

LET THERE BE NO DIVISIONS
Sermon for the 3rd Sunday after the Epiphany 2026
1 Corinthians 1:10-18

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all. Amen.

The text for our sermon today is the Second Reading from before, 1 Corinthians 1:10-18:
Lord God, heavenly Father, sanctify us through Your truth, Your Word is truth. Amen.

Dear friends in Christ,

“That old evil foe, now means deadly woe.” These words of Luther in his famous hymn are spot on. The Apostle Peter warns us to be watchful because our *“adversary the devil prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour”* (1 Peter 5:8). The devil *“tries every trick and does not stop until he finally wears us out, so that we either renounce our faith or throw up our hands and put up our feet, becoming indifferent or impatient”* (Large Catechism V, 26).

One of the chief weapons the devil uses, and what Paul warns about today, is *division*. The devil tries to drive a wedge between Christians and even divide congregations. Worse still, he seeks divide the church. “Divide and conquer” is the devil’s strategy against the church. Weaken the enemy by dividing the troops against each other. Prowl around looking for the lone sheep, the isolated one who is wandering by himself in the wilderness, away from the flock and the shepherd, because there is nothing more vulnerable than the solitary sheep, the one left all alone. There is nothing more vulnerable to the crafts and assaults of the evil one than the individual believer, all by himself. He is easy pickings for that old evil foe.

This strategy of the devil is deceptively simple — *use sin to isolate the sinner*. So you sin, and the devil uses that sin to make you doubt whether you are a child of God or forgiven. He stirs up guilt and shame so you begin to think God doesn’t want anything to do with you. You stop praying; you stop hearing the Word; you stop communing. You may not even notice the change at first, but eventually *it doesn’t matter to you anymore*. You may still show up at church once in a while just to check in or to stay on the books, but it really doesn’t mean much, if anything. Or the devil may simply stir up some good old-fashioned apathy and boredom. Who needs those old, boring hymns and tired sermons on Christ crucified when there is so much entertainment available at the touch of a button? And if I’m feeling vaguely “spiritual” and need a lift, I can dial something up on TV, read a sermon online, or listen to some inspirational music or a podcast. Bam! The devil’s got you right where he wants you. ***He has taken your eyes off Jesus and onto your spiritual self.***

But that’s only *half the job*. The other half is to *isolate you from your fellow believers*. Again, the devil uses sin to get the job done. You sin against your brother and vice versa. It may be something big or, as is usually the case, something trivial. Someone said or did something you didn’t like. And then the devil stirs up anger and resentment, and before you know it, you’re at each other’s throats. Or he puts this bug in your ear that things aren’t going the way you want them to go, and so you take your toys and go somewhere else, or you just stay at home so you don’t have to deal with “those people” anymore. And now you are in the perfect place for the devil — all alone in your own little world and isolated from the flock, isolated from the shepherd. We have all heard that proverb, *“Idle hands are the devil’s playthings.”* If you’re not doing something useful, you’ll end up doing something annoying, destructive or just plain stupid, just the sort of sheep a roaring lion is looking for.

Paul had heard of divisions within the Corinthian congregation after some people from Chloe’s household visited him. Members were suing one another in the secular court. There was quarrelling and dissension. They were talking in terms of “we” and “they,” divided along party lines. Some said, **“I follow Paul.”** Paul was the first missionary, and perhaps his teaching was regarded as most authentic.

Others said, “**I follow Apollos.**” Perhaps his teaching may have been more advanced than Paul’s, who would later say, “*I planted, Apollos watered, but God gave the growth*” (1 Cor. 3:6). Still others said, “**I follow Cephas,**” the Aramaic name for Peter. Peter may have carried particular authority as a follower of Jesus in His earthly ministry. But perhaps the most dangerous of them all were the ones who boasted, “**I follow Christ.**” How could they be considered dangerous? Because they were behaving as though they were the only ones who did. These people who claimed to give all their loyalty to Christ were also guilty of *factionalism*. Their slogan, “**I follow Christ,**” had become a party slogan. They may well have been less concerned about healing the divisions than they were about proving that they were the best party. Paul would later warn the Christians in Rome, “*Do not be arrogant, but be afraid*” (Rom. 11:20). Paul wanted to remind those Corinthian Christians who prided themselves on their power and freedom in the Spirit to be careful not to fall from grace.

Into all this nasty division, dissension, and party pettiness, Paul fires the arrow of his apostolic appeal. “**I appeal to you, brothers, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that all of you agree, and that there be no divisions among you, but that you be united in the same mind and the same judgment.**”

Unity is the way of Christ and His Spirit; division is the way of the devil. Paul would later write to the Ephesians, “*There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called to the one hope that belongs to your call, one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of us all, who is above all and through all and in all*” (Eph. 4:4).

