

"Celebrating the Centrality of Christ in the Local Assembly"

Author: Patrick J. Griffiths ©
 Date: January 15, 2006
 Title: An Overview of 1 Corinthians 1-10: Part I
 Text: 1 Corinthians 1:10-13, Ephesians 4:11-16
 Theme: The cross work is big enough to unit diverse people into one body.

In our last study, we summarized chapters 1-4 from the book of 1 Corinthians. The big idea is focused on division within a local church. We asked three questions: Why is division a terrible sin? What is division's opposite? And how do we fight for unity and against division in the Church?

In discussing division within our local church we considered the issue of Calvinism. This week I would like us to finish the first question and then go about answering the last two questions. Again, we will take our time and try to bring clarity to this topic.

I am making a distinction between division and disagreement. Disagreement is something that exists in every relationship. Disagreements that polarize around positions or people can lead to a divided fellowship. And if the disagreement and/or division is not marked by biblical love and grace, then it has the potential of splintering the fellowship.

There is always a tendency to ignore problems or avoid confrontation. But problems and confrontation are not bad things. How we handle them might be but the problem or the confrontation is not bad.

ILLUSTRATION:

Take the marriage relationship for an example of this idea. It is possible to have two people living under the same roof with two totally separate lives. Most of us would not identify that as a healthy marriage. Sometimes it is unavoidable no matter how hard you try to reconcile.

One of the primary ways to avoid this scenario is to confront the problematic opportunities when they are small and hopefully resolve the disagreements in a healthy way in order to restore tension filled relationships. If we do not confront our problems, we could be inviting a polarized relationship and no one I know wants that.

Some might ask why we would discuss this in a public forum.

ILLUSTRATION:

I will not ask how many of you have doors that squeak in your home. But if you do you can either ignore the problem or you can address it and go about trying to fix it. These are areas that have or are squeaking and not only are they being addressed, but we are always seeking to correct and improve everything we do as an expression of WBC.

ILLUSTRATION:

When you are a public speaker and something happens in the audience whether it is a phone that goes off, a baby starts to cry, or someone gets up to leave the sanctuary, you are always evaluating how you will handle the disruption. Some speakers ignore the problem while others might draw attention to it, either way it is trying to be handled.

We have not ignored the problem, but today I will address an issue that many of us are already aware of.

I was surprised to hear many who did not really understand what constitutes theological Calvinism. I have made available a study that summarizes Calvinistic theology and Arminianistic theology in The Moody Handbook of Theology by Paul Enns. He attempts to be neutral and give both systems a fair shake. It will be on the TVM table in the foyer.

As we consider our second issue that we have wrestled with or are wrestling with, I need to stress once more Paul's perspective on people who sit at opposite ends of the disagreement.

In 1:10 Paul addresses his concerns to the "brothers." It is "A word he will use thirty-nine times in this letter, far and away the most frequent use in any of his letters (next are Romans and 1 Thessalonians, each with nineteen)." (Morris, 1 Corinthians, 39).

Paul deems both parties as brothers in Christ. Neither one is more spiritual than the other. Paul is calling on both parts to put Christ first. Again, our discussion is around areas that have caused some people to leave the WBC fellowship. They have not been splitting the church. It has not become factious or schismatic.

I do not look down on people who disagree with me. I feel very comfortable in our fellowship and with you. I endeavor to look at you the same way the Father looks at you and that is in Christ.

As many of you have already guessed the second area is around musical style that is used in our corporate worship service. Most people in our fellowship have broad tastes as it relates to musical style, but some have a narrower preference style taste as it relates to a church service. So let us talk about musical style preference.

The second was over the issue of musical style preference

Musical preference is always a hot button within any fellowship. We will never make everyone happy with our musical style unless the fellowship is numerically small or has had only one style for decades.

Lest we think that this issue is new I would like us to be reminded of church history.

ILLUSTRATION:

Benjamin Keach was a Baptist who lived from 1640 to 1704. He was born February 29, 1640, at Stoke Hammond, Buckinghamshire, England (3). He joined the General Baptists at age fifteen and was baptized by John Russell (3). The church was so impressed with Keach's knowledge of the Bible and spiritual sensitivity that, when he was eighteen, they called him to the work of the ministry (3). In 1668 Keach became pastor of a church that met in a private house on Tooley Street in London. He remained pastor of that congregation until his death (3).

