

People of God, did you know that in the Bible there is recorded one of Jesus' prayers which he prayed for you? In John 17 in His High Priestly Prayer the Lord Jesus prayed for all those who would believe in Him through the word of the apostles. That's us. And the prayer that Jesus uttered to His Father on our behalf was this: He said, "*that they would be one, just as you, Father are in me, and I am in you, that they also may be in us, so that the world may believe that you have sent me.*"

Jesus prayed that we would be one, just as the Father is one with the Son and as the Son is one with the Father. The unity of God's people is so important that our Lord Jesus even ties the world's belief in Him to the unity that exists within the Church.

In our Gospel text today in John 10 the Lord Jesus is the Good Shepherd of the Sheep. And he tells his disciples that he has other sheep which are not of this fold. "*I must bring them also, and they will listen to my voice. So there will be one flock, one shepherd.*"

These other sheep Jesus refers to here are the Gentiles that he will bring into the Church. Let us remember the sermon from last week, where we saw the image of Jew and Gentile together in another form, in the form of Bread and Fish upon the charcoal fire that Jesus was cooking on the seashore. And he tells the disciples to bring some of the fish they caught of the 153 large fish. And John adds the important note, that the net did not break. Remember, the Net of the Church had no schism, despite the fact it held so many large and diverse fish.

Sheep, fish - these do not seem like harmful creatures. Why would Jesus pray that sheep and sheep be one? Why would he pray that fish would have unity with bread? These are docile creatures, are they not? Well these images

only communicate as much as they were intended to communicate. No metaphor tells the whole story.

In the prophet Isaiah however, he shows the imagery of Jews and Gentiles together in the New Heavens and the New Earth under the reign of the Messianic King like this:

⁶*“The wolf also shall dwell with the lamb,
The leopard shall lie down with the young goat,
The calf and the young lion and the fatling together;
And a little child shall lead them.*

⁷*The cow and the bear shall graze;
Their young ones shall lie down together;
And the lion shall eat straw like the ox.*

⁸*The nursing child shall play by the cobra’s hole,
And the weaned child shall put his hand in the viper’s den.*

⁹*They shall not hurt nor destroy in all My holy mountain,
For the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the LORD
As the waters cover the sea.*

This glorious image of predator and prey coexisting in harmony with each other is the New Covenant Church. Jesus prayer that his people be one, is not a prayer that people who are already alike and get along keep it up. His prayer is that peoples who are vastly different from one another, peoples who have been historical enemies with each other, will be made to live peaceably with each other because the Spirit of the Lord God is upon Him to rule over these peoples. Jesus makes them one because he puts his Spirit of wisdom and understanding, His Spirit of counsel and might, His Spirit of knowledge and of the fear of the Lord in his people. He rules his people by His Spirit, and this is how enemies become friends and become brothers.

Our Lord's prayer is that people who are very different from one another would be so ruled by the Spirit of Christ in His Church that they become one.

However, many of us know the sad reality that often exists in the Church, where there is not unity and harmony, where there is not oneness, but where there is seemingly endless strife and division, and schisms and church splits and infighting. Sadly, many in the Church have not internalized the prophet Isaiah's word, nor the prayer of our Lord, nor the commands of his apostles to pursue peace in the Church and be maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. Too often people give into their animal nature and they bite and devour one another. Paul therefore warns the Galatians that they be careful lest after biting and devouring one another, they consume each other. But the Spirit of liberty has set us free from following our beastly nature. We have been given the Spirit of Christ so that we might love one another.

Spiritual Pride

Now, as we consider how we can fulfill the Lord's prayer for us here in Christ the Redeemer Church, that we would be one, it would be good for us to consider what are some of the things that are likely to cause division among us. What will make us bite and devour one another, what will make the net of the church break, if we are not careful to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the Bond of Peace? Let us consider this.

Firstly, I believe one thing that could absolutely destroy us is this - spiritual pride. We have many in our church who very intelligent and smart and well educated and theologically trained. But with such knowledge, comes pride. Knowledge puffs up, says the Apostle Paul. And when you are puffed up with pride, you can look down upon other people, and treat them as though

they were less than you because you have the knowledge and experience and they do not.

Pride puts people in unhealthy competition with one another, which makes us look at other people with disdain. Pride makes people crave power so they can feel superior to others, which fuels that enmity between people which Christ died to kill.

But here is a call to humility.

Paul says in 1 Cor. 8, *that Knowledge puffs up, but love builds up.* ² *And if anyone thinks that he knows anything, he knows nothing yet as he ought to know.* ³ *But if anyone loves God, this one is known by God.* In other words, your knowledge of Scripture and of theology or philosophy, or history or whatever, your greatness in whatever it is that you think you have that others don't, that is a gift given to you from God. And it is not meant to be used against your fellow Christians as some means of lording some power or authority over them. Because let's be honest. You do not know what you think you know, as you ought to know. Right? And if you are going to boast in anything, boast in the Lord.

