

"Celebrating the Centrality of Christ in the Local Assembly"

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 Title: An Overview of 1 Corinthians 1-10: Part I
 Text: 1 Corinthians 1:10-17
 Theme: The cross work is big enough to unit diverse people into one body.

Introduction:

The people of Corinth find themselves in the middle of factions and division. The fellowship is marked by schisms and quarrellings. Such actions on their part outraged the apostle. Multiple issues are addressed by the apostle. His endeavor is to bring unity to the local body of believers. Anyone who is a part of any fellowship can feel the emotion within the letter. As the letter is studied, one must constantly come back to the background issue of division. Division forms the platform for his various appeals.

"The church was marked by internal strife, but it was not yet organizationally split." (Gromacki, 1 Corinthians, 10) The internal quarrelling had not yet manifested itself in a church split. What Paul deems the solution to the problem is a Christ centered theology.

In 1:10 Paul addresses his concerns to the "brothers." It is "a word he will use thirty-nine times in this letter, far and away the most frequent use in any of his letters (next are Romans and 1 Thessalonians, each with nineteen)." (Morris, 1 Corinthians, 39). Paul deems both parties as brothers in Christ. Neither one is more spiritual than the other. Paul is calling on both parts to put Christ first.

Paul's passion for the people of God and their unity is present. He does not wish to see the local assembly divided.

Why am I preaching this?

ILLUSTRATION:

If we were to attend a symphony and had all the various instrumentation present, each piece would have its distinct role, but combined they would be stronger. Each piece would submit to the leadership of one conductor and each instrument would seek to blend or stand out only as the piece would dictate.

Independent individualism is perhaps Americanism, but it is not biblical Christianity. God designed His people for community.

What is the biblical ideal?

Each part is completely dependent on Christ and inter-dependent on the individual pieces.

How will they best hear it?

The Holy Spirit must do this work in our individual hearts or any fellowship will be factious.

What danger is this paragraph addressing?

You are a Christian. After that everything else is secondary. Labels can serve a purpose, but every label is restrictive in what it addresses. There are denominational labels, there are theological labels that define whole systems, and there are labels that define areas of theology. All of this labeling can be of value when understood against the backdrop of humility, teach-ability, and charity, but become divisive where conformity and legalism are prominent.

What is seducing our affections away from the sufficiency of Christ?

Why is there so much division in Christ's body? The simple answer is pride. Proverbs 13:10 says, "Through insolence comes nothing but strife, but wisdom is with those who receive counsel." Insolence is nothing but pride. We are so self-consumed that we will fight even when we are wrong just to save face.

What are my idols?

How does this affect me personally? We do not want to drive people away. And because of this there is a tendency to sweep things under the rug. Perhaps today we need to pull the rug back and take a look at what has been swept under the rug?

ILLUSTRATION:

Sometimes when company comes unannounced there is a tendency to clean house by throwing everything into the closet. Or perhaps we simply get too lazy to really deal with the clutter so we continue to stack it in our closet. You cannot go on living like that. At some point in time you have to address the items that are in the closet. Perhaps today it is time to look into the closet of our lives and get rid of the clutter.

Sometimes in our desire to not ruffle any feathers we choose not to address problems as they come up inside of any normal family. We think that by avoiding the issue it will simply go away. Friend, we do not do anyone any good by avoiding confrontation. When it is done is a biblical way everyone wins.

To say we have problems that need confronting is to say that we are a normal fellowship and the health of any fellowship will be seen by how they handle their problems.

The big idea of this study is Dealing with division (1-4). The primary text is 1 Corinthians 1:10-13

Now I exhort you, brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you all agree and that there be no divisions among you, but that you be made complete in the same mind and in the same judgment. For I have been informed concerning you, my brethren, by Chloe's people, that there are quarrels among you. Now I mean this, that each one of you is saying, "I am of Paul," and "I of Apollos," and "I of Cephas," and "I of Christ." Has Christ been divided? Paul was not crucified for you, was he? Or were you baptized in the name of Paul?

This morning as we have gathered as a fellowship, we are sitting in communion with each part. We value isolation and anonymity. We want our space, but the Christian life is about community and communion.

There are three questions I would like us to consider in this study: Why is division a terrible sin? What is division's opposite? And how do we fight for unity and against division in the Church?

I. Why is division a terrible sin?

Division is terrible because it destroys the very nature of the cross-work. Robert L. Reymond in his work, A New Systematic Theology of the Christian Faith makes the following observation.

"The church is one by virtue of its union with Christ. All its members are baptized by one Spirit into one body having one Head and one Lord. There is one building with one foundation, one flock under one Shepherd. Dissensions and divisions among Christians obscure the oneness of the body of Christ." (Reymond, A New Systematic Theology of the Christian Faith, 839)

The sin canceling death of Jesus Christ obliterated those elements that separated us. We see this in Ephesians 2:14-16 and Galatians 3:28.

Ephesians 2:14-16 For He Himself is our peace, who made both groups into one and broke down the barrier of the dividing wall, by abolishing in His flesh the enmity, which is the Law of

commandments contained in ordinances, so that in Himself He might make the two into one new man, thus establishing peace, and might reconcile them both in one body to God through the cross, by it having put to death the enmity.

Galatians 3:28 There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free man, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus.

