

“To whom do you belong?”

Scripture: 1 Corinthians 1:10-17

Graphic: cross, division, wisdom vs cross, baptism

Key Verses: 1:17 For Christ did not send me to baptize but to proclaim the gospel, and not with eloquent wisdom, so that the cross of Christ might not be emptied of its power.

Theme: Any divisions in the church cause the power and love of God to be diluted. For the sake of the cross of Jesus Christ and its salvation power, pull together for Him. It's not about you or me, or the wisdom we think we have, it's about the death and resurrection of Christ, and the victory of the cross over sin and death.

1) Introduction

- a) Introduce the series...over the next 6 weeks, leading up to Lent, we will camping out in the first part of the book of 1 Corinthians...so bring your Bibles with you and let's see what God's word has to say through the Apostle Paul about unity in Christ.
- b) Some of you may have used Borax in the past (I happened to have an empty box of it here). I use Borax to sometimes dry the hide of a deer head (like you wanted to know THAT). But the story behind Borax is fascinating, especially the story of the 20-mule team which is depicted on the label...
- c) From 1883 to 1889, each load of borax ore that was transported to the rail spur in Mojave, California, had to be hauled through the desert, from Death Valley. Each load, including the wagon, drivers, and supplies weighed about 33 tons. And so they need that many horses and mules to pull the load. And they all had to be pulling in the same direction or the job couldn't be done.
- d) If they were divided in their purpose, then they can't deliver the goods...or what's worse, they risk death...
- e) Today, as we begin this look into Paul's letter to the church in Corinth, we are challenged to take a look at our own lives...our own church...and be moving toward unity in Christ. And it all depends on who we belong to and what that identification means to our journey of faith in this world.
- f) Open your Bibles with me today to 1 Corinthians 1, starting in verse 10...
- g) Let's pray...

2) Scripture

- a) **Read 1 Corinthians 1:10**

- i) Let's stop right there for a minute...
- ii) What is Paul saying, here, as he opens the body of this letter? That everything seems great? That the church of Corinth is a well-oiled machine? That they are all pulling in the same direction?
- iii) There's division in the church! There are some serious problems and Paul is writing to urgently appeal to them to stop.
- iv) And the problem isn't necessarily that there are merely divisions in this group of people...the problem is that there are divisions in the body of Christ, the church. That makes all the difference in the world to Paul. This is one of the churches that Paul started! He has a real concern about their current state...because it shouldn't be like this.
- v) In contrast, look back at verses 4-9...
 - (1) Verse 4 – Paul gives thanks for the church at Corinth because God's grace had been given to them...
 - (2) Verse 5 – the church has been enriched in EVERY WAY, and (verse 6), so has the testimony of Christ.
 - (3) Verse 7 – they are not lacking ANY SPIRITUAL GIFT
 - (4) Verse 8 – God will strengthen them to the very end, when Christ returns
 - (5) Verse 9 – they have been called into fellowship with Christ!
- vi) Basically, the church in Corinth had everything they needed because of their foundation in Jesus Christ. And so something has gone haywire...
- vii) And now Paul, writing from Ephesus, where he was staying, is making this plea. But notice he first identifies with them – calling them brothers and sisters. These are his siblings in Christ...he's saying that they are of the same Father.
- viii) And then he invokes the authority they share in Jesus Christ – in the NAME of Jesus Christ. This gives weight to what he is about to say, which is: to urgently appeal to them that they MUST get along, they MUST learn to be considerate to each other, and they MUST cultivate this common life together.
- ix) And this is something they obviously weren't doing...

x) And then Paul goes on to report to them that he knows exactly what they HAVE been doing...

b) Read verses 11-13

- i) Paul got a report of their church quarrelling from Chloe's family.
- ii) Couple things about Chloe – because Paul names HER here, instead of her husband, probably means she was a wealthy widow who had some ties to Paul. Since this report came from Chloe's family, and not Chloe, she may or may not have been a Christian, but some in her family obviously were. And probably they were in Corinth on business and they went to this church, probably to worship and be with other believers.
- iii) What they found was not peace and harmony...not “sharing in all things and breaking bread with glad and generous hearts” that Luke writes about in Acts 4. What they found was shocking!
- iv) Have you seen that show *When Vacations Attack?* It's all about family vacations where something goes horribly wrong and someone catches it on video? Man, this is *When Churches Attack!* Things are going terribly wrong since the time Paul left them...sexual immorality, in-fighting...
- v) And now Chloe's family reports this to Paul...
- vi) Now, some people love to “report” about the sinful and unfortunate things that happen in the church. And eventually, the pastor usually here's about it. Many times, the person reporting the behavior of someone else is doing so because they think it should be done a different way...maybe if we make that person stop, you know, we can do it my way instead, right? I've been a pastor long enough to know this is how we sometimes operate.
- vii) But it's pretty clear here that this report from Chloe's family is not meant to take one side or another, it's not just narking on the church. It's an urgent and painful appeal to Paul to **DO SOMETHING!**
- viii) Chloe's family cares so authentically for the integrity of the body of Christ, for the **SAKE** of Christ, that they are reporting this to Paul so he can help the church get back on track. It's like, “Paul we came through Corinth and went to the church and we saw and heard all these really divisive things...”

