

Doctrinal Unity

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[0:00] Welcome to Built on God's Word, the preaching and teaching ministry of Highland Park Baptist Church in Bartlesville, Oklahoma.! Elder Tom Holland teaches on 1 Corinthians 1, verses 10-17.

! The Apostle Paul even used the description of saints several times, some 60 times, in the Corinthian letters to describe many in the church.

And that is a title reserved only for true believers. Like any true church, then or now, it was not without problems and even dissension.

The church at Corinth, and maybe we could call it First Baptist Church at Corinth, they were not immune from such hurts. As Paul will reveal to us in our lesson today, and we're still in chapter 1 in a book that goes for 16 chapters.

Let me read to you what our verses say this evening. I'm going to read from the ESV. A lot of you guys carry that.

[1:52] And this is 1 Corinthians 1, verses 10-17. I appeal to you, brothers, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that all of you agree that there may be no divisions among you, but that you be united in the same mind and the same judgment.

For it has been reported to me by Chloe's people, that there is quarreling among you, my brothers. What I mean is that each of you says, well, I follow Paul, or I follow Apollos, or I follow Cephas, that's Peter, or I follow Christ.

Is Christ divided? Was Paul crucified for you? Or were you baptized in the name of Paul? I thank God that I baptized none of you except Crispus and Gaius, so that no one may say that you were baptized in my name.

I did also baptize the household of Stephanas. Beyond that, I do not know whether I baptized anyone else.

[3:36] For Christ did not send me to baptize, but to preach the gospel. And not with words of eloquent wisdom, lest the cross of Christ be emptied of its power.

Now there can be any number of reasons why churches engage in quarrels. But tragically, it often comes down to selfish desires.

And in the inspired book that bears his name, James, the half-brother of Jesus, saw this. Let me read these words from James chapter 4, verses 1 and 2.

What causes quarrels and what causes fights among you? Is it not this, that your passions are at war within you?

You desire and do not have. So you murder. You covet and cannot obtain, so you fight and quarrel.

[4:57] You do not have because you do not ask. Now one thing we can say for certain is that churches that are fighting amongst themselves are outside the will of God.

Whatever else we want to say about them, they're not centered on the will of the Lord. And sadly, fighting does occur. But the Lord Jesus called us to be one in His name.

For His part, let me just say that Satan loves a good church fight. He knows that in church quarrels, people are hurt and demoralized and they become discouraged.

And in the process, the cause of Christ suffers greatly. In a church fight, God the Father will be dishonored.

Christ the Son will suffer disgrace. And further, the work of the Holy Spirit will be hampered or even quashed.

[6:20] In such a fight, the church members will be robbed of both joy and their effectiveness to bring the gospel to a dying world.

So in our lesson today, the Apostle Paul is going to focus on the results of a church whose members are quarreling among themselves.

And we will see as we go forward in this church, it had a lot of problems. But Paul chose to focus first on the quarreling.

Internal bickering is condemned often in the New Testament. Even in the great book of John chapter 17, and by the way, that's the chapter that we refer to as the high priestly prayer, probably the high watermark in the Word of God. We see the Lord pleading for oneness in the church. Let me read a few verses.

[7:34] John 17, 11. Of course, Jesus talking. I am no longer in the world, but they are in the world and I'm coming to you.

Holy Father, keep them in your name which you have given me that they may be one even as we are one.

And then, in John 17, in verse 20-23, we read these words. I do not ask for these only, but also for those who will believe in me through their word that they may all be one, just 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 have sent me. The glory that you have given me I have given to them that they may be one even as we are one. I in them and you in me that they may become perfectly one so that the world may know that you sent me and love them even as you loved me.

Those are powerful words. When I read those words in the High Priestly Prayer, there's a certain element in me that cringes. When the world looks at the church loving each other, loving the lost, feeding the hungry and so forth, the world can say, boy, those guys must belong to Jesus.

[9:43] He said that's how his people would behave and I want what they have. But, if the world looks at the church and sees quarreling and fighting and people being hurt, that same world can say, I don't believe these people belong to Jesus.

They're not behaving the way he said his people would behave. But they carry it a further step, guys. Further, the world can even say, I'm not even sure Jesus is who he says he is.

Because if he was, his people would not be treating their fellow church members in this manner. That's a frightening, frightening comment.

So, Paul, in the midst of this church fighting amongst themselves, issues a plea for unity and oneness among the body of Christ.

And the first thing we see in the scriptures, we see that Paul was striving for doctrinal agreement. Can we at least agree on the doctrines that are taught in the Word of God?

[11:10] I remember a number of years ago, we were at church and ran into a former, one of the ministers here who had started his own church. Mike asked this young guy, he said, what's your doctrine in the new church?

