

## Our Savior's Earnest Appeal for Unity

✠ **Say the same thing.** (v.10)

✠ **Dissolve the divisions.** (vv.10-13a)

✠ **Uncross the cross of Christ.** (vv.10,13b-17)

In the name of Jesus, our only Lord and Savior, dearly redeemed family of God:

Among God's people there has always been a challenge to avoid extremes. Satan suggested Adam and Eve were stuck following God, but led them off into the extreme of self-worship. When the Israelites entered the Promised Land, the Bible says, "*everyone did as he saw fit.*" (Judges 17:6; 21:25) In the time of the Judges disunity with God and each other brought down God's wrath and judgment. But when God raised up a judge like Gideon, God had to make sure the man did not fall to his own conceit. First God sent home 22,000 soldiers and reduced Gideon's army by 2/3. Then God said 10,000 troops were still too many. When God was finished, only 300 were left, "*in order that Israel may not boast against me that her own strength has saved her.*" (Judges 7:2 NIV84) God saved His people by His own power.

Disunity can tear through a country, a family, or a congregation like cancer through a pancreas. The Lord of the Church wants to unite us to save souls for eternity. The dear Holy Spirit through the Lord's Apostle Paul gives **Our Savior's Earnest Appeal for Unity**. It literally begins with this:

✠ **Say the same thing.** (v.10)

*"I appeal to you, brothers, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ...."* Since Paul was sent as Jesus' own Apostle, he writes in his second letter: *"We are therefore Christ's ambassadors, as though God were making his appeal through us. We implore you on Christ's behalf: Be reconciled to God."* (2 Corinthians 5:20 NIV84) Ever since Jesus ascended into heaven, He communicates with us through His apostles, pastors and teachers who **Say the same thing**, *"that all of you agree with one another...."*

Did you know most theologians today, and many who call themselves "Lutheran," claim this is impossible? They "agree to disagree." But Jesus gave His marching orders to His Church with no room to commit "the great omission in the Great Commission." Jesus said: *"All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore while going, disciple all ethnic groups, by baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and by teaching them to guard and treasure everything I have commanded you."* (Matthew 28:18f TPA) This is not "cafeteria Christianity" to pick and choose. God says: *"Let...the one who has my word speak it faithfully."* (Jeremiah 23:28)

When God says, *"You shall not murder,"* and, *"Speak up for those who cannot speak for themselves"* (Proverbs 31:8), we cannot be silent when some insist it's a woman's right to abort her baby. This is not politics; this is God's Word. Likewise, with marriage. It's God's institution between one man and one woman for life. Society does not get to change that. Christ' people are not allowed to say everyone is going to heaven. God says of Jesus: *"Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to men by which we must be saved."* (Acts 4:12) In public and private God wants His people to **Say the same thing**. Jesus says, *"Whoever confesses me before men (literally, says the same thing), I will also confess him before my Father in heaven. But whoever disowns me before men, I will disown him before my Father in heaven."* (Matthew 10:32f TPA) **Say the same thing** and...

✠ **Dissolve the divisions.** (vv.10-13a)

Someone might ask, "Does this mean we can never have our own opinion?" Corinth was like the Twin Cities, at the crossroads of commerce, filled with talented people. And the Lord's Apostle Paul praises God for the many gifts in their congregation. But notice how he says this: *"I always thank God*

*for you because of his grace given you in Christ Jesus.”* (1:4) See the goal emerging? In matters of personal opinion where God’s Word is silent, we can disagree without being disagreeable just as we can **“contend for the faith”** (Jude 3) without being contentious. Where Christ’s love prevails, His people **Dissolve the divisions. Divisions** grow like weeds from personal opinions disconnected from Christ.

Aren’t you glad you don’t live in Corinth? **“My brothers, some from Chloe’s household have informed me that there are quarrels (i.e., divisions) among you. What I mean is this: One of you says, “I follow Paul”; another, “I follow Apollos”; another, “I follow Cephas”; still another, “I follow Christ.” Is Christ divided?...”** Some claimed to follow Christ as if that meant not following Paul and the other apostles. In our day some may refer to this as “rugged individualism,” which can be understood in a good way, but sometimes is little more than another excuse for disunity like the time of the Judges when **“everyone did as he saw fit.”** (Judges 17:6; 21:25) Whether over-loyal to leaders or overblown with self, **Dissolve the divisions** and hear **Our Savior’s Earnest Appeal for Unity.**

God’s Word makes us one. Our Savior earnestly pleads through Paul in Ephesians: **“As a prisoner for the Lord, then, I urge you to live a life worthy of the calling you have received. Be completely humble and gentle; be patient, bearing with one another in love. Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace. There is one body and one Spirit – just as you were called to one hope when you were called – one Lord, one faith, one baptism; one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all.”** (4:1–6 NIV84) **“One faith”** and one **cross of Christ**, so...

#### ✠ **Uncross the cross of Christ. (vv.10,13b-17)**

Strange isn’t it, how many churchmen have taken Christ’s simple command to baptize all people in the name of the Triune God and crossed off the unity? In Corinth they were hung up on who did the baptizing. As long as God’s Word was used with the water, whose hands sprinkled or poured it was so unimportant that Paul could not even remember whom he had baptized. And the reason was simply this as Paul says, **“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.”**

The Lord of the Church does not want His people to get hung up on the hands of baptism or the voice of the orator. Whether the preacher is eloquent like Apollos, educated like Paul or prominent like Peter, the focus always has to be on **the cross of Christ**. That’s the source of power for your soul to go to heaven. Only by **the cross of Christ** can the Church gather blood bought souls for glory. Our first verse wires the circuit to this last verse to **Uncross the cross of Christ: “I appeal to you, brothers, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that all of you... be perfectly united in mind and thought.”**

Here’s where the Holy Spirit’s Greek original is fascinating. The word for **“perfectly united”** (καταρτιζω) is also found in our Gospel lesson when Jesus called the brothers Peter and Andrew, James and John from **“preparing”** or **“mending their nets”** to **“Come, follow me, and I will make you fishers of men.”** (Matthew 4:18-22) Nets got tangled from fishing, like congregations working hard to catch souls. Time and patience are needed to **Uncross the cross of Christ** to keep us all lined up, working together.

Our “net” nowadays is more like a satellite uplink, cross wired to the electrical grid. God beams His Word of truth to sinners the world over, covered by the forgiveness won on Calvary’s cross and broadcast around the globe. If CNN can newflash the globe, don’t short the Gospel as if it might not be heard. But a satellite dish or cable TV can’t broadcast the message unless plugged into the power grid. Christ gathers His Church into congregations. God beams down His blessings of grace and forgiveness through Word and sacrament. But unless we are plugged in, we lack the power to proclaim. Wires close, but not connected, short out. A three-pronged plug of Father, Son and Holy Spirit keeps the juice flowing between Christians without any sparks from crossed wires. **Uncross the cross of Christ. Dissolve the divisions. Say the same thing.** This is our joy in Jesus, **“perfectly united”** in Him. Amen.