

Male: Today's Scripture reading will be from 1 Corinthians, chapter 1, verses 1 through 18.

[Reading in Spanish]

This is the Word of the Lord.

Brandon Barker: Amen! The reason we read the text in Spanish today and this morning when Isaac was leading he sang a few songs in Spanish, including the one leading into that, was to try to communicate our heart as a campus for the immediate community, the immediate context the Lord has placed us in on the heels of Transform. All right?

Open up to 1 Corinthians 1, page 952 if you have one of our Bibles. Last week, we looked at Paul. We looked at Paul going from Athens to Corinth. We asked why he would do that. Why would he leave Athens and go to Corinth? We said the reason is the Lord said, "There are many people in that city who are my people. There are many people whom I want you to go and to preach the gospel to. I want you to herald the gospel to.

They're going to hear, and they're going to believe, and they're going to respond. Then those who respond to the gospel are going to be called into the church, into this thing called the local body of Christ, the local church." Now this week we're going to shift. We're going to look at Paul's heart. I want to just throw my cards or Paul's cards up on the table for you guys about where we're going. Last week it was God sends so the gospel can save. Now this week, Paul is going to say out of 1 Corinthians 1 that God unites to display the gospel. Let me pray, and then we're going to get after it.

Father, I love you, and I bless you. I praise you for this room. I praise you for the men and women in here. I pray the Holy Spirit of God, the same Holy Spirit who inspired the text of 1 Corinthians, might do a majestic work in us tonight, maybe shaping us, molding us a little bit more into the image of your Son, the Son of the Father, Jesus Christ. It's in his holy name we pray, amen. Amen!

Last week, I introduced you guys to my son. I thought a picture for context might be a little bit helpful. We can do a lot better than that, all right? Take the picture down. We're going to start all over, ladies. Ladies, I expect a whole lot more out of you. Is the picture gone yet? Is it gone? Okay, picture back. That's better.

I'm very proud of you guys. I told you guys about my son and how I saw the light under the door. I walked in, and there was shaving cream...well, toothpaste...all over his face. Well, it happened again.

This week, I saw the light under the door. I walked in, except this time it wasn't toothpaste. It was my son running from his sister's bed to his bed with his Pull-Up around his ankles and number two just flying everywhere. I said, "Hey! Hey, Buddy! What are you doing?" He said, "I went potty!" I went, "Thank you for that. I was confused as to what happened in here in the last few moments. I didn't get that. I didn't understand that."

There was a degree to where we're excited about this, right? We're trying to start potty training our son. He is trying, all right? He is doing the best he can. He doesn't really know. He is giving it a shot. Here's the thing. When you are potty training a child, you have to be there with them all the time, every time. If you don't, he'll just make a mess of things. I'm not going to say, "Hey, you guys are potty training 2-year-olds." What I am going to say is this.

When you're trying to grow in Jesus, when you're trying to walk with Jesus, when you're trying to mature in Jesus, the local church, the body of Christ, has to be there all the time, every time. There is never a day where you outgrow needing the body of Christ. There's never a day when you're supposed to do this thing on your own. That day will never get here.

When you're potty training, there comes a day when you're kind of off on your own, right? There's a day when you're no longer potty training. I'm 35. My mom doesn't call me and walk me through, not that she has ever called me and walked me through it. There's a day when you're not. When it comes to the church, there is never that day. There is never this day where you're just off on your own. If there ever comes a day when you try to go out and walk out the Christian life, when you try to follow Jesus on your own apart from the local church, you will make a mess of things.

You are designed by God to follow Jesus intimately connected, intimately woven into the local church. If I could just do some parentheses right here and pause. This is why we have to pray for our missionaries. This is why we have to pray for our missionaries who are out on the field somewhere where there is no local church or our missionaries headed to Somalia right now where there is no local church. There are the five of them who have moved. That's what they have. We were designed by God to pray for them. We're designed by God to do this. Back to the sermon.

We're designed by God to do this intimately, intimately connected into and inside the local church, the bride of Christ, that our lives were meant to be lived out in deep relationship interwoven together. Now to

do that, for that to functionally happen, we have to kind of deconstruct some things about the church. The church is not an event. We have to stop seeing church as an event, as that thing we do on Sunday, right?

