

Division and Unity - A look at 1 Corinthians 1: 10-13

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This article is in response to a meme posted on Facebook that spoke of "Division in the First Century," and showed people saying "I am of Paul," "I am of Apollos," "I am of Cephas," and "I am of Christ." Then it said "Division in the Twenty-First Century," and showed people saying "I'm a Baptist," "I'm Catholic," "I'm a Mormon," and "I'm a Christian."

The Scripture that they used to base this on is 1 Corinthians 1:10-13, which says,

10 Now I exhort you, brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you all agree, and there be no divisions among you, but you be made complete in the same mind and in the same judgment. 11 For I have been informed concerning you, my brethren, by Chloe's people, that there are quarrels among you. 12 Now I mean this, that each one of you is saying, "I am of Paul," and "I of Apollos," and "I of Cephas," and "I of Christ." 13 Has Christ been divided? Paul was not crucified for you, was he? Or were you baptized in the name of Paul?

There is a major problem with what this meme presents. To understand this let's go back to who it is talking about in 1 Corinthians. Back in 1 Corinthians 1:2 it says,

to the church of God which is at Corinth, to those who have been sanctified in Christ Jesus, saints by calling, with all who in every place call upon the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, their Lord and ours:

"The church of God." It is important to understand that this is not referring to the modern day groups that have "church of God" in their name. These groups are manmade groups that are formed around the teachings of men. The group here in Corinth was a church that belonged to God, this is the same thing as the "churches of Christ" (Romans 16:16). They were simply a group that belonged to Christ. If we go back into the book of Acts chapter 18, we can

read of their history. Paul came to Corinth and began to teach in the synagogues (Acts 18:4). He devoted himself to the word (Acts 18:5). Paul would have been preaching the gospel, because he believed it was God's power to save (Romans 1:16). Paul believed that there was only one gospel and to preach anything different caused one to be accursed (Galatians 1:6-10). Paul also believed that the gospel had to be obeyed in order for one to be saved from eternal destruction (2 Thessalonians 1:6-10). Paul's gospel was the teaching about the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus as foretold in the Scriptures (1 Corinthians 15:1-4). Paul also explained how we could "obey the death, burial, and resurrection of Christ - the gospel" when he wrote to the Romans about what they had done in Romans 6:3-7,

3 Or do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus have been baptized into His death? 4 Therefore we have been buried with Him through baptism into death, in order that as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, so we too might walk in newness of life. 5 For if we have become united with Him in the likeness of His death, certainly we shall be also in the likeness of His resurrection, 6 knowing this, that our old self was crucified with Him, that our body of sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves to sin; 7 for he who has died is freed from sin.

It is when a person, upon their belief (Mark 16:15-16), repentance (Acts 2:38) and confession (Acts 8:36-37) humbles themselves to being immersed in water (Acts 10:47-48), for the forgiveness of their sins (Acts 2:38) and thus washes away their sins (Acts 22:16). This is what we see the Corinthians doing in Acts 18:8,

And Crispus, the leader of the synagogue, believed in the Lord with all his household, and many of the Corinthians when they heard were believing and being baptized.

So getting back to 1 Corinthians 1:10-13, all of those involved here had been taught the same gospel. They had all obeyed the same gospel by being immersed in water. They had all been added to the same number (or same church, KJV) (Acts 2:47), that is the Lord's

church, the one that belongs to Christ (God), the one that Paul collectively calls the churches of Christ in Romans 16:16.

The division being dealt with in 1 Corinthians 1:10-13, is division among people who are all a part of the Lord's church and they are starting to cling to certain teachers (Paul, Apollos, Cephas, and then there were those who simply made the claim to follow Christ). We should never follow "the preacher," we should always follow Christ.

In the meme, all those in the First Century had the same seed planted in them, they all obeyed that same gospel, they were all a part of the same group of called out people (church). The problem in the meme is that those in the Twenty-First Century each heard different teachings. You cannot plant the pure seed of the word of God and get Baptists, and Catholics, and Mormons. You have to plant Baptist seed (their distinct teachings), Catholic seed (their distinct teachings), and Mormon seed (their distinct teachings) in order to get these various religious groups.

First Corinthians 1:10-13 is about division within the Lord's church, not the division of denominationalism. Don't get me wrong denominationalism is wrong, it is just not addressed in 1 Corinthians 1:10-13.

Denominationalism is wrong because it requires preaching something other than Scripture and the Word (2 Timothy 3:16 - 2 Timothy 4:4). Denominationalism is wrong because it requires preaching "another gospel" (Galatians 1:6-10). Denominationalism is wrong because it violates Jesus' prayer for unity (John 17:17-21). All denominationalism requires the teaching and doctrines of men to exist and therefore result in a vain worship of God (Matthew 15:1-9).

All Quotes from: New American Standard Bible. 1986 (electronic edition.) La Habra, CA: The Lockman Foundation.