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“Unity in Diversity:” Embracing Bhinneka Tunggal Ika in Diverse Churches Based on 1 Corinthians 1:10-17 and Ephesians 4:1-6

Melvin Abrillian 

Vancouver School of Theology, Canada

melvinabrillian@gmail.com

Abstract:

This article examines efforts to acquire unity in heterogeneous churches by drawing inspiration from 1 Corinthians 1:10-17 and Ephesians 4:1-6. In Indonesia, unity is challenged due to divisions arising from differences of opinion. Similar to the Corinthians, recent disputes between Christians have emerged due to distinctions in the doctrine of salvation. Through a descriptive qualitative method using literary and historical criticism, this literature study delves into the historical and theological context of the two letters. It presents practical efforts to achieve ecclesial unity. The results show that both texts emphasize the importance of avoiding factionalism and promoting the unity that Paul aspires to. Interestingly, the author of Ephesians uses Paul’s argument that Christians are of one baptism and adds teachings that Paul did not record in 1 Corinthians 1:10-17: five moral virtues that believers can apply in their daily lives and seven concepts of oneness theology that underlie ecclesial unity. In conclusion, the epistles warn the modern church to maintain and strengthen the “Bhinneka Tunggal Ika” spirit in their complex and varied congregational life. Therefore, they can also emulate the accomplishments of the Ephesian audiences, who embraced and celebrated diversity among diverse members.

Keywords:

Corinthians; Ephesians;
unity; diversity; division

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Melvin Abrillian



INTRODUCTION

Bhinneka Tunggal Ika is the Republic of Indonesia's motto, meaning "Unity in Diversity." This expression signifies the unity of the Indonesian people amidst a diverse range of ethnicities, religions, races, cultures, customs, traditions, and groups. It also highlights the relationship between unity and diversity, which is relevant to the nation, the state, and everyday life (families and communities).¹ Additionally, the slogan "united we stand, divided we fall" further bolsters the spirit of unity among Indonesian citizens.²

Despite progress in promoting equality and harmony, instances of discrimination, intolerance, and conflict continue to be pervasive in our nation. For instance, the clashes between the Nduga and Lani Jaya tribes in Papua in 2022,³ as well as the dispute between Christians and Muslims in Tolikara in 2015,⁴ are just a few examples. Furthermore, internal disagreements within certain groups persist, leading to conflicts and factions between Islamic schools, madhhabs, and organizations.⁵ Even the Christian church is not immune to such issues. Recently, a young pastor named Brian Siawarta referred to himself as a Progressive Christian due to his belief in universal salvation,⁶ which led to condemnation and accusations of heresy from other Christians on social media.

This evidence is unfortunate because I observed these internal debates and disputes in the early church, particularly in the Corinthian community. I hypothesized that the Corinthian divisions continue in today's church, which contradicts the ideal of unity emphasized in the New Testament, especially in the letter to the Ephesians. Therefore, I will analyze the teachings on church unity in 1 Corinthians 1:10-17 and Ephesians 4:1-6 to draw parallels between the experience of the first-century assembly and today's community. I will

¹ Audrey Kahin, *Historical Dictionary of Indonesia* (Maryland: Rowman & Littlefield, 2015), 73.

² Okta Herningsih, Patriantoro, and Amriani Amir, "Peribahasa Dalam Bahasa Melayu Dialek Tayan Hilir," *Jurnal Pendidikan Dan Pembelajaran Khatulistiwa* 8, no. 10 (2019): 1–10.

³ Editorial Team, "Bentrokan Warga Nduga-Lanny Jaya Papua, Tiga Luka Kena Panah," *CNN Indonesia*, 2022, <https://www.cnnindonesia.com/nasional/20220109124546-20-744345/bentrokan-warga-nduga-lanny-jaya-papua-tiga-luka-kena-panah>.

⁴ Editorial Team, "Insiden Tolikara Bukan Hanya Konflik Agama," *CNN Indonesia*, 2015, <https://www.cnnindonesia.com/nasional/20150720145313-20-67278/insiden-tolikara-bukan-hanya-konflik-agama>.

⁵ Egi Sukma Baihaki, "Konflik Internal Umat Islam: Antara Warisan Sejarah Dan Harapan Di Masa Depan," *Fikrah: Jurnal Ilmu Aqidah Dan Studi Keagamaan* 6, no. 1 (June 30, 2018): 49–72, <https://doi.org/10.21043/fikrah.v6i1.2606>.

⁶ Login, "Ketemu Pendeta Brian, Habib Jafar Syahadat Ulang," Deddy Corbuzier, 2024, <https://youtu.be/jSzC-KnVjEU?si=LhGsut3R8RDoYHBP>.

also discuss practical actions the modern church can take to maintain Bhinneka Tunggal Ika in a complex and diverse church life.

In recent years, several theological studies have explored church unity, church divisions stemming from differences in opinion, and the interpretation of both texts. For instance, Rumondor's research suggests that the Corinthians experienced division due to pride and the cult of particular leaders. In response, Paul urged unity and stressed the equality of all apostles.⁷ My study differs from his in that I present baptism as the concept Paul used to promote unity, and Ephesians 4:1-6 complements his argument by providing practical ways to achieve church unity.

