

UNITED

1 Corinthians 1-2:5

MPS: God's people are UNITED in the Gospel of Jesus Christ for Kingdom Impact in the world.

OBJ: Every person can understand how the Church is UNITED by four factors.

INTRO I begin a new series today entitled UNITED: Together in the Gospel, a study of 1 Corinthians. Corinthians is an interesting letter written to an even more interesting congregation of people. The church in Corinth was full of problems, and big problems. Paul responds to the troubles in the Corinthian church and calls for unity. Corinthians has been called the New Testament's Deuteronomy. It begins with a very clear message of the gospel. But, by chapter 7 it moves into a topical treatise that is as varied as life itself. In the midst of such a diversity of issues and topics, Paul labors for one, united people in the gospel of Jesus Christ.

Unity fuels God's people for kingdom mission in the world. UNITED in the gospel is not simply about getting along with one another in the church, but the church getting on, moving forward with God's mission in the world. There are many challenges that the church faces in the world that threaten to thwart the mission. Initially, First Corinthians seems like it's about everything, addressing a large variety of topics with no real thread of commonality. But it's really only about one thing, how God's people are UNITED in the gospel. What we **know** and **claim** determines **how we live** to strengthen **what we say** to the world.

TRANS So, What does it mean and look like for a church to be UNITED?

MPS: God's people are UNITED in the Gospel of Jesus Christ for Kingdom Impact in the world.

TRANS Four factors show how the Church is UNITED in Jesus.

#1. Purpose of Salvation: We are saved in Jesus to serve God's Kingdom mission in the world. .1-9

Paul begins his letter to the church at Corinth with a typical introduction. He introduces himself as the writer, identifies the intended audience as the Corinth congregation, and offers a salutation about the hearers as a thanksgiving. These opening words are important because they provide helpful insight about the church, both in Corinth and for us today.

The first truth we see addresses the identity of Christians. Paul writes,

²To the church of God that is in Corinth, 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: ³ Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

Paul addresses the Corinthian church by proclaiming a truth with two phrases; *sanctified in Christ Jesus, called to be saints together*. The first phrase "*sanctified in Christ Jesus*". "*Sanctified*" is the Greek word *hagios* which means "holy". The New Testament uses this title to identify believers. But more than a title, "holy" states what is true about Christians. When God saves a person by faith in Jesus Christ, he makes them holy, not by their personal righteousness, but by placing Jesus' righteousness on them. *This is the miracle of salvation; the unrighteous made righteous by the Righteous One becoming unrighteousness for us.*

The second phrase "*called to be saints together*" completes the truth. There is no option to choose between the two phrases. Both are true. Both must be included for the complete truth. All who are "*sanctified in Christ Jesus*" are "*called to be saints together*". *Every recipient of God's salvation serves God's commissioning call.*

TRANS We need to understand how we live in this call.

Christians live out God's call "*together*". The title "*saints*" is used sixty-one (61) times in the New Testament for Christians. Every use is plural, with only one exception where the singular form addresses each individual. (Phil 4:21)

Christianity is distinctively personal, but it's never only individual. Being in covenant as an active participant with a local church is a vital, Biblical expression of Christianity. **When God saves you in Jesus Christ, he makes you part of His people to serve His Kingdom mission in the world.**

TRANS Paul then gives thanks for the Corinthian church.

