

The unity/disunity of the Corinthians

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[0 : 00] We come into the chapter at verse 10, and we read to verse 17. I appeal to you, brothers, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you all agree, and there be no dissensions among you, that you be united in the same mind and in the same judgment. For it has been reported to me by Chloe's people that there is calling among you, my brothers. What I mean is that each one of you says, I belong to Paul, or I belong to Apollos, or I belong to Cephas, or I belong to Christ. Is Christ divided? Was Paul crucified for you? Or were you baptized in the name of Paul? I am thankful that I baptized none of you except Crispus and Gaius, lest anyone should 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 eloquent wisdom, lest the cross of Christ be emptied of its power. Amen. May the Lord bless to us, that reading may it be, to his praise and to his glory.

In these Sunday nights, we've been looking at this letter of Paul, and the intention is to cover the first three chapters. Now, in weeks one and two, we looked at what he said in the first three verses. And each of these things is a unit on its own. So, I'm not going to spend the time repeating what I said in week one or week two, except to say this. What he's doing in the first three verses is to lay the foundation for what is now coming. And the foundation is he's reminding them of what the church of God is now coming. And the foundation is to lay the foundation for what is now coming.

They are set apart for God and his purposes. They are living a holy life. And they are exercising this healthy prayer ministry. When we looked at verses 4 to 7, the principal factor which had brought all this about was the gift of the grace of God. That's what made them different people. It's to say with John Newton, amazing grace, how sweet the sound that saved a wretch like me. And all of this is necessary now that he comes down to the heart of the matter, which is to deal with the problem of party spirit, which had resulted in the different personalities of the ministers of the Word of God at Corinth.

So now he comes to deal with this all-important problem. So think with me, if you will, about the appeal the apostle makes. I appeal to you, brothers and sisters, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that all of you agree and that there be no dissensions among you, but that you be united in the same mind and in the same judgment. So here's his appeal. His appeal is that they should be united.

[4 : 19] And this appeal is made in the name of Jesus Christ. Because what he's saying is this, if you are the church of God, a result of the grace of God, be united in Christ.

If your lives have been set apart for the purposes of God, be united in Christ. If you are exercising this healthy prayer ministry, be united in Christ. This is the unifying factor. It doesn't matter what your persuasion is, how you came to the Lord, what your testimony is now. Be united in the one that will unite you, Jesus Christ. And he makes this appeal on the basis of what they are, that is, the church of God, etc.

And they are making this appeal through, as I've already said, the name of the Lord Jesus Christ. Now, when we study the epistles of Paul, we find that this isn't the only epistle that has an appeal.

I think it was someone who said about Norman Vincent Peale, you know, the power of positive thinking, that he found Peale appalling, but Paul appealing.

Romans 12, verse 1. Now, here's an appeal.

[6 : 27] Here's an appeal for consecration, for dedication, for the service of the Lord. But it's not done on the basis of what they are.

It's done on the basis of what God has done for them. He defines it as the mercies of God. Now, what are the mercies of God?

Well, we could take time tonight and go through the entire epistle to the Romans. We're not going to do that. What he's talking about is the ever-extensive mercy of God, which, according to the Psalms, is from everlasting to everlasting, in purposing that our Lord Jesus Christ might die in our place, that we might be made the righteousness of God in Him.

Listen to what he says in 3, fact 25. Romans 3, 25. Speaking of Jesus, whom God has purposed as a propitiation, which is effective by means of His blood.

It is to be received by faith. This was to show God's righteousness, because in His divine forbearance, He had passed over former sins.

[7 : 53] Now, what is it that the apostle is talking about? If we take the word propitiation, which is retained by the ESV, and some of the more modern versions, but not by others, what it means is that the wrath of God, which is directed against you and me because of our sin, has been satisfied by the death of Jesus on the cross.

So, the appeal that the apostle makes to the Romans isn't based on what they are. It's based on the mercies of God.

Now, of course, it can be seen that the two letters are entirely different. In the epistle to the Romans, the apostle is talking about the basis of the Christian gospel, and he wants to make sure that they are properly grounded in the faith.

Whereas, in 1 Corinthians, the apostle is seeking to correct some of the false and wrong practices of the church, and he does this by making this appeal.

I appeal to you, brothers and sisters, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ. And this appeal has a name, and it's this, that all of you agree and that there be no dissensions among you, but that you may be united in the same mind and in the same judgment.

[9 : 35] Now, what he's appealing for here is what we read about in Ephesians 4 right at the beginning of the service, the bond of the unity of peace.

This can only be achieved by the Spirit of God. This is what he has to say to every church.

Be united in Christ. And what he said to the Thessalonians in chapter 4, verses 9 and 10, is this, What a beautiful picture that is of the church that has received the gospel.

He's walking in the power of the Spirit and has this bond of unity, the blessing of peace.

