

# Toward Unity in the Cross

## Summary and Goal

In 1 Corinthians 1:10-31 we are given direction and truth to guide our hearts and conduct toward unity. Our unity must be grounded in biblical convictions, not popular personalities. The wisdom and power this world has to offer cannot stand against the wisdom and power displayed at the cross, which shows us that our unity is furthered as we boast only in the wisdom and power of our glorious Lord.

### ***Main Passage***

1 Corinthians 1:10-31

### ***Session Outline***

1. Unity is grounded in convictions, not personalities (1 Cor. 1:10-17).
2. Unity is preceded by God's wisdom shown at the cross (1 Cor. 1:18-25).
3. Unity is furthered by Christians who boast only in the Lord (1 Cor. 1:26-31).

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### ***Theological Theme***

Unity in the church must be grounded in truth, by the cross of Christ, and for the glory of God.

### ***Christ Connection***

Paul addressed divisions in the Corinthian church by reminding believers that the gospel overturns human expectations and robs us of any ability to boast in our salvation. Jesus is our wisdom, righteousness, sanctification, and redemption; therefore, selfish boasting and divisions have no place among God's people.

### ***Missional Application***

God calls us to strive for unity in the church in order to showcase the beauty of the cross and the truth that Christ alone is the source of our salvation.

# Toward Unity in the Cross

## Session 2

### ? For Further Discussion

How would you describe the difference between Christian unity and the way the broader culture thinks about unity?

### Point 1 Option

Play the video “London Symphony Orchestra Conducting Masterclass”: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=T2Eh9MFyNT4>

Ask the following questions for discussion:

- In what specific ways did the video help you appreciate the intricate nature of performing in an orchestra?
- How would you compare the roles of pastors and leaders in the local church to that of a conductor?
- Why are trust, humility, and sharing a common purpose necessary traits for serving in either an orchestra or a local church?

## Introduction

Share Aesop’s fable (leader p. 22); connect it to Satan’s method of attack and the importance of church unity (leader p. 22; personal study guide [PSG] p. 19).

- ? What are some common causes of division within churches today?

Summarize this session on unity that is grounded in biblical truth, by the cross of Christ, and for the glory of God (leader p. 23; PSG p. 20).

## 1. Unity is grounded in convictions, not personalities (1 Cor. 1:10-17).

Read 1 Corinthians 1:10-17. Describe the history and division of the church at Corinth, *calling attention to the city on* **Pack Item 2: New Testament Letters Map**. Relate how Paul challenged them to turn away from their divisions and toward unity that lasts, which is grounded in gospel convictions rather than personalities (leader pp. 23-24; PSG pp. 20-21).

- ? Why are we tempted to find church unity in people, ideas, and activities instead of in the gospel?
- ? How does the gospel help us maintain unity despite being diverse in so many other ways?

Use the analogy of a symphony to illustrate that Christians should be distinctive yet in accord with one another, unified by the gospel (leader p. 24; PSG p. 21).

- ? What are some ways we can make sure we are calling attention to Christ instead of ourselves?

## 2. Unity is preceded by God’s wisdom shown at the cross (1 Cor. 1:18-25).

Contrast the world’s wisdom with the wisdom of the cross. Then read 1 Corinthians 1:18-25. Show how God’s use of the cross falls into the category of God’s ways not being our ways. Say that true wisdom is to recognize this and trust in Christ (leader pp. 25-26; PSG pp. 22-23).

 What reasons do non-believers have today for finding the message of the cross so hard to believe?

Emphasize that the young Corinthian church needed to remember that the “foolishness” of the cross is what binds Christians together—something we also need to remember (leader pp. 26-27; PSG p. 23).

 How should the gospel help you put your gifts and talents and those of others in proper perspective?

### 3. Unity is furthered by Christians who boast only in the Lord (1 Cor. 1:26-31).

Share how gratitude and humility drive us toward unity. Then ask a volunteer to read 1 Corinthians 1:26-31. Draw attention to the type of people God has chosen and why—so that no one can boast in themselves but only in the Lord (leader pp. 27-28; PSG pp. 24-25).

 What will it look like for Christians to embrace weak and foolish lives in the eyes of the world?

