

# Call to Unity

*1 Corinthians Series*

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**Bible Text:** 1 Corinthians 1:10-16

**Preached on:** Sunday, March 21, 1999

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In Psalm chapter 133 and verse one the psalmist declares, “Behold, how good and how pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity!”<sup>1</sup>

Notice that it is both good and pleasant. It is good in that it is right. It is in accord with the will of God. It is pleasant in that it is agreeable to our souls. Strife and envy and division is not pleasant, but unity is. It is good, the Bible says, and it is pleasant for brethren to dwell together in unity.

That applies to a family and it applies to God’s family, to God’s Church.

But unity is often missing in both of those spheres particularly among... do we find this problem among Christian brethren. The state of affairs is often not good when it comes to the unity of God’s people and because it is not good and it is not the way the Lord would have it, neither is it agreeable to our souls.

Our life together in the body of Christ is to be a good and pleasant experience. It is to be up building. It is to be edifying. But when brethren are not in unity, that good and agreeable thing is not our possession.

The Church of Jesus Christ throughout the world suffers greatly from a lack of unity. The Church is divided in many, many ways. Individual congregations also suffer in the same fashion. But we are going to see today that this is nothing new. Our text this morning in 1 Corinthians chapter one reveals to us in the apostolic church of Corinth we find a church that was plagued by dissention, by division and by faction. And the apostle Paul, as he begins his epistle here, he writes to the Corinthians to exhort them to unity. He calls upon them to put away their contentions and to cease their factions.

Paul’s message to them and his message to us today is this. As Christian brethren there should be no divisions and factions among us. Rather, we are to be perfectly united in Christ our Savior and Lord speaking and thinking the same thing. That is, speaking and thinking that which is according to his Word.

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<sup>1</sup> Psalm 133:1.

That proposition is stated for us explicitly in verse 10 of our text where Paul says, “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.”<sup>2</sup>

That is an amazing exhortation as we will look at in detail and as we come to consider the amount of unity, the depth of unity that is portrayed in that exhortation that is given to us by the apostle Paul.

Now this unity of which Paul speaks is to extend to the whole body of Christ. But as the Corinthians, we must begin at home. You and I can not unify the Church world wide. That is not within our sphere. We may be able to contribute a little tiny bit to that unity, but we can make a big difference concerning this congregation.

And if you will note this command, though it applied to the whole body of Christ, was written to a particular church, to a particular congregation. And the call there is to be perfectly joined together in the same mind, in the same judgment.

And so, today, let us not fret about the disunity of the Church at large. That will not be our focus though we will talk about that and are concerned about that and we will speak somewhat to that need.

But let us begin at home. Let us begin here at Immanuel Free Reformed Church as a new congregation raised up by God to put within ourselves this commitment that there will be no factions or divisions among us. And make it our goal to obey the apostle Paul when he calls us as Christian brethren to dwell together in unity. For this is good and this is pleasant.

We could say and we could state our proposition in this manner therefore. As Christian brethren joined together in Immanuel Free Reformed Church, Paul said to us, “Let there be no divisions or factions among you. Rather let us be perfectly united in Christ our Savior and Lord, speaking and thinking the same things and having the same mind and judgment.”

Now the context for the passage today is important to set because we are moving from Paul’s introductory words where he gives to the Corinthians his greeting and his salutation and then, as his custom, he speaks of his prayers to them. So we have considered these things in the previous two weeks.

This morning we begin, now with the main body of Paul’s epistle to this church. The first section of Corinthians, the epistle of 1 Corinthians, begins here then in verse 10 of chapter one and goes to the end of chapter six. In this initial section Paul is dealing with problems in the Church at Corinth that had been reported to him by others.

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<sup>2</sup> 1 Corinthians 1:10.

Then in chapter seven through 14 Paul moves on to deal with the questions that had been posed to him officially by the church. So the second part of the epistle Paul is dealing with their questions that were sent to him. Delegates were sent to Paul with a list of questions that dealt with problems in the church that they wanted Paul to answer. Paul doesn't get to them until chapter seven.

He begins here in chapter one by dealing with problems they did not ask him about, but that he had heard about, that he knew were very, very serious. And so he begins his opening words by dealing with this problem that had been reported to him concerning division.

In chapter one through chapter six Paul deals with four problems that had been reported to him by others. First is the problem of division that goes from chapter one verse 10 to chapter four and verse 21, quite a long section. Then he deals with the problem of incest or we might say the problem of the Church in its failure to discipline the incestuous member. This had been reported. In fact, Paul says, "It is commonly known that this is what is happening among you. What a disgrace." And he is going to deal with that as he begins in chapter five and covers that whole chapter. Then in chapter six we have the problem of believers in Corinth going before the secular courts to deal with their problems, their differences, their lawsuits. He deals with that problem in chapter six verses one through eight. And then in chapter six nine through 20 he deals with another problem that has been reported to him, the problem of sexual immorality in the Church at Corinth.

As you can see, the problem of division receives the greatest attention by Paul. This is because Paul spend a great deal of time addressing two of the major causes for their division and for their factions. The first is that of a misunderstanding of the Christian message. That is one of the reasons for their divisions and factions. And the second reason that he points out to them particularly is a misunderstanding of the nature of Christian ministry.

