

TODAY'S TEXT

Text: 1 Corinthians 1:10-25

I appeal to you, brothers and sisters, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that all of you agree with one another in what you say and that there be no divisions among you, but that you be perfectly united in mind and thought. ¹¹ My brothers and sisters, some from Chloe's household have informed me that there are quarrels among you. ¹² What I mean is this: One of you says, "I follow Paul"; another, "I follow Apollos"; another, "I follow Cephas[b]"; still another, "I follow Christ." ¹³ Is Christ divided? Was Paul crucified for you? Were you baptized in the name of Paul? ¹⁴ I thank God that I did not baptize any of you except Crispus and Gaius, ¹⁵ so no one can say that you were baptized in my name. ¹⁶ (Yes, I also baptized the household of Stephanas; beyond that, I don't remember if I baptized anyone else.) ¹⁷ For Christ did not send me to baptize, but to preach the gospel—not with wisdom and eloquence, lest the cross of Christ be emptied of its power. ¹⁸ For the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God. ¹⁹ For it is written: "I will destroy the wisdom of the wise; the intelligence of the intelligent I will frustrate." ²⁰ Where is the wise person? Where is the teacher of the law? Where is the philosopher of this age? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of the world? ²¹ For since in the wisdom of God the world through its wisdom did not know him, God was pleased through the foolishness of what was preached to save those who believe. ²² Jews demand signs and Greeks look for wisdom, ²³ but we preach Christ crucified: a stumbling block to Jews and foolishness to Gentiles, ²⁴ but to those whom God has called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God. ²⁵ For the foolishness of God is wiser than human wisdom, and the weakness of God is stronger than human strength.

FIRST THOUGHTS

- Describe your experiences in a close-knit, unified group, as well as your experiences in a divisive group situation. How did the unity impact how others perceived that group?

UNDERSTAND THE CONTEXT

The church is a group of people from many different walks of life, backgrounds, and interests that finds its unity in the gospel. At times, divisions occur in the church over many different things—some significant and some trite. Sometimes we let our preferences get in the way of our mission, and believers are unnecessarily divided. In this week's lesson, Paul addressed divisions in the Corinthian church and called the congregation to be united.

Paul began this letter with a greeting and a prayerful thanksgiving to God for the church at Corinth. Paul's terms "grace" and "peace" (1:3) are foundational truths that will guide his whole approach to his readers in this letter.

Although the church at Corinth had significant problems, Paul was thankful that the grace of God was given to them in Christ Jesus (1:4), and that God called them into fellowship with His Son (1:9). They had been sanctified in Christ and called as saints (1:2), having been enriched in Him in every way (1:5). These truths were important for the Corinthian believers to remember, especially as Paul's stern correction was soon to follow. Paul didn't begin his letter by exposing his readers' laundry list of sins, but rather pointed them back to their true identity in Christ.

Paul also mentioned peace. With all of their divisions and problems, Paul desired for them the kind of peace and wholeness that the gospel provides. Whatever their circumstances or the difficulties between them, God had called them to live in peace.

Early in this letter, however, Paul raised the issue of problems in the church at Corinth. These problems—mostly moral and relational, but some theological—he will address in this letter. He had a fatherly love for this church, which drove him to confront the problems present among her members (4:14-15). In the first four chapters of 1 Corinthians, Paul focused his attention on the disunity that was tearing the church apart.

EXPLORE THE TEXT

CALL FOR UNITY

> Read 1 Corinthians 1:10

- What difference does it make that Paul addressed the Corinthians in the name of Jesus Christ?
- What did Paul's exhortation indicate that the Corinthians understood about God and His ways?

CONTEMPT FOR DIVISIONS

> Read 1 Corinthians 1:11-16

- ° What part does selfishness play in the Corinthian believers' identification with different leaders?
- ° What purpose did Paul's rhetorical questions serve?
- ° Why was Paul glad he did not baptize many of the Corinthians believers?

THE CROSS THAT DIVIDES

> Read 1 Corinthians 1:17-25

- ° According to Paul, what makes preaching ineffective?
- ° In what ways does the cross divide?

SUMMARIZE AND CHALLENGE

Immaturity weakens God's church, division breaks God's heart, and gospel-focused preaching changes people's lives. Paul spoke truth to the Corinthian church. He wanted God's people to face reality. The problem wasn't salvation; the concern was sanctification. God's people weren't maturing in the faith. The writer of Hebrews declared a similar message. He said, "We have a great deal to say about this, and it is difficult to explain, since you have become too lazy to understand. Although by this time you ought to be teachers, you need someone to teach you the basic principles of God's revelation again. You need milk, not solid food. Now everyone who lives on milk is inexperienced with the message about righteousness, because he is an infant. But solid food is for the mature—for those whose senses have been trained to distinguish between good and evil" (Heb. 5:11-14). While Paul's message was bold and straightforward, it was delivered by "speaking the truth in love" (Eph. 4:15).

All believers share the same salvation and thus should be unified through that confession.

- ° In light of Paul's instruction to the Corinthian church, what can today's church do to eliminate factions within the church and strengthen unity?

Personal Challenge: Evaluate your attitude toward fellow church members. Do you cultivate divisiveness, or do you promote unity? Put Christ first, and encourage love among believers. In unity, believers should glorify Christ so that others will receive salvation.

- ° Are you growing in your personal sanctification – becoming more and more like Christ? When we focus on our own spiritual growth we do not spend so much time analyzing our fellow church members.

PREPARING FOR NEXT WEEK

- Read 1 Corinthians 6:12-20
- What is an example of something that is permissible but not beneficial?
- How does a holy life bring God glory?

READ THROUGH THE BIBLE

6th – Genesis 15-17; Luke 6 | **7th** – Genesis 18-19; Psalm 3; Luke 7 | **8th** – Genesis 20-22; Luke 8 | **9th** – Genesis 23-24; Luke 9 | **10th** – Genesis 25-26; Psalm 6; Luke 10 | **11th** – Genesis 27-28; Psalm 4; Luke 11 | **12th** – Genesis 29-30; Luke 12