**HEALTHY CHURCHES UNITE**

**(1 Corinthians 1:10-3:23)**

Are you familiar with the word *onomatopoeia?* It is a word that sounds like the sound to which it refers. For instance, yesterday morning I heard the thunder *boom.* Sometimes, but not often, I will hear our dog *bark.* Yesterday, I was working on this message at home. Our cat was in the kitchen where I was and she would *meow* every now and then. I looked in her bowl, and it was empty. Mystery solved. *Boom, bark, meow,* and so many other words in our language are onomatopoeias. The sound of the word itself makes a sound similar to what it refers.

In the first verse of today’s text, there is word that strikes me as an onomatopoeia. I don’t know that it is; it just sounds like one. It is translated into English as *division.* The Greek word is *schizmata.* We get the word *schism* from it. *Schism* just sounds like a blade being sharpened before that knife or axe divides something in two.

In 1 Corinthians 1:10, Paul urges the church in Corinth to now allow schisms or divisions to remain within their church fellowship. Unfortunately, the church in Corinth had divisions aplenty.

Division and churches seem to go together like peanut butter and jelly. Where you find one, the other isn’t far behind. We are potentially divided over so many things: worship style, mode of baptism, the meaning of the Lord’s Supper, how often it is to be observed, our view of the end times, and many other theological matters.

I used to have a subscription to *Leadership Journal.* It only comes out four times a year. Each time I got the most recent edition in the mail, I would open it, and the first thing I would do was look for a read the cartoons. In one cartoon, a church usher was helping a guest family to their seat. He asked them, “Do you want to sit in clapping or non-clapping.”

Years ago, I preached a revival at a church in Miami, OK. One evening I was standing at the back with a longtime member of the church. He noticed a college student or two enter the sanctuary. He whispered to me, “I hope they don’t bring that clapping with them.” I laughed. I thought he was making a joke. I looked at his face and realized, he wasn’t joking.

When there is division in a church, it is no laughing matter.

I announced a few weeks ago that we are going to go through Paul’s first letter to the Church in Corinth. This church had no shortage of problems, and Paul addressed many of those issues in his correspondence to them. Paul was trying to nurse this church to spiritual health. Based on what Paul wrote, we are going to be looking at what healthy churches do.

In our first message, we said, *Healthy Churches Remember.* We examined the first 9 verses of this letter. Based on that text, we said that if we want to be healthy . . .

* We need to remember who we are and what we have.
* We need to remember the source of all our blessings.
* We need to remember, it is all about Jesus.
* We need to remember to encourage the struggling.

We took a close look at those first 9 verses, but tonight, we are going to tackle a much larger section of this letter. We can’t do a deep dive. We will have to skim the surface, and we will miss much of what is there, but I want to bring to your attention four key points related to the idea that healthy churches unite.

1. **HEALTHY CHURCHES UNITE UNDER THE LORDSHIP OF JESUS.**

Let’s begin with 1:10-16 and 3:1-4. The believers in Corinth aligned themselves under various leaders. Some were Paul followers. Others belonged to the Apollos faction. Still others saw themselves as Peter disciples. A final group said rightly but maybe a little sanctimoniously, “Well, we follow Christ.”

I think some of that goes on today. Some people are into Rick Warren. They have seen his success, and so they read everything he writes and try to do church the way Rick Warren advocates. Joel Olsteen has plenty of followers. Craig Groeschel has numerous adherents. Some were Bill Hybels devotees, but he had a fall from grace, so to speak, recently. His camp has diminished. I enjoy reading authors such as Max Lucado, John Ortberg, John Piper, and Tim Keller.

Many church members and pastors follow the cult of personality. It even extends to the Bibles we read. Growing up I had a Scofield Study Bible. Friends had the Ryrie Study Bible. There is the MacArthur Study Bible. You can find the David Jeremiah Study Bible. And there are many others.

Much can be gleaned by skilled teachers and authors, but they should supplement, not be a substitute for our own study and reading of the Word of God.

Much harm has been caused by rallying around a single leader. In our own denomination, when someone was seen as a threat to someone else’s influence, terrible things have been done to silence and neutralize the threat. Those who went out to defend their leader may not have resorted to violent acts, but they used vile words. As far as I know, no one has been murdered, but their character has been assassinated. Serious injury has been done to their reputation.

We have one Savior, one Lord. Let’s rally around Him. We should talk about Him not about our favorite preacher or author.

We have not been called to follow personalities; we have been called to follow Jesus.

