

Text: 1 Corinthians 1:10-17

Title: Unity out of Disunity

Truth: The church must endeavor to maintain its unity around Christ.

Date/Location: Sunday January 26, 2020 at FBC

Introduction

We need to begin with a reading of the passage and a review of the basic facts that we can extricate from it:

1. There are divisions in the church. These were reported to Paul by someone who belonged to the household of Chloe. I find it interesting that Paul did not hide the name of the family who reported the problem.
2. The divisions are factions in that there were several groups of believers in the church, each group favoring one or the other gospel ministers.
3. Instead of divisions, the apostle wanted the church to be united in speech, mind, and judgment.
4. Paul had not baptized many of the people in Corinth.
5. The emphasis of Paul's apostolic ministry was to plainly preach the gospel and honor Christ as much as possible in doing so.
6. Paul pleads with the believers to straighten out their problems.

I. The Divisions in Corinth, v. 11-13

- A. At least some, if not many, of the believers were fans of either Paul, Apollos, Peter, or Christ himself. Why exactly they are favoring one over the other is not stated explicitly, though it may be simply that these men were famous. We can make other Scripturally-educated guesses as well:
 1. Paul was "the apostle to the Gentiles," who had been a prominent Jew. So perhaps Gentile converts saw him as their man. But he was not too good in terms of his speechmaking (2 Cor. 10:10).
 2. Apollos was a knowledgeable and excellent orator, perfectly fitted to the spirit of the times (Acts 18:24).
 3. Peter was the head of the apostolic band (so people thought) and was very close to Christ. Although he had stumbled a few times, he was still the most prominent of the apostles.
 4. Last but not least, of course, Christ Himself is better than all those! But if you have a superiority complex about yourself because you follow Christ, that itself is not good. You can be all wrong about being right.

- B. The problem of factions was serious enough that news traveled to Paul through some of the believers in the church. Evidently there was a fifth group that was concerned for the church to maintain its moorings in the gospel and to eliminate the factions. Often in a failing church there is a group of people who want to remain faithful. They might not know exactly how or what to do, but they are there. Listen to their concerns!
- C. We have the same kind of divisions today in evangelicalism. “I follow **MacArthur**. His teaching is the most Biblical. If you disagree with some point he makes, then you are way off.” “I follow **Piper** because he is reformed and he is passionate in his preaching of God’s glory.” “I follow **Mohler** because he is culturally relevant and runs a large, conservative seminary.” “I follow **Dever** because he has the doctrine of the church just right.” “I follow **Calvin** because his system is most logical, most Biblical, and most glorifying to God.” “I am a **Biblicist**, so I have risen above all the petty party politics of these other factions.” “I use only the **KJV authorized version** because only it is perfectly faithful to God’s word. If you don’t use it, you are unfaithful to God.” And so on...
- D. To answer Paul’s rhetorical questions in v. 13: Christ is not divided. Paul was not crucified for them. They were not baptized in the name of Paul.

II. Paul’s Exhortation for the Church: Unity, v. 10

- A. His “pleading” was not “begging.” He is asking and even demanding from a position of authority as a direct representative of Jesus Christ (1 Cor. 14:37). It is more exhortation and urging than appealing. In other words, removing divisions and all that is associated with them is a command, not an option. Our one Lord is worthy of a united church. The testimony of His name deserves that we be united around Him, because the church is about **Him**, not about us or our little factions.
- B. The unity of which he speaks is specifically within the local assembly. He is not talking about global or “ecumenical” unity here, although there is an implication for that. If all local churches *were* united around the right interpretation of Scripture, they would naturally be united with one another. No extra effort would be necessary to bring about a “forced” or superficial unity.
- C. The unity Paul enjoins is explained in four phrases:
 1. Speak the same thing. The speech is an external manifestation of an inner reality. It is not merely a “pasted on smile.” It is speaking out of genuine belief that is in agreement with one another.

