

STAND TOGETHER

by Drew Filer¹

Each member in a rock band has his own role. The guitarists play the foundational rhythms of the song; the bassist hits those low notes, giving the music a fuller sound; the singers put the emotion, the energy of the song into words, often getting melodies stuck in the listeners' heads; and the drummer sets the tempo, keeping everyone in time with each other. Though every member is skilled in his own right, they only make music when they come together. But what happens if someone gets off-beat? If even one member gets off by even one beat, it throws the entire song off. It may still sound okay, but there's still that unmistakable delay between the drummer's back-beat, and the guitarist's chord change.

We see the same principle in our own lives. As fellow believers, we are called to be united, especially in regards to carrying out the Great Commission. "I [Paul] appeal to you, brothers, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that all of you agree, and that there be no divisions among you, but that you be united in the same mind and the same judgment," (1 Cor. 1:10, ESV). To fully understand the truth of Scripture, we need to look at it in proper context.

First, we need some background. The city of Corinth lay on an isthmus—a strip of land separating two bodies of water: the Corinthian Gulf, and the Saronic Gulf. It was in the center of a very popular and well-traveled trade route, thus making it a prosperous area. The church, in turn, became wealthy. This had an effect on not only its culture, but its struggles.

The book of I Corinthians was written for many of the same reasons that Paul's other epistles were written: to encourage, correct, and direct the church. He opens the letter with a greeting, then goes directly into thanksgiving (v. 1-9). However, verse 10 is where Paul begins his correction—his reproach.

When the verse is broken down into smaller portions, it's easier to really understand what Paul is saying and why he is saying it, which is just as important. Paul begins his reproach in a rather unusual way. He says "I appeal to you, brothers..." This phrase alone gives us insight into Paul's next statement. Notice how he addresses the readers. He calls them "brothers." This plainly shows that he's talking to believers. These people are already saved, so Paul is not correcting this church because he's concerned about their eternal security. This verse is a discipleship passage. In other words, post-salvation. He knows they're secure in their position before God, and wants to help them live that out more. Secondly, we see that this is an appeal—"I appeal to you..." Paul comes to his brothers in Christ out of love, with their well-being at the forefront of his mind.

Paul then makes a very serious statement: "I appeal to you...in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ..." (emphasis mine). Jesus is the Name above all names. To do something on His behalf, is to do the very work of God Almighty. Paul is giving this church the message God has laid on his heart. What Paul says next is not to be taken lightly.

He says: "I appeal to you, brothers...that all of you agree, and that there be no divisions among you, but that you be united in the same mind and the same judgment." Take a minute to let that sink in. "...that there be no divisions among you..." None. This isn't just a request to get along. This is a command to be perfectly united in every way. To be of "one mind and judgment" is to be convicted of the same truths and of the same understanding. To be one just as a body is one.

This appeal is restated in Paul's letter to the church at Philippi: "Only, let your manner of life be worthy of the gospel of Christ, so that whether I come and see you or am absent, I may hear of you that you are standing firm in spirit, with one mind striving side by side for the faith of the gospel," (Phil 1:27, ESV emphasis mine). Paul uses almost exactly the same wording: "one mind". Unity in the Church is not an idea formed by a good man. It is the standard set by the head of our Body, Christ. We cannot be divided.

Yet, we see this happening all around us. There are hundreds of different denominations, each with its own list of beliefs and interpretations. Even within these denominations we don't agree on some very serious issues. There are Calvinists, Arminians, Free Gracers, Pre-Millenials, Post-Millenials, Amillenials, and the list goes on. It's good that churches have a level of autonomy, please don't misunderstand. But, the global Church is so divided that it sometimes hinders the spread of the gospel. This is exactly what the enemy wants! He's deliberately dividing us.

The principle of Christian unity is stated time and again in Scripture, in almost every epistle, in Acts and in Revelation. A theme that recurs that much should not be taken lightly. When God repeats something, it's not because He forgot that He already said it. He's omniscient; being forgetful just isn't a part of His nature. God repeats Himself for our benefit. We are such forgetful creatures that God not only emphasizes, but re-emphasizes the things He really wants us to grasp. If we don't understand these things, the consequences could be astronomical.

Look at the analogy of a band again. Just as one off-beat guitar can throw off an entire song, so one major division can throw us off course and hinder our fulfillment of the Great Commission. It's very difficult to make disciples if we're too busy bickering amongst ourselves. We need to be unified. If we can't agree with each other, that's going to affect our ministry. God has given us a mission. We have been commanded to "Go, therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the Name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that [Jesus] has commanded [us]." (Matt. 28:19-20a ESV). In these verses, Jesus is speaking to all of His disciples. We are to carry out this command both individually and collectively. We must stand united in our task.

Many people look at those who disagree with them as enemies, rather than understanding that if we have knowledge, we are stewards of it for the benefit of those people. We can curse them, and so divide the Body, or we can build them up in the truth and so edify the Body. If we do the latter, we can contribute to the unification of the Body. I don't claim to have all the answers. Not even close! All I know is that these are issues we as the Church need to prayerfully consider.

Being divisive is not the way that Jesus intended the Church to function, nor is it the way the first century church started out. All throughout the book of Acts, Luke speaks of the collective church as a whole. There was never supposed to be this much division.

Don't let us be another generation of denominations and sects. We can become the generation that works toward reunifying the Church! We have to fight back against the enemy's work to divide the Church. We have to unite. We have to stand together!



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