

1Corinthians 1:13-17 "Christ Is Not Divided"

**1 Corinthians 1:13-17** <sup>13</sup> Has Christ been divided? Paul was not crucified for you, was he? Or were you baptized in the name of Paul? <sup>14</sup> I thank God that I baptized none of you except Crispus and Gaius, <sup>15</sup> so that no one would say you were baptized in my name. <sup>16</sup> Now I did baptize also the household of Stephanas; beyond that, I do not know whether I baptized any other. <sup>17</sup> For Christ did not send me to baptize, but to preach the gospel, not in cleverness of speech, so that the cross of Christ would not be made void.

Last week we left Paul addressing the Christians in the church at Corinth and rebuking them for dividing up into different factions. What created these factions, we simply aren't told; only that it was reported that there were quarrels among them.

These quarrels seem to be related to people placing more emphasis on different leaders rather than on being united in Christ. And so, some were saying that, "we follow Paul", while others said, "we follow Apollos", others, "we follow Peter", and of course some were saying, "we follow Jesus".

This resulted in creating chaos and causing such quarrels that the body of Christ there in Corinth was more concerned with being right about their positions than going forward with the work of Christ in bringing people the gospel.

And this is always the case when these sorts of divisions arise. More energy is spent trying to solve a problem, which is more times than not a result of pride or misunderstanding, and the work of Christ's Kingdom suffers.

Now, the fact that the church is made up of human beings will ensure that there will always be the possibility that petty problems will arise and be blown out of proportion. Someone may feel slighted and then tells someone else, who in turn tells someone else, all the while making the problem look bigger and bigger.

Instead of going to the individual or individuals themselves, who are part of the problem, the back door approach is often taken and when it finally has to be dealt with you're now having to deal not only with the offended parties, but also half of the body of Christ.

And this is what is going on in Corinth. We don't know if Chloe went to the parties involved, or if it had gotten so out of control that she simply felt it was beyond repair, and believed that only Paul could solve the problem at this point.

But, it's interesting to note that it doesn't take much to divide any church. In this case there were those who, for whatever reason, gravitated toward certain leaders and took up positions against those who felt strongly about different leaders.

I've known of churches dividing over what color the new carpet should be in the sanctuary, or the choice of a music leader whose style is a little different from the previous one.

As many different people as there are in the body of Christ, we could conceivably have as many different reasons for division. This doesn't mean that some divisions aren't warranted. For example, if someone is teaching heresy and they're not willing to repent of it when confronted, then there should be a dividing out.

But the word of God actually gives the directions for how such an action should take place. In such dramatic cases the division should ideally only involve the individual or individuals who are promoting such heresy.

But it doesn't have to be heresy. It can be any unrepentant sin which promotes division within the body. But instead of letting the division spread throughout the body, it is imperative, in certain cases, to divide out the one who is causing the division and who is not willing to repent.

TIT 3:10 "Warn a divisive person once, and then warn him a second time. After that, have nothing to do with him."

In the case at Corinth, Paul is assuming that the problem can be solved by allowing each party to repent before he goes in and starts asking people to leave. But, notice his line of thought concerning their divisive problem of looking to men rather than Christ who unites them.

He asks a question which is meant to help them reflect on the truth of God's word, and therein lies the answer to any problem in the church. The word of God must be the final arbitrator when it comes to deciding how to deal with such issues. In fact, in this case, Paul asks three questions.

1CO 1:13 "Is Christ divided? Was Paul crucified for you? Were you baptized into the name of Paul?"

The first question: "Is Christ divided?" By the way, these are all rhetorical questions with the answer already implied. No, Christ is not divided. In other words, Jesus Christ doesn't have one set of truths for this group, while having another set of truths for the other group, thus making both groups legitimate while being divided on different truths.

That simply will not fly. But again, this does raise another question. If Christ is not divided, then why are there so many different denominations? How many times have we heard this argument?

The answer is, that despite how many different denominations there are, that still doesn't divide Christ. There may be divisions among men, but not with Christ who is the One head over the body.

But what about all of the apparent divisions, in the form of different denominations, in the body of Christ? First, it's important to note that among true evangelical churches the divisions are much more slight than it might appear when it comes to the essentials of the faith.

The virgin birth of Christ, the deity or Godhood of Christ along with His true humanity, His perfect sinless life, His substitutionary atonement for the penalty of our sins, His death on the cross and His bodily resurrection from the dead, and repentance and faith alone in His atonement for the remission of sins. Every true evangelical church holds unswervingly to these truths which are essential for salvation.

In this we all agree. There are no divisions. It's when we get into areas of preference, or style, or tradition that there arise divisions which are often based on conviction. This doesn't mean that they are legitimate biblical divisions, it simply means that different people look at different aspects of the church and arrive at different conclusions on such issues.

