

# Life Together

*Do you not know that you are God's temple and that God's Spirit dwells in you?  
If anyone destroys God's temple, God will destroy him.  
For God's temple is holy, and you are that temple.  
(1 Corinthians 3:16-17. ESV)*

*And we all, with unveiled face, beholding the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same  
image from one degree of glory to another. For this comes from the Lord who is the Spirit.  
(2 Corinthians 3:18. ESV)*

## **Be United**

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**1 Corinthians 1:10-17**

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### **Introduction:**

Good morning! Open your Bibles to 1 Corinthians 1:10. Last week we looked at the indicative foundation that Paul lays for the several chapters of imperatives that now follow. Paul says: "I am going to remind you of who you are in Christ and what God is doing in your midst" – that's clarifying the indicatives – clarifying "what is"; now in verse 10 Paul begins to push them to live like who they are. You are one in Christ, the old divisions are dead and buried in the Gospel, now, let's talk about how to be saints TOGETHER. He says:

#### **1 Corinthians 1:10 (ESV)**

<sup>10</sup> **I appeal to you**, brothers, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, **that all of you agree, and that there be no divisions among you, but that you be united** in the same mind and the same judgment.

The first Gospel implication that Paul wants to focus on is the need for the church of God to be united. This begins a teaching unit that runs from 1:10 all the way through 4:16. After that Paul talks about the need for purity, the right use of the gifts, and the need for order and propriety in worship. These folks had a lot of problems and so Paul gets right into it. He says in verse 11 that he has heard from "Chloe's people" that the church in Corinth is seriously divided. Chloe's people are probably servants or employees of a person named Chloe who had business interests in Corinth but who lived in Ephesus where Paul was presently preaching. These people appear to have brought a letter – perhaps a reply to Paul's first letter – and they reported that these

Christians in Corinth were seriously divided. Interestingly, unity was not the topic they wanted to talk to Paul about – Paul doesn't actually begin to address their questions until chapter 7 – unity is the issue that PAUL wants to talk about. Just as a side bar, please notice that good preachers don't always ask people what topics they'd like to hear preaching on. Sometimes people don't know what they really need to hear. That is part of the value of going through a book of the Bible from start to finish. My guess is that when you heard that we were going to do a series on 1 & 2 Corinthians there was probably something you were looking forward to in that. "I can't wait until we hit the issue of spiritual gifts" or "I can't wait until we hit the issue of homosexuality" but it would be very bad if we just skipped forward to those "hot topics" because we would miss hearing about all the things we don't know we need to hear about. Doing it this way ensures we hear some of what we want to hear and a lot of what we don't.

Now before we jump into the text we need first to ask why unity was such a big deal for the Apostle Paul. Who cares really, whether the church is unified or not? This isn't kindergarten. This isn't the Public School system where every kid has to be invited to your birthday party or you get arrested for bullying – this is the kingdom of God! Right? So who really cares whether everybody is getting along? Well, apparently, the Apostle Paul cares and he cares because of the eschatological promise of the Gospel. Let me show you what I mean by that.

Scholars generally agree that Paul is referencing Malachi 1:11 in the introduction of this letter. Look back up at 1 Corinthians 1:2:

**1 Corinthians 1:2 (ESV)**

<sup>2</sup> To the church of God that is in Corinth, to those sanctified in Christ Jesus, called to be saints together **with all those who in every place call upon the name of our Lord Jesus Christ**, both their Lord and ours:

Paul seems to be identifying the existence of the Corinthian church with a promise made about the Gospel 400 years before. The prophet Malachi records God saying:

**Malachi 1:11 (ESV)**

<sup>11</sup> For from the rising of the sun to its setting **my name will be great among the nations**, and **in every place** incense will be offered to my name, and a pure offering. For my name will be great among the nations, says the LORD of hosts.

