

Lesson 7: Schismatics or Reformers?

- **1 Corinthians 1:10** “I appeal to you, brothers, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that all of you agree, and that there be no *divisions* (σχίσματα) among you, but that you be united in the same mind and the same judgment.”
- **1 Corinthians 11:18** “For, in the first place, when you come together as a church, I hear that there are *divisions* (σχίσματα) among you. And I believe it in part.”
- **1 Corinthians 12:24-25** “But God has so composed the body, giving greater honor to the part that lacked it, ²⁵ that there may be no *division* (σχίσμα) in the body, but that the members may have the same care for one another.”
- **Ephesians 4:2-3** “...with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love, ³ eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.”
- **Philippians 3:16** “Only let us hold true to what we have attained.”

I. The Nature of the Unity of the Church

- Invisible unity
- Visible unity
 - Faith and Profession
 - Public worship, ordinances, order and government
 - Affection, Love, Sympathy, Cooperation, and Encouragement

Anthony Burgess,

There is a unity of faith and profession, when they all believe and speak the same thing. This must be laid as the foundation of unity, for unity in error and idolatry, or false ways, is not peace, but a faction or conspiracy. This unity of faith is reckoned among the many unities the Apostle mentions in Ephesians 4:5 and Philippians 2:2. They are exhorted to be *of one mind*, and the Apostle notably presses this in 1 Corinthians 1:10 *that they speak the same thing, being perfectly joined together in the same mind, and the same judgment*. What a sad breach then has the Devil made upon God’s people, when there are so few of the same mind, and [that] judge the same things.

There is a unity in fundamentals or essentials, and a unity in circumstantial or less principals. ... Although in many things they have not attained to the same mind, to the same judgment, *yet they all agree in those things, that are necessary to salvation, and this is called all truth*. The Spirit of God shall lead them into all truth, John 26:13 and they have the unction which teaches them all things, 1 John 2:20.

II. Definitions of Schism

John Calvin

Heretics indeed do with false doctrine corrupt the pureness of *faith*, but the schismatics sometimes when where there is like faith, do break the bond of *fellowship*.

Amandus Polanus

Schismatics, retaining sometimes even the purity of *faith* and religion, they do through ambition of honor or function, break the band of brotherly *love*.

John Brinsley

Schism is an unwarrantable voluntary separating and withdrawing from church communion in a true church.

- Schism is any division in the church
 - In opinion – this is properly heresy (By *faith* we are united to the head)
 - In practice – this is properly schism (By *love* we are united to one another)
- Divisions are with separation or without separation
 - Those who do not separate are internal sects or factions
 - Those who separate are properly schismatics
 - Those who leave *the* church are apostates
 - Those who leave *a* church
 - Quietly do nothing (negative)
 - Start a new church. Set up altar against altar: 2 Kings 16 (positive)

According to these definitions:

You are not guilty of schism if:

- What you left is not a true church.
- You were forced out.
- You patiently tried to reform its heresy, idolatry, superstition, or serious scandal.

You are guilty of schism if:

- You left a true church.
- Of your own choosing.
- Without trying to address the errors which were of such a serious nature that you could no longer remain there.

III. Evaluating: Separation or Schism?

1. The Protestants' Separation from Rome

Henry Altingius

Schism is to depart from the true unity of the church. There can be no schism where there is not first true unity. And the evangelical churches did not depart from the unity of the true and catholic church ... but they earnestly retain it, as those which follow the norm of apostolic doctrine; and by faith, prayer, and earnestness in preserving harmony, they are joined together with all the pious, who embrace the same Christ sincerely, according to the doctrine of the Gospel.

2. The Nonconformists' Separation from the Church of England

John Owen

By the *communion*, and *uniting ourselves* unto the Church, which is pressed either on ministers or people, a total submission unto the rule as established in the Book of Canons, and Rubric of the Liturgy, is required of them all. ... Nor is it in the power [of any parish minister] ... to give indulgence unto them in their abstinence from the least ceremony enjoined.

3. The Particular Baptists' Separation from Congregationalists

John Owen

A separation from some churches...with a mind and resolution to serve God in the due observation of Church institutions, according to that light which men have received, is no where called schism.

2LCF Appendix

Although we do differ from our brethren who are paedobaptists; in the subject and administration of baptism, and such other circumstances as have a necessary dependence on our observance of that ordinance, and do frequent our own assemblies for our mutual edification, and discharge of those duties ... yet we would not be from hence misconstrued, as if [this] did any ways disoblige or alienate our affections or conversation from any others that fear the Lord; but that we may and do we as we have opportunity participate of the labors of those, whom God hath indued with abilities above ourselves, and called to the ministry of the word.

IV. Conclusions:

- In the case of true schism, the “remedy” is worse than the malady.
 - The finger is broken; cut off the hand!
 - It is a terrible sin, which we should all fear to commit.
 - The deed may have been done, but you can still repent.
- This is Jesus’ church, not ours.

We should not be jealous of what we have. “We want to keep doing things our way.”
We should not be selfish. “I don’t want to lose my job.”

- Our Confession seeks to prevent schism (2LCF 26.13)

No church-members upon any offence taken by them, having performed their duty required of them towards the person they are offended at, ought to disturb any Church order, or absent themselves from the assemblies of the Church, or Administration of any ordinances, upon the account of such offence at any of their fellow members; but to wait upon Christ, in the further proceeding of the Church.

- Our Constitution seeks to prevent schism

“Do you submit yourself to the government and discipline of this church and *do you promise* to seek its purity and peace?”

- The modern context is complicated.

We should seek visible unity with other churches of like faith and practice.
God is sovereign over the disunity of the church and can bring good out of evil.