

Against Tribalism
1 Corinthians 1:10-17
September 13th, 2020

1. An appeal to _____ (1:10)
2. A description of _____ (1:11-12)
3. An undivided _____ (1:13-17)
4. How can I avoid tribalism and divisions in my church?
 - a. Focus on _____.
 - b. Be _____ to preserve the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. (Eph. 4:1-6)
 - c. Fellowship _____ within the body.
 - d. Don't elevate a _____ teacher.

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Reflection and Discussion Questions
1 Corinthians 1:10-17

1. How does Jesus describe the unity He desires for His people in John 17:21-23? According to these verses, what is the result of that type of unity?
2. How does the appeal to unity in Philippians 2:1-2 compare to the appeal to unity in 1 Corinthians 1:10?
 - How can we be united and “of the same mind” without going beyond what is written in scripture or micro-managing each other’s lives and beliefs?
 - In other words, what are some primary doctrines that we must agree on and what are secondary doctrines that we can have freedom to disagree on while still remaining united?
3. Why are people tempted to divide up the church into followers of certain people? Have you seen this? What examples can you think of?
4. What is unique about Christ that elevates Him above any human teacher? How does that fit with Paul’s appeal to unity?
5. In what sense did Christ not send him to baptize? Aren’t we all called to make disciples by baptizing them and teaching them? (Matt. 28:19-20) How does this fit in his overall argument about divisions?

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Big idea: Divisions in the body around human leaders violate the unity we should have in the gospel of Christ.

Intro

In His high priestly prayer the night before His arrest and execution, Jesus prayed for His disciples and all that would believe in Him through their words. That means He was praying for us.

He prayed that we would be kept by the Father

John 17:15 "I do not ask You to take them out of the world, but to keep them from the evil *one*."

He prayed that we would be sanctified by the truth and sent into the world

John 17:17-18 "Sanctify them in the truth; Your word is truth. ¹⁸ "As You sent Me into the world, I also have sent them into the world."

He prayed that we would be one

John 17:21-23 that they may all be one; even as You, Father, *are* in Me and I in You, that they also may be in Us, so that the world may believe that You sent Me. ²² "The glory which You have given Me I have given to them, that they may be one, just as We are one; ²³ I in them and You in Me, that they may be perfected in unity, so that the world may know that You sent Me, and loved them, even as You have loved Me."

His "so that" phrase tells us that it is one way that the world would believe that Jesus really is who He said He is – through this unity the world may know that "You sent Me, and love them."

Earlier in the same night he said that a love for one another will be a way that people will know we are His disciples.

John 13:35 "By this all men will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another."

And yet unity can be elusive in a church.

Sometimes disunity comes out of a love for truth.

Sometimes disunity comes out of a love for holiness.

But sometimes disunity comes from pride and unnecessary division.

That was the case in Corinth. And it is the first major problem Paul addresses in this letter.

After the brief intro that we looked at last week, the letter is divided into 5 major topics. In each one he shows how a right understanding and application of the gospel addresses the problem.

Describes the problem

Responds with the gospel

Shows how they are not living out what they say they believe

Learning to think about every area of life through the lens of the gospel

5 areas

Divisions (1-4)

Sex/marriage (5-7)

Food (8-10)

Gathering (11-14)

Resurrection (15-16)

How do you live in light of the gospel when the cultural current is pushing hard against you?

The culture was divided over personalities and leaders and the church was echoing that divide rather than contrasting it.

Sexual sin was rampant in the city and if anything it was ramped up in the church.

Idol worship was common and most of the food came from being sacrificed to idols. Should a Christian participate in that?

How do the different parts of the body operate when we gather so that we grow in love rather than build up our own egos through pride?

How does the reality of the resurrection of Christ and our own future resurrections affect how we live today?

1. An appeal to **unity** (1:10)

- a. "Now" forms the transition.
- b. Notice the tone
 - i. He "exhorts" them – parakaleo – coming alongside someone to help.
 1. CSB – urge, ESV and NIV – appeal, kjv – beseech, nkj – plead
 2. It's not a 'command' right out of the gates, probably partially because as we'll see in the letter they were questioning his authority so leaning on authority wouldn't be wise.
 3. But it also shows that he is urging them as his brothers and sisters in Christ to conform their behavior to the gospel not as law but as response to the grace that is in Christ.
 4. Similar to his words to Philemon
 - a. **Philemon. 1:8-9** Therefore, though I have enough confidence in Christ to order you to do what is proper, yet for love's sake I rather appeal to you
 - ii. He calls them brethren
 - iii. He appeals to the name of Jesus
 1. Tenderness and seriousness.
- c. His appeal is that they agree without divisions but rather be knit together in the same mind.
 - i. These divisions should be mended, which is the literal idea behind being made complete. It's a words that is used of restoring or knitting together a fishing net that had been torn.
- d. What type of division is occurring though?
 - i. The next few verses tell us a little about it.

