

Text: 1 Cor. 1:10-17

Title: "Mending torn relationships between Christian brothers"

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Introduction: Betsy Ross was, of course, the seamstress who designed and sewed the very first flag of the United States. Betsy was a woman who understood the pain of division. She was raised a Quaker but fell in love with an Episcopalian with whom she worked. The Quakers of that day disallowed marriage outside of the Society of Friends, so when Betsy went with John Ross to New Jersey to elope, she was "read out" of the Quaker meeting house and shunned by her family and friends. John and Betsy Ross attended Christ Church in Philadelphia, purchasing a pew next to that of the Washingtons.

Philadelphia, the home of the Rosses, became a fractured town after the publication of Tomas Paine's *Common Sense* in January of 1776, revolutionaries on one side and loyalists on the other. Shortly thereafter, after only three years of marriage at the age of 24, Betsy was severed from her husband John, who lost his life to an explosion at a munitions depot he was guarding as a member of the Pennsylvania militia. She remarried only to lose that husband as well to the Revolutionary War. Another painful division affected Betsy, when the tensions of the war caused a split between pacifist Quakers and Free Quakers or Fighting Quakers. Betsy rejoined the fighting Quakers, and her home and upholstery shop were occupied by enemy British troops for much of the war.

In May or June of 1776, a committee of three, George Washington, Robert Morris, and George Ross, the uncle of her deceased husband, asked Betsy on behalf of the Continental Congress to design and sew a flag for the colonies. She agreed and sewed together the separate fabrics that came to be the great rallying point for the birth of our Union. I mention Betsy

Ross, this morning, because it was striking to me that the lady who, in the providence of God, was chosen to sew together the symbol of our nation's union, one nation, under God, indivisible, was also a lady who knew the pain of many divisions in her life – divisions from her church, friends, family, two husbands, and even her home.

Our passage has something in common with the life of Betsy Ross. Her life felt the pains of many divisions, and Paul is addressing this pain in the Corinthian church in this passage. Betsy's life is remembered for sewing, and Paul uses some terms in our passage that relate to the need to mend the tearing of fabric. In v. 10, when Paul says, "that there be no divisions," he uses the word from which we get *schism*, which is also used in Matt. 9:16 of a tear in a garment.

He tells us that the opposite of these divisions or tears in the fabric of the body of Christ is to "be perfectly joined together" again (v. 10). That phrase is a single word in the original, which refers to the mending of nets in Matt. 4:21. Some of the fabric of the relationships among the brethren at Corinth had been badly torn, and it needed to be mended. Our title this morning is "Mending torn relationships between Christian brothers," and I want us to see three things from the passage about this very important theme:

I. Mend torn relationships by understanding why Paul gives this exhortation (vv. 10-17).

Illustration: Torn fabric can create embarrassing situations. One of the games played at the Jr./Sr. banquet my children were a part of at their Christian school involved moms answering questions about their senior sons, and one of the questions was "what was your most embarrassing moment"? After we came home, I mentioned to my family that the embarrassing moments the seniors mentioned did not come close to my most embarrassing moment.

We were visiting our dear friends, Pastor Dave Reinhardt and his family, and Dave had lent me a bathing suit that was a bit too big for me so that we could enjoy time at a water park together. Kara was small then, and she had climbed up on a slide but did not want to come down. I went up on the slide to retrieve her, slipped awkwardly with her in my hands, but was finally able to carry her down off the slide. After coming down, I heard my dear wife and Janet Reinhardt giggling uncontrollably behind me, and when I asked them what they were enjoying so, they managed to eek out that when I slipped with Kara I had managed to tear the fabric of the back of my swimming trunks. Naturally, I did not do a lot of laughing, and my time in the water park was officially over. I can laugh about it now, but it was embarrassing at the time.

Application: Tears in relationships are not as funny as that experience, but they are often no less embarrassing. I will tell you the story of swim trunks that got torn, but I will not tell you the story of a torn relationship I am experiencing this morning. These realities of our lives are so painful, we often do not want even to acknowledge them, let alone tell others of them or deal with them. But notice what Paul says in v. 11, “For it has been declared unto me . . .”