⁴I give thanks to my God always for you because of the grace of God that was given you in Christ Jesus,

God motivates Paul's thanksgiving in every way, because of grace that was given in Christ Jesus (.4), because they were enriched in speech and knowledge (.5), because a testimony about Christ was confirmed (.6), and because they are not lacking in any gift (.7). None of these originated in the Corinthian people. The Corinthians were neither great people nor a great church model. But God is great and He is faithful. **God's work in Jesus Christ motivates thanksgiving that returns as glory unto His Name.**

Background on Corinth

Corinth was a Roman colony, a very cosmopolitan place and an important city. It was intellectually alert and materially prosperous, but morally corrupt. There was a pronounced tendency for its inhabitants to indulge their desires of whatever sort. One historian records (von Dobschutz):

"The ideal of the Corinthian was the reckless development of the individual. The merchant who made his gain by all and every means, the man of pleasure surrendering himself to every lust, the athlete steeled to every bodily exercise and proud in his physical strength, are the true Corinthian types: in a word the man who recognized no superior and no law but his own desires. (Cited in Parry, p. x.)¹

Corinth was a city that celebrated her immorality. The term "Corinthianize" was popular Greek for "go to the devil".² In other words, considering the phrase "to hell in a handbasket" often used to describe culture, Corinth was the handbasket so many were in riding toward. Corinth gained such a reputation for sexual vices that Aristophanes coined the phrase "*korinthiazō*", which interprets 'to act like a Corinthian' and means 'to commit fornication'.³ Corinth was thoroughly immoral.

Corinth was important for one main reason: It was a strategic city from which the gospel could radiate out to the surrounding districts. Anything preached in Corinth would be sure of a wide dissemination."⁴ The problems and immorality of the culture are never too much for the gospel to be effective and the people to be used by God. **The first factor that unites the church is the purpose of our salvation: We are saved in Jesus and sent to serve God's Kingdom mission in the world.**

TRANS The second factor for how the Church is united is...

#2. Power of the Gospel: We are united in Gospel-centered perspective and conviction. .10-17

Paul appeals to the Corinthians for agreement. (.10) Many had come to faith to form the Corinth Church. But more than the influence of 'the church in the world', the 'world was in the church' at Corinth. "The biggest issue was that people were not getting along. The conflicting values of diverse groups in the broader society had been carried over into the church as divisive issues. Paul summoned them to think instead as servants."⁵

Paul calls them to be "united in the same mind and the same judgment." The gospel unites Christians not because it makes us all alike, but because it makes us all like our one Lord by one Spirit. The gospel supercedes all worldly statuses and labels to make all a servants under one Lord, Jesus Christ.

¹ Leon Morris, *1 Corinthians: An Introduction and Commentary*, vol. 7, Tyndale New Testament Commentaries (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1985), 19–22.

² Leon Morris, *1 Corinthians: An Introduction and Commentary*, 21.

³ Gordon D. Fee, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, ed. Ned B. Stonehouse et al., Revised Edition., The New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI; Cambridge, U.K.: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2014), 3.

⁴ Leon Morris, *1 Corinthians: An Introduction and Commentary*, 22.f

⁵ Craig S. Keener, *The IVP Bible Background Commentary: New Testament* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1993), 1 Co.

The gospel unites in two primary areas, discernment and conviction. “*Mind*” refers to one’s perspective or point of view. The gospel transforms our minds so that we seek to discern God’s perspective, His good, pleasing and perfect will. “*Judgment*” refers to thinking that leads to a decision, or conviction. Paul later tells the Corinthians that we view everything differently because of Jesus. (2 Cor 5:16). **The gospel transforms the mind to discern God’s will and hold convictions to walk in God’s way.**

Paul confronts real divisions. Wealthy people didn’t want to associate with and wouldn’t consider serving those who are poor. Some claim to be “Christian” but ignore blatant sin because it makes them uncomfortable to deal with it. The ‘hyper-spiritual’ use their gifts to justify looking down on others. These are divisions based on worldly values that have not been spiritually-discerned and convictions that are counter to gospel unity. **Christians reject divisions that we might live and walk in the wisdom and power of God United together as the body of Christ.**

UNITED is the defining testimony of the church. The key to united lies in Paul’s question; “*Is Christ divided?*” Christ is not divided. When worldly values trump gospel values, the world rules the church and the church falsely claims our Lord Jesus is divided. Divisions reveal where someone or something else is ruling in the church. When the church tolerates divisions, we bear a false witness of our Lord Jesus Christ. The power of the gospel unites the church by destroying worldly values and nurturing Biblical values that guide spiritual discernment and obedience for each person. **The power of the gospel unites the church in gospel-centered perspective and conviction, to think and act in accordance with God’s will and way for God’s Kingdom purpose.**

APPL **What does “Gospel-centered” mean?** This second factor is a faithful definition and understanding of “Gospel-centered.”

