

Divisions Deny Christ

1Cor 1.10-17

PRAYER

Please open your bibles to 1Corinthians, chapter 1. We'll be reading verses 10-17.

Now I exhort you, brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you all agree, and that there be no divisions among you, but that you be made complete in the same mind and in the same judgment. ¹¹ For I have been informed concerning you, my brethren, by Chloe's *people*, that there are quarrels among you. ¹² Now I mean this: that each one of you is saying, "I am of Paul," and "I of Apollos," and "I of Cephas," and "I of Christ." ¹³ Has Christ been divided? *Paul* was not crucified for you, was he? 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 would say you were baptized in my name. ¹⁶ Now I did baptize also the household of Stephanas; beyond that, I do not know whether I baptized any other. ¹⁷ For *Christ did not send me to baptize, but to preach the gospel*, not in cleverness of speech, so that the cross of Christ would not be made void. ^{NAU}

The key phrase in this passage, I think, is the first part of verse 13. *Look at that.* Paul asks the crucial and deciding question when it comes to ending divisions in the church: "*Has Christ been divided?*" Having divisions is like saying that Christ himself could be divided – as if he and the Father were not one, and as if we were not one WITH them as God's children. It's ABSURD! It's CRAZY!

And yet Scripture shows, and Church History affirms, that we are indeed divided. If only that were IM-POSSIBLE! *Because unless our divisions are warranted, they belie the truth that we have One Spirit.* OK. When are divisions *not* warranted? They're not warranted when we choose to break fellowship over NON-essentials. Or as we see here, when one person is exalted in our eyes above all others, so that we follow *him* instead of *Christ*. These sorts of divisions deny the Oneness of the Godhead whom we represent. They indicate we have rejected Christ's prayer for us on the eve of his crucifixion. He prayed that we might be one even as the Father and Son are One (John 17.22). *Unity is an essential of the faith.*

Now, *not all divisions are evil.* Sometimes, there's a **good reason** to **divide**. If *another* gospel is being preached by someone, then we have no biblical fellowship with that person, for light has no fellowship with darkness. (2Cor 6.14) Paul told the Romans to shun those who create rifts and stumbling blocks that are contrary to

sound doctrine (Rom 16:17). But there are *other* divisions, say like those between the Baptists and Presbyterians, which concern *non-essentials*, like the mode of baptism. Should they dunk or sprinkle? They are divided in practice, but they are **not** divided in faith. They don't break fellowship over this issue.

At Corinth, however, there IS a break in fellowship, and it's over *non-essentials*. So several questions come to mind as we look at this passage.

- HOW are these divisions affecting their calling – their *mission*?
- WHY are these believers at Corinth divided? Is it warranted or not? and
- WHAT does Paul say they should do about it? How will they mend the rift?

I. How do divisions affect our calling?

In Matt 12.25, Jesus says, “Every kingdom divided against itself is *laid waste*, and NO city or house divided against itself will stand.”^{ESV} So unwarranted divisions lay waste the Church; they destroy our ability to do our assigned work. But **how?**

First, The world finds it hard to receive the Gospel when it thinks we don't speak with **one voice**, or when we don't proclaim **one gospel**; or when we disagree as to **what Christ accomplished**, or if we argue publicly about **Scripture interpretation**. Thus **division denies the absolute truth of Christ in the Gospel.**

Second, how can we know who WE are if we don't know who *Christ* is? This is a danger for the Corinthians because of their identity crisis. They're divided about the *person of Jesus Christ*. **They misperceive who they are in relation to him as their Head**. Even though they understand *what he did for them*; and even though they know *God's Word*, that knowledge alone didn't prevent divisions! So Paul asks, “**IS CHRIST DIVIDED??**” If not, then how can THEY be? They are united **under Christ!** Thus, **division denies the headship of Christ in the Church.**

