



Week 12: Christ Our Riches

1 Corinthians 1:10-17

GOAL:

Explore how putting Jesus at the center leads to unity.

CHECKLIST

- Prepare for your group meeting by praying for yourself and your group (feel free to use the prayer below) and reading through this Leader's Guide.
- Encourage your group members to finish the semester strong by continuing to spend time with God each day using our VRBC Growth Guide. Remind your group that we will give them an opportunity to share each week in Grow Group about what they learned from these readings and times of prayer.
- Take attendance in Planning Center, including guests/new members. Help new members register for your group using the QR code in your room or at vrbc.net/grow.
- Remind your group about the Christmas Store Auction & Bingo Night on April 18. Invite your group to attend and participate together!

PREPARING THROUGH PRAYER:

Heavenly Father, I praise you for the grace and mercy that you have given us so freely in your son, Jesus. Thank you for adopting all those who trust Christ into your family as your dearly loved children and as brothers and sisters with each other. I confess that although your plan for us is to live in unity with one another, far too often we draw lines of division between us. Forgive us, and teach us to fix our eyes on Jesus, the source of true unity. As we follow him together, please unite us through the power of the Holy Spirit, fulfilling Jesus' prayer for us in John 17 that we would be brought to complete unity. In the name of Jesus we pray, Amen.

And let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds, not giving up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but encouraging one another—and all the more as you see the Day approaching. Hebrews 10:24-25

CONNECT, COORDINATE & PRAY

- Use this time to connect with your group relationally - both formally and informally.
- Spend a few minutes covering any details the group needs to know, including an invitation to come to the Christmas Store Auction & Bingo night on April 18:
- Invite your group to share one way that they have seen God at work in the past week, and one way they're praying for God to move in the week to come.
- Spend time praying for your group members and for your time together today, including any praises or prayer requests from your previous conversation.

DISCUSS

- How did the Holy Spirit speak to you this week through the readings about unity?
- In Pastor John's sermon, he told a story from his childhood about "drawing a line" down the middle of the back seat to divide the car between him and his sister. How have you seen people in our culture "draw lines" between themselves and others? How about within the Church?

Leaders: *In case you missed it, John's story was about him and his sister sharing the back seat (the bench seat in a station wagon from the '80s!) on a long car ride. After fighting for a while over space, one of them would eventually draw an imaginary line down the middle of the seat, saying, "This side is mine, and that side is yours. Stay out of my side!"*

Talk with the group about how people in our culture have become "line-drawing experts!" They will likely come up with a wide variety of topics. Some may be on the less harmful side (which state has the best bbq, what sports team we root for) and others may be on the more serious side (political views, race, religion). You don't need to spend much time on this - just enough to make the point that line-drawing comes naturally to all people.

You can also just briefly touch on any ways people have seen divisions within the church - you might hear about arguments over doctrine, ministry models, or even carpet color!

- Read 1 Corinthians 1:10, Ephesians 1:8b-10, Ephesians 4:4-6, Romans 12:4-5, John 17:20-23. What do these passages reveal about God's desire for his followers?

Leaders: *These passages paint God's desire for us in beautiful detail! The consistent message of the New Testament is that God's plan for his followers is to live in unity. A few specifics:*

- *1 Corinthians 1:10 - this verse describes what unity should look like: agreeing in what we say, refusing to divide ourselves into factions, and experiencing unity (not uniformity) in the way we think.*

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WEEK 12

- *Ephesians 1:8b-10 - this is an amazing passage that tells us that God's ultimate plan is to bring unity to ALL THINGS under Christ! We won't fully experience this until "the times reach their fulfillment" but this promise should give us great hope.*
 - *Ephesians 4:4-6 - this passage emphasizes the source of our unity - the oneness of God and our experience of his grace. We are members of one body (the Church) because there is one Spirit, one hope, one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all!*
 - *Romans 12:4-5 - This passage emphasizes the idea of unity within diversity (not uniformity). Just as a body has many parts, all with different functions, the church is characterized by diversity as well. But even in this diversity, there is unity.*
 - *John 17:20-23 - As John discussed in his sermon, in this passage, Jesus prays an amazing prayer for his followers. He prays that we would all experience the same kind of unity that he experiences with his heavenly Father. What a thought!*
- Why is it so hard to live in unity? What do you think is behind our tendency to draw lines between ourselves and others?

Leaders: *The ultimate answer to this question is that our divisions are a result of sin - both our own individual sins and the brokenness that comes from living in a sinful world. When the first humans sinned, they immediately began to draw lines between themselves. Adam blamed Eve for giving him the fruit. Eve blamed the serpent. And both of them hid themselves from God. Ever since, people have been dividing themselves from one another (and from God) because of their sin.*

More specifically, we draw lines between ourselves and others in order to make us look/feel better by distinguishing ourselves from others we deem to be unworthy. By separating ourselves from them, we try to give people (and ourselves) the illusion that because we aren't like those people, then we are better than those people. We aren't confident in our own identity or worth, so we have to put others down and divide ourselves from them to validate our worth.

This may sound like a cynical way to view things, and some may claim that the source of this division is people rightly trying to separate themselves from those who are evil. While there may be a kernel of truth to this in some cases, if you peel back enough layers, I (John) think you will always find that pride is at the heart of all division. (See Proverbs 13:10 - "Where there is strife, there is pride" and Galatians 5:26 "Let us not become conceited, provoking and envying one another.")

- What was dividing the church in Corinth? (See 1 Corinthians 1:11-12) How is this a danger in the modern church? What are some other danger points for unity in the church?

