

Christ, the Healer of Division

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[0 : 00] Now we're going to turn to 1 Corinthians chapter 1. 1 Corinthians chapter 1. We're going to read from verse 10 to verse 17.

So, let's read. For Paul writes to the church in Corinth, 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's been reported to me by Chloe's people that there's 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, another word for Peter, or I follow Christ.

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, so that no one may say that you were baptized in my name.

I did baptize also the household of Stephanas. 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.

[1 : 32] May God add his blessing to that reading, this holy word as we see, and pray that we see more closely this whole emphasis on the Lord Jesus Christ as the healer, the healer of this church, the healer of division.

Four points to consider this morning as we focus on the Lord Jesus Christ. The authority of Jesus, he who gives ultimate authority to teach, to learn, to follow, follow him.

And then when we think of the completeness of Jesus, we have all that we need, all that we are in him, and no one else, nothing else. And of course the emphasis on the cross of Christ, without which we cannot live for the Savior.

And then finally the Lordship of Christ, proclaiming Jesus as Lord. Let's think, what's Paul saying in this passage? Well, think of the Apostle Paul.

I mean, Paul's suffered so much in his missionary journeys. He's proclaimed the name of Jesus. He's proclaimed Jesus as Lord and Savior. He's preached to others, to Jew and to Gentile of the Lord Jesus as the promised Christ, the promised Messiah.

[2 : 50] And in doing that, he's been physically persecuted. His preaching's been rejected by so many. So many people have reviled him. So many fellow Jews have reviled Paul because of his proclaiming Jesus as the promised Messiah.

He's been threatened with death. He's had sleepless nights. He's been cold. He's been hungry. He's been living in constant suffering, constant trial for his work as an apostle.

In fact, he's going to write more of his trials in the second letter that he writes to the church in Corinth. But there's something that really, truly grieves him.

There's something that really hurts him to the core. Something that causes him such sadness. It's not his persecution. Well, that, of course, obviously impacts his life.

He knows he has to share in the sufferings of the Lord Jesus. But what truly hurts him to the core is trouble. Trouble in the church.

[3 : 58] He writes to the church in Galatia about false teachers coming into the church. That deeply troubles him. Or as we see here in the passage, divisions in the church in Corinth.

Paul's so sad about what he's hearing from others. About these divisions that are emerging in the church in Corinth. Now, we learned about that church. We've been learning about that church certainly a few weeks ago.

We learned that Jews and non-Jews were converted there in Corinth. The very synagogue ruler himself converted in Corinth. It was read in Acts 18, verse 8.

Many of the Corinthians hearing Paul believed and were baptized. Many of them going into that church. And last week we learned of this man, Apollos, this converted Jew from North Africa. He'd been in Ephesus and then from Ephesus he went to Corinth. And we're told about his time in Corinth. Acts 18 again. He greatly helped those who through grace had believed.

[5 : 01] So what we read in the history of the church there in Acts, the church in Corinth that's been built up, built up numerically, they have these men, Paul and Apollos, who've been teaching them, supporting them, helping them.

But something happened to cause troubled waters to stir. Factions. Divisions. And divisions on the basis of stated loyalties.

I follow Paul. I follow Apollos. I follow Cephas. I follow Christ. Now we'll obviously come to these in more detail in a minute. So what's Paul going to do?

And what lessons can we learn this morning about what we're seeing here from this new church that certainly it seemed had lost its way in being united and following the Lord Jesus?

Well, that's where we come first of all to the authority of Christ. Because although we've read these names, Paul and Apollos and Cephas, the other word for Peter, or Christ, yes.

[6 : 10] Well, who's at the core? Who's at the center of this teaching? It's Jesus, the Lord Jesus Christ. I mean, divisions in a church grieve any minister, any pastor, any believer.

But the main issue, always the main issue, when we think about division, is Jesus. And as we're focusing on this passage, let's be clear about what your main objective, my main objective is, in the context of church.

It's to honor our Lord and Savior. It's to give Him the glory in every aspect of our lives, whether together as a congregation or individually.

And certainly where there are particular issues to be resolved in a church and in any congregation. Well, what comes first is the honor of the Lord Jesus. It's not about any other individual.

It's Jesus' honor that's at stake. And, well, Paul confirms this as he continues to focus on the Lord Jesus. And notice, he's writing not by his own authority.

[7 : 18] He's writing by the authority of Jesus. I appeal to you, brothers, by the name of the Lord Jesus Christ. I appeal to you, brothers and sisters even, by the name of the Lord Jesus Christ.

