

Unity in the Church: A Call for Unity

1 Corinthians 1:1-17 || Pastor Paul Hahn || 8 November 2020

*To CARE for one another in truth and in love,
To GROW together as followers of Jesus,
To SERVE those God has placed in our path.
– CG Mission Statement*

Icebreaker: Have you ever had an “identity crisis”? What brought you to that place and what helped you rediscover your identity?

Worship: John 17:11-13, 23 (*Read aloud 3 times, reflect and listen for God’s invitation to you.*)

Sermon Summary for 1 Corinthians 1:1-17 (*Read the passage before reading the sermon summary.*)

Paul’s first letter to the Corinthians talks about his call by God to spread the Gospel. Paul is clear that all who read his words are called by God as well: to be His people, to be His bride the church, to be part of His new Kingdom. Together, we are part of one body in Christ – connected and called to be unified in Him. This unity is an eternal, cosmic, spiritual reality. Jesus came, died and rose again to make it so. We cannot undo the unity of Christ’s church any more than we could tear Jesus apart. And yet, Paul calls on us to beware of divisions in the church body, urging us to “agree on all things” and put aside divisions. Unity in Christ must actively be pursued and lived out, for it can be threatened – both internally and externally.

External // Ancient Corinth was much like Los Angeles is today. A crossroads of lifestyles, beliefs, values, and people groups. This led to many questions for those exploring what it meant to have a relationship with Jesus: How much of the culture around them could they bring into the church? Could they continue to engage in the sexual and social freedoms that marked the city? Or are there structures and standards from God’s word that Christians need to follow? Should the wealth or power or influence of our life before coming to Christ have a say in our standing within the church? All of these forces and questions were exerting pressure on the church in Corinth – just as they do today in our city. We have other threats today as well, both political and social. And Paul would say to us through his letter: Sharpen each other. Talk to each other. Encourage and challenge and learn from each other about these important issues. But ultimately, we are to make the death and resurrection of Christ what unites us – to root ourselves in this so deeply that it’s as though we don’t disagree on anything else.

Some may find this level of unity hard to believe. Our culture would say that our faith demands specific opinions about certain issues... and therefore any disagreements would make unity impossible. But we see this isn’t true: Jesus modeled Christian unity through His disciples – where Simon the Zealot (a man deeply devoted to the Jewish way of life) lived in fellowship with Matthew (a Jew who chose to live fully as a Roman). We’re so distant from these men today that it can be difficult to appreciate how significant and personal these differences were – just as significant and personal as any issue that threatens to divide us today. The Gospel can do the same for us. Life together in the church can be like a healthy marriage, grounded on the commitment to become one by God’s grace. Healthy marriages may have big arguments about secondary issues – which won’t consume the relationship because the primary issue is their union before God. And our union in Christ is meant to be even stronger than this!

Internal Threats // The Gospel is also bigger than the internal forces that might tear us apart. Within the church, whatever you get proud about or feel beholden to champion (or criticize) – whether a teacher or teaching or doctrine or how we go about worship, etc. – Paul is calling us to make sure we do not destroy what Christ has wrought. Our faith isn’t about these issues. It’s about Christ. We are one in the Gospel of Jesus Christ, and we are set apart to live it and to share it. To the extent that we let these internal forces divide us, the Gospel is partially lost in its effectiveness and power to be a light shining from us out into the world. So let us center our lives on Christ and see what Jesus might do in us and through us in Los Angeles and throughout the world.

Discussion Questions *(You will not be able to discuss all the questions. Pick the ones you like. Some are personal perspective and application questions for life-transforming discussion.)*

- Why do you think Paul chose to start his letter to the Corinthians with the issue of unity – especially in light of all their other problems?
 - What does Paul say that helps you understand the importance of unity in the body of Christ?
 - Consider Jesus' prayer to the Father in John 17:11, 23.
 - What is His desire for us?
 - How does He make it possible?
 - What are the key inside and outside threats we face that threaten our unity and oneness?
 - It is our union with Christ that unites us. How does coming back to the Gospel enable us to work through the things that threaten our oneness?
 - Just as the Apostles did, how can we listen to, encourage, challenge, learn from, and submit to one another in our differences while making sure what unites us is Jesus?
 - Why is lack of unity so ugly and what damage is being done?
 - What can we do to more highly prioritize and guard our oneness? What will you do?
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Prayer

Pray Jesus' prayer of John 17:20-21 for the church today. "My prayer is not for them alone. I pray also for those who will believe in me through their message, that all of them may be one, Father, just as you are in me and I am in you. May they also be in us so that the world may believe that you have sent me."

See this week's CG Prayer Guide [Here](#). Use the prayer guide prompts for group, family or personal use this week.

Engage & Experience

Unity demands that we embrace each other in our weaknesses and struggles to live out the Gospel, just as Jesus has embraced all of us in our weakness. Unity is loving and encouraging one another to embrace Jesus, and to trust God with the outcome of those things that tend to pull us apart. There is power in unity, together we can create a movement that brings great hope as the Gospel powerfully moves forward in the church and the world. Prioritize unity this week; next week let your group know what you think God did in your life as you engaged and experienced unity. (Read Ephesians 4 for more on what it takes to live in unity with others.)