

1 Corinthians 1:10-17

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[0 : 00] Well, by God's grace, I'm here this morning.

So let's ask for the Lord's help before we look at his word together. Please pray with me. God, we do thank you for your grace.

We thank you for your grace that has covered all of our sins in Christ. Lord, we thank you for your grace which shows itself to us in love that has no source in ourselves that we are lovable, but Lord, comes from you and your abundant and overflowing love for us.

Thank you for your grace that enables us in our weakness, in our frailty, Lord, and even in our sin, Lord. And it was us to look to you, not despair, but find hope, hope of forgiveness, hope of strength, hope of life with you.

God, as we look into your word this morning, we pray that you will help us. Lord, may our hearts be ready to receive your word. May our minds be alert to listen to what you have to say to us.

[1 : 26] God, I ask for your help this morning. Lord, give me clarity of thought and of expression. Give my body strength, I pray. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

When you walk into a situation, reception, a new neighborhood, a block party, what's the first thing that you are asked?

Well, it depends on where you are and depends on the context, doesn't it? Some places you'll be asked the question, what do you do? Other places you'll be asked, oh, where are you from?

Some places you'll be asked, oh, who's your father? Who's your daddy? Some places you'll be asked, what family do you come from?

All of these questions are different ways of trying to get at the core question, which is, who are you? Of course, the question, the answer is complicated to that, isn't it?

[2 : 31] I may actually go to a block party this afternoon in my neighborhood, and I've been thinking about how I might answer the question, oh, hi, who are you? Well, I live at 161.

I lived there for five years. I'm a pastor. I'm a father. This is Eli and Katie. I'm a guy who lives in the neighborhood.

I'm a widower. I'm from Boston and Pittsburgh. I have a degree from Princeton and a degree from Trinity Evangelical Divinity School.

I'm a Pirates fan and a Red Sox fan. Hope I didn't step on any toes there. And here's the thing.

All of those things are true of me. All of them are, in God's sovereignty, a part of who I am. But the question of who am I has to do not just with what those things are, but how I weight them.

[3 : 34] What do I trust in to be my core identity? And, you know, when we ask those questions of other people, it's worth thinking, why do we do that?

Sometimes we ask those questions. Who are you? Who are you? Where are you from? Those kinds of questions. We do it because we want to make connections. Oh, oh, yeah. Maybe we know someone in common.

We make connections humanly through asking those kinds of questions. But I think that often we can also use those questions to find our place in the pecking order.

We walk into the room and we think, okay, who am I a peer with? Who is my superior socially, organizationally?

Who am I over in this group? We often walk in and we ask these questions because we want to figure out where do I fit in all of this? But there can also be an even uglier side to this, can't there be?

[4 : 40] It's that we look for ways to distinguish ourselves, this is who I am, as opposed to who you are, so that we find those places of difference. And in those differences, then we can find ourselves comparing ourselves.

Am I better than you or am I worse than you? That allows us to become snobs and critics and to separate ourselves from one another in an attempt to build ourselves up.

It's the classic elementary school bully routine, isn't it? You walk into the playground as a bully.

What do you look for? The one person who's a little different from everyone else.

Oh, she wears glasses. He's from a different ethnic group. Um, he's really tall. She's really short.

And you beat up on him. And you make fun of him. To make yourself feel better.

One might argue that this dynamic in the smaller settings of our social lives are also the ones that are writ large on the social fabric of our world that lead to things like genocide, tribal warfare.

[5 : 50] Things that, as much as we wish would go away, they don't. We long for a world of peace and unity. We long for a place where people can get along. But there are those terrible people out there who do those terrible things.

Well, friends, I think it's actually a little more complicated than that, isn't it? Because that very same dynamic that may happen largely in things like the Holocaust or the refugee crisis today and our response to it, the very same thing is in our hearts and plays out in all these little social settings day in and day out.

Who are we? What does the Bible have to say about this? How does the gospel of Jesus Christ impact how we understand who we are and then how does that impact how we relate to one another?

