

The Church, Together and Divided

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[0 : 0 0] How you guys doing? Good? Really good? So, so good? Hey, so if you're here for the first time, my name is, I wish I could actually preach in front of everybody. We could be, well, it'd be terrible if you're in a circle because then you could see that I have no rear end. But if we were closer to each other, that would be really good because I just kind of feel like as a family, we've come together here and we're finishing this sermon series on God's story, our story. We're looking at a new story. And so for those of you who are here for the first time, we just want to kind of lay some groundwork. And one of the groundworks is that we believe that this is God's word, that it's living and active and infallible. And it's all that we need for living the life that God has planned for us. Not one thing less, not one thing more. This is God's word to us. It's a covenant that God's given his people, God's people. So I know that there are people in here who aren't in the family of God yet. You're searching, you're seeking.

And just realize that this is, this is a message that's very personal to the family of God. And God's given it to us to teach us about himself and what it means to walk with him. So don't go off tomorrow at work and say to your boss who's not in church, my pastor said, da, da, da, da, and you should be doing this, this, and this, and this. Because that doesn't mean anything to people who aren't in the family of God, right? Because this is just for God's family. It's just, it's this message for us. My prayer would be more like your boss's life is falling apart and has no meaning.

And he looks at you and he says, how do you keep your life together so much? Then you could say, I follow Jesus Christ. And through your actions, your words have so much more power, but God's word, is powerful and it changes us for forever, right? We've also said we've been on this journey and we've looked at this journey. I have a little calendar here, a little diagram for you, that when we come on this journey and this, we come to Christ and that's the conversion point. And this is our whole life. And what the Bible says and what we've been doing through God's word and our word and what we're going to learn in the church of Corinth is that on this whole life, we're going through this process of growing and we're growing in our awareness of God's holiness and we're growing in an awareness of our sinfulness and our brokenness and our flesh. And wherever you are on your journey, these two things should be happening always in your life. And you see that if you've all of a sudden stopped growing in your awareness of God's holiness, what's going to happen is you're going to start performing. You're going to start saying things like, well, I go to church and I do Sunday school and I do this and I do that and I must be right because that's what we're supposed to do.

And you're going to see that if you stop growing in the awareness of your flesh and your sinfulness, what you're going to start doing is you're going to pretend. And the church is full of pretenders, aren't we? We all wear masks. We all say, you know, everything's great and everything's perfect. And we don't want people to see that we are broken and we have struggles with these things in our life.

But the Bible says that all of these things are true. And if we forget one or the other, what ultimately happens is that we shrink the gospel. We shrink the power of the cross. We shrink the power of what Christ has done on the cross. And so that our lives and our message and what we teach here and what we talk about outside means less. It means nothing. It's going to be shore up. And so this is the journey that we're on. And as we look at Corinthians, the Corinthian church was struggling with these same things. Do you know that, does that make sense? And we just keep teaching that over and over and over again because I need to hear that over and over again because I forget. I forget often. You know, right before Christ was betrayed, he prayed for us. Did you know that? We're told that he prayed for you and I specifically, that he prayed for Watermark at least three times. I put parts of it in your bulletin. It's found in John 17. It's called the High Priestly

[4 : 08] Prayer. And in it, he prays three times that you and I would be one, that we'd be united, that we'd be whole, that we'd be unbroken. The word actually there and what Paul uses is *untorn* because Paul's his tent maker. And when he says united, it means no tears. It's consistent. He's not praying. Jesus isn't praying that we wouldn't be different because you just look around us and we have a lot of different people. He's not praying that we wouldn't be diverse. But what he's praying is that we would be different and diverse and then we would be together. And it's my experience at the church who struggles with this the most out of anything throughout the history of the church. We struggle with unity. I mean, I think Jesus prayed this for us because he knew that we would always be broken.

He knew that we'd always be selfish. He knew that we'd always be self-centered. He knew that we would struggle with pride. He knew that it would be easier for Tobin to be divided and separated from the people of God than it would be for me to be unified. It would be easier for me to find something wrong with them or some kind of discrepancy that made them different. And it would be easier for me to be at odds with them than to be together with them. It'd be easier for us to be disunified than unified.

