

Title: Houston, We've Got a Problem!

Text: 1 Corinthians 1.10-17

Theme: Unity has to be addressed by the gospel

Series: 1 Corinthians #3

Prop Stmt

Jason was entering his freshman year when his family moved and he had to change schools. He was sick to his stomach just thinking about walking into a strange place, wondering where his locker was, where his classes were, where the bathrooms were, but most of all he dreaded all of the looks that he would get as the outsider. The students were basically divided up into 3 major groups and 1 minor groups. Of course, there were the athletes, both guys and girls. And like most schools there was a group of brainy people who excelled in all of the advance classes. Many of them were in the band as well. The third group was the party-hogs. They hated school, hated the athletes, hated the brainy kids, hated the teachers, hated the police, hated the government, hated their parents and generally hated everything except those who hated everything as well. There was a fourth group, they were the refuse, reject group that everyone seemed to shun.

From his first day it was very clear to Jason that he was expected to choose, what group would he be in. To a freshman in high school, much of life can be wrapped up in that crucial issue. He has to find his group, but in so doing, he immediately labels himself as being against the others. It is not fair, but it happens way too often.

This same scenario is repeated thousands of times a week not only in schools, but also in churches. Let me show you how this happens. In verse 9, we read that we have been called into koinonia. We have been called into fellowship. Answering the call to follow Christ brings with it the call to be church. Koinonia is the NT word for fellowship and it means loving one another, teaching one another, serving one another, praying for one another, helping one another, encouraging one another, and confronting one another. The "one anothers" in the NT are all different aspects of fellowship. True fellowship is more than socializing at a church picnic, it is one life truly caring for another life and helping that person mature as a follower of Christ. True fellowship is founded upon and grounded in Christ. That is why true fellowship is so threatening to self-centered people. And guess what? We all tend to be self-centered people, so it is very easy to create artificial fellowship. There is another name for artificial fellowship – it is called a clique.

Artificial fellowship is created when people attempt to satisfy their desire to belong by attaching themselves to people or movements other than Christ. Let's say that you own a Harley Davison motorcycle. Have you ever known people like this to be cliquish? What is interesting is how you are expected to conform so that everyone in the group looks like a non-conformist. We could say the same thing about a fan club. But while understand that people are going to organize themselves on the basis of surface issues outside of the church, it is a serious problem when churches are fundamentally divided over surface issues.

If you looked close enough you would find some minor differences between John MacArthur (pastor and writer) and John Piper another pastor and writer). John MacArthur and John Piper enjoy mutual ministry and genuine fellowship. But it is very easy for people to line themselves up behind different spiritual leaders and make more of the differences than what actually exist. When theology becomes an excuse for sinful attitudes and self-centeredness, something is dreadfully wrong with either your theology or your failure to apply it. That, my dear brothers and sisters is what was shaking the ground under the feet of the Corinthian church. Large gaps were appearing in the floor, and unless they were corrected, the entire church was going to cave in.

We deal with problems by going back to the gospel (justification is the basis for sanctification) 1.10-2.5, by appealing to God's wisdom 2.6-2.16 and by following God's ways 3.1-4.21.

1. **God's command for the church is unity.** – v.10

God has called you to fellowship (v.9) but you are not living out that fellowship and that is a huge problem! In these verses (10-16) there is one command and it is in v.10. I appeal to you (parakaleo) lit. to call alongside, which really conveys how urgent and personal this matter is. "I appeal to you brothers in or through the name of our Lord Jesus Christ that all of you AGREE WITH ONE ANOTHER

A. **Unity is a matter of urgency.**

B. **Unity is a matter of theology.**

"in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ"

C. **Unity is a matter of attitude.** (mind-set)

"perfectly united" means to be restored to your proper condition. The word was used to describe the mending of nets in Matthew 4.21.

D. **Unity is a matter of your goal.** "and thought" - consent

2. **Satan's goal for the church is division.** – v.11-12

Because division will lead to destruction.

A. **Division starts in the heart** – v.11

There were quarrels in the church. This is more than somebody getting upset at someone else about a matter, this means that there is a spirit of contention and division that is setting in the church. If you went to the church at Corinth, this spirit sucked you into its vortex, set you on a side and instantly you were in the middle of a fight.

