

The Challenges of Membership

MAIN IDEA: Every member of the church is called to overcome divisions and pursue unity in the church in order to reflect the church's union with Christ.

DIGGING IN: In 1 Corinthians 1.10-17, after encouraging the Corinthians based on the evidences of God's grace he saw in them, Paul begins to address an issue of utmost importance in the Corinthian church:

1 Corinthians 1.10-17

I appeal to you, brothers, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that all of you agree, and that there be no divisions among you, but that you be united in the same mind and the same judgment. ¹¹ For it has been reported to me by Chloe's people that there is quarreling among you, my brothers. ¹² What I mean is that each one of you says, "I follow Paul," or "I follow Apollos," or "I follow Cephas," or "I follow Christ." ¹³ Is Christ divided? Was Paul crucified for you? Or were you baptized in the name of Paul? ¹⁴ I thank God that I baptized none of you except Crispus and Gaius, ¹⁵ so that no one may say that you were baptized in my name. ¹⁶ (I did baptize also the household of Stephanas. Beyond that, I do not know whether I baptized anyone else.) ¹⁷ For Christ did not send me to baptize but to preach the gospel, and not with words of eloquent wisdom, lest the cross of Christ be emptied of its power.

1. What does Paul appeal to the Corinthians to do (v.10)?

2. How many ways does he state his appeal (v.10)? What does this tell us about how important this issue of division in the church was to Paul?

3. What was reported to Paul about the Corinthians church (v.11)? What specific examples of this does Paul give (v.12)?

4. What attitude does the statement “ I follow Paul” or “I follow Apollos” express? What’s wrong with this attitude toward Christian leaders? (Hint v.17) for one reason why the Corinthians may have been aligning themselves with some leaders over others.

5. What’s Paul’s first response to these divisions in the church (v.13)?

6. Why does Paul ask, “Is Christ divided?” What does this teach us about the nature of the church and why unity in the church is so important? (Hint: See also 1 Corinthians 12, especially verse 12 and 13.)

7. The Corinthians were wrongly attaching themselves to one Christian leader or another at the expense of the church’s unity. What are some of the right ways we should relate to leaders in the church?

(See Philippians 1.15-18; 1 Thessalonians 5.12-13; Hebrews 13.7,17; 3 John 5-8).

8. How do these biblical ways of relating to local church leaders help build the church’s unity?

9. What are some sources of division in the church that you’ve experienced? How do you think the apostle Paul would respond to each of these divisions?

10. Why are some ways that you can seek to built unity in your local church? Give specific examples.

11. Think about the divisions we discussed in Question 9. How does church membership help to foster unity in the face of these challenges?