

I Corinthians 1 - 7 One Church, One Hero, One Gospel I Corinthians 1:10-17"

I Corinthians 1:10-17. I'll be looking at a little bit of chapter two and some verses later in chapter one, but I've decided to focus on just a few verses tonight, and to speak on the essential theme of the unity of the church. One church, one hero, one gospel is a summary of what Paul has to say in this passage. Certainly, something we all need. Listen to God's Word as I read it to you.

I appeal to you, brothers, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that all of you agree and that there be no divisions among you, but that you be united in the same mind and the same judgment. For it has been reported to me by Chloe's people that there is quarreling among you, my brothers. What I mean is that each one of you says, I follow Paul, or I follow Apollos, or I follow Cephas, or I follow Christ. Is Christ divided? Was Paul crucified for you, or were you baptized in the name of Paul? I thank God that I baptized. None of you accept Crispus and Gaius so that no one may say that you were baptized in my name. He offers a little parenthesis. I did baptize also the household of Stephanas.. Beyond that, I don't know whether I baptized anyone else. For Christ did not send me to baptize, but to preach the gospel, not with words of eloquent wisdom, lest the cross of Christ be emptied of its power. For the word of the cross is folly to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved, it is the power of God.

Let's pray for a moment.

I pray that you give us ears to hear. Lord, I thank you for the high level of unity this church has experienced over the years. And yet, Lord, we pray for more and we pray not only for unity, but for unity over the right things and in the right ways. And may we all learn whether there's a bit of disunity in our lives or not. May we all learn from your word this evening. We pray in Jesus' name, Amen.

One day I was talking to a pastor and I asked him how things were going. How's your ministry going? He said, the church is growing. We're doing well, but I have a few critics. What he meant as time went by was I have a number of critics and some of them are angry. Okay. What are they criticizing you for? Well, he said, I'm criticized by some for being a legalist. All I preach is la la la. That's what they say. And then there's another group that accuses me of antinomianism. All you preach is grace, grace, grace. Pause. That might mean I'm in the right place. It also might mean that his church has some people who are very worried about antinomianism. Antinomianism is the idea that the law of God no longer counts or applies to us today. We're free in Christ and we don't need laws. And there's a danger of lawlessness in our culture and even some churches. And you don't preach the law enough, says one group. But another group is very enamored of the gospel of grace, which we should all be enamored of the gospel of grace.

You know, it's in our foundational convictions here, and there's just too much grace. So I'm criticized. I thought, this is probably because some people in your church are listening to one set of authors or radio preachers, and another group is listening to another group, and you're reaping the harvest of clashes in Christendom. Now, there's nothing wrong with having debates and having a desire to follow a hero.

You know, it's harmless today in sports, we have heroes. Who's your favorite baseball player? Who's the best baseball player? Who's the best hitter? Is it Shohei Ohtani or is it Aaron Judge? We can have a lovely conversation and debate the statistics. Who's the greatest quarterback in the NFL? Is it Patrick Mahomes or Josh Allen, or do we want to just rule out anybody that didn't play for Alabama and say, it's got to be Jalen Hurt or Tua or maybe, maybe Mo Ro even, you know he's not a pro yet, but he will be someday. And we can have a debate about that. And we can decide who the greatest basketball player is. Maybe it's Nikola Jokic in all of his glorious slowness and inability to jump and all of his Majesty as a rebounder and shooter. Maybe it's Steph Curry or maybe it's you know, and it's fun. It's fun to have those debates about who your athletic hero is, but not so much in the church and the church division about, you know, maybe your favorite song. That's one thing. But to divide in a serious way, the coral, which is what Chloe's people said, Chloe's people reported that there is quarreling and strife among you, not fun debates, but quarreling. Quarreling about what? If you read through the whole book? It's lawsuits and sex and marriage and what to eat and how to eat. And the resurrection as it already passed, and Christian freedom and communion and spiritual gifts. And they're quarreling. We don't know who Chloe's people are. They're obviously important. Somehow they're heated. I gave a report that Paul is listening to, and he says, we have a problem here. The problem, not to put too much emphasis on this, is that they're each following their hero. Now, we don't really know exactly why they were following three different heroes.

