

## *“Finding Calm In The Chaos.”*

2 Corinthians 4: 1-9

King Duncan tells about a Psychology professor who was giving his students a test. He asked one question regarding manic depression. The question read: *“What would you call someone who walks back and forth screaming at the top of his lungs one minute, and then sits in a chair and weeps uncontrollably the next?”*

One of the students answered: *“A basketball coach.”*

Well, coaching basketball DOES take a toll on a person, emotionally. Former Indiana coach Bobby Knight is famous for his temper tantrums during a game. About twenty years ago or so, I was at a costume party when someone came dressed as Bobby Knight! He had the whole get-up done right -- red sweater, light colored trousers, and he had his hair frosted and combed in Bobby Knight style....and he even had the black, bushy eyebrows! As part of his costume, he carried around with him a light weight, folding chair that closely resembled the chairs on the sideline of a basketball game. At different moments throughout the party, everyone would clear the dance floor and this guy would go into his Bobby Knight routine -- he would yell at the referee, throw a fit, and then hurl his chair across the floor. He was the life of the party!

The Apostle Paul wasn't Bobby Knight, but he was pretty upset nonetheless. A church that he had planted in the city of Corinth (in Greece) was in a big, chaotic mess. It was a church that was full of factions and cliques, and they were all quarrelling with one another.

It all got started in Corinth when a new group of people came into the church and began spreading all kinds of lies -- lies about the Apostle Paul and his ministry, and lies about the Lord Jesus Christ Himself. And as a result, the church in Corinth started coming to pieces!

You should probably be aware that the time period when this happened was approximately 55 A.D. -- well over nineteen-hundred years ago. The writer of the book of Ecclesiastes was probably on to something when he wrote: *“.....there is nothing new under the sun. Is there anything of which one can say, 'Look! This is something new?' It was here already, long ago; it was here before our time.”* (Ecclesiastes 1: 9b - 10) (NIV)

Church fights are nothing new. They have been around for eons. There was a pretty rough one that happened at Corinth, and so the Apostle Paul sat down and wrote at

least a couple of different letters to the Corinthian church. Letters that in part were scolding them for their behavior, but more than that they were letters of instruction -- letters instructing them to ground everything in Christ.

These letters we know today as First and Second Corinthians, two books that make up part of our Bible.

These were Paul's letters aimed at teaching the Corinthians to be better Christian people.

But Paul had to be careful how he did that. He couldn't be a Bobby Knight about it and start slinging chairs across the floor!

You want to know a recipe for getting bad results from someone? Just treat them badly, and you're sure to get bad results. But if you hope to get good results, then treat them with dignity and respect.

Paul wants the chaos in Corinth to end; and he wants the chaos to be transformed into calm. But he knows that it can't happen if he is going to perpetually throw a fit and throw chairs.

So he reminds them that salvation is a gift from God through Christ, and that in the midst of pain there is hope for healing. He writes:

*“But we have this treasure in jars of clay -- (“treasure” means something from God and “jars of clay” refer to our mortal bodies) -- to show that this all-surpassing power is from God and not from us.*

*We are hard pressed on every side, but not crushed; perplexed, but not in despair; persecuted, but not abandoned; struck down, but not destroyed.*

(verses 7-9) (NIV)

The difficulties at Corinth were resolvable, Paul believed, and that is why he wrote words such as *“Hard pressed but not crushed”* and *“Struck down but not destroyed.”*

Any time that people's lives have not been transformed by the Gospel, fertile soil is being laid for something else to come in and take its place. Such was the case with the Corinthians.

The god of this age had something to with it, Paul said. He writes:

*‘The god of this age has blinded the minds of unbelievers, so that they cannot see the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God.’ (verse 4)*

Notice in the printed text in your bulletin where it says *the god of this age*... it is god that begins with a small “g” and not a capital “G.” That’s not a misprint. It’s because Paul isn’t speaking about God the Creator; rather he is speaking about the spiritual adversary. Our English word “Satan” originates from the Hebrew word *HASS-SATAN* (transliteration) which means “adversary.” Even though this letter was written in Greek and not in Hebrew, the contextual meaning of it remains the same.

So Paul says that there are those in the Corinthian church who cannot understand the gospel because their minds have been “blinded” by the adversary.

