

# *This Week at the Creek*

is a CreekWeb Internet Ministry of  
**the Church at Dyers Creek**

*DyersCreekChurch@aol.com*

*www.dyerscreek.com*

(Jeff Wallace, pastor)

(Verlon Pritchett, associate pastor)

Here's the text from the pastor's Sunday message:

## **The Church's One Foundation**

1 Corinthians 1:10-17

April 6, 2008

Let's start with three imperfect preachers. A Church of God preacher gives an unusual sermon using a peanut to make several important points about the wisdom of God in nature. One of the congregation greets him at the door and says, "Very interesting, Pastor. I never expected to learn so much from a nut."

Then there's the Baptist preacher who asks a little boy who was attending church for the first time how he liked it. The boy's reply? "The music was real nice but the commercial was way too long!"

And last but not least is the Lutheran pastor who always began each service with the words: "The Lord be with you." The congregation always responded, "and also with you." But this one Sunday when the sound system wasn't working, the pastor says, "There's something wrong with this microphone." Without missing a beat, his congregation responds, "and also with you." We're all so hopelessly flawed!

As a teenager in Knoxville, I always looked forward to Sunday nights after church getting in the car, turning on the radio, and listening to Casey Kasem and "America's Top Forty" – a countdown of the most popular songs in the country – always hoping my favorite songs would be at the top of the charts. In the large and culturally diverse Corinthian church, the believers had their favorite preachers that they wanted at the top of the charts. Some followed Paul, who had founded their church; some who had heard Peter preach in Jerusalem followed him; others listened only to Apollos, an eloquent and popular preacher who had quite a dynamic ministry in Corinth.

Although these three preachers were united in their Christian message, their personalities attracted different people – a lot like churches today. But because their followers were so loyally devoted to their personal favorite, the church was actually in danger of dividing. That's why in the first ten verses of

this letter to the church at Corinth, the apostle Paul mentions Jesus Christ ten times. He wanted to make it perfectly clear who it is all preachers and teachers should emphasize – that God's message is much more important than any of its human messengers.

The apostle Paul had founded the church in Corinth on his second missionary journey. Eighteen months after he left, arguments and divisions arose, and some church members slipped back into their old immoral lifestyles. Paul penned this letter to address the problems and clear up any confusion about what's right and wrong so they would remove the immorality from among them. This particular church had a reputation for jumping from fad to fad – and one of the latest fads was exalting and lining up behind one particular preacher to the disregard of the others. Hearing about such dividing lines, the apostle wanted to keep Christianity from degenerating into just another fad – and to preserve the unity of the church.

And so it is that Paul calls them "brothers and sisters" and tells them to "let there be real harmony" and to allow for no "divisions" and to be of "one mind, united in thought and purpose." He knew – and emphasized – that all Christians are part of God's family, that they share a unity that runs even deeper than that of blood brothers and sisters. And because of that, he didn't want any petty differences to divide the believers at Corinth – or at any other church, for that matter!

The same type of challenge lies before us: To focus not on denominational labels or even doctrinal perfection, but to look only to Jesus, the Head of the church and the Savior of humanity – the church's one foundation. He should always be number one on any Christian's top forty list. And if He's at the top of our charts, we'll find that certain truths will emerge. Like different parts of a contemporary hit, like different instruments in a band, like different staves on a sheet of music, these core convictions – or rhythms – work together to make music we can all appreciate.

There's the rhythm that suggests, for example, that being a Christian is the main thing. This is the beat that should drive the song that forms the soundtrack for our lives. But problems arise when we let our own preferences get in the way, when we march to the beat of whatever drummer seems most pleasing to us, when we fall for the sound of a Methodist bass drum or a Baptist cymbal, a Nazarene snare drum or a Church of God conga. With all these different tempos and beats all around us all the time, we can lose touch with the steady, saving drumbeat of Jesus Christ.

To get back to the main thing, we need to empty ourselves of personal concern for denominational labels and fine theological distinctions. Our call is to respond to Christ, not to a human agenda. Of course, it can be unsettling to let go of our own personal agenda and allow Jesus to come in and take over. What will He ask of us? A higher level of sexual morality? To overcome racist tendencies? Greater generosity? To let go of greed? More willingness to forgive? To

overpower the anger or the gluttony or the envy that resides within us? This can be hard – no doubt about it. But if being Christian is going to be our primary identity, we will find a way to allow Jesus to lay down the drumbeat for our lives.

