

# Being a disciple who knits!

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[ 0 : 0 0 ] We're reading from 1 Corinthians 1, verses 1-17. Praise to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

I give thanks to my God always for you because of the grace of God that was given to you in Christ Jesus, that in every way you are enriched in him, in all speech, in all knowledge, even as the testimony about Christ was confirmed among you, so that you are not lacking in any spiritual gift as you wait for the revealing of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Who will sustain you to the end, guiltless in the day of our Lord Jesus Christ. God is faithful by whom you are called into the fellowship of his Son, Jesus Christ our Lord.

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.

For it has been reported to me by Chloe's people that there is quarrelling among you, my brothers. What I mean is that each of you says, I follow Paul, or I follow Apollos, or I follow Cephas, or I follow Christ.

[ 1 : 3 8 ] Is Christ divided? Was Paul crucified for you? Or were you baptized in the name of Paul? I thank God that I baptized none of you except Crispus and Gaius, that no one may say that you were baptized in my name.

I did baptize also the household of Stephanas. Beyond that, I don't know whether I baptized anyone else. But 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.

Well, I may have lost my marbles, but I'm moving more fluidly than Joel is by the look of it. Okay, well, it's nice to be back, I think.

I wasn't sure I was going to be able to come back after having a FaceTime vision of what you did at camp. Making fun of me, so I'm still to determine who actually was the instigator of that particular game.

I shall have a conversation with him sometime. So I thought when I looked at it on FaceTime, it was absolutely brutal. But then I thought afterwards, actually, no, there was heaps more that could have been said.

[ 2 : 5 2 ] So I actually decided I got off rather lightly. So thank you for being merciful to me in making fun of me at the same time. Obviously, 13 weeks, 14 weeks, it turned into 26 weeks, and we're going back for another stint after this month of April.

So, yeah, the Lord sort of swept aside our thing that we had planned for years in terms of local ministry. He just seems to have swept that aside, and we're in a totally different place to what we ever imagined ourselves to be, and quite happily so.

And I just want to recognize that Alison has been a big part in that. She's stood alongside me in ministry for 44 years. And she's actually been encouraging me to stay longer.

What's happening out here needs your skills, is what she said. So that's very generous over to me. And it's very hard for her to do that sort of thing in a strange place. So I'm particularly thankful for that.

The two congregations are small, but if they combine, which they're trying to do at the minute, they get every chance of thriving. So if we can keep the vision dominant of the enjoyment of being together and the benefits of being together and stop people becoming process dominant, that is, arguing about governance or what the style of church looks like, then there's a good future.

[ 4 : 05 ] And the two churches out there think I might be useful in helping that process because while I know both the Presbyterian system and the Anglican system, I'm not rusted on to either of them.

So that puts me in a position, they think, to be able to sort of, I don't know, help them navigate or referee this time of change for them. So, yeah, all right, we'll look at God's word now.

So, hmm. Well, the question, as I always do to start, is, is it possible to be married but to continue living as though you were a single person?

Now, sadly, we've got to answer that not only is it possible, but it's actually very common these days. A more personal question then to develop that.

Is it possible to be a Christian, to be committed to this church family here and yet live and act like a non-Christian?

[ 5 : 12 ] Is it possible for us, speaking collectively now, corporately, is it possible for us as a church family to be Christians, to talk about Jesus, to pride ourselves on our Christian heritage and still act collectively like non-Christians?

I think the answer must be yes. And that's a scary answer. And that answer, yes, is our point of connection into Paul's letter to the Christians at Corinth.

The reality for the Christians at Corinth was that they were being tutored more by the Corinthian culture all around them than they were by Jesus and his word.

And the evidence of that was in the church. They were Christians, and we'll see that. Paul has no trouble at all in saying they're Christians.

But in the challenge of relationships in the church family, they very quickly defaulted back to their old pre-Christian way of thinking and acting towards one another.

[ 6 : 37 ] Hence the title. They were plugged into Jesus, but not switched on to Jesus. It's just like a fan. Imagine, just picture a fan, just a cooling fan.