Leaders: *The specific issue dividing the church in Corinth was which spiritual leader people most resonated with. They were dividing up over their loyalty to different leaders (which is ironic, given that the leaders themselves had no rivalries between them!) This is a danger in the modern church just as much as it was in Corinth. Not only can different pastors within a church create their own little fan clubs, church members can begin to associate the church itself with a particular pastor. You often hear someone say, "I go to pastor so-and-so's church," when Scripture teaches that the church*

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belongs to God, not the pastor! (See Acts 20:28)

And of course, there are tons of other danger points for unity in the church. Unity can be threatened whenever people put their own preferences, needs, and views above their devotion to Christ and his Church. This can take many forms: disagreements and rivalries over ministry models, how to spend budget money, how to engage with the culture, how best to reach the community, which doctrines to emphasize, and more.

- What did Pastor John say is the path forward toward unity? Why isn't just trying harder to be unified the answer? What was the meaning of the illustration about tuning pianos?

Leaders: *In the sermon, I said that the path forward is putting Christ at the center. You might think that the way to experience unity is to try harder to be unified. But the problem is that because of our sin and brokenness, we aren't capable of creating unity for ourselves, no matter how hard we try!!! It can only come as a gift of God. We definitely have a role to play (more on that in a later question), but we can't do it on our own.*

The answer, then, isn't just to focus on unity - it's to focus on Christ, putting him at the center. The illustration (borrowed from A.W. Tozer) is that if 100 pianos are all tuned using the same tuning fork, then they will automatically be in tune with each other. In the same way, if all of the people in a church are "tuned" to Christ, they will also be in tune with each other. As we'll see in a few minutes, this doesn't mean we just pray by ourselves and then hope to experience unity. It definitely requires effort and intentionality. But tuning our hearts to Christ must come first.

- Read 1 Corinthians 1:13, Ephesians 2:14-16, Colossians 1:18-20, and Colossians 3:12-13. What do these passages point to as the source of Christian unity?

Leaders: *All of these passages make the point that the true source of Christian unity is Christ and his cross:*

- *1 Corinthians 1:13 - Paul asks these rhetorical questions to point out how ludicrous it is to put a human leader on a pedestal...it is Jesus Christ who was crucified for us, not a pastor! It is Jesus' name into which we were baptized!*
- *Ephesians 2:14-16 - In this passage, Paul makes the point that Jesus not only bring peace, he IS our peace. And the way he created "one new humanity" consisting of Jews and Gentiles was "through the cross, by which he put to death their hostility."*
- *Colossians 1:18-20 - Here, Paul makes this same point again...he says that Jesus made "peace through his blood, shed on the cross" for all people, under him - the one who reigns supreme.*
- *Colossians 3:12-13 - In this final passage, Paul gets into the specifics of what unity looks like in action. And not surprisingly, it looks like following Jesus example! Just as he forgave us through the cross, we are to forgive others, which is an important part of working toward unity.*

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- Read Ephesians 4:2-3. How can we reconcile Paul's admonition in this passage to "make every effort" with the truth that Christ is the source of unity?

Leaders: *Just because we can't achieve unity on our own doesn't mean we don't have a role to play. Far from it! In fact, working toward unity is strenuous, demanding, and difficult. That's why Paul says "make every effort." He doesn't say, "just sit back and enjoy the wonderful gift of unity." No! He knows that because of our sinfulness, it's going to require effort on our part. But don't forget the rest of the verse...it says, "make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit." It's not a unity of our own that we create. Instead, it is the unity of the Spirit that we keep. And this keeping requires intense effort on our part - effort empowered by the Spirit, but effort nonetheless.*

Dallas Willard talks a lot about this topic. He says that sometimes our (good) emphasis on grace can lull us into thinking that obedience isn't important. Tongue-in-cheek, he has said, "In some churches, we aren't just saved by grace, we're paralyzed by it!" In other words, we have misunderstood what grace is and taken it to mean that we don't have to cooperate with God and his grace through intentional action. But as he continues, "grace isn't opposed to effort. It's only opposed to earning." Our intentional efforts to obey Jesus are an essential part of how we receive, experience, and embody the grace of Jesus.

When it comes to unity, we have to start with Jesus. We can't create unity on our own - it's impossible. But once we fix our eyes on Jesus, putting him at the very center and beginning to be transformed by his grace, we find ourselves filled with holy motivation to do the hard work required to live in the gift of unity. Near the end of 1 Corinthians, Paul gives a great description of this partnership. In 1 Corinthians 15:10, he says, "But by the grace of God I am what I am, and his grace to me was not without effect. No, I worked harder than all of them - yet not I, but the grace of God that was with me." May this be true of us!!!

Leaders: *For this final question, give the group 3-4 minutes to think and then discuss with 1-2 people sitting next to them:*

- Who is one Christian in your life who you have a tendency to divide yourself from? What specific steps is the Lord inviting you to take this week to help "keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace" with them?

Leaders: *As we often say, this is where the rubber meets the road! Resist the temptation to skip this question, even if it may feel a little uncomfortable. Think about how the Spirit may want to use this lesson and this question to bring miraculous reconciliation between followers of Jesus this week!*

PRAY

Spend some time praying together as a group, using the Scriptures we've discussed as a guide. Focus your prayer on two primary areas:

- Pray that each of you would actively work toward unity with other believers by putting Christ at the center of your life and relationships.
- Pray for VRBC, specifically as we look ahead to the transition to a new Senior Pastor. Pray that all of us would recognize Jesus as the true head of the church, and that we would move forward together in unity, regardless of who God calls into that role.