

INTRODUCTION

The title of our message tonight is the Not-So-Great Divide. The Great Divide is west of Denver, Colorado. Paul is writing about a problem in a church, the problem of division and it's not-so-great a divide. Sometimes we fantasize that the churches in the Book of Acts and in the first and second century were perfect churches.

And sometimes I wish we could have churches like they had back in the New Testament time, but those churches had many problems and Corinth had many, *many* problems. If you lived in Corinth, you were faced with excessive temptations. The City of Corinth was the fourth largest in the Roman Empire, and without a doubt the most immoral of all the cities of that era. There was a term used throughout the Roman Empire; it was called a "Corinthian girl." If someone was called a Corinthian girl, they were automatically recognized as a prostitute. If you corrupted someone's life, you were said to have corinthianized them. That's how terrible and immoral a city it was, and this church was comprised of people who came out of a sinful kind of lifestyle and brought some of their problems with them.

And one of the ones Paul addresses first is the problem of contention, division, and argument in the church.

1 Corinthians 1:10-17. "I appeal to you, brothers, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that all of you agree with one another so that there may be no divisions among you and that you may be perfectly united in mind and thought. My brothers, some from Chloe's household have informed me that there are quarrels among you. What I mean is this: One of you says, 'I follow Paul'; another, 'I follow Apollos'; another, 'I follow Cephas'; still another, 'I follow Christ.' Is Christ divided? Was Paul crucified for you? Were you baptized into the name of Paul? I am thankful that I did not baptize any of you except Crispus and Gaius, so that no one can say that you were baptized into my name. (Yes, I also baptized the household of Stephanas; beyond that, I don't remember if I baptized anyone else.) For Christ did not send me to baptize, but to preach the gospel—not with words of human wisdom, lest the cross of Christ be emptied of its power."

If you've been in church for many years, any church, you can probably can remember some problems or divisions, and perhaps some of you have even been in churches that split over disagreements and division. I preached not too many years ago in Mayfield, Kentucky, and on the outskirts of Mayfield, Kentucky there is a church named No Peg Baptist Church. You know how it got its name? Years earlier when the circuit riding preachers went from church to church, this church had a certain preacher who would come and he would take off his riding coat and there was no place to hang it.

So, one of the men in the church took it upon himself to take a wooden peg and put it in the wall in the back of the church so that when the guest preacher came, he would have a place to hang his coat. His actions so incensed other members of the church, that it became a great issue of controversy that he had put a peg in that church, and so those who didn't like it, ended up leaving the church, forming another church, and they named it No Peg Baptist Church.

There's a church in Tennessee named New Harmony Baptist Church. Right across the street is New Harmony No. 2, because years ago the church got into a great argument about which side of the platform the piano should be placed on. One group said it should be placed on the left side, another group said, no, it should be placed on the right side, and they couldn't agree.

One Sunday it was on the right side and the next Sunday a group that wanted it to be on the other side arrived early for church and some men picked it up and moved it to the other side. The next Sunday, the next group arrived even earlier and moved it back to the other side. It got so ridiculous—and this is all true—it got to the point that groups were arriving at the church at 5:00 a.m. on Sunday morning so they could be the first to move the piano. Finally, it became such a point of disagreement and there was so little harmony in New Harmony Baptist Church, that a group of members left and started New Harmony Baptist Church No. 2, and you know that that's just sometimes the nature of people to argue and to disagree and we have it today in our church, people that don't agree with everything that's going on and they get all upset and huffy.

And it was present in the church at Corinth. Jesus said, "[I pray] that all of them may be one, Father, just as you are in me and I am in you." (John 17:21 NIV) A church that is divided is not truly representing the body of Jesus Christ. It is a sick body when there's division and we're going to see what Paul had to say about it. Let's notice three things about division.

I. THE NEGATIVE EFFECTS OF DIVISION

Consider the negative effects of division in the church.

A. Division harms the church's reputation.

I could name many ways that it affects the church negatively, but it harms the church's reputation in the community. One of the reasons Paul was so upset with his church is he said you ought to be presenting a message of love and the community ought to look at you and say, "Those people love each other," but because there's arguing and disagreements, the church's reputation was being hindered.

Jesus said, "By this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another." (John 13:35 NIV) He didn't say, "If you wear a God loves you pin," or if you wear a cross around your neck. Have love one for another, that's what he said, and when the world looks at the church and sees arguing and division, the world laughs all the way to hell, saying, "Those people are supposed to love one another and they can't even get along."