And that leads us to our passage this morning. We are continuing in our series in 1 Corinthians. If you're using the Pew Bible, we're in page 952. And for those of you who have asked, we are actually setting off on a series that will preach through the whole book of 1 Corinthians.

Don't be afraid that the sermon schedule only gets us through chapter 4. That's just how we'll get to before we take a break for Advent. Then we'll come back after Christmas and we'll dive on in.

Bucket your seatbelts.

[7 : 18] Here we go. It's going to be a great time because this book is such a powerful book where the Lord is going to help us think about what does it mean to know Christ and to be a follower of him in this world.

And as Nick preached last week, Paul has just thanked God for this church in Corinth, for the work of grace that God has done in these people and for the evidence of his gifting, his calling, and his bringing them together into a unity in Christ, under Christ.

All of it is focused on Jesus Christ. If you remember, he said verses 1 through 9, name the name of Jesus Christ 11 times. It's a powerful thing.

And after having given thanks, Paul then begins. He begins to address concerns. The whole structure of the book is really about Paul addressing concerns. Chapters 1 through 6 are dealing with concerns that he's heard about.

Chapter 7 begins the concerns that the church themselves have written to Paul asking him about or dialoguing with him about certain things.

[8 : 33] So we see the first problem that Paul addresses surface in this passage. So let's read it together. 1 Corinthians chapter 1, starting in verse 10.

I appeal to you brothers, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that all of you agree that there be no distinctions 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 quarreling among you, my brothers.

What I mean is that each one of you says, I follow Paul, I follow Apollos, I follow Cephas, or I follow Christ.

Is Christ divided? Was Paul crucified for you? Or were you baptized in my name? I'm sorry, were you baptized in the name of Paul?

I thank God I baptized none of you except Crispus and Gaius so that no one may say you were baptized in my name. I did baptize the household of Stephanas.

[9 : 45] Beyond that, I don't know whether I baptized anyone else. 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.

Friends, this is what Paul wants us to hear today, is that God has called his people, God has called us into a unity that is based on the deepest and the most profound identity we can have, that of being in Christ.

Paul is going to say that unity flows from a proper identity. And as we work through the passage, we're going to see Paul sort of presents the problem, and then he attacks, or then he puts forth a solution.

He says, this is the problem, that's what we'll talk about first, and then this is the solution, this is how we respond to it in a proper way. So first, what is the problem? Really, it's in verses 10 through 12. Starts out by saying, there are divisions among you. Right? And these divisions seem to be related to a number of things, don't they?

[11:04] These divisions are related to personalities. Paul, Apollos, who was a follower of Paul's, a relative, who had probably ministered in Corinth at one point, silver-tongued Apollos.

He's probably a great speaker. I follow Paul. Well, Paul is the original apostle to the Gentiles. I follow Cephas, which is the Aramaic name for Peter. Well, he was with Jesus.

I want to be on his team. I follow Christ. Well, you guys follow human leaders. Look at me. I know that that's silly. I'm on the Christ team.

And in doing this, they've separated themselves from one another. They've said, I'm better than you are by my identification with this person.

It also seems to be connected to baptism. Well, I was baptized by John Stott. Well, I was baptized by Billy Graham.

[12:04] Well, I was baptized by the Pope. Well, I was baptized by Jesus himself. You know? And somehow, they latched on to baptism as one of these identifiers.

It also seems that it was probably connected to gifting and speaking. We see that at the end and we'll see it much more as we go on in the next couple of chapters.

That eloquence and being able to speak publicly in the frame of the Corinthian context with sophistry and rhetoric and filling the pattern of expected rhetoric so that you can impress impress your hearers.

So for all these reasons, the church in Corinth was divided. They were divided like a piece of fabric that is meant to be whole that had been torn up into pieces.

Notice how strong this identification with the leaders is. It's not just I like this guy better than this guy or I've been blessed by this guy and not that guy.

[13:21] It's not nearly that shallow. It's much more profound. Look at it again. It's in verse what? Verse 12, right? I follow Paul. I follow Paul. This is how the ESV translates it.

You know how it is in the original? It actually just says I am of Paul. Look back to verse 2 for a second. Who does the church really belong to?

