

Joel Breidenbaugh

(1 Corinthians 1:10-17)

Intro. Some people are always in pursuit of the perfect church. You may have heard about the couple who could never find the perfect church, for everyone they went, they found something they didn't like about it. Finally, they started their own church & called it “The True Church.” Someone asked them, “How many members does your church have?” “There's just the two of us,” replied the husband, “my wife & me, but sometimes I'm not sure about her!” (Vines, 23) We are in our series entitled “Growing Pains” from 1<sup>st</sup> Corinthians. Today, we look at “Divisions” from 1:10-17.

Theme: Unity

Background: Paul had planted the church about 3 years earlier & now writes to them to address some growing pains they were experiencing by letting too much of the world into the church.

➤ We only have time to unpack a few verses today, but in the upcoming weeks, we'll look at how Paul unpacks his solutions for the problem of divisions & rival factions. I want to give you 2 lessons to learn in light of divisions within the church.

### I. Don't Be Fractured, But Be United (1:10-12)

- Paul appeals to them as “brothers” (1:10)—they are spiritually united to each other in God's family & need to remember God's grace in Christ in uniting them together in fellowship (cf. 1:9) as they work through their problems
- “divisions”—Greek schismata (where we get our word “schisms”)—the most serious divisions involve doctrine & Paul warned against such in Romans 16:17 (I'll say something again about which doctrines must be agreed upon & which has room for differences)
- “be united in the same mind & the same judgment”—that you agree together to put Christ & His work first (cf. Romans 15:5-7)

Illus: “quarreling” (1:11)—a part of life ever since the Fall (similar terms in Romans 1:29 & Galatians 5:19-20)—toddlers fight over wanting things their way & children fight over toys & youth fight over boyfriends & girlfriends & positions on sports' teams or cheerleading teams & then adults fight over places in business or PTA or politics—since the world is known for its quarreling, believers should be different & united (learn to get along)

- People were following different leaders—while it is natural to have special affection for someone who led us to Christ or teaches you at key moments in your life or someone who has counseled you through problems, it becomes divisive if it causes segregation within the congregation or decreases loyalty to other leaders

Illus: I once served a church that was deacon-led & the members followed the deacons on whatever they wanted. I had a deacons' meeting & everyone was in agreement with something I was leading them to do except for one deacon. He stated why he disagreed but the rest decided to support it. When we got to the business meeting, however, things changed. I spoke in favor of it & the one deacon spoke against it. Then, when it came time to vote by raised hands, all the deacons sided with the one deacon & made it look like it was me against them! Needless to say, I lost the vote & while I could live with that, I wouldn't live with them pulling such things on me again & told them if they weren't going to vote with me, they shouldn't show their support behind closed doors

- The Corinthian boasting in some way reflected the local polytheistic culture—where some claimed one god was better than another, the Corinthian believers were claiming their baptism was greater than others around them
- Don't argue & boast whether John Holloway baptized you or Nick Dawson or Bill Haynes or Larry Michaels or Joel Breidenbaugh or Billy Graham or anyone else, because though a proper administrator is needed (they were all believers themselves), there is no greater value in one administrator over another
- Likewise, while you may really like your SS teacher, you shouldn't quarrel over who you should really follow in the church—I follow Jim Wade, I follow Nick Elkins, I follow Jane Beougher, I follow our pastor, I follow Jesus!

- “be united”—perfectly joined—a medical term used to describe the setting of a broken bone or fitting together of joints
- Illus: What happens to this branch on the tree if it gets fractured? Unless it’s fixed, it begins to lose nutrients & health & it begins to die—so it is with the church that doesn’t fix the fractures & divisions that creep up
- II. Be Focused & United in Christ & His Cross (1:13-17)**
- Notice that the issue wasn’t who got baptized (they were all baptized, because the NT everywhere teaches that believers expressed their allegiance to Christ via baptism by immersion, Mark 1:10; Acts 8:38-39; Romans 6:3-4; Colossians 2:12)
  - Who was baptized in the NT? Believers (not a single case of infants getting baptized—household baptisms are only mentioned about 5x, without stating if infants were included, but 3x it clearly says they believed first, so infants could not have been included, cf. Acts 2:39; 10:24, 46-47; 11:14-17; 16:31-34; 18:8)
  - Does the NT know of individuals who came to saving faith in Jesus this side of the new covenant who didn’t get baptized? No (the thief on the cross is the closest & he had a deathbed conversion, but the new covenant wasn’t completed until Jesus rose from the dead)
  - Whenever someone became a believer, they were commanded to be baptized (Matthew 28:19; Acts 2:38)
  - When Jesus was “baptized unto death,” He was fully immersed into God’s wrath on the cross
  - “There is no such thing in the New Testament as an unbaptized person being an active member of any local church” (Wayne Grudem in response to John Piper about allowing non-baptized believers to become members of his church)
  - I say all these things because some people read this passage & say “baptism isn’t important,” but Paul isn’t saying that. He is saying it doesn’t matter who baptized you & it isn’t the most important thing
- Illus: We need to focus on the right issues. Whenever we want to see how well we are focusing, we go to a doctor & look at an eye chart (show pic). It lets us know what our vision is. The believers are Corinth needed better vision to quit being divisive & focus on Christ & His work on the cross
- Touch on theological triage as beliefs that unite at different levels (see Hebrews 6 for differing levels of doctrine, not to mention 1 Corinthians 1:17)—it amazes me how many mature Christians don’t see this in Scripture, as if whatever they believe must be believed by others or they’re false in their teachings
  - Primary beliefs are essential and necessary to the Christian faith—God, sin, Person & work of Christ, repentance & faith, authority of Scripture
  - Secondary beliefs are not essential, but important in denominational heritage (some argue more for biblical faithfulness & others argue more for church tradition)—baptism, Lord’s Supper, church government, women in ministry, cooperation in mission
  - Tertiary beliefs are neither essential nor (very) important—sign gifts, end-times, scope of the atonement
  - Church votes normally don’t deal with primary beliefs (budget, ministerial staff) & thus don’t require absolute unanimity (though super-majorities are helpful to preserve as much unity as possible)
- Conc.** You don’t have to attend very many “free” churches (without denominational hierarchy) before you come across business meetings. In those meeting you can experience divisions. It’s been said for every 15 Baptists you get in a room together, there are at least 16 opinions on any matter. One issue you don’t hear voted on is the power of the cross. It’s a settled issue. God sent His Son Jesus Christ to live a perfect life & die on the cross in place of sinners & then rise from the dead to prove Himself as Lord so that anyone who turns from their way of life & trusts in Him can have forgiveness & hope & peace & life—that’s the power of the cross. Will you put your hope in Jesus & His work on the cross for you?