

Unity and Diversity in the Church from 1 Corinthians

"For just as the body is one and has many members, and all the members of the body, though many are one body, so it is with Christ." (1 Cor. 12:12 ESV)

Warm Up Questions:

1. What do you think of when someone speaks of church unity?
2. How have you seen the church display unity or disunity?

I. The Church is...¹

1. "The community of all true believers for all time." (Grudem, 1238)
2. The Greek word, **ekklesia**, means assembly, which is often translated as "Church" in the New Testament. (Matt. 16:18; Acts; Eph. 2:11-22)
3. Invisible / Visible (2 Tim. 2:19; 1 Cor. 1:2)
4. Local / Universal (1 Cor. 1:2; 16:19; Eph. 5:25)
5. Metaphors for the Church:
 - a. Family language (1 Tim. 5:1-2; Matt. 12:49-50; Eph. 5:32)
 - b. Body language 1 Cor. 12 a body; Eph 1:22-23; 4:11-16; Col. 2:19)
 - c. Plant/Field language (John 15:5; 1 Cor. 3:6-9)
 - d. Building/Temple language (1 Cor. 3:9b, 16-17; 1 Pet. 2:4-5)
6. New Covenant Community (origin at Pentecost)
 - a. Distinct from Israel of OT (Eph. 2, 1 Cor. 9, Rom 11. Israel of God Gal. 6:16)
7. One (unity, John 17:21); Holy (set apart from the world, growing progressively in sanctification, 1 Cor. 1:2); Catholic (universal across space and time, Rev. 5:9), Apostolic (built upon the teaching of the Apostles, Eph. 2:20)²

II. The Problem and Solutions regarding Unity in the Corinthian Church

- A. Favorite Preachers and Worldly Wisdom (1:10-17)
- B. Paul's responses to this initial problem:
 1. 1 Cor. 2:1-5 Paul's surprising approach to ministry
 2. 1 Cor. 3:1-9 The ordained ministry of different ministers
 3. 1 Cor. 1:26-31; 3:16-17 A reminder of who you are

¹ Much of the material in this section is from Wayne Grudem's *Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Biblical Doctrine* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1994).

² Language from the Nicene Creed (4th century)

C. Lawsuits between believers (6:1-8)

1. What is Paul's priority with regard to grievances between believers?
2. Is this a warrant for trying all legal cases between believers in the church only?
3. What would be a realistic way to seek resolution of "trivial cases" between believers in the context of the local church?

D. Issues of Conscience (8:1-13)

1. What are some issues of conscience that people struggle with today?
2. What are some ways that people often respond if another has an issue of conscience?
3. How does Paul respond? (see also Rom. 14)

E. Divisions related to the Lord's Supper (11:17-34)

1. How was the Lord's Supper being misused at the church in Corinth?
2. Why is it shocking to have division in the church in the context of the Lord's Supper?
3. What are Paul's exhortations in response to this particular set of problems?

F. Spiritual Gifts and the Body of Christ (12:1-27)

1. Where do we find unity and diversity in this first section, 12:1-11?
2. If one believes that some of these spiritual gifts are no longer common in the life of the church, how does that change the relevance of this passage?
3. Read 12:12-31. How does the illustration of "the body" help to communicate importance of each member of the church?

G. The more excellent way... Love (Ch 13)

1. How great is the "best" spiritual gift without love?
2. How can a Biblically loving response be expressed in each of the Corinthian conflicts which we have discussed today?

H. Two areas where division is necessary, and diversity should not be tolerated

1. Clear sin (1 Cor. 5)
2. First order doctrines (1 Cor. 15) – Use Theological Triage to distinguish between Primary, Secondary and Tertiary doctrines.³

³ See Albert Mohler's article, *Theological Triage*.