Paul says in verse 10 "that there may be no divisions among you." You may recognize the Greek word *schisma*, because we got a couple of English words that come from it. We use the word "schism" and "scissors" from that very word. The idea of a schism and scissors are division. It's a divided fellowship, a divided body. This word, *schisma*, was used to describe a piece of cloth, a garment that had been ripped, and that's what division does. It rips the church

B. Division hurts the church's fellowship.

The second negative affect of division is it hurts the church's fellowship. Fellowship is the word *koinonia*, which means sharing. When the church is really being true to the body of Christ, when one member is hurting, all the members of the body ought to hurt, and you see, the church is a living organism, not a dead organization, and as I've said before, whenever there is a weak part of an organization in the business world, what do the upper level administration and bosses do? They'll sometimes cut out the weak part of an organization; but in a body, in your body, when there is a part that is hurting, what do you do for it? Well, let's just take your little toe, for example. Why do you think God gave us little toes? So, you could find the bedpost in the middle of the night when you're coming back from the bathroom. That's what it's for. I mean, you don't use it for anything else.

When your little toe is hurting, you don't cut it off. When your little toe is hurting, all the attention of the rest of your body goes there and your hands go down there and they hold it. Your leg lifts it up and your mouth voices the pain. All the parts of your body pay attention to that little toe, and that's what Paul is trying to teach us here, that when one part of the body is hurting, all the body is hurting, and we ought to be sensitive to the pain of people and ought to be sensitive to the pain of those who are divisive because there's a reason they're divisive.

C. Division grieves the Holy Spirit.

The third negative effect is it grieves the Holy Spirit. The Bible says there are three sins that you can commit against the Holy Spirit. There's blasphemy against the Holy Spirit; the unforgiveable sin—unbelief—rejecting Jesus. Then Paul says quenching the Spirit. Quenching the Spirit means putting out a fire. When the Holy Spirit is leading you to do something and you don't follow the good leading of the Holy Spirit, that's quenching the Spirit, but do you know what grieving the Spirit is? Grieving the Spirit is acting in a way contrary to the character of Jesus Christ. You grieve the Holy Spirit and if there's anything we know about the character of Jesus Christ, it's seen in the fruits of the spirit: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control, and in that same passage in Galatians 5, it gives the works of the flesh, and one of the works of the flesh is *schismata*. When you became a Christian, you did not lose your sinful flesh, it's still there, but God introduced a new element into your life, a new direction, the Holy Spirit. In Galatians, Paul says the spirit and the flesh are contrary against each other and if you walk in the spirit, you won't fulfill the lust of the flesh, but if you're walking in the flesh, you won't fulfill the desires of the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit is trying to lead you to walk in the spirit and to express love, joy, faith, all the food of the spirit, but when you obey the leading of your flesh, that causes you to be divisive and self-centered and you grieve the Holy Spirit. What does it mean to grieve? You all know what it means to grieve, you're sad, you're broken-hearted, you hurt, and the Bible says you can grieve the spirit by a divisive, contentious attitude.

II. THE CAUSE OF DIVISION

What causes division in a church? Well, Paul said in the church at Corinth, there were at least

four factions or groups, and division is caused when you get one little group over here and maybe one other group over here. It can take two groups, but in Corinth there were four different groups and he identifies them.

A. Paul followers: The old-time traditionalists

There was the Paul group; they said, "I follow Paul." Now what can we call them? These represented the old-time traditionalists; these were literally the charter members, because Paul founded the church at Corinth. In the Book of Acts, he was the one that went there, led the first converts to Christ and established the church.

He was the founding pastor and no doubt there some of the people there were led to Christ under Paul's ministry, and so they liked to do things the way Paul always did them. And by this time, we don't even know who the pastor is, but can't you see some of the newer members of the church coming in and wanting to do things another way but the Paul group says, "I've been here from the beginning of this church, I was here when Paul preached his first sermon, we've never done it that way before." Every church has what's called pioneers and homesteaders. The pioneers are the ones that go out there and blaze a trail, but then sometimes they become a little conservative, and then you got the homesteaders that try to move in on their territory and the pioneers don't like it and that happens in a lot of churches.

So, there was the first group, the traditionalists, who had never done it any other way than Paul showed them how.

