

Can We Agree? Amos 3:3; I Corinthians 1:10-12

The following names may not mean much to you unless you were a college basketball fan in the early 1990's. Chris Webber, Jalen Rose, Juwan Howard, Jimmy King, and Ray Jackson became known their freshman year as the Fab-5 playing for the University of Michigan. Many sports writers considered them to be the best freshman recruiting class of all time and were the first team in NCAA history to have an all-freshman starting lineup competing in the national championship game. Four of the five players participated in the 1991 McDonald's High School All-star game featuring the top-rated players in the nation. Except for Ray Jackson, the other four went on to have careers in the NBA. Chris Webber was part of last year's Basketball Hall of Fame class.

They were an outstanding team with exceptional talent, yet they never won a Big 10 championship or an NCAA title. Controversy surrounded the teams NCAA wins in the tournament when it was discovered that Chris Webber had received money from an alumnus forfeiting his amateur status. That may have contributed to his decision to leave school after his sophomore year to enter the NBA draft.

As an armchair coach, my observation and assessment of their lack of coming home with the coveted championship crown was in how they played. Singularly they were phenomenal players, but as a team when you bring the best in their class together it can be difficult to forge comradery that can galvanize and synchronize a team into playing together. With their own unique talents, at times they took games into their own individual hands rather than play as a team. But that's my opinion.

That illustration reminds us as we have been discussing over the past number weeks of the growing need that fellowship, the working together of the body of Christ, is important, or might I say is paramount to our standing strong in a world that is aggressively and even boldly attacking the church. As I have said before, let me repeat, we need each other. We need to join together in all the good days

and all the bad days and all the in between days to learn what it is to be in fellowship so that we can sing with enthusiasm "I'm so glad I'm a part of the family of God, joint heirs with Jesus as we travel this sod." It is with increasing urgency that we need each other, more than just on a Sunday morning or a Wednesday night or a monthly fellowship dinner. We cannot showcase our individual gifts, but instead must blend them in working together for the good of the church and the glory of God. That's why **Amos 3:3** is a good place to start this morning.

Turn back into the Old Testament section of the minor prophets. If you're not sure where to find Amos, start with Daniel, then Hosea, then Joel, then Amos. Our opening text is in **Amos 3:3**.

This verse tells me that there is an expectation in fellowship.

I. AN EXPECTATION IN FELLOWSHIP – **Amos 3:3**

Whether you enjoy country music or not, the name Hank Williams is well known. He dropped out of High School to pursue stardom in country music, but his dreams ended due to his alcoholism. He married singer Audrey Shepherd at a gas station in Alabama. When the marriage hit the rocks, she threw Hank out of the house. Fueled by a broken heart, he wrote the song "I'm So Lonesome, I Could Cry." He died shortly after that in the back seat of his Cadillac from heart failure on the way to a performance. He was 29.

David Jeremiah writes that his songs of loneliness and heartache made him an American icon. Somehow his mournful melodies touched the hearts of those who are so lonely they could cry.

The Bible has a one-word answer for loneliness. As a matter of fact, it's a divine answer. That word is fellowship. That's our opportunity to be best friends with the Lord and part of His worldwide family. If you feel so lonely you could cry, walk with another.

Amos was a shepherd/farmer. He had flocks and sycamore-fig groves. He was from Tekoa, a small town about 6 miles south of Bethlehem and 11

miles from Jerusalem. That means he lived in Judah. But he wasn't sent to them. God had a message for him to deliver to the people of Israel or the 10 northern tribes. It was a difficult message to deliver because it was about God's impending judgment on them for being unfaithful, disobedient and breaking the covenant with God. In a word, they had broken fellowship with God, and He was going to judge them if they didn't repent.

The people were indignant at the message from Amos and essentially told him to go on back to Judah and take his message to them. They didn't want to hear it. But Amos gave them God's message anyway substantiating the warning of judgment. So certain was the justice God would mete out, Amos issued 7 rhetorical questions that confirmed what God said would in fact come true.

