

That all of them may be ONE

ONENESS GUIDE #3

# TOWARD ONENESS

September 26, 2010

I Corinthians 1:1-17

DESTINED FOR UNITY...  
WITH GOD

In Jesus Christ Our Lord

WITH EACH  
OTHER  
In The Church

WITH EACH  
OTHER  
In Our Family

## Unity: A Great Loss and Illusive Treasure II

*...that all of them may be one,  
Father, just as you 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.*

- Jesus (John 17:21)

### I CORINTHIANS 1:1-17

**1** Paul, called to be an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God, and our brother Sosthenes,

**2** To the church of God in Corinth, to those sanctified in Christ Jesus and called to be holy, together with all those everywhere who call on the name of our Lord Jesus Christ—their Lord and ours:

**3** Grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

#### THANKSGIVING

**4** I always thank God for you because of his grace given you in Christ Jesus. **5** For in him you have been enriched in every way—in all your speaking and in all your knowledge—**6** because our testimony about Christ was confirmed in you. **7** Therefore you do not lack any spiritual gift as you eagerly wait for our Lord Jesus Christ to be revealed. **8** He will keep you strong to the end, so that you will be blameless on the day of our Lord Jesus Christ. **9** God, who has called you into fellowship with his Son Jesus Christ our Lord, is faithful. *[next page]*



## I Corinthians 1:1-17 - A Church Divided

### I Corinthians 1:1-17 (continued)

#### DIVISIONS IN THE CHURCH

<sup>10</sup> 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. <sup>11</sup> My brothers, some from Chloe's household have informed me that there are quarrels among you. <sup>12</sup> What I mean is this: One of you says, "I follow Paul"; another, "I follow Apollos"; another, "I follow Cephas<sup>a</sup>"; still another, "I follow Christ."

<sup>13</sup> Is Christ divided? Was Paul crucified for you? Were you baptized into<sup>b</sup> the name of Paul? <sup>14</sup> I am thankful

that I did not baptize any of you except Crispus and Gaius, <sup>15</sup> so no one can say that you were baptized into my name. <sup>16</sup> (Yes, I also baptized the household of Stephanas; beyond that, I don't remember if I baptized anyone else.) <sup>17</sup> For Christ did not send me to baptize, but to preach the gospel—not with words of human wisdom, lest the cross of Christ be emptied of its power.



## Self Study in Oneness for Week Three

YOUR WORD IS A LAMP TO MY FEET AND A LIGHT TO MY PATH. - PSALM 119:105

**Day 1** **Look:** Read Acts 18 (and the back page notes concerning the city and church of Corinth)

**Ask:**

1. Where did Paul go first in Corinth to preach the Good News of Jesus? Why do you suppose the Jews forced him to leave? What caused the strife between them?
2. Where did he go next? What happened there?
3. What do you think God's special Word to Paul at this time meant to him? What does it say to you about Who is in control of things?
4. What do we learn about Apollos in this chapter? How might he be the cause of disunity later?

**Meditate:** Who do you know who seem to resent anyone talking about Jesus? Why do you think they react this way?

**Pray:** *Each day* - Praise God. Confess your sins. Thank Him for His Word & ask Him to help you understand & apply it.  
*Today* - Pray for people you know who are rejecting the truth about Jesus? Ask God to soften their hearts.

**Day 2** **Look:** Read 1 Corinthians (Skim the whole Book, noting the issues Paul addresses.)

**2 Ask:** 1. What are some of the practical life-issues you find Paul discussing in this letter?

2. What sorts of attitudes and actions does Paul call the Corinthians to take in response to their difficulties?

**Meditate:** How does disunity in the church either cause or intensify the problems Paul identifies? How would a greater commitment to unity among themselves help the Corinthians with these issues?

**Pray:** *Today* - Ask God to help you see how others in your church family could support and assist you with your struggles and concerns and to help you take a step toward doing the same for someone you know.

**Day 3** **Look:** Read 1 Corinthians 1:1-9

**3 Ask:** 1. How does Paul define the Church (v.2)? What does this tell us about how the Church will find its unity?

2. Paul will have many serious criticisms of this church, yet he begins by giving thanks for them. Why? For what does he give God thanks? (vv.4-7) How might each of these blessings have become problems for the Corinthian believers?

3. What does Paul say about Jesus and His Father here? (vv.8-9) What does this suggest about where these people will find real help for their difficulties?

**Meditate:** Why might it be difficult for people to look to God for strength, especially where they need it most? Where do you need God's help today? Where do you think your church needs it?

**Pray:** *Today* - Ask God to help you, to heal you, to guide you, where you need it most. Ask the same for your church family.

**Day 4** **Look:** Read 1 Corinthians 1:10-17

**4 Ask:** 1. What does Paul ask his readers to do? (v.10)

2. What is happening that is working against this church's unity? (vv.11-12)

3. Knowing what you know of Paul, what reasons might people have for saying "I follow Paul"? What about "I follow Apollos" or "I follow Cephas" [= Peter]?

**Meditate:** What sort of divisions have you observed in churches today? How have competing claims by gifted leaders and their dedicated followers hurt the church throughout history? Who is the real leader of the Church? How does this reality help us evaluate the claims of other leaders?

**Pray:** *Today* - Pray for Jesus to help you see Him as the one true leader of His church and to help us avoid foolish quarrels.

