

INTRODUCTION

- [I] Imagine you are on a helicopter and flying over a huge piece of land called **1 Corinthians**. Looking out and down, you see the land directly below you marked “**1:10-17**”. This should tell you straight away that you have passed the Introduction (Sender-Addressee-Greetings-Prayer) portion and that you have now entered the body of the epistle!
- [II] The body of the epistle has two main parts, each denoted by the letter ‘C’ - Contamination (**1:10-6:20**) and Confusion (**7:1-16:4**). In the 1st part of the body, we find Paul addressing problems in the Corinthian Church, problems that were reported to him, problems that arose due to their *contamination* by the world. In the 2nd part of the body, we find Paul dealing with questions posed by the Corinthian Church, questions conveyed to Paul via a letter, questions that troubled them because of their *confusion*.
- [III] The ‘Contamination’ part of the body has *four* sections. We can remember these 4 sections using the acronym F.I.L.I. The 1st section (F) is from **1:10-4:21**, a pretty long section. The 18 verses for our study today (**1:10-17**) belong to this section.

OVERVIEW OF 1:10-4:21

Here is the 1st problem Paul had to address in his epistle to the Corinthian Church. What is it and what’s the significance? *The problem is Faction. The fact that Paul chose to address this problem first (why not sexual immorality in the church, why not confusion about the resurrection) reveals Paul’s priority! First things first!! Disunity among believers is the first issue to be dealt with and that immediately!*

Paul's priority reflects the emphasis of Scripture. Psalm 133, John 17 and Philippians 1:27, 4:2-3 leave us in no doubt that the Word of God stresses the beauty of unity and the danger of division.

It was said that the city of Corinth in the first century was a city of debate and division. One of the favourite past-time of the Corinthians was to debate the merits of the various schools of philosophy and their leaders. Sadly, the church @ Corinth resembled the city of Corinth (instead of being radically different and hence a testimony to the Corinthian unbelievers) in that she too was divided in all kind of ways - rich and poor, slave and free, cultured and barbaric, Jew and Gentile, I belong to XX while you follow YY . . . The church should be different - remember she was God's church, sanctified in Christ, called saints - but she wasn't!

MESSAGE OF 1:10-17

How does Paul begin?

Verse 10a: *Now I plead with you, brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ . . .*

Plead: Paul begins by pleading with them! Instead of *commanding* them to be united, he pleaded with them over this issue. Not only does this word show the intensity of Paul's feelings over this matter (the word can also be translated as 'beseech', 'implore', 'entreat'), it also reveals his general approach to Christian ministry. He used the same word in **Philippians 4:2** when pleading with Euodias and Syntyche to be united. He rather pleads than commands. In addition, we note that the word in Greek is '*parakaleo*' which has the meaning of coming alongside. The picture before us

therefore is that Paul is very concerned about this problem, but he is not standing over there and barking his commands to these believers to pull their socks up! Rather, he is prepared to come alongside them, and do whatever it takes, whatever he can, to help and encourage them to deal with the problem!

Brethren: Paul begins by reminding them of who they are: brethren! The word in Greek is *'adelphos'*, derived from the word *'delphus'*, the Greek word for 'womb'! All of you, together with me --- we are all brethren, we are all from the same womb (so to speak) --- the womb of God's grace and mercy!! Identity amnesia leads to identity replacement leads to disgraceful conduct! If you remember you are brethren, you all come from the same womb, then you should stop this disgraceful divisions among you!

Jesus Christ: Paul begins by bringing Jesus Christ into the room! You against him and he against you, but you have forgotten that there is a Third Person in this room and He is most important! He is your meek and gentle Saviour --- would you behave so arrogantly and self-centredly in His presence? He gave His life for you and it is through Him that you receive all the mercies and blessings of God - could you continue to wound His heart by your silly divisions?

How Paul begins is how we should begin --- in our attempt to help others as well as in our effort to resolve whatever conflicts and tensions there may exist between believers. Begin by pleading, by remembering our identity and by bringing Jesus into the room!

What does Paul want to achieve?

