

A Divided Church

1 Corinthians 1:10-17

Introduction

Corinthians: We're back in Paul's letter to the church in Corinth. Remember, Corinth is this up-and-coming city, flush with cash, obsessed with the latest trends, sexually promiscuous, and cosmopolitan.

- Unfortunately, the church in Corinth is acting *just like the world* (why it's a little bit of a misnomer to "be like the early church"; the early church is full of broken people, just like us. Our hope is in Jesus, not the early church). "The church has been called to be set-apart (not set-against), distinct and living counter-culturally in order to love our neighbors" from our identity as citizens of God's kingdom, i.e., not of this world (Edwards).
- In the midst of the chaos of this ancient city, the Apostle Paul writes this gospel-saturated letter to give the church clarity and direction (something I think is desperately needed in our world today).
 - E.g., Jake breaking his leg and everyone gathering around and screaming. We need calm, confident, clear-headed helpers.
 - Paul is a reflection of the calm voice of the gospel in the midst of the chaos of the world. He continues to stand firm on the message of Christ and to focus on the faithfulness of God.
 - "Take whatever is broken in your spiritual life and apply the gospel to it" (Greear).

Divided World: The method of the world is "**divide and conquer**." Everyone picks a team (politics, sports, education, technology, geography, etc.). Republican vs. Democrat. Eagles vs. Cowboys. Friends vs. the Office. Mac vs. PC. Nike vs. Adidas.

- Not only do we feel the need to pick a "tribe" but then we demonize everyone else. You end up unable to see the good and others or the bad in your own.
- The church should be a place of **diverse unity** but, too often, it has just as many internal cliques as everyone else.
- This is the first problem that Paul addresses in 1 Corinthians.

¹⁰ I appeal to you, brothers, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that all of you agree, and that there be no divisions among you, but that you be united in the same mind and the same judgment. ¹¹ For it has been reported to me by Chloe's people that there is quarreling among you, my brothers. ¹² What I mean is that each one of you says, "I follow Paul," or "I follow Apollos," or "I follow Cephas," or "I follow Christ." ¹³ Is Christ divided? Was Paul crucified for you? Or were you baptized in the name of Paul? ¹⁴ I thank God that I baptized none of you except Crispus and Gaius, ¹⁵ so that no one may say that you were baptized in my name. ¹⁶ (I did baptize also the household of Stephanas. Beyond that, I do not know whether I baptized

anyone else.)¹⁷ For Christ did not send me to baptize but to preach the gospel, and not with words of eloquent wisdom, lest the cross of Christ be emptied of its power.¹

1. The Call to Unity (v. 10)

¹⁰ I appeal to you, brothers, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that all of you agree, and that there be no divisions among you, but that you be united in the same mind and the same judgment.

The Importance of Unity: Of all the things Jesus could pray before his betrayal, arrest, and crucifixion, he prayed for the church *to be one* (John 17, High Priestly Prayer).

- ¹⁴ I have given them your word, and the world has hated them because they are not of the world, just as I am not of the world. ¹⁵ I do not ask that you take them out of the world, but that you keep them from the evil one. ¹⁶ They are not of the world, just as I am not of the world. ¹⁷ Sanctify them in the truth; your word is truth. ¹⁸ As you sent me into the world, so I have sent them into the world. ¹⁹ And for their sake I consecrate myself, that they also may be sanctified in truth. ²⁰ “I do not ask for these only, but also for those who will believe in me through their word, ²¹ that they may all be one, just as you, Father, are in me, and I in you, that they also may be in us, so that the world may believe that you have sent me. ²² The glory that you have given me I have given to them, that they may be one even as we are one, ²³ I in them and you in me, that they may become perfectly one, so that the world may know that you sent me and loved them even as you loved me (Jn 17:14-23). **Do you and I value unity this much?**

When Paul appeals to them as *siblings* (that’s what brothers means), he does it not only out of *love* but in accordance with the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.