Every single picture of the church in the Scriptures is a corporate image. There is no notion of the isolated, individual believer. The church is a priesthood of the baptised, the household of God’s children, a spiritual temple built out of living stones. Even the word church means “*assembly, ones who are called out and brought together.*”

The front-running image is that of a body with many different kinds of members. “*We, though many, are one body in Christ, and individually members of one another*” (Rom. 12:5). A body consists of a variety of parts or members. Each one of them is different and serves its own special purpose. Big toe, little toe, ear, eye, nose, finger, and all the rest. One is not more important or indispensable than the others. The little toe may seem insignificant until you lose it, and then you’ll see what it’s been doing down there all along, keeping your balance and stride. And you’ll miss it. You literally need to learn to walk all over again when you lose your little toe.

A body can function more or less without some of its parts, though not without a certain amount of hardship and suffering. But the parts cannot exist without the body and without each other. A severed toe or ear will die apart from the body. The ear cannot say to the big toe, “I don’t need you; I can get along just fine without you.” Without the big toe and the foot to which it is attached, the ear cannot move anywhere. And without the ear to hear the traffic and the warning signals, the big toe won’t know to stop when the car is coming.

Parts of the body need each other in order to function. And they all need to be joined together as a body and not some random collection of individual parts.

If we are going to be guided by the Scriptures and see the church as God sees it through the lens of the Word, we need to adjust our thinking about the congregation. While we are many individuals of different opinions, ages, skills, perspectives, etc., we are all members of one body and members of one another. We share the same baptismal bath. We eat the same bread that is the Body of Christ; we drink the same cup that is the blood of Christ. We are literally “bodied” and “bloodied” together in a unity that transcends our individuality. The church is much more than the sum of its parts.

One of the great heresies against the church is the notion that the church is a gathering of “like-minded individuals.” In other words, the church is like a country club where people who agree with each other get together to agree with each other. And while this is certainly what Paul urges the Corinthians toward

— that they agree with each other and be of the same mind and judgment — this is not what makes them the church. *It's the other way around.* In other words, you don't become a member of the body of Christ because you agree and have the same mind; *you have the same mind because you are a member of the body of Christ.* Unity is God's doing, the work of the Spirit working through the Word, calling, gathering, enlightening, sanctifying, and keeping the whole church with Christ in the one true faith. God works unity; Sin works disunity. The devil, together with our own sinful natures, is what divides the church and isolates its members.

Unity was threatened in the Corinthian congregation. Divisions are not simply sins of members against members; they are sins against the body of Christ, the very body that was nailed to the cross to bring all things in heaven and on earth together under His lordship. *To perpetuate division and discord is to be an instrument in the hand of the devil, to be the knife in his hand, hacking away at and dismembering the body of Christ.* You don't want to be in that position, I assure you. If you ever find yourself referring to fellow members as “those people” or “that group” you need to stop, drop, and repent because you're playing into the devil's hands.

The antidote is not compromise or some phony version of “playing nice,” but the cross of Jesus. Paul squares the divided Corinthians up to the cross of Christ. He preaches “*nothing but Christ and Him crucified*” (1 Cor. 2:2). He literally holds before their eyes dead Jesus hanging on a cross, taking away their sins, rescuing them from sin, death, and the devil and says to them, “*How do all your divisions stack up against this?*” How do your cliques and quarrels look when viewed against the cross of Jesus? We read about how the disciples bickered over who was the top dog on the night Jesus was betrayed, and we shake our heads at how silly they are. Didn't they hear Jesus? Didn't they realise what He was about to do? He was talking about His body being given into death and His blood shed on the cross, and they are arguing over which one of them is the greatest!

We're appalled by their lack of hearing and understanding, yet we ourselves do the same thing. We can go from the altar directly to each other's throats in just a few short steps. The same mouth that eats and drinks the body and blood of Christ and sings His praises can curse and slander a brother in the next breath. One body can quickly become many scattered members if left to our own devices.

The answer lies in the cross of Jesus. Not the symbol but the fruits. In baptism, we die to self and rise as members of Christ's body. In the Word that kills sin and the sinner and raises up the saint. In the Supper, where we partake of the one body of Christ and are made the one body of Christ. “*Because there is one bread, we who are many are one body, for we all partake of the one bread,*” Paul reminds the Corinthians later in his letter (1 Cor. 10:17). There are many grains, but one loaf. There are many grapes, but one cup. There are many members, but one body. God does this, we don't do it. God is doing this here too, among us. By the Word of the cross, which is utter foolishness to the world but the power of God for salvation to all who believe, we are being made one, *in spite of ourselves.*

You are one body in the Lord. Baptised with one baptism. Forgiven by one Word. Fed by one body and one blood. You are one in Christ. And when you agree with one another, and strive to work together and are united in mind and judgment, when divisions are healed instead of perpetuated, you are being the body of Christ that you are. In the name of Jesus, amen.

The peace of God which passes all understanding, keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.