

High Peaks Bible Fellowship

Divisions within the Church 1 Corinthians 1:10-17

Paul's Exhortation (1 Cor 1:10)

- "Now" = this word begins the body of Paul's letter to the Corinthians.
- "I exhort" (*parakaleo*, to come alongside to help) = this is a word of affectionate exhortation rather than of stern command.
- Paul appeals to them on the basis of his relationship to them as brothers, as well as on the basis of the Lordship of Jesus Christ.
- His exhortation includes three things:
 1. "That you all speak the same thing" = as opposed to speaking different things (see 1 Cor 1:12). This verb is the present active subjunctive = "that you keep on speaking."
 2. "That there be no divisions among you" = present active subjunctive, meaning "that divisions may not continue to be" (they already had them). Divisions (*schismata*) = schisms (from *schizo*, to split, tear, or rend - see Matt 9:16; Mark 2:21).
 3. "That you be perfectly joined together" (*katartizo*) = to restore, mend, or repair that which is torn or out of order (see Matt 4:21; Mark 1:19). The word was used for mending broken bones or for the realignment of a dislocated joint.
- "The same mind" = the thoughts, counsels, and plans of the mind. They should be of a mind to treat each other with kindness and live in harmony.
- "The same judgment" = the knowledge, opinion, attitude, or disposition of the mind. They should have a brotherly attitude and be sympathetically disposed toward each other.

The Explanation for the Exhortation (1 Cor 1:11)

What is the Problem?

- "I have been informed" = it had been made clear to Paul; it was clearly communicated.
- "By Chloe's people" = it is not known whether they were the servants, the children, or other relatives in Chloe's household. However, it is clear that the Corinthian believers would have known Chloe and who these people were who brought the news to Paul. The problem that Paul was dealing with was not something spread by gossip. These people were willing to be identified and Paul gives specific details of the situation.
- "There are quarrels" = contention, conflict, dissent. This word is listed in the catalog of works of the flesh as "strife" (Gal 5:20).

The Details of the Problem (1 Cor 1:12)

- "Now I am saying this" = this is exactly what I mean by quarrels!
- Who was at fault? "Each one of you" = all of the individuals within the church were involved in taking sides and participating in different divisions or factions. Every person was somehow involved in the problem.
- What were they claiming? I am *so-and-so's* follower! I belong to this party! These were not the forerunners of modern denominations. They were individual preferences and opinions about particular church leaders which were causing bickering and rivalries among the members. This was a reflection of the typical Greek mindset - its love of philosophical speculation, and its enthusiasm for following the intellectual trends and fads of the day.
- Who were these leaders?
 - **Paul** had founded the church at Corinth, and the early members would have been his converts. Paul had always emphasized Christian liberty, so this group may have been attempting to take Christian liberty to

an extreme - using their freedom to do whatever they pleased and trying to justify it by saying they were following Paul.

- **Apollos** came after Paul and spoke with the polished, cultured style of the Alexandrian school which would have been very attractive to the philosophy-loving Greeks. The Alexandrians were the ones who eventually intellectualized Christianity, so this group may have consisted of intellectual believers who wanted to treat Christianity as if it were one of the Greek schools of philosophy.
- **Cephas** was the Aramaic name for Peter, the apostle of the circumcision (Gal 2:7), and was probably being claimed by the Jewish element in the congregation. This group may have been legalists who were emphasizing the Mosaic Law and opposing Christian liberty.
- **Christ** was probably being claimed by those in the congregation who assumed an attitude of superiority and rejected all human leadership. The way it is listed here with the other names of leaders indicates that it was being claimed in a divisive spirit. They may have had the right name, but they did not have the right attitude!

Paul's Argument Against Their Divisive Spirit (1 Cor 1:13-17)

Three Thought-provoking Questions (1 Cor 1:13)

- Paul does not ask these questions because he is expecting an answer. He is forcing the Corinthians (and us) to think about their implications for divisive behavior in the church. Paul cringes to think that anyone would say, "I am Paul's man - I belong to Paul."
- Has Christ been divided? *merizo* = to cut something into pieces and distribute the parts to various people. Was Christ dismembered or cut into pieces and given to different factions? Paul's graphic imagery emphasizes his amazement at the divisive spirit in Corinth! Here Paul appeals to the unity of the person of Christ.
- Was Paul crucified for you? Paul shows his tact by using himself as the illustration, rather than using Apollos or Cephas. He takes up the subject of our redemption. In the Greek, the phrasing of the question demands a strong negative answer: "Surely it was not Paul that was crucified for you, was it?" In the previous question the majestic deity of Christ makes it impossible for Him to be divided; in this question the flawed humanity of Paul makes it impossible for him to be the source of our redemption. Here Paul appeals to the cross of Christ.
- Were you baptized into the name of Paul? It was through the ordinance of Christian baptism that believers declared their personal association with the death, burial, and resurrection of Christ on their behalf. In the previous question the cross emphasized their redemption by Christ, while here baptism emphasized their dedication to Him. In this question Paul shows how silly it is that he could be put on par with Christ. Even though he was the founder of their local church and their spiritual father in the faith, it is ridiculous that they should call themselves by his name rather than Christ's. Here Paul appeals to their identification with Christ alone in baptism.

