

How to maintain the unity of the church

1 Corinthians: 10-13, 17-19, 25-31

Chinese people are known for being disunited. Wherever there are Chinese people, there are internal conflicts. Some people say: "The wisdom and ability of the Chinese are no less than those of people from any other country. Fighting alone, the Chinese are very outstanding, like a dragon. But if you put three dragons together, the three dragons become three worms." Why? Because of disunity: you fight me, I fight you, and we offset each other's strength.

Why were there factions in the Corinthian church? Because they exalted man and despised the cross. If we hold high the cross, the church will surely be united. When man is exalted, the church will surely be divided! How to maintain the unity of the church? There are three things to do:

1. Do not exalt human characteristics

In verse 11, Paul describes the disunity in the Corinthian church as being caused by "disputes." "Dispute" is made up of "division" and "contention". Division and contention are inseparable. When we contend with each other, we will split. Why contend? In verse 12 Paul points out that the contention among them was because the "I" was too strong: "I" belonged to Paul, "I" belonged to Apollos, "I" belonged to Cephas, and "I" belonged to Christ. The church in Corinth was divided into four factions.

Thank God for giving us such a wonderful church. But if we feel that our church is better than others and growing faster than other churches, we will unconsciously develop a sense of superiority. Even if we do not say so, our attitude will more or less reveal it, causing members of other churches to feel disgusted. This will invisibly create a contentious spirit among ourselves and create an undercurrent of disunity.

In this world, no church or denomination is perfect. Each has its advantages and limitations. Each has different styles, gifts, and traditions, so there is no need for them to contend with each other. Exalting human characteristics will only cause contention and division, and we must never do this. The differences between them allow different churches and denominations to complement each other, making everyone more complete and able to win all kinds of people for God.

2. Do not exalt human wisdom

Human wisdom and the doctrine of the cross are two different paths. People generally have two reactions to the doctrine of the cross: unbelievers will find it foolish, while believers will recognize it as the power of God. (v. 20) Why do unbelievers see the doctrine of the cross as foolishness? Because to accept the doctrine of the cross, we must admit that we are sinners, we must admit human weakness and inability, we must admit that we cannot rely on ourselves, and we cannot rely on good behavior, good strategies, or good methods. Only God can save us. This requires a humbling of one's pride, which is difficult for unbelievers. Therefore, unbelievers do not like the cross and think it as foolish.

People tend to be attracted to big, numerous, and powerful things, thinking that large numbers of people, large ministries, magnificent buildings, and lively scenes are the only things that will be effective. We must be careful, as outward achievements can easily go to one's head and cause one to forget to rely on the Lord, resulting in failure.

To exalt human efforts and achievements is to exalt human wisdom. When everyone exalts human wisdom, there is only one result: you cannot tolerate me and I cannot tolerate you, so we will contend with each other, leading to factions and disputes. Only by upholding the cross can the church be united.

3. Exalt God's grace of election

In daily life, most people make their choices based on human wisdom. For example: When a company looks for people, it must hire those who are capable and educated; and when choosing a spouse, it also looks for those who are good-looking and have good manners. But God's election is very different from the choice of the human heart. God chooses the foolish, the weak, the lowly, the despised, and the nothing in this world (verses 26-28). The entire Bible is the history of God's election. God's election is not determined by a person's performance or quality, but is based on God's mercy. He has mercy on the weak and lowly.

Why does God choose the weak and lowly? The answer is in verse 29: "So that no flesh might boast in his presence." If we want to boast, we should boast in the Lord (verse 31). This makes

us more humble and dare not take away the glory of God.