Verse 10b: *that you all speak the same thing, and that there be no divisions among you, but that you be perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment.*

❖ *You all speak the same thing*

Literally, it means that the same thing may be said by all of you. When all of you say the same things, it shows that all of you are allies and compatriots, that all of you are in a state of unity. This then is what Paul holds out to these Corinthian Christians as the goal to strive for – unity (speak the same thing).

Think of a choir singing from the same page of music. Now think of a group of cats howling its own cacophonous tune. The second picture is what the Corinthian Christians are behaving right now, which is not what Paul wanted. The first picture beautifully shows unity amidst diversity. Yes, in a choir, we have sopranos and altos and tenors and bass, and their voices are so different, yet there is harmony in their singing because they are singing the same song, from the same page, in accordance with the parts they have been assigned.

This is the unity that Paul holds out for the believers @ Corinth to achieve. It is the same goal for all of us as a church and as Christians relating to other Christians.

❖ *There be no divisions among you.*

The word 'division' is '*schisma*' in Greek, which means to rip apart, to split, to tear apart of a garment, coming from the root word to split or sever. It recalls to them that in the first place, they are one piece but now the sad picture is that this one

piece has been torn into many parts! The same word is used in 11:18 and 12:25. In 11:18, the '*schisma*' is over rich and poor. In 12:25, the '*schisma*' is over what gifts you have while here the '*schisma*' appears to be over which church leader you prefer to follow!

❖ *That you be perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment*

'Perfectly joined together' (*katartizo*) means to complete thoroughly or to repair. In **Matthew 4:21**, it was used to describe how Simon and Andrew 'mended their nets'. It can also be used to describe how one tunes his musical instrument before the concert begins or sets the bone that's out of joint. **Galatians 6:1** and **1 Peter 5:10** are two well-known New Testament passages that used this word. By using *katartizo*, Paul conveys that their current state is not the original, ideal state – the net is broken, the instrument is out of tune, the bone is disjoint. But he also conveys the message that it needs not remain in this sad state, but it can be restored/repared. Effort is needed and this is why he is pleading and exhorting them to put their hands to it!

We note that in 2 Corinthians 13:11, Paul said, "*Finally, brethren, farewell. Become complete (katartizo). Be of good comfort, be of one mind, live in peace; and the God of love and peace will be with you.*" The fact that he had to talk about this problem right at the end of 2 Corinthians, after having addressed it in 1 Corinthians, it sets a realistic tone to this whole matter. We must begin to deal with the problem right now, but we may have to battle it for quite a while! There will be times when we believe we have conquered it, but then to our surprise, it is resurrected and we have to fight the battle all over again! In one word, we are in this for the long haul!!

The word *'mind'* (*nous*) means thought, feeling, will, the psychological facility of understanding, reasoning and deciding, way of thinking, attitude, ability to judge good and right from evil and wrong. The word *'judgment'* (*gnome*) means cognition, opinion, goal, intention, opinion, that which is purposed or holding a view. It is clear that both word refers to what goes on inside more than what can be seen outside. In other words, Paul is not satisfied with have just mere outward show of unity. What he wants -- really wants -- is real unity on the inside! He is here saying, *"Think alike, then we will have real unity!"*

As we review the above observations, it is clear what Paul is really after – real spiritual unity among believers that was once present but now broken because of our sins!

How does Paul know about this problem?

Verse 11: *For it has been declared to me concerning you, my brethren, by those of Chloe's household, that there are contentions among you.*

The Corinthian Christians did not inform Paul of this serious problem they have. In fact, they may not see this as a problem at all! It was Chloe's household that informed Paul of this serious problem festering in the church @ Corinth. Should we view this report as gossip?

It is gossip if Chloe's household informed Paul but said, *"Please don't quote us!"* The fact that they were prepared to come out in the open and put their name to it (assume that Paul mentions them by name because they are fine with it) shows that this is not gossip. They are genuinely concerned!! Are you?

How does their disunity express itself?

Verse 12: *Now I say this, that each of you says, "I am of Paul," or "I am of Apollos," or "I am of Cephas," or "I am of Christ."*

They were dividing themselves according to human leaders – Paul, Apollos, Cephas. Paul was the original preacher, Apollos the eloquent preacher while Cephas was the Jerusalem connection. The issue is one of glorifying in individuals and despising/excluding those who don't belong to their group!