Note that Paul referred to Jeremiah 9:23-24 following the phrase “as it is written” (leader p. 28). Focus on boasting in the Lord as the common denominator that unites believers (leader p. 29; PSG p. 25).

*Put up the poster **Pack Item 3: Hearing the Old Testament in the New** and pass out copies of the corresponding **Pack Item 4: Handout**. Ask group members to fill in the blank on their handout for this session: “The LORD: Boast...” (answer: “Jesus Christ: Boast...”). You may want to emphasize Jesus’ divinity in this OT/NT connection to further ground our reason to boast in Him. Encourage group members to keep this handout for use throughout the studies in this volume.*

 Why is boasting in yourself so strongly condemned throughout Scripture?

 How does boasting in the Lord bring Christians together in unity?

### Conclusion

Stress that Christlike humility to serve rather than be served is what begins to unify us (leader p. 29; PSG p. 26). *Apply the truths of this session with “His Mission, Your Mission” (PSG p. 27).*

### For Further Discussion

In addition to perspective on the cross of Christ, what are some other ways the world’s wisdom differs from God’s wisdom (consider Jas. 3:13-18)?

### Conclusion Option

Consider closing this group meeting by singing together the hymn “When I Survey the Wondrous Cross.”

(Available as **Pack Item 5: Hymn Handout** in *The Gospel Project for Adults: Leader Pack*. Make as many copies as needed.)

**Christ Connection:** Paul addressed divisions in the Corinthian church by reminding believers that the gospel overturns human expectations and robs us of any ability to boast in our salvation. Jesus is our wisdom, righteousness, sanctification, and redemption; therefore, selfish boasting and divisions have no place among God’s people.

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**Missional Application:** God calls us to strive for unity in the church in order to showcase the beauty of the cross and the truth that Christ alone is the source of our salvation.

# Toward Unity in the Cross

## Session 2

### Voices from the Church

“The biggest pain that a Christian worker has is not from attacks from outside the church. Attacks from within the church are always more painful than serious persecution.”<sup>2</sup>

—Ajith Fernando

## Introduction

“A Lion used to prowl about a field in which Four Oxen used to dwell. Many a time he tried to attack them; but whenever he came near they turned their tails to one another, so that whichever way he approached them he was met by the horns of one of them. At last, however, they fell a-quarrelling among themselves, and each went off to pasture alone in a separate corner of the field. Then the Lion attacked them one by one and soon made an end of all four.”<sup>1</sup>

The lion depicted in Aesop’s fable knew that as long as the four oxen stayed together, he didn’t stand a chance against the strength of the allied quartet. But the minute the four oxen decided to dwell on their own, their power through numbers disappeared. The lion then resumed his attack and triumphed.

The Bible tells us that we have an adversary in Satan, who prowls about like a lion seeking someone to devour (1 Pet. 5:8). Satan loves to attack the body of Christ—the church—because he knows if he can get us isolated from the “herd,” he can take us down, making our moments unproductive for the movement of the kingdom of God.

God has commissioned the church to take the message of the gospel to the nations. We are to live out the gospel so that His glory is clear and undeniable. He has purposed to use us—you and me, as part of the local church—to build the kingdom. When we are united through the cross, we stand as an undeniable force for the gospel. But if we are divided, at best, we become ineffective at carrying the message of the cross to the lost world around us. At worst, we steal the glory meant to be given to our King.

God’s heart for us is to be a unified, powerful front against the schemes of the evil one. Not only is unity a critical line of defense, it is also crucial to our offense of carrying the gospel to the nations.



What are some common causes of division within churches today?

## Session Summary

In 1 Corinthians 1:10-31 we are given direction and truth to guide our hearts and conduct toward unity. In this session we will see that our unity must be grounded in biblical convictions, not popular personalities. We will also contrast the wisdom and power this world has to offer with the wisdom and power displayed at the cross, which will show us that our unity is furthered as we boast only in the wisdom and power of our glorious Lord.

## 1. Unity is grounded in convictions, not personalities (1 Cor. 1:10-17).

Though we don't always realize we do it, we love to put spiritual leaders on a pedestal—just like the church in Corinth. Instead of simply learning from their leaders and imitating their obedience, the Corinthian Christians turned their affiliation with their heroes in the faith into status symbols and a cause for arrogant boasting.

