

Title: Different, yet the Same

Text: 1 Corinthians 12-14

Theme: Worship that is unified by the exaltation of Christ and the edification of the body

Series: 1 Corinthians #52

Prop Stmt.

1 Corinthians is a fascinating book because the truth of the gospel keeps getting squeezed through the lives of the people at this church. This book deals with controversial issues, and because of that, this book is appealed to as an apologetic or a polemic. But, when this book is studied only as a topical dictionary, then the very reason for the book is lost. For example, should women wear a hat in church? If you want to debate that issue, you are going to appeal to 1 Corinthians 11 and line up your arguments for or against. If you want to debate the Bible's position on divorce and remarriage, you have to deal with chapter 7 and line up your arguments for or against. If you are in a discussion with someone about spiritual gifts, and in particular about the gift of tongues, you are going to appeal to 1 Corinthians 12-14 and line up your arguments for or against. I fear that for many, the book of 1 Corinthians is a collection of verses that are used in a verbal arsenal to argue a particular point, while the big idea of the book is not only neglected, but is violated even as the arguments are made about these topics.

It is true that Paul wrote this book to these believers in order to straighten out some serious problems. There were some immediate problems and there were some deeper issues. In fact, the deeper issues were like a moist Petri dish that made it very easy for the bacteria of the immediate problems to flourish.

The deeper issue at Corinth was pride. A close relative to this was what some have described as an "overrealized eschatology." That sounds a little heavy, but it simply means that some people were claiming future promises as present guarantees. In the future, we will be glorified. We will be like Christ. We will be perfect. We will be whole. We will not suffer with sickness, sin or disappointment. Christ has accomplished that for us. All of that is true. If, however, I claim that right now, I am free from sin, all sickness and disappointment, then I am claiming promises for the future, too early. Some of the believers in Corinth, were trying to give others the impression that they had arrived spiritually. They were the ones who were in the know. They were enjoying right now the promises of the future. They had their best life now. Who needs heaven, when you can it all now? This schism in the church between the spiritual haves (the ones who possessed the spiritual secrets) and the rest of the people, made it very difficult to solve problems. That is why, whenever problems are addressed, Paul does so much more than just argue about the topics themselves, he deals with the heart of the issue.

Beginning in chapter 7, Paul addresses the immediate problems. But, these immediate problems reveal the fact that the church itself is deeply divided. They are not only divided by these problems, they do not know how to solve problems very well either. Notice 7.1 "Now for matters you wrote about" and he deals with marriage. 7.25, "Now about virgins" and he deals with when to get married. 8.1 "Now about food sacrificed to

idols.” 11.3 “Now I want you to realize that the head of every man is Christ (authority structures). 12.1 “Now about spiritual gifts...” 15.1 “Now, brothers, I want to remind you of the gospel...” 16.1 “Now about the collection for God’s people.”

Chapters 12-14 are not stand alone. The topic of the public life and worship of the church is dealt with in earnest beginning in chapter 11, but the foundation for all of these issues has to go back to the gospel. That is why Paul basically begins this book with the gospel and ends it with the gospel. Like many of you, I have been privy to many debates about issues raised in these chapters. I have no interest in violating the very spirit of the gospel, or the Spirit Himself as I seek to explain or even argue for a particular point. Some people have acted as if these chapters are the only ones in the Bible, while others have shied away from them. We are going to plow through them, verse by verse, but, I trust, in a way that we do not lose sight of the big picture, nor ignoring the truths that may rattle our cages a bit. Truthfully, our cages need to get rattled a little bit.

One of the reasons that I am enjoying this book so much, is because my study of it is forcing me to deal with some issues that I want to wrestle through at a deeper level. I am not fully satisfied with some of my own positions on things and this gives me the opportunity to do some fresh study and exploration. Therefore, I am not going to give away all of my positions on these topics ahead of time. I want us to enjoy the thrill of fresh study. I do not want to artificially place over the text a pre-determined position and be robbed of discovering all that God has for us. But, neither can I ignore what has and is going on in the name of Christ in relation to these chapters. I know that this passage has been and continues to be a battleground for many.

