



gracefellowship

Series: Crossroads: Between Kingdom and Culture
Date: February 18, 2024
1:10-17

Title: United in Jesus
Passage: 1 Corinthians

Scripture Reading: 1 Corinthians 1:10-31

The past two weeks we have introduced the book of 1 Corinthians by looking at the history and culture of the city and talking about Paul's greeting to the people where he did his best to encourage them, but primarily pointed to the reality that anything good happening in the church was completely a result of God's grace through Jesus. Today we are going to discover the first big issue causing problems within the church at Corinth.

We just heard the text read for us and we are about to read it again, but as we read it I want you to pay attention to the specific issue Paul is addressing:

Divisions over human leaders splintered the Church in Corinth.

I know we can't imagine in the 21st century that people would have preferences of leaders and would argue and disagree about who they should follow- especially in an election year- but that was happening in the Corinthian Church. And while my statement about an election year points to political leaders outside the realm of the Church, the arguments taking place in Corinth focused on spiritual leaders within the local church and the arguments taking place may have even pointed to deeper factions and divides among people groups. This morning we are going to see how Paul defines the problem and then responds to it with the gospel.

:: 1 Corinthians 1:10-12

¹⁰ I appeal to you, brothers and sisters, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that all of you agree with one another in what you say and that there be no divisions among you, but that you be perfectly united in mind and thought.

¹¹ My brothers and sisters, some from Chloe's household have informed me that there are quarrels among you.

¹² 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."

The first thing I want you to notice is how Paul addresses the church.

1. **He appeals to them- he doesn't command them.**

Appeal = plead, beg

2. **He calls them brothers and sisters, not children.**

Paul is appealing to them as equals, not trying to lord over them.

3. **His appeal is in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ.**

Paul appeals to them not through his own limited human power, but by the divine power of Jesus.

Next look at what he appeals to them to do:

¹⁰ I appeal to you, brothers and sisters, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that all of you agree with one another in what you say and that there be no divisions among you, but that you be perfectly united in mind and thought.

Simple, right? Agree with one another in what you say and let there be NO DIVISIONS among you, but be PERFECTLY UNITED in mind and thought (purpose). We could spend a lot of time on this single verse! Is Paul looking for us to function with "hive mind" or to do "group think?" I don't think that is what he is talking about because he is going to get to some specifics in a minute. But I want us to point out a couple things in this passage to help us think a little.

A. **The Greek word for divisions is "schismata." (English= Schism)**

He is essentially saying there are things happening in the church that are tearing it apart.

Instead he instructs them to be...

B. **Perfectly United- Joined together**

a. Medical Term- Put together a bone that has been fractured.

Illustration: My friend's son once broke his arm playing sports and after weeks in a cast, when they took the cast off they found the bones had not been set correctly and had not grown back together fully, there was still a bow in his arm. It's called a "malunion fracture" and can result in the bone being twisted, rotated or bent.

They had to break his arm again and reset the bone so it would be perfectly united.

b. For Paul, he is probably thinking in terms of his profession- a tent maker. When Paul would make a tent he would be sure to have the sections of the tent fit perfectly together and sewn in the proper places to prevent leaks. If the fabric weren't perfectly aligned, the tent would leak.

What does it look like for us as a church to be united? Again, this doesn't mean we absolutely, 100%, agree on all things or we are incompatible. How many of you have iPhones? Where are my Android people? Let me see the hands of Coke

drinkers. Now where are my Pepsi people? See, we are already in trouble. We can't agree!

At GFC here is how we typically talk about this, and if you've been through our Discovery Experience you've heard this before:

In the essentials we have unity.

- The divine inspiration of Scripture and the authority of Scripture.
- The doctrine of God as Triune- He is One God in the form of Three Persons
- The virgin birth
- The sinless life and divine nature of Jesus
- The death, resurrection and ascension of Jesus
- Salvation by grace through faith- the gift of God

We are unified around the things the Bible clearly lays out as an essential belief.

