

# BELPRES CHURCH

## **Sermon Title: Who Do You Follow?**

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### **Scripture:**

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#### **1 Corinthians 1:10-13**

"I appeal to you, brothers and sisters, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that all of you agree with one another in what you say and that there be no divisions among you, but that you be perfectly united in mind and thought. My brothers and sisters, some from Chloe's household have informed me that there are quarrels among you. What I mean is this: One of you says, "' follow Paul'; another, 'I follow Apollos'; another, 'I follow Cephas'; still another, 'I follow Christ.' Is Christ divided? Was Paul crucified for you? Were you baptized in the name of Paul?"

3:1-4: "Brothers and sisters, I could not address you as people who live by the Spirit but as people who are still worldly—mere infants in Christ. I gave you milk, not solid food, for you were not yet ready for it. Indeed, you are still not ready. You are still worldly. For since there is jealousy and quarreling among you, are you not worldly? Are you not acting like mere humans? For when one says, 'I follow Paul,' and another, 'I follow Apollos,' are you not mere human beings?"

3:21-23: "So then, no more boasting about human leaders! All things are yours, whether Paul or Apollos or Cephas or the world or life or death or the present or the future—all are yours, and you are of Christ, and Christ is of God."

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**Transcript:**

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Great to see all of you here. Those of you joining us online, thank you. Happy Mother's Day. Thank you for being here on a very hot Sunday in the air conditioned community center. It felt good to come in here.

The scripture comes from First Corinthians Chapter One and Chapter Three. "I appeal to you brothers and sisters in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that all of you agree with one another in what you say and that there be no divisions among you, but that you may be perfectly united in mind and thought." My brothers and sisters, some from Chloe's household have informed me that there are quarrels among you. What I mean is this. One of you says, I follow Paul. Another, I follow a Apollos. Another, I follow Cephas. Still others, I follow Christ. Is Christ divided? Was Paul crucified for you? Brothers and sisters, I could not address you as people who live by the spirit, but as people who are still worldly, mere infants in Christ, I gave you milk, not solid food for you are not yet ready for it. Indeed, you are still not ready. You are still worldly for since there is jealousy and quarreling among you, are you not worldly? For when one says I follow Paul, and another, I follow a Apollos, are you not mere human beings?"

So then no more boasting about human leaders. All things are yours, whether Paul or a Apollos or Cephas or the world or life or death or the present or the future, all are yours and you are of Christ and Christ is of God. Well, a few weeks ago I told you that in my life I've been blessed to be part of three great churches and one truly terrible church.

And the terrible church was when I worked in seminary as part of my ... I worked there when I was in seminaries, part of my training. And I'm really glad that I worked there because negative modeling is still modeling and I learned so many things not to do. Like for instance, have a bust of the former senior pastor on the communion table, which is what this church did. The guy had been dead for years, but they had this bust of the former senior pastor on the communion table. So every Sunday, and the communion table is right up front. Every Sunday there the bust was, this little statue, this sculpture of just his head, former senior pastor staring out at the entire congregation every Sunday. And just in case you're wondering, is that theologically okay? No, don't do that. It scares the children. Mommy, who's the creepy man up front?

So one week the new senior pastor moved the bust to a side table. It was still up front, it was just on the side. Well, that set off all kinds of mutterings and sputterings and spasms and

conflicts between the pro bust people and the anti busters. And this fight went on for a couple of weeks until finally some elders told the senior pastor that unless he put the bust back on the communion table, they would stop giving. And so he put the bust back on the table and the great bust conflict was resolved. This is the last sermon in a series on how as Christians, we can disagree in a different way than we're seeing in our culture. Not like that. Not that way. That's negative modeling. We can do better.

And as we know, there's tons of conflict in our culture right now. There's generational, racial, cultural, political conflict. Family members are not talking to each other. People are even getting divorced. All kinds of division in our churches, in our schools, in our nation. I've recently read a couple of articles from Bosnians, one from Bosnia, a guy from Bosnia, another from a guy from Rwanda, Bosnia where there's a terrible civil war, Rwanda, a genocide against Tutsis warning the United States saying the political rhetoric in the US is starting to sound similar to the rhetoric that preceded those horrible events. The dehumanizing language, branding the other side not as opponents who are wrong, but as enemies who are evil.

But what could be if disciples of Jesus showed what it means to have unity. And unity does not mean we agree, we don't agree. Unity is when we disagree in a way that shows the world the power of Jesus to bring different kinds of people together, and where we allow the Holy Spirit to use our differences to refine our worldviews, to be closer to Jesus. How might that heal divided schools, churches, families, country? And that's what the Apostle Paul is driving at in the text I just read from his letter to the church in Corinth. And of all the churches, the Apostle Paul started, the Corinthians were the most messed up church ever. So he asked to write them letters to tell them things that would seem basic to us, like don't sleep with your stepmother because there was someone in the church that was doing that and the rest of the church was going, well done you. Yay you go. He also had to tell them, don't get hammered on the communion wine because they were also doing that.

