

Undivided

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[0 : 00] Since we're beginning a new sermon series, we just concluded our series through the book of Ephesians. And let me provide a little bit of background for this new letter through 1 Corinthians.

So the epistle to the 1 Corinthians written by the Apostle Paul around 55 AD. And Corinth was at the time a Roman colony. And it's a narrow strip of land that connects basically the northern mainland of Greece to the southern peninsula.

So it's a narrow strip of land that has the Mediterranean Sea on either side of it to the east and the west. So it's a very strategic location. And because of that, it was a very diverse city.

And it's not really not unlike Cambridge and Boston really today. But because of diversity and not just that, the Corinthian church was also very divisive.

It was what we might call a problem church. And Paul is having to address a lot of different things. And one of the issues being, they were challenging Apostle Paul's very authority. They were saying, well, I mean, why should we listen to you?

[1 : 05] I mean, we have these great people to follow. So Paul is addressing a lot of serious problems as he writes this letter. They disagreed on a number of issues, including sexual immorality, lawsuits, marriage and divorce, singleness, spiritual gifts, and public worship.

And they were engaging in all this kind of back and forth of one-upmanship with one another. And so Paul is trying to tell them through this letter to stop their one-upmanship and prideful, basically, divisions, and then to unite together for the advancement of the good news of Jesus Christ.

So that's really the main point of the reason why Paul writes this letter. And as our church continues to get older, and as our church continues to grow, the Lord willing, by His grace, there will be increasing temptations for disagreements and divisions.

And because of that, our hope is that as we go through the first Corinthians together, the sermon series entitled Undivided, that we will come through the end of it stronger in our unity in Christ as a church.

And at the root of all forms of divisiveness, and especially the divisiveness of the Corinthian church here, was spiritual pride and elitism, which our passage for today addresses.

[2 : 24] And there's a book entitled Privilege. The subtitle is The Making of an Adolescent Elite at St. Paul School. It's an interesting sociological study about our social elite and how it develops.

And the author's name is Shamus Khan, and he was once a student at St. Paul School, and then he became later a teacher, and then later a researcher at the institution. St. Paul School is a college prep-forter school.

It's in New Hampshire. It's one of the most exclusive college prep-forter schools in the whole country. It's one of the eight, I believe, schools in the Eight Schools Association, which is basically the Ivy League of high schools.

And so they, it's really hard to get in. And as he was researching this, though, he noted that the most successful students at this school, basically the students that will in the future make up the social elite, are not necessarily the most hardworking students.

Instead, he wrote this. He says that they are the students who embody what he calls, in quote, the ease of privilege. He writes, these students, because they were conditioned by their academic, economic, and environmental privilege, they carry themselves with tremendous confidence, and in a sense, this air of superiority about them.

[3 : 46] And that helps them to get ahead in life, succeed, and to get people's esteem. It's what he calls the ease of privilege. The most successful students, he noted during his research, are people who embody that ease of privilege.

But what's interesting about that is also that he notes that while these are the most successful students for this reason, and while they are products of their privilege, they themselves believe that they're successful solely because of their intrinsic talent and hard work.

That's kind of the example of social elitism, how that develops. And that kind of mistaken elitism also finds its way in the church. Christians who have been privileged to receive much grace from God can imagine themselves as belonging to this elite class of Christians and look down on other believers.

The grace that they have received from God is a gift. They take credit for it themselves and flaunt their own merits. Ah, it's my superior devotion to God.

Ah, it's because I serve God more than these people. Ah, it's because I had great mentors and teachers. Oh, it's because of my superior upbringing in a Christian home.

[5 : 04] Oh, it's because I got a great theological education from this Christian college or seminary. All of us, I would say, have at some point been guilty of this spiritual elitism or have been offended by this spiritual elitism.

Probably many of us have done both, right? And the church in Corinth was falling into a similar pitfall. And so Apostle Paul graciously and forcefully addresses this issue in our passage for today. And his main point is this, that those who belong to the church of God by the grace of God should boast only in the cross of Christ. That's the main point. And those will be my three points.

It's that the first, the church of God in verses 1 to 3. Second, the grace of God in verses 4 to 9. And lastly, the cross of Christ in verses 10 to 17. Paul begins the letter by identifying himself in verse 1 as the author.

Paul called by the will of God to be an apostle of Christ Jesus and our brother Sosthenes. It's a similar introduction to the one found in Ephesians, but it's actually far more detailed than any other introduction we find in Paul's other epistles.