Santo's analysis of Ephesians 4:1-16 states that unity is developed through the commonality of the body of Christ and the diversity of gifts.⁸ However, my research focuses solely on verse 6, delving into the theological foundation and practical measures to gain unity not explicitly outlined in 1 Corinthians 1:10-17. Moreover, Adon and Budi's research proposes the church as an ambassador of God's love amid Indonesia's diversity crisis.⁹ Unlike their work, my article centers on unity among Christians rather than among religious communities, and I also present additional practical steps beyond love, drawing from Ephesians 4:1-6.

METHODS

In this research, I utilize a descriptive qualitative method based on a literature study. I need to trace various facts and data from ancient times so that I will refer to written references, such as the New Revised Standard Version Updated Edition (NRSVUE), monographs, commentaries on the two letters, and relevant scholarly articles. Using literary

⁷ Bobby A. Rumondor, "Konsep Paulus Dalam Mengatasi Perpecahan Gereja Di Korintus Dan Implikasinya Pada Gereja Masa Kini," *Jurnal Rumea: Pendidikan Dan Teologi Kristen* 1, no. 2 (2021): 13-33.

⁸ Joseph Christ Santo, "Makna Kesatuan Gereja Dalam Efesus 4:1-16," *Jurnal Teologi El-Shadday* 4, no. 2 (2017): 1-34.

⁹ Mathias Jebaru Adon and Antonius Sad Budi, "Komunitas Kristiani Sebagai Duta Kasih Allah Di Tengah Kebhinekaan Bangsa Indonesia," *LOGON ZOES: Jurnal Teologi, Sosial Dan Budaya* 4, no. 2 (September 14, 2021): 135-53, <https://doi.org/10.53827/lz.v4i2.28>.

and historical criticism,¹⁰ I will discover both authors' ecclesiological ideas regarding the "Unity in Diversity" they aspire to in the body of Christ.

In my research process, I use four data analysis techniques based on Miles and Huberman's framework: data collection, reduction, presentation, and conclusion.¹¹ First, I will gather data from written sources and filter the information for analysis. Then, I will present the findings and discuss the conversations of the two authors in both texts, their respective opinions' backgrounds, and the comparison or development of the theology of church unity as discussed in 1 Corinthians 1:10-17 and Ephesians 4:1-6. Finally, I will provide contemporary implications for modern churches in dispute and conclude this study.

DISCUSSION

Literary Criticism: The Context of Both Texts

1 Corinthians 1:10-17

1 Corinthians is one of seven uncontested Pauline letters, alongside Romans, 2 Corinthians, Galatians, Philippians, 1 Thessalonians, and Philemon. This means historians and theologians have unanimously agreed that Paul is the undisputed author of all these epistles. After establishing the church, Paul wrote the first letter to the Corinthians (5:9). The contents of this letter are unknown except for Paul's urging to avoid associations with sexually immoral Christians. Paul and Apollos also did not seem to regard each other as rivals or have a bad relationship (16:12).¹²

Afterward, the Corinthian community experienced a schism, and Chloe's people were there, so they reported it verbally to Paul in Ephesus. Besides that, he also received a letter from the church asking him questions about some matters (7:1), hand-delivered by Stephanas, Fortunatus, and Achaicus, along with some oral information (16:15-18). In

¹⁰ Biblical criticism aims to objectively understand the meaning of biblical authors using scientific methods, particularly history and literature. John Barton, *The Nature of Biblical Criticism* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2007), 4.

¹¹ Sugiyono, *Metode Penelitian Pendidikan: Pendekatan Kuantitatif, Kualitatif, Dan R&D* (Bandung: Alfabeta, 2015), 338.

¹² David A. DeSilva, *An Introduction to the New Testament: Contexts, Methods, and Ministry Formation* (Illinois: InterVarsity Press, 2018), 494; Mark Allan Powell, *Introducing the New Testament: A Historical, Literary, and Theological Survey* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2009), 278.

response to all these reports, Paul wrote 1 Corinthians,¹³ where Sosthenes is also believed to be the co-author because the first verse includes his name.¹⁴ Since his three-year stay in Ephesus was around 52-55 CE (Acts 20:31), and he wrote it before Pentecost (1 Cor. 16:8), this epistle was probably written around 55 CE during his third journey¹⁵ for the mixed church of lower and upper-class Jews and Gentiles at Corinth, considering the many races there.¹⁶

Specifically, 1 Corinthians 1:10-17 is in the body of the letter, precisely in the first part: The Division (1:10-4:21). After a brief introduction, it begins with Paul addressing the news of the division among them. He emphasizes that his comments are free from any party interests because the divisions go against the gospel (1:13-31). He also asserts that all preachers are only servants (3:5)¹⁷ and his gospel is not of human wisdom (1:17) but a message of divine wisdom revealed and understood by the Spirit (2:1-3:23). This counters the Sophist claims in chapters 1-4, especially 2:1-5, and asserts that the spirit of factionalism must be overthrown (3:21).¹⁸ To conclude his argument, he points to his own example (4:1-21).¹⁹

Ephesians 4:1-6

Ephesians is one of six contested Pauline letters, alongside Colossians, 1-2 Timothy, Titus, and 2 Thessalonians. This means scholars are still debating the authorship of these epistles because they are not uniquely Pauline. They argue that Ephesians explains Paul's topics but with different arguments. For example, Paul mentions Christ is the church's foundation in 1 Corinthians 3:5-11, whereas Ephesians 2:19-22 says the apostles and

¹³ Robert W. Wall, J. Paul Sampley, and N.T. Wright, *The New Interpreter's Bible* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2002), 373.

