

Perspectives on Unity

Scripture: 1 Corinthians 3:1-23

The Corinthian church was polluted by the world's wisdom, causing the church to be torn apart. In chapter 3, Paul challenges the church to throw away the garbage that comes from worldly wisdom and to restore the unity and beauty of the church. Paul uses three metaphors to describe the church: as a field (V.1-9), a temple (V.16-17), and a house (V.10-15). Through these three metaphors, Paul allows us to see the unity of the church from three different perspectives. These three parables bring out the three attitudes that Christians should have toward unity. As long as we have these three mindsets, we can maintain the unity of the church.

1. Man has only a supporting role, God is the protagonist

This is the mentality that we get from the analogy of the church to a field. Farming the fields requires many different processes: sowing seeds, irrigating, pest control, fertilizing, harvesting... Different tasks require different people to work with. Who is more important? This question is actually focusing too much on people. What matters is not what we can do, but what God can do! Who can change lives? Is it the pastor? Is it the team leader? None of these. We can try hard, but it is God who makes it work. (V.7)

We are just deacons (V.5). The original meaning of deacon is servant. The servant is just a supporting role. The purpose of a supporting role is not to highlight himself but to highlight the protagonist. God is the protagonist because "only God makes him grow." When everyone desires to be the protagonist, they will compete with each other. If they see themselves as supporting roles, they will naturally replace competition with cooperation, because everyone has a common goal, which is to bring glory to the protagonist!

2. Cherish the unity God has given us

This is the mentality that we get from the analogy of the church as the temple of God. "Do you not know that you are the temple of God, and that the Spirit of God dwells in you?" (V.16) In its original meaning, "the Spirit of God dwells in you" can also be translated as "the Spirit of God dwells among you." The Holy Spirit dwells among us, connecting us together. When we destroy the spiritual unity among us, we are destroying the temple of God. God cherishes the unity of the

church. God says sternly: "If anyone destroys God's temple, God will destroy that person!" (V.17).

We should also cherish what God cherishes. If we cherish unity, we will not do anything to destroy it. The thing that is most likely to destroy unity is the human tongue. No church is perfect because no one is perfect. When you see imperfections in a group, you will naturally feel heartbroken because you love the group, and when you feel heartbroken, you will naturally seek someone to vent your emotions. Unfortunately, many people seek help from others to vent their emotions, but they are unknowingly used by Satan and become people who spread divisions. If you see someone you are dissatisfied with, you should talk to the person concerned, and do not complain behind his back. If he does not listen, find one or two brothers to share with him. If he still refuses to listen, you can ask the pastor of the church to share with him together with you. If he does not even listen to the pastor and that person is proved to be wrong, church discipline must be enforced. (See Matthew 18:15-17)

3. Everyone must give an account to God in the end

This is the mentality that we get from the analogy of the church as a house. There are two kinds of materials we can use to build a house. The first material is gold, silver and gemstones. Gold, silver and precious stones can stand the test of fire and their value will last forever. The second material is wood and straw, which cannot withstand the test of fire and whose value is only superficial and temporary. (See V.12-15)

What does the fire that tests our works mean? In Revelation 1:14, the Bible describes the eyes of God as a flame of fire. Fire here refers to the eyes of God, and God's eyes see through the hearts of people. All hidden things are exposed in His sight. It is God's vision, like a flame, that tests whether our works are truly valuable.

Therefore, we must constantly examine our motives for serving, whether we are doing it for God or for people. If you do it for others to see, there will naturally be jealousy and disputes. If you believe that you will have to give an account to God in the end, then as long as God sees it, it will be fine, and you should not care whether others see it or not. In this way, there will be no jealousy or quarreling.

Discussion Questions

1. Are you satisfied with the current level of unity in your group? Please rate from 0 to 10. (0 is the lowest score and 10 is the highest score) Why did you give this score?
2. In terms of maintaining the unity of the group, among the three mindsets mentioned above, which one do you think your group needs to be strengthened the most right now? Why do you feel so? What can we do (or not do) to reinforce this mindset?