

Series: What is Jesus saying to our church? (a study in Revelation)

Sermon Text: Summary of 1 Corinthians 1-5 (Slido) **Key Word(s):** Negotiables, Diversity

All month long we're celebrating the advents (the past and future appearances) of Jesus and we're pondering the question: "*What is Jesus saying to our church?*" Last time, we discussed some non-negotiables, how **certain things should be true of all churches**. Today, we'll kick off a multi-week conversation about "*church negotiables*" by exploring Paul's infamous letter to the Corinthian church and unpacking this second...

BIG IDEA: The gospel creates beautifully diverse churches. (The Negotiables)

In our study of the 7 churches, we've learned that the church on earth is to pattern herself after the church in Heaven, which according to Revelation 5:9 includes: "*people for God from every tribe (lineage), language, people (self-defined), and nation (geography).*" While the church in heaven is beautifully diverse, earthly churches struggle to include those who differ from us. Using Paul's letter to the ancient church in Corinth, Greece, this lesson will address 4 reasons churches struggle to embrace those who aren't like us: 1) Lacking a gospel perspective. 2) Building an identity based on preferences. 3) Equating unity with heartless conformity. 4) Forgetting that Jesus is the only solution to sin.

First, let's talk about gospel perspective: Were you to read this entire letter, you'd quickly realize how messed up the Corinthian church was. Despite that, listen to Paul's perspective in *1 Corinthians 1:4-9: I give thanks to my God always for you because of the grace of God that was given you in Christ Jesus, that in every way you were enriched in him in all speech and all knowledge--even as the testimony about Christ (the gospel cf. Ch 15) was confirmed among you--so that you are not lacking in any gift, as you wait for the revealing (future advent) of our Lord Jesus Christ, who will sustain you to the end, guiltless in the day of our Lord Jesus Christ. God is faithful, by whom you were called into the fellowship of his Son, Jesus Christ our Lord.* How could Paul be *thankful* for a messed-up church? His hope and peace weren't rooted in their performance, but in the transformative *grace of God in Christ Jesus*, who walks among His churches as we read in Revelation 2:1. The Lord's constant, *sustaining* presence turns our ordinary assembly into a redemptive community enabling us to have hope for and extend peace to whoever is drawn in by *the gospel*, no matter how broken, messy, or different. Is that your attitude, or are there people here that you'd prefer not to worship with? My point is simple: Lacking a gospel perspective keeps us from embracing diverse types of people.

Next, let's talk about preferences: In our prior lesson we said, “*To visualize the hope Jesus has for His messy church, we must focus on His faithful presence, not the flawed members.*” Statements like that can sound as if we should never address right and wrong. Yet, plenty of passages say otherwise, like how Ephesians 4:15 says to “*speak the truth in love, so that we can grow up...*” The problem is that we blur the lines between things that bother God (absolutes, non-negotiables) and stuff that irritates us (preferences, negotiables). What motivates us to impose our preferences on others? Let's read about how preferences were causing senseless division in ***verses 10-12: 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. For it has been reported to me by Chloe's people (likely the church that met in her home) that there is quarreling among you. 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."*** Their quarrels stemmed from idolizing certain leaders, creating rival factions, arguing over baptism (v13), and mainly, not letting the cross of Christ shape their identity (cf. 1:14-31). They divided over secondary matters like how eloquently Apollos put things (cf. Acts 18:24-26) and contrasting the teachings of Jesus and Paul (if you don't know, some folks rationalize the acceptance of certain sins by wrongly suggesting that Jesus and Paul disagreed). Why do we get so attached to certain voices/ideas or pit certain leaders/churches against others? Every leader/church has blind spots, and we should have the integrity to teach what's clear, be honest about what's unclear, and stay curious so that God's Spirit can reveal what we've misunderstood. My point is simple: Building an identity based on preferences keeps us from embracing diverse types of people.

Now, let's talk about unity: Gospel unity isn't conformity to preference, or agreement on issues, or simply gathering diverse people under one roof. For example, churches can claim to be multi-ethnic or multi-generational, but that's not the same as developing reciprocal relationships where mutual learning takes place. Another example is how some churches navigate the “*worship wars*” by offering traditional and contemporary services, so nobody must deny themselves or be loving, patient, or kind (cf. Matthew 16:24-25; Galatians 5:22). Gospel unity is a supernatural gift that can't be manufactured, yet Ephesians 4:3 says, “*be eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.*” To do that, we must ask questions like those in ***verse 13: Is Christ divided? (then His people should not be) Was Paul crucified for you? (then Jesus is our only hope/peace) Were you baptized in the name of Paul? (then don't idolize non-gospel issues like baptism or a leader who baptized us).*** Paul finally summarized this huge section in ***4:6-7*** where we can glean 3 keys to maintaining unity: I have applied all these things to myself and

Apollos for your benefit, brothers, that you may learn by us not to go beyond what is written (so, stick to what the Bible says), that none of you may be puffed up in favor of one against another (so, don't play favorites). For...what do you have that you did not receive (from God)? If then you received it, why do you boast as if you did not? (so, quit acting like you are self-made). My point is simple: Equating unity with heartless conformity keeps us from embracing diverse types of people.

