

1 Corinthians 1:10-17

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[0 : 00] Well, good morning and welcome as we continue in our morning series through the letter of 1 Corinthians. And I would encourage you, if you have a Bible, to open to it.

We will be walking our way through it sequentially all year in today, chapter 1, verses 10 through 17. I received a phone call yesterday, the significance of which I didn't fully comprehend until after hanging up.

Don't know if you ever had that kind of experience. I knew the person well, extremely well, and had actually been looking forward to speaking with him.

When the phone call came, I was ready for a period of catching up. We hadn't spoken in a while. But immediately, the one who placed the call launched into something that was dear to his heart and evidently a weight upon his soul.

And all the time for normal, conversational, relational aspects disappeared to the point where I finished the phone call this way.

[1 : 22] Well, I had actually been looking forward to calling you as well. And I'll do it later today so that we can catch up. And there it went. When we read the letter to 1 Corinthians, something of that nature occurs.

And you couldn't have noticed it until now. But by verse 10, Paul is launching into something that is a weight upon his soul. It is urgently held within his heart.

And it's voiced in the sense of an immediate appeal. Before anything's done, we're already making an appeal in the letter. 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, but that you be united in the same mind and in the same judgment.

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

Verses 10, 11, and 12. An appeal immediately expressed. An appeal for unity, which stems from a report of divisions.

[2 : 38] That word appeal is an inordinately strong word given our place in the letter. The greeting has only finished.

It's a word best used when worked up to. Think of the letter of Paul to the Romans.

Eleven chapters of discourse and argument and thoughts laid out. And then in 12.1, I appeal to you, brothers, by the mercies of God.

It's often placed then on the backside of what would have already been previous discourse. To find it here at the very opening is striking.

It reveals to us something about Paul more directly, something about his sense of the situation and what was going on.

[3 : 41] And therefore, we learn as we enter into this letter this year, you are reading a letter that has an incredible sense of pace to it. No time for much of anything else.

An appeal. It's an appeal for unity. Notice. The word there for being united in the same is, in a sense, the word used elsewhere for nets that are mended.

So unity is actually the bringing back together, the apportioning of something, the laying out of it in ways that will be beneficial for all.

The folding of it. The arrangement of it. I am praying. I am appealing to you for an arrangement of mind. For a mending of demeanor and judgment that would be unified in spirit.

Notice it stems from a report of divisions. I've often felt sorry for Chloe, verse 11, for it has been reported to me by Chloe's people. It's almost as if you have this sense of it was the email that wasn't to be forwarded on.

[4 : 55] And somehow it went forward and found its way into the hands of Paul. Oh, Paul, why did you have to put my own name in there? But there it is. It had been reported to me by Chloe's people that there are divisions among you.

The word divisions is where we would understand something to be rent asunder or a schism. It's used in Mark 15 to speak of the curtain that is torn.

Something is being torn in the church. It's being torn among the people. And therefore, that is the reason for the appeal.

In practical terms, what was the schism? What was the tearing that needed mending which forced the appeal before any pleasantries were communicated?

Let me mention them in two ways by practical terms. One, there appeared to be in Corinth a preference among the congregants of one teacher over and against another.

[6 : 01] Notice how he frames it here. I mean that each one of you says, I follow Paul or I follow Apollos or I follow Cephas or I follow Christ. Literally, more woodenly, I'm of Paul.

Well, I'm of Apollos. I'm of Cephas. Well, but I am of Christ. This preference of one teacher in the church over and against another is what was tearing the church, which forced the appeal.

Let me put it simply, in an election season of life that we've just finished, there was a partisan spirit that had taken root within the church.

There were actually now leaders with a constituency. I mean, think of all the notion there of the quotations in verse 12.

It almost looks like these are slogans themselves, the slogans of the campaign. Who are you lining up behind? That's one of the things when we think about what is the practical terms, what was the schism.

[7 : 18] Secondly, though, you could also notice that pride, there was not only the preference of one over the other, but pride that one felt via their personal connection to one teacher over and against another.

That's about all I can make of all of the extended verses and verbiage here on baptism. Paul sensed that he is not wanting to be associated or connected with individuals via baptism, but his proclamation.

In other words, some were beginning to take pride because they had come into the church through one of these various people. In other words, they enjoyed one over the other because of their personal connection in faith to the one over the other.

That's always a tearing apart of the church. And so he moves in verses 1, chapter 1, 10 to 12 with an appeal for unity that stems from a report of division.

And that division is rooted in a preferential partisan spirit and in a pride that people in the congregation were taking with their leaders. What happens in verses 13 to 16 is Paul, in a sense, provides an argument that would mitigate against any continuation of this kind of thinking.

