

The Imperfect Church – 2
The Divided Church
1 Corinthians 1:10-17

Introduction

In February of 2018, Amy Chua published a new book called [Political Tribes](#) [pic – [Political Tribes](#)]. In it she tells the story of Carl Marlantes, a marine Lieutenant who served in Vietnam and his observations about the unity that exists among diverse soldiers. He writes:

“I was from a small town on the Oregon coast. I saw how [the military] brought together young men from diverse racial and ethnic backgrounds and forced them to trust one another with their lives ... If I was pinned down by enemy fire and I needed an M-79 man, I'd scream for Thompson, because he was the best. I didn't even think about what color Thompson was. ... White guys had to listen to soul music and black guys had to listen to country music. We didn't fear one another. And the experience stuck with us. Hundreds of thousands of young men came home from Vietnam with different ideas about race – some for the worse, but most for the better. Racism wasn't solved in Vietnam, but I believe it was where our country finally learned that it just might be possible for us all to get along.”

When people are given a common identity (soldier) and a common mission (win a battle) they get past all the issues that once divided them and move forward together as one. This is but a whisper of what Christ does in the Church. When Christians understand their one identity in Christ and their one mission as the Church, unity is the natural result.

But what we know from experience, is that concept seems like an idea from an ivory-tower idealist who has never been around actual people before. People are naturally divided. Due to the signature sin of the human race, Pride, we tend to believe that we are right and everyone else is wrong. We tend to believe that we are better and those around us are worse. So we judge. We categorize. We belittle. We villainize. We gossip and slander. Why? So that we can prove to ourselves and those around us that we are right, we are better.

TS – the Church is no exception to this reality. The Corinthian Church shows us the reality of the sin of disunity and the solution to this pervasive problem.

1 Corinthians 1:10-17 - ¹⁰ I appeal to you, dear brothers and sisters, by the authority of our Lord Jesus Christ, to live in harmony with each other. Let there be no divisions in the church. Rather, be of one mind, united in thought and purpose. ¹¹ For some members of Chloe's household have told me about your quarrels, my dear brothers and sisters. ¹² Some of you are saying, "I am a follower of Paul." Others are saying, "I follow Apollos," or "I follow Peter," or "I follow only Christ."

¹³ Has Christ been divided into factions? Was I, Paul, crucified for you? Were any of you baptized in the name of Paul? Of course not! ¹⁴ I thank God that I did not baptize any of you except Crispus and Gaius, ¹⁵ for now no one can say they were baptized in my name. ¹⁶ (Oh yes, I also baptized the household of Stephanas, but I don't remember baptizing anyone else.) ¹⁷ For Christ didn't send me to baptize, but to preach the Good News—and not with clever speech, for fear that the cross of Christ would lose its power.

TS – simple outline for us today. This text teaches us two truths: 1) The Problem – Disunity; 2) The Solution – Christ.

1. THE PROBLEM – DISUNITY

This church in Corinth is decidedly divided. Look again at v. 12 to see the depth of their division.

1 Corinthians 1:12 - ¹² Some of you are saying, "I am a follower of Paul." Others are saying, "I follow Apollos," or "I follow Peter," or "I follow only Christ."

These Christians are actually "saying" (we will come back to that word in a few minutes) that they are active followers of different leaders in the church. While following godly leadership is always a good and biblical thing, turning that into a political exercise is always a bad thing. We don't know exactly what it was that made people divide into factions around the names of these leaders, but it was real.

The Paul Party –Paul had planted this church by preaching the Gospel and helping people Discover Grace. As one who has planted a church I can tell you that it is a unique experience. It's inspirational to put a Gospel outpost where one doesn't currently exist. It's overwhelming when the first pagan you've befriended understands the Gospel. It's humbling when that first volunteer offers to help further the work. It makes an impact on your own life and the lives of the people around you that cannot be overstated. That is what they had all experienced with Paul. It was an incredible, inspirational, overwhelming time that meant a great deal to them spiritually. But now Paul is gone and has moved on to another city. Paul writes this letter a few years

after the church is planted. This Paul Party could be those who are longing for the good old days when Paul was around.

