

This Changes Everything
Week 2: From Division to Unity
1 Corinthians 1:10-17

He is STILL risen!

We had such a great Easter celebration here last week. It was so good to see everyone and celebrate the resurrection together. I really appreciate our oldest daughter, Adalyn, giving me a hand at the beginning of my sermon. Norah was going to join her, but woke up sick that day. Adalyn said she still wanted to do it and, honestly, I think she had the most pressure of anyone on her that morning...keeping the Jenga pieces from falling before it was time!

During the 11 o'clock service, she moved a piece and the top half almost fell. She reached up and caught it and told me later she was thinking something you all probably think most Sundays, "Hurry up and get to the point!" She did a great job and I was so proud of her.

As I was packing up the Jenga game Tuesday morning, I was thinking about how easy it is to do the same thing with the message of Easter. On Easter morning, we have a huge emphasis on the resurrection, and we should! That's what the morning is about. Jesus lived, died, and lives again. But often times, we treat the resurrection like something we pull out once a year, celebrate, and then, like decorations for a season, we box it up and tuck it away until next year.

But, if you remember, the point of the Jenga illustration is that the resurrection is the foundational piece of our faith. You pull it out and the entire thing comes crashing down. Nothing else matters. The conclusion is that **the resurrection changes everything!** And, for the next few weeks, we're going to explore some of the ways that the Gospel, the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus, shapes us and the Church.

We're in week 2 of a series through the book of 1 Corinthians. Last week, we looked at chapter 15 because that's where Paul spends a lot of time exploring the resurrection. So, we started at the end, and today, we're going to jump back to the beginning. So, if you have a Bible or a Bible app you like to use, turn with me to 1 Corinthians 1.

1 Corinthians is a letter, written by the Apostle Paul, to the Church in Corinth, Greece sometime around 54/55 A.D. And, even though it was written so long ago, I think there are some similarities between 1st Century Corinth and 21st Century Bloomington, Indiana.

First, Corinth was just a cool place to be, kinda like Bloomington. It offered so many things, from commerce to community. Corinth was a hub of education and ideas. It was a place of culture and knowledge, filled with all kinds of political viewpoints, faiths, ideologies, and practices. It was kind of a melting pot of all these things.

And Paul writes this letter because there were all of these new Christians (which at that point, everyone is a new Christian!), these new Christians who have been steeped in their culture and

shaped by its values, and ideas, and practices. And these new followers of Jesus were bringing all of these things, things that felt very normal to them and the world around them, they brought them into the Church and it led to all kinds of problems. The Church in Corinth was filled with division and sexual immorality, doctrinal confusion, pagan worship practices.

And, it's interesting that, in the midst of all these issues going on, Paul starts his letter with an appeal for unity. I think he knows that, without unity, they won't be able to solve their issues and this church, that he helped start, would fall apart sooner rather than later. So, in these verses that we're looking at today, Paul gives the Corinthians, and us, a call to unity. He points out some of the causes of disunity, and he ends by pointing to our power for unity. Let's look at the call to unity in **verse 10...(READ)**

Paul appeals to them as "brothers and sisters." As family. That's their identity. It's our identity. And healthy families don't necessarily agree about everything, but they are committed to each other and to working through problems that pop up. Paul reminds them that they are the family of God and calls them to remain united.

You see, unity is not something we create, it's something we cultivate. It's something we've been given, in Christ, and we are to care for it and maintain it. Paul says in **Ephesians 4:3, "Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace."** The Holy Spirit binds us together. Our job is to care for our unity, protect it, nurture it so we can keep it.

When you read through the New Testament, you find that unity in the Church is a big deal. It reflects the very nature of God and reveals the power of the Gospel at work in us. So, what does it look like to live in unity? Paul gives us three things. It means we agree with one another in what we say, that we live with no divisions between us, and we are the same in mind and thought.

And, that doesn't mean that we can't disagree on anything. In fact, I think as Christians, we can disagree on a variety of topics. Unity means that we agree on the core truths of the Gospel. That Jesus lived, died for us, and lives again. Unity means believing and saying the same things about that, and in those places where we disagree, we don't let divisions form among us.

That word for "divisions" in verse 10 describes a tear in a garment. It might start as a fray, but if you don't pay attention to it, eventually the fray becomes a rip and the garment tears in two. Paul's painting this word picture to encourage us to mend the tears in our relationships with one another. To do something about those rips before it becomes a division. And we do that by talking to each other in those places where we might disagree. Not talking AT each other like we see in the world around us, but talk to each other with the Gospel informing us, not our feelings.

That also means that unity is not blanket affirmation of what anyone thinks or feels or how they choose to live. That's not Christian unity, either. Christian unity is a collective affirmation of what God thinks and feels and how he instructs us to live. And, in humility, we pursue Him and His

ways together. And, along that journey, wherever God's Word confronts or conflicts with what we think or how we live, we don't affirm it just to get along, we lovingly confront it, confess it, or repent from it.