Here is an important truth that we need to consider: Anytime that a church is not universally grounded in a saving faith in Jesus Christ, then the potential for conflict and division becomes much greater. This is what the problem was in Corinth.

The motto of our denomination is: *In essentials unity, in non-essentials diversity, in all things, love.* I will tell you that one of those “essentials” is faith in Jesus Christ. Our UCC Statement of Faith affirms that all who trust in Christ receive His promise of “forgiveness of sins and fullness of grace.” Whenever we receive new members into the church, one of the questions that we ask them right out of the UCC Book of Worship is this: *“Do you profess Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior?”* Faith in Christ is not only essential to salvation, it is the very foundation of church membership.

Then...the last part of our motto: *In all things, love.* Paul had already emphasized the importance of being loving in his first letter to the Corinthians. (1 Corinthians 13)

I’ll sum it up: *We can believe in Christ and call ourselves His followers, but if we don’t behave in a way that is loving, then our faith is a sham.*

There is a true story that comes out of the American Civil War. Lee had surrendered to Grant at Appomattox. Our country had just come through four long years of civil war in which mass numbers of our fellow citizens had slaughtered -- and spilled -- American blood on American soil.

There were many divisions of opinion. Some people believed that slavery was okay and others believed that it was wrong. It’s impossible to have it both ways, and the anti-slavery people rightly won that debate. There were others who believed that the South should secede from the Union and form their own country, the Confederate States of America. Others didn’t want that to happen; they wanted the USA kept

intact. Well, today we know how that all turned out. When you have competing ideals, not everyone is going to have things their way.

What is ultimately more important however, is how we behaved as a country following that period -- and it started with the actions of General Grant at Appomattox.

General Lee appeared at the surrender table in his full dress uniform. Confederate grey. His brass polished and his boots spit shined. Standing tall and squared away. (He paid particular attention to his appearance because he fully expected to be placed under arrest and hauled into U.S. Court.)

General Grant on the other hand, showed up in the field uniform of a Private with only his hat identifying him as a General Officer. He had mud on his boots and his uniform was wrinkled. His appearance wasn't that he disrespected General Lee, rather it was just the opposite. Grant came casually because he didn't want to make a big show out of the South's surrender. As a matter of fact, General Grant had ordered his men to NOT celebrate or fire any twenty-one gun salutes, or engage in any such hoopla.

The two Generals sat down at the table and one of the first things that Grant did was have his aide bring General Lee a cup of coffee. The two men sat there sipping coffee and just chit-chatting about old Army times; their days as cadets at West Point, to their various appointments since then. Then after that, they got down to the business at hand.

General Grant began explaining the terms of surrender, which turned out to be far more generous than what Robert E. Lee was expecting. According to military custom, General Lee surrendered his sword to General Grant who also in military custom, accepted it. THEN General Grant did something virtually unprecedented: He presented the sword back to Lee with the words, "*I believe that this belongs to you, General.*"

Grant asked Lee if his men had any needs. Lee answered by saying that his men had not had anything to eat for several days. Right away, Grant summoned his aide and ordered that the Confederate troops immediately be provided with meat, bread, eggs, butter, coffee, and anything else that was needed for their sustenance and well-being.

Grant further ordered that the men of the Confederate Army were to be immediately paroled and allowed to return to their homes, and that they were to be permitted to keep their horses, mules, and their rifles. Confederate officers were also to be paroled, and they were to be permitted to retain possession of their horses and their side arms.

Grant also ordered the Union Army Band to play *Dixie* as the Confederate troops passed by, as well as for the Union troops to render the proper salute...out of respect.

Our nation has healed remarkably well since the Civil War, and a lot of it has to do with General Grant's -- and President Lincoln's -- refusal to engage in hateful conduct.

Calm can indeed come out of chaos. Yes, it is true that we can't always have something both ways. A tomato can't be both red and yellow at the same time -- it's either one or the other. But, the people who are tending and picking the tomatoes can still treat one another with fairness and kindness.

We don't know what all transpired in the church at Corinth since the Apostle Paul wrote those letters, but we do know what can transpire in the church at Kiel if we will surrender everything to Jesus Christ.

AMEN.