Some people would even say it's in our DNA. But Jesus knew that the most powerful thing you and I could... Now listen to this, guys. Jesus knew that the most powerful thing that you and I could do right now, the most powerful thing that would testify to the power of the cross in the gospel is that we would be unified as a community. He says that this is the thing that's going to give the validity to the power of the cross. Now when I've looked at this service in here and I've counted, I've counted over 20 different cultures and origins and races and ethnicities and nations and cultures and background in Watermark. And I think it's amazing because when I go home to churches in America, they're all saying, we want a church that's not all white middle class. We want a church that's not all Asian. We want a church that's all mixed together. And we're able to say that this is what Watermark is like already.

And what the Bible says and what Jesus says is this right now, right here, Watermark, this is going to be the greatest testimony to the power of the gospel to a self-centered world.

And what we're doing right here, this unity and coming together and worshiping together and loving each other and being in fellowship with each other and praying for each other, this is going to be the greatest testimony to a world that is fragmented and separated. And he says to us that if you don't have love, if you don't show unity, then the power of the cross is diminished and the gospel is diminished. And so Jesus continually over and over says that by this, they will know your love.

[6 : 46] By this, they are going to know your unity. By this, they're going to know that you have a community. By this, when men see you come together in the church, in the family of God, the world, all the world is going to know that you're changed, that your heart is changed. They're going to know that the gospel means something because you love each other. You're going to love people who are different than you, and you're going to love people who come from different cultures than you.

We're looking at this church in Corinth. We're looking at 1 Corinthians. It started in the book of Acts, Acts chapter 18, if you want to go back and read it. And Paul was on a missionary journey, and he was teaching these people in Corinth, which was a crazy, crazy, diverse city. It's an old city. It was founded in about 1200 BC and had been destroyed many times, but then the Romans came in. Julius Caesar, about 44 BC, redid Corinth, and he made it this incredibly strategic city. Some people would say that Corinth was the most powerful city in the empire. In some ways, it was even more powerful than Rome. And historians would say that it was a strategic city, and we got a little map of it here, this strategic city that was on this peninsula, and it connected the northern part of Greece to the southern part of Greece. So it was a land bridge, but not only was it a land bridge, but it connected these two bodies of water, the Mediterranean and the sea behind it. And so sometimes people, instead of sailing around the coast, which was often very dangerous and fit with storms, they would just pull their boat up, and they would drag it three miles across Corinth to get it into the other harbor. And so because of this, Corinth was this massive, powerful city. Ancient historians say that

Corinth was the center of materialism and the center of sexuality in all the world. Did you know that? That it was this center that if you wanted to get wealthy, if you wanted to become wealthy, you moved to Corinth because this is where people got wealthy through commercial ventures. I mean, in Corinth, you became important in several ways. Either you became important because you were

wealthy within society, or maybe you became important because you married into the right family within society, or maybe you became important because you had the correct social ties in society, or maybe that you were educated. Do you know that if you went to a seminary, or not a seminary, but a university in Corinth, they only taught two topics. They taught rhetoric, teach people how to speak well and speak about just eloquently, because people loved to have their ears tickled, and they just loved great, powerful speakers. And they taught philosophy. And these are the only two things that people learned in the universities in Corinth, and as what was valued in the culture, or you became powerful because you were a Jew, or you became powerful because you were a Greek, or you became powerful because you were Roman, or maybe you became powerful because you were part of a certain religious party. But what the historians tell us is that Corinth, like Hong Kong, was just full of different segregations and parties, and it was all these barriers to prevent unity and from people coming together. The historians say that there's this big scramble for wealth and honor, and people were always trying to get wealthy, and they're always trying to be individualist, and they're always trying to be self-centered and self-important. And it was so strong that it even moved into the church of Corinth. So the people in the church, they struggled with self-centeredness and self-importance. And I know that we don't struggle with this, but they did. They struggled with materialism. They struggled with individualism.

And I've already said that the important thing in this church was wisdom. The most important thing was that you were wise, and people sought after wisdom, and it was valued. And in the church or wherever, in their clubs, they would have the best speakers. They had the most persuasive speakers because that was the thing that was most valued. It didn't care if you were teaching on nonsense or just whatever, but the important thing was that you could teach on nonsense well.

[10:46] Corinth was also this melting pot of religions. I mean, all the religions came together in Corinth, and people worshiped all the religions. And it was really interesting because even if you look through archaeology, there's inscriptions on people's houses, and it would say stuff like, I pray to all the gods, or I worship all the gods, because that was important to have all your bases covered. The most important god to pray for was the Caesar, the cult of Caesar, the Roman emperor cult.