¹⁴ Sosthenes was the official of the synagogue, maltreated publicly by the furious Jews in front of the tribunal after the proconsul Gallio rejected to against Paul (Acts 18:12-17). Powell, *Introducing the New Testament: A Historical, Literary, and Theological Survey*, 279.

¹⁵ DeSilva, *An Introduction to the New Testament: Contexts, Methods, and Ministry Formation*, 491; D.A. Carson and Douglas J. Moo, *An Introduction to the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2009), 448.

¹⁶ Raymond E. Brown, *An Introduction to the New Testament*, ed. David Noel Freedman (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1997), 514.

¹⁷ DeSilva, *An Introduction to the New Testament: Contexts, Methods, and Ministry Formation*, 492.

¹⁸ Carson and Moo, *An Introduction to the New Testament*, 427.

¹⁹ Louis Berkhof, *Introduction to the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Christian Classics Ethereal Library, 2004), 84.

prophets are the foundation. Another point of contention is the unusual vocabularies, syntaxes, and long Greek sentences with genitive links (cf. Eph. 1:15-23, 4:11-16) that are unlike Paul’s typical writing style.²⁰ Furthermore, some manuscripts do not record “in Ephesus” (1:1), causing many scholars to consider this letter an encyclical. This indicates that someone closely related to Paul wrote Ephesians around 80-100 BC to be distributed to various church groups in Asia Minor, not just Ephesus.²¹

Regardless, most scholars agree on two things. *First*, the chief theme of Ephesians is the unity of the one church.²² *Second*, Ephesians is divided into chapters 1-3 of doctrinal/theological materials and chapters 4-6 of practical, ethical, and moral exhortations.²³ Although NRSVUE includes chapters 4:1-16 in one passage, I follow Dunn, Fowl, and Thielman in separating it into verses 1-6 and 7-16 because verse 7 begins with “but,” opening the new discourse of God’s gifts (4:7-16), which are directly unrelated to ecclesial divisions and unity.²⁴ Snodgrass subdivides these six verses into two smaller sections: ethical imperatives (vv. 1-3) and theological indicatives (vv. 4-6).²⁵ He argues that the former is based on the latter because they often blend in the same text throughout the

²⁰ Another peculiarity is the similarity in theology, vocabulary, and phrasing between Ephesians and Colossians. About 70% of Colossians’ content is in Ephesians, and even Ephesians 6:21-22 and Colossians 4:7-8 are identical. This shows that Colossians was written first, and the author of Ephesians incorporated material from Colossians.

²¹ Bart D. Ehrman, *The New Testament: A Historical Introduction to the Early Christian Writings* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 381.

²² Ephesians’ favorite words are “unity,” “one,” and “all and in all,” so that it is ecclesial-centric. Margaret Y. MacDonald, *The Pauline Churches: A Socio-Historical Study of Institutionalization in the Pauline and Deutero-Pauline Writings* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 91; Martin Rese, “Church and Israel in the Deuteropauline Letters,” *Scottish Journal of Theology* 43, no. 1 (1990): 28; Klyne Snodgrass, “Ephesians,” in *The NIV Application Commentary: Pauline Epistles* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996), 2144.

²³ J.D.G. Dunn, “Ephesians,” in *The Oxford Bible Commentary: The Pauline Epistles*, ed. John Muddiman and John Barton (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010), 172; Stephen E. Fowl, *The Old Testament Library: Ephesians* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2012), 155; Snodgrass, “Ephesians,” 2143; Ehrman, *The New Testament: A Historical Introduction to the Early Christian Writings*, 350; Berkhof, *Introduction to the New Testament*, 102.

²⁴ Dunn, “Ephesians,” 180; Fowl, *The Old Testament Library: Ephesians*, 156; Frank Thielman, *Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament: Ephesians*, ed. Robert W. Yarbrough and Robert Stein (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2010), 246.

²⁵ He asserts that the author presents practical actions because ecclesiology and ethics cannot be separated. Just as Christology is related to soteriology, ecclesiology is also related to ethics, which continues throughout Ephesians. The ethics are marked by love due to the occurrence of “love” in verses 2 and 16.

New Testament.²⁶ Thus, verses 4-6 provide theological support for the imperatives in verses 1-3.²⁷

Interestingly, as Thielman points out, there is language similarity among verses 1-6, Romans 12:1, Philippians 1:27, 1 Thessalonians 2:12, 4:1, and Colossians 3:12-15.²⁸ Fiorenza and Fowl also observe that the author takes “humility” from Philippians 2:1-4 and Colossians 3:12, includes “gentleness” and “patience” from Colossians 3:12 and Galatians 5:22-23 as fruits of the Spirit, and adds “love” in verse 2 to highlight the importance of being loving towards the community.²⁹ These virtues imply that differences in religious-ethnic status and practices must be recognized and respected, enabling them to sustain unity in diversity.³⁰ Additionally, Bruce discovers that the theological confession (vv. 4-6) has also been referenced by Paul in 1 Corinthians 1:10-17, 8:6, 12:4-6.³¹ Hence, all this evidence presents that the author of Ephesians has reinterpreted some verses in the uncontested and contested letters with his own language and context.