It can be plugged into a PowerPoint, but it actually is useless until it's switched on, until the power flows through the fan and enables the fan to do what the fan was created to do.

We've got to be plugged in and switched on to Jesus. But let me pause for a moment and just say two things.

The next four Sundays are my last four sermons, four periods of formal teaching after 24 years. The elders wanted me to do some handover stuff, some things, some pointers that I would urge the church family to as I move out the door and others step up.

And I thought 1 Corinthians would be a really good way of doing that, looking at this thought of how we can be plugged into Jesus, but not switched on. In other words, how we can be here, but not actually useful, mature disciples of Jesus.

[ 7 : 55 ] Second thing that I want to do is just step back into the background, the backstory of the church at Corinth before we jump into the details. Corinth was a large, young, absolutely booming city.

It was a melting pot of religions and philosophies and lifestyles. It was said by the local writers of the time that any pleasure, any vice or sexual perversion imaginable could be found in Corinth.

That's the sort of cosmopolitan city it was. Personal freedom was valued most of all and meant that then any behaviour had to be deemed to be acceptable.

It's my freedom, it's my right. I'm talking about a city some 2,000 years ago. It sounds a little bit modern and familiar, doesn't it? In among all that was a fledgling church, probably only about five years old when Paul writes this letter back to them.

Acts tells us, Acts chapter 18 is the backstory, and you can go and read it. It's a very interesting reading. Paul was there for about 18 months, getting the church set up and running. But 18 months isn't very long.

[ 9 : 13 ] And then Paul moved on to other fields, and Apollos took over the pastoring of the church. So, in this very strong Corinthian culture, was this young church.

It's not surprising there, I think, to discover heaps of serious issues in the church. It's not too much to say this church was almost dysfunctional in terms of relationships, and on a bigger level, their credibility in the local city was almost in tatters.

The people looking into the church couldn't see any difference between what was happening in the church and what was happening out in society. It was a mess. The Corinthian culture was impacting, and you'll see this if you read through the letter of Corinthians 1 and 2, it was impacting what they thought was important in the church, who were considered good leaders in the church.

What was appropriate sexual behavior among individuals in the church? What was their own view of personal freedom, and how should you exercise freedom in the context of a community?

Their rights, their use of money. What makes a person worthy of respect in the church? How and when to get involved in the church, and on what basis? And so the list of problems, you can read through, and you can tease all those problems.

[ 10 : 46 ] There was a bag full of problems. The church was a mess. And it's into that relational dysfunction that Paul introduces the key principle.

And this key principle underpins everything else in this letter. And it's such a simple principle, and yet it seems so hard for us to get a hold of it. The principle is really simple.

It is, if you're following the outline, you'll see it in front of you. The principle is this. Remember that in Christ, you have it all. In Christ, you have it all.

Paul was hurting for these believers. He was their spiritual father. And he was responding to a report that things had fallen apart.

And they were pleading to Paul for urgent help. And when you think about the dysfunctional mess that Paul's speaking into, and then the way in which he engages the believers at Corinth, it's absolutely amazing.

[ 12 : 00 ] Paul begins with an absolutely extravagant description of them in verse 2. And remember, as we start reading this text, remember the dysfunctional mess I've just described. It's everywhere.

The place has just fallen apart. And Paul says, to the church of God in Corinth, to those sanctified in Christ Jesus, called to be saints, together with all of those who in every place call upon the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, both their Lord and ours.

Grace, and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Paul's response first utterance into this dysfunctional mess.

Hey guys, remember, you're the church of Christ. You're died for people. You're sanctified. You're called saints in Christ.

God's special, holy, set apart people. In other words, Paul sent him, remember guys, you are a community defined by Jesus, defined by God's saving work within you.

[ 13 : 17 ] You have the most incredible privilege of being forgiven. You've been made new from the inside out. You've been brought into God's own family. And you're brought into fellowship with Christians everywhere across the world, but especially there in Corinth.

Paul wants them to remember and take on board practically that in Christ they have it all. And he follows through with lots more detail in verses 49.

Paul wants them to remember that in Christ they were graciously saved, verse 4. I give thanks to my God always for you.

