# 1 Corinthians 1:10-17: Divisions in the Church

## Introduction

After an introductory passage of positional truth and solid foundation in who they are in Christ, Paul begins the labor of love that is the meat of His letter to the Corinthians. That is to state that division has no place in the body that is one in Christ. Paul’s writing in this letter will cover many topics where division is causing cracks in the church’s focus. This section is focused on the mind, judgment, and personal internalization of that division because of a lack of understanding of the purpose of the gospel.

## Now I exhort you, brethren by the Name of our Lord Jesus Christ

*Exhortation* has been translated here, but the Greek concept carries with it the idea that you would call someone along side you. Paul is engaging the believers that they should return to proper form alongside himself. He’s calling them away from the earthly things they had saddled up alongside and drawing them to the proper heavenly focus in line with biblical Christianity and as exemplified by Paul.

He doesn’t forget to remind them of their relationship in Christ: they’re brethren by the name of Christ. Ephesians 3:14-21 paints this picture of the body of Christ as brethren and puts a fine point on the expected intimacy and unity and the powerful, loving, outcome this body has in Christ alone. Corinth would receive a similar lesson in chapter 13.

*What happens to your thinking when the people around you are family instead of people that believe the same thing you do?*

## That you all agree and that there be no divisions among you

Agreement is probably a complementary idea in this part of the verse, but the Greek carries a meaning of saying the same thing. The vast difference between arguing and splitting hairs and putting forth new or contradicting ideas would have caused the church to be split, the outside world to be confused about the body, and shown some to be errant and problematic. No divisions would seem high and lofty in human institutions, but the Holy Spirit leading abiding believers will shed light on immaturity and carnality and reconcile believers in revealed truth.

*What happens to the vulnerabilities in a body when there is no division in it?*

## But that you be made complete in the same mind and in the same judgment.

Some Greek nerdery for context: the subjunctive mood is a language construct in the Greek that sets the likelihood of probability to possible, but is not certain[[1]](#footnote--1). The translation ‘that you be’ is subjunctive and should be seen as a hope and desire of Paul’s for the potential outcome of repaired unity (aka *complete*) through the Spirit. The possibility is something borne in an abiding believer. Assigning division to the flesh, Paul contrasts it and places it in alignment with the purity of a mind beholding [2 Corinthians 3:18, Colossians 3:1-3], submitting [James 4:7] and renewed by Christ [Romans 12:2]. Paul will tell them that they *have the mind of Christ* in1 Corinthians 2:16, but the Greek cultural problem of knowing and not doing had infiltrated the thinking of the church. This was not just a few individuals, but was reflective of the whole body needing to be submitted to Christ in their thinking [cf. Philippians 1:27].

*Complete* may not be the clearest translation from the Greek in this case as mending is part of the Greek word’s meaning [Matthew 4:21, mending the nets]. Given the division and broken state of the church in Corinth we should take complete to mean restored or completely unified.

It is interesting that Paul builds on having the same mind with the principle of judgment. We’re often told that judging is wrong, but Paul’s concern here is not judging of others, but the idea of judgment of ourselves. The church in Corinth was so full of liberties outside of what was wholesome and healthy that the consequences were dire and the fruit of the Spirit was distinctly lacking. When unity of mind and judgment are in place the outcome of singular focus through a diversity of gifts as discussed in chapters 12-14 would lead to a growth of the body that the church in Corinth would have been surprised by based on their current state.

*If mending is possible how would the believers in Corinth become mended?*

## For I have been informed concerning you…that there are quarrels among you

Paul’s reference to Chloe in this verse seems to be one of personal relationship, but we don’t have any other references to her in the scriptures. Given this, we’ll focus in on the message that Chloe’s people sent: there’s a whole lot of striving going on. The Corinthians definitely loved to be first in things and so the division in mind and judgment was bearing the fruit of quarrels. Quarrels are personally invested in problems that are rooted in self-righteousness or self-justification. They show a lack of trust, a lack of abiding and a lack of respect for who other believers are in Christ.