We are not sure who Chloe was, probably a prominent lady of business who lived in Ephesus and whose household included some Christians who had business in Corinth. What we do know for sure, however, is that these people were not guilty of gossip. They were genuinely concerned for the mending of torn relationships, and the pain involved in this topic did not keep them from trying to help. It is clear that their report is the immediate reason why Paul gave this exhortation to mend relationships, but the text mentions other things that made mending the relationships necessary as well.

1. The exhortation to mend was necessary because of the authority of the name of the Lord Jesus Christ (v. 10a). The

Corinthians were to mend their torn relationships because the honor of the name of our Lord Jesus Christ required it. As one called of God to minister to the spiritual needs of this church, Paul understood the difference between the importance of his own name and that of the name of the Lord Jesus Christ (v. 13). It is because Jesus Christ, who is our Lord, the Lord who was crucified for us, wants us to mend our torn relationships that we must work to do so. This is an exhortation, not a direct command, but it nevertheless must be done because it comes to us through the name of the Lord Jesus Christ. He wants His church to be one, and He deserves to have it so.

2. The exhortation to mend is necessary because church members prioritized “I am” (vv. 12-15).

Illustration: Any illness has symptoms that should not be confused with the illness’s cause. A cold might exhibit symptoms such as sneezing and coughing, but I do not have a cold because I sneeze and cough. I have a cold because I have a viral infection deep within my system.

Application: I believe that as we read about the party spirit of the Corinthians in this passage, it is easy to confuse the symptoms and the cause. Both are miserable conditions that have no role among those called *saints* and *brethren*. The symptoms here are these slogans of loyalty to specific leaders, and for some to Christ as best of all. The problem, of course, is not the appreciation of each of these leaders, nor of Christ. The problem is rather that the party spirit adds the idea, “and you don’t” or “more than you.” So what is really being said here is “I am of Paul, and you are not really.” “I am of Apollos, in a way that you are not.” “I am of Cephas or Peter, and you do not seem to measure up to the same standard.” And best of all, “I am of Christ, and you just do not get it the way I do.”

You see, the real problem with these symptoms is their root cause, and it is captured in the phrase, “I am.” Relationships

were being torn in Corinth because people cared more about what “I am” than about what “Christ is.” Their conversations were probably a lot like our own in this regard. Paul was probably preferred because of his personal care for specific people; Apollos was probably preferred because of an attraction to his style of ministry; Peter was probably preferred because of his reputation as the lead apostle, kind of like our radio preachers or conference speakers are greatly admired from a distance today (note that none of these were even involved in leadership in Corinth at this time; nobody was saying “I am of Stephanus,” but see 16:15-18). Those who claimed to be of Christ saw themselves as rising far above the fray, close to the Savior in a way that others were not. In every case, what dominates the discussion are the two little words, “I am.” We have to learn to think in terms of “Christ is” and “the body of Christ is” in order to see relationships that have been torn by too much “I am” or “My family is” properly mended.

II. Mend torn relationships by understanding that schisms lead to heresy (v. 10, “speak the same thing”).

Illustration: Tears not fixed get worse over time. I have a pair of shorts that has a horizontal tear along the lower hem of one leg, and often when I try to put those shorts on my toe gets caught on that hem making the tear worse. Then the worse tear also makes it more likely that my toe will get caught on the hem again and the cycle will continue until the hem comes completely off. The only way to prevent that is to fix the tear before it can get any worse.

Application: Paul understands that torn relationships in the body of Christ can become much worse, full blown rips that are dangerous to the well-being of the faith of the brethren. He uses the word *schism* for the tears, and the word *heresy* for the full-blown rip (2 Pet. 2:1, note the words “among you”). Notice two things about the relationship between personal schism and doctrinal heresy with me.