Put that alongside the dysfunctional mess I've just described. Isn't that quite extraordinary? because of the grace he gives thanks because of the grace that was given you in Christ Jesus that in every way you were enriched in him.

Get that? In every way you were made rich in him. They have every blessing imaginable. What is every blessing imaginable?

[ 14 : 35 ] it's in there. They've got the ability to understand the gospel and they've responded to the gospel. They've been plugged into Jesus. What more is there says Paul?

That's the secret of light and life. and more than that they've got the ability to speak it to others.

Verse 6 they were the living proof testimony about Jesus was confirmed to me. They actually were the living proof of the changing power of the gospel.

people. Verse 7 they lacked nothing by which they need or nothing they needed to live obediently until Christ returns.

And verses 8 and 9 who will sustain you the same Jesus who will sustain you to the end guiltless in the day of our Lord Jesus. Again get that against the dysfunctional mess these people were making and continue to make guiltless in the day of our Lord Jesus Christ.

[ 15 : 50 ] God is faithful by whom you were called into the fellowship of his son Jesus Christ our Lord. In other words in spite of all the mess that's all around you that you're causing actively says to these Christians these believers the Lord Jesus himself would keep you to the end why?

Because that's what God does it was God who called you to himself sovereignly in the first place and promised to keep you for eternal life.

Now why have I labored that? Because friends we ought to be so encouraged by and drawn to Paul's grace based approach to this church.

There were serious problems in the church divisions immorality power struggles but Paul's reminding them those struggles actually while they're real do not define them as believers.

they're the church says Paul not because you got everything right or are getting everything right but because the Lord has started a wonderful work of total renovation through his spirit in your midst and he will complete it.

[ 17 : 19 ] my friends it's just a very practical problem for it is so often we lose sight of our standing in Christ.

When we come under pressure when our relationships come under pressure what do we do? We immediately toss out gospel categories. We might be gospel shaped for years and then pressure comes on and suddenly we turf out gospel shape and we revert back to the old pre-Christian way of thinking and doing things and relating to one another and it just causes carnage.

We lose sight of our standing in Christ and all the blessings that are ours to be enjoyed the blessings that we need to be mature in Christ to be different in this world.

we already have them in Christ but we lose that because we become focused on our failings and shortcomings things.

It's so interesting to me and it's been a model I've tried you can be the judge of how successful I've been but it's a model I've tried to have all my ministry years. Paul doesn't rip into these believers when they get it so badly wrong.

[ 18 : 47 ] He doesn't rip into them in anger. He doesn't say what a hopeless bunch of losers you are. I'm out of here. He doesn't seek to shame them in their stupidity.

He doesn't seek to intimidate them into just doing the right thing because of what will look good. He doesn't seem to manipulate them or threaten them. He doesn't withdraw support of them as a strategy to put pressure on them to do the right thing.

Paul will have nothing of that sort of approach. It's always, hey, remember who you are in Christ. That's what you need to think about at this stage.

Paul's confident that if only they can understand their new identity in Christ, then they'll overflow with the right connections from that, right thinking, right desires, right actions.

All of those things that reflect their new grace-based life. things that are going to apply to the right principle practically in verses 10 to 7.

[ 20 : 01 ] It applies it to the relational dysfunction. Verse 10, 11 puts the spotlight on a very serious problem in the church.

It says, verse 10, I appeal to you, brothers, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ. There's that grace-based approach again, 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.

The serious problem is this. There's some sort of major disconnect in these Christians, as I said before, plugged in but not switched on. They were not living as people who have it all in Jesus.

Internal fights, bickering, had caused them to splinter into hostile, competing factions. Verse 12, it seems so innocuous and yet so profound in the church.

Division seems to have arisen out of seemingly harmless loyalties. Look at verse 12. What I mean is that each of you says, and here's the seemingly harmless loyalties, I follow Paul, or I follow Apollos, or I follow Cephas, or the super-spiritual ones saying, well I don't follow any person, I just get my orders direct from Jesus.

[ 21 : 35 ] It seems harmless, doesn't it? It's just human nature. To warm to one personality more than another personality. To warm to one style of teaching more than another style of teaching.