My family gets up. Either on Sunday morning or on Sunday night, we go to church. Church is the event we go to on Sunday. I got this quote from the Acts 29 Twitter feed. If you don't know what Acts 29 is, Acts 29 is the network of church-planting churches that our lead teaching pastor, Matt, is the president of. If Acts 29 is not a reliable source to get quotes from, then we're all in trouble. Here it is. "Church is not an event to be attended but an identity to be practiced."

Listen. Church is not an event to be attended; it's an identity to be practiced. Paul is going to come along, and he is going to say, "Amen!" It's a communal identity to be practiced, to be lived out in the context of community, in the context of the local church. It's a communal identity to be practiced. When it is a communal identity to be practiced, you have a chance at being a place of grace, where you live by grace, where you extend grace, where you receive grace. You have a chance to be a place where honesty and transparency and vulnerability reign.

This is what Paul's heart is for the church in Corinth. This is what Paul wanted in the church of Corinth because he knows in this, in this kind of local church where unity reigns, where transparency and honesty and vulnerability are present, you have a chance at being a living display of the glory of the gospel of Jesus Christ. That is a driving burden for Paul, but it wasn't happening at the church in Corinth. Let's get into the text.

We're going to pick it up in verse 1, and we're going to make our way to verse 17. There's going to be a lot in there. I can't preach all of it. It would take four to five hours to even try. Y'all would be furious. I'd eventually end up preaching to just seats. I'd be upset and hurt by that. Y'all would leave. It would be a terrible thing. There are going to be three verses that stand out, that just kind of jump out off of the page at us.

The first one is going to be verse 6. It's going to be these parentheses. Paul is going to kind of design these parentheses into the text. He is going to design it to just hold it up so you go, "Hey, listen. As you navigate your way through all that's around it, see this. Look at this right here." Then when we hit verse 10, there's going to be a shift. There's going to kind of be a shift in tone in Paul. Then we're going to hit verse 17. He is going to come back. He is going to say, "Now this is why this matters. This is why everything I've been saying is so important." Let's get into verse 1.

Verse 1: **"Paul, called by the will of God to be an apostle of Christ Jesus..."** Now I can't read the word *Paul* and not stop. I can't read the word *Paul* and not stop and say, "Hey, listen. No matter your

background, no matter where you came from, no matter what your pedigree, no matter what your family...your family can be as crazy as mine...you're still invited in. You're still welcome in this place, in this room. The grace of God can be for you."

Paul was a man who was guilty of what we'd call *hate crimes*. Well, we might not call them *hate crimes*, but he was a man who murdered Christians, people who loved Jesus, because they loved Jesus. He was a man who murdered men and women who God radically intervened. Now he wrote the majority of the New Testament. No matter what your background, no matter where you came from, no matter what your past, no matter what last night looked like, the word *Paul* says you're all invited in.

The grace of God is not removed from you. It's not so far reaching that it can't reach you. **"Paul, called by the will of God to be an apostle of Christ Jesus and our brother Sosthenes, to the church of God that is in Corinth..."** Now emotionally, we need to emotionally put ourselves in the place of Paul here. Now remember Paul had gone to Corinth. He had preached the gospel. Then there was this movement where men and women heard and responded. They believed. He spent a year and a half teaching the Word of God among them and planting this church.

He did it in the city of Corinth. I want you guys to feel the heartbreak of Paul as he writes this knowing that Corinth was this city... It was this economic hub city of the day. Corinth was this city where there were trade routes running north, south, east and west. He plants it. I want you to feel what Paul would have felt as he left a year and a half later, saying, "Listen. There's such an opportunity for the gospel to spread from here. Just by the virtue and nature of who you are and where you are, church in Corinth, the gospel could spread to the ends of the..."

Just through you! You don't have to be varsity. You just need to get along, love Jesus, and the gospel will naturally spread." But then he left. Listen to what happens. After Paul left, the church became divided. The church was divided, each following a different teacher, each following a different distinct personality. In their division over teachers, they minimized Christ to the level of a teacher. We're going to see that in a minute. The rich were keeping to themselves. There was very little church discipline.

