

1 Corinthians: A Picture of the Real Church – Practice Harmony: Chapter 1

Hockey is no more! NHL Hockey won't be a reality this year!

The player's association and the owners could not get it together and so there is no Hockey season this year! Some of you might not care, but imagine for a minute what it would be like with no football season, basketball season, baseball season. Some of you still might not care, but the fourth biggest league in America has shut down because of disunity!

I don't have much sympathy for the players who make big bucks nor the owners, but their decision to not get along impacts so many people!

With every game not played, scores of people who do the little things that allow games to be played don't work. They are the ticket-takers and sellers, Zamboni drivers, the people who collect parking fees and direct traffic, all those who work in the concession stands, the ushers, security guards, and janitors. Many are either retired and trying to supplement inadequate pensions and Social security or students who are struggling to get themselves through college.

They work by the hour, the game, or the hot dog, and they're hurting. So, too, are the hundreds of employees in team offices who were told to go home and not to come back until there were games to be played and business to be done.

The same is true for us in the Church. Whenever we do not get along in this Church, people all around us are impacted:

- The lost are not won,
- Those who struggle in their faith give up, and
- The sold out are discouraged.

We have begun a sermon on 1 Corinthians. In fact, it started last week - Why? 1 Corinthians gives us a picture of what a real church looks like and how to deal with the issues that we face today! It is such a practical book that keeps pointing us back to God!

Today, I want to look at the first chapter of 1 Corinthians and see what it has to say to us today. I believe that when we look at this chapter, we are going to see a picture of a splintered church. A church that was split because of people's opinions.

The Church has fought with disunity from the very beginning.

- The Church stayed together because of the authority of the Holy Spirit inspired apostles, and because of persecution.
- After the apostles died, there was a great void of leadership.

- The Emperor Constantine stepped in and combined church and state, ending persecution & beginning the idea that belonging to a certain country also means belonging to that country's religion.
- The Church (w/out the apostle's authority & an incentive to stay pure) began teaching things like:
 - You need a Creed to be a Christian (Nicene Creed - 325 A.D.– Revelation 22:18 warns of adding words to the Bible)
 - Purgatory (593 A.D. – 1 John 1:9 says that confession of sin purifies. Purgatory is not needed.)
 - The Priesthood of the Ordained (660 A.D.– 1 Timothy 2:5 says that Jesus alone is our priest and the one who goes to God the Father for us)
 - Transubstantiation (meaning that communion was the actual blood and body of Christ - not just a symbol – 1000 A.D.– Mat 26:26-29 says that Jesus gave the first communion. So Jesus ate and drank Himself?)
 - the Celibacy of Priests (1015 A.D.– 1 Timothy 4:1-4 says that a sign that people are following demons is that they will forbid people to marry.)
 - Sprinkling for baptism (1311 A.D. – Acts 8:38-39 tells the story of the Philip and the Eunuch. It says that the Eunuch went down into the water. Another example: Jesus baptism – Matthew 3)
 - The selling of indulgences (Romans 1:17 says that righteousness is by faith, not by the buying of forgiveness)
- With each wrong teaching, the Church became more disunified. There were splinter groups within the Church that would rise up against each false teaching.
- The Church then split in 1054 between the Roman Catholic Church and the Greek Orthodox over the use of icons in worship, the authority of the bishops, and other issues.
- Then Martin Luther came along in 1529 and tried to reform the Roman Catholic Church. This began the Reformation. His followers formed the Lutheran Denomination.
- Then others followed John Calvin (1536 – Presbyterians), others followed John Knox (1550), some followed King Henry VIII (1552 - Episcopalians), Baptists (1611), John Wesley (1739 – Methodist), Alexander Mack (1708 – Brethren), and the list goes on.

The Church has become splintered! Jesus had another idea about the Church, however. He wanted us to be one!