## The quarrel of spiritual lineage: Each one is saying I am of…

Paul then calls out the childlike thinking of the quarrels by being extremely specific, but also self-deprecating. If you’re going to claim Paul as the one who preached the gospel to you and as your baptizer: he’s not that that enthusiastic about it. The purpose of the gospel is to save you eternally by placing you in Christ. The purpose of baptism is to signify an inward change in an outward way. It is a testimony of your response to the gospel, and that you have died to this world and the flesh and are a new creation in Christ. How much of that is centered on the preacher or baptizer? None of it.

The significant element of being *of Christ* is that the proper answer was that they were of Christ. Yet others had attached themselves under the names of the apostles and their affiliation led them to pride and quarreling. The false importance led to arguments that had no merit and had no value.

## Has Christ been divided?

Paul hones in on a critical quality of the work of Christ: it is singular, it is between God and His Son, and it has no ability to be parted out. The concept of dividing Christ’s authority, Christ’s work, and His life is absurd, and Paul wants to refute it through the use of this rhetorical question to show the Corinthians they have not used their faculties and they have not respected the work of the Spirit in the body.

*What is the hypostatic union and why does it matter here?*

## Paul was not crucified for you…were you baptized in the name of Paul?

To further show the logical error that some in Corinth had made Paul targets the gospel mutation that they would have had to have believed: “That Paul died for our sins according to the scriptures, and that he was buried, and that he was raised on the third day according to the scriptures”[[2]](#footnote-0). This false gospel would have surely been qualified for a Galatians-like letter. And just in case this was not ridiculous enough he insinuates that they think that they were baptized in the name of the Father, the Paul and the Holy Spirit[[3]](#footnote-1).

*Why is our faith in the person and work of Jesus Christ?*

## Paul’s Baptisms in Corinth

In verses 14 and 16 Paul covers the names of people he recalls baptizing, but inserts in 15 the concern that no one would be able to claim being baptized into his name. He’s against that assertion and those that respond to the gospel he preached were to be baptized into the gospel’s federal head, the Lord Jesus Christ [Romans 5:11,17].

## For Christ did not send me to baptize, but to preach the gospel

As baptism is the subsequent response to the gospel, and as such does not save, Paul was not concerned with this as a primary mission. If the gospel [1 Corinthians 15:3-4] was preached and then responded to the baptisms would be a natural part of the process, but the work of the Holy Spirit was first in calling man to respond to the work of Christ unto a relationship with the Father.

Paul’s calling, as discussed before, led him to the Gentiles and to reach out to the lost around the Roman empire. This didn’t prevent Paul from reaching out to the Jews first [Romans 1:16, 2:10] as they would have had the scriptures to respond to, but he then reached out to the gentiles who would have been hungry for a religion that had substance to it.

*Why were you baptized and why did it matter who baptized you?*

## Not in cleverness of speech, so that the cross of Christ would be made void

Paul writes in Colossians 4:6 that the believers in Colossae should speak *with grace, as though seasoned with salt*, but here he is careful to differentiate graciousness from cleverness. The Corinthian orators would have spun quite the clever (aka philosophical) speech, but without spiritual authenticity and truth. Paul’s plain speech and clear presentation would have been critically valuable for the world to respond to. How can a child be able to respond to the gospel if it can’t be understood in simplicity? And what value is a gospel that needs to be sold through value propositions and clever branding?

The word void is not common to much of the writing of our time. For something to be made void means for it to be rendered into nothing, empty or invalid. If Paul used the cleverness of speech to deliver something it would have increased the potential for confusion and the response could be to the wrong person or principles. Cleverness could lead to mental assent and not faith. The listener could believe in a nice guy who really cared about all the people of the world and through some unfortunate events he died, but then God, who is really cool, saved him from death through a miracle. That is not the gospel, it is not what saves, and it is eternally damning. However, the world has somehow turned the gospel into a message of a loving Jesus who only wanted people to feel good.

*How do we share the gospel to avoid cleverness and having it return void?*

1. in contrast to the Indicative mood, which is highly likely, or being presented as true [↑](#footnote-ref--1)
2. This is a twist on 1 Cor. 15:3-4, and is exaggerated heresy to point out absurdity [↑](#footnote-ref-0)
3. This is a twist on Matt. 28:19, and is also exaggerated heresy to point out absurdity [↑](#footnote-ref-1)