

“The Church Divided” // 1 Corinthians 1:10–24

// *Cutting Through the Noise* # 1

This weekend we are starting a new series, not on horror movies in the Bible, but on the book of 1 Cor. called *Cutting Through the Noise*. So open up your Bibles to 1 Cor 1.¹

Of our four kids, our 3rd child, Ryah, was born the quickest. She came lightning fast. As in, we barely got inside the hospital before she was here. The doctor called it “**precipitous labor**” or “**preposterous labor**” or something like that. Of course, I didn’t know that term then; I just remember things got real serious real fast about 4:30 am. **There was no “I think I’m in labor, we should time these contractions and get ready,”** it was just “We need to go NOW.” I remember being on the way there trying to convince Veronica to let me run into Starbucks because, you know, it was going to be a long morning... for me and some coffee would help. Thankfully she vetoed that and we went straight to Durham Regional. When we got inside the emergency room they could tell it was time and everybody started yelling and they put her in a chair and took her to a room. It was chaos. Doctors and nurses running in; everyone shouting instructions at her about getting into certain positions and pushing and NOT HYPERVENTILATING and it felt like total pandemonium. I could tell Veronica was feeling panicky when finally, one midwife leaned right down in her face and calmly but forcefully said, “Listen, if you push for 2 minutes, this baby will be out.” Veronica locked eyes with her, nodded slightly and pushed twice, and Ryah came into the world.

(I was trying to get Veronica to let me tell that story with ME being the voice of calm and clarity in the chaos, and she said, “Just tell it like it happened.” So I said, “Well, what was I doing during this time?” She said, “You were part of the chaos.”)

Paul’s first letter to the Corinthians is like a calm, clear voice speaking into the midst of chaos. Things at the church in Corinth are in turmoil, and Paul sets up the gospel up like a lighthouse to guide them through the **troubled waters of their problems**. For Paul, the gospel is the clear, calm voice that cuts through the noise.

Let me tell you a little bit about this church in Corinth to help set this up. Paul had planted this young church on his first missionary journey--a story you can read later in **Acts 18** if you want. Corinth was one of the most up and coming cities of the Roman Empire: it had a beautiful port that turned the city into both an economic powerhouse and vacation destination. It attracted young, upwardly mobile people from all over the Empire; Apple and Amazon announced they were moving there; sports was a big deal. It was **cosmopolitan, young, rich, and very diverse**--the city boasted scores and scores of temples to the Greek and Roman gods. The architecture there was amazing.

¹ Works Consulted: Tim Mackie, The Bible Project, "[Overview: 1 Corinthians](#)," Oct. 15, 2015; Greg Lanier and Nancy Guthrie, "Greg Lanier on 1 Corinthians," episode posted on The Gospel Coalition, December 12, 2019; John Mark Comer, "First Corinthians: Factions," sermon preached on October 10, 2010; Timothy Keller, "Predestination," sermon preached on April 20, 1997; Mark Driscoll, "1 Corinthians #3 - Preaching Jesus," sermon preached on January 22, 2006.

Paul had lived in this city for about a year and a half and led a bunch of young Corinthians to Christ. He loved this church; they represented some of his best work; he felt really close with these people.

But after he left, Paul started getting reports that his young church wasn't doing that well; he started seeing things as he scrolled through their Insta feeds that concerned him. In 5 primary areas:

