

1 Corinthians 1:1-17: How to Be a Unified Church

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Introduction

- <https://www.cbsnews.com/philadelphia/news/taylor-swifts-massive-influence-from-nfl-viewership-to-sales-both-big-and-small/> - Last year Taylor Swift had more impact on the NFL than anyone else - any player, any coach, etc. Shows the power of celebrity/personality.
- It's human nature to be drawn to people and to lift up the people, but in 1 Corinthians Paul is calling us to be drawn to Jesus and His truth because His truth transforms. When we look to people more than we look to Jesus, it's a recipe for a divided church.
- The church at Corinth is a troubled church. This is actually the second letter that Paul writes to the church. We don't have the first letter, but in this letter, he mentions a previous letter ([1 Corinthians 5:9](#)).
- Corinth was a very cosmopolitan city - a port city with lots of traffic due to trade. A city like Los Angeles, New York, or Las Vegas. Known for the Isthmian games (second to Olympics) also known for pagan worship. Several temples, but a major temple to Aphrodite. According to first-century geographer Strabo, 1000 temple prostitutes at temple to Aphrodite. Corinth known for loose morality, and the church at Corinth struggled to follow Jesus rather than following their culture.
- Paul addresses quite a few controversies in this letter. We live in a Corinthian type culture where anything goes. This study will be very helpful for our church.

- First 17 verses a call to unity in Christ. If the church is not unified, it will not stand well in a divided world. How do stay unified in a divided world? Two ways to help us stay unified.

Put your eyes on Jesus.

- Corinth a struggling church, but Paul loved this church. He planted the church on his second missionary journey ([Acts 18](#)) and stayed there for 18 months. Paul has been away for a while, and writes this letter from Ephesus in 55 A.D.
- After he left he began to get reports that the church wasn't doing well. The first problem Paul addresses are the divisions that were in the church. Some of you have been a part of a divided church where everyone has different opinions, or fight about silly things. You may have been a part of a church that seemed to fight about everything.
- A unified church is a church with their eyes on Jesus. Sounds so simple, but such a challenge for us. So easy to put eyes on people, stuff, desires, etc.
- Paul reminds the church that:
 - **Jesus is at work in the church.** “to those sanctified, called saints” (vs. 2) - Jesus has made us holy by saving us (positional sanctification), and He expects us to live out who we are. vs. 8 - Jesus strengthening His people - helping us by His Spirit to live out our faith in this so that we will be blameless. We ARE blameless, and we WILL BE blameless. In the present, we are learning how to live out who we are. Jesus is doing this work *collectively* in us. Are you cooperating with His work or resisting His work in you?
 - **Jesus is Lord of the church.** Notice that Paul doesn't say anything about himself when he begins the letter. He doesn't speak about what a great apostle he is and why the church should listen to him.

Instead, it's all about Jesus. Jesus has sanctified the church. God has given grace to the church in Jesus. The testimony of Jesus is confirmed in the changed lives within the church. Several times Paul refers to Jesus as Lord. He is the ONE who has died and risen again for His people. He is the ONE who is at the right hand of the Father. He is the ONE who we exist for. He is the ONE calling the shots and directing our lives. He is the only ONE we gather to worship, and He is the only ONE we live for in surrender and obedience. Are you surrendered to His Lordship in your life? Do you live for Him as Lord, or is Jesus an addition to your that you lean on only when you need a little extra help in life?

- **Jesus is generous to the church.** Jesus is generous to save us, but He's also generous to spiritually gift us. Enriched in every way in speech and all knowledge (vs. 5) - two things that Corinthians prized in their culture. They have the knowledge of God and they have heard His voice in Christ Jesus. The church at Corinth fascinated with spiritual gifts. Several chapters devoted to spiritual gifts (12-14). Spiritual gifts is an ability that God has given you by the Spirit upon your salvation to uniquely bless the body and serve Christ. The church at Corinth does not lack in spiritual giftedness. Neither does the church at Northwood. God has gifted us. If you are spiritually gifted by Jesus, no excuse for not living out your giftedness.
- Opening verses real clear: Put your eyes on Jesus. The church (and you) exists because of Jesus and for Jesus. Are your eyes fixed on Him?

Take your eyes off of people.

- The problem at Corinth was that their eyes were not fixed on Jesus. Their eyes were fixed on their preferences. Specifically, what spiritual leader they preferred. They were choosing sides.