- ix) "...we heard one clique say they were for Paul and one group say they belonged to Apollos, and one group to Cephas (Peter), still another to Christ! It's tearing the church apart....do something!"
- x) And so Paul challenges them...and he asks them three questions, whose answers are implied by the context. Has Christ been divided? NO! Was Paul crucified for you? (join me) "NO!" Were you baptized in the name of Paul? (everyone) "NO!" Of course not!
- xi) Then why would you be identifying yourself with anyone, ultimately, beside Jesus Christ? Why?
- xii) Your baptism, infers Paul, is the only identification card you need and it doesn't have your picture on it, or mine, or Peter's, or Apollos'. It has Christ's picture on it. You were baptized into the church with Jesus' baptism. It's His Spirit that comes to fill you and justify you. He's the one that we should all claim that we belong to! He's the one who died for our sins! It's HIS cross that we bear. You belong to Christ. Even though there are many competing owners in your life: work, family, church, hobbies, other people...you belong to Christ, says Paul!
- xiii) Paul is fed up...he goes on to write...

c) Read verses 14-16

- i) Thank God I can't claim that I baptized you people, is really what he's saying. You can just read the frustration.
- ii) If you are a parent, or have ever been responsible for kids, you know that sometimes it's frustrating. And I'm not calling out the youth here today, because if you could ask my parents, they would tell you that I sometimes was frustrating. They taught me well, but I often decided that I knew better. I got sidetracked. I got prideful.
- iii) The church had lost its way and Paul was letting them know that he wasn't taking the blame. This was tough love.
- iv) But just like our parents are supposed to love us unconditionally, Paul is showing his unconditional love to the church in Corinth by sending this urgent appeal for them to sit up and fly straight.
- v) And it's not about him...it's not about the church...it's not about who leads or who follows, ultimately...it's about Jesus Christ...

d) Read verse 17

- i) Paul's main job was not to baptize. He's like, "Any old apostle can do that!" His main task, his calling, was to proclaim the gospel – which is the good news about Jesus Christ. The **WHOLE** news about Jesus Christ.
- ii) But, and I love this, "not with eloquent wisdom, so that the cross of Christ might not be emptied of its power."
- iii) Paul uses the term *wisdom* as a code word to represent that which is our own source of worth and status. If you have this "wisdom," then it causes you to present yourself as something more than those without it. This is even true if the wisdom you present is about Jesus. If anyone of us makes it seem like we are better Christians because of the things we know about Christ, then the whole point of **KNOWING** Christ is nullified.
- iv) In contrast to this so-called wisdom, Paul uses the term *cross* as shorthand code for the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ which leads to salvation for those who trust in it.
- v) And so, he doesn't want to **WOW** people with his wisdom...with what he knows. He wants to allow the conviction and power of the Good News about **JESUS** and the cross to be the thing that cuts to the heart for transformation. And it's available to all who claim Christ as Lord and Savior...all who belong to Christ alone.
- vi) More specifically, he wants the horror and hope of the cross of Christ to do all the work for salvation from sin and restoration to new life!!
- vii) As a preacher, if I were to stand up here and talk about the things I wanted to talk about, we'd hear lots of eternally worthless stories about my family, or hunting, or camping...maybe computers or the latest Sabres game...you name it. Stupid stuff. Stuff I like, but stuff that makes no eternal difference. This is not the stuff that is at the core of who I am in Christ.
- viii) And God forbid me from ever standing up here to bring whatever wisdom **I** have in lieu of the message of Christ and him crucified. And I'm serious about that...and I want you all to hold me critically accountable to that.
- ix) Because that which does not unite us under the banner of the cross of Christ, will divide us under the veil of the world.

x) So where do we go with this today? What can we take with us?