So, unity is not uniformity. It doesn't mean we'll agree about everything, but that we'll agree about the most important things of the Gospel. And we will strive to be more like Jesus together. That's the kind of unity Paul is calling the Corinthians, and us, to cultivate and care for. And, he makes this appeal knowing full well there are many things that will put our unity to the test. And, in verses 11 and 12, I think he highlights one of the biggest causes for disunity. Look at it with me...(READ vs. 11 and 12)

We like to think that divisions within the Church are always because of Theological differences, and that happens. But, in my experience, most division within the Church comes down to preferences and styles way more than doctrine and beliefs. People may try to cloak it in doctrine because it sounds better, but it's usually over a preference or desire or tradition.

And, in a way, I think that's what's going on here. People in Corinth are aligning themselves with different teachers and leaders, not based on their theology, but on their style, their charisma. They're arguing and dividing over their preferences.

And so, you have people who are saying, "I'm a Paul guy!" These are probably the people who have been around for a while. They might have helped Paul start the church or became followers of Jesus under his preaching.

Others say that they're an Apollos person! One thing we know about Apollos from the book of Acts is that he could preach! He's a dynamic speaker. Eloquent and full of charisma. He was Greek, so he probably appealed to his fellow Greeks in Corinth that valued rhetoric and wisdom.

Others are saying, "I'm a Peter guy." There were probably some Jewish Christians living in Corinth and, when they heard Peter preach, they just felt more connected to him. He knew their background and culture.

Others are just like, "Yeah, yeah. You follow all of your preachers and man made traditions. I don't need anyone else. It's just me and Jesus." And, that sounds good, but it seems like they're weaponizing the name of Jesus and using it against their brothers and sisters in Christ.

Each person has their preference and it's causing divisions within the church. And, there's nothing wrong with preferences. We all have them. It's just, When our preferences become our priority, we will stir up division every time. When we hold up our preferences or opinions as the most important thing, we begin to look down on those who may not share them with us. We can become critical of them. Maybe even give off a spiritual arrogance that we're better or more devoted to Jesus than they are.

I've served in the Church long enough to know that we...I...can get almost evangelistic about our preferences and favorite styles or ministry programs, as if that's the only thing a person needs. Or it's the only right way to do it. Or, it's the most important cause the church ought to focus on.

But, the most important thing people need, that I NEED, is Jesus! When we elevate anything or anyone above Him, not only does it weaken our faith, but it has the potential to cause divisions within the Church. Paul knows this, so he points back to Jesus as the one who gives us power for the unity we've been called to. Look at **verse 13...(READ vs. 13-17)**

Baptism was important to Paul, but it's not what he went there to do. He went there to preach the Gospel, and baptisms were a result of people finding faith in Jesus. He's reminding them that their life and their faith and their unity is all about Jesus. Nothing and no one else! And, he does this by using some hyperbole in verse 13. Look at it again...**(READ vs. 13)**

These questions are ridiculous, and I think that's his point. Paul's saying that the way they are living is so contrary to the Gospel that, if he were trying to come up with a theology to match the way they're living, it would look something like this. That Christ has been divided. That Paul died for them and they were baptized in his name. It's absurd, and Paul's saying that these little factions within the church are equally absurd.

And, you can replace the name of Paul with any preference we hold. Did that worship style die for you? Were you baptized into its name? Did that ministry or program or cause die for you? Were you baptized into its name? If not, then why are you holding it above the name of Jesus and the unity he's given the Church?

You see, Christ is unified, and so is his body. Christ was crucified for you, so nothing and no one else is worthy of your allegiance. We are baptized INTO Christ, so we identify with Him above anything else. In all of these questions, Paul is reminding us of the source and power for our unity and I think verse 17 sums it up...**(READ vs. 17)**

Paul is shifting our attention away from personality and preferences and putting it back on Jesus and the power of the Gospel at work in us and in the Church.

Christ is our righteousness and our true identity, so we can let go of trying to be right all the time or demanding our own way or getting defensive when others disagree with us.

Christ is our security, so we can let go of our fears and need to control everything and everyone around us.

Jesus, and His resurrection, is our victory, so we can lay down all of our selfish ambition, vain conceit, and need to win every argument.

So, is there anything in your life that you're holding above Jesus? Any preference that you've made a priority in your faith that you need to lay down at the foot of the cross? Maybe there's a

hard conversation you need to have with someone in order to cultivate and care for the unity we have in Christ. Don't talk about that person to others. Talk to that person and work things out.

The power of the Gospel is in the cross of Christ and his resurrection. And when the main passion, pursuit, and desire of the Church is more of Jesus and less of us, then we find the unity that Christ has given us and that Paul calls us to.

Let's remember and celebrate that power at work in us now.