



## **2. A Passion for Unity (1 Cor 1:10-17)**

This is the second in our series on the heart of Fellowship. Here we are in a church in the middle of Norfolk, all from different backgrounds. Why are we here? Because in Christ we have been drawn into fellowship with God and as a result of being part of His family, we are now in fellowship with one another. Later on in the series we'll see how important that diversity is for us.

On the other hand, there is a sense in which we are all the same. We found out last week that in terms of our righteousness, we are all equal before God. We are equally as righteous before a holy God because all our righteousness is in Christ.

God wants us to fellowship with Him and grow into maturity. It doesn't create super-Christians but those that walk in humility in Christ but in the power of the Spirit too. In Christ God has brought us into relationship with one another.

Our fellowship relationship with one another can be summed up in one verse in chapter 1:

*I appeal to you, brothers, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that all of you agree with one another so that there may be no divisions among you and that you may be perfectly united in mind and thought.*

We are a people called to unity. It is a unity of agreement, a unity of mind and thought. Why are we called to such a unity? Because as we found in the first chapter last week that we are *those sanctified in Christ Jesus and called to be holy*. We are called to be holy by a holy God.

What is the characteristic of the Godhead: Father, Son and Spirit? Complete unity of mind and thought. And if that's the nature of God, that should be the nature of the body of Christ too. Unity is not an optional extra for people we like. Or an optional extra for people who share our point of view. We are all called to agreement - a complete unity of mind and thought and that's a message for each one of us who are part of this church fellowship just as it was to the Corinthians.

If we look down at 2000 years of church history, or maybe our own short lives, then unity is probably not your experience of the people of God. Yet we are called to a unity of mind and thought. We are called to walk in agreement. For most people down the ages it is like a slippery snake.

All through the NT we see problems with Christians who did not agree. I'm sure too you also have experience of nasty moments where people not only didn't agree, but the whole thing led to conflict in the church. Most of the denominations came into existence because people couldn't agree.

We may feel tempted to just say that it's par for the course. But we are called to be united in mind and thought nevertheless. That's the message of scripture to us.

So how do we define this unity of mind and thought?

We can define unity by what it's not. Unity is not uniformity. Down the centuries, unity has been seen as doing things like everybody else. So if you look at the blurb from the BU they will say Baptists are defined by what they do in terms of organisation or worship. In fact, if you go to worship in many traditional Baptist Churches in Britain you'll get the same menu served up. That's a unity of what people do. It's like MacDonalds. You go to a restaurant and you get a product and the Big Mac will be the same wherever you go in the world. That's uniformity. If you don't like the food, you go elsewhere.

Uniformity makes people fit into a mould and tells us what we should do and how we should think. One of the biggest generators of disunity down the ages has been the attempt of some to get all to fit into a mould to create uniformity and call it unity. And when people disagree - they are cast out or leave. Bingo! You get another new denomination. We have fellowship with those we like or who suits us. And when we don't like it, we move on somewhere else.

That's not the way we find unity presented in 1 Corinthians 1:10 where we are called to be *perfectly united in mind and thought?* We know from elsewhere in the letter that it was a diverse fellowship. People were from different races and backgrounds. Some were rich and some were poor. There were religious factions. People were doing what they thought was right - yet the call was to be united in mind and thought and that call was to all of them.

It's revision time again! You'll remember that in our worship series we found that true worship isn't about what we do, but the heart with which we do it. True worship comes out of our gratitude to a living God.

It's the same with fellowship. Unity is born out of relationships - a desire to seek agreement with one another and to be united in mind and thought. As we are called to love one another as Christ has loved us, then our desire is to serve God together in fellowship with one mind and thought. Unity doesn't come out of a desire to find uniformity but out of a desire for loving fellowship.

And what gives us that mind for unity? Fellowship with God. Let me give you some familiar verses from Ephesians 4

*Eph 4:3 Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace. 4 There is one body and one Spirit-- just as you were called to one hope when you were called-- 5 one Lord, one faith, one baptism; 6 one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all.*

*Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace.* Bearing in mind what I just said about the unity of the Godhead, we see that that unity of mind is of the Spirit of God. Paul here stresses the one-ness of our faith - the Rule of One as I have described it when we studied Ephesians. We are one whether we like it or not. we may like to be flexible about what we believe but there is only one brand of the Christian faith - God's. We may like our denominations and differences but the rule of one means that's there's only one right way of being church and doing church and that's God's.

