



BELIEVERS CHAPEL

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The Sermons of Dan Duncan

1 Corinthians 1:10-17

1 Corinthians

“A House Divided”

TRANSCRIPT

[Message] We are in our second lesson in our series in 1 Corinthians, so turn to 1 Corinthians chapter 1 and we're going to look at verses 10 through 17. Paul has given his introduction to the letter. He has made thanksgiving to the Corinthians and thanked God for the many blessings He has given to them, and now things change somewhat abruptly with verse 10.

"Now I exhort you, brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you all agree and that there be no divisions among you, but that you be made complete in the same mind and in the same judgment. For I have been informed concerning you, my brethren, by Chloe's people, that there are quarrels among you. Now I mean this, that each one of you is saying, 'I am of Paul,' and 'I of Apollos,' and 'I of Cephas,' and 'I of Christ.' Has Christ been divided? Paul was not crucified for you, was he? Or were you baptized in the name of Paul? I thank God that I baptized none of you except Crispus and Gaius, so that no one would say you were baptized in my name. Now I did baptize also the household of Stephanas; beyond that, I do not know whether I baptized any other. For Christ did not send me to baptize, but to preach the gospel, not in cleverness of speech, so that the cross of Christ would not be made void."

May the Lord bless this reading of His Word. Let's bow together in prayer.

[Prayer] Father, we do thank you for this time together. It's a great privilege and a great blessing to meet together with the saints every Lord's day, every Sunday morning, and fellowship as we do and have real fellowship, true fellowship, which is fellowship in your Word, in the ministry of your Word where we think together about that which you've revealed to us. We have in this book the inerrant revelation, your Word, your revelation. It is infallible and it is reliable for everything and in every age. It's a book that was written 2,000 years ago, 3,000 years ago, 3,500 years ago, and yet it is as relevant today as it was in Moses' day and Paul's day. This is a book that is alive and active and sharper than any two-edged sword. It's unique, and we have the privilege of reading it and examining it, considering the text of Scripture today together.

And fortunately, we have an infallible teacher – not the one standing in the pulpit but the one that is in the hearts of your people, the one who has sealed our hearts, the Holy Spirit who is the gift to every believer in Jesus Christ. He has sealed our hearts. He is there permanently. He keeps us secure. He guides us through the twists and turns of life. He gives us wisdom and he gives us instruction, and we pray for that ministry this morning, that it would go unhindered, that all of us would be able to clear our minds of the details of life and all of the things that can capture our attention, things that are certainly important, things that we'll have to deal with during the week, some very difficult, some trivial, but things that can occupy our thoughts, and we pray, Lord, you clear those out of our mind and you would enable us to focus our attention upon your Word and that we would be taught and that we would be built up in the faith and that we would be equipped for the week to come and the challenges that we will face.

So Lord, bless us and draw us close to yourself, draw us into your fellowship. We are in that fellowship but may we experience it and enjoy it. May this be a time of worship and learning, a very enjoyable time for us. We pray that for ourselves spiritually and we pray that for the meeting tonight, that you'd bless it and bless the meetings during the week, the women's classes and then the Wednesday night classes and pray that you'd bless all who teach and that the Spirit of God would minister through them to those who are in attendance. But bless us materially as well, Lord. Bless us physically. We have great needs.

Kent mentioned the employment problems that many are dealing with in this church, and we pray that you would encourage those who are out of work and open doors of opportunity for them and give them wisdom and bless the meeting, the class

this week as they discuss opportunities and ways to approach the problem. Give all of your people wisdom and give them patience and those who are suffering physically, those who are undergoing great trials – and some are going through great trials physically. I pray that you'd encourage them with the promises that we have and help them to rest in that. Help them to call upon those promises and enable them to see your hand of encouragement and if it be your Will, healing in their lives. Bless them.

Bless our nation, bless our leaders, give them wisdom and protection, bless this land and most importantly, Lord, bless it with spiritual life. And perhaps, if it please you, use us as we go out into the world and into the community, into the workplace or the neighborhood, to be lights in the midst of darkness. Equip us to that end, Father, we pray. And now bless us as we continue with our worship, that it would please you and be helpful to all of us. We pray these things in Christ's name. Amen.