To engage with one person over a longer period of time than another person. But what happened here was that this seemingly harmless loyalty, as people promote the various teachers who had featured in the life of the church.

But it turned into rivalry, which turned into hostility, which turned into competition, as their preferences and loyalties became reasons to break fellowship with those who thought differently, and perhaps to stand in judgment over them.

Well, obviously, we, our group, has actually got it better than your group. My friends, what started with seemingly harmless loyalties ended up in civil war in the local church family.

And you've got to scratch your head and think, how the heck did we get to there? How the heck did we get to there? How the heck did we get to there? And Paul responds firmly because it's a serious threat to the community of believers.

[ 23 : 08 ] His challenge, again, is to live as the grace-based people you are. He makes three points in these verses, and bear with me, it's not going to take too long.

I just said that especially for Sarah. It tells me not to apologize. Paul appeals for agreement. Renewed unity in both mind and action.

New determination to handle differences of opinion and preferences in a way that demonstrates their deep unity in Christ. You look at verse 10, this is where the knitting bit comes in.

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.

In the Greek, that word united there is the word, it's like knitting, that you be knitted together. And it's probably a medical term where a bone is broken and when properly set, so I've read, hopefully the medicals here aren't going to jump up and disagree with me, disagree with me afterwards, just let me in my own little world in the minute.

[ 24 : 25 ] But apparently when a bone is properly set and knits together again properly, then that knitted together joint is actually stronger than the original bone.

That's the picture that Paul's saying here. Bickering in the church, says Paul, is like having a broken bone.

And we all know what happens if we have a displaced fracture and we ignore it. It can cause serious deformity, or in the worst case, it can cause death if sepsis gets in.

So Paul's saying, look, we just can't ignore a broken bone. We can't leave it unattended. It will cause infection, it will cause pain, it will cause disfigurement, it will cause the destruction of the church family.

Now, given that we're all sinfully self interested at some point, or many points, it's impossible to imagine in a community like this that we will avoid relational breaks.

[ 25 : 35 ] They will happen. Far more than we want them to happen, but they will happen. Paul's point is that when they do occur, then every effort needs to be made to ensure they're healed properly, properly knitted together again, and even stronger, therefore, than the original connection.

My friends, here's where it starts to become really practical. Every person here, knitting's often seen to be the domain of old women, but I'm telling you this morning, every person here, men, women, boys and girls, every one of us need to be master knitters.

if the future of this church is going to be guaranteed. We need to be passionate about healing relational dysfunction, properly healing relational dysfunction.

We must be passionate in choosing not to live with permanent relational pain, permanent relational disfigurement. the pathway to true healing simply to express practically who we are in Christ.

We already have deep unity in Christ. Being passionate to maintain, protect, and build up deep unity in Christ is what will make you the most useful and mature disciple you can be in this church family.

[ 27 : 21 ] And that's one of the things I want to say to you all as I sort of am out the back door. You want to be useful? I hope you do want to be useful in this church family. Well, be a relational knitter.

Don't live with relational disfigurement. we're just in the process of combining two churches in Weewa.

The biggest issue I'm going to be dealing with when I go back for the next ten weeks is a whole raft of relational dysfunction. People move from the present church to Anglin because of broken relationships and vice versa.

And it's all coming to the surface. It's all coming to the We must be knitters. You must be a knitter.

It's not the elder's job. It's your job. Well, it's not only their job. Sorry. It's your job. Not only is it a threat to the congregation, but even worse than that, failure to be passionate about healing and relational dysfunction ends up making a mockery of the changing power of the gospel.

- [ 28 : 42 ] And the church just becomes like the rest of the world. Another place of rival factions and vicious attack. Well, the second thing then Paul says to the believers in Corinth is major in the majors.

Keep Christ and salvation issues central. Paul throws up three questions in verse 13. Very profound questions and yet very simple questions.

Is Christ divided? You guys have managed to make it appear as if he divided. You've got now all these different factions all claiming to be followers of Christ and yet not talking to each other or not relating to each other.

