

## PAUL'S PLEA FOR CHURCH UNITY

**Text:** 1 Corinthians 1:10-17

### **Introduction:**

1. Having completed the salutation, the Apostle now issues his first correction to the Corinthian church. It goes to the heart of the problem in the Corinthian church which is carnal disunity. Carnality produces disunity in a church!
2. God does not accept carnal division in his local churches and neither should we. It is serious business and must be dealt with thoroughly and biblically.
3. The context here is the local church This unity is in the context of the New Testament assembly. This exhortation was directed to a Bible-believing church. It is not referring to an ecumenical unity that sacrifices truth in the name of "fellowship".
4. We will divide the Apostle's appeal into **three parts** for our exposition.

**Take note of...**

### **I. THE FOUNDATION OF THE APPEAL (VS. 10A)**

#### **A. The Apostle's Entreaty – "Now I beseech you brethren"**

1. The tone of the entreaty – 'beseech'
  - a. The word 'beseech' comes from the Greek word 'parakaleo' meaning "to call near, to invite, to implore or console." It is translated "exhort" (Acts 2:40), "desire" (Acts 8:31), "call" (Acts 28:20) and "entreat" (Lk. 15:28, 1 Tim. 5:1).
  - b. The Apostle could have issued a firm command but instead, he issues an entreaty. The Apostle is going to deal with the carnality boldly but he commences his reproof with the tone of an appeal.
2. The tie of the entreaty – 'brethren'
  - a. Paul is speaking to saved people, brothers and sisters in Christ. A regenerate church membership is essential to unity in the local church.
  - b. Paul is issuing an appeal along family lines. They were brothers and sisters in the Lord and it was unfitting for them to be in such a state of disunion.

#### **B. The Lord's Authority – "by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ"**

1. Paul had authority as an Apostle so his entreaty carried weight but now he appeals to the highest authority, that of the Lord Jesus Christ Himself.
2. We are saved by calling on the blessed name of Christ (Rom. 10:13), we pray in and through that blessed Name, and it is in submission to that blessed Name and by the power of that Name

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that we must put aside carnal differences and unite for the cause of Christ.

3. "It is a unity "by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ". Our unity is in Him, by Him and for Him. It is a unity in the Word of God (Christ is the Living Word). The Bible is the "word of Christ" (Col. 3:16). He is the Author and the main Theme. It is to make Christ the center of every life and every aspect of life. When Christ is the center of every member's life, then He is the center of the church as a body and that is true unity." (Cloud)
4. "Their reverence and love of Christ, and regard for his authority as their Lord, should induce them to yield obedience to the Apostle's exhortation. It was not out of respect to him, but out of regard to Christ they should obey." (Hodge)

## II. THE FOCUS OF THE APPEAL (VS. 10B)

The demonstrative pronoun 'that' introduces the heart of the appeal. The Apostle calls for:

### A. The Removal of Disunity – "and that there be no divisions among you"

1. The word 'divisions' comes from the Greek word 'schisma' meaning a split, tear, rent; a schism. The same Greek word is used of a tear ('rent') in a garment (Matt. 9:16, Mark 2:21). The word is used in John 7:43, 9:16 and 10:19 of the 'division' between the Jews over Christ.
2. A schism is not a complete severance but a rip/tear in the fabric of the local church. There were a number of factions within the Corinthian church but they were still one church.
3. Notice that the standard for the local church is "no divisions". A church that tolerates schisms in the assembly is disobeying the word of God. Divisions in the local church cannot be ignored or tolerated, they must be lovingly and biblically resolved.
4. Illustration: Make four tears in a piece of paper.