God said that the work of the Messiah would result in a radical broadening of the people of God to include people from every nation – this would no longer be an exclusively Jewish thing – but

rather people from every nation IN EVERY PLACE would come together to offer praise and worship to Almighty God. You are that, Paul says to the Corinthians. You are people from the nations worshipping God a long way from Jerusalem. You are the fulfilment of that promise. Now don't ruin it by falling apart. Don't rob God of glory, don't diminish the fame of the Gospel by disintegrating into petty factionalism. How many of you know that your failure to grow in Christ can rob God of glory? Don't do that, Paul says. The Gospel has made you a part of a new people of God characterized by diversity AND UNITY. God has birthed that in you and now God wants to complete that in you. And so Paul begins to teach towards that end. He wants to teach them about coming together as a church. Let me read the text to you and then draw out his counsel on building and maintain unity in the church of Jesus Christ. Hear now the Word of the Lord:

### **1 Corinthians 1:10-17 (ESV)**

<sup>10</sup> I appeal to you, brothers, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that all of you agree, and that there be no divisions among you, but that you be united in the same mind and the same judgment.

<sup>11</sup> For it has been reported to me by Chloe's people that there is quarreling among you, my brothers.

<sup>12</sup> What I mean is that each one of you says, "I follow Paul," or "I follow Apollos," or "I follow Cephas," or "I follow Christ."

<sup>13</sup> Is Christ divided? Was Paul crucified for you? Or were you baptized in the name of Paul?

<sup>14</sup> I thank God that I baptized none of you except Crispus and Gaius,

<sup>15</sup> so that no one may say that you were baptized in my name.

<sup>16</sup> (I did baptize also the household of Stephanas. Beyond that, I do not know whether I baptized anyone else.)

<sup>17</sup> For Christ did not send me to baptize but to preach the gospel, and not with words of eloquent wisdom, lest the cross of Christ be emptied of its power.

This is the Word of the Lord, thanks be to God.

Paul has at least 4 important things to say to the Corinthian Christians about coming together as a church.

### **Coming Together As A Church:**

First of all we see him saying that:

#### **1. Unity begins with and is built upon "same thinking" and "same judging"**

Look in your Bibles at verses 10-12. In verse 10 Paul says "I appeal to you that all of you agree". Literally in the Greek it says "That you all say the same thing". What thing? Well for the

options we have to go down to verse 12. Some are saying “I follow Paul”, some are saying “I follow Apollos” and some are saying “I follow Cephas or Peter”. What should they all be saying? “I follow Christ”. I want you all to say that and I don’t want there to be divisions. Now towards that end – everyone following Christ – Paul commends “same thinking” and “same judging”. Look carefully at verse 10:

<sup>10</sup> I appeal to you, brothers, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that all of you agree, and that there be no divisions among you, but that you **be united in the same mind and the same judgment.**

The word translated as “be united” is a word Paul borrows from the medical profession. It means to knit back together, like when the pieces of a broken bone re-adhere to one another. Paul says the same thing using the same word in 2 Corinthians 13:11:

Aim for **restoration**, comfort one another, agree with one another, live in peace; and the God of love and peace will be with you.

Same word, same concern. The church was fracturing like pieces of a bone and Paul says: “I want you to come together”. Be one in what you think and how you judge. Those terms are overlapping, the first one means “mind” or “thinking” and the second one means “judgment” or “opinion”. Are you hearing that? Paul is saying that you foster church unity by developing Gospel agreement. That is exact opposite of what we expect Paul to say. We tend to think in modern day Evangelicalism that theology is the enemy of unity. We think that if people get too excited about theology – if they start using words like “Sovereignty” and “election” and “soteriology” and “eschatology” that the experience of unity will be diminished. The dominant attitude out there in Evangelicalism and particularly in our wider denomination is that theological precision is the enemy of congregational unity. Paul says the exact opposite. He says: “Do you know what will bring people together in following Christ? Robust doctrinal agreement.” Get people on the same page with respect to who God is, who we are, what God has done in Christ to secure our salvation, how we should respond and where this is all going and you will be building unity in your church. You will be able to talk together about all the things that really matter in this life if you do that. You’ll have a common language and common faith and that is the beginning of life together in the Gospel.

