

The previous verses were praising the Corinthians for their gifts and encouraging them that Jesus would sustain them guiltless at His return. Paul then jumps right into addressing the numerous problems. While each issue was important, the one that seemed to be most urgent was the quarreling and division that was taking place. <sup>10</sup> *I appeal to you, brothers, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that all of you agree, and that there be no divisions among you, but that you be united in the same mind and the same judgment.* 1 Corinthians 1:10

From the first churches onward there have been problems which all center around man's ego. We are born with a selfish nature and from our first crying demands grow up practicing how to have our way. We who are in Christ are supposed to have crucified our old nature when we came to Christ, but as we learned in the letter to the Galatians, the old nature remains at war with the Spirit. We need to crucify our old nature daily (Galatians 5:17<sup>i</sup>; 6:14<sup>ii</sup>). So, it shouldn't be surprising when we see quarrels and factions form within churches. Wherever you have a group of people there will eventually be strife over who is going to have their way. There will be strong personalities that argue and quiet people who are offended. When egos are wounded it tends to divide us.

Ideally, the church should have godly elders who seek the Lord's will through prayer and the revelation of the Word. The congregation should then submit to the ruling of the elders in major issues (Hebrews 13:17<sup>iii</sup>). In minor interpersonal issues **we should all prefer others above ourselves and refuse to be offended (Philippians 2:3<sup>iv</sup>)**. But the fact that we have these divisions shows we are not always surrendered to the Spirit.

*Quarreling is a reality in the church because selfishness and other sins are realities in the church. Because of quarreling the Father is dishonored, the Son is disgraced, His people are demoralized and discredited, and the world is turned off and confirmed in unbelief. Fractured fellowship robs Christians of joy and effectiveness, robs God of glory, and robs the world of the true testimony of the gospel. A high price for an ego trip!<sup>v</sup>*

When I first came to this church, it had just split over property issues and then was about to split again over the firing of the last pastor. I tried to get each side to recognize that there should be forgiveness over past issues as we are commanded to forgive and love one another (John 13:34<sup>vi</sup>). Colossians 3:13 commands us, <sup>13</sup> *bearing with one another and, if one has a complaint against another, forgiving each other; as the Lord has forgiven you, so you also must forgive.* But each side had their heels dug in and would not humble themselves. That is putting ego before the Lord and refusing to obey Him. And that was what was happening in the church in Corinth.

Paul started with the most important urgent problem. The church had separated into factions. Divisions are a work of man's fallen nature (Galatians 5:20<sup>vii</sup>). We can have different opinions and interpretations but the love of Christ and for one another is such a priority that the little differences over issues that are not clear in the Word of God should not divide us. We must humble ourselves and find a way to reach united decisions or simply let the elders lead us forward. Not everyone will be happy with every decision, but we trust the Lord will have His way and put the differences behind us. **LOVE is the priority, and the first fruit of the Spirit.**

Jesus' high priestly prayer focused on the unity of believers. Jesus declared that it was our unity that would cause the world to believe (John 17:20,21<sup>viii</sup>). That means when we cause disunity because we consider our opinion more important than others and insist on it, we hinder people from coming to Christ. When you look at it like that, it should make us all cringe at the thought of being that stubborn. It should help us prefer others above ourselves. Love for others is a sign that we truly love God (1 John 3:14<sup>ix</sup>).

Paul was pleading with them to have the same mind and same judgment which means they support the elders' decisions even if they had another opinion. We see that in the church councils in Acts and in the description of the role of elders. The term elders is interchangeable in some passages with shepherds which is translated as pastors. They are to lead and feed the flock (1 Peter 5:1,2<sup>x</sup>). Therefore, when issues come up upon of which there are various opinions, the elders will seek the Lord, the Great Shepherd, as to His leading. They will come to a conclusion when they are all of one mind on the Lord's leading. That is why it is so important to have elders who meet the qualifications in Titus 1 and 1 Timothy 3.

