

The Call for Christian Unity

1 Corinthians 1:10-17

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Introduction:

Open your Bible to 1 Corinthians chapter 1 and we're going to be looking at verses 10-17 this morning. If you're following along in the pew Bible, we are on page 952.

¹⁰ 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. ¹¹ For it has been reported to me by Chloe's people that there is quarreling among you, my brothers. ¹² 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." ¹³ Is Christ divided? Was Paul crucified for you? Or were you baptized in the name of Paul? ¹⁴ I thank God that I baptized none of you except Crispus and Gaius, ¹⁵ so that no one may say that you were baptized in my name. ¹⁶ (I did baptize also the household of Stephanas. Beyond that, I do not know whether I baptized anyone else.) ¹⁷ 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.

There is a saying that if we all agreed all the time, life would be boring.

While it's true that we all bring something different and unique to the table in our relationships with one another, there is a core belief system that should bind us together in loving unity. It defines our fellowship. It is the adhesive that holds us together and the reason we gather and eat together and worship together and do life together.

Paul was writing to the church in Corinth which was pretty much a mess. And the very first thing Paul addresses in this letter is the issue of factions in the church. Verses 10-17 actually set the tone for the whole rest of the letter, as Paul will address issues such as believers suing one another, celebrating the Lord's supper in a manner where some go hungry and some feast, some believers taking on an air of superiority because they had certain spiritual gifts which they deemed greater than others, and, as we will see today, believers who label themselves as followers of certain leaders over and against other supposedly "less superior" leaders.

And we have the exact same thing happening today, especially in this hour when we find ourselves in such a contentious political season. Not only are unbelievers divided, but Christians as well. And what of the endless salvation and election debates? Instead of coming together in understanding we label each other and shut each other out.

And yet in the midst of this, God's Word cries out to believers everywhere:

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.

Can you hear the cry of Paul's heart in this verse? He's writing to them as an apostle using full apostolic authority, and yet he addresses them here as "brothers," a term of endearment that he uses a total of 39 times in this letter. He's appealing to their common brotherhood in the faith.

But even more can you hear the cry of God's heart? What must it be for Him to look down upon Christ's body as it endlessly tears itself apart, if not physically, then certainly emotionally and spiritually?

This is definitely in sharp contrast to the previous verse which says, "God is faithful, by whom you were called into the fellowship of his Son, Jesus Christ." We'll return to this thought later.

We find in this verse, verse 10 of our passage, a definite call to all believers:

1. Listen to and obey God's plea for unity in the church. (v. 10)

If we're being called to obey something, we must fully understand what God is calling us to obey. Let's look more closely at this passage and seek to fully understand what Paul is saying in this verse.

Paul's appeal to his readers is that they all agree. The original word translated "agree" literally means "to say the same thing." As a matter of fact, the NIV translated it, "that all of you agree with one another in what you say." He wants them to say the same thing, which also implies thinking the same thing.

Paul adds to this request, "and that there be no divisions among you," the Greek word there is *schismata*, where we get our word "schism" from. Maybe a better term would be "factions." He's saying there shouldn't be any schism or division among you. The idea of a schism is like a tear in fabric.

To really get a fuller picture of what Paul is saying, let's look at another passage where the same word, *schismata*, is used in regard to unity.

We see in 1 Corinthians 12:24-25:

But God has so composed the body, giving greater honor to the part that lacked it, ²⁵ that there may be no division in the body, but that the members may have the same care for one another.

Here we see that the opposite of "division" or "schism" is to have care for one another. This is a unity of the heart, where fellow believers are so one with each other and care so much for each other that when one member hurts, they all hurt.

Paul clarifies this call even further by saying what he does want them to do. He says, "*but that you be united in the same mind and the same judgment.*"

If the idea of "schism" is like a tear, then the idea of "united" is that of being mended, or woven together, like a fisherman would mend his net after it was torn. This is a unity of the mind.

Paul's aim here is that believers would be in such harmony with one another that they would, with one voice, glorify God.

Paul gives a wonderful picture of this mindset that he calls his readers to in **Ephesians 4:1-6**:

I therefore, a prisoner for the Lord, urge you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling to which you have been called, ² with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love, ³ eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. ⁴ There is one body and one Spirit—just as you were called to the one hope that belongs to your call—⁵ one Lord, one faith, one baptism, ⁶ one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all.

Notice he says that we should bear with one another in love with all humility and with patience. That means that we need to recognize that we all have things to learn and we're all in a different place on our Christian journey. Those who are younger in the faith or who maybe haven't had their eyes opened to the truth of Scripture in some area need to be loved with patience and humility by those who are more mature in the faith.