[6 : 14] And I think the reason for that is this, because we later learn in the letter that in chapter 4, verses 1 to 5, that these Corinthian believers were judging Paul, right? And we also find out in chapter 9 that they were questioning his apostleship.

Is Paul really a true apostle, right? And fully aware of this, so Paul, right from the get-go, emphasized the divine origin of his apostleship. He says, Paul called by the will of God to be an apostle of Christ Jesus.

The word apostle can be used generally to refer to the messengers of the gospel, but Paul is using the word in a more formal, official sense to refer to those who belong to the office of apostle, who are laying the foundations of the church by proclaiming authoritatively the gospel of Jesus Christ. So he's claiming to be someone who was personally appointed and commissioned by the resurrected Christ to be a church-planting missionary, as 1 Corinthians 9 talks about. So he's saying, I am an apostle by the will of God.

And this self-awareness of Paul is very important as we go through this letter as a whole, because on the one hand, Paul is incredibly self-effacing and humble.

[7 : 23] He doesn't like to take credit for himself. But on the other hand, when it comes to defending his ministry and authority as an apostle, he's very assertive, and he's staunchly defensive of his own basic calling.

And I think the reason why we see, on the one hand, great humility and great confidence in Paul at the same time is because he knew, without a doubt, that he were called by the will of God to be an apostle.

And so, and that, we'll see, and recognizing that, the fact that he is so, by the grace of God, will be the antidote, will be what heals the spiritual elitism that's besetting the Corinthians at the moment. But Paul also mentions one of his companions, as he writes, he calls him our brother, Sosthenes. It's not clear who he is, but there is a guy that's with the same name that's mentioned in Acts 18, 17, who was a leader in the synagogue there, but later was beaten by an angry Jewish mob.

He probably converted to Christianity at this point. And then afterward, joined Paul and his missionary journey. So he mentions him as well as someone who is greeting the Corinthian church.

[8 : 35] And then, having introduced himself and Sosthenes, Paul names his addressees, the people whom he is addressing in verse 2. To 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.

This is very interesting, because nowhere else in all of his letters, except for his two letters to the Corinthian church, Paul addresses his recipients as the church of God.

So, in Romans, he says, to all those in Rome who are loved by God and called to be saints. In Galatians, he says, to the churches of Galatia. In Ephesians, he says, to the saints who are in Ephesus.

Colossians, he says, to the saints and faithful brothers in Christ, the Colossians. In 1 and 2 Thessalonians, he writes, to the church of the Thessalonians in God. But when addressing the Corinthians, he doesn't just call them saints, he doesn't just call them brothers or sisters, he tells them, to the church of God that is in Corinth.

And with that phrasing, Paul's intentionally addressing one of their chief problems, namely spiritual pride. Because they don't belong to some special class of Christians distinct from the rest of the churches.

[9 : 54] He's saying, no, you are one of the churches of God. You belong to him. He is your owner, he is your Lord, and you are the church of God. And because the church belongs to God, they are called sanctified in Christ Jesus, called to be saints.

When we hear the word sanctification, we usually think of the progressive sanctification, that Christians, as Christians, we strive to become more like God in our life, and we grow in our holiness day to day. But that's not the kind of sanctification that is in view.

What's in view here is what theologians call definitive sanctification, that at the moment we turn to Christ in faith, that we are sanctified, sanctified, that we are, and it's really simultaneous with our justification, that we're considered saints of God in a real way.

That's what he references in 1 Corinthians 6, 11 later, when he says, you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God.

It's something that's already taken place. We are sanctified in Christ Jesus when we believe in Jesus for salvation. And then, the fact that they are called to be saints is also speaking about the same reality, right?

[11 : 05] The words sanctified and saint come from the same Greek word that means holy. And the basic meaning of the word holy is to be set apart, right? So holiness is an attribute of God because God is set apart.

He's someone that transcends the created world, right? He's set apart from the rest of the world.

And so when something is called holy, where someone is called holy, we're saying that that person is set apart for God's special purposes, right?

And so saints are those who are, they're the holy ones. They're the ones who are sanctified.

They're the ones who are set apart for God's special purposes. And for that reason, church is very special.

And Paul freely acknowledges that. However, the Corinthian church believed that they were superior to other churches. They were charting an independent course.

And because of that, later in 1436, Paul rebukes them. Was it from you that the word of God came? Or are you the only ones it has reached? Right? So all throughout this letter, Paul emphasizes the fact that they belong to, he emphasizes practices and teachings that are basically found in all the churches.