Now we go on. We consider the report to the apostle. It is being reported to me by Chloe's people that there is quarreling among you, my brothers.

[11 : 08] Now when I started this series, I made the point that the writing of 1 Corinthians comes from two distinct sources. They had written a letter to them, to Paul, that is, about different matters.

And in chapter 7, verse 1, he starts to answer the points that they'd made in that letter. He says, Now concerning the matters you wrote to me.

And if you trace that word concerning in chapters 7 and 16, you'll be able to detect all the matters that they raised in this letter. But this is something different.

This isn't a letter. This is, it has been reported to me by Chloe's people. Now, who was Chloe?

Well, the answer is, we don't know. Because this is the only time that she occurs. But the probability is that she was a large householder who lived in Ephesus.

[12 : 23] And as part of our household staff, she had a number of Christian slaves. There it is who report this matter to the Apostle Paul.

And what they report isn't only found here in chapter 1. You also find it in chapter 11, in verse 18. He says this, When you assemble as a church, I hear that there are divisions among you, and I partly believe it.

He's saying this in the context of the Lord's Supper. And then in 15, he says, chapter 15, How can some among you say that there is no resurrection of the dead?

So some of them have come to disbelieve the teaching on the resurrection. It has been reported to me by Chloe's people.

Now, this isn't the only report that the Apostle gives. And we're now going to see on the screen another one from 1 Thessalonians.

[13 : 40] For not only has the word of the Lord sounded forth from you in Macedonia and Achaia, but your faith in God has gone forth everywhere so that we need not say anything.

For they themselves report concerning us what kind of reception we had among you, and how you turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God, and to wait and to wait for his Son from heaven whom he raised from the dead, Jesus, who delivers us from the wrath to come.

Here is a report of something tremendous that's happened to the Thessalonians. And all of Macedonia is talking about it.

They're talking about the way that Paul and his colleagues were received. the kind of reception we had among you, and how they turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God.

It was a dynamic and positive reception. And if we ask the question, how is it that Paul achieved that?

[14 : 52] In the earlier verses of the chapter, he says, our gospel did not come unto you in word only, but in power and in the Holy Spirit.

And what we need in today's society in the 21st century is what the apostle had in that time, the unction of God and what he had to say.

It brought a tremendous result. That's one kind of report. It has been reported to me by Chloe's people that there is quarreling among you, my brothers and sisters.

This verb that's here is reported. It's actually an unusual Greek verb. The way I mention this is because there are certain things that are lying beneath the surface which don't come out in English translation.

And the verb actually means to make clear. Now, remember what I said in 1 Corinthians 11 and 18. There are, I hear that there are divisions among you and I partly believe it.

[16 : 13] In other words, he's astounded that this church that was founded on a sound gospel and in the power of the Holy Spirit has now ended up being so divided.

And that's borne out with this verb. He's had to have it made clear to him. Now, the details are these.

What I mean is that each one of you says, I belong to Paul or I belong to Apollos or I belong to Cephas, which is the Aramaic word for Peter, or I belong to Christ.

In other words, this party spirit had developed around those who were the ministers and preachers of the gospel.

Mark this, there's nobody exempt from this party spirit. What I mean is each one of you says all the people in Corinth were divided like this.

[17 : 33] How did it come about? Some people said, we like Paul. We are so grateful for the way that he systemizes the teaching of the Bible and he makes these dogmatic statements about the faith.

We are of Paul. Second group said, no, we are of Apollos. Now, if you read about Apollos, Apollos was a man who had great eloquence.

He had a mastery of words. We like his use of language in preaching, we are of Apollos. Apollos. The third group said, we are of Peter or Cephas as it's called in this verse.

We like his simpler approach to life, to the Bible and the fact that he is a man of action. We are of Peter. And there was even a fourth group who preferred not to associate themselves with any ministers but they said, we are of Christ.

Christ. So, it's all got to do, this party spirit, firstly, with the preachers of the gospel.

[18 : 52] But as you read further in this chapter and the verses we read, not only is it got to do with the preachers, but it's got to do with the ministers who baptize different people.

Were you baptized in the name of Paul? I am thankful I baptized none of you except Crispus and Gaius, lest anyone should say you were baptized in my name.

Now, what he's getting across here is who does the baptizing? Totally unimportant. Who does the preaching? Equally unimportant.

So, he says, is Christ divided? Was Paul crucified for you? Or were you baptized in the name of Christ?

In other words, what he's trying to do here is take them back to that moment that they received the grace of God. the great turning that there was in their lives.

[20 : 04] They were now facing a new direction. And this has not been achieved by Paul, Apollos, Peter, or anyone else, but by the Lord himself.

So, then he goes on to say, later in the epistle and verses that we'll consider later on, chapter 3, 5 to 7, what then is Apollos?

What is Paul? Servant through whom you believe as the Lord assigned to each. I have planted, Apollos watered, but God gave the growth.

