

Intro:

We started a series last week called “Church: are you serious?” You can interpret the title in various ways. You can interpret it with a sense of disgust or distance. Or you can take it as a positive challenge toward dedicating yourself to Jesus, his church, and his mission. Our hope is that, through this series, we will better understand Jesus and what “church” is, and move from disgust and distance to dedication.

Today’s topic is crucial for this positive movement: we’re talking about the issue of disunity, divisiveness within churches.

We are all familiar with the terribly negative and destructive effects of divisiveness- workplace, family, roommates.

Divisiveness in the church is the same, if not worse. What the passage will point us to today is simply this- **Divisiveness based on PSP (Personality and Style Preferences) must be squashed. A Jesus-focused, family mindset is how it will get done.**

Read Text: 1 Corinthians 1:10-17

Background info:

- This is a letter written some 20 years after Jesus’ death and resurrection. It’s a letter that comes within a series of exchanges between the church and Paul- the pastor who founded the church. This is actually the second letter Paul writes, based partly on reports from Chloe (v.11) about the situation there.

- It’s important to note that our passage is part of a larger section and train of thought, chapters 1-4. It’s important to read and understand these verses in light of that larger section, and we’ll be doing that.

In any case, back to our main point:

Divisiveness based on PSP is must be squashed.

This is pretty clear as the passage gets started. (Read v.10). Note the specifics, because it points to how divisiveness happens:

Speech: “you all agree” is literally speak the same to each other.

Mindset: “mind” refers to a mindset- we’ll talk about that more.

Purpose and opinions: “judgment” can refer to either your goals or opinions. The call is to either a) get the same purpose, or b) learn to be unified even in different opinions. (note: “to make complete” is actually the word used for mending tears; it’s used in the gospels where the disciples are mending their fishing nets. So the picture is of opinions being one together in unity, not necessarily uniformity)

Why were they divisive? They got focused on what I want to call PSP- personality and style preferences- and so became divisive. Let’s take a look at how things are presented.

Read v.11-12. What’s going on behind the scenes with these slogans? A careful reading of the rest of the section (remember, it goes up through chapter 4) and the rest of the book will uncover a few things.

First, what’s not happening:

- These are not leader-led divisions. The leaders were in unity. See 3:5-7, 22; 4:6; 16:12. This is not a leader problem, it’s a general church problem- they were all involved, and so we must be as we read through this.

- These are not theological divisions, divisions based on people having different beliefs (No evidence in text, as compared to Galatians, for example). This is important to note because sometimes it may be necessary to divide on belief.

- These are not divisions with full blown, clearly demarcated factions; it’s more a mindset issue. (The rest of the text really doesn’t play out four groups, leading many to also think Paul is using caricature here). This helps us properly understand the situation, and also means all of us need to pay attention, even if our church on the surface doesn’t manifest crazy divided parties.

Now, what then is happening:

- People differ on their opinions on who’s a better leader.

- These opinions were about PSP- personality and style preferences- based in the surrounding cultural values, things like a leader’s speaking style, the way they interact with people, and so on. We know this, for example, because the issue of “wisdom” becomes the central focus in the next two chapters (1/3 of all NT usages are in 1 Corinthians 1-3). This supposed “wisdom” was really about cute logic and smooth talk, as seen in the cultural writings of the time, and also the way Paul talks about it (eg- 2:1,5). Paul also seems to zero out Apollos as an example here in his discussion, a leader known for his eloquence- check out how the Bible describes him (Acts 18:24-25, 27-28). Again, this is not done because Paul and Apollos have a problem with each other. But the church is doing so. Again, let’s take a look at the bigger picture. 3:21-22, 4:6.

- This made a lot of sense given the cultural background they came from: significance was found in what leader you followed, and how close you got to that person. That is something that must be squashed. But the interesting thing is to note that it there were some who weren't into the leadership thing, and they were letting that attitude bring division as well! Going back to v. 12, this is what the saying "I am of Christ" probably refers to- people who say, hey, well I'm of Christ- meaning, I'm really focused on Jesus, not on some leader, so I'm better than you! Well, that's still a divisive attitude. And it's based on what really is the problem here- a focus on people (in this case the self) and not Jesus! That's ultimately the root cause of PSP based of divisiveness- when people, not Jesus, become the focus of our spirituality.