In other words, as Paul is dealing with the problem of division, he uses an opportunity to deal with their misunderstandings in these areas to give two very powerful and classic statement to the Church concerning the nature of the Christian message and the nature of Christian ministry, one of the reasons why it is such a long section. But it was because of their misunderstanding of those two things that at least in part they were led to this state of disunion and division and faction in the Church at Corinth.

Now the passage we are looking at this morning begins the section where Paul addresses the problem of the divisions in Corinth. He begins with an exhortation to unity. He then proceeds to specifically identify the problems in Corinth. He then asks them some very important questions. And then he concludes by talking about his own ministry in regard to baptism and we will see how this all ties together.

First of all, then, in verse 10 we have the exhortation to unity, the exhortation to unity given by the apostle Paul. And with each of the main divisions of our sermon today, after

we give the descriptive division, such as this one, the exhortation to unity, we are going to turn that into an exhortation for us.

And so in this exhortation for unity to the Corinthians I say this. Brethren, we are called to unity. Brethren, we are called to unity.

Paul says, “Now I beseech you, brethren.”<sup>3</sup>

The word “beseech” is a word of exhortation. There is passion as Paul comes before them and admonishes them strongly and exhorts them concerning the problem of division. But notice how he begins his exhortation about the division, by addressing them as what? Brethren.

“I beseech you, brethren.”<sup>4</sup>

That is, these are Christian brothers and sisters.

Most of you probably know the Greek word for brother or brethren. Do you know what that is? Someone? The city of brotherly love, Philadelphia, αδελφος (ad-el-fos') is the word for brother in the Greek language.

Interestingly, the word for brother, the Greek word for brother comes from the word for womb in the Greek. The Greek word is αδελφος (ad-el-fos') for brother. The Greek word for womb is δελφος (del-fos').

Now we, can understand how that word developed, can't we? Because brothers are from the same womb. They have the same parents. They are joined together in a very unique and special way. They are brothers.

I have two brothers. We both came... we all three of us, both my brother and I came from the same womb. We have a unique identity. We have the same parents who gave to us life. We, therefore, are brethren. We have a close physical bond. We are members of the same family and, of course, I also have two sisters. We, too, came.

The word brother here is used in the broad sense of all the family, brother and sisters alike.

Now think about that. The word brethren is used to describe the Christian in his relationship to other Christians because we ourselves, also, are born from the same source, aren't we? No physical womb, but we are born of God. We all proceed from the same source. Life was given to us from the very same source. It was God himself. We have been born again through the power of God our Father through the blood of Jesus Christ and the administration of the Spirit unto us.

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<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

Christians are those who have been born of God and are therefore fellow members in God's covenant family. There is a close bond between Christians because they are of the same family. They have the same heavenly Father. And as members of God's covenant family Paul speaks to the Corinthians as brethren.

I wonder if in the back of Paul's mind is Psalm 133 verse one.

“Behold, how good and how pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity!”<sup>5</sup>

You see, the discussion of Christian unity begins with the realization that all who are born of God are brother, all the same family. There is a union that cannot be denied.

Now we may be in a family and in a circumstance where we are somewhat ashamed of some of our brothers or sisters and we are not really that all excited about being united to them, but that does not deny the fact, does it, something that cannot be escaped, they are our brother and our sister.

Christian unity, the discussion of it, then, begins with the idea and the concept that all who are born of God are members of this same family. We are one by God's gracious new birth.

Now unity is the nature of a family. By nature a family is a unit. We are beginning now talking, of course, of the physical analogy. A family begins with a husband and wife who, according to God's ordinance, are joined together in the covenant of marriage. This is a bond that is never to be broken. It is a bond that is deep. It is a bond that is mystical. It goes beyond what we can understand how God brings together a husband and wife and binds them together in marriage. The family at its very institution and beginning is a unity, a unique, unbreakable unity between husband and wife. And from that unity come children which is the perfect expression of their unity, isn't it?

The husband and wife come together, each contributing that which the Creator has designed for them to contribute and from that comes the child.

There is a physical unity. But also parent of children are bound with a unity of the heart, a unity of the soul, something that is deeper, what the Bible calls a natural affection that is there by God's created design.

The family as a unit, it is unity.

Love is essential to the sustaining of that unity.

One of the proverbs that Jesus uses in dealing with his enemies was the proverb, “A house divided against itself cannot stand.”<sup>6</sup> A house by nature is a unity and it cannot stand unless it remains in that unity.

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<sup>5</sup> Psalm 133:1.

So as unity is the nature of a family, so we see from the New Testament that unity is the nature of the Church. There is an underlying spiritual unity that we all share in Jesus Christ. We all have been made to drink of the same Spirit. We have all been baptized into one body through the power of God's Holy Spirit and we are one. This is the nature of the Church. It is a unity by nature.

That is why Paul says in Ephesians chapter four that you and I are to give all diligence not to create unity in the Church, but to keep it, to keep it. God has created it. God has made the Church one. It is our calling to keep the unity, not create it, which means our work is not that hard, right? God has already made us one.

I wish it were so, that is, that it was easy.

