A friend was concerned that the warning Paul gave to Christians about dividing believers into groups based on who they followed was similar to the Catholic Church’s hierarchy of Bishops presiding over regions or dioceses.

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The Question:

Paul spoke about people choosing favorite leaders claiming precedence.

**1 Cor 1:10 I appeal to you, brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that all of you agree and that there be no dissensions among you, but that you be united in the same mind and the same judgment.**

**11 For it has been reported to me by Chlo'e's people that there is quarreling among you, my brethren.**

**12 What I mean is that each one of you says, "I belong to Paul," or "I belong to Apol'los," or "I belong to Cephas," or "I belong to Christ."**

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

Is this divisive? Did the fathers do this? History’s testimony?

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My Answer:

Yes, it was (and is) divisive for divisions to occur within the Body of Christ. Jesus said,

**“Upon this rock, I will build My church.”** (not churches) **“And the gates of hell shall not prevail against it.”** (“it”, not them). (**Mt 16:18)**

Paul says,

**“There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called to the one hope that belongs to your call,
5 one Lord, one faith, one baptism, (Eph 4:4-5)**

And in Jesus’ beautiful prayer to the Father on the night that He instituted the New Covenant, He prayed for unity:

**John 17:11 “Now I am no longer in the world, but these are in the world, and I come to You. Holy Father, keep through Your name those whom You have given Me, that they may be one as We are.**

**17:21 “that they all may be one, as You, Father, are in Me, and I in You; that they also may be one in Us, that the world may believe that You sent Me.**

**22 “And the glory which You gave Me I have given them, that they may be one just as We are one:**

**23 “I in them, and You in Me; that they may be made perfect in one, and that the world may know that You have sent Me, and have loved them as You have loved Me.**

The importance of unity among Christians is so important that Jesus tied His Divinity and authority to it. He made Christian unity a key sign that would lead the world to know that the Father sent Him (v. 21).

So when Paul heard that some were separating into groups that followed particular leaders in the faith (Paul, Apollos, Peter), he chastised them. He was not criticizing these leaders of the faith. He was criticizing believers who were gravitating toward one of the leaders, like Apollos, to the point of saying they were “of” them, rather than in communion with the entire Body of Christ. It would be hard to say that Lutherans are not “of Luther” or Calvinists are not “of Calvin”. It would also be hard to say that so-called “Mega-Churches” or non-denominational groups headed by one charismatic preacher are not “of him” since they are completely independent from any other body or person. In practically all cases, if that preacher ends his ministry, that Mega-Church ceases to exist.

The Apostolic teaching from the beginning was that there was one faith, in Christ.

God appointed men from the beginning of time to lead His people and act as His authority:

Abraham, David, and Moses were all clear leaders of God’s people, divinely appointed, but the people did not claim that these leaders were usurping God’s authority or acting apart from that authority. They understood (at least the faithful ones) that those leaders were leading in accordance with God’s blessing and according to His direction. The same is true with leaders in the Church (priests, bishops, and the Pope). The only authority they have is from God, handed down directly by the laying on of hands from their predecessors who can trace their authority back to the original Apostles who were appointed by Christ.