- That’s what it means to do something “in Jesus’ name.” You can’t just tack it onto the end of a prayer and think that it magically transforms something bad good (“bless this food to our bodies, in Jesus’ name” doesn’t magically erase the fat content or calories from your meal). When we say “in Jesus’ name” it *should mean* according to his will and design.
- That what Paul is basing his appeal for unity on, the *desire of Jesus*.
 - We saw this in our study of Philipppians. One of the most pressing dangers for the church throughout time is **division** (σχίσματα). This is us, “schisms rent asunder” (*The Church’s One Foundation*). We are a divided church (historically and presently). We have hundreds of denominations (dozens of Baptist denominations alone), not mention dozens of Baptist denominations (denominations are good and necessary in our world). **But the way we relate to one another is often as competitors rather than partners.**

¹ ¹⁰ Παρακαλώ δὲ ὑμᾶς, ἀδελφοί, διὰ τοῦ ὀνόματος τοῦ κυρίου ἡμῶν Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ, ἵνα τὸ αὐτὸ λέγητε πάντες καὶ μὴ ἦ ἐν ὑμῖν σχίσματα, ἧτε δὲ κατηρητισμένοι ἐν τῷ αὐτῷ νοί καὶ ἐν τῇ αὐτῇ γνώμῃ. ¹¹ ἐδηλώθη γάρ μοι περὶ ὑμῶν, ἀδελφοί μου, ὑπὸ τῶν Χλόης ὅτι ἐριδες ἐν ὑμῖν εἰσιν. ¹² λέγω δὲ τοῦτο ὅτι ἕκαστος ὑμῶν λέγει, Ἐγὼ μὲν εἰμι Παύλου, Ἐγὼ δὲ Ἀπολλῶ, Ἐγὼ δὲ Κηφᾶ, Ἐγὼ δὲ Χριστοῦ. ¹³ μεμέρισται ὁ Χριστός; μὴ Παῦλος ἐσταυρώθη ὑπὲρ ὑμῶν, ἢ εἰς τὸ ὄνομα Παύλου ἐβαπτίσθητε; ¹⁴ εὐχαριστῶ [τῷ θεῷ] ὅτι οὐδένα ὑμῶν ἐβάπτισα εἰ μὴ Κρίσπον καὶ Γάϊον, ¹⁵ ἵνα μὴ τις εἴπη ὅτι εἰς τὸ ἕμὸν ὄνομα ἐβαπτίσθητε. ¹⁶ ἐβάπτισα δὲ καὶ τὸν Στεφανᾶ οἶκον, λοιπὸν οὐκ οἶδα εἴ τινα ἄλλον ἐβάπτισα. ¹⁷ οὐ γὰρ ἀπέστειλὲν με Χριστὸς βαπτίζειν ἀλλὰ εὐαγγελίζεσθαι, οὐκ ἐν σοφίᾳ λόγου, ἵνα μὴ κενωθῇ ὁ σταυρὸς τοῦ Χριστοῦ.

- **Explaining the division** is easy (the fact of division). **Convincing us to unify** is hard. I'm more interested in unity on the personal, local level. If we can't be unified here, at Redemption Heights Church, then we don't stand much of a chance anywhere else.
- I really think the place to live this is "here" (*contra* Twitter ministry). The healthiest Christians I see are those focused on their local church rather than "national" issues.
 - It can be quite disappointing how many people will walk away from church over small (at least relatively small in light of eternity) disagreements. It ought not be (paint color oppressed her spirit).

Ditches of Division:

- Now, there are **ditches** on both sides of the **path of unity**. **(1)** On one side is **relativism** or **empty tolerance**. Paul is not calling them to abandon their theology or drop the gospel in the name of unity. He is calling them to unify around the gospel of Jesus Christ (J.D.'s story about a statement on evangelism that left out a call to repentance and the "evangel"). Our unity must flow into and out of the truth of the gospel. **(2)** On the other side is the danger of **uniformity**. Unity is based on the gospel, not other external or superficial things. The beauty of gospel community is that we are united in Christ *but not the same* (the world understands "birds of a feather flock together").
 - We don't paper over our differences, we celebrate them. We don't need or want a bunch of people that are the same, we want want a bunch of *different* people that are *united*.
 - But this is hard. It's sometimes feels easier to demands conformity to my preferences than learn to appreciate and grow from the unique perspectives of others.
- Only the gospel can give us a stable and secure standard of unity that allows us to celebrate diversity.
 - And gospel united diversity is important to our holy living. Building a diverse church is difficult but important because homogenous cultures (and churches) hide homogenous sins.
 - We think that the way "we" do things is the right way and it isn't until other brothers and sisters, in love, show us another way that we can see what we're missing.
 - We like people *like* us because we *like* us. "Hey, you're just like me, you're awesome" ("He looks like you." "He sounds handsome").