- **First, there were lots of divisions** among the body; factions; tribes. We'll see that today. Paul's going to deal with this problem in chapters 1–4.
- **Second, they had sex and romance... confusion, to put it mildly.** I guess that's what you'd expect in a city full of young people, but sexual sin was happening in the church and a lot of the members were like, "I mean, what's the big deal--everybody in Corinth seems to be ok with it." So in chapters 5–7 Paul dishes out a lot of truth about sex, marriage, singleness and divorce.
- **Third, there was a lot of acrimony over differences of conviction on what Christians were and were not allowed to do.** Specifically, whether they could eat meat that had been offered to idols or not. And I know that doesn't seem like a super relevant question to us anymore, but in dealing with this Paul is going to lay out gospel-based principles that show us how to deal with differences of conviction today, like how we approach politics; or differences in the best way educate our children; whether we drink alcohol; or whether or not to get vaccinated and wear masks. That's chapters 9–10.
- **Fourth, their church services were chaotic.** People were interrupting the church service saying "the Holy Spirit had put something on my heart" and if they weren't recognized, they were saying that leadership was quenching the spirit. And a lot of people were shouting out in tongues and it felt like a madhouse. So in chapters 11 through 14 Paul is going to lay out some guidelines for how to let the Holy Spirit work in the church.
- **Fifth, there were some saying the resurrection of Jesus--and a lot of his miracles--were not that important.** More important, they said, was what Jesus taught and how he lived. So in chapter 15 Paul is going to explain to them why the resurrection--an actual, physical, bodily resurrection--is everything to the Christian.

In discussing each of these problems, Paul follows a pattern: He defines the problem and then leads us to see that problem through the lens of the gospel. (If you want to get your mind around Paul's basic teaching strategy, it is that: **Take whatever is broken in your spiritual life and apply the gospel to it, because faith in the gospel is the cure, regardless of the sickness.**) That's like a lifetime of theology in one sentence: **Take whatever is broken in your spiritual life and apply the gospel to it, because faith in the gospel is the cure, regardless of the sickness.** The gospel: the truth that all of us stand hopelessly condemned before God but God in his grace came to earth to die for our sin and now offers eternal life as a free gift to all who will receive it, humbly, by faith.² Going deeper into that message is the answer for just about everything in the Christian life.

We're going to walk through these 5 sections of Paul's letter, spending 2–3 weeks on each of them, because I feel, honestly, like he could have written this letter to our church here in Raleigh-Durham. Am I right?

- **Do we sometimes have divisions?** You're like, "No... Summit members seem to agree on everything!" OK, well clearly you haven't been in a small group. Or paid attention to social media.

² The above adapted from *The Bible Project*

- And I don't mean **JV disagreements**, like Jordan over Lebron, or Chick-fil-A over Popeyes, or Myers-Briggs over Enneagram, or whether the toilet paper should unroll over or under. No, we have members that disagree on some relatively important matters and who come from some pretty wildly different backgrounds. Is it possible for Christians like that to be unified?

And how about sexual sin, or sexual confusion--is that present in our church? And do we have questions about singleness and divorce? Do some of us have questions about the Holy Spirit's role in a church service and how to follow him? Do we have people who question Christianity's miraculous claims? **Yes to all.**

Now, some of you look at that list and think, "Man! **Divisions, gossip, sexual sin, charismatic chaos**--Corinth sounds like a pretty jacked up church--I'm not sure that's the kind of church I want to be part of. And you're telling me, Pastor, that the church of Corinth reminds you of *this* church?" Yeah, well we don't want you either, you Pharisee. Just kidding. Listen: **Any church actually reaching people has these kinds of problems.** Because when you reach lost sheep they come in smelling like... well, sheep. And sometimes they leave sheep poop on the floor and you step in it and it smells bad. But I'll take those problems all day if it means we're reaching people.

Tim Keller says there are two kinds of problems that churches have:

- There are: **'Living problems'**. **Living problems**--the church is reaching unchurched people who are bringing in all their issues. Because they reach across political lines, have to wade through messy political discussions. Because they reach across ethnic boundaries, they have to wade through uncomfortable cultural clashes. Because they reach across financial boundaries, they have to discuss how the poor and the wealthy do life together. And the people you bring in don't always know how to talk or behave.
 - **Ant: Early on in my ministry here I led several guys to Christ I played basketball with and I asked one of them to share his testimony at Easter because it was so powerful.** So everybody is there, all dressed up. Now, this next part I've told you before, but all these guys had court nicknames for each other; one guy was Air/ Flash/ Money. They called me "No Don't Shoot." Anyway, this guy is telling the story and he was talking about when we first met, how I'd gone over to his team to try and get to know them, and he was like, "Oh no, please don't let this guy try to play on our team, **he sucks!**" **Now, it's Easter and** everyone is in their Sunday best and I'm watching all these little old ladies as he stands in the pulpit and says, "He sucks." I forgot to tell him that we don't use words like 'sucks' in the pulpit... I wonder what else he's planning to say. **I was in a prayer group one time** with a brand new Christian who dropped the f-bomb...

