

Genuine Unity – 1 Cor 11:17-22

As good as it was to get away, it's good to be back

And I'm so thankful for Jeremy and Bill who preached in my absence without missing a beat; Really pertinent messages that are worth hearing if you weren't here

Meanwhile, we were at a camp in Colorado the first week, where among other things, we did a high ropes course

The *same* high ropes course with the *same* telephone pole that I referred to in this year's Easter message, as an illustration of what it means to believe; Remember that?

Well this year, I brought back a little video so you'd feel my pain; Take a look (**Video**)

- That was our first week; The following weekend, last weekend, Becky and I flew to Oakville, Ontario – a suburb of Toronto . . .

Where I met with several of the Canadian pastors in our fellowship . . .

And preached at HBC-Oakville – a church very similar to ours in many respects

But one of the coolest parts of our visit, took place with a Customs agent in the airport, that I have to tell you about before we get going

We were on our way *out* of Canada, and when it was our turn to step up to the counter, we gave him our passports, and he scanned them and looked at them . . .

And then he asked, “What were you doing in Canada?”

And I said, “I preached at church here in the Toronto area”

And he said, “What did you talk about?”

Which did *not* take me by surprise, b/c the exact same thing happened to us 7 years ago

The customs agent asked what we were doing in Canada . . .

I told him I preached at a local church; He asked me what I preach about . . .

I told him the subject; And then he asked me what the main points of the message were!

That was 7 years ago

So all of that's going through my mind as the new guy is asking the exact same questions

Only this time, when I told him that I had preached about making God-honoring decisions, he goes . . .

“How do you do that? Do you just pray? And how do u know that's what God wants?”

So I said, “Well, the Bible gives us 7 criteria in 1 Corinthians, to help us in that”

And he picked up his pen, turned over a piece of paper, and said, “Where's that?”

So I said, “1 Cor 10:23-11:1”; And he's starts writing it down – 1 C-o-r-i-nthians 10:23

And I'm in the middle of repeating it for him several times, when I just blurt out, “You know what, you can have my notes if you want. I have them right here in my suitcase”

“It's the full manuscript of my message;” And he looks up and goes, “Sure”

So I open my suitcase, pull out my Bible, get the notes out, re-assemble them, and hand them over the counter; And as I do, he says, “Can I keep them?” And I'm like, “Sure”

At which point Becky says, “The church we were at is HBC-Oakville. You should check it out sometime”

And the next thing he said just about floored us; He goes, “I live in Oakville”

And I'm not even sure what we said after that, b/c by the time I recovered, he was handing us our passports and saying, “Thanks for visiting Canada; Come again”

And that was it

Is that not so cool? I was so fueled by that, I couldn't wait to tell you; You never know

- That said, let's turn in our Bibles to 1 Cor 11:17-22; (**Intro**)

But in the following instructions I do not commend you, because when you come together it is not for the better but for the worse. 18 For, in the first place, when you come together as a church, I hear that there are divisions among you. And I believe it in part, 19 for there must be factions among you in order that those who are genuine among you may be recognized. 20 When you come together, it is not the Lord's supper that you eat. 21 For in eating, each one goes ahead with his own meal. One goes hungry, another gets drunk. 22 What! Do you not have houses to eat and drink in? Or do you despise the church of God and humiliate those who have nothing? What shall I say to you? Shall I commend you in this? No, I will not.

Paul starts in v17 by saying – *But in the following instructions I do not commend you*

Which begs some investigation as to what he's contrasting

Otherwise you're left scratching your head as to what he's talking about

And normally, you need only look at the previous verse

But in this case, you have to go all the way back to v2 of chapter 11 to get the flow of thought; That's where Paul says . . .

Now I commend you because you remember me in everything and maintain the traditions even as I delivered them to you.

And then spends 14 verses talking about headship, head coverings, and shame . . .

And then returns to his original thought of commendation in v17, to say – *But in the following instructions I do not commend you*

I commend you for some things, v2, but not this one, v17; Not the one that follows

Because when you come together [he says] it is not for the better but for the worse.

They were gathering together, “going to church” if you will – but the outcome wasn't good; Instead of building one another up, they were tearing one another down

Instead of *exalting* Christ in their fellowship and worship, they were diminishing him

All b/c they lacked the genuine unity, of a Christ-centered community

- Look at v18 – *For, in the first place, when you come together as a church, I hear that there are divisions among you. Dis-unity*

Now, we looked at this in chapter 1, and saw that some of those divisions stemmed from personal preferences

Where some people were saying – “*I follow Paul,*” [and others] “*I follow Apollos,*” or “*I follow Cephas,*” or “*I follow Christ*” (1:12); Remember that?

