

THE PROBLEM: A DIVIDED CHURCH

1 CORINTHIANS 01:10–16

DIVISION OVERVIEW: (1 Cor 01:10 – 04:21) Unity and Division

The church at Corinth was in a sad state. The fellowship among believers had deteriorated to such a degree that it was about to crumble and collapse. There was severe division and dissension in the ranks: verbal accusations, differing opinions, competitive positions, power struggles, envy, contention, grumbling, griping, complaining, murmuring, quarrelling, attacking and gossiping. Believer stood against believer, and there was no give in any corner. Disaster was about to strike; the church was divided and a severe split was threatened.

This was the first problem dealt with by Paul. It had to be dealt with first, for a house divided against itself cannot stand. There were other problems in the church, other matters that had to be handled, but the people could not handle them unless they were brought together in one spirit and mind. The ministry and mission of the church could not effectively go on until the people stood together. Worship, exhortation, missions and reaching and ministering to people — the very cause of Christ, the very reason He came to earth and died — was affected and would continue to suffer until the people were brought together.

Thank God there is an answer to every division, no matter how severe and threatening. In fact, the Holy Spirit through Paul gives eleven answers or solutions to division within the church. A quick glance at the overall outline of this section will show how *sound* the answers are. The answers will pull any divided church together if the people are willing to listen.

1. The problem: a divided church (1:10-16).
2. Answer one: the cross (1:17-25).
3. Answer two: seeing God's simple and humble people (1:26-31).
4. Answer three: sound preaching (2:1-5).
5. Answer four: God's revealed wisdom (2:6-13).
6. Answer five: understanding the spiritual stages of man (2:14-3:4).
7. Answer six: seeing who ministers really are (3:5-9).
8. Answer seven: being a wise builder (3:10-17).
9. Answer eight: renouncing self-deception (3:18-23).
10. Answer nine: letting God judge (4:1-5).
11. Answer ten: not comparing and judging ministers (4:6-13).
12. Answer eleven: seeing and understanding the Spirit of God's Minister (4:14-21).

Introduction: (1 Cor. 01:10–16)

Division within the church is one of the most serious problems a church can face, if not *the* most serious. It can devastate the church's fellowship, worship, mission and witness to the world unless it is solved quickly. Paul knew this; therefore, he sought to solve the

problem immediately. Every church and minister of God needs to study and keep this passage forever in their memories.

- I. The strong exhortation: all of you agree (v. 10).
- II. The tragic report: contention, quarrels, arguments (v. 11).
- III. The arguing parties (v. 12).
- IV. The problem with cliques (vv. 13-16).

I. 1 Corinthians 01:10 Unity and Division

The strong exhortation is “all of you agree.” Note how Paul approaches the severe problem of division: he does not have fire in his eyes nor a spirit of rebuke and fight in his heart. There is not even a trace of anger in him. On the contrary, his heart is tender and full of love. He graciously appeals to the Corinthians.

- => He says, “I appeal to you.” The word “appeal” (*parakalo*) means to call to one’s side. Paul says, “I call you to my side; come, let’s share together, talk the matter over. I ask, plead, beg — hear what I have to say.”
- => He calls them *brothers* twice in just two verses (v. 10, 11).
- => He begs them in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ to heed what he is saying. He pleads with them to consider their love for Christ. They must do away with their divisions and be unified once again — for the sake of Christ. For Him and His cause they must obey Him and be united in one spirit and one mind.

Thought 1. Ministers of the gospel and leaders must not lambaste nor attack and censure those in the congregation who cause trouble and dissension and division. Rather, they must approach the divisive person in a spirit of tenderness and love, and in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ. Sometimes it may be difficult because of the severity of the problem and the arrogance and unwillingness of the troublemaker. Nevertheless, the heart of Christ is love and restoration. Therefore, we must always reach out in a spirit of love and restoration before church discipline is ever attempted (see Mt. 18:15-20).

Mat 5:7 “*Blessed are the merciful, for they will be shown mercy.*”

Mark 11:25 “*And when you stand praying, if you hold anything against anyone, forgive him, so that your Father in heaven may forgive you your sins.*”

Mat 18:15- 17 “*If your brother sins against you, go and show him his fault, just between the two of you. If he listens to you, you have won your brother over. But if he will not listen, take one or two others along, so that ‘every matter may be established by the testimony of two or three witnesses.’ If he refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church; and if he refuses to listen even to the church, treat him as you would a pagan or a tax collector.*”

Luke 5:31-32 *Jesus answered them, "It is not the healthy who need a doctor, but the sick. I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance."*

Acts 10:36 *You know the message God sent to the people of Israel, telling the good news of peace through Jesus Christ, who is Lord of all.*

Isa 53:5 *But he was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was upon him, and by his wounds we are healed.*

The exhortation is strong; it is direct and straightforward. And note: it is immediately given. There is no hesitation and no equivocation in giving it. There should be no problem in understanding it, for it is plainly and simply stated.