So then the point is that God calls us to obedience here. We need to see this passage in 1 Corinthians 1:10 as a call from God to eagerly pursue and desire unity among brothers and sisters in Christ. This should be our goal, and always at the forefront of our mind, especially when disagreements come up.

So let's look at specifically what Paul was dealing with and what kind of divisions he was encountering in the church, which brings us to our second point this morning.

2. Seek to understand the issues of the disunity. (vv. 11-12)

¹¹ For it has been reported to me by Chloe's people that there is quarreling among you, my brothers. ¹² 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."

Did you hear how many mentions of the word "I" was mentioned in there? Paul very easily could have said, "I have this spiritual gift," or "I have that spiritual gift," or "I have a better meal than you." To the Corinthians it seemed like the church was all about them personally instead of being all about God being glorified through Christ.

Jesus Himself had to squash this kind of talk when His disciples were arguing with one another about who was greatest in the kingdom of God or who would sit at His right hand and who would sit on his left in the kingdom.

What was happening specifically in this verse is that people were aligning themselves behind their favorite teacher and personality. They would focus on certain aspects or strengths of that teacher that they admired and raised that strength above everything else, to the point where they saw their favorite personality (and thus themselves) as more superior to the others. Paul later calls this attitude "being controlled by your sinful nature."

1 Corinthians 3:1-4 (NLT) *Dear brothers and sisters, when I was with you I couldn't talk to you as I would to spiritual people. I had to talk as though you belonged to this world or as though you were infants in Christ. ² I had to feed you with milk, not with solid food, because you*

were't ready for anything stronger. And you still aren't ready,³ for you are still controlled by your sinful nature. You are jealous of one another and quarrel with each other. Doesn't that prove you are controlled by your sinful nature? Aren't you living like people of the world?
⁴ When one of you says, "I am a follower of Paul," and another says, "I follow Apollos," aren't you acting just like people of the world?

What Paul is doing here is uncovering what the division is. He's tackling it head on. He's not afraid to call it what it is because he wants to heal the rift. He wants to bring reconciliation between the people.

So where are we at Grace Fellowship?

Will you allow me to be candid with you?

Grace Fellowship is really no different than most churches in this area. We have here that age old debate concerning election and salvation. Some follow a more Reformed view and emphasize God's sovereignty. Others follow a more Wesleyan view and emphasize man's free will. You might say that some people here say, "I follow Calvin," and others say "I follow Wesley."

Now don't misunderstand me. This is a very healthy church. I've seen what an unhealthy church looks like that was filled with divisions and factions and we can all praise God that that isn't the story here. I believe that the members of Grace Fellowship truly love God and want to follow Christ. We have a high view of the Scriptures, that they are God's inerrant Word, and that they carry full authority over our lives.

The difference comes in our interpretation of those Scriptures in a few areas. And there can at times be real differences of opinion here. BUT...I truly believe that the greater difference between us is what we THINK one another believes. It has been my experience that almost 100% of the time, those on both sides of the debate have common misunderstandings about what the other believes. I've seen it time and time and time again. Calvinists, for example, will say that non-Calvinists just don't believe in or have a high view of God's sovereignty. And that's just not true. I can tell you that John Wesley himself, and many, many who share his beliefs have an extremely high view of God's sovereignty. In my opinion, very few people have written better hymns that extol the majesty and sovereign grace of God than John and Charles Wesley.

Non-Calvinists, on the other hand, will say that Calvinists don't believe man has free will or that their beliefs make evangelism unnecessary. Again, that is simply not accurate. Historic Calvinists actually do believe that man is free to choose whatever he desires and that he alone bears responsibility for his sinful choices. Historic Calvinists also believe in the universal free offer of the gospel to all people without qualification and God's command to evangelize, the necessity of the proclamation of the gospel, and that all who will come to Christ in faith will be saved.

Now of course, as I said, there are real differences between the two views and I am NOT advocating anyone to arbitrarily toss out their beliefs on this issue. But my point here is, if two people were to actually sit down together and listen to each other, and seek to fully understand

their own view and then seek to understand one another, I am confident that they would find that there is FAR more agreement than they thought.

So I make two suggestions to you. First, read some helpful books on what the other believes. Second, if you ever have a disagreement with a brother or sister in Christ, sit down with them over coffee and listen to one another. The same thing applies if you have a disagreement with me or Pastor Rob. Come to us and let's talk it out. We can't be in unity unless we sit down together and seek to understand one another.

