

## #269 "Falling in Line"

By Brent Barnett

[www.relevantbibleteaching.com](http://www.relevantbibleteaching.com)

1 Corinthians 1:10-13 says,

"Now I exhort you, brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, **that you all agree and that there be no divisions among you, but that you be made complete in the same mind and in the same judgment.** For I have been informed concerning you, my brethren, by Chloe's *people*, that there are quarrels among you. Now I mean this, that each one of you is saying, 'I am of Paul,' and 'I of Apollos,' and 'I of Cephas,' and 'I of Christ.' Has Christ been divided? Paul was not crucified for you, was he? Or were you baptized in the name of Paul?" (emphasis mine)

Paul in this passage gives a strong admonition that the body of believers would all agree and end the divisions by being made complete in the same mind and judgment. This is similar to what he said in Philippians 2:1-2 by emphasizing that if the Spirit does indeed bring fellowship, believers must be of the same mind, of the same love, united in spirit, and intent on one purpose. In other words, anything less than doctrinal agreement is a result of something not reflective of Christ or His desires for His church. Sadly, a bird's eye view of professing Christianity is not indicative of agreement but of division, infighting, quarrels, taking sides, meaningless debates, fake unity that is really tolerance and compromise, and the exaltation of people and institutions rather than Christ and His Word. As a young person interested in serving Christ, there is great pressure to decide which label to take, which denominational seminary to join, which leader to get in league with, and which movement has the best "momentum" behind it. Confusion is quick to set in for those who try to make sense of it all, while others enjoy the pride and comfort of having a group to side with and fund their future. But should a person talk a denominational book, especially if they don't agree with it in its entirety? By taking on a particular label, do they lose the chance to ever stand above the interdenominational fray by teaching truth that stands in judgment over all? The point is that there is great pressure to pick people to follow and to get dragged into the ongoing skirmishes when the Bible says that we should seek doctrinal purity and desire to fall in line with Christ and His Word. There is a cost to contending for doctrinal purity and true unity, but it is what true believers must do (Jude 1:3).

**Unity is attained via actual doctrinal agreement by faith through the working of the Spirit in the hearts of the redeemed as He helps them to grow complete and mature in Christ** (Ephesians 4:11-16). Jesus did come to bring a sword which divides based upon doctrine and belief (Matthew 10:34), and lies must be cut down as people actually come to a common belief concerning the Scripture. Sadly, many do not believe that to be possible or even worth seeking out. With man, it is impossible, but with God and the Holy Spirit in the hearts of believers, it is possible (Mark 10:27) and worth striving our entire lives for (Romans 8:14, 1 Corinthians 2:16). Of course, it is a process, and it requires much patience, grace, and humility. But it is the calling nonetheless. There is, after all, only one Lord, one faith, one baptism into Christ, one body, one Spirit, one God and Father over all (Ephesians 4:4-5). Rather than picking a certain

label or taking a particular side of a debate, people should ask why they are being given the choice to follow a manmade doctrinal position in the first place? It should be irrelevant who is on any one side of an issue. The only thing that matters is what the Bible says. Entire seminaries and books of theology can be wrong in part or in whole, and there is no ultimate authority to a consensus vote, an ordination board, a denominational leader, or a figurehead of a movement or trend.

It is the Bible that separates truth from error. It is the Spirit that unifies, and He does so by leading people into all truth. John 16:13 says, "But when He, the Spirit of truth, comes, *He will guide you into all the truth*; for He will not speak on His own initiative, but whatever He hears, He will speak; and He will disclose to you what is to come" (italics mine). **The promise of God to Christians is not that He will help them find some truth or partial truth but that He will guide them into all the truth.** John 17:17 says, "Sanctify them in the truth; Your word is truth." It all comes down to faith in the Spirit's power to unify and actually give a true interpretation and illumination to the believer's heart concerning what God's Word says. If we cannot ever know the truth, then we cannot be sanctified and unified. But if Jesus was right to pray for believer's sanctification and unity (John 17:21), then the Word of God which is the truth can and does sanctify and unify. The Word itself is powerful and able to divide even the thoughts and intentions of the heart (Hebrews 4:12). Indeed, that is where truth must work, for it is pride, deceit, arrogance, and lying that leads to false teaching. Motives, attitudes, agendas, and modes of thinking must be purified, and then the Scripture will become clearer to those with humble hearts. Sin creates bias and confusion (Deuteronomy 7:23, 1 Corinthians 14:33), and it is as God purifies the heart that the doctrinal understanding comes together and makes sense. Doctrine has consequences, and it can be helpful to analyze the practical outworking of a particular viewpoint in order to expose why it is not of God or not consistent with the rest of the Scripture. Doctrine that is true always leads to humility rather than pride, and it always highlights God's grace, the need for faith, and the sufficiency of Christ and His Word.

Unity is not about finding common ground between various sects, but it is about holding the Scripture in judgment over all particular creeds and doctrinal viewpoints and coming into alignment with it. It is not about being of John Calvin, John Wesley, or Bob Jones, just to name a few label names, but being of Christ. It is not wrong to imitate a person inasmuch as they have imitated Christ, but Christ must always be the only chief and fully reliable role model (1 Corinthians 11:1, Hebrews 13:7). **This is where people too often err. They oversell people and market their achievements and systems of belief rather than sell out to Christ and His Word above all other sources of knowledge.**

If there is a division among true believers, somebody has believed a lie and interpreted Scripture incorrectly. Somebody has fallen in line with somebody other than Christ, and this needs to get fixed. There is a time to split from a group that denies sound doctrine or adds to or takes away from the Scripture. That is part of contending for the truth, and it preserves the hope of unity by preserving the doctrine that unifies.

The early church was simply known as Christians (a term which implied that they had fallen in line with Christ, likely with mocking intent- Acts 11:26, Acts 26:28) and followers of the Way (Acts 9:2), clearly inferring an allegiance to Christ above all others (John 14:6). Is it not good enough just to be a Christian

anymore? Why must we also tie ourselves to labels and movements and famous Christians? Why has Christ Himself become so small and the Scripture so downgraded?

Paul's rhetorical question was, "Has Christ been divided?" The point is that Christ cannot be divided even if those who profess to follow in His steps are. The admonition is thus clear. **Christ doesn't wish to be divided, and He won't be. Either we are with Him and in alignment with His Word, or we are not. It is as simple as that.** If we want to grow in unity, we must fall in line with Him and ask the Spirit to guide us into all truth according to the Word. It alone has the power to sanctify, and teaching and preaching are a waste if they are not grounded in the authority of Scripture and backed by its instruction. **We must remember that, in heaven, nobody will be of Paul, of Peter, or of Apollos, just of Christ. We would be wise to fall in line with Him.**