

UNITED IN THE GOSPEL



+ SESSION OUTLINE

1. The church is united under one leader (1 Cor. 1:10-17).
2. The church is united by one gospel (1 Cor. 1:18-25).
3. The church is united in one body (1 Cor. 12:12-18).

Background Passages: 1 Corinthians 1; 12

+ WHAT WILL MY GROUP LEARN?

The church is one body, joined together by Christ and His gospel.

+ HOW WILL MY GROUP SEE CHRIST?

Christ's desire is for His church to be united as one to fulfill our mission and reflect the oneness of our trinitarian God. Just as the Father, Son, and Spirit have carried out the plan of redemption in unity, so too is the church to be unified as we carry out God's plan of evangelism and missions.

+ HOW SHOULD MY GROUP RESPOND?

Because Jesus has joined all who trust in Him together as one church, we cast aside all causes of division and fight to preserve unity to show the watching world God's power to reconcile.

GROUP TIME

Group content found in the Daily Discipleship Guide is included in the shaded areas throughout the session.



SCRIPTURE HANDOUT

Scan this QR code for a reproducible handout of this session's Scripture passages.

INTRODUCTION

ASK: As participants arrive, ask: **What are some examples of products that started off with great promise but quickly fell apart?** (wait for a volunteer to respond first; only share your response as a conclusion to the discussion; some examples would be yo-yos that quickly get tangled, silly putty that quickly loses its stickiness, or certain knives that end up not being sharp, etc.)

TRANSITION: The church at Corinth proved to be a church that struggled to grow without much outside help. They had embraced the gospel but were more influenced by society than their Savior. Paul diagnosed several areas that needed addressing. First up was their lack of unity.

SUMMARIZE: Help your group understand the **setting** for this session.

- As the gospel spread, the first Christian missionaries established new churches in metropolitan areas. One such city was Corinth. Destroyed in 146 BC by Rome, then revitalized about one hundred years later, the “new” Corinth was a bustling crossroads filled with trade, tourism, and travelers seeking to settle in this land of opportunity. It was a strategic place for ministry, and the apostle Paul established a church there during his second missionary journey in the early AD 50s. After eighteen months of ministry, Paul left the Corinthian church. First Corinthians provides a peek into the state of the church just a few years after her birth, and the prognosis was not good.



Listen to session-by-session training every week on
 Ministry Grid, Apple Podcasts, or Spotify:
ministrygrid.com/gospelproject | gospelproject.com/leader-training.

POINT 1

THE CHURCH IS UNITED UNDER ONE LEADER

(1 COR. 1:10-17).

READ: Invite a volunteer to read aloud **1 Corinthians 1:10-17** from his or her Bible.

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

STUDY: Ask group members to read verse 10 again on their own and underline the commands Paul gives to the church. Give them about thirty seconds of silence to do so, then ask them to share what they observed. (agree in what you say; have no divisions; be united in understanding and conviction)

EXPLAIN: Discuss **verses 10-11** and the following idea (Daily Discipleship Guide [DDG] p. 98):

Disunity must be addressed because unity is foundational to the church.

- Paul wrote this letter in response to the disturbing reports he had received regarding the dysfunction in the church at Corinth. He also received correspondence directly from church members, requesting counsel for specific problems they were experiencing.
- As a man of strategy, Paul dove right in to address the church's lack of unity. Before he could answer their questions, he needed to address their divisions. If they could not unify through their faith in Christ, there would be no hope for change among them for other issues.
- The Greek word translated into "united" holds a medical meaning, particular to the resetting of bones in the case of a break. Thus, Paul is depicting the need for this shattered church to be restored back to being one.¹ Just as a broken bone is useless for its intended purpose, so is this injured church unusable for the cause of Christ as long as it remains fractured into factions.

VOICES from THE CHURCH

"Christian worship is shaped by the cross—and so must Christian theology be, unless the theologian is to find himself alienated from the worship of the church. The heart and mind of the church cannot be allowed to go their separate ways, but must be forged together in a cruciform unity."²

—Alister E. McGrath

ASK: (DDG p. 98)

How does disunity threaten the growth of a church? (it divides a church into smaller groups that fight each other; it creates bitterness and resentment; it creates a you and them mentality; it breeds negativity)

DIG: Instruct the class to study 1 Corinthians 1:12-17 as you read it aloud. Specifically, ask them to underline any evidence of the problem within the church. After you read the passage, discuss what stood out to them.

HIGHLIGHT: Discuss **verses 12-17** with the following idea (DDG p. 98):

When divisions arise, focused attention on Christ can bring people back together.

