



## Sermon Transcript September 12, 2021

### An Appeal for U.N.I.T.Y. UNITY! It is a Appealing! 1 Corinthians 1:1-3, 10-17

This message from the Bible was addressed originally to the people of Wethersfield Evangelical Free Church on September 12, 2021 at 511 Maple Street, Wethersfield, CT, 06109 by Dr. Scott W. Solberg. This is a transcription that bears the strength and weaknesses of oral delivery. It is not meant to be a polished essay. An audio and video version of this sermon may also be found on the church website at [www.wethefc.com](http://www.wethefc.com)

## Sermon Text

### 1 Corinthians 1:1-3

1 Paul, called by the will of God to be an apostle of Christ Jesus, and our brother Sosthenes, 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: 3 Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

### 1 Corinthians 1:10-17

10 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. 11 For it has been reported to me by Chloe's people that there is quarreling among you, my brothers. 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.

13 Is Christ divided? Was Paul crucified for you? Or were you baptized in the name of Paul? 14 I thank God that I baptized none of you except Crispus and Gaius, 15 so that no one may say that you were baptized in my name. 16 (I did baptize also the household of Stephanas. Beyond that, I do not know whether I baptized anyone else.) 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.

## Introduction

Are we experiencing *déjà vu* or *duja ve*? Of course, *déjà vu* is that odd feeling that whatever you are experiencing has happened before. *Duja ve*, on the other hand, is the exact opposite of *déjà vu*. It is the feeling that what is happening right now has never happened before. And yet, as I contemplate this question, I can't help but hear in the back of my mind what we read in Ecclesiastes 1:9. "*What has been is what will be, and what has been done is what will be done, and there is nothing new under the sun.*" That is the sense I get when I read Paul's first letter to the church at Corinth. "*There is nothing new under the sun.*"

The first part of this letter, 1 Corinthians 1-6, is Paul's response to a report he was given about the church in Corinth. Paul says in verse 11, "*For it has been reported to me by Chloe's people. We are not sure who "Chloe" was or who "her people" happened to be. Some think Chloe's people may be Crispus, Gaius and Stephanos listed a couple verses later in our passage this morning. But whoever "Chloe's people" happen to be, they did not give Paul a favorable report about the church in Corinth. So, 1 Corinthians 1-6 is Paul's response to this negative report about the church in Corinth. But then, when we get to 1 Corinthians 7, Paul begins to respond to questions that were sent to him by the church about some of the challenges they were facing. He transitions in 1 Corinthians 7:1 by saying, "Now concerning the matters about which you wrote . . ." The rest of the letter addresses these varied concerns submitted to Paul in writing.*

If you take the report issued by *Chloe's people* and combine it with the questions and concerns that were sent to Paul in writing from the church itself, you can readily identify five major problems plaguing this first century church.

1. They were divided and not united.
2. They celebrated sexual immorality within the church.
3. They didn't know how to get along with one another when they disagreed with one another on secondary matters—matters of opinion or conviction.
4. They had different ideas of what to do when they gathered for worship.
5. They were confused on a major doctrine: the resurrection from the dead.

Division . . . Sexual purity . . . Getting along with others you don't agree with . . . Worship . . . Doctrine. When I compare these issues from the first century to our issues in the twenty-first century, I can help but agree with that great "theologian" from the past—Yogi Berra . . . "It is *déjà vu* all over again." So whatever Paul has to say to this church trying to live out their faith in the first century should be very helpful and relevant to us living out our faith right here in Connecticut in the year 2021.

For the next five weeks, we are going to look at the first of the five major problems plaguing this early church—the problem of division. We are going to work our way through 1 Corinthians 1-4 and we are going to see what Paul has to say to this divided church about the importance of unity. Starting next Sunday, I am going to begin to share with you “five methods” Paul offers this divided church to help them achieve unity. But before we start thinking about “what we need to do to achieve unity”, I want us to give some thought this morning about what we mean when we talk about the unity of the church, the body of Christ.

I want to do two things this morning. I first want to talk about Paul’s “appeal for unity.” What is the unity that Paul is calling for when he says in verse 10, “*I appeal to you, brothers . . . that you be united.*” Secondly, I want to ask the question “Why?” Here I want to consider “the appeal of unity.” Why is unity so “appealing?” The title of my message is: “Unity! It is Appealing!” And it is! But it is more than that. It is critical to what it means for us to be the church and our unity has a direct impact on our ability to proclaim Jesus to our families . . . our community . . . our world.