And basically, if you didn't burn incense to the altar of Caesar, if you didn't worship Caesar in some form or the other, you couldn't do business. So Christians in this culture, in this day and age, they faced incredible struggles. I mean, it was so hard to be a Christian because they only worshiped one god.

Do you know that, and I was reading this through some historians, that Christians were often labeled as hateful. Christians were labeled as hateful because they didn't go along with everything that society said was okay.

And so when society said something was wrong, the Christians would say, no, we can't do that. And you could actually read documents that they were labeled as hateful. Does that sound familiar? So the Christians had it really difficult, but not in Corinth.

Listen to me, the Christians didn't have it hard in Corinth. And the reason is, is because the church in Corinth was like a club. The church in Corinth was like the Aberdeen Boat Club, or the Marina Club, or the Hockey Club, or the Jockey Club, or the Cricket Club, or whichever club you went to.

[12:22] I remember when we were moving to Hong Kong, and Christina's dad was telling us about Hong Kong. He said, be careful of Hong Kong because it's a place where you can get clubbed to death. And you can. And so the church was like a club, and it was just something that people did with part of their lives.

People just came to church because it was just something they did. It wasn't a part of who they were. It wasn't something holistically of them. It's just they did it because it's just what they did. And so because of that, the church faced no pressure from outside.

The church was just like the outside. And so people, when you came to church, you didn't feel any pressure from the outside because you were just like the outside, and who cares about you? You're just like another club. But what happened to the church of Corinth was that they faced pressure internally.

They faced these schisms and these breakings and these tearings of their relationships and their fellowships. And what you see in the Bible is either a church faces temptation and hardship from outside because they're walking with the Lord, and they're loving God, and they're doing community

well, and they're doing mission well, and they're loving people well.

Or if they're not doing that, then they're going to face tension from inside because they're being torn up and being torn apart. When I was back in the States, I was talking to a friend, and his church is actually going through a church split. It's about to go through a massive church split right now.

[13 : 31] And it's not going through a church split because they're standing up for Christ. It's going through a church split because they're just like the culture. And so people inside are fighting over this.

And so Paul comes about 52 AD, and he comes to this amazing city called Corinth, which is diverse and segregated and powerful and rich. And he comes in and he plants his church.

And this church starts to grow. And Paul stays there for 18 months if you read Acts because God says, stay here. I have something planned for you. And the first thing that is amazing that happens is the leader of the synagogue comes to Christ.

This guy named Crispus comes to Christ, and there's just this big upheaval in the synagogue. And so they kick the Christians out of the synagogue, and they start worshiping in a house right next to the synagogue. But there's all this revival happening in the synagogue, and people don't know what's going on.

And so the synagogue gets in, and then they ordain another high priest. His name is Sothenes. And you read about him in the beginning. And then a little while later, Sothenes comes to Christ also.

[14 : 31] And so the church is just doing some amazing things there. And after 18 months, Paul hears from the Lord, and he says, okay, it's time for me to go on. And he goes on this mission trip, and he goes on, and he serves, and he's planting other churches.

And all of a sudden, he starts to hear these rumors about something going on in the church. He hears it from Chloe's people. We don't know who Chloe is, but we know that she was a very powerful woman within the church. Maybe even part of the church met in her house.

And he hears these rumors, and so he starts to write these letters. And he starts writing these letters, and what we're reading today, and for the next couple months, is probably the second letter that he sent out.

And in this letter, it's really simple when you read it, because the focus is pretty clear. He's talking to the people, and he's talking about the foolishness of our hearts, and in our brokenness.

And he's trying to turn our focus off of ourselves, and he's trying to put our focus on the wisdom of God. Maybe another way to say it is, he's trying to teach them and us what it means to be spiritual.

[15 : 34] Because we struggle with what it means to be spiritual. I wrote a definition for you in the bulletin above there. I said, Spirituality is the life of Jesus Christ, produced in a believer by the Holy Spirit through the Word of God in response to a beating of faith, invading every area of human existence.

And the church struggled with that. They didn't understand what it meant to be holy, and so they had these schisms. And so we have in verse 10, if you look there, Paul starts off his letter to these people.

And what he's going to talk about, we're just going to talk about three things, and then we're going to pray. But I think, I don't think this is the most important message for us as a church right now, but I think it will be the most important message for us as a church in the very, very near future.

Because something's going to happen in this church as people start to love the Lord and love each other. And what's going to happen is they're going to start talking to their friends at work. And they're going to start being different in the workplace.

