

Hot Potatoes (1): Our Issue vs THE Issue

(1 Corinthians 1:18-2:1)

I. Introduction

- A. Suppose your family has a disagreement over where to eat lunch today
1. You are in the mood for BBQ and want to try the new *Mission BBQ*
 - a. Others are in the mood for seafood and want to go to *Red Lobster*
 - b. Others are in the mood for Taco's and they insist on *Plaza Azteca*
 - c. Others insist on chicken... (tough luck, *Chick-Fil-A* is closed)
 2. What to do? Go to **Golden Coral** where they have all (done badly)
 - a. **Take Turns**: someone picks a place today and someone else next
 - b. **Honor**: If there's birthday or one had a bad week, they get to pick
 - c. **Compromise**: Go home for grilled cheese (*disappoint all equally*)
 3. What you don't do (hopefully) is choose up sides and have big fight
 - a. *Fish-ites* don't accuse *Chicken-ites* of not really being family
 - b. *BBQ-uarians* don't build a new restaurant and exclude all *Taco-ists*
 - c. And no one will declare that grilled cheese is the only true lunch
- B. Sadly, that is exactly what we have tended to do in the family of God
1. Church at Corinth was divided over (among other things) what to eat
 - a. Is it OK or not OK to purchase and meat sacrificed to pagan idols
 - 1) This issue had to do with others—Jew vs Greek, rich vs poor
 - 2) But one of the things this church was splitting over was food
 - b. Before Paul will discuss issue, he discussed attitudes (**1 Cor 8:1-3**)
 - c. More important to have the right view of unity than of the issue
 2. Jesus have his disciples (us) a new command (**John 13:34-35**)
 - a. Those that followed him would trumpet truth through their love
 - b. Note that Jesus calls this a new command, not a new suggestion!
 - 1) World doesn't see Christ when we are 100% right in theology
 - 2) We show Jesus to the world when we love like Jesus loved
 - c. Jesus prays for our unity right before the cross (**John 17:20-23**)

- C. That doesn't mean we will never be different and will never disagree
1. Unity doesn't mean uniformity; it doesn't mean we'll always agree
 - a. Unity doesn't mean we should ignore or never discuss differences
 - b. Unity doesn't mean we'll never come to impasse on differences
 - c. Unity DOES mean we love each other more than our differences
 2. **History:** Our roots are in the revivals of the early 19th century
 - a. Barton W. Stone led one frontier revival at Cane Ridge, KY (1801)
 - 1) Some 20,000 Baptists, Methodists and Presbyterians attended
 - a) Once revival was over, they could no longer worship together
 - b) Why? Baptists, Methodists & Presbyterians! Different creeds
 - 2) Stone began unity movement of Christians in denominations
 - 3) Unity is "*our polar star.*" We must have "*no creed but Christ*"
 - b. In 1809, Alexander Campbell came from Scotland (father in 1807)
 - 1) Both Campbells came to see denominational creeds as divisive
 - 2) They sought to return Christianity to time before denomination
 - 3) Unity is only possible if we "*Speak where the Bible speaks...*"
 - c. Two movements found each other and merged (Stone-Campbell)
 - d. **Irony:** Stone and Campbell agreed on unity but on little else
 - 1) **Stone:** Unitarian, premillennial, stress Spirit, ignored baptism
 - 2) **Campbell:** Trinitarian, postmillennial, stress baptism, not Spirit
 - 3) Disagreed on nature of atonement (*Substitution vs Satisfaction*)
 - 4) Disagreed over what to call movement (*Disciples vs Christian*)
 - e. They did not ignore these differences but discussed them openly
 - 1) Sometimes they were acerbic and sarcastic toward each other
 - 2) They loved and admired each other more than their differences
 3. Point of history lesson? When exactly did we forget how to do this?
 - a. Our church began because we realized the need for unity in Christ
 - b. When did we start thinking that what really matters is being right?
 - c. When did we start seeing love and unity as only optional matters?

II. The Part That Matters

A. Earlier we mentioned Corinth struggling with unity over food

1. They really struggled with unity over several different issues
 - a. They divided around personality of preachers (1 Cor 1:11-12)
 - b. They divided over property disputes...in court! (1 Cor 6:1)
 - c. They divided male vs female over head-coverings (1 Cor 11:4-5)
 - d. They divided rich vs poor over Lord's Supper (1 Cor 11:20-21)
 - e. They divided prophets vs tongues-speakers over worship (14:26)
2. So what do you do if the church is divided? *Focus on what matters!*
 - a. Some things don't matter; some things matter a lot (1 Cor 1:18)
 - 1) Some will want to focus on other things—signs-n-syllogisms
 - 2) They'll talk about their religious experiences and theology
 - b. Paul said his focus was on Christ and the cross (1 Cor 1:22-24)
 - c. That wasn't just one of his points; it was only point (1 Cor 2:1-2)
3. Answer to our division in staying in the shadow of the cross
 - a. We cannot come to Christ without also coming closer together!
 - b. We cannot stand under the cross without standing there together!

B. That doesn't mean differences disappear; there'll always be hot potatoes!

1. Unity doesn't mean we run for cover when these hot potatoes arise
 - a. A healthy church is one where we can discuss hot potato issues
 - b. It's unhealthy sign if the only way to stay together is keep quiet
 - 1) Friend once mentioned a father who was very conservative
 - 2) "*Only way to keep peace is never discuss religion*" Very sad!
2. Unity is not ability to see everything the same; that's uniformity
 - a. If we learn anything from history, we know that will not happen
 - b. Unity is ability to appreciate Christ in one with whom you disagree
3. The power of salvation is Jesus, not my ability to do or know right
 - a. Power of unity is Jesus, not our ability to understand things alike
 - b. We need to trust in Jesus, and get on obeying his command to love

III. Conclusion

- A. Over first part of summer we'll revisit some "hot potato" issues
 - 1. Some are hot potatoes for many churches (gender roles/identity)
 - a. Some are hot potatoes only for our heritage (music/communion)
 - b. Some are hot potatoes only because we haven't discussed them
 - 2. Each lesson will have two parts—I'll present the issue in the sermon
 - a. We'll then work through it and resolve it the following Wednesday
 - 1) Actually, we have discussed all these before on Wednesdays
 - 2) Only 30-40 are there Wednesdays, and these wider audience
 - b. Some of these hot potatoes are brought up as academic exercise
 - c. Some are hot potatoes because they represent needed changes
 - 3. So hold onto your hat and be here on Sundays and Wednesdays
- B. Let's end with one more observation about the church and unity
 - 1. When Paul writes to stress unity, he says to maintain it (**Eph 4:1-3**)
 - a. We are to be humble, gentle, patience; that's where unity thrives
 - b. It's hard to be unified with folks you're bashing or being bashed by
 - c. So we are to live in such a way that allows for atmosphere of unity
 - 2. But we don't create unity! It is always the unity of the Holy Spirit
 - a. Without humility, gentleness and patience, unity is impossible
 - b. These are the fruit of the Spirit that He bring to bear in our lives
 - 1) We can get in the way and make it impossible for Him to work
 - 2) We must continually "*keep step with the Spirit*" (**Gal 5:25**)
 - c. But we need to know that unity is not only the command of God
 - d. It is also the work of God. No wonder its hard; only God can do it!