

1 CORINTHIANS 1:10–17, “TO THE CHURCH OF GOD”

¹⁰I 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. ¹¹My brothers, some from Chloe’s household have informed me that there are quarrels among you. ¹²What I mean is this: One of you says, “I follow Paul”; another, “I follow Apollos”; another, “I follow Cephas”; still another, “I follow Christ.”

¹³Is Christ divided? Was Paul crucified for you? Were you baptized into the name of Paul? ¹⁴I am thankful that I did not baptize any of you except Crispus and Gaius, ¹⁵so no one can say that you were baptized into my name. ¹⁶(Yes, I also baptized the household of Stephanas; beyond that, I don't remember if I baptized anyone else.) ¹⁷For Christ did not send me to baptize, but to preach the gospel—not with words of human wisdom, lest the cross of Christ be emptied of its power.

Discussion Questions (Choose a manageable number to discuss)

1. How does current political polarization in the U.S. underscore the human tendency to undercut common ground and dispense with mutual respect?
2. What kind of track record does the Christian church have (v. 10) on agreeing with one another and being perfectly united?
Why is that so?
3. From Paul’s description (vv. 11–12), what can we tell about why factions were drawn to (or disparaged) different celebrities?
4. Announcing allegiance to Paul, Apollos, or Cephas could be attributed to personality differences. But what more subtle basis for division was behind the claims of the “Jesus only” people?
5. Were the disagreements of the Corinthians between the worship of different gods, on the one hand, or between the differing perspectives of secondary personalities on the other? How could Paul’s three questions (v. 13) help them sort out whether the persons or movements at issue were with them in the same faith?
6. How does one steer between the twin dangers of asking for total unity irrespective of truth, and elevating secondary concerns to fellowship breakers?
7. What do you make of Paul’s parenthetical remarks (vv. 14–16) after his third question? Is he downplaying the importance of baptism, or (v. 17) asserting that baptizing was not a primary element of his apostolic calling?
8. Pastor Josh Moody noted that in verse 17 Paul begins moving beyond the logical implications to the heart intentions behind divisions. How does reliance on human wisdom sap the “foolishness” of the message of the cross (v. 18)?
How does reliance on human strength sell the power of God short?
9. Is there anything wrong with passionate, straightforward efforts to persuade? (See 2 Corinthians 5:11).
10. Have you watched someone use the cross as a starting point to advance his own agenda? Why might targeting an audience or audience segment lead to manipulative techniques? How would genuinely preaching to an audience of One prevent that?