

Jason Upchurch - 1 Cor. 1:10-17 How to Agree in the Lord

I wanted to read our passage from last week along with our passage from this week because I wanted to you to see the huge contrast between the two sections. We saw last week Paul genuinely thanking God for his work in this church that has a lot of difficulties and almost like whiplash Paul dives into this church's biggest problem: division.

The Corinthian church is very divided. They are divided on a number of issues from spiritual gifts to their view of the Lord's Supper. But likely the biggest thing that they are divided about is their favorite leader. Not only has the Corinthian church been blessed by God to have every spiritual gift imaginable poured out to the greatest degree. They've also had the privilege of having the very best leaders and preachers in the Church.

They've had the apostle Paul - who is the preeminent church planter and preacher of the gospel in the NT. They've had Apollos, who the book of Acts describes as being mighty in what? The Scriptures. Apollos was an amazing preacher. They've had Cephas, which is another name for the apostle Peter. Later in the book Paul says he's sending Timothy to the church - who is Paul's right hand man who helped plant the church and is an incredibly gifted pastor and preacher himself. They've heard from Silas - another great leader. They've had at least 2 synagogue leaders be part of their church who were both trained at preaching and teaching. These guys were stacked.

This coming March I'm going to go to the Shepherd's Conference in Los Angeles and one of the joys is that they bring in all these incredibly gifted preachers who faithfully and joyfully preach the Word of God. And it is like being at spiritual Disneyland for a few days. Imagine having the best leaders and pastors from all over the country in our church every Sunday. Take your top 5 preachers and having them in and out of church all the time. That's what Corinth was like. These guys weren't here all the time, but they were at the church often enough where people glommed on to them and followed them. And, sadly, began to follow after them so much that they began dividing over who their favorite leaders were.

This problem is so huge that Paul deals with this issue throughout the first 4 chapters of the book. The first 25% of the book is taken up dealing with issues of division over leaders Watch this. In **Chapter 2:1-4** he's downplaying his role as a speaker. **Read**

Why is he downplaying his ability to speak? Because he wants people to realize that his central concern is simply the gospel. He was never trying to be fancy. He wants the people who say "I am of Paul" to stop thinking he's something great.

In Chapter 3 where Paul is talking about how everyone plays a different part in the Kingdom he's still addressing this issue of division over favorite leaders. **Read 1-9**

He's saying, "You guys, we're just all part of the planting process. The one who really matters in all of this is God who is the one who gives all the growth. **Read 21-23**

What's he saying? He's saying as much as we might love our leaders and preachers they're just a cog in the complicated work of gospel ministry. Really, Paul says they're not cogs but slaves. Servants whom the Corinthians can use for whatever they need. When we get all excited about our favorite preachers were getting all excited about slaves.

Maybe you like my preaching, maybe MacArthur or Sproul or Voddie Baucham, or you've got favorite speakers up at camp. Be careful, Paul says, about how you view them. In the grand scheme of things that's like saying "Oh yeah, that's my favorite slave!" We're all slaves - here to serve the church.

He'll go on in chapter 4 to talk about how even your favorite leader will be subject to judgment. **Read 4:6-7**

He goes on to talk about how the apostles are really men who have been set aside by God to be abused - they are the scum of the world he says in **vs. 13** - that they might rightly view leaders.

And I think this super crucial even for us today. Maybe even more so for us today because we have so much access to different preachers and leaders. We can watch all the sermons we want online or listen to all the sermons we want. We can read books by favorite authors and it's easy to begin exalting people.

And it's easy to begin exalting people in the local congregation and begin to divide based on our favorite personality.

I also realize that especially as your pastor I can have a large influence in your life. To some extent that's a really good thing. God gave shepherds and teachers for the building up of the body of Christ - so that we can attain maturity. That's my goal for you is that you be mature in Christ.

So here's the big picture this morning, here's how to agree in the Lord: stop looking at leaders and start looking at Jesus.

Any time there is division over favorite leaders it's primarily because we have taken our eyes off of Jesus and we've been looking too hard at leaders.

So the big picture this morning is that if you are aligning yourself with you favorite leader than you are with Christ, there's a problem.

Here's how that plays out:

The appeal for unity
The hindrance to unity
The truth that brings unity
The practice of unity

1) The appeal for unity. **Read 10**

So here we have Paul appealing for unity - those are the words he uses. This is an appeal, not directly a command, although we are certainly commanded to be unified in other places.

