

1 Corinthians 1:1-11:1

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Preacher: David Helm

[0 : 00] Good morning. It's great to be back with you last week. Lisa and I had the privilege of attending our daughter's college graduation.

And so we were out of town for that and had a wonderful family time. But it is good to be back with this family, and particularly on Pentecost Sunday. It is good to draw attention to the uniqueness of that day, especially when I think of what it means that the Holy Spirit comes from heaven.

That there is a presence of the living God, not only orchestrating providential events in the world, but now taking up residence in the hearts of men and women who call Jesus their Lord.

Nothing could be greater, this rending of our soul and the receiving of life. For indeed, this life draws down a great curtain.

I think of all the events of the life that we live and the discouragements you face, and the, at times, depressions that come your way, the despondency that's there, the questioning of whether there is any hope left for us in the world.

[1 : 29] And this is the day we recall that the Holy Spirit comes and can be yours. We are preparing today to break for our summer from this weekly communion service.

We run this service during the academic year and look forward to what God might have for us after Labor Day. And I want to basically take a look today, not so much merely at chapter 1, verses 10 to 17, but the fullness of what we've been in, in this letter, chapter 1 through chapter 10.

In other words, the last thing that, the first thing that I want to do before we break for vacation is to have us go back over the hole.

I do this with my kids on holiday. As we're driving home from being away a week or two, I ask them now, let's just pause and reflect for a moment on where we've been, all the things we've seen, and how we are enriched because of having seen them and been there.

And I'll usually ask the children the question, do you remember when I picked you up from school the day before we went to vacation? And they'll look all the way back, and it'll feel for them like a long time ago.

[3 : 06] And we will rehearse all the highlights and all the ways that we have been enriched. That's what we do on the last day of our vacation.

It's what I want to do this morning before we set out on vacation. Where have we been? What have we seen? And how are we enriched?

I want to do that in three ways. First, just remind us of the occasion of this letter. What was the occasional reason for the letter?

And it really came to us in two ways. We've learned this through what we've traveled. There was a report about them, that is the church at Corinth, that came to Paul.

And there was, likewise, a letter from them that came to Paul. And this report about them and letter from them are the occasion of the letter that is written to them.

[4 : 10] Take a look at chapter 1, verse 11. For it has been reported to me by Chloe's people. And that line, a report from Chloe, provides an occasional setting for the letter.

He is writing because of the things that have been reported to him. And that report carried us through the letter all the way through chapter 6 until you arrive at chapter 7, verse 1.

Take a look at it structurally there. Now, concerning the matters about which you wrote, not only had a report been given to Paul about them, but a letter had come from them.

And the report was troubling. And the letter indicated all the things that they were lacking. Look back to the very beginning on the report.

It was troubling because he had heard that there were quarrels among them. In other words, there was an internal divisiveness in play.

[5 : 21] It had reared its head in church factionalism. Some following one and some following the other. And we learn that that factionalism was not merely a matter of celebrity status.

that I prefer Paul to Apollos or Apollos to Peter or Peter to Christ. It isn't merely that they preferred one over and against the other for their celebrity or their style.

Nor was it merely linked through whom they might have been baptized. Rather, it was actually the content of their teaching. that these teachers had been leveraged in the church to the point where people said, well, Paul says this and that's what I'm holding to.

Whereas others would say, well, I'm not worried about Paul. I'm only following the word of Christ. And this factionalism created divisiveness of spirit and a breakdown within the family.

What a troubling report. This is a church that Paul had planted. And the letter knew, in the letter, he knew he would need to address it.

[6 : 44] What was the nature of the divisiveness? Not only in regard to the factionalism present, but we saw that there was infidelity. There was a lack of life that matched the word that had been proclaimed.

There was marital infidelity. There was a freedom practice within the church to continue seeing temple prostitutes. There was litigation going on among brothers and sisters.

Fundamental manifestations of a breakdown of all the things that the gospel was to do. The letter that they wrote him, chapter 7, through where we've been so far in chapter 10, demonstrates many of the things that they were lacking.

They were lacking a common understanding that the gospel should bring them that would be applied to a correct judgment. So on things of marriage, some in the church were saying, once you're a Christian, all sex should actually be refrained from.

this kind of dualistic mentality. Or you shouldn't get married at all. And all of these questions, they lack judgment on the implication of the gospel for intimate relationships.