B. Apollos followers: The preacher-lovers

Then there was the group that followed Apollos. They were the preacher-lovers. The Book of Acts tells us Apollos was a young, golden-throated orator with a lot of personality; a charismatic kind of figure, and when he preached, this group said, "He can preach so much better than Paul!" Later on in his letters, Paul said, "I came to you and I spoke with weakness, I had no dynamism in my preaching." We don't have any physical descriptions of Paul in the New Testament, but in the third century A.D., Pliny the Elder, one of the early church fathers, gives a description of Paul, and he described a very short guy.

If you transfer what Pliny the Elder said the height of Paul was into our height today, he would be about 4' 11". Pliny the Elder says Paul was bald, bowlegged, and had an eyebrow that went all the way across his head. That's the only physical description we have of Paul, and we don't know if it's accurate, but Pliny the Elder writes this about Paul, and he didn't speak well. So, you've got young Apollos, who comes on the scene and preaches up a storm, and you got these people who come into the church under his ministry and they say, "Oh, Apollos, he's our man, if he can't do it, no one can!" "He's the best. Let's get his tapes and books. He's great!" The Paul crowd says, "Pfft, you should have heard Paul. He wasn't flashy like Apollos, but he was solid as a rock. I love Paul's good teaching, not that flash-in-the-pan preaching like Apollos." And you got some people like that in the church. They're just preacher lovers and the preacher can never do any wrong and they'll defend him to the death and that's what they were doing for Apollos.

C. Cephas followers: The legalists

Then you had a third group. They said, "We follow Cephas." Now, you don't know who Cephas is. That's Peter. Commentators love to write four or five chapters on that one little thing right there, trying to prove or disprove whether or not Peter ever went to Corinth. As far as we know, he never went to Corinth. We have no record of Peter ever going to Corinth, so we believe this group was probably a group of Jewish people who had migrated from Israel. Maybe they were part of the Jerusalem church where Peter was prominent.

You've got to understand where they're coming from. They are Jewish believers and it's very obvious in the Book of Acts that these Jewish believers are very legalistic. Everything is black and white, never any gray. Do you remember what these legalistic Jewish Christians tried to do in Acts 15? They said, "What do you mean these gentiles are becoming Christians? They cannot become Christians unless first they become circumcised, they must obey all the dietary laws of the Book of Leviticus and they must become good Jews." It was a big argument. A legalist is one who still lives totally under "thou shalt" and "thou shalt not;" and we have legalists in churches today.

There are people who are much more interested in rules and regulations than they are principals of the word of God. Legalists are kind of like computers. Whatever you put in the computer is going to come out. Garbage in, garbage out. Computers have no feelings whatsoever, just whatever you put into them, that's what comes out, and that's kind of the way legalists are. They never change their mind about things. It's always this way and no other way and these were the Cephas crowd.

D. Christ followers: The spiritually-proud

But then there was a final group that said, "I follow Christ." They were the spiritually-proud who didn't want to follow anyone except Jesus. Now, it sounds good on the surface, but Paul lumps this crowd in the same groups as the other.

We have that same kind of division today. It may be comparing the current pastor to former pastors. We've got one group that says I'm a Charles Stanley fan, I'm a Max Lucado fan, I'm a Chuck Swindoll fan, I'm a Bill Gothard fan, and everybody divides up into their little groups. "This is my man, I love what he has to say, and he's right, he can never be wrong," and Paul says this division is wrong. Now, I want you to look at the text again, look at Verse 12 again where Paul lists these four groups. The problem is not the word Paul, it's not the word Apollos, it's not the word Cephas and for sure it's not the word Christ. The problem is the word "I." The cause of division is self-centeredness, selfishness. *I am right, I've got my opinion and it is correct, it is accurate.* You know, that's a problem with a lot of people, pride and selfishness.

Anger gets us into trouble and then it's pride that keeps us from getting out of the problem. It's pride that keeps us from admitting we're wrong. President Lyndon Johnson told a story one time and although I wasn't real big Lyndon Johnson fan, I thought this was pretty funny. There was an old hound dog that was just laying down hollering and yelping. A man came up and said,

"Is that your dog?"

The old farmer said, "Yup."

"Why is he hollering?"

"Because he's laying on a cocklebur."

"Well, why don't he just get up?"

And the old farmer spit and said, "Well, because he just enjoys hollering."

Have you met people like that in the church? They're sitting on a cocklebur, and don't get off because they enjoy hollering. And sometimes that's why people do it, they want to get some attention, and Paul says it's wrong to divide yourself up into factions.

