

“Jesus’ style of unity”

1 Corinthians 1:10-18 NIV

“I appeal to you, brothers, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that all of you agree with one another so that there may be no divisions among you and that you may be perfectly united in mind and thought.

“(11) My brothers, some from Chloe's household have informed me that there are quarrels among you.

(12) What I mean is this: One of you says, ‘I follow Paul’; another, ‘I follow Apollos’; another, ‘I follow Cephas’; still another, ‘I follow Christ.’ (13) Is Christ divided? Was Paul crucified for you? Were you baptized into the name of Paul?

“(14) I am thankful that I did not baptize any of you except Crispus and Gaius, (15) so no one can say that you were baptized into my name. (16) (Yes, I also baptized the household of Stephanas; beyond that, I don't remember if I baptized anyone else.)

“(17) For Christ did not send me to baptize, but to preach the gospel--not with words of human wisdom, lest the cross of Christ be emptied of its power.(18) For the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God.”

Christ-centered churches where unity prevails accomplish mighty things.

Unity and harmony appeal to us visually.

Do you enjoy watching rowing teams with their arms working rhythmically, oars dipping in perfect time?

Some enjoy ballet’s graceful motion. We depend on our bodies responding in a unified way.

It means major trouble when they don’t.

David praised the beauty of human cooperation and harmony:

“How good and pleasant it is when brothers live together in unity!”¹

¹ (Psalm 133:1 NIV)

People working in accord accomplish remarkable things.

Railroads lay down steel rails now using machines that do the heavy lifting for them.

In the old days, section gangs working in unison placed them.

A section of rail 39’ long weighed up to 2,000 lbs.

Crews lifted those cumbersome rails and put them in place to a definite cadence.

One man sang while others rhythmically lifted and shoved to maximize lifting power.

Those burly guys didn’t need fitness centers to burn their extra calories.

Do you recall hearing the song of the “Volga Boatmen”?

The lyrics and tune center on the work of laborers pulling ropes attached to loaded boats and barges.

They struggled on a path along the shore gripping heavy lines, tugging vessels up the Volga River.

They sang a rhythmic song. “Yo-heave-ho. All together once again . . . Haul the barge my brothers; Bend your shoulders to the line! As along the shore we run, sing our chorus in the sun.”

All pulled on the “heave.”

If you heaved on the “heave” they probably replaced you with a guy who wasn’t sick to his stomach.

I doubt anyone supplied anti-acids.

To every endeavor, unity is crucial.

“I appeal to you, brothers, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that all of you agree with one another so that there may be no divisions among you and that you may be perfectly united in mind and thought.”

The word translated “**divisions**” is the term from which “schismatic” comes.

Schism originally meant to “split or tear.”

In contrast, the Greek terms “perfectly united” refer to the setting of a fractured bone, outfitting a ship to sail, mending nets, or adjusting parts of an instrument so it can work properly.

The Greeks probably would use term translated “perfectly united” today to define a well-tuned engine.

Few things frustrate us as badly as trying to drive a vehicle that misfires.

Norma and I have an old Cub LoBoy tractor that powers our snow blower. In cold weather, that old tractor starts stubbornly. Then it runs several minutes, absolutely powerless, firing on only three cylinders of its four cylinders--coughing, sputtering, and backfiring.

I am usually frozen before the ancient machine warms enough to move, let alone blow snow.

We can mend nets, tune engines, and repair most broken bones.

How can churches work in harmony?

How do we get church members to say the same thing?

Avoid division?

Unite in mind and purpose?

Most church groups bear the shame of terrible divisiveness.

Meeting together under one roof does not mean that they are unified any more than tying two cats together by the tail will unifies them.

The tie gives them union but not unity. Many church groups worship in one building, recite common creeds, and share leaders, but they are not unified.

How do you unite people in the Lord?

People have so many differences.

Years ago I was driving from Dallas to Abilene, Texas where I planned to attend some lectures at Abilene Christian University.

Some old friends, former Hollywood members, lived in Weatherford, Texas.

On my way to Abilene, I planned to visit them.

I came to a stoplight in Weatherford and waited for the light to change.

Two women I judged to be about my age occupied the car head of me. They appeared to be talking.

The light changed to green, they still talked. I gave them a polite amount of time to finish their conversation—far longer than customary in LA, and then “patiently” honked the horn.

A strange thing occurred.

They did not hastily speed ahead.

They did not display any anger.

