

Unity and Division (Because of the Gospel)

SPEAKER	Matt Ryniker
DATE	Sunday, January 22, 2023
PASSAGES	1 Corinthians 1; 1 Corinthians 3; Acts 15; Galatians 2; Galatians 5
MESSAGE	Begins at 1:07:31 in the service

THE BIG IDEA

Unity is not coming together so as to be together. It is coming, empty-handed, to the one foundation there can be — the person of Jesus Christ. That is why the same apostle who says *be of one mind* can also say *have nothing to do with him*, and mean the same thing both times.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- ◆ Paul commands one mind and also commands separation. The two only contradict each other if unity means togetherness rather than a shared foundation.
- ◆ The Corinthian problem was not having a favourite teacher. It was quarrelling in factions around teachers — which Paul calls behaving like mere humans.
- ◆ Eloquence can empty the cross of its power. Attract people by carnal means and you will have to keep them by carnal means.
- ◆ Planters and waterers are not wizards. They get the ground wet; God does the thing nobody understands. Which means you do not need to feel qualified to speak the gospel to someone who is not ready.
- ◆ The foundation of Christianity is the person of Jesus, not a Jesus mindset. Being Jesus-ish and being *in* Jesus are different religions, and one of them always sneaks works back in.
- ◆ Holiness is not the same as purity. You are holy because the Spirit of God lives in you — you cannot get holier than belonging to Christ.

- ◆ We have no spiritual unity with each other directly. I have unity with you only if I am in Christ and you are in Christ, which is exactly why a false Christ is worth fighting over.

► 1:08:09

Matt opened by admitting that most of us have heard plenty of unity messages, particularly between 2016 and 2020, and that a certain amount of boredom was permitted. What he wanted to add was the part those messages usually leave out — the places where Paul, the great apostle of one mind, tells churches to separate on purpose.

1. The contradiction, laid out first

► 1:08:49

In the same letter, four chapters later, Paul reminds Corinth of an earlier note telling them not to associate with anyone who bears the name of brother and is sexually immoral, or greedy, or an idolater, or a — not even to eat with him. Elders who persist in sin are to be rebuked in front of everyone (1 Timothy 5:20). Those who ignore the letter are to be noted and avoided (2 Thessalonians 3:14–15). None of these, Matt observed, is anybody’s life verse or throw-pillow text.

“As for a person who stirs up division, after warning him once and then twice, have nothing more to do with him.”

TITUS 3:10 ↗

Which raises the question the whole message hangs on: isn’t having nothing to do with someone a divisive act — and if so, are you now going to warn yourself? Since Paul clearly holds both, the divergence has to be in what unity actually is.

2. The quarrel at Corinth

► 1:12:03

“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... 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?”

1 CORINTHIANS 1:10-13 ↗

Matt was careful about what is and is not the problem. Having a favourite teacher is not the issue — if you listen to one preacher constantly, fine. The issue is quarrelling in factions around teachers. Nor is “the same mind” an instruction to become the Borg on all things; it stands in opposition to faction-based quarrelling. And Paul’s first answer is not a management technique. It is a question about Christ: our unity comes from a unified Lord, not from being in the same room or wearing the same label.

3. Why eloquence is a liability

► 1:15:33

Paul is relieved he baptised almost nobody, so that no one could claim his name, and says Christ sent him to preach the gospel

“not with words of eloquent wisdom, lest the cross of Christ be emptied of its power.” Matt passed along a line from a Baptist pastor that has stuck with him: “If you attract people through carnal means, you may end up having to keep them through carnal means.” Fancy words can also be a blunt instrument — *did you hear the Greek I just used, therefore submit* — or they can quietly shift the draw from the cross to wise sayings. “Which is another reason we don’t do Christian TED talks.” The remedy for disunity is not to work slowly toward the cross; it is to start there.

4. Servants, not wizards

► 1:20:13

By chapter three Paul is blunter still: while there is jealousy and strife among you, are you not of the flesh and behaving only in a human way? Matt lingered on that phrase. Behaving in a merely human way is what you would expect of humans — so the alternative cannot be human strength applied harder. It is a grace, a mystical union with Christ.