And they're going to start going to be living ethical lives. And they're going to be very different than the culture of Hong Kong around them. And when that starts happening in your life and in your workplace and in your family, God's Spirit's going to move.

[16 : 44] People's lives are going to be changed. Because we're going to be different than the culture around us. And when that happens, we're going to have a choice. And our choice is, are we going to stay and start thinking about how we're going to take care of everybody in our church and stay inwardly focused?

Or are we going to continue to remember that we're here to plant other churches and reach out to people who aren't in church on Sunday? And when we come to that point, we're going to need 1 Corinthians more than any other part of the scripture.

Because it's going to look at our heart. And it's going to ask us, who are we serving? And who are we following? And what's the most important thing in our life? So in verse 10, he talks to them and he starts to exhort them.

And it's interesting because he's an apostle and he doesn't say, I'm an apostle. This is what you need to do. I planted you. This is what you should do. I'm your dad.

Who cares what you say? This is what's going to happen. Why? Because I'm the dad. He doesn't say that at all. He exhorts them. He pleads with them. And he says, it's not based on his authority and not based on who he is, but it's based on Jesus.

[17 : 51] And what he's saying to them and to us is that if we keep our eyes off of Christ, the moment we lose our focus off of Christ, bad things are going to happen in our lives. And so Paul says, look at Jesus.

Look at what he's done. Look at who he is. Look at all the things that he's brought you to. He is the one who's called you. He is the one who's built you up. He's the one bringing you here.

And then you see, he's going to put the standard for us as a church. So we're going to have a standard, we're going to have a problem, and we're going to have the solution. It's very simple. It's only going to be in three verses. Verse 10, verse 11 and 12, and verse 13.

Four verses. So we're going to have a standard, we're going to have a problem, and we're going to have a solution. And the standard is this. This is what he says in verse 10. He says, and he's a really strong, passionate words in Greek.

They're very powerful. And it's a father begging for a son. The son is about to leave the household. The father's grabbed onto the cloak of the son. And the father is begging to the son.

[18 : 48] And the most passionate words that he could say, and he's saying, I exhort you. I plead with you. Let there be no divisions. Let there be no tears.

Let there be no brokenness. Let there be nothing that separates each other among yourselves.

That you be united. The Greek word means whole. It means complete. It means together.

That there should be nothing that can take you apart. That you are no divisions. That you are united. You're not just united in name, but you're united in mind. And you're united in your judgment.

Now what Paul is talking about here, what he's saying is he's talking about the gospel. It's something that we've been talking about all along. He's talking about this is what Christ has done for us. This is who Christ is. This is the cross. And he's saying that there's nothing, there's nothing more powerful in your life.

There's nothing more important to us today. There's nothing that's the ability to change us. There's nothing that has the ability to heal us. There's nothing that has the ability to bring us whole. There's nothing that has the ability to fix us, to bring us life.

[19 : 49] There's nothing that has the ability to do that, but Jesus Christ in the cross. That's what he's appealing to us for. Keep our focus on Christ.

Now he's not saying don't be diverse. I mean he's not saying don't have differences. But what he is saying that in these differences, in these diversities, don't raise them to the level of the gospel.

All these other things are secondary. And he's saying guard against these things because the minute these preferences that you and I have, the minute these things that we want in a church, the minute these things we want in our community group, the minute these things we want in our Christian family, the minute these things become more important than the gospel, they're going to tear us apart.

And Paul is warning them about these things, and he's saying be different. You don't have to be alike, but remember that in secondary things, guard your heart.

Don't allow anything else to rise above the gospel. What he's saying is the gospel, who Christ is and what Christ has done, hold these things really tightly because the minute we lose focus on the cross, then we lose focus on hope.

[21 : 03] We lose focus on the reason that we're together. We lose the power that we change.

Does that, does that, am I making any sense at all here? So there are secondary things that are going to come into our church, like how we baptize, and what Bible verses you like to read, and what scripture verses you like, and what translations you like, and what speakers you like, and what type of worship music you like, and what colors on the banners you like.

And all of these things aren't the gospel. In my 40 years in churches, I've seen churches split over the color of the carpet. I've seen churches split over what mission groups they should support.

I've seen churches split over the style of music, whether there's drums or there's not drums. I've seen churches split over how they use their money, how they save, how much should they save. I've seen churches split because they hired a pastor to make the church grow, and the church actually grew, and the people that were there got angry that it grew because they were no longer the powerful ones because there's a lot of other powerful people then. And all these things happen like that because we keep and we lose our focus off of the gospel and who Jesus is.