So, neither he who plants or he who waters is anything, but only God who gives the growth. So, we see that these are verses that we will examine later on.

But he's now asserting a very important principle. Get your eyes off who are the preachers of the gospel. The important thing in the preaching of the gospel is that there is a living Christ behind it, speaking to the whosoever, challenge them on where they are, calling them to repent, and giving them the grace of God.

[21 : 35] God. And the reason that he now says all this is that he believes that this centering on Christ as the true minister of the sanctuary will cause them to be united in Christ.

We turn thirdly. Verse 17. The aim of the apostle. Christ did not send me to baptize, but to preach the gospel, and not with eloquent wisdom, lest the cross of Christ be emptied of its power.

So here he's saying, my aim in life is not to baptize. My aim in life is to preach the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ.

The Greek term that's used for his position. He uses it a lot of himself. He says, I'm a kyrrouks.

And a kyrouks is a herald or a street crier. We had them in the Middle Ages. They would stand on the street corner and shout out, hear ye, hear ye, and tell you all about what the king had decided.

[23 : 03] Well, Paul says, that's exactly what I'm doing. Now, why is it that he gets back to this fundamental bit and the reason for his preaching of the gospel?

The reason is that the message of the cross in all its fullness is one that humbles the human soul.

Do you remember Galatians 2 verse 20? I am crucified with Christ, nevertheless I live, and not I. The life I now live, I live in the flesh by faith in the Son of God who loved me and gave himself for me.

Many years ago, I remember the Reverend William White, that is, the father, preaching on that verse and saying there are two gospels in that verse.

There's a gospel for saints. I am crucified with Christ, and a gospel for sinners, the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.

[24 : 25] So he writes to the Galatians in words that we'll sing very shortly. But far be it from me to glory, except in the cross of the Lord Jesus Christ, by which the world has been crucified to me and I to the world.

And he goes on in 1 Corinthians 9, 16, woe is me if I do not proclaim this gospel. And if we're asking the question, where is this desire come from?

Where is this compelling call? It's come from his experience in Acts 9. That day when he stepped out to arrest the saints in Damascus, he had no thought of surrendering to the claims of Jesus Christ.

But he meditates on his experience in Galatians and also in his defense before the Pharisees in the Acts of the Apostles. This is what he says to the Galatians.

I would have you know, brothers, that the gospel which was preached by me is not man's gospel. I did not receive it from man, nor did anyone teach me it, but it came through a revelation of Jesus Christ.

[25 : 57] This is the greatest thing that motivates the Apostle Paul. Not his learning, not his position as a Pharisee, but his experience of the revelation of Jesus Christ.

It totally transformed him. He goes on in verses 13 and 14. You heard of my former life in Judaism, how I persecuted the church of God violently and tried to destroy it.

And I advanced in Judaism beyond many of my own age of my people. So extremely zealous was I for the traditions of my fathers.

So what's happened in this man's experience? What's happened is that those things that were dear to him, that he would have formally laid down his life for, the traditions of the faith, were all given up by a revelation of Jesus Christ.

He goes on, verses 15 and 16. When he who had set me apart before I was born and had called me through his grace was pleased to reveal his son to me or in me in order that I might preach him among the Gentiles, I did not confer with flesh and blood.

[27 : 30] So the reason that he is so dedicated to the preaching of the gospel is this experience. Because what happened in that experience was this, that into Paul came the life of Christ and into Paul the preacher came the goal of the gospel.

Go into all the world, it was part of him. All set aside, those things that were very dear to him. And that's what he's now saying to the Corinthians.

You want to forget all about this, all about Paul, all about Apollos, about Cephas. You need to do something with the experience that you've got.

He says this in chapter 2, the verses we'll consider probably the third or fourth Sunday in October. when I came to you, brothers and sisters, I did not come proclaiming to you the testimony of God in lofty words or wisdom, for I decided to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ and him crucified.

So this message, this is the thing that you should be absorbed in, he says. this is the thing that should fill your life.

[29 : 06] Do something with your experience. Forget your party spirit. Be reconciled to one another. Endeavor to keep the unity of the spirit in the bond of peace.

Is Christ divided? No, he's not. God. In Ephesians 4, we read about the varying unities that there are in the grace of God.

And these unities are all based on the Trinity. And sometimes we speak of the God, the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit as the Trinity in a triunity.

Trinity, if that's true of the Godhead, how much more should it be true of the church of God?

Christ did not send me to baptize, but to preach the gospel, and not with eloquent wisdom, lest the cross of Christ be emptied of its power. Can we learn anything from this?

[30 : 17] I think we can. I think we can learn from it the value of our experience in the grace of God.

We can allow that experience to motivate us so that the goal of the gospel gets into our hearts and souls, and we can have a vision of what it is to preach the gospel to the whosoever.

Amen. Amen.