*<sup>10</sup> 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. <sup>11</sup> For it has been reported to me by Chloe's people that there is quarreling among you, my brothers. <sup>12</sup> 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." <sup>13</sup> Is Christ divided? Was Paul crucified for you? Or were you baptized in the name of Paul? <sup>14</sup> I thank God that I baptized none of you except Crispus and Gaius, <sup>15</sup> so that no one may say that you were baptized in my name. <sup>16</sup> (I did baptize also the household of Stephanas. Beyond that, I do not know whether I baptized anyone else.) <sup>17</sup> For Christ did not send me to baptize but to preach the gospel, and not with words of eloquent wisdom, lest the cross of Christ be emptied of its power.*

Divided. Immature. Quarreling. This was the type of church Paul was writing to. They were a new body of believers, only a few years old, and Paul was one of its founders (Acts 18:1-11).<sup>3</sup> After birthing this church and laboring with them for eighteen months in the truths of the gospel, he left them and continued his missionary journey. However, he soon received reports of the immorality and dissension among them (1 Cor. 1:11).

Like an ornate jigsaw puzzle, Christians are part of a whole. Not one piece is alike, and no one piece can stand alone. We don't make sense without each other. But here in the church at Corinth, people attempted to start a puzzle of their own. Men and women rallied around different leaders, and then they tried to prove why their group was better than the others.

## Further Commentary

"Paul introduces in verses 10-17 the key for promoting unity and avoiding divisiveness—focusing on Christ rather than exalting human leaders. In so doing, we are driven to the cross, which should also promote humility rather than arrogance and rivalry. When we recognize the cross and all it stands for—the atoning, substitutionary sacrifice of the God-man for sinners in need of salvation, vindicated by his bodily resurrection and exaltation—we have identified the cluster of complementary and fundamental truths that must forever form the core of Christian faith. We also recognize how most other doctrines recede into the periphery...We should resolve not to let these less central matters erect barriers to fellowship and service among God's people in his world."<sup>4</sup>

—Craig L. Blomberg

## Voices from Church History

"Satan always hates Christian fellowship. It is his policy to keep Christians apart. He delights in anything that can divide saints from one another. He attaches far more importance to godly relationships than we do. Since unity is strength, he does his best to promote separation."<sup>5</sup>

—Charles H. Spurgeon (1834-1892)

## Further Commentary

“It is hard to imagine, but Christians can actually find themselves doing things in the name of the gospel that are absolutely contrary to the gospel. Many Corinthian believers had fallen into such a predicament. They had aligned themselves against one another, using human wisdom and persuasive powers to support their divisive ways. Paul’s response to this situation cut straight to the heart of the matter. To divide the church on the basis of human wisdom is to oppose the gospel of Christ. The true gospel does not rely on human wisdom, but on the power of God received through faith in the death and resurrection of Christ.”<sup>6</sup>

—Richard L. Pratt Jr.

## 99 Essential Christian Doctrines

### 79. Body of Christ

The New Testament describes the church as the body of Christ. The church lives and operates as Christ’s representative here on earth, with Christ as its head (Col. 1:18). This means that the church is an extension of Christ’s ministry, carrying out His work by fulfilling the Great Commission (Matt. 28:18-20). In addition, the picture of the church as the body of Christ shows us the interconnectedness of individual Christians, with each member dependent upon one another for growth and sanctification (1 Cor. 12).

Later in 1 Corinthians 12–14, we see that they fought a similar battle over spiritual gifts, continually debating over which gift was most important. In response, Paul exhorted them with the perspective that the church of God, the bride of Christ, is one body. By the Holy Spirit, we each have been given specific and needed gifts that are meant to be used for the greater good (1 Cor. 12). The people of the Corinthian church, however, attempted to use their gifts, as well as their affiliations with a popular personality, to serve their own egos.

Therefore, Paul challenged them to turn away from their divisions and toward unity. Specifically, Paul told them to be united “in the same mind and the same judgment” (1:10; see also Phil. 1:27; 2:1-8).

