

Unity in Christ

1 Corinthians 1:10-17

Jesus prayed that the church would be one just as He was with the Father, so that the world would believe the Father sent the Son (Jn. 17:20-21). The church is God's family, and like your family, not everyone always gets along. Paul gets word from Chloe's people that the Christians in Corinth were fighting, and of all the issues in this letter, he puts this one first. Unity among God's people is priority.

The Call to Unity

Paul pleads with the brethren by the name of the Lord Jesus (v10). This is something to speak up about, and the appeal is made from the person of Jesus because Christians bear His name (Ex. 20:7). Our unity is given to us to preserve (Eph. 4:3), and we do so by speaking the same thing, without division, joined together in the same mind and same judgment (v10). Paul is not calling for tolerance in the sense of accepting everything. This is the apostle who confronts Peter in front of church of Antioch and tells the Corinthians to judge and avoid unrepentant believers (Gal. 2:11; 1 Cor. 5:13). We don't speak the same thing by having nothing to say. Besides, often the most intolerant people scream for "tolerance". The call here is much higher: speak the same thing, that is, agree, so that there are no divisions. Some people believe that Christians can't agree about anything, but we actually agree about all the most important things: the Trinity, the Bible, worship, sin, the death and resurrection of Jesus, salvation, and the judgment to come. These are primary doctrines that are not up for discussion. We can disagree about less important things, but this shouldn't cause divisions (*schismata*), which is like having broken sections in a net (v10). Unity is not tolerance, but neither is it uniformity. The threefold *same* amounts to agreeing, valuing what's important, and living together in warm fellowship. We unite around biblical principles and put them into practice them by different methods. This is unity and diversity of gifting and calling.

The Obstacle to Unity

Contentions break out in Corinth when they choose a teacher and set him and themselves against others (v12). Paul had planted the church. Apollos was from Alexandria and may have taught with rhetorical skill and wisdom that appealed to some, and Cephas is the Aramaic name for Peter, the leader of the apostles. All of these teachers were in fellowship and co-laborers (e.g. 1 Cor. 3:6), but their "followers" took their strengths or minor differences and made them into divisions. Note that even Christians who said, "I am of Christ" were no less contentious than the others! Avoiding sectarianism is not an issue word choice. There's a way to be wrong about everything. In Jesus' parable of the Pharisee and tax collector, the Pharisee's prayer was perfect in content, but it came from a proud heart that despised others, so God rejected it (Lk. 18:11-14). You can say "No creed but Christ" and be a doctrinal schismatic, and you can memorize the Westminster Confession and be the most catholic Christian in the kingdom. People like to identify themselves in groups and set

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themselves against other groups. It can be a theological tradition or teacher or denomination, or lack thereof. Out here in the great north left, you're likely to find a Christian church really happy about not being part of a denomination, unaware they are a denomination unto themselves. You also find Christians who are unable to be part of any church because of problems in it. This is like refusing to be a friend to anyone because you have challenges with current friends. Fractures between people always occur because at least one party gets out of fellowship with God. In the first, archetypical conflict of our race, Cain was angry with God because He didn't regard his offering, and he then rose up against his brother Abel and murdered him (Gen. 4:4-8). The Christians in Corinth were willing to quarrel over things that didn't matter and weren't even true. Beyond the names of their teachers, Paul doesn't even address the differences.

The Source of Unity

He points them to the root of their identity: was Christ divided (v13)? By asking if Paul was crucified or if they were baptized into his name, he points out how unimportant he is. They've taken their eyes off Jesus. He is glad he only baptized Crispus and Gaius so the factional accusations could not be brought against him (vv14-15). He remembers also baptizing Stephanus' household but can't remember any others (v16). So much for the headcount! His goal was not to figure out how to put water on as many people as possible, but to preach as straightforwardly, "lest the cross of Christ should be made of no effect" (v17). Preaching drives baptism. To let the gospel get pushed out of the center guts the cross of its power. We always have to remember this. We come to church to hear how desperately we need the cleansing grace of God. It doesn't matter if you have been a Christian forever or if you are a non-Christian, totally unsure. Believe in the perfect life, the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus for your sins, call on His name and be saved. If you're a Christian, walk in the light, confess your sins, and as far as it depends on you, be in fellowship with your brothers and sisters. Jesus is one and we were baptized into His name, united in one wonderful family.