III. GOD'S CURE FOR DIVISION

Instead we ought to strive for the unity of the Holy Spirit, and that brings us to our final point. What is God's cure for division? It is the same today just as it was for the church at Corinth. Now, I want to use two words, and I want you to learn that one of these comes only from God and one comes from us.

A. God creates unity, not uniformity or unison.

God creates unity. Unity is not manmade. Only God can create unity, because unity is totally contrary to human nature. Human nature, the flesh, is me, myself, and I, but only God can create unity. He's the only one that can create anything.

Notice that unity is not uniformity. A lot of people are confused about that. Oh, we need to have uniformity in our church, everybody needs to dress exactly the same way and if you don't dress the way I think you ought to dress, brother, you're wrong. Everybody ought to wear their hair exactly the same way and if you don't wear your hair the way I think you ought to wear your hair, you are wrong. Everybody has got to love the same kind of music and if you don't like my kind of music, you are wrong. We're not talking about uniformity here. God made us different, and we're not talking about uniformity, but *unity*, and we're not talking about unison either. Unison is everybody singing the same part. But when they sing in harmony, that's the beauty of the body of Christ. We're all so different, and I think God made us different, so he can make us one. Have you ever noticed that bricks aren't always exactly the same size and same shape, but a good mason can take bricks and he can build a straight wall. He just fills in the gaps with the mortar and you and I are like those bricks that are all different shapes and maybe different colors and different sizes and the Holy Spirit is the mortar that ties us together, smooths over our differences, and connects us together, and only God can do that.

You can try to create uniformity and you can try to create unison, but that is not Holy Spirit created unity. You can take two tomcats and tie their tails together and hang them over a clothesline and you've got union, but you don't have unity, and that's a problem in some of our churches. We try in our own strength to create unity and only God can, but what can we do?

B. We practice agreement.

Here's our part: God creates unity, we practice agreement. "I appeal to you, brothers, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that all of you agree with one another so that there may be no divisions among you, and that you may be perfectly united in mind and thought." (vs. 10) Unity is a beautiful word. Unity is what God does, but when we agree, then he allows us to be united.

That word, united, is a beautiful word. It is a word that was used by doctors; it's a medical term that means to take a broken bone and to set that bone back together. So, what is God talking about? He's talking about when there is fellowship that's broken in a church, God wants to set that back together in unity, but let's face it, if you've got a broken bone, you must go to the doctor and you must say, I've got a problem and you surrender yourself to someone else to do that, and that's our part, to agree together that the source of our unity is God and we agree together on that. But you don't have to agree with me on everything. But you have to agree with me on the important things. We have to be in agreement on the essentials. Not on the peripheral issues, but on the essentials, but when we do disagree, then we disagree without being disagreeable.

Let's look at three ways of agreeing that Paul talks about.

1. Agreement in thought.

We ought to agree together in thought. "Perfectly united in mind and in thought." (vs. 10) If you're thinking right, you'll speak right, and if you're speaking and thinking right, you'll act right. I'm thinking one thing; you're thinking another thing, who is right? Well, we don't know because you don't have to think like me and I don't have to think like you, but we both must strive to think like Jesus. "Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus." (Philippians 2:5 KJV) If this piano was out of tune and this organ was out of tune, all I would have to do is take a tuning fork, tune the piano to the tuning fork, and tune the organ to the tuning fork, and both of them would be in tune with each other.

Jesus is our tuning fork and you don't have to tune your mind to my mind and I don't have to tune my mind to your mind, but we both should strive to tune our mind to Jesus, and when I'm tuned in to Jesus and you're tuned in to Jesus, guess what? We'll be thinking the same thing, right? We'll be in agreement.

2. Agreement in treatment.

You need to agree together in treatment, the way you treat people. You should not show favoritism, you should treat all people equally. Now, let me tell you how unity and agreement works in a church. Anytime that there's a divisive issue, ask yourself two questions. First, "What does Jesus think about this? And second, "Is this worth hurting my church over?"

And if it's an essential issue, then yes, you need to stand up for what you believe, but you need to decide, if it's not essential, is it worth the pain and the division and harm caused by

disagreeing. You've heard the old statement, a bulldog can whip a skunk, but it's just not worth the fight. In my role as pastor, I've only got a certain number of fights in me and I'm not going to fight over everything, but I'll fight over some things, the essential things, and Paul gives us something here that's essential. And frankly, Paul gives something in this passage that is not essential. Verse 17 lists the essentials. "Preach the gospel—not with words of human wisdom, lest the cross of Christ be emptied of its power." I want to say loudly and I want to say clearly to you that the cross of Jesus Christ is absolutely essential, you can never compromise it.

