

I would like to welcome you to our services, whether you are watching online or here in the sanctuary, we are so glad that you are joining us. My name is Pastor David Pranga, one of the pastors at Brewster Baptist Church. Pastor Doug and Jill are away in Maine, celebrating Doug's father Victor's 90<sup>th</sup> birthday.

For those who are new today, we are in a series called, "The Bible – A Story of Love, Belonging, Redemption, and Hope." We as a church are going through the entire Bible, one book each week. We take one story or passage from each book and talk about it.

As many of you know, we made it through the Old Testament, then through the Gospels (Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John). Now we've entered the Letters to the Churches. This week, we are in *1 Corinthians*, a letter that Paul wrote to the church of Corinth. I need to give you some background information.

Corinth was a very large and wealthy city, making it the most important city of Greece. Located on an isthmus, it was an important seacoast city. Lots of sailors and because of its location, people and goods from all around the world flowed in and out of its ports.

Corinth was a grand city of art, sports, theater, dramas, musical, philosophy, and religion. The town was also known for their Greek gods (especially Venus - the goddess of love). The city had many religious shrines and temples devoted to foreign gods. Sexual immorality and debauchery were everywhere.

Corinth was the last place you would think of starting a church. Yet Paul spent 18 months with the people of Corinth building one. During this time with early believers, Paul emphasized a few things:

- what it means to follow Jesus Christ;
- what a lifestyle of Christ-followers should be like;
- how they were supposed to be different than the world around them. They were to be "set apart" to love one another and honor God.

Now we fast forward 2 years. Paul is now in Ephesus, and he hears a report from Chloe's household. We don't know much about Chloe or her household, but we do know that she and her household sent messages to Paul about the church of Corinth. Upon hearing these reports, Paul could not believe what was going on in the church. He must have thought to himself, "My, you've got to be kidding me!"

Paul wrote four letters in total to the church of Corinth, but we only have two. The second of the four letters is *1<sup>st</sup> Corinthians*.

I want you to be aware that Paul loves the people of Corinth. They are not only his brothers and sisters in Christ, but his friends. In these letters, Paul wanted to

encourage the church, but he also wanted to correct them. Remember, Paul cared very much how they were living their lives. It was far different than what he taught them.

I want to encourage you to read *1<sup>st</sup> Corinthians*. It is broken into two parts. The first six chapters deal with major problems happening in the church:

- 1) they are divided into four groups competing for church leadership;
- 2) they are defiled with sexual immorality and drunkenness;
- 3) they are disgraced by problems inside the church that were known to the community. The church had a terrible reputation.

Chapters 7 to 15 deal with a variety of issues which the Corinthians wrote about from a previous letter. We see Paul answering the questions that deal with:

- 1) marriage;
- 2) worship & the Lord's Supper;
- 3) spiritual gifts;
- 4) resurrection.

Which brings me to our passage for today, **1 Corinthians 1:10 -17:**

***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.***

It probably should not come as a shock to us that there were quarrels and division among the early believers. It was becoming a major issue. It reminded me of a story:

*There was once a man in San Francisco walking along the Golden Gate Bridge. He saw a second man about to jump over the edge. He stopped him and said, "Surely it can't be that bad. You know God loves you." The man about to jump got a tear in his eye.*

*First Man: "Are you a Christian or a Jew or a Hindu?"  
Man on bridge: "I'm a Christian."*

*First Man: "Me, too. Are you Protestant or Catholic?"*  
*Man on bridge: "I'm Protestant."*  
*First Man: "I am, too! What franchise?"*  
*Man on bridge: "I'm Baptist."*  
*First Man: "So am I. Northern Baptist or Southern Baptist?"*  
*Man on bridge: "Northern Baptist."*  
*First Man: "That's a miracle! I am, too! Are you Northern Conservative Baptist or Northern Liberal Baptist?"*  
*Man on bridge: "Northern Conservative Baptist."*  
*First Man: "Me, too! Are you Northern Conservative Fundamentalist Baptist or Northern Conservative Reformed Baptist?"*  
*Man on bridge: "I'm Northern Conservative Fundamentalist Baptist, Karl Ripley."*  
*First Man: "Me, too! Are you Northern Conservative Fundamentalist Baptist Great Lakes region or Northern Conservative Fundamentalist Baptist Eastern region?"*  
*Man on bridge: "I'm Northern Conservative Fundamentalist Baptist Great Lakes region."*  
*First Man: "So am I! Are you Northern Conservative Fundamentalist Baptist Great Lakes region council of 1897 or Northern Conservative Fundamentalist Baptist Great Lakes region council of 1912?"*  
*Man on bridge: "I'm Northern Conservative Fundamentalist Baptist Great Lakes region council of 1912."*  
*First Man: "Die, heretic!" and threw him over the bridge.*