Listen, here is what I’m saying – here is what Paul is saying: You have to believe together in order to belong together.

That's not rocket science. The prophet Amos said that long before the Apostle Paul:

**Amos 3:3 (NKJV)**

<sup>3</sup> Can two walk together, unless they are agreed?

If you don't believe together in Christ then you can't be together as a church. The basis of unity in the church is theological agreement in the Gospel.

Secondly, in terms of coming together as a church we see Paul saying that:

## **2. Unity is threatened when worldly values are uncritically adopted in the church**

To understand this one we have to get back into the details of Corinthian culture. You remember the summary of the essential problem that I read to you last week:

“Each of the community problems Paul needed to address grew out of the Corinthians’ **inability to let the gospel message fully reshape their gentile, Greco-Roman lives**... The Corinthians were simply trying to be Christians with a minimal amount of social and theological disturbance.”<sup>1</sup>

The essential problem in Corinth is what we used to call “worldliness”. There was just too much Corinth in the church. Corinth – like many other Greco-Roman cities – had a passionate love affair with rhetoric. We just don't get this in our culture. The last thing we want to do is listen to someone give a speech, but listening and giving speeches was a big part of Greco-Roman life! People would literally line up for hours to sit as the audience in court trials. There were people who made their living in cities like Corinth as professional jury sitters. In Canada if you are selected for Jury Duty the first thing you do is go to WebMD in order to look up contagious diseases you can fake. In Corinth, people would jump at the chance to be a jurist and to listen to finely crafted arguments from professional orators. It was to them what reality tv is to us. It was entertainment; more than that, it was an addiction. Remember what Luke says about the citizens of Athens, just down the road from Corinth:

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<sup>1</sup>Roy E. Ciampa and Brian S. Rosner, *The First Letter to the Corinthians*, Pillar New Testament Commentary. Accordance electronic ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2010), 5.

**Acts 17:21 (ESV)**

<sup>21</sup> Now all the Athenians and the foreigners who lived there would spend their time in nothing except telling or hearing something new.

Giving and hearing speeches was a big part of Greco Roman culture and the professional orators were the rock stars of their day. When a professional orator would come into town he would send out minions with pamphlets advertising when and where he would give his next speech. People would flock to hear him and they always wanted to hear new techniques of argumentation as well as mastery of the classic forms and approaches. That was the culture and they were bringing those values and methods uncritically into the church.

That's why Paul says that when he preached in Corinth it was not with eloquent words (1:17) and it was not a public display of wisdom (2:4), rather it was plain spoken preaching of the Gospel with a demonstration of the Spirit and of power. Paul decided that when preaching in this city – so addicted to rhetoric and to oration – that he would intentionally present the Gospel in a straightforward, unadorned, unsophisticated way. Now why is this such an issue? Its an issue because the medium is the message. My daughter Madison was learning about that in High School just this past week. We explain that to kids in High School and Paul is explaining it to people in his day. The way you communicate has to harmonize with what you are communicating. If I stand up on an elevated soap box, wearing a \$5000 suit and speaking to you through a gold plated megaphone and I say to you: “Be humble and serve the poor” my medium will destroy my message. How you speak has to complement what you speak. Paul is saying that these fancy, arrogant, professional methods and values, brought into the church unthinkingly by the Corinthians are actually obscuring and diminishing the ministry of the Gospel in their midst. The Gospel is a message about God's strength and human weakness. The Gospel is God intentionally by-passing human wisdom and learning. When God wanted to make a way home for humanity – he did not make a way that was more accessible to the wise and to the learned. Instead he made a way that even a child can find. He made a humble way. He made a poor way. He made a lowly way and so we can't talk about that Gospel in lofty, arrogant, exalted ways. Methods matter.