## **An Appeal for Unity**

In verse 10, we hear Paul make his appeal for unity. He says, “*I appeal to you, brothers, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that all of you agree*, [that word *agree* is literally “*say the same thing*”.] So let’s start over, “*I appeal to you, brothers, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that all of you [say the same thing] and that there be no divisions among you, but that you be united in the same mind and the same judgment.*” To emphasize his appeal for unity, Paul repeats the word *same* three times. There is a *sameness* to our unity. There is a oneness about us. The reason he makes this appeal is because in the next verse he lets them know what *Chloe’s people* have told him. They are not *saying the same thing*. Nor are they of *the same mind and the same judgment*. Instead, he hears that “*there is quarreling among you.*”

When we talk about unity in the church, there are two sides to the coin. On one side of the coin, there is what is called “positional unity.” What this means is that if we are in Christ this unity we have in the church is already a reality. Paul picks up on this reality when he rattles off the word “*one*” seven times in Ephesians 4. “*There is one body . . . one Spirit . . . one hope . . . one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all.*” We don’t form our unity. We don’t create our unity. There is an ontological reality here that speaks to our nature—who we are as “the church.” Because of the work of Jesus and the baptism of the Holy Spirit, we are already one.

You see this reality in Paul's greeting to the church 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.*" Notice how Paul talks about the local church (the church in Corinth) and the universal church (*those who in every place call upon the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.*) What is true about us as a local fellowship of believers, and those who are worshipping this morning in the four churches we gathered with last week and those of faith who are scattered all around the globe and who have gone before us? What is true of us in Christ? Paul says *we are saints together!* Jesus is their Lord and our Lord! We are one!

Now, if that is the case—we are already one in Christ—what is the need for the appeal? Why does Paul have to say to this church, "*I appeal to you, brothers, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ . . . that you be united*" when they are already united in Christ? It is interesting that there are two times in this passage he refers to them as *brothers*. The second time is when he brings up the report from *Chloe's people . . . there is quarreling among you, my brothers.*" He brings it down to family terms. Like any family, we don't always act like we are family. But even when we don't act like we are family, we are still family. As a parent you might say, "don't talk to your sister like that!" Why? "She is your sister!" "Don't hit your brother!" Why? "He is your brother!" Act like it. That is what Paul is saying here. "Don't quarrel and divide?" Why? You are family!

This leads us to the other side of the coin when we talk about unity. Even though this is something that has already been achieved for us in Christ, we still need to maintain it. We need to tend to it. The reason there is an appeal for unity is because these brothers in Corinth aren't acting like they are brothers. They are quarreling with one another. They are divided. What seems to be the problem?

On the surface, the nature of their division seems to be centered around personalities. Paul speaks to what he heard in the report from *Chloe's people* in verse 12. "*What I mean is that each one of you says, I follow Paul, or I follow Apollos, or I follow Cephas (Peter), or I follow Christ.*" He is not suggesting that these church leaders are fomenting these divisions. We are not really sure why the church is dividing around these different personalities. But it is worth noting here that three of the four parties are not aligning themselves with Paul. And it is not like Paul is trying to exert himself above these other three parties. He sure isn't looking to exert himself over Christ? In fact he asks a rhetorical question: "*Is Christ divided?*" No! But by dividing themselves into these camps, they kept Paul at an arm's length and they did not respect his authority in the church. And yet, Paul is saying, "Look, we are all on the same team!" We are one!

Craig Blomberg says that it is providential that we don't know more details behind what is causing this division in the church at Corinth. He said, "in applying this passage we need to see that Paul's principles transcend the specific conflicts."<sup>1</sup> And that is the point, isn't it? We may not know all the specifics that come with the division in the church at Corinth, but we do know the reality of dealing with division in our own church experiences. Gordon Fee said it this way, "Moreover, because our own experience is of a church divided, and especially because we have sometimes also experienced painfully destructive quarrels within the church in various ways, we instinctively feel ourselves immediately in touch with their problem."<sup>2</sup> In other words, from time to time, we too need to hear Paul's appeal for unity.