He said, oh, we don't have doctrine. Doctrine divides. If anyone gets up to talk about doctrine, we'll kick them out. But here, Jesus wants there to be doctrinal agreement.

1 Corinthians chapter 1 verse 10, I appeal to you brothers, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you all agree. me. And that there be no divisions among you, but that you be united in the same mind and the same judgment.

The ESV uses the word appeal. I appeal to you. The New American Standard uses the word exhort. regardless, they are words that come from the Greek word parakaleo or the verb form parakletos. The words show up in the English translations of the Bible which utilize words such as the helper, the comforter, and the advocate.

[12:31] And these words should all be familiar to us because they speak of one who comes alongside of someone else in order to help.

And that person that comes alongside is of course none other than the Holy Spirit of God. But interestingly, Paul makes his appeal to his brothers in the church at Corinth.

And this is how he refers to them. He wants the church to act harmoniously because they are brothers in Christ.

People who are in fellowship with the Lord Jesus Christ should also be in fellowship with one another. If you cannot come together and agree on the great doctrines of the Bible, there will ultimately be divisions in that particular body.

Paul desires the church to be in agreement on these great doctrines. The King James Version of the Bible has a very accurate translation from the original language.

[13:56] It says we should all speak the same thing. And I don't quote King James much, but I like that. We should all speak the same thing.

If we don't, then the seeds of confusion and discord that are sown in a church will ultimately grow. They'll be like ivy on a wall. people. Now, many churches go through times of division. I'm not sure I know of any church that hasn't gone through times of division.

And in the Greek language, that word for division is schemata, from which we get the English word schism. when the Lord was on earth, there arose divisions among people as to who he was. Some said, oh, he's a great prophet. Others were saying, hey, you know what, he's a really smart guy. He knows a lot. But then he was making claims, and his followers were making claims, that they wouldn't support.

[15:16] And some came even to the belief that he was the Christ, the Messiah, the Son of God. In John's Gospel, we read these words, so there was a division among the people over him.

Not everybody believed then or now that he's the Messiah. Now, we live in a day when there are still divisions, over who Christ is.

Now, I personally think our church is a cut above many churches in our area because we understand his divinity, we understand his relationship to the Father and to the Spirit.

And in Paul's day, there existed serious divisions involving the correct meaning of doctrine.

As a result, the Apostle Paul gave this warning that has stood the test of time. And we find this in the great book of Romans.

[16:27] We also find references in John. I appeal to you brothers to watch out for those who cause divisions and create obstacles contrary to the doctrine that you've been taught.

And then he adds these two words, avoid them. Wow, that's pretty strong. Avoid people like this. Now, there are many around our country and the world that teach things that are contrary to Scripture.

We know that. One thing people who do that have in common is that they're not serving Christ.

Whatever else they might be doing, they're not serving the Master.

They're serving themselves. They're serving their own interests. Mark this thought down in your mental file. on matters that are clearly being taught in Scripture, there is no room for division in the body of Christ.

You know, I've had people say to me, well, I'm going to go home and pray about that. You don't have to, depending on what it is. Jesus may have already answered that deal. You don't have to pray about something that He's always revealed.

[17:52] This is what I want you to do. Can you imagine the Lord said to us, this is what I want you to do. Well, we'll go pray about that and see if we really should. Of course, we do what He said.

And let me add something else here. There are some truths we can disagree on. We can disagree, and it's not going to destroy the body of Christ.

It's not going to destroy this church. John Piper calls that secondary issues. When Jesus died on the cross, you remember, His spirit departed and it went somewhere for three days.

And people write books about that. Well, where did He go? And what did He do? Well, we don't know for sure. The Bible isn't totally clear on that.

There's room for believers to have varied opinions and that should in no way be harmful to our fellowship. I like saying, well, if the Bible is silent on something, we should be too.

[19:15] But on those Bible truths that are clear, there should never be division. Is Christ God in human flesh?

Absolutely. To deny that is to deny Him. He's God in human flesh. Was He born of a virgin? Yes, that's essential.

He didn't inherit a sin nature from His Father, earthly father. He didn't have an earthly father.

Joseph was the adopted father. And there's many other things we could list there.

But there shouldn't be division. What is the purpose of unity in the body, in the church today? Unity brings glory to God.

glory to God. And unity in the church is both a joy and a blessing.

[20:21] The best way to maintain unity is by putting the Lord in His revealed word first and foremost. And where does this unity come from?