I want to pause right there. I want to say something about church discipline. Church, church discipline is this thing that when you are a member of the church, when you're a part of the local church and you are walking in continual grievous sin where the church... There are processes in the Scripture. We kind of call you out of that sin. We follow what we call a discipline process. It is never meant to be malicious. It's always meant to say, "Come home! Come home! Listen, you're running outside the boundaries of grace. Come home!"

It is an arrogant and cowardice pastor or man or church that would not practice church discipline when it's meant to be for your good. It's a church that would say, like this church in Corinth, "Like me! Like me! I don't want you to be mad at me. So if you'll like me, I won't do this." That is an arrogant man who would say that when the grace of God, when the Scripture would say, "Do this. Call them back home. Call them home."

There was very little church discipline going on. They were loose on morality and doctrine. They were allowing sin that pagans wouldn't. They were unwilling to submit to authority. Paul's apostleship was being questioned. They were taking one another to court. They were unconcerned about the conscience of fellow believers. They were pursuing dramatic gifts of the Spirit over the Spirit of love. As much of a train wreck as this church was... And it was. I mean, I can't think of another church that was a kind of train wreck that in three years, this would be true of them.

If there was ever a time for Paul to break from the normal introduction and blow them up from the word *go*, this is the church. Listen to how Paul addresses them. Let's keep reading. **"...to those sanctified in Christ Jesus, called to be saints together with all those who in every place call upon the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, both their Lord and ours: grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ."**

Paul right here reminds us of a couple of things. He reminds us that first, the church is made up of people who are converted to Jesus and that the church is the place where you grow in Jesus together. As much of a train wreck as this church was, look at how Paul addresses them. He calls them sanctified, holy, set apart by God for God. That as much of a wreck as this church has been, he still opens the letter by saying, "Hey, listen. Remember you are the sanctified saints, the holy ones of God."

I can't help but imagine, I can't help believe in a room of this size, balcony to the ground, there are some men and women in this room right now who are saying, "Listen, man, last night... I cannot believe about last night. If I told you right now what happened, you wouldn't believe me (or last week or last month or last year). I have this sin just creeping up on me, and I just can't fight it, Brandon. I can't fight it anymore!" Paul would say, "Hey, hey, hey, saint. Hey, saint. You address that with the grace of God. Remember you are a holy one of God set apart by God for God.

You've been set apart by God for God, and the mercy of God is here for you. Run home to the mercy and grace of God. Put walls up in your life, but run them to mercy first. Come to Jesus first." Paul was a man gripped by grace. Verse 4: **"I give thanks to my God always for you because of the grace of God that was given you in Christ Jesus, that in every way you were enriched in him in all speech and all knowledge..."**

Listen. Now here is the time we've shifted from the intro, starting to get into the meat of the letter. If I'm writing this letter, if I'm Paul and we're rolling back time 2,000 years ago... Praise God I'm not, but if I'm writing this letter, at this point...at *least* at this point if not in the intro...I'm blowing them up. I'm dropping the hammer. I'm coming in and saying, "Listen, I see no evidence of the grace of God in your life. I see no evidence. You can't tell me about Jesus, because I see no evidence of Jesus in your life whatsoever."

But Paul was a man gripped by grace to a degree that I am not yet. Paul knows this. He knows what he was forgiven of. He knows grace. He knows sanctification is a slow process. He knows he was a man who murdered fellow believers. God intervened and redeemed him and called him home, called him to Jesus. He knows what he was redeemed from. He knows how long it took for the grace of God to begin a real deep work in his life.

This slow process of sanctification has absolutely been true in my life. I have always wrestled with an unholy ambition in my life. I wrestled with that before. I brought that into Christianity. I brought that into the church in pastoring. If y'all were my John Henderson, if you will, if I could just confess this that in 2009, when we started the campus down here, I saw a chance to just kind of prove myself, to just show, "I belong."

I just saw that. I knew never to say that, but in my heart that's what was going on. In my immaturity and my arrogance, I did a lot of foolish and stupid things. There were two groups of men primarily who were very much Paul for me, who very much extended the grace of God to me, who modeled this grace to me. The first is you. The first is my local church family. The first is you.

