

## **“The Glue That Holds Us Together”**

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Dr. Kipp Wolfe

I Corinthians 1:10-18

Did you notice in our scripture today that Paul referred to the Christians at Corinth as “Brothers” and “Sisters?” It is as if he is setting them up, kind of buttering them up, if you will, for what is about to come.

I saw something recently that made me think about this. How many of you were at Happy Timers this week? Raise your hand if you were at Happy Timers. I know one person especially was at Happy Timers. Jeff Daniels, you were at Happy Timers. Lori Fullbright from Channel 6 was the program for Happy Timers and she asked Jeff to volunteer to help her. She had him seated in a chair and stood behind him, asking him to describe her. . . what she looked like, what she was wearing, as if she had robbed him and he were giving a description to the police.

Several times while that was happening, Jeff tried to turn around. I don’t know if it was because he had forgotten or because she is kind of easy on the eyes, isn’t she, Jeff? He might just have wanted to turn around and look at her. I told Carol afterwards I would have loved to have been seated in that chair and would have done something similar to what Paul did. When she asked me to give a description of her, I would have said something like “Well, the person who robbed me was a young, attractive woman.” Then when she asked what color her hair was, I would have said, “It looks to me like you dye it black!”

This letter to the church at Corinth is a letter to us. It’s not just about something that happened a long time ago. Paul would remind us also that we are brothers and sisters in Christ. We are part of what is known as the Restoration Movement, along with the Church of Christ and independent Christian churches. At one point in our history, we said “If we could just get back to the New Testament church and do things the way they did then, everything would be all right.” Read this scripture. We know that is not right. Things were a mess back then. That’s why Paul wrote this letter to the church at Corinth. It’s not enough to just always look back.

You need to know this about your minister in case you read about me in the newspaper some day. If I leave here at a certain time in the afternoon, I am taking my life in my own hands. I go out here by Denver, then go down a ramp to get on the Broken Arrow Expressway. But I have to get across three or four lanes of traffic to get in the left lane so I can get on that ramp. If there is a line of cars there, I’m just at their mercy. Someone has to wait and let me in line. I’m looking back, but I’m looking forward, and sure enough someone will stop in front of me. So if I get killed someday out there, you’ll understand why.

Can you imagine trying to drive a car always looking backward? How foolish that would be. But we've done that in the church. We might say, "You know, if we could just get back to the way it was 40, 50 or 60 years ago . . ." God is speaking to First Christian Church Tulsa, today, and saying, "You're family. You are brothers and sisters."

Listen to these words from my favorite writer. Listen closely because he mentions Disciples of Christ.

"There are Baptists, Methodists, and Episcopalians. There are Presbyterians, Lutherans, and Congregationalists. There are Disciples of Christ. There are Seventh-day Adventists and Jehovah's Witnesses. There are Moravians. There are Quakers. And that's only for starters. New denominations spring up. Old denominations split up and form new branches.

"When Jesus took the bread and said, "This is my body which is broken for you," (1 Corinthians 11:24), it's hard to believe that even in his wildest dreams he foresaw the tragic and ludicrous brokenness of the church as his body. There's no reason why everyone should be Christian in the same way and every reason to leave room for differences, but if all the competing factions of Christendom were to give as much of themselves to the high calling and holy hope that unites them as they do now to the relative inconsequentialities that divide them, the church would look more like the kingdom of God for a change and less like an ungodly mess."-

Frederick Buechner

We are brothers and sisters. Here's an illustration of this. Some of you are aware that this past week Dick Norman's brother died. I was visiting with Dick and sharing with him about my brother and about how close we are. We are about the same difference in age that Dick and his brother were. I said that I could only imagine how difficult it would be for me if my brother died. I said, "Dick, I know that no one could replace your brother, but I also know that you know you have a whole church full of brothers and sisters in Christ who care about you." When we got through visiting, I know Dick understood, because he said to me, "Thank you, Brother."

We are family. We are brothers and sisters in Christ. Paul has said, "There is one body, one Lord, one Spirit, one Hope, one Faith, one Baptism, and one God." We sang a hymn this morning, "The Church's One Foundation Is Jesus Christ Her Lord," but do we really believe that? Do we really live that? Sometimes it seems to me that in the church, THE church, our foundation is anything but Christ. Some churches seem to have as their foundation some kind of a disagreement and feel they need to take a stand. The stand could be on any issue, you name it: pro-life, pro-choice, homosexuality, peace, immigration. Let me tell you this. I have never read anywhere in the scripture that it is more important for us to care about our own opinions than it is to care about each other.