Lately, I have seen a slew of articles written about people choosing to come back to church or choosing not to leave their church. Here are a few titles I have seen: "Why I'm Going Back to Church After Heading to College." "Why I am Going Back to Church After My Divorce." "Why I Am Staying at My Church After a Hard Year." The titles invoke the question: "Why would you want to go back?" "Why would you stay?" It is messy there. The titles imply that the church doesn't always reflect well the oneness that we have in Christ. The last of these articles, "Why I Am Staying at my Church After a Hard Year" was written by the pastor. At the end of the article he writes, "There is a mountain of pastors and church members who, after an unusually challenging year and a half, are feeling the same sort of exhaustion. They are feeling, like I often do, as though the only thing they are giving their congregation is their failure. If your fatigue or hurt is leaving you feeling as though you can't possibly return to service or worship at your local church, I would humbly ask you to lift your eyes and try for a moment to look past your pain. The gathering of saints to which you are a part is radiant."<sup>3</sup>

That is the appeal Paul is making to any "ordinary" church like ours. It is an appeal to recognize that we have been called by God and we are *saints together* because of Jesus. And so we work together to maintain that unity we have in Jesus. It is essential. It is worth it.

## **The Appeal of Unity**

Why? Why is our unity so important? What is the "appeal" of our unity? Gordon Fee points out that the issue of our unity is not the main issue here. It is not the pressing issue on Paul's mind. There is something bigger here that Paul is addressing. Fee said the division of the church was a symptom of a greater problem. Here is what he said. "The greater issue is the threat posed to the gospel, and along with that to the nature of

the church and its apostolic ministry.”<sup>4</sup> By “apostolic ministry” he is referring to the witness of the church in the community. Paul is not looking at the church in Corinth and saying to them, “Can’t we all just get along with each other.” “Wouldn’t that be nice?” No! Something far bigger is at stake here. The power of the gospel at work through the church is tied to our unity. The testimony of Jesus through the church is at stake. Listen to how he opens up his appeal in verse 10, “*I appeal to you, brothers, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.*” It is the testimony of Jesus through the church that is front and center on Paul’s mind and heart when he makes his appeal for unity.

There are two things that are “appealing” about our unity in Christ. Our unity demonstrates the presence of Christ and the power of Christ.

The Presence of Christ: Our unity gets to the very nature of what it means for us to be the church. My favorite definition for the church is a simple definition. Simply put, “the church is the presence of Christ on earth.”<sup>5</sup> That really “ups the game”, doesn’t it? Church is more than a service we attend on a Sunday. Church is more than a building we maintain. Church is more than a host of programs we offer. The church is the very presence of Christ on earth. When people encounter the church—the people of God—they ought to encounter Jesus.

In the New Testament, there are several metaphors to describe the church. The church is the *household* or the *temple* of God. That means it is the place where Christ dwells. The church is the *bride of Christ* and so there is this union we share with Christ. The church is *the body of Christ*, the organism that is Christ on earth. God has chosen in this age to identify himself with his church. There is a very real mystical union between Christ and the church to the point that we become the very presence of Jesus to the world. I like what Donald MacNair says about this. He says, “Let this reality command center stage in your thoughts. With so grand an identity at issue, how can we allow our focus to wander to petty differences and matters of personal comfort. The glory of God—His presence—matters so much more.”<sup>6</sup> That is exactly what matters to Paul most here. It is the nature of the church, the very presence of Christ on earth.

And so Paul asks that rhetorical question: “*Is Christ divided?*” Now keep in mind, Christ was one of the four parties listed by Paul in verse 12. He says, “*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.*” So when he asks: “*Is Christ divided?*” Paul is saying here, “Absurd! Can Christ be made a party in the same breath as the others?” And furthermore, “Do you mean to say that Christ has been apportioned out so that only one group has

him?”<sup>7</sup> That is absurd! Christ can not be divided. Nor can his church.

Do you know where our unity is rooted? It is rooted in the Trinity, the Triune God. We worship one God made up of three distinct persons: God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Spirit. Another way to say “Trinity” is “Tri-unity.” Unity is not “uniformity.” Rather, in the Godhead, we have three distinct and diverse persons serving one another and united as one. It is the Triune nature of God that tells us that at the core of who God is—God is love. So it is with the church. We are one body and we are made up of many members, in unity with one another with Christ as our head.