**Day 5** **Look:** Read 1 Corinthians 1:10-17

**5 Ask:** 1. Jesus Christ is the One we are truly called to follow. So, what is the problem with proclaiming "I follow Christ!" when others are saying "I follow Paul (or Apollos or Peter)"? What might be the motivation for such a statement?

2. How does Paul respond to the existence of these competing parties within this church? (vv. 13-17) What do these Paul-, Apollos-, Peter- or Christ-based claims of superiority suggest about how these people viewed the church?

3. Who does Paul say we are to follow? How does this put an end to any valid competition about leadership in the Church?

**Meditate:** What would Paul say to people today who focus on their denominational identity or say with pride things like "I am a Baptist" or "I follow the Lutheran way" or "I was baptized as a Presbyterian" or "I belong to a non-denominational church where it's truly all about Jesus!"? What would he say about the way divisive party-spirit has shown itself in us?

**Pray:** *Today* - Pray for all the different types of churches you are aware of - Presbyterian, Charismatic, Methodist, Baptist, Independent, etc. - and ask Jesus to help us all see Him more clearly, follow Him more nearly and love Him more dearly.



## Notes

**Corinth** was a city with a dramatic history and an enviable location. In 146 B.C. the Roman Legions under L. Mummius Achaicus captured and destroyed the city, and it lay in ruins for a century. Then in 44 B.C. it was rebuilt by Julius Caesar and proceeded to grow rapidly. By the time of Paul's visit to the city about 100 years later, it had become a great cosmopolitan center, the capital of the province of Achaia and the third most important city in the Roman Empire (after Rome and Alexandria). This rapid growth was mainly due to its favorable location on a narrow stretch of land that connected the northern and southern parts of Greece which featured two fine harbors to its east and west. Thus Corinth controlled trade routes in all directions. It was also a place of fertile soil where grapes especially were grown in abundance (our word "currant" comes from "Corinth"). All kinds of people found their way to Corinth. "Of Greek cities the least Greek, it was at this time the least Roman of Roman colonies... where Greeks, Latins, Syrians, Asiatics, Egyptians, and Jews, bought and sold, laboured and revelled, quarrelled and hob-nobbed, in the city and its ports, as nowhere else in Greece." (Thomas Charles Edwards, First Epistle to the Corinthians, 1885). This was also a city whose very name became synonymous with luxurious excess, philosophical pretension, vice and debauchery. "Corinthianize" was a popular Greek way of saying "go to the devil." It was here around A.D. 50 that the Apostle Paul spent about 18 months (his longest stay anywhere except Ephesus) during his 2nd Missionary Journey (see Acts Ch. 18) and found himself fighting the battle "to prevent Christianity from succumbing to the debilitating enticements offered by Paganism" (Richard Peace, 1 Corinthians). As the following quote indicates it was a difficult battle: *The ideal of the Corinthian was the reckless development of the individual. The merchant who made his gain by all and every means, the man of pleasure surrendering himself to every lust, the athlete steeled to every bodily exercise and proud in his physical strength, are the true Corinthian types: in a word the man who recognised no superior and no law but his own desires.* (R St. John Parry, The First Epistle to the Corinthians, 1926).

**First Corinthians** was written by Paul three or four years after his visit to Corinth because he had been informed that this important church was in danger. It was marked by a divisive spirit and struggled with serious issues related to sexual immorality, lawsuits, marriage, foods & idolatry, proper worship, supernatural gifts & resurrection. It was a church full of young-in-the-faith believers whose pagan culture of wealth, pride & independence made it difficult for them to submit to the redemptive authority of Jesus Christ over them & to live as His followers. The letter is somewhat unique in that it offers very little direct teaching about God & theology but instead remains focused on the Corinthians' practical issues confronting & correcting their errors in thought & behavior. **Additional Notes: Sosthenes** (v.1) - This may well be the same man mentioned in Acts 18:8 & 17 who was the leader of the Jewish Synagogue in Corinth & who may have later become a Christian and a partner in Paul's ministry. The letter is written by Paul (note the "I" in v. 4), but he models unity in Christ by including Sosthenes in the greeting & calling this man "our brother." **Their Lord and ours** (v.2) - Paul calls them to a holiness that is shared & is based not on superior knowledge or practice but on having a common Lord in Jesus Christ. Thus he begins his correction of those who desire to set themselves apart from & above other believers. **Called you into fellowship with His Son** (v.9) - God Himself - Jesus Himself - is both the source & the goal of the calling that makes us Christians. Nobody is saved because their church group is smarter than the others. We are saved by Jesus. And nobody is called ultimately to be a Presbyterian (or any other *type* of Christian). We are called to Jesus. **Divisions** (v.10) - *Schism* is the root word in Greek & it was used to refer to tears in clothing. **Wisdom** (v.17) - (Gk. *sophia*) This is a key word in this letters & a key to factionalism: It can only happen when we misunderstand

### Small Group Guide

the unifying & integrating nature of God's wisdom.



**Hearing About Us** - 1. Who were some of your heroes (real or fictional) when you were a child? Who are your heroes today? 2. Did you ever dispute with others over your heroes (Who was more heroic... Which one would win in a fight...)?

**Heeding God's Word** - 1. What problems were plaguing the Corinthian Church? What do you think was behind these dispute? 2. Do they remind you of church disputes you've heard of or been a part of? 3. As time permits, share any insights you gained from your Self Study in Oneness for this week (see page 3).

**Helping One Another in Prayer to God** - Share prayer requests among group members as you are willing and able.

Hold hands and go around the circle with each group member praying, out loud or silently, for one another like last week.