

Resilient Series - Tribalism & the Church  
Ryan Patty / 12.27.2020 / 1 Corinthians 3:1-9

Good morning Christ Community! I hope each of you had a Merry Christmas and are looking forward to the new year! I am excited to be able to preach God's Word to you this morning. For those of you who are new or visiting my name is Ryan and I serve as one of the pastors here. On this last Sunday of 2020, if you have a bible or a device I invite you to turn to 1 Corinthians chapter 3. 1 Corinthians chapter 3.

We have been over the past 4 weeks walking through a short topical series called "Resilient" as we seek to look at the competing worldviews that seek to overthrow and challenge our Christian worldview. As we said last week, we are seeking to do as Paul said in 2 Cor. 10 and "demolish arguments and every proud thing that is raised up against the knowledge of God, and we take every thought captive to obey Christ." That is the goal of this series and what we are trying to inform and instruct us in collectively. And this week is the last week of the series. For the majority of next year we will actually be walking through the book of Acts as we study the early Christian church and how it was able to flourish in the midst of difficulties. We are excited for that and so that will start next week, please be praying for it!

But as I said this week is the last of the Resilient series as we look at the subject of Tribalism. Tribalism and the Church is the title of today's message. And as we will come to see, tribalism isn't so much itself a worldview, but really the product of our varying worldviews. We end up "belonging" or "associating" with those who think and act like us.

- This isn't always a bad thing, in fact sometimes it can be a good thing, but the problem with tribalism comes when that associating becomes a faction within the church, when it ends up inhibiting the progress of the Gospel, and when it causes us to label someone else as first and foremost what "camp" they belong to instead of first and foremost that they are an image-bearer of God.

And tribalism, in a sense, is all around us. We belong to all sorts of tribes. We root for schools we graduated from, we feel a part of that tribe. We root for teams we wished we could play for. We root for the Dallas Cowboys because they are America's team... Speaking of which

- Think of America. There are those in here who are from the northeast and resonate with certain things from that area. A Boston or NY accent comes out, or the debate between deep dish or thin crust pizza happens, and you feel right at home. There are those in here from, as Daniel so aptly says, “the state that shall not be named” and can’t help but talk about how their food choices are better than any other place in America. And they will talk about it. And then there are those of us from the south who don’t see Southern cooking as signaling a heart attack but as actually manna from Heaven. We can associate with tribes based on where we grew up or call home or teams we like or hobbies we enjoy or so many other things.

The problem with tribes is when they infiltrate the church and cause us to factionalize. This was the issue in Corinth. A prosperous city on the coast that was known to be the combination of NY, LA, and Vegas of the ancient world. It was the place to be. The city had a plethora of religions and cultic practices that were always tempting the Christians to add a little syncretism to their faith. A Little of this, a little of that gets thrown in and before long the Christian church in Corinth has a large amount of Corinth in them. Couple that with various leaders within the church seeking to address the problems in different ways, and factions begin to occur; various leaders begin to be followed One party saying “this is okay,” while another says that’s wrong and really “its this that is allowed.” Therefore varying attitudes and behaviors emerge in the church and it is undermining their Christian unity, their witness to Corinth at large. And so Paul has to do surgery in this letter. Radical surgery without killing the patient, and that’s just what he does.

### 1 Corinthians 3:1-9 (CSB)

3 For my part, brothers and sisters, I was not able to speak to you as spiritual people but as people of the flesh, as babies in Christ. 2 I gave you milk to drink, not solid food, since you were not yet ready for it. In fact, you are still not ready, 3 because you are still worldly. For since there is envy and strife among you, are you not worldly and behaving like mere humans? 4 For whenever someone says, “I belong to Paul,” and another, “I belong to Apollos,” are you not acting like mere humans? 5 What then is Apollos? What is Paul? They are servants through whom you believed, and each has the role the Lord has given. 6 I planted, Apollos watered, but God gave the growth. 7 So, then, neither the one who plants nor the one who waters is anything, but only God who gives the growth. 8 Now he who plants and he who waters are one, and each will receive his own reward according to his own labor. 9 For we are God’s coworkers. You are God’s field, God’s building. Let’s pray.

Much like last week, our goal this morning is to see the pitfalls and the trappings of Tribalism. Particularly what tribalism reveals about us when we give into it. Three things from this passage, and then a warning and exhortation for the church in light of this competing worldview and sinful disposition that seeks to tempt us.

### 1. Tribalism reveals our immaturity (v. 1-2a)

3 For my part, brothers and sisters, I was not able to speak to you as spiritual people but as people of the flesh, as babies in Christ. 2 I gave you milk to drink, not solid food, since you were not yet ready for it.