Lastly, let's talk about sin: What God calls “sin” must never be deemed a “preference.” In *chapter 5*, the Corinthians were celebrating ideas that hinder human flourishing by not reflecting God’s image. They thought forgiveness meant that their bodily activities could no longer harm them spiritually (cf. 9:24-10:22). 3 times Paul rebuked their “anything goes” attitude (cf. 6:12; 10:23), which involved determining their own truth and no place for correction. They were *proudly* casting off the chains of Jewish laws and Gentile customs, but Paul’s shock is evident in *5:1-2*: “*It is actually reported that there is sexual immorality among you, and of a kind that is not tolerated even among pagans, for a man has his father's wife. And you are arrogant! Ought you not rather to mourn? Let him who has done this be removed from among you.*” So, the proper response to sin is *sadness*, not *arrogant pride* that says, “*it's not our place to judge!*” The all important “*why*” is found in *5:6-8*, which we’ll read from the Message Version (whole chapter below): *Your flip and callous arrogance in these things bothers me. You pass it off as a small thing, but it's anything but that. Yeast, too, is a 'small thing,' but it works its way through a whole batch of bread dough pretty fast. So, get rid of this 'yeast.' Our true identity is flat and plain, not puffed up with the wrong kind of ingredient. The Messiah, our Passover Lamb, has already been sacrificed for the Passover meal, and we are the Unraised Bread part of the Feast. So, let's live out our part in the Feast, not as raised bread swollen with the yeast of evil, but as flat bread—simple, genuine, unpretentious.* This Old Testament Passover language describes God’s hope for His people in every age (pre-Advent or post-Advent). Realizing that only God is perfect, 1 Peter 1:14-15 says: “*As obedient children, do not be conformed to the passions of your former ignorance, but as he who called you is holy (different, distinct from the world), you also be holy in all your conduct.*”

Like a loving parent, our Creator can’t bear to watch sin ruin us. That’s why, instead of giving us what we deserve, He has humbly sacrificed to provide redemption through faith in His Son, Jesus Christ. How should this truth inform the way we help others? Galatians 6:1-2 (NLT) says, “*Dear brothers and sisters, if another believer is overcome by some sin, you who are godly should gently and humbly help that person back onto the right path. And be careful not to fall into the same temptation yourself. Share each other's burdens, and in this way obey the law of Christ.*” Like Jesus, we’re to be full of grace and

truth (cf. John 1:14), not “[half grace and half truth](#).” So, for example, we truthfully say, “*That’s not how we think/act in God’s family*” AND gracefully provide supportive structures for change. We address sin in redemptive ways without disrespecting, dehumanizing, or discussing with the wrong people (cf. Matthew 18:15-17). After all, sin has only 1 solution, which doesn’t start with “*having common sense*”, “*following the rules*”, “*trying harder*”, “*self-determination*”, or any human effort. So, think about this: “*Instead of putting the heat lamp on people, how does it help to put the spotlight on faith in Jesus?*”

Supernatural transformation differs from self-improvement and heartless conformity, yet there does come a time, as in any family, when enough is enough. A church’s pursuit of ***sincerity and truth*** includes ***purging out the old leaven of malice and evil***. It seems the Corinthians had misunderstood Paul’s prior advice on this, so in *verses 9-13* he said: ***I wrote to you in my letter not to associate with*** (the Greek root implies ongoing intimacy/identifying with) **[sexually immoral people](#)**--***not at all meaning the sexually immoral of this world, or the greedy and swindlers, or idolaters, since then you would need to go out of the world*** (they thought he had meant to avoid all immoral people, which is impossible. So, to clarify he said...). ***But now I’m writing to you not to associate with*** (be repeatedly identified/mixed up with) ***anyone who bears the name of brother/sister*** (claims to be a Christian) ***if he/she is guilty of sexual immorality or greed, or is an idolater, reviler, drunkard, or swindler--not even to eat with such a one. For what have I to do with judging outsiders? Is it not those inside the church whom you are to judge? God judges those outside. Purge the evil person from among you.*** So, we’re not obligated to correct the entire world, just ***those inside our church family*** which represents Jesus. His point is simple: **[We can only help those who realize they need Jesus](#)**. Sadly, I’ve come to this place with unrepentant people, where like a parent, I finally realized my “*help*” was enabling destructive behavior. **Does anyone struggle with that like I do?** My heart is to never “*let anyone go*”, but some walk away to avoid agreeing with God or resolving conflict. Often, they’ll seek a church that leaves them alone or accepts their sinful lifestyle instead of growing alongside helpers who know their issues and love them. My heart is also to never “*kick anyone out*”, but as Paul noted here, we must stop unrepentant predators who mislead and abuse others. Next week, we’ll explore some ways **the gospel creates beautifully diverse churches**.

