



1 Corinthians 3:1-23_Principles of Unity
Short Expositions for an Important Time in CRCC
July 28, 2013

Text: 1 Corinthians 3:1-23

- The last time we were in this Epistle, we read: *“Now we have received not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God, that we might understand the things freely given us by God. (13) And we impart this in words not taught by human wisdom but taught by the Spirit, interpreting spiritual truths to those who are spiritual. (14) The natural person does not accept the things of the Spirit of God, for they are folly to him, and he is not able to understand them because they are spiritually discerned. 1Co 2:12-14 ESV*
- Therefore, if we, a local body of Christ, have received the Spirit (not the spirit, small ‘s’ of the world), there should be a growing level of spiritual understanding of the things taught by the Spirit.
- Remember, the context of the first few chapters of 1 Corinthians (a city steeped in sin and paganism and a church torn by class issues, sin, doctrinal issues, and church order issues) is **UNITY**:
 1. *“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.” 1Co 1:10 ESV*
- **Dear friends, I make the same simple appeal: Stay together. Agree. Let there be no divisions among you. Have the same mind and judgment.**

Short Expositions, Verse by Verse

- (1) *But I, brothers, could not address you as spiritual people, but as people of the flesh, as infants in Christ.*
 - The Apostle’s apparent desire was to address the Corinthians with more depth in previous times of teaching. He chose not to because of their **immaturity**. Please know, a characteristic of immaturity is you don’t think you are. LOL!
 - There seems to be the expectation on Paul’s part that this church should be further along.
- (2) *I fed you with milk, not solid food, for you were not ready for it. And even now you are not yet ready,*
 - This is a gentle **rebuke**. He’s saying he wanted to say more to them, but since they were and are “fleshly” and not spiritual he could not.
 - Nevertheless, Paul still fed them. He still taught them, loved them, and strengthened them.
 - However, there is an admonishment here: “You still are not ready. Why not?”
- (3) *for you are still of the flesh. For while there is jealousy and strife among you, are you not of the flesh and behaving only in a human way?*
 - Two very important areas of caution are mentioned: **jealousy** (wanting what someone else has) and **strife** (quarreling, wrangling, being disagreeable, keeping some mess going! ☺).
 - These are characteristics of the fleshly, “human” nature, and do not promote devil-chasing unity.
 - In bible-believing churches, these are two to really watch out for. Yes, common vice can be an issue as well . . . but for those who think they are “spiritual” these are tricky:
 - And ungodly “wanting” is at the root of jealousy. Yes, even couched in spiritual terms.
 - Spiritual arrogance can KEEP strife going, and going, and going . . . bible in hand.
- (4) *For when one says, “I follow Paul,” and another, “I follow Apollos,” are you not being merely human?*

- We are followers of Christ! Therein is the **foundation** of all Christian Unity. **Jesus is Lord.**
- Paul is cautioning the Corinthians about putting too much emphasis on the human teacher. He is in no way saying treat them poorly. He is, however, saying that to divide based on them is immature, dishonors the Church's true Head, and hurts the church itself.
- Given the multitude of teaching around these days, I plead with CRCC: be discerning and please guard our unity, and that of the Body of Christ.

(5) *What then is Apollos? What is Paul? Servants through whom you believed, as the Lord assigned to each.*

- These are wonderful verses that give **perspective** to every leader. Ultimately, the teacher is just a tool in the hand of the Master.
- There is also great encouragement here for all who preach the Gospel. God assigns our tasks, works in us towards their completion (Php 1:6), and does the saving. All we really have to do is be faithful. 😊

(6) *I planted, Apollos watered, but God gave the growth.*

- And therefore God gets all the glory! **CRCC, be faithful in your planting and watering!**
- This is an interesting balance. God must receive all the glory, and yet humans need encouragement every once and awhile.
- However, if we must err, always err on the side of minimizing the human and exalting God!

(7) *So neither he who plants nor he who waters is anything, but only God who gives the growth.*

- So, according to Scripture, the planter and waterboy are **nothing**. 😊 God however, is something. Wow.
- How much disunity is caused by "fighting for MY rights" or "You can't do that to ME" or "I don't have to take that?"
- The *great* apostle is saying, "I am nothing." I wonder if the "I am somebody" mindset is hurting us, our dependence on Christ, and subsequently, the power of the Holy Ghost in us due to pride.