Listen to what A.W. Tozer wrote many years ago:

One hundred pianos all tuned to the same fork are automatically tuned to each other. They are of one accord by being tuned, not to each other, but to another standard to which each one must individually bow. So one hundred worshippers meet together, each one looking away to Christ, are in heart nearer to each other than they could possibly be were they to become “unity” conscious and turn their eyes away from God to strive for closer fellowship.

If unity matters to us, if it matters to us as much as it matters to God, we will quit looking at one another. Instead, we will all look to Christ, our Lord.

1. **HEALTHY CHURCHES UNITE AROUND THE CROSS OF JESUS.**

Paul had much to say about the cross of Christ. Look at 1:17-18. Paul recognized that he had been sent by God to preach the gospel, and central to the gospel was the cross. Not everyone is able to appreciate the message of the cross. Paul points out, “to us who are being saved it is the power of God.”

Notice he said, “being saved.” He uses the present tense. We usually use the past tense. We say, “I was saved . . .” We ask, “Have you been saved?” Have you caught on to the fact that salvation involves the past, the present, and the future?

If you trusted Christ, you were saved; you are being saved; you will be saved. This is the difference between justification, sanctification, and glorification.

Justification happened at a point in time. Your sins were forgiven. You were made right with God.

Sanctification is a process. You are being made more like the One who saved you. You are being fashioned into the image of Jesus. That doesn’t happen overnight.

Glorification has yet to happen. It won’t take place until Jesus returns. When He comes back, at that moment, we will be changed and receive a resurrection body. Our salvation will be complete. We will be in a glorified place in our glorified body, and we will see with our eyes, the glorified Christ.

Salvation involves being freed from the penalty of sin (justification), the power of sin (sanctification), and the presence of sin (glorification).

According to Paul, the power of God is seen in the cross. The message of the Christ is what God used to save us, and it is what God is using to save us.

Look also at vv. 22-23. We don’t preach what people want to hear; we preach what they need to hear. They need to hear about the cross of Christ.

I think it is great to invite people to church. I urge you to do that. Studies show that people are more likely to come to church when they are invited by a friend. If you want to see our attendance grow and our church grow, invite people. I do want you to know, however, that sharing the gospel, witnessing to others, the work of evangelism, has nothing to do with inviting people to church. We have been called to share the gospel, to tell the story of Jesus, and invite others to trust Him. That is not the work of preachers alone. All of us are called to proclaim the good news of Jesus.

Notice 2:1-2. I mentioned Mark Dever in my last message from 1 Corinthians. Let me read a couple of things he wrote as he dealt with the verses we are covering. He wrote, “Polished, positive preachers are no substitutes for Christ crucified.” Later he added:

Friends, if you find yourself moving to another community and looking for a new church, look for most of all—the clear preaching of Christ and him crucified. Look for it in the hymns and prayers and in the preaching. Look for a commitment to faithfully offensive evangelism—evangelism that makes clear that we do not save ourselves, but that our only hope is trusting in God alone through Christ alone.

If we cannot unite around the cross of Christ, we are not going to be able to unite around anything. Roman Catholics, Eastern Orthodox, Pentecostals, and Protestants of every stripe ought to be able to affirm that Jesus, the Son of God, died on the cross for us and that He arose from the dead.

I have heard it said that the ground at the foot of the cross is level. In other words, the message of the cross is an equalizer. It is meant for everybody. Everybody is a sinner and stands in need of the forgiveness that only Christ can give. That means the rich and the poor, educated and uneducated, blue collar and white collar, black and white and every color in between have to go to Jesus for salvation. The ground at the cross is level ground. No one is able to stand above another.

There are many things in church that are dis-unifying.

* Some affirm the gifts of the Spirit while others do not.
* Some are big on church tradition while others are not.
* Some are open to new translations while some hold to KJV only.
* Some say we are still bound by the OT Scripture while others say we are called to live under the new covenant.
* Some emphasize law while others preach grace.

Regardless of where you land on a myriad of things, we should unite around the cross of Christ.

1. **HEALTHY CHURCHES UNITE WITH THE**

**MIND OF JESUS.**

Look at 2:14-16. Paul emphasizes not the subtle differences between believers but rather the one fundamental difference between a lost person and a saved person. He calls the lost person “the natural man.” If you are a Christian, you are a supernatural person. You have something beyond nature. You have the Spirit of God living within you. The person who has not accepted Jesus does not have the Spirit of Christ living within him, and because he doesn’t he doesn’t understand the things of God. They don’t make sense to him. He reads the Bible and scratches his head. He doesn’t get it. He hears sermons, and they go right over him. He listens to powerful Bible teaching, and it doesn’t do anything for him.