To the church of God. But these men and women in Corinth have lost sight of that. Haven't they? And they've divided themselves.

And it seems like in identifying with these human leaders they're trying to ride their coattails to success. In the competitive context of the Corinthian world they're thinking how do I get ahead? And they've translated it from their business practices and from their social settings into the church itself. I want to be a part of the really cool church that's really getting ahead. I don't want to be a part of that backwater church over there that isn't very exciting.

[14:27] I want to be I want to follow these coattails to spiritual prominence in the church and in the world. Kind of like I want to find the right startup guy to invest my money in so that I can be in on the ground floor of the next Google, Twitter, Facebook whatever it is.

they're wielding their identity against one another with this desire to get ahead. And it's become not just their preferred leader but it's become their identity.

I am of Paul I am of Apollos. It's also important this is a slight side note but it's important to recognize that these divisions are not doctrinal.

Right? For one thing Paul and Apollos and Peter would be horrified to know that their names are being used by this. None of these men advocated for this cultivated it or would support it if they knew that it was happening.

But secondly recognize that this is not a Galatians situation. Paul clearly says there are times when the gospel is at stake the truth and the clarity of the gospel is at stake and divisions are important and to say that man is a false teacher that person is a false teacher because they are distorting the gospel is an important thing in the life of our church.

[15:59] And yet friends how often and maybe how often especially for us in the Protestant tradition have we allowed personality splits and secondary things like what version of the Bible do

we follow or what color is the carpet or what kind of music do we play.

There are so many ways that we then blow little secondary things up into primary and central things about the gospel and then divide over them in ways that are unhealthy.

That's what these men did. They said the church here said here are men who I've been blessed by their ministry and then they've been inflated to a place of prominence in their identity and their understanding of the Christian life that has completely distorted it and torn the fabric of the church apart.

So we need to be careful about our motivations when we go to the place of doctrinal division even though there are times when it is appropriate and right.

This is why we at Trinity talk about ourselves as a gospel centered church because we want the gospel to be in the center. Now we always have to talk about what is the gospel and what's an entailment of the gospel and what's the implications of the gospel and all of those things and those are all good conversations but we say it explicitly because we want to make the important things the important things in our church.

[17 : 37] We are Baptist but we really want to be about the gospel. That's a conviction we hold but it's not the very core of our identity let alone our positions on the end times or our denominational affiliation or our support of a political party or a candidate.

we could go on and on about different ways in which churches could be known for lots of different things and Paul says don't let yourself be divided over these things.

This is the problem. Now is this really a problem in our church? This is a worthwhile question to explore don't you think?

Is this really I thank the Lord that this is not a major problem in our church. I don't believe as I walk in here on Friday that there are four factions that are sitting amongst you all that are somehow fighting and backbiting and challenging one another for the control or direction or prominence in our church and I am so thankful for that.

But having said that let me explore it a little bit with you. A couple of reflections on this. One we have a co-pastor model in this church. If you're new to it there are three of us Greg, Nick and I who are staff elders.

[18 : 59] That means that we are full time on the staff of the church we are called pastors. There are elders that we are peers with who are not on the staff of the church that we serve with. One of the dangers one of the fears when this model was put into place four or five years ago was that our church would very easily devolve into the I'm of Nick and I'm of Greg and I'm of Matt.

Oh how thankful I am that by the grace of God that has not been true. And I will say that I think it is to a large extent because of the humility of the men that I serve with that they have discouraged it they have not done anything to encourage it they have refuted it when it has come up they speak well of one another and it's made a huge difference.

But it has been God's grace that that is true. Friends may this always be true of our church. I think there might be a second kind of division in our church though that may be a little more salient and may strike a little bit closer to home.

So let me explore this for a few minutes. It's a division that's woven into the very fabric of our community just like in the Corinthian community there was a culture that encouraged that kind of division.

The division that I see that's at least possible in our church would be this I am of Yale I am not of Yale.

[20 : 42] Now this may not be true some of you are going to be fence sitters some of you are going to be married some in some out some of you may not feel this at all but let's explore it for a few minutes just to think about it.