In these five years, the kind of grace you have shown me and the way I get to watch you show it to the rest of the staff is overwhelming. It is overwhelming the grace you show us. This church and you have always been a warm blanket to my family. I cannot thank you and I cannot bless you enough for that. I pray it continues for the staff here as we go on and on and on in the months and years and decades to come.

The second group is our staff, primarily Steve Hardin. They have been unbelievably gracious to me, to us, over the years. In my foolishness, they have been gracious to us. I'll confess this for the staff. We're not perfect, certainly not perfect, but there is a real love among the staff. There is a growing love among the staff at your campus and at your church. I praise God for that. I bless God for that. Grace doesn't ignore the problem. Listen, you need to hear this. Grace doesn't ignore the problem.

Grace doesn't say, "Hey, I see this in your life. I see this going on over here, but I'm not going to say anything." That's not grace. That's cowardice. In Romans 1, I call that more wrath. That's not grace. Listen.

The day Steve Hardin sat me down and said, "You're going to counseling, and I'm not asking" was a life-changing day. It was a life-changing day in my life. I got to go and sit there and uproot insecurities I didn't know existed in me because I had a man willing to sit down and say, "You're doing this. I'll pay for it if I have to, but you're doing this."

I have to believe in this room right now there are some of you who need someone to come to you and say, "You're going to counseling. I'm not asking." There are some of you in this room right now who you know there's somebody in your life who you need to go and tell, "You're going to counseling, and I'm not asking." I want to plead with you: don't take the cowardly way out. Take the loving way in.

Maybe it's not counseling for you. Maybe it's, man, someone has never told you about the value of discipleship and finding someone to walk with you, disciple you, train you, equip you, and mentor you in this faith. Maybe you need to be discipling someone. You need someone to come to you and say, "Hey, it's not okay that you don't have a group of men or women who you're investing your life in." Maybe you need someone to tell *that* to you.

Grace doesn't ignore problems; grace addresses problems, loving our way into them. Paul doesn't ignore the problem in Corinth either. He just begins with grace. He begins with grace because he knows God is after a transformed heart. He knows behavioral modification is an illusionary solution. It's an illusionary solution. If we are always controlling, modifying our behavior for the people around us, what we're doing is we're creating a false view of me for me, deceiving myself into believing I'm something other than I am and that I always take that false...

I hold it up to God, and I say, "Hey, God, sanctify that," but I'm never holding up an honest view of me to God, saying, "Sanctify me." Behavioral modification is an illusionary solution, and God is not after that. He is after a transformed, redeemed, renewed heart. Paul knows this. Now we hit verse 6. In verse 6, we have these parentheses where Paul is going to hold it up, and he is going to say, "As you read all this, remember this. See this. Hear this."

Verse 6: **"...even as the testimony about Christ was confirmed among you..."** The testimony here is Paul's testimony. Paul is saying, "Listen. I came, and I preached. I preached the gospel. I heralded the message among you. Then the testimony of my mouth was confirmed as true by you." This is how this works. The preacher and the hearer go hand in hand. That's what we do. We come in here. We open up the Word. We preach from the Word.

Then the power, the authority, the truth of the Word in Jesus Christ is testified to in your life. There is no better testimony to the truth and grace of the Word that's preached in the gathering than your love for one

another and your love for the community. I cannot think of a better display of this than Transform yesterday.

My soul was overwhelmingly encouraged yesterday as I walked around and saw what you guys were doing and how you were taking the grace of God and extending it to Cary Middle School and Thomas Jefferson High School. There were over a thousand men and women who checked in and registered. Who knows how many actually showed up who were here serving? Some painting, some translating, some cleaning, some, like me, just in the way. They were here, and you were serving. Praise God for that!

The stories over and over and over came rolling in last night as we emailed together about teachers who were saying, "Hey, why do y'all do this? Why did you do this?" and getting to say, "Hey, listen. This is because we love Jesus. Because the grace of God has so impacted my life, I want to extend that grace to you guys, no strings attached. We're here to serve. We're here to love you guys." That is the testimony of our proclamation being lived out as true in the world.

