

Reconciling with One Another: Confession, Part 1

Selected Scriptures

One of the most precious gifts from God that any church can enjoy is the gift of Christian unity, of harmony between Christians. And it's been such a joy for me, personally, to watch over this previous year as our church has grown in unity, in harmony and in genuine Christian fellowship. It's one indication that God has started a mighty work in our midst, and I think we need to realize that. Like Paul said, "I also am certain of this," Philippians 1:6, "that he who began a good work in us is going to bring it to completion at the day of Christ Jesus." I am confident of that; that's a promise of his holy Word. We know that "He is able to do exceedingly, abundantly beyond all that we ask and think," Ephesians 3:20. But as to how he intends to fulfill his promise exactly as to the precise shape that all of that takes, well that's his to reveal, and it's our privilege to discover, our joy to witness that together as a church family. But I know this: He is just getting started, and that is an exciting thing to behold.



The platform for growth, for fruitfulness, for Gospel effectiveness in and through any local church, including this church, is church-wide unity and harmony that points to the triune God. The God that we worship is One. He is One. The persons of the God-head are perfect in holy harmony with one another. So when we are unified, when we are in harmony with one another, we are reflecting and glorifying God truly. And God will bless us; he will accomplish great Gospel work through us. That is one of the profound and abiding joys of our time here on earth is to share in the propagation of the Gospel with Christians, fellow Christians in a local church setting of one heart and one mind.

That's the nature of our fellowship, partnership in the Gospel ministry. We have the privilege of being together to build a strong, healthy, mature church body. And we get to do that together. That's a great, great privilege. That's something that can only be accomplished here on earth because when we get to heaven, there is no evangelism going on. We evangelize here; we build here. There, perfection! Here, we work. That's something that can only be accomplished here, also in a spirit of unity and harmony as we all move forward together in one mind and in one heart.

As a collective body, as a spiritual temple built to honor God, our witness is of an orderly, unified, harmonious God, who is known in and through the love that his people have for one another. Love: The first fruits of the life of the Holy Spirit, the first evidence of his life working in and through his people. That is the chief virtue: love. It's the foremost of all Christian virtues, and that practical, operative presence of love is the evidence that the Holy Spirit is operating among us, that he is free among us, unhindered among us. Where love is active, the fullness of his presence is going to be manifest in and through us, isn't it? Galatians 5:22, "The fruit of the spirit is love." Also, joy and peace, patience. Patience is only demonstrated when there is an opportunity not to show patience, right? We give each other plenty of opportunity to show patience and kindness and goodness and faithfulness and gentleness and self-control. Those are the virtues are being manifest increasingly in and through this church.

Those are the virtues, primarily love, that unite us. They bring us together one to another; they enable us to live together in harmony, in joy, in patience and understanding, in a spirit of forgiveness and of grace. That is the mark of a truly Christian assembly, which in the church promotes safety and security among our fellowship, promotes acceptance and love,

increases satisfaction and contentedness in the church. That is the very work of the Holy Spirit in our midst, which is manifest clearly in the unity and the harmony that we are seeing and enjoying. It is a precious gift. I want you recognize that. I want you to appreciate it, give thanks to God for it, and I also want you to be committed in a deep, abiding conviction to keep on pursuing that unity, and be very careful to protect it.

Above all things, Satan wants to destroy our unity. When he sees a church coming together in unity, harmony, and joy, you know what he wants to do? He wants to target it. A unified, harmonious church is a mortal threat to the kingdom of darkness. Only the Spirit can cause such a divergent group of people to come into the unity of the faith, Ephesians 4:13, to come into the unity about the knowledge of the Son of God. Doctrinal clarity, biblical fidelity, a corporate common commitment to that are the marks of genuine spiritual unity produced by the Holy Spirit. And that terrifies the enemy.

So the enemy works, labors, connives, schemes to sow the seeds of disunity in our midst. He's always trying. Often, he experiences varying measures of success. The seeds of disunity can be summed up in one word. What causes disunity in the church? You know the word. It's sin. Sin destroys our unity.

Sometimes the enemy sows the seed of disunity in the form of a divisive person sent into the congregation, and at first, he or she appears to be one of the sheep. But time goes by and reveals that this person is not a true sheep, but a false convert, someone whose life or doctrine is out of step with the Christian faith. And Paul told Titus to deal with someone like that quickly, decisively because that person is a threat to church unity. Titus 3:10-11, "As for a person who stirs up division, after warning him once and then twice, have nothing more to do with him, knowing that such a person is warped and sinful; he is self-condemned." Strong words! But it's serious. It's a threat.