The first one is found in **verse 3** and the focus of our topic of fellowship. **“Do two walk together unless they have agreed to do so?”**

This question points out to me an expectation within fellowship. This verse talks first about the walk of fellowship.

A. The Walk of Fellowship

I think we would all agree that fellowship requires at least two people. It's hard to have fellowship by yourself – even if it's me, myself, and I. If you are by yourself, you can make your own decisions about what to buy, where to go, what to do. When someone else enters the picture, now you have to consider the opinion of that person when making decisions, especially if you want harmony or unity in the relationship.

If I was a betting man, I would wager that this has probably happened in your home. It's happened in ours. It goes something like this:

You come home from work and your wife says she's had a long day and doesn't feel like cooking and wants to go out for dinner. You're fine with that so you ask where she wants to go eat. She says it doesn't matter. She's tired and hungry. Well, what do you feel like eating?

It doesn't matter.

How about Chinese?

No.

I thought it didn't matter?

It doesn't, just not Chinese. We had that last week.

How about a steak house?

Nope, I'm not in the mood for a steak.

How about Italian?

No, that doesn't sound good either.

I thought it didn't matter.

It doesn't, just not those places.

So you end up ordering pizza.

Now if Robyn and I had that discussion, we would probably end up at the Mexican restaurant, which is her favorite.

The conversation can take even longer when you have more than two people trying to decide the where, the what, the when, the why, and the how. Everyone has their opinion. That's why the walk of fellowship requires, and I emphasize that word, the walk of fellowship requires the willingness in fellowship.

B. The Willingness in Fellowship

Within this willingness in fellowship is consideration, communication and concurrence. To be in fellowship, to agree, they must discuss where they are going, that's the consideration; that requires communication, talking about it; and then they must come to an agreement on it, that's the concurrence. Two don't walk together unless and until they have first met, talked and then agreed to their journey together.

A team that can't put aside its differences and begin to play together for a common goal, can't win.

A Board that can't get along, won't succeed.

A church that can't agree on doctrine, won't grow.

A marriage that can't operate in love, won't last.

H.A. Ironside says that according to **Amos 3:3**, the key to true fellowship is the ability to agree. You may have differing opinions about what you are discussing, but in the end, you agree on the course of action or direction you take. It means that there is willingness at times to compromise, that you don't

always have to have your way in the matter, that you can work things out to get to where you want to go. It is refreshing when teams and churches and businesses and marriages can work together instead of against each other.

I have been here for 16 years. There have been a lot of Board meetings discussing a wide range of topics. In those 16 years, there has only been one occasion that I can recall where a vote was taken that we didn't have unanimity. Though we have discussed lots of other topics where there has been differing opinions, we have discussed them in such a way that when a vote is finally taken, we all agree on the direction to take.

Can a Board walk together unless they agree?

Can a church walk together unless they agree?

Can a marriage walk together unless they agree?

Now, they may not agree on everything, and that's okay, but they must agree to walk together if they are going to go in the same direction.

The message Amos gave to the 10 tribes was that they were not walking in agreement with God. They had chosen to walk away from God and not with Him. They had chosen not to walk with Him by not obeying His commandments.

Folks, if we want to walk with God, we must agree that the direction He is going is the right way and then agree to follow Him. Alexander MacLaren describes fellowship with God as getting side by side with Him and I'll add that we must get side by side with God and let Him lead the way.

It is said that Abraham walked before God. That means he ordered his life under the watchful eye of God. It doesn't mean he was perfect. Instead, he lived in such a way to please God.

Scripture speaks of walking after God, which means to conform to His Will, following His commands. David was a man who walked after God.

Then there is walking with God. That was Enoch. **Genesis 5:24 "Enoch walked with God; then he was no more, because God took him away."**

How did he walk with God?

Hebrews 11:5 tells that he pleased God.

How did he please God?

How does anyone please God?

The answer is in **Verse 6 "Without faith it is impossible to please God, because anyone who comes to Him must believe that He exists and that He rewards those who earnestly seek Him."**

To please God, we must have faith. That's what it means to walk with God.