But I think this is actually very pastoral to appeal to people in the midst of difficulty rather than start throwing demands around. Usually if there's disagreement already, adding commands into the mix of it only makes the whole situation worse.

An appeal is usually softer, gentler, meant to disarm people a little bit. It's no less serious, it's just softer. It's a way to deescalate a volatile situation.

And notice what he does here: he brings them back to their common faith in Jesus. **Read 10**

He gives them 2 truths at the same time. I appeal to you, **brothers**. He's reminding them that they are part of family. That, through faith in Jesus, they are united together in an eternal family bond. Ultimately the family unit is to be the most unified in society - that's what we are in Christ.

This is the angst of every parent when their kids are fighting, isn't it? "Good night, you guys, you are part of the same family stop fighting!" There is an assumed unity within the family unit where we should by nature understand that we are all on the same side. My success is your success and vice versa.

The second appeal he makes is based on the Lord Jesus. **Read 10**

What does that mean? He's appealing to them by the name of Jesus? What he's doing is invoking the authority of Jesus. In the old movies where you had a cop chasing a bad guy they would yell, "Stop in the name of the law!" What is the name of the law? The name of the law is authority that the law gives a cop to tell a person to stop. The cop only has authority because the law gives him authority.

Paul is doing the same kind of thing: he's saying, "I'm appealing for you all to agree based on the authority of Jesus." And if you weren't sure: know for certain Jesus wants us to agree with each other.

John 17:21: he prays to the Father that we might be one, just as he and the Father are one.

That's pretty tight. And that's not pie in the sky: Jesus is anticipating the Father answering that prayer. It's possible to be one.

In fact, that oneness among believers is the way in which many people will come to know the saving gospel message. What Jesus wants is a redeemed people who are so united around him, despite every other difference imaginable, that the world goes "Wow - whatever is bringing them together is pretty amazing."

So this appeal for unity is based on our common brotherhood and based on our Lord's own desire.

What does that unity entail? Just how unified do we need to be? **Read 10**

So Paul lists 3 positives, one negative: agree, same mind, same judgment, no division. What does that mean? Does that mean that we have to agree with each other, lockstep, on absolutely every detail?

Does that mean we all have to agree on what movies are appropriate? Or we all have to have the same view of spiritual gifts or eschatology or whether we should social distance or not?

I don't think so because. Frankly, that would be impossible. There's no way we're going to agree on all these things. Besides, the Bible gives us some flexibility on some doctrines as well as freedom in daily living.

No, what Paul is appealing for here is to be unified in their understanding of the role of leaders. That's what he's talking about. He's saying: Stop being divided over your leaders. You should have the same mind about your leaders. You should agree about your leaders.

Which brings us to the second point. So we've seen the appeal for unity.

2) Here's the hindrance to unity. **Read 10-12**

So Paul is making this appeal because he's heard a report that factions in their congregation. Some people are claiming they follow Paul, other Apollos and so on. He did not hear that from the church, he heard it from an outside source - Chloe's people.

Now here's where this gets interesting. Remember that some of this letter is simply a reply to the Corinthian church from Paul. He's answering their questions. **Look at 7:1, 8:1, 12:1, 16:1 Read**

So the Corinthians sent him a letter. "Hi Paul, how you doing? Hope all is well in Ephesus. We're all good, we're happy, but hey we've got some questions. Could you answer these and get back to us?"

Meanwhile Chloe's people - we have no idea who they are or who Chloe is, but everyone would have known them - they go to Ephesus and tell Paul the church in Corinth is a zoo. It's like Wresltemania except the crowd is cheering for their favorite preacher.

There's also something else the congregation was keeping from Paul. **Look at 5:1. Read**

"Oh yeah, we forgot to mention that." They didn't tell him this, it was reported to him. Maybe by Chloe's people or someone else. It seems like in chapter 6 they were also hiding believers suing one another over business transactions.

They were intentionally keeping this information from Paul. He's got their letter in one hand and Chloe's people telling him "Here's what's really up."

This is like the parents going out on a date and coming home and the kids are all like “Welcome back, it was fine” and the babysitter is all like “They tried burn the house down. Three times.”

That’s what’s going on here. The Corinthians weren’t letting Paul know just how divided they were. He found that out through Chloe’s people.

