

1 CORINTHIANS 1:10-17

INTRODUCTION

One of the arguments that the cults and other false religions use to oppose the church is to highlight the divisions within the Christian Church. They then highlight the apparent unity of their own organisation. This apparent unity is very appealing to many and it is one reason why people are often impressed with the cults and one reason why people disassociate themselves with the Christian Church.

If you have been a Christian a long time then I will be surprised if you have never encountered a split within a church or at least a very serious disagreement that affected the church deeply. Disharmony and disunity is not a new thing it has been with the church since its very inception and the church at Corinth was experiencing a time of disunity.

Now sadly it seems that disunity and disharmony is part of life. You get it in all aspects of life. You will find it in the classroom in our Schools; you get it in homes among children and parents. You find it in the workplace, in business and in Politics. In fact I don't think we can contemplate one aspect of life where disagreements and disharmony do not exist. Now disunity is part of the effects of mankind's fall into sin and James tells us that quarrels and fights and disharmony come from within ourselves (James 4:1-2). The bible teaches us that mankind is sinful and that the heart of our sinfulness is selfishness. It is our natural inclination as human beings from the minute we are born into this world unto we die to look after number 1.

Even believers who have been redeemed by Christ are tempted and sadly often fall into the temptation to live lives that focus on self will and self interest and self centredness. Now when the Christian Church allows selfishness to become dominate in the life of its members then you can guarantee that disharmony and disunity will follow. When a church is not united then the Lord laments such a situation but Satan applauds it and encourages it.

There are fewer things that will discourage and weaken a church like bickering backbiting and fighting among the members. There is nothing that will undermine the testimony of the church like internal fights and conflicts.

The bible however is real it does not say that there is never fights within the church nor does it try to hide such things but it does give us ways to avoid them and ways in dealing with them when they arise. The bible tells us that sadly selfishness and other sins are a reality within God's church and here at Corinth we have an example.

Disunity is very serious it cannot be left to sort itself out it has to be dealt with and Paul as an Apostle of Jesus Christ is determined to deal with this faction in the church at Corinth. Notice how he deals with it.

1. HE APPEALS TO THE CHURCH (v 10)

The word translated "appeal" means to exhort and it carries the idea of coming alongside someone to help. So Paul wants to come alongside the Corinthian church in order to help it sort out the problems that are causing division within the church. He calls them brothers yet they are not behaving like it. Paul exhorts the church in the 'name of the Lord Jesus Christ to agree with one another' and the reason is clear, so that no divisions will exist between them.

They are all one in Jesus Christ and they are one in fellowship with each other therefore they must begin to live like one and not be divided any longer. Their unity in Jesus Christ is Paul's ultimate appeal to this church; if they are one in Christ then the reality is that they must live this reality out

with one another within the church. You see if believers are related to Jesus Christ through redemption then all believers must be related to one another.

We have the same Father and the same Saviour. Therefore when there is complaining and quarrelling in the church we do indeed cause the church great harm and we bring hurt to the leaders of the church and to its members.

We also put a barrier between unbelievers and the gospel but worst of all is the fact that we bring dishonour to our Head the Lord Jesus Christ. It is no wonder that Paul appeals to the church in the 'name of the Lord Jesus Christ' for his sake stop fighting says Paul and start agreeing with one another.

Now agreeing with one another in any local church might seem an impossible task when you think about the various people and various opinions that make up any local congregation. The words "that all of you agree" literally reads "that you all speak the same thing." Now there is nothing more confusing for the unbeliever or for the new Christian to hear supposedly mature and informed Christians tell conflicting things about the gospel, the Bible, the church and Christian living. There is nothing more devastating to a local church than everyone having his or her own ideas and interpretations about the faith.

Such a thing is bound to cause various divisions within the church as it did in the church at Corinth. This is why Paul tells us to agree in the 'name of the Lord Jesus Christ.' Christ's name represents all that he is, his character and his will.

When we pray in the name of the Lord Jesus we are praying according to his will and word. So to agree in his name is to agree on the things that are clear in Scripture to agree on the things that are His will for the church, things that are taught in his word. Every local church will have probably in writing its beliefs and practises. Those beliefs and practises should be in harmony with the word of God and therefore are God's will for his church.

Every person therefore who is a member of a local church must surely be in agreement with the doctrinal stance of the church. We must be in agreement with the fundamental ethos and beliefs of the church to which we belong, otherwise disunity will come in. Our own doctrinal stance is what is known as "reformed" or to put it another way we believe in "the doctrines of grace."

We make no apology for that we believe this is what the bible teaches and we will seek to convince everyone who comes into this church of the Scriptural basis for our beliefs. We are as a church united on those great biblical doctrines and everyone who joins our church must understand the doctrinal position that this church takes.

It might be that an individual might not agree with some aspect of our stance, they might be sincere in searching the Scriptures but as yet they cannot see our church's doctrinal position. Well that person in coming to this church must understand that we will try to convince them through the preaching and teaching of God's word of our own stance and that person or people must not cause division by promoting doctrines that we believe are contrary to Scripture.