If you read seven commentaries, you'll have six and a half theories, but one way or another, one way or another, there are some people who are following Paul. They say, I follow Paul and others say, I follow Apollos. I'll tell you who they are in a minute. And another group saying, I follow CFS, which is the Apostle Peter, and then another group apparently off to the side saying, you know, you guys may follow Paul in the past, but I follow Jesus. So just so you know, I'm the one who has it right, and they quarrel about these things. Now, it's good to have multiple exemplary leaders and praise God. The church in Corinth did have multiple leaders, and Paul was there, and Apollos was there, and evidently there were no record of an act evidently surface, or Peter was there as well.

But Paul says, the danger is you put your eyes on your heroes, you take your eyes off Jesus, which is never good in the life of the church. Now, what he's saying is that having a hero takes our eyes not only off of Christ, but also moves us away from the unity we should have as Christians. Did you notice how many times Paul says unity is important? Just look at the text again for a moment. He says, I appeal to your brothers by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ. So in the name of Jesus that all of you agree. That's number one. That's the first time he says it. All

of you agree, number two, that there be no divisions under you. That's the second time he says it, that you should be united in the same mind. That's the third. And then finally says the same judgment. So he really says it depends. I count either 3 or 4 times. You should be in agreement. And he uses the word here. He says, I appeal to your brothers. Now, I don't know how well a lot of you know your Bible is really well, and you know that late in Paul's epistles, he'll often wrap up his theology by saying, I appeal to you.

So in Romans 12:1, most famously, he finishes all the theology of the book. And then this is, I appeal to you, brothers, by the mercies of God, present your bodies as living sacrifices. Right? He does the same thing in Colossians, does the same thing in Ephesians. At the end of his theology he says, I appeal, I apply, meditate and apply this to your life. But here he jumps in right away. And the truth of the matter is, he has given us enough theology to jump in and address this problem that he's heard about because he loves the church. He wants them. He wants them to be more united. Now, what's the appeal? He says, well, you've been called up in chapter one, the earlier verses, you've been called to be saints. And you, you've called on the Lord Jesus Christ, and grace and peace came to you through our Lord Jesus Christ. You all receive the grace of God. So that's the basis for his appeal. You're one in God calling you, and you're calling on God and receiving grace and peace and salvation from the Lord. And that's enough for us to agree.

Now when Paul says, I want you to agree, literally what he says is, I want you to speak the same. Now, he can't mean say identical words, because Paul himself does not describe the gospel in identical words. He doesn't just repeat the same words in epistle after epistle or look at the four Gospels. They all present the story of Christ, but they do not present identical pictures of Christ. It's not four sets of the same reports. They all have a way of creating one picture. And so what he's saying is a fundamental unity of thought and heart, an action. That's what we should have. And these slogans divide people. I follow Paul means I don't follow other people, and I follow Apollos and I follow. This is probably a mindset among some people that you know, Paul started our church, but we need to get away from him a little bit. We need other leaders. And that's, of course, a spirit of division. Slogans do that. Now. The church in Corinth had slogans like I follow Paul, I follow a. But they also later on, Lord willing, we'll get there before the year is over. They also had slogans like all things are lawful for me. I just want to pause what they mean when they say all things are lawful for me is I'm not going to be bound by regulations from the law. And other people say, no, God's law is good. And as we saw this morning, the law of God gives us liberty. And so we're going to follow the law. Paul says, don't give me a slogan that says, I don't need to follow the law and don't. We shouldn't counter with another slogan, although we do have lots of foundations in the scriptures. You know, like your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path. Let me just pause and think about how a slogan can mislead us. Let's suppose a father and a daughter or a son, a father and a child have this little discussion, and the son says, or the daughter says, all things are lawful for me. And that's what running in her head. And the dad says, we're guided by God's law. And so this is something that actually happens in homes. A teenager says to his or her father, dad, I have a problem. I've been invited to two parties this

