

Disunity was not an isolated problem of the Corinthian church. Many churches have experienced it. It is also a topic which is often discussed. The Corinthian situation gives us an excellent case study by which to understand some of the dynamics in disunity. Paul appeals for a united spirit, he points to the dangerous current conditions of the church, and then adamantly opposes the factious spirit. We, too, are challenged to guard against factious thinking.

I. Paul appeals for agreement among the Corinthians (v. 10)

1. Unified agreement is essential thrust of Paul's appeal.

The Corinthians were to seek agreement with one another. This did not exclude diversity (cf. Ch. 12), nor any difference of opinion (cf. Ch. 10; Rom 14), nor abandoning doctrine (cf. Eph 4:11-16).

2. The person and work of Christ is the essential argument for agreement.

He appeals on the basis of who Christ is, His Person and His Authority, and on the basis of what He has done for us. Our efforts toward agreement can never be in conflict with these truth.

3. The manner in which we relate to one another expresses the essential nature of the agreement to which Paul is calling the Corinthians.

a. Negatively: there should be no division. Division or "schism" can mean literally a tear or figuratively a difference of opinion or feeling of alienation. Paul's expression communicates hesitance. They had not yet physically separated but they were torn in their attitude and actions to one another.

b. Positively expressed: there should be unity in mind and judgment. "Perfected united" means to mend or rejoin (cf Mt 4:21). "Mind" generally expresses our way of thinking or understanding. "Thought" distinguishes itself from "mind" in the sense that an opinion, judgment or decision is reached in this thinking process. Agreement was to derive itself from their understanding of truth and the decisions to which they came on the basis of that truth.

II. Paul accuses the Corinthians of having a contentious spirit (vv. 11-12).

At some point travelers from Corinth visited Paul and reported that there were quarrels in the church. These quarrels evidenced themselves in factions or groups claiming to adhere to a particular leader.

1. The nature of the factious spirit is found in the term "quarrel", a different term than "division" meaning contention, strife, bickering, or, in classical Greek, also rivalries. (This does not teach against holding an opinion and believing it to be right but that we should strive to find the truth which unifies.)

2. There was clear evidence of this contentious spirit in the factions which had developed. It was typical of Greek culture to have various schools of philosophy and leaders of those schools. This had crept into the church and all of them were doing the same thing, choosing their own leaders like Paul, perhaps as founder, Apollos, perhaps as the eloquent, gifted teacher, Cephas (or Peter), as the apostle to the Jews, and even Christ. In the latter case they may have been "purists" who rejected the teaching of those God had so gifted and adhered only to the direct words of Jesus.

We sometimes do the same today as the Corinthians did. It is easy for Christians to have a favorite Bible teacher or author. It even comes to the point that they read or listen more to that teacher than they spend directly studying or reading the Bible for themselves. Or in going to the other extreme and not receiving teaching from anyone. This does not mean that "taking sides" is always wrong. Paul, Peter and John all "took sides" against error. The Corinthians were wrong in making factions were none existed or where none should have existed.

III. Paul adamantly objected to this factious spirit among the Corinthians (vv. 13-17).

1. Such factions were totally incongruous with the person and work of Christ.

a. Neither the person nor the work of Christ can be divided up and apportioned to one part of the church and not the others. Christ is the foundation of the church, the gift giver to the Church, the source of all spiritual blessings to the whole church.

b. Paul also was not crucified for anyone. Only the blood of Jesus Christ cleanses. By His blood we have been bought! It was appalling to Paul that anyone would even consider becoming his follower.

c. In this regard he asks if they had been baptized in his name. He was thankful that he had not baptized many, since he wanted none to think that they should follow him rather than Christ.

2. The priority of Paul's commission was to preach the Gospel.

a. Paul does not deny the command of Christ to baptize (Mt 28:19-20), but a recognition of Paul's part in fulfilling that commission by preaching the Gospel. The churches baptized the new believers. Baptism is not essential for salvation although, because of its mention here, baptism can be seen as an important testimony.

b. Paul does place a priority on the simple presentation of the Gospel message. Nothing was to detract from the Gospel. Handling the Gospel in the same fashion as any other Greek philosophy in effect emptied it of its unique content. Rhetoric should not detract from the message. Factions should not minimize the uniqueness of the message.

It is important that we guard against following men or a school of thought rather than Christ. It is important that we guard against anything that would detract from the truth, even supposed "enhancements", whether rhetoric or multi-media. The Gospel message is the power of God to salvation. On the other hand we should strive to know the truth. As we all draw closer to the truth, we will all come closer in agreement.