There's also the rhythm that suggests that being faithful – not perfect – is critical to authentic discipleship. The melody strummed through the pages of Scripture is one of faithfulness, not perfection. Unfortunately, we sometimes forget that we're imperfect creatures instead of perfect Creators, petty people instead of loving Lords, selfish sinners instead of selfless Saviors – and we come down rather hard on others and even on ourselves. Part of us knows that we're called to trust Christ, to lean on Him, to walk with Him into an uncertain future; but another part acts as though our job is to achieve moral, spiritual, and doctrinal perfection.

One of the best exercises in faithfulness – as opposed to perfection – is worship. In worship, we rediscover that we are of Christ, not of a denominational label or even esteemed spiritual mentors. In the confession, forgiveness, proclamation, praise, thanksgiving, and fellowship of worship, we rediscover that our mission in life is to be faithful to the God who creates us, redeems us, sustains us, and loves us in spite of our imperfections. And when we see ourselves redeemed and loved by God, we can see others in that light as well. Within the body of Christ, acceptance of each other is required; agreement on fine points of doctrine is optional.

Some years ago at the Seattle Special Olympics, nine contestants, all physically or mentally disabled, assembled at the starting line for the hundred-yard dash. At the gun, they all started out, not exactly in a dash, but with a relish to run the race to the finish and win. All, that is, except one boy who stumbled on the asphalt, tumbled over a couple of times, and began to cry. The other eight heard the boy cry. They all slowed down and looked back. Then they stopped. Then they all turned around and went back – every single one of them.

One girl with Down's syndrome bent down and kissed the boy who fell and said, "This will make it better." Then all nine linked arms and walked across the finish line together. Everyone in the stadium stood, and the cheering went on for several minutes. People who were there that day are still telling the story. Why? Because deep down we all know this one thing: What matters in this life is more than winning for ourselves; what truly matters in this life is helping others win, even if it means slowing down and changing our course from time to time.

In his book, *Whistling in the Dark*, Frederick Buechner writes, "There are Baptists, Methodists, Episcopalians. There are Presbyterians, Lutherans, Congregationalists. There are Disciples of Christ. There are Seventh-Day Adventists and Jehovah's Witnesses. There are Moravians. There are Quakers. And that's only for starters. New denominations spring up. Old denominations split up and form new branches. When Jesus took the bread and said, 'This is my body which is broken for you,' it's hard to believe that in His wildest dreams He

foresaw the tragic and ludicrous brokenness of the church as His body. There's no reason why everyone should be **Christian** in the same way and every reason to leave room for **differences**. But if the competing factions of Christendom were to give as much of themselves to the high calling and holy hope that unites them as they do now to the relative inconsequentialities that divide them, the church would look more like the kingdom of God for a change and less like an ungodly mess."

A sad section of this Scripture passage is when Paul wondered whether the Corinthians' quarrels had divided Christ into pieces. This is a graphic picture of what happens when the church is divided. With the many churches and styles of worship available today, we could get caught up in the same game of "my church is better than yours" or "my preacher is better than yours." To do so would divide Christ again. But Christ is not divided, and His true followers should not allow anything to divide them. Don't let your appreciation for any doctrine or denomination or teacher or preacher or author lead you into pride.

This passage doesn't require everyone to believe exactly the same. There's a difference between having opposing viewpoints and being divisive. A group of people will not completely agree on every issue, but they can work together harmoniously if they agree on what truly matters: Jesus Christ is Lord of all. Our allegiance must be to **Christ** and to the **unity** that He desires. He and He alone must be permanently at the top of our charts.

Let us pray: Lord, help us in our daily walk with You to speak and behave in a way that will reduce arguments and increase harmony. May we be unified in our devotion to You – and to You alone. In Jesus' name.

### Sources

Frederick Buechner. *Whistling in the Dark: An ABC Theologized* (HarperOne)

Leonard Sweet. "Top of the Charts" in *Homiletics* (January/February 1999)

*Life Application Study Bible: New Living Translation* (Tyndale)

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