[12 : 17] Because Paul wants to bring them back to, instead of charting their own independent course, to be united with the practices of the other churches. You know, to reign them back in. And that's what Paul's trying to do in verse 2 here.

He's trying to bring them back down to earth. He says, To 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.

Their Lord and our Lord the same. The church in every place calls on the same name of Jesus Christ. And the Corinthian church is not called to be a superior church, a better church, a different church, but called to be the church together with all the saints.

And sometimes, this is true in the modern day as well, right? Specific local churches and specific denominations can be so enamored with themselves that they begin to think that their way of doing things is the only way of doing things.

They think that they have a monopoly on truth and best practices. But the truth is that every church that calls upon the name of our Lord Jesus Christ belongs to the same extended family of God and have the same spirit of God.

[13:37] And in all likelihood, for that reason, there are probably other churches in the world that have done what we're doing and have thought about what we are thinking about and what we're wrestling with. And therefore, we should assume not a posture of pride but a posture of humility and a posture of learning as we dialogue with other churches and with the spirit fellowship.

And after addressing his recipients, Paul greets them formally in verse 3, Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. That's it.

Paul's trademark greeting, right? Grace and peace. And the same one he uses in Ephesians 1-2, the standard Greek salutation was simply greetings which is a variation of the word rejoice, right? But Paul transforms that, just changes one constant here and one verb there and he, to turn that into grace so that the Christian, distinctively Christian greeting becomes not just greetings but grace.

And grace refers to God's unmerited favor as one Bible dictionary puts it, the absolutely free expression of the loving kindness of God to men in the bounty and benevolence of the giver.

[14:52] It's unmerited, meaning that we didn't earn it. It's out of God's absolute freedom that he bestows his grace on us. It's a gift given to us out of his sheer bounty and benevolence.

And God treats us with the favor that we don't deserve. That's grace. It's the grace, the reason for God's saving acts, all of his saving acts. And if grace is the reason for God's saving activity, then peace is the result of God's saving activity.

The word peace doesn't refer merely to an absence of conflict. It's a translation of the Old Testament concept of shalom which refers to a state of being whole, of having a life that is whole, well-ordered before God, according to God's purpose and design.

Right? And that's only possible through the grace of God. So really, when he says grace and peace, Paul's summarizing his entire theology. The grace, the reason why God saves, and the peace, the result of God's saving activity.

May that be to you, Paul is saying. That's his blessing as he begins his letter. So the true church of God, then, is the church that has been constituted, that has been formed by the grace and peace from God.

[16:03] And that's my first point, the church of God. Then, having greeted the Corinthian believers as the church of God, Paul proceeds to give thanks to God for the grace of God at work in their lives.

And that's my second point, the grace of God. Paul says in verse 4, I give thanks to my God always for you because of the grace of God that was given you in Christ Jesus.

Notice how Christ-centered this whole passage is. Right? You look at Christ is mentioned no less than 12 times in the span of just these 17 verses. Right? Paul describes himself as an apostle of Christ Jesus in verse 1.

Corinthian believers have been sanctified in Christ Jesus in verse 2. And here in verse 4, he says that grace was given in Christ Jesus. And Paul's theology is Christ-centered because he understands that all of the spiritual blessings that we receive from God the Father are mediated through Jesus Christ.

There's no grace of God that comes to us, that reaches us apart from Jesus Christ, that doesn't come through Jesus Christ. The Holy Spirit, our comforter and our advocate, would not indwell us apart from Christ.

[17:16] The sweet fellowship that we enjoy as the body of Christ, as the family of God, would not be ours apart from the grace through Jesus Christ. That's why Paul can't help but speak so frequently about Christ.

Right? And later in chapter 2, verse 2, he says, I decided to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ and Him crucified. As believers, we need to be characterized by that, the dominance of Christ in our lives.

That's why when we gather, we don't tire of speaking about Christ. We don't ever tire of singing about Christ. Christ. That's what God ordained. God the Father ordained that Christ will be exalted and the Spirit glorifies the Son.

That's, and sometimes I think we get a little bit, sometimes I've seen people criticize churches that they say are too Christ-centered. That church is too Christ-centered, too gospel-centered. It's imbalanced. There is no such thing, to be Christ-centered is to be profoundly Trinitarian because that's what God the Father ordained.

[18 : 27] That's what the Spirit of God does. They glorify the Son. Every grace we receive comes through Jesus Christ. And I already explained what Paul means by grace earlier, but here in verse 4, Paul's not simply speaking about, in general, about the grace of God, but he has in mind as he writes this, a very specific manifestation of the grace of God.