Therefore, for the balance of this sermon I want to accomplish three things:

1. Give you an overview of the issues today.
2. Give you an overview of these 3 chapters.
3. Point out the main issue – again.

OVERVIEW OF ISSUES TODAY

Western Christianity is broadly defined by two groups:

1. Roman Catholics
2. Protestants

Protestants are broadly defined by two groups:

1. Liberals
2. Evangelicals

Note: Liberal protestants are dying. Unfortunately their theology is not and is being recycled by many evangelicals who are unwittingly planting theological depth charges that will take them down the same road as the liberal denominations.

Evangelicals are broadly defined by two groups:

1. Charismatics

2. Non-Charismatics

Like so many labels, the terms do not accurately nor technically reflect all of the things that are associated with them. Adding turmoil to the already confusing theological potpourri is the fact that there is such an abominable and pathetically shallow level of theological teaching in churches today. So, I am understandably painting with a broad brush, please give me some latitude.

No Word	Spirit	Word	No Spirit
No Theology	Subjective Feeling	Objective Truth	No Feeling
Emotionalism	Music	Preaching	Intellectualism
Arrogance	Humility	Humility	Arrogance
No Knowing	Experiencing God	Knowing about God	No Experience
No Control	Passionate Worship	Controlled Worship	No Passion
No Sickness	Healing	Submission	No Healing
Litmus Test	Tongues	No Tongues	Litmus Test
On going Revelation	Prophecy	No Prophecy	No Spirit-led
Self-focused	Personal experience	God-focused	Self-ignored
Worship self	Man-centered	God-centered	Man belittled
Manipulation	Expect God to move	Expect little	Dead
Demanding	More Prayer	Little Prayer	Complacent
No Discernment	Love	Truth	No Grace

The debate has tended to pit the extremes against each other. Unfortunately most of the extremes on the charismatic side are on television.

Result:

Self-Centered Emotionalism
All Miracles
No Humanity
Empty Hype
Disillusionment

Self-Centered Intellectualism
No Miracles
No Divinity
Empty-Rationalism
Disillusionment

Now, I want to go back to a previous point for a minute. When Paul is dealing with some of the immediate problems, he often does so (not always, but often does so) by pointing out that with some of the issues neither side is completely right nor completely wrong. That is seen in how he deals with what food is acceptable, whether or not to marry and with the issue of tongues speaking.

Tongues is the lightning rod issue today, and it appears to have been a contentious matter then as well. I am convinced of that because Paul says, in his conclusion (14.39) “do not forbid speaking in tongues.” It seems that there was probably such an abuse of this gift going on that some in the Corinthian church were saying to stop it completely. The Bible says, you cannot do that. On the other hand, that does not give permission to people to abuse this. That is why the same Holy Spirit who directed Paul to say, “do not forbid” its

use, also gave us a very clear definition of tongues, its purposes, and how it is to function in the life of the church. We will work through all of that when we get to chapter 14. Because quite frankly, there is not much said about tongues until then. Chapter 12 says a couple of things, chapter 13, once and then chapter 14.

OVERVIEW OF THE 3 CHAPTERS

12 - You are the Body of Christ.

The big idea of chapter 12 is the big idea of chapter 11. You are a body – start acting like it! The strong need the weak, the weak need the strong, the rich need the poor, the poor need the rich, the slaves need the free, the free need the slaves, the followers need the leaders, the leaders need the followers, the hand needs the ear, the ear needs the eye, the head needs the feet, etc. The body is a unit, though it is made up of many parts (v.12). There should be no division in the body, but its parts should have equal concern for each other. (v.25) We are different in giftedness, but the same is essence. We are different in practice, but the same in position. We are different in function, but the same in Christ. All believers have been baptized by means of the Spirit into the body of Christ, but not all believers have the same gifts. Therefore, (v.29) are all apostles? – NO! Are all prophets? – NO! Are all teachers? – NO! Do all work miracles? – NO! Do all have the gifts of healing? – NO! Do all speak in tongues? NO! Do all interpret? – NO!