[22 : 23] And so Paul is exhorting them. He's saying, embrace your differences. I made you different. Be open to secondary things. Be open to all these things.

But remember that the goal, the primary thing, is who Jesus is and what he's done for us. And the minute we lose focus of that, the minute we lose focus of our standard, then we lose focus of why we're here as a church.

So in verse 11 and 12, what happens is there's this problem comes in, and you can read it. I've been informed concerning you, my brethren, by Chloe's people that there are quarrels among you. And by this I mean that some of you come in and say, hey, and I am of Paul, and I am of Apollos, and I am of Cephas, and I am of Christ.

And what's happened is these powerful people, or these people within the church are there, and they start taking their focus off of the gospel, and they start taking their focus on things that were important in their society. They start thinking about things like money.

They start thinking about things like teaching styles and personalities. And well, Apollos was probably one of the best preachers in the Old and New Testament. And Paul says later that he's incredible.

[23 : 29] But the church starts focusing on his teaching style instead of the gospel. And they focus on things like spiritual gifts, and they focus on their wealth, and they focus on their resources, and they focus on where they stand in society, and they focus on just their cultures that they come from, and they focus on their family background, and they focus on their intellect and their education.

And they focus on all these other things up until chapter five. And up until chapter five, you just see this church being torn apart and torn apart and torn apart and torn apart, because there's other things that have come in, and it's replaced the gospel and the Christ and the cross.

And Paul's pleading with them, and he's begging with them, please don't do that. And in these two verses, he gives us some signs. We need to be careful. We need to warn. He says the minute we lose focus off of the cross, the minute we lose focus off of the gospel, what Jesus has done is the first thing that happens is we get these divisions.

We get these divisions in our community and in our care group and our community group and in our church, and in our church as a whole, there's these divisions that happen because we've lost focus of who Christ is and why he came.

The next thing he says is when these divisions happen, then we stop thinking that the gospel and the Christ is the only thing that we need, and we start putting power on other things. We start saying, well, I really need this person to bless my house and to preach for me.

[24 : 48] I really need this person to counsel me. I really need the right teacher. I really need to be baptized by the right person. I really need to be baptized by the right way. I really need to worship in the right church.

I really need these spiritual gifts. I really need the right spiritual gifts. I really need to be able to use these spiritual gifts. And what happens in this church and which could happen in every church is that we take our focus off of Christ and we put it on the things around us.

And so the things around us, we invest with power, like the worship style or the pastor or other things. And Paul is warning them and he's warning us that the minute we do that, the minute we take our focus off of the gospel and we divide and we put power in who we are or our denomination or what we believe.

I mean, some of us, we're like the theology police, right? We want to make sure everybody has perfect theology. And that's the most important thing, to have the perfect theology. And what Paul is saying is the minute we take our focus off of these things, we put our focus on these things, we take our focus off of Jesus, then we start to take away the power of the gospel.

And the last thing he says is when we start to do these things that we start to become prideful. And we say things like, I'm a Paul. And I'm of Cephas. And I am of Peter.

[26 : 10] And I am of Jesus. And I am of Apollos. And so we've lost the focus of Christ and what he's done in our life. And so we put our focus on our groups and what kind of groups we belong to, just like what's happening in the church in Corinth, just like society, just like Hong Kong.

What group do you belong to? What club are you a part of? What's your major? Where do you go to school? How much money do you have? Where do you live? All these things are things that separate the church. And Paul says the minute we start allowing those to come in, then we've lost the power of God's word.

He actually says that when we have these things come in and we stop focusing on the Christ, that people will start to mock us. Have you ever been mocked?

I was talking to a person about a month ago. I was talking to them about coming to church. They weren't churchgoers. And they looked at me and they kind of laughed.

And I said, so what's up? He goes, well, you know, I've found that my club can do everything that the church does. My club does it better.

[27 : 19] My club takes care of my kids. My club feeds me. I can find my community in my club. I know my kids are. I know they're going to be treated by people who have the same values that I have.

Why would I want to go to a church? Because when I look at the church, it's no different than my club. And what Paul says is that's what happens when we lose our focus, when we've lost the power of the gospel.

The people who don't know Christ, people who are looking at us to see if we're different, to see if we're unified, to see if we don't fight, like everybody else in Hong Kong culture, if they don't see those things that are different, then they just dismiss what Christ is doing because it's not working in your life.