And so Paul begins by saying, "I beseech you, brethren."<sup>7</sup>

And I say, "Brethren, let us understand our unity that we have in Jesus Christ. This is a foundation for discussing the whole concept of unity within the Church."

He says, "I beseech you, brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ."<sup>8</sup>

Notice the singular. We are talking here about brethren who are united under a single name. That is going to be significant as we are going to see in verse 12 in Corinth. They had broken up and had chosen other names by which to identify themselves. But we are brethren under one name and our brethren hood is based on that name, the name of Christ.

Paul says, "I beseech you, brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ"<sup>9</sup>

That is, out of reverence for Christ, out of the regard for his authority, I call you to unity. Paul is speaking the word of Christ to his Church.

Christ, when he was praying in the upper room, one of the great aspects of his prayer and one of the great burdens of his prayer is that his people would be one. Now his apostle, in the name of the one who prayed for unity is calling us to that unity in the fulfillment of Christ's prayer.

Now, let us look at and see the kind of unity that we are talking about here, the depth of it. He begins by saying that you all speak the same thing, that you all speak the same thing.

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<sup>6</sup> Matthew 12:25.

<sup>7</sup> 1 Corinthians 1:10.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid.

This was a common phrase in the ancient world, expressing agreement. In other words when two people said, “We are speaking the same thing,” it was a saying to express agreement. It was also used in a more technical sense to refer to the Greek political community when it was free from factions.

When a particular community was joined together a city state was joined together and this political community enjoyed oneness. There were no factions, warring factions within that community were fighting each other for the ascendancy. When they were all one, they were... it was said that that community spoke the same thing. They were united together.

The word “speak” here that we are talking about involves the thought, also, that is behind the words. In other words, you are thinking the same thing, therefore, you are speaking the same thing.

Paul says, “I want you to speak the same thing.” That is, I want you to think alike. I want you to speak alike.

Now, of course, Paul is not denying the idea of diversity within the body of Christ. He is talking about a united confession, a united testimony, a united understanding of the Word of God where the people are moving together with one mind and one voice for the kingdom of God, that you all speak the same thing, that is, that you be in agreement together.

“That there be no divisions among you,”<sup>10</sup> is the next thing that he says. This is a negative expression to emphasize the importance of unity and the nature of true unity. The word “division” here is the word σχισμοῦτα (skhis'-mah-tah) from which we get our English word schism. A schism was a tear or a rent. It can be used in the natural world of a garment that is torn.

Jesus used it in his illustration about putting a new cloth on old clothing. I mean, a new patch on old clothing and then it tears when it shrinks and the rent is the same word as used here, a divide.

The word was used in a metaphorical sense, though, of division, of dissension as we think of the word schism. A schism is a division that is brought about because there is a difference of opinion among the people. Dissensions... we think of the word dissension, we think of disagreements that produce angry words, strife and quarrels and the breach of friendships.

So, therefore, this word division that we are talking about here refers to those disagreements that bring about angry, strife and friendships and unity are broken.

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<sup>10</sup> Ibid.

Paul says, “We don’t want any divisions among you, no schisms among you. But rather that you be perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment.”

The word “perfectly joined” meant literally to mend or repair. In other words, we have a rent, we have a tear, it is God’s will that that rend be mended, that you be perfectly joined together, that you be fit and sound, that you be as God has intended you to be. God made you one. Now your divisions and factions have come and that has torn the one that has been God made. I want to put that together. I want it sewed back up. I want it healed.

Paul said, “I want you perfectly joined as God originally had you. I want you back as one.”

And, therefore, you will be perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment. This is how they are to be joined.

They were not to be of different opinions.

Different opinions on what? Well, for example, the issues that they had written him about and he deals with chapter seven through 14. I believe the church of Corinth was rent over differences of opinion about conduct at the Lord’s Supper. They had difference of opinion and there were schisms and angry quarrels over the question of covering of women in worship and so they wrote to Paul. They wanted some answers.

They had division and schisms in the church because they did not understand nor have the same mind about the nature of spiritual gifts and the use of tongues, for example, in public worship.

They weren’t of the same mind. Paul’s writings corrected that and to bring them to the same mind.

And in a sense, Paul is saying, “Now, when you come to deal with the problems that are causing you to be divided, here the Word of Christ. Submit to his Word and then you will be one again.”

You see, the reason why the church had a different mind and opinion is not because there are two valid opinions out there. There is only one. And that opinion is the opinion of Christ and his Word.

Unity is based on the common understanding of the truth of God. And without that common understanding there will be strife and quarrels and angry words.

This is a strong call to unity in thought, word, views and purpose. Look at another one with me right over, back a couple of pages in your Bible to Romans chapter 15 verses five and six.



Now the God of patience and consolation grant you to be likeminded one toward another according to Christ Jesus: That ye may with one mind and one mouth glorify God, even the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.<sup>11</sup>

Again, the call to the Church is to have one mind and to speak one voice in glory to God the Father. God is not glorified when his Church is speaking two opposite and contradictory things on the same subject.