He names what he's talking about in verse 48. 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 are enriched in Him, in all speech, in all knowledge, even as the testimony about Christ was confirmed among you so that you are not lacking in any gift as you wait for the revealing of our Lord Jesus Christ who will sustain you to the end, guiltless in the day of our Lord Jesus Christ.

The grace of God was given to the church of God with the result that in every way the Corinthian believers were enriched in Him in all speech and knowledge so that they were not lacking in any gift.

So especially here in the context of 1 Corinthians, Paul closely associates the grace of God with the gifts of God. And that's what Paul is doing here too. He's saying that the gifts of God that you have now among you is an expression of the grace of God and in that Paul is rejoicing and giving thanks to God for it.

And he describes it this way, he says, they were enriched in every way with all speech and all knowledge. So the full spectrum according to Paul of spiritual gifts have been demonstrated, have been witnessed in the context of the Corinthian church.

[20 : 10] And what does it mean? What does it mean by speech and all knowledge? So later in 1 Corinthians 12, Paul lists the various gifts of the Holy Spirit. And then in verse 8 of that chapter, he specifically mentions the utterance of wisdom and the utterance of knowledge.

So the word utterance is the same word that is translated here as speech. And knowledge, of course, is the same word. So by all speech and knowledge, Paul's referring not to just talking, but to various gifts of spirit-inspired speech.

So such as knowledge, wisdom, tongues, prophecy that he all specifically mentions in 1 Corinthians 12-14. And interestingly enough, though, this is helpful because in those later chapters, Paul's offering a stern rebuke, a correction of how the Corinthian church was thinking too highly of themselves because of their gifts of speech and knowledge.

in particular, the gift of tongues, which is a form of spiritual speech addressed to God. And I'll teach on the tongues more specifically when we get to 1 Corinthians 14.

And they thought that because they spoke in tongues that they had spiritually alive. We're already there. We're enjoying the fullness of God's presence in the kingdom now. And so they were puffed up because of it.

[21 : 29] And because of this disproportionately enlarged view of spiritual gifts of speech and knowledge, they used them in an unruly and disorderly manner in the corporate worship context. And that's why Paul corrects them later.

And so when you keep that context in mind, it's remarkable that Paul thanks God for those very gifts that's causing all these problems in the Corinthian church. He says, these very gifts of speech and knowledge are the source that they're manifestation of God's grace.

gifts. This is a helpful example of not throwing the baby out with the bathwater. So they are definitely misunderstanding the spiritual gifts and definitely misusing the spiritual gifts.

But nevertheless, Paul says, that is a real and good demonstration of God's grace. And for that part of that, I thank God. And Paul is, I think, completely sincere when he offers that thanksgiving.

It's, I think that's remarkable because, you know, it's easy for me to thank God for you guys. I can pray this passage on behalf of you guys because I'm thankful for you all.

[22 : 43] And it's easy for me to do that. But to be in Paul's shoes, to be writing to the church, that's challenging his very apostleship. And for him to write about the very things that's causing the strife and discord in the church and for him to say, you know what, I know you're kind of messing the use of that up, but I still thank God that that's an evidence of God's grace for you.

That's such a helpful practice for us as we relate to one another. That helps us to bear with one another, doesn't it?

Yeah, you were sinning in that way. Yeah, you are messing that up in that way. But you know what, I see that grace of God in you. And even as he's thanking God for the Corinthians, the gifts that are among the Corinthian believers, he also pastorally redirects them.

Right? And he does that in two ways. First, rather than emphasizing the gifts in and of themselves, Paul emphasizes the grace of God in giving these gifts to them.

So he focuses on God as the giver instead of the recipients as the gifted. Right? And by redirecting the Corinthian believers focused in that way, he calls for greater humility among them.

[24 : 06] He's saying, in essence, what you have is a gift from God. You didn't earn it, so why boast about it as if you didn't receive it freely from the Lord? In the same way, when we encounter highly gifted people in our church, and there's quite a few highly gifted people in our church, as you look at them, we shouldn't admire them in and of themselves and be jealous of them, but rather we should adore and thank God for the gifts that they have.

It's good to acknowledge one another's gifts, that's true, but our focus shouldn't be, oh, how gifted is so and so, but rather, oh, how generous of our God to give them those gifts.

Second, he redirects them another way, second, the Corinthian believers thought that the spiritual gifts were evidence of their spiritual arrival.