He's not writing on his own authority. Now, yes, he's got a leading position in the church. He's an apostle. He has that position of authority as an apostle of Jesus. But when he's making this appeal, this appeal for healing of division in the church, he's doing it under authority of the Lord Jesus.

Notice he mentions the name, our Lord Jesus Christ. It's by that name and no other name that Paul mentions to make his appeal to his brothers and sisters in Christ, to respond to the grace of Christ and stop their disunity.

And that authority of Jesus, the central aspect of the authority of Jesus, it's not just for Paul's day. It's not just for 2,000 years ago. It's for now.

It's a present reality. Because anything that's done in a church, anything that's done in any church that proclaims the Lord Jesus as Savior, we do what we do under his authority.

[8 : 35] The authority to preach the word is by authority of the Lord Jesus. The authority to hold any office in the church, whether it's an elder or a deacon or a minister, it's not any kind of self-ordained authority.

It's by the authority that's from the Lord. The authority to carry out all the different things that we do in a church, preaching, teaching, baptism, Lord's Supper, which I pray will be happening in a few weeks' time.

We don't make up these great matters. We do what we do as we're commanded to do them from the Lord Jesus. So that when any preacher calls you to repent and turn from your evil ways, he does that not by his own authority.

He does it under authority of the Lord Jesus. Jesus proclaims the word of the Lord. And when a preacher calls on a congregation to love one another, to do it in Christ, he does that by authority of the word of God.

And so here's Paul speaking with the authority of Jesus. He's urging believers in Corinth, as we read here 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.

[9 : 56] In other words, that they stop their quarreling, that quarreling that so divided the church, that church so beloved by Paul. So what's Paul actually saying here?

What's he urging in the name of the Lord? He's urging unity, a unity of mind and purpose to realize the real damage that quarreling does in a church.

Paul mentions this in more than one occasion in different letters. And he was speaking about the kind of behavior, even saying that kind of behavior, the quarreling or another word is strife.

In fact, it's the same word in the original. It's what non-believers do, Paul's saying. You know, Paul, when he was writing to the Galatians, he mentioned that kind of behavior, strife or quarreling.

You see, that's the kind of behavior that's done by those who aren't believers, the works of the flesh. And strife covers a whole lot of associated things, things like rivalries and conflicts.

[10:59] Well, yes, it's behavior that's happened since the fall of man that's going to carry on until Jesus returns. But it's that attitude of mind that can so often stem from jealousy. Jealousy from one person, maybe one group, maybe person who resents the abilities of another, or jealousies that really grow into divisions in a church.

There are factions that can happen in the body of Christ. Some emphasize one doctrine over another. Maybe some attitude that, you know, brings about an arrogance, you know, harshly judging another.

Or maybe assuming a sort of high ground that, you know, that I understand Scripture more than you do. That kind of attitude, that kind of arrogance, or maybe a cultural identity.

You know, I'm from a certain background far better than yours. Well, it's happened over the centuries. And it really undermines the grace of the Lord Jesus. Because any kind of arrogance condemns others within the body of the Lord Jesus.

You know, sneering at others, maybe because they don't have the same kind of background that you have. Maybe elevating one culture or family background over another.

[12:19] That leads to division. Rivalries. We've all seen it. I've seen it. You've seen it, I'm sure. The kind of behavior that leads to division and strife. Because strife leads to denying the body of Jesus.

It leads to a worldly mindset that has nothing at all to do with the peace of the Lord Jesus, the peace of Christ. Strife is totally opposite to the fruit of the Spirit that Paul writes of in Galatians 5. He mentions love, of course, as the first fruit of the Spirit. Well, love. There's love in a church that takes away strife. Joy eliminates strife.

Peace takes away quarreling. Then, of course, the other aspects of fruit. Patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control.

When they're present in a church, well, the sin of quarreling and strife. Don't see that where the fruit of the Spirit is exercised. Christ. Because strife tears apart the body of Christ.

[13:28] Because it's what Paul's saying here when he speaks of the completeness of Christ.

Paul's saying, what I mean is this. Each one of you says, I follow Paul, or I follow Apollos, or I follow Cephas, or I follow Christ.

And then he says, is Christ divided? So Paul's basically reciting the news that he's heard from other people. You know, he's aghast that there should be cliques in the church there in Corinth.

Some people saying that their allegiance is to Paul. Some saying their allegiance is to Apollos.

Some saying their allegiance is to Peter, Cephas. Some saying, well, we're the Christ ones above you others in the church.

So in response to what he's heard, he asks three questions. He wants to get the people, wants to get us, to see how foolish divisions are in a church.

