

HEALING BROKEN FELLOWSHIP

1 Corinthians 1:10–17

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1 Corinthians 1:10–17 (NIV)

“I appeal to you, brothers, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that all of you agree with one another so that there may be no divisions among you and that you may be perfectly united in mind and thought. My brothers, some from Chloe’s household have informed me that there are quarrels among you. What I mean is this: One of you says, ‘I follow Paul’; another, ‘I follow Apollos’; another, ‘I follow Cephas’; still another, ‘I follow Christ.’ Is Christ divided? Was Paul crucified for you? Were you baptized into the name of Paul? I am thankful that I did not baptize any of you except Crispus and Gaius, so no one can say that you were baptized into my name. (Yes, I also baptized the household of Stephanas; beyond that, I don’t remember if I baptized anyone else.) 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.”

When I was ten years of age, my father was pastoring a small church in Oklahoma. There arose in that part of the country a particular movement which placed a strong emphasis upon external exuberance as a mark of the ministry of the Holy Spirit. This movement swept our particular area and divided our church. In those days, in that particular region of the country, the pastor’s salary was determined by the Sunday morning tithes and offering. Sunday morning offerings belonged to the pastor, and Sunday evening offerings belonged to the church—a unique kind of division. We knew that the division was serious when my father’s weekly salary went down to seven dollars. One night at the altar, as a ten-year-old kid, I remember looking at this scene: One of the

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deacons of the church confronted my father with a clenched fist, demanding that my father resign the church, because he was hindering the power of God from operating.

Out of that division, God did a work of calling me into the ministry and of saving me, immediately prior to that. The division was ultimately dealt with and that church is going on today.

But some of us here in this body have had heartrending experiences, seeing divisions in churches. I start with that story just to indicate that I, as a person, am not unfamiliar with the problem Paul is dealing with in Corinthians. Division is the mark of this Corinthian church. Paul, in verse 9 (the verse we closed with last week), says that God has called us into the fellowship of His Son, Christ Jesus our Lord. Fellowship is *koinonia*. Here was a church where there was not fellowship or *koinonia*. And by the way, divisions not only come among churches. Divisions can come among families. Divisions can come among friends. Divisions can be found anywhere. So the principles that are applied here by Paul to the healing of broken relationships can be taken by us and applied, perhaps, to broken relationships that are about us in life.

Verse 10 speaks to us about the qualification of the person that desires to be a healer. Paul here seeks to be a healer in this Corinthian situation.

I. He begins with a spirit of conciliation, through the words, “I appeal to you, brothers” (1 Corinthians 1:10).

We must remember that Paul is an apostle and, therefore, he has authority to order. He has authority to command. But instead, he approaches this grievous breach between brothers and sisters, not with the phrase “I order” or “I command you” or “I demand of you.” But he comes with a spirit of conciliation, “I appeal to you.” He is not coming to this division between people with a spirit of “I’m going to knock their heads together and get their act straightened out.” Or

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“That really ticks me off, and I’m going to deal with it.” All of which, when used to apply to divisions between people, only rupture them further—if we come with a spirit of braggadocio and macho and ordering people around. That is not the way a division is healed.

Paul further indicates this conciliation by calling them “brothers.” This word so beautifully softens the rebuke. He does not say to them, “I appeal to you, you fleshly Christians.” We’ll get into that a little bit later. He does not say to them, “I appeal to you, you stupid people who should know what you’re doing.” But, “I appeal to you, brothers.” In that very word—brothers—Paul is showing how wrong divisions are. How can two brothers not walk together? He begins in a spirit of conciliation.

II. And I think significantly, too, in approaching the division as a healer, he had the clear knowledge of what the Lord wanted to happen.

This is not always the case I’ve found when I approach a division. Sometimes, I’m simply concerned about what I want and not what the Lord may want in the situation, and I have no idea in my mind of the final picture I want to see emerge.

