

## **Barriers to Community: Factions- Misunderstanding of the Ministry**

(1 Cor. 1:10-17; 3:1-11)

Abstract: When Christians are not growing spiritually, they tend to yield to their flesh. Their focus is on themselves instead of God. They seek the applause of men instead of our Lord and Savior. This selfish mentality can easily lead to cliques and division. May we recognize that we are on the same team complementing one another instead of competing with one another. We must place our allegiance in God.

### INTRODUCTION

Our theme this year is Many in One: Diversity in a United Church. We are in a diverse church with different languages and cultures. However, we are united and committed to furthering the Kingdom of God with the gospel. Our target groups might be different, where the Chinese congregation is committed to reaching the immigrant Chinese, and they are most suited to do that. The target group for the English congregation is our neighbors. Although we might use different methods to reach out to our respective target groups, we are united on a single mission to spread the Good News to the ends of the earth.

However, Satan is trying to do all that he can to prevent us from accomplishing our mission. One of the ways he hinders us from advancing the Good News is by providing barriers to community. For the next four Sundays, our new preaching series is “Barriers to Community.” Satan will use factions, selfishness, spiritual pride and cultural pride to make us ineffective for God. Today’s topic is factions or divisions. There are two ways division occurs: 1) through external force 2) through internal force, which is the more destructive. Satan will work hard to get church members to clash with each other; to be disgruntled with each other.

It is natural to see people disagree with one another. Children disagree over which is the coolest toy. Teens disagree over who is the most popular person. College students disagree over who is the prettiest girl. Adults disagree about who is the best candidate to vote for. It is a given that there will be disagreement. However, what we do after we disagree is the key. For some, it leads to quarreling with harmful words being exchanged, which results in broken relationships. It is common to see the two opposing sides recruiting people to side with them. Competing groups are formed. Before you know it, there is division or factions. Unfortunately, we see these immature behaviors in churches today. This also occurred in the Church at Corinth, which I want to talk about today. There are three major parts to my message this morning, namely, the report of division, the rebuke of division, and the resolution to division. There is an outline in your bulletin that you can follow.

#### A. Report of Division

Let us turn to 1 Cor. 1:10-12, “I appeal to you, brothers, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that all of you agree with one another so that there may be no divisions among you and that you may be perfectly united in mind and thought. My brothers, some from Chloe’s household have informed me that there are quarrels among you. What I mean is this: One of you says, “I follow Paul”, another, “I follow Apollos”; another, “I follow Cephas”, still another, ”I follow Christ.”

We see four different cliques that were formed here. Each had a preference as to whom they wanted to follow. One group said, “I am with Paul because he is the founder of the church. Another person claimed that his hero is Apollos because he is eloquent in speech.

Others voiced that their leader is Cephas, who is the Apostle Peter, because he was one of the original 12 apostles. Others declared that they are followers of Christ. We see them trying to distinguish their spirituality by whom they associate with. This comparison is divisive. Instead of recognizing that they are all on the same team and complementing one another, they were competing with one another. There were quarreling between the different factions: claiming one leader is better than the other. Satan loves to see this kind of divisive behavior. It distracts God's people from proclaiming the gospel. They are focusing more on themselves than on the Lord.

Anger flares and harsh words are exchanged. Feelings are hurt. Most harmful is that the immature behavior of the believers shames God. One of the main reasons why non-Christians choose not to believe in Christ and the gospel is seeing Christians clashing with each other. Paul rebukes them for their division. [ Let us read 1 Cor. 1:13-15, "Is Christ divided? Was Paul crucified for you? Were you baptized into the name of Paul? I am thankful that I did not baptize any of you except Crispus and Gaius, so no one can say that you were baptized into my name." ]

Here we see Paul using several rhetorical questions to challenge the believers to rethink why they are divided. Paul did not preach one Christ, Apollos another, and Peter another. There is one savior and one gospel.

## B. Rebuke of Division

Humanly speaking, we enjoy following human leaders. We tend to identify with spiritual leaders that have helped us. They become our idols. We admire them so much that we worship them. Too often, we place the messenger above the message. Unfortunately, both the followers and the leaders fall into this trap.

Leaders can also place the messenger above the message, which encourages followers to play favoritism, which can lead to division. Naturally, leaders desire applause from men. If they are not careful, they lose sight of whom they are serving and why they are serving. They can form an "irreplaceable" mentality. "No one can do such a good job as me." "I cannot be replaced." Pride can sneak up. We give ourselves great credit for our fruitfulness. In reality, God deserves the credit of all the fruit. We are just the means or tools and not the cause. God is the one that gave us the ability to serve Him. May we deflect compliments that are given to us. May we praise God for what He has done through us. Leaders, our goal is to point people to God and not to ourselves.

In 1 Cor. 3:1-4, Paul further expands his rebuke of division toward the Corinthians. (1 Cor. 3:1-4). "Brothers, I could not address you as spiritual but as worldly- mere infants in Christ. I gave you milk, not solid food, for you were not yet ready for it. Indeed, you are still not ready. You are still worldly. For since there is jealousy and quarreling among you, are you not worldly? Are you not acting like mere men? For when one says, "I follow Paul," and another, "I follow Apollos," and are you not mere men?" Paul rebukes them as being carnal or worldly or fleshly. In v.1, they were called "Brothers" indicating that they are Christians.

