

**Maintenance Required**  
**Lesson Two - Division**  
1 Corinthians 1:10-3:23

**Intro:**

No-one likes division though all of us are undoubtedly familiar with it. Whenever I think of division, I think of someone stirring the pot. Have you ever been around someone like that? It is never enjoyable.

A brief look at our country shows how prevalent disunity and division are. Division over political alliance, division over immigration, division over social programs, division over abortion. The list could go on and on.

Churches are not immune from this phenomenon as well. It would be amazing if they were, but because churches are made up of broken sinners, then division is easily created within the church.

“Issues arise, personalities conflict, sins are committed. Resolution can be difficult work, and fighting our corner or backing our guy can be so much more immediately appealing.”<sup>1</sup>

Unity does not happen by accident but requires willful actions and decisions by the members of a congregation. In the passage, 1 Corinthians 1:10-3:23, Paul addresses the topic of disunity within the body - how it started, what it is rooted in, and what it threatens to destroy.

Notice the command that he begins the next section with (in 1 Cor 1:10), “Now I beseech you, brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that ye all speak the same thing, and that there be no divisions among you; but that ye be perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment.”

Unity is not an optional reality for the local church, but a command that cuts to the heart of our purpose as a church. Unity is important because what it is centered around evidences what our purpose is.<sup>2</sup>

In our lesson this evening, we are going to take some time and walk through these areas and give us space to evaluate - what does our church body look

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<sup>1</sup> Dever, Mark. 12 Challenges Churches Face (9Marks) (p. 26). Crossway. Kindle Edition.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid. p. 26.

like? Is it a body that is fractured by disunity in spirit and purpose, or is our body one that embraces unity in the Gospel. Am I creating unity within the body or am I stoking division?

## **How Division Starts - Chap. 1 v. 10-16**

Having encouraged the Corinthian church in the beginning of chapter 1, Paul wastes no time in jumping into the topics at hand that need to be discussed with the church.

So what is the situation that Paul is writing to address? Divisions have arisen within the church at Corinth and are threatening to rip the church apart. The word divisions carries with it the idea of splits or breaches.<sup>3</sup>

Illus: Think of a giant battle scene in a movie like Lord of the Rings where the enemy aims to split the front and create a breach in their lines allowing the enemies to attack and destroy without resistance.

So what was causing this dire situation: The members of Corinth were divided in their loyalties to the various preachers and teachers within the body and it had started to create partisanship within the body.

Note what Paul writes in vs. 12-16 - Read Verses

The members of Corinth were drawing lines based on which teacher they deemed was best - You had the Paul community (founder of the church); you had the Apollos community (a great teacher of the Word that continued after Paul left); you had the Peter community (a great apostle in the Jerusalem church); and then you had the Jesus community (their loyalty resided in the teachings of Christ).

It appears from Paul's writings that it was not simple disagreement on who was the best teacher but had gotten to a place of division, disunity, and animosity towards those who disagreed.

This was not an uncommon cultural issue within Corinth. This would have bled over naturally from their time as pagan idolators having pledged their

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<sup>3</sup> Robert Jamieson, A. R. Fausset, and David Brown, Commentary Critical and Explanatory on the Whole Bible, vol. 2 (Oak Harbor, WA: Logos Research Systems, Inc., 1997), 263.

allegiance to one of the false Gods such as “I belong to Aphrodite” and “I belong to Demeter.”<sup>4</sup>

It could also be born out of a good heart - I really appreciate the care and investment that this brother has made in my life with the truth of Scripture - but it had morphed into ideological camps that twisted and destroyed the unity that the Gospel frees us to.

Paul drives this point home with the use of his rhetorical question in v. 13 - Is Christ divided? Their alliance to a man threatened to undermine their message of the Gospel. It is all about Christ while allegiance to a man centers the message around the person rather than the Savior.

Paul continued on through the end of chapter 1 and the start of chapter 2 reminding them over and over, it is about Christ and not man. It is not about the giftedness of the speaker or their magnetic personality. It is about Christ.<sup>5</sup>

How does this subtly sink into our own hearts and lives - Rejection of one pastors shepherding because you like another pastor better; critique of one pastors sermons while praising another's; discouragement and resentment when a pastor leaves to continue another work for Christ.