weekend, and dad says that doesn't sound like a problem. That sounds great. I mean, you've got friends. That's wonderful. And the child says, well, the problem is that they're both at the same time. And I was invited to the not as cool party first, and I was invited to the Cool Party second. Dad says, did you say you'd come to the not so cool party? Child says yes. Dad says there's no problem. You gave your word. Jesus word is clear. What? Your. Yes. Yes. You're. No, no. You said you'd come. You can come. You should come. And by the way, don't just come for five minutes and then leave. You said you would come to the party. It's simple. Now, if you have a slogan that says I'll not be bound by God's law. If that slogan is in your mind and your child, you're going to resist what your father says, and you're going to have strife with dad. You're gonna have strife within yourself, because you kind of know that you should keep your word, but you don't want to keep your word. Paul says that the Corinthians should speak the same. That is to say, speak the same, have no divisions, means we agree on the big issues. We agree on the fundamentals. We don't say, I follow Paul, I follow chiffres, I follow Apollos. Another word that he uses. He says, you know, you want, you agree, and I want you to have a union. The word for union there be united is a word that's used of mending nets. Like when Jesus called the apostles by the Lake of Galilee. They were mending their nets. They were uniting torn nets. It's also used in the Bible. Describe people who have a broken relationship and they need to mend their relationship. He's saying, I want you to be united. And here's a little hint in the word that he chooses, a rare word that he chooses, that things are broken between you and you've got to take some time to mend what is broken between you, so that your relationships have the form that they should have so that they are perfected, even he even says that I want you have.

I'm still in verse ten. So he says, first of all, I want them to be no division. I want you to agree. I want you to be united. That's sort of been talking about just now. I want you have the same mind and the same judgment. Now the same mind means the same thoughts about the big ideas. But the word judgment means, decisions about things that are debatable. Paul says Paul uses the word judgment in chapter seven when talking to people or thinking about whether they should get married or not, he says, this is my judgment, meaning it's my solid, considered opinion. Paul is saying, I want you even to have as much unit as you possibly can about debatable matters. Now that seems like a tall order, but if our minds are one, if our minds are one, even when we disagree, we have enough in common that we can have a good conversation about it.

Let me let me illustrate a little bit from our family. My family, my wife and I, to be precise. So I would say that we have unity, that we have the same mind, even though we disagree about certain things too, that just list some things we disagree about. My wife and I disagree about how strong coffee should be in the morning. I think it should be just right, and she thinks it should be too strong. But the debate really is how many scoops of coffee do you put in? How much cream do you put in? And we also disagree here to find my list here because they're all really safe. We disagree about sushi. I think sushi is pretty good. She thinks it's pretty bad. Always. We disagree about music. I like Jason Isbell and the Waylon Jennings, and she likes Motown. In case you don't know, they're pretty far apart. And we do agree on Conor Oberst.

Sure glad to agree about him, but we have a lot of disagreements about music, but we have enough agreement that we can handle our dispute about coffee. It's real simple. She makes it at night, makes it as strong as she wants. And I come in the morning and I pour water in my cup first. This solves the problem. I give it to her straight the way she made it and I just add water. So we disagree and we disagree. But we're one. Yes, we're young one because we agree that we should drink coffee together in the morning and love each other. Be kind to be sensitive and put each other first as much as we possibly can. And when we're differing on music in the middle of the day, we, you know, kind of take turns or we turn it down, we go into the room and we take care of our little disagreements. We don't quarrel about coffee, we don't quarrel about the music. I might say, hey, could we go Mozart today? Because, you know, I need to concentrate on things, and Mozart allows that. And she generally says, sure, we can do Mozart because we have a big unity about our life. That's what that's a picture. One mind. Even though Paul knows perfectly well that the people in the church differ on a variety of matters, we can be one.

Even while we disagree somewhat about some things. If we are one in the big issues, how do we approach life? Does God exist? Am I a sinner? Is there hope? Why is the world torn apart the way it is? How can we work toward a better life together? We agree on those things. Paul says. Unfortunately, verse 11 closes people as reported, there's quarreling. It's a strong word. The word means strife, antagonism, contention, bitter disputes, and we're all too familiar with it. I mentioned this morning that we have, you know, this danger of the world creeping in. The true believer is a genuine believer. Real religion is unstained by the world, and the world is a place. It's marked by tension. And people make a name for themselves. Mrs. or Miss Abcdefg. She goes on her program and riles people up against all the evil doers on the other side of the debate. And then Mr. Mellow P comes in and says those people over there, one group is owning the libs and another group is crushing the conservatives. And you make a name by being contentious.