I cannot understand why God in His overarching providence determines division in the fellowship, but I do know that such actions from what we know in the Scripture are harmful and hurtful on this horizontal plan.

Jesus spoke of and prayed for unity within His body in John 10:14-16 and 17:20-23. “The unity among Christians for which our Lord is praying here is to be a visible unity if, as he prays, the world is to learn from it that the Father has sent him.” (Reymond, A New Systematic Theology of the Christian Faith, 840)

Every division within a local body or body at large is a travesty against the cross of Jesus Christ. We are denigrating His work in our behalf when we divide the body of Christ.

The word Paul uses in 1:10, 11:18, and 12:25 is our English word *schism*. It speaks of alienation, of a breach in the relationship between two people.

1 Corinthians 1:10 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.

1 Corinthians 11:18 for first of all, when ye come together in the church, I hear that **there be divisions among you**; and I partly believe it.

1 Corinthians 12:25 that there should be **no schism in the body**; but that the members should have the same care one for another.

These same ideas are present wherever the flesh is manifested. Listen to the following passages.

Romans 1:28-32	Galatians 5:19-21	Colossians 3:8-11
<p>28 And just as they did not see fit to acknowledge God any longer, God gave them over to a depraved mind, to do those things which are not proper,</p> <p>29 being filled with all unrighteousness, wickedness, greed, evil; full of envy, murder, strife, deceit, malice; they are gossips,</p> <p>30 slanderers, haters of God, insolent, arrogant, boastful, inventors of evil, disobedient to parents,</p> <p>31 without understanding, untrustworthy, unloving, unmerciful;</p> <p>32 and although they know the ordinance of God, that those who practice such things are worthy of death, they not only do the same, but also give hearty approval to those who practice them.</p>	<p>19 Now the deeds of the flesh are evident, which are: immorality, impurity, sensuality,</p> <p>20 idolatry, sorcery, enmities, strife, jealousy, outbursts of anger, disputes, dissensions, factions,</p> <p>21 envying, drunkenness, carousing, and things like these, of which I forewarn you, just as I have forewarned you, that those who practice such things will not inherit the kingdom of God.</p>	<p>8 But now you also, put them all aside: anger, wrath, malice, slander, and abusive speech from your mouth.</p> <p>9 Do not lie to one another, since you laid aside the old self with its evil practices,</p> <p>10 and have put on the new self who is being renewed to a true knowledge according to the image of the One who created him--</p> <p>11 a renewal in which there is no distinction between Greek and Jew, circumcised and uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave and freeman, but Christ is all, and in all.</p>

When I have chosen to leave a fellowship, I left because I did not want to become a problem. Sometimes it is almost unavoidable, but we must make sure that even when we find ourselves having to leave, we leave with a gracious and loving spirit. It is really easy to slander the body of Christ when we are gossiping under the guise of informing and inviting prayer.

In my years at WBC I am always fascinated and saddened when I hear of other people talking negatively about our fellowship. Those occasions have been far and few between, but I find it unfortunate. I do not have enough time in the day to criticize those fellowships that would disagree with us. I am thrilled for every fellowship that is seeking to uphold the integrity of the biblical text, call His people to Christ as their sufficiency and call sinners to repent and be saved.

I thank God for all other Evangelical Churches. They are not the enemy. The devil, the world, and the flesh are. Other Evangelical Churches are my allies in my fight against the kingdom of darkness.

ILLUSTRATION: (Make I be transparent with you for a moment?)

Although I believe that somehow in ways I do not understand God is actively working even inside of a divided fellowship, every person who leaves takes a piece of who we are with them.

In the three years that I have been here we have faced two opportunities for portraying biblical love and practicing biblical grace. God has protected us from having these areas become factious and strife marked, but they have moved some people to stop identifying themselves with this fellowship.

The first was over the issue of Calvinism.

My theological roots are many. I was raised a Roman Catholic, I was born-again at the age of 17 and went to a Baptist College. I then went to a strong fundamentalist – separatist Seminary. I was trained in Traditional Dispensationalism for eschatology and ecclesiology and Reformed thinking in the area of Soteriology. At the age of 38 I embraced a very strong position on the centrality of Christ and His cross work in my behalf. I am now the pastor of an independent Bible church. There is a real mish-mash of thinking as it relates to my training.

Of all the things I have been, the most controversial was my Reformed thinking in the area of Soteriology. Most of you do not know or even care what that means, but the more popular name for Reformed thought is Calvinism. Depending on perspective Calvinism is either booed or cheered.

I do not necessarily identify myself by the label Calvinist only because it is limited in what it addresses and most people who know something of Calvinism are woefully ignorant of its conclusions.

It is tragic, but doctrine has been used to divide the body of Christ. I do believe theology is important and I have spent my life studying it, but I do not believe theology is so important that it should destroy the unity of a fellowship.

We have had a number of people who felt it was necessary to leave our fellowship because of their uninformed understanding of what constitutes Calvinistic thought. It was not over my evangelistic zeal or passion for missions, but over their fear of what Calvinism was caricatured to be.

God has worked grace in me. I do not care what you believe about Calvinism, but I do care that you do not use your theology to divide this body. A body is not divided because of theological pluralism. A body is divided because of an unloving intolerance toward the diversity as it exists in any local fellowship.

(Ended the message here on January 8, 2006 – Continued next week)