

RIGHT VS WRONG

1 CORINTHIANS 1:10-18

Now I appeal to you, brothers and sisters, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that all of you be in agreement and that there be no divisions among you, but that you be united in the same mind and the same purpose. For it has been reported to me by Chloe's people that there are quarrels among you, my brothers and sisters. What I mean is that each of you says, "I belong to Paul," or "I belong to Apollos," or "I belong to Cephas," or "I belong to Christ." Has Christ been divided? Was Paul crucified for you? Or were you baptized in the name of Paul?

I thank God that I baptized none of you except Crispus and Gaius, so that no one can say that you were baptized in my name. (I did baptize also the household of Stephanas; beyond that, I do not know whether I baptized anyone else.)

For Christ did not send me to baptize but to proclaim the gospel, and not with eloquent wisdom, so that the cross of Christ might not be emptied of its power. For the message about the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God.

A man is driving up a steep, narrow mountain road. A woman is driving down the same road. As they pass each other, the woman leans out of the window and yells “PIG!!” The man immediately leans out of his window and replies, “WITCH!!” or a word that rhymes with “witch.” They each continue on their way, and as the man rounds the next corner, he crashes into a pig in the middle of the road. If men would only listen.

Why is it always so important for us to be right, or to believe that our point of view or world view is the only right view? If you are a liberal American you get most of your news from MSNBC or the Huffington Post, and if you are a conservative you listen to Fox News or read the Wall Street Journal. We tend to get our news from sources we already agree with so that the information doesn’t contradict what we believe.

We divide ourselves many other ways as well: We are Pro Choice or Pro Life, Pro gay marriage or anti- gay marriage, Republican or Democrat. What we don’t do is listen to each other, because if we believe we are right, then those who disagree with us must be wrong.

The first century church in Corinth that Paul is writing to was divided in more ways than our political system and equally dysfunctional. Some of the members were swayed by brilliant rhetoric, others were influenced by knowledge, others were impressed by spiritual gifts, and still others attached importance to wealth and social status. Some followed the teachings of Paul, while some preferred the doctrine of Peter while still others found their own gurus.

There was sexual immorality in the church — a man sleeping with his father’s wife — and this behavior was being tolerated by some. There were abuses at the Lord’s Supper, with the rich arriving early and enjoying the very best food and drink and getting drunk, while the poor arrived later and had only the leftovers to consume.

In the face of these fractures, Paul calls for the Corinthian Christians to be “united in the same mind and the same purpose”. Some in the church lived their faith based on the teachings of the Ten Commandments and all of its precepts, attempting to be as holy as possible, while an opposing camp emphasized God’s grace and love, and caring for one’s neighbors. One group held fast to the

traditions of their forbearers, while the other group was open to new ideas and possibilities. The first group put a great deal of weight on the truth, covenant, and obligations, while the other was committed to liberation, charity, grace and openness.

We're not talking right and wrong here, good and bad, because both sides are important to the church, both have deep roots in our Scripture and tradition, and both are necessary for a fully formed community of faith. To these two polarized groups, Paul encourages them to work together. What unites the church, Paul says, are not our differing personalities or our politics of right or left, but we are united by Christ and our love for him.

The church is made up of individuals with differing world views and competing understandings of what is right and what is wrong. Paul doesn't expect the Corinthians to have identical views and perspectives on all things, nor does he expect them to live out their Christian faith in exactly the same way. But he does expect them to be united in their determination to follow Jesus and to love one another. What we are to unite around is the cross of Christ, the symbol of God's love and Christ's self-sacrifice.

Some in our church are clear about their beliefs and are firm in what they believe is moral and right. Others in our church are more flexible and fluid in their beliefs and prefer to show hospitality and inclusion to those who have been told that they are not completely welcome in the church.

So how can the church be united? The key is the message of the cross, and that message is that Christ loves us and accepts us, forgives us and calls us. My viewpoints on same sex marriage, abortion, universal healthcare, redistribution of wealth, racism, sexism, are inconsequential in comparison to the message of the cross.

The message of the cross is what unites us, it's what we are all about. As Benjamin Franklin once said, "Brothers, let us all hang together, for if we don't, we most assuredly will hang separately." The key is to remember is that it's not about you or me or, it's about the message. It's not about being right or wrong, about being on one side or the other. It is the message of the cross that matters.