

Church Fights (Part 2) – 1 Cor 1:10-17

1 Cor 1:10-17; (9 a.m. – Dr. Craig Blomberg; Professor; Perspectives; 1 Cor Comment.)

We're in the middle of a 2-part message this week, called Church Fights

Referring to the strife and quarrelling and fighting that often goes on within a church
And my suspicions that many of you had experienced such a thing, and still feel the effects of it, were confirmed by some of your emails this past week

Like this one from a woman who says . . .

Pastor Rob, I just wanted to let you know that I really enjoyed the sermon this past weekend although I listened with great sadness. As you spoke about church fights it brought back some unpleasant memories, fresh memories. My husband and I experienced the church fights at our previous church. We were onlookers and not part of those starting the fights, and it was a very tough decision to leave, but one we knew we had to make. It's saddens us to know that it is not uncommon in churches. We were married and already had our first child before we found the Lord. Our old church was the only church we knew as Christians. I went through a grieving process as we left. I cried for 2 weeks before I felt true peace that our decision was the right one. Your sermons since then have spoke to us on so many different levels. It's just so unfortunate that fights like this happen. People's lives can be damaged by them. Some may even turn away from Christ. I know because my husband was almost there. Before we left, we talked with the pastor and some members of the board, and left on good terms. When we attended Party with the Pastors and you said "leave your bags at the door" we had already agreed to do so. Thank you for addressing issues that I never thought a pastor would address.

Painful and discouraging to say the least

Confirming that church fights are as much of an issue in our day, as they were in Paul's
That's the first thing we learned from this passage last week . . .

(Review of Part 1) They're an issue

And an issue that Paul addresses head on

And just to refresh our memories about it, I want to re-read the passage

I'm not going to go back over it to explain it and discuss its meaning – we spent a considerable time doing that last week . . .

But I do want to re-read it to get the gist of what's going on . . .

And then spend the rest of our time applying it to our church, and connecting it to some other Scriptures that bear on the issue – 1 Cor 1:10-17

Then and now, church fights are an issue

Revealing all *kinds* of ugly things in those involved, whether you want them to or not

And that was the second point we covered

They're revealing

Revealing of things like spiritual arrogance, and foolishness, and favoritism – where your connection to one leader causes you to think less of another

And we ended by talking about the dangerous naiveté of those who are prone to church fights – prone to nitpick and prone to stir the pot, and clueless about it

That was Part 1, and I would encourage you to get a copy/listen online if u haven't already

Part Two, and the third point I want to make re church fights, is that . . .

They're destructive

That's the obvious implication of his appeal in v10 to be unified

Be unified – b/c church fights are destructive

They start as *divisions* (10), or tears in the fabric of our fellowship, and sometimes never get mended; sometimes b/c you don't want them to (carry your baggage on purpose)
Sometimes those wounds are never allowed to heal
And if they do, they often leave a painful scar that lingers for a long, long time
Serving as a constant reminder of the destruction

- And you don't have to look very far for examples – many of you bear those scars . . .
And the landscape is littered with churches that have never fully recovered, or actually sit vacant – due to a church fight; **They're destructive**

And there are at least 5 reasons for that; 5 Reasons Church Fights Are Destructive

1. They alienate the world

There's no bigger turn off for an unbelieving world, than a church that's fighting
Instead of attracting them by our *love* for one another, we repel them by our hate

Let's face it – the world doesn't think much of us in the first place

And hearing about our fights, or seeing the destructive consequences – just adds fuel to their fire

Who wants to be a part of something that's messed up? Something's that dysfunctional?

Who wants to get involved in other people's issues and problems and meltdowns?

Nobody; Not even other *believers*; Let alone *unbelievers*

- When I hear of a club or organization that's having trouble b/c they're fighting with each other, I'm like – “whatever; get over it; get some perspective”
And I *certainly* have no desire to be a part of it
Especially something I don't even believe in, or like
Which is *exactly* the attitude of the unbelieving **world toward us**

You know what they think of our little church fights?