Paul throughout 1 Corinthians does not mince words. And I appreciate that. In this specific part of his letter he is writing to address the perceived factions, the tribes, that have occurred as each tribe appeals to their various leaders, whether it be Paul, or Apollos, or someone else.

- And in the midst of factions within the church, Paul starts off by saying that he couldn't even speak to them as spiritual people. That was the entire point of the majority of chapter 2, that the Holy Spirit opens our minds to be able to know God and comprehend what He has done and is doing in the world. **The Spirit gives us the ability to "evaluate everything" as he says in chapter 2 verse 15.** But here in chapter three he returns to the problem in the church and he says, I couldn't even talk to you as a spiritual person, as a believer, as a disciple, but instead I had to talk to you as a person of the flesh. This is really interesting.
  - Because if you look at 2:14 Paul calls that person, the person without the Spirit as the "natural person," they cannot comprehend the things of the Spirit. And then in 2:6 and 2:15 and 3:1 there is the "spiritual person" or the "mature person." But here he says well, you aren't natural because you do have the spirit and you're a baby in the faith, and you're definitely not mature. So what does he call them? People of the flesh. Babes in Christ.
  - He had to talk to them in this manner because of their lack of maturity. They weren't maturing as they should have been. And many of us know what this is like. Upon our profession of faith, our trusting in Christ as our only hope in life and death, many of us had a time that we would have been called this. A Person of the flesh. An infant in Christ. We loved Jesus but we were still working out what it meant to follow him, to be his disciple. We desired holiness, but sin still seemed to have a hold and so there was a process of maturation and growth, usually over a period of time. When we were saved, we didn't immediately become mature, we understand this..

- But Paul writes to his beloved church here and that hasn't taken place. Their immaturity is still showing as they are now factionalized and divided up into various "Christian" tribes and failing to present a united church. And Paul tells them, I had to give you only milk. You weren't ready for the meat and you still aren't. The milk in my view is they understood that the Gospel saved them. But they weren't yet eating meat because they hadn't come to understand that not only does the Gospel save them but it sanctifies them, it sets them apart for holiness and grows them in the grace and knowledge of Christ. **So Paul's not saying that they don't have the Spirit, they do. But he is saying *act like it!*** Your thinking and behaviour are not of the Spirit, act in accordance with it. Pursue spiritual growth, pursue the meat that enables you to grow, it's time to wean, move on from the milk. In other words, mature, grow, stop staying the same.

Instead they were factionalized and each rowing in their own direction in their own stream of discipleship. The church itself wasn't collectively rowing together. They wanted what their own tribe offered, whether it be power, prestige, or prominence, rather than wanting what is best for the entire body. Without a clear understanding of the Gospel, a clear vision and mission for how to make disciples, then it is easy for a church to fall prey to this. It is easy for immaturity to manifest itself in tribalism because they fail to understand what it means to be mature in Christ and therefore succumb to anything and everything that tempts them in another way.

- a. **Immature disciples, immature Christians, people of the flesh as Paul tells the Corinthians, often sow division, whether they realize it or not.** Tribalism reveals our immaturity. Instead of seeking to grow, instead of seeking for the church overall to flourish, we seek what makes us happy or what we think to be true or what our version of the church or its leaders should look like. That's a recipe for division. And notice the language Paul uses in verse 2, "they weren't ready for the meat yet." Not only were they not eating meat, they weren't even ready for it yet. That should instruct us in what it means to have a gentle, contrite, humble, and gracious spirit as we seek to mature and grow in Christ. Those who are immature are often just the opposite of those things.
- b. So in light of that, let's heed the call collectively Christ Community, to pursue growth in Christ this coming year. Every single one of us has not arrived, we can still grow, still mature, still deepen our affections and love for God. Let's pursue maturity in the areas we still might be on a diet of milk in, it will only serve to grow the church in health and maturity overall.

## 2. Tribalism reveals our worldliness (2b-4)

In fact, you are still not ready, 3 because you are still worldly. For since there is envy and strife among you, are you not worldly and behaving like mere humans? 4 For whenever someone says, “I belong to Paul,” and another, “I belong to Apollos,” are you not acting like mere humans?