I mentioned this earlier, right? And he addresses this in greater depth in chapter 4 and chapter 13, but they were basically acting as if their salvation was already fulfilled and consummated, right?

They have all that is needful to enjoy the fullness of Christ. That's what they believed because they had these gifts of tongues and prophecy and all of this.

[25 : 23] But what Paul reminds them of is that the gifts that they possess currently is not evidence of their arrival, but evidence of their waiting for arrival, arrival and return of Jesus Christ.

So he says in verses 7 to 8, so that you are not lacking in any gift as you wait for the revealing of our Lord Jesus Christ who will sustain you to the end, guiltless in the day of our Lord Jesus Christ. Paul says very clearly in chapter 13 of this epistle that the spiritual gifts like prophecy and tongues will cease when Christ returns because their purpose is to build up the church until they are fully built up.

So the very existence of those gifts is a sign that we have not arrived, that we are not done being sanctified, we are not done growing, that we need to wait eagerly for the coming, second coming of Christ.

And I think those two things are connected. Perhaps it's because we are not eagerly awaiting the return of Christ. We are not eagerly preparing ourselves for the return of Christ and for that reason we don't eagerly desire the spiritual gifts.

[26 : 28] because if we see the need for our preparation, if we see and anticipate the coming of Christ, then we will want to be edified, we will want to be built up and the spiritual gifts are given for that purpose.

And so Paul wisely reorients these Corinthian believers even while he's sincerely thanking God for them. And then Paul expresses his faith that God will sustain them to the end, guiltless in the day of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Man, the Corinthians are far from guiltless and misguided in so many ways. So what gives Paul such confidence that they will be sustained until the end?

The answer we find in verse 9. God is faithful by whom you were called into the fellowship of his Son, Jesus Christ, our Lord.

I'm so grateful for that verse. The basis for Paul's faith that the Corinthians would be sustained to the end is not their faithfulness but God's faithfulness.

[27 : 40] Because even if we are faithless, he remains faithful for he cannot deny himself. 2 Timothy 2.13 Now that does not mean that we do not have to persevere in our faith.

We do have to persevere to the end. But the preserving grace of God is prior to our own perseverance because it's God who enables our perseverance.

Our perseverance itself depends on God's faithfulness. And that's why the subject of the verb is God. In verse 8, he says that God will sustain them to the end.

Some people debate whether the subject is Christ or God, but either way, it's the same difference. It's God, not us, who is sustaining. The word sustain in verse 8 actually is exactly the same word that is translated as confirmed in verse 6.

So Paul repeats that same word to emphasize the fact that the God who initially confirmed the testimony about Christ in our midst, he's the same God who will confirm our salvation in the end.

[28 : 41] It's God who guarantees our salvation from the beginning to the end. That's what makes Paul so hopeful.

And that attitude also informed Paul's perspective about the Corinthians. That's super helpful for us as well. As we look at each other's shortcoming as the family of God, we remind ourselves as we see each other's sins, we remind ourselves that's just dross that is being removed from the gold that will be.

That's not who we will be in the end. God's going to sustain us to the end because God is faithful. So that gives us hope as we pray for one another and as we live together in seeking to grow in Christ.

So that's my second point, the grace of God. We belong to the church of God by the grace of God. And after the introductory greeting and thanksgiving, Paul turns to the main body of his letter in verse 10 where he teaches that those who belong to the church of God by the grace of God should boast only in the cross of Christ.

And that's my third point, the cross of Christ and he finds it necessary to emphasize the cross of Christ for this reason. Let's read verse 10 together. 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.

[30 : 25] The word that is translated agree literally means speak the same in Greek. And so three times in this verse Paul is repeating this word same.

So he says to emphasize the importance of unity he exhorts him to speak the same and to have the same mind and to have the same judgment. And Paul does that, exhorts this with the authority of Christ.

He says, 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. you know, for us moderners, telling other people to agree with each other kind of strikes us as a little strange and maybe a little bit pushy, right?

I mean, how can you tell someone to agree? If they agree, they agree. If they don't, they don't, right? I mean, how can you tell someone to agree? And that's kind of how we think about it. But when it comes to our confession of faith, right?

Because Paul's not here, and this is actually not, for Paul this is actually kind of common when he tells people to have the same mind and agree. And in Philippians 4, 2, actually he says, I entreat Eodia and I entreat Syntyche to agree in the Lord, right?