This reflects that God must be the God of confusion. This reflects that his truth must not be clear. This reflects that maybe he himself doesn't know what he thinks. But when God's people are united in the truth seeking the very same thing, they have a power and a witness that is undeniable. In fact, that was the basis of Christ's prayer. He wanted them to be one so the world would know the Father had sent him and that he was one with the Father. The unity of God's people in the truth of God is the deciding testimony they bring to the world of Christ and the truth of his gospel and the unity between the godhead with which we... to whom we give our worship, the Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

In other words, unity is based in practice on the truth. Unity is not based on feelings or tolerance.

Now, feelings are good and helpful to have. Good feelings [?].

Furthermore, tolerance is something that is necessary. When we have people from all different backgrounds, levels of spiritual growth and so forth and there is a place for that... What I am saying, a church is not unified if every member has a different view on everything and everybody is just tolerating each other's views. That is not Christian unity.

Unity is based, in practice by means of a common submission to God's Word which is the one truth to which we give testimony. Therefore, I say the way in which obtain unity is by coming to know the truth, by seeking it as individual Christians and by teaching it in the Church.

For this to happen, though, there is something that is absolutely essential. And that is that each one of us must bring a humble and teachable spirit to the fellowship of God's people.

Proverbs 13:10 says, "Only by pride cometh contention."<sup>12</sup>

It is the refusal to be taught of another, to be able to admit that, hey, I erred in that area. I was wrong. For all these years as a Christian I thought that was the way of truth. But now God shows me through you that I was in error.

That doesn't come naturally to us. We want to defend our position. We want to come to

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<sup>11</sup> Romans 15:5-6.

<sup>12</sup> Proverbs 13:10.

our position and spend the rest of our lives defending it on the basis of our pride and unwillingness to recognize that we have been in error in a certain particular doctrine or error.

We need humility. You see, when there is humility among the brother and sisters we are all open to be taught and exhorted and to learn from one another. And therefore we are not contending with angry words and quarrels. We are saying to people, “You know, I appreciate you bringing that perspective to me. I never really thought of it that way. I really want to seek this out. Let’s talk more about this. Let’s pray about this together and, you know, I appreciate, but perhaps maybe you have missed a couple of things in which you have said to me and I would like to share something with you.”

And as that kind of humble spirit along one or another because we all know we don’t have it. Only God has the truth, not us. See, we understand that. None of us has the truth. Only God does. And that is where we go to to find it. And therefore humility we want to be taught.

Furthermore, it means a humility we must teach.

Paul says in 2 Timothy to the young man Timothy, ministering in Ephesus, he says, verse 23 of chapter two, “But foolish and unlearned questions avoid, knowing that they do gender strifes.”<sup>13</sup>

It sure helps if we don’t have foolish, unlearned questions floating around in a church. They tend to just generate strife. But how should Timothy respond to that kind of a situation?

Here is how and here is how each Christian should respond in their own sphere.

And the servant of the Lord must not strive; but be gentle unto all men, apt to teach, patient, In meekness instructing those that oppose themselves; if God peradventure will give them repentance to the acknowledging of the truth.<sup>14</sup>

Do you hear the situation? Where foolish and unlearned questions are circulating, Timothy, go in there and blast them and with the day.

No. “Timothy, be gentle. Know your stuff. Be able to teach what is the truth, the truth that I have taught to you, Timothy, as it is in Jesus Christ. Know what you are going to teach. Be gentle in your teaching and be patient with those that you are teaching. And in meekness instruct them, not in pride and arrogance.”

How many of us are attracted to a person who brings to us an air of pride? They are going to show us the way?

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<sup>13</sup> 2 Timothy 2:23.

<sup>14</sup> 2 Timothy 2 :24-25.

I am not too encouraged to listen to somebody who comes to me with that spirit. They might have the truth, but I am not just not too interested in hearing it from them. But a man who comes or a woman if women to women come in meekness, there is the way in which we are going to come to the truth.

Patience and meekness.

You know, who is the real... do people say that those who are zealous for the biblical doctrine and truth are the cause of so much disunity in the Church? That is an absolute lie.

Do you know who is the cause of disunity? False teachers. The Church was one in doctrine delivered from the apostles. But Satan had sent his ministers in and false teaching has infected the church over the centuries and it is a false teachers that have always brought the division. And every one of Paul's congregation there was division because false teachers had come. It is not those who are zealous for the truth, it is the false ministers, the false teachers that have divided the church of Christ. And the only way to bring it back to unity is to zealously press for the truth because that is the only thin that can bring us to unity, practically speaking. So we have the unity that is described in 1 Corinthians, we are thinking and speaking the same way.

That is not mere tolerance, is it? Speaking and thinking the same way.

The calling of the Church and the calling to Immanuel Free Reformed Church as given in 1 Corinthians one here is there be no divisions among us, but that we are perfectly joined together in the same mind and the same judgment and that we embark together on a journey of truth to know God's Word, to minister to one another.

“Iron sharpeneth iron; so a man sharpeneth the countenance of his friend.”<sup>15</sup>

That we are willing to in humility and meekness discuss the differences that we have because we are all striving for only one single goal, the truth as it is in Jesus. That will bring us tremendous unity, the kind of unity that Christ prayed for that his people would be one even as the Father and Son are one and the Father and Son do not have two opinions on the same subject.