Most often, though, the most common method of the enemy sowing the seed of sin in our midst is through that pernicious ally that he finds within each and every one of us. It's the sin nature. It's the enemy within. We all feel it. We all know its devices, its temptations, its enticements, its alluring, always creeping, always ready to take us captive. The sinful proclivity is what the Bible calls, the flesh, the old man, the old nature, what Paul called, this body of sin. And at the root of all that sin, that which animates this body of sin, is the sin of self-centered, self-interested pride. The sin of pride is what is at heart of destroying Christian unity even as a root of pride bears all manner of rotten fruit.

That's why Paul's opening rebuke to the Corinthian church in 1 Corinthians 1:10 started with an appeal to Christian unity. He said, "I appeal to you, brothers, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ," 1 Corinthians 1:10, "that all of you agree, and that there be no divisions among you, but that you be united in the same mind and in the same judgment." You know what? After that appeal, Paul proceeded in the next four chapters to confront their particular outworking of pride in and through the sinful divisions in the church, how all these people on the outside looked like great people. I mean, you had the Peter camp, and the Paul camp, and the Apollos camp. Apollo's camp loved eloquent preaching. Paul's camp loved great theology. Peter's camp more faithful to the Jewish ways. And then there was that one camp that trumped them all, the Christ camp. I mean, who's going to differ with the Christ camp? Outworking of pride, and all of it was distasteful.

So whether we're talking about so-called, private sins of the mind and the heart, or the more public sins that disrupt the harmony of Christians relationships, sowing discord, causing temptations to bitterness, at the heart of all those sins is a heart of pride. And the enemy most often uses our own pride to lead us to sin against one another. He loves that sin because it's so hard to spot sometimes, and it disrupts, fractures our

unity, disrupts our harmony. It destroys the bond of loving fellowship that we have together. That is why we are repeatedly in Scripture commanded to strive for unity to keep pursuing unity, to keep protecting our unity. Ephesians 4:3, "You must be eager to maintain the unity of the spirit in the bond of peace." Philippians 1:27, We are to "Stand firm in one spirit, with one mind striving side by side for the faith of the gospel." Philippians 2:2, We are to "be in full accord and of one mind with one another." Listen, we will only have the same mind, be in full accord, unified in kleet, in complete harmony, that is only going to happen if we are all in pursuit of one mind: the mind of Christ. The mind of Christ.

If we think like he thinks, then we're going to be of one heart and one mind. It'll be his mind that governs us, that leads us, that directs us, that comforts us, that shepherds us. But if sin enters the camp, by whatever means, whoever it is, well, then we depart from his thinking. In which his thinking, there is no sin in his thinking. Our minds and our hearts will enter into a darkness that actually divides, where there is no unity. Sin is what creates disunity. Remove sin, unity returns. Without sin, all are of one heart and of one mind. All is unity, all is harmony. That sounds really good, doesn't it! Perfect unity, perfect harmony, listen, that's what heaven is like.

That's what heaven is like: no sin, no division, no disunity, all is harmony, all is peace, all is joy. Why? Because that's what marks the fellowship of the Godhead itself: Father, Son, Holy Spirit, perfect unity, perfect harmony. And if our fellowship is with the Father, and with his Son Jesus Christ, 1 John 1:3, then our fellowship is going to be marked and distinguished by that same kind of blessed unity and joy-filled harmony.

But while we're here on earth, our fellowship is not perfect, is it? And that's what brings us to our subject of the morning, which is the subject of biblical reconciliation. Since unity is so vital to the health, the harmony, the vitality of the church, and since it's inevitable that we will sin against one another, as long as we wrestle with the sin nature in this earthly tent, then our sin against one another is going to be there. And that sin is going to jeopardize our unity. It's like cancer.

Sin is spiritual cancer. And when it goes unresolved, when it goes unconfessed, sin is infinitely more destructive and deadly than cancer. We need to get rid of it! We need to get rid of it right away; do not wait. Sin is so common, though, isn't it? It's like a weed. As much as you try to dig them out, put

weed-killer on them, dig down the roots and pull them out, those weeds just keep coming back. It's like our sin. Sin in each and every family. Husbands sin against wives; wives sin against husbands. Parents sin against children, children against parents. Every cross or unkind word, every instance of impatience or sharp-tongued reply, every critical-spirited expectation you hold over other people's heads, there's sin in families. There's sin among church members. So destructive. So what are we going to do? How are we going to keep our sins from doing the devil's work? How are we going to keep our sins from dividing us and destroying our unity? How are we going to correct the source of division that our sins can potentially cause in our midst? And when the sins come, how are we going to repair the breach that the devil wants to use to gain entry and divide us and keep us divided and ineffective?

Here's the answer: We reconcile with one another. We reconcile with one another. As fellow members of Christ's body, we're members of one another, and we need to reconcile with one another. Reconciliation is first and foremost a matter of love toward God, and reconciliation is inextricably linked to love for God, to love for one another. If we truly love God, we're going to be quick to reconcile with other people as well. That's what John, the Apostle of love, tells us in 1 John 4:20, "If

anyone says, 'I love God,' and hates his brother, he is a liar; for he who does not love his brother whom he has seen cannot love God whom he has not seen." You follow the logic, there. It's the outworking of love for God and one another to reconcile broken relationships. Those who claim to be Christians but refuse to reconcile broken relationships, refuse to pursue harmony in the body of Christ, you know what, it doesn't really matter what they say. If they refuse to love others by reconciling with them, then the Holy Spirit condemns them as liars. Strong language!