We will not stifle good honest discussion of doctrinal views that are different from our own for we all must surely seek to come under the authority of God's word and be willing to be taught by others and the Holy Spirit. But it is important that we seek under God to agree with one another so that there will be no divisions among us. Our aim should always be to be perfectly united in mind and thought.

That takes hard work and much study and a willing heart but if a church is to avoid divisions then it must always be willing to work with those who disagree with them either to enlighten them or be enlightened themselves.

We must all be willing to be taught and we must all be willing to discuss our beliefs openly and honestly and in a loving attitude. The problem with churches can be that we feel we must preserve our doctrinal position at all costs and therefore can do so very aggressively and without love.

I am convinced that the doctrines we hold dear are clearly taught in Scripture but I must never be so convinced that I am not open to listen to others who disagree with me and the same must be true of you. Within God's church we must always work hard at being perfectly united in mind and thought so that there are no divisions among us.

2. THE CAUSE OF THE DIVISION IN THE CHURCH (vs. 11-17)

It seems that there was a group in the church at Corinth who were saved under the ministry of Peter (Cephas) while others were saved under the ministry of Apollos and Paul. Paul had been told about these divisions from Chloe household, someone in her household was concerned about the problems in the church so they wrote to Paul about what was happening.

Each one of these groups had their favourites probably because they were converted and greatly helped under their ministry. There was a group who claimed to follow only Christ and it is difficult to know what this meant but it could be that they believed that they had no need for any human teachers they were taught by Christ.

Now in Corinth each group was clearly vocal and the words I follow Paul etc. was probably their slogan.

The church was divided around men that they had an attachment too even though these leaders gave no encouragement to these groups and were no doubt horrified to have their names associated with them. The result of such a party spirit is division in the church.

Now Paul's approach in dealing with this party spirit is to remind the believers at Corinth that they are one in Christ. He reminds them that no human leader no matter how gifted and effective should have the loyalty that belongs only to Jesus Christ. He asks a number of simple questions that hammer home his point. Is Christ divided? Was Paul crucified for you? Was anyone baptised into the name of Paul? The answer to all Paul's questions is No. Christ is not divided so why is the church at Corinth dividing itself up into groups.

Paul was not crucified for them so that they are forgiven; so why is it that people in the church are giving their loyalty to him rather than to Christ who has died for them? They were not baptised into Paul's name, which means they did not confess loyalty to Paul at their baptism; it was not to him that they were making a public confession of faith through baptism and they were not united to him through faith.

So why do you act as if this was the case that is Paul's great argument? Party spirits in churches divides Christ and divides the church. If we are united to Christ then we must be loyal to him alone and we must be united to his church. Christ has died for all his people it is in his name that one openly confesses allegiance to him through baptism therefore all party spirits are wrong. We are dividing what Christ has united.

Now we still find this in churches today. Perhaps we have it when a new Pastor comes into a church and is constantly compared with their former one. This new man doesn't preach like our former Pastor. He doesn't visit as often, he doesn't seem to be as gifted. When the former Pastor

is back in the area perhaps preaching at another church they miss their own services in order to hear their former Pastor.

We do this with preachers too. We can so easily follow preachers because we like their style or mannerism and do so at the expense of the local church. So we have Christians who are not committed to any local church but move about Sunday by Sunday depending on who is preaching where.

We might even do it the other way round that is we will not attend our own church when a certain preacher is preaching because he is too long or too hard to follow or simply we don't like his style. Such party spirits divide churches, Christ is not divided he has died for all his people so we should not get into the following of leaders or preachers. God places us in local churches that is where we should be committed to; no matter who is preaching because Christ is not divided we should be loyal to him alone and to do that means being loyal to his church in the place that he has put us.

Paul is thankful to God that God preserved him from baptising too many converts otherwise people might have become proud and claimed to be superior because Paul baptised them. Paul is glad that he did not encourage party spirits by baptising too many people; only a few people were baptised by him as far as he can remember. Paul's task was not to baptise but to preach the gospel.

He was an Apostle given the task of planting and establishing churches he left his converts to be baptised by others probably by the Elders of the church that he planted. He is not saying that baptism is not an important ordinance of the church but he is saying that he did not baptise many because his main task was to preach the gospel in the power of God.

His point is that God had preserved him from encouraging party spirits within the church, not many could say I was baptised by the great Apostle Paul. However even though Paul discouraged party spirits, the church at Corinth was still divided by them. Paul appeals to the church to repent of this party spirit and to remember who they are in Christ and what he has done for them. They are to make every effort to agree with one another and to be united in mind and thought. If the church at Corinth is going to make any impact upon its own society then unity must be displayed for Christ is not divided.

It's the same in our own day and generation. Disunity and division have blighted God's cause. God has blessed us in this church by the remarkable unity we have shown over the years but we must not become complacent.

Do not let party spirits come into our church. Seek under God and by his grace to agree with one another about clear biblical teaching and finally let us be willing and open to learn from one another so that we will be perfectly united in mind and thought.

Let's pray.