

MINISTRY BY MAIL
Lutheran Conference of Confessional Fellowship
www.lutheranlccf.org
Third Sunday After Epiphany, January 24, 2021

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(Hymns found in The Lutheran Hymnal, CPH, 1941)

Hymns: 427, 294: 1-2, 464, 412, 47.

Lessons: Deuteronomy 6:4-19, Ephesians 4:1-6, John 10:7-18

Sermon Text: 1 Corinthians 1:10-17 (NIV)

Sermon by Pastor Robert Mehlretter

In the name of Jesus Christ, Dear Fellow Redeemed,

In the first 9 verses of this letter, Paul has established the foundation of his entire letter. It is Jesus Christ and what he has done, is doing, and will do for the Corinthians. What will Jesus Christ do for them if he fills their lives? How will they live if they truly have fellowship with God's Son Jesus Christ? He is writing to people who have been made fully aware of their sins by the preaching of the Law, as we learn from the commandments. But they have also been made fully aware of the gospel. That is the marvelous knowledge that God sent his only Son Jesus Christ to suffer and die for their sins and to rise again so that they, too might rise to eternal life with their Savior in heaven.

With that background fully in his mind Paul begins a discussion of the problems in this visible gathering of Christians. First he tells us that there are divisions in this congregation. Some say they follow Paul, others say they follow Apollos, another pastor who served in their midst, others say they follow Peter, and others claiming even greater superiority, claim they follow Christ. As you read later in the letter, there are problems with gross immorality and open idolatry and even disagreement on the resurrection from the dead. So this was not a congregation without problems. Saint Paul has no reason to praise them for their Christian living. But he does teach them about

TRUE CHRISTIAN UNITY

- 1. It is worked by the Holy Ghost;**
- 2. It consists of Christians in a visible church**
 - a. Agreeing with one another,**
 - b. Having no divisions among them and**
 - c. Being perfectly united in mind and thought.**

In his introduction to this first letter to the Christians in Corinth, Saint Paul reminded you, as you heard last Sunday, that ***“God, who has called you into fellowship with his Son Jesus Christ our Lord, is faithful.”*** God is faithful and he ***“has called you into fellowship with his Son Jesus Christ our Lord.”*** A few minutes ago you confessed that you believe in the Holy Christian Church, also called the communion of saints. That is the invisible gathering of everyone who has ever believed and ever will believe in Jesus Christ. It is all those everywhere and at every time in history who believe in Jesus as the Savior. It is faith which makes one a member of that group. But we can't see faith. We can only see fruits of faith, and so we have rightly called this the “invisible church”.

In one of our public confessions*, we state: “We believe that the unity of the Church is real and actual. This is the unity of which Luther speaks in our Small Catechism when he says of the Holy Spirit that “He calls, gathers, enlightens, and sanctifies the whole Christian Church on earth, and keeps it with Jesus Christ in the one true faith.” Christians are united because each Christian is entirely a creation of the Spirit. Christians share the same nature from beginning to end. ***“For there is no difference; for all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God; being justified freely by His grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus.”*** (Romans 3:22-24) All Christians are God's children on the basis of Christ's redemption of the world and on the basis of the work of the Spirit who through Baptism and the Word appropriates this holiness to us: ... ***“ye are all one in Christ Jesus.”*** (Galatians 3:28) Through faith the Holy Spirit unites us with Jesus Christ and we become part of His Body and united with every Christian, and Jesus' prayer is fulfilled: ***“that they all may be one; as Thou Father art in Me, and I in Thee, that***

they also may be one in Us.” (John 17:21) This unity of the Body of Christ, the Church, is expressed by Paul in Romans 12:5, *“We, being many, are one body in Christ, and every one members one of another.”* This unity is most beautifully expressed in Ephesians 4:4-6, *“There is one body, and one Spirit, even as ye are called in one hope of your calling; one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in you all.”* *

The Holy Christian Church, the same thing as “the communion of saints”, is found on earth only where the gospel is preached and the sacraments are administered. Those who confess to believe in Jesus Christ as Savior gather into visible groups, called churches. We call such a visible gathering a church, and Faith Evangelical Lutheran Church and Christ Our Redeemer Evangelical Lutheran Church are such visible churches, because people come together to hear the gospel, and we know that the Holy Spirit, the Holy Ghost, will use the gospel to bring people in that group to faith.

What is the mind, what is to be the attitude and mind of those gathered together in a visible church? Our sermon text plainly states that when Saint Paul writes: *“I appeal to you, brothers, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that all of you agree with one another so that there may be no divisions among you and that you may be perfectly united in mind and thought.”*

“Christians according to the new man are perfectly joined together in the same mind. The Holy Spirit makes them children of God and He makes them all the same. They are agreed on sin, its nature, its origin, its means, its fruits, and so on. They are agreed on [God’s] grace, its ... means, its fruits, and so on. There may be different degrees of understanding, ... [but in] ... essence ... all believers are perfectly agreed.” *

“[Because] Christians are perfectly joined together in one mind by the Spirit, it follows that the [Holy] Spirit moves them all [so] that they all speak the same thing. Though the manner of speaking may vary, yet the Truth [of God’s Word] spoken must [always] be one and the same thing. The Church exists for the purpose of glorifying God. [It is only by] speaking the same thing ... [as we read in Romans] *“that ye may with one mind and with one mouth glorify God, even the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ”* (Romans 15:6) [that this goal is attained]” *

“The high standard of scripture is clear. All members of the Church are to speak the same thing in all matters of faith. This is [plain, as we read words from our text from the King James Version]: *“Now I beseech you, brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that ye all speak the same thing, and that there be no divisions among you; but that ye be perfectly joined together in the same mind and the same judgment.”* *