Now let me be clear and contrite here. By clear I mean that we will often say in here that the message stays the same even though the method can and will change from generation to generation. You've heard me say that and you've probably heard other people say that. That's

how we explain why we use to sing Gospel songs by organ accompaniment and now we sing them by guitar accompaniment. Same Gospel message, different delivery method. In the interests of clarity let's acknowledge that Paul was in many respects methodologically flexible. He was the guy who says later in this same letter:

<sup>22</sup> To the weak I became weak, that I might win the weak. I have become all things to all people, that by all means I might save some. (1 Corinthians 9:22. ESV)

That's methodological flexibility! So to be clear, we can and should adapt out methods to reach as many people as we can but – here's where I want to be contrite – we need to be more careful about what methods we allow into the church. Not all methods equally serve our message. I want to think more about that because Paul says, methods can serve or diminish the clarity of the Gospel and therefore the unity of your church.

Thirdly, in terms of coming together as a church, Paul says:

### **3. Unity is threatened by an exaggerated focus on the gifts and personalities of exceptional leaders**

I mentioned that orators were the rock stars of Greco-Roman culture and that appears to have transferred over into the church. Everybody had their favourite preacher.

#### **1 Corinthians 1:12 (ESV)**

each one of you says, "I follow Paul," or "I follow Apollos," or "I follow Cephas,"

Now sometimes you will hear people say that this passage means to teach that we must not identify ourselves by any theological labels. So we mustn't say: "I am a Calvinist" or "I am a Baptist" or "I am a dispensationalist" or whatever theological label you wish. We must just say: "I am a Christian". Listen, I long resisted applying a theological label to myself, but eventually if you think along the same lines as a famous scholar or a well known group of Christians, you discover its quicker and more convenient to just adopt the label, albeit in a secondary sense. Is that rather benign practice what Paul is discouraging here? Some think so. Some say that applying categorical labels to your beliefs can cause unnecessary division. We should stick to the basics and focus on the essentials. Is that where Paul is going here? I don't think so, for one

thing Paul was not afraid to sever fellowship with someone if he thought they were outside the bounds of Biblical orthodoxy. This is the guy who told one of his young protégés:

This charge I entrust to you, Timothy, my child, in accordance with the prophecies previously made about you, that by them you may wage the good warfare, <sup>19</sup> holding faith and a good conscience. By rejecting this, some have made shipwreck of their faith, <sup>20</sup> among whom are Hymenaeus and Alexander, whom I have handed over to Satan that they may learn not to blaspheme. (1 Timothy 1:18-20. ESV)

Paul says to Timothy: “Don’t hang out with Hymenaeus and Alexander anymore – I kicked them out of the church because they are heretics” – that doesn’t sound like a guy who is suspicious of theological categories and doctrinal precision. The issue in Corinth was not theological precision – there isn’t a lot to choose from between the theology of Paul, Apollos and Peter – this isn’t Calvinism versus Arminianism versus Pelagianism – the problem wasn’t content, it was personality and style. Ciampa and Rosner write:

The Corinthians were divided, rallying around particular figures whom they held to be superior to the others. Such a **personality-focused approach to leadership**, with its emphasis on the high rank of the leader and the status conferred on the follower, betrays the influence of Corinthian society. The Corinthians made too much of specific leaders and specific styles of leadership.<sup>2</sup>

The problem was that the hero worship of professional orators was transferred uncritically to leaders within the church. There was too much emphasis on preaching style and leadership persona. The church was becoming a cult of personality. Listen to me very carefully, if you know anything about what is happening in the wider Evangelical world right now, you know this is still a problem. Churches in North America can grow way too fast for all the wrong reasons. Churches can spring up over night and turn preaching personalities into rock stars – far more so in the US than here but it still happens here. Canadians have a bit of “tall poppy syndrome” which is to say we instinctively seek to cut down extraordinarily gifted leaders – our American cousins don’t seem to have that problem. They have the opposite problem. Canadians are conflicted when it comes to gifted leaders – we can’t figure out if we love them or hate them. The Bible rescues us from that dilemma and says: “Don’t despise them and don’t deify them. It’s not about them! It’s about what God has done in Christ to secure our salvation!” That has to be the focus in the church or you are asking for trouble. When leaders become the focus it is inevitable that eventually the entire church will crumble and fall – we are watching that play out