### B. The Renewal of Unity – "that ye all speak the same thing...but that ye be perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment"

1. The explanation of this unity – "that ye be perfectly joined together"
  - a. 'but' = indicates a contrast to the "divisions", a blessed contrast.
  - b. The phrase "perfectly joined together" comes from the verb 'katartizo' and denotes to render fit, complete. The word was used by the Greeks for the setting of broken bones and for the reconciling of political factions. In the New Testament, it is used of the mending of fishing nets (Matt. 4:21, Mk. 1:19). The same word is translated 'restore' in Galatians 6:1. Paul wanted their differences to be mended or repaired in such a way as to remain

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joined together permanently. (Gromacki) “The basic meaning is to put back together, to make one again something that was broken or separated.” (JM)

- c. The Apostle is calling upon them to repair the rips in the assembly.
  - d. Church unity must not only be restored when it has been lost, it must be maintained when it is present. Ephesians 4:3  
“**Endeavouring to keep the unity** of the Spirit in the bond of peace.”
    - i. ‘endeavouring’ = means giving diligence, making every effort, to exert one’s self, be zealous. “It speaks of determined effort.” (Wuest) The same word is translated ‘study’ (2 Tim. 2:15), “do” or “give diligence (2. Tim. 4:9, 21; Tit. 3:12, 2. Pet. 1:10, 3:14) and ‘labour’ (Heb. 4:11). Synonyms for ‘endeavour’: Striving, aiming, laboring, struggling, exerting, seeking, trying.
    - ii. “to keep” = means “to keep by guarding, to guard by exercising watchful care. It speaks of guarding something which is in one’s possession.” (Wuest) The same word is also translated ‘observe’ (Matt. 23:3), ‘watched’ (Matt. 27:36), ‘preserved’ (1 Thess. 5:23) and “hold fast” (Rev. 3:3).
    - iii. “the unity” = comes from the root word ‘one’. To be unified is to be one – in “one accord and in one place” (Acts 1:14, 2:1, 46; 4:24; 5:12)
    - iv. Challenge: Unity is a very delicate and fragile thing in a church and can easily be disrupted unless each member takes this responsibility to heart. Our unity is a vital part of our witness for the Lord (John 13:35).
  - e. Unity in the local church is a sweet thing but disunity is a bitter and grievous thing. Psalm 133:1 “Behold, how **good** and how **pleasant it is** for brethren to dwell together in unity!”
2. The expression of this unity – “**same** thing...**same** mind...**same** judgment”

When the church is unified (“perfectly joined together”), there will be:

- a. Unity of words – “that ye all speak the same thing”.
  - i. Speaking the same thing means no doctrinal division. Churches that tolerate a spectrum of doctrinal views are disobeying this Biblical command. Since God requires such unity, the church must be very careful about receiving members. Prospective members must be in complete harmony with the church’s doctrinal position. Romans 15:5-6 “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

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- Lord Jesus Christ.” We have “one body”, “one Spirit”, “one hope”, “one Lord”, “one faith” and “one baptism” and “one God and Father of all” (See Eph. 4:4-6). Therefore let us be in “one accord”, in “one place” and speak with “one mouth” for the sake of the truth and the glory of God.
- ii. Speaking the same thing means no carnal division. There is nothing that brings disgrace upon a church’s testimony before the unsaved than a fleshly war of words in a local church. The Corinthian believers were not just fighting over doctrinal matters, they were quarreling over petty, fleshly things (Vs. 11-12).
  - iii. Speaking the same thing means submitting to the truth. When we own the Bible as our standard and submit ourselves to it, we will speak with a united voice.
  - iv. Speaking the same thing involves submitting to local church authority (1 Thess. 5:12-13; Heb. 13:17). This is especially important when it concerns things that are of a subjective nature (e.g., practical day to day running of the church and its ministries, differences of opinion).
  - v. Speaking the same thing involves yielding my own will for others (Eph. 5:20-21). You don’t have to have it your way every time in the local church!
- b. Unity in wisdom – “in the same mind”
- i. The word ‘mind’ comes from the Greek word ‘nous’ and refers to “the faculty by which truth is grasped” (Vine).
  - ii. It is a reference to the inner man and reminds us that unity is not a mere outward conformity to keep the peace but a deep-seated oneness in the truth. It is inner unity produced by the Holy Spirit (“unity of the Spirit” Eph. 4:3) in the heart of the yielded believer. Such inner unity fruits in outward words and actions.
  - iii. This refutes the ecumenical “unity in diversity” doctrine. It also refutes the “in essentials unity, in non-essentials liberty doctrine”. Complete unity in the truth is the Divine standard for His local churches.
- c. Unity of will – “in the same judgment”
- i. “Of these words *nous* denotes the frame or state of mind, *gnōmē* the judgment, opinion or sentiment, which is the outcome of *nous*” (Lightfoot).
  - ii. W.E. Vine writes, ‘mind’ (*nous*) is the faculty by which truth is grasped and (*gnome*) is the opinion formed concerning truth.
  - iii. This is a consensus/agreement in decisions that flows out of a unity of heart and mind.