This truth of scripture has down the ages sent people scuttling for their NT to find out what the model church is - the pure and perfect church. And what do we get - some more denominations! One of the great features of the NT is that it doesn't give a blueprint for the church because God wants unity, not uniformity. We can find plenty of principles and practices for a healthy church fellowship, and 1 Corinthians is full of

them. But the NT drops short of telling us how we should organise and run a local church. Why? Because it allows the Spirit of God to mould and make church fellowships that allow Him too. It doesn't take much of a genius to realise that God pours out His blessing today on churches of all types, denominations, shapes and sizes. God's church is one that should be conformed to His Spirit, doing His will.

So let's look at the verse again:

*I appeal to you, brothers, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that all of you agree with one another so that there may be no divisions among you and that you may be perfectly united in mind and thought.*

Then Ephesians 4:3 *Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace*

United in mind and thought. Keep the unity of the Spirit. Surely a unity of mind and thought is a unity of mind born out of the Spirit? What God desires of His people is that their minds conform to His mind. I believe that is what God desires of us. That's what unity is about. And it's all done through the bond of peace - we are bonded together as brothers and sisters in Christ. We have fellowship. We are called to loving fellowship. The desire for unity of mind comes from our love for one another and a desire for our minds to conform to the Spirit.

And as we conform to His Spirit we become the church that God wants us to be. My experience of the way that God uses church fellowships is not through them finding a perfect NT pattern, but being prepared as individuals and as a fellowship to conform to His will.

But as Paul found in Corinth, more than often is not what happens.

*11 My brothers, some from Chloe's household have informed me that there are quarrels among you. 12 What I mean is this: One of you says, "I follow Paul"; another, "I follow Apollos"; another, "I follow Cephas"; still another, "I follow Christ." 13 Is Christ divided? Was Paul crucified for you? Were you baptized into the name of Paul?*

The church at Corinth was a divided Church. And what great issue had divided them? None. No great issue. They were a pretty sad bunch. They had split in to a Paul party, and Apollos party and a Peter party. We know is that neither Paul, Apollos or Peter approved of what they did. But they did it anyway. The huge majority of church splits are on irrelevant matters that godly people would sort easily.

These were not godly people. In fact Paul describes them in chapter 3 as immature - babies who were no better than the world in their quarrelling.

What we learn here is that lack of unity in a church fellowship is a mark of the immaturity of the fellowship. They are not walking in the mind and will of God and it shows.

We are fortunate as a Church in that we do not have these kind of problems. This passage exists to make sure we don't. It's there to remind us what kind of fellowship we should be in Christ and how easy it is to slip into a kind of fellowship that becomes divided for trivial reasons. It's a call to love one another, to desire fellowship one with another and to grow together in Christ one with another so that we move forward in His will.

As we come to a new year, we are called to agreement. We are called to a unity of mind and thought. We are called not to agree with the Pastor, or agree with the Baptists but we are called to seek the mind and will of God. And that's critical here. We need to be

agreeing with one another and I don't believe that it's in the democratic sense of finding compromise or some wishy-washy statements that offend no-one.

As people in fellowship with God our that agreement should be on that God is revealing to us of His mind.

I could tell you what I would like for this Church and I'm sure that I would get 50 different versions of what you would like. But what does God want? Where is God in all this? What is His mind? I can be pretty sure it's quite different to what I think or what any of us thinks. But we are called to walk together in agreement.

I have this sense that we are walking where we have not walked before here. Let's start to pray and walk in agreement and see God glorified.

*Father*

*You have called us to be people who agree with one another and who walk perfectly in mind and thought. We pray that by your Spirit who brings forth unity, that you will bind us together, that we may agree according to Your will and have Your mind an thought within us so that all the glory may go to You.*

*In Jesus' name*

*Amen*



*Preached by Mark Reid, Swaffham Baptist Church, 11/1/04. Scripture Quotes NIV  
© Mark Reid 2004*