[Message] We've all heard that idle hands are the devil's workshop, meaning when people aren't active and productive, the devil is at work tempting them with mischief. But the fact is the devil is also at work where people are active. His workshop is churches, especially the best churches where people are earnest and engaged in service. In fact, I can imagine that if we could take a tour of his shop, the only tools we would find would be a mallet and a wedge, but they would be well-worn tools because he is very active in splitting churches. In fact, he is so skilled at his craft that he can break up the best of friends and strongest assemblies. _____ and _____ and _____ were good friends and faithful workers in the gospel, but something came between them to cause a feud, and the church of Corinth suffered a breakdown in unity.

That's one reason Paul wrote the book of 1 Corinthians. The church had been infected with party spirit. There were cliques throughout the congregation. Now, you wouldn't know that from the introduction of the letter because Paul begins the first nine verses of this book thanking God for all of the blessings that he had given the Corinthians. He had made them saints. He had enriched them with spiritual gifts. Few churches have been blessed the way the Corinthian church was blessed with the spiritual gifts that they had, and at the end, Paul says that God had called them into fellowship with his Son, Jesus Christ our Lord. What an unimaginable blessing they had and that every believer has, to be in fellowship with the Son of God. They were all united together in Him, in His life and His power and His care.

You can almost round out the apostle's words, those first nine verses, with that line from Shakespeare's Henry V, "We few, we happy few, we band of brothers." They were brothers. Paul calls them that in the next verse, in verse 10, but they weren't happy. They were divided and Paul now addresses this problem, and it was a grave one. This is a book about problems and questions. He didn't write it like he did the book of Romans where he lays out in a systematic fashion an explanation of the gospel. This is a book where he corrects people who were in trouble. They had a number of difficulties, so rather than develop a doctrine, he corrects problems.

The first one he speaks to is the divisions in the church, and the fact that he tackles that one first may indicate the seriousness of it and the importance of it. After all, if a church is not united, it is not effective. It loses its witness. The light goes out and the church goes away. That's the reason the devil is so active in congregations. So from a lengthy, heartfelt statement of thanksgiving, Paul suddenly makes an appeal for unity. It is affectionate – he calls them brothers – but it is urgent. He speaks to them on the authority of Christ. "I exhort you, brethren, by the name of Christ that you all agree and that there be no divisions among you, but that you be made complete in the same mind and in the same judgment." In other words, be united. Do whatever it takes to heal the divisions. That's the meaning.

That's the basic lesson of this text this morning, be united, and Paul uses some interesting words to give that lesson. Literally, agree is speak the same thing. It's an idiom, it's an expression for unite because in ancient times, parties and factions had their slogans, just as they do today. We know that from politics. Presidential candidates have their slogans. Back in the early 1950s, Dwight Eisenhower's slogan was I like Ike. I remember that, vaguely, but we had a button, "I Like Ike," and what that was saying was I like Ike; I don't like Stevenson. I'm with the Republicans; I'm against the Democrats. It was a way, as slogans are a way, of defining our divisions, our differences.

Well, there were ancient divisions like that, too, where parties had their watchwords that set them apart from others. So the expression, speak the same thing, meant something like stop shouting your slogans. Have the same slogan. Speak together, be united, that's what Paul was urging because the divisions were serious. The Greek word that Paul uses here is *schemata*. We get our word "schism" from that and it means a rip, a split, a tear. That's what these divisions were, they were rips, they were tears in the church. They needed to be mended, which is the meaning of be made complete in the same mind. The word used here, be made complete, is the word that our Lord used in Matthew 4:21 of mending nets.

It was also used in ancient medical literature of a surgeon setting a broken bone. Paul used the word in Galatians 6:1 where he writes about the believer caught in a sin and counsels the person who is spiritual to restore such a one in a spirit of gentleness. Setting a bone requires skill, it requires gentleness. My family had an illustration a number of years ago. One of my daughters was roller skating out front with a friend. She fell, she broke her arm, my wife picked her up in the car and rushed her off to a doctor, and she picked an excellent orthopedic surgeon. He was a man who'd gotten on-the-job training on the ski slopes of Switzerland. He knew how to set bones, and so he said, "I don't recommend giving a general anesthesia. It has lingering effects, and if we use a needle to deaden it, it will be as painful as setting it, so I'm going to do it without."