For example, many churches would never allow worship music that would be led by a guitar. Many churches would never allow any music unless it were a traditional hymn. In fact, there are churches that would not even allow musical instruments to be used.

Now, this might seem silly to us, but these people take it seriously to the point where they would divide themselves out as a distinct group within Christendom. This kind of division is not good if it condemns other Christians for practicing something which is different.

Unfortunately, in many of these cases it is not the word of God that is the basis for such convictions but traditions of men that have been passed down that have been adhered to for years.

This now gets into the area of Christian liberty. And this is where it may be okay for certain differences to be accepted as long as it does not affect the gospel. And I believe this is one reason that God allows these kinds of differences, because it tests our ability to love one another despite these differences.

Now, admittedly many Christians fail in this area and these kinds of divisions, which might otherwise fall into the category of Christian liberty, can turn into something that determines the only true test of fellowship. At that point it has now become a division which is ungodly. And this seems to be what Paul is addressing.

If for example, the church in Corinth had different people who really appreciated Paul more than Apollos, or Peter, it might have simply been a difference of preference. It's when that preference turns to division and begins putting one group down that it can become ungodly.

Every year at the Pastor's conference in Merritt Island we have different speakers who come from all over the country. They all are godly men who love the Lord. And yet, invariably whenever you talk to different people after the conference you'll find that they got more from one speaker than they did from another.

Sometimes the only thing that made the difference was the way in which the person spoke, or the way in which the speaker used certain illustrations. I've known people who loved the animated way in which a speaker spoke, and then immediately turn around to another person who said, 'I don't care for all of the animation in their approach to preaching.'

But never have I left a conference with all of these different approaches to the way a person addresses the body of Christ where any one of those speakers were put down or were used to cause a division.

Sure, someone may like the style of one person over another. And I'm sure this was part of the equation in Corinth, but it should never be used as a cause for division if those teachers are teaching the truth of God's word.

Christ is not divided. And His truth is not divided. But, where differences of opinion come up, (as long as they don't conflict with the word of God), we should be able to love one another enough to be patient with each other and use the differences as an opportunity to draw close to Christ and one another instead of pushing each other away, which causes division.

Now, keep in mind that Paul is addressing one particular church. He's not addressing the universal church in this context, though we know that the Holy Spirit most certainly is addressing the entire church for our benefit. And so, what this means is that in a local setting, it is much more important to keep the unity in the body, because it effects people who are part of the same local family, if you will.

I mean, despite differences we may have, for example, with a church in Atlanta, that will never have the same impact on this local body as it would if those differences crept up in this local body. And so, it's perfectly all right for a church in Atlanta to sing only hymns. But, if someone from that Atlanta church came here and started creating a problem over that issue then what was acceptable there would cause a division here.

In love, however, we must be willing to help people see the differences and the liberty we might have. If that isn't going to satisfy that person then we would simply direct them to a church where they only sing hymns. The point I'm trying to make is that there will always be differences on these types of issues.

But, Christian love must cover the differences, as long as they are not heretical, and help to promote peace within a local body. Because without the peace and unity we share in Christ His work will never go forward. And isn't that really the reason we're here?

Every true evangelical church meets a particular need in whatever community they happen to be in. But, every true evangelical church must never assume that there won't be differences within that body. The question is, how will they be dealt with? This is one reason there are different denominations.

But, not every denomination is being true to God's word and in those cases where the leadership is not being true to the Lord and His word people should divide themselves out and find a church where God is truly being honored.

In the case at Corinth, these people were arguing over stupid things that should never have escalated to the degree they did, and Paul is going to make this clear as he makes the case that no mere man could ever take Christ's place as being the unifying factor in any local church.

Notice the second question Paul raises in verse 13. "Was Paul crucified for you?"

What kind of a question is that? Obviously, Paul was not crucified for these people, or any people. He's still alive at this writing. But that's the point. Sometimes it takes the shock of the obvious to get people's attention.

I mean, suppose there was a group in a church who demanded that you dress a certain way to be part of their church. Ladies, you can no longer wear pants to church. And guys, unless you come with a shirt and tie you will not be welcome here. You may laugh at such a notion, but I'm here to tell you that there are churches like that.

Now, what if someone wrote to them and asked the question: "Are you the Holy Spirit?" The obvious answer is, 'no, we're not the Holy Spirit.' What that is intended to do is to make people think about their role as opposed to the role of the Holy Spirit in the life of an individual in the church.

Is there anything wrong with ladies wearing dresses as opposed to pants? Of course not. But if an individual has a conviction for herself to wear only dresses that's between her and the Holy Spirit since there is no biblical mandate for wearing only dresses to church.