But I'll take living-church problems all day over the second type of problem, which is:

- **'Dying problems'**. **A church with dying problems.** In a church like this, everyone is from the same political party, so no fights there. **They are all of the same ethnicity**, so no uncomfortable cultural clashes. Everybody is at about the same income level so they all think the same about money. The problem is, a group of people who all look the same, think the same, act the same, vote exactly the same, is not a church. It's a quickly dying Christian country club.

So which kind of church do you want to be a part of? A church with living problems or dying problems? I'll take living problems all day! You with me? Say Amen.

So, today, we're **going to jump right into the first problem**: the problem of divisions.³ Vs. **10**:

Now I urge you, brothers and sisters, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that all of you agree in what you say, that there be no divisions among you, This is Paul's thesis statement for the first four chapters, maybe for the whole book! Notice that he invokes **the name of our Lord,** which means that this is as weighty and serious as Paul ever speaks. He always speaks with the authority of an Apostle, but now he's invoking God's name. This goes to the core of who we are. **"Let there be no divisions,"** no factions, no tribalism, no sense of Varsity and JV squads in the church.

You say, "What kind of divisions exactly were there in the Corinthian church?"

- **Some were theological in nature:** Christians were divided on what to do about a lot of the OT laws. Some wanted to hang on to them since holiness; others wanted to celebrate their freedom and distance themselves from all Jewish law. They were also divided on how to interact with the world. Could you go places where there were idols and eat food there, or should you keep your distance?
- **So some of the divisions were theological in nature; some were personality driven.** Look at vs. **11: For it has been reported to me about you, my brothers and sisters... that there is rivalry among you. 12 One of you says, "I belong to Paul," or "I belong to Apollos," or "I belong to Cephas," or "I belong to Christ."**
 - Some were like, **"I'm a Paul guy.** You know, Paul is such a good theologian, and his letters are awesome. I'm trying to memorize them."
 - Others were like, "Well, yeah, **Paul's great with the theology,** but he's boring. (And BTW, Paul acknowledged this in **2 Cor--**"I'm mighty in my writing but weak in my preaching." You've **heard the one about the usher who was seating people** when a little old lady came in and asked to be put on the front row. The usher said, "Oh, ma'am, I would NOT recommend that. Our pastor is SO boring. He for sure will put you to sleep and if you're on the front row everyone can see you. The old lady said, "Young man, do you know who I am?" He said, "No." She said, "I'm the pastor's mother." At which point the man said, "Ma'am, do you know who I am?" And she said, 'No,' and he said, "Thank God" and walked away. That was Paul. He had a preaching style only a mother could love.) **So these people were like, "I'm an Apollos guy." Apollos, you see, was this guy who showed up in Corinth right after Paul and really grew the church.** You can read his story in Acts 18. He was an excellent speaker, even though theologically sometimes he'd get off and some other leader would have to take him aside and correct him. But man, could he preach.
 - So now you have these factions. Some are like, **"I'm #TeamPaul; theology is my jam."** Others are like, "No, #TeamApollos, because I'm into growth and reaching people." "Well, you stink." "No, you stink." "Apollos has weak theology." "Yeah, but Paul is boring. I heard a guy fell out of the window one time when he was teaching his "great theology." What good is your theology if people are dying in church?"⁴ And things were getting heated.