Not only does tribalism reveal our immaturity, but it reveals our sinfulness, our iniquity, our worldliness. We are to be distinct, set apart, a royal priesthood, a group of redeemed saints who, although are not perfect, are marked by graciousness and love and truth and care and gentleness and peace and patience and forgiveness and holiness... But Paul here says that our tribalism, our factions that can form within a church, reveal that we are not acting like the church but instead acting like the world. We are not a beacon on a hill then but a lamp covered up. Look at the interesting word usage here:

- Beginning of v. 3 - “because you are still worldly.”
- End of v. 3, “are you not acting like mere humans?”
- Again at End of v. 4 “are you not acting like mere humans?”

What does Paul mean here?

First at the beginning of v. 3, he takes the word for being people of “the flesh” that we looked at from v. 1 (σαρκινος) and he changes it now in verse 3 to worldly (σαρκικος) or really “fleshly.” This is now stronger language. They are not just of the flesh but behaving according to the flesh. They are acting carnal and worldly Paul is saying.

And then twice he clarifies what he means in behaving worldly by saying, “are you not acting like mere humans?”

How does most of humanity act? In sin: With quarrels and strife and rivalries. That should not be true of the church.

But how is this church acting? In sin: With quarrels and strife and rivalries.

- Whatever they may say about themselves and whatever they may say about God or one another, their character undermines it and shows their to be a major disconnect. They may indeed be “spiritual,” but are unfortunately acting like the devil.
  - James 4:4-5 says, “4 You adulterous people! Don’t you know that friendship with the world is hostility toward God? So whoever wants to be the friend of the world becomes the enemy of God. 5 Or do you think it’s without reason that the Scripture says: The spirit he made to dwell in us envies intensely?”

- And this is the truth of tribalism. When we partake in it, we reveal ourselves to be acting like the world. Instead of being set apart and desiring to be unified in Christ, desiring to serve and build up his body and to collectively be the bride of Christ, we undermine all of that with our various tribes and we fracture the body, we end up being hypocritical and worldly as we proclaim to a dying world, “come and taste and see, we have something so much better to offer;” yet when they come in they shout right back to us, “it’s no different in here from out there!”
  - And what should we be like? Remember what Peter said in our last series?
    - 9 But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his possession, so that you may proclaim the praises of the one who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light.
    - 10 Once you were not a people, but now you are God’s people; you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy. - 1 Peter 2:9-10
  - It’s really hard to be the chosen people of God, to be called to be set apart, to be seeking to pursue holiness, to marvel at the mercy and grace of God, and yet see no noticeable difference from the rest of the world. Darkness doesn’t do anything proclaiming more darkness to the world. The light is what brings about change. So let us, as the church collectively, be salt and light, truth and grace, love and mercy to a lost and dying world.
- You see, Tribalism and rivalries are diseases that infect the body like a plague, like gangrene, it slowly spreads and ends up killing off more and more members.
- **And many of you know** this to be true. You have walked through difficult church splits and church divisions. Sleepless nights that cause you to question your faith because of how sin has so infected a church. You’ve been hurt by the church or by its leaders, and you are still trying to work out what forgiveness looks like in your own heart. That’s hard. That’s really difficult and I don’t want to just brush those things aside and tell you it shouldn’t hurt anymore because I know it does.
  - Laura and I in our young lives have been a part of some really difficult church revitalizations where we would plead with God “why?!” Why are we going through this. We have no idea what to do.
- My plea to us all however is to not let those things fester and stew, as that only broods further sin through Gossip and hate in our hearts. A church that is marked by open confession, vulnerability, and

forgiveness will be a church that safe-guards itself well against the temptations that tribalism can bring about.

And look at how Paul characterizes the Corinthian tribalism. Some are saying, “I belong to Paul.” Others are saying, “I belong to Apollos.” It’s no different today. Whether your Calvinist or Arminian, Pre-trib, Mid-trib, or Post-Trib, Premil or Amil, Continuationist or cessationist, we all have the people we listen to and follow. And that’s, in part, the problem with tribalism, we end up majoring on the minors, one of those, instead of on the Gospel.

- So let me say this. The minors aren't bad. Many denominations and various churches collectively agree on secondary and tertiary issues and decide to worship and gather together. That's completely fine. We can do more and get further together than we can apart. However making these minors a major thing is where the issue comes in. Paul says in 1 Cor. 15:3 that the Gospel is of first importance. So it does matter if your convictions are more Reformed or Arminian, more complementarian than egalitarian, more Baptist than Lutheran, more incarnational than attractional, more charismatic than cessationist, it all matters... just not as much as the Gospel of Jesus Christ. We should hold deep convictions regarding all issues the Bible speaks to, but we should not make secondary things the main thing. (Ryan Huguely). When we do that we end up succumbing to worldliness and tribalism and we lose our Christian unity and our Christian liberty.