Historical Criticism: The Socio-Historical Context of Both Texts

1 Corinthians 1:10-17

In Paul’s era, Corinth was a cosmopolitan place, the home of various religious and philosophical movements.³² It was also famous for being open to new ideas, diversity, arts, lavish lifestyles, conspicuous consumption, and sexual promiscuity.³³ Interestingly, the

²⁶ Just as the proclamation (*kerygma*) and instruction (*didache*) are inseparable, so are the indicative and imperative.

²⁷ Snodgrass, “Ephesians,” 2143.

²⁸ Thielman, *Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament: Ephesians*, 246–47.

²⁹ They have been called holy and blameless before God in love (1:4) and are already rooted and grounded in love (3:17), so, unsurprisingly, they have to love each other.

³⁰ Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, *Wisdom Commentary: Ephesians* (Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 2017), 50; Fowl, *The Old Testament Library: Ephesians*, 160.

³¹ F.F. Bruce, *The Epistles to the Colossians, to Philemon, and to the Ephesians* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1984), 227.

³² Ehrman, *The New Testament: A Historical Introduction to the Early Christian Writings*, 290.

³³ As a result, Corinth gained a reputation as a city of worldly wisdom and great moral depravity. For instance, there were two temples of prostitution for Aphrodite (Venus), the goddess of love, where a thousand maidens devoted themselves to the sensual service of the goddess. It even caused Corinthian immorality to become a byword throughout the empire. There was even an expression “to act/live like a Corinthian (*κορινθιάζειν* – *korinthiazein*)” as Roman slang for engaging in sexual promiscuity or licentious behavior. Brown, *An Introduction to the New Testament*, 515; Powell, *Introducing the New Testament: A Historical, Literary, and Theological Survey*, 278.

Corinthian people were an agonistic society built on a culture of honor/shame. That is, some people (patrons) were more potent and honorable than others (clients).³⁴ Due to massive diversity, Corinth also developed a highly competitive environment where many people vied to promote themselves in business, politics, and society.³⁵ Orators, sophists, rhetors, preachers, and declaimers also mocked each other and competed fiercely to gain prestige and enhance their reputation before the crowds.³⁶ This was exacerbated by a robust rhetorical tradition where favorite rhetoricians were seen as heroes and their followers as fans. If their students are allied with them, these heroes and fans are both honored in society.³⁷

Unfortunately, this pervasive Hellenistic tradition of self-promotion and honor, gained by allying with an apostolic founder, governed the everyday lives of the Corinthian church. Consequently, they debated the virtues of each apostle and formed rival factions and social unrest based on their preferred preacher.³⁸ These divisions were further exacerbated when they attempted to boost prestige by claiming Christian preachers as their partners. As a result, they regarded themselves as followers of Paul, Apollos, Cephas, or Christ (1:12), which is why Paul implores them to focus on their internal relationships and unity.³⁹

³⁴ It is an ancient Greco-Roman culture that divided everyone’s status into two classes: patrons and clients. Patrons were honored for giving gifts or benefactions. They provided food, built roads or public places, held offices, hosted parties, festivities, games, or churches, and many more. Clients were shamed for granting patrons honor, loyalty, and services. They were slaves, prisoners, the crucified, and many more. Uniquely, such honor was a precious commodity and gave social power, just as money today signifies one’s power. That is why patrons rule over and cannot be friends with clients.

³⁵ Because of this honor/shame culture and competitive environment, many politicians desired public recognition and honor by erecting buildings with their own money.

³⁶ DeSilva, *An Introduction to the New Testament: Contexts, Methods, and Ministry Formation*, 488–89.

³⁷ Most itinerant orators would gladly accept and depend on their followers’ patronage (cf. 1 Cor. 9:4, 6, 11–12, 14), which led to intense divisions between followers of different orators. Carson and Moo, *An Introduction to the New Testament*, 427; DeSilva, *An Introduction to the New Testament: Contexts, Methods, and Ministry Formation*, 494.

³⁸ Perhaps baptism was one of the causes of their dissension because Paul challenged them as to whether they were baptized in his name (1:13), explained the baptism he had only performed on Crispus, Gaius, and Stephanas (1:14–16), and affirmed his calling was not to baptize (1:17).

³⁹ According to Berkhof, four divisions did not mean there were four separate parties with their own organizations but merely disputes in the church due to differences of opinion. Furthermore, Paul also mentions that they met several times (11:18; 14:23), which suggests that they did not lead to an absolute split. “I belong to Paul” most likely consisted of serious-minded people paying more attention to the contents of the gospel preaching than its form and accepting the simple doctrine of the cross wholeheartedly. “I belong to Apollos” probably consisted of cultured Greeks who preferred a speculative and rhetorical presentation on free grace over Paul’s simple preaching. “I belong to Cephas” consisted of conservative Jewish believers who adhered to

Ephesians 4:1-6

Fowl utters that there was no particular fragility, conflict, or polemic in the Ephesian church even though 4:1-6 underlines unity and appropriate behavior among members.⁴⁰ MacDonald and Ehrman acknowledge that studying their condition in 80-100 BC is challenging due to the obscurity of its literature and the lack of references to their situation.⁴¹ Despite this, they presume that the central pressures in this period were deviant conduct emerging as new generations joined the community and tensions between Jewish and Gentile Christians due to the inclusion of Gentiles into Israel's privilege (2:11-12, 19).⁴²

