

“Is Christ Divided?”

1 Corinthians 1:10-17

The first thing that the Holy Spirit addresses in the church at Corinth, through the Apostle Paul’s letter (after the initial salutation), is that of division. There is nothing more destructive to a church than to let one’s opinion, or personality, or politics, or any thing else that will cause a division to enter in – if allowed, the work of the Lord will cease, and the devil will have one. That’s what was happening in Corinth at the time of the writing.

As we saw at the beginning of our study of this letter, the city of Corinth was very liberal (for its day) and very educated – they prided themselves on that particular thing. As is the case many times, as people are brought to Christ out of their setting and culture, they bring a bit of that with them to the church – they shouldn’t (we’ve been made a new creation) but it happens – and it happened in Corinth.

Thomas Carlyle said, “Ten men banded together in love and unity can do what ten thousand separately would fail to do.”

– Robert C. Shannon, *1000 Windows*, (Cincinnati, Ohio: Standard Publishing Company, 1997).

The mark of community—true biblical unity—is not the absence of conflict but the presence of a reconciling spirit.

– Bill Hybels, *Leadership*, Vol. 14, no. 1.

Interestingly, of all the songs in the Book of Revelation, not one is a solo. The twenty-four elders sing and cast their crowns

before His feet, the united voices of countless angels resound, every living creature in heaven and earth and under the earth and all that is in them are joined in one song. Those who are victorious over the beast are given harps and a song to sing. In every case multitudes of people or angels unite in the same song with absolute unity.

--Graham Kendrick. Leadership, Vol. 15, no. 2.

The title of this message comes from verse 13 and it asks a very important, yet seemingly completely unnecessary question – one that seems absurd when we hear it – “Is Christ Divided?” Of course not – so if He’s not divided then why is His “body” divided, which is what the church is called – “the body of Christ.”

1 Corinthians 12:27

(27) Now ye are the body of Christ, and members in particular.

Ephesians 4:12

(12) For the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ:

As we will see, the fact is that the church was already divided when the letter was written – the Apostle is writing here to bring them back together in unity – a difficult task under even the best of circumstances. Once someone leaves a church it is very difficult for them to come back and ever be united again. Best to stop the division before it begins – but that didn’t happen here so he’s writing to help them set it right.

To bring the unity back to the body of Christ, the church needs to:

I. REPAIR THE DIVISION – VS. 10

“Be perfectly joined together”

A. *By coming together in the work of Christ – “beseech” – “parakaleho”*

1. The word for “beseech” here (and in most cases in the Apostle Paul’s writing) means to call to the side of – to call for aid
2. The Apostle is writing to the church, calling to them to come together for the furtherance of the gospel
3. “By the name of our Lord Jesus Christ” – it is through His name, for His name, and in His name that we are to do what we do

B. *By realizing we’re all connected – “brethren” – he uses this term to draw their attention to the fact that they were all one in Christ*

Galatians 3:28

(28) There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither bond nor free, there is neither male nor female: for ye are all one in Christ Jesus.

C. *By making sure we all have the same message – “ye all speak the same thing”*

1. “Ye all speak” - the word structure here is one that means to keep on speaking
2. It something they had done and needed to get back to and to continue in it
3. “The same thing” – as opposed to divisive issues – just stay away from them

Philippians 1:27

(27) Only let your conversation be as it becometh the gospel of Christ: that whether I come and see you, or else be absent, I may hear of your affairs, that ye stand fast in one spirit, with one mind striving together for the

faith of the gospel;

***D. By knowing there will be conflicts –
“there be no divisions among you”***

1. The word for “divisions” is where our word “schism” comes from – means to split or tear – in classical Greek it was only used for tears in material
2. These divisions, schisms, were already there but shouldn’t be – since they were there, however, they needed repaired
3. We need to recognize there is a problem when one exists in order for it to be repaired

***E. By understanding repairs can be made if
we want them to be – “but that ye be
perfectly joined together in the same
mind and in the same judgment”***

1. “But” – in contrast to what’s before – in contrast to divisions
2. “Ye be” – plural – the entirety of the body of Christ in Corinth
3. “Perfectly joined together” – one word in the Greek – means to put back together, to repair the tear in the garment – “to put a thing in its appropriate condition” (Zodhiates)
4. “Same mind and in the same judgment”
 - a) “Same mind” – with the same purpose in mind, done in unity and harmony – as some consider this referring to the mind of Christ (as referenced in Phil. 2:5), we are

to have the same mind towards others as He does (G. Campbell Morgan)

Philippians 2:5

(5) Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus:

b) "In the same judgment"

(1) Some versions translate this "opinion" but that's not the understanding, considering the context

(2) The word comes from the root of the word translated "knowledge" and more closely resembles the usage of the word "understanding" in the Old Testament – the ability to put into action what we know