- Immersed in a culture driven by ambition, fueled by status, and divided by factions, the local church had allowed the values of the secular world to influence them more than God's Word.
- In verse 13, Paul used a series of rhetorical questions to drive his point home: Christ is the One who died for His people. Christ is the One in whose name they were baptized. Christ alone is the One whom Christians should identify with and unite around. Though Paul baptized some, he wanted it to be clear that it was in Christ that people were baptized.
- Ultimately, Paul knew that Christ didn't send him to baptize but to preach the gospel. Yet even in his preaching, it was Christ who had all the power.
- Paul was a trained and gifted communicator. But verse 17 demonstrates that Paul chose not to rely on his ability to speak with eloquence. He recognized that the power to change lives comes from Christ alone. Using over-the-top methods to wow individuals to Christ (and keep their interest) can rob the gospel of its glory. Everything should point to Christ.

DISCUSS: (DDG p. 98)

How ought Paul's rebuke in this passage shape what we look for and celebrate in a church leader? (too often we look for charisma, off-the-charts communication skills, and the ability to keep an audience's attention as primary in determining the value of a preacher; instead, we ought to grade him by whether he accurately teaches the Bible, how he points us to our need for the gospel, and helps stir our affections for Christ)

TRANSITION: The universal church is led by Christ. The Lord provides local leaders to serve and care for His bride, but Christ is the ultimate Head.

APOLLOS & CEPHAS

Other leaders in the church body at the time that individuals in the Corinthian church were boasting to be their followers. These leaders themselves were not trying to faction themselves. It was the people who were saying, "I am of Paul" or of "Apollos" or "Cephas" (also known as Peter [John 1:42]).

POINT 2

THE CHURCH IS UNITED BY ONE GOSPEL

(1 COR. 1:18-25).

READ: Invite a volunteer to read **1 Corinthians 1:18-25** from his or her Bible.

18 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. **19** For it is written, “I will destroy the wisdom of the wise, and the discernment of the discerning I will thwart.” **20** 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? **21** 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. **22** For Jews demand signs and Greeks seek wisdom, **23** but we preach Christ crucified, a stumbling block to Jews and folly to Gentiles, **24** but to those who are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God. **25** For the foolishness of God is wiser than men, and the weakness of God is stronger than men.

INTERACT: In groups of 3-4, ask, “How is man’s wisdom different from God’s wisdom?” (man’s wisdom is limited unless enlightened by God; God’s wisdom is perfect; man’s wisdom is good but God’s wisdom is better; sometimes they coincide when man looks to God, but not always) Discuss your answers together.

EXPLAIN: Discuss **verses 18-21** and the following (DDG p. 98):

The world’s wisdom leads to death, but the wisdom of the cross rescues those who embrace Christ.

- Paul further illustrated his reason for not relying on his own rhetorical skills in his preaching ministry. If people “come to Christ” through his oratory persuasion—instead of the power of the gospel—they have misplaced their faith. This thought is more clearly stated later in 1 Corinthians 2:4-5, where Paul declared that he did not want to rely on man-made words, but on the power of the Spirit, “so that your faith might not rest in the wisdom of men but in the power of God.”
- Verse 19 quotes Isaiah 29:14. God earlier rebuked the lip service of the Israelites while their hearts were far from Him (Isa. 29:13). Here, Paul argued that the “wise” words of man are meaningless. The people of Israel relied on their wisdom and proved to be foolish.
- From here, Paul returned to four more rhetorical questions to hammer home his point: The wisdom of man is nothing but folly. The wisdom of the cross is completely counter-cultural. This “foolish” gospel must be clearly understood and embraced for it to affect salvation. Paul refused to trust solely in earthly wisdom to carry out God’s eternal purposes.

ASK: (DDG p. 98)

What are some “red flags” that might indicate our leaning on the world’s wisdom instead of God’s? (we justify our actions with “I know the Bible says . . . but”; we spend lots of time analyzing situations, with little prayer; definitions of success are solely numbers-based; we think pragmatism prevails; a decision is clearly against biblical principles)

SHARE: In groups of 3-4, ask, “How is the gospel a ‘stumbling block’ to some in the world?” (they can’t disprove it so they stumble over their own wisdom; they want to reject it because it’s not culturally acceptable in some circles, but they find it compelling; they might know that it’s true, but they don’t want to surrender to it which makes it a stumbling block)

HIGHLIGHT: Discuss **verses 22-25** (DDG p. 98):

All are united in Christ when they trust that He is the power and wisdom of God.