2. A description of **division** (1:11-12)

- a. Word has gotten to Paul in Ephesus across the Aegean Sea that there are quarrels among them.
- b. Their quarrels and division were rallying around their various teachers
 - i. 1:11-12
 - ii. **1 Corinthians 3:3-4** for you are still fleshly. For since there is jealousy and strife among you, are you not fleshly, and are you not walking like mere men? 4 For when one says, "I am of Paul," and another, "I am of Apollos," are you not mere men?
 - iii. Saying "I am of Paul, Apollos, Cephas" was a way of identifying with a human teacher as part of that "tribe."
 - iv. Paul was the apostle who first brought the gospel to Corinth.

- v. Apollos followed him
 - 1. **Acts 18:24** Now a Jew named Apollos, an Alexandrian by birth, an eloquent man, came to Ephesus; and he was mighty in the Scriptures.
- vi. Cephas was the Aramaic for Peter the apostle
- c. Their quarrels had an element of pride and boasting
 - i. **1 Corinthians 1:29** so that no man may boast before God.
 - ii. **1 Corinthians 3:21a** So then let no one boast in men.
 - iii. **1 Corinthians 4:6** Now these things, brethren, I have figuratively applied to myself and Apollos for your sakes, so that in us you may learn not to exceed what is written, so that no one of you will become arrogant in behalf of one against the other.
- d. Their divisions lead to a lack of care and concern for each other.
 - i. **1 Corinthians 12:25-27** ...so that there may be no division in the body, but that the members may have the same care for one another. ²⁶ And if one member suffers, all the members suffer with it; if *one* member is honored, all the members rejoice with it. ²⁷ Now you are Christ's body, and individually members of it.
- e. It's natural to feel a sense of appreciation for someone that played a critical role in your spiritual life.
 - i. Bible study leader who first shared the gospel with you.
 - ii. SS leader who disciplined you
 - iii. Pastor who taught you during a key point in your college years
 - iv. Pastor who counseled you during a marriage conflict
 - v. Author who clarified something life changing for you
- f. The problem is when those leaders become rallying points of division.
- g. The problem is when a passion for theology gets oversimplified into putting people in different camps based on who they read, listen to, and respect. ??
 - i. Their followers take it farther than the teachers and become caricatures of the original.
 - 1. They are more Calvinist than Calvin.
 - 2. They adopt MacArthur's passion for truth and expository preaching but neglect his personal tenderness with people.
 - ii. Churches can become personality cults rallying around different charismatic leaders.
 - 1. That's why my solution is to be very boring.
 - iii. We can be guilty of tribalism in which we shape our identity by what tribe we belong to – I go to this conference, I read these people, I believe these secondary doctrines – rather than by Christ alone.
- 3. An undivided **Christ** (1:13-17)
 - a. Because we are one in Christ we should not be divided
 - i. **1 Corinthians 12:12** For even as the body is one and yet has many members, and all the members of the body, though they are many, are one body, so also is Christ.
 - ii. **Romans 12:4-5** For just as we have many members in one body and all the members do not have the same function ⁵ so we, who are many, are one body in Christ, and individually members one of another