Question: What's wrong with the "I am of Christ" group?

How can such silly factions be present in Shalom Church today? By dividing ourselves and restricting our fellowship to certain people along certain human categories:

20s, 30s, 40s, 50s, 60s, 70s

European cars, Japanese cars, public transport, walk . . .

Singles, married . . .

Mothers at home, working mothers

Medical industry, financial industry, education industry . . .

Landed property, condominiums, HDB flat, rental, tents . . .

We cannot erase these categories and distinctions. They are there and we need to recognize them. However, to fellowship only along these lines, to say *"I will only interact with this group of people because"* and make no effort to fellowship with others, worse to look down on them, it would be to fall into the modern version of the problem addressed here. *Are we guilty?*

What considerations should be brought to bear on this problem?

- (A) **Verse 11:** *For it has been declared to me concerning you, my brethren, by those of Chloe's household, that there are contentions among you.*

We must recognize the true nature of our actions --- Paul the apostle of Jesus Christ calls it 'contentions'. This word (*erides*) is the same word used in **Galatians 5:20** -- idolatry, sorcery, hatred, contentions (*erides*), jealousies, outbursts of wrath, selfish ambitions, dissensions, heresies -- that he classified as the works of the flesh and which he further said that those who practiced them will not inherit the kingdom of God! It's that serious! We need to see the seriousness of it!! Similarly in **Romans 13:12-14**, to engage in *erides* is classified as the works of darkness, as the lusts of the flesh.

- (B) **Verse 13:** *Is Christ divided? Was Paul crucified for you? Or were you baptized in the name of Paul?*

The answer to these three rhetorical questions is 'No!' Christ is not divided and Paul was not crucified for you and you were not baptised in the name of Paul. What is Paul trying to get at here? He is seeking to lead the Christians to see just how ridiculous and insane is their action! And he does that by reminding them of the gospel --- Christ is One, He died for you and into His name you were baptised, whereby He is now your Lord! In the same way, we need to see just how childish and mad is our faction and divisions in the church!!

- (C) **Verses 14-17.**

As Paul mentioned about baptism, he reminded them of just how few people he had baptised while he was with them. This is not because he devalued the

ordinance of baptism, but because he is clear as to what he was called to do – to preach the gospel. This last statement in **verse 17** acts as a bridge to the next argument that he wants to bring into this whole discussion. As we shall see, their division has a deeper root than just taking sides with a preferred human leader and Paul therefore wants to address it. So it is important that we don't just see the true nature of our sinful act, the insanity of our sinful act but also the deeper, heart issues behind that sinful act. If we want to truly deal with the problem, we need to go deep. We need to deal with the root/heart issue!

CONCLUSION

A story was told that there was once a Carpenter's Tools Conference. Brother Hammer presided, and several suggested that he leave the meeting because he was too noisy. Brother Hammer replied, *"If I have to leave, then Brother Screw must go also, for you have to turn him around again and again to get him to accomplish anything"*. Brother Screw then spoke up, *"Well, if you wish, I'll leave, but Brother Plane must also leave too - all his work is on the surface, and his efforts have no depth"*. To that Brother Plane responded, *"Brother Ruler will also have to withdraw, for he is always measuring folks as though he were the only one who is right"*. Brother Ruler then spoke up against Brother Sandpaper, *"You ought to leave too, because you're so rough, and always rubbing people up the wrong way"*. While they were arguing, Carpenter of Nazareth entered the room to start His day's work. Putting on His workmen cloak, , He went to the bench to make a pulpit from which to proclaim the gospel. He employed the hammer, the screw, the plane, the rule, the sandpaper, and all the other tools. After the day's work, when the pulpit was finished, Brother Saw arose and remarked: *"Brethren, I observe that all of us are workers together with the Lord"*.

This is Paul's opening shot concerning this problem of faction in the Corinthian Church, a problem in existence due to their contamination by the world. Paul wants to them to know that their divisions (*schisma* and *erides*) are unnecessary, unreasonable and ungodly (sinful)!

Rather than divide ourselves over silly human classifications, we should remind ourselves of our oneness in Christ and of our calling to be instruments in Christ's hand to accomplish His mission here on earth!