But it's strong because it's so serious. Husbands, you must reconcile with your wives, wives with your husbands. Parents, you must reconcile with your children when you sin against them, children, obviously, with parents. Church members must reconcile with one another. In fact, so serious is our duty to reconcile with one another, that Jesus said, Matthew 5:23-24, he said, "if you are offering your gift at the altar and there remember that your brother has something against you, leave your gift at the altar and then go. Go, first be reconciled to your brother, and then come and offer your gift." Why? Because your worship of the God you have not seen is blatantly hypocritical if you refuse to be reconciled to your brother, whom you have seen. God doesn't want you to be hypocritical in your worship. Hypocritical

worship is not worship. It's a veritable stench in his nostrils. It's an offense against his holy mercy and his costly love.

Just to show you that, turn over to 2 Corinthians, chapter 5, just so you can see how serious this issue of reconciliation is. The entire message of the Gospel, the entire ministry of the Gospel, the whole reason that God left us here on earth, that can be summed up in what Paul calls in 2 Corinthians 5:18 "The ministry of reconciliation." The ministry of reconciliation that's the Gospel ministry. It's a synonym. 2 Corinthians 5:18, Paul starts by saying, "All this is from God." All this. All what? Well, looking back, it's all the sovereign working of God to save the sinner, the compelling love of Christ, the substitutionary sacrifice of Christ, the regenerating power of the Holy Spirit. All of this is from God. He did everything. "All this is from God, who through Christ reconciled us to himself and gave us the ministry of reconciliation; that is, in Christ, God was reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and entrusting to us the message of reconciliation."

Look, who is the subject of all those verbs in verses 18 and 19? You see the verbs, there: reconciled, gave, was reconciling, not counting, entrusting. Who's the subject? God.

God is the subject of those verbs. Salvation is his initiative, not ours. It's all of grace, "not of works lest any man should boast." That's what he's saying. Look at verse 20, "Therefore," on the basis of the fact that God saved us, reconciled us, "therefore we are ambassadors for Christ, God making his appeal through us. We implore you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God. For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God."

You know what he's saying there? He's appealing to them; he's imploring them to be reconciled to God. Why? Because God took the initiative. God did everything. He did everything to secure our salvation, so be reconciled to him because in Christ, God has reconciled us to himself. Don't delay! To refuse to reconcile, knowing how God has made haste to reconcile us to himself, that is a slap in the face of our redeemer. And God didn't reconcile us here with cheap grace, did he? He didn't overlook our sin, not at all. God confronted our sin. He dealt with it head-on. He called it what it is. He didn't forgive us by ignoring it. He forgave us all of our assaults, and he didn't do it by being non-judgmental. He was clearly judgmental, and he was condemning of our sin and in calling us to repent. He called sin, sin and he didn't sugarcoat it. It was an unvarnished look at who we really are before his holiness. And when he saw it, he

poured out his wrath, but not on us. Not on us. He poured out his wrath on his son. He forgave us by imputing our sin to Christ, by reckoning our sin to Christ, counting it against him and punishing him instead of us so that he could let us go free, we who did not deserve it.

That's reconciliation, that "one who knew no sin," Jesus Christ, "God put him to death so that in him we might become the righteousness of God." Just as our sins were imputed to Christ, and God treated Christ the way we deserve to be treated for our sin, bearing the terrible weight of the holy wrath of God, so also God imputed Christ's perfect righteousness to us, and he treated us the way we certainly don't deserve. He treated us the way Christ deserves to be treated. Christ and Christ alone merited the favor of God, and we're brought into that favor because of God's great love with which he loved us. Isn't that good news?

He reconciled us to himself through the sinless death of Christ and the perfect righteousness of Christ. That is the Gospel that saved us, that is the message that we have received to tell others: Be reconciled to God. And that it is why it is so utterly out of step to refuse to reconcile with people that we have offended or with people who have offended us. Why would

we do that? If God has forgiven us such a great, unpayable, eternal debt, infinite debt. We can never repay it. Why would we refuse to reconcile with another human being? That human being whose sin is really not against us, it's against God. We just got the spillover effect.

Look, we need to deal with these things. We cannot, we dare not come to the altar with our worship when we're refusing to reconcile or when we are withholding reconciliation from another Christian. We reconcile with one another, it is the true outworking of our love and devotion to God, who reconciled us to himself. We reconcile with one another to please God, to honor Jesus Christ, and to restore the body of Christ to perfect unity and harmony for effective and fruitful service to Christ.