

LENTEN MIDWEEK #3
1 CORINTHIANS 1:10-17
1 CORINTHIANS 11:17-22, 33
MARCH 27, 2019

Diversity and Challenges

The first Christians were Jews. They were Jews that lived in Jerusalem, Judea and Galilee. They spoke the same language and had many of the same customs. The biggest issue for the first Christians was the persecution by the Jews that were not Christians. They sought to destroy the church of Jesus Christ. There was a basic unity among the Christians in the early times of the church.

Life in the church became more complicated as Christianity started to grow and move beyond Israel. With Paul's missionary journeys came new congregations of people. The church was no longer a Jewish Christian church but also included Gentiles who had their own customs and ways of life. The Gentile churches had their own challenges as well. The Gentile Christians did not have the history of the Ten Commandments. They were a diverse people among themselves. They often did not share the values of the Jews.

The sudden diversity in the church caused arguments and disputes about doctrine and the correct teaching of the word of God. Paul and Peter argued about food laws and what was accepted and what was not. Unity in the church began to look different as new people were coming into the body of Christ. The church was becoming a diverse group with many members and many parts of the body.

1 Corinthians 1:10, 11 Now I appeal to you, brothers and sisters, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that all of you be in agreement and that there be no divisions among you, but that you be united in the same mind and the same purpose. ¹¹For it has been reported to me by Chloe's people that there are quarrels among you, my brothers and sisters.

Not only was there a difference based on ethnicity but also on other preferences within the church. There have been many challenges in the church. Who is the head of the church? To whom does the church belong? One of the struggles and conflicts in the church at Corinth was about church leadership and the teaching of scripture. As Paul wrote this portion of the letter he scolds them about their thoughts concerning who they belong to. Some claimed to belong to Chloe while others belong to Paul. Some belong to Apollos and others to Cephas. Paul argues that we do not belong to one person but that we belong to Jesus Christ. We have Christ as our head and we are the body of Christ.

The church has become and is becoming a diverse group. Our congregation is an example of this diversity. Our Savior's is made up of people from many places. We also enjoy those that come other faith backgrounds. Jesus proclaimed a vision for the church and the kingdom of God that says people would come from east and west, north and south. We will sit at the banqueting table together.

The Holy Spirit challenges the church in all times and places to recognize that our unity does not come from common cultural ties. The unity of the church is also not based on family ties or in social status. It is based only in Jesus Christ. It is Jesus who unites us and Jesus who ministers to us. We belong to Jesus and the Holy Spirit calls us together as the body of Christ.

1 Corinthians 11:17, 18 **Now in the following instructions I do not commend you, because when you come together it is not for the better but for the worse. ¹⁸For, to begin with, when you come together as a church, I hear that there are divisions among you; and to some extent I believe it.**

We come the to communion table as one people. The other big issue facing the Corinthian church was the practice of Holy Communion. In the first century church Holy Communion was called the Love Feast. It was more than our wafer

and small cup of wine. It was a feast. Masters, servants and slaves all came together in the church. All sections of society came together to become part of the church. They were to proclaim one Gospel, one Jesus Christ, crucified, died and risen. One of the struggles had to do with some that came early and devoured the food before others could arrive. Paul scolds them for not loving their neighbor as themselves. He says that this is not the gospel of love but it is one person having contempt for another. They were to come together as one body to share this uniting meal together.

The message of the gospel is that Jesus Christ died on the cross for you. He gave you life through the power of God. The message of the cross is one of unity. There is only one gospel. There are many eloquent preachers that proclaim the gospel. There are many that do not have eloquent voices and deep vocabulary but they proclaim the same gospel. Paul was perhaps the greatest of all evangelists but his message is nothing apart from the gospel of Jesus Christ. He claims no eloquent wisdom but gives glory to God. The power of our message is the power of the cross. Apart from the cross there is no power. Apart from the cross there is no salvation and there is not godly wisdom.

You are one body with all others. You have Christ as your head and the rest of Christianity as parts of your body. Let no division come among us. We serve our Lord and our Savior. There is one body and gospel. We will serve the Lord with our entire lives. AMEN