

DIVISIONS IN THE LOCAL CHURCH

TEXT: I CORINTHIANS 1:10-17

INTRODUCTION:

1. We left off last week at verse 9, which refers to the wonderful fellowship Christians enjoy.
2. But unfortunately this fellowship is often disrupted by divisions, contentions, and factions (1:10-12).
3. In verse 10, the apostle Paul pleads with them (“I beseech you, brethren”). He does not command them.
4. “Beseech” speaks of grace. “Command” speaks of law.
5. He asks them “by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ” (1:10). He pleads on the basis of their love for Christ, and because of their reverence for him as their Lord and Saviour.
6. There should be unity in the church (1:10).
7. Psalm 133:1 says, “Behold, how good and how pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity!”
8. “That ye all speak the same thing” (1:10) refers to Bible doctrine. Perfect uniformity of opinion cannot be expected among Christians on every single issue, but on the fundamental doctrines of the Christian faith, we should all agree.
9. In his commentary on I Corinthians, H.A. Ironside tells a story about an old Quaker who left one meeting-place after another, and finally someone asked him, “Well, what church are you in now?”
10. The old man said, “I finally found the true church at last.”
11. “How many belong to it?”
12. “Just my wife and myself, and I am not too sure about her sometimes.”

13. I heard another story about a man that was shipwrecked on an island way out in the middle of the Pacific Ocean. All the other passengers drowned, and he was the only survivor.
14. He was there alone on this small island for several months. One day he saw a boat out in the distance and so he built a big fire.
15. The captain saw him and came to his rescue. The captain said, "I see you built three houses on the island. Tell me about it."
16. The man said, "The first house is my home, and the one next to it is my church."
17. The captain said, "What about the other building?"
18. "Oh, that's where I used to go to church."

- I. DIVISIONS
- II. CONTENTIONS
- III. FACTIONS

I. DIVISIONS

1. Romans 16:17 says, "Now I beseech you, brethren, mark them which cause divisions and offences contrary to the doctrine which ye have learned; and avoid them."
2. "But that ye be perfectly joined together in the same mind..." (I Cor. 1:10). This "same mind" is the mind of Christ (cf. 2:16b).
3. Philippians 2:5 says, "Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus." When we have the same mind, we will be peacemakers, not troublemakers.
4. "In the same judgment" (1:10b) refers to having one purpose. It means having spiritual discernment.

5. H.A. Ironside said, “Every believer has the Spirit of God dwelling within him to give him discernment, and when things come up about which we differ, if we depend upon the guidance of the Spirit of God, He will give the discernment we need. I am afraid some of us never get very far in real discernment, and the reason is that we neglect the study of our Bibles” (*I Corinthians*).

II. CONTENTIONS (1:11)

1. Paul was notified of these contentions “by them which are of the house of Chloe” (1:11).
2. It was good and necessary for them to bring this to Paul’s attention. You may recall that when Joseph’s brothers were up to no good, Genesis 37:2 says “Joseph brought unto his father their evil report.” This is the right thing to do.
3. “Contentions” means, “quarreling and strife.” The same word is translated “strife” in Galatians 5:20, where it is listed as one of the works of the flesh (cf. I Cor. 3:3).
4. Titus 3:9 says we are to “avoid foolish questions, and genealogies, and contentions.”

III. FACTIONS

1. By “factions,” I am referring to small groups in the church (1:12; 3:1-4).
2. Human factions diminish the importance of the Gospel. They direct attention to men and away from God. I was in a preaching conference a few years ago where several prominent preachers spoke. As each preacher walked up to the pulpit there was thunderous applause. I do not think that is appropriate.

3. Another word that would describe these groups would be “cliques.”
4. A clique has been defined as an exclusive group of persons, held together by common interests, views, or purposes. In the church of Corinth, the cliques were centered around people.
5. Some have described these cliques as “personality cults.”
6. “I am of Paul; and I of Apollos; and I of Cephas (Simon Peter); and I of Christ” (1:12).
7. The last group seems like the strangest. Why would any Christian start a clique based on Christ, when all true Christians are disciples of Christ?
8. J. Allen Blair said that members of this group declared, “We do not need men to teach us; Christ is our Teacher.” Blair said, “The followers of this group considered themselves more holy than the others” (*Living Wisely*).
9. Paul then asks the question, “Is Christ divided?” (1:13). If people are truly converted to Christ, then they are all of Christ. Therefore, no one group should arrogate to itself the name of Christ.
10. “Was Paul crucified for you?” (1:13). Of course, Paul was not crucified for us. Paul pointed others to Christ, and he faithfully preached the cross of Christ (cf. 1:18, 23).
11. It offended Paul that Christians were forming little man-centered groups (1:12, 13).
12. “Were ye baptized in the name of Paul?” (1:13b). Paul was not minimizing or belittling baptism. Paul’s point was that when a person gets saved, he is baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, not in the name of any preacher, whether it be Paul, or Apollos, or Cephas, or anyone.
13. Acts 2:38 says, “Then Peter said unto them, Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for

the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost.”