Can I tell you something? Divided people don’t always tell you they’re divided. There’s a lot of marriages where there’s a lot of division and nobody on the outside knows. There’s a lot of families where there’s a lot of division and nobody on the outside knows. Same thing with churches.

Sometimes the only way it’s found out is someone from the inside letting others know. Their letter may have had some issues to deal with - but the big thing they were covering up from the pastor who started this church was the amount of division going on.

And the big hindrance to unity in this section is their siding with their favorite leader. They’ve got all these different t-shirts on for their favorite guy.

And the weird thing is that if all those leaders were all present in the church with each other they’d all be disgusted. They’re all boasting about who baptized them. Paul literally says “Thank God I only baptized a couple of you.” He doesn’t want them wearing a “Paul” jersey. Apollos wouldn’t want them wearing an Apollos jersey.

I don’t want you wear Jason jerseys. How weird would that be? But that’s what going on. They’re dividing up over their favorite leader when even their leaders would be disgusted at this.

The foundational problem here is that they are aligning themselves with their favorite person rather than with Jesus.

When I was in Bible college we would call people MacArthurites or Piper-ites because you could tell where they got their theological influences. It was almost like if Johnny Mac said it, it might as well be in red letters. And here was a weird thing that this passage even touches on - there was an unusually large amount of people who grew up in the church, got baptized then came to Master’s only to have some kind of epiphany they maybe they weren’t really saved when they were baptized. But now they knew for sure and they wanted John MacArthur to baptize them on Sunday night. So you had all these kids getting rebaptized by John MacArthur.

I wonder if they would have been disappointed if one of the other elders did that instead? I don’t know their heart, but it seems more than a little suspicious all these Christian college kids need to get re-baptized.

I think he would have been mortified to overhear someone calling someone else a MacArthurite. I’d be mortified to hear you guys bragging on your friends that you were “of Jason” or that I baptized you and that made you better than others.

Whoever your favorite leader, preacher, pastor, whatever is know this: they are a wretched sinner saved by grace alone through faith alone. And if Jesus had not shown them infinite mercy they would be on their way to hell just like the rest of mankind.

Aligning yourself with anyone other than Jesus is a stumbling block.

So we have the appeal to be unified, the hindrance to unity.

3) Here’s the truth that brings unity. It’s given in 3 questions, all of which the answer are “no.” **Read 13**

The truth that brings unity is that the only person we should be identifying with is Jesus Christ. We don’t identify with an apostle, we don’t identify with Moses, we don’t identify with Augustine or Aquinas or Luther or Calvin or MacArthur or Sproul or Jason. We identify with Jesus. Why? Because all of us are united under Christ.

There is only one body of Christ. There's not 2 or 3 or 476. There is only one body and we are all united by our head, which is Jesus Christ.

Eph. 5:23: Christ is the head of the Church.

Col. 1:18: He is the head of the body, the Church

Look over at **12:12-14, 27-31**. This truth will come up later as Paul calls the church to be unified despite the Holy Spirit giving them different gifts. **Read**

So what's the point here? The point is that although we are all different body parts, as it were, we are all part of **Christ's** body. We are fundamentally one unit, one body.

If our mindset is always to figure out how we are different and how we disagree we're missing this massive truth that in Christ we have all been brought together. Christ cannot be and is not divided.

Anyone who begins to make distinctions based on mere humans is attempting to divide Christ. Notice what else Paul says back in **1:13**. **Read**

Not only is Christ not divided, but our identity is in the crucifixion of Jesus. Paul wasn't crucified for them, Piper wasn't crucified for us, I wasn't crucified for you. Every aspect of who we are revolves around who was crucified for us.

I mean, what they were saying, essentially, was, "Yeah, Jesus was executed for me, but where I really find my identity is in this other guy who writes letters." Really?

No one would ever say that, of course, but many times that's functionally what happens. We can become so absorbed into one guy that we are treating him or her like our functional Savior.

He goes on. **Read 13**

When someone is baptized in obedience to Christ, they are actually doing a couple things all at the same time. First, they are identifying themselves with Christ. They are saying to the watching world - believers and unbelievers - that they are on the side of Jesus. Going down into the water and back out is a representation of dying with Jesus and rising again through our union with Jesus.

Baptism is also a kind of prayer to God for a clean conscience. It's how a person cries out to God that they are following Jesus.