³That's especially pertinent right now—a recent Lifeway study among pastors after Covid shows that church unity is their #1 concern—which hasn't been the case in the past. Usually it's money or growth. Now it's unity. And an unprecedented number of people have left churches during this season. <https://www.google.com/url?q=https://lifewayresearch.com/2021/03/09/u-s-churchgoers-say-theyll-return-post-covid/&sa=D&source=editors&ust=1629843141542000&usq=AQyVaw1coqXdksl0hz9S6te1qvV/>

⁴ Mark Driscoll, "1 Corinthians #3 - Preaching Jesus" January 22, 2006.

- There's another group that felt this way about Peter (Cephas is another name for Peter, btw). And then my favorite, a group that was like: **"I belong to Christ."** **In every church you've got the Jesus-juke guy. "I'm not into your theology books or favorite preachers. Just me and my Bible."** BTW, commentators say this might have been the most arrogant group of all, because they assumed they didn't need the church--just them and Jesus.

BTW: Do we see these same divisions at work today? Uh, yeah.

- **You've always got 'Bible knowledge guy' in the church.** He's like: Just give me John Calvin, John Piper, and John MacArthur, the 1st, 2nd and 3rd John of modern day American Christianity. They are always complaining that there's not enough "meat" in the sermon. And listen, **I'm all into spiritual feeding.** I hope that's obvious. But sometimes this group is really self-centered. It's like all they want from church is for it to be a classroom that puffs up their heads with theological knowledge. And you start to sense that pride and self-centeredness are at work. They don't care about reaching people and are not really that much into spiritual growth, they just like to LEARN. What's ironic to me about this group is that they masquerade as spiritually mature, but do you know what they remind me of? (Parents, **remember when your toddler** was in a high chair, with his bib, saying "FEED ME!!!). And every once in a while when they are **unhappy with what you give them**, they flip their plate over, which is like that person who sends me the email complaining that the sermon didn't have enough OT cross-references or Greek verb tense analysis for them. Again, I'm all into deep preaching, but for some it's not about actual spiritual maturity; it's something else.
- **Others are like, "No, I'm an experience-guy."** If I don't get goose bumps at some point in the sermon and the altars are not full of people weeping, it wasn't a Spirit-filled sermon."
- **Others are like, "I'm a "take care of the body" guy.** "Church" ought to be about discipleship and really doing life together. Small groups should last 4 hours and everyone should know everything about everyone else."
- Others are like, **"I'm a missions and evangelism guy.** Churches should only be measured solely by how fervently they are getting the gospel out."
- Others are like, **"I'm a social justice guy.** I'm all about loving our community."
- And still others are like, "Give me diversity or give me death." The only thing I care about the church is that it looks like a rainbow on stage.

Now, there's truth in all these, of course, and a gospel-loving church pursues all of them. Summit tries to. AND, let me say, there's nothing wrong with being particularly attracted to one of those--having a special proclivity toward it--that might be a part of your personal gifting. What's wrong is when those preferences are accompanied by a spirit of division. Self-righteousness and separation.

Paul gives 4 correctives to this spirit of divisiveness.

1. Understand Unity (vs. 10)

"...be united with the same understanding and the same conviction." Be united how? By magically starting to agree on everything? No. Paul doesn't write 1 Cor to settle all the arguments. He doesn't even say, "Guys, let

me come and settle all these disagreements and then you can be unified. No, he says, "Be of the same understanding and same conviction" and he means "be of the same understanding and same conviction about the GOSPEL." Have the same UNDERSTANDING about the importance of the gospel over these secondary things and the same CONVICTION about the primacy of the gospel.

