

Text: I Corinthians 1:10-17

Title: “A House Divided”

INTRODUCTION

Luke 11:17 - “Any kingdom divided against itself will be ruined, and a house divided against itself will fall.

This is true of any kingdom and of any home. And it is certainly true of the house of God, the church of the Lord Jesus Christ. But the converse is true as well. A kingdom, a family, a church that is united will stand.

Open your Bibles with me to I Corinthians 1:10. As you're turn let me encourage you about a couple of things:

- Connection tonight – Our students will be leading our worship. We'll share together in the Lord's Supper and then the focus of our praying will be on our schools.
- New Bible study options – Look at your worship folder.

Let read I Corinthians 1:10-17.

ILLUSTRATION – As I read these verses three incidences came to my mind:

- A pastor friend calls for prayer as a handful of people in his church decided that they didn't like him and wanted him to leave. The vast majority of the church supported the pastor's leadership. The attackers went to court to get an injunction against the pastor. When the judge threw out the matter, the church members went to a Christian talk radio program where they called in their attacks against the pastor and the church.
- A friend from another city called with a broken heart that some of the staff members, and a few of their followers decided a new church needed to be started just down the street from this church. It's left the pastor feeling betrayed and many of the church members confused.
- The Star-Telegram a couple of weeks ago carried the story of a local pastor who saw the church as a means of building a profitable business. When the business venture failed, it jeopardized the financial health of the church, leaving the church divided over the leadership of the pastor.

We have to work at unity in the church. One of the true signs of spiritual maturity in a believer and in a church is the presence of unity.

1. THE INSTRUCTION (v.10)

You can sense the passion in Paul's heart as he instructs:

1 Corinthians 1:10 - I appeal to you, brothers, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that all of you agree with one another so that there may be no divisions among you and that you may be perfectly united in mind and thought.

And this appeal comes “**in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ...**” Nine times in the first nine verses Paul refers to that glorious Name, Jesus Christ. Keep your eyes on Jesus, and your focus on Him. When we get our eyes off of Jesus Christ, it will happen for us as it happened in the church at Corinth. They had they’re eyes, their focus, on people. And the results were disastrous.

SUMMARY - Agreement on the essentials plus humility on the peripherals equals unity in Christ.

- **Agreement on the essentials**

“agree” = lit. “say the same thing.” They were to speak the same thing in regards to the basic fundamentals of the faith, summed up in the Gospel.

Note: Unity is not finding the lowest common denominator that we can agree on, and settling there. No! Genuine Christian unity is based on agreement on the essentials. And the essentials are found here in the Scriptures.

Now let me show you where this started.

2 Timothy 1:13-14 - What you heard from me, keep as the pattern of sound teaching, with faith and love in Christ Jesus. 14 Guard the good deposit that was entrusted to you—guard it with the help of the Holy Spirit who lives in us.

Note: Timothy was not just to make up his own message. Now why could Paul say, “Teach only what I taught you?” Because he was an apostle vested with the authority of Jesus Christ, as were the other apostles like Peter, James and John. They were entrusted with a once-in-history assignment to communicate the truths that would be set forth in Scripture and would become the norm for all believers and churches of all ages.

The Holy Spirit says that same thing to us. In the Bible we have this “good deposit” passed along to us. And this “pattern” of truth is the basis for our unity. That’s why we make a big deal about teaching and preaching the Bible to all ages. This is the “same thing” that we are to speak.

- **Humility on the peripherals (NOT NON-ESSENTIALS)**

The instruction continues that there should be “no divisions.” This was a political term used of rival parties in politics. So we have to be careful to hold on to and teach the pattern of truth. We also have to avoid squabbling over matters that aren’t really central ... they’re peripheral.

ILLUSTRATION – Years ago I heard a fable about a young lion and a cougar. Both were thirsty and arrived at their usual water hole at the same time. They immediately began to argue about who should drink first. The argument became heated, and each decided he would rather die than give up the privilege of being first to drink. They began to fight. Their cruel attacks on each other were suddenly interrupted. They both looked up. Circling overhead was a flock of vultures waiting for the loser to fall. Quietly, the two beasts turned and walked away. The thought of being devoured was all they needed to end their quarrel.

