



CHARIS-MATTERS

STUDIES IN FIRST CORINTHIANS

Text

First Corinthians 1:10-17

Topic

The apostle Paul received a reliable report that the believers in the church at Corinth were hurting the testimony of Jesus by contending with one another

Title

"I Coulda Been a Contender"

Introduction

If you've been in any type of meeting in the past several years you've heard someone say something like, *"Let's all get on the same page."*

They mean that everyone in the organization should have the same information and be thinking about it in the same way in order to achieve a common purpose.

In our text the apostle Paul will ask the believers in the church at Corinth to "all speak the same thing" (v10). It's his way of saying, *"Let's all get on the same page."* It's the same basic idea.

Instead of being on the same page the believers at Corinth were involved in serious "contentions" with one another. Those contentions and the "divisions" they caused were totally inconsistent with the message of the Cross by which they had been saved.

Contentions and divisions should never characterize a church. Sadly, they are all too common.

I'll organize my thoughts around two points: #1 The Cross Jesus Died Upon Inspires You To Reject Contentions, and #2 Contentions Indicate You Are Ignoring The Cross Jesus Died Upon.

#1 The Cross Jesus Died Upon Inspires You To Reject Contentions

(v10-12)

From verse ten of chapter one all the way to the end of chapter four the apostle was dealing with what he called "divisions" and "contentions."

- "Divisions" is from a word that describes a tear in a garment. It's torn but not yet separated.
- "Contentions" goes beyond disagreements. It means quarreling. It can be translated *wrangling*. We use it to describe a person who is handling uncooperative livestock. It shouldn't be used of people but it is and that is tragic.

Open quarreling was tearing the church apart. What would Paul say to them?

1 Corinthians 1:10 Now I plead with you, brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, 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.

Paul "plead[ed]" with them. It's a strong word but one which falls short of being a command or a demand. He wanted them to change their behavior because they realized it was wrong, not simply because he told them to.

Church life is so much easier when we each examine ourselves and make the corrections and adjustments suggested in God's Word.

He reminded them they were "brethren" and therefore members of the same spiritual family. He reminded them they were ultimately under the

authority of the “Lord Jesus Christ” as servants in His household. The two metaphors are themselves very instructive:

1. If brothers in a family are fighting their father might have to step in and lay down some discipline. The believers at Corinth should have had a greater fear of their heavenly Father intervening.
2. As servants they ought to be listening to the voice of their Master for direction and wisdom rather than raising their own voices against one another so they could not hear.

Either way, Christians should understand that we don’t have the freedom to quarrel and tear into each other. There is something greater, something better, going on in the church. There is higher ground to defend.

Paul wanted them to “all speak the same thing... perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment.” We’ll return to this in a moment after we see exactly how Paul knew about these problems.

1 Corinthians 1:11 For it has been declared to me concerning you, my brethren, by those of Chloe's household, that there are contentions among you.

Commentators suggest that “Chloe” was a trusted believer living in Ephesus. Members of “Chloe’s household” had been in Corinth on business or on vacation. While there they attended meetings of the church at Corinth. *The meetings were not what they expected!* Instead of hearing about the Lord they got an earful as the believers either openly quarreled with one another or privately gossiped and slandered and back-bit one another.

When believers gather what we say casually can be more effective or damaging than what we say ‘officially.’ Our casual conversations, overheard, reveal a great deal about how submitted we really are to Jesus and how committed we really are to the Gospel.

What were they quarreling so much about?

1 Corinthians 1:12 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."

“Cephas,” by the way, is another name for the apostle Peter.

This has to be something more than having a favorite Bible teacher and arguing over why your guy is smarter or better than my guy. What is it, then?

If you think about it for a while you begin to see that each of these three guys had a different emphasis:

- Paul was being used by God to reach the Gentiles with the Gospel. He was “all things to all men” so that he could bring them to Jesus. Paul specifically determined to simplify his teaching in order to reach the greatest amount of people. He says of himself that his words were simple.
- “Apollos” is introduced to us in the Book of Acts. Much is made of his intellect and his skills as a speaker.
- “Cephas” (Peter) remained heavily influenced by Jewish culture.

