I realize that with this subject there exists the possibility of doing more harm than good, if I am misunderstood. First, let it be understood I am not preaching at any one. In my ministry I can with all honesty and candor say; that I have never used the pulpit as a means to preach at what I perceived as a problem and I am not doing so now. If I were just picking passages to preach on I probably would not preach on this passage tonight. But the truth is that preparation for this series started weeks ago and so it is the Holy Spirit that brings us to this subject on this particular evening.

Read with me beginning in verse ten, “Now I plead with you, brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you all speak the same thing, and that there be no divisions among you, but that you be perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment. (11) For it has been declared to me concerning you, my brethren, by those of Chloe’s household, that there are contentions among you. (12) Now I say this, that each of you says, “I am of Paul,” or “I am of Apollos,” or “I am of Cephas,” or “I am of Christ.” (13) Is Christ divided? Was Paul crucified for you? Or were you baptized in the name of Paul? (14) I thank God that I baptized none of you except Crispus and Gaius, (15) lest anyone should say that I had baptized in my own name. (16) Yes, I also baptized the household of Stephanas. Besides, I do not know whether I baptized any other. (17) For Christ did not send me to baptize, but to preach the gospel, not with wisdom of words, lest the cross of Christ should be made of no effect.”

First, The Things That Divide Them

· The Quarrels (vv. 10-11)

“Now I plead with you, brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you all speak the same thing, and that there be no divisions among you, but that you be perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment. (11) For it has been declared to me concerning you, my brethren, by those of Chloe’s household, that there are contentions among you.”

To say that the church at Corinth was a church with problems is a huge understate-ment. Here is a church in which a man is having an immoral relationship with his stepmother and instead of reproving him, some defending his freedom in Christ. Believers are suing one another in the secular courts of law. Some are visiting temple prostitutes while others are advancing celibacy as the Christian ideal. There are disagreements about the role that women could play in the church and the church can not decide how to deal with those who want to speak in tongues in the services. But among the Corinthians many sins and shortcomings, quarreling is the one
that Paul chose to deal with first. The unity of the church is of such crucial important that Paul puts if first in his list of problems he has to deal with at Corinth. But is unity, really that important. Well, God seems to think so!

Jesus outlines his ideal for his people in (John 17:11, 21-23) “Now I am no longer in the world, but these are in the world, and I come to You. Holy Father, keep through Your name those whom You have given Me, that they may be one as We are.... (21) that they all may be one, as You, Father, are in Me, and I in You; that they also may be one in Us, that the world may believe that You sent Me. (22) And the glory which You gave Me I have given them, that they may be one just as We are one: (23) I in them, and You in Me; that they may be made perfect in one, and that the world may know that You have sent Me, and have loved them as You have loved Me.”

As John MacArthur states, “Tragically - though it is forbidden by God, is totally out of character with our redeemed natures and is in complete opposition to everything our Lord prayed for and intended for His church – fighting does occur among believers, among those who are called to be one in the Lord Jesus Christ.” [John MacArthur. The MacArthur New Testament Commentary – 1 Corinthians. (Chicago: Moody, 1984) p. 24]

This desire for unity is not new. In the book of Proverbs (133; 1) in the Old Testament we read, “Behold, how good and how pleasant it is For brethren to dwell together in unity.”

· The Cliques (v. 12)

Verse twelve identifies that there four cliques in the church at Corinth. “Now I say this, that each of you says, “I am of Paul,” or “I am of Apollos,” or “I am of Cephas,” or “I am of Christ.”

They centered around one of the four powerful men who had been a leader in the church at Corinth. First, there are those who say, “We are of Paul.” Hey we are the founders of this church we have been around here since the beginning. We are the most important based on longevity. The rest of you guys are just newcomers.

Then there are those who identify themselves by saying, “We are of Apollos.” Apollos was a cultured and polished speaker. It is likely that he attracted the educated and cultured from among the Gentile believers.

Third, there are those who identify themselves by saying, ‘We are Cephas” (Peter). Most likely this group is made up of Hebrew Christians, Christians of Jewish origin. These may have been people of deep spiritual roots who may have been a little worried about the spiritual depth of some of the recent converts.