Third, Christ says **NO house divided against itself will stand!** It CANNOT stand. It cannot withstand the attacks of the enemy, nor avoid the snares of this world. It cannot defend its own *barricades*, much less launch an assault on the *Gates of Hell!* Instead, “**it FALLS!**” Lk 12.52. When the church is no longer a means to end, and it becomes an end in itself, and a difference of opinion becomes an excuse to break fellowship, we have fallen into Satan's snare. Our testimony of Christ's love and Lordship becomes a lie. **Division denies the working of Christ in our lives.**

II. Why are the Corinthians divided? They've been debating **Scripture application**. How does the truth of the Gospel play out in their daily lives? How does it govern

life together in the church? Some think their liberty in Christ, and their release from the penalty of sin, means they can do whatever they want. That's why others wrote Paul asking for his guidance in particular areas of conduct. They needed a referee to help them separate *truth* from *opinion*. **That's good!** However, it says "There are **quarrels among you**" **That's bad!** Worse, those quarrels are being driven by a preference for one personality over another.

The Corinthians have become followers of men instead of followers of Christ; they identify themselves with a man instead of identifying with Christ. They want to be taught by a man, instead of being taught by Christ. They want the authority of a man, instead of the authority of Christ. Here's the thing though: **Men have no authority in themselves.** The ONLY authority they have is the authority of Jesus Christ. Jesus said, "you are not to be called rabbi, for you have one teacher, and you are all brothers...¹⁰ Neither be called instructors, for you have one instructor, the Christ." (Mat 23:8, 10^{ESV}) As for authority, Jesus said "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to **ME**." (Mat 28:18^{ESV})

THAT'S the context of this passage. *Do men teach us, or only Christ? Do men have authority, or only Christ?* Listen to the prophet Jeremiah.

But this is the covenant I will make with the house of Israel after those days, declares the LORD: I will put my law within them, and I will write it on their hearts. I will be their God, and they shall be my people. No longer shall each one teach his neighbor, and each his brother, saying, 'Know the LORD,' for they shall ALL know me, from the least of them to the greatest..." (Jer 31:33-34^{ESV})

OK. But how do we come to know God if it's not from other men, and not from our own feelings and imaginations? The answer is that God reveals himself in **Scripture**. God's PROMISES and HIS COVENANT are found in the Bible and nowhere else. We can't discover them in the creation. That only reveals God's *existence* and some of his general attributes; but God's **written Word** reveals God's unconditional love, His unchanging attributes, His unmerited grace, His unsolicited promises, and His inexorable will concerning us!

THAT is our authority. Our knowledge of God and His commandments, of Christ and his work, of the Church and its workings, all come from God's Word.

To seek our fame, our glory, our knowledge, and our authority from a man instead of from God himself is nothing less than **idolatry**. It was a status symbol for these Corinthians to be **baptized** by someone of renown, someone with a famous name –

they liked being *taught* by a famous man, as if they were *not* being taught by GOD. They have mistaken the lips of men who are speaking the words of God, for the voice of God himself. That's *idolatry*. It's a temptation for every one of us to do that – to exalt a man simply because God gifted him in some way; or we may be tempted to exalt ourselves over someone else, thinking we're somehow special and that we deserve everyone's attention.

Paul asks later on in this letter, “[What do you have that you were not given? Why then do you boast?](#)” (1Cor 4.7) If we must not boast in ourselves, then why would we boast in another believer? We mention men's names and writings as if they were modern *prophets*. We quote some of them better and more often than we quote God's Word! They would be appalled at the thought!

It isn't wrong to admire mighty men and women of God. It isn't wrong to speak highly of them or to quote them. It isn't wrong to use their names, or refer to their writings. But remember that if they say something valuable, it is *only* valuable *because God said it*. To put what God has said in a memorable form for other believers, is not to say something *different* than what God has said, nor is it a *substitute* for what God said. A preacher's ability to break the bread of life for fellow believers is a gift that was given to him for the good of the Body. It's his duty to exercise that gift. It's *precious* to the body of Christ; it's *necessary* for our sustenance and equipping. But it is *never* a cause for exaltation, idolatry, or **division**. *There the gifted servant stands; he can do no other*. Receive his offering as if from the hand of God. See his good deeds, and praise your Father in heaven. Don't cause that person to stumble by pushing him toward vanity.