Hebrews 12:15 - *See to it that no one misses the grace of God and that no bitter root grows up to cause trouble and defile many.*

Galatians 5:15 - *If you keep on biting and devouring each other, watch out or you will be destroyed by each other.*

So what do we do? Let's turn to 1 Corinthians 1:10-17 and find out. READ

1. Practice Harmony (vs. 10-17):

a. What destroys Harmony? Set this up by having the congregation sing "Amazing Grace"

i. Singing off key – you sing off key while they sing

1. Legalism is doing things your own way. It is putting your opinion on the same pedestal as God's Word in matters that God has given freedom.
2. In the Corinthian Church and in Rome, there was a huge controversy over eating meat sacrificed to idols. EXPLAIN
3. What are some meats today?
4. Romans 14:19-21 (NLT) - *So then, let us aim for harmony in the church and try to build each other up. Don't tear apart the work of God over what you eat. Remember, there is nothing wrong with these things in themselves. But it is wrong to eat anything if it makes another person stumble. Don't eat meat or drink wine or do anything else if it might cause another Christian to stumble.*

ii. Singing your own tune – have the congregation divided – one half sing the normal "Amazing Grace", while the other sing to the tune of Gilligan's Island

1. Criticism & Gossip
2. Proverbs 6:16-19 - *There are six things the Lord hates, seven that are detestable to him: haughty eyes, a lying tongue, hands that shed innocent blood, a heart that devises wicked schemes, feet that are quick to rush into evil, a false witness who pours out lies and a man who stirs up dissension among brothers.*
3. Proverbs 16:28 (NLT) - *A troublemaker plants seeds of strife; gossip separates the best of friends.*

iii. Singing your own song – have the congregation sing "Amazing Grace" while you sing "When peace like a river"

1. False Teaching
2. Acts 20:29-31 (NLT) - *I know full well that false teachers, like vicious wolves, will come in among you..., not sparing the flock. Even some of you will distort the truth in order to draw a following. Watch out!*
3. False Teaching can run rampant, because it sticks in our head and in our heart.
4. Having a Saturday service vs. Worship on the Sabbath!

b. Biblical Harmony includes:

- i. Sharing true feelings (authenticity)
- ii. Encouragement of everyone (mutuality)
- iii. Support for everyone (sympathy)
- iv. Forgiveness (mercy)
- v. Speaking the truth in love (honesty)
- vi. Admitting our weaknesses (humility)
- vii. Respecting differences (courtesy)
- viii. No gossip (confidentiality)
- ix. Making the group a priority (frequency)

- c. Ephesians 4:3 (NLT) - *Always keep yourselves united in the Holy Spirit, and bind yourselves together with peace.*

We are called to practice harmony, but we are also called to focus on the cross.
READ vs. 18-25.

2. Focus on the Cross (18-25):

a. The Cross is foolishness (vs. 18)

- i. Mercy doesn't make sense
 1. Mercy is forgiving someone who doesn't deserve it
 2. The worst of humans can be forgiven!
 3. God's mercy is too great to get your mind around it
- ii. Grace doesn't make sense
 1. Grace is giving someone a gift who doesn't deserve it
 2. The worst of humans are given a prize by God
 3. God's grace at the cross is foolishness:
 - a. Stumbling block to the Jew – grace and mercy are against the whole idea of the Law
 - b. Foolishness to the Gentile – grace and mercy doesn't make sense
- iii. Even though the cross might be foolish to the world, harmony happens when we focus on the cross:
 1. 1 John 3:16 - *This is how we know what love is: Jesus Christ laid down his life for us. And we ought to lay down our lives for our brothers.*
 2. In other words, when we focus on what the world calls foolishness, then we can really love each other.

I thank God for grace and mercy! I thank God that the cross is God's foolishness! If God did things that only made sense, then I wouldn't have hope! I don't deserve grace and mercy. Thank God for the foolishness of the cross.

b. The Cross is God's power (vs. 25)

- i. Jesus established the Church through the cross and no matter what it has faces it has stood.
- ii. Matthew 16:18 - *Now I say to you that you are Peter, and upon this rock I will build my church, and all the powers of hell will not conquer it.*
- iii. Extreme Opinions have tried to make what Jesus said a lie. Here are issues that have actually split churches:
 1. Having the Communion table located in the center front of the church auditorium, instead of the pulpit.
 2. Allowing men without ties and jackets to serve the Lord's Supper
 3. Changing the present order of worship
 4. A preacher growing a beard
 5. Paying a preacher
 6. Serving coffee in the Sunday School class
 7. Having someone beside the preacher do baptisms
 8. Using a particular version of the Bible other than the KJV
 9. Women giving the invocation or benediction
 10. Attending movies
 11. Having Small groups and Sunday School classes led by lay members
 12. Having Sunday School
 13. Having the Lord's Supper on a weekday
 14. A man's wearing a pony-tail hair style or an earring
- iv. This doesn't include the dogmatic doctrinal arguments that have been fought over! Things that still split the church today:
 1. Original Sin
 2. Speaking in Tongues
 3. Baptism
 4. Human sexuality
 5. Predestination and Free Will
 6. There is a reason that we have over 158 main stream denominations with hundreds more of variations of these!
- v. Church problems in Corinth that could have split the Church there:
 1. Food dedicated to idols
 2. the Law of Love
 3. Women's Head-coverings