Broken and Healed: but that you be united (united, perfectly joined together, made complete). "Restoring to a prior condition, the putting in order of something that has fallen into disarray" (Hays). The image that comes to mind is setting a bone. When it is broken, if you don't set it, it will heal crooked (e.g., Great Granny Turner). You could damage it permanently. And the fix is sometimes *quite* painful but it is worth it. The surgery is necessary for the healing. The problem of division is not easily resolved but it is necessary to fix so that the body of Christ can function to its full potential.

2. The Danger of Division (vv. 11–16)

A Report: Why does Paul bring up the need for unity, because he has heard about the divisions in the church. ¹¹ For it has been reported to me by Chloe's people that there is quarreling among you, my brothers.

- What report does he hear? That they're thriving in their faith, that they're sharing the gospel? No. He hears that they are fighting. **This is their reputation.** **What is our reputation?**
- If unity is an often overlooked central command of Christ. "Quarreling" is an often overlooked sin. Paul lists it in his sin lists in Rom 1:29, 13:13; 2 Cor 12:20; Gal 5:20; Phil 1:15; 1 Tim 6:4; Tit 3:9.
 - The word "quarrel" (ἔριδος) usually described as a verbal type of conflict from rivalry. It's "always saying bad things about one another, never having a good word to say to one another" (L&N).

Tribalism: Paul explains in hyperbolic fashion what is at the core of their division – tribalism built around preferred leadership personalities. ¹² What I mean is that each one of you says, "I follow Paul," or "I follow Apollos," or "I follow Cephas," or "I follow Christ."

- "The were called into [unity] in Christ but instead have divided up the body of Christ into competing cliques" (Garland).

Team Paul: founding apostle, planter, original, "traditional," studied simplicity. Team Paul is complaining that these other groups are not missional enough.

Team Apollos: eloquent and educated, well-versed in Scripture, rhetorical prowess (can *preach*). Team Apollos is complaining that the other groups are not good enough preachers.

Team Cephas: Peter, the head of the Jewish faction (tough in a predominantly Gentile church), those fixated on their Jewish roots. Team Cephas always wants more Levitical cross references and a *shofar*.

Team Christ: *Seems like the best team (and it is)*, but really this is the faux spiritual ones. It's a hyperspiritual power play. "I don't need any of those guys, it's just me and my Bible. I know best, I don't need a leader. We're the ones who *really* belong to Christ (but we're not so sure about you).

Factionalism: Paul is mocking them as if they are children "belonging" to Paul or Apollos. The have a tribe mentality.

- We need leaders, leaders are Biblical and good, but we don't follow messengers, we follow the message.
 - These people were trying to get power in the church by connecting their lives to a personality (something none of these other leaders wanted; certainly not Paul)
- Paul is good. Apollos is good. Peter is good. Christ is good (duh). They aren't against each other. There is truth from each of them. They are meant to work *together*, to build up, not divide.
 - **You don't need someone to lose for you to win.**
- I see this in churches today. We aren't competitors, we are partners.

- People have their favorite Youtube preacher or worship leader. Sometimes you wonder if they worship the messenger more than the message.

Division: ¹³ Is Christ divided? These Corinthians have divided the body of Christ. He destroyed their partisan spirit with three simple questions.

- It is crazy to exalt one leader over another when they are all in Christ
 - How could you divide the body of Christ? Is Christ divided and only given to some? Has Christ been divided and parceled out?
 - “No Christian or group of Christians possesses a monopoly of the presence, wisdom or power of Christ” (Thiselton)

I see this sort of **division** even in the way people approach the NT. Some talk about the Gospels as if they are varsity Christianity and Paul and other letters are j.v. Even though the Gospels are written by Apostles (just like Paul) and inspired by the same Holy Spirit.