But for the Corinthians, it's all about vanity and success. It's all about *competing* and *comparing*. It's all about having the winning *team*, with a winning *captain*. Every two years, Corinth hosted the *Isthmian Games* – a form of Olympics. Men and women competitors came from around the world to win prizes in athletics or in the arts. For weeks, the city would swell with visitors and the money would flow. Whoever made the most money, or received the highest prize, or gained the largest following, became the talk of the town and then of the world. ***That mindset found its way into the church***. Believers there were competing with each other.

III. How will they mend these prideful divisions?

Let's unpack this passage in a little more detail to see if we can discover the answer to that question.

Verse 10. Now I exhort you, brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, – **Mending begins by submitting to the authority of Christ.** To say something in the name of Christ is to say you are speaking with the *authority* of Christ. This may sound like a plea, or a strong request, but it's not. If it was a request, Paul wouldn't speak in Jesus' *name*. And the word for "exhort" here can also mean to summon someone to duty. Paul is giving an *order* from Christ, but he's giving it lovingly, to those he calls "brothers." Yet, what Paul is about to ask is not an option, for all the reasons I just gave you. What does Paul ask of them?

that you all agree and that there be no divisions among you, but that you be made complete in the same mind and in the same judgment. – The word "agree" is a little misleading. The **King James** says "that you all say the same." That's a better way to put it. They are to speak with one voice, from the same mind, with the same judgment – *because the one mind and the one judgment are Christ's*, just as the *knowledge* and *speech* are Christ's. And Christ is NOT divided. Paul isn't just saying, "STOP THAT!" or "Agree to disagree." He's telling them to submit to Christ, to have no divisions of mind, so there will be no divisions of body. God's Word has ONE truth. There's something else going on here in the wording. That word for "**divisions**" is interesting. It can also refer to **tearing** a piece of fabric. And the word for "**made complete**" can also refer to **mending** a piece of fabric.

I think Paul may be saying that the fabric of their fellowship has been torn; it must be mended and made whole again. I also think he may be hinting at Christ's tunic. John said that Christ's tunic *was a single garment without seams, woven from the top down*. (Joh 19.23) That's quite an image for the Church. Paul is telling them it's time to stop tearing the fabric, and to begin mending it. They must be of one mind to do that. How? They can *choose* to say one thing. They can *choose* to submit to God's Word as their only authority, instead of treating God's Church like a political convention. And lastly, they can *choose* to stop breaking fellowship over non-essentials. ***In effect, they must stop dressing Christ's body in torn rags.***

Look at verse 12 ...EACH one of you is saying, "I am of Paul," and "I of Apollos," and "I of Cephas," (Peter) and "I of Christ." – There is no "thus saith the Lord" here at all. It's like an election primary, and they're all wearing party buttons. "Cephas, Cephas, he's our man..." Put me down for what HE said. I can't *say* it myself. I haven't *studied* it myself. I haven't come to any *conclusions* myself. I have no *convictions* about it myself. ***He'll speak for me, instead of I'll speak for Christ.*** We're more than willing to say "me too" because we never seem to find the time or the energy to discover the answers for ourselves. So we must believe whatever we're told by someone else. **We don't ask God for answers;** we ask

other men who have asked God; at least we hope so. We don't talk to God directly in prayer, and we don't listen to God directly through His Word. Thus we live our Christian lives second-hand, by proxy, riding another's coat-tails. And we lament that we don't know God – that we feel distant, and abandoned. *Really...*

So Paul *instructs* the Corinthians, even as he *chastises* them. **He points them back to Christ** *as every good preacher should do*. He brings them back to the cross.

