

Bible Study Series - The Epistle of 1 Corinthians

The Problem Of Division

1 Corinthians 1:10-17

Introduction

Grumbling and murmuring is nothing new and seem to have always been a common practice of human beings. In many of the biblical records, these occurrences seemed to have taken place when people took their eyes off God and focused on the wrong things. The results were normally disastrous. The Corinthian Church, like many today, had been distracted by personalities and so Paul's intention was for them to focus on Jesus and His work through the cross. 1 Corinthians 1:10-17 is about Christian unity.

The Initial Plea (v. 10)

*"I **appeal** to you, brothers and sisters"* (v.10). As an apostle of Jesus Christ, Paul had the authority to command the Corinthians Christians but with a loving heart he begs and pleads with them, to be unified.

His plea was that there should be no **divisions** among them. Using the Greek word "schismata" he was asking that there be no "tear or rend" among them. He was appealing to them to stop ripping up of each other and tearing up the body of Christ. He wanted them to be **"perfectly joined together."** This was a medical concept of putting together a joint or bone that has been dislocated. This dislocation was not natural and should be cured.

The Problem (vv. 11-12)

So what was the problem this church was having? It seems as if the church was divided over personalities. There were four "parties" which probably were making the following claims: -

- **"Paul's Party"** – "Paul founded our church, so we are following in his footsteps, therefore we are the true Christians"
- **"Apollos' Party"** – "Apollos is great in power and spiritual gifts, so we are following in his footsteps."
- **"Peter's Party"** – "Peter was the first among the apostles and was given the keys to the kingdom of heaven by Jesus, therefore he is our man."
- **"Jesus' Party"** – "You are wrong to be following ordinary men, we are following Christ himself, therefore we are the ones right with God."

One is not sure if these "parties" actually existed in Corinth but the factions may have centered around the people in the congregation who were boasting among themselves for following a particular person they considered great.

Is it possible that loyalty to Christian leaders can divide the church? What is the connection between human loyalty and potential disunity?

The Place Of Baptism

It seems as if one of the divisive issues of the Corinthian Christians was that of baptism; more precisely, who administered their baptism. Some of them were bragging about who baptised them, as if this was a badge of distinction and something of pride. Paul was thankful that even though he may have baptised a handful of persons he was happy it wasn't more, so that they didn't start talking about being baptised in his name (vv.14-16). While baptism has its place it is not necessary for salvation. They also needed to know that the power of baptism is in the spiritual reality that it represents, not in who performs it. Paul reminded them that he was an evangelist "*Christ did not send me to baptize, but to preach the gospel.*" (v.17).

Do we still have similar issues in the contemporary church that have divided the church and need to be addressed the way Paul did?

For Reflection

Members of the church will differ on matters of doctrines and practices but we should never allow such matters to divide the body of Christ. Paul's appeal "*that all of you agree with one another in what you say and that you be perfectly united in mind and thought.*" (v. 10) is not a call for absolute uniformity of opinion and belief, but that even with our differences we should still be UNITED. Disagreement does not have to mean division.

The unity to which the Corinthians, were being called is to be found in the fact that they were members of the body of Christ, and Christ is not divided (v.15). Paul mentioned the name of Christ ten times in the first 10 verses for them to understand that they were to be grounded in Christ and not in anything else.

What issues are there that Christians are divided over and do these help the cause of Christ or hinder it? Do we get distracted by minor doctrines and forget about the real reason for which we are Christians – Christ crucified for us?

Let us not just pray for a united church, but seek to do what we can to bring about the unity.

Glossary of Terms

Baptism is an outward act that symbolizes the inward phenomenon of coming to and accepting Jesus Christ as real, as God incarnate, as the sacrificial means by which those who believe in him can be forever reconciled to God. The purpose of baptism is to give visual testimony of our commitment to Christ. It is the first step of discipleship ([Acts 8:26-39](#)). <https://www.crosswalk.com/faith/spiritual-life/baptism-what-is-it-meaning-and-definition.html>