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### III. THE FACTS BEHIND THE APPEAL (VS. 11-17)

The connective 'for' introduces the basis/reason for the Apostle's appeal. He then proceeds to refute their carnal thinking. The truth/facts are seen in:

#### A. Chloe's Report (Vs. 11-12)

1. The source of the report (Vs. 11a)
  - a. Paul reveals the source of his facts. Chloe and her household had given the Apostle an accurate picture of what was going on at Corinth. Evidently the Apostle Paul had confidence in Chloe's godly character as well as those in her household. She must have been a woman in reputation for truthfulness and godliness for Paul to act on her report in such a confident manner.
  - b. The phrase "it hath been declared" is used in the Greek papyri, in reference to official, legal evidence. Thus, Paul had been furnished with solid proof of the Corinthian divisions.
  - c. It was right for Chloe to give such a report to the Apostle Paul and it was right for the Apostle Paul to hear it! This was not slander or idle gossip. This was a factual account of what was going on and the Apostle Paul was the appropriate authority to appeal to in the circumstances.
  - d. Someone has wisely observed that gossip is when you are speaking to someone about an issue who is not a part of the problem or the solution. It is right and appropriate for church leadership to be informed of divisions in the assembly.
  - e. Note: The difference between a carnal gossip and a genuine individual of integrity is this – a talebearer likes to work anonymously. They don't want anyone to know what they are spreading. Somehow who is speaking the truth will be prepared to put their name to what they are reporting as they have nothing to hide.
  - f. W.E. Vine writes, "The mention of Chloe's household, implies their willingness to be known as the informants. That the Apostle has no hesitation in identifying them provides sufficient evidence that it was not a case of mere tale-telling, but of God-fearing disclosure to the one who was especially qualified to handle the matter so that it might be dealt with after a godly sort."
2. The substance of the report (Vs. 11b)
  - a. The substance of Chloe's report was that there were "contentions" in the church at Corinth. This word means more than just a difference of opinion; it connotes quarrels or wranglings. It is one of the works of sinful flesh, translated as "variance" (Gal. 5:20). The word is translated "debate" in Romans 1:29. The word is translated "strife" 3 times in the New

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Testament (Rom. 13:13, 1 Cor. 3:3, Phil. 1:15, 1 Tim. 6:4)  
(Gromacki)