This subject is a timely message for the church of the 21st century, for we have separated into a thousand different factions which has weakened the church's testimony in the world. We should hold to Biblical truth and if necessary separate over heresy. We must stand firm on the Word of God and refuse to compromise what is clear in Scripture. But too often we divide over minor doctrines or ceremonial differences. Our independent spirit in America even has us church hopping to find the one we like best, at least for the moment, and then on to another when we have a minor disagreement. This shows little commitment to one another which is contrary to the family like descriptions of the church in the New Testament (1 Corinthians 13:7<sup>xi</sup>).

Paul has reminded them of his authority as an apostle, but he pleads with them for unity calling them brothers twice. You can sense anguish for their unity to be restored. To that brotherly affection he adds authority of "by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ." That is the ultimate authority. Jesus calls them to be united in Him. The church is the one body of Christ in the world. All is to be done for His glory and not the glory of man. That is the basis for Paul's call for all to agree. His wording is literally to speak the same things.

Every church body should be united around the basic Biblical doctrines: **Inerrancy of Scripture; the Trinity; the incarnation and virgin birth; the sinless life of Jesus; His atoning death and victory over death; the Great Commission; the indwelling Holy Spirit; the coming return of Christ; final judgment; and His eternal reign.** If the Scripture is clear on an issue, to argue against it is to argue with God. There are many other minor doctrines, and each church body needs to decide where they stand for the sake of unity in that church. We can be in fellowship and disagree over minor issues in which the Scriptures are not clear, but we should not try to convince others within the church that our view is the only correct one. Doing so will start a faction and confuse new believers.

*<sup>11</sup> For it has been reported to me by Chloe's people that there is quarreling among you, my brothers.* 1 Corinthians 1:11 The result of dividing into factions is quarreling, contention, strife – I know better than you do! Members of one of the prominent families in Corinth had reported this problem to Paul.

James tells us that our quarreling comes from our passions that are at war within us (James 4:1<sup>xii</sup>). We need to humble ourselves and agree with one another. If the other person has their way and they are wrong, you will be proved right. If they are right, you

can thank God you weren't pushy. If it is over leadership, as in the case here, trust the Lord to work it out. Realize it is the same Spirit working in each leader.

Different personalities are reached by different styles. Have the same mind and the same judgment. In other words, focus on what you agree on, the basics of who Jesus is and what He has done and is doing, and set aside minor differences so that your unity will glorify God (Romans 15:6<sup>xiii</sup>).

Most people build factions over minor things like not having their way about some physical thing or minor doctrine. They forget we are a family, and you don't just split a family over trivial issues. Remember that everything that we see is temporal. What we don't see is eternal. The things we fuss over are often just blip in time, while we forget to emphasize the eternal (1 John 2:17<sup>xiv</sup>; 1 Corinthians 7:31<sup>xv</sup>). Wouldn't it be great if we could put on a pair of future glasses and see ten years later and realize our petty issue didn't matter at all? Or better yet, what if we could get a glimpse of heaven and realize our argument wasted our precious time on earth and detracted from the Kingdom of God?

*<sup>12</sup> What I mean is that each one of you says, "I follow Paul," or "I follow Apollos," or "I follow Cephas," or "I follow Christ."* 1 Corinthians 1:12 The church in Corinth was acting like the citizens of Corinth who were all about patronage. "Who is your sponsor? My sponsor is better than yours." *Patronage is our escapist fix to numb the suspicion and fear that there is something wrong with the world and that it might be us.*<sup>xvi</sup>

This reminds me of denominations. Luther was frustrated with people calling themselves Lutherans. He insisted they call themselves Christians. We just can't seem to help our competitive nature and pride in being the ones who are special. Of course you think your church is the best one for you or you would be going to a different one. But at the same time recognize that other Bible believing churches are the best ones for those who attend there and that we are one in Christ. Though there are always competitive pastors and attendees, the church should never be about competition with one another. We should never be encouraging someone to leave their church to come to ours unless their church is out right heretical. **We are competing with the world and the devil for souls, not with other churches for the number of attendees.** If our focus is on Jesus, then we will be grateful for fellow soldiers in Christ wherever they attend (2 Timothy 2:3,4<sup>xvii</sup>). It is interesting that on the mission field when the culture is not so favorable, the different missions tend to work together. It is easier for them to realize the real reason we are here is not the biggest church but making disciples of Jesus.