It's not working in my life. I mean, these are heavy words, right? I mean, I should have said at the very beginning, I should have said, hey, and by the way, this is God's word, and if I ever speak up here and you never get bothered, if I ever say something that God's word says and it doesn't really challenge you, if it doesn't really, you get angry, hopefully you're not getting angry at me, but you're getting angry at God, if I ever say something that doesn't really challenge you, then you're not listening to what God's word is saying.

And these are intense words. I mean, these are words that people, when they hear these, sometimes they don't want to come back to church because they're being challenged in their walk. They're being challenged whether they're consistent and living like God wants them to live.

[28 : 51] And it's challenging me. I've been a part of some of these splits. And as I look back now over the years, I just, I weep. And I wonder, what have we just said?

Why are we really here? And what's the primary thing? Where does the primary power come from? And it's not coming from our orthodoxy and it's not coming from our denomination.

And it's not even, I've seen churches split over names. It's not even coming from what we name the church. But the power's coming from a cross and Jesus Christ hanging on it.

So we have, this is what the church is supposed to be, unified. We have, this is the problem, what's going on, because people have come in and they start splitting up things and things are getting bad and things are getting messy. And finally, just in verse 13, he gives us the cure.

And if you look at it, it's really simple. It's three sentences, three questions written in Greek. And when you write a sentence or question in Greek, you can write it in such a way that it demands a positive response or a negative response or an open response.

[30 : 01] And both of these are written in such a way that the response has to be no. And so Paul was thinking about what's going on in the church and what could go on in our church. And he asked this question, has Christ been divided?

No. Is there something you need to add to the power of the gospel to change your life? No. Is there something plus the cross that we need?

No. Has Christ been divided? Was Paul crucified for you? Was he? Was your favorite speaker crucified for you? Was that perfect church community group crucified for you?

No. Were you baptized in Paul's name? No. What Christ is trying to teach us and he's trying to teach them is that what Paul is, is he's saying that Christ is everything.

That Jesus is your only hope. You know, God might use your CG leader or a pastor or your community group or the elders or even Watermark. He might use this church in amazing ways to

help you grow and take the next step in your spiritual formation with God.

[31 : 16] But this church isn't your hope. And if it becomes your hope, if you lift something up besides Jesus, you're always going to have trouble. And that's what's happening to the church in Corinth.

They're lifting something else up. And can I be honest with you? A lot of us in here, we're lifting up other things besides Jesus also. It's one of the reasons some of our lives are in such a mess.

Because we're looking to other things for power and healing and change and hope and meaning and purpose and significance and honor.

And what Paul is saying is if you look for them in anything else, you're going to be empty. You're going to be hollow. You're going to be hurting.

Because the cross is enough. What Christ has done for you is enough. And if you lift anything else up, you're going to be disappointed.

[32 : 22] And when you get disappointed, you're either going to be disappointed because not everybody else likes what you like, like the style of worship or the pastors or the church. And so you're going to be disappointed at them and they're going to be disappointed at you because you like different things than they like and you're going to have disunity.

Or you're going to be disappointed because you're going to say, well, I really like Chris or I really like Tobin. They're great guys and one day you're going to see us do something stupid, something sinful, something broken. And then you're going to go, wow, I can't believe he did that because he's a pastor and he shouldn't do that because pastors know better than that.

And that happens all the time in Asian cultures, doesn't it? But your pastors are broken, sinful people. And if anyone ever comes up here and teaches you that they're not, you need to get up and leave.

Because you're going to be disappointed. And so in this book, we're going to go on and it's going to be so powerful. But Paul, his heart, and it's amazing because he just goes over and over.

He's so concerned about anything taking the place of Jesus. He's so concerned about anything taking the place of the cross. He's so concerned about baptisms and sacraments and flashy worship bands and a beautiful church building and how we preach and who's preaching.

[33 : 35] You know, Jesus, I mean, Paul says that he's glad that he's not a flashy teacher. Paul actually, in 1 Corinthians 4, says, I'm kind of glad that I'm not flashy and really rhetorical and logical and that everybody loves my style because if I did, maybe they would, like me, more than Christ.

Maybe I would diminish the message of the gospel more by my actions and my jokes and how I teach. And so Paul was very cautious not to rob anything of God's word.

So let me ask you a question. I didn't know they're gonna come because it's at the end of the sermon and I always ask questions because it's the only way I learn. I learn a lot by watching people's facial expressions when I ask the questions.

So how about us today? Are there things in our lives that take away the power of the gospel? Are there idols?