1 Cor 1:10 *I appeal to you, brothers, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that all of you agree with one another so that there may be no divisions among you and that you may be perfectly united in mind and thought.*

1. The exhortation is to agree in speech: reach agreement, quit talking against each other, accusing, attacking, murmuring, grumbling, griping, complaining, gossiping. Quit using the tongue to stir dissension and division.

James 3:6 *The tongue also is a fire, a world of evil among the parts of the body. It corrupts the whole person, sets the whole course of his life on fire, and is itself set on fire by hell.*

James 4:11 *Brothers, do not slander one another. Anyone who speaks against his brother or judges him speaks against the law and judges it. When you judge the law, you are not keeping it, but sitting in judgment on it.*

1 Pet 2:1 *Therefore, rid yourselves of all malice and all deceit, hypocrisy, envy and slander of every kind.*

1 Pet 3:10 *For, "Whoever would love life and see good days must keep his tongue from evil and his lips from deceitful speech."*

Psa 34:13 *Keep your tongue from evil and your lips from speaking lies.*

Prov 13:3 *He who guards his lips guards his life, but he who speaks rashly will come to ruin.*

Prov 21:23 *He who guards his mouth and his tongue keeps himself from calamity.*

2. The exhortation is to allow no dissension or division. The word "division" (schismata) means to split, to rend, to tear apart. Note the words "among you." The division or dissension is not outside the church; it is not out in the world. It is inside the church. The divisive church is not working to bring peace, love and brotherhood to the world; the divisive church is not seen out in the world ministering to the starving, diseased and lost masses of the world. The divisive church is seen fuming and fighting. The sinful and devastating problems of dissension are within the divisive church. The divisive church is splitting, rending and tearing itself apart.

Luke 11:17 *Jesus knew their thoughts and said to them: “Any kingdom divided against itself will be ruined, and a house divided against itself will fall.”*

1 Cor 3:3 *You are still worldly. For since there is jealousy and quarrelling among you, are you not worldly? Are you not acting like mere men?*

3. The exhortation is to be “*perfectly* united in mind and thought.” The words “perfectly united” mean just what they say: to be in perfect union with each other; to be perfectly united and joined together; to be restored to the perfect union of being together. The idea behind the Greek word is that of a torn net being repaired and mended (Mt. 4:21), or a man’s broken and dislocated limb being restored to its proper place.

The union is to be in both mind and thought. The mind would involve thoughts, reasoning, affections, emotions, motives and intentions. Thought would involve conclusions, purposes, goals and objectives. The exhortation is for the Corinthian church to restore itself, and note: they are not just to be united together — they are to be perfectly united together in mind and thought.

2 Cor 3:11 *And if what was fading away came with glory, how much greater is the glory of that which lasts!*

Eph 4:3 *Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace.*

Eph 4:31-32 *Get rid of all bitterness, rage and anger, brawling and slander, along with every form of malice. Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you.*

Phil 1:27 *Whatever happens, conduct yourselves in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ. Then, whether I come and see you or only hear about you in my absence, I will know that you stand firm in one spirit, contending as one man for the faith of the gospel.*

1 Pet 3:8 *Finally, all of you, live in harmony with one another; be sympathetic, love as brothers, be compassionate and humble.*

II. 1 Corinthians 01:11 The Tragic Report of Contention

The tragic report is that contention, quarrels and arguments are within the church. The contention was so severe that some believer went to Paul about the matter. Just who the believer was is not known. He or she was of the household of Chloe, who was apparently a believer well known to the Corinthians. Chloe was probably a citizen of Ephesus and not of Corinth. Paul would never have identified his source of information if he or she had lived in Corinth lest some of the arguing parties turn against Chloe and her household. Paul was writing to Corinth from Ephesus, so a member of her household probably reported the matter to Paul on some return trip from Corinth.

The depth and seriousness of the division is again brought out by the word “quarrels” (*erides*). The word means wrangling, strife, contentions, arguments, factions. Note: the

nature of division is more clearly defined by the word. The church was arguing and splitting into groups, contending and quarrelling over something. There was a severe strife between factions and cliques in the church. Contention is one of the terrible “works of the flesh, an act of the sinful nature.”

