

*Family Quarrels*  
April 24, 2016  
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*1 Corinthians 1:10-18*



The purpose of a family is to provide a supportive environment for the growth and nurture of children and adults as they enjoy life, explore each day, expand their knowledge, and appreciate new adventures and discoveries. Family is the place where unconditional love is expressed and where optimism abounds. Family is where we can totally be ourselves even if that means that who we are today is different from who we were last week.

In families we learn how to express our needs. From the moment we are born we use our voice to make our needs known. We try out new ideas and debate the logic of family rules such as curfew and chores. In families we have many different kinds of relationships: parent, child, cousins, grandparents, siblings.

And I don't know about you, but in my family we also had our quarrels. Some of our family quarrels were over why my younger brother got away with so many of the things for which I was grounded. He was sly and clever and knew how to butter up my mom to get what he wanted. There were also quarrels over who would host holiday gatherings. And many words were expressed over Uncle Craig's wife who kept her own last name rather than erase her name and use only his. I can still hear the pain in my grandfather's voice over this one.

Every family has its quarrels. Perhaps it is exactly because we love one another so deeply that we care enough to voice our pain, express our disappointment and insist on our way, which by the way, we KNOW is the right way.

Church families are no different. In this congregation we identify one another as sister and brother in Christ, siblings of the same Creator God, united in the belief that Jesus Christ is our Messiah, the Master teacher of how to live according to God.

And yes, we have sibling disagreements.

I've not been here long enough to hear all the stories but I imagine there have been times when our congregation had disagreements. Maybe it was in the choosing the color for the carpet, what kind of music is appropriate for worship, what mission efforts to support, to serve as a PADS host site or not. Can you remember a conversation or dialogue in this church where there was more than one opinion?

Today's scripture lesson takes us to the opening of Paul's letter to the Corinthians. Paul has previously planted the church in Corinth and now is writing a letter to them with his concerns. Paul urges the church to be of one mind and be committed to unity. He has heard that there is a kind of one-upmanship going on...folks in the church aligning their loyalties with the person who baptized them....almost as if these church leaders had factions or fan clubs. Some are boasting they belong to Paul....the prolific traveler and founder of so many Christian communities.... others are devoted to Cephas, also known as Peter....I can just hear them...you know Peter, he's *my* pastor....he was the disciple closest to Jesus....he ate and healed and taught with Jesus. Another may have pointed out that Apollos was the hometown pastor...he's one of us.

It may be easy for us, in reading this to hear the superficial nature of their arguments....it is not to which pastor they belong, it matters not which hands baptize, for we all belong to Christ.

In baptism we are marked as children of God and claimed a member of Christ's family. In this new identity, we are joined to Christians of all persuasions. Yes, in church membership we declare I am Christian, I am Presbyterian and I choose to be

a member of this specific Presbyterian church. In this big Christian family as well as our own CPC, there are bound to be times we have differences of opinions.

So when Paul says be in agreement and let there be no division between you, I wonder if he had any idea how many times the church of Jesus Christ would divide and split over a difference of interpretation or doctrine. Just go to Wikipedia and search number of Christian denominations and the lists go on and on. It lists 17 different Presbyterian denominations in the United States alone.

I have times when I wonder what God thinks about all the different denominations. We all believe in the same Jesus, so why so many different churches? I rejoice that the Lutherans, Presbyterians and Catholics are in conversations about sacraments focusing on where we are in common belief rather than the nuances that separate us. Perhaps one day we'll reunite at the table of Jesus Christ.

In recent years, our own denomination has experienced churches leaving the denomination due to irreconcilable differences in theology of ordination and marriage.

A wise theologian once said:

In essentials unity,  
in non-essentials liberty,  
in all things charity.

The church of Jesus Christ is to be united in the things that are essential, such as: it is Jesus that is our savior, teacher and redeemer. It is not me or Lauren that baptizes you. It was not John David Burton, Christine Chakoian or Dean Lindsey....it is the Holy Spirit of God that baptizes all through the cleansing waters. We are not to align ourselves with any given earthly leader of God's church but to be clear, we belong to Jesus.

There will always be issues or ideas over which we will have differences. God has gifted us with free will and the ability to reason and form opinions.

Our challenge then, is to determine what is essential. Some of what is essential is our belief in God, Jesus and Holy Spirit and the mystery of the Trinity. Another essential is the Incarnational nature of God's Word come to earth in the human Jesus Christ. Our Holy Book which gathered the teachings, wisdom, poetry and history of our tribe is the Bible. What else is essential in our belief system? Start a list inside your bulletin: Essential....non-essential.

Belief and worship of God is essential, but non-essential is the name we call God. One sister may call God Father, another brother may call God Creator.

We cherish and read the Bible together, but we may have different interpretations of what the scripture is teaching. We depend on the life of Jesus Christ to serve as witness to clarifying the essence of the scripture. We also place each scripture in the context of the time and place it was written. And most importantly, we pray the Holy Spirit will clarify each reading for the learning needed that day. The Bible is essential, but it is non-essential that each of us have the exact same interpretation of every scripture in the Bible.

Because of the diversity with which God created the world, we have different preferences. Some say Cubs, others cheer on Sox. Some prefer paint brush to markers. The same is true of the music we use to deepen our worship of God. It is essential that we use the gift of music to praise God; what is non-essential and therefore in which we have freedom, is the genre of music used to express love of God.

In things that are non-essential we have the freedom to express various opinions.

Because we are a church family,

in all relationships, in all conversations,  
in all decisions and the determining of priorities and goals,  
we desire charity....the deepest of love and compassion.

We are not republicans or democrats, we are not progressive or conservative, we are not identified with our address in Clarendon Hills or Burr Ridge or Darien or Downers Grove or Hinsdale or Westmont. These are divides that are erased in the one body of Jesus Christ.

We are the people of God, devoted to the teachings of Jesus Christ and marked in the baptismal waters of the Holy Spirit. Of this, there is no division. Amen.