Keach introduced congregational singing into Baptist churches, despite what one called a "grueling controversy" over the practice (8). The practice of hymn singing in worship was innovative (3). In 1673, he persuaded the church at Horsley Down to sing a hymn at the close of the Lord's Supper. Six years later the church agreed to sing a hymn on "public thanksgiving days," and fourteen years after that, to sing as part of every Sunday's worship. **Keach was patient; twenty years were necessary to complete the transition to singing** (8). It was not until the late **1680s** when Benjamin Keach pioneered in Baptist church music **that Particular Baptist allowed singing in church, and the General Baptists resisted it for another generation**. Early Baptists in America also opposed singing, and not until the eighteenth century did most of them become comfortable with hymns (8). Even so, twenty-two of Keach's members withdrew to join a non-singing church (8). Keach was not able to convince all the opponents of hymn singing of its holiness. Some used the unflattering nomenclature of "error, apostasy, human tradition, pre-limited forms, mischievous error, carnal forms, and carnal worship" to describe Keach's worship (3). At the 1689 assembly, the Particular Baptists gave cautious approval to singing or at least to the concept of each congregation deciding its own practices without censure from others. With even that much approval, singing quickly caught on (8).

(3) L. Russ Bush and Tom J. Nettles, *Baptists and the Bible* (Chicago: Moody Press 1980), 92-99.

(8) H. Leon McBeth, *The Baptist Heritage* (Nashville, TN: Broadman Press, 1987), 94-95, 687.

The issues that can frustrate a fellowship are not new. We are not going to settle the matter to everyone's preference. My appeal is not for you to abandon your like for a musical style, but for all of us to think larger than ourselves.

As an elder board we have chosen an eclectic style of musical expression for corporate worship for the following reasons.

1. Instrumental diversity is consistent with Psalm 150 where a diverse/broad spectrum of instrumentation is noted.
2. Musical styles are inherently amoral. For example, musical styles like jazz, rap, or rock and roll are not intrinsically sinful or a hymn style or classical style inherently good.

[There is a Christian radio station in our area that would disagree with me vehemently. I disagree with them in this area. The fact that we disagree is not, for me, an issue. For them, however, it is an issue. Their attitude toward those who disagree with them on this area has been hurtful to the body of Christ at large.]

I believe you can have music that is constructed poorly and played poorly, but it is not because of the style that it is bad. Style and lyrics are two different venues. Whatever morality exists in music is defined by the cultural and lyrical context in which it is found.

3. Biblical love and graciousness should be able to embrace the stylistic tastes within any **trans-generational fellowship**. We strive to joy in the joy of others.
4. We wish to represent musical styles that are reflective of all generations. On any given Sunday we have as much musical diversity as possible. We seek to celebrate this musical diversity by bringing in groups that reflect our global family. We have done this in the past with the Trinidad steel drum group, the Judson Choir in February and in July we are bringing in the African children's choir.

We are not so foolish as to think change is automatic or can happen without struggle. We are equally convinced that everything that can be said about a topic is not capable of being contained in four short statements or that the statements themselves have no flexibility to them.

We have not chosen musical styles in order to appeal to the unsaved on Sunday mornings. We are not gathered for them, but for Him.

I have had several people note how God cannot be worshipped with drums or the guitar. Drums are percussion and guitars are stringed instrumentation. You might not like the manner in which they are played, but the instruments themselves have no moral value. I think we know that, but I feel it needs to be said.

As it relates to matters of the heart, not musical beauty or excellence, I could stand up here and bang two rocks together and in so doing worship God. Or I could have the Mormon Tabernacle Choir sing and it would be an abomination before God. Worship rests in the heart of the individual.

Yet the devil delights in rending the body of Christ. Our flesh is always seeking preeminence and wanting to have its conveniences and perspectives placated. This time in the life of WBC and in me personally has been a time of reflection and, I trust, spiritual growth.

I have wrestled and continue to wrestle with our desire to have one service that reflects the entire fellowship. There are four things I think about when I evaluate the musical expression of our worship service. First, is it Christ-exalting? Second, is it Word-Centered? Third, is it Global-Impacting? And finally, is it Grace-Based? And right now, I answer with a yes.

I want us to be one as a fellowship more than I care about a singular style of musical expression. And the only way I can see this happening is when grace reigns in the heart of every individual.