2. No divisions. This is the word “schisms.” It means tears or cracks. These are not minor, but are seriously damaging to the church, especially if you “live” at the boundaries of one of the tears (a friendship or a family relationship has been damaged).
 3. Perfectly joined together in the same mind. When there are rips, as in a net, you mend the net to put it back together. So it is with torn minds. The mind has to do with knowledge and belief and convictions. These convictions encompass our priorities, values, doctrines, and philosophies. They drive how we think and what we do.
 4. Perfectly joined together in the same judgment. These convictions also underlie how we decide things—not just the process of decision making, but the actual decisions themselves.
- D. Repentance would be necessary among those in the factions.

III. About Baptism in Gospel Ministry, v. 14-17

- A. Evidently, Paul’s practice was to baptize very few, if any, and allow the new believers—perhaps those with leadership potential—to take up the task of baptizing the other new converts. Or, perhaps, Paul had waited for some time to pass so that new converts could be instructed more fully in Christian doctrine before being baptized. It could be a combination of the above reasoning.
- B. Keeping his baptisms to a minimum was obviously a wise approach, because some Corinthians got the false idea that if Paul baptized them they were better than if someone else did. They thought that Paul was baptizing into his own name instead of the name of Christ. His approach largely avoided the obvious one-upmanship that would come from people-centered Christians who have lost sight of the focus of their faith—Christ Himself.
- C. The ones Paul did baptize were Crispus and Gaius, and the household of Stephanas. Recall that **Crispus** had been a prominent Jewish leader, “ruler of the synagogue” but was saved (Acts 18:8). **Gaius** was a Macedonian as well, but began to travel with Paul as we see in Acts 19:29. He was different than the Gaius of Derbe (Acts 20:4), but probably the same as the Gaius of Romans 16:23 who hosted Paul while he wrote the letter to the Roman church. I do not know if he is the same as the Gaius of 3 John 1. **Stephanas** and his household were of note in the church, for we see them come up again in 1 Cor. 16:15-17, mentioned as ones who have devoted themselves to Christian ministry.

- D. The fact that he does not recall any other baptisms show where Paul's focus was. I can sympathize in the sense that I have to keep records to know who I have baptized. Even then, I don't remember sometimes—"Did I baptize that person?" The point is not that baptism is unimportant. Rather, *who* officiates is not the most significant. What is important is *that* the believer testifies of his or her faith in Christ. The importance and joy of the testimony of Christ in a person's life so far overshadows the person who helps dunk them that the officiant fades into obscurity.
- E. Paul's purpose was not to be an oratorical superstar or otherwise to draw attention to himself, because that would lessen the glory of the cross of Christ. Paul was not trying to gain a following for himself. Paul believed himself to be a pointer to Christ (1 Cor. 11:1). That is all a minister of the gospel ever is. To be sure, that is a glorious ministry, but it is still just pointing. The Lord and His glory is where we want Christians' focus to be.
- F. The idea of the wisdom of words will come up again in the letter. I think we can understand this fairly easily, though from a slightly different perspective than the Corinthians.
1. History indicates that the Greeks were enamored with speech and rhetoric and logic and philosophy. Someone who could use such things in a persuasive manner would gain a hearing and draw people to himself. Paul was interested in drawing people to someone else, so a simple, non-fancy style would better suit his ministry. Anyway, the message of the cross didn't meet the world's expectations for a logical or powerful message. It is not a "self-improvement" kind of thing because it points out human weakness and inability to save ourselves.
 2. In the modern era also, people can think that if they come up with just the right persuasive words, or logic, or scientific arguments, or apologetic method, or psychological manipulation, or "miracles" they can more effectively win people to Christ. But those things empty the cross of its power. It is Christ and the message of the cross that is the power of God for salvation—not our defense of the faith *per se*—that convinces people to be saved. It is the Spirit's work on the mind and conscience of a person that we need, not better speech. God uses the most "halting" speech as long as its content is Christ. The power of the gospel is in the cross, not in the clever speech of the messenger.

Conclusion

Paul's exhortation is for the believers to be perfectly united in Christian belief and practice. We too have some work yet to do on this! MAP