

Today is the 2nd in a sermon series of 7 studying 1 Corinthians - the series is called Harmony in Diversity. Last week I began to introduce this book by describing the city of Corinth which is where this letter of 1 Corinthians was addressed. If you missed the first sermon and are interested to know what you missed, copies of the sermon are in the Narthex and on our website - you can listen on Youtube or Facebook.

I'm also offering a Daily Bible Study Guide to go along with this study, which you have as an insert. I hope you've found this is an easy way to study this book a little more in depth on your own.

Last week we studied the first 9 verses of chapter one. Today we'll look at the verses Cheryl read for us 10-18 and begin to talk about one of the main topics of the book - the disagreements that were happening in this new church in Corinth.

Speaking of disagreements, did you hear about the man who hired a specialist aviation lawyer to take care of his dispute with a baggage handler? He lost the case. And this doesn't have anything to do with anything, but do you know which type of music is a balloon's least favorite? (Pop).

Now.. I invite you to POP open your Bibles or your app and look at our passage for today - verses 10-18. Last week I explained that this book was initially a letter, written by the apostle Paul, to a new church in the city of Corinth, in Greece. Today, the main point I want to make is that this new church had some big problems and one of them was divisions among the people and the rancor it was causing.

Churches aren't perfect, because we, as a people, aren't perfect. And it's not possible, or healthy, to have the very same opinions about everything all the time. The main point **is not** that this church didn't agree about everything, but that their disagreements created divisions and fighting, which are the two main words I'm pondering with you today.

Recently I was talking with someone who apologized because, in a meeting they had spoken up and voiced an opinion different from the person who had the floor - kind of opposite from them. I thought they were apologizing for raising an opposing opinion. I assured them there was nothing to

apologize for, because it's okay to share a different opinion. But that's not why they were apologizing. They were apologizing for the manner in which they'd spoken and the spirit of the words that were conveyed were harmful. It wasn't the difference of opinion itself, but the divisiveness, the way in which the opinion was offered sounded like they were fighting instead of discussing.

There's a communication technique I've been trying to work on over the last few years. The idea is to use a **specific tone of voice** when having a challenging conversation. This certain tone of voice can automatically create a sense of well being and support by..... speaking slowly, in a lower register and trailing down at the end of a comment. This way of speaking creates a sense of calmness instead of anxiety even though the idea being communicated might be different or contrary to the person's opinion you're speaking with. It's not a new technique and it's so simple it sounds easy and not worth taking time with. Except that, it's REALLY hard to do, especially when emotions have escalated in a conversation.

You know how they say it doesn't matter what you say to a dog, but the tone of voice is everything? "Rover! I really like you ! I'm gonna pet you and give you lots of love!" And the dog cowers, tail between the legs.

Okay - well this isn't exactly like that, but similar. So if I said: [*emphatically, with gusto*] "I don't agree with that idea. I think we should wait, and talk about it later." Or if I said the same thing this way: [*in slow, low voice*] "I don't agree with that idea. I think we should wait, and talk about it again later."

The difference between those two, even though they're the same words, and the result is to continue to keep connected instead of being divided. But it really takes work and presence of mind to... speak slowly, in a lower register, with downward inflection at the end..... when we're feeling emotional about a topic. It's much more natural to jump to a higher register and be more emphatic.

But even if we have strong feelings, we don't HAVE to speak with strong intonations. Research has shown across many academic disciplines that this one small technique can completely change outcomes and

help maintain relationships in conflict. Even the FBI uses it. It's entirely possible to temper communication, especially when the base intent is to communicate and stay connected, rather than be offensive and cause division.

Look back with me now at verses 10 & 11 in our scripture lesson today. I'll read them again: "Now I encourage you, brothers and sisters, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ: Agree with each other and don't be divided into rival groups. Instead, be restored with the same mind and the same purpose. My brothers and sisters, Chloe's people gave me some information about you, that you're fighting with each other."