- iii. **Ephesians 4:4-6** *There is one body and one Spirit, just as also you were called in one hope of your calling; ⁵ one Lord, one faith, one baptism, ⁶ one God and Father of all who is over all and through all and in all.*
 - iv. This clearly cuts across racism. It's a theological truth that exposes the lie that certain people should be treated differently or accepted or rejected based on the color of their skin.
- b. Because of the uniqueness of Christ's work we should not be divided.
 - i. Absurdity of their slogans – I am of Paul, I follow Cephas - which are in the name of mere humans.
 - ii. Paul is essentially saying, "don't make an idol out of me! I'm not your savior!"
 - iii. The ground is level at the foot of the cross.
 - 1. There are flawed, sinful humans and there is the perfect Savior. Those are the only two categories.
 - 2. Among the flawed, sinful humans there are two other categories – those who believe they are sinners and come to Jesus for forgiveness and those who do not.
- c. We were baptized in the name of Christ not a human leader.
 - i. Baptism symbolized the reality of your death to sin and new life in Christ.
 - 1. **Romans 6:2-4** May it never be! How shall we who died to sin still live in it? ³ Or do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus have been baptized into His death? ⁴ Therefore we have been buried with Him through baptism into death, so that as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, so we too might walk in newness of life.
 - 2. Baptism symbolizes our identification with Jesus.
 - a. We were baptized into His death.
 - b. He was our substitute and our representative.
 - ii. Baptism symbolizes our initiation into the body of Christ, the church. (1 Corinthians 12:13)
 - 1. **1 Corinthians 12:13** For by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body, whether Jews or Greeks, whether slaves or free, and we were all made to drink of one Spirit.
 - 2. You can say that baptism is the initiatory ritual of the church and communion is the ongoing ritual of the church.
- d. Paul goes on to explain how glad he is that he didn't baptize many of them, not because baptism is insignificant, but because that was clearly a source of confusion and pride for them.
 - i. Crispus was the leader of the Jewish synagogue mentioned in Acts 18:8 who believed. The name Gaius is mentioned in Acts, Romans, and 3 John as well as here. If it's the same figure, he was a prominent host and elder of the church.
- e. Why would he say that Christ didn't send him to baptize but to preach the gospel?
 - i. Doesn't the great commission include baptizing people?
 - 1. **Matthew 28:19** "Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit,
 - ii. Given the context of the issue there of personality cults, his point is that's not why he was sent.
 - 1. His mission was not to gather a people around him that follow Paul.

2. His mission was to preach Christ.
 - a. Of course as people respond to the gospel, the God-ordained mode of declaring your trust in Christ is baptism in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit – not in the name of Paul!
- f. Verse 17 introduces a point that will be developed through the rest of the chapter and even through this whole section on divisions that goes through chapter 4.
 - i. It isn't man's clever wisdom or eloquent speech that should be on display – but the glory of the gospel.
 - ii. This was a problem in Corinth because the Greeks placed a high value on rhetorical skill. The church had adopted that also.
 - iii. Paul says, "No. I'm not going to gather around a group of followers who rally around me – 'Paul baptized me!' 'Paul is such a great speaker!' My mission to declare the gospel and point people to Jesus."
 - iv. He would say in 2 Corinthians
 1. **2 Corinthians 4:5** For we do not preach ourselves but Christ Jesus as Lord, and ourselves as your bond-servants for Jesus' sake.
4. How can I avoid tribalism and divisions in my church?
 - a. Focus on Jesus.
 - i. As we focus on Jesus and proclaim the gospel, divisions will happen.
 1. **John 7:43** So a division occurred in the crowd because of Him.
 2. Matthew 3:12 ¹² "His winnowing fork is in His hand,
 3. **Acts 14:4** But the people of the city were divided; and some sided with the Jews, and some with the apostles.
 - ii. William Farley, a retired pastor: "The gospel is inherently divisive. It affects both unbelievers and saints. Believers respond with joy. Others respond with anger, condescension, disgust, or apathy. Sometimes, unbelieving visitors will walk out in the middle of your Sunday sermon. Sometimes, professing Christians will, too. Why? Because the gospel commands us to humble ourselves and renounce dependence on our good works. It commands us to submit to sovereign grace. This message is humbling, and our pride doesn't like to be humbled."
 - iii. In other words, it's not that we pursue unity at any cost – the cost of truth, the cost of clarity with the gospel.
 - iv. Augustine - In essentials, unity. In non-essentials, liberty. In all things, charity.
 - v. Matt Smethurst - True Christian unity is the art of maximizing what's primary without minimizing what's secondary.
 - vi. But we are united around Christ, united in Christ.
 - b. Be diligent to preserve the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. (Eph. 4:1-6)
 - i. **Ephesians 4:1** Therefore I, the prisoner of the Lord, implore you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling with which you have been called, ² with all humility and gentleness, with patience, showing tolerance for one another in love, ³ being diligent to preserve the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. ⁴ *There is one body and one Spirit*, just as also you were called in one hope of your calling; ⁵ one Lord, one faith, one baptism, ⁶ one God and Father of all who is over all and through all and in all.
 - ii. It takes humility, gentleness, patience, and tolerance to preserve unity that we have objectively in Christ.