So here at Christ Community, we do seek to keep the main thing, the main thing. Christ and him crucified. And we will faithfully teach what God's Word says and we write our Statement of Faith for clarity on where we stand on many secondary and tertiary issues that we hold. But we don't seek to make one of the minor things the test of your faith or your faithfulness. We desire to preach Christ and Him crucified and to seek to show how the Gospel is applicable to all areas of your life!

- And this is what the Corinthians, again, had failed in. They had elevated certain beliefs and practices and people rather than keeping Christ at the center of their faith. Their resulting tribalism within the church revealed that they were still plagued by worldliness, and that is a sad thing as it undermines the church's mission into its community and the world at large.

**3. Tribalism reveals our ignorance** Tribalism reveals our immaturity, it reveals our worldliness, and it also reveals our ignorance. (v.5-9)

5 What then is Apollos? What is Paul? They are servants through whom you believed, and each has the role the Lord has given. 6 I planted, Apollos watered, but God gave the growth. 7 So, then, neither the one who plants nor the one who waters is anything, but only God who gives the growth. 8 Now he who plants and he who waters are one, and each will receive his own reward according to his own labor. 9 For we are God's coworkers. You are God's field, God's building.

Paul is fed up with the factions and tribes that he has heard about within the Corinthian church and so now he tells them point blank that what these tribes and factions reveal about them is that they are ignorant of the ways of God. "What then is Apollos? What is Paul?" They are simply servants through whom you believed. The Lord has called them, he says, to individual roles.

- Paul was the church planter - he proclaimed the Gospel in Corinth and helped to establish elders and helped to establish the church and then he went and did it again elsewhere.
- Apollos was the pastor who watered there. He labored amongst the church in Corinth and sought to teach them the ways of God.
- And God is ultimately the one who gave the growth. And Paul says, Missionaries, church planters, pastors, apologists, evangelists, anybody else is ultimately not really anything but a servant to God. God gives the growth and therefore God deserves the glory and honor and praise for any work that is done in any place around the world.

When we succumb to following this person or that, or succumb to various tribes that divide the body of Christ, we reveal our ignorance about how God is at work in the world. He is at work through his servants, "those called according to his purpose" in order to serve and build up the body of Christ. They in and of themselves are not nothing, as Paul says, but it is truly God who is at work through them and therefore deserves the recognition.

- And your pastors know this to be true as well! The refrain is the same: What is Ryan? What is Daniel? What is Patrick? What is Jeff? What is anyone of our elders? The answer 2000 years later is the same for us. Servants who seek to labor among you. As Jeff reminds us so well, this is ultimately the Lord's church. Servants come and go, but he will be faithful in building his church. CCC is not about the prestige or status of its leaders but



ultimately about King Jesus. We are here for his glory not for ours. We have to all be united on that front in order to fulfill the vision and mission of the church.

Tribalism reveals in us an immaturity, we end up having a stunted growth as our immaturity causes us to factionalize. It reveals in us a worldliness, as we allow worldly desires and actions to infiltrate the church and we end up looking like the world. And it reveals in us an ignorance, we don't understand how God is at work in the world and end up elevating or diminishing leaders instead of viewing them in the proper way.

- So in light of those three points, we need to heed a warning to the church about tribalism, and an exhortation in light of it.

## A Warning to the Church about Tribalism

- **Be on guard against tribalism within the church** (whether it's to various leaders or various thoughts)

As we said earlier, tribalism itself isn't so much of a strong worldview but actually the byproduct of our various worldviews. It tends to be the end result. We fall into differing tribes and camps based on our worldview and then tend to demonize anyone else from a different camp because of theirs. The problem comes when tribalism makes its way into the church, as it did in Corinth, because it severely undermines the unity and witness of God's people. And one of the most prominent ways that tribalism manifests itself today is often the same way it manifested in Corinth, through the sole allegiance to various leaders within the church. This leads to inflated egos that manifest in pride, and as the proverbs tell us, pride cometh before the Fall..