Because of those problems, the unknown author wrote Ephesians to reaffirm Paul's message: Christ brought about the incorporation of Jews and Gentiles into a new, universal body/church and their reconciliation with God through His event. As Thielman asserts, His people are not formed along ethnicity but are "one new humanity" (2:15), which is at peace with itself (2:14) and its Creator (2:13, 17).⁴³ Unlike Paul's letters focusing on local congregations, he exclusively sees the universal church (1:22; 3:10, 21; 5:23-25, 27, 29, 32), firmly anchored on its apostolic foundation and obedient to its exalted Head (1:22; 2:19-20; 5:23).⁴⁴ In this case, Rese argues that he emphasizes the invalidity of Israel's inheritance because the unified church of Jews and Gentiles has now taken over it.⁴⁵ That is why he persuades all members to respond to this fact by embracing and promoting unity in Christ.⁴⁶

the decisions of the Jerusalem council and specific legal observances. "I belong to Christ" probably consisted of the ultra-pious ones who despised all human leadership, considered themselves the ideal group, were filled with spiritual pride, and became a significant stumbling block to Paul. Berkhof, *Introduction to the New Testament*, 87.

⁴⁰ Fowl, *The Old Testament Library: Ephesians*, 157.

⁴¹ The encyclical form of Ephesians obviously makes its socio-historical context very difficult to determine.

⁴² MacDonald, *The Pauline Churches: A Socio-Historical Study of Institutionalization in the Pauline and Deutero-Pauline Writings*, 115; Ehrman, *The New Testament: A Historical Introduction to the Early Christian Writings*, 354; Dunn, "Ephesians," 181.

⁴³ Thielman, *Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament: Ephesians*, 250.

⁴⁴ Carl R. Holladay, *A Critical Introduction to the New Testament* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2005), 577.

⁴⁵ This starkly contrasts Paul's belief in Romans 9-11 that the church and Israel are two distinct entities. Rese, "Church and Israel in the Deuteropauline Letters," 27.

⁴⁶ MacDonald underscores that the deviant behavior also causes him to offer love-patriarchal household codes so they can behave appropriately in living a Christ-like life (5:21-6:9, cf. Col. 3:18-4:1). He describes how distinct groups in the church can have unified, just, and harmonious relationships. While social differences are maintained, those of lower status (slaves/wives) should respect, serve, and submit to their superiors. Conversely, those in power (masters/husbands) should also respect and care for the needs of their subordinates in return for their obedience. By doing so, he aims to stabilize their life with unity and harmonize their

Theological Comparison: Church Schism and Unity Based on Both Texts

1 Corinthians 1:10-17

At first glance, Paul aimed to quell the party spirit among them, puncture their assumptions, and reveal their cultural captivity to bring them to the unity of faith in Christ (1:13).⁴⁷ His goal was to change their views of each other and their roles in the church and the world. Paul believed that spiritual unity could not be achieved if a church relied on impressive speakers or worldly methods to gain people's conviction. Instead, he emphasized that the church should focus on serving God's message and not people's desires or the reputation of its leaders.⁴⁸ Those who serve in the church are co-workers in God's field, servants of Christ, and stewards of God's mysteries (4:1), not partisan heroes. Therefore, he expected them to focus on Christ's cross (1:18-2:5), true spiritual wisdom (2:6-16), equality of all believers (3:1-23), and treating Christian leaders appropriately (4:1-21), not on the persuasive arts of men (2:1-5).⁴⁹

In this pericope, Paul cites baptism as his basis for unity. He associates it with the cross of Christ, referring to His death and resurrection (v. 17). Paul believes that when they are baptized into Jesus' death, they are also raised in the Spirit with Him and no longer under the dominion of sin and death (12:13). God has broken the power of sin and death, so now they are His children, set free to love God and neighbor in obedience to Christ's command to love with all our heart, soul, mind, and strength as ourselves (Matt. 22:37-39). Therefore, freedom should not be used to serve the flesh, including division and strife, but rather to serve and love one another (cf. Gal. 5).⁵⁰

So, Paul's argument in this passage is related to his ecclesiology. In addition to criticizing all factions for giving too much importance to human beings (3:5-7, 21-23), which leads to jealousy and disputes (3:3), he offers two ideas about the church and factionalism. *First*, the church is God's temple where His Spirit dwells within the community (3:16-17).

relationship with outsiders. MacDonald, *The Pauline Churches: A Socio-Historical Study of Institutionalization in the Pauline and Deutero-Pauline Writings*, 119–20.

⁴⁷ Charles L. Campbell, *A Theological Commentary on the Bible: 1 Corinthians* (Kentucky: Westminster John Knox Press, 2018), 29.

⁴⁸ DeSilva, *An Introduction to the New Testament: Contexts, Methods, and Ministry Formation*, 492.

⁴⁹ Carson and Moo, *An Introduction to the New Testament*, 428; Craig L. Blomberg, *The NIV Application Commentary: 1 Corinthians* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1994), 37.

⁵⁰ Bruce, *The Epistles to the Colossians, to Philemon, and to the Ephesians*, 227.