Verse 13 Paul was not crucified for you, was he? – In other words, do you mistake ME for Christ on the cross? **Or were you baptized in the name of Paul?** Do you mistake MY name for the name of Christ, the name which is above all names, the one by which you were adopted into the kingdom of God as sons and daughters? Then Paul names Crispus, Gaius, and Stephanus, who were all good servants, men who understood what it means to be a servant of all. But as for the others, Paul is grateful he didn't baptize any of them, lest they shame him this way.

Verse 17 For Christ did not send me to baptize, but to preach the gospel, – Let's take some time to look at this, because Paul is speaking about what we're all called to do. We baptized three believers last week. Our calling was not just to baptize them, but to make disciples of them. How are we doing that? We proclaimed the Gospel to them, and we instructed them in their obedience to Christ. And so their baptism was an outward response to an inward work of faith, a visible symbol of an invisible spiritual birth. It wasn't an end in itself. It was a means of showing Christ's work in them, and celebrating their new birth.

Grace is not an end in itself; it is given to accomplish something in those who receive it. Christ's authority is not an end in itself either. It's given to accomplish something. WHY has all authority been given to Christ? Matt 28. The Great Commission.

All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore, because I have all authority, I am sending you into the world with my authority to do my work in my name. Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit,²⁰ teaching them to observe all that I commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age.

This is Paul's charge and it is OUR charge – our *calling*. Paul sees preaching the gospel as his *first order of business*. It doesn't matter who baptized someone. It matters that they have come to Christ for salvation, that they are wholly *his*.

Therefore, the *second order of business* is dying to sin, and rising to newness of life. That's why Paul emphasizes baptism here. The sign of *effective* grace, of coming to Christ, is baptism. Then comes the process of instruction that equips these new believers to move on from the milk of salvation – grasping what Christ accomplished on the cross – to the meat of discipleship, which is *responsive obedience*. Strict obedience is not for the immature or uninstructed. It is for mature believers – hearty souls who have counted the cost and willingly sacrifice themselves for their calling. They are men and women of *force*, who take hold of the kingdom *forcefully* – they are not and cannot be wimps if they are to be more than conquerors. They are armed and equipped for battle. They know who they are, what Christ has done, who they represent, and *who has been given authority over all things*. They don't live in fear and constant anxiety, for Christ is Lord over all. All things have been placed under him, including *them*. They are transformed in their minds, transformed in their purposes, and transformed in their conduct.

Until we clearly understand what Christ did for us, there can be no transformation. There can be no moving on from **milk** to **meat**. For the Corinthians, their soil was prepared by God. The gospel was preached by Paul. The seed was planted by the Spirit. The ground was watered and fed by the Church. The seed then grew into a tender shoot. **NOW comes the turning point – the mark of every true believer.** Each seed must continue to grow and mature until it produces the fruit of the Spirit. *Paul understood that.* He was **not sent to baptize, but to preach the Gospel.**

Preaching the Gospel implants the life of Christ in a regenerated soul; that's someone who has been prepared by the Spirit to receive the Gospel. *Baptism* comes later as a visible sign of what cannot YET be seen. **But, in time it will be seen in the fruit of the Spirit and in willing obedience.** And so Paul has **not been sent to baptize, but to preach.**

Preaching the Gospel also nurtures that seedling so it grows straight and strong, upward towards the light of our heavenly Father. The Gospel disciplines believers in the faith. It sets the boundaries of our conduct, even as it proclaims our liberty in Christ. Paul knows that. He has **not been sent to baptize, but to preach.**

Paul doesn't confuse the joy of baptism with the work of Gospel preaching. Paul has been called to the *work* – he has been called to *preach*. **He will not have the sign without first having the thing signified.** He's seeking *disciples* not *baptizees* – he preaches the Gospel to draw out *students* and *followers* of Jesus Christ: living, breathing representations of the Lord Jesus Christ – those who are coming to know

Christ, coming to know God, coming into fellowship with the Father and the Son, by the work of the Holy Spirit. The Gospel must be firmly planted in the soil of their soul *so that it produces fruit*. Paul *preaches* to produce fruit.