One of the things that I think is true is that when you come to a prestigious university like Yale it's very easy for that to become very central to your identity very quickly.

It's just it's not a conscious decision. You walk into the culture and part of it is the university itself tells you that you are the best and the brightest and you're going to change the world and you're going to be presidents of the United States and you're special because you're at Yale.

and you're repeated over and over and over again. And I'm not sure you always know how deep it is. I'm not sure you always recognize how much you communicate that to those around you who aren't a part of Yale.

It plays out in really simple ways very normal human ways maybe your social cliques the people who are in your professional school or in your college or in your you just naturally gravitate towards those and those are the people you talk to after church and those are the people who you get a small group with and they're the church that you sort of hang out with.

[22 : 09] Another way I think it seeps in is if you haven't listened to Pastor Greg's sermon that he preached a couple years ago in Jeremiah 29 go back and look it up on the website and listen to it. He said there are lots of people who come to New Haven for a while to get their stuff and to get out and it's very easy in a place like Yale to do that.

You come in and you're only here to get your degree to get through your program and to move on and you've got your sights set on something else and this is just a way station and you know just like stopping at a rest area you may ignore all the restaurants if all you need is a bathroom you know you're just doing you're getting what you need and then you keep going.

It's easy in the questions that you ask when you meet someone new oh who are you right? What do you do? Oh what department are you in? Well you know what if you're just working in a job in town those can really be off-putting.

They communicate automatically I'm not a part of your world. I say you but I want to say this I remember doing this I was a student once when I went off to university I lived in a town but I didn't know anything about it I didn't care anything about it it wasn't until after I graduated and stayed for a little while that I began to learn about the region and about the spiritual condition of it and the place of the church I was thankful that I was in a church where I actually got to know some of the church members outside of just the university community through service it's a plug for the one thing you get involved in those things you get to meet people in the church who are different which is wonderful but one of the things that I realized is that when I didn't care about the town that I was in it communicated to those who lived there it doesn't matter that's very painful and it's very dividing now how about those of you who are not of Yale often everything seems to be about

Yale doesn't it you might feel envious of all the attention all the resources all the opportunities that people who are of Yale have you might feel insecure and threatened well they're really smart people I'm not very smart how do I go to Bible study with smart people like that that's intimidating you may feel contemptuous because you've seen them try to change a tire and you know they can't do it you may be weary if you've been here for a while of the stream that's flowing through our church you may resent them for taking and not giving it seems and you may feel like an overlooked majority not valued or seen very well in our society here in

[25 : 29] New Haven maybe even here in our church church I expose this division not because I think it is tearing our church apart but because I think it could I expose it because I want us to see that if we have taken on these attitudes the root of them may be in our identity we see ourselves in one camp or the other and in doing so we allow ourselves to separate from people who are different from us we think we end up competing for the resources for the attention of the pastors for the money and the budget we could end up having a mutual attitude of superiority one over the other we can have a disregard or be dismissive of one another and friends if we embrace that then we're a part of the problem that Paul is exposing and confronting in the church in

Corinth let me just say this out of these two things that I think are very salient in our church culture I would just want to ask a series of questions because there are lots of things that we can put our identities in there are lots of ways that we can build ourselves up and separate ourselves from those around us even within the church so let me just ask you some questions to reflect on your own when I introduce myself what do I say what does that say who I think I am in this particular relationship how do what how I share myself how does that position me with regard to the other person do I use my identity subtly or not so subtly to make myself look good in the eyes of others we need to ask ourselves these questions I think this tendency runs pretty deep in human and humanity the good news is there's hope we don't have to be divided our longing for a unity that is real and substantial is possible in the kingdom of

God and in Christ because when we find our identity not in all of these other things but in Christ himself this then produces a unity in us that is a beautiful thing to behold let's explore how Paul talks about this in the passage look back with me in verses we're going to start in verse 10 because you see Paul's initial solution it seems to be very easy don't be divided agree be of the same mind think the same have the same judgment just get along right and he's not doing that superficially you'll see he's building the case for it but at the very beginning he's saying don't be divided if you

feel divided you are doing something that is contrary to your nature and contrary to the nature of the community that God has called you into having the same judgment and having the same mind is not just agreeing to disagree it's not just shallow tolerance in the way that our world often presents it today it's a deeper unity of values and of priorities and of ends it is that there is a core of truth that matters to us a truth about who