And he asks these three questions that, in fact, assume an answer within the questions. Because each question that's asked, the assumption is that the answer is no.

[14:30] Because Paul wants to strike home how wrong divisions are, of course, in the church in Corinth. Of course, in all churches. Look at the first question.

It's about unity in the church. Is Christ divided? Verse 13. I mean, all these groups in the church, they were expressing loyalties to individuals.

Now, yes, okay, one group expressed loyalty to Jesus. I think the inference there is that, you know, we are more Jesus followers than you others are. But, you see, the whole thing is this was disrupting the body of Christ.

I mean, later in chapter 12 here in 1 Corinthians, Paul writes about the church as the body of Christ. You know, together, in the church together, united by the Holy Spirit in Christ.

Because unity speaks of the salvation of Jesus. The Lord Jesus died for all who are his. His crucifixion, his death for all.

[15 : 38] For all who are his. All joined together in the one Savior. But what's happening there in Corinth? People are going against that unity.

They're breaking up into different groups. They're saying, well, in fact, they're saying that by the breaking into different groups that Christ divided. The body of Christ, the church, broken up because of their different preferences.

You know, one group saying, we are the Paul people. Or we are the Apollos people. We are the Peter people. Jesus people. Instead of rejoicing in the one Savior who died for all who are his. Now, maybe the so-called Paul people, maybe they were particularly attracted to Paul. I mean, Paul had planted the church there in Corinth. Or maybe the Apollos people were attracted to Apollos' intellectual abilities.

And so they thought we were cut above the rest. And maybe the Peter people liked Peter's Jewish credentials. And so they had a kind of cultural bias.

[16 : 47] They were not told what specifically the reasons were. But the point is this. These were man-made divisions. Utterly opposed to the unity of the church found in the body of Christ.

Because Jesus is the one Christ. They're not different parts of Christ. He doesn't apportion out different parts of himself to others.

He's the one Christ who gave his one self for the one church. So any kind of man-made divisions based on preferences, personal preferences, personal inclinations, that's got no place in the church that Jesus died for by his one death.

That one death that results in one faith, one Lord, one baptism, and one Savior. And that message has got to be proclaimed loud and clear.

Not just 2,000 years ago, but throughout the ages. Because the church is one. The Lord Jesus is one completed Savior. And we know through times of history, even in fairly recent times, there have been these schisms that have brought shame to the church.

[18 : 00] Cliques that have been based on things like culture or language or doctrinal preferences. Legalism. The cult of leaders that so divided believers.

Or even the opposite. People whom God has raised up to positions of leadership. And these people, faithful men of God, have been rejected and shunned. So, Paul asks the question, is Christ divided?

Well, the answer is in the question. No. Christ is not divided. He's not going to be divided by these different groups. Because he cannot be divided.

But then there's the second question that really deals with the whole matter of the cross of Christ. Was Christ, was Paul crucified for you? Was Paul, there's the answers in the question, of course. I mean, Paul is no kind of self-seeking sort of mega church leader, you know, who wants all the glory and all the praise, all the adulation. Paul knows that he's the Lord's servant.

[19 : 06] And he's doing what he's doing. Not for the glory of himself, but for the glory of God. For the glory of the Savior. The glory even of the Lord Jesus who saved him.

Paul doesn't want any kind of clique that wants to associate with himself. He's living a life of service. Remember what John the Baptist said of Jesus.

It's the same sentiment that Paul has of Jesus. He must increase. I must decrease. And so Paul's saying to the Corinthians, he's saying, I wasn't crucified for you.

I'm not the Savior. I'm not the one to anyone should give allegiance or loyalty. Paul's saying, I point you to Jesus. It's not Jesus pointing you to me.

So, he's saying, get rid of any kind of attachment, Paul's saying, to me. But show your love to the Savior. Don't show your loyalty to me.

[20 : 06] We're fellow believers. We're fellow servants of the Lord. Was Paul crucified for you? Paul's saying, of course, no. Jesus was crucified for you.

When Jesus died on the cross, his arms were stretched out. Of course, in the agony of crucifixion, his arms, as his hands were nailed to the cross. But think again of these arms that were stretched out physically.

And then think again what these stretched out arms showed. They showed that he died for all. That his arms encompassed all for whom he died.

The loving arms of Jesus that were there on the cross are the same arms that surround you in love. They're his arms from his love. And all you who are his.

Well, remember, you're not outside of these arms, these surrounding arms of love. Jesus was crucified for you. Paul's saying to the church in Corinth and even to the church today.

