

EPIPHANY 2, JANUARY 19, 2019

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Lectionary Readings: Isaiah 9:1-4; Psalm 27; 1 Corinthians 1:10-18; Matthew 4:12-25

Sermon Title: *Is Christ Divided?*

Prayer: *Let the words of my mouth and the meditation of [our] heart[s] be acceptable in Your sight, O LORD, [our] Rock and [our] Redeemer. (Psalm 19:14)*

Salutation: Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. (Ephesians 1:2)

Text: The Word from God through which the Holy Spirit comes to stir our hearts for the Second Sunday after the Epiphany of Our Lord is from our Epistle Reading: 1 Corinthians, chapter 1.

Introduction: Dear friends in Christ, is Christ divided? That's the question that the Apostle Paul asks in our text. So:

- Is Christ divided?
- Can we divide Jesus up into pieces?

The idea is obviously ludicrous, and that's Paul's intent. It's quite obvious that Christ is not divided and cannot be divided. Here, Paul is making it very clear that Christ is not divided. Therefore, those who confess to be a part of His church ought not be divided either. Paul makes that clear in the opening verse of our text (v 10):

"I appeal to you, brothers, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that all of you agree and that there be no divisions among you, but that you be united in the same mind and the same judgment."

I. Why is Paul saying all of this? Oftentimes, we see conflict in the church, where the membership is divided. Sadly, it's not something new. In Corinth, Paul was addressing a church that was surrounded by darkness. Corinthian society was known for its immorality.

In fact, to call someone a Corinthian was to accuse them of being sexually lewd. Why?

- Prostitution was rampant in the city, and the local religions of the city made wide use of temple prostitutes. In fact, the temple of Aphrodite alone employed one thousand temple prostitutes.
- Homosexuality was embraced.
- And, the city was filled with all kinds of idols.

The only thing that was condemned was faithful Christianity. The fact is that, Corinthian society in the first century, wasn't a whole lot different than the society that the church faces in America today.

So, this was a tough place to plant a church, but the Apostle Paul did. Just imagine the work that congregation had before it! It was a small congregation in a massive city that was filled with people who did not have the hope of Jesus Christ, as their Savior.

Little did they realize that, they were on the road to hell. You see, the city was filled with people who needed the forgiveness of sins, and the hope of eternal life that only Jesus could give them.

So, you'd think that this congregation would really be concerned about the task before her. You'd think they'd be trying to bring the light of Jesus Christ into a world filled with so much darkness. But they weren't. What were they doing? They were fighting among themselves.

What were they fighting over? Well, we see that the Corinthian church had divided into factions. What were these factions over? Well:

- One group was saying: "*I follow Pastor Apollos!*"
- Others were saying: "*I follow Pastor Cephas!*"
- Still others were saying: "*I follow Pastor Paul!*"

And then there was the group that was saying that they weren't following any pastor at all. They were claiming that they followed Christ. What they meant by that is that they didn't need any pastor at all. Why? Well, because they were following Jesus directly and claiming some direct spiritual line to Jesus.

But why had these factions developed? Well, you see the members of the church in Corinth had gone pastor shopping:

- Each group had its agenda on what they wanted to do and how they believed the church should be run.
- Each group had its ideas on what they wanted to believe and what they wanted to be able to do.

So, they went around until they found a pastor that they thought was telling them what they wanted to hear, or at least wasn't telling them what they didn't want to hear. You see, what they were doing was attaching themselves to different personalities.

Therefore, they weren't focusing on Christ. Rather than asking what God's Word taught, and if what they were being told was in line with Christ's Word, they were simply focusing on getting someone to tell them what was in line with what they wanted to hear. Therefore, they weren't following Christ. This was what was causing divisions in the church.

II. We still see it today, don't we? What causes divisions in churches today? Well:

- It happens when people don't follow Christ.
- It happens when people become focused on getting their way and decide that they only want to hear what is in line with what they want to believe and do.

In fact, when I go to pastors' conferences, the book displays are filled with such titles as *Alligators in the Congregation*, *Clergy Killers*, *Pastor Abusers*, and *Peacemakers*. Fifty years ago, we never heard of such a thing. However, today, there are business type organizations that charge churches good amounts of money, to come in and *supposedly* tell congregations how to deal with conflict.

Realistically: "*Is Christ divided?*" No! Therefore, Christ's church isn't to be divided either. If Christ's Church is divided, it's because people in the church are not focused on Christ. How do we stay focused on Christ? It's by being firmly grounded in His Word.

However, what does it say if a congregation has no knowledge of Christ's Word and no interest in learning what Christ's Word says? And that can even be to the point that, pastors are scolded for standing firm in God's Word.

At my installation of the parish of St. James and St. Paul's, I made a promise to God and to the congregations that, I would conduct my ministry here according to God's Word. Our constitutions explicitly require us to do everything according to God's Word.

However, Christ's church being divided is very real. Remember, we talked about how the church in Corinth was failing to bring the light of Christ into a world filled with darkness. We're living in a world filled with darkness. And, when there are divisions, those divisions prevent the church from bringing the light of Christ to a world filled with darkness.

For illustrative purposes, where there are divisions, it's like watching a three-legged race. That's where two people each place a leg in a sack and then try to run a race. And, if the two people involved are pulling in opposite directions, what happens? They're not going anywhere.

So, I ask you: “*Do you know, then, what it is that unifies us as a congregation? What is it that pulls and holds us together as a church?*” If you can’t immediately answer those questions, then our congregations have real problems. You see, as right and proper as they may be:

- It’s not our buildings.
- It’s not our histories.
- It’s not the fact that we have a lot of friends here.
- It’s not the community meals we prepare.
- It’s not the Pastor.

What holds us together is Christ!

To help us grasp this concept, at the very beginning of his letter to the Corinthians, Paul refers to the Corinthians as those who have been sanctified by Christ to be called saints, who in every place call upon the name of our Lord Jesus Christ (1 Corinthians 1:2).

And so, you have been sanctified by Christ!

- He has suffered and died for your sins on the cross, and overcome death for you through His resurrection.
- He has given you life and salvation.
- In the waters of Baptism, He joined you together with those around you who have been entered into Christ.

Is Christ divided? No! So, how does His church remain united? It is by being focused on Christ. The word that Paul uses for agreement (*λέγω – légo*) here means to speak the same thing. Therefore, being united or pulling together is by being firmly grounded in Christ’s Word and saying the same thing together, as we believe, teach, and confess.

Then, in the context of our text, Paul also tells us how divisions in the church are healed. It is through repentance and forgiveness. Again, we speak the same thing. When we sin, we confess our sins and speak words of forgiveness to those around us.

Conclusion: Therefore, dear friends in Christ: “*Is Christ divided?*” The answer is unequivocally: “*No!*” However, as long as people insist on having their own way, there will be divisions. Unity will only come:

- As the Holy Spirit leads people to repent of their way.
- And submit to Christ’s way as revealed in the Bible.

In the name of ✠ Jesus, Who forgives all your sins. Amen.

To God alone the Glory!