When looking at the original Greek - the words "agree with each other", which sounds like Paul wants everyone to have the same opinion about everything, is actually more accurately translated, "speak the same thing". Paul is not saying that in all subjects a church must agree on everything, but in this specific instance, Paul is asking these people to call one another by the same name, that is Christian, rather than Chloe's people, or Apollos' or Paul's. In that church, factions were separating people off, dividing them into parties, calling itself by the name of some of the apostles who were preaching, teaching and baptizing.

Where it says "restored with the same mind and the same purpose", is more literally translated in Greek - "be knit together in the same capacity for reflective thinking". Those two phrases sound very different. It's not meant to be an encouragement to all have the same opinion about everything and never discuss differences, but to continue to be a unit - "united" - and allow each other the same respect to think in order to make good decisions as a church even if the thinking is different. "be knit together in the same capacity for reflective thinking".

Again verses 10 & 11 in brief - "Speak the same thing - Christian - and don't be divided.... you're fighting with each other." It's so revealing that the words in Greek here for divided and fighting are also used in quite a few other places in the New Testament when listing "acts of a sinful nature" idolatry, drunkenness, envy, divisiveness, quarrelsomeness - or fighting.

This tells me that the problem Paul is addressing here isn't having different opinions. The problem is the spirit and manner of the communication of them, the intention of bullying another into the same point of view instead of being respectful and listening to try to understand another's point of view.

This sort of re-understanding of these verses is why I LOVE studying the Bible. Not just reading it, but taking the time and interest to study it. Many times what I think and assume the words mean at first glance, turn out to be VERY different. And the revelation of God's Word that comes as I really study, changes my world and my view of the world and how I am in it.

I like how John Wesley, one of the founders of the Methodist Church, describes this idea in his "Sermons on Several Occasions" written in 1771. "But although a difference in opinions or modes of worship may prevent an entire external union, yet need it prevent our union in affection? Though we can't think alike, may we not love alike? May we not be of one heart, though we are not of one opinion? Without all doubt we may."

He also says later that it's important to "know thy mind and what one believes," but that differences of opinion or belief should never prevent Christians from loving one another. And the Bible seems to teach: Love is an action.

I want to share a true story to illustrate my thoughts and close this sermon. I think this story reflects the results of Paul's teaching here to "be knit together in the same capacity for reflective thinking" - how the manner and spirit with which we communicate can change our relationships. It's from someone I've cited before and whose work I really appreciate Edwin Friedman, an ordained rabbi and therapist.

There was a man and woman who were in their second marriage. They both previously had children from their first marriages. A few weeks into the second marriage, the wife began to be in serious conflict with the daughter of her new husband. When the daughter broke house rules, the wife believed in strict punishments and would give them out. The husband disagreed with this form of discipline and was pained over the whole situation. But every time

he tried to express his difference of opinion, his wife would begin to have a very physical reaction, so he'd back down and not speak up. You see, his wife suffered from Lupus, an autoimmune disease and when she'd have flare ups, the reduction in blood platelets actually caused her skin to bruise. The way the husband expressed his disagreement was triggering her Lupus, which caused him to back down, but still be upset. It didn't solve anything.

In therapy, Friedman coached the husband to offer his true thoughts in a calm way and support only the punishments he believed in, but remain loving and connected, even if his wife's Lupus flared up.

The husband tried it and worked on showing love and staying connected to his wife even as he tried to calmly disagree. He also would only support the punishments he thought appropriate.

Within one week of trying this, the wife's blood platelet count went up, not down, higher than it had in years and soon after that, her Lupus completely stabilized. Their family became stronger and healthier as a result of this new, calm truth telling. This isn't to say that the wife's disease wasn't serious, but that the manner and spirit of his communication, his work on being a strong self, yet showing love, actually helped her and the whole family be healthier too. Which goes to show that even *one person's* effort to "be restored with the same mind and same purpose" or in other words "be knit together in the same capacity for reflective thinking" can help our whole church system become healthier and stronger.

May you and I be that one.