There is no better testimony I can think of than Transform yesterday. Love it! As you dive into the community of the church... Now if you're trying to move in deeper in the church, you are not going to find us to be a perfect people. You're not going to find any church to be a perfect people. You're going to find people who are wrestling through the same sinful life you are, the same fallen world you are. You will find this to be a people who extend grace to one another and to you.

The place we live this out is called Home Groups. Home Groups are, at The Village, the context of community. It's where we live this out. It's where the testimony of our gospel is played out, is lived out. So these parentheses are so important to Paul because it's his heart for the church. It's his heart for Corinth, that this church in this city would be a living testimony, a living display of the gospel of Jesus Christ. That's his heart for them.

It's why these parentheses are so important, that he is saying all of this because he is saying, "Listen. I don't want your division to remove from this. I want you to be a living testimony of the truth and grace of the gospel of Jesus Christ." It's why God unites the church around Jesus to display Jesus. This is what Paul's heart is for the church in Corinth, and it's our heart and my heart for you.

Verse 7: **"...so that you are not lacking in any gift..."** Paul is starting to address the Corinthian problem, the part of the problem. One of the problems was they were divided over the gifts. Now this division over gifts is just a symptom of the problem. There's a deeper root issue, and Paul is going to start getting to it. **"...so that you are not lacking in any gift as you wait..."** The word *wait* is an eager longing, eager expectation for a future event.

As you wait, as you're eagerly awaiting, as you're eagerly longing. **"...for the revealing of our Lord Jesus Christ..."** What I think Paul is doing here is a bit of reverse psychology. I think Paul is a bit like the girl who would say to her boyfriend, "Hey, I love how you take me on romantic dates." The boy would say, "I don't remember taking you on any romantic dates." She would say, "I know! That's the point. When are you going to start taking me on romantic dates?" All the ladies said, "Amen!"

What Paul is doing here is he is saying, "Listen, the root issue is there is no longing for Jesus to return." He is saying, "I love your longing for Jesus to return, but we both know there's really no longing for Jesus to return. We know you're not longing for him. If you are not longing for the return of Jesus, it means functionally you want the benefits of Jesus without Jesus." Let that be "Amen!" and "Ouch!" to all of us. If you are not longing, if there is no longing inside of your soul for the return of Jesus, to be in the presence of Jesus, you are functionally saying, "I want the benefits of Jesus without Jesus."

This is not just a Corinthian problem; this is an *us* problem. It's a *me* problem. "I want that husband. I want a wife. I'm here. I'm in. If I can't find it, I'm out." "I want a job. I want this job, so I'm praying for the blessing for this job. I'm not praying, 'I want your will. I want you.' I want this job. I'm praying because I want this job." "I want my kids to grow up in a safe home, in a good church. I want good moral kids. I'm not really all that interested in Jesus myself. I think he is cool. I'm all right with it, but I want good kids." This is, "I want the benefits of Jesus without Jesus. I want the things that come along with Jesus without Jesus."

If this seeps into the church, it will always lead to division in the body. Always, because you're not living for a greater day to come. You're living to maximize today. Even this has something underneath it, so let's keep reading. Verse 7: **"...of our Lord Jesus Christ, who will sustain you to the end, guiltless in the day of our Lord Jesus Christ."** Underneath this is a lack of trust. Underneath wanting the benefits of Jesus without Jesus is a lack of trust that either Jesus can and will sustain you to the end or he is enough when you get there.

It's a lack of trust either that he will sustain you to the end or that he is enough to satisfy your soul when you get there. That's what sits underneath one of the benefits of Jesus without Jesus. If you are not trusting, not hoping in Jesus for tomorrow, you're going to chase something today. This keeping up with the Joneses? This is, "I want the comforts of tomorrow today." Sex outside of marriage? This is, "I want the pleasures of tomorrow today."

Last week we collectively, united agreed that I have a great fashion sense. I can prove it: same clothes two weeks in a row. We talked about the kind of money we spend on clothing and how insane that is. What I'm not going to say is we should all be here in skivvies or if you spend \$2 on a shirt more than that, you're

sinning. What I am going to say is this. If you spend a crazy amount of money on your clothing, you are longing for the full acceptance that's only going to come when Jesus returns today.

