

UNITED IN THE GOSPEL



+ **SESSION IN A SENTENCE:**

The church is one body, joined together by Christ and His gospel.

+ **BACKGROUND PASSAGES:**

1 Corinthians 1; 12

+ **SETTING:**

As the gospel spread, the first Christian missionaries established new churches in metropolitan areas. One such city was Corinth. Destroyed in 146 BC by Rome, then revitalized about one hundred years later, the “new” Corinth was a bustling crossroads filled with trade, tourism, and travelers seeking to settle in this land of opportunity. It was a strategic place for ministry, and the apostle Paul established a church there during his second missionary journey in the early AD 50s. After eighteen months of ministry, Paul left the Corinthian church. First Corinthians provides a peek into the state of the church just a few years after her birth, and the prognosis was not good.

DAY 1

READ:

1 Corinthians 1:10-17

FOCAL PASSAGE:

1 Corinthians 1:10-12

NOTES

Paul. Apollos. Cephas. These were each influential teachers at the time of Paul's writing of 1 Corinthians. The church was busy identifying with the latest and greatest more than they were focusing on following Christ. In response to this passage, we could certainly look around at the famous pastors, authors, and influencers we listen to and double check that we aren't hitching our wagon to theirs instead of to the Lord Jesus Christ. That would be a good and right application.

But there is one faction that we need to consider that we may not recognize as a danger. Sometimes the distracting sect in which we find ourselves is the group of self-followers. It is the group who praises self-interest, personal goals, and individual autonomy above all else. This is the cohort that encourages each other toward the empowerment of and reliance on self. Self-sacrifice is something to be avoided. Submission is a disease. Selflessness is a foreign concept. Unfortunately, the cultural waters we swim in have been filled by the world with these messages. Thanks to the media we consume, we are surrounded by this self-following sect of society, and it is easy to absorb its values. The worldview where "self" is in charge has absolutely infiltrated the church and is just as dangerous as the man-centered factions of Paul's day.

What are some ways you can turn down the voices of the cult of self in your life?

DAY 2

READ:

1 Corinthians 1:10-17

FOCAL PASSAGE:

1 Corinthians 1:17

NOTES

The gospel is not deficient. It is not in need of a multivitamin to grow or an energy drink to get going. The message and power of the cross is enough to save. In God's perfect wisdom and sovereign rule, He has ordained that His people be vehicles for the gospel message. We are meant to carry and proclaim the good news to those who need it. But we don't need to add to it, dress it up, or play it cool. When we do, it rarely ends well.

Unfortunately, the efforts to make the gospel attractive and relevant draw attention and glory from the message to the messenger. Paul understood this, which is why he rejected human eloquence over gospel essentials. Even if we are not the ones who make decisions on how to best communicate God's Word, we can pay attention to the messages we listen to and praise. Are we more enamored with sticky statements than we are with the simple gospel message? Are the messages we listen to permeated with funny stories and personal sentiments, or are they filled with the precepts of God? Do they turn our hearts to the speaker or to Christ?

What do I look for in a good speaker, teacher, or pastor?

DAY 3

READ:

1 Corinthians 1:18-25

FOCAL PASSAGE:

1 Corinthians 1:25

NOTES

The kingdom of God is upside-down compared to the values of this world. What's up is down and what's down is up, if we try to understand His ways from an earthly perspective. For example, according to a biblical worldview, purity, prudence, generosity, and self-sacrifice are wise and good. This is because the Bible teaches that there is life after death, Christians are stewards of God's good gifts, and there will be a judgment of deeds where His people will be rewarded for good eternal investments.

But these same virtues are vices for those who reject or are ignorant of biblical ways. If you only live once, and there is no pending judgment, then the wisest thing you can do is squeeze every drop you can out of everything and everyone. Live it up. Experience anything you're interested in. Pursue the best life you can, in whatever way you want to define "best." Build your empire here. Investments are wise, if they result in a greater quality and enjoyment of this life. Relationships make sense as long as it is a 50/50 endeavor. Eternal investments are a waste of time.

Take warning, however. God will not be mocked, and we will eventually reap what we sow (Galatians 6:7). Our worldview affects everything. The wisdom of God is folly to the world because they are tending a garden that is small and temporary. But the kingdom of God is a vast and eternal paradise we get to enjoy with Him forever.

How can I make sure that it is God and His Word that shape my definition of wisdom, and not the messages of the world?

DAY 4

READ:

Psalm 133

FOCAL PASSAGE:

Psalm 133:1

NOTES



KEY DOCTRINE #84: UNITY OF THE CHURCH

Christ's desire for the church is that we be united as one in Him by the gospel (Philippians 2:1-2), reflecting the oneness of our trinitarian God (John 17:20-23). As such, we are to allow for no divisions to separate us (1 Corinthians 1:10), such as ethnicity, socio-economics, nationality, language, politics, or secondary doctrinal beliefs. Our objective is not simply to work around or look past these differences within the body of Christ but to celebrate the diversity of God's people made one in Christ (1 Corinthians 12:12-13; Ephesians 4:4-6,11-13), demonstrating humility (Romans 12:3,16; Philippians 2:5-11) and freely loving and forgiving one another (Colossians 3:13-14) to reflect the power of Christ who reconciles all things to Himself (Psalm 133:1; Ephesians 1:10; 2:14).