God is and what he's done in the world and who we are in relationship to him and not only is that truth true but it is the most important thing about us so it is both the truth of it and the significance of it that brings us together that's what Paul is saying when he talks about being of the same mind and the same what is the phrase let me look at it same mind and the same judgment right he's saying this is at the core in Christ this is where it is and there are lots of ways that he helps us understand the basis of this do you notice that one of the first things he did is to say brothers I appeal to you brothers and then he repeats it at the end of verse 11 my brothers he's saying God has called us in Christ into a family now your family may be completely fractured your family may feel like there's no unity in it at all but the biblical picture the biblical picture of unity is that

God has called you into one family with one God and father over us all and we are called to be brothers and sisters of Jesus the redeemer and the king what a glorious thing that is so he says how can we be divided against one another if Christ has called us into one family and then secondly he says and I appeal to you in the name of Christ this is in verse 10 again he's saying we are not only called into this family but we have one authority over us the church has one head who is Jesus Christ he alone has the ultimate authority and so how can we divide ourselves against one another and claim identity in this person and this person when there is one person who alone has the authority over us and then Paul in verse 13 or verse 12 no verse 13

[31 : 26] I love Paul's rhetorical questions you should look particularly in first Corinthians he pulls them out a lot to get his point across and it's always worth asking when there's a question what is Paul expecting the answer to be right look at verse 13 is Christ divided well of course not how can you divide Christ so how can you divide his church that's the answer that he's giving and then he keeps going was Paul crucified for you well this is absurd of course not only Christ was crucified then why are you making so much of Paul that you are diminishing the excellency and the supremacy of Christ he keeps going were you baptized into the name of Paul right he picks up this this baptized thing of course you wouldn't be baptized in the name of Paul Paul hasn't done anything but proclaim to you what Jesus has done you are baptized in the name of Jesus

Christ because he's done the work of redemption for you and we'll explore that as we get down a little bit further and this leads him a little bit into this place of baptism and I love how he does this because he says look I'm glad I didn't baptize many of you because then it might look like I was trying to build my own little army sort of counting my scalps you know I'm trying to get people to be my people by baptizing him he's like I'm glad I didn't baptize and then in God's sovereignty this little aside in verse 16 is so beautiful isn't it right because it's funny Paul's like I only baptized to oh this what is Paul saying it didn't matter to him it wasn't important at all who it was who performed the baptism ceremony what Paul cared about is who were you baptized into and you were baptized not into your church leader not into your denomination not into your particular church faction you were baptized into

Christ and in the name of Christ so how can you divide over these things which leads us to verse 17 in some ways this is where we see the end of where Paul has been taking this argument he's saying you are divided don't be of one mind be of one mind because you have all of these things in Christ in common then in verse 17 what he says is read it with me 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 now look Paul didn't not baptize people right Matthew 28 18 would say that he actually was called to baptize people just like everyone else in the church is called to go and make disciples and baptize people but what Paul is saying is that my job before you is to proclaim what God has done in Christ and don't use baptism as this kingdom I wasn't called to do that that's not why I came I came to proclaim to you the excellencies of what God has done in Jesus and not only did I do that but I did it not buying into the impressive ways that I could have spoken to impress you why because I want you to see the power of the cross friends this is the very center of what Paul wants us to get to it is the cross of Christ that alone has the power to give us an identity that can actually produce true unity when we grab hold of other identities spiritual leaders theological schools who baptized me what's my education whatever it is when we grab on those things and