In the non-essentials we have liberty.

Non-essentials are areas of our faith that don't have a bearing on our salvation.

- Don't drink vs. Don't get drunk
- Views on Eschatology: we can disagree and still have Christian fellowship

In all our views we exhibit love.

- Unity is maintained when we love one another even when we disagree on certain things.

That leads us to see what the disagreement was in the Corinthian Church.

:: 1 Corinthians 1:11-12

¹¹ My brothers and sisters, some from Chloe's household have informed me that there are quarrels among you.

¹² 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."

When Paul says there are quarrels among them we might think that there was some minor gossip, or a few people were disagreeing in a business meeting, but in reality the Greek word Paul is using indicates that war was happening among the people! They had battle lines drawn and were staunchly standing in opposing camps as they decided within the church which voice of leadership to listen to.

Paul tells us he knows exactly what is being said because someone from Chloe's household wrote to inform him of the fighting taking place.

¹² 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."

In our day and time this could easily take place not just with people who are leaders in our local church, but because of the internet and podcasts and TV we might have people who are saying...

"I follow Francis Chan."

"I follow Louie Giglio."
"I follow Beth Moore."
"I follow John Piper."
"I follow David Jeremiah."

And it's as if those men or women shape everything you believe about the Bible. If they say it, it must have come from the mouth of Jesus himself! Don't get me wrong- I love the access we have to incredible Bible teachers all over the country and the world! There is much to learn from them. But it becomes a problem when your favorite guy to listen to starts to separate you from a brother or sister because their favorite guy doesn't believe the exact same way.

When Paul confronts this issue in the church of Corinth there are people who have picked favorites. Maybe we even do this here. "Well, I like when Joel teaches, but I LOVE when Nathan speaks!" "Nathan's great, but when Kyle preaches it's like the glory of God descends on us!" "How can you like those young guys when an old, seasoned veteran like Andy Malcolm is available?"

Or maybe we pick favorites when it comes to worship leadership.

"I could listen to Ryan's voice all day!"
"I like Jordan, he plays my favorite songs!"
"C'mon! Aaron is the greatest and there's really no question."
"Can Keely lead worship every week? She's so good!"

It's fine to have styles or music or preaching you like as a personal preference, but it should never be something that causes division among us! And if you are only at this church because of an individual, you're here for the wrong reason! I'm not planning to go anywhere any time soon, but if I were to leave and you all of a sudden feel you can't worship here any more, you're motivation to be part of this church is improper.

But there is probably something deeper going on in Corinth as people are picking and choosing who they follow. Remember, Corinth is a city that has recently been rebuilt and populated with people from all over the Roman Empire. The city of Rome has recently kicked out all the Jewish people and they are resettling in new locations and Corinth is attractive because it's a boom town where you can make it financially.

- Those saying, "I follow Paul," are probably primarily Greeks. Remember, Paul has turned most of his attention in ministry to reaching Gentiles.
- Then there are those who say, "I follow Apollos." Apollos was a Jew but was born in Alexandria, Egypt in Africa. He was known to be an incredible speaker and teacher. Many people enjoyed listening to him preach, but he was also from Africa and probably gained a following from people who had come from that region.
- Then others say, "I follow Cephas," or Peter. Peter is a Jew and was a disciple of Jesus. He has lots of street cred with Jewish Christians.

Do you see the underlying issue that's happening in the Church of Corinth? They have a Jewish section of the church; they have a Greek section of the church; they may have an African section of the church. They division are now drawing racial lines and it's creating problems and tensions as they align themselves racially and keep anyone else at arm's length.

- Then there was one final group that simply said, "I follow Christ." These are super-spiritual people. But it kind of feels like they think they're better than everyone else doesn't it? Notice that Paul doesn't commend them and say, "You all should be like the group following Jesus." He lumps them in with the other three factions. The mentality of a group of people like this is: "We are the only ones really following Jesus and the rest of the people in this church are missing the mark...but we are praying for them."

