

# Unity of the Faith

## 1 Corinthians 1:10-17

Last week we studied the introduction to 1 Corinthians where we saw Paul describe his relationship to Jesus as an Apostle and read what he had to say about the Corinthians relationship to Jesus as the church of God in Corinth. As we open our text at verse 10 this morning we see Paul beginning to address the problem in Corinth, which is highlights for us in verse 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."

It seems that the quarrels in Corinth resulted from an inappropriate attachment to different leaders that took precedent over their relationship with Jesus.<sup>1</sup>

Paul is concerned about this and so in these seven verses he

- expresses a plea,
- addresses the problem,
- highlights what their priority is to be.

Let's now look at each of these in turn.

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<sup>1</sup>Apollos was a native of Alexandria, a Mediterranean port city in Egypt on the Nile Delta. By the time Paul writes 1 Corinthians in 55 AD Apollos has spent time in Corinth where as Luke tells us in Acts 18 "he greatly helped those who through grace had become believers, for he powerfully refuted the Jews in public, showing by the scriptures that the Messiah is Jesus. Cephas is the Apostle Peter. It seemed that in Corinth the church was fighting over who was the superior leader by saying "I belong to this one or that one." They were losing their focus because they were losing sight of what it means to be a Church centred on Christ Jesus our Lord, rather than on one of the leaders.

### **Paul's Plea:**

At verse 10 we read: "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." Notice that Paul addresses their problem of division in a positive way. He affirms that as followers of Jesus they are to be united in mind and purpose. From 1:18 through to the end of chapter 15 he will show what this mind and purpose looks like. I want to look at the first part of this verse, particularly the word appeal. The word appeal comes from the same root as the word plea. Both words come from the Greek word "*parakaleo*" which is the same root word used by Jesus when he refers to the Holy Spirit as the Paraclete. The basic meaning of the word Paraclete is someone who comes along side to help. Therefore by saying "I appeal to you" Paul is saying to the Corinthians that he wants to come along side them to help them see what it means to be united in mind and purpose

It is helpful to remember that when Jesus refers to the Holy Spirit as the Paraclete he then goes on to say that the Spirit will come along side the Apostles to lead them into all truth. This is what Paul wants to do here. When they come to see more clearly the truth about Jesus, their divisions will be addressed and replaced by a Christ-centred unity.

Please note that Paul makes his appeal "by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ." By stating it like this he is saying that he doesn't represent himself, but he is a representative of Jesus. It isn't because Paul is a conflict resolution consultant that he is asking them to allow him to come along side them. Rather it is because of who he is and because of who they are in relationship to Jesus Christ. He is their brother and they have the same Lord. They are part of the same family with Jesus as the head of this family. And just as blood families can be places where the quarreling is harsh, the same can happen in the family of God. But Paul wants them to know that this kind of quarreling and divisiveness is not Jesus' will for them and so he makes his appeal in Jesus' name.

There are two words he uses in this verse that will be helpful for us to understand more fully.

The first is the word *agreement*. The Greek for this word is *symphonia* from which we get the word symphony. Paul is saying that the church is to be like a symphony. Every

voice is blending together to form harmonies that fit one with the other. This is the word picture the word agreement is to form in our minds. But at the moment the Corinthians are not sounding like the CPO but more like Black Sabbath because there are divisions among them. The word used here for divisions comes from the Greek word schismata, from which we get the English word schism. The word schismata means "to tear apart." Paul is concerned that in Corinth the quarrels happening are tearing the church apart.

As we look at this verse it teaches us much about what it means to be a biblical leader relating to a local congregation. We have observed that Paul sees his authority as having its basis in the message he is preaching which grows out of his relationship with Jesus. His passion for the Gospel of Jesus overflows in the love he has for these people. This is at the core of what it means to be a Christian leader. Our love for God fills us with a love for the people with whom we live out our faith. And rather than telling parishioners what to do from on high, a biblical leader will come along side those who make up the church and share in their life together seeking to work towards a common mind and a common purpose. May I say at this point what a joy it is for me to come along side you and grow as your brother in our Lord Jesus Christ as we grow together in living out a life of deepening unity in Christ. As we share in this life together it is my hope that each of you will come to see more fully how the Word of God is like a musical score from which we are all to play. As we do this there will be a growing unity at St. Augustine's that is like the harmonies created when an orchestra is playing together

## **2 The Problem**

Having issued his plea Paul then goes on to look at the problem in Corinth. The problem was centred on a personality cult that had arisen amongst the Corinthians. Although Paul, Appolos and Peter didn't want to create a personality cult following it seems that the Corinthians had done so regardless.

