

Christ Heals Our Divisions

1 Corinthians 1:10-18

Divisions in the Church

¹⁰ Now I appeal to you, brothers and sisters, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that all of you be in agreement and that there be no divisions among you, but that you be united in the same mind and the same purpose. ¹¹ For it has been reported to me by Chloe's people that there are quarrels among you, my brothers and sisters. ¹² What I mean is that each of you says, "I belong to Paul," or "I belong to Apollos," or "I belong to Cephas," or "I belong to Christ." ¹³ Has Christ been divided? Was Paul crucified for you? Or were you baptized in the name of Paul? ¹⁴ I thank God that I baptized none of you except Crispus and Gaius, ¹⁵ so that no one can say that you were baptized in my name. ¹⁶ (I did baptize also the household of Stephanas; beyond that, I do not know whether I baptized anyone else.) ¹⁷ For Christ did not send me to baptize but to proclaim the gospel, and not with eloquent wisdom, so that the cross of Christ might not be emptied of its power.

Christ the Power and Wisdom of God

(Cp Isa 29.14)

¹⁸ For the message about the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God.¹

Greeting to you, my brothers and sisters in Christ! Praise God for all that God has done in our lives and brought us to this time of worship and fellowship! Together we are the Body of Christ.

Our scripture is from 1 Corinthians chapter one. Paul addresses his readers as "brothers and sisters" and appealed to them in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ that they have no division among themselves, but that they be united in both mind and purpose. What an odd thing to write to Brothers and Sisters in Christ. Doesn't

¹ *The Holy Bible : New Revised Standard Version*. Nashville : Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1989, S. 1 Co 1:10-18

the fact that they wore the name of Christ automatically mean that they were people of unity and peace? After all, didn't they receive unity and peace with all Christians at their baptism? Even though we don't always act like it, we are all members of the same family. But let me know get ahead of this scripture or myself.

Paul appealed to brothers and sister, not to adversaries, in the most authoritative fashion at his disposal: in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, the source and focus of Corinthian unity. His appeal was for harmony, not the elimination of diversity. He desired a unity of all the parts, like a quilt of various colors and patterns blended together in a harmonious whole. However, instead of this unity, the fabric was coming apart at the seams, or so Chloe's servants said.

Paul then asked three (3) rhetorical questions. In such a question the way the question is asked suggest that the answer expected is a definite "NO!."

The first question was "Is Christ divided or 'Has Christ been divided and different parts handed out to different people?'" The very idea is grotesque and must be rejected.

Paul identified four parties in the Church at Corinth. These parties had not broken away from the Church; the divisions were within the fellowship. The word he used to describe them is *schismata*, which is the word for tearing a garment. The Corinthian Church was in danger of becoming as unsightly as a torn garment. It must be noted that the leaders of the Church who are named, Paul and Cephas and Apollos, had nothing to do with these divisions. There were no dissensions between them. Without their knowledge and without their consent their names had been appropriated by these Corinthian factions. So let us examine each party to see what they may have stood for.

There were those who claimed to belong to Paul. This party would have been mainly of Gentile Christians. Paul had always preached the gospel of Christian freedom and the end of the law. It is most likely that this party was attempting to turn liberty into license and using their new found Christianity as an excuse to do as they liked. They had forgotten that the good news brought Christian ethics and obedience. They had forgotten that they were saved, not to be free to sin, but to be free not to sin.

Then there was the party who claimed to belong to Apollos. From Acts we learn that Apollos was a Jew from Alexandria, an eloquent man and well versed in the scriptures. His hometown was the center of intellectual activity. It was there that scholars had made a science of allegorizing the scriptures and finding the hidden meanings in the simplest passages of scripture. For an example of the kind of thing they did there is the Epistle of Barnabas, that argues from a comparison of Genesis 14:14 and 18:23 that Abraham had a household of 318 people whom he circumcised. The Greeks used letters as symbols for numbers, so 18 is iota followed by eta, which are the first two letters of the name Jesus; and the Greek for 300 is the letter tau, which is the shape of the Cross; therefore this old incident is a foretelling of the crucifixion of Jesus on his Cross! Alexandrian learning was full of that kind of thing. Also the Alexandrians were enthusiasts for literary graces. They were in fact the people who intellectualized Christianity. Those who claimed to belong to Apollos were probably the intellectuals who were turning Christianity into a philosophy rather than a religion.

Next there were those who claimed to belong to Cephas, the Jewish form of Peter's name. These were most likely Jews; and against the ruling of the Jerusalem Council, they came teaching that a Christian must still observe the Jewish law. They believed in grace as long as you obeyed the Jewish Law.

Then there were those who claimed to belong to Christ. They must have been a small and rigid sect who claimed that they were the only true Christians in Corinth. Their real fault was not in saying that they belonged to Christ, but in acting as if Christ belonged to them. This may have been a little, intolerant, self-righteous group.

But Paul did not preach one Christ, Apollos another, and Peter another. There is one Savior and one Gospel (Gal. 1:6–9). So how did the Corinthians create this four-way division? Why were there quarrels and contentions among them?