## **B. Division finds an excuse in minor differences – v.12**

“I am one of Paul’s people, I, for my part am for Apollos, I am a Peter person, as for me, I belong to Christ.”

The problem as Paul outlines it here in v.12 is what we would call personality cults. Ayn Rand calls people like this glad-handers. They seek to find their worth based on who they know and with whom they associate themselves.

For example, on our flight back from Russia, Roy and I were on the plane with one of the Detroit Red Wings and we had a chance to talk to him a little bit. Now, is that interesting? Sure! Does that add value and worth to my life? No! But some people try to vicariously find worth by attaching themselves to what they perceive to be the importance of other people. You see, what is happening at Corinth is not legitimate theological discussion over different doctrines and philosophy of ministry. What is happening is the elevation of personalities that none of the personalities are approving of.

There have been different theories advanced over the possible differences that existed within these four groups. The most likely scenario is as follows: The followers of Paul were those who were now remembering the good old days when Paul was in town, and were using their loyalty to Paul as an excuse following other leaders. The followers of Apollos were likely influenced by his giftedness in the area of speaking, and while he did not know more than Paul, he was probably a bit more eloquent, giving people a flimsy basis for comparison. There is no solid evidence that points to Peter having been to Corinth at this point, although he may have. Many people are very loyal to the person that God uses to bring them to faith in Christ, which may explain Peter’s influence here, or it could be that there was a Jewish element that viewed Peter as being more traditional in keeping the OT than others. The Christ group was using this label as a pious cover-up for not being a functional part of the body. They were like the people who said, I follow Christ, I don’t need the church. I can pray right here in my garden, or on the 13<sup>th</sup> fairway or in my cabin on the lake. Yes you can, but I doubt that you do. What you cannot do is obey the call of God in v.9 to koinonia, when you say I follow Christ I do not need to be part of a church.

### **3. Understanding priorities produces unity. (13-17)**

Notice how Paul responds to this. He deals with this problem by appealing to the person and the work of Christ and asks a very obvious but challenging question. Look, if we are the body of Christ, then let me ask you this – is Christ divided?

#### **A. The Person of Christ is our Personal Goal. (13-16)**

The church is fundamentally not sociological, but Christological. Do you know what I mean by that? We are here on the earth to reflect Christ, to be Christ, and to continue the

work that Christ started. Therefore, Christ is not only our foundation, he is our goal. We are to model our lives, our relationships, our attitudes, our motives and our purposes around Him and according to Him. That is why Paul asks this question. If we are the body of Christ then can you explain to me how we can be divided?

The reality is, the body of Christ is often divided because people fight and divide over the wrong issues. There are issues worth fighting and dividing over, but personalities is not one of them. The less, theologically sensitive people are, the more prone they are to be influenced by personalities instead of truth. That is why Paul hits this head-on using himself as the first target.

Hey! Was Paul crucified for you? Of course not! Neither were you baptized into the name of Paul. Therefore, since salvation is not found in Paul, do not make Paul your Savior. Paul is not your Savior – Jesus is.

But here is what happens. We see or hear a leader or ministry that appears to have a measure of success. From all that we know he or they have their ducks all in a row. It is so easy and so tempting to follow them, instead of truly following Christ. Following them is the lazy person's approach to church life or to personal sanctification. Therefore, if John MacArthur says it, or John Piper says it, or Chuck Swindoll says it, or whoever

#### **B. The Preaching of Christ is our Public Task. (17)**

“The faithful preaching of the cross results in men ceasing to put their trust in any human device, and relying rather on God's work in Christ. A reliance on rhetoric would cause men to trust in men, the very antithesis of what the preaching of the cross is meant to effect.”

Conclusion:

An appeal to those who have been through church problems.

I cannot guarantee you a church without problems, in fact I can guarantee you a church that has problems. The issue is, what is the process that the church has in place for dealing with the problems. The question that you have to ask yourself is this, am I going to be part of the solution, or am I going to sit on the sidelines, pretending to be spiritual and actually contribute to the problems because of my failure to be all that God wants me to be in the church.