(8) *He who plants and he who waters are one, and each will receive his wages according to his labor.*

- May the Lord produce this kind of unity among local congregations: "We are one."
- Assuming a reasonable degree of essential doctrine conformity, this is a wonderful truth. There will be NO DENOMINATIONS in heaven.
- Some disagreements are so **small** they simply should not divide us. Help your church, Lord.

(9) *For we are God's fellow workers. You are God's field, God's building.*

- Wow. Again, what a unity-producing mindset! "I'm not the man. I'm not the one. I'm not the boss. I'm just a **worker!**" 😊
- Friends, you are God's field, God's building. Paul was giving his life that the fields would produce fruit and the building would be built upon an unshakeable foundation!

(10) *According to the grace of God given to me, like a skilled master builder I laid a foundation, and someone else is building upon it. Let each one take care how he builds upon it.*

- One can only build according to the **grace** given. This lessens jealousy and envy and focuses trust and hope on Christ!

- Eventually, someone else will build upon every good foundation. You aren't Christ; let it go. He alone is sovereign. I'm beginning to think God designed it this way so we would know it is all about Him not us.
- So, we can be at peace with one another instead of scratching and clawing for "our **purpose**."

(11) For no one can lay a foundation other than that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ.

- This should be the only concern. Paul didn't care that Apollos taught; He cared that Apollos taught Christ and Him crucified! **Truth** matters much more than the truth teller!
- Can you begin to see how this mindset brings unity? Our center, focus, and unity point is Christ and His commands.
- I honestly have come to believe that there is way too much bickering. Yes, we must confront sins and bring correction (as Paul empathically does in 1 Corinthians!), but who cares about carpet color? 😊

(12) Now if anyone builds on the foundation with gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, straw—

(13) each one's work will become manifest, for the Day will disclose it, because it will be revealed by fire, and the fire will test what sort of work each one has done.

(14) If the work that anyone has built on the foundation survives, he will receive a reward.

(15) If anyone's work is burned up, he will suffer loss, though he himself will be saved, but only as through fire.

- Metaphorically speaking, Paul uses common building materials to make a salient point: protect unity and fight for truth, but understand that God will judge it all.
- Gold, silver, and precious stones will make it (good things); wood, hay, and straw will not (not so good). A teacher's works (and anyone who contributes to building up or tearing down the church) will be **judged**.
- **CRCC, let's continue to "test all things" (1 Thess 5:21), but also understand that our unity is more important than some things as well.**

(16) Do you not know that you are God's temple and that God's Spirit dwells in you?

(17) If anyone destroys God's temple, God will destroy him. For God's temple is holy, and you are that temple.

(18) Let no one deceive himself. If anyone among you thinks that he is wise in this age, let him become a fool that he may become wise.

(19) For the wisdom of this world is folly with God. For it is written, "He catches the wise in their craftiness,"

(20) and again, "The Lord knows the thoughts of the wise, that they are futile."

- What an astounding truth! We are God's holy temple!
- The Corinthian's main problem of "thinking we are wise" is addressed again and again.
- In context, "How should temple-people act?" 😊 Should they worry about who baptized them when God lives in them? Should they be arrogant or boastful? NO!
- The posture of such people likened to, "becoming a fool that he may become wise."
- Worldly wisdom puffs up and promotes deceit (craftiness); godly wisdom promotes humility.

(21) So let no one boast in men. For all things are yours,

(22) whether Paul or Apollos or Cephas or the world or life or death or the present or the future—all are yours,

(23) and you are Christ's, and Christ is God's.

- Therefore if we boast at all, it must be in the Lord, not men. We can and should love and honor and pray for our leaders, but there is a line we must never cross.
- Paul said that he and the others were simply men given to the church, and all them “belonged” to the church.
- What an amazing final argument for unity in this section! It’s not “I am of Apollos;” Rather, it’s “all are ours!” Wow!
- And of course, the credit belongs to Christ . . . and indeed all belongs to Christ and God! In that sense, there is NO reason for disunity over teachers. . . because all (including the world, life, death, etc.) belongs to God.

Amen.