There might be more to it than that, but it is at least that. You are longing to be accepted by people. You're longing for that full acceptance that's only going to come when Jesus returns today. Here's what I'm saying. Listen. I'm not trying to crack on anybody's clothing. What I am saying is you have an idol in your life. Address it. An idol is, "I value *this* more than Jesus." Anything that falls in that category is an idol. If you have an idol... It could be comfort. It could be pleasure. It could be acceptance.

If you have any idol in your life, address it. Address it! Tullian Tchividjian said, "Jesus plus nothing equals everything." He was right. Jesus plus life... "I want Jesus plus *this*" is a misunderstanding of the benefits of Jesus, that the benefit of Jesus is...Jesus. Now there are gracious things that come along with him, but he is the primary benefit that God says, "I give you myself. I give you myself!" Let's keep reading.

Verse 9: **"God is faithful..."** This is kind of a bridge statement from what he had said to what he is going to say starting in verse 10. **"God is faithful by whom you were called into the fellowship of his Son, Jesus Christ our Lord."** So God has called you collectively into the fellowship of the Son. Now because of this, verse 10. **"I appeal to you, brothers..."** Listen. Feel the emotion of Paul here. "I appeal to you. I'm pleading with you! I'm appealing 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." What Paul is after is people so gripped by grace that unity reigns. Our unity was purchased by the death of a sinless Savior. Unity applied, unity achieved, requires the death of ourselves. The problem is we all have a depraved and wicked and innately selfish heart.

Yesterday, I am driving in my minivan right over there. Yes, I do have a minivan. My minivan is awesome. If I had known how cool minivans were, I would have gotten one when I was 22 and single. I would have been rolling through college, pumping country music in my minivan. I love my minivan. You keep your minivan jokes to yourself, all right?

I turned around to my little daughter, and I said, "Hey, sweetheart. Daddy loves Sister, and Daddy loves Bubba, and Daddy loves Mommy." She said, "Yeah! And Sister loves Bubba, and Sister loves Mommy, and Sister loves Daddy, and Sister loves *me!*" My little 3-year-old daughter has an adorably wicked little heart. An adorably wicked little heart! You're no different, and I'm no different. We are born with an innately, instinctively wicked heart.

In order to reconcile this, the Father sent his Son to do the most selfless act in human history: to live a sinless life and to die for the sins of others. The selfish part we are born with had to be remedied by a selfless act in the Son, a sinless Son dying for the sins of others. For a community to flourish inside the church, that has to grip us. We have to be gripped by grace. We have to be gripped by the reality that, "I'm selfish, and I'm in need of Jesus. Jesus intervened in my life, and I want to extend Jesus to others."

I've been a pastor here for five and a half years. In the five and a half years, I've heard often about Home Groups, "I went. I checked it out. It just really wasn't what I was looking for." Typically, what that means is, "I didn't get my needs met, so I'm out." When you have been gripped by the grace of God, Home Groups are not about what you get but about what you can give and about how you can extend the grace of Jesus to others.

When you've been gripped by grace, you're willing to give community a chance to flourish. You'd be willing to give it time to flourish. More importantly, when you've been gripped by the grace of God in Jesus Christ, you're not looking to other people to make up any lack you feel in Jesus. You're not looking to people to make up what you feel is the lack in Jesus.

When you've been gripped by this kind of grace where you're going, "Jesus, you're enough. You're enough! I want to experience you through the church, but you are my hope. You are enough," Home Groups become about extending that grace to others and displaying and sharing in the gospel of Jesus Christ together. Here's the beautiful thing. If we're all bought in, church... I'm talking to the church family here.

If we all bought in, we would all receive because we'd all be extending the grace of God to one another, except instead of trying to come to one and trying to get something that we weren't meant to give in the first place... We wouldn't be putting weight on other people they're not meant to carry. We're putting that weight on Jesus, letting him carry it, and extending mercy and grace to one another. If that becomes a deep functional reality inside our church, we have a chance to be undivided, united in heart, united in the same mind, the same judgment, the same purpose.