Unity that is grounded in gospel convictions lasts; unity that is attached to personalities doesn’t. That is what went wrong in Corinth, where there were several leaders to follow, and the church fragmented. The same can be true of churches today with multiple staff members or strong leaders in the church body. But even a church where everyone is unified behind the same leader may have placed its unity in peril, which can become evident when that leader leaves the church. But the gospel is unchanging. The gospel will not leave. The gospel will not accidentally or intentionally make us take unnecessary sides. That is why unity is grounded rightly in the gospel of Jesus Christ alone.

- ❓ Why are we tempted to find church unity in people, ideas, and activities instead of in the gospel?
- ❓ How does the gospel help us maintain unity despite being diverse in so many other ways?

As Christians, we are unified by the gospel of Christ. We are to be distinctive yet in accord with one another, like a beautiful symphony of notes and instruments that can only be heard and appreciated if every member of the orchestra plays his or her notes exactly as they were envisioned by the composer. Instead of pursuing notoriety by our own tune or playing the praises of another, we are to come together in perfect harmony to sing the song of the good news of Jesus to one another and to the lost souls around us.

Paul got this. He navigated well the balance of being a spiritual hero without stripping Christ of the fame due His name. We can learn much from his example, whether we find ourselves in a leadership position or we are looking for spiritual direction from another.

- ❓ What are some ways we can make sure we are calling attention to Christ instead of ourselves?

## 2. Unity is preceded by God’s wisdom shown at the cross (1 Cor. 1:18-25).

After stating that our unity can be found in Christ alone, Paul went on to show us the brilliance of the cross. From the world’s perspective, the cross makes no sense. The Jews were looking for the signs of the Messiah, a glorious king who would rescue them in a powerful, obvious way. To the wisdom-seeking Greeks, an uneducated, unimportant man from Galilee who willingly walked to His own death did not fit the part either. Nothing about this crucified Jesus looked wise, but it absolutely was.



*<sup>18</sup> For the word of the cross is folly to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God. <sup>19</sup> For it is written, “I will destroy the wisdom of the wise, and the discernment of the discerning I will thwart.” <sup>20</sup> Where is the one who is wise? Where is the scribe? Where is the debater of this age? Has not*

*God made foolish the wisdom of the world? <sup>21</sup> For since, in the wisdom of God, the world did not know God through wisdom, it pleased God through the folly of what we preach to save those who believe. <sup>22</sup> For Jews demand signs and Greeks seek wisdom, <sup>23</sup> but we preach Christ crucified, a stumbling block to Jews and folly to Gentiles, <sup>24</sup> but to those who are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God. <sup>25</sup> For the foolishness of God is wiser than men, and the weakness of God is stronger than men.*

From my home office, I heard the water running in the bathroom across the hall. I assumed it was one of my children washing his or her hands, but after several minutes, I crossed the hall to investigate and found my six year old holding a soggy, disintegrating piece of bread under the faucet. Immediately, I swooped in to stop the stream of water, which was pooling in the quickly clogging sink. While I cleaned the mess, my husband, Chris, did some detective work to get to the bottom of why our sweet six year old would dream of placing his bread under running water. His confession: He was trying to melt the butter.

Chris explained to our confused child why hot water is not the best way to melt butter. Through the eyes of an adult, this “cooking method” is foolish. But for my hungry kindergartener, who knew he was not allowed to cook on his own, it seemed to be the best option available.

### Further Commentary

“The apostle Paul lived an extraordinarily charismatic life. He healed the sick and cast out demons. He even healed a man crippled from birth. It was an event so miraculous that the people at Lystra wanted to sacrifice oxen to him as if he were a Roman god (Acts 14:8-18). Yet in his letters Paul never mentioned the miraculous events recorded in the book of Acts, events that displayed the power of God in his ministry. Paul connected the power of God to a specific historic event—the Cross of Jesus Christ. Paul understood that the power of God is not found in boasting about miracles or in showing off one’s power over demons in exorcisms. Rather, God’s power is released through ‘the word of the cross’—through the simple preaching and teaching of the Cross of our Lord Jesus Christ.”<sup>7</sup>

