

“One in the Spirit”  
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06/06/2021

### **Opening Prayer**

Good Morning Beloved, thank the Good Lord we have finally made it to summer. (At least in my mind it's the summer.) With the changing of the seasons we are also changing from one season to another in the church calendar. We have, for the last several weeks, been tackling various individual topics. We had Mother's Day, Confirmation, Memorial Day, etc. Before that we had been in the book of 1<sup>st</sup> Corinthians, and that is what we are returning to today. We had already looked at the first five chapters of this book written by the Apostle Paul, and today as we look at 1<sup>st</sup> Corinthians chapter six, we focus upon our unity in the church. We can see here that all the way back to the beginning there have been disputes amongst Christians. While we are redeemed by Christ's blood and worship the same Lord, we are still living in a world filled with sin. Make no mistake, the sins of the church are many, and the sins committed by so-called Christians are many. But we are not to live this way Beloved, we are to be unified in the Spirit (that is the Holy Spirit) and even if we disagree on some things our core is to be the same. Before we can really dig in to how our text today speaks to unity in the Spirit, we first must do a little refresher on this book that we are studying.

1<sup>st</sup> Corinthians is one of the first books of the Bible written in the New Testament with most sources claiming Paul writes it in the mid 50's A.D. That puts its composition about twenty years after the death of Christ. It is notable, because many of the disciples and Apostles and eye-witnesses of Jesus and His resurrection would have still been alive, which gives backing to the words Paul writes. The city of Corinth itself was a wealthy and important city located on the isthmus between two parts of the Mediterranean Sea, it was a great city of trade between the eastern and western parts of the Roman Empire. As such a wealthy city filled with traders and sailors from around the globe, it also gained a reputation for itself as a city of debauchery. There was an especially prominent set of Roman temples, with Aphrodite's temple (being the “goddess of love”) perhaps the most conspicuous for its use of thousands of temple prostitutes. Beloved, this city had a reputation that was easily backed up in reality. It was an ancient version of Las Vegas, or Amsterdam, or Bangkok. It is in this place that the church of Corinth springs up, and out of all the places that Paul is mentioned as having spent time on his

missionary journeys, according to the book of Acts this is where Paul spent the longest single period of time at eighteen months. The church, when Paul writes to it, has begun to drift away after he has left. They have been given over to all sorts of strange teachings and are in the process of losing their salvation to false teachings, to the culture that surrounded them, and as we can see in our reading today to disputes within the church. Beloved, to bring this into our world, we have to learn from the Corinthian church. This is especially relevant for our world today, in which there is much in the way of disunity within the body of Christ. Beloved, as we will see, we are accountable not only to each other, but also to the Holy Spirit that resides within us.

At the end of 1<sup>st</sup> Corinthians 5, Paul makes the statement that very many Christians these days like to ignore when he says “For what have I to do with judging outsiders? Do you not judge those who are within the church?” The truth is that we are held to a standard within the confines of the global church. This is why we have doctrines, creeds, sacraments, and rules. A Christian is definable by the truths that they believe and hold to, truths that come from scripture. That is what unifies us Beloved, and it is how a Christian in rural Minnesota can call another Christian in Brazil a “brother in Christ.” We are unified by what we believe, and the core of our theology is supposed to be the same regardless of our backgrounds, our heritage, or any other thing. However, as we can see in chapter six, there were major disputes and separations happening in this church. Paul accuses them of not acting in a Christlike manner towards each other when he says “Does any one of you, when he has a case against his neighbor, dare to go to law before the unrighteous and not before the saints?” There are people in this church who are suing one another in a Roman secular court. Beloved, I hope you can see the obvious issues that are at play here, and that we can all recognize that a church with members treating each other like this does not survive. One of the things Paul recommends is found in 1<sup>st</sup> Cor. 5:13 “But those who are outside [the church], God judges. Remove the wicked man from among yourselves.” He also says in verse five “I say this to your shame. Is it so, that there is not among you one wise man who will be able to decide between his brethren?”