And so Paul asks at verse 13

- Has Christ been divided?
- Was Paul crucified for you?
- Or were you baptized in the name of Paul?

Paul's questions all demand the answer no. But because of the way the Corinthians were acting their divisions were undermining the core Gospel. The divisions in Corinth denied that there was only one Christ who was crucified for us and in whose name we have been baptized. Clearly the name of Christ, the Cross of Christ and the person of Christ are all at stake when the church is divided. The Corinthians were effectively insulting Christ by dislodging him from his place of supremacy and replacing him with human leaders.<sup>2</sup>

Whenever there is deep division in the church the same thing happens. This is why there is such concern among many within the Anglican Communion about the consecrating of an American priest to be a bishop who is a practising homosexual. Such an action divides the church and undermines the witness we have because it places the homosexual political agenda at the forefront of the church's life and displaces the supreme place we are to give to Jesus Christ. Such teaching and actions are schismatic because they tear the church apart and this is why it is so important to address divisions when they occur within the Church of Jesus Christ.

I want to show you something about how Paul writes these opening verses of 1 Corinthians that emphasize how important unity in Christ is for the Church, Look back at verse 1. Who does Paul say he was called to be an apostle of? Jesus Christ. Look at verse 2. Who does Paul say the Corinthians are sanctified in? Christ Jesus. Who does Paul say that they called on? Jesus Christ our Lord. Look at verse 3. Who does Paul say that grace and peace come from? God and the Lord Jesus Christ. Look at verse 4; Who does Paul say gave them the grace of God? Christ Jesus. Verse 5. Who were they enriched by? HIM Jesus Christ. Verse 6. What testimony was confirmed in them? The testimony of Christ. Verse 7 Who were they waiting for? Our Lord Jesus Christ. Verse 8 On what day will they be blameless. The day of our Lord Jesus Christ. Verse 9 Into what fellowship were they called? The fellowship of is his Jesus Christ our Lord. And lastly verse 10. He invokes the name of the Lord Jesus Christ in the plea.

Do you think Paul is trying to make a point. Our unity comes from Jesus Christ The important thing is not the messenger but the message. And when the message is distorted as it is being done so by those wanting to ordain homosexuals to the priesthood and to the office of Bishop the church is no longer living in a Christ

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<sup>2</sup>John Stott Basic Christian Leadership, page 28

centred way.

Look at it this way. When we send an ambassador to another country she doesn't represent herself does she. No she represents Canada. The problem in Corinth and in Anglicanism today is that the ambassador is more important than the message. Paul is intentional to write this in such a way that you can't miss Jesus. He is what matters. He is the one we represent. Not ourselves or a certain issue, like homosexuality.

When we are representing Jesus Christ we will have the right priority highlighted for us in the last verses of the passage for today.

### **3. The Priority**

One of the ways the Corinthians were showing favouritism to one leader over another was in baptism. Perhaps they were saying something like this.

"I was baptized by Paul. Well, you think that's something. I was baptized by Peter and another piped up and said I'm an Apollos man. He baptized me."

The Corinthians were giving priority to those who baptized them as opposed to what baptism means. Paul isn't sure whom he baptized apart from Crispus and Stephanus. He wants to make it clear that his ministry is one that is centred on the Gospel.

Paul ends this passage by saying that the priority of the church's life is to be the Cross. This is what he means when at verse 17 he says "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.

When we recognize the Cross and all it stands for

- the atoning substitutionary sacrifice of the God-Man for sinners in need of salvation vindicated by his bodily resurrection and ascension

we will have identified those truths that are at the core of the Christian faith and are our priority.

We will also recognize how most other doctrines recede into the periphery and will

lead us to resolve not to let these secondary issues erect barriers that hinder our being faithful witnesses to Christ in the world.

As Paul begins the heart of his letter we see that by his plea he wants to come along side the Corinthians so that he can address the problem of disunity. As we will see next week it is the message of the cross that is to be the priority in the Corinthian church just as it is to be our priority here. For it is out of the theme of the Cross that all other themes within the life of the church are written. This in turn allows us to grow in being disciples of Jesus who are in agreement being united in the same mind and the same purpose because like a symphony orchestra we are playing from the same score.

Amen.