[8 : 08] They lack judgment in regard to food that was sacrificed to idols. They lack judgment in regard to the freedom that they possessed in Christ and how they use that in the context of life.

And so the letter's occasion, stimulated by a report about them and a letter from them, gives us the content. What was the letter's intention?

Right there in chapter 1, verse 10. I appeal to you, brothers, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that all of you agree and there be no divisions among you, that you be united in the same mind and the same judgment.

I have come to think that that verse is the fountainhead of the letter. That everything in the letter is moving toward accomplishing that end, that aim, that goal to unite them in mind and in judgment that there would be agreement.

Those are the marks of a healthy church. Think of our own church. Are we united in mind concerning the gospel and what it is and in judgment the implications and how we live life in light of it?

[9 : 36] It's much more so the mark of a healthy church than giftedness. And this ought to be an encouragement to all of us. He knew that that church was very gifted yet spiritually immature.

What a wonderful thing to be to lack gifts that sway the multitudes but to be spiritually mature. How encouraging to think that you and I dwell in a body that the mark of our health rests in the maturity of the way in which we relate to one another.

No need for bells. No need for whistles. No need for cleverness. Or the accolades of the many.

But quiet, humble, godly, living, in the context with one another, the mark of a healthy church. Love. As Paul will get to later in his letter.

As I think about trying to apply the first ten chapters of this letter to my heart, it would be to make Paul's appeal our prayer.

[10 : 49] look at his appeal, verse ten. I appeal to you brothers by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ that all of you agree that there be no divisions among you but that you be united in the same mind and the same judgment.

as you begin to set out on the summer holiday that will take you far and wide. What a wonderful summer prayer. Paul's appeal, your prayer, dear Lord, may we in the church of which I am a member, may we agree in Christ.

May you keep us from division. may you unite us in the mind of Christ and bring us to the same judgment that the freedoms we possess would be used in service of one another.

This is going to be my prayer for the summer and I commend it to you until we meet again. The letter's occasion, the letter's intention which then gives rise to the letter's argument.

If you have an incomplete church that lacks understanding and judgment where quarrels and divisiveness exist, what is the argument that will be used by Paul to restore unity?

[12 : 26] It's simply this, the gospel. That's the argument of the first ten chapters. It opened, really, his argument in verse 18, for the word of the cross is folly to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved.

It is the power of God. He begins immediately to unfold the gospel and what God has done so that we would be fixed to the mind of Christ and living under the judgments of Christ.

so that the one who was great and became weak would influence our manner of living with one another. Not taking our freedoms and foisting them at the expense of others, but serving in all ways.

The argument of Corinthians meant to establish the intention of unity which would meet the occasion of their factionalism is the gospel.

Look at it in chapter 1, verse 18. The message of it and chapter 2, verses 1 to 3, the manner in which it came. The message of it overturns all the wisdom and power and upward mobility strategies of the world in which we live.

[13 : 50] and the manner of it was in weakness, in service, in quietness, in humbleness. Therefore, that is the judgment that would affect all the things in this letter.

in tone, the letter and the argument are parental. We noticed that, didn't we? Paul is very much in this letter a parent to a child.

I want you to understand the gospel, but not just informationally. Transformationally. I want the gospel to transform the way you live together. And so, he is applying the gospel to all the deficiencies that came from the report and the letter.

The gospel has something to say about your use of freedom. The gospel has something to say about your use of rights. The gospel has something to say about the manner in which you conduct yourself with others in the church.

The gospel is the argument for Paul. Well, it's my prayer this summer that these first ten chapters would be settling in.

[15 : 12] That you would this morning be able to rehearse in your mind, where have we been? What have we seen? How am I enriched? Is my life and are my prayers moving my church to greater unity and judgment in the gospel?

May it be so for you by the power of the Holy Spirit that overcomes all deficiencies of soul and heart.

Our Heavenly Father, we do thank you for this letter written to a young church who had gone wayward and it's so easy for our own hearts to go wayward, to move away from the message and the manner of life, to move away from one another in ways that are destructive to ourselves.

I pray, O Lord, that we would begin to embody the lessons of these chapters and that you would apply them to our heart and our mind, that we would be your body in this place in Christ's name.

Amen.