

Bad Ideas for a Good Church

Week 1 - *We Can Be United Around Personalities*

Text: 1 Corinthians 1:10-17

Big Idea

A church that builds unity around personalities instead of Christ will eventually fracture rather than flourish.

I. Opening: A Good Church with Favorite Voices

- Every church has “favorite voices”
 - Storytellers
 - Deep teachers
 - Visionary leaders
- This isn’t sinful, it’s human
- The church in Corinth faced the same reality
- Illustration: “*Team Paul / Team Apollos / Team Peter*” jerseys
- Key insight:
 - Corinth was **not** a failing church
 - It was founded by Paul, gifted, active, and growing
- The problem:
 - A *bad idea* took hold: unity built around **personalities**, not **Jesus**

II. Where We Are in the Story of Scripture

- Jesus’ death and resurrection have already happened
- The Spirit has already been poured out (Pentecost)
- The church has already been born
- Jews and Gentiles are now learning to live together as God’s people
- 1 Corinthians is not about:
 - How to become Christians
- It *is* about:
 - What Christians look like when they live together after Easter
- Corinth as a test case:
 - Diverse, wealthy, competitive, status-driven city
 - A church learning how the gospel reshapes everyday life
- Purpose of the letter:

- To correct good churches drifting in unhealthy directions

III. Exposition of 1 Corinthians 1:10-17

A. Paul's Appeal for Unity (v. 10)

- Paul opens with an *appeal*, not an accusation
- He speaks "by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ"
- Key word: **schismata**
 - Literally "tears in fabric"
 - The church pictured as a garment being ripped apart
- Unity clarified:
 - Not sameness
 - Not shared preferences
 - Shared direction, allegiance, and center: **Jesus**

B. The Reality of Division (vv. 11-12)

- Report from Chloe's people: visible, lived conflict
- Four slogans:
 - "I follow Paul"
 - "I follow Apollos"
 - "I follow Cephas"
 - "I follow Christ"
- Why this is dangerous:
 - All names are good
 - But identity is being built around leaders
- Even "I follow Christ" becomes problematic:
 - Not humility
 - Spiritual superiority
- Core problem:
 - Admiration turned into **identity formation**

C. Paul's Corrective Questions (v. 13)

- Three piercing questions:
 - Is Christ divided?
 - Was Paul crucified for you?
 - Were you baptized in Paul's name?
- The focus:
 - The cross
- Key truth:
 - No leader died for you
 - No leader was raised for you

- Division begins when something other than the crucified Christ becomes central
- Dividing the church means tearing at Christ's own body

D. Paul Minimizes Himself (vv. 14-17)

- Paul downplays his role in baptizing
- Purpose:
 - Dismantling the cult of personality
- Key statement:
 - Paul's call is to preach the gospel
- Warning:
 - There is a way to minister that empties the cross of its power
- Clarification:
 - The issue is not eloquence
 - The issue is when style replaces faithfulness to Christ

IV. Main Points

1. The Gospel Creates Unity, Not Uniformity

- Unity ≠ same music, style, or opinions
- Unity = shared allegiance to Jesus
- Churches can survive preference diversity
- Churches cannot survive divided loyalty
- When Christ is central:
 - Differences are manageable
- When Christ is marginal:
 - Differences become destructive

2. Personality-Driven Faith Produces Faction-Driven Churches

- Corinth's mistake:
 - Turning leaders into identity markers
- Key contrast:
 - Charisma gathers crowds
 - Christ forms communities
- Warning signs:
 - "This is my church because of this person..."
- Division rarely begins loudly, it begins gradually

3. The Cross Is the Only Foundation That Won't Divide Us

- The cross appears foolish to the world
- The cross:

- Humble us
- Levels us
- Removes spiritual hierarchy
- At the foot of the cross:
 - No spiritual celebrities
 - Only forgiven sinners
- A crucified Messiah is strong enough to hold a diverse church together

V. Application

A. Application for the Church

- Resist personality-based unity
- Appreciate leaders without idolizing them
- Refuse to let preference become identity
- Measure health by faithfulness, not impressiveness
- Unity requires repeated, intentional choices

B. Application for Individuals

- Key reflection question:
 - *Am I following Jesus or my favorite voice about Jesus?*
- Learning from leaders is good
- Letting one voice dominate discernment is dangerous
- Discipleship means:
 - Being shaped by Jesus Himself
 - Not just by those who speak most clearly about Him

VI. Conclusion: Returning to the Center

- The Corinthians began well
- Jesus slowly drifted from the center
- This was the first bad idea, and others follow from it
- Paul redirects, not rejects
- Baptism reminder:
 - Not baptized into Paul, Apollos, Peter, or Billy
 - Baptized into Christ
- Identity defined by the crucified and risen Jesus
- Warning progression:
 - Division → compromise → confusion → loss of witness
- Final hope:
 - When Christ is treasured, not sidelined, the church flourishes
- Closing question:
 - *Is Christ still at the center or has something else taken His place?*