

Focus on 1 Corinthians 1:10–18

WHAT is important to know?

—From “Exegetical Perspective” by James W. Thompson

The rhetorical questions in verse 13, all assuming a negative answer, indicate the absurdity of dividing into factions. “Is Christ divided?” anticipates the later argument that members are nothing more than the feet and hands in the one body of Christ composed of people from every background (12:12–13). “Was Paul crucified for you?” suggests the distortion of the confession “Christ died for our sins” (1 Cor. 15:3). Similarly, “Were you baptized into the name of Paul?” suggests that the Corinthians have substituted human leaders for Christ. What the Corinthians have missed, therefore, is an understanding of Jesus Christ, the foundation of their faith.

WHERE is God in these words?

—From “Theological Perspective” by Timothy F. Sedgwick

Paul’s call for “no divisions among you” (v. 10) shows the purpose of God’s work in Christ, reconciling the world and bringing peace. This is the gospel and is nothing other than Paul’s theology of the cross (v. 17). It is wrong to identify Christian faith with ritual cleansing or healing, with a particular understanding of baptism, or with the beliefs and practices of a particular person or group. The gospel is given in the cross as self-sacrifice, giving oneself up in response to and care for the other, the cross as bearing the burdens of others—not as self-denial and resignation, but in joy and thanksgiving. To claim anything else empties the cross of Christ of its power.

SO WHAT does this mean for our lives?

—From “Pastoral Perspective” by Alan Gregory

The church is easily divided by “causes.” “Social justice” is pitted against “biblical faithfulness,” progressivisms against traditionalisms, and a stand on one issue divides the true hearted from the reprobate. But Jesus is not a cause, he is Lord and life-giver for all; our enterprises, even the godly and proper ones, cannot reflect but a fraction of the glorious good he has done and will do for his creation. Our theological and ethical disputes, our controversies over Christian practice, are hopelessly compromised as soon as we fail to recognize those with whom we contend as also “in Christ.” All our initiatives, parties, groupings, causes are, as it were, “inside the brackets,” Christ alone is outside, as “Lord of all.”

NOW WHAT is God’s word calling us to do?

—From “Homiletical Perspective” by
Harry B. Adams

Paul seeks ways in which the divisions and the quarrels can be dealt with meaningfully and constructively. He reminds the people that the saving grace of God does not come through any human leader, but only through the gospel that manifests the saving love of God. Paul is clear that he did not bring the saving power of God: “Was Paul crucified for you?” (v. 13). Paul is clear that the expression of God’s saving love is not in human wisdom, but in the cross of Christ, the awesome manifestation of the way and the power of God.

Unity, Liberty, Charity

“In essentials, unity; in nonessentials, liberty; in all things, charity.”

This motto is attributed to Rupertus Meldenius, a German Lutheran theologian from the early seventeenth century, a time of great religious turmoil in Europe.¹

UNITY

UNITY IN ESSENTIALS

Doctrines or practices that are essential to all churches.

LIBERTY

LIBERTY IN NONESSENTIALS

Doctrines or practices that are nonessential and vary among churches.

CHARITY

CHARITY IN ALL THINGS

Ways we can love one another and work with each other despite our differences.

1. Philip Schaff, *History of the Christian Church*, vol. 7 (repr., Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1965), 650–53.