Have you thought about the fact that just as fellowship with God is walking by faith in agreement with God, so fellowship with others is a walk of faith when you agree to join someone else in fellowship with them?

H.A. Ironside writes "Two can walk together only when they are agreed. It is not a question of seeing all details alike, but of having common thoughts as to the ground of their communion together... Saints cannot walk together in holy association if the one seeks to honor God, and the other has lapsed into loose thoughts and evil ways."

When it comes to the expectation of fellowship, they walk together in willingness – considering, communicating, and concurring with each other. That's agreement in fellowship and let me add that you must first be in agreement with God, then agreement with others falls into place.

If **Amos 3:3** gives us an expectation in fellowship. **I Corinthians 1:10** gives us an entreaty for their fellowship.

II. AN ENTREATY FOR THEIR FELLOWSHIP – I Corinthians 1:10

Paul begins with an appeal for fellowship from authority.

A. An Appeal From Authority – v. 10a
"I appeal to you, brothers, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ."

The appeal is to those who are called brothers. **Verse 1** defines what that means to be brothers. They are the church of God in Corinth.

They are those sanctified in Christ Jesus who are called to be holy.

They are the ones who are part of the family of God by a common faith in Jesus Christ as Savior, that in some mystical way the Holy Spirit binds all the believers in Christ into one family. Because of Christ, we are in unity or fellowship through Christ.

The term **“brothers”** tones down the harshness of the message, while at the same time emphasizing its seriousness. It also affirms the unity of their family relationship. Paul is appealing to the local fellowship of believers in Corinth and it is just as much an admonition for any church to heed what he is about to say. So while on the one hand, we read back in **verse 3** that Paul gave thanks to God for this body of believers, in **verse 10** he is entreating them, appealing to them regarding the issue of strife or lack of fellowship in the church that is evident.

Now notice the authority by which Paul is appealing to them. He is not using his authority as an apostle, although he begins his letter with that title to let them know he has the authority given to him by the will of God to speak on behalf of God.

He is not coming to them in the authority of the other apostles in Jerusalem. Remember that when there was an issue by some Christian Jews that Gentiles should practice Jewish rituals that it was taken to the Apostles in Jerusalem who heard Paul’s testimony and then deliberated what should be done, concluding that being a Christian did not require following Jewish laws. In their authority as head of the church, they sent a letter at the hands of Paul and Barnabas back to the Gentile churches. Paul isn’t using that authority as the source of his admonishment.

There is only one authority by which Paul is appealing to them regarding the concerns he will address and that was the authority of the head of the church, Jesus Christ Himself. The name of Jesus is the instrument or means of the entreaty.

The word **“beseech”** in the KJV or **“appeal”** in the NIV means to call aside or call together. It is a strong word used to produce a particular response or

effect in the life of another person. It is more than just asking, it is urging a change in conduct.

By appealing to them through the name of Jesus Christ, is the same as saying “I appeal to you in Jesus Christ.” His name represented all that He is in His person, His character, and His will. There wasn’t any greater authority by whom Paul could use to appeal to them. There wasn’t any higher or greater name that could be used to get them to sit up and pay attention, to listen, to take note, to consider what Paul was about to tell them that could affect a change. Because of who the appeal was from, they couldn’t ignore it. They could disobey it, but they couldn’t ignore it coming from Jesus Christ. So strong is the name of Jesus, Paul used it 10 times in the first 10 verses. Jesus is the focus and the means of unity in the church.

So the question is, would they listen and would they obey?

If that appeal came to us, what would we do with it?

There is an appeal from authority.

There is then, an appeal for agreement.

B. An Appeal for Agreement – v. 10b

In essence, it’s the same appeal from **Amos 3:3**.
“Can two walk together except they be agreed?”

In this verse Paul addresses the lack of fellowship that existed in this church.

He is calling on them to heal the conflict and harmonize the church.

1. Heal the conflict

“...all of you agree with one another so that there may be no divisions among you...”

I have read about churches who had to call in an arbitrator to bring two factions within the church together, to work at healing, restoring, reconciling groups within the church. Who knows how it started or why it persisted? But it became big enough where an advocate had to come in and tell each group to go to their corners so they could sort out their differences.