A true education comes to the point where the person is humbled by how much he still does not know. And besides, being a faithful Christian is not even about how much you know. It is about whether you are known by God. And if God knows you then that knowledge ought to lead you to love God and to love your brother or sister in the Lord, and to help build up them up in the Lord. Knowledge puffs up, but love builds up. So please, be on the look out for your own spiritual pride, for it will lead to division in the body, and it will lead you to sow strife among these your brothers and sisters. And we will know that pride is taking over because just underneath the surface of our community there is an uneasy feeling that exists between

peoples. You are cordial and friendly with one another on the surface, but on the inside, you are cursing them. Pride will destroy us all. Let it go, and do not think more highly of your self than you ought. You are a sinner saved by grace. And that is it.

Idealist Dreaming

A second issue I see that could bring strife and division to our Church is this: Idealistic Dreaming. We are intentionally trying to build a Christian Community. And praise the Lord, he is blessing us. However, a very real temptation for those who have not experienced a Christian community like ours, might be to come here and think it is supposed to be this ideal community that they have in created in their mind, and then when they get here and see that we fall woefully short of their ideal, they become disillusioned and upset.

And the person could respond to this great disillusionment seeking to impose on our community their ideals and dreams, and then stop at nothing until it is fulfilled. But this never works. It only destroys the real community that Christ established, for the sake of trying to establish an imaginary community that only exists in the mind of the dreamer. Deitrich Bonhoeffer writes about this in his book *Life Together*:

God hates visionary dreaming; it makes the dreamer proud and pretentious. The man who fashions a visionary ideal of community demands that it be realized by God, by others, and by himself. He enters the community of Christians with his demands, sets up his own law, and judges the brethren and God himself accordingly. He stands adamant, a living reproach to all others in the circle of brethren. He acts as if he is the creator of the Christian community, as if his dream binds men together. When things do not go his way, he calls the effort a failure. When his ideal picture

is destroyed, he sees the community going to smash. So he becomes, first an accuser of his brethren, then an accuser of God, and finally the despairing accuser of himself.

“Christian brotherhood is not an ideal which we must realize; it is rather a reality created by God in Christ in which we may participate. The more clearly we learn to recognize that the ground and strength and promise of all our fellowship is in Jesus Christ alone, the more serenely shall we think of our fellowship and pray and hope for it.”¹

Simply put, do not come to Pella and CTR thinking that we are something we are not, and don't think that you are going to be the person who changes us into your ideal church. We all have ideals, but in order to make this thing work, we all must be willing to sacrifice something of our ideals in order to live in this real community. Even I do not have my own way all the time, People of God. Let us learn to put away our ideal Community that exists only in our minds and be thankful for actual community that God is really establishing here and now.

Spiritual Domineering

And a third thing which I think will lead to schism in this body, which relates to the previous two, but is worth mentioning as a separate issue, is Spiritual Domineering. Jesus told his disciples when they were arguing over who was the greatest that they ought to not act the like how the rulers of the gentiles do and Lord authority over people. But they ought to learn from Christ who humbled himself even unto death and served others.

Likewise, The Apostle Peter tells the elders in 1 Peter 5 to shepherd the flock of God that is among them, not domineering over those in their charge, but by being examples to the flock.

¹ Bonhoeffer, Life Together, 26-28, 30

We tend to attract a bunch of type A Alpha personalities to our church. Both Men and Women. I have heard it said that even you CTR women in particular are quite intimidating. You Alphas are those who tend to take control of situations and you dominate conversations and force your will upon others. You refuse to allow other people who are less dominant to have a say in what goes on, and you effectively reject them from helping. It is your way or the high way.

Also, you cover over your spiritual domineering by acting as if you just serving, or that you are trying to preserve the unity of the church. When a something is suggested to be done, you are quick to tell others what should and should not be done, but you are not quick to listen. You tend to force your way on to others, instead of allowing others to have their way. To you, church unity and peace is everyone agreeing with you.

But I strongly urge you, to not use your alpha personality to dominate the church. Every discussion or idea or opportunity that arises in the church does not need your approval or oversight. God has given the body other members to contribute to the life of the Church besides you. And you Alphas need to learn some humility and patience and gentleness and deference, and allow others who are more of a lowly and quieter disposition to express their thoughts and their ideas and contribute to the life of the body without you forcing your way and opinion on to them. Your idealist dreaming and demanding that others follow along with you and your vision of the church will cause strife and division in this body. I already see it happening. It happens mostly among you women.

You stronger members need to use your strength to build up one another and encourage one another, not dominate and lord it over others. As the Holy Spirit says in Romans 15 - *"We who are strong have an obligation to bear with the failings of the weak, and not to please ourselves."*² *Let each of us please his*

neighbor for his good, to build him up... ⁵May the God of endurance and encouragement grant you to live in such harmony with one another, in accord with Christ Jesus, ⁶that together you may with one voice glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. ⁷Therefore welcome one another as Christ has welcomed you, for the glory of God.”