And so when someone is baptized, I literally say "I baptize you in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit." The Father who planned their salvation, the Son who accomplished their salvation and the Spirit who applied the work of salvation - all three in one are part of the baptismal formal because they all in unison bring someone into the household of faith. We get that from **Matthew 28**.

Wouldn't it be weird for me to say "I baptize you in the name of Jason Upchurch." That's blasphemous, not to mention weird. This is essentially what they were doing by making factions. They were essentially saying that what they were publicly identified with was a man. Cephas or Paul or Apollos.

The truth that conquers division is that Christ is not divided. If someone is in Christ then we are fundamentally united to them through Jesus. And Christ is the one who died for us, not someone else and because of that it is to him we should look. And we were baptized in the name of the Triune God - of which Christ is part.

What do we do with that truth?

4) This is the practice of unity. **Read 14-17**

What do we learn here for coming together? The big takeaway is that we do things to specifically minimize our own importance or the importance of men and we do everything to amplify Christ.

Paul does 2 practical things here. First, when he was in ministry he only baptized a few people. Crispus and Gaius - maybe a couple of others. That way people couldn't brag that they had been baptized by their favorite apostle.

I wonder if John MacArthur had his other elders do the baptizing if there would have been less baptisms. I have to believe it would have been less.

Does this mean it's wrong for a pastor to baptize? No, of course not. I think that's the pattern we see in the NT: elders are the ones who baptize, maybe deacons. But it's not important which elder baptizes you. What's important is getting baptized.

It's like when you go to a wedding, do you care who's leading the ceremony? Not a lot. You're looking at the bride and groom and celebrating vows. Same thing is true with baptism.

Paul doesn't even remember who all he baptized because that wasn't his primary mission.

Two quick notes on that: If I baptized you and I've forgotten that I did, I apologize. I've baptized a lot of people. I used to look at this passage and wonder how it was possible that Paul couldn't remember who all he's baptized. But it's easy to forget. I've looked back on photos of people I baptized years ago and I had completely forgot about it.

Second: It's interesting that Paul says that Christ did not send him to baptize but to preach the gospel. **Read 17**

Wait, isn't part of following Jesus that we are to get baptized? The answer is yes. But here's the important thing we need to note here: baptism is not intrinsic to the gospel message. Paul makes a distinction between believing that Christ died on a cross for our sins and the act of baptism. One saves you, the other simply signifies you've believed the gospel message. Those who say you have to be baptized in order to be saved are actually preaching a false gospel of works.

Should we get baptized? Of course. If you're following Jesus and you haven't been baptized you need to be - it's an act of obedience to do it and an act of disobedience not to. But it's not a saving act. Salvation is by grace alone through faith alone.

Paul says he's glad he didn't baptize many because that would have added to the division. They got baptized, just not by him.

I think what this means practically for us is that if there are things we are doing that brings undue attention to us and not to Jesus, we need to hand those off to someone else.

Usually those are upfront things like preaching, leading music, baptizing, weddings, those kinds of things.

But it could be other things too. One of the things I don't like about conferences or meeting new pastors is that we usually have a good conversation for like 2 minutes then the conversation turns to how we're different. Are you baptist or Presbyterian or non denominational? Are you a cessationist or a continuationist? Are you an Arminian or Calvinist?

Brothers and sisters we're Christians. That's what we are. And when people begin to talk about silly matters that divide us we don't give them an inch lest the cross of Christ be emptied of its power to bring us together despite all of our differences.

When I'm around people who profess to know Jesus I ask them their testimony. I ask them about when and where they were baptized. I ask them about what they're learning in their daily reading. I ask them about how

they are encouraged at their church. I ask them what the most influential books are and why. I ask anything I possibly can to know more about how Christ has worked in them.

Are there differences? I'm sure we'll find them.

But listen, our job when we're around others is to do our level best to make sure the cross of Christ is not emptied of it's power. The power it has is salvation. Bringing wretched sinners from every walk of life together into the Kingdom despite all our differences.

The power of the cross is to take Jew and Gentile and Methodist and Baptist and all those who believe in the free gift of Jesus Christ and make us with one voice praise our Lord.

Will there be those who want to divide? Of course. But that's on them not on us. Woe to man or woman who seeks to stir up division in the church.

Christ is not divided. His cross still has incredible power to unite us in him.

Pray