Now, what's interesting is that Corinth is a lot like America today. Ancient Corinth is more like America today than probably any other city that got any Paul's letters. And Corinth was a city marked by strife, and their strife was over. The question of master teachers and rhetoricians, the great skill in the ancient world, the core of the curriculum in most equivalent of universities was rhetoric. Rhetoric is the arts of persuasion, learning enough about history and about grammar, and about government to persuade anybody to do or say anything to persuade people. It's all about the presentation. And people would actually get into shouting matches. When one person was speaking, one rhetorician was speaking. They'd shout out things like, well said and crown him. And then when the other rhetorician would stand up, they would try to shout them down. And then the devotees of the different rhetoricians in the same space at the same time would get into quarrels and fights and heap abuse on each other, and once in a while even come to public displays of rage. One person said, I think a public display of rage means hitting each other. That's my interpretation. That was in Corinth, and they're influenced by their society and their love of rhetoricians. And they say, you know, Paul was not a rhetorician. He wasn't. He says he wasn't. He doesn't try to move people by words of eloquent wisdom. He just says stuff.

And I love it. The boldness of the Apostle Paul. Fantastic. And others say, no, I love I love Apollos because he's gifted at rhetoric. He could stand and deliver, he can move people.

And so there is this difference of opinion. Now we have a little picture up here that's going to just come for a second, I hope. I believe we're going to get a picture of three faces. There we are. Those are three pictures. And the picture on the right is a common depiction of Paul, who was allegedly this is what the first records say. Bald hook nosed, bow legged, short and had a weak voice. None of those are traits of beloved rhetoricians. Now, the one on the left, if it's Paul, Cephas and Apollos, which one do you think he looks like? Yeah, he's handsome, right? He's got big eyes. And that's an idea of what may be Apollos. He's handsome. He's bold, is great posture. He stands up and everybody hears him. All the traits you want in the middle is a guess about what Surface or Peter might have looked like at the end of his life. So we'll pop that down and put the scriptures back up. The idea. There's a hint from other from church history that Paul just wasn't all that attractive a person, and some people perhaps disliked him for that reason. Of course, there's every reason to love Paul, right? I mean, he was the bold, fearless planter of the church. He's the one acts up. Chapter 18 says he's the one that went into the synagogue, the synagogue of Corinth, and said, if you're looking for the Christ, the Christ is Jesus. He said it several times, and the Jews in the synagogue began to revile him and become hateful toward him, as so often happened.

But Paul was fearless, and Crispus, the leader of the synagogue, believed in Paul and followed him and allied himself with the early church. And so, of course, we could be excited about the Apostle Paul. What about Apollos? Apollos was a native of Alexandria, possibly the most educated city in the ancient world. And he was. The Bible says in acts chapter 18, also an eloquent man, competent in the scriptures, he spoke boldly in the synagogue.

I'm quoting the book of Acts. And he had been instructed in the way of the Lord, and being fervent in spirit, and loved this passion. Everybody loved his passion. He spoke and taught accurately the things concerning Jesus now goes on to say, some of you remember this goes on to say that he didn't really know about the baptism of Jesus, only knew about the baptism of Paul and people at the Paul Messi persona Aquila teach him about Christian baptism, but they loved him because he was eloquent and he was learned and persuasive.

And these, of course, are good things later on. The Corinthians, in II Corinthians 10:10 say, you know Paul, he's weak. This is a quote. This is what they said. His letters are weighty and strong. Paul's quoting one of their letters to him later on. His letters are weighty and strong, but his bodily presence is weak and his speech is of no account. So we don't we don't respect him. It's so little interest in rhetoric. Well, he had no interest in rhetoric because he had greater interest. He says in chapter two, I think in chapter one, I didn't want to be wise in the ways of the world. I came proclaiming the testimony of God. What's the testimony of God? The testimony goddess is to something the Corinthians didn't even think you should talk about.