Now it would be nice if we could be unanimous when we speak of earthly things, too. But we must emphasize that this unity is a one-ness in theology, that is, a unity in speaking of what God tells us in his Holy, inerrant, inspired Word. When we speak of something that the Bible decides, that is when and where we must have this unity and bow to what the Word of God says. “As we are members of the Church we may speak, confess, and teach only the Word of God. *“If any man speak, let him speak as the oracles of God; if any man minister, let him do it as of the ability which God giveth: that God in all things may be glorified through Jesus Christ, to whom be praise and dominion for ever and ever. Amen.”* (1 Peter 4:11) [In the New International Version this reads *“If anyone speaks, he should do it as one speaking the very words of God.”*] The Church is to speak the same thing and that thing is called by Peter *“the oracles of God.”* In so far as [we] are human beings, the members of the Church have no wisdom, no truth [in and of ourselves]. [Our] united message is the revelation sent down from heaven, God’s sayings. St. Paul testifies this in [the next chapter of First Corinthians:] *“We have not received the spirit of the world but the Spirit who is from God, that we may understand what God has freely given us.”* (1 Corinthians 2:12 NIV [Remember that] the commission, the mission, of the Church is *“teaching them to observe all things, whatsoever I have commanded you.”* (Matthew 28:20)” *, or in the New International Version *“teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you.”*

Do you see what this fellowship is? It is a oneness created by God, as you heard in our Epistle lesson from Ephesians.

Let’s talk about some applications of that idea. You came here to hear the Word of God. Many people go to other churches for many other reasons. You want to be members here because you believe what this congregation believes, teaches, and confesses. Most people would not want to be members of an organization if they didn’t agree with it and its principles and its mission statement. I have often used the example of an organization called “Save The Whales”. If you don’t think that whales need saving you wouldn’t join that organization. If you don’t believe in a cause, you don’t support it, you don’t join it.

And if you get into something and realize that you don’t agree with it, you get out of it.

What is called “faith based organizations” are a danger to the one who wants to remain faithful to the Word of God. There are many such “faith-based organizations”, even in our own communities which do many good things for people. But we must be extremely careful about supporting them or joining them lest by our actions, we are not speaking the same things as God’s Word speaks. In the history of our congregations and of our members we have studied Aid Association for Lutherans and Lutheran Brotherhood, which have combined to form an organization called “Thrivent”, organized under law as a Fraternal Benefit Society. Although Thrivent originally allowed only Lutherans to become members, in 2013 they changed “to include all Christians.” They state that they are “a not-for-profit membership organization of Christians” “and members are owners.” Members of Thrivent are supporting churches and church bodies that they might normally never dream of supporting. Members of Thrivent, through their membership, are supporting and promoting false-teaching churches as well as doing things people recognize as good and beneficial.

God forbids church fellowship, that is, doing religious things together, when we are not agreed in doctrine and practice. God tells us to **“Watch out for false prophets.”** Matthew 7:15 (NIV) He also tells us to **“Keep away from” “those who cause divisions and put obstacles in your way that are contrary to the teaching you have learned.”** Romans 16:17 (NIV)

There are also many examples of unscriptural church fellowship in our communities. Churches who do not agree in doctrine join in religious activities. “Faith-based organizations” invite our membership. Yet we must, as Saint Paul and God exhort us, agree with one another and have no divisions among us and be perfectly united in mind and thought when it comes to teaching and living what God says.

When it comes to opinions about earthly matters, we certainly may have differing opinions. When it comes to plain, clear Scriptural teaching, we must be united. That will be obvious in our fruits of faith.

In our nation we are free to hold and express political opinions. But we must never try to bind the consciences of others with our opinions.

We are living in times when many are convinced that churches must take political positions. The church that is faithful to God will always take a stand against sin, wherever it is found.

Unfortunately, many well-meaning people have decided that their churches must support political parties. The most obvious illustration of that today is many people who are identified by the broad term “evangelicals” supporting particular candidates for government office to the exclusion of other candidates. The mission of the church is to prepare men for eternity. The mission of the state is taking care of things in this world.

As a church we are to support Jesus Christ and his truth. And throughout our earthly lives we are to show love and concern for our fellow confessors of Christ. Scripture reminds us: **“You, my brothers, were called to be free. But do not use your freedom to indulge the sinful nature; rather, serve one another in love. The entire law is summed up in a single command: ‘Love your neighbor as yourself.’ If you keep on biting and devouring each other, watch out or you will be destroyed by each other.”** Galatians 5:13-15 (NIV)

Although the descriptive word “Evangelical” is part of our church name, we do not support what is called “the evangelical movement”. Many teachings and practice of “the evangelical movement” are not in agreement with the Word of God.

The simple message of “God sent his son Jesus Christ to die for my sins” is attacked and compromised by any and every compromise and attack on the pure Word of God.

You have been called by the Word of God to have and live and experience fellowship with the Lord Jesus. That is being part of the family of God – adopted sons of God, brothers and sisters of Jesus Christ. God tells us **“You are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus.”** (Galatians 3:26 NIV) Jesus tells us plainly **“He who is not with me is against me, and he who does not gather with me, scatters.”** (Luke 11:23 NIV)

As you continue your week’s activities as you leave here, remember God’s invitation and admonition through Saint Paul: **“I appeal to you, brothers, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that all of you agree with one another so that there may be no divisions among you and that you may be perfectly united in mind and thought.”** May our fruits of faith always show the bond we share in the Holy Christian Church, the communion of saints! May God truly guide our thoughts, our words, and our actions! Amen.

*Concerning Church Fellowship, paragraphs 4, 5, 6, 7