make them our primary thing we deny the centrality of the work of Christ in our lives we deny that the cross is as significant as it should be in our lives but friends when Christ is our identity when he is central in our lives when he is central in our thoughts about who we are oh friends it makes all the difference because we gather together under him and when we interact with one another we're able to come to each other not figuring out and comparing and contrasting figure out where do I fit with these people but we encounter each other instead with the joy of exploring and learning about the grace of God in this person's life we get to hear their story and we get to see how Christ and the cross of Christ has intersected with them because of this when Christ is our central identity these other things which are true of us fade into the background they don't become the thing that we need in order to connect with one another when Christ is our identity we can give up our comparison we can give up our competitive spirit of where do [37 : 26] I fit am I more spiritual or less spiritual than this person am I more important or less important in the church is my role more significant or less significant in the church none of these things matter we don't need to make much of ourselves because Christ has called us and made us his own and so we can instead love and serve others we can make much of others and friends when we know that our identity is in Christ we don't spend so much of our time so much of our heart energy so much of our passions desperately seeking to find something that's going to be so significant that will actually bear the weight of our human identity we think that if my success in my career or the way that I fulfill my duties at church or whatever it is if we think that those things are where we will find it we find that they can't actually bear the weight and when we find that

Christ is actually the center of it then all those other things are a part of who we are but they don't have to bear that weight and that's a beautiful gift to us I read a story I think it wasn't in an evangelism book it was a long time ago I couldn't find it but I read this great story once about in the 1970s some of you will remember this some of you weren't born yet when people used to wear coats and ties to church all the time everybody and it was expected and it was a way to honor the Lord and it was a good thing and during the early 70s there was a revival in America and it was a revival especially among the young people and especially among the people who were counter cultural some of you may have been some of those people the hippies who went to Woodstock also became followers of Jesus in lots of ways and he tells of a story of a young man with long hair and a tank top and flip flops who walked into a church because he had been encountered Christ and been changed by him and he walked into church he looked around he looked at all the suits thought well and he walked up to the front and he sat on the floor right there and it was awkward and it was like whoa and one of the ushers took off his coat walked down the aisle took off his shoes and sat down next to the young man and they worshipped together it was a very practical very pragmatic very visible way in which that usher understood that though he wore a church tie to church because it was the culture of the day that wasn't what his identity was and he saw in this young man with his tank top and his long hair and his flip flops Jesus a brother and he welcomed him friends this is of course the very nature of the gospel the reason why taking these identities and creating divisions among you empties the cross of its power is because it has nothing to do with the one who hung on the cross

Jesus came not in a competitive spirit not to assert himself as the ruler by riding on a horse with an army in his back but Jesus came not to be served but to serve to give his life a ransom for many money he went to the cross to die for our sins he took the penalty that they deserved that we deserve so that we don't have to he lived a life not of self exaltation but of self sacrifice he bought us with the price of his very life and this is why Paul says how can you divide the people of Christ around anything when this precious treasure of the blood of the very son of God has bought you and brought you into a unity this is the glory of the church this is the goodness so who are you is a really important question the Bible would say that the most important question for you to ask is are you in

Christ or are you not and if you're here this morning and you're exploring Christianity I hope you will see that though the church may look very fragmented in its forms and in its modern day expressions this is not the intent and this is not the goal and this is not how it will be there will be a unity in the people of God in eternity that will be a beautiful thing to behold and there is in fact even now a beauty in the people of God as people from different denominations and from different socioeconomic levels and from different races and from Yale and not Yale gather together every Sunday to worship God and I hope you will see that this is founded in the very work of Christ and he

calls you to believe and come in and to the rest to those of you who are in the church already may we make much of

[43 : 40] Christ I don't want to talk about unity every week I want to talk about Christ and as we talk about Christ and as we exalt him in our hearts as we treasure him as we make him central in our identity as all the other things that we do in our lives find their place under him and in relationship to him then Christ is great for us and then we will be a church not divided but united let's pray Lord thank you for this word we thank you for Christ and that the cross has a power to transform us to give us a new identity far more profound than anything we would create on our own and Lord in that identity you produce in us a unity Lord that has beauty to it God we pray you would we pray that in your mercy

Lord you would help us help us to be that kind of church that your love and your mercy your righteousness and justice seen at the cross would be magnified and proclaimed through our body not by our divisions but by our unity we pray these things in Jesus name Amen