For example, last Sunday, on the way to church, Jewel, my wife, and I got into a “discussion” as to who owed whom an apology for some particular incident. I indicated that I was not going to apologize, and she indicated that she was not going to apologize, because we both felt we were in the right. When you come to a situation like that, it’s so easy to become locked into what *I* want. We decided to reconcile without the need for either of us to apologize. Given the context, neither of us was in the wrong.

But it’s so easy to become locked into what we want. It’s far more difficult to become locked into what Jesus wants. Paul, therefore, appeals to the Corinthians, not on the basis of what he, as an apostle, wants. But he appeals to healing of this division on the basis of what Jesus Himself

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wants. That's why he used the term "I appeal to you brothers, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ" (1 Corinthians 1:10). Meaning that, when you think of what He wants for the situation, then you begin to go to work on it. There was no other name and there is no other name big enough, great enough, glorious enough and powerful enough to draw everybody together. Our diversities and differences of background are too great. The name which pulls us together is the name of Jesus.

Paul says, "Being pulled together in the name of Jesus, I want you to all agree with one another." Literally this reads, "I want you all to say the same thing." Commentators have had some problems, wondering what he meant by "all say the same thing." Does this mean we always talk alike and never have any divergences? Probably, this phrase has to do with what we find later in verse 12, "Some are saying, 'I am of Paul,' 'I am of Apollos,' 'I am of Cephas,' and 'I am of Christ.'" They're saying different things in the Corinthian church about the source of their identity. Paul says, "You need to put away these differences and start saying the same thing." What happens here is that Paul is admonishing us not to put our slot in the body of Christ in preeminence over our commitment to Jesus Christ. Don't put your slot ahead of Jesus Christ Himself. That's so easy to do.

For example, to say, "I am of Newport Mesa Christian Center," or "I am of Calvary Chapel," or "I am of Mariners," or "I am of St. Andrews" or "I am of Prince of Peace." Really, all of us are of Christ. There may be diversity, but I assure you that there is not division among us. It would be wrong, in our looking at the body of Christ in this area, to put our attachment to a particular body ahead of our attachment to Jesus Christ. There are those who find their identity in the phrase "I am charismatic." Others, who find their identity in the term, "I am non-charismatic." There are some who find their identity in the term, "Once saved, always saved." Others find their

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identity in the term, “I am not once saved always saved.” There are others who find their identity in the term, “I am dispensational.” And others who say, “I am covenantal.” There are some who say, “I am of the King James Version.” And others who would say, “I am of the Revised Standard Version.” They’ll make a point of division on the basis of which version they go with. Some will say, “I am of Billy Graham,” and others will say, “I am of Kenneth Hagin.” Others will say, “I am of Francis Schaeffer,” and others, “I am of C. S. Lewis.” Or “I am Baptist,” or “I am Presbyterian,” or “I am Lutheran,” or “I am Assemblies of God.” Or “I am independent, non-denominational, inter-denominational.”

Paul says, “You all say the same thing.” What is the same thing we all say? “I am of Christ.” That is our common confession. As to the different organizations of the body of Christ to which we belong, these are meant to simply express the diversity of the body of Christ. There is a distinct difference between division and diversity. Paul will encourage the Corinthians later to express their diversity, especially in 1 Corinthians 12. But division is another matter.

From time to time, people ask me, “What kind of church is this?” My response is, “It is a Christian church.” Not denominationally as such, but a Christian church in the broadest sense, in the generic sense. It is where Christians, regardless of their background or whatever, are called to be together in Christ. We are Christians, meant to be Christians, meant to associate with all of those who name the name of Christ.

One of the things that Paul sees as an end result is to bring people into saying the same thing. He wants to bring an end to this division or schism, “that there be no divisions among you” (1 Corinthians 1:10). The word here signifies a garment that is ripped, that is torn. The splits may not be outwardly visible at Corinth. That is, they haven’t started church number one, church

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number two, church number three and church number four in different corners of the town. But they are already having a fault line of division among them.

Paul says, “I want you to be perfectly united in mind and in thought” (1 Corinthians 1:10).