Think about this thought, “We have the mind of Christ.” What an incredible statement. If we have the mind of Christ that means we can think the way Jesus thinks. We can value what Jesus values. We can respond the way Jesus would respond. The lost person can’t do that because he or she doesn’t have the mind of Christ. They way Jesus thinks and what Jesus thinks is a complete mystery to him.

N.T. Wright is a Christian theologian. His initials, N.T., suit him well because he happens to be a New Testament scholar. His last name Wright is also appropriate because he has written many books. Some of his more academic works are difficult to get through and very deep. He has, however, written a set of commentaries on each of the N.T. books for the average person, the person who is not seminary trained. He realizes that is what the N.T. was for because it was written not in Classical Greek but what is called Koine Greek, Common Greek. That was the Greek spoken in the street by the common person.

In his book, *John for Everyone*, Wright wrote:

A friend of mine described the reaction when he went home, as a young teenager, and announced to his mother that he’d become a Christian. Alarmed, she thought he’d joined some kind of cult. “They’ve brainwashed you!” she said. He was ready with the right answer. “If you’d seen what was in my brain,” he replied, “you’d realize it needed washing!”

Wright added:

If anything, it’s our surrounding culture that brainwashes us, persuading us in a thousand subtle ways that the present world is the only one there is . . . What the gospel does is to administer a sharp jolt, to shine a bright light, to kick-start the brain, and the moral sensibility, into working properly for the first time.

When we value what the world values and think the way the world thinks, we can’t help but find ourselves divided. We will be at odds with one another often, and often it will be over trivial things. The present lack of unity in the church is due in large part because we do not seek to operate with the mind of Christ. We settle for thinking the way the world thinks.

Let’s set a higher standard for ourselves. Let’s work at uniting under the Lordship of Jesus, around the cross of Jesus, and with the mind of Jesus. There is one more thing that healthy churches do.

1. **HEALTHY CHURCHES UNITE IN THE SERVICE OF JESUS.**

Let’s look at 3:5-9. Then, Paul changes the metaphor from an agricultural one to an architectural on in v.10. He goes from growing to building. The point is the same. We are in this together, and while we are co-workers, God is the One who is ultimately responsible for our success.

In vv. 5-9 we see that we are just farm-hands. We may have different responsibilities in the operation, but we have the same goal, and we have the same employer—God, and God is the One who makes what we plant and water grow.

In v. 10, Paul likens himself to one who builds a foundation. While the foundation is critical, a building is more than a foundation. Paul couldn’t do it all. Co-workers have to learn to trust one another.

Verse 11 teaches that while Paul was laying the foundation, he wasn’t the foundation. Jesus is the only worthy foundation we have.

Look at how Paul closes out the 3rd chapter. I want to read vv. 21-23 from *The Message* paraphrase:

**21-23**I don’t want to hear any of you bragging about yourself or anyone else. Everything is already yours as a gift—Paul, Apollos, Peter, the world, life, death, the present, the future—all of it is yours, and you are privileged to be in union with Christ, who is in union with God.

In order for you and me to unite with one another, we must first unite with God. We have to live in vital union with and constant dependence upon Him. You can’t depend upon me, and I can’t depend upon you unless we know that both of us are depending upon God. If we are depending upon ourselves, we will prove to be undependable.

I close with a story told by Kyle Idelman. He confessed:

When I started a new church in Los Angeles County, California, I found that I was overwhelmed with pressure and stress. I was working more than seventy hours a week. My wife would ask me to take a day off, and I would say, “I can’t.” I wasn’t sleeping at night, and I started to take sleeping pills. When the church was about a year old, I woke up in the night, and I had this strange sense that God was laughing at me. As I lay in bed, I wondered, Why is God laughing at me?

It would take five years before I finally got an answer to that question. Here’s how it happened: when we moved into our current house, I saved the heaviest piece of furniture for last—the desk from my office. As I was pushing and pulling the desk with all my might, my four-year-old son came over and asked if he could help. So together we started sliding it across the floor. He was pushing and grunting as we inched our way along. After a few minutes, my son stopped pushing, looked up at me, and said, “Dad, you’re in my way.” And then he tried to push the desk by himself. Of course it didn’t budge. Then I realized that he thought he was actually doing all the work, instead of me. I couldn’t help but laugh.

The moment I started laughing at my son’s comment, I recalled that middle-of-the-night incident and I realized why God was laughing at me. I thought I was pushing the desk. I know that’s ridiculous, but instead of recognizing God’s power and strength, I started to think it all depended on me.

Just maybe, much of our division is a result of taking ourselves too seriously. We think it depends upon us or upon those that we idolize. We need to remember that we have been called to serve God; He doesn’t exist to serve us. And while He may choose to use us, in the end, He will be the One who does the heavy lifting.