While the division that is seen within our passage is around the leadership of the church, there are a variety of other areas that division can take root - the ending of a specific ministry that you love, the inclusion of a song that you don't like, the timing of a missions trip that doesn't allow you to be a part.

Division arises because we move the focus off of Christ and our unity in Him and center the focus on ourselves and our own wants. How does division start? Our vision becomes self-centered.

As I mentioned at the beginning of this point, what our unity is centered around evidences what our purpose is. Sadly, I think far too often, what we see in our American churches is that the unity is around ourselves, what we want - we believe in unity as long as we are happy. It is false unity that is as fragile as the word “no”.

It starts by having the wrong view - a view of ourselves and not Christ

If you haven't caught the theme yet - Division is rooted in our own pride.

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<sup>4</sup> Dever, Mark. 12 Challenges Churches Face (9Marks) (p. 27). Crossway. Kindle Edition.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid. p. 27

## **What is division rooted in?**

All of us have been guilty of the humble brag - "I am the most humble person I know." Let me give a pastoral example "I wish people would stop asking me to speak at conferences." On its surface it seems genuine and then you peel away the top layer to recognize, no they just really want me to know how many conferences that they get to speak at.

Often, though, our bragging is a lot more straightforward - Look at my brand new Mercedes car. Look at my amazing house. Look at my amazing kids. All of us have been guilty of participating in a conversation that was a series of one ups - I sprained my arm - yeah, well, I broke my arm - oh, yeah, did I tell you about the time I had my arm ripped off and then I had to fly in a helicopter for 13 hours to France so the one surgeon in the world who could do the surgery could reattach my arm.

What do these illustrations remind us? Pride is so easy to give place to. At the core of the Corinthians' attachment to these various teachers was not for the praise of God or perhaps even the praise of the teacher, but in the validation of their own self-righteousness.

If you read through the length of this passage, Paul brings their worldly pride and self-exultation right out into the open. Notice what Paul states at the end of chapter one - The point of the Gospel is so that no flesh could boast of their own standing before God.

We are all rightfully condemned before God with a sin debt that we could never pay to restore our relationship back with Him. But Christ stepped into our place and payed our sin debt for us so that we could be restored back to the Father, and we could boast of Him!

Note v. 31 - He that glorieth, let him glory in the Lord.

Division in the body is often rooted in our own pride and arrogance rather than unity in the glory of Christ. Paul's solution for the division within the church at Corinth was not a comparison game between the various teachers, but a theological teaching.

Unity within the body is about the elevation and glory of Christ; division within the body is usually about the elevation and glory of the self.

Remember the disciples arguing about who would be the greatest in heaven? Do you remember Jesus' response? The greatest is the one that is

the least. Position in the kingdom of Christ is never about status but about service. It is not about being the most recognized and favored, but the most humble.

What is division rooted in? Our pride and self-exaltation that builds ourselves up rather than Christ.

What is Paul calling them to embrace - A unity that is centered on Christ and focused on giving glory to Him rather than ourselves. We don't care who gets the recognition. We don't care who gets the praise. We don't care if we are never considered the greatest. All we care about is the proclamation of the cross and the glorification of Christ.

### **What does Division destroy?**

To close our lesson today, I wanted to share the seven things that Mark Dever highlights in his book are expressed from Godly unity.<sup>6</sup>

#### **1. Godly Unity Displays Christ**

We have already spent some time walking through this point so I will keep it brief. When we find unity within the body of Christ, with people that are sinners just like us with differing opinions, cultures, and personalities we do something that is not culturally understood within the world. How can you find unity in the areas that seem to create such friction in our world? Christ. He is the only answer. Christ and the redemptive power of His Gospel that tears down the "wall of hostility" (Eph. 2:14-16).

Nothing brings more glory to God and draws more people to Him than the unity that we can possess as His followers towards each other within the body.