—Africa Study Bible

## Further Commentary

“This paragraph is crucial, both in the context of this particular letter and for the overall understanding of Paul’s theology. Here he delivers the heart and essence of the gospel he believed and proclaimed. Paul’s lines reveal that God works in a most peculiar way—first, God works in defiance of the standards of this world as they are understood or construed by humanity, and second, God’s work is powerful so that it incapacitates, reverses, even turns upside down the values of this world as they are objectively established and understood by humans. Paul declares this way of God’s working as a fact—it is God’s saving activity that amounts to the soteriological reality of the cross of Jesus Christ.”<sup>9</sup>

—Marion L. Soards

## Voices from Church History

“Be united with other Christians. A wall with loose bricks is not good. The bricks must be cemented together.”<sup>10</sup>

—Corrie ten Boom (1892-1983)

The actions of my six year old showed independence, ingenuity, and self-sufficiency, characteristics that will one day prove helpful for everyday living. (A cooking class might not be a bad idea, either.) I’m sure each of us can look back and find our own foolish thoughts and actions as a child. What seems right to a little one often pales in comparison to the wisdom an adult can give. And yet, even the greatest acumen, ingenuity, and vigor any adult in this world is able to show is weak and foolish compared to the brilliance of our God, as we read in Isaiah 55:8: “For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, declares the LORD.”

God’s use of the cross to bring about the deliverance of people from sin certainly falls into this category. Crucifixion was Rome’s chosen manner of execution for slaves and non-citizens, and because it was so cruel and shameful, only Roman citizens who had been declared enemies of the state were crucified.<sup>8</sup>

To the Jewish mind and heart, the cross was a symbol of tyranny by an occupying foreign power. The thought that the long-awaited Messiah would end up being crucified was foolish because they looked to the Messiah to be the one who would finally free them from such oppression. For them, Jesus’ crucifixion closed the door on the possibility that He was the Messiah. While the Gentiles had no notion of the Messiah, they saw the cross as foolishness because the basic idea of an executed criminal being a hero was absurd.

The world’s wisdom sees the cross as foolishness, but God made the world’s wisdom foolish through the cross. The cross was God’s plan to provide forgiveness for sinners who could not find forgiveness on their own. It is through faith in what is preached about the cross—Christ crucified—that people can be saved. True wisdom is to recognize this and trust in Christ. True foolishness is to reject the cross.



What reasons do non-believers have today for finding the message of the cross so hard to believe?

This young Corinthian church needed to remember that the gospel makes no sense from a human perspective. Not one of them deserved the grace of God, and neither do we. Yet it is this “foolishness” that binds us as believers. The undeserved forgiveness and abundant spiritual blessings we receive from our heavenly Creator unify us amidst all our earthly differences. Regardless of our backgrounds, spiritual gifts, or tightly held opinions, through the cross we all obtain eternal life with God. The gospel is our common denominator.

Everything we possess, both physical and spiritual, is a gift of grace. All brilliance comes from God—even within our Christian circles. The gifted speaker, talented worship leader, and incredible Bible teacher all possess what they have through God—even more reason to cast aside our pedestal-putting tendencies.

God’s power, perspective, and preeminence are infinitely greater than anything you and I can conjure up. Pointing our hearts continually to this truth might just be the wisest action we can take in our Christian walk. As David put it: “When I look at your heavens, the work of your fingers, the moon and the stars, which you have set in place, what is man that you are mindful of him, and the son of man that you care for him?” (Ps. 8:3-4).

 How should the gospel help you put your gifts and talents and those of others in proper perspective?

### 3. Unity is furthered by Christians who boast only in the Lord (1 Cor. 1:26-31).

A first-born achiever in a small private school, I excelled among my peers. I received straight As, played several sports, and ran around with the cool crowd. My senior year of high school, I was voted student body president and “Most Likely to Succeed” and then graduated a salutatorian. As I prepared to move cross-country to Auburn University, I set my sights on scholarships and resuming the ranks of the top percent of my new college classes.

