

**TITLE: GOD COMMANDS UNITY!**

**TEXT: 1 CORINTHIANS 1:10-17**

**INTRO:** One of the biggest complaints about “Christianity” (i.e., that which is perceived as Christianity) is the division among its adherents. There are so many groups claiming to be Christian, yet there is no agreement. Even within the Lord’s church division exists. We’ve all probably heard the statement “You can’t legislate morality.” But can you legislate unity? (The answer to both is “Yes!”)

## **I. UNITY IS COMMANDED:**

### **A. (v. 11-12) The problem**

1. (v. 11) *It’s been declared to me of (about) you...there are contentions* (quarrels, disagreements) *among you*. What quarrels?
2. (v. 12) *Every one of you says...I am of Paul, Apollos, Cephas, Christ*. They were dividing over who had converted them! This is the spiritual equivalent of two kids saying, “My dad can beat up your dad,” when their dads are friends! All four taught the same thing! This is about pride, which should never exist in the church (**1 Tim 6:3-5** speaks of the man who is proud, and boastful, but in reality knows nothing!).
3. These are still brethren – we’re not told of any doctrinal differences being taught by any of these factions, only that they were claiming different leaders within the church. So even if two groups are teaching the same thing, just divided by leader affiliation, it is still sinful.
4. In the religious world, there seems to be an unlimited number of opposing doctrines being taught in the name of Christianity. And the usual way of dealing with these differences is simply to ignore them – just agree to disagree! But what does God say?

### **B. (v. 10) The solution. *Now I beseech* (urge)...*by the name* (authority) of...*Christ* – this isn’t just Paul’s opinion; he appeals to Christ’s authority! Next he expresses the requirement of unity **five times** in this verse!**

1. *That ye all speak the same thing*. Doctrinally, Christians should never be saying or teaching different things.
2. *And that there be no divisions among you*. There should be **no divisions**, at any level.
  - a. All that claim to be Christians should look alike (doctrinally).
  - b. In the church, there should never be “cliques” or “parties” holding to different beliefs or follow different leaders. This disunity will eventually become evident to other members and worse, to non-members!
3. *But that ye be perfectly joined together* (made complete together – cognate of the word translated “perfect” in **2 Tim 3:17**). All the members together make up the church. We ought to feel incomplete without one another! How are we to be one?
  - a. *In the same mind* (thoughts, feelings). We agree on everything!
  - b. *And in the same judgment* (knowledge, advice, decision). We come to the same doctrinal conclusions.
4. **HOW can this be done?** This is the big question! Many claim that it’s impossible. But God doesn’t give commands that are impossible! Instead, He tells us how; and the way to be one is easy (**Col 3:17** – don’t do anything without Christ’s authority; **1 Pet 4:11** – speak only according to the oracles of God – i.e., the Scriptures). The Scriptures don’t contradict, and neither should we!

### **C. (v. 13-17) The reasoning for the argument – Christ is not divided in any way!**

1. (v. 13) *Is Christ divided!* **NO!** Where division exists, both cannot be right! Either one or both is wrong – doctrinally, or for dividing fellowship (as with these Corinthian brethren).
2. (v. 14-17) Paul goes on to say that, because of this type of pride in the church, he was glad he had only baptized a few, so people wouldn’t be claiming to have been baptized in Paul’s name.

## **II. WHAT HAPPENS WHEN UNITY DOESN’T EXIST?**

### **A. Lack of unity in the religious world (among all those that claim Christianity)?**

1. There can be no unity between light & darkness (**2 Cor 6:14-16**). It’s natural to want to put a difference between denominations & those who have no religious affiliation, but they’re both still non-Christians. This is an unpopular statement, but it’s true.
  - a. If a person or group refuses to obey the Bible, especially the plan of salvation, then we cannot pursue unity with them.
  - b. This is obviously not the situation Paul’s dealing with; these are brethren – they’ve all been obedient to the gospel.
2. We can pursue unity by teaching the truth and encouraging them to put away denominational doctrines (i.e., the restoration).

### **B. Lack of unity and divisions in the church?**

1. Are the divisions over opinions (optional matters)?
  - a. There clearly are issues that are matters of opinion (e.g., when there are multiple expedient ways to fulfill a command – time of worship, order of worship, location of worship, old/new songs, # of songs/prayers, length of sermon!).
  - b. Love should be the motivation in these matters (**1 Cor 8**). Here we can agree to disagree. We cannot, however, bind laws God didn’t bind (located preacher, Bible classes, etc.). This is legalism, which is sin, and is now *not* a matter of opinion!
2. Are the divisions over doctrine?
  - a. We can’t just agree to disagree on doctrinal matters (this is how denominations formed). Both cannot be right! We must be willing to study the issue with open minds, **without being prideful. Pride kills!** *God resists the proud...* (**James 4:6**).
  - b. What if a brother (or brethren) refuses to correct a false teaching? **Eph 5:11** – reprove him. **Titus 3:10** – *A man that is a heretic* (factious, divisive) *after the first and second admonition reject*. After warnings, brethren like this should be avoided (disfellowshipped) (**1 Tim 1:20; Rom 16:17**). This type of person can divide and destroy a congregation very quickly!
  - c. What about members of a congregation that teaches false doctrine?
    - **A member has the responsibility to confront** false teaching, to reprove, rebuke, and exhort with all longsuffering & doctrine (**2 Tim 4:2**). This is written to Timothy, but Timothy was also told to take what he’d heard from Paul and commit it to faithful men who would teach others (**2:2**). So this sin must be confronted (**Mt 18:15-17**).
    - **A member has the responsibility to leave**. If the congregation won’t change (which is usually the case), *Jesus* will remove its lampstand (church status) – **Rev 2:5**. \***2 Jn 9-11** tells us not to be a part of it, or we will be “*partaker of his evil deeds*.” So if the error is not corrected, the sound brethren must leave or eventually be held accountable for it too! And this is happening all over! Members are remaining in congregations that have fallen away, partaking of the sin by their affiliation. These brethren are sinning, and will be lost if they do not repent!

**CONCLUSION:** Division is **not** accepted by God. And we see that it is very serious to be a part of it in any way. However, true unity exists when both parties are walking in the light (**1 John 1:7**). This is the key. We can teach others, but we can’t control them & *make* them walk in the light. If they (Christians or non-Christians) refuse, then we do not & cannot have fellowship! All we can do and must do is make sure *we* are obedient.