She gave the permission to do that and so he took my daughter's arm and he was talking to her and suddenly without warning he snapped it back into place, just like that. That's what I'm told. I wasn't there. If I'd been there, I'd have probably been on the floor and they'd have been spending more time reviving me than mending my daughter, but that's what I think Paul is talking about. That's how those ancient doctors, Galen and Hippocrates, would have set bones. Took a great deal of skill and so does restoring a brother or sister, and that's what was needed in Corinth.

The church was fragmented. It was a body of broken bones and it needed urgent attention. It needed healing or mending. It was being torn apart by these divisions, and it was as useless as an athlete with a broken leg or a fishing net full of holes. So it needed to be restored. And the way to do that spiritually is by restoring people to the same mind and judgment. Now, that doesn't require unanimity on everything. It doesn't require that we think the same thoughts on every issue. That's impossible, that's not necessary. There are going to be disagreements among us. There are going to be disagreements of all kinds. Politics, there's going to be disagreements there. Sports, we know that.

We have in this family – I'm not kidding you. You won't believe me, but we have in this family, here in Dallas, Texas, Cowboy country, we have a family that roots for the San Francisco 49ers. Now, you may not believe that, but what you will believe is that we have Aggies and Longhorns here. They root for different teams. They're friendly, but they're at odds on that. Now, there is a solution, and I know you know the solution, but we can all root for the Horned Frogs. That'll solve all of the problems. They're just not too far over here and – no, but there are divisions among us and there's going to be those kinds of divisions, but certainly and fundamentally, there must be unity in the knowledge of Christ.

The saints, believers, are those who have been called into fellowship with Christ, so that assumes unity of doctrine on the person and work of Christ. There's no flexibility there. That He is the eternal Son of God, no variation there. That His death was the atonement for sin – the only atonement for sin – that salvation is only in Him and that He is the only mediator between God and man. There is no division there. There must be unity there, and there is unity there. But even believers who are orthodox, who are straight on their doctrine, can be divided. That's true – it was true in Corinth. It wasn't so much a division of doctrine; it was a division in attitude, so the idea here is be free of competitiveness. That's really what he's urging here.

And Paul was on solid ground urging that because he had a direct source of information from people who witnessed the problem and were willing to be cited, to be referred to, in the correction he gave. In verse 11, he says some people had come from Corinth and told him about these things. He identifies them as Chloe's people. They were probably servants of a woman named Chloe who was evidently well-known, a well-known Christian woman, either from Corinth or from Ephesus. But these fellow Christians who were connected to her had returned from Corinth to Ephesus where Paul was – this letter was written from the city of Ephesus – and they came to him with a report on the conditions back there in Corinth. They had seen it all.

So Paul had this on good authority, and he was able to get specific about the situation. He lists four cliques in the congregation according to the leaders that they had adopted. They had adopted these leaders; the leaders hadn't adopted them. The leaders hadn't set themselves up as the heads of these various cliques. The people had done that and in one group, they were saying, "I'm of Paul." In another, "I'm of Apollos." Another, "I'm of Cephas." And finally there were those who rose above them all to say, "I'm of Christ." The church was divided against itself, according to these factions, and each one was quarreling with the other, arguing that their teacher was the best, their group was the best, they had the truth and you needed to follow them.

Paul doesn't say why people lined up behind certain teachers, but it's easy to imagine how that could have happened. Paul established the church, so very likely some felt a loyalty to him or thought he was a deep teacher, and they would speak of how they learned so much from him. He unfolded the whole counsel of God. No one knew the Word of God like Paul did. He teaches us so much, and of course most of us would agree with that. We are in debt to Paul's ministry, but not everyone felt that way in that day. He repeated a complaint of the people in 2 Corinthians 10:19.

He wrote that some said his letters – speaking about Paul – his letters are weighty and strong but his personal presence is unimpressive and his speech contemptible. He doesn't have a good presence in the pulpit. He doesn't dress very well. He doesn't look as stout as some people.

