

"Is Christ Divided?"

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[0:00] A series starting last week in Paul's first letter to the Corinthians! It's our second week through it! We're going to be in 1 Corinthians 1, 10-17.

This morning it's on page 1213 of your Pew Bible. So I encourage you and invite you to open up and follow along as we dive into it.

Now, if you remember, if you were here last week, we began last week by looking at the city of Corinth and the church of God that resides in it.

And if you remember from last week, one of the major ethos of Corinth is its preoccupation with self-promotion, self-importance, and arrogance.

This was the culture of the city. And anywhere there is a preoccupation with those things, there will always be factions and divisions characterized by power plays or power politics.

[1:07] And that is the way of the fallen world. And that it is so should not be a surprise. And it probably isn't a surprise to you. Corinth, like 21st century America, had been totally indoctrinated in this way of life.

But the sorrow, the tragedy, is that these worldly values have seeped in into the church of God in Corinth as well.

She had adopted the worldly wisdom of her culture. So much so that it is now the reason for Paul's letter to them.

Paul's letter in 1 Corinthians is really to call them to refocus their vision on Jesus Christ. So Paul continues in verse 10 there of the first chapter.

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.

[2:23] Paul's appeal, if you see that, is to the whole body. Here the apostle highlights, as he has been doing since the opening of this letter, he highlights their identity as members of the family of God.

So brothers, he says. By the way, the word brothers means adelphos in Greek. And it's a plural Greek word used to describe children of the same family.

Children of the same family. So it's better understood as actually siblings. I appeal to you, brothers and sisters in the same family of God.

Paul's appeal then is to those who have been adopted into God's family by grace, through faith in Jesus Christ. I appeal to you, siblings, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.

On what basis does Paul make this appeal? He does so in the name of Jesus Christ. In other words, he's saying to them, I urge you to unity by the name of the one who has made you one family in him.

[3:45] Because it is true the life and death of Jesus Christ, through whom you have been brought into the family of God. You might have said something like that to your children at one time or the other.

Or maybe heard your parents say that to you. You are brothers and sisters. Act like it. For here, Paul isn't yelling at them.

Rather, he is imploring them. Here is a heartfelt cry from the apostle to the church that he has lovingly labored over.

I appeal to you, siblings, brothers and sisters in Christ Jesus, that all of you agree that there be no divisions among you, but that you may be united in the same mind and the same judgment.

The word united is from a Greek word that means to mend or to knit together. A good way for us to understand the root of that word is to look in Mark 1, verse 19.

[5:02] It's the same word that is used there in Mark 1, verse 19 to describe James and John. As they sat in their father's boat, mending or knitting together their torn fishing nets.

Remember, they were fishermen. And when Jesus came upon them, they were sitting there in their father's boat, mending the nets, knitting it together. That's the same word that you use there.

And it makes sense to use that word because in that context, because the word divisions that is used, that there be no divisions among you, is the word schismatter. And we've come to understand it to be schism, which is, you know, factions and divisions.

But actually, the word itself is better understood as a tear or split, as in a fishing net. And this is what has happened to the Corinthian church.

They are meant to be united. They are meant to be knit together as they live out their life together as God's children. But a split, a tear, as happened among them, so that they are now divided.

[6:10] And what is true of a torn fishing net is true of them. Such a tear in the unity of the church is dangerous.

It's dangerous. It can even be fatal if left unaddressed. Such a tear in the fabric of the unity within that church threatens their usefulness and their effectiveness.

And not only that, it tells a lie about who they truly are as brothers and sisters in Christ, belonging to God, children of the same Father.

So Paul tells them, be mended. Be united, he says. Be of the same mind and the same judgment. Now, we ought to know here, Paul isn't calling for uniformity. Unity he's calling for, but not uniformity. Those two words are distinct.

[7:18] Christ's church is not a place where we are meant to be carbon copies of one another. Rather, it is a place where God brings us in all our diversity and differences into union with himself and with one another.

Now, the New Testament description of the church as the body, which you will see as we continue in 1 Corinthians in chapter 12, is helpful for us to hear as we go along.

The body is diverse. Think of your own body. It is diverse. Different parts. Making one unified body, working in unison to achieve a common purpose.

So, unity is what Paul is appealing to, not uniformity. Unfortunately, the church often confuses the two. And that in itself is often the cause of divisions in the church when we strive for uniformity rather than unity.

when one member or group expects the rest of the body to be like them. Imagine if all of us were to be on the worship team.

[8:40] Or we were all lay readers. We would be in the altar guild. Some of the altar guild people are saying, well, some of us in worship are also in the altar guild.

We will be in the children's Sunday school leading our children. in the knowledge and love of God. Imagine if we're all doing the same thing in the body of Christ.

Is that a well-functioning church? No. That's what uniformity looks like in practice. It causes a tear in the body.