It doesn't take that much to make Christians fight with each other. I'm sure there are a lot of people in this room with the scars to prove it, and I suspect some of us have scarred other people. Unfortunately, even Christians can have sharp disagreements with each other. We live in a world where divisions and quarrels seem very normal. For some it just seems like a part of life.

John MacArthur wrote...

*"Quarrels are a part of life. We grow up in them and around them. Infants are quick to express displeasure when they are not given something they want or when something they like is taken away. Little children cry, fight, and throw temper tantrums because they cannot have their own way. We argue and fight over a rattle, then a toy, then a football, then a position on the team or school play, then in business, the PTA, or politics. Friends fight, husbands and wives fight, businesses fight, cities fight, even nations fight – sometimes to the point of war."*

Unfortunately, we live in a time where there are a lot of disagreements, divisions, and quarrels in our lives.

As we turn back to the text, what is happening in the church of Corinth? Paul starts out by saying,

***My brothers and sisters, some from Chloe's household have informed me that there are quarrels among you. 1 Cor. 1:11***

Chloe shares that there is “quarreling” or disagreement going on in the church. Let me continue reading....

***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.”***  
***1 Corinthians 1:12***

The Christians at Corinth, who are very young in their faith, were divided into factions based on different leaders in the church. And I can easily see how this happened. The people who were mentored and came to faith under Paul’s leadership shared how awesome that experience was. The followers of Apollos raved about his speaking talents and skills. Not to be outdone, those who followed Cephas or Peter would share about his strengths and how he was a true disciple and one whom everyone should follow. As I read these verses, I saw how divisive this had become as each faction had their favorite leader. These church members were filled with pride and arrogance and probably boasted about who they followed. It sounded like the church’s entire focus was upon who led them in their spiritual faith.

When Paul heard this message from Chloe’s household, it broke his heart to hear about division and disunity. How does Paul respond? He does not take sides. Paul poked fun at himself. He tried to dispel these factions and create harmony. Paul goes on to ask three important questions in verse 13:

***Is Christ divided? Was Paul crucified for you? Were you baptized in the name of Paul?***

I think Paul asked these questions for one important reason. He wanted everyone to remember that the most important thing was not about these leaders, but that Jesus Christ was the most important person. Jesus Christ was crucified. They were baptized by the Father, Son (Jesus), and Holy Spirit. Paul wanted to remind all the Christ-followers that Jesus was the only person they should be boasting about. Paul was trying to unify the church by going back to the foundation of the Christian faith.

There are key verses in each Bible passage that Paul wanted all the followers in the church of Corinth to focus upon:

***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.*** - ***1 Corinthians 1:10***

I love how Paul begins, “**I appeal to you**”, meaning, “I ask you” or “I urge you”. Paul is *showing respect* to his audience. Then we see how Paul cares about each of the

followers. Paul addresses them as, “brothers and sisters”, sharing his love and affection for the Christ-followers.

Paul had started this church 18 months previously. Paul stressed that the church needed to show unity. He pleaded with the young believers not to show division, not to quarrel, but to be united in mind and thought.

Paul challenged and emphasized the concept of “UNITY”, which was important to Paul. It was important to Jesus as we see in **John 17** as he prays for his disciples and his followers.

I believe that Paul wants his “brothers and sisters” to remember what brought them together in the first place. It was their faith in Jesus. Unfortunately, their eyes have lost their focus and it has shifted from Jesus to themselves. That is always a start to problems!

I was listening to Rick Warren’s podcast this past week. Rick said this about the current state of the church...

“We have seen the greatest division in the church in the past two years than I have seen in my lifetime. We have the largest unchurched people in our lifetime currently. We also have the largest de-churched people as well. A lot of people have left the church in the past 2 1/2 years.”

What happened? The church lost its focus. We started caring more about issues than about reaching and discipling people for Christ.

The focus in the last 2 1/2 years has been on COVID, the most dominant issue. We argued about shots. There were groups of people that wanted everyone to get a shot. We had other groups of people that did not want the shot. People left.