Our Context at Ethnos:

While I believe we have avoided this much of the time, we are never immune to the possibly of PSP-based divisiveness. We can get caught up in certain preferences and styles of leadership and spirituality, leading us to grow more people focused, which leads us to start distancing ourselves from people, dismissing them as people we aren't going to grow close with- the beginnings of divisiveness. Let me just mention a few specifics areas of our church life where we need to beware.

a) Community Groups and Ministry Teams. The fact of the matter is that each community group has its own distinctive personality and style. There's nothing wrong with this, and there's nothing wrong with enjoying that, as many of you do. There's nothing wrong with this, but we need to beware that we don't get divisive, thinking and talking like our group is somehow better than the others, more with it, and not relating with other groups.

b) Ethnicity and Culture. Some of our personality and style differences come from our ethnic and cultural backgrounds. Some of us are more outspoken and seem more driven, others of us are quieter and more passive. And our cultural and ethnic context plays a part. Sure, we perhaps prefer some traits over others. But does that preference lead to divisiveness in our thinking and speaking? Do we say or think out loud- well, yea, of course I'm going to be nice and all, but to really spend time and bring them in as a close friend and family member, well.... Does PSP lead to some distancing? That has the potential to turn into divisiveness if sin seizes it.

We could go on: how often do we judge, and perhaps begin the process of distancing, based on certain preferences or styles in clothing (do they wear anti-establishment or mainstream brands), where we live (UTC vs. City Heights?), cultural sophistication, and so on.

We should also note how this affects the larger Christian community we are a part of. Very simply, we need to be very very careful with how we think and talk about ourselves and other churches. Yes, every church and every pastor is unique and distinct. And there's nothing wrong to prefer one. But do we talk of the differences in a way that leads to division, especially over preferences and styles? Do we subtly put down other ministries when we talk about them? The Rock, Coast Vineyard, Ethnic Churches, and so on. God help us.

How do we get rid of this PSP divisiveness? Our answers will be fleshed out in the weeks to come. But a good start is to note this in our passage: **A Jesus-focused, family mindset is how it will get done.**

I use the word "mindset" because of v.11. I use it, too, because of that is indeed what the rest of the passage illustrates- Paul's mindset where Jesus controls all his thinking and reasoning. Note:

v.11- Jesus has authority. "In the name of Jesus." on the basis of who Jesus is and what he has done for us, you need to do this.

v. 13- Jesus made all of what we know as life with God possible. He died for us.

v.12- Jesus is the one who ultimately defines us. As Paul talks about baptism, and then begins his transition to the topic which we will cover next week, he emphasizes the idea that we are baptized in his name. Baptism is an act that symbolically redefines us. We die to sin and ourselves, and we rise to new life. This is done in the name of Jesus, not in some leader's name! Jesus must define us as a community.

Paul asks us to get a mindset that is focused and absorbed on Jesus and how he defines us, not on personality and style.

And Paul also encourages a family mindset...

v. 10, 11- "brothers and sisters." this is deliberate. One of my pastoral role models, Chuck Swindoll, once said something to me while I was in high school that I have tried to keep ever since- "Never talk about the church as if it was a business." Oh, how easy it is for us to do so, because some of the components involved are so similar! And how easy it is to talk about church using the word "politics." But one of the controlling ideas of what a church is in the Bible is family. God help us in this.

Challenge:

a) Repent of our divisiveness. b) Make a commitment to put away PSP divisiveness. c) Change your mind- focus on Jesus.

Extra Study Notes:

Paul's relationship with the Corinthian Church:

Paul establishes the church somewhere from 49-51 AD. (Acts 18)

A couple years later, Paul writes a letter, one we do not possess. (1 Cor. 5:9)

The Corinthians respond with a letter. (1 Cor. 16:15-17)

In addition, an oral report is given by believers from Corinth. (1 Cor. 1:11)

****Paul writes 1 Corinthians.****

Paul visits the church (2 Cor. 1:15-16), having changed his previous plan in 1 Cor. 16:5-9.

Paul leaves and writes another letter, one we do not possess (2 Cor. 2:3-4, 7:8, 12)

Paul meets Titus, who gives a report on how the letter was received (2 Cor. 2:12-13, 7:6ff)

****Paul writes 2 Corinthians.****

See various commentaries for more detail.

v.12- **Apollos** is mentioned in the 3:4, 5, 22; 4:6; 16:12, and also in Acts 18:24-28. He was in Corinth after Paul planted the church, while Paul was gone (Acts 19:1). **Peter** is mentioned again in 9:5. We have no evidence either way of his presence in Corinth.

v.14-16- **Crispus**- Acts 18:8- ruler of the synagogue in Corinth who becomes a Jesus follower. Based on archeological evidence of what a ruler did, he was probably a wealthy patron. Jewish. **Gaius**- common Roman first name. Not a complete name, so some speculate he might be Titius Justus in Acts 18:7. Romans 16:23 mentions him as a host to a house church. Gaius is probably wealthy. **Stephanus**- 16:15- one of the first converts in Corinth.