

Care Group Homework
(For the week of November 1, 2009)
I Corinthians 1:10-17 - What We Believe About the Church

Getting to know one another:

1. This last week we were able to watch football, basketball, baseball and hockey. It also snowed. What is your favorite sport to watch? What is your favorite outdoor activity?

Getting into the Word:

2. Read I Corinthians 1:10-17. Why do you think we continue to have divisions in the church today?

Divisions arise out of our desire to be right all the time.

We don't want to appear to have made a bad decision and follow the wrong teacher.

3. What is Paul's response to divisions in the church? How should that guide our response?

Paul strips away the divisions by reminding us that we are all saved through Christ. The issue of baptism in the text appears tied to identifying with a particular teacher (the one who baptized you). Paul seeks to move away from counting baptisms to preaching the gospel. Our response to division in the church should come on two levels, we should do our best to seek not to be the source of division and also we should attempt to help people focus on that which is ultimately important - the preaching of the Gospel.

4. What do you think would be sufficient reason to divide from other believers? What are some problems with choosing to divide? What are some benefits?

Depending on the depth of the division, there are many reasons why someone might want to fellowship with a different local congregation. Worshiping in a different congregation is different from dividing. You can choose to worship someplace else simply on the basis of personal preference (since worship styles are not matters of Biblical standards). When our divisions arise out of a militant statement of right and wrong (oftentimes assigning the 'wrong' church to a position of heresy or worse) such division lacks insight into the great variety of valid interpretations of scripture and personal preferences or emphasis available within the church. There are significant benefits to dividing for the purpose of providing church experiences which attract those outside of Christ. Many of the issues which divide us are in reality matters of preference. I prefer contemporary worship over traditional. I prefer formal worship over informal. I prefer Coke over Pepsi. Even if we were to extend that to the political arena it in large part still works. The Republicans and Democrats have what appear to be dramatic and unresolvable differences yet both rely upon some underlying principles which unite us.

In discovering our common ground we are able to build upon our points of agreement and discern that many of our biggest conflicts will melt away as we learn to love one another with the love of Christ.

5. Ephesians 5:22-24 tells us that Christ is the head of the church. What is the importance of that statement? How does it play out in our lives?

From this statement we draw the conclusion that ultimately any authority we grant to an earthly leader must be held under the umbrella of Christ as the head. We can always appeal to Christ who is the head over any authority we may grant one another.

6. Acts 6 teaches that at least in some circumstances the local church made decision concerning the appointing of leaders. What other means of choosing leaders do you see in the scripture? How does the concept of the priesthood of all believers impact your view of church structure?

I Timothy 1:3 may imply that Paul appointed Timothy as pastor of Ephesus. Titus 1:5 may also imply that Paul had appointed Titus as pastor in Crete - and even having authority in the region to appoint elders.

7. We affirm two ordinances of the church, Baptism and the Lord's Supper. Do you think there could be other ordinances? Although the words are often used interchangeably, what is the difference between an ordinance and a sacrament? Why is it significant that we believe in ordinances rather than sacraments?

Some would add washing of the feet as another ordinance of the church. Webster defines a sacraments as "a formal religious act that is sacred as a sign or symbol of a spiritual reality". They define an ordinance as "something ordained or decreed by a deity." In common usage a sacrament has come to mean an ordinance which has an effect upon our salvation. The question of believing in ordinances rather than sacraments is only relevant when considered from the perspective of common usage. If the sacraments could save you that it is not faith which saves you but the practice of some sacrament. Such a perspective strips faith from the salvation equation.