

Unity – Part I

24 September 2023

Dear Sisters and Elders,

The Bible dictionary describes Corinth as an extremely diverse and worldly city “... because the main current of the trade between Asia and western Europe passed through its harbors.” It goes on to explain that most of Paul’s converts were Greeks who despite their love of life, freedom, logic, and eloquent speech, lived in an environment of moral corruption and self-centeredness. In the first chapter of 1 Corinthians, Paul rebukes them for divisiveness, disobedience, and impurity. A good example is found in verses 10 and 11: “Now I beseech you, brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that ye all speak the same thing, and that there be no divisions among you; but that ye be perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment.”

Some of the members of the Church in Corinth had created division based on who baptized them, as though a baptism by Apollos was somehow different than a baptism by Cephas (see vs 12). In verse 22, the disunity was further exacerbated by whether a person was a Jew or a Greek. Paul is truly trying to encourage them to put aside their differences and focus on Jesus Christ. “But of him are ye in Christ Jesus, who of God is made unto us wisdom, and righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption” (verse 30).

In the next 9 chapters, Paul is teaching the Corinthian saints that salvation is in Jesus Christ and none else. He teaches them that unity in the faith comes when they are taught by the Holy Ghost and have the mind of Christ (1 Cor 2:13,16). In Chapter 3 he chastises them because there is envying and strife among them and they walk as men focused on the wisdom of the world and not of God (1 Cor 3:3,19). He goes on in Chapter 4, telling them to not be puffed up against one another (1 Cor 4:6) and then tells them that “the Kingdom of God is not in word, but in power”. In other words, talk is cheap. Living the gospel, righteously exercising the Priesthood, and having faith in Jesus Christ is how and where heavenly power is manifest. Chapter 5 is a warning against fornication and being in the company of fornicators (1 Cor 5:9). Corinth was well known for its immorality and being a member of the Church in that environment was a challenge. Chapter 6 is a warning to the saints that they should not take one another to courts of law to resolve differences, but rather to inspired priesthood leaders where they can learn to humble themselves rather than seek to defraud a brother (1 Cor 6:5,7). He reminds them that while they used to do these things, they have been washed and sanctified in the name of Jesus Christ, and they need to now leave those things behind (1 Cor 6:11). I especially love verse 17 in that same chapter, “But he that is joined unto the Lord is one spirit.”

Chapter 7 is about marriage, as Paul answers some questions about which the leaders in Corinth wrote to Paul. In Chapter 8, Paul is again correcting the Corinthian saints regarding idols and the eating of meat left over from idol sacrifices. I love the counsel that he gives regarding the eating of this meat. He says since the idols are not real and don’t actually exist, any sacrifice to them is meaningless, and eating the meat of the animals sacrificed means nothing. But then he warns that some who are weak, will be offended at this practice

and walk away from the Church. In other words, avoid the very appearance of evil, even if there is no evil in the act itself, others may stumble because of their perception of our actions. There are two wonderful quotes in 1 Cor 8:1,3. *“Knowledge puffeth up, but charity edifieth.”* And, *“But if any man love God, the same is known of Him”*.

In Chapter 9, Paul continues his counsel and encouragement for the saints to be unified. He does this by witnessing of his apostolic ministry, assuring the saints that he is not glorying in himself (v 16), but rather in the gospel of Jesus Christ. In verse 14 he says, *“Even so hath the Lord ordained that they which preach the gospel should live of the gospel.”* In verses 20-23, Paul explains how he preached the gospel by meeting people where they were. If they were Jewish, then he spoke as a Jew. To those under the law (Pharisees), he taught as one under the law. To those who didn't live the law of Moses, he taught them as one also not under the law (but clarified he was *“under the law to Christ”*). To the spiritually weak, he spoke as one who had been weak. Because of his many experiences, he was able to teach people regardless of what they believed. He met them where they were and brought them to Jesus Christ.

In Chapter 10, he gives what I think is perhaps the best statement of the entire letter regarding application to us as missionaries. It is found in verse 33: *“Even as I please all men in all things, not seeking mine own profit, but the profit of many, that they may be saved.”* He tells us that as a minister of the gospel of Jesus Christ, he was not seeking for self-interests, but instead he was focused only on the interests of others because he wanted them to be saved through Jesus Christ. That perhaps is the ultimate definition of unity.

With that as a backdrop, here are some summary points on unity we can learn from Paul and the Corinthians.

- Unity means we are joined together with the same mind and the same judgment (meaning we all make the same decisions regarding right from wrong) regardless of our birth country.
- Unity is about looking vertically rather than horizontally for approval.
- Unity is impossible when there is contention and deceit.
- Unity only comes when we all focus first on Jesus Christ.
- Unity is only possible if we are worthy to have the companionship of the Holy Ghost.
- Unity will not be achieved if we focus on the wisdom of the world since the world will never agree on what is right and what is wrong.
- Unity is only possible for those who preach the gospel if they live the gospel.
- Unity is built with friends we teach when we meet them where they are and then point them to Christ.
- Unity is only possible when we look upward and outward.

Attached to this email are two pictures. One showing a person who is looking inward and another showing the same person looking upward and outward. The attributes of each are listed alongside the picture. When we are looking inward, we are focused on our own self-interests and desires. When we look upward and outward, our focus is on what is best for the “many”, which by the way, is also best for us.

May we as a mission, as companionships, and as individuals face the Savior Jesus Christ in everything we do. May we let go of the pull of the world through the phone and its social media tenacles, as well as “friends” from back home who constantly distract us from this work. May we let go of the popular opinions, fashions, speech, and never-ending thirst for money. May we humble ourselves with soft hearts, broken hearts, hearts that understand, and look heavenward and outward as we strive to be unified in this great and last gathering of Israel.

All my love,

President Kunz