Note: Most of the things that churches squabble about are not central to the truth. They generally have to do with lesser things. And we must work hard to not be divided up like political parties over these peripheral issues. And the only way to do that is to be humble about them. You may feel strongly about a matter, but in humility, you do not pridefully assert your opinion, and so divide the fellowship.

Agreement on the essentials plus humility on the peripherals will lead to ...

- **Unity in the faith**

When we keep our focus on Jesus and the truth of the Gospel, and not allow ourselves to get splintered up over peripheral issues, we will be “perfectly united” (v.10c).

This was a term often used in many different ways. It was used to describe the setting of a broken bone. The word is used of fishermen mending nets.

It means to make all the parts fit together, like the many fragments that make up a mosaic. The verb is perfect passive. The idea is that the Holy Spirit does this work, and we cooperate.

Some of you may be thinking, “Well this doesn’t apply to me.” No, v.10 says “all of you agree with one another...” “All” means “all.” No one is exempt from this command. Agree ... all of you. No divisions ... applies to all of you. Complete unity ... all of you.

2. THE SITUATION (vv.11-12)

1 Corinthians 1:11 - My brothers, some from Chloe’s household have informed me that there are quarrels among you.

Paul had received a very credible report from some active members of the church in Corinth that things were a mess down there.

There were “quarrels” ... strife, squabbles and all kinds of conflict. These are not just differences of opinion, but disputes that threatened the life of the church. These squabbles, sadly, were not over the central issues of the Gospel, but over personal preferences of church members.

Quarrels over various personalities divided up the church into cliques. People had become proud of their “group” and therefore treated others with contempt.

Four Corinthian cliques:

#1 – The Paul Party – Paul founded the church, and had baptized a few of them. Paul’s emphasis had been to take the Gospel to the Gentiles, so this Paul Party may have been believers who were Gentiles.

#2 – The Apollos Applauders – Humanly speaking, it’s easy to see how church members in Corinth could be loyal to Apollos. According to Acts 18, Apollos came to town after Paul left and was a brilliant and eloquent preacher. Greeks, as the Corinthians were, were particularly enamored with rhetoric and argumentative skills. Some of the church members in Corinth were so wowed by Apollos that they viewed other ministers and preachers as ineffective and unworthy of following, even if they have biblical authority.

#3 – The Cephas Sect – We have no record of Cephas (the Aramaic form of Peter’s name) ever visited Corinth. But he was still well-known and highly esteemed among believers. This personality cult may have included those who were still very loyal to their Jewish roots, and the mother church in Jerusalem, and to Peter as the chief apostle.

Note: These leaders were not promoting this kind of cultish following. These were all men of God and servants of Christ. It was the spiritually immature Corinthian believers who had splintered up.

#4 – The Christ Crowd – On first observation, this would seem to be the right crowd, but actually they were likely a super-spiritual group who claimed to have a corner on Christ that others didn't have. They said they belonged to Christ, but their real claim was the Christ belonged to them, and to no one else. They were obviously superior to the others because they were "of Christ."

Note: This is something that is a very subtle danger for serious Christians. There's a difference between someone who comes across as spiritually superior, and someone who comes to as spiritually real. When I'm around people who are spiritually real, I generally am not forced into a comparison, but am pulled into the presence of the Lord. It's not that I feel they are superior and I am inferior, but that God is near. In the presence of their love and humility I'm not forced to look at them or at myself in comparison, but that I am turned to the Lord in some way.

So the Corinthians had clumped up around the Lord's public servants, and around the name of the Lord Himself, playing off against each other, until these silly rivalries actually threatened to destroy the church.

Each of these factions was, no doubt, looking down their noses at the others with an air of superiority. When, in fact, they were really just demonstrating their own immaturity.

1 Corinthians 3:3 - You are still worldly. For since there is jealousy and quarreling among you, are you not worldly? Are you not acting like mere men?

