

1 Corinthians 1:1–11:1

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[0 : 00] Well, good evening and welcome, not only to what is for us in this neighborhood the outset of a fall term, but for us at Holy Trinity Church, the return of our weekly communion service.

And I just want you to know that we'll be here week by week, Sunday evening by Sunday evening, and we hope that you put this in your calendar as a way to close out the Lord's day.

It's been prayerfully planned, and hopefully by the power of the Spirit to guide us all in the Word of Christ. We finished our series last spring in this same service, preaching through the 10th chapter of Paul's letter to the church at Corinth, the first letter.

And so we thought that this fall we would commence where we left off, chapter 11, and take us all the way through the 16th chapter.

But before launching in, today a review of sorts, a looking back at where this service has traveled in the preaching of the Word over the last year before moving ahead.

[1 : 23] And so while the reading came in the New Testament from 1 Corinthians 1, 10 to 17, the message, in a sense, is to capture chapter 1 through chapter 10.

Don't worry. It won't take as long to get there as you might think. Looking back before pressing on is a common practice in the Helm household.

The exercise is especially true on the backside of extended vacations. I have five children, Lisa and I do, and when they were young and still in tow, I would lead them in this exercise of the mind.

Well, I would say, vacation's almost over. School's about set to begin again. Let's spend a few moments recalling all the things we did.

What were the highlights? Where did we go? Where have we been? The goal was simple. To cement in our minds the ground we had covered and to celebrate it.

[2 : 35] And that's what I want to do today. Since we are all returned and ready for another year, I want us to recall the good ground of 1 Corinthians chapter 1 through 10 to cement in our mind or to refresh our memory of three pressing highlights that will need to be held before we launch into the exposition of chapter 11 next week.

First, the letter's occasion. Paul wrote this letter, 1 Corinthians, in response to two things. A report that he had been given about them and a letter that he had received from them.

The report concerned him. Their letter compelled him. And as a result, he picked up his pen to communicate with them. We're told about the report early on.

If you have a text in front of you, 1 Corinthians 1, verse 11. Take a look. He writes, For it has been reported to me by Chloe's people that there is quarreling among you my brothers.

Poor Chloe. Evidently, somebody forwarded the email that she meant for his eyes only. But the report traveled and news had gotten out of all the things she had said about the church that he had planted.

[4 : 11] Quarreling had broken out. And this was a church that Paul had just planted a few short years before. If you're familiar with the book of Acts, chapter 18, there is a record put down by Luke of the early days of Paul planting a church in Corinth that came right on the backside of his time in Athens.

He was fearful while he was in Corinth. Fearful of physical persecution to the point where he didn't want to preach.

And he received a vision in the night, he writes, of the Lord who told him, I am with you. No one will attack you or harm you.

For I have many in this city who are my people. And so as a result, Paul, in this great urban center of Corinth, began to preach.

And the church was born. By the time he writes this letter, though, the local landscape has changed. The congregation was entangled.

[5 : 25] Not with external conflicts, which is what he feared, but with internal conflict, something he never foresaw.

And the nature of the quarreling was factionalism. The text that was read tells us that congregants were aligning themselves behind particular teachers, almost as if they were leveraging out parceled words that they admired most in one over and against another.

In some sense, they succumbed to status or celebrity. In another sense, they moved beyond that to the actual content of the individual speech.

If you get a chance to go back and read through the letter, you'll notice there's this sloganeering in place where he's actually bringing forward lines that they claim he said or someone else said and they do it to the discrepancy of others.

This is what accounts for that strange addition of the word Christ in chapter 1 verse 12. Somebody would say, I follow Christ. In other words, I'm only taking what I know he said.

[6 : 47] Not what Paul said or Paulus or anyone else. And others would say, well, I agree with that, but I am a special adherent to what Paul said or the celebrity nature of it.

I was baptized by Paul. Latching themselves to individuals. Taken together, those two aspects, the celebrity status and the content of their speech concerned Paul.

It was part of the occasion for writing. The report that Chloe's people bring him in verse 11 may be the occasion for everything that actually happens in chapters 1 through 6.

He lists things that were in the report. Not only factionalism, but infidelity in the church, this frivolous lawsuit among brothers and sisters, and the content of 1 to 6 all falls out of the report in chapter 1 verse 11.

But there was more. Take a look at chapter 7 verse 1. The occasion for the letter was not limited to the report about them. It also included a letter he had received from them.