3) Application

- i) Paul gives this urgent appeal to the church in Corinth to be of one voice, one mind, and one purpose.
- ii) And because Paul is way more clever than I am, let me pass HIS appeal on to us, the Panama UMC. Be of one voice, one mind, and one purpose.
- iii) Before we unpack that, though, we need to understand that unity is not uniformity. We are not all the same...all believers don't have the identical views on all things. We are not called to march in lockstep. There is value in distinctiveness...value is our unique gifts and graces (which we will be studying)...value is our personalities and our stories.
- iv) We have the freedom in Christ to make a range of acceptable but different moral choices in our lives. True unity doesn't come from being the same as the person next to me, but is established by God's grace, Christ's love, and the reception of the Holy Spirit.
- v) With that in mind, then, does it mean to have one voice, one mind, and one purpose?
- vi) One voice. When two people sing together, the only time that it sounds like one voice is when they are on perfect pitch together. Still two voices...still two different tone qualities...still two unique persons making the sound. But it sounds like one voice.
 - (1) As we live out this Christian journey together, I challenge you to listen to the voices around you and find the ways that your voice can sing as one voice with others. Ask yourself what gifts you bring and what ministries light your fire of passion. Then find others who are passionate about that and SING in unison for Christ. You'll find that you're talking the same language and saying the same things! Maybe it's Vacation Bible School this summer...maybe it's learning to play an instrument and playing for the glory of God...maybe it's helping with one of the ministry teams.
 - (2) Whatever it is, remind yourself, and those around you, that it's not about how good WE are as a church...it's not about how cool OUR team is compared to the other team that's maybe struggling...it's about making a kingdom difference for Christ.

vii) Second thing: Be of one mind! When we stop thinking about the things that divide us - the things that annoy us about other people in the church, or the things that we think we could do better – we are freed to be thinking about the things of God together.

(1) It might look like spending time in Bible study together. It might be just sharing a meal or getting excited about a ministry together. Whatever it is, it's a difficult endeavor, especially in a church that will continue to grow. As we invite new and different people to be part of what God is doing here, and as we expand our borders, this unity of mind has to be intentional.

viii) And finally, be of one purpose! For Paul that means to unite under the cross and be always ready to share the truth about your source of hope and salvation. Encourage and push each other to grow in our faith, to finally get rid of that sinful situation that keeps tearing us down, and live boldly and ashamedly for the purpose of Christ.

(1) He told us to go into the world and make disciples.

(2) He told us to preach and teach the Good News.

(3) He told us to baptize new believers, and share Holy Communion.

(4) He told us to love and care for each other.

(5) These are the purposes that unite us in Christ, and should never be the points on a doctrinal chart that divide us. Denominations come and go, churches open and close, but the gospel message of salvation through Jesus Christ stands firm...is the same yesterday, today, and tomorrow.

ix) It is our task - our calling - sing together for Christ, to think together for Christ, and to work together for Christ. Anything else, as Paul reminds us, is a vain attempt to impress people, and will empty the power and the love of God from the cross on which Jesus died.

4) Conclusion

a) That 20-mule team had to always be pulling in the same direction. If they didn't, sometimes the consequences were deadly. When they did, though, they reached the watering holes together, they made it to the destination together, and the goods were delivered together.

- b) We are baptized into the one family of God, the one Spirit, and one Lord. Nothing about God is divided. It's where we belong.
- c) And the church, sinful though we are, is the main instrument of God's plan for the salvation of the world. If we spend our time tearing each other down, then the only thing we have is a group of people who don't like each other very much trying to make the other people do what they want.
- d) But as God's instrument for the salvation of the world, we don't have time to do that. The world is already almost completely turned off by our lives. If you didn't notice, active, faithful, evangelical Christians are the minority in this world and have been for a while.
- e) The church universal has been quietly emptying the power of the cross of Christ in this culture by our participation in pursuits other than Christ, and him crucified.
- f) This morning, let Paul's appeal to belong to Christ be your guiding light as you come to pray and as we sing.
- g) If God is tugging at your heart to stop wasting any more time without Him at the center and lead in our life, I invite you to come and give what you have to His use. This is between you and God...it's your stuff. He expects each one of us to lay aside our sin and ask for his forgiveness. It's because he loves each one of us and died for us.
- h) In that cross is the power of life...the power of the Holy Spirit in our lives, and the power of God to restore us to life for Him. Mysterious and unbelievable as it is, it is real.
- i) As we sing, I invite everyone who wants to offer prayer to God to come and spend time with Him as your unifying act of being one voice, one mind, and one purpose with God this morning.
- j) Come!
- k) (kneel) Let's pray...