



Battling Division 1:10-17; 3:1-9

There is nothing as difficult and demoralising to a Christian than to face division within the church. Division causes churches to be weak and members to be unproductive and unhappy. Division causes the church to lose all effective witness for Christ in this world.

1. Were you ever a part of church that was divided? Describe how this affected you. How effective was the church in evangelism and other important matters?

2. How did Paul learn of the division in the Corinthian church? (1:11)

One of the primary reasons Paul writes to the Corinthian church is to tackle the subject of division. He begins to address division here and does not finish the topic until the end of chapter four. While a group of Christians may not agree on everything every time, the church can and must live in unity. This was the great prayer of Jesus in John 17 and should be the prayer of every Christian.

In this lesson we will ask three questions about division and unity. Let's begin by reading 1 Corinthians 1:10-17 and 3:1-9.

I. Why Does Division Exist?

The reason division exists is largely found in chapter three. Here we see three specific reasons why there was division in the Corinthian church.

A. Members of the church were spiritually immature. (3:1-2)

3. How does Paul describe the Corinthian Christians in 3:1?



Though there is no way to avoid beginning our lives in Christ as spiritual infants, it is necessary that Christians mature in their faith. The Corinthian Christians were still not ready for solid food. They were immature and they were not spiritual people. In 2:14-15 Paul contrasts “natural” and “spiritual” people. The natural person does not understand or accept the things of the Spirit of God while the spiritual person uses discernment and allows himself to be led by God's Spirit which lives within him.

4. How can Christians develop spiritual maturity?

B. Members of the church were fleshly. (1:11; 3:3)

To be fleshly is to be governed by the urges and desires of the body. Christians ought to be governed by a devotion to God and be led by the Spirit.

5. What signs of fleshliness does Paul mention in 3:3?

In 1:11, Paul says that it was reported that there was quarrelling in the church. The word quarrelling denotes discord, strife, arguments, anger, and contention. These quarrels led to division in the church. Quarrelling is one of works of the flesh (2 Cor. 12:20; Gal. 5:19-20; 1 Tim. 6:4).

C. Members of the church had a divided or misdirected loyalty. (1:10-13; 3:4-5)**6. Describe the divided or misdirected loyalty found in 1:11,12 and 3:4,5?**

Our devotion must be to Jesus Christ and not to any man. Our allegiance is not to the evangelist or the elders. They are mere men who are frail, human, and capable of disappointing. Though we love and respect our leaders and our brothers and sisters, our ultimate loyalty and devotion belong to Christ alone. The Corinthian Christians had factions among them with some claiming to be loyal to Paul, others to Apollos, still others to Cephas, and finally some who claimed to be loyal to Christ.

At first reading we might conclude that those who said they followed Christ were the “right” ones, but that would be a misunderstanding of the problem. There was a contentious party spirit in the church and those who claimed to follow Christ were just another splinter group. In 1:10 the word translated as “division” is the Greek word “*schismata*” from which we get the English word “schism.”

7. Define schism and answer what might cause people to place their allegiance in a man or a particular schism?

The appeal to unity in the church is based on the Lordship of Christ. Paul stresses that he is only a man and was not crucified for them. They were baptised into the name (or by the authority of Christ) and not Paul. Paul expresses his gladness that he did not baptise many because that might have given them greater reason to boast in him. Our allegiance is to Christ alone who is our Saviour and Lord.

II. What Can We Do to Avoid Division?**A. Recognise that God expects unity in the church. (1:10)**

In 1:10 Paul makes his appeal for unity on the name of the Lord Jesus Christ. Any argument, bickering, fighting, or quarrelling in the church conflicts with the expressed will of God.

8. Define the word “appeal” found in 1:10. (Note: The KJV uses the word “beseech” and the NASB translates the word as “exhort”)

B. Members of the church must stand in agreement. (1:10)

Paul appeals to the Christians that **“all of you agree.”** The Greek is even more specific. Literally Christians are to **“say”** the same thing. How destructive it is to the witness of the church in this world if Christians are not saying the same thing. While every Christian is an individual, we can agree to stand in unity because we have one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one Bible, one message, one hope, and one goal. We ought to be able to say the same thing.

C. Members of the church must get along. (1:10)

It should be easy for church members to get along. We are to have no schisms. The Greek word *schismata* originally referred to ploughing the ground or tearing something into two parts. Webster’s dictionary defines the word “schism” this way: “a split or division in an organised group or society, especially a church.” What a sad commentary that church splits stand as one of the primary definitions for the word “schism.”

III. What is the Description of a Unified Church?**A. A united body working together without seeking personal glory. (1:17; 3:6-9)****9. Describe the roles of Christian workers in the development of the church.****10. What is God’s role in the development of the church.**

It is Christ who died to purchase the church through his blood. He is Saviour and Lord and we are only his servants. Christians must not get caught up in who gets any credit since we are all working together to serve the Lord and build his church. We read in 1 Cor. 3:8, **“He who plants and he who waters are one, and each will receive his wages according to his labor.”** A crop will not grow without being planted, but likewise it will not grow without water and cultivation. All Christians who work together are necessary for evangelism and the health of the church. Any credit or any wages that are paid will come from the Lord and not from men. Our desire is only to serve Christ and to see his church prosper.

B. Members of the church must understand that we work with God. (1:17; 3:9)

Paul was sent to preach and not to baptise (1:17). This is not to downplay the essential role of baptism in conversion (Acts 2:38; Romans 6:4), but to say that while the proclamation of the gospel is vital, the one who administers baptism is not important. Further, it is Christ who sent Paul to share the gospel, not with clever words, but with the message of the cross.

In 3:9, we read this amazing fact: Christians are God’s **“fellow workers.”** What a wonderful truth that we work with God to accomplish his will of reaching this lost world (Mark 16:20; 2 Cor 5:20) and that we are **“God’s field”** and **“God’s building.”** We work with him to build the church and we are a part of the church he is building. It should be our great hope and great labour to see a church that is mature, united, and active in sharing the gospel.