

## 1 Co 1:10-17 Sermon Outline

**Theme:** I appeal to you to be united (practice your unity in Jesus Christ).

**Intro: Rapport/Application** A church full of individualistically conceived and employed spiritual gifts runs the risk of division. what are the things that could cause division in the church today; materialism, entertainment approach, rapid change, ...

### **Point 1: The appeal**

*Image; you know how this looks/feels*

Apply: Be united

no divisions/no quarrels – far from fellowship (v9) there's division, quarrels (act of the flesh Gal 5:14ff)

'agree'- idiom for unity. 'perfectly united'- restoration of Mt 4:21 for mending nets

ill;

The nature of the division: One of you says, "I follow Paul"; another, "I follow Apollos"; another, "I follow Cephas"; still another, "I follow Christ."

choice b/w Paul and Apollos prob based on preaching method (cf Acts 18:26ff; but still a colleague 1 Co 3:6-9)

Peter – more Jewish?

Christ party – ill; 2 tier spirituality

*Extend; so what are you going to do about it this week?*

### **Point 2: The basis of the appeal**

*Image; you know how this looks/feels*

I appeal in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ,

Is Christ divided? utter impossibility, Christ is one, his body/church is one

Was Paul crucified for you? unthinkable, bordering on the blasphemous

ill; you get an uncomfortable feeling when you hear things that are borderline

Christ's cross is central

Were you baptized into the name of Paul?

another borderline statement

they hadn't realised the significance of their baptism, died with Christ, risen with Christ, bought by his precious blood

*Extend; so what are you going to do about it this week?*

### **Point 3: Paul's thankfulness**

*Image; you know how this looks/feels*

I am thankful that I did not baptize many of you so no one can say that you were baptized into my name.

compare the thankfulness of the previous passage

finds a positive even here, but a pity

For Christ did not send me to baptize, but to preach the gospel

—not with words of human wisdom, lest the cross of Christ be emptied of its power. 'dwindle to

nothing, vanish

under the weight of rhetorical argument & dialectic subtlety'

- a synthesis of content and brilliance of technique would rob the cross of its force ie saving

content, consequent offense, and related divine efficacy.

ill; interesting, entertaining sermon, but not spiritual content

wisdom as a formal characteristic of skilful speech is not far from describing also the content of

which the cross may come to look like a foolish error.

at least some of the Cors were setting too high a value on human wisdom & human eloquence in line with the

typical Gk admiration for rhetoric & philosophical studies. But not for Paul, that would draw people to the preacher. It would

nullify the cross of Christ. Faithful preaching leads people to put their trust in God through Christ.

ill; comments like, that was such a moving sermon

*Extend; so what are you going to do about it this week?*

**Aim:** In spite of our differences let's practice the unity we have in our Lord Jesus Christ.

### **The appeal**

<sup>10</sup> I appeal to you, brothers,

in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ,

[so] that

all of you agree with one another [and/so that] there may be no divisions among you

and that you may be perfectly united in mind and thought.

[for] <sup>11</sup> My brothers, some from Chloe's household have informed me

that there are quarrels among you.

<sup>12</sup> What I mean is this: One of you says, "I follow Paul"; another, "I follow Apollos"; another, "I follow Cephas"; still another, "I follow Christ."

### **The basis of the appeal**

<sup>13</sup> Is Christ divided? Was Paul crucified for you? Were you baptized into the name of Paul?

### **Paul's thankfulness**

<sup>14</sup> I am thankful that I did not baptize any of you except Crispus and Gaius,

<sup>15</sup> so no one can say that you were baptized into my name.

<sup>16</sup> (Yes, I also baptized the household of Stephanas; beyond that, I don't remember if I baptized anyone else.)

<sup>17</sup> For Christ did not send me to baptize, but to preach the gospel

—not with words of human wisdom, lest the cross of Christ be emptied of its power.

## 1 Co 1:10-17 rev

Dear Congregation

Last Sunday morning we started a series on Paul's 1<sup>st</sup> letter to the Corinthians. We looked at the 1<sup>st</sup> 9 verses of chapter 1. And you might remember that the main message of those verses was that we can thank God for his faithfulness in his grace shown, his gifts given, and the future glory that we look forward to.

And if the letter stopped there, you'd have a pretty rosy picture of this church here in Corinth. But it doesn't. And in this very next passage you start to get a very different picture. It turns out that they were being torn apart by a whole range of different issues. The church was divided. Corinth was a church of individuals - using their particular gifts and pushing their particular agendas with very little thought for the congregation as a whole.

And as we saw last week too, it was an attitude they'd brought into the church from their non-Christian background. They were the product of their upbringing. A few years before, they hadn't known any better. And now they still carried attitudes from their pagan background that weren't biblical at all. They didn't even realise it. They thought they were a model church.