For one thing they were looking at the Gospel from a philosophical point of view. Corinth was a city filled with teachers and philosophers, all of whom wanted to share their “wisdom.” The other thing is that human nature enjoys following human leaders. We tend to identify more with spiritual leaders who help us and whose ministry we understand and enjoy. Instead of emphasizing the message of the Word, the Corinthians emphasized the messenger. They took their eyes off the Lord and put them onto the Lord’s servants, and this led to competition. Today there are followers of Joel Olsteen, T. D. Jakes, Joyce Meyers and many others. But it is sinful for church members to compare pastors, or for Christians to follow human leaders as disciples of men and women and not disciples of Jesus Christ. The “personality cults” in the church today are in direct disobedience to the Word of God. Only Jesus Christ should have the place of dominance in the Christian’s life (Col. 1:18).

Paul was the minister who founded the church, so most of the members would have accepted Christ through his ministry. Apollos followed Paul (Acts 18:24–28) and had an effective ministry. We have no record that Peter (Cephas) ever visited Corinth. Each of these leaders had a different personality and a different approach to the ministry of the Word; but they were one (1 Cor. 3:3–8; 4:6).

The second question was: Were you baptized in the name of Paul? (vv. 13b-17) We must remember how important baptism was and is in the New Testament church. In first century Palestine, when a sinner trusted Christ and was baptized, he or she cut themselves off from their old life and often was rejected by family and friends. Dr. Lee, of the Korean Christian Church spoke on Thursday morning and told us how he was rejected by his family when he was baptized at age 8. It cost something to be baptized in that day.

We are baptized in the name of Jesus. This phrase: “in the name of” in Greek implies the closest possible connection. To give money into a person’s name was to pay it into their account. A soldier swore loyalty into the name of Caesar; he belonged absolutely to the Emperor. “Into the name of” implied utter possession. In Christianity it implied that the Christian was not only possessed by Christ but was also identified with Christ. All that Paul is saying is, “I am glad that I was so busy preaching, because if I had baptized it would have given some of you the excuse to say that you were baptized into my possession instead of into Christ’s.”

It is wrong to identify any preacher’s name with your baptism other than the name of Jesus Christ. To do so is to create division. In 2005 I visited Israel and some in my party were baptized in the Jordan River. But it did not matter who did the baptizing or in what body of water, what matters is that our baptism is in Christ Jesus.

Paul did remember baptizing a few people. Crispus had been the ruler of the synagogue in Corinth (Acts 18:8); and Gaius was probably the man Paul lived with when he wrote Romans (Rom. 16:23). “The household of Stephanas” (1 Cor. 1:16) is probably described in part in 1 Corinthians 16:15–18. Apparently Paul did not carry with him a record of the names of all the people he baptized. It was sufficient that they were written in God’s book.

Paul's last rhetorical question is: "Was Paul crucified for you?" (vv. 18–25) The mention of the cross in 1 Corinthians 1:17 introduced a long section on the power of the Gospel versus the weakness of man's wisdom. Paul approached this problem of division in the church by first pointing to the unity of Christ: there is one Savior and one body. Then he reminded them of their baptism into Christ's body (1 Cor. 12:13), the church. Then he took them to the cross.

Crucifixion was not only a horrible death; it was a shameful death. It was illegal to crucify a Roman citizen. Crucifixion was never mentioned in polite society, any more than we today would discuss over dinner the gas chamber or the electric chair or lethal injection as means of capital punishment.

The key word Paul used here is wisdom and the key idea that Paul expressed is that we dare not try to override God's revealed message with human wisdom. God's wisdom is revealed primarily in the cross of Jesus Christ, but not everybody sees or understands this.

Both to the cultured Greek and to the pious Jew, the story that Christianity had to tell sounded like folly. The Christian message is the gospel which tells that God has sent Jesus into the World to live and die and be resurrected; that Christ fulfilled the prophecy; that Christ will come again; and that humans are to repent, confess faith in Christ, be baptized and receive the promised gift of the Holy Spirit.

It looked as if the Christian message had little chance of success against the background of Jewish or Greek life; but as Paul said, "What looks like God's foolishness is wiser than human wisdom; and what looks like God's weakness is stronger than human strength."²

² Barclay, William, lecturer in the University of Glasgow (Hrsg.): *The Letters to the Corinthians*. Philadelphia : The Westminster Press, 2000, c1975 (The Daily Study Bible Series, Rev. Ed), S. 13

Paul pointed out that some stumble at the cross (v. 23a); some laugh at the cross (v. 23b); some believe and experience the power and the wisdom of the cross (v. 24).

Those who have been called by God's grace, and who have responded by faith (see 2 Thes. 2:13–14), realize that Christ is God's power and God's wisdom. Not the Christ of the manger, or the temple, or the marketplace—but the Christ of the cross. It is in the death of Christ that God has revealed the foolishness of man's wisdom and the weakness of man's power.

Before we shake our heads at the Corinthians, we must remember that division has always been a problem among God's people, and almost every New Testament epistle deals with this topic or mentions it in one way or another. Even the 12 Apostles did not always get along with each other.