- In verse 14, Paul paralleled that the word of the cross is the power of God. This correlation between the proclaiming of God’s Word and His power was further explained here in this section. Christ displays and provides both power and wisdom for all who embrace Him as Savior.
- Isaiah 8:14-15 spoke of the coming Messiah as “a rock of stumbling” by which many would be broken, snared, and captured. Many Jews were unable to accept the Messiah who came. They stumbled over the “weak” ways and “foolish” means by which He ushered in His Kingdom rule. What they expected blinded them from seeing the very salvation they’d spent centuries waiting for.
- In a similar way, the Greeks sought after wisdom with their many philosophers, yet man’s wisdom is foolishness to God.
- Paul, then, makes the point to acknowledge that some Jews and Greeks who trust in Christ will find Him as the ultimate power and wisdom. True wisdom and power are found only under the one gospel.

DISCUSS: (DDG p. 98)

What happens when we rely on human wisdom instead of God’s wisdom found in the gospel? (we become divisive; we become distracted; we might end up doing right things but not the better things; we can lose our focus on Christ; we get tempted by worldly things)

TRANSITION: In His power and wisdom, God called His people to salvation so that we would make disciples, working together to complete that commission.

POINT 3

THE CHURCH IS UNITED IN ONE BODY

(1 COR. 12:12-18).



SPIRITUAL GIFTS

Scan this QR code for some tools to help your group identify and use their spiritual gifts for the benefit of the church body.

READ: Invite a volunteer to read **1 Corinthians 12:12-18** from his or her Bible.

12 For just as the body is one and has many members, and all the members of the body, though many, are one body, so it is with Christ.

13 For in one Spirit we were all baptized into one body—Jews or Greeks, slaves or free—and all were made to drink of one Spirit. **14** For

the body does not consist of one member but of many. **15** If the foot should say, “Because I am not a hand, I do not belong to the body,”

that would not make it any less a part of the body. **16** And if the ear should say, “Because I am not an eye, I do not belong to the body,”

that would not make it any less a part of the body. **17** If the whole body were an eye, where would be the sense of hearing? If the whole body were an ear, where would be the sense of smell? **18** But as it is, God

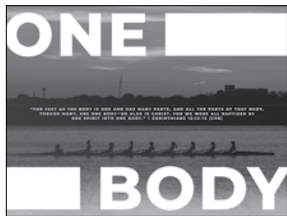
arranged the members in the body, each one of them, as he chose.

SUMMARIZE: In groups of 3-4, ask the groups to read 1 Corinthians 12:4-7, and summarize Paul’s preceding teaching. (Paul denotes that there are a variety of gifts, ministries, and activities in the body of Christ—all of which are from God. These are “manifestations” of the Holy Spirit, to be used for the common good.)

EXPLAIN: Call attention to **PACK ITEM 12: ONE BODY** and read the verses there. Invite a volunteer to read the key doctrine “Unity of the Church” in their DDG (p. 99). Then discuss with **verses 12-13**.

Key Doctrine #84: Unity of the Church: Christ’s desire for the church is that we be united as one in Him by the gospel (Phil. 2:1-2), reflecting the oneness of our trinitarian God (John 17:20-23). As such, we are to allow for no divisions to separate us (1 Cor. 1:10), such as ethnicity, socio-economics, nationality, language, politics, or secondary doctrinal beliefs. Our objective is not simply to work around or look past these differences within the body of Christ but to celebrate the diversity of God’s people made one in Christ (1 Cor. 12:12-13; Eph. 4:4-6,11-13), demonstrating humility (Rom. 12:3,16; Phil. 2:5-11) and freely loving and forgiving one another (Col. 3:13-14) to reflect the power of Christ who reconciles all things to Himself (Ps. 133:1; Eph. 1:10; 2:14).

- The Corinthian Christians sent Paul a list of questions they had for him. Paul provided perspective on spiritual gifts through the analogy of something every person could relate to: the body. Just as each person has one physical body with many parts, so are many Christians part of one spiritual body. We share an identity, a calling, and a Savior.
- Though we are one body, we understand and experience that oneness as individuals. This unity of the church is an echo of the unity of the Trinity, who is one in nature yet comprises three unique Persons.



ASK: (DDG p. 99)

Why is it sometimes difficult to celebrate the differences within the body? (because we are prideful; because we don't like things that are different; because we lack an understanding of differences; because we fail to have compassion on those who grew up differently; because of sin)

SHARE: Ask the group to share, "What are some hindrances that keep each part from performing their purpose within the body? (some don't know what gifts they have; some church's structures—or lack of—make it hard to get involved; we tend to think we need an official invitation or job before we can exercise our gifts; insecurity; selfishness; busyness; disobedience)

INSTRUCT: Discuss **verses 14-18** with the following idea (DDG p. 99):

As we are one body, every Christian has a specific and special God-given role to play in the local church.