- It’s like pitting Jesus against the OT (which Jesus himself says is inspired by God). The earliest Christians understood that all of Scripture was God-breathed and recognized Peter and Paul to be Scripture alongside the Gospels.
 - When we divide the Gospels from Paul it is historically naive, canonically incomplete, and often comes from a misguided attempt to take the parts of God’s teaching that we like and avoid the parts we don’t. It flies in the face of the self-authenticating, Spirit-directed nature of Scripture.
- The apostles were in a better position to understand the context for Jesus’s preaching, sayings and commands than we are. They were Jesus’s friends and students, and they knew Aramaic and Greek better than anyone alive today. It would be foolhardy to simply subordinate what they wrote about Jesus to our interpretation of Jesus’s words.
- The consistent witness of the early church is that what Scripture says, God says and Paul’s letters and the rest of the NT are Scripture.
 - We dare not divide Paul from Christ. Paul is a servant, an apostle of Christ.

Crucified: Was Paul crucified for you? None of these leaders died for their sins. Why do we worship the servants (celebrity preachers) rather than the master? Every human leader (even the best ones) will disappoint you. Do you think past leaders were that much better or do we just have the internet and more cameras now? The great shepherd will never disappoint you. Jesus will never let you down.

Baptism: Or were you baptized in the name of Paul? Baptism is a sign of our identity. It is a picture of our death (into the water), burial (under the water), and resurrection (out of the water). It is a picture of our entrance into the people of Jesus.

- So we baptize “in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit” because that is who we belong to. It is a sign of ownership and possession.
- But the Corinthians seem to be more concerned with the *baptizer* than the *baptism*. They cared more about the *messenger* than the *message*.

Paul’s Humility: Paul continues to live what he teaches. He is not interested in consolidating power, but rather expanding the KoG. ¹⁴ I thank God that I baptized none of you except Crispus

and Gaius, ¹⁵ so that no one may say that you were baptized in my name. ¹⁶ (I did baptize also the household of Stephanas. Beyond that, I do not know whether I baptized anyone else.)

- Baptism doesn't require "apostolic hands" (it's not a mystical ritual).
- He says he doesn't even remember all who he baptized (we thank God but we don't keep score).
- In our celebrity obsessed, tribalistic, ego-driven culture, there is something beautiful about a leader who is not seeking glory (e.g., Marco Smith, Herb Hathaway, Jim Barr, etc.). It wasn't about them.

Preferences are fine but don't put your hope in a human leader.

- It shouldn't matter who's preaching (James or Mark) as much as *what* they are preaching.
 - Consumeristic culture perverts how we think of church. What made the sermon good (funny, engaging, etc.)? I'm not saying it should be boring. But too often we worry more about the musicianship of the band and the temperature of the sanctuary than the content of the message. Do we treat the church more like the cinema?

3. The Power of the Cross (v. 17)

Message: ¹⁷ For Christ did not send me to baptize but to preach the gospel, and not with words of eloquent wisdom, lest the cross of Christ be emptied of its power.

- We don't follow a messenger, we follow a message.
- What you catch 'em with, you keep 'em with.
 - If you catch them with clever preaching, dynamic worship, manipulation, or false promises then, as soon as that changes, or their preferences change, then you lose them.
- I'm not saying good preaching or good music is unimportant but we should always prioritize **substance over style, reality over rhetoric, being good more than sounding good**. I want what we have at RH to have true, real, power and weight (not just spiritual slight of hand).
 - "We want to be part of something that can only be explained by the power of God" (Barley).
 - If we're not careful, we can try to do with our human means what is meant to occur through the power of the gospel. We don't want superficial moments we want lifelong change. I love what we have because it is real, it is of God.
- Be careful not to manipulate or cajole

Conclusion:

Division in the church weakens us by placing our hope on personalities and methods rather than the power of God. It teaches us to depend on the wrong thing. We need to work hard to unify around the gospel rather than our preferences. We need Jesus at the center of it all.

- That requires we value him above all. We have to trust his plan and his methods and we have to love his people. The centrality of the gospel.