There was a word you didn't utter in polite society in Corinth and Rome. That word was crucified. That was considered so rude because it was so shameful that somebody die that way with nobody to protect them, to defend them, to die in such pain, the lowest of the low. We don't talk about that. And Paul talked about it because it was essential to the gospel. He says, in fact, I decided, you know, nothing among you accept Jesus Christ and Him crucified. You told me, don't talk about crucifixion. But he said, I need to talk about crucifixion, because the crucifixion of Jesus Christ on the cross was a substitutionary atonement for your sins, which you need to be right with God. And so I will talk about people didn't like it, so they said, I prefer other teachers. Paul says a little bit later, my speech and my message were not implausible words of wisdom, but in demonstration of the spirit of power, so that your faith might not rest in the wisdom of men, but in the power of God. He's. I'm not. Saint Paul had no strength. He had the strength of conviction. Even if his voice was weak. He certainly had persuasive powers. But he didn't draw on that. He just stood and he spoke what had to be said, whether people considered it wise or not, because that was the message God gave him. And he didn't flinch. Let me say it a different way. Paul could be eloquent. If you read the book of Romans, it is magnificently full of little hints and allusions in a thread, or a word that's dropped in chapter one, is picked up in chapter three and then echoed in chapter six, and it comes back in chapter 12.

It's a beautiful literary composition. But it's not as emphasis. And then in Ephesians he writes a sentence in those days, believe it or not, people thought a really long sentence was a sign of elegance and eloquence. He writes a sentence that's 257 words long and still comprehensible. Most paragraphs are less than 257 words. It just goes and goes. He goes so he could do it, but he says, that's not my. My focus is on preaching the gospel of Christ. Now let me apply this to you personally or in the future tense. This church has a history of pastors who are gifted preachers, but they weren't men who looked to be impressive in rhetoric. They said what they had to say. They said it with power, with conviction, praise God. But they didn't have rhetorical flourishes to draw attention to themselves. And I'm going to say that most likely your next pastor will not either. And I must say, the pastor after that most likely will not either. And I'm going to also say that you may not like the style of your next pastor, because styles vary.

It can't be helped. Don't focus too much on style. Don't focus on style. Focus on substance. Focus on substance. Love your next pastor, even if his style is different from what you're used to, different from what you think is best, different from what you like. Focus on the content of the words. And I have to say, I'm grateful that this church is not one that's gotten caught up in style.

There's nothing wrong with a strong voice or confidence, or good elocution or memorable phrasing. We're thankful for all those things, but those are never the essence. The essence is always to hear about the gospel of Christ and all its implications and receive it for that reason.

In other words, I'm saying to you, brothers and sisters, a year from now, please don't say I follow Paul, I follow Apollos, I follow Cephas. Don't use other words for that. Receive your next pastor

as the one God has sent you. So here's the choice in those days, Paul, Apollos, or Cephas, you could love Paul because he's the first one to say Jesus is the Christ. Jesus is the atonement. You could love Peter because he's the first of the apostles. He's the first one to say, Jesus, you are the Christ, the son of the living God. He is one of the inner three. Of course, we could love Peter. Of course we could say, I follow Peter, and of course we can imagine somebody saying a plague on all of you. Stop this business. Who would say maybe, maybe positively, but maybe in a smart, snarky kind of way? Well, you know, I follow Jesus.

Martin Luther found out after he'd been leading the Reformation for a few years, that people started to call themselves Lutherans. So at first they just called themselves reformers. And then some said, well, let's call it Protestants because we protest against Catholic theology and Catholic errors. And Luther found out that people called themselves Lutherans, and he was appalled. This is what he said. What is Luther? The teaching is not mine, nor was I crucified for anyone. How could I? A poor, stinking bag of maggots. I told John I was going to talk about maggot maggots in the service. He said okay, whatever. How could I? A poor stinking bag of maggots, come to the point where people call the children of Christ by my evil name.

Well said. We should say the same thing about Calvinists. I know, I know, we don't mean any harm by it. We're just trying to say where we stand. Maybe you could say I'm a disciple who follows what Paul says in Romans. And then there's other people who follow Wesley and various other groups. And there's the hero of the day today.

It's all possible. Paul asks a question in verse 13, Is Christ divided? Was Paul crucified? For you? Were. But were you baptized into the name of Paul? No, Christ is not divided. No, Paul was not crucified to atone for your sins. JB Packer says in one place Scripture sets forth the love, grace, mercy, pity, kindness, and compassion of God.

The offended creator in himself, providing the atonement that our sin made necessary. That's what we all agree on his mercy, grace, kindness. The one who is offended put away his own offense. Paul didn't do it. Apollos didn't do it. As Christ divided. The answer is no. Although the church divides now, Paul has a moment that, just tickles me.