Although my SAT scores were high compared to most of my peers, I had to take the test twice in order to qualify for university scholarship applications (none of which I received). My grades weren’t high enough to make it into the honors dorm, I didn’t pass the entrance exam for my AP Biology credits to transfer, and my first quarter in college I received my first B. It was a blow to my ego. I walked around bruised and battered for weeks. Distraught and disoriented, my identity as “top of the class” was stripped away. Suddenly, I was faced with a realization: *I am not as brilliant as I thought. I grew up a big fish in a small pond.*

Yet it was amidst this humiliating first quarter in school that God began the biggest work in me. Stripped of all my accolades and attention from people, I discovered my desperate need for the presence of Christ in my everyday moments. I learned that my identity and significance are not based in any of my actions or attributes. My worth comes from being chosen and called into God’s kingdom. He didn’t choose me because I had anything to offer Him. He chose me—foolish, weak, and insignificant in the eyes of the world—because of His good character and great mercy, grace, and love toward me.

#### Voices from the Church

“Only at the cross do we see the love of God without ambiguity. Here is God’s farthest reach, His most ambitious rescue effort. God personally came to our side of the chasm, willing to suffer for us and with us. At the cross His love burst upon the world with unmistakable clarity. Here at last we have found solid reasons to believe that there was a genuine connection between God and man.”<sup>11</sup>

—Erwin W. Lutzer

## Further Commentary

“Christ and his apostles were all in humble positions. The apostles endured poverty, hardship and persecution (4:11-13). So the lack of status that clings to the church today is nothing new. It is to be expected as part of our participation in the offence of the cross. Those who oppose Christ suggest that the church exploits people, luring the poor and forcing them to convert. But our work with the poor is not born of a desire to exploit but of a desire to demonstrate the divine love that calls, inspires and leads to righteousness, holiness and redemption.”<sup>12</sup>

—Finny Philip

## Further Commentary

“By the Father’s doing, believers have an identification ‘in Christ’ (shorthand for ‘in Christ crucified,’ cp. vv. 23-24,30; 2:2). Because of this they possess the wisdom of God—Christ crucified, the very essence of wisdom. Through this wisdom, believers have justification at God’s court, sanctification that allows their entrance into his presence, and ultimate redemption.”<sup>13</sup>

—F. Alan Tomlinson

Gratitude and humility drive us toward unity together. When we truly grasp the depth of our sin and the breadth of God’s love for us, we will see people through the lens of this same love. When we rally around the work of Christ at the cross—an act of glorious grace from God—there is absolutely no room for boasting in anyone but God. Pride in any part of us is an act of forgetfulness. We cannot glorify God and ourselves at the same time. Paul didn’t hold back as he drove this point home.

*<sup>26</sup> For consider your calling, brothers: not many of you were wise according to worldly standards, not many were powerful, not many were of noble birth. <sup>27</sup> But God chose what is foolish in the world to shame the wise; God chose what is weak in the world to shame the strong; <sup>28</sup> God chose what is low and despised in the world, even things that are not, to bring to nothing things that are, <sup>29</sup> so that no human being might boast in the presence of God. <sup>30</sup> And because of him you are in Christ Jesus, who became to us wisdom from God, righteousness and sanctification and redemption, <sup>31</sup> so that, as it is written, “Let the one who boasts, boast in the Lord.”*

Notice whom God has chosen. People who are not wise. Not powerful. Not of nobility. People who are weak, insignificant, and despised. That doesn’t make for a good résumé, does it? Why did God choose people the world looks past? Paul answered that question twice—so that no one can boast in himself but only in the Lord (1:29,31). God’s choosing reminds us of His grace—our salvation is not based on who we are or what we have done—and drives us toward humility. We cannot boast in ourselves because we have nothing worthy to boast about.



What will it look like for Christians to embrace weak and foolish lives in the eyes of the world?

In verse 31, Paul writes “as it is written.” This phrase almost always refers to another place in Scripture, and when we study the Bible, it is good to find the original source of the statement that follows. In this case, Paul was referring to Jeremiah 9:23-24:

Thus says the LORD: “Let not the wise man boast in his wisdom, let not the mighty man boast in his might, let not the rich man boast in his riches, but let him who boasts boast in this, that he understands and knows me, that I am the LORD who practices steadfast love, justice, and righteousness in the earth. For in these things I delight, declares the LORD.”

It is a great honor to know the Lord, our faithful, loving, righteousness Judge. Believers have much to boast about in Him. Again, this is our common denominator, our rallying cry. Though we may have different preferences on how our church building should look or opposing views on the details of our Sunday service, we are united in the desire to point others to God as the faithful, loving Savior. As we fix our eyes on Jesus, instead of our supposed strengths and our tightly held opinions, our hearts are naturally stirred for His name to be praised, and we will joyfully and passionately proclaim His goodness to the nations.