As we go further in this letter, we will see how this is being played out in the Corinthian church. And Paul actually begins to name some of the issues.

Paul begins to name the problem in verse 12. But before that, he says in verse 11, it has been reported to me by Chloe's people that there is quarreling among you.

[9:43] Now, who are Chloe's people? We might wonder. Who are these people? Are they snitches? Knitting stitches? Yeah, that's a 21st century slang and it probably flew over some of your heads.

I apologize for that. But that's not what's going on here. That's not what's going on here. Chloe's people are likely outsiders. They're not members of the Corinthian church, likely.

The guess is that Chloe is a wealthy, because when Paul says these are from Chloe's people, he says in a way that they would have understood who that person is. The guess is that Chloe is a wealthy merchant woman, likely from Asia Minor, likely based in Ephesus.

Remember that Paul writing this letter is in Ephesus as he writes to the church in Corinth. And so, Chloe's people were likely employees of Chloe who worked for her in her business.

Remember that Corinth is a major thoroughfare for trade. And so they might have come to Corinth on trade, and some of these people and Chloe's people are Christians.

[10:52] And so it's likely that they gathered together to worship with the Corinthian church on the Lord's Day like this, or on a weekly Bible study. And as they gathered with the Corinthian church, they observed the disunity within that local body.

And out of concern, they faithfully brought the news to Paul in Ephesus. Now, remember that the Corinthian church, we talked about it last week, one of the problems is their arrogance and self-importance and self-pride.

Remember that the Corinthian church thought that they were the cat's meow. That's another slang. It's an old school slang, so maybe some of you got that one. They were the cat's meow.

They were the, you know, they were the important, they are it. This is what a church looks like. We are the Corinthian church, we're important, we are sophisticated, we have knowledge, we have spiritual gifts.

They thought they are the picture-perfect church with all the wonderful spiritual gifts. Their arrogance blinded them to the fact that there is actually division among them.

[12:07] And they are so blinded that they might think that those divisions are not of any significance really. They are just minor differences of personalities, they might say.

They are just different ways of expression, they might say. Whereas, the division is not hidden at all. It's apparent to members of a different local church as they observe them.

So much so that out of great concern, they brought the news of their quarreling and dissension to Paul in Ephesus. And what is the nature of this quarreling among them?

Look in verse 12. Each one of you says, I follow Paul, or I follow Apollos, or I follow Cephas, or I follow Christ.

It is crucial we understand the nature of what's going on here in this verse 12, because it will shed light on the rest of the book. Paul names four names there.

[13:13] And possibly, it means four cliques within the church. And this is what they're saying. I am for Paul, the Paul faction. I am for Apollos, the Paul's faction.

I am for Cephas. Cephas is Peter's Jewish name, Apostle Peter. That's who Cephas is. I am for Cephas. And others, I am for Christ.

The first key thing to note is that Paul is not commending any of the groups. He's not commending any of the groups. Not even the ones who are for him.

Not even the ones who say they're for Christ. Because all of them, all these different factions are just slogans. Perhaps you've heard of the term sloganeering.

Here are some examples for you. Listen to them and see if any of them ring a bell. I like Ike.

[14:19] Nixon's the one. Or more recent ones. Yes, we can. Or, make America great again.

If you haven't yet got it, those are political slogans. And that's the way of doing politics. I was looking at it ever since the 1840s.

You can look online, Google, all the slogans for each candidate for president through each election throughout. It's not a new thing. It's a common thing. It's sloganeering. It's not only in the sphere of politics.

Advertising slogans. Right? I can name companies right now, and you can just give me what their slogans are. They've been ingrained to us. We've imbibed them. We see them all the time.

Slogans are short phrases that allow for easy identification or affiliation. There are slogans in politics. There are slogans even in clans.

[15:19] That's where it actually comes from, the word. It's a Gaelic term to describe different factions and what their motto is and their slogans are.

And that's precisely what's going on here in verse 12. The people in Corinth have developed slogans for themselves within the church to show what team they belong to.

And none of the names listed here are in real opposition to one another. I mean, none of the principles. Paul is not in opposition to Peter or Apollos. And none of these men who are servants of the Lord are in opposition to Christ.

There's no hatred among the principles. There is no contention with one another. Paul isn't against Apollos. In fact, he will go on later in this letter to commend Apollos as a fellow worker in Christ.

As a faithful fellow worker in Christ. We can learn more about Apollos and do this at home and you're looking at 18. Verse 24 to 28. You'll learn more about this man, Apollos.

[16:30] We're introduced to him there in Acts 18. He's described as a learned man from Alexandria. Competent in scriptures. That this is what Luke tells us about him in Acts.

