

**Dear Church**  
**1 Corinthians 1:10-17**

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Happy Father's Day to everyone. Most of you know that Keren and I brought our third child home about two months ago. Being a dad is one of the greatest gifts anyone could ever experience. Here's a picture of our crew from this week. They older two have loved having the new one, but there have been some adjustments! They went from having their own rooms to having to share a room. It used to be when people came over to the house they wanted to play with Hudson and Addie; now they want to hold the little baby. They used to get a lot of one on one time with us; now Keren and I have to be really purposeful about getting that alone time with each kid. As Keren and I are giving so much attention to Luke, Hudson and Addie have really grown in their friendship. They run around the house together. They play in the backyard together. I can't tell you how much joy it brings to my heart as a father when my kids are getting along, playing well, working as a team in unity. Most of the time it's peaceful and sweet, but occasionally it's not so sweet. Instead of playing together and working as a team, they start fighting. I'm sure none of the other parents here have ever had to deal with something like that. They both want the same toy, they both want to be first down the slide, they both want to pick which show they are going to watch. Keren and I have had to do a lot of coaching and training these days, teaching them how to work well together, because it doesn't come naturally. In the same way that as parents we want our kids to be united and to love one another, God wants that for us as his children. Paul, as the man who planted the church in Corinth, wanted that for this congregation, as well. When Paul was there, it seemed like things were going pretty well. But after he left, disagreements sprung up and fighting ensued. As their father in the faith, Paul trained and coached them toward unity.

As we move into week three of our series in 1st Corinthians and look at the letter Paul wrote to this church, we are going to see him stress the importance of unity, and his message to them is also God's word to us. Let's read it:

I appeal to you, brothers and sisters, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that all of you agree with one another in what you say and that there be no divisions among you, but that you be perfectly united in mind and thought. My brothers and sisters, some from Chloe's household have informed me that there are quarrels among you. 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."

Is Christ divided? Was Paul crucified for you? Were you baptized in the name of Paul? I thank God that I did not baptize any of you except Crispus and Gaius, so no one can say that you were baptized in my name. (Yes, I also baptized the household of Stephanas; beyond that, I don't remember if I baptized anyone else.) For Christ did not send me to baptize, but to preach the gospel—not with wisdom and eloquence, lest the cross of Christ be emptied of its power. (1 Corinthians 1:10-17)

The unmistakable emphasis in this passage is on unity. Paul says that he has heard from a reliable source that there are quarrels among them stemming from preference-based issues. The Greek word for quarrel that is used in 1:11 is *herides*, which is defined as, "a hot dispute; the emotional flame that ignites whenever rivalry becomes intolerable." What was their rivalry? What were they disputing over? Not foundational matters, but preference-based issues. Some of them were really passionate about the teaching and leadership style of a leader in the church named Apollos. Others were passionate about the teaching and leadership style of Cephas—a reference to the apostle Peter. Others committed to Paul and thought he was the best leader; they rallied around him. Paul was even happy that he didn't baptize many of them so that people weren't focusing on their connection to him as the one who led them to faith in Christ but rather the focus was on the one in whom their faith placed. Others were saying, I follow Christ,

which of course, in and of itself is a really good thing. But if you make it sound like you are the only one really following Christ, and if people don't align with you then they don't know Christ, it's no longer a good thing at all. There were these different factions, these different groups emerging. Division made its way into the church!

As almost always happens when there is division, word begins to spread, people begin to talk, and even though Paul is hundreds of miles away, doing ministry in the city of Ephesus, he hears about what's going on. Why are they fighting? After learning about the breakdown in relationships he makes a four-fold appeal to them: in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ there should be no divisions among you but rather perfect unity in mind and thought.

