

## *Love within the Body of Christ*

February 5, 2006

Some of the greatest conflicts I have ever known have been among Christians. Some of the most petty differences that I have ever heard of are between Christians. Being a pastor & the son of a pastor, the church is my reference point. It is what I am the most familiar with and it is amazing how conflictual church members and Christians can be to one another. If I were to rank the greatest pains within my life, they would almost all be pains inflicted by other Christians. In that list there would also be included a death of a loved one, but the other top pains would be from other Christians. Some of my greatest joys and experiences of love and support also come from other Christians, but this morning I ask you why is there so much pain that is experienced among Christians.

Jesus said, *34 I give you a new commandment, that you love one another. Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another. 35 By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another.*" Jn 13:34-35

We should be known for our love and especially our love for each other. Sadly we are often known for anything but our love for one another. This morning we continue the them: Love God. Love others. Make disciples. As I have shared the beginning point is to realize how much God loves you and accept that love. That love will transform you. Then you are to love the Lord your God with all your heart, all your soul & with all your mind. Beyond our love for God and a way to show our love for God we are to love one another. Last week we looked at how to love people that are mean to you. Today this focus is on loving other Christians. Sometimes they are the ones that are the meanest to you, so we can have some carry over from last week.

I want us to begin by thinking about why do people in the church or Christians in general don't get along & why do we not have a greater love for one another?

1) **Theological differences** – honestly this is often more of a problem of ministers than lay people. But what are the theological issues:

- Women's roles within the church
- Pastoral authority – I've been called a wimp
- How to interpret the Bible
- Homosexuality

Should these issues keep us from working together and loving one another? Should it keep missionaries from working together?

2) **Kicked out of input**

A sad event in Christian life is that sometimes those in leadership are not willing to work with those with different views and will not allow different views to be included. If we are excluded from leadership and participation with a group – how should we respond?

Keep loving them. We can find other avenues of partnership, but we are to keep loving our fellow Christians.

### 3) **Church competition**

A church member told me of getting a call from a new church that described their church and how much better it is than any other church. Are you involved in a church? Yes, but I have a friend that is not that may be interested in your church. But doesn't our church sound better to you than your church. So how do we feel about this new church? Well our goal should be to love them. Realize they may be immature in their approach, but love em.

## **LOCAL CHURCH**

What causes conflicts within a local church?

1) **Control** – I want things my way. I want the music to be my style. I want the programs to be most fitting to me. And sometimes it relates to when a person is not able to control other areas of their life, so they want to have control within the church.

I had a pastor tell me about doing long range planning at a church. They were discussing changes to the facilities and everyone spoke about their preferences. The pastor did something daring. He said, "we are not to be thinking about our preferences. We are building a church for the future. What type of facilities do we need for 20 years from now – when none of us will be here?" The goal take a broader look. Our goal is to not be our way, but what is best for the church & what God is leading us to do?

Control can cause a big conflict within a church & sometimes it is not so much about what we are doing, but who is in control.

2) **Change** – Change often brings conflicts. Some people don't want to experience any changes. Within a church or any organization there is always going to be changes that occur. Changes could include: SS curriculum, order of worship service, style of music, time of service, etc. The older we get the harder it can be to experience change. I had someone once tell me that he didn't like some things at our church – too many activities, too many changes, & then he told me of visiting a church he really liked – not many activities, things didn't change and they people weren't friendly. He later told me that the church wasn't growing and they were hardly any young people. Change can be hard. We don't need to change just for the sake of change, but change can be necessary and change can cause conflicts.

There are conflicts about what the pastor did or didn't do. When I was 26 years old & serving as a pastor I had a man get really upset because I walked in the sanctuary & spoke to Mr. Jim, but not to him. I didn't purposefully leave him out, it was just that Mr. Jim was blind & I was trying to include him, when everyone else in the sanctuary could see me.

Some of our conflicts are not so petty. There can be times that people intentionally or unintentionally do things that hurt us & it can be hurting us deeply. It could be during a difficult time in our life & our church friends are not there for us. It could be that we don't get the support we need in a program we are leading.

Conflicts amongst church members is not a new problem. It seems that religious leaders or what we may call church leaders often had conflicts with Jesus. When he healed someone they conspired how to destroy him.

***Mark 3:1-5** 1 Again he entered the synagogue, and a man was there who had a withered hand. 2 They watched him to see whether he would cure him on the Sabbath, so that they might accuse him. 3 And he said to the man who had the withered hand, "Come forward." 4 Then he said to them, "Is it lawful to do good or to do harm on the Sabbath, to save life or to kill?" But they were silent. 5 He looked around at them with anger; he was grieved at their hardness of heart and said to the man, "Stretch out your hand." He stretched it out, and his hand was restored. 6 The Pharisees went out and immediately conspired with the Herodians against him, how to destroy him.*

After he brings Lazarus back from the dead they made plans to have him killed.

*John 11:45-48* **45** Many of the Jews therefore, who had come with Mary and had seen what Jesus did, believed in him. **46** But some of them went to the Pharisees and told them what he had done. **47** So the chief priests and the Pharisees called a meeting of the council, and said, "What are we to do? This man is performing many signs. **48** If we let him go on like this, everyone will believe in him, and the Romans will come and destroy both our holy place and our nation."