Thus, any action a person or group takes to destroy the church unity attacks God's holy dwelling place. *Second*, the church is also the body of Christ, where every member is like a part of the body (12:12-27). Though they are different, everyone is essential to the community. That is why Powell suggests church unity is an accomplished reality (12:27) where individuals are connected. If one member suffers, the whole community is also affected.⁵¹

DeSilva supports Powell's statement by providing a practical example of the Lord's Supper. Given ethnic and social variations, the wealthy must provide the same meal for everyone to enjoy, promoting strong unity, solidarity, and sensitivity towards the poorer members. Additionally, the issue of gifts was also discussed. God's gifts they received should not be used for comparison or boasting but rather to build up the church in a spirit of love (14:1-5, 18-19, 39). Therefore, it is clear that Paul wrote this passage to proclaim that the church is familial cooperation, not competition.⁵²

Ephesians 4:1-6

According to Thielman, the author of Ephesians first explains that his readers are instrumental in God's plan to sum up everything in heaven and on earth in Christ (1:10). He then teaches that God has called them to be part of His people not because of anything they have done (2:8-9) or social group to which they belong (2:11-13) but solely His grace. For this reason, they need to pursue cross-ethnic church unity (2:11-22) to restore the original unity of His creation by forming "one new human being" among Jews and Gentiles in Christ (2:15). This unity also reveals the beauty of His wisdom to the inimical spiritual powers of the universe (3:10). Hence, the author calls them to be a new, unified people, the initial stage of God's new creation (4:1). Subsequently, he introduces practical advice on how they can zealously live in unity with one another so that they may fulfill the role God has assigned to them in the universe (4:2-3). Ultimately, he bases those ethical ways of ecclesial unity on theological oneness (4:4-6).⁵³

⁵¹ Powell, *Introducing the New Testament: A Historical, Literary, and Theological Survey*, 279.

⁵² DeSilva, *An Introduction to the New Testament: Contexts, Methods, and Ministry Formation*, 497.

⁵³ Thielman, *Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament: Ephesians*, 246.

In comparison, 1 Corinthians 1:10 and Ephesians 4:1 urge their respective church to avoid divisions and embrace unity. However, in Ephesians 4:2-3, the author complements his exhortation with five practical ways to achieve unity: humility, gentleness, patience, love, and peace. It is noteworthy that while Paul discusses love in 1 Corinthians 13, he does not mention it in 1:10-17.⁵⁴ Moreover, in Ephesians 4:4-6, the author even adds the theological basis of ecclesial unity in the unity of God (one Spirit, Lord, God, and Father) and the unity of the church’s response to God (one body, faith, and baptism), which is absent in 1 Corinthians 1:10-17.⁵⁵

Firstly, concerning the ethical imperatives of virtues (vv. 2-3), he first mentions “humility,” deemed an essential quality of the Christian life. While the word had a negative connotation in first-century Greek, it is now seen as a positive trait that involves considering others better than oneself and seeking their interests (Rom. 12:3-8, Phil. 2:1-11).⁵⁶ He then notes the importance of “gentleness,” which involves confessing before God and being kind and generous to others (cf. Col. 3:12-13).⁵⁷ The virtues of “patience” and “love” are also emphasized, as they require perseverance in one’s beliefs, faithfulness, and endurance in the face of dislike and hatred (Gal. 6:2, Col. 3:13).⁵⁸

The last virtue is “peace,” but it is notable that he first writes “the unity of the Spirit” (4:3), which is not found in 1 Corinthians. While Paul does mention “one Spirit” in 1 Corinthians 12:13,⁵⁹ he uses the Greek root εἷς (*heis*) for “one,” which differs from ἐνότης (*henotēs*) used in Ephesians for “unity.” Bruce suggests that the phrase does not demonstrate

⁵⁴ Essentially, Paul only begs them to be of one mind in verse 10 and gives reasons why they should not be divided in the following verses.

⁵⁵ Thielman, *Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament: Ephesians*, 250.

⁵⁶ “Humility” is an uncommon and harmful term in first-century Greek, connoting vile servility and an object of ridicule. The Ephesians’ pagan neighbors would not have considered it a virtue but as a characteristic to avoid. For example, Josephus says that the Roman emperor Galba was accused of “humility” by the praetorian guard, to whom he had refused the usual celebratory pay bonus on his accession. Snodgrass, “Ephesians,” 2145; Fowl, *The Old Testament Library: Ephesians*, 160.

⁵⁷ Thielman, *Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament: Ephesians*, 253–54.

⁵⁸ Fowl points out that the church comprises people with different measures of faith maturity, different experiences of God’s love, and different worship temperaments. The one body of Christ has various members, so it is no wonder that the author encourages them to endure, forgive, respect, support, and show tolerance and harmony with each other in “love.” Snodgrass, “Ephesians,” 2146; Fowl, *The Old Testament Library: Ephesians*, 161.

⁵⁹ In this verse, Paul says that the Corinthians were baptized in the one Spirit, not united in the one Spirit.

that there is only one Spirit, but rather, the one Spirit imparts unity to the community. As members of one body, they should live in unity with each other and strive for peace.⁶⁰ Dunn and Snodgrass simplify that the Spirit gives unity to them, but they can destroy it. Hence, the author stresses the significance of "peace," reminding them that it is unnatural to live without it (cf. 2:14).⁶¹

Secondly, concerning the theological indicatives of oneness (vv. 4-6), he displays a Pauline creed with a threefold triadic structure preceded by the number "one:" (1) body, Spirit, hope, (2) Lord, faith, baptism, (3) God and Father of all. According to Fiorenza, the first one explicates the church's calling for a communal body enlivened by one Spirit. The second triad seems related to the baptismal discourse throughout the epistle (1:11-14; 2:1-6; 4:22-24, 30; 5:25-27). The climax of this theology is the final statement that God is the Father of all things.⁶² As a result, ecclesial unity focuses not on the same formulas/rituals but on the same God who has freed them.⁶³