There was a conflict in one church over which side of the platform the piano should be on. One group wanted it stage left, the other wanted it stage right. So they held two separate services so each group could get what they wanted.

Churches have had conflict over the hymn book selection, Bible translations, music styles, jewelry, perfume, real or fake flowers and the list unfortunately goes on ad nauseum.

We chuckle but those are real issues that cause strife in the church. And Paul says stop. Agree with one another. **Are they really issues that should cause such conflict?** Don't allow divisions to exist. They cause bitterness, resentment, and animosity.

The word for **"division"** is our English word schism. It means to split or divide. The word was used of a farmer who plowed his field where the plow divided the soil. It was used of splitting wood. Here it's used in a moral sense of division between the people of God.

An old Quaker went from church to church looking for just the right one to attend. Later on someone asked him if he had settled on a church. He said he and his wife were finally attending the true church made up of just the two of them, but then added that he wasn't all that sure about his wife.

Warren Wiersbe reminds us that there has always been a problem with division among God's people. Adam and Eve were divided.
Abraham and Lot were divided.
The disciples were divided.
Paul and Barnabas were divided.
The church at Corinth was divided.

What are some things that can cause division in a church or even in a family?

Gossip, criticism, hatred, bitterness, envy, and resentment – just to name a few.

James adds to the things that cause division, quarrels, and strife in a church when he writes **"What causes fights and quarrels among you? Don't they come from your desires that battle within you?" (James 4:1)** In other words, it's a

heart issue, it's our own sinful pride that causes divisions.

Paul strongly appeals to this church to heal, to get along, to speak the same thing or agree on the same thing with what he will identify in a moment as the cause of their division. **Paul wants the church to heal, but how do they do that?** He offers direction to make that happen. Harmonize the church.

2. Harmonize the church

"...that you may be perfectly united in mind and thought." The KJV reads **"to be perfectly joined."**

The St. Louis Arch is an architectural marvel. Built as a monument to the western expansion, it stands 630 feet tall. Construction began in 1963 and took two and half years to complete. Made of stainless steel and built in the form of a catenary arch it is a breath-taking site with the Mississippi River in the foreground and the St. Louis skyline behind it. Construction began on both sides of the structure at the same time ending with the insertion of a single piece at the top of the arch. For those of you who understand the margin of error required for that one piece to fit at the top, you will appreciate that the base of each leg at ground level could only have an engineering tolerance of 1/64th of an inch or they would not meet at the top.

Paul calls the church to be perfectly joined together in mind and thought or there would not be fellowship in the body, the church. There needs to exist harmony in the fellowship. The term **"perfectly joined"** is a medical term and speaks of how the body is skillfully knit together. The message to the body of Christ is that it must have a loving union if it is to be perfectly fit together.

Walvoord and Zuck make an important distinction, something we discussed when we addressed fellowship in **I Corinthians 12**. Listen carefully to what they say: This is an **"Appeal for harmony, not the elimination of diversity."** Unity with diversity, but without division. There is beauty in diversity. **We have at home a quilt that my Great-grandmother put together. It's a patchwork quilt. It's pieces of this and that. There's a piece my grandfather**

embroidered, and another my great uncle did. I'm guessing it was when they were young. Separate pieces makes it look like a mismatched bunch of fabric, but combined they form a quilt.

We may look like a bunch of mismatched pieces but when put together, when in harmony, we form a beautiful tapestry known as the church, the body of Christ. As we live in harmony, Paul says we are to have the same mind and the same thought. To the Philippians he writes what that mind looks like, the kind of mind we are to have.

Philippians 2:1-8

In **verse 5**, the KJV reads that we are to have the same mind as Christ. The mind or attitude Paul is speaking about is humility. For the church to be in harmony, its people must live in humility with each other. That means to put others first. Paul uses Christ as the ultimate example who put others first. If we are walking in or with the Spirit, there will be no division because we are putting the needs of others before our own needs – selfless living rather than selfish living. There will then be harmony because the Spirit of God does not divide. He creates unity not division.