This word “perfectly united” has, at its root, the idea of restoration. It means “to put in order,” “to restore,” “to restore to its former condition.” There are three times the word is used in the New Testament. The first time it is used, James and John, in the Gospels, are mending their nets. That’s the word that Paul uses here for “perfectly united.” It’s the same word in the Gospels where Peter and John are mending their nets. “Mending”—“perfectly united.” To mend a net meant to clean the net from the previous catch. It meant to repair it if there were things that were left undone. And it meant folding it back, putting the net back in the shape it was before it was cast.

Here is exactly what Paul is telling the Corinthians. “Your divisions have fouled up the net and I want you to take those divisions and get them restored, so you’ll get back in the place that you were before the divisions.” I would say that this is a tremendous model of divisions that may occur between believers or friends or family. The Lord does not want some kind of endless state of civil war or a declared truce which still has hostilities in the heart. He wants us to go way beyond that and get back to the original condition of the relationship, before the division occurred. That the relationship be restored and put back together and knit together.

Some have the viewpoint that you cannot unscramble an egg. Once you scramble an egg, there’s no way to get back the yolk. That’s true as it pertains to an egg. But Paul changes the situation as it pertains to human relationship. He is talking to us here, very clearly, in respect to division and restoration. The restoration is occurring when we have the mind and judgment of Jesus. “That you be united in mind and thought.” How is that accomplished? By having the mind of Christ.

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As in Philippians 2:5–11, that mind which comes through humble servanthood. The Lord wants our divisions put away and wants us to find ourselves back in the relationship as it was before the division occurred.

So the healer has this sort of temperament and character. That he or she approaches, with gentleness and humility, and has a goal of seeing a perfect healing take place in the relationship. Verses 11–12 talk about diagnosing correctly the source of the division. How many times we jump to false conclusions and maybe don't have our facts straight, and create a bigger mess than before we got into it. It's always possible to reach wrong conclusions, isn't it? We hear what we want to hear. A lot of times, hearing rumors can be wonderfully delectable. We hear what we want to hear.

Paul, in verse 11, says, "certain people from Chloe's household have informed me." The word "informed" here has the meaning of "making perfectly clear." Chloe was a woman, evidently, of means. Her "household" here is probably her employees. She has come to Ephesus. They have brought Paul, not some anonymous tip, not an anonymous letter, not some rumors, but on the dotted line, they have identified who they were and what the problem was. Often, we never get to our problems if we just go by remote control. I never do anything on the basis of an anonymous letter or a rumor. It may not be accurate information.

Paul waits until the information is accurate. And when he has discerned that he has the right source of the problem, he then looks at the problem—in verse 12. On the surface he sees that these Chloe people have brought him the report that the Corinthian church is dividing into four camps.

"I'm of Paul." We don't know exactly what these various parties believed, but they were probably all united on the essentials of the faith. It had to do with particular Christian customs

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and practices, and likes and dislikes, that they were dividing over. Probably the people that were associating with Paul were those who had been converted and identified themselves as the founders of the church, the people who had been there the longest. Maybe they were probably Gentile Christians. No doubt, they were systematic Bible study lovers, because that's what Paul did basically.

Then the Apollos party. Apollos was the preacher that followed Paul. He is identified in the Book of Acts as being from Alexandria. He was eloquent and well-versed in Scriptures. That tells us a lot that we know about the Alexandrian school of Christianity, from the early centuries. They were people who had a rich allegorical interpretation of the Old Testament. Apollos may have been one of these kinds of people. For an example of a second century Alexandrian Christianity, we have an epistle of Barnabas that argues from Genesis 14:14, that since Abraham had a household of three hundred and eighteen people, this verse prophesies the crucifixion of Christ. How they arrive at this is that three hundred and eighteen in the Greek numbers are signified by the letters of the alphabet. The Alexandrian school, modeled in the epistle of Barnabas, would say that Jesus is prophesied as being crucified in the number three hundred and eighteen, which is the number of Abraham's household. Therefore, if you go back to the Old Testament, you find prophetic Scripture which speaks of Jesus. You can find prophetic Scripture which speaks of Jesus without getting this deep into it. But there are those who find significance in every color of twine in the tabernacle, and the tapestry and the layers—and find rich symbolism everywhere. They're able to just make the Scriptures get up and walk and live. Apollos seems to have been this kind of person.