TRANS The third factor for how the Church is united is...

3. Testimony of the Cross: Christ crucified demonstrates God’s power to save. .18-31

Paul begins the next section,

¹⁸For 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.

“Word of the cross” is a phrase that is basically synonymous with “gospel”. It means God’s message of salvation through the cross. The cross was God’s statement that shows where sin and elevated self-love leads, to cruel, punishing, painful, unjust death. This message is folly to those who do not believe. But for those who trust in Christ, it is God’s power for salvation. By faith, God’s word of the cross is the life in which we live. **When we move beyond the gospel of Jesus Christ, we ‘move on’ to something other than Christianity altogether.**

God has done what no other has ever conceived. The cross confounds and destroys every structure of worldly power and wisdom. **Where are the world’s wisest philosophers to offer a greater explanation, the apologists to put forth a more compelling argument?** In the cross God renders the world’s wisdom that belongs merely to the sphere of human self-sufficiency as foolish. **God reveals in the cross His sovereign plan over life that humanity’s best has not conceived.**

Christians testify to God’s wisdom in the cross. The word “preach” in verse 21 (*kerygma*) does not mean the act of preaching itself, but the content of that proclamation, namely the message of a crucified Messiah. What the world scoffs at as foolish, we testify to in faith and God in sovereignty saves people through it. In the cross God says, “You could never find me, never save yourself, and never find a better way. But I have come to you, to save you.” **God brings salvation through the very measure and means that the world scoffs at as foolish, the cross of Christ.**

Death is final to humanity, but not to God. God levels humanity’s lofty intellect and high constructs in the gospel. The big bang of humanity’s power he causes to fizzle like a dud firecracker in light of the cross. **The cross is God’s declaration in death, “I, alone, am. There is none other.”**

²²For Jews demand signs and Greeks seek wisdom, ²³but we preach Christ crucified,

The world's idols demand more, clamoring to make God like one of us. When religion loses its 'luster', as it inevitably does, the religious demand a sign to return the awe and interest and validate its ritual. Religion always needs a 'big splash' to motivate external conformity. When worldly wisdom fractures and loses its command, a superior argument is sought to sustain the 'talk'. Hedonism, atheism and humanism aspire to the "next level": a more elated pleasure, an elevated argument or high accomplishment, because hope rests in the pleasure, philosophy or performance of humanity. [Idols create a never-ending demand to produce more to create the illusion of real life.](#)

²⁴ but to those who are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God.

Christians testify to the cross of Christ as God's power and wisdom personified. The cross crushes every human-created power and wisdom and leaves us helpless before God. There is nothing we can do to please God. We are not perfect. We cannot perform. We cannot conceive of any argument that competes with God or by which God must be compelled to save us. [Once the message of the cross is set forth, only God can bring salvation.](#)

²⁵For the foolishness of God is wiser than men, and the weakness of God is stronger than men.

But in our helpless moment, God reveals His power and wisdom to save. The demand God places on us for our sin He was pleased to put on Jesus on the cross. (Heb 2:17; 1 John 2:2; 1 John 4:10) Jesus was righteousness but died as one who became sin for us. (2 Cor 5:21) The demand of perfect performance the law places upon us God was pleased to accept Jesus' perfect performance for us. (James 2:10; Rom 8:3-4) "*No one is righteous, no not one; no one understands; no one seeks for God.*" (Rom 3:10b-11) We stand helpless without God. "*But God shows his love for us in that while were still sinners, Christ died for us.*" (Rom 5:8) [The word of the cross is God's revelation to us in our sin that He alone saves.](#)