Can you think of the disaster if that was the case? I mean, you can't even conceive of it, a world of chaos.

And often the world is a chaos because Christians do not speak the same thing.

The exhortation to unity.

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<sup>15</sup> Proverbs 27:17.

In verses 11 and 12 we move on to the second part of Paul's dealing here with his opening approach to the problem there.

He deals with the problem now of contention and faction there in Corinth and he says, "Brethren, we must carefully avoid contentions and factions."

Verse 11. Paul identifies why he is exhorting them to unity. He exhorted them in verse 10. Now he says, "For it has been declared unto me of you..."<sup>16</sup>

In other words, "I have been told what is going on there in Corinth. He again stresses the word "My brethren."

Here is who told him. "...by them which are of the house of Chloe, that there are contentions among you."<sup>17</sup>

Now who these members are of the house of Chloe we are not exactly sure. Perhaps they were those who were in Ephesus. Paul wrote this from Ephesus and they had been to Corinth on business or something like that. And they had visited the church there and they came back and said, "Paul, you wouldn't believe what is happening there in your church in Corinth. There are all kinds of factions and divisions and arguments and quarrels going on in that church. And after church instead of fellowshiping they are fighting. They are quarreling. There is an angry contentious spirit there."

Or, perhaps, the house of Chloe was in there in Corinth and they had sent some people to Paul or they had gone to Paul themselves and said, "Paul, you know, I know this is not a... we are not here officially from the church, but I want to tell you there is a problem there."

Whatever, the apostle Paul has accepted their testimony. And he says, "I have been told that there are contentions among you."

The word "contentions" here means that of wrangling or strife. To wrangle is to be engaged in angry disputes. Notice the plural also. There are contentions all around.

Now I want you to see with me how the New Testament views this idea of contentions very, very negatively. Let's begin Romans chapter one and verse 29.

Here we have the description of the judgment of God on mankind for the rejection of the truth and how he has given them over to all kinds of wickednesses. And it says in verse 29, "Being filled with all unrighteousness, fornication, wickedness, covetousness, maliciousness; full of envy, murder..."<sup>18</sup> And there is the word "debate," the same word translated contentions in 1 Corinthians.

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<sup>16</sup> 1 Corinthians 1:11.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid.

<sup>18</sup> Romans 1:29.

Now, by the way, those that thought we were doing wrong Thursday night with a debate do not understand the nature of this Greek word. It means angry quarrels. There were no angry quarrels. That was greatly blessed the way in which the two brothers on various sides of the issue conducted themselves. They did it with vigor, yet with humility and with a common respect for each other. That was not a debate in the sense of this word here. It was a discussion.

The debate that is being spoken of here is the angry quarrels, the bitter disputes.

But notice where it is listed, right after murder. Pretty serious.

Chapter 13 of Romans the word is used again.

Let us walk, verse 13, “Let us walk honestly, as in the day; not in rioting and drunkenness, not in chambering and wantonness, not in strife.”<sup>19</sup> There is the word. Same word translated differently by the King James translators. And envy.

Look again. Look what are the sins that are around it. “Rioting , drunkenness, immorality.” There it is.

In 1 Corinthians chapter three in the midst of what we are looking at here, the word appears in the same section where Paul is dealing with divisions. But look how he explains it.

He says, “For ye are yet carnal: for whereas there is among you envying, and strife, and divisions, are ye not carnal, and walk as men?”<sup>20</sup>

The word strife there is the word that is translated the same word for contentions. Carnal men, fleshly men, not spiritual men are those who are involved in contentions. No spiritual man is ever involved in contentions, angry bitter disputes. They are not.

2 Corinthians chapter 12 and verse 20.

“For I fear, lest, when I come, I shall not find you such as I would, and that I shall be found unto you such as ye would not: lest there be debates.”<sup>21</sup> And there is the word. Angry bitter.

Look at the kind of things that happen when there is contention. Debate, envying, wrath, strife, back biting, whispering, swelling tumults. Look at the company that the word debate or contention carries.

Galatians five.

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<sup>19</sup> Romans 13:13.

<sup>20</sup> 1 Corinthians 3:3.

<sup>21</sup> 2 Corinthians 12:20

I want us to be impressed as we go through these passages to see how terrible a thing contention is in the eyes of God and how strong the New Testament condemns it. And it is listed with the worst of sins we can commit.

Paul says in Galatians 5:19:

Now the works of the flesh are manifest, which are these; Adultery, fornication, uncleanness, lasciviousness, Idolatry, witchcraft, hatred, variance, emulations, wrath, strife, seditions, heresies, envyings, murders.<sup>22</sup>

And so forth.

And look what he says. He concludes and he says, “I have told you that those who do these things shall not inherit the kingdom of God.” Contentious people will not inherit the kingdom, just like a murderers won’t.

Are you starting to hate the concept of contention? I hope so because that is how I want to feel, but I despise this idea of angry bitter disputes and strife and wrangling that it is so contrary to the Spirit of Christ and his people.

We are not talking about bold defense of the truth. We are talking about bitter, angry wrangling people who are filled with the flesh.

You see, when we stand boldly for the truth we are to do it with meekness and humility. Contentious people have neither.