The verses in Philippians not only tell us we must have the mind of Christ which is a humble mind, but we must have a helpful manner where we serve others. Christ humbled Himself and came to our world to serve.

If there is to be healing, if there is to be harmony in the church, we must have the mind of Christ: be humble, be helpful. Be selfless and serving.

Paul's entreaty for fellowship is an appeal from the authority of Christ and an appeal for agreement within the church. His entreaty is based on what we find in **verses 11-12** because there was an estrangement in their fellowship.

III. AN ESTRANGEMENT IN THEIR FELLOWSHIP – vv. 11-12

In **verse 11**, their division is exposed.

A. Their Division Is Exposed – v. 11

There isn't a lot of information we know about Chloe. She must have been a person of some standing and influence both in the community and in the church. Scholars are divided on whether she was even from Corinth. She may have lived in a neighboring city, but was well aware of the church in Corinth. They suggest this may be the case because if she were from Corinth and her name is mentioned could have resulted in potential hardship for her from members in the church for calling them out regarding their divisiveness.

Something else we can't be sure of is if household refers to family members or to servants. One thing we know for sure is that the information her household took to Paul was of such significance that Paul felt the need to address it with them. And it is equally important to note that it took some courage on their part to bring the issue to Paul.

Chloe's household sent word to Paul that there were quarrels in the church. The KJV uses the term "**contentions**" which comes from the word *eris* meaning strife. The dictionary defines strife as a bitter quarrel or conflict. Their division was exposed, and Paul went on to explain their division.

B. Their Division Is Explained – v. 12

How many of you know that a good thing can become a bad thing? Their division centered around favorite teachers. They turned a good thing into a bad thing. Look at these names. It's an all-star list of highly sought-after Christian speakers.

There was of course Paul. He started the church and has been described as one of the most intellectually gifted men of his day, rivaling any of the great philosophers. He was a gifted teacher.

Then there was Apollos. He was considered an extremely eloquent speaker. He preached captivating, edge of your seat sermons that could keep an audience's attention for a long time.

Others really liked Cephas or Peter. That he is referred to as Cephas and not Peter suggests that it was the Jewish Christians in Corinth who followed

him. He was the working-class pastor, the blue-collar preacher, the guy who actually walked and talked with Jesus. He was an Apostle, a leader of the early church.

But then there was the pious group who followed Jesus. You couldn't get any better than Him. God Himself in the flesh.

Think of it this way if Paul was writing to our church. It would be like some of you old timers saying you really like Pastor Essenberg, while others might say you prefer Pastor Don and still others saying you prefer me.

I get it. It's natural to follow human leaders, especially those spiritual leaders who help us and whose ministry we enjoy. In the case of the church in Corinth, they emphasized the messenger instead of the message and it created conflict and competition.

Last Sunday as we were entering the church we chose to attend while on vacation the greeter asked if we were new. Robyn said we were on vacation and mentioned that I was a pastor. The greeter then asked if I was checking out the competition.

The problem as Paul pointed out is that factions developed because of personal preferences around personality or teaching style and it created competition. This wasn't just that one group preferred their leader over the others. They had strong opinions that resulted in some bitterness toward the other groups. And Paul asks the obvious question in **verse 13: "Is Christ divided."** When Jesus was attacked by the Pharisees for casting out demons, they claimed He was doing so by the power of the devil. Jesus responded by saying that it's foolish to think that the devil would want to divide himself by casting out his own minions. A house divided against itself can't stand.

That is what Paul is trying to get at. When there is true fellowship within the body of Christ, there is no division or competition among its people because as spiritual teachers and leaders, we all want the same thing – unity and spiritual growth in the body. As

we see from **Acts 2:42-47**, when there is unity in the church, there will be abundant fruit, not bad apples. There will be spiritual growth and unity. It comes back full circle to the challenge Paul lays out in **verse 10** to be perfectly united together in mind and thought.

Our challenge as a church is to stay focused on God so that there are no divisions among us. Let's strive to have the mind of Christ. That's how we can agree.