Let’s pray: Jesus, your Advent inspires us to take your gospel to everyone with humility, compassion, and wisdom. In John 14-16, you referred to your Spirit as “*the Helper*”, which I love because it reminds us of how we must abide in you for help and so you can transform us into better helpers of messy, broken, and diverse people. Please grow us into helpers who are full of grace and truth like you are, Jesus. Amen.

Considerations for discussion leaders:

1. Keep circling back to the big idea and main points of the passage to stay on track.
2. Keep the group small for deeper sharing.
3. Keep the discussion around 30 mins. Once you hit the “sweet spot”, spend your time there.
4. Keep these simple questions in your back pocket: What is God teaching you? What are you going to do about it? How will it help you love & serve others?

Preparing for our sermon from this summary of 1 Corinthians 1-5: It’s helpful to repeatedly read over the chapter(s) we’re exploring. It would also be beneficial to utilize a commentary that lays out the variety of ways our ancestors have interpreted the text. If you need a suggestion, please ask! Also, the Bible isn’t merely meant to “*inform*” us but to also “*transform*” us, so we should expect the Spirit to reveal a “*next step*” which always begins with faith in Christ—either trusting Him for the first time or exercising faith to repent and change with help from Christ’s Spirit and His church body!

Specific application questions (Don’t forget the underlined questions in the sermon notes above!):

Other Articles/Songs/Videos: Please ask us for help obtaining other resources.

Quotes related to this passage:

- **1 Corinthians 5 from The Message Version:** “1-2 I also received a report of scandalous sex within your church family, a kind that wouldn’t be tolerated even outside the church: One of your men is sleeping with his stepmother. And you’re so above it all that it doesn’t even faze you! Shouldn’t this break your hearts? Shouldn’t it bring you to your knees in tears? Shouldn’t this person and his conduct be confronted and dealt with? 3-5 I’ll tell you what I would do. Even though I’m not there in person, consider me right there with you, because I can fully see what’s going on. I’m telling you that this is wrong. You must not simply look the other way and hope it goes away on its own. Bring it out in the open and deal with it in the authority of Jesus our Master. Assemble the community—I’ll be present in spirit with you and our Master Jesus will be present in power. Hold this man’s conduct up to public scrutiny. Let him defend it if he can! But if he can’t, then out with him! It will be totally devastating to him, of course, and embarrassing to you. But better devastation and embarrassment than damnation. You want him on his feet and forgiven before the Master on the Day of Judgment. 6-8 Your flip and callous arrogance in these things bothers me. You pass it off as a small thing, but it’s anything but that. Yeast, too, is a “small thing,” but it works its way through a whole batch of bread dough pretty fast. So get rid of this “yeast.” Our true identity is flat and plain, not puffed up with the wrong kind of ingredient. The Messiah, our Passover Lamb, has already been sacrificed for the Passover meal, and we are the Unraised Bread part of the Feast. So let’s live out our part in the Feast, not as raised bread swollen with the yeast of evil, but as flat bread—simple, genuine, unpretentious. 9-13 I wrote you in my earlier letter that you shouldn’t make yourselves at home among the sexually promiscuous. I didn’t mean that you should have nothing at all to do with outsiders of that sort. Or with criminals, whether blue- or white-collar. Or with spiritual phonies, for that matter. You’d have to leave the world entirely to do that! But I am saying that you shouldn’t act as if everything is just fine when a friend who claims to be a Christian is promiscuous or crooked, is flip with God or rude to friends, gets drunk or becomes greedy and predatory. You can’t just go along with this, treating it as acceptable behavior. I’m not responsible for what the outsiders do, but don’t we have some responsibility for those within

our community of believers? God decides on the outsiders, but we need to decide when our brothers and sisters are out of line and, if necessary, clean house.” Copyright © 1993, 2002, 2018 by Eugene H. Peterson

Quotes related to the larger context:

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