1 Timothy chapter six and verse four. And look at where this word is used again.

Beginning at verse three.

If any man teach otherwise, and consent not to wholesome words, even the words of our Lord Jesus Christ, and to the doctrine which is according to godliness; He is proud, knowing nothing, but doting about questions and strifes of words, whereof cometh envy, strife, railings, evil surmisings.<sup>23</sup>

There is the word strife again. Notice the individual involved in this kind of contention, the same word from 1 Corinthians chapter one. They are proud people who are doting about questions and they just want to argue and fight with everybody because they love to do it.

It is evil.

And one more, Titus chapter three and verse nine.

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<sup>22</sup> Galatians 5:19-21.

<sup>23</sup> 1 Timothy 6:3-4.

“But avoid foolish questions, and genealogies, and...”<sup>24</sup> Here is the word, “contention, and strivings about the law; for they are unprofitable and vain.”<sup>25</sup>

Verse 10. “A man that is an heretick after the first and second admonition reject.”<sup>26</sup>

Men who are heretical, foolish men who are dealing with their questions and genealogies and fine point of the law and twisting the law to their own purpose are the kind of people that are involved in contention.

You see, the word contention that Paul is speaking of here in 1 Corinthians 1:11 where he said that there are contentions among you, in other words, there is a serious problem there. I mean there are serious difficulties in the Corinthian congregation. They are engaged in this kind of strife and contention that we have seen as we have surveyed the New Testament that is hateful to God and destructive to the Church and it is the mark of a foolish, fleshly man.

We brothers and sisters must avoid with all of our hearts and souls by the grace of God this kind of contention, these kind of angry disputes in the church. And if we see brothers or sisters involved in them, then the rest of us must go in humility and rebuke them for that. We cannot allow it to begin.

Once it is allowed it tends to spread like cancer.

There will be disagreements in the Church. There will be disagreement among us on certain areas in certain issues. But the path to being of one mind is not the path of contention. Contention is not an option. An angry contentious spirit is to be avoided at all costs.

Proverbs... you see, we don't have time to go to that. I spent a good bit of time surveying the New Testament. Proverbs is loaded with verses about contentious people, the danger that they are. The problem is contention.

Now in verse 12 after he says, “There are contentions among you,”<sup>27</sup> he moves on to another aspect of their problem. Not only is there argument over all kinds of issues, they are also of a party nature.

“Now this I say, that every one of you saith, I am of Paul; and I of Apollos; and I of Cephas; and I of Christ.”<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>24</sup> Titus 3:9.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid.

<sup>26</sup> Titus 3:10.

<sup>27</sup> 1 Corinthians 1:11.

<sup>28</sup> 1 Corinthians 1:12.

These were factions in the Church at Corinth. A faction is a group that is united together in or around some idea or whatever, but they are united in opposition to others. That is a faction. Factions are against one another.

And we have these factions in the Church at Corinth.

They were taken up with what we call a party spirit. The individual is there to serve the interests of his own group or party, not the good of the Church.

Now if we have had no contemporary illustrations of party spirit, have we recently in the United States? The debacle in Washington? What a disgrace.

Those Republicans and Democrats. All they were concerned about was their party, not the United States of America.

But the most disgusting display came from the Democrats. That is the party spirit. And it rends the nation and it rends the church.

Here at Corinth apparently there were four parties, perhaps only three, but I think four. Some believe it this way. There are three parties. "I am of Paul; and I of Apollos; and I of Cephas,"<sup>29</sup> and Paul says, "But I want you to know that I am of Christ."

Well, I am not sure that is the interpretation. But the actual structure of the language seems to indicate that there are actually four different factions. There is a Pauline faction, those who say, "I am of Paul."

That is, "I am disciple of Paul. I follow the way of Paul," and so on. Their identity, therefore, was in terms of Paul the apostle.

Come to Corinth Church and you say, "Who are you?"

"I am of Paul."

Well, what about you?

"I am of Apollos."

Of course we know of Paul, the great apostle who was the founder of the Church at Corinth and we... there were apparently some people there who had been probably led to Christ through Paul and they had... he was their first spiritual leader and teacher and they were joined to Paul.

There was also the Apollos group. Apollos was a great and eloquent man, a zealous Jewish Christian who at first just preached the way of the baptism of John and was taken aside by Aquila and Priscilla and taught a more excellent way, but it says in Acts that he

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<sup>29</sup> 1 Corinthians 1:12



was mighty in the Scriptures and eloquent. And his eloquence probably really appealed to some of the Corinthians because of their... the high value they placed on that kind of ability.

And they identified themselves with Apollos and that was probably a division among the Greek and the Gentile Corinthian church members.

And then we have Cephas or Peter. Perhaps this was the Jewish element within the church had decided that they were going to side with Peter. Peter was more important than any of them. He was the leader of the apostles from the beginning even when Jesus was on earth. And so they tended to take their identity from Peter.

And perhaps they thought Peter supported them more in the use of the continuation of certain of the Jewish distinctives.

And then we have a third, a fourth group that says they were of Christ. And what exactly that it refers to, I mean, it is anybody's guess.