Verse 11: **"For it has been reported to me by Chloe's people..."** I just love that Chloe had people. All right, I don't know who she was, but she had people! **"...that there is quarreling among you, my brothers."** Paul always comes back, "My brothers. You're crazy, jacked-up people, but you're my brothers, and I love you."

Verse 12: **"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.'"** When you exalt men, you minimize Christ. You exalt men; you divide the church. A divided church begs the question of verse 13. **"Is Christ divided?"** Listen. Imagine. Try to put

yourself in the place of Paul. Imagine having to write this letter or someone who is receiving it. Imagine if someone came in here and looked at us and watched us interact with one another and said to us, "Hey, I have a question. Is Christ divided? Because you sure are."

I praise God. I bless God, and I can't say this enough to you that I don't think that's true of us right now. I think by the grace and by the mercy of God, someone coming in looking at our local church family would not say to us, "Is Christ divided?" But I want these words of Paul to be an everlasting reminder to you of the value of unity, the value of unity inside the local church. I praise God that he wouldn't say that, but can you imagine getting these words written to you or having to write them?

"Is Christ divided? Was Paul crucified for you? Or were you baptized in the name of Paul?" The divided church reflects a divided Christ. I said a divided church reflects a divided Christ. A divided church makes the gospel look untrue. Listen to me. A divided church makes the gospel look untrue. By our testimony, by our confession out of our mouths, we say Jesus Christ can reconcile and redeem all things. Then if we live holy, unreconciled lives among one another, we make the gospel look untrue by the testimony of our lives.

Let that be an everlasting reminder about the value of the unity inside the local church. Let's keep reading. Verse 14. Paul says, **"I thank God that I baptized none of you except Crispus and Gaius, so that no one may say that you were baptized in my name. (I did baptize also the household of Stephanas. Beyond that, I do not know whether I baptized anyone else.)"** Paul wasn't opposed to baptism. He is not anti-baptism. What he is saying is, "I don't want people twisting baptism. I don't want people saying, 'Because Paul baptized me, I follow Paul.'"

He doesn't want that. That's not what he is after. Paul has a singular heart to see Christ exalted, to see Jesus lifted high, and to see the church local and global united around the name and the glory and the renown of Jesus Christ. So Paul is after, and it's because of this that he can say in verse 17, **"For Christ did not send me to baptize but to preach the gospel, and not with words of eloquent wisdom, lest the cross of Christ be emptied of its power."**

Why would Paul care about eloquent wisdom? Because Paul, caring about eloquent wisdom would say from his heart, "Eloquent wisdom says follow me; the cross says follow Jesus." He doesn't want that. He doesn't want our division...people following Paul and some following Christ...to bring about division inside the church, to minimize our display of the gospel, and to minimize the power that we display in the cross. Listen. You cannot remove and I can't remove the power of the cross to save anybody. None of us can.

What we can remove is the power of our display of the cross. Herein lies the heart of the problem for Paul. He is looking at this church in Corinth, and he is saying, "Man, y'all are not displaying the power of the cross. My heart is so much for you to be a majestic and glorious display of the grace of God that we have in Jesus Christ." In this heart of Paul for the church in Corinth, you have my heart for you, our hearts for you, that you would be a majestic and a glorious display of the grace of God in Jesus Christ.

That you would be a majestic testimony, a glorious testimony to the truth and grace of Jesus and the power of the gospel, the power to save, the power to sanctify, the power to sustain, the power to bring all men and women under one banner, the banner of the blood of Jesus Christ, knowing that God so unites the church together so that we would be a living testimony, a living display of the glory of God and the gospel of Jesus Christ for the glory of his name and the joy of all people. Let me pray.

Father, I love you, and I bless you. I praise you for this family. I praise you for this local church. I pray you would be on display. I pray in our lives and in our testimony, in our church, in our gatherings, in our Home Groups, and in our neighborhood, you would be on display. I pray for the men and women who have walked in today and they just feel the weight of sin in their life.

They feel the weight of what last night or last week or last month or last year was like. They just feel like, "I'll never get out from under this." I pray they would hear the words of Paul saying, "Oh saint, come home. Oh saint, come home. Run to grace. Run to mercy. There's a safe place at the cross for you. Run home." It's in Christ's name I pray, amen. Amen.