On the other hand, aren't we the same sometimes? It's funny how you sometimes hear people criticising the way the church did things in the past without them realising that the next generation will say exactly the same kinds of things about us. We've taken on values and attitudes and practices from our society in the same kind of way they did - we're the frogs in the pan of our society in the same way that they were - the heat is being turned up, and we often don't even realise it. We have accepted ideas and attitudes that aren't especially biblical.

Just think about the way our society has become more and more *materialistic*. Missionaries who only come back to Australia every few years will tell you how they see Australia grow more materialistic with

every visit. And they see it creep into the church – every time they come back there’s some new gadget or fad that everyone’s taking on board – we’ve all got a mobile phone, or a laptop, a 2<sup>nd</sup> bathroom, or a 3rd, a movie room. And it seems normal to us because everyone around us is doing it – but it also means that many people in the church can’t find the time or the money anymore for the really important things. Too many Christians have time and money for the things we want, but very little for God’s kingdom – no time or money for outreach or mission, no time or money for the work of the church.

As well as that our society has just gone through a few centuries of *rationalism*. Most people have believed that everything can be explained without a need for the supernatural. And that influence has crept into the church too. Too many people in the wider church have trouble accepting that Jesus’ miracles literally happened – that he walked on the water, healed the sick, raised the dead, physically rose from the dead himself.

And one last example is how our society has given more and more importance to *tolerance* –tolerating everything except absolute values and principles. And so plenty of people in the church have moved in that direction too. We find it increasingly hard to stand up for important issues anymore. We have a sneaking feeling that people should be allowed to do whatever they want.

And that’s just 3 examples of how the values of society creep into the church as well - which then makes life in our churches less unified, less harmonious. People take on these attitudes to a greater or lesser extent and wonder why they have trouble agreeing with people at the other end of the spectrum. It all leads to more tension and division in the church.

### **Point 1**

And so these verses this morning *open with an appeal for unity*. Because the reality in Corinth was division.

It's an appeal that's just as relevant for us. I'm sure that over the years Gosnells has had its fair share of issues that people have disagreed on. The latest one has been whether we should use a data projector in worship services or not. Before that it was probably questions like who could read the Bible in church, who could be involved in music. All of these kinds of things can cause division. And it's often because different segments of the congregation are coming at the issues from different angles, sometimes even from directions that aren't especially biblical.

But the appeal here is that, in spite of the kinds of issues that are going to come up in church life, in spite of the fact that we're going to look at things from different angles, we stay united.

Paul even uses the term 'perfectly united'. It's used in Matthew to describe fishermen fixing and restoring their nets. The nets had been damaged by the day's work. But there's going to be another day's work tomorrow. And so the fishermen fix them before sundown. Corinth had become torn and ripped by their disagreements and fights. They needed to be fixed again, reunited.

And you see here that the way division in Corinth had developed was that different groups that disagreed on particular issues had *picked a champion* for their cause who seemed to be saying what they wanted – Paul, Apollos, Cephas (or Peter as we know him better). One group even believed they followed Christ in a way the others didn't.

And there were differences between Paul and Apollos and Peter in their approach, or style. The difference between Paul and Apollos was probably their preaching style. And Peter was probably more Jewish than both of them. And yet none of these differences in style or approach meant anything. They were all fellow workers in the kingdom and they all came with the same message. In 1 Co 3 Paul writes, 'What, after all, is Apollos? And what is Paul? Only servants, through whom you came to believe – as the Lord has assigned to each his task. I planted the seed, Apollos watered it, but God made it grow.'

And we need to be careful too, how we deal with the issues that come and go in the life of the church. If

we divide into groups on every issue and believe that we can only win if the others lose, then we're taking the same approach as Corinth. But if you take that approach, in fact, everyone loses. And instead we need to understand that if we hurt one part of the church, we hurt ourselves, because we're all one body. We cut off our nose to spite our face. We need to work at issues together. And we're not always going to agree on everything. But causing great rifts and divisions over every issue isn't the answer either.

## **Point 2**

But then *how do we work at achieving this unity*. Surely agreeing with each other so that there aren't any differences, and working for perfect unity in mind and thought, is a bit idealistic?

But the approach given here is that instead of making the issue that we happen to disagree on at any particular time our primary focus, we keep our common ground as our primary focus, and build from there.

And so *Paul appeals to them in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ*. We're all servants of the same master. We're all children in the same family. We're all citizens of the same kingdom. We're all heirs along with the same Jesus Christ. What we need to do is keep that unity as our primary focus as we deal with the issues on which we differ - rather than let that fade into the background and make winning every issue our number one priority. I've heard people say from time to time that we're all going to have to get along in heaven, so we may as well learn to do it now. And it's true.

There was a good example of that a couple of Synods ago with the 'women as deacons' appeals. Everyone knew it was going to be a divisive issue. There were rumbles from the beginning that whichever way it went churches might be leaving the denomination over it. And when the vote was finally cast and the appeals not upheld, one delegate felt conscience bound on confessional grounds to step down from his position as a delegate.