They think they're stupid, and pathetic, and hypocritical

And they're right – on *all* fronts

No wonder it alienates them – and it's our fault

That's the first reason church fights are destructive – they alienate the world

Nobody walks in the doors anymore, and the church goes down hill fast

2. They shame the name

There's nothing God-glorifying about a church fight

There's nothing Christ-exalting about letting *your* preferences, and *your* offenses, and *your* issues – take root, and sprout into a bitter fight; nothing

In fact, just the opposite is true – it brings shame to the name

Shame to the one on whom the church is built in the first place

Shame to the one who's still head of it

Shame to the one who continues to intercede for it; Shame to the one who died for it

Church fights don't make Jesus look *good*, they make him look *bad*

B/c people inside/out wonder how he can be so good, if the thing he's built is so bad
It doesn't add up; And it shames his name

- Kind of like an architect, who designs a beautiful building, but ends up looking bad b/c of poor workmanship on the part of the builders – it shames his name
And b/c of that, do you think he's he going to keep using the same builders? I think not
And neither will Jesus

In speaking to the church in Ephesus, in **Rev 2:5**, he says . . .

Repent, and do the works you did at first. If not, I will come to you and remove your lampstand [i.e. your witness, your light, your ability to shine for me] from its place, unless you repent.

Bring *shame* to the name of Jesus, and we risk losing his blessing **to proclaim it** *****

- **But that's not** the worst of it; Turn to **1 Cor 3:16-17**

He's still talking about the different reasons for divisions in the church, and says . . .
Do you [plural, speaking to the church] not know that you are God's temple and that God's Spirit dwells in you? If anyone destroys God's temple [the church], God will destroy him. For God's temple is holy, and you are that temple.

We are God's temple – not just individually, but collectively, as a church

And God does not take kindly to those who destroy it

Who destroy the dwelling place of his Spirit

Do so, and you risk his wrath to destroy your life – which could be everything from death, to misery, to hell

Church fights are destructive b/c they shame the name, and Jesus **won't stand for it**

3. They grieve the Spirit

Eph 4:30 – *Do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, by whom you were sealed for the day of redemption.*

When u do wrong things as a believer – like fight in church, u force the HS to participate
He lives within you, and the wrong *you* do, you force *him* to do with you
Which, as you might imagine, grieves him *****

That would be like forcing your mom, or your dad, or the person you most respect in the world – to join you in your sin; to be right there with you
Can you imagine how that might *grieve* them?
Now imagine that they are the perfect, holy God of the universe, when we fight amongst ourselves

- And it *destroys* a church, by marginalizing the very one who unites us in the first place
When we fight, we push the HS to the periphery, and diminish his influence in our lives

That doesn't mean we render him *powerless* by our fights, it just means he rarely moves where he's not wanted

And without the move of the HS (newsflash), we have no church

He *is* the glue that holds us together

No wonder Paul said **don't grieve him**

4. They demoralize the people

Talk about robbing people of joy, and taking the wind out of their sails

Church fights are at the top of the list

Who gets excited about coming to church, to be around people w/ whom you're fighting?

“Get in the car Martha – it's Sunday, and time to feel sick to our stomach again”

Who does that? Nobody

Nobody gets excited about being around people with whom they have a problem

People with whom they're at odds; People with whom they can't agree

It's debilitating; It's deflating; And it's demoralizing

The result of which is . . .

Nobody wants to serve; Nobody wants pray; And nobody wants to give

The only thing people want to do in the middle of a fight, is stay away; and they do

Which is why it's so important, if you have an issue with someone – to either let it go, or resolve it

Otherwise it will fester, infect those around you, and demoralize yourself

All of which **destroys a church**

Church fights are destructive b/c they alienate the world, shame the name, grieve the

Spirit, demoralize the people, and last . . .

5. They delight the devil

1 Peter 5:8 – *Your adversary the devil prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour.*

That's what he likes to do – devour people; feed on their souls

And nothing would delight him more than to feast on a church, a whole church

To destroy the focal point of God's work on earth right now *****

- You see, he failed to destroy the body of Christ *physically*, on the cross
So now he's trying to destroy it *spiritually*, in the church
And nothing stokes his fire more, than to see us do the dirty work *ourselves*
To fight and tear one another down, without so much as lifting a finger on his own

Don't go there

Having been *delivered* from the domain of darkness, stay out of it

Otherwise, it's only a matter of time before you delight the devil, add fuel to his fire, and **destroy the church**

That's the 3rd part of church fights I want you to see – they're destructive

The fourth, is that . . .

They're avoidable

They're an issue, they're revealing, they're destructive, and they're avoidable

We don't have to fear them, and we *don't* have to accept them

Even with imperfect people; And hurt feelings; And misunderstandings

And bad decisions; And financial struggles; And moral failures

Even with all of that in the church – fights don't have to happen; They're avoidable

But it takes unified leaders to do so; Church fights are avoidable . . .