[31 : 36] So he tells them to agree because they were disagreeing about something. So this is a very different, it's radically different from our kind of modern day perception of agreement and people's own opinions because the modern motto is to each is home, to each his own, right?

Whatever you believe, you believe, and I'll believe, I'll believe. I mean, that's really the modern attitude. But for Paul, that's not the attitude. He says, I appeal to you, brothers, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ that all of you agree.

In Paul's thinking, he believes that in the context of the church, it's possible for believers to agree. But what are we supposed to agree on? Paul is not telling us to agree on every single personal preference or taste or opinion, but when it comes to our confession of faith, when it comes to our knowledge about Jesus Christ, Paul expects and enjoins agreement.

In short, he's calling for unity, not uniformity, and he says in Ephesians 4.13 that the church should strive to attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God.

So he's calling here for a confessional unity that deals with the content of our faith, especially that which concerns the knowledge of the Son of God. And the fact that that's the kind of unity Paul has in mind is confirmed in later verses.

[32 : 58] You get verses 11-13 with me. It says, 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? So Paul, this is so fascinating, but Paul received a report from Chloe's people.

I have no idea who those people are, but most likely Chloe's people didn't belong to the Corinthian church because he cites their report as something that's credible and objective, something that the Corinthian believers would accept.

And if they were one of the factions in the Corinthian church, it probably would not be a reliable thing to cite. And so Paul, these are probably kind of third-party believers who are on their way to Paul, stopped by the Corinthian church and got to witness this first hand.

And they're reporting some serious issues in the Corinthian church that they are taking on names of various Christian leaders as slogans for themselves and declaring allegiance to them in a position to others.

[34 : 17] The fact that only some of the people said, I follow Paul, shows clearly that there were people in the Corinthian church who opposed Paul himself. Others claimed, I follow Apollos, or I follow Cephas, which is Peter.

And still others, arrogantly, claiming to rise above the fray, they said, oh, I follow Christ. Christ. I mean, that seems pious on the surface, but claiming to saying, I follow Christ, not as a way of trying to bring people together into unity, but as another one of the factions saying, oh, you follow Paul, I follow Christ.

I mean, that shows their immaturity. This is also a problematic attitude that they had. They suffered from the same spiritual elitism that the others were guilty of, even though they're saying what is true, that we should all follow Christ.

And we can easily become guilty of this ourselves, can't we? At the local level, a group of believers can say, you know, I follow pastor so-and-so. He preaches the best sermons.

Oh, yeah? Others can say, I follow pastor so-and-so. He's wiser and more mature. Right? At the more regional level, a group of believers can say, oh, I follow John Piper.

[35 : 43] He's the most biblical and bold. And then others can say, oh, yeah? But he's so overbearing and inflexible. I follow Tim Keller.

He's much more reasonable and nuanced. At a more historical level, people can say, you know, I follow John Wesley. Because he really understands the prominence of the Holy Spirit.

And then others will say, oh, yeah? I follow John Calvin. Only he really understood the doctrines of grace. That hits way too close to home, doesn't it?

It does for me, too. The problem is not these men's ministry per se, but that we use their names for the purpose of asserting our spiritual superiority over other people.

That we are dividing and quarreling rather than seeking agreement, seeking unity. A similar thing was happening within the Corinthian church.

[36 : 48] And we don't know the details of what each of these groups of people were claiming for themselves, but there seems to have been a particularly loyal following of Apollos, because Paul specifically mentions Apollos several times throughout his letter.

He says in chapter 3, verse 3-7, For while there is jealousy and strife among you, are you not of the flesh and behaving only in a human way? For when one says, I follow Paul, and another, I follow Apollos, are you not being merely human?

What then is Apollos? What is Paul, servant through whom you believe as the Lord assigned to each? I planted Apollos' water, but God gave the growth. So neither he who plants nor he who waters is anything, but only God who gives the growth.

And then later, in chapter 4, verse 6, he encourages the Corinthian believers to learn from his example and Apollos' example, and to not to go beyond, I'm quoting, not to go beyond what is written, that none of you may be puffed up in favor of one against another.

So that's the problem here. Some people were getting puffed up in favor of Apollos against Paul, and vice versa. And we could infer what the problem might have been, because Acts 18.24 teaches us that Apollos was a native of Alexandria, an eloquent man, competent in the scriptures.

[38 : 14] Alexandria was an ancient city famous as the center of Greek philosophy, and Apollos was a learned and eloquent man, and the fact that he's described as eloquent probably refers to his Greek training, formal training in Greek rhetoric, which means he was a trained philosopher and a trained orator like the traveling Greek philosophers of that time.