I agree that there is too much division within the body of Christ. But, it is not a simple matter of everyone agreeing to disagree. We cannot throw our theology out the window and pretend that it does not exist or that it does not matter. But I do believe, that tongues should not be the huge chasm in the body of Christ. If those who have pushed and pushed this gift, would at the very least acknowledge the clear biblical evidence that the gift of tongues is never given in Scripture as the mark of genuine Christianity, nor the litmus test for a second blessing, then I am convinced that a huge wall of tension between the two camps will be blown up and we can move toward a Christ-exalting, Spirit-driven, love-saturated appreciation and embracing of each other in the gospel of Jesus Christ.

13 - Biblical Love is the most important characteristic

Now, are you ready to see what chapter 13 is all about? The greatest mark of the church is her love for God as seen in her love for each other!!! You can speak in tongues all you want, but if you don't have love, you might as well go around and drop trash can lids on concrete floors, because to this world, that is what your life is like. It will be just a bunch of noise. You can know all of the arguments for reformed theology, and give a brilliant defense of historic pre-millennialism, but if you do not have love, it is empty air. You can even give 45 billion dollars to a humanitarian foundation, or die trying to rescue people out of the World Trade Center, but if you do not love the way God defines love, it does not count one iota. I am not suggesting that love is the only criteria for valid Christianity. 1 John is very clear that you have to the right view of Christ (Christological confession) and you have to have a life that is characterized by obedience to God's commands. But,

in light of Paul's discussion on what gift (or what gift possessor) is the greatest, the whole debate betrays an ignorance of what is truly great – Love!

Look at 13.13. How does a charismatic read this? “And now these three remain: faith, hope and love. But the greatest of these is tongues!” How does a non-charismatic read this? “And now these three remain: faith, hope and love. But the greatest of these is reformed theology!”

14a – Intelligible Worship is Crucial (1-20)

I cannot say with one-hundred percent certainty that the gift of tongues has completely passed off of the scene of church history and experience. Yes, chapter 13 says that tongues will cease, but only when perfection comes. We are not there yet! The end of chapter 14 is very strong. “Do not forbid speaking in tongues.” So, I have a hard time saying that you cannot do this. But, this does not open the door for nonsense. Chapter 14 deals with a theology of tongues more than any other passage in the Bible. This is going to be a fascinating study. Interestingly enough the big idea of the first 20 verses is the importance of intelligible worship. Yes, God is a personal God and is to be known and experienced on a personal basis. There is a lot to be commended for feeling your faith. But feeling your faith has dangers that have to be recognized.

D.A. Carson, one of the most pre-eminent (and humble) NT scholars of our day, said regarding this text, “Whatever the place for profound, personal experience and corporate emotional experience, the assembled church is a place for intelligibility. Our God is a thinking, speaking God; and if we will know him, we must learn to think his thoughts after him. ...edification in the church depends utterly on intelligibility, understanding, coherence.”

14b – Preaching is more Beneficial to the church than Tongues (20-25)

14c – Proper Order must be followed in your meetings (26-36)

14d – Warning! (37-38)

14e- Summary (39-40)

The history of the church is full of pendulum swings between a strong intellectually driven formulation of Christian doctrine and uncontrolled emotionalism. Is it possible to understand and embrace the doctrines of grace, to be theologically grounded, to be a true student of the Word and at the same time be a passionate, expressive, intense, sacrificing, follower of Jesus? The obvious answer is – yes! The presence of danger in either extreme should not deter us from pursuing the entire biblical path. I will pray with my spirit, but I will also pray with my mind. I will sing with my spirit, but I will also sing with my mind.

We are a church that historically, is more in the non-charismatic tradition. The one thing that we tend to be afraid of is losing control. So, we have a faith that is the product of teaching and explanation. Our faith makes sense, but it just doesn't seem to make a

difference. Brothers and sisters, I do not want my fear of losing control to keep us from being completely in the hand of God. God is absolutely sovereign and I embrace that.