And that he taught accurately. So, it's not a matter of heresy or heterodoxy that's being preached here. Apollos is a faithful minister of the gospel. And though he was gifted, Paul tells us, he was deficient in a crucial area of his theology.

But such was the character of Apollos that even in that deficiency, he humbled himself enough to submit to teaching and correction from Aquila and Priscilla.

And they taught him and they corrected him and he humbled himself and he continues in his faithful ministry. And so, he came, Apollos came to Corinth after Paul had left. And it seemed that the Corinthians had taken a liking to him and his style rather than Paul's.

What about the Paul's theme? The I am for Peter slogan is. There's a lot of speculation there but it's not actually certain that Peter was ever in Corinth. But you can imagine in a city like Corinth, a hub of trade and of information.

[17 : 51] News of the wider church would have readily reached Corinth. They would know what's going on in all the other areas of the church because people are constantly coming into the two ports of Corinth in trade.

And so, news of the wider church would be readily accessible to them. So, you can imagine whether or not Peter had visited them it doesn't matter but they would have heard of the famous Apostle Peter. they would have heard of the famous Peter and his deeds and his missionary journeys from Christians that are passing through their ports.

So, some of them might have adopted him as their standard bearer on account of second-hand reports of him. It's not unlike today how many people go to church and they compare their pastors to that famous preacher they've seen on TV or that famous preacher whose books they've read. That's probably what's going on with the Peter faction. Oh yeah, we've heard of Peter. We know what he is. We know how powerful influential he is. We're going to adopt him. That's his flag.

And then, what about the I Am For Jesus group? You would think at this point that this is the group that Paul will commend. After all, I Am For Jesus is really what they ought to be saying.

[19 : 11] But Paul condemns them all, including the group that says I Am For Jesus. Because what is true of the other groups is also true of them. The slogans had nothing to do with the men or with the Lord, Jesus Christ.

The slogans are merely branding for their own power-grabbing games. The teaching of these men, which in truth is the same faithful proclamation of the gospel, is not what matters to the Corinthians. What matters to the Corinthians is their own worldly knowledge masquerading as spiritual maturity. So, what they've done is they've reduced the Church of Christ to political factions and political parties, each with their own competing branding.

And as one writer puts it, the whole church has fallen prey to a love for disputation and conflict in which various members exalt themselves, boasting in themselves, by supposing that their knowledge is from one of their renowned leaders.

Christians are in the Corinthians and And so, Paul continues in verse 13. Is Christ divided?

[20 : 37] Was Paul crucified for you? Or were you baptized in the name of Paul? Paul resorts to these three rhetorical questions to show the absurdity of their slogans?

Is Christ divided? You can imagine having this question put to them, they might answer Paul back, well, of course not.

We are following Christ, they would say. But, along with Chloe's people, we can see that is in fact not what they are doing.

They are not following Christ. There is quarreling and dissension among them. They are actually dividing Christ. By making him one of many different parties in their power grabbing games, they were dividing Christ.

By pretending that only them have the truth or knowledge, they are dividing Christ.

[21 : 53] They are flying a flag that shows, really, ultimately, their own spiritual elitism, rather than Christ, risen and ascended, rather than the gospel of Christ crucified.

And by using the names of his faithful servants, Paul, Apollos, and Peter, they are just using those as mere covers for their own worldly claims to wisdom, while dividing Christ.

So Paul says, was Christ divided? Was Paul crucified for you? Or were you baptized in the name of Paul? Paul drives his point home. So you will claim to be of my party.

Was I crucified for you? Paul asks. Were you baptized in my name? Again, these are rhetorical questions. And although he uses his own name here, what he says of himself, at least those that

claims to be of his party, is also true for the I am for Apollo's party.

Or I am for Cephas party. Was Paul crucified for you? Were you baptized in Apollo's name? Was Cephas crucified for you? Were you baptized in his name? The clear answer to all of it is no.

[23 : 18] And in saying no, Paul hopes to shame them and let them see their foolishness. How dare you attempt to divvy up Christ, church?

How dare you attempt to divvy up Christ for your own selfish aims? Because it is one and the same. For Paul, it is one and the same.

To divvy up the church is the same as divvying up Christ. He is the head of the body, the Bible tells us, the church.

He is the bridegroom, the church is his bride. she belongs to him and he to her. And what God has joined together, let no man put asunder.

Divisions, the tearing in the fabric of unity in Christ's body is the same as attempting to tear Christ, the head, up.

[24 : 31] So, Paul says to them, Corinthians, are you putting me or Apollos or Cephas in the place of Christ? And Paul means to tell them, we have not placed ourselves, in our preaching of the gospel to you, we have not placed ourselves in the place of Christ.

You will go on to tell them that it's all him, actually, in his ministry to them, is to make sure that Christ and him alone is proclaimed, so much so that he suffered deprivations for that very purpose. Paul, Apollos, Peter, cannot be your patrons. No other man can be your patron other than Jesus Christ.

and to think or act as if human beings, men, are the patrons of the church, is to function according to the wisdom of the world, which is no wisdom at all.