And Corinthians, it seems, were enamored with Apollos' gift, with his ability. And so they developed a cult of personality around him.

And that happens so often nowadays too, when someone that's very charismatic or gifted, a cult of personality develops around a person. And they were saying to Paul, Paul, okay, well, he's an accomplished Jewish theologian, we'll admit that, but Apollos, he's the Greek philosopher.

Have you ever heard him preach? He's got the real goods. We follow Apollos. That's the attitude that Paul's dealing with. And so that's what he seems to be aiming at when in chapter two, verses one to five, it's a preview of next week where he says, And I, when I came to you, brothers, did not come proclaiming to you the testimony of God with lofty speech or wisdom.

For I decided to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ and him crucified. And I was with you in weakness and in fear and much trembling. And my speech and my message were not in plausible words of wisdom, but in demonstration of the spirit and of power so that your faith might not rest in the wisdom of man, but in the power of God.

[39 : 57] All of this is absurd nonsense to Paul. Because he corrects the Corinthians in verse 13 with a series of rhetorical questions. Is Christ divided? Was Paul crucified for you?

Or were you baptized in the name of Paul? There's only one Jesus Christ, and that means there's only one body of Christ, which is the church of God, so that divisions and factions should have no place in the church.

And Paul's clearly not impressed, even with the people who are saying, I follow Paul, right? He's saying, what is Paul? Was Paul crucified for you? If they thought that they're going to win some points with Paul by saying, oh, I follow Paul, they were dead wrong.

He's not impressed that his name is being used as a slogan, because that's not what he wants for himself or Apollos or anyone else. to be baptized into the name of someone is to owe your allegiance to that person.

That's why Christians are baptized in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit. So of course they were not baptized in the name of Paul. But it seems that the Corinthians are making a big deal of who baptized them.

[41 : 07] Oh, you got baptized by Paul? Guess what? I got baptized by Apollos. But Paul rebukes this kind of attitude. And the mention of baptism sidetracks Paul for a bit, and you guys probably noticed that as we were reading, in verses 14 to 16 he 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.

Well, I did baptize also the house of Stephanas. Beyond that, I do not know whether I baptized anyone else. It's really kind of a funny little glimpse into Paul's thinking, right, as he's writing this, kind of ad hoc, right, he's just, and Gaius mentioned Acts 18, 8, I mean, Crispus is mentioned there, and Gaius is mentioned in Romans 16, 23.

He doesn't think that he baptized anyone except for those guys, and then as he's writing, his memory is dropped, and everyone's, oh wait, but I did baptize the Stephanas, the household of Stephanas, but apart from that, I don't think I baptized anyone else, right?

It's like, so he's like, it's kind of a humorous glimpse into his own humanity, right? Paul's a man just like us, he forgets just like us, and he sometimes remembers things just like us, and so even though this was an unintentional thing, it kind of proves his point in an uncalculated way that we shouldn't idolize him, we shouldn't follow him, he's just a man, we should follow Christ.

The ministers of the gospel are just tools, just servants, how ridiculous than to give their name such prominence in the Christian life.

[42 : 47] Nowadays, vocational ministers are not highly regarded outside of the church, but there is still a measure of prestige and respect that comes from within the church toward ministers.

And ministers, and I'm aware of this, have to be careful, have to watch their hearts, lest they become accustomed to that, comfortable with the praise and esteem, and seek that, and demand that from other people.

Hannah and I are, this is a good opportunity to let you guys know, I guess, is that Hannah and I are going on our annual vacation starting tomorrow, and with the kids, we're going to Seattle to visit my parents, and taking time away like this on occasion I think is a great opportunity for us, and for me personally, and for the church.

And the reason why I think that is because for me it's an exercise in relinquishing my control over the church. It's an exercise in humility to recognize that, you know what, the church really doesn't need me.

If the Lord wills it, he will grow the church even if I fall off the planet tomorrow. I'm not essential to this church, Christ is. And for the church, I think it's a great opportunity to hear other voices, people still scriptural, yes, but people speaking from different backgrounds and experiences.

[44 : 08] And it's a reminder for all of you to take ownership of the church since it belongs to God, and because of that it belongs to all of you who belong to God. It's a reminder to not build a church around Sean, but around the cross of Christ.

And so Paul concludes this section by reorienting the Corinthian church to focus on the gospel, the cross of Christ in verse 17. It says, 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. Just a qualification here. Paul is not saying here that baptism is unimportant. He says in Romans 6, 3 to 4, do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death?