Though we are loved, cherished, and highly valued through the sacrifice of Jesus, Christ walked obediently to the cross to glorify His Father first and foremost. We too must follow in the footsteps of Christ and walk in purposeful obedience to glorify the Father in our daily lives.

- ❓ Why is boasting in yourself so strongly condemned throughout Scripture?
- ❓ How does boasting in the Lord bring Christians together in unity?

## Conclusion

Too often we approach the body of Christ to be served by it. We're tired and weary. Sad and lonely. Needy for refreshment and encouragement, significance and affirmation. The church does serve as the hands and feet of Jesus, and we should receive such ministry and love from the church, but if our mind-set is mostly about what we can get from the people of God instead of holding on to a humble heart of service, we have it all backward. Jesus Himself came not to be served but to serve (Mark 10:45), and this example of humility is what begins to unify us. So when we're tempted to demand our own way and assert our preferences to serve our own needs, we miss the unifying purpose of the church: to glorify God and make known the name of His Son, Jesus, through a lifetime of Spirit-filled living.

**CHRIST CONNECTION:** Paul addressed divisions in the Corinthian church by reminding believers that the gospel overturns human expectations and robs us of any ability to boast in our salvation. Jesus is our wisdom, righteousness, sanctification, and redemption; therefore, selfish boasting and divisions have no place among God's people.

## Voices from Church History

"Boasting is an evidence that we are pleased with self; belittling, that we are disappointed with it. Either way, we reveal that we have a high opinion of ourselves."<sup>14</sup>

—A. W. Tozer (1897-1963)

## Voices from Church History

"When I survey the wondrous cross, On which the Prince of glory died, My richest gain I count but loss, And pour contempt on all my pride. Forbid it, Lord, that I should boast, Save in the death of Christ, my God! All the vain things that charm me most, I sacrifice them to His blood. See, from His head, His hands, His feet, Sorrow and love flow mingled down; Did e'er such love and sorrow meet, Or thorns compose so rich a crown? Were the whole realm of nature mine, That were a present far too small; Love so amazing, so divine, Demands my soul, my life, my all."<sup>15</sup>

—Isaac Watts (1674-1748)

## Additional Resources

# Toward Unity in the Cross

## References

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Grow with other group leaders at the Group Ministry blog at [LifeWay.com/GroupMinistry](http://LifeWay.com/GroupMinistry).

## Study Material

- "1 Corinthians: Internal Immaturity and External Hellenizing Threats"—Pages 163-202 in *From Pentecost to Patmos* by Craig L. Blomberg
- "Dying to Self and Discovering So Much More"—Article by Jan Johnson; find a link to this article at [GospelProject.com/AdditionalResources](http://GospelProject.com/AdditionalResources)
- Previous *Biblical Illustrator* articles, including "Paul and the Corinthian Church," can be purchased, along with other articles for this quarter, at [LifeWay.com/BiblicalIllustrator](http://LifeWay.com/BiblicalIllustrator). Look for Bundles: The Gospel Project.

## Sermon

John Piper: "Let the One Who Boasts Boast in the Lord"

Find a link to this at [GospelProject.com/AdditionalResources](http://GospelProject.com/AdditionalResources)

## Tip of the Week

### *The Gospel Project Leader Pack*

Throughout the session plans in this Leader Guide, you will see references to pack items that will enhance your group meeting and help group members gain more from this study of God's Word. These items are available in *The Gospel Project for Adults: Leader Pack*.

- The posters and charts in the Leader Pack will help foster discussion within your group and make clear the connections throughout the Scriptures.
- The map will help put the stories of Scripture in geographical context.
- The pack also includes some take-away items so group members can recall what they learned in the session and be reminded to apply what they learned as they go about their mission of making Jesus known in the world.
- The DVD in the pack contains customizable files of the Leader session plans and commentary, as well as videos from our general editor that will help leaders make the most efficient use of their group time.

*The Gospel Project for Adults: Leader Pack* is available in print and digital formats. Order today at [GospelProject.com](http://GospelProject.com) or by calling 800-458-2772.

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