14. Jesus said, “Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost” (Matthew 28:19).
15. Because of the fact that these Corinthians were making so much of individual preachers, Paul said, “I thank God that I baptized none of you...” (1:14-17).
16. Paul was not saying, “I am thankful that you were not baptized.” That was not his point.
17. And besides, they were baptized. Acts 18:8 says, “And many of the Corinthians hearing believed, and were baptized.”
18. Their baptism followed their hearing and their believing.
19. Paul was not minimizing baptism; he was emphasizing the importance of preaching the Gospel of Christ (1:17).
20. H.A. Ironside said Paul wrote that he was thankful, since they were so given to party spirit, that so few of them could say, “I have been baptized by Paul” (*I Corinthians*).
21. Paul wrote, “I thank God that I baptized none of you, but Crispus (he was the ruler of the synagogue) and Gaius (there are several believers in the New Testament with this name); Lest any should say that I had baptized in mine own name” (1:14, 15).
22. Then Paul added, “And I baptized also the household of Stephanas” (1:16; cf. 16:15-17).
23. Paul said that the household of Stephanas had “addicted themselves to the ministry of the saints” (I Cor. 16:15). That is a good addiction!
24. Finally, Paul said, “Besides, I know not whether I baptized any other” (1:16b).

25. Paul's point – "For Christ sent me not to baptize, but to preach the gospel..." (1:17).
26. Paul did not say that he was not commissioned to baptize. What he did say is that he was not sent to make baptism the most important part of his ministry. Neither is any preacher.
27. The most important part of his ministry was preaching the Gospel. Paul was sent to preach the Gospel (1:17).
28. And when he went out preaching, and when souls were saved, they were properly baptized.
29. There are many things occupy a preacher's time, and baptizing new converts is certainly one of them. But first and foremost, the preacher must preach the Gospel (1:17).
30. By the way, I Corinthians 1:14-17 proves that baptismal regeneration is a false doctrine. If baptism could save people, Paul would not say, "I thank God that I baptized none of you, but Crispus and Gaius" (1:14).
31. If baptism could save people, Paul would say, "I thank God that I baptized as many people as I could."
32. The primary thrust and priority of Paul's work was to preach the Gospel, not to baptize.
33. Paul's great ministry was making Christ known, "not with wisdom of words, lest the cross of Christ should be made of none effect" (1:17).
34. Paul did not depend upon great oratory or rhetoric, but on the power of the Holy Spirit enabling him to preach the Gospel (1:17).
35. The cross divides saints from sinners, but the cross never divides saints from saints. The cross is the cure for carnality.

CONCLUSION:

1. First Corinthians 1:10 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."
2. I heard an interesting story about a big quarrel in a tool box. It seems that the tools in a carpenter's tool box got into a heated argument one day. They were all picking on Mr. Pencil because he was so small, and he always seemed to get lost. They said you can never find him when you need him, and then when he is found, he's often dull, and he needs to get sharpened.
3. Brother Hammer kept trying to get them to stop their fussing, but the other members of the tool box told him that he was too noisy. But Brother Hammer said to Brother Awl, "I do not know why you are acting as the spokesman for the tool box. You are small and insignificant and you make a very small impression."
4. At this point, Brother Screwdriver spoke up, but he was shouted down right away. Bro. Awl said, "Brother Screwdriver, we don't need you around here. You are always going around and around in circles. You have to turn around and around to get anywhere."
5. Brother Screwdriver noticed that Brother Sandpaper was laughing at these remarks, and so he said, "Brother Sandpaper you shouldn't laugh. You are too rough, and you are always rubbing people the wrong way."
6. Brother Plane started to defend Brother Sandpaper, but Brother Saw said, "What do you know about anything? All of your work is on the surface; there's no depth to what you do. Besides, you have to be pushed to do any work around here."
7. To this Brother Plane said, "Well, Brother Saw, I think you ought to leave, because your comments cut too deep."
8. Brother Saw, "If I go, then what about Brother Pliers? He is always putting pressure on others. And I think Brother Ruler should have to go too, because he is always measuring other folks as though he were the only one who is right."

9. Brother Ruler was about to defend himself when in the midst of the argument, the Carpenter of Nazareth walked in. He put on His tool belt and went to the workbench to make a pulpit.
10. He used the pencil, and the ruler, and the saw, and the plane, and the hammer, and the awl, and the screwdriver, and the pliers, and the sandpaper, and all the other tools.
11. When the day's work was over, the pulpit was finished, and the carpenter went home.
12. Despite all of the accusations that were made, the carpenter used every one of the tools to get the job done.