As a pastor of a church, I am one who lives in a world where I am constantly being compared to all my predecessors. The number one criticism I have received over the last 18 years of doing this is...“ you are not like _____. You don’t preach like him, you don’t lead like him. You aren’t as outgoing as him.” As unfair and challenging as that is, I cannot imagine how tough it would be if the Apostle Paul had been here before me. The lure of the good old days is powerful. And everyone can be guilty of it. ILL – years ago I started a worship gathering for 18-25 year olds. It started quite small with only 10 people. In those early days DJ and Margo started attending and became core leaders for us. Within just a few years that group of 10 had grown to over 200. DJ made a comment one day that has stuck with me ever since. He said, “It’s not like it used to be around here. I liked it better when we had 20 or so. I don’t know anyone anymore.” DJ was 30 at the time. Everyone longs to go back to times that were especially meaningful to you. But when that becomes divisive, it’s a problem. Remember, Hope defines us and drives us. We posture forward, not backwards.

The Apollos Party – The book of Acts describes Apollos as highly intellectual (from Alexandria), had great doctrine, and was a gifted preacher. As a powerful communicator with a charismatic personality, people could naturally gravitate towards him. Richard Hays writes, “[Wherever there are cults of personality in the church, Paul’s indictment hits home. When the charisma and ambition of the preacher begin to loom larger than the gospel of the cross, something is dreadfully wrong. When the faithful start to align and define themselves in terms of one particular leader, a red flag should go up.](#)”¹

The Peter Party – even though Paul had planted this church, once someone was introduced to Christianity in this era of history, the Apostle Peter looms large in the background. He was the Chief Apostle, helped lead the church in Jerusalem (flagship church of the world), and was known for his close association with Jesus. Peter is the Sr. leader of The Global Church.

The Christ Party – this one can be confusing. Shouldn’t Paul praise this group who aren’t falling prey to these petty divisions but are standing only with Christ? Since he offers no praise for them, there is obviously a problem

¹ Richard B. Hays, [First Corinthians](#), Interpretation, a Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching (Louisville, KY: John Knox Press, 1997), 25.

with what they were doing. Perhaps they were being overly spiritual and judgmental, looking down at all these other groups and self-righteously declaring how much better they are because they are with Jesus. All they did was hijack Jesus to create another faction.

TS – so what was his counsel to them?

v. 10 – “I appeal to you, dear brothers and sisters, by the authority of our Lord Jesus Christ, to live in harmony with each other. Let there be no divisions in the church. Rather, be of one mind, united in thought and purpose.”

“I appeal to you...” – He doesn’t bark an order here. He doesn’t issue an ultimatum. He appeals. The Greek word is *paraklete*, a word used to describe the role of the Holy Spirit (the one who comes alongside). “I’m coming alongside you to help deal with this problem.”

“...dear brothers and sisters...” – William Barclay writes, “Twice, Paul addresses the Corinthians as *brothers*. As Theodore Beza, the sixteenth-century Calvinist commentator, said, ‘In that word too there lies hidden an argument.’ By the very use of the word, Paul does two things. First, he softens the rebuke which is given, not in any threatening way, but as from one who has no other emotion than love. Second, it should have shown them how wrong their dissensions and divisions were. They were fellow Christians, and they should have lived in mutual love.”²

“live in harmony with each other.” – I said earlier we could come back to the word “saying” from v. 12. They were saying “I follow ____.” Here in v. 10 when he says “live in harmony” the Greek word he uses literally translates as “say the same thing.” They were saying different things about who they were following. Paul tells them to live in harmony, to “say the same thing” together. Follow Christ. The one name that unites us is not some leader or preacher. The one name that unites us is the name of our Savior, Jesus Christ our Lord.

“Let there be no divisions in the church.” – divisions is the word *schisms*. It was a word used of a torn garment. Let there be no tears that separate people in the church. Instead, he says...

² William Barclay, [The Letters to the Corinthians](#), 3rd ed., The New Daily Study Bible (Louisville, KY; London: Westminster John Knox Press, 2002), 17.

