

1st Corinthians 1:10

10 Now I appeal to you, brothers and sisters, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that all of you be in agreement and that there be no divisions among you, but that you be united in the same mind and the same purpose (NRSV).

This is one of those rare times when the scripture reading is limited to one verse. It is concise and to the point. I am reminded of the time many years ago when I was serving a church that had an active youth ministry. On youth Sunday a high school student would read the scripture. On one particular Sunday I selected a one verse scripture. The teenager read the verse and kept on going like the Energizer Bunny Rabbit. He was not used to just one verse and must have thought it was a misprint in the bulletin.

Today's Scripture is concise and to the point. Everyone is to be in agreement with no divisions. You are to be united with the same mind and same purpose. Unity of the Christian church is a biblical mandate. Every split in the history of Christian church goes against biblical teachings. Every conflict within the life of a denomination or an individual church goes against biblical teachings of love, humility, and unity.

When I meet people out in public and they find out that I am a pastor, they frequently engage in theological conversation, and many times people will express the need for unity. I make an effort to enlighten them that this is what we are all about – unity in one Spirit, one Lord, one faith, and one baptism. Our denomination was founded on unity. When America was wild and in the process of being settled debauchery was rampant. A prevailing theological concept emerged that the only way to combat such blatant wickedness and stand against Satan is to have a united force against evil. We cannot be united if we are divided by ideology, opinions, and human preferences. What we can all agree on is Jesus. We can be united if we are willing to focus our lives on what Jesus said and did instead of differences of opinions.

Christian unity is a biblical mandate. **Ephesians 4:13** until all of us come to the unity of the faith (NRSV). This is a call to mature in faith to the point of unity and not being swayed by various doctrines. This is very applicable in our contemporary society. Another example is **John 17:21** that they may all be one. As you, Father, are in me and I am in you, may they also be in us, so that the world may believe that you have sent me (NRSV). This is a prayer of Jesus that calls for unity, not just for his current disciples, but a prayer for all of the believers to be united as one. Unity is not just a biblical mandate, it is a specific directive from Jesus. According to Jesus, the unbelieving world will judge whether or not God sent Jesus based on the church's visible unity. Now, the contemporary world does not see this unity and that enforces the lost faith that we see prevalent in society today.

The church that Jesus set up and established is clearly defined in Acts. On the 1st day of the week the followers of Jesus got together for teaching, fellowship, communion, and prayers. They were united with no divisions. Jesus set up the united church that people divided up amongst themselves. As the church grew, it grew according to human preference and grew away from being the united church that Jesus set up. East and west split due to different leadership and authority, the Protestants split off from the Catholics and continued splintering off. As they go in their own directions the go further away from

being the united church that Jesus established. Our objective is to reverse that trend and go back to being the united church that Jesus set up.

We are not one hundred percent pure followers of Jesus. We fail to love our enemies, love our neighbors as the self, do good to those that hate you, pray for those who abuse you, and bless those who curse you. Frequently we encounter people that are concerned with specific biblical interpretations. I ask “Why is this your concern, if you are not doing what Jesus said to do, why are you concerned with something else? We choose who we are, how to behave, and what to believe. You have made a choice to follow Jesus but we all struggle to follow one hundred percent. We fail because we want our stuff our way which means we have not completely surrendered. We are not one hundred percent true to Christ when we insist on our own things. The point is that we should be focused on being the person that Jesus means for us to be. The followers of Jesus are to be of one mind, one heart, and one body. A personal directive from Jesus is to go and make disciples and teach them to obey everything that Jesus teaches.

You can have differences of opinion and still be united. For example in my nuclear family, my wife Brenda has a different persona, and my son has his own persona, but the family dynamics are as one unit. We each do our own things, watch different TV shows, read different books, and have different friends. But we are united together as a family. We come together at the dinner table and discuss whatever is going on in life, what we want to do together, and major events.

In seminary I found myself defending a comment. “If Jesus were here today, leading, preaching, and teaching us, like he did two thousand years ago, we would all be doing things differently.” He would tell us what we are doing wrong and we would listen to him because we would be doing his thing instead of our thing. Our contemporary worship, and mission, has morphed throughout generations and has been shaped by humanity. Jesus would tell us about being sidetracked by our ideas and opinions and get us back together as the united body of Christ. None of us are the one hundred percent ideal Christian and no specific denomination or church is one hundred percent ideal wither. We are guided by human desires and opinions. Jesus would keep us from going our own way and being led astray by human desire and particular doctrine.

When people are more concerned with their own agenda than they are for the Word of God as it is given to us by Jesus then we commit the same sin that Jesus was up against – the renegade church. The church is united when it is focused on pleasing God and following Jesus. Love is the glue that keeps it all together. We are to love Jesus to and remain united in Christ.