What I love about this letter is that Paul doesn't begin with practical steps to take or by addressing attitudes or issues; he begins by drawing attention to the name of Jesus. Why are we focusing on unity? Because it matters to Jesus! On the last night of Jesus' life, when he prayed for everyone who would come to believe in him, what did he pray for? Unity. Look it up in John 17:20-23. When Jesus prayed for the church, right before he gave his life for the church, he prayed we would be united. It was his dying wish! Bringing about unity was the purpose of his death. As he hung on the cross, arms stretched out, it was the ultimate picture of reaching out to a holy God and sinful people and, by virtue of his substitutionary death, paying the debt to reconcile the two. Jesus is the ultimate peace maker. When he preached, he said, "Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God." Jesus wanted peace, unity, harmony; he wants his followers to agree, to get along, to love one another. So Paul appeals to them in the name of our Lord Jesus.

In the name of Jesus he says, "There should be no divisions among you." The Greek word for division is *skismata*, the same root word from which we get "schism." It means fighting and contention not from the outside, but from someone on your own team.

Some of you who follow football likely know the name Geno Smith. He is presently the quarterback for the Seahawks, but seven years ago he was the starting quarterback for the New York Jets. Right before 2015 season kicked off, while he was in the locker room, one of his teammates punched him in his face and broke his jaw, causing him to have surgery and subsequently miss all but one game the entire season. Football players expect to take hits, but they expect them to come from someone on the other side of the field wearing a different jersey, not from their own team. How many people in the church have been sidelined, taken out of commission, or worse yet, maybe even left the church and left the faith, not because of something someone out there did to them, but because of division and fighting from someone in the church? Satan loves it when he can get Christians to do his work for him. That's what was happening in Corinth. Paul says, in the name of Jesus, it has to stop! Forget your territorialism, forget your tribalism, forget your hobby-horses and your pet issues. Jesus trumps all of that!

Paul says that instead of division there should be perfect unity in mind and thought. About three weeks ago my sister sent the family a text asking for prayer. Her 12-year-old son had fallen off his bike and broken his wrist. We all started praying: God, help Caden. Help him get to see a doctor right away, help them to get things fixed, help him heal as soon as possible. Of course, his parents took him to the ER. Doctors took an x-ray to understand exactly what was going on and then they did surgery to set the two bones that had become fractured and lined them up the way they are supposed to be. They put his wrist in a cast for several weeks to promote healing and strength. The reason I tell you that story is because the word for perfect unity that Paul uses in this passage is a word used by the ancient medical community to refer to setting a broken bone.

Sometimes we have an accident and break a bone in our body; sometimes, relationally, within a church, we have an accident—there is a miscue, a mistake is made, and we end up with a fracture in our body. We all know what to do if there is something broken in our physical body: we seek healing right away! We go to a medical professional to seek help, let it be examined, and we take the bone or bones that were broken, reset them, give a little bit of time for healing and restoration, and then we get back to normal life. The same has to be true when something is broken in our church body. It will inevitably happen. When something is broken relationally we have to do something about it. If you break your femur, you don't just sit there and pretend nothing is going on. You don't think, "I'll just passive aggressively be quiet about this for four or five years, try to keep it under wraps; it'll take care of itself." It won't! If it doesn't get reset, and reset correctly, you could be crippled the rest of your life! In the exact same way, if a relationship is broken in the body of Christ, we have to do something about it. We can't just wait around, we need to act. It usually helps to go to someone who can help, take an x-ray to see what's really going on under the surface, and then do whatever it takes to bring unity and alignment. Sure, it'll take a little rest and healing. But restoration will come—and it can be just as strong if not stronger than before!

Paul is telling the Corinthians they need to have those fractured relationships reset. They need unity in mind and thought. Unity in mind and thought doesn't mean that we all check our brains at the door and become a cult where we robotically read our convictions from a script. It means that we have the same attitude, the same orientation, the same focus, the same goal. You might remember the infamous dress—white and gold or blue and black? Unity doesn't mean that we have the exact same conclusions or perspective on every little issue, but that we are united around the issues that matter most!