Interestingly, the author of Ephesians strongly aligns with Paul's theology of baptism (1 Cor. 1:17). He discusses it again and even adds that Jesus' event not only demolished the power of sin and death but also religious and ethnic boundaries. This means Gentiles are now included in Israel's heritage (3:3-6), and all humanity is reconciled and united into one body with one another and Christ the Head (1:10, 22-23; 5:32).⁶⁴ In simpler terms, he celebrates this achievement of Paul's gospel and universal ideal, marrying all nations into one community that worships the one God (Rom. 3:27-30).⁶⁵ He seems to be congratulating his audiences for doing everything right as they were a united church that had broken with a pagan past to embrace a shared future joined in a confession of faith and seven oneness (4:4-6). This is the ideal Pauline church, and they succeeded in realizing it.⁶⁶

⁶⁰ Bruce, *The Epistles to the Colossians, to Philemon, and to the Ephesians*, 227.

⁶¹ This fact also alludes to Paul's remark that "the mind on the Spirit is life and peace" (Rom. 8:6). Dunn, "Ephesians," 181; Snodgrass, "Ephesians," 2147.

⁶² Fiorenza, *Wisdom Commentary: Ephesians*, 51.

⁶³ Dunn, "Ephesians," 181.

⁶⁴ This is called "The Third Way," namely a model in which Jews leave Judaism and Gentiles leave gods so that they join together as one reconciled church/body.

⁶⁵ The difference is that while the Gentiles for uncontested Paul are joined with Israel in one olive tree as grafted on branches, Ephesians has identified the church as the site of Israel, placing both believing Jews and Gentiles into one new domain.

⁶⁶ They may not have a strong enough sense of the power of sin to divide people and keep them from living out the unity that is their calling in Christ. DeSilva, *An Introduction to the New Testament: Contexts, Methods, and Ministry Formation*, 640.

Thielman provides a clear summary of the author’s theological basis for the virtues. Christ died to bring together diverse ethnic and social groups and form them into “one body” (v. 4). The unity of this body is maintained by the presence of the “one Spirit” (v. 4) within the church. His death also gives “one hope” (v. 4) to those who were without hope and establishes “one Lord” (v. 5) for all of his readers to confess. They believe in “one faith” (v. 5) related to this Lord and His significance and have undergone the “one baptism” (v. 5) in the Spirit. Their worship is focused on “one God and Father of all” (v. 6), summing them all up in Christ. Hence, if the assembly is unified in their willingness to acknowledge these teachings, they should also be willing to cultivate the practical attitudes that foster the unity for which Christ died.⁶⁷

Ephesians 4:1-6 Complementing 1 Corinthians 1:10-17

After reviewing the above discussions, I have come to three conclusions. *First*, both texts exhort their readers to avoid divisions and remain united in the Spirit because Christ’s event has restored all things. Nevertheless, their definitions of unity differ slightly. In 1 Corinthians, the church was split into four parties due to different teachings and their desire for honor. So, Paul’s admonition is a counterattack on the dominant Greco-Roman culture of self-promotion, social climbing, and agonistic society. In contrast, there were no schisms in Ephesians but ethnic tensions between the new generation of Jewish and Gentile Christians concerning Israel’s privileges and deviant conduct. Therefore, the author’s instruction relates to the community’s unity of ethnicity and social status.

Second, another dissimilarity lies in how to address the issues. Paul does not suggest any practical actions to resolve the factions, whereas the author of Ephesians provides five moral virtues “to maintain the unity of the Spirit” (4:2-3), answering the question, “How are you going to unite in light of loving God and neighbors who are specifically different from you?” *Third*, the final distinction lies in both authors’ theological concepts that underlie their arguments for ecclesial unity. Paul merely mentions baptism as the foundation of unity since it was one of the topics the Corinthians debated. However, the author of Ephesians preserves it and even adds six more theologies of oneness as the reason for their unity (4:4-6).

⁶⁷ Thielman, *Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament: Ephesians*, 261.

These three overviews evidence that the author of Ephesians did not modify and remove Paul's arguments on church schism, unity, and baptism in 1 Corinthians 1:10-17. Instead, he agrees with Paul, reuses his comments, and even supplements the lacking teachings by quoting some of the materials and virtues from the contested letters. Therefore, Ephesians 4:1-6 can be considered detailed instructions, directions, and warnings for implementing ecclesial "Unity in Diversity" for the entire early and modern church, given that this epistle is an encyclical.

Contemporary Implications for Modern Churches in Dispute

Carson and Moo argue that 1 Corinthians 10:1-17 is the most straightforward condemnation of arrogance, boasting, pride, self-promotion, and self-confidence in the Pauline corpus.⁶⁸ DeSilva adds that it also portrays Paul's vision of church unity and harmony, extending beyond the local congregation to how Christians interact within their own denomination, with inter-denomination and non-denomination. Currently, some may identify themselves by saying, "I belong to Luther," "I belong to Calvin," "I belong to Wesley," "I belong to Anglican," "I belong to Presbyterian," "I belong to Pentecostal," and so on, creating divisions, scorn, or competition between Christians of other lines. If left unchecked, it can hinder and forget his vision for a global church.⁶⁹

According to Fowl, Christian divisions contradict the unity of the Spirit because they grieve the Holy Spirit (Eph. 4:30).⁷⁰ Dunn agrees, asserting that abolishing the divided wall of humanity and bringing all things into unity in Christ are central to God's universal purpose. In other words, church unity is crucial as it reflects the oneness of God.⁷¹ So, both authors invite us to answer the question: "Will we live out the apostolic vision for the one body and bear witness to Christ's victory over all the powers and principalities that divide humanity? Alternatively, will we allow them to perpetuate divisiveness, territorialism, and exclusivism?"