A lot of people call for unity in the church but often they don't seem to know what it is. Write this down. For Paul,

- **Unity is NOT uniformity**, where everybody in the church agrees on everything. That's not the biblical vision of the church. The NT church is a church where Jesus is so large that it makes disagreement on secondary things less important.
 - **Y'all ready for some frank talk?** What was most disappointing for me in 2020 was how so many church people were willing to walk away from their church over a relatively small disagreement--at least small in light of the gospel and in light of eternity. 'Well you didn't say enough about this cultural issue, so I'm leaving.' Or 'You said too much, so I'm leaving.' Or, 'I don't like how you approach vaccines or masks so I'm out.' I talked with people that had been at the church for a decade and said, "I married your kids. I walked with you through the tragedy of some death of a loved one. And now you're leaving because you disagreed with what we are doing with masks?" We Christians say we hate 'cancel culture', but it was amazing to me how so many of us cancelled our church over disagreement rather small things--again, small in light of the gospel. **For Paul, unity is not uniformity. But for Paul**
- **Unity is (also) NOT relativism**:⁵ Which is where you say that everyone is right about everything (that's ridiculous). There are right and wrong approaches to many things. The question is the importance we give these things in our fellowship. Do we have the same conviction about the gospel and understanding of its importance?
- Similarly, **Unity is NOT abandoning the faith**: Some Christians think the only way we can be unified is by refusing to take clear stands on anything. But throughout his letter to the Corinthians Paul will identify certain beliefs and say, "We have to agree on these or we've lost our identity as God's people." Things like the person and work of Christ; the nature of saving faith; the inerrancy of the Bible; or even God's designs for gender and sexuality.
 - I was once part of a global meeting of Christian leaders who wanted to issue a joint statement on Christian witness and they produced this 5 page document called "Christians and Evangelism and the 21st century." It was essentially a bunch of progressive political talking points, but I read all 5 pages and there literally was not a single word about the necessity of faith in the finished work of Christ for salvation. And it was a statement on EVANGELISM. So, in an open session, I asked the document authors about that, and they said, "Well, we didn't want to be theologically divisive." So in our joint statement on evangelism we can't even unify around the gospel? Needless to say I didn't sign the statement.
- Finally, **Unity is NOT sentimentality**. Where you paper over divisions, never talk about them, and just smile for the camera. This is what many churches seem to want: "**Diversity for us is a snapshot** of the stage, because that looks good," but these people never do life together. And, those outside the majority never seem to find themselves in positions of influence. That's not Paul's vision of unity. It's real people, with different perspectives and preferences, who find a larger uniting hope in Jesus. **Unity is having the same**

⁵ John Mark Comer helped me put specific language to this idea: "First Corinthians: Factions" October 10, 2010.

conviction about the gospel, the same understanding about its importance, and then attempting to think about everything else in line with that.

Which leads Paul to corrective #2:

2. Embrace Grace (vv. 13–24)

This is the main point, so let me read several verses: **13 Is Christ divided? Was Paul crucified for you? Or were you baptized in Paul's name? 14 I thank God that I baptized none of you except Crispus and Gaius, 15 so that no one can say you were baptized in my name. 16 I did, in fact, baptize the household of Stephanas; beyond that, I don't recall if I baptized anyone else.** (Let me digress for a moment, because I love that verse. We know that Paul dictated this letter to a scribe. And Paul is like, "I didn't baptize any of you! ... Except for these two guys, Crispus and Gaius. And maybe one other one. Yep, some guy named Stephanas; I did, in fact, baptize Stephanas. And some other people in his house. I think. Honestly it's a bit hazy ... but you get the point! It wasn't a major part of what I did." This guy the whole time is just writing it all down.

17 For Christ did not send me to baptize, but to preach the gospel—not with eloquent wisdom, so that the cross of Christ will not be emptied of its effect. (And we're like, "Well, Paul, you could work at being a LITTLE eloquent, because then people wouldn't go to sleep and fall out of windows and DIE." But Paul says the point is not winning people to my personality; the power is in the gospel not in my persona). **20 Where is the one who is wise? Where is the teacher of the law? Where is the debater of this age?... 21 For since, in God's wisdom, the world did not know God through wisdom, God was pleased to save those who believe through the foolishness of what is preached. 22 For the Jews ask for signs and the Greeks seek wisdom, 23 but we preach Christ crucified, a stumbling block to the Jews and foolishness to the Gentiles. 24 Yet to those who are called... Christ is the power of God and the wisdom of God, 25 because God's foolishness is wiser than human wisdom, and God's weakness is stronger than human strength.**