One body. One body. It certainly doesn't mean that we all have to be the same or believe the same, but when faced with difficult choices in the church, our first consider-

ation is always not what I believe, but how do I care for you? How do we care for those who are outside the church?

Many of you are aware that from the very beginning of our movement one of our mottos, or slogans, was "Unity is our polar star." In other words, it is our guiding principle. Throughout history in the Christian church we have been known for our ecumenical efforts; for our efforts to work with other churches and other denominations. Sadly, however, our ecumenical efforts with other churches have often been better than what we have done within our own churches. There is a wonderful word, ecumenism. No one here probably mentioned that word in conversation last week or will this week.

Ecumenism starts at home. That means that not only does it start within our church, it starts within our homes. How many of us act and live as if we care more about those outside our own families, our own marriages, than we do about those in our own homes?

The problem in our church and in our homes is that, quite honestly, we have cared more about being right than being righteous. There is a wonderful saying: "The world tears and the church repairs." Don't you love that? We repair with a glue that is stronger than any force in the world. The glue that holds us together is nothing less than the Cross of Christ.

Paul said, "Was Paul crucified for you?" Of course not. And I can say to you today, Was Kipp crucified for you? Was Carol crucified for you? We have several ordained ministers here nearly every Sunday morning. I love what Bill Coffin said one time about ordained ministers. He said, "Ministers are like manure. If you spread them out, they are pretty useful. But if you get them all together, they raise quite a stink!"

As I look across the congregation today, I see four, maybe five ordained ministers of our church. Bill, Diane, Les, David, Howard. They were not crucified for you. Brent Cantrell, Glenn Evans, Roy Griggs, Gene Brice, Frank See, Sloan Gentry, Hallie Gantz, Claude Hill; they were not crucified for you. The glue that holds us together is nothing less than the cross of Christ. You know that Christ calls us to bear our own cross. In fact, we cannot follow Christ, he said, unless we are willing to take up a cross for him.

The cross of Christ does two things for us. You need to hear this. The cross of Christ says to us, "There is nothing we can do to make God love us any less." Did you hear that? "There is nothing we can do to make God love us any less." But the cross of Christ also says, "There is nothing we can do to make God love us any more." Do you realize how incredibly freeing that can be? We don't have to run around being good little girls and boys, trying to earn points from God. There is nothing we can do to make God love us any more, because God has shared all of the love that God has at the cross.

Bear with me while I share this poor analogy with you. If you know me, you are not surprised that this analogy is about basketball. I promise that the next time I go to the ballet I will share some kind of a lesson about a tutu. Back during the holidays, The Tournament of Champions was held out at the fairgrounds. If you are a basketball fan, you will recall that Pawnee and Verdigris played each other. That doesn't seem like that at-

tractive a game, but if you are a fan of basketball, you know that those two teams have two of the best players in the state: Keiton Page and Rotnei Clarke. I met one of our members out there at the ballgame that day, so I wasn't there by myself.

It was a joy for me to watch these two young high school basketball players. Obviously they had spent hours in the gym practicing. They are both small by basketball standards. Keiton Page is listed as 5' 10". He's probably more like 5' 8" or 5' 9". Rotnei Clarke is listed as 6' 1". He's probably more like 6' tall. They both play guard, and they are tremendous 3-point shooters, but that's not what I admired the most about them. Both of them have learned that they could drive to the basket and either pass off to a teammate or, more often than not, get fouled and shoot free throws. Coaches have a name for this. It's called, "taking it to the rack—taking it to the glass." Some players never learn to do it. Some players don't want to do it, especially if you are a little guy, because if you go in there with all the big guys you might get hurt. These two guys have learned to do it.

As Christians, we are called to "take it to the cross." Do you have some kind of difficulty at work? Do you have some kind of difficulty at home? Do you have some kind of difficulty at church? Do you have some kind of personal difficulty? Take it to the cross. I believe this is what Paul was saying to the church at Corinth, and I know it's what the living Christ is saying to us today. Amen