Same thing happened with masks. Some groups wanted everyone to wear a mask and other groups wanted freedom not to wear a mask. What happened? People left the church.

You can go back to the elections. Certain people wanted one candidate, others want another candidate for president. What happened? People left the church over politics.

In the past 2 1/2 years, we have invited those issues into the church, and they have become the dominant themes. In some ways, I think we need to get back to being the church. As a church we need to get back and focus upon Jesus. We need to start loving God and loving our neighbor. It starts with our families, people in this church, and the people around us.

Here is what we should focus on doing:

**1. Individually**

When you have quarrels or disagreement with someone, I believe you have to ask yourself these questions: What is your purpose? Are you looking to win at all cost? or create unity? If that is your purpose, I can tell you from experience there will only be one person happy. That person may not be you. Are you looking to create unity or harmony when you have quarrels or disagreements?

I believe it starts with:

- A. **Prayer** – Start with asking God for help. Acknowledge that you cannot handle it by yourself. You need God's help.
- B. **Focus on Christ** –remember the cross and what Jesus has done for us. When we pray, focusing on Jesus, something inside awakens humility.
- C. **Acknowledge both are sinful** – recognize your own responsibility for the quarrel and disagreement, it is not just one-sided.
- D. **Offer Grace & Love** – Grace is something the person does not deserve. Love is something given unconditionally. It's a choice. When you offer the person grace and love, there is sense of cooperation and better chance for unity.

Illustration: When I was teenager and into my mid-twenties, I can think back to the disagreements and quarrels that I would have with parents or family members.

If you ask me, my parents or siblings were wrong. As teenager and young adult, I thought that I knew everything and had life pretty figured out. My parents and siblings just did not understand my way of thinking. I did not acknowledge it at the time, but in some of those arguments with my parents, I was at fault, more than I realized.

But my parents chose not to win every battle at all costs. They practiced prayer, focused on Christ, and more than anything, they offered me grace and love, much more than I, in my immaturity, deserved.

Many years later with more life experience, with my own kids, I realized how much love and grace my parents gave me. What I am learning now is how to offer that same grace and love to my kids. My kids will tell you I have a lot to learn. I am working on it.

In life, we have quarrels and disagreements with our friends and co-workers. I would practice these simple steps as well.

Question: **Do I have to win this disagreement?** Can I practice unity and cooperation?

1. **Prayer** – I need God's help. I cannot do it on my own.
2. **Focus on Christ** – Remember the cross!
3. **Acknowledge we are both sinful** – We both played a part.
4. **How can I offer love and grace?** Remember offering grace is giving someone something they do not deserve. Offering love is a choice. It is choice to love and practice unity.

In every church there will be quarrels and disagreement. I agree with what Rick Warren has said about division in the church, especially concerning COVID and Politics.

As a church we have lost our focus on what really is important. We need to fix our eyes and hearts on two important things.

1. **Are we Glorifying God with our actions?** How do we practice grace and love? Can we live without getting our own way on minor issues? It's a struggle and I would like to do a better job offering grace and love. I need to keep my focus on the big issues of **Loving God and Loving my Neighbor!**
2. **How can church show unity?** We need to remember we are called to be a **witness to our Community**. If you remember, the church in Corinth was a disgrace and the community knew about the problem inside the church. It was very poor witness.

We want our church to be special. We want our church to be known for loving people and teaching the word of God. When people come to visit, we want them to see and hear people who practice grace and love. As Christians, we want BBC to be a place that draws people to come and meet Jesus.

Let us pray.....

### **Questions for Discussion & Reflection:**

1. What do families argue about the most? How did these quarrels get settled?
2. Why do you think Paul emphasizes that he is an apostle? What is significant about the way Paul addresses this church? Why does Paul remind them of their calling as well?
3. What specific problems was Paul addressing in the Corinthian church? What had the unresolved quarrels produced? Why was this a problem?
4. Why are divisions and cliques, especially in the church, so damaging to the Christian community inside and outside the church?
5. On what basis did Paul appeal to the Corinthian believers? Why is unity so important to Paul (verse 10)? Why is it important to remember what we have in common versus what causes division among us?
6. When you are facing quarrels and division, what helps you bring it back to unity?
7. Why is it so important to the apostle Paul and to Jesus that we are united? What witness does a unified church give to a lost community and to the world?