4. A man live immorally with his stepmother
 5. Christians suing each other
 6. Celibacy & Virginity
 7. Marriage and Divorce
- vi. No matter what the church faces, the power of the cross is there! It can defeat anything! Jesus is the ultimate foundation, and when He lays down something – it last forever!
1. 1 Corinthians 3:11 - *For no one can lay any other foundation than the one we already have—Jesus Christ.*
 2. This means that when we face these issues that threaten to split the church, we must turn back to Christ over and over again. We must focus on the cross!

The cross is foolishness, power, and...

c. The Cross is God's wisdom

- i. What does it mean that the cross is God's wisdom? Look at the text to find the answer!
- ii. Verse 30 declares that God's wisdom is our:
 1. Righteousness = in a right relationship with God
 2. Holiness = separated out/ chosen, but above in quality
 3. Redemption = paid for your sins
- iii. The bottom line: Do you trust yourself or God's ways?

The Holy Spirit calls us out in and gives us practical advice in this first chapter of 1 Corinthians:

1. Practice Harmony
2. Focus on the Cross, and...

3. Remember your Calling (26-31):

- a. Read with me verses 26-31.
- b. Thank God for this verse! This tells us that at the foot of the cross, there is room for the: oppressed, poor, hungry, thirsty, wretched, blind, poorly dressed, lower class, uneducated, undeserving, unpopular, people with a bad reputation... Basically, everyone who the world would throw away! This means that there is hope for everyone!
- c. Paul calls you to remember what you were. Some people have a hard time with this. They think that it is unspiritual to remember what God has brought you through and should only focus on the future. While we shouldn't get hung

up on our past, we are called to remember what we were before Christ.

There are two people in this room:

- i. Those who grew up in the Church
- ii. Those who came to Christ later

No matter, which category you are in, let me tell you, that God has saved each one from the worst of sins: drug use, prostitution, anger, drunkenness, lust, etc. If it weren't for the grace of God working in your life, it is possible that each person here would have been through these things. And yet it is the cross that saves us! Whether you have never cussed in your life, or whether you have invented new ways to sin, it is the cross that has saved you! This should humble us!

- d. You did not get where you are by anything you have done! It is totally what Christ has done on the cross!
 - i. Paul finished this section by quoting Jeremiah 9:23 & 24. If you flipped back and looked it up, it would read: *This is what the Lord says: "Let not the wise man gloat in his wisdom, or the mighty man in his might, or the rich man in his riches. Let them boast in this alone: that they truly know me and understand that I am the Lord who is just and righteous, whose love is unfailing, and that I delight in these things. I, the Lord, have spoken!"*
 - ii. Galatians 6:14 - *May I never boast except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, through which the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world.*
 - iii. Again, 1 Peter 5:5c remind us: *"God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble."*
- e. We are called to "Boast in the Lord," not what we have done or become! Hasn't Jesus done wonderful things for you? Shout it out – boast about it!

From the beginning, Jesus' had Passion for the Church:

- How important are the Last words of the dying? Children care very much what their parent's wishes are before they die. Legal battles within families are formed over how to bury the dead, divide up the estate, or any last wishes. I know that I have family members who have not talked to one another because of such issues.
- John 17 gives us a "last wish list" of Jesus:
- Before Jesus would be executed Jesus Prayed:
 - That His disciples would stand on the Truth, the Word - John 17:17
 - That they would go into the world to reach others – vs. 18
 - For future generations of believers – vs. 20 <-- He prayed for us!

- That His disciples would be ONE, so that the world will believe – vs. 21

Jesus went through whipping, ridicule, nakedness, and the cross to establish the Church, to make sure that we would practice harmony!

Jesus wants us to:

- Practice Harmony
- Focus on the Cross
- Remember Our Calling

So, I ask you, for the sake of Jesus:

- How will you work to put others first? How will you work to not allow your opinions get in the way of your growth here?
- How will you practice biblical harmony?
- Who do you need to go to and mend the fence? Ask for forgiveness?
- How can you show your support of the things going on here?
- How will you grow closer to your church and ultimately closer to God in the next 6 months?
- What real ministry can you get involved in?
- How will you remember what Christ has done?
- How will you practice harmony?

Just As I Am – Hymnal # 516