Names and peripheral doctrine do define where we stand, but they can also divide, and the body is not divided into parts, separated from one another. It is the same Lord working in each. We should learn to appreciate the differences. Some churches focus on the gifts of the Spirit, some on evangelism, some on teaching the Word and discipleship, some on serving the needs in the community. Each is an expression of Christ and tends to reach people that the other emphasis would not reach.

Paul is writing because the church was dividing into groups over which pastor/elder they liked best, so there was a Paul group which no doubt liked deep doctrinal teaching. There was an Apollos group. They like eloquent explanations. The Cephas group probably liked Peter's down to earth explanations and personal experiences with Jesus. The Christ group may have been like some today who don't think they need the teachers or pastors which the Word declares God has given to the church (Ephesians

4:11<sup>xviii</sup>). The cult of personality ends up in focusing on the teacher rather than the message.

The same thing is happening today. Some are fans of Franklin Graham, and others of Charles Stanley, while others only listen John McArthur. There is nothing wrong with having a favorite style, but it is when we emphasize the man to the exclusion of all others and boast in him rather than the cross that we cause division (Galatians 6:14<sup>xix</sup>). None of those teachers in Corinth or those I just mentioned would encourage that. If you hear a preacher say that he is the only one you should listen to, never listen to him again. It is a giant red flag declaring an over-inflated ego. It is a cult like mentality.

We all have our preferences, but we must realize that it is a choice to focus on one portion of the Christian doctrine. When we do that to the neglect or even denial of the rest, we become out of balance and risk becoming heretical (the Greek word for factions in 11:19<sup>xx</sup>). Instead, we should appreciate the other portions of doctrine emphasized by other Bible believing churches. We should avoid speaking negatively about those with a different emphasis, as if we had chosen the best and they are somehow not as important. Our focus should always be on knowing Jesus, the Word, and making disciples.

*<sup>13</sup> Is Christ divided? Was Paul crucified for you? Or were you baptized in the name of Paul? <sup>14</sup> I thank God that I baptized none of you except Crispus and Gaius, <sup>15</sup> so that no one may say that you were baptized in my name. <sup>16</sup> (I did baptize also the household of Stephanas. Beyond that, I do not know whether I baptized anyone else.)* 1 Corinthians 1:13-16 Are there factions in Christ? NO! We may have different convictions as to meaning and interpretation of non-essential Scripture passages, but Jesus is not divided. We may have different emphases, but Jesus is truth! He never changes and is indivisible. When the focus turns from Jesus to any other man, there will always be a distortion of who God is, for Jesus alone is the exact imprint of God's nature (Hebrews 1:3<sup>xxi</sup>). No other man has a corner on truth. Whether the pope, the Dali Lama, or your favorite preacher, to be human is to be fallible (Romans 3:23<sup>xxii</sup>).

Some in Corinth appear to have been following the individual who baptized them. Paul did not want followers for himself. He was making disciples of Jesus. He did not want to create the Paul denomination or First Church of Saint Paul. He wanted all the focus to be on Jesus. That should be the goal of every godly pastor and ministry. Ministries that name themselves after the leader's name often end up having to change the name when the leader's weakness is exposed.

There is an important lesson in that Paul only baptized a few people. He let the local elders do the work. He did not have to be the center of attention or make people dependent on his presence. He wanted them to see Jesus in their leaders and their own lives. That should be our goal as well. We are not dependent on any man other than the man Christ Jesus. Leaders will pass away, but the mission of advancing God's kingdom in the hearts of mankind must go on. Several of our elders who I thought were essential to Wayside's successful ministry are now with the Lord. God raises up people to take their place. It is His work, and while we honor people for their service, it is all for God's glory!

We are all dispensable! I include myself. Someone said that if I were to leave the church would cease. God forbid! I'm just one in a string of pastors that have led Wayside. Under some previous pastors the attendance was three times as large. Eventually God will move me on, or I'll get too old to fill this role well and the elders will carry on. By

God's grace the lead pastor and elders will do a better job at discipling followers of Jesus. The church belongs to Jesus. He is our lodestar. He is our everything.