Can you imagine a letter to Paul from his supporters that would have said to him, "We miss you, Paul, and your excellent leadership. Things will never be the same here without you. The new

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preacher, Apollos, is good speaker, but his sermons are superficial compared to yours”? A lot of people might take great comfort in that. (“When I left, things got worse.”) But Paul was not that kind of person.

Or a letter to Apollos from his supporters, “We sure are glad that you’ve come, Apollos. Paul was a very good man to get our church started, but he never was much of a preacher. Your sermons are so, so inspiring.”

Then the Cephas party comes along. They were probably the legalists. They found their identity in clutching on to what they thought was the Jewishness of Peter. Peter wouldn’t have identified with that group at all. Neither would Paul have identified with his group. Or Apollos with his group. These were people using names. People sometimes define their status in Christ by the length of one’s hair or sleeves or skirt. Probably, the Cephas party was legalistically-oriented like this.

Finally, there came along the Christ party. These were the people who said, “We don’t belong to any man. We belong to Christ.” Practically, every grouping of Christians has within it some potential of some sort of movement to say, “We’re the really spiritual ones. If you really want to know what being spiritual is, you can look at our particular group. We don’t need any human to tell us what to do, because we listen directly to Christ.” Paul identifies these superficial problems.

In reading the text, there’s a real reason for the division. Paul very precisely states the problem. The real problem was not Paul, Apollos, Cephas or Christ—it was ego. Ego leads to strife or quarrels. It’s characteristic, in Romans 1:29, of the old life, before we ever found Christ. In Galatians 5:20, it’s the work of the flesh. The problem with the Corinthian believers is that they were a bunch of ego-centered, rather than Christ-centered, people.

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Carl Sandburg tells the story that one of Abraham Lincoln's neighbors saw him lugging his two small sons down the street. Both boys were bawling loudly. The neighbor asked, "What's the matter?" Lincoln answered, "Just what's the matter with the whole world...I've got three walnuts and each wants two!" In the actions of these small sons, Lincoln saw mirrored the selfishness and the strife that plagues the world. Ego. What *I* want.

What is the remedy to this situation? Paul says the remedy, first of all, is to rethink Christ. Is Christ divided? Has Christ been divided? Has Christ been parceled out and has He now become the property of one group? Is Christ the property of the charismatics? Is He the property of the non-charismatics? Is Christ the property of the dispensationalists? Is He the property of the non-dispensationalists? Is Christ the property of the Presbyterians? Is He the property of the Assemblies of God? No. He cannot be divided. He cannot be parceled out to any one particular group, since He is all in all and all for all.

The real fault of these parties, especially the Christ party here, was not in saying they belonged to Christ, but in acting as if Christ belonged to them. No one person, no one group, no one organization, no one church, no one creature, can give us the whole of Jesus Christ.

I sometimes have to rethink the matter of Christian pride. C. S. Lewis identifies it as the most deadly vice. It's here, I think, in the incorrect answer of "is Christ divided?" Because, if we fail to ponder Paul's question at times, we can sit back and be—very much in the flesh—proud of a particular association that we have or church that we attend or fellowship to which we belong. It's not the question of, "We're the best." It's the question that, at the cross of Jesus Christ, we found grace. We, who were not worthy, have been made worthy by the blood of Christ.

Paul says, "Rethink Christ." Christ hasn't been handed out and become the property of any one group. He tells these Corinthians, "Not only do you need to rethink Christ, you need to rethink

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me. You need to rethink Paul.” Has Paul been crucified for you? Paul, through this question, is saying, “No preacher can be crucified for you. No preacher can forgive your sins. No preacher can heal a hurt or supply the power that you need. This alone comes from Jesus Christ. All I can do is be a conduit of what the Lord wants. I have no power to save you, no power to heal you, no power to speak to your inner man. That comes from Christ.”

