

1 Corinthians

Gospel-Centered Living in a Sin-Centered World

Section 1: Unity and the Gospel

The Danger of Division

1 Corinthians 1:10-17

Introduction

John 17:9–19 (NKJV) — 9, 11b, 21-23 “I pray for them. I do not pray for the world but for those whom You have given Me, for they are Yours ... **11** ... keep through Your name those whom You have given Me, that they may be one as We are ... **21** that they all may be one, as You, Father, are in Me, and I in You; that they also may be one in Us, that the world may believe that You sent Me. **22** And the glory which You gave Me I have given them, that they may be one just as We are one: **23** I in them, and You in Me; that they may be made perfect in one, and that the world may know that You have sent Me, and have loved them as You have loved Me.

Beginning here in chapter 1 verse 10 and going through the end of chapter 4, Paul specifically addresses the different ways that division rather than unity defines the church at Corinth.

It is not until chapter 3 that we actually see the reason for the divisions ...

1 Corinthians 3:1 (NKJV) — 1 And I, brethren, could not speak to you as to spiritual people but as to carnal, as to babes in Christ.

A Plea for Unity in the Church (10)

It must not go unnoticed that in verse 9, Paul says ...

1 Corinthians 1:9 (NKJV) — 9 God is faithful, by whom you were called into the fellowship of His Son, Jesus Christ our Lord.

The thought is this, because believes are in fellowship with the Lord, they should be one in fellowship with each other. Sadly though, for the church in Corinth and for many churches today, that is simply not the case.

Plead

Depending on context can carry a force from encourage to implore (beg ... please)

From the word paraclete – “to come along side”

Brethren

A term of endearment that reveals Paul’s heart

Name of our Lord Jesus Christ

Note what Akin and Merritt call “the full, majestic title of our Savior.” (17)

Lord: Deity and Authority

Jesus: Savior

Christ: Messiah

“To make an appeal in the name of Jesus is to evoke his person and character and to speak authoritatively as the Lord’s representative.”
(Taylor, 50-51)

Jesus is the one and only way a diverse people can be unified.

It has to be based on His word, His will, His ways.

ILLUS: Philippians 4:2 (NKJV) — 2 I implore Euodia and I implore Syntyche to be of the same mind in the Lord.

No divisions

This certainly isn’t an unqualified statement, because in Chapter 5 Paul will tell the church to remove the brother engaged in unrepentant immorality.

“Sometimes division must take place when the issue is moral or theological.” (Akin & Merritt, 16)

Greek term: *Schismata* from where we get the English terms schism and even scissors. Meaning “to tear or rip”

What Paul is referring to is unity not uniformity

Anything that “divide(s) because of pride.” (Wilson, 15)

As we read in John 17 – division of partiality, authority, or priority is that which undermines the gospel. Unity is so that the world may believe in and come to know Christ.

“Dividing into political parties may be the way of the world, but it should not be the practice of the people of God.” (Akin & Merritt, 17)

“The text reads literally, “that you speak the same thing and that you be joined together in the same mind and same outlook.” (Taylor, 51)

“Same”: pertaining to that which is identical to something.

Interesting is that this word can also be translated as him, them, her, it. With “him” being the most used.

Same Speak

Matthew 10:19b–20 (NKJV) — 19b ... For it will be given to you in that hour what you should speak; **20** for it is not you who speak, but the Spirit of your Father who speaks in you.

Same Mind

Philippians 2:5 (NKJV) — 5 Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus,

Same Judgment

“Opinion or Agreement” – NIV: Thought NLT:
Purpose, CSV: Conviction

“God is not confused or self-contradictory. He does not disagree with Himself and His Word does not disagree with itself ... there must be agreement in Him, in His will, in His Word.” (MacArthur, 27)

It is only this that allows to the church to be “perfectly joined.”

Perfectly Joined: a term that means “to mend.” Its application ranged from mending a net to setting a bone.

A Display of Partiality by the Church (11-12)

“What was in the minds of the church in verse 10 manifested ... out of their mouths in verse 11.” (Akin & Merritt, 19)

Declared

Chloe

It was not Chloe, but Chloe’s “household” that brought the news of “contention” within the church to Paul.

Household:

What we do know it they were proactive and protective of God’s church!

Contentions

“Strife” and “discord”

The term doesn't speak of just a disagreement through words but also that of actions.

Paul uses this same term in lists of vices

Romans 13:13 (NKJV) — 13 Let us walk properly, as in the day, not in revelry and drunkenness, not in lewdness and lust, not in strife and envy.

Galatians 5:19–20 (NKJV) — 19 Now the works of the flesh are evident, which are: adultery, fornication, uncleanness, lewdness, **20** idolatry, sorcery, hatred, contentions, jealousies, outbursts of wrath, selfish ambitions, dissensions, heresies,

ILLUS: Twitter – a keyboard was once a tool and is now used as a weapon

These dissensions were based on the leadership of the church.

“At various crucial junctions in our lives, God uses certain individuals in a very profound way. Although we recognize this is the work of God, we cannot help but be grateful for the individuals who so profoundly moves us at a pivotal time.” (Patterson, 28)

ILLUS: That is vastly different from how people often view the “Rock Star” preachers of today.

“Instead of emphasizing the message of the Word, the Corinthians emphasized the messenger.” (Wiersbe, 569)

This was exactly what was happening in the Church at Corinth.

I am of Paul

Minister to the gentile

I am of Apollos

Smart and gifted speaker

Acts 18:24 (NKJV) — 24 Now a certain Jew named Apollos, born at Alexandria, an eloquent man and mighty in the Scriptures, came to Ephesus.