But it was encouraging to see what happened next. There was no attitude from those delegates supporting women as deacons that they'd won and that was all that mattered. Instead it was understood that a brother

in Christ was hurting, and over the next couple of days an arrangement was worked out so that his concerns of conscience could be dealt with, and he returned to his position as delegate.

***And so Paul asks the Corinthians, ‘Is Christ divided?’*** If Jesus Christ is one and we’re his body, surely we should be one.

You wonder what Paul would have thought of the way things are nowadays, with so many different denominations – some of which aren’t really all that different. Actually, there was a child once, who was asked by his friend why he couldn’t come to his church. And he said, “Because I belong to another abomination.” I wonder if Paul would have feel the same way.

As Christians, we are duty bound to work for unity, even between denominations. And so PARCWA for example, the “Presbyterian and Reformed Churches of WA”, is a good council to support and be a part of. It’s one other way to express our spiritual unity with other denominations in practice.

***And Paul asks, ‘Was I crucified for you?’*** That even sounds blasphemous, doesn’t it? It’s one of those statements you hear sometimes that’s borderline enough to give you an uncomfortable feeling just hearing it. It must have shocked the Corinthians. After all, there’s only one crucifixion that has any value when it comes to our salvation - Jesus’ crucifixion. But if that’s true, then why would you want to claim to follow anyone but Jesus?

***Or were they baptised into the name of Paul?*** They obviously hadn’t realised the significance of their baptism. Baptism speaks of dying with Christ, rising to new life in him. He’d bought them with his precious blood. Why were they holding Paul’s name up as if that was anything important, or Apollos, or Peter?

And we too, in our disagreements and differences over issues with each other or other committed Christians need to remember that we’re firstly united in Jesus Christ. Even as we call ourselves Calvinists

we need to remember that first of all we're Christians. Even as we sometimes label and stereotype other Christians as progressive, conservative; older, younger; for a data projector, against a data projector; we need to remember that first of all we're united in Jesus Christ as our Saviour and our King.

### **Point 3**

And then this passage finishes with *a note of thankfulness*.

But you notice that it's a glaring contrast to the thanks in last week's passage. In verses 4-9 Paul thanks God for his grace, his gifts, and the glory we look forward to. But here he's thankful that he didn't baptise any more people than he did because of the way these things had become a cause for pride and church politics.

And isn't it a real pity when people do that. I've heard some ministers say that they wouldn't mind getting closer to people in their congregations that they get on well with, but they suspected that they would start boasting to others in the congregation about the friendship. And so they don't.

And they're only worried about it because most ministers know of churches where that sort of thing has happened.

And part of wrapping up on a note of thankfulness is *bringing things back to the gospel*. Paul's specific God-given mandate was to preach the gospel – to bring the good news about the death and resurrection of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ to the masses.

But even here he has to qualify that he didn't do that with words of human wisdom, lest the cross of Christ was emptied of its power. And unfortunately that's another dig at the Corinthians for the value they placed on Greek wisdom and philosophy. Paul wasn't going to preach the gospel using the methods and approaches they valued. It might get more people interested. It might draw a crowd. Paul might make a name for himself. But if that was his main concern the next thing he'd be doing would be watering down the gospel. The problem is, the gospel itself is an offense to those not being saved. The gospel isn't attractive to people unless the Holy Spirit works in their hearts and makes it attractive. And so, if Paul

went down that road, he would become just another Greek orator with lots to say but no saving message.

And of course, we need to be careful about that as well. We need to bring the gospel with us into our day to day lives in a way that Australians today can clearly understand. We should work hard at clearing away the stumbling blocks that keep people from hearing it. On the other hand the one stumbling block we can't clear away is the gospel itself. Only the Holy Spirit himself can get people over that stumbling block.

And of course, we're prone to try. Surely we'd see more people saved if we do things the way society does. We could hold a lucky door prize. We could spend less time presenting the gospel and more time meeting people's immediate needs. We could stop aiming for life transformation and just work on entertaining. And we'd probably see results. We'd probably see more people coming through the door. But we'd have sacrificed the gospel in the process.

### **Conc**

But it is only the gospel message that gives us the right foundation to build on. The gospel message is the basis of our unity as Christians. The Corinthian church wasn't perfect, and our church isn't perfect, but through the message of the gospel we have a unity in Jesus that transcends our differences and disagreements.

There's a poem called the PERFECT CHURCH that goes:

I think that I shall never See A church that's all it ought to be;  
A church whose members never stray Beyond the straight and narrow way;  
A church that has no empty pews; Whose pastor never gets the blues;  
A church whose deacons always deak; And none are proud, and all are meek;  
Where gossips never peddle lies Or make complaints or criticise;  
Where all are always sweet and kind; And all to other's faults are blind.  
Such perfect churches there may be But none of them is known to me.  
But still I'll work and pray and plan To make our church the best I can.

Fortunately God doesn't expect us to be a perfect church. But what he does expect is that we work at resolving our differences from the common ground of faith in Jesus Christ. Then at least we can work at

them together as brothers and sisters – not always agreeing – but not dividing over every issue either.