As believers in Christ, God had given the Corinthians a new nature, where they had the capacity to overcome sin, but they had a choice. The Apostle Paul in (Rom. 7:23) speaks of the wrestling match that is going on within them between trusting in the world versus trusting

in God. "But I see another law at work in the members of my body, waging war against the law of my mind and making me a prisoner of the law of sin at work within my members." Because the Corinthians chose to follow the ways of the world instead the ways of the Lord, they were carnal. One of the evidences of their carnality or worldliness was jealousy and quarreling. It is a clear description of immaturity of their faith. As a result, there was division and factions among them. They had lost sight of the real enemy, Satan, and not each other.

Another description of a carnal Christian is that they continue to take milk although they should be eating solid food. (1 Cor. 3:2) "I gave you milk, not solid food, for you were not yet ready for it. Indeed, you are still not ready. You are still worldly."

ILLUSTRATION: I am blessed to have three grandkids. Two are in LA, but one is in Houston. She is the cutest baby. Mackenzie is 10 months old. She is a good eater. She started with 3 oz of milk, and then it went to 4oz, 5oz, and 6 oz. Several months back, she started with solid food. As a result, she grew faster.

Believers are expected to grow in their faith. It is unusual if someone has been a Christian a long time, but still drinks milk, which are elementary truths. May we not be satisfied with milk. We can move from carnal to spiritual by eating solid food, which are deeper doctrinal truths.

APPL: We have a book store in the lobby. I encourage you all to check out a bunch of recommended readings. Dig yourselves into some solid spiritual food. In addition, we have some excellent Sunday school classes. Come and join us. However, having more knowledge does not make us mature, but the constant use of God's Word that makes the difference. (Heb. 5:13-14) "Anyone who lives on milk, being still an infant, is not acquainted with the teaching about righteousness. But solid food is for the mature, who by constant use have trained themselves to distinguish good from evil."

Carnality leads to division and factions because believers are yielding to the ways of the world instead of yielding to the ways of God. Three evidences of carnality are 1) Jealousy 2) Quarreling 3) Drinking milk and not eating solid food. When this happens, the church would never unite and be an effective witness for the Lord. [ We have looked at the Report of division and the Rebuke of division; I want to go to our final point, which is the Resolution of division. READ (1 Cor. 3:5-9) "What, after all, is Apollos? And what is Paul? Only servants, through whom you came to believe - as the Lord has assigned to each his task. I planted the seed, Apollos watered it, but God made it grow. So neither he who plants nor he who waters is anything, but only God, who makes things grow. The man who plants and the man who waters have one purpose, and each will be rewarded according to his own labor. For we are God's fellow workers; you are God's field, God's building."

### C. Resolution of Division

One of the resolutions of division is to have a clear understanding of our relationship with believers. Paul illustrates this by showing how a plant grows. He says, "Paul planted the seed, Apollos watered it, but God made it grow."

#### 1. The relationship with believers as our coworkers

We as children of God are all on the same team with the same purpose to give glory to God. Paul, Apollos, and Peter all are called servants. They do not have power to bear fruit. They are all just as important. One is not rated higher than the other. God has given each one of them a special assignment. In order for fruit to take place, they must all work together as a team to accomplish the task God has given to them. God has wired each of us in a unique way. We each have strengths. Each of us has different gifts. We need each other to win the game for the Lord. Servants are the means and not the cause. We are tools for the Lord. God being the coach knows how we are wired and gifted so that He can maximize our strengths for the team. We all have a part in the process of winning the game for the Lord. In verse 6, we need to remember that God made it grow. God is the one that makes things happen.

Therefore, let us not just look at ourselves thinking that we are the most important person of the team. We need each other and when we understand and practice our gifts and our role, God's team is most effective. To overcome division and factions, we need to value other members of the team. Listen and respect one another. God will reward us for our availability to be used for His kingdom with our God-given gifts.

[ The second way of resolving division is recognizing our relationship with God, who must be our foundation. We have it in the previous point that God is the cause and we are only the means. "I have planted, Apollos watered, but God gave the increase." Paul gives another illustration of a building. ]

## 2. The relationship with God as our foundation

The Corinthians were emphasizing certain spiritual leaders over other spiritual leaders based on their personality and background. They were building their foundation on these human leaders. Our foundation needs to be on Jesus Christ, who is our cornerstone. He is not only our eternal hope, but the only hope. If we build our structure with wrong foundation, such as human leaders, it will not last. Too often when a key leader leaves, the church collapses. Let us read (1 Cor. 3:11) "But each one should be careful how he builds. For no one can lay any foundation other than the one already laid, which is Jesus Christ."

May we yield our allegiance not to any human leader, but to Our Lord Jesus Christ alone. May we value other believers as fellow coworkers and as part of an awesome team with different gifts to be used as instruments for God to give Him all the glory. When we are united with one purpose, then we become an unstoppable team for God.