

1 Cor. 1:10-17 Is Christ Divided?

10 Now I plead with you, brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you all speak the same thing, and that there be no divisions among you, but that you be perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment.

11 For it has been declared to me concerning you, my brethren, by those of Chloe's household, that there are contentions among you.

12 Now I say this, that each of you says, "I am of Paul," or "I am of Apollos," or "I am of Cephas," or "I am of 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 lest anyone should say that I had baptized in my own name.

16 Yes, I also baptized the household of Stephanas. Besides, I do not know whether I baptized any other.

17 For Christ did not send me to baptize, but to preach the gospel, not with wisdom of words, lest the cross of Christ should be made of no effect.

I have always been uncomfortable with the label “Calvinism,” not because I have any problem with the doctrines associated with Calvin, the so-called 5 points or the theology that Calvin himself taught, I believe that as Spurgeon put it ***“I have my own private opinion that there is no such thing as preaching Christ and Him crucified, unless we preach that which is nowadays called Calvinism. It is a nickname to call it Calvinism; Calvinism is the gospel and nothing else.”***

What I have a problem with is the label itself, not what it denotes, because Calvin was a man, and I’m not a follower of Calvin. Calvin was not the Messiah, he was not crucified for my sins, neither was I saved through faith in Calvin and in a very real sense I am not a follower of Calvin, I am a follower of the Lord Jesus Christ. So when people ask me “are you a Calvinist?” I will often answer with something along the lines of “I am a Christian, but yes I am Reformed” often they’ll simply think I’m being

smart-alecky, maybe sometimes I am, but to me the distinction is an important one.

For that reason I am also glad that I belong to a denomination which calls itself *Presbyterian* after the Greek word *Presbyter* meaning “elder” which refers to the system of church government we believe is biblical, namely representative rule by elected Elders. I would be less comfortable being called a Wesleyan or a Lutheran for instance and thus once again associated with individual men and their teachings.

But of course it is still very possible for us to call ourselves by any name but in fact to have a party spirit, and by that I don’t obviously mean the person who is “the life of the party”, I mean to have a spirit of division – Forming blocs or parties within the church. Paul here is writing to rebuke the Corinthians for exactly that practice. The church was clearly in danger of dividing up into various groups – divisions – and the Greek for division is *schisma*, a split, a schism.

Now while it may be possible or even necessary to have parties in the world of politics, because there is no organic unity in politics, that is clearly not the case in the church. The church as we discussed this morning is one body, and to introduce divisions in it is to tear apart the body. Splitting the church should be like dividing the family, saying I am of Dad, or I am of Mom.

But at this point you might be saying, “wait a minute Andy, I see what you are saying, but the Church *has* been split and divided by schism and heresy, there are well over 10,000 denominations in the USA alone. And as for the family, that too is often split by divorce. Sadly many children are forced into the horrible position of being “of Dad” or “of Mom”.

Well that’s true, but as the old saying goes, “is” does not imply “ought.” Families have been rent apart by divorce, but that doesn’t mean that we shouldn’t do all that we can to endeavor to keep them together. Schism and Heresy have happened in the church but they ought not have, and we ought not to continue to rend the church into smaller and smaller divisions. We ought to avoid division.

But how do you accomplish that in the church?

Let me immediately dismiss two ways that we *shouldn't avoid or seek to heal divisions*.

The first is by an awful process of compromise whereby we sacrifice purity and truth for the sake of a false unity. For instance, if we were to attempt to return to the Roman Catholic church while ignoring all of the unbiblical doctrines that that organization practices. How can we have a unity founded on ignoring error? That would be like what God condemned in the teaching of the false priests and prophets who ***“healed the hurt of the daughter of My people slightly, Saying, 'Peace, peace!' When there is no peace.”*** (Jer. 8:11) Brothers we can no more ignore spiritual adultery in the church than we could ignore physical adultery in a marriage. Seeking to preserve unity on those grounds would be empty and wrong and harmful to the spiritual health of the church.

The second would be by attempting to remove the doctrinal content of the faith for the sake of ecumenism. Creating kind of a dumbed-down non-doctrinal Christianity. That was what was tried in the 19th century, you had the slogans “No Creed but Jesus” and “Doctrine divides, Mission unites” but what they found was that when you empty the doctrinal content of Christianity you create sort of a truth vacuum and heresy inevitably comes flooding into fill the void, and heretical doctrine divides faster than anything else. Its not surprising at all that it was that “Doctrineless” Christianity that produced the Jehovah’s Witnesses and the Mormons.

Paul instead tells us here how to better keep the peace, and purity, and unity of the church.