People of God, if you continue to exercise spiritual domineering over others in this body, what will happen, and what is already happening, is that those lesser members whom you repeatedly deny opportunity to serve and to share their ideas and to encourage them in their labors, they won't want to volunteer, and they won't want to help, and they will be back away from exercising their gifts because you made them feel time and time again that their efforts and ideas aren't worth anything. Because only you can make decisions around here. Because it has to be your way or the highway. And that kind of spiritual domineering will absolutely destroy this body. Remember, the Church doesn't belong to you. It belongs to Christ. And we are all equally members of it. So please, do not suffocate one of Christ's members for your own spiritual ambition and idealistic wish dreaming, and domineering.

Humility

Those are some of the things that I see that will cause schism in this body. How shall we then live together if we are not to be prideful and idealistic and domineering? How shall we maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of Peace in the one body of Christ? Chiefly, we should be humble, The Apostle Peter teaches the Christian community to whom he is writing, that they ought to humble themselves. *“Clothe yourselves, all of you, with humility toward one another, for God opposes the proud but gives grace to the*

humble. Humble yourselves therefore under the mighty hand of God so that at the proper time he may exalt you.”

And then Paul also says in Eph. 4 – urges the church to walk in a manner worthy of their calling as Christians with all humility:

What is humility? It literally means, lowliness of mind. It means not thinking of yourself more highly than you ought, but rather giving due considerations to your own shortcomings, and to the value and worth of others. “Pride lurks behind all discord, while the greatest single secret of concord is humility”, says John Stott.

The Apostle Paul teaches the Philippians that humility is the great attribute which Christ our Lord modelled for us, by which he accomplished our salvation, thereby giving us an example that we should walk in it. He says: ²*complete my joy by being of the same mind, having the same love, being in full accord and of one mind.* ³*Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility count others more significant than yourselves.* ⁴*Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others.* ⁵*Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus,*

And then he explains how Christ humbled himself to the point of becoming nothing and dying on the cross as a slave. And it was for this great act of humiliation that he was exalted to the right hand of God. We are to follow in this pattern, Paul says. God opposes the proud, but gives grace to the humble.

Gentleness

Paul also says that we are to walk according to a spirit of gentleness or meekness. Meekness is not weakness, but it is strength under control. A man may be strong, physically or mentally, but he is to use his strength to

defend and protect His people, not fight against his people. Not every person is an enemy. Certainly not your wife or children, and not those of your own Christian community. Just because someone may have a different theological opinion than you do, does not mean that person is a satanic antichrist whom you must purge from the church. It does not mean they are a heretic, and need to be tarred and feathered on social media, and have their reputations destroyed.

The call to be gentle with the people of God is also a call to be wise to when and how to use the strength God has given you. Only a fool burns down his own house in order to get rid of a mouse. So keep a lid on fits of rage. Learn to be like Jesus, and treat others with gentleness and respect.

And of course we need to be patient with each other, and bear with one another. And that means forgiving one another freely, not taking offense so easily, not holding on to grudges, and not complaining about each other. Do not allow your brother's or sister's personality to become occasion for you to become an accuser of the brethren. When someone does something that annoys you, instead of complaining about them, how about you pray for them. Instead of getting frustrated with them and sowing hatred in your own heart toward them, how about you pray for them and ask God to soften your heart toward them?

Love

And finally Paul says we ought to love another. And one of the simple ways we can love each other is by believing the best of our brothers and sisters. It means first of all if you are going to be suspicious about someone, you should first of all be suspicious about yourself and your motives and your knowledge and your pride. Love others by not virtually excommunicating them from the life of the church because they have a different definition of

justification than you do, or because they choose to wear a head covering and you do not. Do not write others out of the Church because they have a different view of baptism than you do. Or who they believe ought to receive the Lord's Supper. There is nothing worse than fighting and causing division in the body about theological issues that were meant to symbolize our unity in Christ.

There is a good bit of space in the orthodox Christian for differences, with a person being a heretic. Let us hold fast to the maxim: "In Essentials, Unity, In Non-essentials, liberty, and in all things Charity." Hold on to your beliefs and convictions, but hold them with grace and charity toward others who might not be where you are theologically. Give people room to grow and be encouraging.

Also, do not virtually excommunicate others from the life of the church by refusing to allow the lesser members to contribute to the life of the church, in your spiritual domination.

If we are going to be eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace, then we must remember 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 all, who is over all and through all and in all.

If we are going to make sure that our net does not break, then we must be aware of our Spiritual pride, our idealist dreaming, and our spiritual domineering. These are things that will cause schism in this body. But they ought to be replaced by humility, gentleness, patience, love, and thanksgiving. When we do this, the church will have no schism, and we will be one, and we will fulfill the Lord's prayer for us, that we be one, just as he is one with the Father and the Father is one with him.

And in this way, people of God, the world will know that the Father sent Jesus Christ, the Good Shepherd of the Sheep, who laid his life down for the sheep, in order to make us one. Amen.