

1 Corinthians 1:10-17, 3:1-13 **United! (Coalface 2) Fintry, 21/4/2013, pm**

A church at the Coalface is one where....

- ... we are united

United!

- What image does the word "United" bring to your mind?
 - I know I'm taking a risk here...
 - *pic: Dundee United logo, and Tannadice!!*
- Or one of the "hands around the world type images?"
 - *pic: world with hands linked round it...*
- Or perhaps its something more personal, more individual:
 - *pic: two men shaking hands...*
 - *pic: group of young people all together...*
- But what is "unity" for us, a church?
 - what does unity mean in our current context, with Theological Commissions and traditionalists and revisionists...?
 - does in consist in not arguing?
- Let me suggest it goes a bit further than that!!

Unity comes from a shared centre (1:13, 3:23)

- Image from a hymn we have sometimes sung:
 - Behold, the mountain of the Lord
in latter days shall rise*
 - mountain of the Lord rising up, everyone able to see it, all tribes gathering to it to worship...
- What Christ has done for us on the Cross, wiping away our sins, washing us clean, so **dwarves everything else**:
 - he was crucified for us, gave his life, his breath, his blood, his everything to rescue us
 - it is round the Cross that we find our unity
 - if we have not knelt in shame at the foot of the Cross, burdened by our sin.... if we have not had that sin lifted from us through the forgiveness Jesus offers through his blood shed on the Cross.... if we do not know the new life Jesus gives at the Cross...
 - then we will not be united
- In the wider Church of Scotland there is talk of unity in diversity, of this being a "broad" church:
 - but its actually mince - for there is a huge divide between those who have placed there sole trust in a Saviour who has died for them, who has risen to give them new life, and those who doubt the divinity of Christ, who are sceptical about the resurrection, who do not believe Christ's death alone deals with our sin
 - across such a divide there is no real unity
 - example: legal fiction of a marriage that has broken down, but where divorce has not been enacted...
 - there are possibly different courses of actions open, but require some desire to actually come together to a solid foundation for restored relationship...
- Unity comes from a shared centre, and that centre is Jesus Christ and him crucified.
 - is that our centre?

Unity grows with humble service (3:5-9)

- This is not merely a practical, psychological observation!
 - key word is "servants" in v.5
 - Apollos and Paul are the Billy Graham's, the John Stott's, the Moderator of the General Assembly, for his day
 - but they are, most truly, **only servants**"

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- As we serve the Lord in humility, doing everything for him, then the focus shifts away from us onto him!
 - whether it is the cleaning or the catering, or the preparation for an event that no one sees (they only see the finished article), or the building maintenance, or the costly time with a needy friend, or sacrifice of time and energy to pray (alone or together), or the sacrificial, self-effacing giving, or....
 - **humble service draws attention away from ourselves and onto Christ - and so draws us together!**

Unity builds a beautiful church (3:10-17)

- Paul uses a powerful image in vs.3:10-15 particularly:
 - a building being built - Paul laid the foundation, others coming along after and continuing to build;
 - each person's workmanship will be tested, by God, in the fire of his pure gaze!
- I confess tendency to view this passage in individualistic terms:
 - a kind of "what have I made of my life" kind of thing
- But Paul is talking in the context of unity, and the building he is talking about is not my life or your life, but **the church!**
 - the work here is gospel labour, pointing others to Jesus... (see v.6)
 - and the **way** in which we are to build is **in unity**
- In other words, the way we work together on an **Alpha** course or on **Summer Focus Team** or in **Girls Brigade**, or the way we treat each other **week-by-week**, whether we value each other enough to talk, to stay and have coffee, to have concern beyond the surface incidentals:
 - (willingness to not be part of the full-story, to give up the need to be integral to everything)
 - all of those **build the church**
 - all of those build a beautiful church, one built with gold, silver and costly stones...

Application

- OK, how do we apply that?
- Well, what divisions might be said to exist among us?
 - where we live: Fintry / non-Fintry...
 - when we worship: evening service / non-evening service...
 - when we pray: Prayer Meeting / no Prayer Meeting...
 - divisions of history, of past fallings-out or previous disappointments, hidden perhaps
 - even simply coffee / non-coffee!
 - member / non-member
 - old / young
- **Apply to current CofS situation:**
 - realise that pleas to unity are properly rooted in a centredness in Christ; we are **not** united with the Mormons or the JWs, and ultimately we are **not** united with those who reject Jesus Christ and him crucified (2:2)
 - seek to act in humble, servant hearted ways - discussion round antagonistic questions at the General Assembly in Perth yesterday...
 - willingness to leave responsibility for crafting the whole to God; maybe my wonderful speech at GA, or my conversation with someone who is grappling with the issues that divide us, doesn't seem to succeed - am I willing to let God use it to build a beautiful church...
- Will we be so centred on Christ that such divisions become trivial?
- Will we so serve Christ and one another that such divisions are healed?
 - forgiving, **repenting** as necessary...
- Will we build this church so that such divisions are repaired?

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- Finish by quoting from the passage:
 - (3:16) *Don't you know that you yourselves are God's temple and that God's Spirit lives in you?* (3:17) *If anyone destroys God's temple, God will destroy him; for God's temple is sacred, and you are that temple.*