Translated: "The fact that you fuss and squabble and quarrel with each other demonstrates that you are not really as spiritual as you think you are. You're really no different than people in the world."

That was the situation in Corinth. Oh church, let's work hard that it will never be the situation in our church.

3. THE APPLICATIONS (vv.13-17)

Specifically, how can we get the job done here, and preserve unity in the church.

- **Establish yourself in the truth.**

In v.13 Paul asks three questions: **1 Corinthians 1:13 - Is Christ divided? Was Paul crucified for you? Were you baptized into the name of Paul?**

v.13 – "Is Christ divided?" – Christ is not divided, and neither should His people be. When you splinter up over the truth, you divide the truth. When you splinter up over Christ, you divide Christ. And Christ cannot and must not be divided. There is one Lord, one faith, one baptism.

ILLUSTRATION – None of the pieces of a jig saw puzzle is perfect or complete in itself. But when you put the pieces together the real picture comes forth. And the picture is the likeness of Jesus Christ.

v.13 – "Was Paul crucified for you?" No, Christ was crucified for us.

v.13 - “Were you baptized into the name of Paul?” No, you were baptized in the name of Jesus. So don’t get your focus on people, or groups of people. Keep your focus on Jesus. You can never go wrong. Jesus will never lead you astray or disappoint you. People will disappoint you sooner or later.

- **Avoid unhealthy worship of any human (I Corinthians 1:14-16).**

Now obviously we all have people whom God has used to bless us. Maybe it’s the pastor who baptized you. Or someone who was preaching at time when God changed your life. But we must not worship these people.

Read vv.14-16. Note: Paul is dictating to Sosthenes. “I don’t recall baptizing anyone. Sosthenes may have interrupted him to remind him. Thus v.16.

We are all to be in the shadow of the Cross. Don’t be Christian celebrity “groupies.” Focus on Christ rather than on exalting human leaders. And the next application is just the other side of the coin to this.

- **Avoid unholy disrespect for others (I Corinthians 1:13-16).**

If you have an unhealthy worship of some leaders, that means that you will inevitably disrespect others.

- **Really care about others in the church (1 Corinthians 12:24-25).**

1 Corinthians 12:25 - There should be no division (same word as in 1:10) in the body, but that its parts should have equal concern for each other.

So the opposite of division is having “equal concern one another.”

ILLUSTRATION – The movie documentary “March of the Penguins” follows the emperor penguins of Antarctica on their incredible journey through ice and snow to mating grounds up to 70 miles inland. There’s amazing unity in what happens. Once the males have reached the breeding grounds and have been given responsibility for the eggs, they override their competitive nature and form a team for the sake of survival. As a massive storm sets in, vicious winds pelt the penguins, which are huddled now in a single mass. The fathers settle into their long wait at the breeding grounds, the temperature is 80 degrees below zero. That’s without taking into account the wind, which can blow 100 miles per hour. Though they can be aggressive during the rest of the year, at this time the males are totally docile, a united and cooperative team. They brace against the storm by merging their thousand bodies into a single mass. They will take turns, each of them getting to spend some time near the center of their huddle where it’s warmer.

All this because they know their own offspring and the whole future of the species depends on this kind of unity.

- **Rely on the power of God (1 Corinthians 1:17).**

These other “things” are really not what changes a person.

1 Corinthians 1:17 - For Christ did not send me to baptize, but to preach the gospel—not with words of human wisdom, lest the cross of Christ be emptied of its power.

“Christ did not send me to baptize, but to preach the gospel.”

Why? Because the gospel is God’s way of changing the human heart. And we’ve got to get the message right. So God took great pains to communicate that to us. If we get baptism wrong, well, that will all get sorted out. But if we get the gospel wrong ... if we don’t clearly communicate how God can change a human heart ... then we’ve ultimately failed.

How? With words of human wisdom? No. This is what the Corinthians loved. This philosophical packaging of the gospel was not necessary then, and it’s not necessary now. In fact, the only packaging really necessary for the Gospel is love. When the Gospel is shared by someone who has the love of Christ in their hearts, that message is like an arrow right to the bullseye of the human heart.