We were buried therefore with him by baptism into death in order that just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life. So Paul clearly understood that baptism is important for the life of the believer, but what he is saying here is that baptism apart from faith in the gospel is useless.

Baptism is intended to be an outward profession of an inward faith, and baptism is effective only insofar as it is a genuine expression of our repentance and faith in God.

[45 : 38] If baptism, imagine this, in and of itself saved people, Paul would never have to preach the gospel. All he has to do is gather a large class and have them line up and just dunk them all in the water.

Everybody will be saved. Hooray. No need to preach the gospel. But Paul doesn't do that because apart from faith in the gospel, which only comes through the hearing of the word, which only comes if someone preaches the gospel, baptism is useless.

So Paul made it the focus of his ministry to preach the gospel. And Paul preached, he says, not with words of eloquent wisdom, lest the cross of Christ be emptied of its power.

In next week's passage, Paul contrasts divine wisdom from human wisdom. And that's a preview of that. The word wisdom is a key word that occurs throughout the book of 1 Corinthians and it's something that the Corinthians really cherished, kind of like what I mentioned with relation to Apollos, right?

This wisdom, philosophy, this system of thought, right? And they put a premium value on the Greek philosophical tradition, rhetorical tradition. But Paul argues that in his ministry, he intentionally avoided such teaching, lest the cross of Christ be emptied of its power.

[47 : 02] Imagine you have a jewel of singular beauty, maybe a very rare and precious diamond. Then you would not encumber that diamond with a whole bunch of distracting and ornate setting.

No, you would want a setting that's simple, that highlights and points to the beauty of the diamond, that doesn't distract from it. For Paul, that's the gospel. That's the cross of Christ.

So let's not encumber it. Let's not put a varnish on it. Let's not cover it up, detract from it with other things. Lest the cross of Christ be emptied of its power.

Paul didn't want anyone to be drawn to Jesus by human eloquence or wisdom. He didn't want any onlooker from the outside to be able to see a conversion and say, oh, that person became a Christian just because he was beguiled by that preacher's eloquence or wisdom.

He wanted everyone looking on to be able to say, that guy, that person came to Jesus because of the power of the cross. Think about that for a minute in the context of our church.

[48 : 23] What are we trying to draw people with? What are we trying to win people with? Is it how friendly and social we are?

Is it how good our music is? Is it good preaching? Is it a smooth service? Is it a particular personality?

Is it the benefits that we give to them, material benefits? If the answer is anything other than the cross of Christ, then our ministry is fundamentally misaligned.

God is the power of the cross of Christ. Paul is referring to the saving power of the cross of Christ, the gospel, the good news of Jesus Christ.

It's that we are sinful, that we have no hope of saving ourselves, that we who are the creatures who were created for God's glory to live for him, we thought to usurp God's own authority, to place ourselves on his throne and to live for ourselves.

[49 : 37] That's what we did. That's what we call sin. But God, who had every right for the sake of justice to punish us, to condemn us for eternity, in love, out of grace and mercy toward us, sends his only son to die for us on the cross for our sins.

We put ourselves where only God deserved to be. And God substitutes his son to the place, the cross, where only we deserve to be.

That's the gospel of Jesus Christ. And for Paul, that's the power of God for salvation. That beautiful, glorious exchange has to be the center of our lives, has to be the ballast for our church.

For those of you who are not yet a believer in Jesus Christ, I would plead with you today. There is grace sufficient for you, and you can know the peace of God if you turn to Jesus. Put your faith in the cross of Christ. And for those of you who are already believers, let's remember together that those who belong to the church of God by the grace of God should boast only in the cross of Christ.

[51 : 07] Let's daily lay aside our crowns, subdue our pride, forsake our spiritual elitism, and seek to live in humility and unity with one another in Jesus Christ.

Let's pray together. God, you have loved us so freely.

You have been bountiful toward us. You have not been stingy. You have been so patient with us. And it's that grace, power to cross the Christ. that alone can enable us to be gracious toward one another, to forgive one another.

So we pray, God, for your help. That you would so fill our hearts with your grace, with your love, that we would overflow in our dealings with one another with such grace and love.

[52 : 46] So that our church would be characterized by the peace that Christ won for us. Peace with you, Father, and peace with one another. Let our boast always and ever be Christ crucified.

not our own righteousness, not our own merits, not our own strivings and efforts. We entrust ourselves to you.

You are the Lord and the builder of our church. Thank you, Lord. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.