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<sup>2</sup>Roy E. Ciampa and Brian S. Rosner, *The First Letter to the Corinthians*, Pillar New Testament Commentary. Accordance electronic ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2010), 77-78.



in American Evangelicalism on a couple of fronts and we need to tremble in our boots and say: “There but for the grace of God go I”. God will not allow his church to stand upon anything other than the message of Jesus Christ and him crucified. All the palaces to pastoral personality will crumble and fall into ruin and many will be the slain within her walls. Build your church on the Word of God, not on the personality of leaders.

Fourthly and lastly, with respect to coming together as a church, Paul says:

#### **4. Unity is nourished by the levelling power of the preached Gospel**

Look at verses 13-17:

<sup>13</sup> Is Christ divided? Was Paul crucified for you? Or were you baptized in the name of Paul?

<sup>14</sup> I thank God that I baptized none of you except Crispus and Gaius,

<sup>15</sup> so that no one may say that you were baptized in my name.

<sup>16</sup> (I did baptize also the household of Stephanas. Beyond that, I do not know whether I baptized anyone else.)

<sup>17</sup> For Christ did not send me to baptize but to preach the gospel, and not with words of eloquent wisdom, lest the cross of Christ be emptied of its power. (ESV)

You don't need to know Greek to know that we are supposed to hear those last two questions in verse 13 as being emphatically in the negative.

- i. No! Paul was not crucified for you, JESUS WAS!
- ii. No! You were not baptized into Paul but INTO CHRIST!

Jesus was crucified for your sins – his life and his death purchased your forgiveness and your eternity – you owe allegiance to him. You need to worship him! You need to sing his praises and leave Paul out of it. You were baptized into Christ – you have standing before God now because you are in Christ. There is one mediator between God and man, the God-man Christ Jesus so if you are in him then you have access to God! You have standing, your prayers will be heard and received as from a son. Your graces will be daily renewed and refreshed as you fellowship with the Son – therefore worship him! He is your source and your power – leave Paul out of it, he can't give you anything!

Paul tries to background himself in the story of their own salvation – he says: “I didn't even walk you through the whole process. I preached the Gospel to you but most of you were baptized by

someone else”. Paul wisely shares the ministry and shares the spotlight laterally with other leaders to help keep the focus on Christ! Oh God may we always do the same!

When we keep the focus on Christ it effectively RIGHT SIZES human leadership. It doesn't marginalize human leadership, that's an overreaction, but it puts it in right perspective. Leaders are useful – Paul later says you should have them and you should pay them if they are full time preachers of the Gospel (1 Corinthians 9:14) – have them and pay them but don't worship them and don't organize around their gifts and personality. Organize around the Gospel. Preach the Gospel well and this whole problem of leader worship to the destruction of the community should rapidly disappear because the Gospel reminds us that we are all equally, debtors to God's grace. We were all dead in our trespasses and sins and we are all now only what he has made us to be, created in Christ Jesus to do good works which he prepared in advance to be our way of life.

That's true for the Apostle Paul, that's true for Pastor Paul and that's true for every son and daughter of God through the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

Put the focus on that – put the focus on the Gospel! Talk and teach about who God is, who we are and were, what God has done in Christ to secure our salvation, how we should respond in worship and obedience and where this is all going for the glory of God and the good of all people. Make that your thing as a church! Organize around that because if you do, then I believe as Paul believed that your unity problems however big or small they may be will diminish and disappear and we will find it much easier to be SAINTS TOGETHER under the Gospel and unto the glory of God in Christ. This is the Word of the Lord, thanks be to God.