Gal 5:19-21 The acts of the sinful nature are obvious: sexual immorality, impurity and debauchery; idolatry and witchcraft; hatred, discord, jealousy, fits of rage, selfish ambition, dissensions, factions and envy; drunkenness, orgies, and the like. I warn you, as I did before, that those who live like this will not inherit the kingdom of God.

III. *1 Corinthians 01:12 Divisions and Super-Spirituality*

The arguing parties. Note the outline of the Scripture: practically everyone was exalting some former minister over the other ministers of the church. The few who were not were becoming super-spiritual, claiming they were followers of Christ and not of man. There were probably three basic problems causing the division within the church.

1. There was the problem in preaching ability and style. There was no difference in the messages preached by Paul and Apollos. They both preached the gospel of Christ, but there was a difference in their style of preaching and ministering. Apollos was a *learned man, with a thorough knowledge of the Scriptures* (Acts 18:24). Paul was *not a great orator* (2 Cor. 10:10; 11:6); therefore, some undervalued Paul as a preacher and surrounded Apollos. They failed to see God’s distinct call and gifts to each minister.

Paul was a small-framed missionary, gifted in the understanding of the Scriptures and gifted as an administrator in church order. Both gifts, although not so much out in the forefront of public recognition, were of immense value. Paul excelled in strengthening believers, in growing disciples, and in establishing churches. There is a good possibility that the Apollos party began to *intellectualize and socialize* Christianity, to turn it away from the doctrine of salvation in Christ, and to de-emphasize the utter necessity to walk in Him day by day.

2. There was the problem of turning liberty into license. Peter’s emphasis had to deal with the *traditions and rituals* of the church, for he was the apostle to the Jews (Gal. 2:7). Some believers preferred that the traditions and rituals be stressed more, and that Paul’s emphasis upon doctrine, salvation and the daily walk of the believer be stressed less. The two groups began to gather around the name of the two apostles and form cliques.
3. There was the problem of those who claimed to follow Christ. These were probably fed up with the other groups and set themselves up as being more spiritual than the others. They looked upon themselves as being too spiritual to lower themselves to the level of becoming identified with any clique. They probably began to think of themselves as the only true spiritual Christians in Corinth. They claimed to follow Christ alone, and they denied needing or receiving the help of any man.

The Corinthians considered themselves to be so advanced in maturity that it gave them a privileged position. They set themselves up as *the judge* of others. They usurped God's authority. They took it upon themselves to judge teachers (1 Cor. 1:12f), to judge the wise and the unwise (1 Cor. 1:19; 2:1f), to establish moral standards (1 Cor. 5:1f), and to judge the gifted and their gifts (1 Cor. 12:1f).

Mat 7:1 *“Do not judge, or you too will be judged.”*

Mat 7:3 *“Why do you look at the speck of sawdust in your brother's eye and pay no attention to the plank in your own eye?”*

Rom 2:1 *You, therefore, have no excuse, you who pass judgment on someone else, for at what ever point you judge the other, you are condemning yourself, because you who pass judgment do the same things.*

Rom 14:4 *Who are you to judge someone else's servant? To his own master he stands or falls. And he will stand, for the Lord is able to make him stand.*

Rom 15:1 *We who are strong ought to bear with the failings of the weak and not to please ourselves.*

1 Cor 4:5 *Therefore judge nothing before the appointed time; wait till the Lord comes. He will bring to light what is hidden in darkness and will expose the motives of men's hearts. At that time each will receive his praise from God.*

James 4:12 *There is only one Lawgiver and Judge, the one who is able to save and destroy. But you — who are you to judge your neighbour?*

IV. 1 Corinthians 01:13–16 Division: Cliques and Groups

The problem with cliques and dissenting groups in the church is threefold. Closely note the verse before the problems are discussed.

1 Cor 1:13 *Is Christ divided? Was Paul crucified for you? Were you baptised into the name of Paul?*

In three short questions Paul shows the critical nature of divisive cliques. Cliques strike...

- at the Person of Christ or His Lordship.
- at the crucifixion or death of Christ.
- at the baptism or witness of the believer.

Note how clearly this is seen as each of the three problems with divisive groups is discussed.

1. Cliques divide Christ. A clique always thinks it is right, no matter how divisive its position is, and it wants its way — too often at any cost.