“What then is Apollos? What is Paul? Servants through whom you believed, as the Lord assigned to each. I planted, Apollos watered, but God gave the growth. So neither he who plants nor he who waters is anything, but only God who gives the growth.”

1 CORINTHIANS 3:5–7 ↗

Jesus used the same picture —

the man who scatters seed, sleeps and rises, and the seed sprouts and grows, he knows not how. Your belonging to the body of Christ is an act of God, not an act of Paul.

► 1:23:07

Matt took what he called a bunny trail off that, and it was one of the warmest turns in the message. If Paul and Apollos were not wizards, then neither do you have to feel like one. We look at someone we would like to reach and decide they are not ready — “well, of course they’re not ready. But what message enables the heart to receive the very message? It is the gospel.” Good soil looks like dirt. It does not take wizardry, and it does not take eloquence; the point is not to do a deliberately poor job to feel spiritual, but to stop waiting for a qualification that was never required.

5. One foundation, and a fire that tells the truth

► 1:25:06

“For no one can lay a foundation other than that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ.”

1 CORINTHIANS 3:10–11 ↗

Here Matt slowed down and said it twice deliberately, because the two versions sound almost identical. The foundation is not Jesus the idea, or a Jesus vibe, or a lifestyle that is Jesus-like — he is not the Buddha. If Christianity boils down to behaving as he behaved, then it reduces to imitation, and works slip back in through the side door: *the main point is to be like him, it’s annoying that you’re still not, try again.* Jesus did things you will never do, such as being the Jewish Messiah and giving his life as a ransom for many. Being Jesus-ish and being in Jesus are not the same religion.

► 1:27:55

What is built on that foundation gets tested by fire (1 Corinthians 3:12–17). Things that look strong may not be; things that look strange may turn out to be true works of God. And when Paul warns that God will destroy anyone who destroys God’s temple, he is not talking about masonry in Jerusalem. He is saying that if you wreak havoc among God’s people, God defends what is his. Matt paused on the word

holy there: holiness is not the same as purity. Holy means separated for, belonging to, possessing God's own presence. Sanctification is growth in holy decisions — but in the strict sense you cannot get holier than having the Spirit of God live in you.

6. All things are yours

► 1:30:49

“So let no one boast in men. For all things are yours, whether Paul or Apollos or Cephas or the world or life or death or the present or the future — all are yours, and you are Christ's, and Christ is God's.”

1 CORINTHIANS 3:21–23 ↗

Any parent has ended a fight over toys by announcing that the toys were never theirs to begin with: they're mine, go to your rooms. Matt pointed out that Paul does the opposite. He does not say nothing belongs to you. He says stop boasting over people, because *all of it* belongs to you — the kingdom, its treasure, grace, fullness of joy — and you are tearing down God's temple over scraps while the whole feast is yours. Then it gets better: the Lord's portion is his people, and the Lord is our chosen portion and our cup. We inherit one another. It will take a miracle for us to believe it.

7. Mr One Mind, causing a scene

► 1:35:45

Then the example. Men came down from Judea teaching that unless you are circumcised according to the custom of Moses you cannot be saved, and Luke records that Paul and Barnabas had “no small dissension and debate” with them. Matt translated: Paul made a scene, big time. Imagine converting to Islam in Texas and then having fluent Arabic speakers from Saudi Arabia arrive to teach you how to be a real Muslim — the intimidation lands instantly, and it sounds legitimate. Paul is not going to let go because someone asked nicely.

► 1:38:23

“But when Cephas came to Antioch, I opposed him to his face, because he stood condemned. For before certain men came from James, he was eating with the Gentiles; but when they came he drew back and separated himself, fearing the circumcision party... so that even Barnabas was led astray by their hypocrisy.”

GALATIANS 2:11-13 ↗

Matt drew out how alone that left Paul. Barnabas had been beside him in Acts 15 and now was not. These were big names — Peter, men from James. The pressure was real, and the pragmatic case was strong: Judaism was the underdog in the Greco-Roman world and infant Christianity was the underdog of underdogs, no emperors, no elites, not many wise by worldly standards, scraping together bread for widows. A few key allies would not have hurt. Paul could have let it go.