All these guys preached the same Gospel but they did it with a different emphasis. Believers in Corinth began looking at the emphasis rather than the substance. Instead of enjoying the variety of God’s servants they began to argue that one way of spreading the Gospel was better than another.

Then there were those who were “of Christ.” It seems that once the quarreling began another group formed and claimed that their approach to ministry was based solely on the example of Jesus.

Paul wanted them to “all speak the same thing... perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment.” It’s a very practical exhortation. He was telling them to get on the same page.

In order to be on the same page you need to know the purpose of the church. The church exists first and foremost to exalt Jesus Christ. That is the purpose of any church, of any gathering of believers.

The 'page' is how a particular church or gathering of believers goes about accomplishing the purpose.

You might say that the 'page' is what we sometimes call the 'vision' for our church. **Every church is trying to accomplish the purpose of exalting Jesus by the particular vision God has given it.** Contentions causing divisions often occur when believers begin to prefer a different emphasis in either doctrine or practice or both.

Take our church as an example. **Of course we want to exalt Jesus!** We attempt to do so by adopting what we sometimes call 'the Calvary distinctives.' They are some of the things that make us a little different than the church next door. Not better; just different.

Within those rather broad distinctives there is a lot of freedom for each Calvary Chapel to discover the particular 'page' the Lord has written for us in our city and county. Some are more mission-minded; some are more charismatic; some are more involved in the local community. The list of differences within the distinctives is extensive. It depends upon how the Lord, whose church it is, directs the leadership.

It is here that contentions and quarrels occur when someone decides they want to write their own addendum to the vision and then drum-up support for it.

As far as I can tell, the leadership of a church has the responsibility to, first of all, actually have a vision! Then they need to communicate it. Then we can all promote the Gospel within it and "all speak the same thing... perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment."

Let me give you an example from outside our church. The most talked about church in America is Saddleback pastored by Rick Warren, called by many, "America's pastor." His book, *The Purpose Driven Life*, is a monster best-seller. A majority of churches in America annually promotes the "Forty Days of Purpose" program. What you may not know is that they have also adopted the model of ministry of Saddleback. They are on the same 'page' with Saddleback in terms of how to organize the church.

What page are they on? At Saddleback and at the thousands of churches who follow their model you must, if you want to be involved, become a member. You must attend the membership class and sign the Lifestyle Covenant.

A major component of that covenant is that you promise to follow the leading of the pastors and not create any division.

Here is how those sections read:

I will protect the unity of my church: (1) By acting in love toward other members, (2) By refusing to gossip; (3) By following the leaders.

I will serve the ministry of my church (1) By discovering my gifts and talents; (2) By being equipped to serve by my pastors; (3) By developing a servant's heart.

After you sign the covenant promising to obey those over you and become a member there is a series of other classes that explain to you the emphasis of the church and how you discover your part in furthering its vision.

Saddleback has captured the apostle Paul's pleading and put it on paper for you to sign. It's their solution to the problem of contentions and divisions.

Why don't we do that? Hold that thought for now. I am going to give you the opportunity to sign something later. First we need to examine Paul's solution.

#2 Contentions Indicate You Are
 Ignoring The Cross Jesus Died Upon
 (v12-17)

Paul didn't mention membership or ask anyone to sign a covenant. He mentioned Jesus Christ being "crucified" in verse thirteen, then "the Cross of Christ" in verse seventeen.

Paul's solution to the contentions causing division was and is the Cross.

1 Corinthians 1:13 Is Christ divided? Was Paul crucified for you? Or were you baptized in the name of Paul?

The church on earth is a body with Jesus as its head. Jesus is not "divided." If the church has divisions within it then it is a reproach and those involved are not living-out the Gospel.

Remember, too, that these "divisions" weren't yet a full-blown church split. They were internal wranglings, posturings for position, rallying support for a position and against other positions.

"Was Paul crucified for you?" *Of course not!* Jesus was. Look to Him. "Were you baptized in the name of Paul?" *Of course not!* Their baptism had been the outward sign of the inward work of salvation accomplished in them by Jesus on the Cross.

Paul was exhorting them to keep their eyes on Jesus as their head and thereby remain united as a body rather than be divided over nuts and bolts issues of ministry.

Having mentioned baptism Paul digressed for a moment.