So some were saying, "Paul's fine, no doubt, but I much prefer Apollos to Paul. Now, there is a man who can preach." And he really could. Apollos came to Corinth after Paul had left and he had a significant ministry there. Luke speaks of that in Acts 18:27-28 where he says he greatly helped them. Apollos had a significant ministry, a very good ministry. He was quite a man. He was a Jewish Christian from Alexandria, which was home to one of the great universities of that age. He was a well-educated man. He was a Harvard man, a Yale man, he was known for his eloquence, and many in Corinth were probably enamored of his learning and certainly of his speech because speech, the ability to give a good speech, was very significant to the Greeks and to the Corinthians.

Well, they'd never heard a better preacher and spoke of how he moved them through his well-crafted sermons – and no doubt he did. But then there's Peter. He was one of the original 12 apostles. That must have been very impressive to many. This was a man who actually walked with Jesus. That's what his devotees would say. Who can match that? I'll tell you who can match that: the Jesus-only party. They didn't follow any man, they followed the Master Himself, which sounds good, but from the context, I think we can say it wasn't good. This was an attitude infused with a partisan spirit. They claimed to have a special relationship to Christ. They claimed to be the real followers within this group.

Well, whatever the reasons might be cited for these groups, they're really all secondary. The root problem was the same with all of them and that's pride. You notice that here. It's all "I" – I am of Paul, I am of Apollos. It was all a boast. We can blame the devil for our problems, but that's almost too convenient. The devil is real. He is at work among us. We should never doubt that, but so is pride, and we should never diminish that. It is in the human heart and the cause of all kinds of trouble. It causes a party spirit, it makes people argumentative, and there are some people who are easily made argumentative because they enjoy an argument and they enjoy winning. It's almost a sport with them. But this is really the kind of thing that Paul was fighting here.

Human pride, self-love, self-exaltation. It is all foolish, it's all completely unnecessary, and Paul states that very forcefully in the next verses with some

rhetoical questions. He asks, "Has Christ been divided?" You have all these divisions here. Is that because Christ has been divided? Of course not. Christ has not been divided. And Christians are people who, by the sovereign electing grace of God, have been called into fellowship with Him, with the Son of God. There's only one Son and we are all in Him united. We all have all of Christ. No one has more or less of Christ than someone else in the church. Now, we may enjoy less of Christ than some other person, but we all have the potential for the full enjoyment of Jesus Christ. Christ hasn't been divided up, so we aren't to be divided, either.

That's the point of his second question. Paul was not crucified for you, was he? He's speaking directly here to the Paul party, but it could be said for the Apollos and the Peter devotees as well. No. Of course Paul had not been crucified for them. There's only one Savior. There's only one atonement that has been made or can be made. The Corinthians knew that, but they were behaving as though their various teachers were their saviors, as though they were the ones that had brought blessing to them. The cross of Christ is central to the gospel. It is the good news. Nothing can be allowed to detract from that. Nothing can be allowed to deflect attention away from that or be a rival to the cross of Christ, to the person and work of Christ. Believers are joined together at the cross, and that in fact is our testimony in baptism.

So thirdly Paul asked, "Were you baptized into the name of Paul?" Again, of course not. They were baptized in the name of Christ. What that means is when they were baptized, they publicly identified themselves with Christ, with His name, which means with His person, all that He is, all that He has done. Now, we see that later in chapter 10 when Paul refers to the exodus from Egypt and says that all those who went through the sea were baptized into Moses. How was that? To be baptized into Moses? Well, he means they identified with him. The Israelites joined themselves to Moses as their leader and they followed him through the sea, and that's the idea here.

When we are baptized, we make a public declaration that we have identified ourselves with Christ, that through faith, we have joined ourselves to Him as the one who died for us, as the one who leads us. He's our Savior, He's our guide. The Corinthians through faith were all joined to Christ. So they weren't baptized into Paul. They weren't even baptized by Paul, and he was glad of it. He says that in verse 14. He knew how people responded to such things. Rivalries can occur. They certainly can occur over something like baptism. Someone might say, "I was baptized by Dr. Johnson. Who baptized you? You weren't baptized by him, were you?" It's easy to set up a kind of rivalry like that. That's not uncommon.