► 1:41:39

Instead: “You were running well. Who hindered you? ... A little leaven leavens the whole lump.” That persuasion, Paul says, does not come from the one who calls you. And it would have cost him nothing but gain to concede — his own persecution would have stopped.

“But if I, brothers, still preach circumcision, why am I still being persecuted? In that case the offense of the cross has been removed. I wish those who unsettle you would emasculate themselves.”

GALATIANS 5:11-12 ↗

8. Why it is worth the fight

► 1:43:58

So the two halves resolve. “Unity, after all, isn’t coming together so as to be together,” Matt said. “It is coming to the one and only gospel there is, the one and only foundation there can be, the person of Jesus Christ, empty-handed.” Separating from a divisive person is a separation for unity’s sake, because a fake Jesus saves nobody and there is no unity to be had with him — however good the numbers look or the room feels.

The reason, he said, is that we have no spiritual unity with one another directly. “I only have unity with you if I’m in Christ and you’re in Christ.” It is indirect, and it runs through one person. Which also means the test of any ministry is not its power. You could move mountains, cast out devils, carry accurate prophetic words, know Greek and Hebrew and centuries of history, have the accent and the

following — and the fire tests one thing: the gospel you preached. Without that foundation, Matt said, you may as well be a 1-800 psychic.

► 1:46:48

He closed by turning the knife toward the people who have been here longest. Twenty years in, thirty years in, there is still no striving after his gifts, as if the cross got us most of the way and we finish the job — having begun by the Spirit, we are not perfected by the flesh. Charismatics have our own version of smuggling it back in: forgiveness is free, but the Spirit is the platinum package, and there is a deluxe tier above that. It creeps in most easily wherever Christianity has quietly become *being like Jesus*, because that is a project that never ends and never arrives. Pursue peace with everyone, he urged — “but with extreme prejudice, like a hostage negotiator.” Not because we share a denomination, a culture, a political animal or a song, but because we are both in the real Christ. There is no other place unity exists.

FOR FURTHER STUDY**SCRIPTURE IN THIS MESSAGE**

- [1 Corinthians 5:9–11](#)
- [1 Timothy 5:20](#)
- [2 Thessalonians 3:14–15](#)
- [Titus 3:10](#)
- [1 Corinthians 1:10–13](#)
- [1 Corinthians 1:17](#)
- [1 Corinthians 3:1–4](#)
- [1 Corinthians 3:5–7](#)
- [Mark 4:26–27](#)
- [1 Corinthians 3:10–11](#)
- [1 Corinthians 3:12–17](#)
- [1 Corinthians 3:21–23](#)
- [Deuteronomy 32:9](#)
- [Psalm 16:5](#)
- [Acts 15:1–2](#)
- [Galatians 2:11–13](#)
- [1 Corinthians 1:26](#)
- [Galatians 5:7–9](#)
- [Galatians 5:11–12](#)
- [Galatians 3:3](#)

FOR YOUR HOPE GROUP

1. Before this message, what did you assume Christian unity was? Where did that assumption come from?
2. Matt said quarrelling in factions around teachers is “behaving in a merely human way.” Where do you see that instinct in yourself — in church, or anywhere else?
3. Paul and Apollos got the ground wet and God did the rest. Who have you written off as “not ready,” and what would it change to speak to them anyway?
4. Where has your Christianity quietly become being like Jesus rather than being in him? What does that do to you when you fail?
5. Peace “with extreme prejudice” means fighting for real unity, not smoothing things over. What does that ask of you this week — a conversation to have, or one to stop avoiding?

ABOUT THE SPEAKER

Matt Ryniker is Hope Chapel's senior pastor — his own description of the job — and reports to the church's governing board, who he cheerfully calls his boss. He and his wife Mandy have been held up from Hope's own pulpit as an example to the congregation. He spent a stretch of his working life as a public school teacher, and he still teaches the parent dedication classes where families commit to raising their children to follow Jesus — a theme that runs straight into this message.

Watch the full message:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lxoHMaS9jSE&t=4051s>

These notes summarise a message preached at Hope Chapel in Austin, Texas. They are a reader's aid, not a transcript — scripture references link to the full passage so you can read it in context.