Perhaps they were claiming some kind of special relationship to Christ through some sort of religious experience or something to that affect. Or maybe they were just simply saying they were above the party spirit. But in saying you are above the party spirit by saying, "I am of Christ," is to continue to make it a party spirit type thing and also to bring Christ down to the level of being one of the party or one of the factions.

You have got a Pauline faction, you have got a Christ faction. No.

So the Church at Corinth was split into these different factions each competing with one another for the ascendancy of their views and their leaders and each considering their teacher to be superior to the others.

Now there is no indication whatsoever in the Bible that any of these teachers encouraged such a thing. We know Paul didn't and we can be pretty sure that Apollos and Peter didn't. This was a failing in the people. And had Apollos and Peter known, they would have said the same things, I believe, as Paul is going to say to them now at this time.

You know, you and I also must guard against factions, developing some sort of party spirit. This is something, though, that both members and leaders must give diligence against.

Carnality is at root when we talk about factions in a church and the root of carnality is pride. Someone wants to make themselves the leader of a group of a particular idea, or perspective in the church and begins to gather people of the same mind around them and before you know it you have got a faction. And that faction then to offset that faction another one arises to claim a higher ground, they would say, and to oppose these carnal Christians.

And before you know it a church can be rent by factions.

We must in a local church be very, very careful about that. But it can also extend to the whole church, can't it? Which brings me to a question here.

What about denominations? What about denominations? I am a Lutheran. I am a Wesleyan. I am a Mennonite. All those are men's names, aren't they? Luther, Wesley, and Menno Simons.

Is that the same? I am of Paul. I am of Wesley. I am of Luther. I am of Menno.

We also have theological labels after a couple of men, Calvin, Calvinism. There is no church or denomination by that name, but there is a theological perspective. There is also opposing that the perspective of Jacob Arminius, Arminians.

I am of Calvin. I am of Arminius.

And we also have divisions over church polity, the Presbyterian system, the Episcopal system or the Baptist system.

I am a Baptist. I am a Presbyterian. I am an Episcopalian.

Or, as one group that I have had quite a bit of contact with lately, I am a Covenanter.

What about this?

Let's take a brief moment because we are running out of time, but let me just address this briefly if I can.

Let's begin as we talk about denominations to realize the situation today is much more confused than it was in the time of Corinth. Great divergences in doctrine of practice have come into the Church throughout the centuries. There are many historical factors at work in the dividing of the Church into these different denominations and groups.

And I would therefore say at this period of time in history denominations are not only inevitable, they are necessary. Here is what I mean. Because error has so infiltrated the church and there is so much divergence of opinion which is so far from the ideal of all speaking the same mind, therefore, for there to be peace in local congregations it has become necessary for Christians to gather with those who are generally of the same mind so they don't spend every Sunday arguing over baptism, every week arguing over church polity, every week arguing over this theological distinctive and that they could not get on with their lives in peace.

It is not the goal of Christ for denominations, but in the current state it is inevitable and necessary. The question is, though, in recognizing that, what kind of a spirit do you bring

to the denominational setting today? A party spirit? If so, it is disastrous. But if not, it is not necessarily disastrous. And it could be the foundation for working toward unity.

In other words, as I described the need of humility to one another within the congregation, so churches and distinctives need to have humility toward one another.

You know something? Those Arminians might be able to teach us something. Maybe not in one particular area where we find our greatest difference, how we would probably think about it, but maybe in others. And maybe there would be a mutual respect and a dialog, a true Christian biblical dialog... I am not talking about the apostate dialog the Modernists want. I am talking about among godly Christians, the kind of dialog that is necessary to bring the Church to its unity.

The party spirit must be rejected.

It is one thing to say I happen to be a Baptist as a follower of Jesus Christ. It is another thing to say I am a Baptist, what are you? You know? It is a big, big difference. But I am afraid that that second one is often the way it is. Pride that our particular theological persuasion or denomination has all of the truth. And therefore what is often between denominations is what we would call warring factions instead of groups of believers who have come to different persuasions, but yet recognize their common unity in Christ and they don't desire to war with other aspects of the Church, but to do all that is possible to promote unity to the degree that it is possible.

You see, the end of denominations there is only one way to end denominations and that is doctrinal unity. It is the only way. That is truth will unite the Church. Truth is learned by the grace of God and truth comes to us all by a humble and teachable spirit. And I believe according to prophetic Scriptures that there will come a day when the whole Church will speak one mind and one voice. I believe that with all my heart. And Paul speaks about that in Ephesians chapter four.

In Ephesians chapter four he says that God has given his gifts to the believers to teach the Church, verse 12:

For the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ: Till we all come in the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ: That we henceforth be no more children, tossed to and fro, and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the sleight of men, and cunning craftiness, whereby they lie in wait to deceive; But speaking the truth in love, may grow up into him in all things, which is the head, even Christ.<sup>30</sup>

That is Christ's goal for the Church and it will happen. God is able to do it. He is sovereign. And in his purpose and in his time he will bring to the Church of Jesus Christ

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<sup>30</sup> Ephesians 4:12-15.

doctrinal unity and we will all be one family, one church throughout the world centered in one name, in Jesus Christ alone.