Why did the religious leaders not like Jesus? - well he did things differently. He brought about change. That was a bigger issue than we often realize. There was a control issue. He threatened the established leadership and control. There was comfort. They were comfortable the way things were. There was jealousy. It is easy for us to criticize the religious leaders of Jesus' day, but we shouldn't look too close, for we may see some of our own traits in them.

Then there was a conflict among Paul & Barnabas related to whether or not to take John Mark on the 2<sup>nd</sup> missionary journey. He had been with them on their 1<sup>st</sup> missionary journey, but went back home & didn't complete the journey with them. **Acts 15:36-41** **36** After some days Paul said to Barnabas, "Come, let us return and visit the believers in every city where we proclaimed the word of the Lord and see how they are doing." **37** Barnabas wanted to take with them John called Mark. **38** But Paul decided not to take with them one who had deserted them in Pamphylia and had not accompanied them in the work. **39** The disagreement became so sharp that they parted company; Barnabas took Mark with him and sailed away to Cyprus. **40** But Paul chose Silas and set out, the believers commending him to the grace of the Lord. **41** He went through Syria and Cilicia, strengthening the churches.

In Philippians we read about 2 women who had a conflict within their local church. *Philippians 4:2-3* **2** *I urge Euodia and I urge Syntyche to be of the same mind in the Lord. 3 Yes, and I ask you also, my loyal companion, help these women, for they have struggled beside me in the work of the gospel, together with Clement and the rest of my co-workers, whose names are in the book of life.*

It would be rather sad if 2,000 years from now people were talking about you and the only thing that was known about you was that you didn't get along with another Christian. Paul urges these two women to work it out and he urges the others in the church to help them work things out – have the mind of Christ, this can bring peace to our strife.

There are conflicts in church and there always have been. These conflicts can hurt and hurt deeply. I have had people tell me that they made a vow to never go to church again or to never go to a certain church. I once called a visitor and she told me that she was looking for a church to attend but she didn't want to really get involved. After talking a few more minutes and I asked, "Have you been at a church that has problems?" She said, "Yes." When Christians don't get along, it hurts the cause of Christ. Some people outside the church are turned off of Christianity because we can't seem to get along. If you have a conflict with another Christian, it is not just about you and that person, it is also about God & God's Kingdom's work.

Let's look at what we are to do. Jesus said, **34** *I give you a new commandment, that you love one another. Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another. 35 By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another."* Jn 13:34-35

We are to love each other. We are to really care about each other and when there is a conflict we are to work to make things right.

The second chapter of Acts tells about when the Holy Spirit came in power to dwell within Believers. 3,000 people accepted Christ that day and some consider that to be the day the church was born. At the end of the chapter is a summary statement that tells us something about how we should get along.

**Acts 2:42-47** **42** *They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers. 43 Awe came upon everyone, because many wonders and signs were being done by the apostles. 44 All who believed were together and had all things in common; 45 they would sell their possessions and goods and distribute the proceeds to all, as any had need. 46 Day by day, as they spent much time together in the temple, they broke bread at home and ate their food with glad and generous hearts, 47 praising God and having the goodwill of all the people. And day by day the Lord added to their number those who were being saved.*

In the early church:

- they devoted themselves to the apostle's teachings which means they sought to learn everything they could about how to be a Christian.
- They were in awe of God.
- They shared with each other.
- They spent time together: eating meals, praising God, caring for one another & Worshipping together

People were attracted to what they had & their God, so people daily were accepting Christ & joining this community.

This week Bono, the lead singer for the Rock Group U2 spoke at the President's prayer breakfast. He spoke before the President, senators, congressman & religious leaders. He thanked them for things they have done & urged them to do more. Bono is a Christian & he has passion to alleviate poverty and AIDS in Africa – a huge task. In this effort, he has connected with people that are very different – George W. Bush, Jesse Helms & Bill Clinton. He has connected with Pat Robertson & Jim Wallis as well as movie stars and all sorts of people. He has connected with Christians, Muslims & Jews. Now obviously he wouldn't agree with the views of this diverse group, but he wants them to focus on his passion – AIDS & poverty in Africa – that is what unites them. He also does more praise than condemnation.

We can learn something from this Irish rock star. As Christians, we should have something that deeply unites us – our relationship with Jesus Christ. We may have some differences in our theology. We may struggle with some changes or lack of changes that take place. We may want control and there may be times that we are deeply hurt by another person.

What are we to do – we are first of all to pray. We are to commune with God, experience God's love & love God back. Then we are to do all that we can to express love to others, especially to other Christians. When there is a conflict, we are to do all that we can to work it out.

As the Psalmist writes, "How good & how pleasant it is when brothers & sisters, dwell together in unity." Psalm 133:1

Last week the focus was on loving those that are hard to love and during the children's chat, I passed out kisses and band-aids as a symbol of how we are to work to make things right with others. This morning I have also brought band-aids. If you would like to, you can take a band-aid as a symbol of how you are going to work to heal a hurt with another person.

There may be another decision you need to make about accepting God's love & demonstrating God's love to others.