We should honor leadership in the church, but we shouldn't exalt leaders. Jesus was not about making fans of men; He wanted followers of Him.

So how is Paul going to address the problem once he identifies it? He is going to look at these issues through the lens of the gospel.

:: 1 Corinthians 1:13-17

¹³ Is Christ divided? Was Paul crucified for you? Were you baptized in the name of Paul?

¹⁴ I thank God that I did not baptize any of you except Crispus and Gaius, ¹⁵ so no one can say that you were baptized in my name.

¹⁶ (Yes, I also baptized the household of Stephanas; beyond that, I don't remember if I baptized anyone else.)

¹⁷ For Christ did not send me to baptize, but to preach the gospel—not with wisdom and eloquence, lest the cross of Christ be emptied of its power.

Here are the three questions Paul asks when we face divisions in the church based on the personalities of our leaders:

1. Is Christ divided?
2. Was Paul (or your favorite speaker/leader/pastor) crucified for you?
3. Were you baptized in the name of Paul?

Paul is going to go on and say that when he came to Corinth he came to preach the gospel- not with wisdom and eloquence, less the cross of Christ be emptied of it's power. What does Paul mean by that?

This isn't about the man preaching, it's about the message of the cross!

The question isn't who is *my* leader? The question is *who died for us*?

Paul wasn't trying to gain a following by being an awesome speaker. He wasn't trying to amaze them with his wisdom and rhetoric. He pointed to the cross of Jesus as the power to save. Why? Because everyone is equal at the foot of the cross. There are not divisions at the foot of the cross. We are all guilty of sin and in need of a Savior and the cross of Jesus is what God used to bring our salvation.

Pay attention to what Paul does to make a point in verses 12 and 13.

In verse 12 it's all singular: "I follow Paul." "I follow Apollos." "I follow Cephas." "I follow Christ."

In verse 13 he moves to the plural: "Is Christ divided? Was Paul crucified for you (all y'all)? Were you (all y'all) baptized in the name of Paul?"

Paul is trying to move them from thinking like individuals to thinking as a body about their position in Jesus.

In his letter to the church in Ephesus, Paul wrote this:

:: Ephesians 4:1-6

¹ As a prisoner for the Lord, then, I urge you to live a life worthy of the calling you have received.

² Be completely humble and gentle; be patient, bearing with one another in love.

³ Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace.

⁴ There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called to one hope when you were called;

⁵ one Lord, one faith, one baptism;

⁶ one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all.

There are a few things Paul tells us to do in this passage that allows us to fight for and maintain unity in the church:

How to Maintain Unity in the Church:

1. Be completely humble and gentle

We aren't meant to push for our own rights and agenda, but to

2. Be patient, bearing with one another in love.

Remember that not everyone is where you are on the path of spiritual maturity. We are all going to do things occasionally that demonstrate immaturity. Be patient and show love as we walk toward Jesus together. We're currently living in a culture that seems to value cancelling people when they make a mistake or do something we disagree with. Be patient with people as they navigate life following Jesus. And what that's difficult, bear with one another in love.

3. Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace.

Unity requires effort. We don't stumble into unity. Human nature is to drift

away from one another and into our own personal preferences. Think of the relationships you have with your spouse or child or best friend. If you don't spend time investing in that relationship you will drift away from one another. If we want to experience unity in the body of Christ we have to fight for it. We have to do maintenance constantly in order to stay relationally connected and theologically aligned.

As we close today let me give you a few questions to consider and then hopefully you can discuss these in your Life Group this week:

- Are you at odds with anyone in the church?
- What would it take from one or both of you to come to a place of peace and unity?
- Do we fight for unity as worshipers of Jesus?
- Do you tend to think of things in the church through the lens of your personal preferences or through the lens of the health of the corporate body?

Ultimately we are unified around Jesus and His sacrificial death. Next week when we come back together we are going to look at how different people approach the cross of Jesus. And then we are going to start picking up the pace a little as we continue journeying through this book.

- Pray