

## The Power of God 1 Corinthians 1:10-18

It is quite obvious from the first verse of our Scripture lesson this morning that the church in Corinth was experiencing some problems. We can almost picture St. Paul with a tear in one eye and a glare in the other as he writes this letter to a group of immature believers in Southern Greece. In order to understand what was happening there, it will be helpful for us to have some background information about Corinth and the early church body there.

Greece is made up of 2 large masses of land, connected by a small stretch of land in the center. You might imagine 2 balloons tied together. Corinth was situated in that strategic part of the country, right in the middle of that small stretch of land connecting the northern and southern sections of the country. It was widely used as a shortcut, and ships would be loaded on skids or rollers and transported through the outskirts of the city. Today there is a canal that allows maritime traffic through. Like many modern-day cities, Corinth was a busy place of commerce and trade and filled with corruption and immorality.

You might compare it to the Mahoning Valley in a way, as we are strategically located halfway between Cleveland and Pittsburgh, and Chicago and New York, and we also have a less than favorable reputation. Corinth was a city in darkness that needed the light of Christ, and that is one reason why Paul chose to start a church there. He stayed there almost 2 years, and soon after he was found innocent of trumped up charges from the Jewish leaders of the day, he left for Ephesus with his close friends Aquilla and Priscilla.

It is in Ephesus that he receives a troubling report from one of his converts in Corinth, someone named Chloe. Verses 10-11 reveals the issue Paul was dealing with. The church is like any organization of people, in that it is likely that contentions will arise from time to time. Personalities can clash, opinions will differ, and personal preferences and egos can lead to disagreements and sometimes even division.

**Verse 12** reveals the extent of the problem. Even more telling is Paul's angry response in **verse 13**. In this specific instance, there appear to be several groups of people who had lost sight of their mission to go and make disciples for Jesus Christ. They had lost their way, and they had lost sight of the way, the truth, and the life. To put it bluntly, they got sidetracked.

That rhetorical question Paul asked is one the church will need to consider again today. Is Christ divided? Can we compare the divisions in that early Corinthian church with the ones dividing us in the in the modern Church and conclude that denominational differences are contrary to Scriptural teaching? Though it is tempting to do that, a careful comparison is in order.

One thing that is different is that today, we are the most mobile generations of people in the history of the world. We can hop in our cars or an Uber and quickly travel for a few dollars clear across town and pass by at least 20 different churches and denominations in the process. The choices we have today are unparalleled in the history of the world. In the Wesleyan tradition alone we have United Methodist, Free Methodist, Primitive Methodist, African Methodist and now the new Global Methodist churches. That is not even close to being an exhaustive list. Is that the same as having the contentions that Paul spoke of where some were following him, others were following Apollos or Cephas, and still others following Christ?

There are some parallels, but we also must consider that even though we are all descendants of Adam and Eve, God has created each of us as a unique individual. We bring different traditions, cultures, and backgrounds to church with us. It would not be wrong to say the people in Banes Cuba might worship a bit differently than the people in Boardman Ohio. The people in Boardman Ohio worship differently than the people in Boardman Ohio. Does that mean Christ is divided?

Paul's letter does help us to answer that question. The context of the first chapter suggests a larger concern than mere political, social, or cultural differences. Verse 10 reveals they were not of the "same mind" and "same judgment". **They were being sidetracked and fooled by the ways of the world.**

He goes on to remind them and us that there is one thing the true church will never fight over. A hint is found in verse 18. The church is united in the same mind and same judgment in the word or message of the cross of Jesus Christ. **The message of the cross is that Jesus Christ loved us so much that He died in our place for our sins.** It is simple yet powerful, so why is that on any given Sunday in America, sermons are preached on nearly every topic but that? If one had to guess, it is likely because of that little 3 letter word that is involved. Sin is an ugly word, but it lies at the heart of the Gospel. We dare not remove it from our vocabulary.

Today it seems that most people want to know how to have a better temporary life now, rather than how they can have a perfect life later in eternity. People want to know how to suffer less now, instead of learning how to **endure suffering so that we will be glorified with Christ.** Rom 8:17 1 Peter 4:12-16 There is no greater symbol of suffering love than the cross of Christ.

The cross must remain the focus of our message, our ministry, and our mission. Is Christ divided? It might look that way to some, but I suggest to you that the answer is no. **Christ never was and never will be divided.** He died on the cross for the sins of everyone who believes in Him, Catholic and Protestant, Reformed or Orthodox, Methodist, or Lutheran, Presbyterian and even Baptists.

With that being said, we must admit that people are divided, and the reality is that it is the cross that divides us. 1:18 It separates those who are being saved from those who are perishing, it separates believers from those who are being fooled by the wise of the world. That word folly has its roots in the Greek word moria, from which we get the English word moron. The cross separates the holy from the profane. There is power in the cross, and at one time the church was not afraid to embrace it for the glory of God. But somewhere along the way we Methodists have lost our passion for the message of the cross, and our culture and our church continues to decay as a result. If the people called Methodists are to become salt and light once again, we must admit we have become sidetracked, much like the early church at Corinth. Some might even say we need to repent. Should we neglect the poor and stop striving for Biblical justice? Of course, we should not. But those two things cannot take priority over the primary mission of the church, which is making disciples for Jesus Christ. That mission begins and ends with the message of the cross.

John Wesley believed and taught that social holiness can only come through personal holiness, and it begins with us. The problems facing this community, this state, this nation, and this world are far too great for humanity to solve alone. The root problem is sin, and bigger jails and bigger armies can't fix it. The message of the cross can. **Sin is no match for a church that has the power of the cross.** Think of how our world would be changed if more Christians would take that seriously. The message of the cross has power to transform lives, homes, cities, and nations.

The cross has been perverted by many who see it as some sort of decoration, rather than a symbol of redemption. One of our goals at Millcreek is to reclaim it for the glory of God. We began a few weeks ago when we decided to disaffiliate with a denomination that has clearly become sidetracked in its mission and practices, a denomination that considers it an asset not to have the same mind and same judgment. Next week, immediately following worship we will meet to discuss why we should consider joining the new Global Methodist Church. I trust we will find that it does have the same mind and same judgment, and the message of the cross has much to do with it. In the meantime, let us pray for guidance.

Lord, we ask you anew to help us to focus on the cross, and to perfectly join us together in the same mind and the same judgment to that end. May all that interferes with that mission be removed from our path, and we pray for receptive minds and hearts to hear your message- our message, the message of the cross. Amen.