To set my next comments into perspective I must tell you a little about myself. I am the ninth child born to my parents, Leroy and Wilzetta Wilson. My sisters and brothers love each other and get together as often as possible: birthdays, holidays, vacations, you get the idea. Our extended family has such close ties that we have three separate family reunions. One gathering is made up of the grand children and their descendents on my mother's grandmother's side of the family; another is the gathering of the descendents of my mother and her siblings; and still another is a gathering of the descendents of my father and his siblings. We love to gather with family! However, sometime jealousy arises. Some years we can't make all the family reunions and have to make a choice. When a family does not show up there is speculation that they chose to attend one of the other gatherings rather than the ones missed. Rumors start, feelings are hurt...divisions happen.

My brothers and sister, I stand before you tonight because there are divisions among us. Some say we of Barton Stone, a great servant of God. Some say we are

of Thomas and Alexander Campbell, both men wonderfully used by God. Some say we know we have the truth because we don't have instrumental music in our worship. Some say we know we are the true Christians because we understand God's creative order and women are not allowed to teach a man. Some say we have arrived at the truth because we will do whatever is necessary to achieve Christian unity. Some say if they want unity then those other people have to do things our way, the New Testament way. Is God pleased with our divisions?

Let me tell you of some of my experiences in this great Stone-Campbell movement. I attended the 200th celebration of the Cane Ridge Revival. It was wonderful to see the field full of Christians that has come to thank God for what had occurred and how the Body of Christ was strengthened by what happened two hundred (200) years earlier. In the Lexington Kentucky newspaper it was my picture that appeared receiving communion at the celebration. I was happy to be a part of the Stone-Campbell movement!

In 2004 I was blessed to attend my first World Convention in Brighton, England. It was a glorious time of worship, education and fellowship. A year later I was in Rochester, Michigan for a similar conference. To give hospitality to all present and to offend no one, the college piano was hidden under the bleachers in the auditorium where we worshipped. The evening speaker encouraged us to put aside our differences and be one Church in Christ. After the worship I walked upon the speaker being reprimanded by an elder who had not appreciated the speaker's admonition. However, as the speaker spoke truth from my reading and understanding of the gospel, so I came later thanked him for his courage to speak truth to those of us who wear the name of Christ.

In 2008 we gathered again in Nashville to worship and fellowship. I especially appreciated the opportunity to participate in different styles of worship and in

different languages. But as I reflect back, I only remember two times outside of these World Conventions or Family Reunions, as I like to call them, that we have intentionally gotten together in the United States. The one was that 200th anniversary of the Cane Ridge revival and the other was the celebration of the Great Communion. My traveling companion, Sarah Beth Simonds, said as recently as Monday how she remembered with joy how the churches came together and lovingly and supportively worshipped together in services around our community to celebrate the Great Communion. She asked: why can't we do more of that and what will it take for us to continue to fellowship.

The universal body of Christ is not divided. No contemporary preacher or teacher person won salvation us, nor do any of us owe our allegiance to anybody except Christ.

From a human point of view, the message of the gospel, at the heart of which is the suffering and dying Savior, seemed foolishly contradictory. It is like when Jesus taught about the one who wants to be greatest must be the servant of all (Matt. 23:11-12). That didn't make any sense to the disciples! But this was precisely what Paul meant to affirm in his analysis of the causes of division in the church.

Fundamentally we need a renewal of our minds (Rom. 12:2). Too often we try to live our Christian lives on the basis of worldly thought pattern which has self-preservation as its ultimate goal. This kind of life is self-seeking, self-serving, and ultimately self-destructive (Luke 9:24-25).

It was this very point which Paul wanted to drive home to the Corinthians. The message of the Cross cuts to the heart of self-centeredness. "The message of the Cross" is the message of self-renunciation, of obedience to God which may lead as it did in Jesus' case to humiliation and death, but which ultimately leads not to

self-destruction but to preservation (Mark 8:34-35) and happiness (2 Tim. 2:12; Rev. 22:5).³

We are called into fellowship because of our union with Jesus Christ: He died for us; we were baptized in His name; we are identified with His cross. Paul asked us to make up our differences and allow the Holy Spirit to kit us together. Our disunion is unnatural and must be cured for the sake of the health and efficiency of the body of the Church. What a wonderful basis for spiritual unity!⁴

I pray that one day our name will be lived out in reality as we unite in the love of Christ. It is not about our differences, it is Christ that unites. Let there be no creed but Christ, and let us be essentially, intentionally and constitutionally one Church in Christ. Let unity be our polar star so that the World might believe.

Thanks be unto God! Amen.

³Walvoord, John F. ; Zuck, Roy B. ; Dallas Theological Seminary: *The Bible Knowledge Commentary : An Exposition of the Scriptures*. Wheaton, IL : Victor Books, 1983-c1985, S. 2:508

⁴Wiersbe, Warren W.: *The Bible Exposition Commentary*. Wheaton, Ill. : Victor Books, 1996, c1989, S. 1 Co 1:10