You can see why in John 4:2 we're told that Jesus Himself was not baptizing but His disciples were. Now, you can imagine the problem with pride a person might have if he or she had been baptized by Christ. "Well, no one's baptism could have been as good as that." Pride is a powerful force in the human heart. The heart of man is so deceptively cunning that it can use good things to feed the ego, to puff it up and then lord it over others and promote self. Even with something like baptism. Paul understood that and was relieved that he had actually baptized only a few Corinthians. He names a couple of them in verse 14, Crispus and Gaius. Later, in verse 16, he remembers that he had baptized the household of Stephanas. But that was very few people.

Most of those in the church were not baptized by him. He hadn't planned it that way but the providence of God had worked that out and he was glad of that. People might have boasted and said they were baptized in his name and they had some special connection to an apostle. But Paul had done nothing in his ministry – nothing in his ministry – to promote any kind of personality cult or direct anyone away from the person and work of Christ Himself or to anyone else. Christ, the cross, they are sufficient. Absolutely sufficient. He brings that out in verse 17 where he explains why it is that he didn't baptize. He says, "For Christ did not send me to baptize but to preach the gospel." Now, that is a very significant statement in regard to salvation. Since Paul was not sent to baptize but to preach the gospel, baptism is obviously not part of the gospel. In other words, we are not saved by being baptized. Adding baptism to faith is not necessary for salvation.

Now, that doesn't mean to suggest that baptism is unimportant and I'm not saying that it is unnecessary, it is not. It is a command of Christ, we are to be baptized, but the Lord didn't give baptism to the church in order to effect salvation but to illustrate salvation. As we've already said, it is the means by which a person gives his or her public testimony of salvation. By going down into the water and coming out, we publicly identify ourselves with Christ, with His death, His burial, and His resurrection. We are declaring our full allegiance to Him. We are saying, "I have joined myself to Him. I died with Him, I was buried with Him, I've been raised to new life in Him, I'm a new creature in Jesus Christ. I'm identified with Him." That's baptism, but that is not what saves. That is simply a testimony of what has already happened. It's an illustration of what has happened in the believer's life. It's an illustration that we have been saved.

Later, in chapter 15, verses 3 and 4, Paul gives the facts of the gospel. He says these things are of first importance and that he received them from Christ. The

revelation he was given is that Christ died for our sins, according to the Scriptures, that He was buried, and that He was raised from the dead, according to the Scriptures. That's what we must believe. Now, if baptism was part of the gospel and necessary for salvation, then we would expect it to be of first importance. But there's no mention of baptism in this. That's because salvation is not by ceremonies or sacraments or human works of any kind; salvation is all of Christ and what He did on the cross. At the cross, salvation was obtained, settled, it was finished there at the cross. That's where God saved His people from their sins.

And in each generation, all through each generation, the Spirit of God applies that work that Christ accomplished at the cross to His people. He draws them to faith in Christ and they're justified and the work of sanctification begins and will continue in their lives until the moment of glorification. It's all the work of Christ. As J. Gresham Machen said – I quoted this last week – "What Christianity announces in the gospel is a gracious act of God." In other words, it's all of God. It's not the product of man's deeds. It's not what man does, it's not his acts in any way. It is all the act of God, the gracious act of God. And Paul didn't want anything to detract from that, from this gracious act of God, from Christ and His work of atonement, not even in the way he presented the gospel. He didn't want that to be a distraction.

That's what he says here. He was sent to preach the gospel, not in cleverness of speech, so that the cross of Christ would not be made void. In other words, Paul did nothing to draw attention to himself through his style or rhetoric. His emphasis was on the content of the gospel, not his technique of preaching. Now, there's nothing wrong with a good technique. There's nothing wrong with style. There's nothing wrong with the use of rhetoric if it doesn't get in the way, if it's useful and doesn't become the thing of importance in and of itself. So he avoided that. Otherwise, he said, he would make the gospel void, make it of no effect. Because people are attracted to a method or messenger and not the message. It's the message that's important. It's the content that's important. Again, style and all of that can be useful and helpful, but it's not the important thing. It's the message.