Pastor Rob and I don't agree on everything theologically. But we have sat down with each other and talked extensively on a number of occasions and we know where each other stands and, more importantly, we know WHY the other one stands there. And while we may still agree to disagree on certain non-essential issues, we *understand* why the other thinks that way and we respect one another's view. Plus, I can't help it if he's wrong about certain things. (allow for laughter)

But we both have a commitment to verse 10 and being in unity and not being divided.

Which actually leads us to our third point this morning, which is realizing just what our unity is based on.

3. Remember our common fellowship is in Christ. (vv.13-17)

¹³ Is Christ divided? Was Paul crucified for you? Or were you baptized in the name of Paul? ¹⁴ I thank God that I baptized none of you except Crispus and Gaius, ¹⁵ so that no one may say that you were baptized in my name. ¹⁶ (I did baptize also the household of Stephanas. Beyond that, I do not know whether I baptized anyone else.) ¹⁷ 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.

In response to the "I follow Paul, I follow Apollos" attitudes, Paul gets right to the point and to the focus of his life and ministry: Christ. He does this by asking a series of rhetorical questions:

- Is Christ divided? *No.*
- Was Paul crucified for you? *No. Christ was.*
- Were you baptized in the name of Paul? *No, but rather in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.*

This is where we return to verse 9.

"God is faithful, by whom you were called into the fellowship of his Son, Jesus Christ."

And here is where I want to issue a very clear warning. We should never seek unity just for unity's sake! Believers are called into a very specific unity...the fellowship of Jesus Christ. This fellowship comes as a product of being in Christ. Those who are "in Christ" are in fellowship with one another.

In his book The Pursuit of God, A.W. Tozer writes, “Has it ever occurred to you that one hundred pianos all tuned to the same fork are automatically tuned to each other? They are of one accord by being tuned, not to each other, but to another standard to which each one must individually bow. So one hundred worshippers meeting together, each one looking away to Christ, are in heart nearer to each other than they could possibly be were they to become ‘unity’ conscious and turn their eyes away from God to strive for closer fellowship.”¹

It’s one thing to say we’re going to be committed to being in unity and not be divided. It’s quite another to have the presence of something to be united around. You see, no one should ever just have unity for unity’s sake. To do so too often means someone has to compromise the truth.

Hear me very carefully! We should never, ever seek unity **at the expense of the truth of the gospel!**

The world’s idea of unity requires people to not stand for anything. That’s why the Christian faith and those who unashamedly profess it are becoming so despised these days.

But Jesus NEVER advocated compromising faith for the sake of unity. In fact, He said stuff like,

³⁴ “Do not think that I have come to bring peace to the earth. I have not come to bring peace, but a sword. ³⁵ For I have come to set a man against his father, and a daughter against her mother, and a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law. ³⁶ And a person's enemies will be those of his own household. ³⁷ Whoever loves father or mother more than me is not worthy of me, and whoever loves son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me. ³⁸ And whoever does not take his cross and follow me is not worthy of me. ³⁹ Whoever finds his life will lose it, and whoever loses his life for my sake will find it. (Matthew 10:34-39)

I would be guilty of not preaching the whole counsel of God if I failed to tell you that such a position will not be comfortable. And unfortunately the push back doesn’t always come solely from outside of the church. That’s why these passages are so important to be preached.

It would be really easy for me to stand here and just tell you to all hold hands, practice your faith within the safe walls of this church building, and just don’t rock the boat too much outside. But I can’t. We live in a world that is getting increasingly hostile toward the truth of God’s Word. And THAT is why the call for unity is so vitally important! You see, Paul doesn’t call us to a unity where nothing is important. He calls us to a unity where God’s people see that Christ and the gospel are ALL IMPORTANT! And that includes how we live out this faith. The confession of our faith means something. It isn’t just a common slogan in some kind of club. Confessing Jesus Christ as Lord carries very serious implications in how we live our lives, the decisions we make every day, the things that we approve of, the attitudes that we have in life, and the motivations of why we do what we do. It means that we’re not ashamed to be identified with Christ. It means that we sense the urgency of sharing the gospel because we know that this gospel is the only hope for a broken and dying world. It means that we live in this unrighteous world and we’re not afraid to stand for righteousness and truth regardless of the consequences. But it also means we

¹ A.W. Tozer. *The Pursuit of God*. (Camp Hill: Christian Publications, 1993), 87.

don't stand alone. But as Christian brothers and sisters we stand together! We stand together on the truth and the integrity of the Word of God without apology and without shame.

Albert Mohler says... "True unity, true Christian unity as defined in the Scripture, is never at the expense of biblical integrity. It is rather predicated upon biblical integrity and a common confession of the faith once for all delivered to the saints."