What Paul does here is identify a bunch of things that DON'T bring salvation:

- **Jesus didn't save the world through philosophical wisdom.** Salvation wasn't figured out by a bunch of philosophers who put their heads to it. No, while the eggheads were pondering life in Athens and Jerusalem, salvation appeared to a bunch of poorly educated shepherds in one of the poorest towns in Israel.
- **Jesus didn't save the world through earthly success.** That's what the Jews wanted--earthly SIGNS of success that validated the Messiah. The Jews of that day sought after SIGNS. Military might. Financial success. But Jesus never got rich. He never commanded an army. He never really even had a large following--when he died, his movement would not have been judged a success by earthly standards. At his death he had just over 100 followers and they all scattered when he died.
- **Jesus didn't save the world through modeling obedience to the law.** The ones who best obeyed the law--the Pharisees--missed Jesus. They were, in fact, his biggest opponents. It was blue-collar workers, fishermen and carpenters and moral misfits like tax collectors and prostitutes that first believed in Jesus.

- **Jesus didn't save the world through the impartation of biblical wisdom.** Listen closely to this one because I don't want you to misunderstand it. Teaching is important; it's what I do every week and how we learn the gospel. But it wasn't Jesus' wisdom that saved us. It was what Jesus *did* that saved us. Think about it: *Jesus' most famous teaching is what? The Sermon on the Mount. Yet **two of the Gospels** don't even record it. I don't know of a single parable told in all 4 Gospels. Only two of the Gospels tell us about Jesus' birth. Only two tell of his temptation. John's Gospel doesn't mention the Last Supper--there's no mention of the Eucharist. Neither Matthew nor John mentions the Ascension. **However, all four Gospels record Jesus' betrayal, his arrest, his trial, Peter's denial, the people's choice of Barabbas; the inscription on the Cross, the Crucifixion and the Resurrection.** So, what does that show you about what the Gospels writers see as essential? **It's faith in his work, not knowledge of his teaching that saves you.***
- That **doesn't mean those other things aren't important**, just that God didn't save us by sending down a teacher to educate us, or a politician to reform us, or a life-coach to help us get it together or a military leader to protect us; he sent down a substitute to die for us--to live the life that we were supposed to live and die the death we were condemned to die.
- And now he saves us through the **"foolishness of preaching."** Foolishness of preaching doesn't mean I'm up here with a beanie on my head and a little propeller going "dudududu," just that what I say is rather simple. Christ did it all. Trust in him. Lean on him. Love him.

So now, **23... we preach Christ crucified...** (because) **24 Christ is the power of God and the wisdom of God**

You're not saved by obtaining enough wisdom or power or righteousness. Christ has all of those things in perfection and we simply receive him, and we get them all in him. **So my goal in preaching is not to fill your heads with enough knowledge that you'll be acceptable to God; or to give you enough practical wisdom that you have no more problems in life;** my goal is for you to see the beauty and sufficiency of Jesus Christ in all of those things and learn to trust and love him.

It's not sophisticated by worldly standards. It's rather foolish: Christ did it all. Trust him.

You say, "Well, what does that got to do with unity?" OK, pay attention. **When you embrace this message of grace, REALLY EMBRACE it, the SPIRIT of divisiveness leaves you.** You see, behind divisiveness always lurks a spirit of pride and self-justification. You're attracted to certain things because they make you feel superior to others.

- **Having more Bible knowledge than others makes me *feel* righteous, so I take pride in being a part of a church that excels in Bible knowledge.** That sets me apart and makes me better than others.
- **Being successful in ministry makes me feel more righteous than other people,** so I want to be a part of a church known for that.
- **Being the most zealous for social justice makes me feel righteous,** so that's the one thing I want to be true of my church because I want to be identified as that.