Paul then tells the Corinthians, too, to rethink baptism. Were you baptized into the name of Paul? Some have thought here, falsely, that Paul is belittling baptism. He’s not belittling baptism at all. He’s simply indicating that he’s glad that no act of his can be misconstrued as annexing people to himself rather than to Christ.

He says, “You’ve been baptized into Christ” (1 Corinthians 1:13). What does this mean? If I place some money in your bank account, it then is at your total disposal. It’s yours to use as you will. It’s been placed into your account. When we have been baptized into Christ, we have been placed completely under His control. The outer baptism which we experience expresses simply the inward reality that has already been accomplished in salvation. Evidently, there may have been some in the Corinthian congregation who were making a deal out of who they were baptized by. Paul says, “It’s not who you’re baptized by. It’s who you’re baptized into.”

Ego is always at the root of the problem of broken relationships. If these relationships are to be healed, we must find ourselves submitting to Jesus Christ. This is the same conduct which Paul had exemplified when he came to Corinth. He did not come to Corinth in the standpoint of “what I can do, how smart I am, how well I can preach, what an organizer I am, what a church growth specialist I am. I’ve had experience all over the world and now I’ve come to Corinth to bless you with my presence.” It’s not that at all. To do that would be to empty the cross of its power. There are so many ways in which we can try to empty the cross. It’s the cross of Jesus Christ that saves

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us, it's not the ingeniousness of some human effort. Paul says, "I wouldn't dare rob the cross of Jesus Christ of its power by pretending that I was the person who saved you, that I am the person who should be your leader. My soul function is to be, if you will, like John the Baptist who said, 'He must increase but I must decrease.'" We must be careful, lest we rob the cross of Jesus Christ of its power and make it vain through our self-effort.

As you look around you, are there divisions in your life? You may, in response to that question, say, "No, as I look around me there are none." I think it's wonderful if that is your testimony.

I'm glad that I can say this of this particular fellowship of believers. As I live among this congregation, I perceive no division in the body. No lining up and saying, "I belong to this group or I belong to that group." I praise God for that. From time to time, we need to look at a Scripture like this to see how it is that we have been especially blessed by the Lord that, we're able to say, "There are no divisions among us." But on a personal, individual, and maybe even a family level, if this word has come to you this morning and you've had to say, "Yes, there are some divisions." "There are divisions that I have with a wife or a husband." Or, "There are divisions that I have with friends or persons in Christ's body." The Lord wants you to approach that division by, first of all, looking at your ego and, from a standpoint of humility, as did Christ, taking a towel and washing the other person's feet. And believing with Christ that that breach, that division, cannot only be repaired in a loose sort of way, but it can be repaired and restored, so that it will be as though the division never took place.

We do not want, in our own personal lives, to rob the cross of Jesus Christ of its power, either.

By saying, as we stand before God, "I'm standing before You as a result of how good I am. How well I've done this week. What a model citizen I am and what a credit I am to Your kingdom."

All of that is wonderful in terms of an expression of moral and ethical behavior, but nevertheless,

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comes short. It is the cross of Jesus Christ that saves us, not how good we are. We never can take a stance of boasting about how good we are, lest we strip the power away from the cross of Jesus Christ. He has made us good. He has made us free. He has made us glad.

Closing Prayer

Our Father, we give You thanks, this morning, for the work of Your love for us. You have healed the broken fellowship between Yourself and us. You took the initiative in healing what we could not heal ourselves. Of bridging the chasm, the distance that lay between You and us. You brought us to Yourself. You reconciled us unto Yourself in Christ Jesus. Having reconciled us unto Yourself, You call upon us to be reconciled one to another. So we hear Your appeal today and we respond to it. And we give You thanks. In Jesus' name. Amen.