They were *divided* over personalities and giftedness, instead of *united* under Christ

That was chapter 1

And while that was still going on, Paul cites two *more* reasons for their divisions in the following verses

The first is *socio-economic differences*; And the second is *insensitivity*

Some were rich and some were poor; Some lived on this side of the tracks, and some on the other; Some went to one school, and some to another

And they allowed those things to divide them

Not only that, but they were just plain insensitive to one another

All of which was *petty*; Whether it was personality driven, socio-economic, or insensitivity – they were divided over petty differences
The implication being, that they needed to set them aside; And so do we
He’s not just pointing this out for *information* sake, but *transformation* sake

So genuine unity among us, requires that we . . .

Set aside petty differences (v18-19)

Which in our day and our church, might include a distaste for someone b/c they’re not very well kept; Or maybe they don’t dress very cool . . .
Or run in the same circles as you; Or drive the same kind of cars, or live in a comparable neighborhood
All petty differences that divide, and that we must set aside to ensure the kind of genuine unity that God desires

Oh, you may not think *consciously* about avoiding people who are different than you . . .
But if the differences in any way prevent you from partnering together in the work of ministry, or prompt feelings of aversion that you don’t set aside . . .
Then it’s a problem; We’re divided, and we lack genuine unity
Obviously implying that divisions, and the petty differences that cause them, are bad

- But in the *second* part of v18, Paul adds an interesting twist
After saying – *I hear that there are divisions among you* . . .
He says – *And I believe it in part, 19 for there must be factions among you in order that those who are genuine among you may be recognized.*

Which is a classic case of Rom 8:28 – *that for those who love God all things work together for good*
B/c while divisions and factions are bad, they’re often necessary to separate the wheat from the chaff; Those who are all in, from those who are just dabbling
Those who are *true* believers, from those who just think they are
Sometimes God uses divisions and factions in a church, to contrast those who are *genuine* followers and *genuine* members of the body of Christ, with those who aren’t

If you think about it, there’s nothing like disagreements and differences, to distinguish between those who are contributing in a church, and those who are leaching
Those who are participants, and those who are spectators
Those who are mature, and those who aren’t
Those *worth* listening to, and those worth ignoring

When things are all *quiet* on the western front, there’s nothing to stir the pot
But when divisions and differences pop up, it’s like churning a great big milk vat – the cream always rises to the top

So yes, genuine unity requires that we set aside petty differences
But often times it takes divisions and factions among us, to reveal those who hold them in the first place

Second, genuine unity requires that we . . .

Avoid selfish practices (v20-21)

Like – putting yourself first, neglecting the needs of others, and over-indulging

Those are the selfish practices Paul highlights in v20-21 – putting yourself first, neglecting the needs of others, and over-indulging; Look at what he says
When you come together, it is not the Lord's supper that you eat. 21 For in eating, each one goes ahead with his own meal. One goes hungry, another gets drunk.

Paul’s like, I don’t know what *you* think you’re eating when you come together, speaking to the Corinthians, but it’s definitely *not* the Lord’s Supper
He would have taught them that the Lord’s Supper is intended to be an intimate time of unity and bonding – unity with Christ, and bonding with one another
Instead, they were practicing a perfect form of *dis*-unity

Where first of all he says, *each one goes ahead with his own meal* – that’s selfish practice #1, putting yourself first
Second, *one goes hungry* – that’s neglecting the needs of others . . .
And third, *another gets drunk* – that’s over-indulging; selfish practice #3
All of which they should have been avoiding; And practices we *too* must avoid, if we’re going to maintain any semblance of genuine unity in our church

- And I’m not just talking about food and drink – these principles apply to far more
Like putting yourself first in *social settings*
Where you exclusively gravitate toward those who are familiar to you, while excluding those who aren’t
Or making a beeline to those you already *know* in the lobby, instead of introducing yourself to someone you’re never met, or someone new to our church
In which case you succumb to the selfish practice of putting yourself first

And what about neglecting the *spiritual* needs of others
Like those who say – “Hey, I think we’re just fine like we are as a church”
“We don’t need to spend any more money on ministry; We don’t need to invest in our future; We don’t need more space”
“My kids have long since graduated from children’s ministry, why would we upgrade that?”