But we're not saved by any of those things. We're saved by Christ and Christ alone. At the end of the day, all my wisdom and Bible knowledge and success and social justice are filthy rags--or, to use Paul's word, *scubala*, dung--to God. I'm saved by Christ who became for me righteousness and wisdom and success and I get all of

things in him. And when you embrace that, you'll find that your pride crumbles and the spirit of divisiveness leaves.

Nathan Coles (a Connecticut farmer in the 1730s) tells the story of listening to the great evangelist George Whitefield preach. Here is how he recorded his conversion in his journal--this is the preaching that spawned the Great Awakening: **"My hearing him preach gave me a heart-wound, and by God's blessing my old foundation was broken up and I saw that my righteousness could not save me."** *IOW, I came to a point where I realized that all the things I had prided myself in; all the things I thought set me apart from others, were useless to God. And then I was ready to embrace the grace of Christ.* It wasn't just his sins he needed to repent of; it was his false sense of self-righteousness. Self-righteousness sends more people to hell than sin ever does.

The **true gospel cuts against the grain of our hearts** in a deep and fundamental way. We want to be able to earn our way to God; to come up with something about us that sets us apart and makes us worthy so we're not just a **charity-case**.⁶ But when you come to a place where you say, "I have no power, no righteousness, no wisdom except what is given me in Christ," that cuts the oxygen off from your pride and takes the spirit of divisiveness right out of you. And when pride and self-justification are taken out of your preferences, you may still have them, but you won't be so smug and defensive and divisive about them.

Which leads me to #3...

3. Enlarge Christ (vs. 13a)

In vs. 13 Paul says, **13 Is Christ divided? Was Paul crucified for you?...**

He's asking: Who is your salvation? Christ? If it's all about him, then what significance do these other things have for your identity? Paul is not saying that when you become a Christian your preferences or differences of perspective just go away, just that they become less important. And when you are dividing over them, that is a sure sign that those **secondary things are too large in your heart and your identity in Christ is too small.**

I always love going to local college basketball games where the whole crowd is united in cheering for the same team. Cameron Crazies, NC State, UNC, Eagle Pride. It doesn't matter. People say, "Who do you cheer for in those moments?" *I cheer for the team of whoever invited me.* But I love it because you look around the room and you see that a lot of these people would be divided on a million other topics, but in that room, for 90 minutes, they are united around the importance of Duke basketball, or UNC or NC State basketball. When things go well for your team you are hugging and high fivin' random people, that's how much commonality you feel. That's at least partially what the gospel should be like. We are just so overwhelmed by Jesus that the other differences seem less relevant, and when we come to church our commonality in him outweighs any secondary perspective or preference.

As I said, one of the most disappointing things to me about the last 18 months was how it became clear that for so many Christians their politics and cultural perspective was so big and their Christ was so small. That was

⁶ Donald Miller, *Blue Like Jazz*

shown by how quickly you cancelled your church membership over some small thing that became in your heart so much bigger than Christ.

4. Wean Yourself Off of Celebrity (vs. 13b)

Throughout these verses Paul keeps saying, “What significance do these earthly leaders have in your spiritual identity? **“Are you baptized in the name of Paul...?”** or Apollos or Peter? Are you dependent on one of US for your salvation?