⁶⁸ For them, while there is very little about church government in 1 Corinthians, this letter significantly contributes to the church doctrine: its nature, unity, diversity, characteristics, behavior, interdependence, and discipline. It also practically describes the nature of Christian life and witness, emphasizing service, self-denial, purity, and weakness as the framework in which God displays His strength. Carson and Moo, *An Introduction to the New Testament*, 451.

⁶⁹ DeSilva, *An Introduction to the New Testament: Contexts, Methods, and Ministry Formation*, 520.

⁷⁰ Fowl, *The Old Testament Library: Ephesians*, 162.

⁷¹ Dunn, "Ephesians," 172.

Concerning this, I observe that Indonesian believers respect ethnic, cultural, socio-economic, and linguistic differences in the church. Unfortunately, distinctions in certain teachings, doctrines, or understandings are still considered “enemies” that must be fought. One precise instance is the Siawarta case that I mentioned in the introduction. It is deplorable to call someone a heretic and assume their teachings are the most correct, as this can promote factionalism within Christ’s body. I also notice that this practice is similar to that of the Corinthians, who competed with each other amidst diverse teachings to claim that the apostles’ teachings they followed were the best, even though modern churches may not accuse others to gain honor in community and society.

I firmly agree with DeSilva stating that the ideal of unity does not necessitate the elimination of distinctive testimonies, practices, and policies of the Christian faith. Each denomination possesses a different understanding of the gospel, and each can significantly enrich the others where we gather together to learn from one another in humility and join together in ministry. Therefore, modern churches should value the multiplicity of forms in which the gospel has manifested in the various members of Christ’s body because His cross (1 Cor. 1:17) justifies and teaches all members, whether ordained or lay, how to lead, follow, love, and serve neighbors.⁷²

In this regard, Philipp Melanchthon famously says, “In essentials, unity. In non-essentials, liberty. In all things, charity.” This means that the church should maintain unity in essential Christian doctrines (such as the Apostles Creed), understand teachings outside the primary doctrine, and love one another in all things (cf. John 13:34-35).⁷³ However, it is crucial to recognize that some Christians find it challenging to accept non-essential teachings distinct from their church, such as soteriology, which is not listed in the Apostolic Creed. That is why I propose five practical steps or virtues of the author of Ephesians,⁷⁴ along with Melanchthon’s opinion, to overcome the disputes arising from doctrinal differences that often

⁷² DeSilva, *An Introduction to the New Testament: Contexts, Methods, and Ministry Formation*, 646.

⁷³ Paul N. Archbald, “Biblical Tolerance in A Post-Modern World,” *Faith in Focus* (Wellington, August 2018), 8–11.

⁷⁴ Carson and Moo advise the church to prioritize love as the most “excellent way” all modern Christians must pursue in this diverse world (1 Cor. 12:31-13:13). “Love” is indeed one of seven moral virtues proposed by the author of Ephesians (4:2). Carson and Moo, *An Introduction to the New Testament*, 451.

tarnish the church. The author’s call for unity is not an invitation to uniformity of all teachings, doctrines, cultures, ethnicities, statuses, and languages but rather an exhortation to embrace “Unity in Diversity.” In other words, we must be one but not the same.⁷⁵

On the other hand, I think it would have been better if pastors, scholars, and others had entered into a sincere conversation about the diversity of evidence in the New Testament on salvation or other debated topics. They can make a sound set of theological arguments based on biblical texts to support their claims. Hence, I note that the teachings of Paul and the author serve as an intense warning to contemporary disunited churches, emphasizing that members of other Christian groups are not competitors but teammates. Paul demonstrates the church’s need to avoid schism and embrace diversity, while the author of Ephesians stresses the importance of imitating his readers who have achieved Paul’s vision of unity through five practical virtues.

CONCLUSION

The recent doctrinal split, especially regarding soteriology, reminds modern readers of the factions in the Corinthian assembly that boasted of their apostles’ teachings to acquire public honor. The rise of Progressive Christianity has caused several members to label one teaching as correct and the other as wrong, even going as far as to brand its adherents as heretics. This fact is unfortunate because it contrasts with Paul’s hope for ecclesial unity, which was realized successfully by the Ephesian audiences. Thus, 1 Corinthians 1:10-17 and Ephesians 4:1-6 serve as a reflection for the warring modern churches, urging them not to eliminate their dissimilarities but to strive for the harmony achieved by the Ephesians, who embraced and celebrated “Bhinneka Tunggal Ika” in their community. Ultimately, the theological indicative and ethical imperative join again: “You are one, so be one!”

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⁷⁵ Campbell argues that the transformed church in Christ will not destroy diverse identities that could lead to division but rather celebrate those differences because they have been reconciled to God and each other, including their enemies. William S. Campbell, “Unity and Diversity in the Church: Transformed Identities and the Peace of Christ in Ephesians,” *Transformation* 25, no. 1 (2008): 15–31, <https://doi.org/10.1177/026537880802500102>.

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