(3) If we are of the same mind one toward another as Christ would be toward us, then we need to make sure we put into practice that oneness – we need to use proper judgement and understanding towards other, knowing we are all different and account for those differences

II. RECOGNIZE DIFFERENCES – VS. 11-16

A. The differences were obvious – vs. 11

1. "It hath been declared" – not just mentioned, not rumors – the word used here means there was ample evidence, and that evidence was used to explain the situation
2. "Of you, my brethren" – imagine how disheartening this was for the Apostle Paul, who had spent at least a year and a half with them, teaching them – and now

he hears this

3. "Contentions among you" – debate, strife, quarrels

B. The differences caused the divisions – vs. 12

1. "That every one of you" – seems to be that every single believer that made up the assembly in Corinth had a hand in causing the divisions – every one of them chose a side in the debate rather than staying united
2. "I am of Paul; and I of Apollos" – Dr. Lightfoot conjectures they might have been the Gentile converts in the church
3. "I of Cephas; and I of Christ" – he points out these might have been the Jewish converts in the church

- a) "Cephas" (a Syriac surname given to Simon) – rendered as "Peter" in the Greek

[John 1:42](#)

(42) And he brought him to Jesus. And when Jesus beheld him, he said, **Thou art Simon the son of Jona: thou shalt be called Cephas**, which is by interpretation, A stone.

[Galatians 2:9](#)

(9) And when James, Cephas, and John, who seemed to be pillars, perceived the grace that was given unto me, they gave to me and Barnabas the right hands of fellowship; that we *should go* unto the heathen, and they unto the circumcision.

- b) "Of Christ" – these seemed to be priding

themselves on not following a certain individual but were “puffing themselves up” to show they were the most spiritual of the bunch

4. No matter what our background was, we are no longer that and it should never be a point of contention in the church (that is one reason I don't believe it's necessary to bring up how bad we were before we got saved, other than to show that God saves sinners)

C. *The divisions can be averted – vs. 13-16*

The mentioning of baptism here, specifically what is said in vs. 15, shows that, recognizing differences and the divisions they can cause, there are actions we can take as leadership of the church to avoid the divisions in the first place – a lot better to avoid them than to try and repair them after the fact

III. REMAIN IN THE DOCTRINE – VS. 17

- A. *Specifically, the doctrine of the cross – if we stay focused on Christ and His work for us and His work for others it will be much easier to stay united***
- B. *This verse demonstrates that our salvation is based solely on the work of Christ on the cross without any works on our part – including baptism***
- C. *“Sent me not to baptize” – he wasn't the pastor, and in most cases, he was not there to act as the authority in the local church, as the pastor would – one of the duties being to baptize believers***

D. "To preach the gospel" – the death, burial, and resurrection – that was the main thing

1 Corinthians 2:2

(2) For I determined not to know any thing among you, save Jesus Christ, and him crucified.

E. "Not with wisdom of words, lest the cross of Christ be made of none effect"

1. "Wisdom of words" – the Greeks prided themselves on their use of words and their knowledge, and it would seem that a big part of the division and contention in the church was because of this – they so loved to argue that they could not accept the opinions of others (goes back to verse 10 and the word "judgment" – opinion, view)
2. "Lest the cross of Christ should be made of none effect" – be made void – the arguments, and the divisions caused by them, were making the message of the gospel of little use
3. God help a church that is more concerned about their opinions than they are about the cause of Christ and His message!!

Conclusion: Any church that takes their focus off the doctrines of Scripture and puts it on anything else there is going to be a price to pay. If we want to see our church grow and be what God intends it to be then we have to stay focused on the Word of God and the message of the cross. If the focus becomes on individuals or programs or anything else, then the purpose of the church is lost.

We must stay unified.

Some missionaries in the Philippines set up a croquet game in their front yard. Several of their Agta Negrito neighbors became interested and wanted to join the fun. The missionaries explained the game and started them out, each with a mallet and ball. As the game progressed, opportunity came for one of the players to take advantage of another by knocking that person's ball out of the court. A missionary explained the procedure, but his advice only puzzled the Negrito friend. "Why would I want to knock his ball out of the court?" he asked. "So you will be the one to win!" a missionary said. The short-statured man, clad only in a loincloth, shook his head in bewilderment. Competition is generally ruled out in a hunting and gathering society, where people survive not by competing but by sharing equally in every activity.

The game continued, but no one followed the missionaries' advice. When a player successfully got through all the wickets, the game was not over for him. He went back and gave aid and advice to his fellows. As the final player moved toward the last wicket, the affair was still very much a team effort. And finally, when the last wicket was played, the "team" shouted happily, "We won! We won!"

That is how the Church, the body of Christ, should be. We're a team. We all win together.

--James S. Hewett, *Illustrations Unlimited* (Wheaton: Tyndale House Publishers, Inc, 1988) pp. 123-124.