

# Is Christ Divided? – 1 Cor 1:10-13

## The Gospel: *The Foundation for Unity*

### Introduction

The modern evangelical movement is calling for unity in the church, and for squabbling over doctrines to cease. The people of God are required to be striving for unity. But let us be careful in our use of words. Do we really mean the same thing? We must understand and then strive for *biblical* unity.

### The Text

"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. For it has been declared to me concerning you, my brethren by those of Chloe's household, that there are contentions among you. 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." Is Christ divided?..." 1 Cor 1:10-13.

### Understanding Biblical Unity

**"I plead"** – After his brief introduction, Paul begins this letter with a strong urging (parakaleo). This is the focus of the next four chapters, and probably is the foundation of all other necessary correction in the following chapters. A muddled gospel and fuzzy doctrine is dividing the church.

**"speak the same thing...no divisions"** – Unity requires that we say the same things about Christ, grace, faith, salvation, the work of the Spirit. We know this because these are the subjects which Paul corrects in the following chapters. We cannot pretend to agree through our silence. But, we must not have any divisions among us. Schismata is a word that pictures the forceful destruction of unity. God is of one mind and doctrinal differences do not reflect his lightheartedness about truth. Rather, division is evidence of our carnality, which is our man-centered thinking about the gospel (1 Cor 3).

**"perfectly joined together"** – This all comes from one Greek word, katartidzo, which means to put in order, to restore to its former condition. It is used of mending nets (Matt 4:21), and is closely related to our idea of 'reformation', which is to restore the church to its original unity of doctrine and continue in the stream of Protestant orthodoxy. We must be joined together in our mind (articulated doctrine) and in our judgment (applied doctrine).

**What schisms existed in Corinth? - "of Paul, Apollos, Cephas, Christ"** – The simple answer is, we don't know exactly. But two comments are important. First, the instructions and corrections which follow in the first four chapters point to a misunderstanding of the nature of the gospel, the work of the Spirit, the state of the unbeliever and the office of preaching. The divisions are doctrinal and are crucial to the integrity and unity of the church. Second, the names of these schisms gives us some clues and parallels for today. We have scriptural accounts of the corrections of Apollos and Cephas (Acts 18 & Gal 2). Obviously, Paul does not think his teaching is wrong (1 Cor 4:14-17). And obviously, we are to be 'of Christ'. In the same way, we believe that 'Calvinism' is sound doctrine, and that we are all to be 'Evangelicals'. More on that later.

### Striving For Biblical Unity

**Not Thinking as Minimalists** - There is a minimal requirement to be a true, believing church (Eph 4:5). But we are not to settle for that as the end of our unity (Eph 4:11-16). To anyone who is teaching a muddled gospel, we are to be brothers and teachers. But anyone who insists, as a condition of unity, that we all 'agree to disagree agreeably', they are denying the foundation of true unity in disagreement, i.e. a willingness to change.

**Correcting Without Compromise** – The goal is a mended, perfected tapestry of biblical doctrine that declares the glory, the truth, and the beauty of the gospel of Jesus Christ. A love of the truth requires that we must not patronize any sin.

**Humble Hearts, Gobs of Grace** – While correcting, we must keep an eye to our own hearts (Gal 6:1). There is a need of the most deliberate humility and self-distrust. We are constantly beset by the seductions, deceptions and drives of lawless pride and passion, self-seeking, self-asserting, self-indulging. There is nothing more hypocritical than to proudly declare yourself a Calvinist. While we do not patronize any sin, yet we do not abandon fellowship over every issue. We must learn the wisdom of thinking hierarchically with regard to sins and yet instill biblical pressure for change.

**Repairing the Ruins** – There is a similarity to the time of Ezra and Nehemiah and the rebuilding of the ruins. The church was not perfect in the past, but it was stronger, and more beautiful. We do need to go back, reforming and recovering, in order to move on ahead, continually reforming. Our duty remains to reform what is in need of reforming. Unity requires thinking and saying the same things, not staying silent, dumbing down doctrinal statements, joining hands and singing fluffy nothings.

## **Reformation – without a ‘party’-spirit**

We must divide where the Scriptures require. And so, for instance, the division which exists between Roman Catholicism and historic Protestantism is valid. The call for reformation within the broader evangelical church is also biblical, but it must be done as brothers and teachers, striving to maintain, preserve and promote greater unity, not simply to be right. Corporately, we must repent of our thousands upon thousands of denominations. And then, corporately, we must strive for like-mindedness according to the Scriptures. Unity is preserved and strengthened when the whole gospel is clearly, sharply, and truthfully proclaimed.