- vs. 10 - Paul urges the church to put away their divisions, agree, and be united.
- Not calling the church to agree on everything (uniformity), but to agree on the main thing: the Gospel and living life in response to the Gospel. Their divisions keeping them from living out the Gospel in Corinth. Divisions sidetracked them from the mission of God.
- You know how easy it is to let conflict hinder you from what's most important. When there's conflict in your home, it takes your attention off of what God has for you. In the church, when we allow conflict and divisions to take root, it keeps us from uniting around Gospel mission.
- Several divisions in Corinth, but in these verses Paul addresses a division over who was the better, most capable leader in Corinth. Chloe, apparently a friend of Paul, had reported to Paul about the division. Some preferred Paul. Maybe because Paul was the founding pastor of the church. Some preferred Apollos. Apollos very eloquent ([Acts 18:24](#)). In Corinth, people would listen to public speaking for entertainment. They loved the great public speakers of the day, and Apollos was an excellent speaker. Some favored Peter. After all, he was actually with Jesus. And he probably spoke his mind. Some liked that. Others said, "I belong to Christ." Sounds really spiritual, but these people probably rejecting spiritual leadership all together and saying, "We just need Jesus and our Bibles. We don't need a pastor." In Corinth, Christians more focused on their spiritual leaders than the One who died for them.
- vs. 13 - Christ is not divided into factions, and Paul, nor any other spiritual leader, was crucified for anyone. Only Jesus was crucified. Our eyes should be on Him far more than any earthly leader.
- A church divided, and Paul is heartbroken. Paul thankful that he did not baptize many so they would not associate their salvation with him - say they were baptized in his name. No one was baptized into Paul or any other leader. They were baptized into Jesus.

- Paul did not want people to rally around him, Peter, or Apollos. Paul wanted people to rally around Jesus. Paul, Peter, and Apollos weren't celebrities. They were servants who were called to point people to the name above every name: Jesus Christ.
- vs. 17 - Not Paul or his ability or lack of ability to preach with eloquence that has power to save, but the cross that has power to save. Jesus saves, not a preacher, not a LCG leader, not a student pastor, etc.
- **Beware of letting your preference for spiritual leaders shape how you engage the church.** It's easy to be drawn to a church because you like the leaders, and it's easy to leave a church because you don't like the leaders. You might like a church because the preacher is humorous, or intellectual, or down to earth, or relational, or whatever. It could be that the preacher is a great public speaker, but there's no life in the church. On the flip side, the preacher could be a not-so-great or not-as-gifted preacher but Jesus is doing some amazing things in that church in spite of the preacher. What you need from a spiritual leader is not humor, intellectualism, or charisma. You need someone who is simply going to help you to understand God's Word and going to lead the church in making disciples. And, you need to get involved in your church and not just casually attend because you like the way the preacher preaches but because you want to be a part of what God is doing.
- **Beware of thinking too highly of your spiritual leaders.** Tendency to think too highly of spiritual leaders and put them on a pedestal. Maybe the temptation to think: "He's such a great Bible scholar." Or, "Such a great leader." Or, "Such a godly man." It's not bad to admire the leaders that God places in your church, but it is unwise to see your leaders for more than they are: servants of Jesus who, like you, working out their salvation. Yes, hold your spiritual leaders to a high, biblical standard, but do not hold them to an impossible standard. The kind of leader you need is one who will point you to Jesus, not himself. (III. - Jack Channel

and Sonny Holmes - pastors you don't remember but you know the One they served. The church was not about them but about their Lord.)

- **Beware of thinking too lowly of your spiritual leaders.** Maybe you think, "I don't need a spiritual leader." For some of us, all we need is our favorite celebrity preacher. In God's design, He has given the local church leaders ([Ephesians 4](#)) to equip the saints for the work of ministry so we might attain maturity. The best spiritual leaders are player-coaches - in the game with you, serving alongside of you and coaching you along the way. Don't think you don't need a spiritual leader. You need pastors and other church leaders to minister to your soul, hold you accountable, and push you toward Christlikeness.
- **Be an encouragement to your spiritual leaders.** If God has placed leaders in your church that preach the Word, strive to make disciples, strive to lead biblically and faithfully, encourage those leaders. Encourage by showing up. Encourage by serving. Encourage by listening well even when your preacher is boring. Encourage by praying for your leaders.
- Let's not be a church divided over preference, and let's not be a church drawn to personalities. Let's be a church with our eyes on Jesus.
- I'm thankful for how Northwood is unified in the Gospel. This morning, the best way you can help us to stay unified is to get in the game with us. For some, you do a good job of filling the seats every Sunday and evaluating what you see, but you're not actually in the ministry with us. Today, will you engage with us in ministry? Make a commitment to church membership? Join a discipleship group? Volunteer in children's ministry? Help with guest services?
- For some, today is the day to look to Jesus - to see that He is the reason why you exist because He created you, and He loves you. He loves you so much that even though you rebelled against Him, He came to this

earth for you, lived for you, died for you, and rose again for you. Will you trust Him as Lord this morning?