The church of Christ has only one true patron, Jesus Christ himself. It is he. Paul tells us earlier in the verses of 1 Corinthians, it is he who has enriched his church with all spiritual gifts through the Holy Spirit.

[26 : 02] And so Paul continues, I thank God that I baptized none of you except Crispus and Gaius. Gaius Titius Justice.

Those two names were, if you're looking at 18, they were early converts in the Corinthian church. I thank God that I baptized none of you except Crispus and Gaius so that no one may say that you were baptized in my name.

And then he remembers, perhaps Stephanus was probably with him as he's writing his, and nudged him, and says, oh yeah, I remember I did baptize also the household of Stephanus, but beyond that, I do not know whether I baptized anyone else, 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 emphasizes there, that baptism, his emphasis on baptism is that in the context, he wants them to see that baptism is not the most important thing here.

by asking them the ritual question, whose name are you baptized into? He wants them to know, and point out that baptism really has to do with allegiance, because what's going on in the Corinthian church is that they're likely boasting in the person who performed their baptism.

[27 : 32] Again, another means of self-promotion and division and tearing out the fabric of unity. Oh yeah, well, Paul baptized me. Well, Apollos, the sophisticated Alexandrian, baptized me.

Maybe, oh, Peter, Peter, baptized me. And Paul is saying to them, what is, what is it to boast in who baptizes you?

Paul invalidates their boasting by reminding them, that it is in Christ's name that they were baptized into. In the waters of baptism, it is they were baptized in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, not in the name of Paul or Apollos or Cephas.

And so you cannot divide him. you hold your full allegiance to Jesus Christ. It is to him you hold, you're filthy.

He is yours in full as you are his. And if you have Christ, you also have God as your father. In other words, Paul seems to be saying to them, again, you are family.

[28 : 59] Act like it. Paul seems to be thankful that he didn't baptize a lot of them. Because they are making baptism into, again, slogans of false allegiance.

Baptism is important. Paul isn't saying that baptism isn't important, but it is ultimately of little importance who baptizes you. Because you are baptized into Christ Jesus.

And even it emphasizes what of more importance is the preaching of the gospel by which you came to know Christ. So let's look.

What plagues the Church of Corinth? What plagues them? Also plagues the Church in our day. Sloganeering, which is merely a tool for power plays, threatens the Church because it obscures Christ.

Sloganeering threatens the Church. Faction building threatens the Church because it obscures Christ Jesus and His Gospel. One starts to focus on differences and on personalities rather than the one who made the Church Jesus Christ, the one who provides for her.

[30 : 31] Brothers and sisters, we cannot shy away from asking Paul's question to ourselves here in 21st century America.

We have to ask the question that Paul asked the Corinthian Church. We cannot shy from asking that same question to ourselves here at Holy Trinity. Is Christ divided?

Was, insert name here, crucified for you? Were you baptized in the name of, insert name here?

Now, it may not be a person's name that is the course of sloganeering within the Church of our day. And, in fact, for the Corinthians, it was ultimately not about the names that they claim here. Those names were just covers used to make up for the adoption of worldly values.

whatever it may be, whatever it is that we may be putting our hopes and trusting, our competences, or using as points of dissension or division, we must answer Paul's question, is Christ divided?

[31 : 46] and in turn, we must follow Dr. Paul's cure. We must refocus on Jesus. So, these three rhetorical questions that Paul has are meant to point us to the person, the work of Jesus Christ, and our identification in him.

Paul is saying to the Corinthian church, as he says to us, you are Christ, by nature of your union with him. You belong to him. His work is the basis by which you've been brought in to the family of God.

You are identified with him, no other person. You're identified with him at baptism. him. So, you owe your allegiance to him.

And he's saying to them, and he says to us, Jesus Christ is sufficient. Don't look at people. Don't put your trust in people.

Even if they're faithful ministers of the gospel, like Paul or Apollos. Don't fly their flag. You only have one fly to fly in the church of Christ.

[33 : 02] It is the banner of Jesus Christ and his alone. And so we will take up Paul's emphasis in verse 17 next week on the centrality of the gospel.

But brothers and sisters in Christ, we must reckon with Paul's question to us as well.

let us close in prayer for unity in the church. Oh God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, our only Savior, the Prince of Peace, give us grace to take to heart the grave dangers we are in through our many divisions.

Deliver your church from all enmity and prejudice and everything that hinders us from godly union. As there is one body and one spirit, one hope of our calling, one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of us all, so make us all to be of one heart and of one mind, united in one holy bond of truth and peace, of faith and love, that with one voice we may give you praise through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God in everlasting glory. Amen.