[8 : 45] First, by showing the absurdity of their thinking this way about people in the church. Do you see the three rhetorical questions there in verse 13? Is Christ divided?

Was Paul crucified for you? Were you baptized in the name of Paul? Three rhetorical questions that really capture the senselessness of this kind of thinking.

In other words, he's saying, look, Christ can't be divided. Christ can't be parceled out among various people. Paul, I wasn't put on a cross for you.

Or thirdly, you were never united to me in baptism. In fact, I didn't baptize any of you. And then, of course, he goes on to explain, well, I did baptize a couple of you, but nobody else, at least not to my knowledge.

But what he's saying is, you weren't united to me when you came to faith in Christ through your baptism. So it's the absurdity of their thinking which really reveals something about the way Paul stands in relationship to them.

[9 : 52] This whole letter now unfolds very quickly for us in regard to its tonal character. This is not collegial. This is not Paul writing to Timothy or Titus.

This is not peer-to-peer relational. That we are all walking together in the bonds of peace in the church. No, this is parental kind of argumentation.

I've used these kind of arguments myself with my own children when they do things that are senseless. And when we are in need of a recovery of a unity that would bring us back to the same mind, a way of thinking.

This is the way a parent speaks to a child. And the whole letter now falls out under that feeling. As a parent, think of it this way.

Whether you were a child and your parent said to you, or a parent and you say this to your children. What in the world were you thinking? You ever have that come at you as a kid? Ever use it as a parent?

[10 : 59] Or, how does that make any sense? Or, did you leave your head at home? All these are the way the parent speaks to the child.

And the child looks back with this, I've seen it on all five of mine. And I remember wearing this look myself when my dad would talk to me. A glazed look, a blank stare, nothing to say, but I don't know.

I don't know. I wasn't thinking. He's like, right. The absurdity of such thinking. This is why parents say, well, get your head on straight.

That's what Paul's doing here. And by demeanor, we are reading a letter from a parent to a child. The second line that he attacks on the division is found in verse 17.

I mean, if verse 13 and 16 is the absurdity of thinking like this about men, then verse 17 goes beyond that to talk about the dangers that this thinking would bring to the central message of his, central tenant of his message.

[12 : 19] In other words, the two things that he attacks division with. One, he tries to instruct them on what does and does not make sense. But then by verse 17, he instructs them on what is actually at stake.

In other words, if left unchecked, according to verse 17, the gospel of the cross would actually be put by the wayside. Verse 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. Paul is saying what changed, what changed them, was not the power that was behind how Paul said stuff.

What changed them was the power behind how God saves us. And he saves us via the cross of Christ. Not through any attachment to the leadership of the church and their persuasive abilities or their person.

That's what's at stake. The cross, the power of the cross would actually be emptied. You ever think of it that way? Preferential treatment in the church, one leader over in another.

[13 : 36] It's not only senseless. Left unchecked, the gospel's at stake. For we would begin to create a Christian church that is built on the backs of men, rather than the death of Christ on a cross.

Be mature in mind, because the message is on the line. How do we apply it? Well, first of all, for us here today, let us be of one mind.

Let us live in such a way with one another that we wouldn't need this kind of phone call or this kind of letter. That there would be time for extended, mature, adult-to-adult conversation on the glories of the gospel that we share.

Be of one mind. Secondly, be mature in that mind. May there be no partisan spirit in our midst. And that's tough, given our propensity in this day.

We have a deep preference for people. And we have great pride in our associations with certain people. Simply ask the question to somebody, where do you go to church?

[14 : 53] And if they give you the name of the pastor, it's the subtle indicators of our attachment to people. Think of it in regard to the early stages of Holy Trinity Church being multi-congregational.

There was a season, a brief few years window where we were in multiple places and from the beginning with multiple voices coming from the pulpit.

And we did our best to maintain a decorum that the word and the cross is what holds us, not the one who is delivering it. It's easier now, now that we all meet at the same time in the day, to come for the word.

And then realize that the message is on the line. This is not a little thing. We'll see over the coming passages that the very gospel is at stake and our need for it will rise or fall on our understanding of the power of God at work in Christ in that message on the cross rather than the characteristics of personality.

Well, let us pray. Our Heavenly Father, I pray that this church would be mature and that our conversations with the apostolic gospel would demonstrate that we have a mature mind, indeed, the mind of Christ, and that we would forego any partisan elements in our life lest we empty the message of its very power.

[16 : 36] We pray this in Jesus' name. Amen. Amen.