But, to assume the role of the Spirit, and start making rules which are outside of the scope of the Scriptures is to assume the role of binding the conscience of someone in that body. In the case at Corinth Paul is trying to shock these people back into reality by pointing them away from placing an overemphasis on earthly leaders, and getting their eyes back on Christ.

It was Christ who was crucified and therefore it is Christ who has purchased us and has a claim on us to follow Him, not men.

1CO 6:19-20 "Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit, who is in you, whom you have received from God? You are not your own; 20 you were bought at a price. Therefore honor God with your body."

Again, this doesn't we discount godly men who have been chosen by Christ to lead the church, but they are not a substitute for Christ.

Because, I'm here to tell you, the moment you start placing an over-emphasis on men, when they let you down, the tendency will be to take your eyes off of Christ and begin measuring the validity of the church based on the behavior of men.

There are national leaders in the church today who have done some ungodly things, who have denied, in some cases, the truth of the gospel of Jesus Christ. Do we then quit Christ because they mess up? No. They didn't die for my sins. They aren't the ones who form my unity with Christ.

I've known people over the years who will not go to church because of some person in a local body who dumped on them. Do we quit the church because of someone else's sin? The church wasn't formed by men, it was purchased by Christ who is the head. I tell them to find a different church if things can't be reconciled.

It is the Spirit of Jesus who has placed us in the Body of Christ. And this is the point Paul is trying to make with these people. If Jesus Christ is the one who has been crucified for us, then our sins can only be forgiven through Him. No mere man must ever be elevated to a position of putting Christ on any level other than being the Son of God, the only Savior of the world.

Our ultimate identification is not a particular denomination or leader in that denomination. I know that many Christians identify themselves in this way. I'm a Baptist, I'm a Presbyterian, I'm a Pentecostal, or I'm with a Calvary Chapel.

Hey, I'm a bit partial when it comes to Calvary Chapel as a fellowship of churches, but Calvary Chapel didn't save me. Calvary Chapel didn't die for my sins. Calvary Chapel is not what I identify myself with when it comes to my salvation.

This is what Paul means when he says to these Corinthians, "were you baptized into the name of Paul?" The word baptism or baptize means to be identified with something or someone.

To be identified with Paul in no way provides salvation. And so, once again, Paul is making the case that to put your identification in Paul or Apollos or Peter, in an unbiblical way, you run the risk of detracting from the truth of the true gospel.

In fact, this must have sparked something in Paul to go off for a moment and discuss the idea of baptism. Notice what he says in the next verse of our text.

1CO 1:14-17 "I am thankful that I did not baptize any of you except Crispus and Gaius, 15 so no one can say that you were baptized into my name. 16 (Yes, I also baptized the household of Stephanas; beyond that, I don't remember if I baptized anyone else.) 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."

He's essentially saying that with the exception of one person, Crispus, no one in Corinth can use Paul's name as a means of being identified with him regarding their salvation. No one can put him on a pedestal because he baptized them and somehow conferred on them some special blessing.

Paul was not in the business of baptizing people though he did baptize some. Gaius was part of the church in Ephesus. And, oh yes, the household of Stephanas, who serves there in Corinth, I also baptized, Paul says. But these are almost after-thoughts, and the reason for this is what Paul says in verse 17.

1CO 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."

Paul says, 'I've baptized relatively few people and there's the possibility that I baptized a few more than what I've mentioned, but I just don't remember. But, it doesn't make any difference because that's not the reason Christ called me out. He didn't send me to baptize people, but to preach the gospel.'

Now, this is very interesting because there are people today, who claim to be Christians, who place such an emphasis on water baptism that they believe that if you're not water baptized you aren't saved.



The denomination which some would label a cult, the Church of Christ, states that you must be water baptized to be saved. The Church of Christ in Beaverton Oregon on their web page pretty much sums it up in these words.

"Churches of Christ have stood alone in the religious world on the subject of water baptism. We have insisted that immersion to a penitent believer is essential to salvation from past sins."

This, by the way, is the same denomination to which Max Lucado, a very prolific and popular writer in the Christian community, belongs. And so, we must be careful to consider not only what is being taught, but also those who are teaching it, because their theological stand, though it may not be prominent in their writings for obvious reasons, most certainly effects those writings.

And yet, what has Paul said about adding anything to the finished work of Christ on the cross alone for the redemption of our sins?

GAL 1:8-9 "But even if we or an angel from heaven should preach a gospel other than the one we preached to you, let him be eternally condemned! 9 As we have already said, so now I say again: If anybody is preaching to you a gospel other than what you accepted, let him be eternally condemned!"