What happens when you just have to leave? There are those occasions when you might have to leave a fellowship. I believe that when such a thing happens you should seek to address the concern as lovingly and graciously as possible and if you still cannot participate then you should leave as quietly as possible and find a fellowship that will facilitate you in ministry and worship.

I do not believe you should leave a fellowship and then stop going to church. It grieves me when people leave a church and then stop going to church altogether. Some of you are friends with these people. You should be encouraging them to come back or to find another fellowship where they can find ministry and encouragement. Christianity is built around community.

We have to move past the idea that there are perfect churches or perfect marriages. All relationships are in process. The healthy churches and marriages are those who recognize the process and are committed to moving the relationship forward.

Regular attendance and commitment to a local church should be a priority as it relates to your spiritual growth. God's Word does not encourage schism in His body.

Now let us address the second question.

I. What is division's opposite?

1 Corinthians 1:10-13

“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?”

The opposite of a divided body is a body that is perfectly joined together. It is like two pieces of one puzzle coming together. Each piece was made to accommodate the other.

“The Greeks used this word for the mending of broken bones. It is the exact word for the healing of the breaches caused by strife.” (Boyer, 1 Corinthians, 27).

How does the Bible picture this unity?

1. It looks like a net mended (Matt. 4:21, Mk. 1:19).
2. It looks like the planets circling in their proper orbit (Heb. 11:3).
3. It looks like each part fulfilling its purpose (Rom. 9:22).
4. It looks like being of the same mind, having the same judgment (1 Cor. 1:10), living in peace (2 Cor. 13:11).
5. It looks like a place where the fallen are restored (Gal. 6:1).
6. It looks like a place where the weak are strengthened (1 Thess. 3:10).

Let us consider the language of Ephesians 4:11-16.

“And He gave some as apostles, and some as prophets, and some as evangelists, and some as pastors and teachers, for the **equipping of the saints** for the work of service, to the **building up** of the body of Christ; until we all attain to **the unity of the faith**, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a mature man, to the measure of the stature which belongs to the fullness of Christ. As a result, we are no longer to be children, tossed here and there by waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, by craftiness in deceitful scheming; but speaking the truth in love, we are **to grow up** in all aspects into Him who is the head,

even Christ, from whom the whole body, **being fitted and held together by what every joint supplies**, according to the proper working of each individual part, causes the **growth of the body for the building up** of itself in love.”

Let us note five ideas expressed in this one passage.

- The word used for “equipping” in verse 12 is the same word used for “made complete” in 1 Corinthians 1:10. We should always be moving toward body unity. All of our instruction and ministry is for this purpose.
- A body built up is marked by biblical unity around the truth of Jesus Christ (v. 13).
- A body built up stays the course as it relates to the centrality, sufficiency, and supremacy of Jesus Christ for every area of one’s daily life and all the relationships that make up one’s life (vv. 14, 15).
- A body built is maturing in their knowledge of who Christ is and how He transforms one’s daily life (v. 15). What marks maturity? I do not make these comments in a vacuum. Regardless as to where you fall the style issue, I believe each of us have to wrestle with these ideas.
 - Maturity can discern the primary over the secondary.
 - Maturity stays the course instead of abandoning the ship.
 - Maturity puts principle over preference.
 - Maturity sees the necessity of being trans-generational.
 - Maturity goes to a person with their concerns instead of gossiping about the person behind their back.
 - Maturity thinks the best of a person instead of judging their motives or thinking malicious thoughts.
 - This is true of every relationship whether it is at work, in the home, with your spouse, or in your local church.
- The strength of the body is based on the individual parts (v. 16). Each joint supplies what is necessary for the body to function properly. Each part is crucial to the overall health of the local fellowship.

This is why I said earlier that “Every person who leaves takes a piece of who we are with them.” When a person leaves a fellowship, for the most part, the overall fellowship is hurt by it. Sometimes a cancerous cell would have to be cut out through church discipline, but that has not been an issue in either of the areas discussed last week or today.

The Holy Spirit is working in and through His people to create a visible unity inside of every local fellowship. How do we have a fellowship that is united biblically? How do we fight for biblical unity and against division in the Church?

II. How do we fight for unity and against division in the Church?

I would like to make three suggestive observations.