Things we cling to? Things we hope in? Take away the power of the gospel? I mean, is our hope in Jesus only?

[34 : 51] Or is it Jesus plus my bank account? Or my job? Or my family? Or my wife? Is my hope in Jesus only and realizing that Jesus is broken and crucified for me?

I mean, do we understand the sacrifice that Christ paid for us on the cross? Do we understand what he's done for us? Do we understand the substitution of sinfulness for sinlessness?

Righteousness for unrighteousness? Do we see that? Or do we let things get in the way of God's power in the cross in our life?

Maybe I should say it this way. Guys, I've been thinking about this. You get to hear it for four minutes and then you get to forget it because you're going to go eat dim sum. But when we look at the cross and we see an innocent Jesus humiliated, beaten, broken, bleeding, when we see Jesus hanging on a cross for us, does that affect you?

Does that affect how you treat other people? Does that affect how you treat your friends, your classmates?

[36 : 27] Does it affect how we treat our spouses? I mean, when we see a Christ crucified for us, does it affect how we do business? I mean, when you go into the work on Monday, are you focusing on the gospel and knowing that no matter what happens, Christ has been crucified for you, he's

there, he's gone before you, he's leading you, he's taking care of your eternity, he can take care of tomorrow.

You don't need to worry about that. You can just let it go and be free and walk with him. Does the gospel affect you?

Does it affect how we handle our resources? Does it affect how we handle our kids? Does it affect how we love each other? And Paul's saying, if it doesn't, if we can look at these gospels and we can look at Jesus hanging up there and it doesn't change how we do work, it doesn't change how we do business, it doesn't change how we treat people, then what he's saying is we've missed the message and we've substituted the power of the cross for something else in our life, whether it's our job or our bank account or our mission or whatever we're on.

We've substituted that power and we're grabbing for power from that and hope from that instead of who Jesus is. And the whole message of Corinthians is Paul's coming back and he wants us to focus.

And I think it's, you know, some of us might say it's naive, but Paul says that if you focused on cross, if you focused on Christ, if you focused on all these things and you realize it as you went through your day that you wouldn't have divisions, that you wouldn't have arguments because you would realize that there's diversity and there's a difference and that's an amazing thing.

[38 : 05] But ultimately, it's Christ who brings us together. And the struggle with the Corinthian church and what could be our struggle one day is this.

They allowed their personal preferences. They allowed their personal ideals. They allow the things that they valued. They allowed these things that were non-essentials and they grabbed them and they brought them into their heart and they allowed these things to rule their lives.

And because they ruled these, they allowed these things to rule their life, they didn't have any place for differences. They didn't have any place for different ideas. They didn't have any place for doing different things. and these divisions were formed just like they were formed in their culture, just like they're in Hong Kong right now.

And these divisions nullified the power of the gospel and they made the church just like the city. Are you just like Hong Kong?

Do we have the same values? Are we looking for the same thing that gives us power? Paul says if we do, we're lost.

[39 : 27] We might as well just close up shop. We might as well just all get a club membership. I want Hong Kong football club. Anybody has an extra one.

But that's what he's saying, right? Because we're no different. Here's some questions I've been asking myself.

How am I doing with my pride? Do I feel like I have all the things of God figured out? And everyone else is wrong?

That only in our church we're doing it well, but all the other churches are wrong? Only in my life am I doing it well, but everybody else is wrong? Or unless they do it just like me, then they're right? Are we the policemen of the truth?

Are we trying to correct everybody else's errors? You know, I was in a church one time with a group of older people, and any time anything was said wrong or different or the wording was used wrong, they would be up immediately to talk to the pastor or the worship leader and say, well, you shouldn't use that word.

[40 : 38] You should use this word, and you should do these things, and you should do these styles. Because in their world, they had grabbed on to those things, and they had elevated those things more than they had elevated the cross in Jesus.

And I use that as an example because I've done it also. And if we're honest, we've all done it because we've allowed our pride to come in here, and we've allowed our pride to correct what people are saying, and what Paul is saying is if you do this, it's going to destroy you.

It's going to destroy the unity of church. More importantly, it's going to destroy the message of the gospel. How do we do when other personalities or preferences hurt our feelings?

When the worship music isn't exactly like you want it, or the sermon isn't exactly like you want it, or the personality of the pastor isn't exactly, or your community group isn't exactly like you want it, and you want a different leader in your community group, and you want to teach on something differently, how do we do when there's these differences and these personalities or these

preferences, what do we do when we don't get our preference?