- The church at Corinth had been stuck in debates about which gift was most important, and they wanted Paul to settle the score. In a body, every part is necessary. In the church, every gift is necessary. There are no greater or lesser gifts.
- In chapter 13, Paul brought a heavy rebuke and call to love. God gives gifts to His people so they can build one another up. It's not a competition. Spiritual gifts don't exist for us to feel better about ourselves. They are temporary supports for believers to love one another so that, together, the church can function the best she can. Paul made it clear that when Christ returns, there would be no need for certain gifts, but "love never ends" (1 Cor. 13:8).

DISCUSS: (DDG p. 99)

From Day 5 in the DDG: **If you knew that your spiritual gift would be taken away tomorrow, what would you do today so you could use it to the fullest?** (answers may vary)

TRANSITION: We are one in Christ. He leads the church. He bled for the church. Furthermore, He is transforming the body into a beautiful bride and will present her at the coming wedding feast. Let us become men and women of unity so we can help facilitate God's good and perfect plan for His church.

MY RESPONSE

SAY: Christ's desire is for His church to be united as one to fulfill our mission and reflect the oneness of our trinitarian God. Just as the Father, Son, and Spirit have carried out the plan of redemption in unity, so too is the church to be unified as we carry out God's plan of evangelism and missions. Because Jesus has joined all who trust in Him together as one church, we cast aside all causes of division and fight to preserve unity to show the watching world God's power to reconcile.

HEAD:

Church unity is vital. Disunity is a sickness, easily spread, that will steal the body of Christ of her vitality. The church has been tasked with the Great Commission—the calling to make disciples of all nations. But we cannot take on this task if we're divided into factions, heading in different directions. Christ-followers must embrace the privilege of belonging to the cohort of Christ, where we share in an eternal calling and look forward to an imperishable inheritance.

How can I play a part in emphasizing the unity of the church?

HEART:

The evil one is crafty. He's had millennia to scheme—and he's good at keeping Christians from living out their faith and calling. He knows that we flourish when we are in the Word of God, following the Spirit of God, among the people of God. Satan employs many tactics to keep us from growing. But we cannot let him win! We must continue to fight.

What can I confess to God that is tempting me away from God's purpose and plan?

HANDS:

God has endowed each Christian with unique gifts, which we are to use for the building up of the local church for the glory of God. Every "part" of the body of Christ is necessary. There are no throw-away members within the church. When we fail to serve the local church, we contribute to her decline. Instead of scrutinizing her failures and making excuses for our absence, each Christ-follower should seek to serve His church the best he or she knows how.

How can I play my part in growing the kingdom with the gifts He's given me?

PRAY: God, thank You for Your provision of the local church. Help us stay unified. Show us how we can better use our gifts to bless the church.

VOICES from THE CHURCH

"Church should be a place where people gather and get along with each other who have no merely human reason for doing so."³

—Craig Blomberg

POINT 1: THE CHURCH IS UNITED UNDER ONE LEADER

(1 COR. 1:10-17).

+

ILLUSTRATION

In a three-legged race, individuals are paired up with their legs tied together at the ankle, and they run to the finish line. As easy as it sounds, many couplets never make it to the end of the race. Some pairs never quite get their stride and speed together, and they both end up on the ground. The Christian life is not a solo sport. God has given us each other—the body of Christ—to run this race of faith with. The closer to one another we can get, the better. When we work together, communicate well, and find a common stride—fueled by the Holy Spirit—we will reach places in the kingdom of God we could never on our own. God has ordained for His people to run this race of faith as a collaborative community, not a lone ranger.

POINT 3: THE CHURCH IS UNITED IN ONE BODY

(1 COR. 12:12-18).

+

ILLUSTRATION

Electrical systems work through utilizing electric currents to power outlets throughout a home. Organized through multiple circuits, if something goes wrong in one circuit, the issue impacts everything plugged into that part of the system. One frayed wire or bad outlet renders the entire circuit useless. God's people are all on the same circuit. What one does or does not do affects the rest of the circuit. When there is a "short" in one area, it stops the effectiveness of others. The good news is, the Holy Spirit can and does supernaturally work in and through the local church, even when we have our wiring all wrong. He can easily find the short in the circuit and fill in the gaps. But when we follow the master plan of the designer, we can better illuminate the love of Christ to the watching world. When every small part functions, the entire circuit works.

References

1. Roy E. Ciampa and Brian S. Rosner, *The First Letter to the Corinthians*, The Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI; Cambridge, U.K.: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2010), 76.
2. Alister E McGrath, *The Mystery of the Cross* (Grand Rapids: Academie Books, 1990), 73.
3. Craig Blomberg, *1 Corinthians*, The NIV Application Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1994), 252.