Paul Amplifies on His Third Question (1 Cor 1:14-17a)

- The remaining verses in this passage deal with Paul's actual practice of baptizing those who believed. He gives thanks for God's providential guidance - God had protected him from being accused of baptizing converts into his own sect.
- Paul's point here is that the human agent in baptism is really unimportant. What is important is that through the act of baptism the believer expresses his complete identification with Christ and his complete dedication to the Lord.
- Paul did not personally baptize many believers. He mentioned Crispus and Gaius here, who were probably Paul's first converts in Corinth. Very few people could say they were baptized by Paul, and no one could say he was baptized into the name of Paul.
- As he is composing this letter, Paul suddenly remembers that there were a few more people in Corinth that he had baptized: the household of Stephanas. Stephanas himself was probably there when Paul was dictating this letter (see 1 Cor 16:17), and he may even have been the one to remind Paul that he had baptized him. If Paul almost forgot that he had baptized Stephanas then he realized he might not have remembered others too, so he included the possibility that he might have baptized others also.
- This incident does not argue against the inspiration of Scripture. Inspiration did not interfere with the personal style and characteristics of the writers of Scripture. Inspiration did not somehow make the apostle Paul omniscient. Inspiration guarantees that what was written was exactly what the Lord wanted written. Here, the Holy Spirit inspired Paul to record his own forgetfulness in order to communicate the impression that the flawed human agent in baptism is not significant. What is important for baptism is not the one who does the baptizing, but the One into whom the believer is baptized (into Christ).

- Paul reminds us of his function in the New Testament church - he was given the office of apostleship which involved preaching the gospel and establishing churches. He sometimes baptized the first few converts until the church was organized, and then this function was turned over to the officers of the local church.

Paul's Transition into the Causes for Their Problem (1 Cor 1:17b)

- "Not in cleverness of speech" = literally, "wisdom (*sophia*) of words" or philosophical reasoning that is presented with theatrical language and sophisticated logic. This kind of wisdom would have been highly valued by the Greeks, but Paul never proclaimed the gospel as a pretentious philosopher or a man of rhetoric (see 1 Cor 2:1-5).
- Paul's concern was that the gospel message might be emptied of its power because men thought more of the human reasoning and the eloquence with which it was presented than of the simple content of the message itself. Here Paul hints at the main cause for the divisions and bickering in the Corinthian church: they had been caused by the influence of philosophy and the ambition for popular acclaim among some of the Corinthian believers.
- Paul had identified the problem and exhorted them to avoid it - but he will go on in the following verses to identify the reason for the problem and to correct the wrong thinking which caused it. There were two main causes:
 1. A wrong conception of the nature of the gospel (1 Cor 1:18 - 3:4)
 2. A wrong conception of the role of ministers (1 Cor 3:5 - 4:21)

Points of Application

- A divisive spirit and factions within the church were not just common to Paul's day, because they have continued right down to our own time. We, too, need to be on our guard against being so devoted to specific people that we cause conflict within our local church. Even when we do not see eye-to-eye with fellow believers, we must give each other credit for honesty and sincerity, and we should be willing to continue to love other believers despite differences of opinion.
- Believers must focus on the important truths of the faith, rather than causing conflicts over non-essentials. Unity on doctrinal matters coupled with a humble willingness to love others will minimize divisions within the church. But we must be able to clearly evaluate whether our disagreements are about peripheral issues or whether they concern the fundamental truths of the faith. Since we are completely dedicated to Christ and to the truths of the Bible, we must unflinchingly take our stand on the Truth and lovingly defend it against those who seek to undermine it.
- When we hear ourselves saying, "I am a follower of *so-and-so* on this particular issue," we should immediately check our motives and our attitudes. Even claiming to belong to Christ Himself can be done with a wrong attitude. We should take every opportunity to examine ourselves.
- We must be on our guard to avoid cluttering up the simple gospel message with intellectual-sounding words or theatrical presentations. It seems that a Christian is never immune from the temptation to please the world. "Academic respectability" has been the downfall of many Christian institutions. While there is nothing wrong with sound reasoning concerning the Scriptures, we must be on our guard not to let intellectualism or philosophy take the place of clear thinking about biblical truth.

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Our primary purpose is to uphold the truths of the Word of God.

I write so that you will know how one ought to conduct himself in the household of God, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and support of the truth. (1 Timothy 3:15)

Our primary responsibility is to equip the saints for the work of ministry.

And He gave some as apostles, and some as prophets, and some as evangelists, and some as pastors and teachers, for the equipping of the saints for the work of service, to the building up of the body of Christ. (Ephesians 4:11-12)