1. Christ allows deterioration from schism to heresy to purify His church (1 Cor. 11:18-19). Notice those words in verse 19, "for there must be heresies." The reason there must be heresies is that local congregations are comprised of the approved and the unapproved, those who truly know the Lord and those whose profession is a false one. Christ allows us to have schisms, torn relationships, to ultimately bring about a needed division between true believers and false. When schisms occur, those who are true believers will work to mend their relationships on the personal level and remain true to the faith. Those who have false professions will reject the faith in heresy, never agreeing to mend the tear of schism.

2. We protect ourselves from heresy by keeping our schisms from destroying our ability to say the same thing (v. 10). When believers say the same thing, they speak a common confession. We are able to deal with the tearing of our relationships as members who have covenanted together under a common calling and confession of faith in a way that we could not if we were not. Our common doctrine is an important protection against allowing schism to widen into heresy.

III. Mend torn relationships with the mind and purpose we share (v. 10, 17).

Illustration: The tools of a sewing project are needle and thread. The tools of mending relationships are the mind and purpose we share.

Application: Having the Corinthian partisans all sit from now on in the same room was not going to accomplish what Paul knew needed to happen for these torn relationships to mend. It is not just that we need to be a part of the same ministry and not divide ourselves up into different groups; we actually need the same mind on issues of disagreement to be together the way the Lord wants us to be. In heaven, we will all agree on every issue that tears at our relationships now. The

question for us is, why cannot we find that agreement now? The answer is that we can because this agreement depends on an attainable shared mind and purpose.

1. The mind shared by all believers is one that is being transformed into the mind of Christ. Paul talks about this in Rom. 12:2. This mind that every believer shares is ever transforming our lives by being renewed in God's truth. As soon as we no longer desire to change into Christlikeness, we lose that mind. We are able to mend the tears in our relationships to the degree that we agree to renew our minds in the transforming truth of the Word of God. That truth will make us less like the world and less like our old selves as it makes us more like Christ. No other process works like this when it comes to mending our torn relationships.

2. The shared purpose of the believer is wrapped up in the good news of the cross (v. 10, "judgment"; [γνώμη is used of the plot to kill Paul in Acts 20:3 and the purpose of the ten kings serving the antichrist in Rev. 17:13, 17; it also carries the idea of making applications of scriptural principles in 1 Cor. 7:25 (singleness) and in 2 Cor. 8:10 (giving – note that Paul here distinguishes his γνώμη on this matter from an expressly authoritative command, v. 8); because the word is singular and emphasizing a shared reality among believers, it seems that the same purpose is a better translation than the same judgment/ application/ conviction]; v. 17).

The tears in our relationships seem less important when we are truly focused on the needs of people for the cross. It is possible to make void the cross, and that possibility ought to create in us a great desire to be unified. The power of the cross has very little to do with rhetorical skill, or personal friendliness, or national fame. It has everything to do with humility.

Conclusion: If you are here today with a relationship between you and a brother that is torn, what does the Lord want you do about that?

- (1) Sanctify Christ as the Lord of your heart – forgive in obedience to Him;
- (2) be approved in a world of people who will not be so – be the one who continues on in the faith, saying the same thing with the people of God in a covenantal commitment to a common confession;
- (3) renew your mind so that it becomes less like the world and more like the mind of Christ, and show patience for that process to work in others who share that mind;
- and (4) glory in the cross as poor contempt on all your pride; see the need of poor sinners to be saved by its glorious power.

Do these things, and the tears that you can mend will be mended, and others that the Lord asks you to endure faithfully will demonstrate that you have been approved.

“A man came—I think it was actually in Philadelphia—on one occasion to the great George Whitefield and asked if he might print his sermons. Whitefield gave this reply; he said, ‘Well, I have no inherent objection, if you like, but you will never be able to put on the printed page the lightning and the thunder.’ That is the distinction—the sermon, and the ‘lightning and the thunder.’ To Whitefield this was of very great importance, and it should be of very great importance to all preachers, as I hope to show. You can put the sermon into print, but not the lightning and the thunder. That comes into the act of preaching and cannot be conveyed by cold print. Indeed it almost baffles the descriptive powers of the best reporters.”

—David Martin Lloyd-Jones,

*Preachers and Preaching*