I am of Cephas

Lead disciple and minister to the Jews

I am of Christ

“Here are some people who from no distinct group at all, but who in their own attempt to rise above the rest ... have fallen into their own brand of spiritual elitism.” (Fee, 58)

What is most interesting is that the contention in the church based on the leadership – was not from the leadership!

1 Corinthians 3:6 (NKJV) — 6 I planted, Apollos watered, but God gave the increase.

Peter is mentioned positively 4 times in 1 Corinthians!

ILLUS: Evangelical twitter

“What is clear is that a party spirit plagued the church in Corinth, and their boasting in men contradicted the very essence of the gospel. The root problem was pride.” (Taylor, 57)

“The source of all ... fighting is the same: man’s depraved, egotistic, selfish nature.” (MacArthur, 24)

James 4:1–2 (NKJV) — 1 Where do wars and fights come from among you? Do they not come from your desires for pleasure that war in your members? **2** You lust and do not have. You murder and covet and cannot obtain. You fight and war. Yet you do not have because you do not ask.

“Few things demoralize, discourage, and weaken a church as much as bickering, backbiting, and fighting among its members. And few things so effectively undermine its testimony before the world.” (MacArthur, 24)

1 Corinthians 4:6 (NKJV) — 6 Now these things, brethren, I have figuratively transferred to myself and Apollos for your sakes, that you may learn in us not to think beyond what is written, that none of you may be puffed up on behalf of one against the other.

A Question of Authority for the Church (13-16)

Is Christ divided

This is a strikingly vivid play on words. It moves beyond dissension to literal division. A gory picture

of each faction being those who rip apart pieces of Christ's body.

Matthew 12:25 (NKJV) — 25 But Jesus knew their thoughts, and said to them: "Every kingdom divided against itself is brought to desolation, and every city or house divided against itself will not stand.

Was Paul crucified for you

Paul's use of himself without mentioning either Apollos or Peter speaks to his humility and lack of rivalry.

Acts 4:12b (NKJV) — 12b ... for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved."

Were you baptized in the name of Paul

While verses 14-16 were not intended as foundational regarding the doctrine of baptism, they nonetheless teach us some very important doctrinal truths regarding baptism.

Crispus

Acts 18:8 (NKJV) — 8 Then Crispus, the ruler of the synagogue, believed on the Lord with all his household. And many of the Corinthians, hearing, believed and were baptized.

Gaius

Romans 16:23 (NKJV) — 23 Gaius, my host and the host of the whole church, greets you. Erastus, the treasurer of the city, greets you, and Quartus, a brother.

Stephanas

1 Corinthians 16:17 (NKJV) — 17 I am glad about the coming of Stephanas, Fortunatus, and Achaicus, for what was lacking on your part they supplied.

1 Corinthians 16:15 (NKJV) — 15 I urge you, brethren—you know the household of Stephanas, that it is the firstfruits of Achaia, and that they have devoted themselves to the ministry of the saints—

I don't know (remember) any others

Doctrinal Truths:

Baptism is distinct from the gospel.

As a result, baptism cannot save anyone.

“Baptism neither confers salvation nor confirms salvation. It is the first step of a saved person in a life of obedience. Were it any more than that Paul would have baptized everyone just to make sure.”

(Phillips, 34)

The name in whom one is baptized, not the person who baptized, is important.

“The person who performed the baptism is utterly insignificant.”
(Schreiner quoted by Akin & Merritt, 21)

A Reminder of Gospel Priority to the Church (17)

The church is called and commissioned to do many things, but regardless of the activity, the priority is to always be the gospel.

Baptism is not priority

“Paul was not minimizing baptism, but rather putting it into its proper perspective.” (Wiersbe, 570)

For a person in the first century to give their life to Christ and then refuse to be baptized would have been a non sequitur – a logical fallacy – absolutely unthought of and completely unheard of.

John 4:1–2 (NKJV) — 1 Therefore, when the Lord knew that the Pharisees had heard that Jesus made and baptized more disciples than John **2** (though Jesus Himself did not baptize, but His disciples),

ILLUS: Between one who sees the gospel and one who sees baptism as primary – if a plane were going down – what would their message be?

Romans 10:9 (NKJV) — 9 that if you confess with your mouth the Lord Jesus and believe in your heart that God has raised Him from the dead, you will be saved.

Preaching the gospel is

Not with human wisdom

“The phrase refers to the sophisticated and cultured speech of those of high status.”
(Taylor, 59)

This doesn't mean without preparation or doing one's best in presentation.

When it comes to the preaching of the gospel it is the message not the messenger that this important!

Cross no effect

Content matters!

Paul's mention of “wisdom” sets the stage for the next section.

Conclusion

Acts 2:46–47 (NKJV) — 46 So continuing daily with one accord in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, they ate their food with gladness and simplicity of heart, **47** praising God and having favor with all the people. And the Lord added to the church daily those who were being saved.

Ephesians 4:1–3 (NKJV) — **1** I, therefore, the prisoner of the Lord, beseech you to walk worthy of the calling with which you were called, **2** with all lowliness and gentleness, with longsuffering, bearing with one another in love, **3** endeavoring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.

“The source of unity is the Lord Himself. We are called to preserve it and we are able to destroy it, but we are not able to create it. The unity of the church is already established by the Holy Spirit. We can only keep it or harm it.” (MacArthur, 30)

ILLUS: Amy Carmichael – Irish missionary to India for 55 years and wrote 35 books.

“God hold us to that which drew us first, when the Cross was the attraction, and we wanted nothing else.” (Amy Carmichael quoted by Akin & Merritt, 22)

Not for selfish reason but for the glory of God and the priority of the gospel.