

A faithful Christian is rescued after many years on a desert island. As he stands on the deck of the rescuing vessel, the captain says to him, "I thought you were stranded alone. How come I can see three huts on the beach?" "Well," replies the castaway, "that one there is my house and that one there is where I go to church." "And the third one?" asks the captain. "Oh, that's my old church."

Today's New Testament reading addresses a conflict that still exists today. That problem was the lack of unity in the church at Corinth. Verse 12 says, "What I mean is that each of you says, 'I belong to Paul,' or 'I belong to Apollos,' or 'I belong to Cephas,' or 'I belong to Christ.'"

The Corinthian Christians had to be united in the faith and the Gospel. But they were divided into factions based on who had baptized them. The reality was Paul, Apollos, and Cephas had all preached the Gospel. They had all helped others see that Jesus was their only hope for a future and eternal life.

However, some people said Paul's style was the best or most important. Others thought Apollos' style was the most important. Others thought Cephas' style was the most important. Others thought their interpretation of Christ's style was the most important.

This passage shows us that the potential for conflict is inevitable in the church, the community, or even the family. There are over 100 references about a conflict in the Bible. And so the real issue becomes not if the conflict will happen, but what will we do about it.

In the New Testament reading, Apostle Paul shares some fundamental truths that are meant to shape our thoughts and guide our behaviors when we find ourselves in a conflict with other believers.

First of all, Paul says in 1 Corinthians 1:10, "Now I appeal to you, brothers and sisters, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that all of you be in

agreement and that there be no divisions among you, but that you be united in the same mind and the same purpose.”

Paul told Christians in Corinth that they must want to be united in agreement. If a conflict happens, reconciliation can only come when people want to resolve the conflict. You cannot be reconciled to someone who doesn't want to be in fellowship with you. Roman 8:6 says, “The attitude that comes from selfishness leads to death, but the attitude that comes from the Spirit leads to life and peace.” We need to know that the unwillingness to live at peace with a brother or sister in Christ is one of the evidence of walking in the flesh. We have to want to be united in Jesus Christ. We have to want to work together to proclaim the Good News.

1 Corinthians 1:13 says, Has Christ been divided? Was Paul crucified for you? Or were you baptized in the name of Paul?

Paul reminds us of what Christ did. Jesus was crucified for us. Jesus reconciled us to God. In Jesus' name, we are baptized. The beginning and the end of the Gospel message is JESUS CHRIST.

The reason why we're to pursue reconciliation is that we will appear before the judgment seat of Christ. Each of us will answer as well for our own behavior. Paul encourages us to live in relationship with others with a view to eternity in 1 Corinthians 3:8, “The one who plants and the one who waters have one purpose, and they will each be rewarded according to their own labor.”

The awareness that we'll stand before the judgment seat of Christ allows us to be reconciled with each other in the law of love. We are not called to justify our position on an issue, but to act in the most loving way toward those with a different viewpoint. We are called to do what leads to peace and mutual edification. The reason we so often fail to resolve conflict in ways that achieve this is because

we're more concerned about vindicating our own positions than we are about reconciling with others.

1 Corinthians 12:24-25 says, "God has so arranged the body, giving the greater honor to the inferior member, that there may be no dissension within the body, but the members may have the same care for one another."

Paul teaches us that the opposite of division is having the "same care for one another." So Being united in Jesus Christ is the oneness of concern and care in Christ, not the oneness of ideas, doctrines, or policies. The fabric of the body should be so interwoven and unified that if one thread is torn, all threads feel the stress. The oneness is a union of heart that feels what the other feels.

If we would simply take the approach that the work of God for reconciliation always takes priority, most conflicts would be eliminated. I want to share with you four ways that people seek to resolve conflict. You can decide which one makes the most sense in light of our message.

First, some people learn to win by conquering others. This way creates an "I win, you lose" scenario. Unfortunately, this way usually makes more conflict than it resolves as one side is left feeling intimidated and manipulated.

Second, some people learn to win by yielding to others. In other words, they give in or give up. This way creates an "I lose, you win" scenario. This way fails because the people who yield are trying to achieve the same outcome as those who conquer. They choose a different way of winning. Their hope is to heap so much guilt upon the other party that they will not possibly be able to enjoy the victory and therefore concede it.

Third, some people learn to win by compromising with others. At first glance, you might think this is the best solution. Many conflict resolutions follow this way. Each person gives up a little, and the conflict is resolved. However,

because it creates an “I lose, you lose” situation, neither party gets what they really want.

Fourth, some people learn to win by collaborating with others. The word means “to work together.” When people collaborate, they decide to cooperate on a mutually desired goal. We are to pursue an outcome that brings peace to the conflicted parties and that helps each to be a better follower of Christ. This way creates a “win-win” situation. It can and does happen when our love for others becomes the motivation for seeking reconciliation.

One of the most famous images from the Vietnam War is the photograph of a nine-year-old girl named Phan Thi Kim Phuc. During a battle between North and South Vietnamese troops, American pilots dropped napalm on her tiny village. Two of her brothers were killed, and she was burned badly. Wearing no clothes, she fled up the road toward the cameraman. Because of the pain her arms are held out from her side and her mouth is open in a cry of agony. The little girl suffered third-degree burns over 50% of her body, but incredibly, she lived! She endured 14 months of painful rehabilitation and scores of skin grafts. Each time the pain was so intense, she lost consciousness when the doctors touched her. Since then she has married, emigrated to Canada and become a Christian. She still has much pain and scars stretch up her arms to her chest and back. In 1996, she accepted an invitation from several Vietnam veterans groups composed of men who fought and sacrificed for the cause of democracy, to join in Veterans Day ceremonies in Washington, D.C. She laid a wreath at the Vietnam Veterans Memorial and spoke words of forgiveness. “I have suffered a lot from both physical and emotional pain,” she told her audience. “Sometimes I could not breathe. But God saved my life and gave me faith and hope. Even if I could talk face to face with the pilot who dropped the bombs, I would tell him ‘ We cannot change history, but we should try to do good

things for the present and for the future to promote peace.” Paul agrees and says, “For Christ did not send me to baptize but to proclaim the gospel, and not with eloquent wisdom, so that the cross of Christ might not be emptied of its power.” To proclaim the Gospel, God calls us to be united in Jesus Christ. Let us do the things which make for peace and the building up of one another.