Well, we're united by Christ and not by men. In the first chapter there, verses 11 and 12, for it has been reported to me by Chloe's people that there is quarreling among you, my brothers, and what I

mean is that each of you says I follow Paul, I follow Apollos, I follow Cephas, I follow Christ. Paul ministered in Corinth for a year and a half and it was just a little village in those days. It's not much bigger today. He ministered there for a year and a half and then he departed and he sent another.

He sent Apollos, a great teacher of the word. He was the second pastor of the congregation there. While this was going on, some in the congregation started putting Cephas, that's of course another name for Peter, as the lead pastor.

They said, well he has to be the lead. He was traveling around with Jesus. There was another group, we'll call these the most pious, that said actually Christ is our special pastor.

[21 : 56] And Paul learned this all from a woman in the church in Corinth named Chloe. Her name shows up in 1 Corinthians chapter 1 verse 11 and nowhere else in the word of God.

We never hear from her again. It's the only place in the Bible, Old and New Testament, where we read her name. She was apparently a prominent person, and there is a possibility that she visited Paul, maybe when he was in Ephesus, but we can't even be certain of that.

The Bible is silent on her. And these two verses are indicative of a church where loyalty has been divided among men.

the result is a church that is divided among factions within the church. I can't think of anything worse than heading up the Tom Holland wing of the church.

Oh my gosh. Reminds me of several years ago, my wife and I had the opportunity to print a Bible in the Coho language.

[23 : 15] It's one of the languages in Vietnam. There's the Hmong and other tribal groups. This was the Coho and we had it printed and VOM Australia helped us smuggle it in and we really were happy that we were able to do that except one of our revered members of the Australian board, he brought me a copy.

I've got it in my library and he said, I want to show you something and, you know, opened it up. Of course, it's in the Coho language except the first page was in English and it said the Tom Holland version of the Bible.

Oh my gosh, I almost cringed. If I've got a version, don't go down and buy it. So here we have these verses that are indicative of a church where loyalty has been divided among men.

And there's a principle we should all be striving for in this church. And that principle is this, oneness in Christ.

We have something that unites us, guys. That's the blood of the Lamb. And if that won't unite us, nothing will. This is how Paul put it.

[24 : 37] verse 13. Is Christ divided? Was Paul crucified for you?

He's talking about himself there. Or were you baptized in the name of Paul? What is Paul teaching here by inspiration of the Holy Spirit?

As believers, we are chosen and designed to be one in Christ. We should never be guilty of disrupting, damaging, and ultimately destroying a church.

Paul worked tirelessly for the church, but Paul never died for the sins of people who were being saved. Christ did that. When people in the church launch into a dispute and quarrel and fight fellow church members, they are a disservice to the Lord, and the church is weakened, and the mission of the church, which is to see souls saved, is hamstrung.

What should be the priority of the church? church, and I'm pretty emphatic on this, preach the gospel of Jesus Christ.

[26 : 11] In season, out of season, preach the gospel. 1 Corinthians chapter 1 verse 14 to 17, I thank God, and this is Paul speaking, that I baptize none of you except Crispus and Gaius, so that no one may say that you were baptized in my name.

And then he goes on and says, I did baptize also the household of Stephanas. Beyond that, I do not know whether I baptized anyone else. This is real revealing here.

For Christ did not send me to baptize. Gosh, Paul must not have been a Baptist. He didn't send me to baptize.

He sent me to preach the gospel. Paul, not with words of eloquent wisdom, lest the cross of Christ be emptied of its power.

The Lord Jesus did not have any type of baptismal ministry, nor did Paul. If many people had been baptized by him, it would have displayed itself in unbridled pride.

[27:41] Can you imagine some guy says, I was baptized by Paul. So what? I was baptized by Jesus. That would never end. That would just keep going on and on and on.

And probably what you would have seen rise up is a couple of cults. That's how cults arise. You'd have the cult of those baptized by Jesus and those who were not.

Now Paul had a very limited record of baptizing people. And he didn't remember most of it. And this is explained by those inspired words we just read.

Besides, baptizing again was not Paul's calling. We already read the calling the Lord put on Paul. For Christ did not send me to baptize, but to preach the gospel and not with words of eloquent wisdom, lest the cross of Christ be emptied of its power.

Paul's calling was to preach the gospel. He was to bring men to oneness in Christ Christ.

[29:06] And he was not going to risk a cult of specially baptized men rising up in his flock and have bragging rights as to who dipped them under the water.

It wasn't going to happen. So let's close with a word of prayer. Father, I thank you that these men were here tonight. Lord, may we grow in our study of this great book.

Lord, be with every man here and their families. Give them a safe journey home. And Lord, bring us back Wednesday for the service and then for Sunday.

We ask all this in Jesus' name. Amen. Amen. To learn more, visit us in person or see the website at highlandparkbaptist.net.