Another large group which would teach a baptismal regeneration; in other words, a water baptism which brings us from death to life, is the Roman Catholic church.

The New Catholic Catechism, which is in full agreement with the Council of Trent, states this about water baptism.

Section 1263 - "By Baptism all sins are forgiven, original sin and all personal sins, as well as all punishment for sin."

Section 1257 - "The Lord Himself affirms that baptism is necessary for salvation.... God has bound salvation to the sacrament of baptism."

Section 1265 - "Baptism not only purifies from all sins, but also makes the neophyte a "new creature", an adopted son of God, who has become a "partaker of the divine nature..."

(Council of Trent, section 6) "Whosoever shall affirm that men are justified solely by the imputation of the righteousness of Christ.... let him be accursed."

If baptism were essential for our salvation Paul would never have made the statement that "Christ did not send me to baptize, but to preach the gospel..." (1CO 1:17)

If the gospel or good news involved the necessity of water baptism then Paul would have made sure he baptized everyone he led to the Lord and would have told everyone else to do the same. That simply isn't the case, unless you begin taking passages out of context.

Jesus Himself would never have been able to tell the thief on the cross that he would be with the Lord that day with Him in Paradise if water baptism were essential for salvation. The repentant thief was never water baptized, though he was baptized into the body of Christ through his faith in the Lord Jesus.

**Romans 6:3-4** <sup>3</sup> Or do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus have been baptized into His death? <sup>4</sup> 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.

This baptism into Christ's death may be demonstrated through water baptism but that is not what Paul is talking about here in Romans. This baptism is of the Spirit that brings an unregenerate person into the body of Christ by regenerating them unto life, the life of Christ.

This is the one baptism that he speaks of in Ephesians.

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

This is ultimately the one baptism that only Christ can perform and it doesn't come through any physical water being administered.

Does this mean that water baptism isn't important? May it never be! Water baptism is an outward expression of an inward work of the Spirit. Jesus commands us to go out and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit.

Water baptism is a way for true believers to show that they are identified with the washing away of our sins through the shed blood of Christ. Water baptism is also a public way of showing our allegiance to Christ as well as our Lord showing the world that we belong to Him.

The acronym UFI best describes what baptism is really all about. Union, fellowship and identification. In Christ we are united to the Father. In Christ we have fellowship with the Spirit. And in Christ we are identified with His shed blood on our behalf.

COL 2:9-12 "For in Christ all the fullness of the Deity lives in bodily form, 10 and you have been given fullness in Christ, who is the head over every power and authority. 11 In him you were also circumcised, in the putting off of the sinful nature, not with a circumcision done by the hands of men but with the circumcision done by Christ, 12 having been buried with him in baptism and raised with him through your faith in the power of God, who raised him from the dead."

ROM 6:3-6 "Or don't you know that all of us who were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? 4 We were therefore buried with him through baptism into death in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too may live a new life. 5 If we have been united with him like this in his death, we will certainly also be united with him in his resurrection. 6 For we know that our old self was crucified with him so that the body of sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves to sin -..."

The baptism which Paul speaks of here is not primarily water baptism, though it is inferred. The baptism Paul speaks of here is the actual identification we have to Christ's blood being put to our account as we receive the Spirit of Christ through faith in Christ. We don't become united with Christ when we get "dunked". We become united with Christ the moment we believe.

This is what we mean by water baptism being an outward expression of an inward spiritual reality. The act of water baptism doesn't save anyone. But, the outward expression of water baptism tells us what kind of baptism or identification with Christ which has taken place in the heart of a person who has believed on the Lord.

This is why water baptism is so important. It gives everyone of us an opportunity to say "amen" to the work Christ has done in us. It

gives us an opportunity to tell the world that we belong to Christ because we are identified with His death on the cross for the remission of our sins.

But water baptism also shows that we are identified with the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead. This is why Paul could say, "If we have been united with him like this in his death, we will certainly also be united with him in his resurrection." (Rom. 6:5)

But as important as water baptism is, may it never take precedence to the gospel of Jesus Christ which "is the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes: first for the Jew, then for the Gentile. For in the gospel a righteousness from God is revealed, a righteousness that is by faith from first to last, just as it is written: "The righteous will live by faith." (ROM 1:16-17)

It is Jesus Christ Himself who unites us and will keep us from all sorts of division as long as we keep our eyes on Him, and love with the love that He's given us.

1JO 3:1 "How great is the love the Father has lavished on us, that we should be called children of God! And that is what we are!..."

May we honor Him as such. And may our unity find its foundation in Christ's redemptive work on our behalf, and may that unity be in the Spirit who unites us to Christ and each other.