Is Christ divided? Is Christ divided? Was Paul crucified for you perhaps? You've given absolute loyalty to Paul or Cephas or Apollo or somebody else.

Are they the ones who are responsible for you being here now in new life? Or perhaps you were baptized into the name of Paul.

- [ 29 : 56 ] And Paul then goes into a little bit of discourse. pretty blunt point isn't it that Paul makes here? Remember your indebtedness for all the help that Paul or Cephas or Apollo or any of the other leaders or any of the other pastors for all the help they've been to you in your Christian walk.

Perhaps they were the one who introduced you to Christ in the first place. And that's a wonderful thing but for all of that, your indebtedness for your new life belongs to Christ.

And remember that when you were baptized you weren't Paul may have baptized you or Cephas or Apollos but you weren't pledging loyalty to them when you were baptized. You were making a statement to the whole world in the church community of your loyalty to Jesus Christ.

I'm thanking him that he's washed you and made you clean. The identity, the personal gifts of the baptizer, the emphasis of the baptizer, totally irrelevant says Paul.

Paul wanted a following for Christ, not himself. And my friends, I tell you, I've lived long enough to say that too many pastors, yep, I'm talking about pastors, too many pastors I think have sought to build a following for themselves.

- [ 31 : 30 ] And I trust that that's not been the case here for me. That would be the worst thing anybody could say to me, I think, is that Father, would you just sought to build a following for yourself?

And verse 17, Paul says, For Christ did not send me to baptize, but to preach the gospel, not with words of eloquent wisdom, lest the cross of Christ be emptied of its power.

Remember, says Paul, it's Christ's mission that you're engaged in. What was I sent to do? Not to big note myself, but to serve Christ. And it says to these believers, your responsibility is to promote the lordship of Christ.

And when you promote the lordship of Christ, you can't promote your own lordship at the same time. It's that simple. You can't promote your own preferences, your own understanding.

Those sorts of things actually undermine the gospel, undermine the lordship and the focus on Christ. Friends, if we're practically aware of who we are in Christ, then we'll be able to keep first things first.

- [ 32 : 52 ] We'll be able to measure on the measures and keep the minors in the place where they ought to be in the minor. And that will promote unity rather than difference.

Third and final thing then, think harmony, not unison. Promote unity in the context of diversity. Now, when you look at verse 10, it's very clear that it's not saying that every church family, every believer in every church family should agree absolutely on every single issue.

I don't think it's saying that at all. But it does demand that the differences should not leave to strife and division. Paul, Peter, Apollos, they all had absolute identical convictions about the necessity for somebody to be saved and how they're saved through the Lord Jesus Christ by grace alone.

But undoubtedly, three different personalities had three different approaches to teaching. Perhaps even three different emphases. Well, we know there are three different emphases in teaching on things other than the actual means and pathway of salvation.

They had different emphases, no doubt, in terms of how things should be done in the church. I have said to you this morning that such differences are normal within a community like this, especially a larger community.

[ 34 : 25 ] Because all the time we're looking at biblical principles and we're trying to work out how do we apply those biblical principles faithfully into a changing cultural setting. And that's a legitimate thing to struggle with.

But here's the problem. When one Christian or one group of Christians push their preference as the only godly option for how things should be done and refuse to allow legitimate differences in viewpoint where legitimate differences in viewpoint might actually legitimately be held.

That was a very clumsy sentence, wasn't it? But I got there in the end. Then when we do that, harmony has been sacrificed for uniformity.

Uniformity, we all have to just be vanilla flavoured. Harmony is we get a whole range of colours and flavours, but we stand united. Holding our convictions strongly and interacting with others who hold different convictions strongly where those different convictions are legitimate.

See, uniformity, and I've seen it in churches, uniformity is where every believer has to have the same viewpoint before they can be accepted as serious minded Christians.

[ 35 : 51 ] And unfortunately, uniformity, as I've observed it, has always been imposed from the top down by heavy-handed leadership. But true unity is expressed in diversity.

That's when you have harmony. Now, hear me carefully. There needs to be fundamental agreement on salvation issues. But beyond that, there are legitimate issues where legitimate differences might be held and debated.