And then one of the other things he has to address is divisions in the church. The city of Corinth itself was very divided on racial and political and economic lines. And those cultural divisions were seeping into the church. So the culture influenced the church more than the church influenced the culture. And the challenge of preaching is making a passage like this relevant to today because it's just so different than what we're seeing. Heavy sarcasm. Paul says, "My brothers and sisters, some have informed me that there are quarrels among you. One of you says, I follow Paul. Another, I follow Apollos. Another, I follow Cephas." So Paul was the founder of their church, but after he left to start other churches, other pastors showed up on the scene, Apollos, Cephas, another name for Peter, Jesus' disciple.

And the Corinthians were saying, "They're better than Paul. They're better speakers than Paul. They're better looking than Paul." Seriously, that was the criteria. How good looking is your pastor? Now, fortunately for all of you, you have this, so we're good here. But other churches, they may be in trouble. And folks were arguing over which pastor was better and some were like team Apollos and some were team Cephas. So Paul says, "I could not address you as people who live by the spirit, but as people who are still worldly, mere infants in Christ. I gave you milk, not solid food for you are not yet ready for it. Indeed, you are still not ready for since there is jealousy and quarreling among you, are you not worldly?"

And basically what Paul is saying here is you're acting like a bunch of babies. Grow up, why don't you? You're spiritual infants. You can only handle milk, not solid food. And by milk, he doesn't mean that their theology isn't deep enough or that they don't know enough Bible history or anything like that. It's that they do know the Bible. It's just they're not doing what's in the Bible. And Paul says, "One sure sign of spiritual immaturity in the church is quarreling and folks insisting on having everything their way."

Now, as we've said, it is okay to disagree. Disagreement is not a bug. It's a feature of the church because it means that we're different and that's what God wants. It's how we disagree that shows how spiritually mature or not mature we are as disciples. And this text shows us how to live in a way that brings healing to our churches, our culture, our schools, our entire nation. And basically Paul's main point is this, who are you really following? Who are you really following? Because one of the reasons that we're divided is we say we're following Jesus, but by how we behave, not by what we say, but our behavior shows that there's actually something else that's more important to us than Jesus.

The Corinthians said they were following Jesus, but really what was more important to them was which was the best pastor, this competition. My seminary church, said they were following Jesus. But what was more important to them was the bust of the senior pastor on the communion table, this weird tradition that they had. It might be our theology, our politics, our social or racial or economic identity, our worship preferences. So a good question to ask is by my behavior, not what I say, but by my behavior, what am I really following? Because whatever we're following more than Jesus, it will let us down. The Democrat Party will let you down. The Republican Party will let you down. This church will let you down. I will let you down. Jesus will never let you down.

Paul says, "Is Christ divided? Was Paul crucified for you?" In other words, Paul didn't die on the cross to pay the price for your sins and mine, neither did your political party, or the Presbyterian denomination, or religious traditions dying on a cross to pay the price for your

sins and mine. Jesus did. He's our savior. He's our only savior. But when our traditions or cultural preferences or politics become more important to us than Jesus, we get divided. And pretty soon we're fighting over busts on communion tables because that's become more important to us than Jesus and his people. And so the antidote to this, the antidote to this is this diagram that I've shown you before.

Me, you, we're far apart, but second diagram, watch what happens. As we get closer to Jesus, we get closer to each other. So given the fact that we often think we're following Jesus, but we're actually not following Jesus and we don't even know it sometimes, how do we make Jesus first? A couple of things.

First, let the Bible bother you. Who or what is discipling you? Who or what is forming your worldview? Is it CNN, Fox News, social media, Hollywood, movies? All of us, including me, are often more formed, our worldview is more formed by the culture than by Jesus. And the Bible is one of the ways that Jesus corrects our faulty worldview, but only if we let it bother us. If we ignore the passages we don't like or explain them away, it can't correct our worldview to be more like Jesus. Paul says to the Corinthians, "I couldn't address you as people who live by the spirit, but as people who are still worldly." You're acting like the culture is what he's saying. We have the mind of Christ. "If any of you think you are wise by the standards of this age, you should become fools so that you may become wise. For the wisdom of this world is foolishness in God's sight."

In other words, the world's wisdom that forms us so much is not always God's wisdom. And the best way to correct our faulty worldview is to let the Bible bother us. And yes, there are passages where we disagree on how to interpret them, and in that case, we allow the Holy Spirit to use our differences to refine our worldview and our understanding of scripture for all of us. But let's also be honest, the vast, vast, vast majority of Bible passages are pretty clear. So let's just start with those and let them correct our cultural, political, religious assumptions.