[21 : 14] Paul's saying, I didn't have an outstretched arm surrounding you in love. I wasn't crucified for you. So you show your loyalty and affection, Paul's saying, not to me, but to the Lord Jesus who died for you.

Now, we said there were people in Corinth who were saying, you know, I'm of Jesus. I'm one of the Jesus people. But again, that was suggesting that, you know, they were better than the others. But no, if the Lord Jesus has died for all who are his, then all who are his are of Jesus. All who are his follow Jesus.

Not just one select group in the church. Not one group more than another. So be reminded of the cross of Jesus here that each one of us has to look up to.

And to be rid of any kind of leaning or affection towards others, whether they're gifted preachers, whether they're gifted teachers, whether they're people with special gifts in the church.

[22 : 18] Maybe there's the sort of delusion of looking to, you know, those who have larger congregations or maybe fancier church buildings, maybe even the coolest website.

That kind of thing that can so distract the Lord's people from following the one true Savior. Because whenever you raise these lesser things above Jesus and glorifying lesser things, you're actually taking away from the work of Jesus on the cross.

Jesus died for all who are his. He died equally for all. Yes, he's given to the church, those in the church, different gifts.

But they're to be used within the body, within the community of the Lord's church. And so look to the cross of Christ. Look to the one who was crucified for you.

He's to be honored. He's to be glorified. He's to be your first love. He's your all in all. Not a preacher or a minister or a teacher or the celebrity across the ocean.

[23 : 25] Notice the Lord Jesus. To whom is your first allegiance? He is Lord. He's Lord to whom, well, to whom you owe your very lives.

Under his loving authority, surrounding you with his arms. He is Lord. As we see finally in the remainder of this section.

Because Paul asks his third question. Or were you baptized in the name of Paul? Again, the answer is in the question. Because no one was baptized in the name of Paul.

All were baptized in the name of Jesus. And that's, of course, true in Paul's day. And this is true in our own day. Baptism. That sign of Christ washing away of our sins.

Baptism. Baptism. That seal that says that when that child or person is baptized. When that child comes to a saving knowledge of the Lord Jesus. Then that child will have that guarantee of salvation.

[24 : 30] And see what Paul's saying then. He's saying, salvation's not in my name. I'm not the Savior. I'm not the one who washed away your sins. It's Jesus.

Jesus. Paul's saying, my work is to preach. When Paul was saying, I only baptized a few people. Because Paul didn't want to have any connection between him and those he baptized.

Paul preached directly to the people. He preached Jesus. And he didn't use eloquent wisdom to, you know, to draw attention to himself.

He preached simply. He preached powerfully. He preached Jesus. He directed his hearers to Jesus. He directed his hearers to the cross.

He directed them. As I pray you're directed to the cross of Jesus. To see him who was crucified for you. And of course there are lessons.

[25 : 29] There are so many lessons to be learned here from this passage. Let's, you know, bring out these lessons. Jesus is Lord. Not any other person.

Because the danger of following, and it's happened and it happens in the church, the following other people, other preachers, high profile preachers and teachers and media stars in the wider church.

Influencers in the church. Let's avoid that. Let's avoid that. Avoid that for the sake of following the one true Lord and Savior Jesus. Because there are too many damaged congregations.

There are too many damaged churches. For Jesus isn't given the preeminence. There's too much disunity that we've all seen over the years that's actually blighted the cause of Christ.

Any kind of disunity grieves the true believer in the Lord Jesus. Pray for that unity. Pray for true unity to be seen even in this congregation.

[26 : 36] Even in our wider denomination. And in every church that proclaims Jesus as Lord and Savior. And so seek then. Yes, seek to love one another.

To be content under Christ's authority. Love the church. Love the church that's the body of Christ. And yes, look at all times to the cross of Christ.

Look to where Jesus died for you. Bow before him. Acknowledge him as Lord in your life. Yes, and seek at all times to honor him.

And serve him who came to serve. And to give his life for you. Amen. Let us pray. Our Heavenly Father, we're so challenged by your word.

So convicted. We know, Lord, that even in our minds we can exercise strife and disunity. But we pray, Lord, that we will be of one mind, one heart, one judgment.

[27 : 39] That truly we will know Jesus as Lord and Savior. Following him. No one else. Lord, be with us. Even as we move on.

Even at this new stage in the life of this congregation. Even in the life of the church. Bless, Lord, this moving forward. That you will be Lord in that.

So hear us, Lord, as we commit these matters to you now. And again, Lord, we pray your forgiveness for our sins. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen. Amen. Amen.