[8 : 09] 7-1. Now concerning the matters about which you wrote. So the occasion of the letter has these two structural markers in the book.

Evidently the young congregation had a number of questions on how Christ now in them intended to alter or change their interaction with the world around them.

That's a natural question. for any who as an adult would begin to follow Jesus. What does this mean for my interaction in life if Christ is in me the hope of glory?

And so the questions began to emerge chapter 7 even related to sex the use of my body now that I'm a Christian. It moved beyond that to marriage.

it perplexed them in regard to issues related to gender continually coming up gifts in the church giving and especially perplexing to them.

- [9 : 19] How do I handle the professional guild of which I'm a member and yet now a follower of Christ? And so from chapter 7 all the way through 16 Paul is responding to these very natural questions for this new congregation.
- What's the application of that for us? Well what would the report be if the word were to get out on the congregation of Holy Trinity?
- What would a report on your interactions with brothers and sisters in Christ reveal? I pray that it wouldn't be one of factionalism or infidelity or this frivolous bitter infighting.
- The letter's occasion. We also saw last year the letter's intention. If a report about them and a letter from them provided the occasion chapter 1 verse 10 and I want you to look there again certainly provides Paul's intention in writing to them.
- He says 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 that you may be united in the same mind and the same judgment.
- [10 : 50] I can tell you this in our time here last year all of the application and the aim of the letter comes tumbling out of verse 10.
- This is the reason he wrote. Notice the opening word. I appeal to you. It's an especially strong word. Paul uses it in Romans but not until chapter 12 when he's laid out a complete argument and on the basis of it an appeal.
- He doesn't have time for that in Corinth which indicates that the letter that he received from them and the report about them raised the urgency to write an appeal to them.
- Immediate behavioral change was required in Corinth and the appeal came forward. What does he want? Nothing less than a complete recovery of unity within the local congregation.
- He wants them to be in agreement. And unity along two lines. Take a look. In mind and in judgment.
- [12 : 06] Those two words make multiple appearances throughout the letter. The goal concerning the report was that they would be of one mind God.
- Not of multiple minds and who they would want to follow or the factions that were existing. No, he wants them to have the mind of Christ. And he wants them to be of one judgment.
- That is, all the freedoms that you have in Christ because he's forgiven your sins actually walk their way out in the world in matters of sex and gender and your relationship to the guild in matters of giftedness and giving in one judgment.
- In other words, he didn't want the church running off in all kinds of directions regarding what it meant that Christ was in me, the hope of glory.
- The application for us, that appeal, 110, his appeal should be our prayer. I don't know if you practice prayers daily, but this would be a great prayer for the fall.
- [13 : 24] Between now and Advent, the daily prayer that the local congregation would be united in the mind of Christ and walking in accordance with the judgments or the implications of that gospel.
- That is the mark of a healthy church, much more so than your knowledge, much more so than our learning. It's the humble submission to the mind of Christ, to his ways in the world.
- God will be letter. The letter's occasion stemming from the report about them and a letter to them. The letter's intention that there would be a unity of mind and judgment.
- The letter's argument and with this we close. How does he accomplish this? What's the argument of the letter? I can put it to you in one word.

The argument of Corinthians is the gospel. That's where he begins. He launches out in chapter 1 verse 17 and following.

[14 : 44] He begins to talk about the cross of Christ. About verse 18 the word of the cross. In other words, he's convinced that if he can reposition them in the gospel they will be united and walking in the ways of Christ.

It's interesting in the whole letter chapter 1 focuses on Christ's death and the upside down wisdom of that. And the letter will close in chapter 15 on his resurrection and the implication of that.

In other words, if he wants them to be the church he desires them to be, he pulls that event, the death and resurrection of Christ and compresses them by way of argument throughout the letter.

It's astounding. A young church that was in need of correction and he's calling them back by the content of the message that saved them.

For who, when we consider what Christ has done for us, can continue to live with frivolous and bittered factions and infidelity.

[16 : 05] Look at the table behind me. His body, his blood, laid down for us. May we humbly receive it and walk in accordance with it.

I want to say to you, welcome to this service and welcome to this table. The next leg of our journey in this letter yet waits for us.

Our Heavenly Father, as we continue in worship, I pray that you would strengthen us to love you well as we close this day.

In Jesus' name, Amen.