And Paul's a great example of someone who has done this because here are all these other pastors, Apollos, Cephas, moving in on his territory, taking people from his church, but he's not fighting. He's not arguing because his worldview is right. And Jesus is the most important thing to him and spreading the good news of Jesus. These other things, traditions, culture, politics, they are important things. They are important things, but they have to be in second place because when they're in second place, we fight less, we have more peace, more joy, more love, because the thing we love the most and our hope is in is Jesus. And that can never be taken away. And that just feels so much better than our current culture of contempt.

Second way that we put Jesus first, locate your quarreling and you will locate your idols and your pain. What we are fighting about behind that, there is often an idol. So the Corinthians were jockeying for prestige based on who their pastor was, which showed that behind that fighting there was an idol of prestige. That was the thing they're actually more concerned about than Jesus. If we're jealous of someone's money or success, maybe that's because we have an idol of those things, or maybe there's pain around those things. Maybe growing up we were told, you were a loser. And so you're jealous of people that are successful and maybe you find yourself quarreling with them.

Writer, C.S. Lewis talks about this when he says, "Suppose you hear on the news about some outrageous thing a politician on the other side of you politically did or said. Some terrible thing this politician on the other side did or said. But then later facts emerged that show that person didn't do it or didn't say it. Is your first thought, oh, thank goodness, even they aren't that bad. Or are you disappointed? Or even hang on to the incorrect version of the story for the joy of being outraged?" Ouch, kind of describes our culture right now, when we relish the self-righteous anger we have inside that might reveal that our politics is actually more important to us than Jesus and his people.

But it's not just politics. I have lots of idols. The human heart is an idol factory. I have lots of idols. One of my students that was part of my college ministry when I was a college pastor, is now himself a pastor. And a while back, I was listening to one of his sermons online and he started to talk about me and he said, "Yeah, my college pastor was a great mentor to me. He was quite a bit older." Okay, was that necessary information? And my former student said, "And he wore these white Reeboks, the kind you have to prove you're a dad to buy. I mean, he was the opposite of cool." What? And then he said, "But that's what I loved about my college pastor. He wasn't trying to be cool." Actually, I was trying to be cool. Nobody told me the white Reeboks were a problem.

And as I listened to that sermon, a little part of my heart died and the sound of my heart dying revealed an idol called my image. And it is often more important to me than Jesus. And it can lead me into conflict in situations like when I get criticized and get defensive trying to defend my image because I've got an idol. Let the Bible bug you, locate your quarreling, you'll find your idols. And then finally want more. Paul says, "So then no more boasting about human leaders." All things are yours, whether Paul or a Apollos or Cephas or the world or life or death or the present or the future, all are yours and you are of Christ. See far from enriching themselves by jockeying for position based on who their pastor was, the Corinthians were actually making themselves miserable and missing out on the gifts that Jesus wants to give.

And so Paul says, "Come on people. Want more for yourselves. Why are you so easily satisfied with teachers and politicians and gurus? Don't you know that the creator of the universe wants a relationship with you and wants to heal the world through you? You don't belong to this political party or that political party, or this tradition or that tradition. In life and in death, you belong to Jesus." So once the bigger things he gives.

So two action steps for this week, two action steps for this week. First, pray. Jesus, show me what I'm following more than you because we're all following, including me, following something other than Jesus. Show me what that is.

And then second, Jesus reorder my loves so that you're number one. Culture, politics, traditions. They can be good things unless they become more important to us than Jesus and his people. Or worse, we confuse following those things with following Jesus. And that just leads to destructive conflict because our loves are in the wrong order. Jesus should be first. There's a man I know named Hank whose parents are divorced. And Hank's dad was very controlling. When Hank was in college, his dad refused to pay for it unless Hank was a business major. And then after Hank graduated, his dad continued to try to control Hank's friends who Hank dated, his faith in Jesus, which his dad hated. But Hank was kind of controlling in his own way as well. And he'd argue and argue and argue with his dad long past the time it was clear that he was never going to convince his dad.

Well, when Hank was about 26, he wanted to go to Zimbabwe in Africa for a few months to do some humanitarian work. And his dad was furious. Said it was a waste of time, said Hank needed to focus on his career. Now, Hank didn't need his dad's approval to go obviously at 26, but he wanted it. And so he argued and argued and argued with his dad, tons of conflict. But as he prayed about it, gradually the Holy Spirit helped Hank to realize that he said he was following Jesus. And in many ways he was. But there were also some mixed motives in going to Zimbabwe, like the desire to be seen as a person who does good things, and most of all the desire to win the argument with his father. He was following those things more than Jesus. And he realized that for Jesus, Jesus' number one priority for him was not Zimbabwe, but how he treated his family.