Every so often, usually when we have our communion services, we will all recite the Apostles' Creed together. Have you noticed that we can all do that confidently and in complete agreement with no hesitation?

Why is that? It's because we are ultimately united in fellowship by our common commitment to Jesus Christ and the Gospel! And that is what we SHOULD be united by!

Hear me. There is absolutely no wiggle room on this one. In order to have true Christian unity we must ALL affirm certain essential doctrinal truths. But not just affirm them with our heads and our mouths, but with a total and complete commitment to consistently live them out!

1. The deity of Christ – Jesus is God in the flesh – and with this doctrine there are several other essential doctrines that need to be affirmed along with it:
 - A) the doctrine of the Trinity, that there is one God, who eternally exists in three persons, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. They are coeternal and of the same nature.
 - B) Jesus Christ is God's only way given to man whereby we can be saved. There are not many ways to God, a way that "works" for you and a way that "works" for me. This is not left up to the opinion of man, it is God's holy and unchangeable Word.
 - C) Jesus' sacrifice is 100% sufficient for our salvation.
2. Second, we are also united around the truth that salvation is by grace through faith and not by works. Now I do realize that there are differences of specific interpretation here, especially between the two views discussed earlier, but essentially we all agree that we cannot in any way earn our salvation by doing good works, that it is by God's grace alone that we are saved, and that we must exercise faith in order to procure that salvation.

Ephesians 2:8

⁸ For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, ⁹ not a result of works, so that no one may boast.

3. The death and resurrection of Christ. Jesus Christ really did die upon a cross for our sins, and he really did rise bodily from the grave in historical space and time.

1 Corinthians 15:17

¹⁷ And if Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile and you are still in your sins.

4. We proclaim one gospel given to us by the apostles. Any other gospel is a false gospel.

1 Corinthians 15:1-4

Now I would remind you, brothers, of the gospel I preached to you, which you received, in which you stand, ² and by which you are being saved, if you hold fast to the word I preached to you—unless you believed in vain.

³ For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received: that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the Scriptures, ⁴ that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the Scriptures.

5. And that which holds all of this together is the firm belief that the Bible is the inerrant, infallible, authoritative Word of the living God.

These are some of the essentials of the faith! These are the truths that unite us.

Everything Paul says in verses 13-17 has this at the heart. We can ask the same questions today. Was Calvin crucified for you? Was Wesley crucified for you? Were you baptized in the name of Calvin or Wesley?

Don't get me wrong. I am proud of the theological tradition that I hold to and I honor the theological heroes of the faith throughout Church history that have preached these doctrines. I love studying them and reading their books.

But John Calvin didn't die for me. Jonathan Edwards wasn't raised for me. I wasn't baptized in the name of Augustine. There is only one who holds that honor. That one is Jesus Christ!

That is why Paul said in the very next chapter:

And I, when I came to you, brothers, did not come proclaiming to you the testimony of God with lofty speech or wisdom. ² For I decided to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ and him crucified. (1 Corinthians 2:1-2)

Can we decide right here and now that no matter what our differences are, we will always decide to know nothing among ourselves except Christ and his crucified?

But these are also the truths that separate us from unbelievers. For we can say with confidence, and we NEED to say with confidence, that anyone who does not believe these things and cannot affirm them, is not united with us. They are not within the family of orthodox Christianity. Not by *our* standards, mind you, but by God's. This is, after all, an exclusive gospel. One MUST believe in the finished work of Christ in order to be saved. One MUST affirm these truths in order to be considered a member of God's family. You MUST be born again in order to see the kingdom of God.

And yet, it is inclusive in the fact that the gospel is held out to all. The Word of God says, "everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved."

I wonder today if you have received this Gospel, this good news of Jesus Christ. This is not some exclusive club in the earthly sense where we look down on non-members. Quite the opposite. We are all sinners, and we who are part of God's family are only so by God's grace. We have nothing in which to boast. And we hold out this message to you as well...the message that we believed, that we were all born sinners and we all fall short of the glory of God. We were all justly under the wrath of a holy God, headed for eternal destruction. But Jesus came to this earth, lived a sinless life, fulfilled God's law perfectly in our stead, took all our sins upon himself and suffered and died upon a cross as our substitute, and after three days He rose from that grave so that we may have new life. And now He reigns as King, and one day every knee will, in fact, bow to Him. But He calls you today to bow your knee to Him now, to turn from your selfishness and your sinful life that only leads you to death and submit to His rule which will lead you to life everlasting. For it is a rule of perfect love.

Will you turn to Him today?