The hymn, *The Church’s One Foundation* says it this way. “Yet we [the church] on earth have union with God, the Three in One.” How is our union of God and his love seen through us? How do we make God’s presence known to the world? The only way this unity can have impact in the world is for it to be visible. Blomberg puts it this way, “Church should be a place where people who have no other natural reason for associating with each other come together in love.”<sup>7</sup> When that love is evident, Christ’s presence is made known. That is the “appeal” of our unity. It demonstrates to the world that Jesus is here. It gives demonstration that God loves you.

The Power of Christ: If you know anything about Paul, you know that he has a passion for the gospel; the simple message of Christ crucified, buried and risen from the dead for the forgiveness of our sins. He says in Romans 1:16 that the *gospel is the power of God for salvation for everyone who believes*. And so he says here in verse 17 that he was sent to *preach the gospel*. But look at the sobering words at the end of verse 17. He talks about *the cross of Christ being emptied of its power*. That is a sobering thought. What could possibly empty the cross of its power? In the verse he talks about relying on eloquent words to speak about Christ, which is part of the cause for division in the church at Corinth. But I can’t read these words apart from the context of this passage. Our divisions weaken the power of the gospel. Our divisions inhibit our “apostolic ministry” - which is the spread of the gospel.

Why is that? It is because the gospel changes our lives and when people see the change, it authenticates our message. When they see our love for one another, our unity, they are given a tangible expression of the difference Christ has made in our lives. McNair puts it this way, “When something changes a hardened criminal into a humble benefactor, when loving relationships grow across ethnic or racial barriers, when people keep promises and tell the truth even to their own hurt, or when a congregation mercifully addresses a community need, the world will recognize the presence of



supernatural power.”<sup>8</sup> Most people are not argued into the kingdom. They are loved into the kingdom. We have said it many times here: Belong—Believe—Become. We want you to know that you BELONG here, no matter what you are going through. We think if you hang out here long enough you will BELIEVE that Jesus is the Christ because you will see it and experience it in the love of God’s people. And then you will BECOME more like Christ as God begins to change your life.

When we are not living in unity, the “cross of Christ is emptied of its power.” There is no authenticating love that says to the world around us that Jesus is indeed the Son of God. Do you remember at the beginning of the sermon we noted how the word *the same* is repeated three times? Paul appealed to the need *that all of you agree* (or, say the same thing), *united in the same mind and the same judgment.*” He is not talking about “uniformity” and everyone having the same opinion about everything. But what he is calling at here with the word *same* is that we be of the same mind when it comes to the gospel and when it comes to our unity. Why? Because there are people around here who need Jesus. And the “appeal of unity” is that it lends itself to the power of the gospel at work in the lives of people.

## Conclusion

The appeal for unity is an appeal for us to reflect what we already are in Christ. We are one so let us maintain our unity. The appeal of unity is that it enables us to be the presence of Jesus and experience the power of Jesus as God uses us to bring people to him. This is a very relevant topic for us to consider as a church family, given all of the challenges of the past year. It is truly *déjà vu all over again!* But we are not left alone. Paul gives us some practical methods to help us maintain our unity.

So here is where we are going over the next five weeks. We are going to use an acrostic that spells out the word unity, U.N.I.T.Y. Each letter will stand for a method we can use to help us live together as brothers and sisters.

- U - Unceasing gratitude
- N - Never lose sight of the cross
- I - Imitate the upside-down wisdom of Jesus
- T - Together we build
- Y - Yield to others

*“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.”*

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<sup>1</sup>Craig Blomberg *1 Corinthians: The NIV Application Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1994) 45

<sup>2</sup>Gordon Fee *The First Epistle to the Corinthians* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2014) 47

<sup>3</sup>Derek Buikema “Why I am Staying at My Church After a Hard Year”  
[www.thegospelcoalition.org](http://www.thegospelcoalition.org) September 4, 2021

<sup>4</sup>Fee, 50

<sup>5</sup>Donald MacNair *The Practices of a Healthy Church* (Phillipsburg: P & R Publishing, 1999)  
Kindle Reader, location 474

<sup>6</sup>Ibid.

<sup>7</sup>Blomberg, 48

<sup>8</sup>McNair, Kindle Location 502

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