Like the Corinthians got a status update, I think it would be helpful for The Creek to get a status update. Like God spoke into that situation through Paul, we'll ask God to speak into our situation, too.

The status report for the Corinthians was that there were quarrels among them stemming from preference-based issues. If I modernize this and apply it to The Creek, here's what I would say: there are minor quarrels among us stemming from preference-based issues. By God's grace and to God's glory I don't think we are experiencing anything like the disagreements and division they were going through in Corinth. We have a body of believers, generally speaking, characterized by maturity, depth, love, and humility. With everything we've been through as a culture and a congregation the last few years, that's a wonderful thing to be able to say. Though we don't have some of the major issues they had, I think we would be wise to realize there are still minor quarrels that spring up in this church that result in contention and division, and they aren't over things like theology or the gospel or Scripture, not about things like the character or integrity of leaders; they are almost always things that seem minor but can end up distracting people from the mission. Two years ago, there were many disputes about masks. This wasn't across the board, but there were a few people who were deciding if they would leave their church, walk away from their faith family they had been a part of for a decade or more, based on the temporary decisions we made about masks. People on both sides. Wow. Heartbreaking. You're not leaving a building—you are leaving people. Relationship you've had for years, for decades, over a short-term decision having to do with this? How could this become a bigger issue than our commitment to unity with one another?

We've had people, and again, not many, but a few, gossip and sow disunity in our church over things like who got to use a certain room for a Bible study. When these issues on occasion get to my desk, I'll just sit there, a little heart-broken and a little confused. I'll scratch my head and say, "People are gossiping and fighting because they want access to a room where they can study the Bible? And learn about not gossiping and fighting?" Not major quarrels, but minor quarrels. Things like the volume of the music, the color of the walls, how many American flags are displayed on our campus. None of these things are major, they are all small—but if given too much attention, time, or passion, they could distract us from our mission to focus on loving God, loving others, and making disciples.

It's not just at a macro level with our entire body. Sometimes quarrels rise up in small circles, such as in life groups or between friends. Usually there is no malice or bad intent, but a misunderstanding or miscommunication can quickly lead to feelings being hurt or someone not feeling respected, valued, or loved. If we don't act, relationships that were originally really tight, where God was clearly at work, can begin to drift and deteriorate.

If our status is "there are minor quarrels among us stemming from preference-based issues," what is God's word to us? The exact same that it was to the Corinthians—in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ there should be no divisions among us but rather perfect unity in mind and thought.

Focus on Jesus Christ. Our unity isn't that we are the same age, the same generation, have the same preferences, like the same restaurants, love the same carpet color or even that we enjoy the same worship songs—it's in Jesus Christ! What unites us is infinitely more significant than anything that could separate us. Even though we are going to have things that are unique about each one of us, we are on the same team! If we want to win, we have to be united and on the same page. The NBA finals wrapped up three days ago. On each team, there are five players that take the court at a time. They aren't all doing the same thing. Some are setting screens or picks, some are dribbling, some are clearing out the lane, some are moving away from the ball to create an open shot. Different athletes, with different skill sets, different strengths and weaknesses, not five guys all playing center, or five guys all trying to shoot at the same time—each person embracing his unique role, but with unity of mind and thought. They know what play they are trying to run; they know what defense to set up in. Without unity of mind and thought, teams almost always lose. When everyone is on the same page, they win championships. That's what Paul wants for the church in Corinth. And that's what God wants for our church today, too.

The mission that God has given is so vitally important. These guys want to win a world championship, cement their legacy, get endorsement deals, make millions. We want to see the church of Jesus Christ as beautiful as she's ever been, we want to see the name of Jesus Christ honored in our day, we want to see the mission of the Jesus Christ advanced in the world, we want to see people who are far from God brought near to God. If that is ever going to become a reality, we have to lay down our preferences and lay down our pride and commit to unity. Ephesians 4:3 says, "Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace." Let's be people who take God at his Word and do whatever it takes to maintain unity in the body of Christ.