Beloved, for major disputes that bring disunity to the church, there are two options that Paul speaks of here. One is to remove the wicked man from amongst them. Sometimes it is the case that there is an unruly person who cannot be reasoned with, cannot be bargained with, and will not work with their Christian neighbor. In

the case of such a person, it is better that they leave. The best option that Paul talks about here though, and the one he really is leading the church into, is mediation. If there are issues, then they should be handled in a wise manner and mediated upon by a wise member of the church. It does the church no good to spread rumors, to hold grudges, to think the least of a brother or sister in Christ, instead of having honest discussions. Whole churches have split and many members have been lost in meaningless debates over foolish things. The carpet color, the official name of the church, someone is unintentionally snubbed in some way, all of these things have lead to the demise of churches. Beloved, I am not saying that this is the case for us. It is not, and for the most part we do play nice and truly love each other, but this scripture is a good reminder that beyond the adiaphora of the church structure we are defined by Christ. We are not to be enemies if we worship Jesus. Paul even goes so far as to say it is better to flat out be wronged by a fellow church member than to act in a way that destroys the church. “Actually, then, it is already a defeat for you, that you have lawsuits with one another. Why not rather be wronged? Why not rather be defrauded?” Note that this is not about protecting someone like a sexual abuser or an embezzler, this is about protecting the church. “Put away the wicked man from you” is still in effect for people like that, but to harbor evil in our hearts for someone over things that are not eternal is foolish and damaging. We would do well to remember that the people we are in church with are fellow believers, and while we are held to a high standard of morality, we are not to give in to Satan’s ploy to separate us from each other and from the love of Christ.

It is for this reason that Paul (by inspiration of the Lord) makes this connection to those who are destroying the church in their selfishness. “Or do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived; neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor effeminate by perversion, nor homosexuals, nor thieves, nor the covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor swindlers, will inherit the kingdom of God. Such were some of you; but you were washed, but you were sanctified, but you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and in the Spirit of our God.” To seek the destruction of another believer, Paul asserts, is to be in unrepentant sin similar to a list of immoral actions. This is not the day to talk about the things our culture calls fine but the Bible does not, in particular the association here of homosexuality and transgender lifestyles with thievery, covetousness, drunkenness, etc. However, I will ask you to ponder if simply reading those verses is offensive, who are we offended against?

Pastor Jake, the church, or what has been affirmed for two millennia as God's word? That is for another message. The main point for us today is focus on how being unified in the Holy Spirit, being unified in God's church, is what we are called to. To live otherwise is to live in sin.

From here Paul will continue in verses 12-20 to remind the Corinthians church (and us) that while the sin within us has been atoned for, we are not to live in sin any longer. He reminds these people that they are to not be "joined" to prostitutes (remember that was a major part of this city) and that we instead are to remember we are joined to the Lord in spirit. We are told to flee immorality, in particular here sexual immorality, as it taints our souls. He reminds us that we have been bought with a price, the price of Jesus upon the cross, and so we are to glorify the Lord in our bodies and in our actions.

Beloved, if we are to summarize this chapter this morning, it is that we are called to be unified in the Spirit both with the Lord and with our fellow believers. Practically this means that we are to be focused upon the same goals and in line with the will of our Father. Praying for each other, loving each other, being joined together in prayer, being moral in our actions and repentant of our sins... we are to be focused on our mission in this world. We are allowed to have disagreements, but not in an unholy manner. To hate your brother in Christ is to invite major sin into your life. To have misgivings that you air in an unhealthy way (rumors, putting someone on blast, etc.) is to invite destruction into the church and into your own life. This morning we confessed our sins to our Lord before we took communion. As we get ready to close our message today, I leave you with a challenge. If you have issues with someone in the church, if you are not unified with someone, then Beloved you are challenged to confess that sin to the Lord and to repent of it too. If you have grievances against another who worships the Lord in our midst, approach them as a sibling in Christ and move from hatred to Christlike love. Pray for that person, engage with them in a healthy way, get rid of the beef between you. Just as we are called to repent of our sins against the Lord, so too are we called to repent of this and to walk together in love of the Lord and love of neighbor. It is our prayer that we would do so going forward. Let us pray,

**Closing Prayer**