So he started to show more love and respect to his stepmother, his dad's second wife who he'd also had a lot of fights with. And he began building a better relationship with his dad. Eventually he was able to say to his dad, "Look, I've heard your concerns for my future, and I know that means you love me. Thank you, but I've got to do this Zimbabwe thing. But Dad, I want you to know whatever happens, I love you and I want a better relationship." And that was a different approach than trying to argue and control his dad. And it started to warm things up between them. Well, when he got back from Zimbabwe, he visited his dad and his

stepmom in the city where they lived before Hank went back to the city he lived in, and his stepmom said to him, "Before you left, the way you handled your dad, that was different. You didn't argue, you didn't fight. Why?"

And Hank said, "Well, Jesus showed me a better way." And his stepmom, who had always been called both to Hank and to Jesus, started asking him questions about Jesus. And so Hank spent the whole week talking to her about Jesus. Well, when it came time for Hank to go back home to where he lived, his stepmom said, "I need someone to keep talking to me about Jesus. Do you have any suggestions?" Well, the only other person Hank knew in that town was his mom. And so even though it seemed kind of awkward for her to be the one to talk to her ex-husband's second wife about Jesus, she said, "I'll talk to her about Jesus." And so they started meeting, and eventually the stepmom became a follower of Jesus. And then Hank's mom and Hank's stepmom started to meet once a week to pray together for Hank. When Hank told that to a friend of his who's a marriage counselor, the marriage counselor said, "That's weird. Usually when the ex and current wife meet, it's to fight, not to pray." But as they both got closer to Jesus by praying together, they got closer to each other. By wanting to go to Zimbabwe, Hank thought he was following Jesus, and in so many ways he was. But what was more important to him was winning the argument with his dad. That's what he was following more than anything else. And the desire to be seen as a person who does good things. And doing good things is a good thing. It's just the order was wrong. He put it above obeying Jesus. But when he took it to prayer, Jesus reordered his love so that Jesus was first. And in getting closer to Jesus, Hank got closer to his dad the same way as mom and stepmom in getting closer to Jesus, got closer to each other.

Now, they didn't always agree. Dad still didn't like the Zimbabwe thing, but they had more unity, they had more love. So how can you follow Jesus more than anything else this week and not confuse our politics, culture, traditions with following him? Because it's so easy to do, and I sometimes do it as well. The most revolutionary statement ever uttered in any society ever in history, most revolutionary statement is these three words. Jesus is Lord. It is the most revolutionary statement ever because Jesus is Lord means everything else is not. He outlasts every earthly thing that we follow, every cultural preference, every religious tradition, every leader, they come and go, but Jesus remains. I mean, how many of us could name all of the US presidents? I mean, we might get a few of them, but most of us would bog down somewhere around Millard Fillmore, as did the entire country. And Taylor and Tyler would really confuse us. Important in their day, but they are forgotten now. But we all know the name of the Jewish carpenter who brought more hope into hopeless situations than anything else on Earth can do. And when he is first and everything else is



second, I fight less, I am less angry because my hope is not getting this thing I want or that thing I want. My hope is not in this political party or that political party. My hope is not in this cultural preference or that cultural preference. In Christ alone, my hope is found. He is my light, my strength, my song, this cornerstone, this solid ground, firm through the fiercest drought and storm, no power in hell, no scheme of man can ever pluck me from his hand. Here in the power of Christ, I stand. I need nothing else.

So Jesus, hallelujah. You help us make you first in our life. Help us to put you first in our life and everything else second, so that we can love others, be more unified, even in disagreement. And show the world a different way of living because you and nothing else are our Lord and the only thing we follow. We ask this in your name, Jesus. Amen.

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**Discussion Questions:**

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*Read this week's scripture(s) & answer the below questions with your friends, family, or All In small group.*

**Introductions:** Spend a few minutes as a group introducing yourselves and welcoming new members to the group.

**Icebreaker Question:** What is your best tip for staying cool on hot summer days?

**Opening Question:** Looking back to last's week's sermon and scripture...How did you live differently or practice what we talked about in your life this week? What did you do and how did it go?

**For Further Study:** Read all of 1 Corinthians 1 and 3 (full chapters) this week.

**Scripture Reflection Questions:** Read this week's scripture together and discuss the following:

- What do we learn about God (e.g., traits, personality, what matters, priorities) in this passage?
- What do we learn about people, and ourselves in particular, this week?

**Sermon Reflection Questions:** Reflecting on this week's sermon, discuss the following:

- Who or what sometimes becomes more important to you than Jesus? How does that contribute to conflict in your life?
- How can you make Jesus more important than those things?

**Closing Question and Application:** Given what we've discussed together today, how might God want you to apply these learnings to your life or in the life of your community this next week? Who might you share this with?

**Closing Group Prayer:** Spend a few minutes together in your group sharing prayer requests and then praying together for each other. Thank God for the time together, the conversation shared, the other people in the group, and for encouragement in the week ahead