The fourth group, the super spiritual ones, identified themselves by saying, “We are of Christ.” But you know I don’t think they are any better than the rest. Although this group sounds
pious, even spiritual, on the surface, Paul included this group just like the rest. Their very tone conveys a sense of superiority, that was offense to God.

It seems as if they are divided along racial, cultural and even educational lines. Here certainly is a church that is divided against itself. But what may be even more tragic is that a large portion of the church may not fit into any of the cliques.

No one likes to think that they are a part of a clique. It has a snobby and not on likes to think they are a snob. By the way here is a bit of trivia for you, “Do you know where the term snob comes from? “When Oxford and Cambridge Universities decided to admit commoners as students in the 1600s, each student was listed on the record by name and title. The commoners’ names were listed with the Latin inscription, Sine Nobilitate, meaning without nobility. The abbreviation was S. Nob., The word “snob” is still in use today.” [Bits & Pieces, June 25, 1992] We don’t like to think of ourselves as snobs.

And although we may not have these exact groups in our church we still have our cliques. We tend to congregate with people like ourselves, with similar background and similar interest. There is nothing innately wrong with this, unless we become so close that we never reach out to include anyone new in our group.

Paul seeks to answer this dispute by asking a series of rhetorical questions in verse thirteen. First he asks, “Is Christ divided?” The answer to this question of course is, No! Next he asks, “Was Paul crucified for you?” Again of course the answer is no! And finally he asks, “Or were you baptized in the name of Paul?” Again the answer is no!

This question causes Paul to go on to reason beginning in verse fourteen, “I thank God that I baptized none of you except Crispus and Gaius, (15) lest anyone should say that I had baptized in my own name. (16) Yes, I also baptized the household of Stephanas. Besides, I do not know whether I baptized any other. (17) For Christ did not send me to baptize, but to preach the gospel...”By saying this Paul is not minimizing the importance of baptism but rather was emphasizing the importance of the preaching of the Gospel.

Jesus in his wisdom did not personally baptize his followers. Can you imagine the bragging right of being able to say, “Yes, but I was baptized by Jesus.” The rise of this party spirit with the church made Paul glad that he had not personally baptized many of the believers there. Charles Swindoll observes, “Apparently, they had come to believe that the authenticity of their faith rested on not only on their baptism but also their baptizer.” [Charles Swindoll. Strong Reproofs for a Scandalous Church. (Bible Study Guide) (Fullerton, Calif.:Insight for Living, 1988) p. 21]

Secondly, The Bond That Unites Them (v. 10)

Now back to Paul original plea in verse ten, “Now I plead with you, brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you all speak the same thing, and that there be no divisions
among you, but that you be perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment.” That which unites us is more important than anything that can divide us.

A. W. Tozer observes, “Has it ever occurred to you that one hundred pianos all tuned to the same fork are automatically tuned to each other? They are of one accord by being tuned, not to each other, but to another standard to which each one must individually bow. So one hundred worshipers [meeting] together, each one looking away to Christ, are in heart nearer to each other than they could possibly be, were they to become ‘unity’ conscious and turn their eyes away from God to strive for closer fellowship. [A. W. Tozer, The Pursuit of God]

Conclusion

Ladies and Gentlemen we are a family. You may wonder, well how does that change the subject that we are addressing. Well, think about for a moment, “What happens when members of a family disagree?” “Do they stop being family?” No of course they don’t. We are related by blood nothing can ever change that. We disagree with members of our families but because we love one another so we get over it and we go on! As the church of Jesus we are related by blood, His shed blood on the Cross of Calvary. We have our disagreement, but because we love each other, we get over them and go on, because the work He has left us to do is to important to waste our time and energy.

It is obvious that fabric of unity in the body of Christ is easily torn or split, with quarrels and cliques and pride. To keep this from happening or to mend the places that it has already been frayed we must, refocus on who we are serving, leave behind our personal aspirations and recommit ourselves to love one another as a family.