*17 For Christ did not send me to baptize but to preach the gospel, and not with words of eloquent wisdom, lest the cross of Christ be emptied of its power.* 1 Corinthians 1:17 Paul saw the proclamation of the gospel as being more important than baptism. It wasn't that baptism was not important, but that the emphasis is on proclaiming the good news, for that alone is essential to salvation. The Corinthians needed to focus on the message more than the messenger. That should be true for every church body.

Paul used Koine (street language) Greek and was not using tools of Greek rhetoric which were popular at the time. The gospel is for all people in every status of life. An exalted language would exclude some and cause the listener to think more of the messenger than the message. When we preach or witness, we must be careful to use common, easily understandable language, and rely on the Holy Spirit to bring home the truth of the message and stir the heart. That is the power! It is not the world's wisdom. It is the wisdom and power of God in His Word and His Spirit (1 Corinthians 2:4,5<sup>xxiii</sup>).

We can empty the cross of its power if we try to be convincing or use a method. Sincerity communicates, and when we sincerely share what the cross means to us in the power of the Holy Spirit, it touches hearts. It may not be received, but at least they know you believe it. That often results in the hearer considering it. The Spirit can stir your words in their hearts when the appropriate time comes.

The sad thing about duty bound sharing of the message is that people realize when it is not done out of love. They don't want to become someone who has to go around doing the same thing. It pushes them away from the gospel.

I remember someone telling me about an incident when there was a broken power line on their street. All the neighbors came out to see when it would be restored. The person's neighbor told them, "Oh no, here comes so and so from down the street. He is always trying to cram Jesus down my throat." Well, maybe he was or maybe that is just how the person felt, but we certainly don't want people to fear communicating with us. They may not receive the gospel, but they should consider us winsome, kind-hearted people. Represent Jesus who was called the friend of sinners (Matthew 11:19<sup>xxiv</sup>). The only people He was harsh with is the religious leaders who were misleading the people. It was their self-righteousness that called Him "the friend of sinners." Little did they know that was a title Jesus would have appreciated. Are you a friend of sinners?

The power of the cross is not in how much Bible you know, or how eloquent your explanations are. If it was, it would carry only a kind of temporary persuasion. **The power of the cross that transformed your life is conveyed in your sincerity and conviction from your personal encounter with Christ and your communion with Him.** That is a power that is greater than any intellectual persuasion or methods taught by man. It is the power of the Holy Spirit that grabs the heart and brings the person into the life-changing presence of Jesus (Acts 1:8<sup>xxv</sup>).

This is our introduction to the first problem Paul is confronting, which is the cult of personality. It was tearing the church into separate factions. The root of the problem was the ego of those in the church body. It was contrary to the Spirit of Jesus and His high priestly prayer of John 17 that we all be one in Him. It took the focus off Jesus.

I plead with you in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you all see that it is Jesus who leads this church through your elders. That each of you is presently an

essential part of this body of believers, but also that you recognize that every one of us is dispensable. This is God's church. If the focus is on Jesus and God's Word with an effort to disciple new believers, then God will continue to bless and provide (2 Corinthians 9:8<sup>xxvi</sup>). The work is not dependent on any individual. It is dependent on an all-powerful God. Let us keep our eyes on Him and place our trust in Him and see what He can do (Hebrews 12:1,2<sup>xxvii</sup>)!

Questions:

- 1 What is the cause of most problems in the church throughout history?
- 2 How should the church function in major and minor issues?
- 3 Review Colossians 3:13.
- 4 What is it that unites us?
- 5 What should our attitude toward other Bible believing churches be?
- 6 What should our focus be?
- 7 Why does no one other than Jesus have all truth?
- 8 What did Paul consider the reason he was sent?
- 9 What are essential considerations in our witness?
- 10 What are the problems created by factions?

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<sup>i</sup> **Galatians 5:17** <sup>17</sup> For the desires of the flesh are against the Spirit, and the desires of the Spirit are against the flesh, for these are opposed to each other, to keep you from doing the things you want to do.

<sup>ii</sup> **Galatians 6:14** <sup>14</sup> But far be it from me to boast except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by which the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world.

<sup>iii</sup> **Hebrews 13:17** <sup>17</sup> Obey your leaders and submit to them, for they are keeping watch over your souls, as those who will have to give an account. Let them do this with joy and not with groaning, for that would be of no advantage to you.