1. Humility about the necessity and effectiveness of wearing masks and distancing.
2. Willing to take steps out of love for one another that we might not if it was just ourselves that we are concerned about.
3. Gentleness and patience with those who struggle with things that you don't – fear, anxiety.
4. Patience and tolerance with those who reach different conclusions about key issues in our society leading up to the election.
 - a. One pastor who serves a church in Washington DC said the following the Sunday after the last presidential election: "It's our job as a congregation to live out the covenant we've taken before the Lord, and to show that the Christ we share is more important to us than the politics we don't. This church has survived close elections before. It was here when Teddy Roosevelt was elected, and when his cousin Franklin defeated President Hoover. We survived Truman v Dewey, Kennedy v Nixon, and Nixon v Humphrey—all close and contentious elections. I was here when we survived Bush v Gore, and in those days we had had Mr. Gore's scheduler as our deacon of sound while the Republican Senate Majority leader sat right down there!"
 - b. It doesn't mean pretending there are no differences between the political parties or that we can't talk about them with each other. But it means not making them an unnecessary dividing line but listening well to others within the body if they disagree with you.
- c. Fellowship **broadly** within the body.
 - i. Avoid just hanging out with and talking to and praying for the people that are most like you at UBC. Join different Bible studies or ABF classes.
- d. Don't elevate a **human** teacher.
 - i. There are authors and pastors that I love that have been tremendously influential in my life – John MacArthur, John Piper, Paul Tripp, Voddie Baucham, Randy Alcorn, CS Lewis. The temptation is to uncritically accept whatever these men teach without comparing it to scripture. If a controversy erupts the temptation is to simply "take their side" and reject their critics. We must not do that. We must bring everything back to scripture and only elevate Christ.



1

John 17:15 "I do not ask You to take them out of the world, but to keep them from the evil *one*."

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John 17:17-18 "Sanctify them in the truth; Your word is truth. ¹⁸ "As You sent Me into the world, I also have sent them into the world."

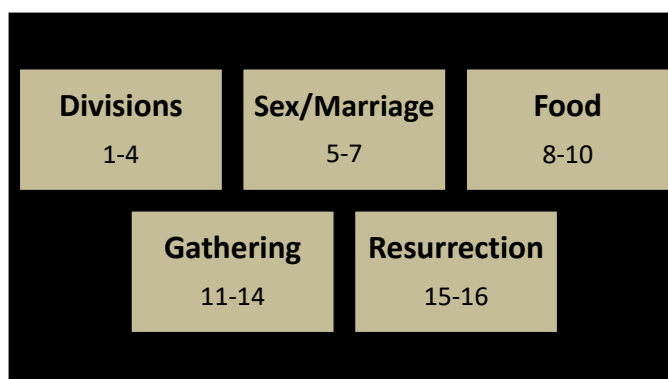
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John 17:21-23 that they may all be one; even as You, Father, *are* in Me and I in You, that they also may be in Us, so that the world may believe that You sent Me. ²² "The glory which You have given Me I have given to them, that they may be one, just as We are one; ²³ I in them and You in Me, that they may be perfected in unity, so that the world may know that You sent Me, and loved them, even as You have loved Me."

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John 13:35 "By this all men will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another."

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1. An appeal to unity (1:10)

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Philemon. 1:8-9 Therefore, though I have enough confidence in Christ to **order** you to do what is proper, yet for love's sake I rather **appeal** to you

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2. A description of *division* (1:11-12)

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Acts 18:24 Now a Jew named Apollos, an Alexandrian by birth, an eloquent man, came to Ephesus; and he was mighty in the Scriptures.

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1 Corinthians 1:29 so that no man may boast before God.

1 Corinthians 3:21a So then let no one boast in men.

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1 Corinthians 4:6 Now these things, brethren, I have figuratively applied to myself and Apollos for your sakes, so that in us you may learn not to exceed what is written, so that no one of you will become arrogant in behalf of one against the other.

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3. An undivided **Christ**
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1 Corinthians 12:12 For even as the body is one and *yet* has many members, and all the members of the body, though they are many, are one body, so also is Christ.

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Romans 12:4-5 For just as we have many members in one body and all the members do not have the same function ⁵ so we, who are many, are one body in Christ, and individually members one of another

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Ephesians 4:4-6 *There is* one body and one Spirit, just as also you were called in one hope of your calling; ⁵ one Lord, one faith, one baptism, ⁶ one God and Father of all who is over all and through all and in all.

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Romans 6:2-4 May it never be! How shall we who died to sin still live in it? ³ Or do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus have been baptized into His death? ⁴ Therefore we have been buried with Him through baptism into death, so that as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, so we too might walk in newness of life.

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1 Corinthians 12:13 For by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body, whether Jews or Greeks, whether slaves or free, and we were all made to drink of one Spirit.

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b. Be **diligent** to preserve the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. (Eph. 4:1-6)

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