

**Divisions****1 Corinthians 1:10–17**

Having finished his greetings to the church at Corinth, Paul immediately hits them with a series of admonitions encouraging them to live godly lives. He first speaks of the divisions within the church, and then points out that they are not growing spiritually. He encourages them to be morally upright and to take immediate action to get rid of the sin that they were ignoring within the assembly. He always builds his admonishments on the doctrine that he taught them earlier. As he says in 1 Corinthians 4:14, he is writing to admonish them, not to shame them. To admonish is to rebuke for wrong behavior and to encourage them to live properly, according to the example given to them by Paul (1 Corinthians 4:16). He takes the first six chapters of 1 Corinthians to point out their failings and encourage them to live for Christ. Throughout his letters to the Corinthians, Paul found it necessary to assert his authority of apostleship over them because there were many who disputed his God-given position.

**Divisions and contentions** (verses 10–13)

After ministering in Corinth for 18 months, Paul traveled back to Antioch to finish up his second major apostolic journey, leaving Aquila and Priscilla in Ephesus. Within a year, he leaves on his third journey, stopping in Ephesus while on his way to southern Greece. While there, Paul received word that the church at Corinth was experiencing some major problems. This was happening some 4–5 years after the church was established by Paul during his second journey. Several people from the house of Chloe had reported to Paul that people were arguing and fighting within the church over who they wanted to follow.

Instead of being united with one mind about the doctrine that Paul had taught them, they were arguing over what man they wanted to follow. They were being swayed by personalities and popularity instead of weighing the various teachings by the unchanging doctrine taught by Paul. This was happening because many did not accept the authority of Paul's apostleship. Instead of being united by a common doctrine, they were divided by the teachings of various popular men. If they had accepted Paul's authority as an apostle, this would not have happened.

This is a common problem today. People are enamored by preachers who are charismatic orators. Instead of carefully evaluating various teachings according to Paul's doctrine, they are drawn to anyone who is able to speak well and say things that are pleasant to hear. Instead of using their minds, people often use their heart in evaluating what is being preached. Scripture tells us to be filled with the knowledge of His will, not with good feelings about something (Colossians 1:9). A teacher who fills us only with emotion and good feelings about ourselves is not one who should be followed.

Another problem we find today is that most people follow the traditions of men instead of heeding the truth of Pauline doctrine. This applies even to solid fundamental pastors and teachers. They often "prove" that their way of thinking is correct because it has been taught and accepted by the "church" for many thousands of years. The reason there are so many churches today is because most people do not accept Paul as our authority, just as was happening within the church at Corinth. This particular church is a microcosm of what is occurring in the world today (Colossians 2:8; 2 Timothy 4:3–4).

Paul tells them to have the same mind, to speak the same thing, to not be divided, and to be perfectly joined together with the same mind and judgment. He is not telling them to become unthinking robots and agree about every issue, only that they are to be united over Paul's doctrine. Instead, some were following Peter and his teaching of the Gospel of the Kingdom. Others were doing the same but were claiming to be following the earthly Christ. Others were following Apollos because he was a dynamic and eloquent speaker (Acts 18:24). They dismissed Paul's message so that they could follow other messengers. These

other teachers were not necessarily bad or wrong, but the focus of these splinter groups within the church should have been on the doctrine, not on any particular person.

People today often follow a particular preacher instead of Pauline doctrine. They will travel great distances to see a popular or well-known preacher, even when their message is wrong. Sometimes there is nothing wrong with the message, but people still become enamored with Christian “celebrities.” Unfortunately, believers who follow a certain person often, without thinking, accept bad teaching. No teacher of Scripture is always completely accurate. Every teaching needs to be evaluated according to the Bible and right division. Many people even accept unscriptural ideas because someone they respect said it. For instance, arguments about Bible translation can easily split a church. Many solid mid-Acts teachers confuse the biblical doctrine of the preservation of God’s word with the unbiblical doctrine of God preserving His word in only one particular translation. We all need to be very careful to understand Pauline doctrine and learn how to apply its principles, but not to take it to extremes to make it say something that God never intended.

### **Baptism** (verses 13–17)

One of the things that the Corinthian church was arguing over was baptism. This is because some were following Cephas (Peter), who obviously taught that baptism was necessary (Acts 2:38). One big divisive issue in churches today is baptism. Do we baptize, or don’t we baptize? If we do baptize do we sprinkle, pour, or dunk? Baptism is certainly a biblical concept, but it is not mandated in every dispensation.

After Paul was saved (Acts 9) we see that people were still being baptized. Paul was baptized by Ananias (Acts 9:18), Cornelius was baptized by Peter (Acts 10:47–48). Paul baptized believers as late as his second apostolic journey in Philippi (Acts 16:15, 33) and in Corinth (Acts 18:8), which was at least 15 years after he was saved. However, something happened between his second and third apostolic journeys. When he wrote to the Corinthians from Ephesus during his third journey, he suddenly makes the declaration that he did not come to baptize, but to preach the gospel. Paul is expressing gladness that he didn’t baptize but only a few early believers. This is a complete contrast to Peter’s instructions as he stands up to address the Jews in Acts 2:38, telling them that they need to repent and be baptized to obtain eternal life. This is also a complete change from what John the Baptist was preaching. According to him, those who refused baptism were rejecting God’s purpose for them (Luke 7:30). John understood that baptism was how Jesus Christ would be made known to the nation of Israel (John 1:31). John’s ministry was one of baptism to prepare Israel for being a nation of priests (Exodus 19:6). Baptism in water was the method which God instituted in order for a priest to serve God in the temple (Exodus 29:4; Leviticus 8:5–6).

Why this change, and why did it take so long to happen? The baptisms that took place after Paul became saved were slightly different from what was practiced under Peter’s ministry with the preaching of the Kingdom. Paul and Cornelius were both baptized only after the Holy Spirit came upon them. You might notice that the Lord told Ananias and Peter what to do, but there is no record of the Lord specifically telling them to baptize. People were being baptized during this period of change simply because the Lord had not instructed anyone yet that water baptism was not a part of the Church, the Body of Christ. This information was apparently revealed to the apostle Paul between his second and third apostolic journeys (Acts 26:16). This is why Paul suddenly announces that he was not sent to baptize.

Paul is the only one in Scripture to say that he did not come to baptize. In contrast, John the Baptist was specifically sent by the Father to baptize (John 1:6, Mark 1:4). Jesus and His Disciples were also doing much baptizing (John 3:22). Baptizing is also a part of the so-called Great Commission (Matthew 28:18). When Paul announces that he didn’t come to baptize, he is separating himself from Kingdom teaching. It demonstrates that changes were taking place and Paul was in the center of those changes.

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