“united in thought and purpose.” – the word for united is a surgical term that was used for setting a broken bone. What has been broken, torn apart, bring it back together.

It would seem these Corinthian Christians have settled into playing politics (Paul uses a few different overtly political words in these verses) and participating in power-plays. Dividing up into different camps is a means of gaining influence and power. I had a professor tell me in undergrad that every problem in every church comes down to the issue of power – who has it and how can I get it? But if we are under the sole authority of Christ, which Paul appeals to here, then all that pettiness goes away and we can unite under him.

2. THE SOLUTION – CHRIST

In v. 13 Paul asks a series of 3 rhetorical questions that tell us the ultimate solution to disunity, and serve as a proverbial “mic drop” on this issue.

v. 13 – “Has Christ been divided into factions? Was I, Paul, crucified for you? Were any of you baptized in the name of Paul? Of course not!”

Can any one group claim Jesus as their sole property? Does one faction have Jesus and all the others are wrong? Christ cannot be divided up, therefore his body (the Church) can never, should never, be divided into factions. Paul will deal with this extensively in chapter 12 where he will hammer home the point that the church, Christ’s body, though it is made up of many parts, it is one body. Jesus never divides his people, he always unites.

Galatians 3:26-28 - ²⁶ For you are all children of God through faith in Christ Jesus. ²⁷ And all who have been united with Christ in baptism have put on Christ, like putting on new clothes. ²⁸ There is no longer Jew or Gentile, slave or free, male and female. For you are all one in Christ Jesus.

Was Paul crucified for you? Is any person, other than Jesus, ultimately responsible for your salvation? Absolutely not. There is only one place that loyalty goes...to the one Savior and Lord. Were you baptized into Paul’s name? I love this argument. Paul isn’t downplaying baptism here, as some have claimed. He is downplaying the person doing the baptizing. He is glad he didn’t baptize more people, not because baptism isn’t important, but by baptizing them he would have unintentionally contributed to their foolish disunity. To be baptized into someone’s name means into their “account” or “under their ownership.” Are you baptized into Paul? No, you are baptized into Christ! Onto his account, under his authority.

Jesus himself is the solution to disunity in the Church. He is the Savior of his people. He is the Lord over his people. Nothing else matters so much that it should divide an undividable people. Richard Hays writes, "The community's life before God depends entirely on Jesus' death on a cross (cf. 11:26; 15:1-3), and the Lord into whose dominion the community has been transferred in baptism is Jesus Christ alone. The church is saved and sustained only in the name of Jesus. When this truth is kept clearly in focus, petty rivalries and preferences for different preachers are seen in their true light: They are simply ridiculous."³

Conclusion

On December 4, 2017 the door rolled up at the 23rd Street Armory in Philadelphia for a special musical performance. 400 student, amateur, and professional musicians paraded in with broken instruments from the city's public schools. They all came together to perform "Symphony for a Broken Orchestra" by Pulitzer Prize-winning composer David Lang [[pic - David Lang](#)], who says he owes his career to his public school music education.

The special event was designed to bring awareness to the lack of funding for the arts in the public school system, and to raise funds to repair over 1,000 instruments. In the seemingly most diverse orchestra in history, the youngest performer was a 9-year old cellist; the oldest, an 82-year old oboist. With their broken instruments, they joined together as one that night, each contributing music from an imperfect, broken source...but together under the guidance of a brilliant Conductor and Composer, this is what they produced: [[video - Symphony for a Broken Orchestra](#)].

So is The Church. We all come as broken instruments offering imperfect contributions. But under the guidance of a brilliant Lord and Head of the Church, we are joined together as one. We are, like all churches, an Imperfect Church. Jesus specializes in Imperfect Churches. He brings broken things together, unifies that which naturally is divided, and creates a harmony that is beautiful.

Ephesians 2:20 - ²⁰ Together, we are his house, built on the foundation of the apostles and the prophets. And the cornerstone is Christ Jesus himself.²¹ We are carefully joined together in him, becoming a holy temple for the Lord.

³ Richard B. Hays, [First Corinthians](#), Interpretation, a Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching (Louisville, KY: John Knox Press, 1997), 23.