=> A clique dethrones Christ. It sets itself up as the *Lord*, as the persons who are able to judge what is right and wrong for the church.

=> A clique attempts the impossible: it tries to divide Christ, to take Christ over to its side. A clique often claims that Christ supports its position, that Christ would hold the position and do exactly what the clique is doing.

Note the question asked by Scripture: Is Christ divided? Is part of Christ over here with this group and part of Him over there with that group? Who rules the church? Who is Lord? Who has the right to judge and say what is right and wrong, the Lord within the church, or cliques within the church?

Jesus Christ cannot be divided. There is only one Lord, only one Person who is called the Lord Jesus Christ. He is not two persons. He nor His will can be split into two divisive cliques. He is one Person and He has one will.

Eph 1:22 *And God placed all things under his feet and appointed him to be head over everything for the church.*

Eph 4:4-5 *There is one body and one Spirit — just as you were called to one hope when you were called — one Lord, one faith, one baptism.*

Col 1:18 *And who also told us of your love in the Spirit.*

2. Cliques elevate men to be saviours. Paul was not crucified for the Corinthians; therefore, he was not the saviour of the Corinthians nor of any other body of believers. This is certain: if Paul was not a saviour, then no other preacher nor any other leader of a clique is a saviour. Believers do not owe their allegiance to preachers and leaders of cliques; they owe their allegiance to the Lord Jesus Christ. It was Jesus Christ who died for us, not preachers and leaders of churches. Therefore, we are to obey and follow the will of Christ as dictated in Scripture, and we are to support the servants of the Lord whom He places in our midst to minister to us. The Lord places a particular minister in our midst because he has a unique gift to offer to the church and ministry — a very special contribution that is needed during a particular time.

Luke 2:11 *“Today in the town of David a Saviour has been born to you; he is Christ the Lord.”*

Eph 5:23 *For the husband is the head of the wife as Christ is the head of the church, his body, of which he is the Saviour.*

Acts 5:31 *God exalted him to his own right hand as Prince and Saviour that he might give repentance and forgiveness of sins to Israel.*

1 Tim 1:15 *Here is a trustworthy saying that deserves full acceptance: Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners — of whom I am the worst.*

Heb 7:25 *Therefore he is able to save completely those who come to God through him, because he always lives to intercede for them.*

3. Cliques make a person a man-follower. This is tragic, for a genuine believer is always baptised in the name of the Lord, not in the name of some minister or church

leader. In his baptism the believer *confessed the Lord* and gave testimony that he was committing his life to follow the Lord. He did not confess loyalty to some man, no matter how great and wonderful the man might be. However, when the person forms or joins a clique, he disassociates himself from Christ and the rest of the believers; he betrays his baptism and commitment to Christ and His church, and gives his loyalty to the leader or position of a divisive clique.

Phil 2:3-4 *Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit, but in humility consider others better than yourselves. Each of you should look not only to your own interests, but also to the interests of others.*

James 4:10 *Humble yourselves before the Lord, and he will lift you up.*

Prov 16:19 *Better to be lowly in spirit and among the oppressed than to share plunder with the proud.*

Prov 29:23 *A man's pride brings him low, but a man of lowly spirit gains honour.*

Isa 57:15 *For this is what the high and lofty One says — he who lives forever, whose name is holy: "I live in a high and holy place, but also with him who is contrite and lowly in spirit, to revive the spirit of the lowly and to revive the heart of the contrite."*

Micah 6:8 *He has showed you, O man, what is good. And what does the Lord require of you? To act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God.*

Now note Paul's adamant denial that he ever attempted to secure a personal following of believers. He thanks God that he had not baptised but a few believers, for no believer can rightfully accuse him of seeking to form a following or a clique.

1 Cor 15:9 *For I am the least of the apostles and do not even deserve to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God.*

Mark 1:7 *And this was his [John the Baptist] message: "After me will come one more powerful than I, the thongs of whose sandals I am not worthy to stoop down and untie." ■*

1 CORINTHIANS 01:14 CRISPUS

The leading ruler of the Jewish synagogue at Corinth. He was led to Christ and baptised by Paul personally (Acts 18:8; 1 Cor. 1:14). □

1 CORINTHIANS 01:14 GAIUS

Paul's host when he was in Corinth. Since Paul baptised Gaius, he probably led him to the Lord as well (Rom. 16:23; 1 Cor. 1:4. Cp. Acts 19:29; 20:4 for a man named Gaius who served as a missionary with Paul. It may be the same Gaius, although the name was a common name in the ancient world.) □