Every time I read it, he says, look, I'm so glad that I give you much room to, to say things about me. And you're loyal to me, he says. Were you baptized in the name of Paul? He says, well, I thank God that he starts off with none of you, but it's almost like he pauses and says, well, none of you except Crispus and Gaius.

So that none of you may say that you were baptized in my name with these two exceptions. And then he pauses as well. Come, I'm adding this. Well, come to think of it, actually, I did baptize some other people, now that I ponder it, I did baptize the household of Stefanos, and then he thinks that maybe. I mean, this is the favorite verse for all people with memory problems.

***I didn't baptize any of you. Well, Crispus and Gaius, I didn't baptize anybody besides those two. Well, the whole stuff, the whole household of Stefan, I said. And beyond that, well, there

might be some more, I don't know, but the big idea is very clear. I'm not a baptizer. And you shouldn't create a false sense of loyalty to me. Paul says, because I baptize you.

Now, I have to tell you, I love baptisms. I love two kinds of baptisms. I love baptizing adults because they've come to faith in Christ as adults. They weren't part of the church and they want to be baptized. And I love baptizing children because children are beautiful and sweet. And what a blessing it is to offer our children to the Lord with great hope in his saving mercy. So I love baptisms. They're beautiful, but they're secondary. The Gospel is primary. One person said it kind of crassly. He said Paul catches fish. Other people put the fish into buckets. Paul's an evangelist. Baptize. Baptism is folding people into the Church of Christ. It's a little bit crass, but it makes the point.

I've had people walk up to me and they're 20 year olds occasionally and they'll say, you baptized me when I was six months old. And they say it because their parents said, you're going to visit this church, and this is the man who baptized you, who was a guest speaker at your church for four months. This this Dan Doriani, a guy was preaching in our church, and we want you to be baptized. And so you don't really know, but you're going to meet him today because we're going to be at his church. And it's sweet. It's a way of establishing a connection. And it's fine if that's all it is, if it's just a way of saying, hey, we got a tie here because people want to make connections with each other, but it's certainly not the basis of loyalty or forming parties between Paul and the others.

Now, it is interesting to me. I'm going to say something that that exists in tension, two ideas that exists in tension. The first idea is that the ground is level at the foot of the cross. I'm sure you've heard that before, by which we mean that everyone who comes to Christ comes in exactly the same way, creating God's image, therefore supremely value in his sight, but also a sinner, therefore in desperate shape. And the only thing we can offer to God is the sin that made his work of salvation necessary. As R.C. Sproul said. So we're all radically equal. And yet. And yet it is noteworthy that the three people that Paul mentions were all prominent in some way or other. And I'm going to just show you that for a minute.

Crispus, I mentioned earlier is described in acts 18 eight as the synagogue ruler. The synagogue ruler was ruler, leader, and always in the synagogues a person of status, most likely status and wealth. That's Crispus. Gaius is described in Romans 1623, and it says Paul writes to the Romans. And it says this from Corinth connected to Corinth, Gaius, who is host to me and to the whole church, the whole church of Corinth greets you. Now, if he could host the whole church, it must have been a pretty big house. He was in. So he's a host to me. I stay with him and the whole church goes.

When it all gathers. When we all gather, we gather in his house. Stephanos was also an early convert. And in I Corinthians 16 Paul says, you know that the household of the finest were the first converts in Achaia. That's the region. That's the Roman name for the region. And they have devoted themselves to the service of the saints, be subject to such as these. So a first convent,

but convert devoted and be subject to him. These are people that are important. And Paul is saying, actually, these are the people that I baptized, and maybe some others too. But he remembers them. We're all the same in Christ, but we're also different in certain ways in the external world. Luke chapter 12, verse 48 speaks to those who have talent and ability in this world and says this.

Jesus says this. This is actually the Christian Standard Bible. We don't usually use it, but I think it's a little better on this at this moment from everyone who has been given much, much will be required. And from the one who has been entrusted with much, even more will be expected. If God has given you much, God expects much of you. If God has handed you great gifts and leadership in this world, it doesn't make you better than anybody else, but it does require more of you. If you have wealth, God expects you. Be generous with it. If God has given you more than you need, he expects you to be generous with people who have less. So the work of God can go forward. And if you are in a position of authority, political or economic authority, you should use it to protect people. Just tell you about Luther again for a minute.

