

The King's Suitcase

By Pastor Greg
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2 Samuel 19:15, 39-43

Bunkertown COB

Bill was traveling over seas on business. In one particular trip to Italy, he found himself on a train not sure which stop would take him to his destination. And not understanding Italian, he was not able to get much help from the other passengers. But in the middle of his hopelessness, another American appears from the back of the train. "Perhaps I could help", the other fellow offers. "Oh thank you" says Bill. "I don't know which stop is mine". "Well, maybe I can help" says the other man, and sets down next to Bill. "Where you from" he asks. "Baltimore" says the business man. "Really? Me too!" says Bill. "How about those Ravens?" "Actually, I'm a Skins fan" says the business man, who then rises from his seat, turns to Bill and says, "Good luck finding your stop", then walks away.

It sure seems to me that we humans go to great lengths to divide ourselves. Redskins, Eagles, Ravens. Dodge, Chevy, or Ford? Or perhaps it's an import? Then is it European or Asian? What computer, Mac or PC? What School, Moulton/Udell or Moravia, Juniata or East Juniata? We live in a society that is constantly looking for ways to divide.

On Facebook, people notice that I'm listed as Pastor Greg. Invariably someone will want to know what Denomination I serve. If I answer according to my heart, most people would not be satisfied. Most people want clear lines of division so they know where to place me in society. But I've learned that as a Christian, my identity comes from Christ Himself, not through the things of this earth. That's the point Paul was trying to make when he said *"There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free man, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus."*¹ (Galatians 3:28) But this doesn't seem to happen often. We Christians have a tendency to find our identity along a very narrow path. And we're not comfortable unless we walk with those most like us.

This is not something new, though. People have been looking for ways to divide for centuries. For those of you who are not familiar with Jewish history, let me

¹New American Standard Bible : 1995 update. 1995 (Ga 3:28). LaHabra, CA: The Lockman Foundation.

give you a quick lesson at no extra charge. When Moses led the Jews out of Egypt, they left as one people. But like most humans, they identified themselves not as the people of God, but according to which son of Jacob they belonged to (Jacob's name was changed to Israel, by the way). So by the time they move into the Promised Land, they were twelve different "Tribes". Each tribe was given a portion of the land. For example, the descendants of Reuben settled in the land east of the Dead Sea. The descendants of Zebulun lived near the Sea of Galilee. The descendants of Judah lived west of the Dead Sea. Eventually though, a division begins to take place. The 10 tribes to the north begin to act independently of the 2 in the south. And this division becomes quite evident after the death of Absalom.

Look how divisive this "family" has become. They even argue about who got to carry the Kings luggage. **(Read 2 Samuel 19:15, 39-43)**

I don't know about you, but it seems kind of silly to be fighting over who got to carry a bunch of suitcases across the water. Were they expecting a big tip? Were they looking for bragging rights (yea, well I carried the kings PDA!)? How in the world did the people of God end up fighting with one another? Because they found their identity in the things that divide, not unite. The things of this earth had become more important than the things of God. Not much has changed, huh?

In Paul's letter to the church in Corinth, he was addressing a similar problem. Apparently these Christians were becoming divided over earthly things. ¹⁰ *I appeal to you, dear brothers and sisters, by the authority of our Lord Jesus Christ, to live in harmony with each other. Let there be no divisions in the church. Rather, be of one mind, united in thought and purpose.* ¹¹ *For some members of Chloe's household have told me about your quarrels, my dear brothers and sisters.* ¹² *Some of you are saying, "I am a follower of Paul." Others are saying, "I follow Apollos," or "I follow Peter," or "I follow only Christ."* ¹³ *Has Christ been divided into factions? Was I, Paul, crucified for you? Were any of you baptized in the name of Paul? Of course not!* ² (1 Corinthians 1:10-13). The Corinthian Church had become a real mess. And why? Because some people had taken their eyes off of God; off of the things that truly matter, and the things that endure.

²Tyndale House Publishers. (2004). *Holy Bible : New Living Translation*. Wheaton, Ill.: Tyndale House Publishers.

So how can a Christian, or churches, keep their heart and mind on the things that truly matter? How can we put an end to the things of this world that divide? By fixing our eyes on Jesus. This was the lesson Paul taught the Christians in Corinth. At the end of this letter, he makes a reference to what was apparently being taught by the first Disciples of Jesus. He says, *“I passed on to you what was most important and what had also been passed on to me. Christ died for our sins, just as the Scriptures said. He was buried, and he was raised from the dead on the third day, just as the Scriptures said.”*³ (1 Corinthians 15:3-4) Shortly after regaining his eye sight, Paul would have been taught these things by the Disciples living in Damascus (Acts 9:19) For the scriptures say that after spending some time with them, he started preaching Jesus as the Messiah.

Notice what he teaches here. But more importantly notice what he does not teach. Jesus was the promised Messiah that God had been talking about for a long time. He died for our sins. And God confirmed that His message was true by raising Jesus from the dead. There were plenty of witnesses who saw Jesus after He died. Most of them are still alive, he says. And taking the scriptures, Paul would show them that Jesus was the one God had promised. This is the Good News that Paul preached. This is the message that united the early church. But just like today, earthly things began to creep into the church that caused divisions and factions. So deep was the division that a special Council Meeting was needed to end the conflict (see Acts 15).

We look back and think how silly it seems that Israel and Judah would fight over the King's Suitcase. But has anything really changed? If you read the history of just about any church you will find a period where there seems to be a faction; a split or division over some of the most elementary things; over some of the pettiest things. Why? Because they are too busy focusing on the earthly things and not the things from God. We Christians have a tendency to focus on the things that divide; worship styles, music styles, building preferences, forms of baptism, organizational structure, etc. rather than holding fast to the things of God. That's why Paul's

³Tyndale House Publishers. (2004). *Holy Bible : New Living Translation*. Wheaton, Ill.: Tyndale House Publishers.

advice is still needed today; that we find our identity in the things of Heaven, not the things of this earth.

You and I can stop this, though. We can put an end to the divisions by fixing our eyes upon Jesus. By remembering that it is the Good News of God's Son that unites us together as one body of Christians called the Bride of Christ. And we can end this Christian Civil War by laying aside the earthly things that we have allowed to become more important than Jesus.

That's why when someone wants to know what Denomination I serve, I'm tempted to say that I am a servant of Christ Jesus, and lead one of His congregations in Bunkertown, PA. I would point out that through Christ we have much in common, rather than dwelling on the things that divide. I wonder, would they be satisfied with my answer.