If that’s your mindset, you’re neglecting the spiritual needs of others; The spiritual needs of those yet to come, those yet to be saved, and those of the next generation
All of which is *far* worse than neglecting someone’s physical needs
If we’re going to continue to cultivate genuine unity, we must avoid selfish practices and selfish thinking like that

And then there’s living excessively when others are barely living; *Over-indulging* when others are barely scraping by
Living at or near the *top* of our culture socio-economically, instead of in the middle of it like Proverbs says (Prov 30:8-9); We have to avoid that kind of selfishness

Does that mean it’s bad or wrong to make scads of money? Not at all
If God’s given you that kind of opportunity and giftedness – make it; and keep making it
But *don’t* keep it for yourself; It’s not wrong to make it, but it *is* wrong to hoard it
Keep what you need, what you *need* to live in the middle of our culture, and give the rest away; Give the rest away for kingdom purposes; Invest in the work of ministry

B/c over-indulgence is selfish

Just like neglecting the needs of others, and putting yourself first

Practices that must be avoided for the sake of genuine unity

And then 3rd . . .

Show some respect (v22)

Genuine unity requires that we set aside petty differences, avoid selfish practices, and show some respect

Respect for the church in general, and respect for those less fortunate in particular

That's what Paul's getting at in v22 where he says – *What!*

As in, are you kidding me?! Are you out of your mind?! I can't even imagine selfishness like that

Do you not have houses to eat and drink in?

IOW can you not satisfy your physical hunger at home, so you don't muddy the spiritual hunger at church? So you don't distract or de-tract from the things of God?

Or do you despise the church of God and humiliate those who have nothing? Paul says

Let me ask you something – Do you so hate God's people that you actually *want* to humiliate and shame them? Especially those who have less than you?

Less money, less knowledge, less maturity, or less influence? Is that how it is?

And regarding the first part of his question – do you have so little respect for the church, *the church of God* as he says it . . .

That you don't think twice about “dissing” it, or giving it your left-overs? Is that you?

Unfortunately, I think it is; I think that's true of some of you

Some of you *despise* the church, our church, and don't even know it

And it shows in at least 4 ways

- The first of which is your **infrequent attendance**

Whether it's worship on the weekends, or Small Group during the week, or Bible Study, or Student Ministry . . .

Your sporadic attendance basically communicates that you don't value the things of God; Oh, you *say* you do

But your actions, or lack thereof in this case, speak *far* louder you're your words

In which case, you *despise* the church of God

Others of you show a lack of respect for church, by your **consistent tardiness**

And I'm not talking about having a bad morning every now and then

I'm talking about those of you are consistently, and persistently, late

And you don't care; You don't care that you interrupt worship, distract those who are already here, divert our attention from God, and deflate those who lead

It's a problem, and I hate it; And you should too

You should hate the fact that you distract, divert, deflate, and despise the church of God

And then there's **lack of commitment**; Maybe that's your thing

You're here week in and week out, and even on time

But give a tithe, a tenth of your income, faithfully and consistently – no way

And if something better comes along, or somebody looks at you sideways, or doesn't let you do what you want – you're outta here

It's a lack of commitment, and it betrays a lack of respect for the church

A lack of respect for the primary means that God has ordained – to proclaim the gospel, equip the saints, and disciple the believers this side of heaven

You despise it

And then 4th, is a **lack of involvement**

Where you intentionally stay on the periphery so that you don't have to do *any* more than you absolutely want

Nothing more than the bare minimum, so you can assuage your conscience

That way nobody calls you, hounds you, or holds you accountable

And while that may not be your *conscious* thought – if you saw this for what it is, the work of the living God, you'd go all out to be all in

But as it is, you don't, b/c you lack respect for God's church (**Summary**)

What shall I say to you? Shall I commend you in this [as Paul says]? *No, I will not.* (v22)

The time has come for some of u, to show a little respect – respect for the church *****

- And then second, is respect for those less fortunate

Paul asks – *Do you despise the church of God and humiliate those who have nothing?* Those less fortunate

You do if you ignore their plight; You do, if you're insensitive to how they might feel when they can't do, or drive, or live the way you do

You do if you fail to treat them like the brother or sister in Christ that they are

In which case, you show a lack of respect (**Summary**)

- Listen, we have a good thing going in terms of genuine unity around here

But don't stop now – especially as we add to our number

Keep setting aside petty differences; Keep avoiding selfish practices . . .

And show some respect – respect for our church in general, and respect for those less fortunate

Pray – God, forgive us of our petty differences; Help us to root them out and set them aside; And reveal to us our selfish practices, giving us the humility and resolve to avoid them; And convict us of our lack of respect, God – showing us the ways we despise your church and the people who comprise it