

What If We Don't?

1 Corinthians 1 & 3; James 4:1-4

Intro

Study after study and conversation after conversation have shown that disunity is a real problem in churches across the country today.

- It causes stress on pastors and church leaders
 - A recent Barna survey showed that 38% of pastors have seriously considered leaving ministry altogether
 - Not just their church, but leaving ministry to go do something else
- It causes stress on congregations
 - There are very few people who actually enjoy conflict
 - Broken relationships, angry conversations, and stressful interactions don't make for a pleasant worship experience...
- It keeps a church from fulfilling what God's called it to do
 - If a people in a congregation are busy fighting with each other, they don't have the energy or motivation to fulfill the Great Commission
 - Churches that experience disunity are a drag on the name of Jesus in a community, making it harder to fulfill the Great Commission not just for them, but for other churches in the area

If these things are true—and they're statistically and anecdotally shown to be true—why do we keep fighting with each other? Why do we often let ideology, politics, and opinion separate the very thing that Jesus gave His life to bring together? And more importantly, what can we do to bring things back together so we're a picture of what Jesus wants.

- Jesus prayed that we would be one in **John 17**
 - Just as He and the Father are one
 - So that the world may know that He was sent by the Father for the work of reconciliation
- You can be the answer to Jesus' prayer!

This morning we'll see what the Bible has to say about the cause of disunity, the effect of disunity, and how to address disunity.

- As you hear the Word this morning, don't sit there thinking about how much other people need to hear this
 - Consider how much *you* need to hear this and listen to what the Word and the Spirit are saying about things you may need to change

1. The Cause

- We're divided when we put preference over people
 - The church in Corinth was clearly divided
 - Paul addresses disunity in **1 Corinthians 1 & 3**
 - The fact that Paul starts his letter addressing disunity may show that this was the primary issue facing this congregation
 - Paul lists different teachers that people were following in **1 Corinthians 1:12**

- Paul, Apollos, Cephas (or Peter)
 - Jesus
 - This isn't as spiritual as it sounds
 - This group was claiming moral and spiritual superiority, claiming they didn't need to listen to anyone
 - More than that, they strongly implied that people who listened to anyone teach was in the wrong
 - They weren't divided over false teaching or doctrine
 - The word Paul uses for divisions doesn't necessarily have a negative meaning
 - It can simply refer to a difference of opinion
 - Paul is probably using the word this way
 - He commends both Peter and Apollos later in **1 Corinthians**
 - Peter in **1 Corinthians 15:11** says that he and the apostles (including Peter) "Preach the same message"
 - Paul says he encouraged Apollos to visit Corinth in **1 Corinthians 16:12**
 - Paul's contention is that the church at Corinth was experiencing division over what teacher people liked
 - Much of the disunity in churches today isn't over false teaching or bad doctrine, but on political or ideological preferences
 - It's ok to have a preference—we all do—but it's not ok to choose that preference over people
- We're divided when we don't act spiritually
 - It's ok to have differences of opinion
 - As we've said several times in this series, if we were all supposed to look the same, there wouldn't be so many commands to be united
 - Those commands assume that we're going to be different
 - If we weren't different, we wouldn't need to be told to be united
 - It's not ok to act unspiritually
 - But that's exactly what happens when we put preference over people
 - Paul calls the Corinthians out on this in **1 Corinthians 3:3-4**
 - There's jealousy and strife
 - When the Corinthians are putting preference over people according to the teachers they're following, Paul says they're acting in a "human way"
 - He actually says that twice, emphasizing how important this thought is
 - Don't fall into the trap of thinking your spiritual when really you're just concerned about getting your preference

2. The Effect

- Disunity creates an unpleasant atmosphere
 - Think about the times you've had strained relationships in church
 - You may not have wanted to come to worship
 - It may have kept you from taking communion
 - You might have shopped at Walmart at 11:00 at night just to avoid the possibility of bumping into the person you're in conflict with
 - Look at how the New Testament describes congregations in disunity
 - **1 Corinthians 1:11; 1 Corinthians 3:3; James 4:1-2**
 - Quarreling, divisions, jealousy, strife, fights, war, murder
 - ***Sounds like a great place to hang out, right?***
 - No one intends for this to happen
 - At the end of the book of Judges, there's a description of chaos
 - We tend to read this as, "Everyone did what they wanted to do"
 - Actually it says, "Everyone did ***what was right*** in their own eyes"
 - The end result was still devastating
 - The same is true in the church
 - While our preferences often come from a good place, they can have an incredibly negative effect on a congregation
 - Hinders our ability to glorify God
 - Hinders our ability to fulfill the Great Commission
- Disunity ignores what God is trying to do
 - God is in the business of bringing things together
 - That's why Jesus came, lived, died, and rose again
 - God reconciles sinners to Himself
 - God reconciles sinners to sinners
 - **Ephesians 2:12-16**
 - Jesus removed the division between Gentiles and Jews
 - Jesus removed the hostility between the two
 - When we put preferences over people, we actively work to undo what God has done through Jesus
 - Putting preference over people does two things in undoing what God has done
 - **James 4:1, 4**
 - It puts us at odds with each other
 - Quarrels and fights
 - It puts us at odds with God
 - We're thinking about ourselves, rather than what God wants
 - Passions are at war "within you"
 - Division and strife don't arise largely from outside influences but from within our own hearts
 - When we act like the world—full of division over preferences—James says we make ourselves enemies of God
 - ***I'm not sure my preferences are worth that...***

3. How Do We Fix This?

- Paul hints at two solutions in **1 Corinthians 1:10-11**
- Put Jesus above your preferences
 - Paul makes his appeal “by the name of the Lord Jesus Christ”
 - Since He’s the head of the church, we should pay more attention to what He wants than to our own preferences
 - He died for the church
 - He’s the center of the church
 - The church was His idea
- Put people above your preferences
 - Jesus didn’t live, die, and raise from the dead to advance your ideology
 - Jesus lived, died, and rose from the dead to reconcile sinners to God and sinners to sinners
 - Those people that God loved so much that He sent His only Son for?
 - You should love them as well
 - Paul refers to the Corinthians as brothers (or brothers and sisters) twice in this passage
 - It shows his affection and love for them
 - Even in the midst of correcting their disunity, Paul put people over preference and modeled that for the Corinthians so they would do the same

Conclusion

Disunity in the church is a big deal.

- It hinders the mission of the church
- It doesn’t communicate the mission of Jesus
- It hurts believers and congregations

Let’s be people who put Jesus and people over our preferences.

- In that way God is glorified as His church pushes against the gates of hell!