It is innate in every human to pursue our personal good. However, that desire often malfunctions. What we think is ideal can become our driving passion at the expense of the well-being of others. Our personal welfare can become all we seek, regardless of the outcome for others. We do not live in a vacuum, and the definition of what is right for us must include the effects of our actions on others.

Another way this instinct goes haywire is in the timing. A massive bowl of ice cream every night, week after week, month after month, may satisfy in the moment. But continually consuming those calorie-laden treats can lead to bad outcomes for our health long term. Delayed gratification is not a strong suit for most of us. Even when we know there is a greater good awaiting us, we still go for the smaller, momentary gain. Oftentimes, we are simply unable to see the long-term ramifications of seeking "good" now.

This is where Scripture is invaluable. God has filled His Word with what is good for us. One such example is here in Psalm 133, where God declares that unity is delightfully good! Living in harmony with our brothers and sisters in Christ is good to pursue and deemed by God as blessed.

How do I make an effort to live in harmony with others more?

DAY 5

READ:

1 Corinthians 12:12-18

FOCAL PASSAGE:

1 Corinthians 12:15-18

NOTES

VOICES from THE CHURCH

"The picture here is the body of Christ as a functioning organism of many mutually essential, interrelating, mutually contributing members. The interconnectedness and the interdependency of these members are so essential to the proper health, function, and growth of the body that Paul says it is impossible for one member to say to another, 'I simply don't need you,' or 'I am able to function quite well on my own, thank you,' or 'I have grown to the point where I no longer need what you have to offer.'"¹

—Paul David Tripp

Sporadically, we may think that God made a mistake when it comes to certain things about us. We all have those things we wish we could change about ourselves. It could be a physical trait: our height, build, hair, or face. Our personality is another thing about us we wish we could change. Whether it be needing more energy to engage with people, or wishing we weren't "too much," there can be much we'd like to change.

Comparison often plays a role in our dissatisfaction with ourselves. We see what is admirable in others and wish we possessed it. Unfortunately, there can be an undercurrent of seeing one sort of personality or gift as more valuable than others. When it comes to the church, we may also give in to thinking that there are some talents that are more vital to the mission. The gifts we have may not seem as important as others.

Paul clearly rebukes this type of thinking. The body of Christ is full of all sorts of gifts—and every one is needed (1 Corinthians 12:18).

If you knew that your spiritual gift would be taken away tomorrow, what would you do today so you could use it to the fullest?

GROUP

NOTES

VOICES from THE CHURCH

“Christian worship is shaped by the cross—and so must Christian theology be, unless the theologian is to find himself alienated from the worship of the church. The heart and mind of the church cannot be allowed to go their separate ways, but must be forged together in a cruciform unity.”²

—Alister E. McGrath

POINT 1: The church is united under one leader (1 Corinthians 1:10-17).

Disunity must be addressed because unity is foundational to the church.

? How does disunity threaten the growth of a church?

When divisions arise, focused attention on Christ can bring people back together.

? How ought Paul’s rebuke in this passage shape what we look for and celebrate in a church leader?

POINT 2: The church is united by one gospel (1 Corinthians 1:18-25).

The world’s wisdom leads to death, but the wisdom of the cross rescues those who embrace Christ.

? What are some “red flags” that might indicate our leaning on the world’s wisdom instead of God’s?

All are united in Christ when they trust that He is the power and wisdom of God.

? What happens when we rely on human wisdom instead of God’s wisdom found in the gospel?

POINT 3: The church is united in one body (1 Corinthians 12:12-18).

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divisions to separate us (1 Corinthians 1:10), such as ethnicity, socio-economics, nationality, language, politics, or secondary doctrinal beliefs. Our objective is not simply to work around or look past these differences within the body of Christ but to celebrate the diversity of God's people made one in Christ (1 Corinthians 12:12-13; Ephesians 4:4-6,11-13), demonstrating humility (Romans 12:3,16; Philippians 2:5-11) and freely loving and forgiving one another (Colossians 3:13-14) to reflect the power of Christ who reconciles all things to Himself (Psalm 133:1; Ephesians 1:10; 2:14).

? Why is it sometimes difficult to celebrate the differences within the body?

As we are one body, every Christian has a specific and special God-given role to play in the local church.

? From Day 5: **If you knew that your spiritual gift would be taken away tomorrow, what would you do today so you could use it to the fullest?**

MY RESPONSE

Because Jesus has joined all who trust in Him together as one church, we cast aside all causes of division and fight to preserve unity to show the watching world God's power to reconcile.

- **HEAD:** How can I play a part in emphasizing the unity of the church?
- **HEART:** What can I confess to God that is tempting me away from God's purpose and plan?
- **HANDS:** How can I play my part in growing the kingdom with the gifts He's given me?



Scan this QR code to access this session's Scripture passages.

VOICES from THE CHURCH

"Church should be a place where people gather and get along with each other who have no merely human reason for doing so."³

—Craig Blomberg