A few months ago, I read an article about a musician named Lev Aronson, who was the principal cellist of the Dallas Symphony. He grew up in Europe, became an accomplished cellist there, he survived the holocaust, came to America after the war, and he eventually moved to Dallas. He was called a musician's musician who – and I'm quoting – did not try to astound or electrify the public. The performer, in his view, was not the point; it was the music. And they used a German word to describe him. It means that he was inside the music. That's how Paul

preached. He wasn't a performer. He wasn't the point. Christ is. He preached as one inside the gospel. People heard it, not him. In all things, Christ is to be exalted. If people do that, if people put Christ first, if they exalt him, there won't be divisions.

But does that mean it's wrong under any circumstance to use a person's name to describe oneself? For example, is it wrong for a New Testament scholar to describe himself or to be described as Pauline in his theology? No. That's simply a way of identifying with the doctrines that Paul emphasized in the New Testament. And we use terms and names like that, not to elevate a man but as our reference point for doctrinal positions and differences. That's helpful. We can distinguish people's theological views in that way. What Paul corrects here is a party spirit that censors and ostracizes people and splits a church. Our concern is to be for unity. We are to recognize our oneness in Christ. Divisions are a danger, even a fatal danger to a church, and a denial of the truth. There's no division in Christ, so there's no division among God's people. Every believer has all of Christ, so we must guard against being divided against ourselves.

Jesus once told the scribes that a house divided against itself will not stand. He was defending Himself against their accusation that He had cast out demons by Beelzebub. How else were they going to explain it? They saw that it had happened, a miracle had occurred, how do you explain that? They could say this was the finger of God that did this, that this person is working by the power of God. That would deny their position. So they said, "Well, yeah, we can explain that. The devil did it. He did it through Satan." So the Lord points out how illogical that is and how impossible that is. That means Satan would be fighting against himself. That means Satan would be defeating himself. Well, you wonder if the devil wasn't listening in on that and got a lesson from it because he quickly began using his mallet and wedge against the church because the church has been divided or churches are. I think he went way back to the beginning. He's always had that as his technique, to divide and conquer.

A church divided won't stand for long. That's why Paul senses an urgency in mending the tear, in healing the divisions. We are brothers. That's how Paul addressed the Corinthian Christians. Believers in Jesus Christ have been called out of the world into the family of God. We are brothers and sisters in Christ. We need to value that relationship and guard ourselves against division and against the pride that causes it. Again, the best way to do that is to understand who Christ is and what He's done for us, who we are in Christ. That's the antidote, that's the remedy for

pride and the divisions it leads to.

That's the reason it is so important, in my opinion – I think I share this with all of the elders – it's the reason it's so important that we observe the Lord's supper weekly. That's just one example, one practical point, but that is very important because it reminds us every week of who we are and who He is, what He's done for us, what we've received from Him, and as we celebrate it together, we take the bread and the cup together, we remind ourselves that we are together in Christ. He's not divided. We all eat of the same loaf, we all drink of the same cup. We're united in Him. We need to always remember that and live in that light and build on that, to be witnesses in the community, to be a blessing to one another, to minister to one another. We can't minister to one another and build each other up in the faith and prepare each for the crises of the day and prepare each other for eternity to come if we're against one another.

So Paul begins in this way with this correction, one of many he'll make in this letter, and such an important one. We need to remember what Christ has done for us in order to maintain our unity. Well, what was that? What did He do for us? He died for us, He died for sinners so that all who believe in Him might be saved. He gained eternal life for us through His blood. If you've never believed in Christ, if you're here without Him, we invite you to come to Him, to believe in Him. Forgiveness and life everlasting are a free gift received through faith alone. We can't earn it, we can only receive it. So I invite you to do that. Look to Christ, believe in Him, receive Him, and be one of His children. May God help you to do that, help all of us to live together and serve together. Let's pray.

[Prayer] Father, we do thank you for your goodness and this lesson that Paul gives us and this encouragement and instruction and exhortation he gave to those Corinthians. It's so easy to read this book, Father, and sort of look down on these Corinthians, all their problems, all of their difficulties, their foolish divisions, and yet it's a mirror of us. It's what we are or, if we're not, what we can become – very easily. Keep us from that. Guard us from that. Put within the heart of each one of us a desire to know our Triune God better, to know Christ better, to understand what He – what God has done for us in the Son. Thank you for Him, thank you for all that we have in Christ. It's in His name we pray. Amen.