- **With unified leaders**

That's where being united in the same mind and judgment *starts* (10b) – w/ the leadership
If the elders, and deacons, and staff are not unified – the rest of the church never *will* be

That's one of the reasons as elders, we make decisions by consensus – b/c it ensures unity
We don't vote *ever* – it's one of the most divisive things u can do; and it *will* trickle down

- We're also careful about the *chemistry* with those we hire
And the *heart* of those we appoint
B/c one of the keys to avoiding church fights, is having unified leaders

Leaders who are of *the same mind and the same judgment* (10b) – completely
Leaders who see problems similarly, and treat them biblically
Leaders who respond to issues quickly, and do so humbly
Leaders who support one another, and pray for one another, and *like* one another
Which I'm happy to say – we *have* here, on *all* fronts

But that's only part of the equation; The leaders also have to be leading godly people
Church fights are avoidable with unified leaders, and . . .

- **With godly people**

Especially people who love peace, more than strife

Have you ever noticed that some people don't seem to be content unless they're in an argument, or a disagreement?
In a twisted sort of way it gives them some measure of satisfaction
Not real conducive to peace

Avoiding church fights, takes godly people who are peace-loving, and *selfless*
People who think less of their *own* opinions, and *more* of their neighbor's
People who are *kingdom*-minded, instead of *self*-minded
People who are focused on spiritual things and eternal things . . .
Instead of worldly things and temporal things
With godly people like that, church fights are **definitely** avoidable

Third, church fights are avoidable . . .

- **With straightforward preaching**

Saying it like it is, is never easy and rarely popular . . .

But I'm convinced that doing so does more to protect our church than *anything* else

Some people wonder why we haven't had any problems
And after correcting them, that in fact we have had our share of problems . . .
I tell them that most of them are dealt with or preempted – by saying it like it is from the pulpit
And when they're not, when they do pop up despite the straightforward preaching – we lean into the problem, and address the issue personally

Kind of like what Paul does here via a letter
This is his up front, straightforward plea – intended to avoid any further fighting
But if they don't get it here, he warns them later that when he comes, he *will* lean into the problem and tell them personally – look at 1 Cor 4:18-21

HOW you can listen and deal with the issue now, or you can wait and deal with it later face to face

But either way, it's going to be dealt with in a straightforward manner

- Fortunately, for us, most issues are dealt with, and most fights avoided, by straightforward preaching and teaching
It's a classic case, where an ounce of prevention is worth a **pound of cure**

- **With doctrinal agreement**

Church fights are avoidable with unified leaders, godly people, straightforward preaching, and doctrinal agreement

Paul says **Eph 4:4-6** – *There is one body and one Spirit – just as you were called to the one hope that belongs to your call – one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all.*

I cite that Scripture to say that – if a church doesn't believe in and agree on the *essentials*, they'll *never* be in doctrinal agreement, and they'll *always* be prone to fights *****

Essentials like the triune nature of God as Father, Son, and HS
And the nature of Christ as fully man and fully God
The depravity of mankind; The substitutionary atonement of Christ's death
His bodily resurrection; His second coming
Salvation by grace alone, through faith alone, in Christ alone
The inspiration of the Scriptures as men were moved by God
The literal interpretation of the Bible, as our rule for faith and life
Church fights are avoidable with doctrinal agreement on the essentials

But they're inevitable without it

If you disagree with our doctrine, you *can't* be fully happy with our church, and *won't* be fully devoted to it

In fact, you'll become increasingly disgruntled and disenfranchised, and prone to a fight

- Now, that's not to say that we have to be carbon copies of one another
Agreement in our doctrine, does not mean uniformity in our thinking
There *are* essentials in which we must be like-minded – yes
But there are also non-essentials in which there's latitude
Things that are not totally clear in Scripture

Like how the sovereignty of God and the free will of man works itself out
Or the details of Christ's return; Or whether some spiritual gifts still exist or not
We don't have to cross our t's and dot our i's exactly the same way on those things
But we do have to agree on the essentials, and sometimes set aside our *personal* convictions, for the sake of unity (**Summary**)

Anything else alienates the world, shames the name, grieves the Spirit, demoralizes the people, and delights the devil

Revealing all kinds of divisions and issues in our church

Don't go **there** (read v10)