- Listen, celebrity has always been a part of the Christian church--larger than life leaders that have a big impact on your spiritual growth. As you can see, it was present in the early church. **In our social media age**, however, this celebrity has taken on new levels.
- And **here's the thing**: associating yourself with some celebrity gives you a sense of identity--I'm set apart because I'm associated with this person; I'm on this person's team.
- Paul says, **You don't need to be set apart by anyone except for Jesus.** All the righteousness and specialness and power you need are in him.”
- Sure, **some earthly leaders can be helpful to you on earth**, and you might gravitate toward them, but you're not dependent on them. They are just temporary tools in Jesus' hand. I love the opening line of Psalm 23: *The Lord is my Shepherd, I shall not want.*” When you say that verse, emphasize the first two words: **THE LORD** is my shepherd. **Who is the Shepherd of your soul?** THE LORD. Is it Paul? Is it Apollos? Is it me? No. Ultimately it's him, and because of THAT, you will never lack.
- **Can I ask you: If I died tomorrow, would you leave this church, or would you stay?** If you'd probably stay, good for you. Your allegiance is to this body. Your allegiance is to the mission.
 - **But if you're like, “Well, I'd leave,”** your allegiance is to me and that's a huge problem. You're treating the church like a restaurant with your favorite chef, not like the family of Jesus that you belong to, or a movement you are committed to. Jesus is your Shepherd and the Holy Spirit is in you. Who is J.D.?
 - I get it that **maybe you came to this church** because my preaching connects with you, or our worship really engages you, or your kids love the student ministries. That's fine as a reason to come. But over time you've got to develop family bonds; bonds that are stronger than preaching preference or worship style; bonds that go beyond me; and bonds that can weather disagreement in the body.
 - **This church needs to become family to you.** And leaving a church should feel like leaving a family. I'm not saying there's never a time to leave a church--I am saying that it shouldn't be like flipping TV channels or switching up what restaurant you go to because this new restaurant has some cool appetizers. If you leave a church, it should feel like walking away from a family!
 - And **engage in the mission here. Don't be a spectator** who comes because you like my style of preaching or enjoy our kind of worship. It's fine to start there, but if you are going to belong to Christ, own and live out the mission.
 - Interestingly, every once in a while here we do a church survey, and every time we find out that those who feel like they are growing the most here are those who... what do you think? Do their QT every day? Are in a small group? Are in a ladies' Bible study? Those are all good things, but the ones who say they are growing the most are the ones who are volunteering. That is the single biggest factor that determines how much you grow here.

- **WHY?** Well, it's like our friend Joby Martin says, **"There's nothing that blesses your walk with Jesus like helping somebody else out with theirs."** So, for some of you it's time to get off the sidelines listening to the preacher and get into the movement and belong to the family.
- **Campus pastors will tell you more about how to do that today.**

And finally, Summit, let's resolve ourselves to make the gospel the one thing we unite around, the thing that is so large in our hearts that other differences seem rather insignificant.

A few years ago I got a letter from a young lady in our church that included a picture of her being baptized. I hadn't been there on the day she got baptized, but she wanted to tell me her story. When she first came to our church, she wasn't a Christian at all--far from it. She was from the West Coast and very far left in every way. Some friends invited her to come to Summit, but she said the first interaction she and I had was on social media. She had said something really snarky in response to some pro-life tweets I had put up. I had responded to her--which is odd, normally I don't respond on social media, but I did on this one, and I'm not sure why. I didn't even know she went to our church, I just thought I was interacting with someone random.

In the letter she told me, she said, "There were so many things I didn't like about you, but I kept coming to the church and eventually, I was overwhelmed by the truth of the gospel and I got saved."

She said, "Now, for the last several months I've been growing by leaps and bounds. She said, "Even though it was clear that you were pro-life; and you believed that gay marriage was not supported in the Bible, you still didn't align this church with a political party. If you had I would never have been able to bring myself to go. But because you didn't, I heard the gospel and I got saved. And now I feel like I am re-learning everything. I just want to thank you for not putting politics as an obstacle in my path to the gospel."

Summit, I've got a lot of perspectives and preferences that are important to me. But NONE of them are as important as the soul of someone like this.

And let me be clear: I'm not talking about ever backing down from preaching the truth. We have to be unapologetic in our stands for the sanctity of life; the sanctity of marriage, God's design for gender and other unpopular things even if it makes people mad and causes them to leave our church. But we are a church where we want Christ to be large and our identity in him to be the voice that cuts through the noise and gives us clarity in who we are and where we are going. Amen?