But, you know, I myself have seen and you I am sure have seen the people when we take our identity as Christians from a particular group, a particular... no matter how noble the group could have been, no matter how noble the group could have been, no matter how noble these Christians were, no matter how fine a teachers they were, we find our identity and we find our place within the Church in terms of those kinds of names, factions. I believe we have fallen into the error of 1 Corinthians when we have the party Spirit.

I am of Paul. I am here to stand against those who are of Apollos at least in some degree.

That must be banished from among us.

What is the answer to factions? The answer to factions in verses 13 through 17.

Brethren, Christ is not divided. He is the only Savior and Lord and Paul by means of three rhetorical questions, questions that bring within their own answers destroys the validity of the Party spirit in Corinth. Here is the first one that destroys it all.

“Is Christ divided?”<sup>31</sup>

What is the answer? No.

So how can his people be divided into factions of I am of Paul, I am of Apollos? Christ is one. There is one head. There is one body. No one has a part of Christ, by the way. He is not divided and the Apollos group has one part of Christ and the other has a part of Christ. They all have all of Christ. And so does every true Christian and every true Church though there be differences in practice. They have Christ. And that makes us one with them.

In Ephesians chapter 4:1-6 Paul goes though the list of ones. There is one baptism, one faith, one Lord and Christ is not divided.

Second question. “Was Paul crucified for you?”<sup>32</sup>

Or, again, was Apollos crucified for you? Was Peter crucified for you?

Of course not. We have only one Savior. All Christians confess that it was not Luther who was crucified for us. It was not Menno Simons that was crucified for us. It wasn't Calvin that was crucified for us. It was Christ and it is Christ that we love and serve. And that is our identity because he is our Savior.

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<sup>31</sup> 1 Corinthians 1:13.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid.

Furthermore, who were we baptized into? Whose name? Well, it was the name of Jesus Christ, the Father, Son and the Holy Spirit, the divine trinity. We were in God's name, not in man's name.

When I was baptized I took an oath of loyalty to Christ, not to any man.

When I became a minister I took an ordination vow to be faithful, not to any man or theological system, but to Christ and his Word.

And one thing that struck me. The debate the other night is that there was a lot of criticism of some of the errors the reformers practiced. But my answer to them is I have no obligation to defend the errors of any reformers. They erred. I will join with you in condemning their error though I believe they taught many truths. I am not committed to them. I will part company with them like that if they go contrary to the Word. My only commitment is to Christ. That is what brings believers together.

Christ is Lord.

Paul then says, "I am so thankful," he says, "By God's providence, that nobody can say that I was around baptizing people in my name in Corinth. In fact, I hardly baptized anybody."

That is what he says.

I thank God that I baptized none of you, but Crispus and Gaius; Lest any should say that I had baptized in mine own name.<sup>33</sup>

Paul says, "Thank God for his providence." Nobody can accuse me of that one.

Oh, he says, "Oh, wait a minute. I also baptized the household of Stephanas besides and I know not whether I baptized any other. I don't recall for the moment if I baptized anybody else."

Then he goes on to say that the focus of my ministry is not baptism, but Christ.

And we are going to deal with this verse the next time we are together in two weeks.

"For Christ sent me not to baptize, but to preach the gospel: not with wisdom of words, lest the cross of Christ should be made of none effect."<sup>34</sup>

As Christian brethren there can be no divisions among us, no factions, no contentions. Rather, we are to be perfectly united in Christ our Savior and Lord seeking and speaking as one according to his word.

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<sup>33</sup> 1 Corinthians 1:14-15.

<sup>34</sup> 1 Corinthians 1:17.

Paul says to us today, “Brethren, we are called to unity. Brethren, we must carefully avoid contention and faction. And, brethren, Christ is not divided. He is Savior and Lord of all who call upon him in truth and you are also joined to all as one body and you are all to be centered in Christ and in Christ alone.”

And when that takes place the impetus and the power to unity is there because our unity is in Christ, not in any man, not in any denomination, not in any theological system. But it is in Christ.

Let us pray.

*Our Father, we ask that you would be pleased this day to use the Word of God as given to us through the apostle Paul. Lord, first may we just have within us a sense of unity with our brethren, born of the same Father, one in Jesus Christ and that we would learn to understand and always see all who call upon the name of Christ in faith regardless of what church they attend, what their theology they hold, or that theology has limits, but it is a true faith in Jesus Christ that there are brother and there are sisters.*

*Father, help us to hate contention and to see it as we have been shown this day in the Scripture that it is a horrible thing. It is a fleshly thing. It is a wicked thing and that we will have humility and weakness and grace as we strive together to come to one mind and to speak the same thing.*

*And, Lord, I pray that as the effect of every message we hope will be our focus today as we go will be on the Lord Jesus Christ and that he is our identity and that we are Christians, followers of Christ the Lord.*

*We pray you will bless Immanuel Free Reformed Church with unity. Lord, give it to us that we might keep that unity that you already have given us in Christ. May we give all diligence to avoid factions, contention and that you will receive the praise and honor and that this church might raise up a testimony to the unity of the Father and the Son and the message of the gospel.*

*Bless us, we pray, as we go from here now that we might honor thee in Jesus’ name.  
Amen.*