#### **2. Godly Unity Exalts the Cross**

There is clear overlap here with the first point, but also some distinction. Gospel unity in the church mirrors the purpose of the Cross. The pain, death, and sorrow of the cross brought about unity of God and man. Likewise, as the people of God, we should seek to live out the unity that the cross purchased for us. We should be unified in our expression of that hope to others!

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<sup>6</sup> Dever, Mark. 12 Challenges Churches Face (9Marks) (p. 26-34). Crossway. Kindle Edition.

### **3. Godly Unity Expresses Humility**

It isn't about me. It isn't about my glory. It isn't about adding merit badges to our Christian life. It is about living in humble service of my fellow brothers and sisters within the body for the glory of my Savior.

My earthly status is not my concern. My concern is living for eternity. The success of our ministry here on this earth is not my own doing, but God's through me.

"When your boasting is only in God, it is hard to get proud and defensive and divisive. Regularly work to humble yourself by comparing what you deserve with what you have been given."<sup>7</sup>

### **4. Godly Unity Shows Wisdom**

When we with unity within the body, we are rejecting the "wisdom" of this world and embracing the wisdom of God. It values the truth of Scripture over the ideologies of the day. The unity finds its firm foundations in the truth of God and is not easily shaken by the thoughts and opinions of man.

When we are unified in purpose, desire, and gathering as a body, we show that we are not consumed by the cultural norms that surround us, but are enlightened by the truth and wisdom of God.

Paul make the contrast here of foolishness vs wisdom. God turns it on its head - what man deems is foolish, God deems as wisdom. Be unified in the wisdom of God.

### **5. Godly Unity Evidences Spiritual Maturity**

At the beginning of Chapter 3, Paul laments that he must write to the believers of Corinth as if they were infants needing the milk and unable to chew the meat that Paul desired to give them from the Word. Why? Because they were carnal believers.

They had received the Gospel but were still clinging to their old way of living, their old way of thinking. The gospel frees us from this and pushes us towards maturity in Christ.

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<sup>7</sup> Dever, Mark. 12 Challenges Churches Face (9Marks) (p. 30). Crossway. Kindle Edition.

What does immaturity look like? Clearly, Paul wants them to recognize division as a major part of it.

How can I give you more, if you have not lived out the little that I have given you? “The Corinthians had received enough teaching to know better than to have the kinds of divisions they were having. They were living by the secular norms of Corinth, and their jealousy and quarrelling proved it.”<sup>8</sup>

## **6. Godly Unity Reflects a Submission to God**

Godly unity is built upon a trust in God’s provision and submission to it. Paul returns in chapter 3 vs. 5 to the issue of partisanship around various teachers in the life of the Church by reminding them that while there have been several involved in the ministry at Corinth all of them are of equal value because all find their root in the provision of God. All were sustained by Him and given fruit through His divine power.

Paul wants them to consider the absurdity and the indictment of that reality. The absurdity that one of God’s provisions in their life would be better than another, but also the indictment that portions of God’s provision wasn’t enough.

Godly unity is filled with gratitude in God’s provision regardless of which brother or sister it comes through, regardless of which pastor is preaching or teaching the lesson. We submitted to God in unity together thankful for the care that He extends to us.

## **7. Godly Unity Comes from Treasuring God’s Promises**

Everything that God has promised, we already have. Remember what Paul started off his letter reminding them: They had been giving everything that they needed for life in Christ. All was given to them, all was accessible. Why? Because all is in Christ and we are all in Him!

They did not need to worry about missing out on anything because they had Christ. You and I do not need to worry about being left out or kept back because we have Christ. Everything He has promised in His Word is true for us.

Unity is possible - even in the culture that we live in today. It is not just a theoretical possibility for our church, but a spirit that we can actively possess.

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<sup>8</sup> Dever, Mark. 12 Challenges Churches Face (9Marks) (p. 32). Crossway. Kindle Edition.

It requires us to embrace spiritual wisdom in humility and reliance on God, trusting in His care, and focused on proclaiming His Gospel for His honor and glory!

Don't give place to the devil and allow division to stunt your spiritual growth. Embrace the unity of Christ and the deep riches it imparts.