The first is that we remember that we have one faith, and that we endeavor to have one mind, and one set of doctrines. Now to do that we cannot be ruled by our own opinions and preferences and private interpretations, and that will inevitably be the result if we are proud and self-willed. The only way we can have true Christian unity is if we truly are willing to die to self and practice

humility and self-denial which is so hard but so necessary. Ephesians 4:1-3 says

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.

In order to have one mind therefore, we are going to have to agree to make one thing the final standard in the church, and that must be God's unchanging word which is alone sufficient. And it means often that we are going to let our preferences fall by the wayside unless they really are taught in the word. An obvious application of this is in our worship. It will need to be simple and biblical, and every element will need to be derived from God's word, not our desires. Begin to insert things based on preferences, and while you may make certain divisions of the church happy, you will destroy any hope of harmony.

So that is the first way, one faith founded on scripture, practiced and preached by a humble gentle people.

The second way to keep the peace, purity and unity of the church is to avoid the dreaded ***cult of personality***.

Paul here rebukes the church because they are being to form their divisions not even based on clear doctrinal differences, but simply upon preferring one teacher or church leader to another. They decided they preferred the style of one man or were simply found him charismatic and were drawn to him. Often a man will simply be more appealing because he is more in keeping with that culture. A good example of that is the difference between Paul and Apollos.

Everyone, even Paul, admitted he was no great preacher in terms of his delivery. I am reminded of the time that Paul preached all night until midnight and Eutychius fell asleep and fell from a third story window and died. Of course he raised that young man from the dead by the power of God, which was possibly the greatest sermon illustration, but the point was Paul

probably had a tendency to go too long, and didn't follow the standard rhetorical devices common in Greek speaking. In fact he specifically says here he didn't preach the gospel with wisdom of words, employing oratorical speaking devices and attempting to persuade men through logical or philosophical appeals. Instead he simply preached the gospel of Christ crucified and issued that general call to faith. Simple preaching with divine power.

No doubt though that would have bored some in the church, instead they preferred the preaching of Apollos. Now of his preaching, Acts tells us it was *eloquent, bold, fervent*. Apollos was probably a great orator able to captivate his listeners, and unfortunately, by comparison Paul's preaching was not as outwardly appealing and so many men were probably comparing him to Apollos negatively and saying they followed him.

It's rather like the modern phenomenon of people looking not for sound and stable churches, but great preachers. For instance, I actually heard someone say of one man who has such a reputation, "I love the way he speaks" but when I followed up expressing concern about the content of "what he speaks" the person actually said "Look, I probably only remember about 5% of the content anyway, but what I do know is it leaves me feeling positive and uplifted." Now brothers and sisters, that is not spiritual reasoning, it is an appeal to the flesh.

Paul though wants them to see how silly it is to divide and follow men according to their gifts, to become the party of Peter or Paul or Apollos, He doesn't even want them to be *HIS followers*, because ultimately they were all ambassadors of Christ, and they were not preaching confidence in themselves but pointing men to Jesus as the one way of salvation. Only Christ was Crucified for their sins, and they were not baptized into Paul or Peter, but into Christ. Christ is all in all.

For that reason Paul was *glad* that he hadn't baptized many except the first followers of Christ in Corinth. Stephanus, who is listed as the first believer in Corinth in chapter 6 and then Crispus and Gaius. So that people wouldn't think he was creating his own party. Incidentally Paul's words here on the

critical importance of gospel preaching should serve as a good corrective to the idea that some people have that Baptism is either of equal or greater importance than preaching or that Baptism is the place where we are converted.

If Baptism was really the method by which men are saved, would Paul really have thanked God that he hadn't baptized many? Hardly! That would have been Paul declaring, "I'm glad I didn't save many of you." No, it's a good reminder that as Paul says in Romans 10: "***So then faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God.***"

So let me give you one final application: Paul here throughout emphasizes the oneness of the church that is only possible in Christ, it is only as we believe in him, and become part of his body that we are truly one. Brothers and Sisters, this party spirit, going after men is rampant in our day and has always been a causer of divisions in the church. Do not yourselves become followers of men or movements, become followers of Christ and ensure that this church, which is Christ's keeps him ever at the center. Brothers and Sisters I will be frank with you, in one sense I am glad I am not charismatic or a great preacher, because I want to create a ministry not where I am lifted up, but where Christ is. I would hope I could be taken out of this pulpit and replaced by any other gospel minister. Remember always:

Eph. 4:4 There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called in one hope of your calling;

5 one Lord, one faith, one baptism;

6 one God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in you all.

Let me give you one overriding application of these three things: **This oneness will only be possible if you have one faith centered on Jesus Christ.**

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Not American Christians but *One Body*

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