Different ideas about how we might do church. Different ideas about what projects this church family should follow into the future. These are things that the elders will call you to contribute to and perhaps make suggestions to.

And there will range. Some of them will be quite out there. One personality or preacher will engage you much more easily than another personality.

Some of you will be saying, well, it's nice to have Calderwood back and others will be saying, oh, gosh, why can't we have Dave Bott up the front as normal or whatever. That's the way it works. Others won't always see your viewpoint with the same passion that you see it.

[ 37 : 24 ] But here's the rub from 1 Corinthians as I understand it. Those differences are legitimate, but what's never right is to dig a trench based on your differences.

to withdraw from people based on your differences. To refuse to join fully in the life of this congregation because that's not how I see it at this point. And worst of all, even to go to war with the church family.



Maybe it seems extreme, but I tell you, I've seen it. I suspect most of you here have seen it too. legitimate differences should never determine the existence and quality of relationship.

And here's putting this positive now. Hopefully it hasn't been too negative, but it needs to be said the way it was said. If we turn that around now, if we discuss our differences and debate them while keeping our focus on Christ, then what happens is that we actually enjoy helping one another better understand God's word.

That can't be a bad thing, can it? There's nothing to fear in that, is there? And we remain united and avoid bitter strife and division at the same time.

[ 39 : 04 ] Now friends, as I wrap up now, I have to say this, I'm so glad that the Lord has preserved us from these types of deep division and disunity that was evident in the church in Corinth.

But hear this equally, we are not immune to such developments. And I tell you, they can just spring up overnight.

we need to be careful and vigilant, especially in times of change like our church family is experiencing currently.

A raft of new elders, me stepping out after 24 years, others stepping up. All the seeds are there for people to start saying, I wish it was like the good old days.

I wish colder was it was back. I wish this, I wish that. I'm not happy with this, I'm not happy with that. What a tragedy, this next point might seem self-promoting but I'm trying to use it as an illustration.

[ 40 : 16 ] What a tragedy it would be if folk in this congregation, I'm looking at you now, if you were more rusted onto me than rusted onto Jesus.

That would torpedo my life ministry. What a tragedy it would be if your involvement in this church was just tied to personalities rather than tied to Jesus.

What a tragedy it would be if your commitment to being a useful disciple in this family was tied to, again, a personality. I don't like the new regime so I'm going to adopt a passive-aggressive commitment and involvement.

friendship. My friends, we need to be committed to displaying the reality that we already have in Jesus, a deep unity, that we might continue to display the changing power of the gospel.

What a tragedy it would be if moving into the new chapter of life as this church family, all you could do was find fault with the new elders.

[ 41 : 48 ] elders. Will they fail you? Of course they will, just like the last lot did. John and me can testify only too well to that, can't we? Of course they'll fail you, because they were sinful men when they were appointed elders, and they will remain sinful men until the day they die, or the Lord comes to take them away.

Get alongside them. Support them. Encourage them. And if necessary, challenge them on the basis of God's word, and I tell you, the men that are there will welcome being pushed back into God's word.

That's their nature, that's their character, that's why they're there. And value the different personalities, value the different approaches, and have this harmony view.

Say, look, any one of them by themselves, like just Coldward by himself, would really get up your nose super quick. when he's part of a team, he's tolerable. He might actually even be helpful. That's a harmony expression.

Realistic and harmonious. In Christ, we already have deep unity. We will always have more in common than we have at odds.

[ 43 : 09 ] Christ. So let's be the best disciples we can be by approaching every relationship and knowing who we are in Christ.

Pray with me. Please. Lord, these words are so easy to hear in some ways. They're not hard to comprehend the meaning of the text, and yet so, so difficult for us to apply them consistently.

Lord, help us. Help us to be relational knitters. Help us to be first and foremost rusted onto you. And from there, then, Lord, value those that you've brought into our lives that have been helpful to us in numerous ways in our Christian work.

Help us to value that, but be committed to you. In Jesus' name, I pray. Well, thank you very much for listening to me. Thank you.