

The Nature of the Unity We Seek

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1 Corinthians 1:10

I appeal to you, brothers, by 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. What Is the "Agreement" in Mind?

What does Paul have in mind by the "agreement" that that he calls for in this verse? What kind of agreement is implied here?

Behind the word "agree" is literally the phrase "say the same." He wants them to say the same thing which would also imply thinking the same thing. Specifically verse 12 pictures them "saying": "I am of Paul!" Etc. He does not want this kind of cross speaking. He wants a common declaration of allegiance. He wants others to be able to say "Amen!" to our affirmations (14:16).

What would Paul want instead of "I am of Apollos!" "I am of Paul!"? He would want: "I am of Paul and Apollos and Cephas—I esteem them all in their different strengths . . . So do I!"

2. What Kind of "Unity" Is in Mind?

1 Corinthians 1:10—"That there be no schisms among you." What kind of unity is implied here?

The word means a tear (Mark 9:16—a bigger tear). It is used two other times and each sheds unique light on the problem of unity.

2.1. 1 Corinthians 11:18–19

For in the first place, when you assemble as a church, I hear that there are divisions [*schismata*] among you; and I partly believe it for there must be factions [*haireseis*] among you in order that those who are genuine among you may be recognized.

The point here is that Paul expects some disunity in the visible church because he knows that some of the professing Christians are not genuine. They are the ones who would fail the test in 2 Corinthians 13:5, and whose faith proves "vain" according to 1 Corinthians 15:1.

So there is a "necessary" disunity in the visible church owing to the reality of unbelief and false profession. This is not to be avoided. It is not the fault of the true believers.

This also implies that unity can never be the absolute criterion for how we should relate to professing Christians. The truth must be.

2.2. 1 Corinthians 12:24b–25

But God has so adjusted the body, giving the greater honor to the inferior part, that there may be no discord [*schisma*] in the body, but that the members may have the same care for one another. If one member suffers, all suffer; if one member is honored, all rejoice together.

Here the opposite of schism is having the "same care for one another." So the unity is oneness of concern and care, not explicitly oneness of ideas.

The fabric of the body should be so interwoven and unified that if one thread is torn, all threads feel the stress. The oneness is a union of heart that feels what the other feels.

It is an open question whether Paul teaches that this kind of unity is possible while holding significantly different views of God and man.

3. "United in the Same Mind"

1 Corinthians 1:10—"That you be united [equipped, mended, completed] in the same mind and in the same judgment." What does this imply about the unity he desires?

The words "mind" (*nous*) and "judgment" (*gnome*) refer not to affections and feelings but to the working of the mind and its products. So here Paul aims at a unity of ideas.

Gnome: 1 Corinthians 7:25, 40; 2 Corinthians 8:10; Philemon 14.

Where else does he express this aim?

Romans 15:5–6—

May the God of steadfastness and encouragement grant you to live in such harmony [*to auto phronein*] with one another, in accord with Christ Jesus, that together you may with one voice glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.

The aim here is that God gets more glory out of harmonious voices than disparate ones.

2 Corinthians 13:11—

Finally, brethren, farewell. Mend your ways, heed my appeal, agree with one another [*to auto phroneite*], live in peace, and the God of love and peace will be with you.

Ephesians 4:1–6, 13—

I therefore, a prisoner for the Lord, beg you to lead a life worthy of the calling to which you have been called, with all lowliness and meekness, with patience, forbearing one another in love, eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called to the one hope that belongs to your call, one Lord, one faith, one

baptism, one God and Father of us all . . . for the building up of the body of Christ until we all attain to the unity of the faith and the knowledge of the Son of God.

Note that the heart unity is grounded in the doctrinal unity of what views we have of God, and unified knowledge of the Son of God is the goal.

Philippians 1:27; 2:2—

That I may hear of you that you stand firm in one spirit, with one mind striving side by side for the faith of the gospel . . . Complete my joy by being of the same mind [*to auto phroneite*], having the same love, being in full accord and of one mind.

See also *homothumadon* in Acts 1:14; 2:46; 4:24; 5:12; 7:57; 8:6; 12:20; 15:25; 18:12; 19:29. Also 4:32—one heart and soul. Also Matthew 23:8—you have one master. Also 1 Peter 8:8.

Conclusion: Paul wills us to move toward total doctrinal unity—thinking the same about all reality, i.e., thinking thoughts that cohere and do not contradict.

4. Basis for Such Unity?

4.1. Truth is one! And has its unity in God who is not a God of confusion. He does not say yes and no like a worldly man (2 Corinthians 1).

4.2. We are being renewed in our minds (Romans 12:2; Ephesians 4:23). And "have the mind of Christ" (1 Corinthians 2:16).

4.3. We have a common authority in the apostolic word of Scripture which is taught by the Spirit (1 Corinthians 2:13).

4.4. We have the Lord himself alive in the church to guide us out of error (Philippians 3:15; Luke 24:45).

5. Our Aim and Expectation

So what are the prospects of unity on this side of heaven? What should we aim at? And if we hit lower than our aim, what should we do?

5.1. We should aim at full doctrinal unity. Not by coercion or manipulation but by the reasonable explanation and defense of biblical ideas. Paul's letters are remarkable illustrations to give people time to bring their thought into line with truth (Philippians 3:15).

5.2. We should aim at heart unity—the interweaving of lives and hearts so that we feel with each other and care for each other.

5.3. We should expect (and not sweep under the rug) disunity in the visible church while there are non-genuine professors of faith in the assembly (1 Corinthians 11:18). This is a clear statement that unity of the visible church can never be the absolute criterion for faith and action.

2 Timothy 2:24–26 tells Timothy to correct his opponents with gentleness in the hope that they might repent. We are not to gloss over significant differences, but "convince, rebuke, exhort, in patience and teaching" (2 Timothy 4:2).

5.4. There will be disunity where there is pride. This we should strive against and not be content with. This was the kind of disunity Paul reckoned with in Corinth. It is the result of not making progress in sanctification as quickly as we should.

5.5. But there is another kind of disagreement that Paul reckons with that he teaches us to live with because it is not rooted mainly in pride but in the limitations of our human perspectives. It turns on relatively minor points of behavior and secondary matters not on major issues. Romans 14:1–6.