How do you respond when you don't get your preference? Do you just take your ball up and go home? I'm out of here. They didn't have drums today. I had somebody who came to check this out, and they basically said, do you have a choir?

[42 : 05] And I said, yeah, we only have a choir like twice a year. They go, I'm out of here. And I was like, well, that's probably a good thing because you're going to be really disappointed. But how do we react when we don't get our preferences?

Are our preferences the primary thing? Are our preferences the gospel? Are our preferences style and look and feel and ideas like that?

Paul says if we hold on to our preferences, we don't allow other people to have their preferences, we don't allow other people to be different, we don't allow diversity. If we don't allow those things, we're going to destroy ourselves, and we're going to destroy the church, and we're going to destroy the power of the gospel.

And the last question is, what do we do with the gospel? I mean, are we teaching the gospel clearly at Watermark? Are there distractions?

Are we teaching the cross clearly? Are we teaching all that Christ has done clearly? Is Christ beautiful to you?

[43 : 10] Is Christ beautiful to you? Think about that for a second. Is Jesus beautiful to you?

Is the fact that he hung on a cross and was beaten and broken for you? Is that amazing? Is that something that when you think about it, you just are in awe?

And you wonder, and you ask questions, why? Is Christ's humility and sacrifice amazing to you?

The church of Corinth struggled with that. And you and I will also. As only as we stay in community, as only as we keep the main thing, the main thing that will change.

And the power won't be Tobin's message or Chris's message or Eric's message. The power will be God's word changing you. Some of the greatest revivals that have happened in the last 200 years have been from men who have no education.

[44 : 37] read the story of Dwight L. Moody, shoe salesman from Chicago. He became so popular, they took him to Oxford. Before he went up to preach at Oxford, the students and the faculty mocked him because of his ability to speak and couldn't use the right vocabulary or the verbiage.

And his message to them when he got up was, hey guys, don't let anybody fool you. God loves you. God loves you. The church of Corinth forgot that. My prayer is that we would never do that.

that we would remind each other daily how awesome and wonderful he is. We allow the power of his word, his deeds, the cross, his blood to change us, to bring us together so that all of your work and all of Hong Kong and all the world see something amazing that we have Texans worshiping with Australians and New Zealanders and South Africans.

I don't want to use accents because every time I use any accent I always sound Mexican. I don't know. But that's what Paul's trying to say. Don't lose your focus.

[46 : 14] God loves you. Father, we thank you for this day. We thank you for your word. We thank you for your son.

We thank you for the cross. We thank you that we can always come back to the truth and the simplicity and we realize that the message that you have in your word for us is not difficult. It's not complex.

It's not complex. It's very simple. It's a savior crucified for broken people doing everything that broken people could not do for themselves so that these broken and separated people could come back to the Father and once again be called his children and receive the blessings of what that means as we walk in this life and beyond.

So what I pray for us, I pray for those of us in here right now who aren't in this journey. They're not with the family of God and they're struggling of what brings them meaning and what brings purpose. I pray that you would open their eyes to your son Jesus.

I beg your forgiveness for our imperfectness as a church. Maybe you came today and no one welcomed you. Maybe you came today and no one asked your name. Maybe you came today and you still don't yet feel like you're at home and I just, I apologize because that's not what we're at.

[47 : 35] As a family. And when I pray for those of us in here who've been on this journey and we've lost focus, we've grabbed other things like style and texture and meeting places and feeling and business plan and budgets and structure and charismatic personalities and we've grabbed

these things and we've elevated them and all of a sudden we've been disappointed and we realize that we've been grabbing the wrong things because our life really hasn't changed in the last couple years because we haven't been clinging to you.

We haven't been clinging to your word. We haven't been clinging to the cross. We haven't been clinging to the gospel. So I apologize for you, for us.

I apologize and I just, we repent before you. May we be different. And when I pray for our church that we wouldn't be a church that just gathers to focus inwardly but will you be a church that understands why you have us here and help us to understand that the power comes in your word and the power comes from the cross and the power comes from an empty tomb and the power comes from a spirit that inhabits his people and changes us and gifts us and the power comes from us looking through your word and allowing it to change us and make us different and that's the only thing the power comes from.

It doesn't come from a program or an individual or a church but it comes through your son. Father, we love you.

We need you. Help us to ask these questions well as we leave. Do we find you beautiful? Are you enough?

[49 : 21] We pray these things in your son Jesus' name. Amen.