<sup>iv</sup> **Philippians 2:3** <sup>3</sup> Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility count others more significant than yourselves.

<sup>v</sup> MacArthur, J. F., Jr. (1984). *1 Corinthians* (p. 24). Chicago: Moody Press.

<sup>vi</sup> **John 13:34** <sup>34</sup> A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another: just as I have loved you, you also are to love one another.

<sup>vii</sup> **Galatians 5:20** <sup>20</sup> idolatry, sorcery, enmity, strife, jealousy, fits of anger, rivalries, dissensions, divisions,

<sup>viii</sup> **John 17:20-21** <sup>20</sup> "I do not ask for these only, but also for those who will believe in me through their word, <sup>21</sup> that they may all be one, just as you, Father, are in me, and I in you, that they also may be in us, so that the world may believe that you have sent me.

<sup>ix</sup> **1 John 3:14** <sup>14</sup> We know that we have passed out of death into life, because we love the brothers. Whoever does not love abides in death.

<sup>x</sup> **1 Peter 5:1-2** <sup>1</sup> So I exhort the elders among you, as a fellow elder and a witness of the sufferings of Christ, as well as a partaker in the glory that is going to be revealed: <sup>2</sup> shepherd the flock of God that is among you, exercising oversight, not under compulsion, but willingly, as God would have you; not for shameful gain, but eagerly;

<sup>xi</sup> **1 Corinthians 13:7** <sup>7</sup> Love bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things.

<sup>xii</sup> **James 4:1** <sup>1</sup> What causes quarrels and what causes fights among you? Is it not this, that your passions are at war within you?

<sup>xiii</sup> **Romans 15:6** <sup>6</sup> that together you may with one voice glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.

<sup>xiv</sup> **1 John 2:17** <sup>17</sup> And the world is passing away along with its desires, but whoever does the will of God abides forever.

<sup>xv</sup> **1 Corinthians 7:31** <sup>31</sup> and those who deal with the world as though they had no dealings with it. For the present form of this world is passing away.

<sup>xvi</sup> <sup>1</sup> Um, S. T. (2015). *1 Corinthians: The Word of the Cross*. (R. K. Hughes, Ed.) (p. 26). Wheaton, IL: Crossway.

<sup>xvii</sup> **2 Timothy 2:3-4** <sup>3</sup> Share in suffering as a good soldier of Christ Jesus.

<sup>4</sup> No soldier gets entangled in civilian pursuits, since his aim is to please the one who enlisted him.

<sup>xviii</sup> **Ephesians 4:11** <sup>11</sup> And he gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the shepherds and teachers,

<sup>xix</sup> **Galatians 6:14** <sup>14</sup> But far be it from me to boast except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by which the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world.

<sup>xx</sup> **1 Corinthians 11:19** <sup>19</sup> for there must be factions among you in order that those who are genuine among you may be recognized.

<sup>xxi</sup> **Hebrews 1:3** <sup>3</sup> He is the radiance of the glory of God and the exact imprint of his nature, and he upholds the universe by the word of his power. After making purification for sins, he sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high,

<sup>xxii</sup> **Romans 3:23** <sup>23</sup> for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God,

<sup>xxiii</sup> **1 Corinthians 2:4-5** <sup>4</sup> and my speech and my message were not in plausible words of wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power, <sup>5</sup> so that your faith might not rest in the wisdom of men but in the power of God.

<sup>xxiv</sup> **Matthew 11:19** <sup>19</sup> The Son of Man came eating and drinking, and they say, 'Look at him! A glutton and a drunkard, a friend of tax collectors and sinners!' Yet wisdom is justified by her deeds."

<sup>xxv</sup> **Acts 1:8** <sup>8</sup> But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth."

<sup>xxvi</sup> **2 Corinthians 9:8** <sup>8</sup> And God is able to make all grace abound to you, so that having all sufficiency in all things at all times, you may abound in every good work.

<sup>xxvii</sup> **Hebrews 12:1-2** <sup>1</sup> Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us also lay aside every weight, and sin which clings so closely, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, <sup>2</sup> looking to Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God.