- We need to heed Paul's words here in 1 Cor. to understand that God gives the growth. That our allegiance is to him first and foremost. Friends, we sadly realize this after it's too late. How many reports do we hear year after year of pastoral failings and the subsequent hurt it does to the church afterwards. Of people's faith being tied to this pastor or that leader and then not knowing where to go after their sin comes to the light.
- Be wary of putting a person in the place of Jesus, they will almost always fail you. Make the foundation of your faith only one person and one person only, Jesus Christ. He is your king, the author and perfecter of your faith. The one who will see you through until the end. The only one who is perfect and worthy of our complete allegiance.
  - And part of being on guard against tribalism is making sure that the main thing is kept the main thing. Hold your convictions tightly yes, but learn what it means to practice Christian unity. Unity is needed when there are differences, right? If we were all the same and thought the same we wouldn't have to heed a call for unity because we would just be united already. But the beauty of Christian unity is that it exists amongst diversity (diverse peoples and diverse thoughts), so let us fight for Christian unity and Christian liberty here at CCC and protect that as a good and Biblical thing. Paul even tells the Corinthians this in the first chapter:
    - **10 Now I urge you, brothers and sisters, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that all of you agree in what you say, that there be no divisions among you, and that you be united with the same understanding and the same conviction. - 1 Corinthians 1:10**

- And this is coming from someone who loves to debate and argue and about the finer points of theology and really has to tone it back here and there. Who often barges into the other 3 pastors' offices, whether they are busy or not, just to launch a series of questions or probe them on something they said. There is a way to do it that is generous and genuinely seeking to sharpen one another, and there is a way to do it that is pugnacious and seeks to question the other person's faith and standing before God. Major on the majors, minor on the minors.

Resist the urge to put your hope in a leader, to tie your faith to them. And resist the urge to make a secondary issue the primary test of faith. Christ is our king, and his death burial and resurrection, the gospel, are what we seek to proclaim first and foremost.

### **An Exhortation to the Church about Tribalism**

If you wrote down my three points, do you notice the kind of undercurrent running beneath them? Tribalism reveals us to be immature, worldly, and ignorant. What's the antidote, what's the opposite of these things? Pursuing maturity, pursuing holiness, and pursuing God. When tribalism reveals us to be immature, this means we need to mature in Christ. When tribalism reveals us to be worldly, this means we need to understand the necessity of holiness in our lives. As Hebrews says, without holiness no one will see the Lord. And when tribalism rears its head in our lives it shows us to be ignorant of God and His ways. We then need to pursue knowing God all the more! Paul still had to remind the Corinthian church of this truth in his second letter as he tells them that they are still being sanctified, still growing in holiness, still needing to pursue God!

- **2 Cor. 7:1 - "So then, dear friends, since we have these promises, (in the past 4 chapters he was just outlining the glory of the new covenant and how it is so much greater than what was before) let us cleanse ourselves from every impurity of the flesh and spirit, bringing holiness to completion in the fear of God."**

What are some practical ways we can grow in holiness? Through communion and fellowship in prayer with Him, through seeking to read His revealed Word and meditate on it and to pray over it! We have to say, "Oh God I want to know you! Help me God to do that! Please help me. Help me to discipline myself for the sake of Godliness, help me to read when I don't feel like it, help me to love the things of God and to disdain the things of this world! God

discipline the sin from my life, grow me in a love for you and a love for others.” Our affections HAVE to be stirred for there to be true growth in our lives. We need to be creatures of the Word, to be not only hearers but doers, to be those who treasure it in our lives. More often than not tribalism comes about in the church when there isn’t growth, when there is stagnation or a running from God. We need to see how immaturity, worldliness, and ignorance fuel tribalistic tendencies in the church and then we need to guard our hearts and our minds and pursue hard after God. The reality friends is that if you’re not pursuing God, growing in your relationship with Him, then you are drifting. There is no lazy river to float on within Christianity. We have to pursue him in order to protect the church from tribalism. To work hard at fellowship within the church, and to seek to be the people of God who are united first and foremost for God.

May that be true of us today, next year, and every year Christ Community Church.  
Would you pray with me?

Today is the last Sunday of the month and therefore I am going to invite our ushers to begin passing out the communion elements, if you need GF just raise your hand. One of the most beautiful things about Communion is that it gives us a picture of being the Family of God, of being one body united for Christ, and recognizing that unity protects us from what we have been talking about today, tribalism.

- So if you are not a professing believer in Jesus Christ, then we ask that you refrain from taking communion today. There is no shame in doing that, no judgment whatsoever. But if your heart is being convicted of sin and your need for a Savior then please come and find one of the pastors or elders or really anyone who is taking communion and they would love to pray and share with you the good news of Jesus Christ.
- And for us as believers, this is a time when we examine ourselves and see where we are in sin. If you have unconfessed sin in your life then confess it now and then rejoice at the grace and mercy of God in our lives. If you need to go ask forgiveness from a brother or sister here then do so now. I’ll come back up in a few minutes to lead us in the taking of communion.