Did not gesture to me to button up or to partake in some other physical activity.

They rubbernecked looking back at me.

I could not understand why those women just kept looking at me.

It finally occurred to me that they were attempting to see if they recognized me.

Evidently in small Texas towns like Weatherford, people customarily honk at

their friends, not impatiently blast the horn at their enemies.

For some reason they never understood my gestures either.

People are different, aren't they?

Corinthian citizens came from numerous cultures—middle Easterners, Greeks, Romans, slaves, and sailors—a potpourri of people.

About the only kinds of people Corinth lacked were Texans.

Paul said to God's people in Corinth what Jesus told the disciples, “Get it together.”

The Lord abhors quarreling and bickering. “My brothers, some from Chloe's household have informed me that there are quarrels among you. What I mean is this: One of you says, ‘I follow Paul’; another, ‘I follow Apollos’; another, ‘I follow Cephas’; still another, ‘I follow Christ.’”

Norma and I admire this church because we never hear quarreling.

Church folks in many places can't get along.

We know that people here differ in their opinions but we do not hear of disputes.

No two persons agree on all matters.

Norma and I often have loving conversations about decisions I face.

She patiently says, **“Bob, I’d do it this way.”**

I impatiently retort, **“But you aren’t doing it!”**

How can people ever unify?

1. First, we must always focus on Christ.

A young man came to the Hollywood church in the early 70s. This intelligent, sincere fellow came from a church that did everything according to a rigid pattern. I asked him about his home church—his father preached there. At one time, the group was sizable but kept getting smaller.

Why was it losing members?

For one simple reason, people kept **“departing from the faith,”** as he termed it. Folks did not lose faith in Jesus as God’s son. They left because they disagreed with his father’s strict interpretation of Scripture.

At the time, the church was comprised of only the minister’s family members.

If the preacher’s wife ever disagreed with him, he was sunk.

Some have tied to organize the church along lines of perfect conformity to the Word.

We should model Jesus’ life and attempt to follow New Testament patterns.

But as Paul explained in Romans 14, not all people see everything in a like manner.

Some people refuse to tolerate any other view than their own.

50 years ago, I was certain about hundreds of matters.

Some of them I’m not sure about now.

Many of them, I no longer care about.

Some essentials, however, convict me more strongly than ever.

Here are a few of them:

- **About three decades, Jesus, the Son of God, lived in a human body without sinning.**
- **He was crucified to pay for my failures.**
- **Three days later he was alive.**

- **Jesus proved his resurrection to numerous people in various ways.**
- **All of us can share his resurrection victory by repenting and being baptized for the remission of our sins.**
- **God’s Spirit lives in all those who obey in this way.**
- **Jesus is coming again to judge all of us according to his righteous standards.**

We need to share this Good News with as many people as possible.²

If you check the board minutes of churches and listen to the conversations of the members, would you hear and see this focus on Christ?

We must focus on Jesus, not our choices.

Think how folks argue over church dinner menus, carpet colors, times of service, savings accounts sizes, the minister’s vestments, and things that distract from Jesus’ Good News.

² The New Testament repeatedly presents and emphasizes these facts.

We emphasize Christ, not our preferences.

2. **Second point: When we lose the focus of the cross the church loses its power.**

“For the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God.”

Vital churches boldly proclaim the Good News of Jesus’ death for our sins, his burial, and his resurrection.

They emphasize the Word, and they follow the Holy Spirit’s guidance.

3. **I must love God and lovingly serve all people, even my enemies, as Jesus taught and showed me.**

Look at those around you right now.

**Whose feet would you least like to wash?
Whom would you least likely not want to serve for a day?**

Folks who think they deserve to be the lead persons and receive 5-star treatment, should not hang around the church.

Churches are comprised of sinners who know they need God’s grace, who confess their own sins, and continue to pray for and serve others.

No person is more important than another.

“But because of his great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy, (5) made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions--it is by grace you have been saved.

“(6) And God raised us up with Christ and seated us with him in the heavenly realms in Christ Jesus, (7) in order that in the coming ages he might show the incomparable riches of his grace, expressed in his kindness to us in Christ Jesus.

“(8) For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith--and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God—(9) not by works, so that no one can boast.

(10) For we are God's workmanship,

created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.”³

We honor Christ for what he has done and serve one another.

When churches and individuals do that, they accomplish mighty things for God.

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³ Ephesians 2:4-10 NIV