Jesus said, ^{ESV} **John 15:8** *By this my Father is glorified, that you bear much fruit and so prove to be my disciples*. As you heard last time, the mystery is not only *them in Christ* (to be saved), but also *Christ in them* (to be sanctified).

And so two separate but related questions must be asked of us concerning our salvation. The first question is, *what has Christ done for you?* **Faith** is how we acknowledge what Christ has done *for us*. The second question is, *what has Christ worked in you?* A **changing life** is how we display Christ's work *in us*. Like baptism, it is the outward sign of the inward change – it's a *process*, not an event. The fancy term we give it is "*progressive sanctification*." Sound disciples, sound recipients of the Gospel, those who are *rooted in Christ*, are joyous and grateful *doers* of God's word and not just *hearers*.

It is vital for Paul that these believers understand the Gospel *clearly*, so that it produces *fruit* in them to the glory of God. It is not enough to know and understand the Gospel – it *must produce fruit*. That is its intended outcome – that is God's will for his people, that they be fruitful. So Paul writes to the Corinthians, [Verse 17](#)

[For Christ didn't send me to baptize, but to preach the gospel, \[How?\] *not in cleverness of speech*, \[Why not?\] so the cross of Christ would not be made void.](#)

The Gospel isn't a topic for intellectual debate; and it's certainly not a cause for division. The Gospel will not justify immorality on our part, nor quarrels that make us drag one another into court. The Gospel faithfully heard and lived out among us *will not* and *cannot* produce these types of responses. Yet these types of responses are clearly evident in the church at Corinth. What *in the world* were they doing to the Gospel of Jesus Christ, that it should produce these effects?

Apparently they were getting CLEVER with it; and in getting clever, they were making it void –they were gutting it of its transforming power, nullifying and falsifying it, stripping the branch of its fruit. The **Message of the Cross**, Paul tells us here, isn't a clever contrivance; it's not spoken using clever speech. The word for "clever" is *sophia* – some translations use *wisdom*. We get our word sophistry from this word *sophia*. **Sophistry** means: "[A deliberately invalid but ingenious argument made in the hope of deceiving someone...](#)" In other words, it's a con

game, an abuse of trust. To mend their divisions, they must put away their cleverness, their *sophistry*, which misleads, misinforms, and divides.

Paul tells them that **HE** didn't preach the Gospel with sophistry to deceive them, nor to draw followers after himself; **HE** didn't lure them into the sort of mysticism that the Greeks were so fond of; **HE** didn't use unclear language, even though Paul was sometimes hard to understand, *perhaps like me...* Paul preached the Message of the Cross with **power**, unadulterated and unadorned. What did *they* preach that it should produce these divisive effects? Why were they being torn apart, when Christ has knit them as a single piece without seams?

We'll save the answer to that question until next week. For now, ask yourself if the Gospel has taken root in you? Are you still a tender young shoot? Or are you growing by God's grace, so that you may produce much fruit? Are we, as the body of Christ, becoming of one mind with Christ, having one judgment with him?

THAT'S what we're called to, for God's glory.

Hear now this blessing. It is God's design for you as the Body of Christ:

¹⁶ I pray that out of his glorious riches he may strengthen you with power through his Spirit in your inner being, ¹⁷ so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith. And I pray that you, being rooted and established in love, ¹⁸ may have power, together with all the saints, to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ, ¹⁹ and to know this love that surpasses knowledge – that you may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God. ²⁰ Now to him who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to his power that is at work within us, ²¹ to him be glory **in the church and in Christ Jesus** throughout all generations, for ever and ever! Amen. (Eph 3:16-21 NIV)