

Glory and Unity in Christ – 1 Corinthians 1:10-17

Introduction – The issue of unity is a theme that comes up in a number of different ways throughout this letter. And so, in a world of divisive Christendom, this must have application for us. Jesus taught that He gave us glory that we might have unity (John 17:20-23). That glory and unity was something the Father and the Son shared with One Another (John 17:1-5). Consider as well Psalm 133 which we just sang. The pleasantness of unity is like the oil running down the beard of Aaron. The image is of the first high priest being anointed with oil, perfumed and precious. Messiah and Christ both mean “*the anointed one.*” This anointing was a foreshadowing of the glory of Christ who was anointed with the Holy Spirit.

When Unity Needs to be Mended – The Corinthians were called into the fellowship of Jesus Christ (v9) and so Paul pleads with them as brethren by that name (10). They are to “*speak the same thing*” and have the same mind and judgment, having no schisms among them (v10). Paul has heard reports that there are quarrels among them that have constituted some kind of party spirit (vv11-12). Even to say, “*I am of Christ*” in their context was divisive, for Christ is not divided (v13). This quarrelling is nonsense, for none of these men (Paul, Apollos, Cephas) gave their lives for them. It was Christ who was crucified; it was Christ who washed them of their sins by His death upon the cross, and it was Christ into whom they were baptized, sanctified unto Him (v13-16, v2).

Paul is not making light of baptism. He is making light of which man does the baptizing (vv14-16). He takes baptism very seriously; in Rom 6:3-4 he teaches that to be baptized into Christ is to be united with Him in His death and resurrection. Baptism points to the real deal; the one baptizing is not the point. He assumes all the church has been baptized and will make important applications about that later (chapter 6, 10). Baptism to the Christian was like crossing the Red Sea for Israel in Exodus; it meant coming out of slavery into freedom and into the kingdom of God.

And so, v17, “*For Christ did not send me to baptize, but to preach the gospel, not with wisdom of words, lest the cross of Christ should be made of no effect.*” The preaching of the gospel, the cross of Christ, was the focal point of Paul’s ministry, the glory of God, and the unity of the church. Baptism into that gospel, that cross, that Christ, establishes a unity the world cannot have (Gal 3:26-29).

Disunity From Pride - These kinds of divisions come from envy and pride, when Christians who are supposed to be spiritual are acting carnal, as mere men (1 Cor 3:1-4). There is a kind of envy that will not allow unity even if every Christian everywhere agreed on everything. Because the carnal heart wants to be the *most right*. This may be exactly what Paul means in his sarcastic tone in 1 Cor 11:19; “you are just looking for some way to be better than the others.”

Not Just Words – Note that “*saying the same thing*” can’t just mean “saying the same thing.” A spirit of sectarianism does not vanish away just because the name of Christ is employed; “I am of Christ, not so sure about you.” A denomination like the Church of Christ can be just as sectarian as the Lutherans, the Pentecostals, or the CREC. And while we are talking about disagreements, it is important to note that there are many things that Christians do agree on. One of our most ecumenical moments in our service is when we recite the Apostles’ or Nicene Creed. We agree on the authority of the Scriptures, the Trinity, the Person and work of Jesus, sin, the Incarnation and Resurrection, salvation and the judgment to come. And many things that we have differences over do not hinder our fellowship at all.

Speaking of Denominations – Denominationalism is a sin, but denominations are not necessarily. There is only one body of Christ, but in time and space there are sub-divisions, much like the sub-divisions of diversity in the midst of unity that is the members of the body of Christ (chapter 12). A “non-denominational” church can be more schismatic than a confederation of churches committed to serving the kingdom together under certain biblical emphases. In addition, we have no indication that Paul, Apollos, and Cephas, were at odds with one another in their teachings or aspirations. Often, it is pride and envy in the followers that cause the schisms. Disgruntled people leave churches all the time, only to find out that they are disgruntled soon enough at the next.

Unity through Separation – Yep, sounds like an oxymoron. But it isn't. In order to maintain unity, the church is instructed to put out those who are divisive (Rom 16:17, Titus 3:10). John is glad when those who were “of us” went out to show that they weren't actually “of us” (1 John 2:18-19). Paul will demand that a member of the Corinthian church be excommunicated (5:1-8), and in a different venue he would declare that “not all Israel are of Israel” (Rom 9:6) and Christians be warned (Rom 11). Church splits are often due to sin. But there are times in the history of the church where our lack of church discipline and church splits have been sinful as well.

The Glory of the Cross that Levels and Unites – All that said, we Christians can quarrel about anything, and much of that needs to be repented of – it is full of envy and pride. Paul ends with that which is central, with that which every minister and every church must make central: the cross of Christ. “Ministers are the soldiers of Christ, and are to erect and display the banner of the cross” – M. Henry. The “cross” declares the death of Christ and His substitutionary atonement. And that means we must emphasize the sin, as defined by the Scriptures alone, which has separated us from God and placed us under His righteous condemnation. The cross lifted up and preached also declares the way out of that terrible and right judgment. Look away from your sin, from yourself, from your group, from your people, from your heritage, from your wicked habits, from your good works, from your elite ancestry – look away from it all – and look to Christ crucified, buried, dead, and raised again. The glory of that gospel is the way to true reconciliation and unity with God and man.

Dave Hatcher – April 22, 2018

Notes for Little Saints

There are many different churches and they can have many differences between them. Let's focus on what makes us all part of the same body of Christ.

What does a true church say about Jesus?

He is fully _____ and fully _____.

He was born of a _____.

He was crucified for our _____.

He died, was buried and on the third day He _____.

He is one of three Persons of the Godhead, the _____,
the _____, and the _____.

One day, Jesus is going to return to this world to judge the _____
and the _____.

When we do have differences of opinion on what God wants us to believe or what He wants us to do, where are we supposed to go for answers?