A. By pursuing the person and work of Jesus Christ.

Biblical unity is a by-product of a unified, but singular, pursuit of Jesus Christ. When body unity is forced or demanded, it becomes a Spirit quenching legalism. Consider the idea as it is laid out for us in Philippians 2:1-8.

“Therefore if there is any encouragement in Christ, if there is any consolation of love, if there is any fellowship of the Spirit, if any affection and compassion, make my joy complete by being of the same mind, maintaining the same love, united in spirit, intent on one purpose. Do nothing from selfishness or empty conceit, but with humility of mind regard one another as more important than yourselves; do not merely look out for your own personal interests, but also for the interests of others. Have this attitude in yourselves which was also in Christ Jesus, who, although He existed in the form of God, did not regard equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied Himself, taking the form of a bond-servant, and being made in the likeness of men. Being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross.”

This pursuit is manifested through biblical study and a “one another mindset.”

B. By portraying biblical love (John 13:34, 35, 1 Cor. 13:1-4).

John 13:34-35 "A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another, even as I have loved you, that you also love one another. By this all men will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another."

1 Corinthians 13:1-7 “If I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, but do not have love, I have become a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal. If I have the gift of prophecy, and know all mysteries and all knowledge; and if I have all faith, so as to remove mountains, but do not have love, I am nothing. And if I give all my possessions to feed the poor, and if I surrender my body to be burned, but do not have love, it profits me nothing. Love is patient, love is kind and is not jealous; love does not brag and is not arrogant, does not act unbecomingly; it does not seek its own, is not provoked, does not take into account a wrong suffered, does not rejoice in unrighteousness, but rejoices with the truth; bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things.”

I will not be side-tracked in my thinking on this point. I still believe that the greatest evangelistic tool we have as a fellowship is our love one for another. And I still believe that any relationship can work where biblical love is practiced. Take any relationship you have that is contentious and mix with it verses 4-7 and that relationship will start to work. Even if you are the only one in the relationship that is exercising these qualities, you will have peace of mind and rest of soul.

C. By practicing biblical grace (Eph. 4:32, Col. 3:1-17).

I have a difficult time separating Christ, Love, and Grace from each other. There might be some fine nuances of word distinctions, but for the most part they are working synonyms. What is grace?

1. Grace loves without condition.
2. Grace accepts without requirement.
3. Grace forgives without limit.
4. Grace serves without reward.

Why do I keep saying this? Because many of us still do not get it.

I believe the differences we have can be overcome if we as a fellowship pursue Christ, portray biblical love and practice biblical grace.

In one of my email interactions the following was said to me with no regard to the discussion at hand, but it is appropriate.

“People need to cement what binds them and surmount what divides them.” (

APPLICATION: (Where do we go from here?)

Paul believed this same thing. Listen to what he says in 1 Corinthians 1:10-13, 23, 2:2. [Read].

Is the redemptive reconciliatory propitiating work of Christ on the cross sufficient for the Father to forgive all of our sins and bring unity out of diversity? Is the work of Christ enough even now as He intercedes in our behalf? If the Father is satisfied with each one of us based on the merit of His Son’s work in our behalf, then why are we still at war with members within His body?

As we think on these things let us ask ourselves this simple question, “What are some practical guidelines for defending unity and defeating division?” Let me suggest six.

1. Do not participate in gossip. Do not talk about people behind their back. If something is misunderstood, ask for clarification.
2. Address problems immediately in a gracious and loving way with the person who can facilitate the change.
3. Be a part of the solution not the problem. For example, if you think Awana boy's club needs more workers and you are a man, then sign up and work in the boy's club. If you think we need a choir, then join the choir and be a part of the solution.
4. Be committed to the larger fellowship and not just your personal preferences and comforts.
5. Allow love to cover a multitude of sins.
6. If you have wronged someone, go to them and ask for their forgiveness. Seek to restore strained relationships.
7. Today my fear is that you will not deal with issues that the Holy Spirit is bringing to your mind right now. There are relationships that need to be addressed right now. Do not let this day pass without addressing these issues. Forget about yourself and think of Christ and deal with your issues.

Issues of morality (5-7)

Issues of liberty (8-10)

D. Issues of ministry (11)

E. Issues of diversity (12-14)

F. Issues of immortality (15)

G. Issues of liberality (16)