- b. Contentions are the fruit of carnality. Fleshly arguments, quarrels and assertive opinions have no place in the local church.
3. The specifics of the report (Vs. 12)
- Paul now moves from the general to the specific – “Now this I say”. The contentions were over personalities, not principles. There is contention of a godly kind (Jude 1:3) but this was contention of a fleshly, ungodly kind. Paul shines a spotlight on partisan spirit that was tearing the church apart. There was:
- a. There was the “I’m of Paul” faction. Paul was the founding pastor of the Corinthian church so it would be natural that many feel a special allegiance to him. Further, he was the Apostle to the Gentiles so this faction was probably made up of Gentile believers.
  - b. There was the “I’m of Apollos” faction. Apollos was an Alexandrian Jew who had been led to Christ by Priscilla and Aquila. He took over pastoring the church of Corinth after Paul. He was a man mighty in the Scriptures with powerful oratorical gifts (Acts 18:24-28). The Corinthians were obsessed with speaking gifts so Apollos was a natural choice for another faction in the church.
  - c. There was the “I’m of Cephas” faction. The name Peter was a big deal amongst the Jews. There is no record of Peter having any direct involvement in the church of Corinth so this faction was likely made up of the Jewish believers in the church.
  - d. There was the “I’m of Christ” faction. This group had the right name but the wrong spirit/motive! In an act of one upmanship, they outdid the others by claiming some special attachment to Christ. Such groups exist today who disdain the local church and godly pastors and teachers claiming they only need Christ.
  - e. Illustration: Factions in political parties (lust for power and control often the motive more than principles).
  - f. Note: Carnality can move in two directions in relation to church leaders. It can manifest itself in disregard and disrespect on the one hand or in making too much out of church leaders on the other hand. The Bible exhorts us to have high respect, love and an obedient spirit towards God’s under shepherds in the local church (1 Thess. 5:12-13; Heb. 13:17). However, a fleshly hero worshiping of a leader is not of God. We are not to honor earthly leaders above what the Bible requires. Personality cults have no place in the local church and that is exactly what the Corinthian believers were doing.

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- g. Matthew Henry writes, “Ministers, however instrumental they are of good to us, are not to be put in Christ’s stead. They are not to usurp Christ’s authority, nor encourage any thing in the people that looks like transferring his authority to them. He is our Saviour and sacrifice; he is our Lord and guide.”

### B. Paul’s Rebuke (Vs. 13-17)

Paul now exposes the foolishness and ungodliness of such partisanship in the local church. Take note of his:

1. Exposing Questions (Vs. 13) Paul’s incisive questions cut through their error like a hot knife through butter.
  - a. “Is Christ divided”? – the answer was clearly a resounding “no”. They were united in Christ. They shared in the common salvation. Therefore, these manmade, carnal divisions were ungodly and unwarranted.
  - b. “was Paul crucified for you” – the answer again is a resounding “no”! Paul was the instrument that God used to plant the Corinthian church but he was just a sinner saved by grace. Later in the Book Paul would testify, “But by the grace of God I am what I am: and his grace which *was bestowed* upon me was not in vain; but I laboured more abundantly than they all: yet not I, but the grace of God which was with me.” (1 Cor. 15:10)
  - c. “or were ye baptised in the name of Paul” – the answer is again a resounding “no”! They had been baptised according to the Great Commission in the name of the Father, Son and Holy Ghost.
2. Ensuing Discussion (Vs. 14-17)

The mention of baptism leads the Apostle Paul into a further discussion.

  - a. The People he had Baptized (Vs. 14-16)
    - i. Paul was thankful that in the Providence of God, he hadn’t done much of the baptizing of the Corinthian converts. He mentions that he remembers only baptizing Crispus, Gaius and the household of Stephanas (Vs. 14, 16)
    - ii. The Lord had lead Paul this way to avoid the accusation that Paul had baptized in his own name (Vs. 15). Given Paul’s notoriety as an Apostle, and the Corinthian tendency to idolize men, we can see Paul’s wisdom in delegating the baptizing of the majority of the converts to others. Even without baptizing the majority of the converts, a Paul the Apostle personality cult had sprung up!
  - b. The Preaching he had Emphasized (Vs. 17).

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- i. The Apostle Paul draws a clear distinction between baptism and the Gospel in this verse. Paul was not saying a believer should not be baptized. On the contrary, the Corinthian believers had all been baptized (Vs. 13). Paul was simply saying that the emphasis of his ministry was the preaching of the Gospel.
- ii. This verse powerfully refutes the teaching that baptism is essential for salvation. If it was a part of the Gospel, why would Paul make such a statement?

### **Conclusion:**

1. How are you contributing to the unity of the local church?
2. Do you have unresolved grievances and offences that need to be dealt with?
3. Are you engaged in petty quarreling with church leadership and fellow church members?
4. Will you die to self, surrender your rights and adjust for the higher purpose of maintaining unity amongst the brethren?