If someone stands up in a Sunday school class at Green Acres Baptist Church and begins to preach that Jesus did not die for our sins, that his death on the cross was not necessary for our salvation, I'll fight over that. Then he gives another example he says is not all that important. What were they arguing about in Corinth? Baptism. "I got baptized by Paul." "Well, I got baptized by Apollos," and so on. Paul said that's not essential. Now, I think baptism is important; I think it's critical for you to grow as a Christian, but if you would ask me, "Brother David, if somebody accepts Jesus Christ and they're not baptized, can they still go to heaven?" You know what I'll say to you? "Yes, indeed, they can." Our Church of Christ friends don't like that passage of scripture, because Paul didn't make much of baptism.

Our Church of Christ friends would be expecting him to immediately baptize everybody who accepted Jesus, but he didn't. He said, he didn't do that; and was glad he didn't, so you can't argue about that. Paul said, some things are essential, some things are not essential.

3. Agreement in truth.

You ought to agree in truth. I've already touched on this, but Paul said the truth is that the preaching of the cross of Jesus Christ must be central and you must agree on the basic truths. Now, let me just tell you what I believe are some of the essentials on which we can never compromise. I believe that the nature and inspiration of this Bible is absolutely essential. I don't believe we can tolerate anybody in our church teaching or preaching who says this book is not God's word; it is just a bunch of fairytales and myths. I'll fight over that.

I don't think that we can compromise the truth that there's only one way to heaven and it is through Jesus Christ. He is the only way to salvation. I will not tolerate anybody in this church teaching or preaching, saying that Jesus is one way to heaven, Muhammad is another, Buddha is another. I think that's heresy. I think the deity of Jesus Christ is absolutely essential. He was not simply a man, he was not simply a good teacher—He was the virgin-born God in the flesh.

You know what I believe about eschatology, the second coming of Jesus Christ. I believe that, but I'm not going to fight over that. You know why? Because I may be wrong about that, and as long as you believe he's coming back, you may think it's going to be totally different than the way I understand it, and I'm not going to argue with you over that.

And when you take the Lord's Supper, I'm not going to argue with you over that. Some people say we're wrong because we don't do it every Sunday; or we're wrong because we don't let everybody come up to the altar and kneel. I'm not going to argue about that, because the Bible

doesn't say exactly how it should be done, but we need to agree together on those basic truths. So, what's the final word? Here it is: In the essentials, agreement; in the nonessentials, liberty, and in everything, love, because Paul is going to say a few chapters later that if I can speak with the tongues of men and angels and I don't have love, I'm nothing. I can preach and I can prophesize, I can give gifts to the poor, but if I don't have love, I am nothing.

So, what is Paul saying here? Same thing he's saying to us: Get your act together, get your fellowship together. Don't gather around some human personality, whomever he may be. Gather around the cross of Jesus.

CONCLUSION

A five-year-old boy got lost in a big city. Police picked him up and took him to the station and he was crying and so upset, he couldn't tell them his address or phone number. Finally they asked him to describe where he lived. And suddenly, the little boy remembered and he said, "There's a church by my house that has a big cross on it," and he looked up at the policeman and said, "Mister, if you could just get me to the cross, I can get home from there." I think that ought to be the prayer of every member of Green Acres Baptist Church and every member of the New Testament Church: Lord, just get me to the cross, keep me at the cross, and I can go home in unity and agreement from that point.

OUTLINE

I. THE NEGATIVE EFFECTS OF DIVISION

- A. Harms the church's reputation.
- B. Hurts the church's fellowship.
- C. Grieves the Holy Spirit.

II. THE CAUSE OF DIVISION

- A. Paul followers: The old-time traditionalists
- B. Apollos followers: The preacher-lovers
- C. Cephas followers: The legalists
- D. Christ followers: The spiritually-proud

III. GOD'S CURE FOR DIVISION

- A. God creates unity, not uniformity or unison.
- B. We practice agreement:
 - 1. in thought
 - 2. in treatment
 - 3. in truth

In the essentials: Agreement

In the non-essentials: Liberty

In everything: Love

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For the Joy...
Pastor David Dykes



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