Luther was put on trial for teaching, as he did, and it was a giant convocation of the leaders of the Roman Empire of the Holy Roman Empire, kind of the equivalent of the Supreme Court. And the governors and the senators all come together. And the Emperor, who was kind of like the president but more powerful Emperor Charles the Fifth. And there was a hearing at a place called Baum's, and Luther was condemned, and he was given a limited period of time. I forget, honestly, I think 90 days to repent or the Emperor would come and seize him and execute him. He had 90 days to repent and Luther had a protector. His name was Frederick the Wise. He was what's called an elector. In those days. An elector was like a governor, but more powerful than that. And he wasn't totally convinced of the gospel yet. But he wanted to listen to Luther. We wanted to ponder things, and he didn't want Luther to be put to death, and he didn't want Luther to recant. And so he sent some of his soldiers dressed up as ruffians and robbers, and sent them to attack. The train of people that were carrying Luther back to Wittenberg, where he lived for that 90 days of meditation. And they attacked it and threw it over and smashed things up and hauled them off to a castle called Wartburg. And he said to them, don't tell me where he is, so that if the emperor asks me, do you know where Luther is? I can honestly say, I do not know. He then protected Luther for the next 26 years of Luther's life, a great personal risk so that the Reformation did not die by execution of its heroes. He risked everything to protect Luther and the Reformation.

By way of contrast, in the 14th century, Christians and Muslims have been living in some measure of peace in North Africa for 6 or 700 years and then, murderous Muslim lords started killing Christians for being Christians, and no one came to their defense. And up to 20 million Christians were executed in a span of several decades because nobody said, I'll stand up. If you have a thought in this world, use it for good. Protect God's people. If you have wealth in this world, use it to be generous, to care for other people in other places. It doesn't make you better. It doesn't make you more worthy in God's sight. We're all equal before God in the most

foundational ways, and we're all somewhat different. And if God has given you much more than you should use.

Now Paul concludes with verse 17, this is my big idea. This is the big point. This is what God has for us. Christ did not send me to baptize, but to preach the gospel, not with words of eloquent wisdom, lest the power, lest the cross of Christ be emptied of its power. What he's saying is very simple. If we focus on rhetoric, persuasion, we can lose the power of the cross. Aristotle, who was the first writer about rhetoric, said, rhetoric is the faculty of discovering the possible means of persuasion in reference to any subject whatsoever. In other words, if you're clever enough, you can persuade people to believe anything. And Paul says, I will not do that. I don't want a shallow emotional response to an entertainment. I'm not going to do it. I'm going to present the cross in all of its glory and all of its offensiveness to secular people. In Corinthian society, it was don't talk about the crucifixion today. It's don't tell me I'm a sinner. Don't tell me I'm under condemnation. You're being hostile toward me. No rhetoric, just the gospel. Let us be formed by that. Let it move us to focus as a church and families, as friends, on the most basic issues of life. So we are one mind. Work it out. The work of Christ establishes a foundation for all things upon which we should agree, and then act that way.

If there's a broken, if the fabric is torn and your relationships mended, put it back together. That's what Paul says. Be united means mend your relationships and think of yourselves that way. Take a break from the ways of the world which are so full of identifying yourself by who we disagree with. Identify yourself by who you agree with. You agree with Christ. You agree with each other on the fundamentals and live out that way and enjoy the beauty, the peace, the happiness, the joy and the fruit of a unified church. That's what Paul said, and I believe it's what God is saying to us today as well.

Let's pray.

Father, I ask that we would live by and under and with your word, a word that really does unify us, and it gives us the means, the tools to find unity together we can come to the same mind. We agree on so many things. And Lord, even if we disagree here and there, may we learn to disagree agreeably and cheerfully and well. Lord, above all, I pray that we would not be clever and try to persuade people of things and be rhetoricians and worldly and entertainers. Let us hold to the great truths of the faith that we're sinners. We're saved only by grace, by your work, your work alone on the cross and in your resurrection. And, Lord, if that's offensive, let us hear the offense. And if that's glorious, let us hear the glory and proclaim it and believe it.

Together we pray in Jesus' name.

Amen.