1 Corinthians 1:14 I thank God that I baptized none of you except Crispus and Gaius,

1 Corinthians 1:15 lest anyone should say that I had baptized in my own name.

1 Corinthians 1:16 Yes, I also baptized the household of Stephanas. Besides, I do not know whether I baptized any other.

In the context of his argument here in chapter one Paul was reminding them that men like himself were mere servants of Jesus. They were saved then called to certain ministries. Paul was sent to them to preach the Gospel and to establish the church. Instead of looking to him or to Apollos or to Peter they ought to look to the Lord and follow His leading.

But they couldn't just say, "We are of Christ," as if the Lord had not raised-up leaders among them to discern the vision for their particular fellowship.

Jesus is indeed the Head of His body on earth; but He has given it pastors and elders to seek Him and direct His people.

These verses in no way diminish baptism as a rite in the church. They do indicate, as the Bible always does, that baptism is not part of the salvation equation. You are saved by grace through faith, *plus nothing!*

1 Corinthians 1:17 For Christ did not send me to baptize, but to preach the gospel, not with wisdom of words, lest the cross of Christ should be made of no effect.

Baptism follows the Gospel. You receive Jesus and are saved; then you are baptized to give testimony of what He has done.

Baptism is a beautiful representation of salvation:

- Jesus died on the Cross and was buried. You go under the water to represent that you died with Him and were buried.
- Jesus rose from the dead. You come up out of the water to represent that you have new life in Jesus, resurrection life.

Paul will define the “Gospel” a little later in this letter. In chapter fifteen he will write,

1 Corinthians 15:1 Moreover, brethren, I declare to you the gospel which I preached to you, which also you received and in which you stand,

1 Corinthians 15:2 by which also you are saved, if you hold fast that word which I preached to you - unless you believed in vain.

1 Corinthians 15:3 For I delivered to you first of all that which I also received: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures,

1 Corinthians 15:4 and that He was buried, and that He rose again the third day according to the Scriptures,

That’s it. Simple. Straightforward.

Paul delivered the Gospel to them “not with wisdom of words, lest the cross of Christ should be made of no effect.” It was the message and not the messenger that was important. Paul did not get in the way of the Gospel being preached. Faithful preaching puts the emphasis on the Person and work of Jesus.

How can the Gospel “be made of no effect?” It means you should never attribute the success of the message to any particular way of delivering it.

What does all this have to do with divisions and contentions? **You can't really have either if you are at the foot of the Cross looking at Jesus!**

There's a program that Christian students participate in annually called “Meet Me at the Pole.” They gather at the flagpole before school for a time of prayer.

Well, what Paul was saying could be summarized as “Meet Me at the Cross.” There are always going to be disagreements among believers in a fellowship.

Disagreements, however, can never be allowed to become contentions leading to divisions. If you find yourself in disagreement and then start looking for others who agree with you... Well, that is the seed bed for division in the church. It results in contentions rather than contentment that the Gospel is being preached. Instead of rallying behind the things a church **is** doing, you begin to get frustrated about what it **is not** doing. It's unproductive, counterproductive, and hurts the testimony of Jesus.

As I mentioned, many churches - including those in our county - have therefore adopted verbatim the Lifestyle Covenant of Saddleback Church. The believers become members and they covenant, by signature, to follow their leaders and to not cause any division by deviating from the stated vision of the church. They promise to stay on the same page.

Why don't we do that? It's wildly popular; churches doing it seem to be growing; it seems to give people a sense of ownership - even though what you are really doing is being drawn in to a series of covenants by which you agree more-and-more to subordinate yourself to the church.

I do want you to sign something! If you have the freedom to write in your Bible, bracket this section of Scripture - verses ten through seventeen.

Then draw a straight horizontal line and sign your name as a covenant with God you will not contend and cause division.

While you are doing it, if you so choose, remember this. **You are already obligated to obey these things. They are part of the New Covenant Jesus has made with you. When you got saved, you signed-on to every truth in this book!**

We are already bound together as members of Jesus Christ's body. Our signatures mean very little, really. Jesus has written His law on our hearts.

Jesus has given you the freedom to obey. Let's meet at the Cross and concentrate on the good things the Lord has set before us to accomplish together.