Christ crucified, the wisdom and power of God, is our unifying center. We testify that there is only one hero, the Lord Jesus Christ. For what God has done in Jesus is His work alone. **But God chose what is foolish in the world to shame the wise (.27a); God chose what is weak in the world to shame the strong (.27b); God chose what is low and despised in the world, even things that are not, to bring to nothing things that are, so that no human being might boast in the presence of God. Jesus is our righteousness, our salvation and only redemption.**

Because of the cross no human can boast in self. But praise be to God, because of the cross no human must boast in self. Jesus supplies all the power and wisdom for salvation for anyone who by faith trusts in Him. This is the Christian testimony that unites us in all things. [The "word of the cross" unites us as we testify, God comes to us and saves people by faith through the cross of Jesus Christ.](#)

4. Reliance upon Spirit's power: Holy Spirit empowers our message of God's power to save. 2:1-5

Paul concludes his introduction with his preaching philosophy while among the Corinthians. He intentionally avoided what many in the church already idolized, clever rhetoric, impressive words and philosophizing. His words remind us how God works in gospel mission. God's salvation rests in Christ's cross and Spirit's power. Impressive words and displays never save. [The message of Jesus Christ crucified for sin and Holy Spirit power saves when the gospel is preached and shared.](#)

Holy Spirit empowers the message. The cross is the most powerful message of love, and doubly so. When the gospel is shared or preached, Holy Spirit works to accomplish God's purpose. Isaiah promises that God's Word accomplishes God's purpose. (Isa 55:11) The Spirit is the accomplisher. "*It is the Spirit who gives life.*" (John 6:63a) [The gospel is fuel that flames the Spirit's power to work in a person's heart and life.](#)

Holy Spirit empowers the messenger. The Spirit sources every gift in gospel ministry whether believing, administration, teaching, prophesying or preaching. But you don't have to 'hold a special position' to be empowered. The Spirit clothes every believer with power (Acts 1) to witness. [Faithful witness is the first work Holy Spirit empowers.](#) He empowers the

tongue of every faithful witness, just as he did for Moses before Pharaoh. [Faithful witness is not about the eloquence of the messenger's speech, but the submission and willingness of the heart to speak and serve God's mission.](#)

Holy Spirit empowers the hearer. The gospel is the only message that is always an inside job. The Spirit works in every hearer to receive the message in faith, identifying and tearing away every obstacle in the heart. **ILLUS** How many times have you sat in a sermon and thought, "How does this man know so much about me?" That's not the man. It's the Spirit. [The Spirit works in every hearer to receive the gospel by faith.](#)

The Spirit works in power when the gospel is shared and preached. When the gospel is not the center of our message in all we do, the Spirit cannot work. When the Spirit is not at work, none of our words matter. Church and ministry may be impressive, measureable, captivating and engaging. But when the gospel is not faithfully proclaimed, what it's not is what it must be, a demonstration of God's power so people can put their faith in Jesus, and not in people. [The Spirit empowers all our work as we labor to share the gospel, Jesus Christ crucified for sin.](#)

CLOSE The gospel of Jesus Christ is the most glorious news proclaimed to all creation, hope to hold forth among all humanity, light to pierce the darkest night, truth to unravel the most twisted deceit, testimony to share with every person, love to satisfy the soul's most powerful longing, wisdom to make straight the most crooked and confusing of situations that brings us into relationship with God through Jesus Christ by Holy Spirit.

We stand UNITED in the Gospel of Jesus Christ because there is no other name given among men whereby we can be saved from sin, rescued from death, ransomed from hell, redeemed from brokenness, reconciled from separation, and redefined to a new purpose and glory, that we might bear His glorious Name as children, renewed to new life, restored to bear glory, re-energized to serve His purpose, re-engaged to serve His mission.