Jesus was the King who had the power to release them from bondage (Pharisees asked Jesus for a sign after all the miracles they had seen, so Jesus gave them the sign of Jonah- resurrection). The cross seemed like weakness and failure (1Cor 1:23 says 'scandalon'=scandalous, offensive) to a Jew awaiting a triumphal Messiah ('cursed is anyone hung on a tree'- Deut 21:23). However, the opposite is true; the cross is God's ultimate display of power- one single sacrifice powerful enough to cover billions upon billions of sins that had no other way of being purged. Also Jesus conquers that which no one else was powerful enough to- death. The resurrection is Jesus' ultimate miracle- it was the focus of the gospel message in the early church.
- **The Greeks were into their wisdom.** They wanted a deep message that made logical sense, but to put hopes in someone who was executed like a criminal seemed foolishness. However, the opposite is true; the cross is God's ultimate display of wisdom- how sinful mankind can be reconciled to a sinless God, how God's justice and mercy are both satisfied legally in one loving transaction.
- As we grow in our knowledge (wisdom) and anointing (power) let's never lose the sense of awe and appreciation and emphasis on what Jesus has done for us on the cross and in His resurrection- these are the foundations of our faith- if we lose these

we have nothing. A building without a foundation will collapse- we need the foundation of the grace of the gospel. Truth needs to be digested- it is no good putting more food in if it causes you to vomit what has gone in before.

Doughnuts. Eric "Badlands" Booker in 2002 consumed 49 glazed doughnuts in only eight minutes. The amount of calories in that serving is eye-popping 9,800. **Ice Cream.** Ed Jarvis is World Ice Cream Eating Champion. It took little effort for him to devour one gallon, nine ounces of vanilla ice cream in 12 minutes. Imagine that ice cream headache. **Hot Dogs.** In 2007, Joey Chestnut consumed 66 hot dogs in 12 minutes. **Pickled Jalapenos.** 63-year-old Richard LeFevre ate 247 pickled jalapeno peppers in eight minutes. Some reports say he didn't even break a sweat. Christian growth is not a speed eating competition- digest each course. The Corinthians needed to live what they had learnt. It ain't the parts of the Bible that I can't understand that bother me, it is the parts that I do understand. – Mark Twain.

Read 1Cor 1:26-31

Unity comes from humiliy- v30 & 31

- In order to deal with disunity issues Paul knew that he had to address the pride issue that was behind it. He points out that very few of them were 'anybodies' before coming to Christ, but now Christ has made them a 'somebody'- Christ has become our wisdom- we are not wise without Him.
- One of the things that those who practised the principles of rhetoric were skilled at doing was blowing their own trumpet. This is a quote from a man called Dio Chrysostom who was trained in rhetoric. Regarding his arriving in major cities including Rome he claims he would be:
.. 'escouted with much enthusiasm.. the recipients of my visits being grateful for my presence and begging me to address them and advise them and flocking about my doors from early dawn, all without my having incurred any expense or having made any contribution, with the result that all would admire me'.
- 1Cor 1:8- 'knowledge puffs up but love builds up'. We need to be so careful as we grow in knowledge and power (gifting) that we don't think we are the source of it all and become arrogant and proud, taking the glory to ourselves. Pride leads to selfish ambition and envy- competition one against the other. The cure of all of this is to realise it is all 'according to God's grace which was given to me'- 1Cor 3:10 and 1Cor 4:7 'what do you have that you did not receive? Now if you did indeed receive it why do you boast as if you had not received it?'
- v31 boasting should be in what God has done rather than self-promotion.

Summary

- Unity is more important than personal preference
- Unity is rooted in the simple message of the cross
- Unity comes from humiliy

Song: *You have become for us wisdom*

Communion

- An average of 171,000 Christians worldwide are martyred for their faith per year (Christianity Today).
- Expressing our unity with the persecuted Church