

Impact

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Date: 25 May 2014

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[0 : 0 0] So as I mentioned, we're going to look for a little while at the second half, I suppose you could say, of 1 Corinthians chapter 1 from verse 10 onwards.

Now this morning, as I said, we were focusing on the identity of the believers. Now, the sharp ones among you may have noticed what I was doing there.

In St. Columba's we have a student group, name of identity. And what I want to think about tonight in this, as I said, the second half of the chapter, is as Paul has taught the Corinthians and refreshed them in their identity in Jesus, I want to look for a little while at how that impact impacted or was to impact their life.

We have a 20s, 30s, or call it what you will group, called impact. So there you go. That's the two titles I want to use tonight. But thinking about that word impact, what do we mean when we say impact?

Or why would we call a group, a fellowship group in the church impact? When two things collide, come together at any degree of force, there's usually movement, isn't there?

[1 : 2 0] If a car hits a lamppost, it's going to move that lamppost if it's going at any speed. It's going to bend it over because it's got force behind it.

As Paul writes to the Corinthians, remember that we noted this morning that the Corinthian church, they were Christians. He was saying that they were in Christ, they were saved, and they had a great identity that they were to remember, but they were struggling.

And they were finding aspects, or Paul recognizes, that aspects of their Christian walk weren't right. And so what he does as he writes to them is he seeks to impact them and move them.

He wants to move them in the right direction. So they're refocused on their Savior Jesus and they're refocused on how that works out in their lives.

Those of you who are regulars in the congregation may remember, Derek recently was preaching through Hebrews. He remember the amount of times he picked up on the fact that as the writer to Hebrews wrote the theology all about God and what God has done, the amount of times he said, therefore, or consequently, or so, as a result of all that I'm saying to you, here's the outworking in your life.

[2 : 3 6] That doesn't just happen in the book of Hebrews. It happens throughout the Bible. And as we learn what God says to us and as the Corinthians were to learn what the Lord was saying to them through Paul, they were to be impacted.

They were to move somewhere. They weren't to just stay where they were, practicing the same old things in the same old rut. And it's the same for us.

It's the same for me. It can be a challenge for us sometimes because we can just get in a rut in our Christian lives, we can feel like we are not moving forward, or we can simply stop looking up and learning and seeing the way the Lord wants to teach us and to move us on in our Christian lives.

Now, thinking about that, the impact that there was to have on their lives, as we move into the rest of chapter one here, I want to pick up on a few things, particularly about the way they speak.

So speaking is important. And you'll know from the morning, one of the things that he said to them about their identity was that there were people who in their speaking were able to testify to each other about what Jesus has done.

[3 : 44] Remember that in verse five, for in him, in Jesus, you've been enriched in every way in all your speaking and in all your knowledge. Speaking is important.

And some of the points I want to draw from the rest of this chapter are about the way they speak, particularly about others. So the first thing that I want to pick up on is from verse 10, this first section from verse 10 onwards, particularly from verse 12 onwards, where he addresses the first of the issues that are festering in their fellowship.

And he teaches them the importance of how they speak about other people, how they speak about men. Now, I'm not trying to be gender exclusive when I say that, but there was a particular issue that they had in that it seems that some of the church had different Christian leaders in their vicinity and they were forming groups who went after this Christian leader or that Christian leader.

So you'll see from verse 12. Paul says in verse 11 that he's received news from somebody in Chloe's household of a problem. Verse 12. What I mean is this, one of you says, I follow Paul.

Someone else says, I follow Paulus. Someone else says, I follow Seaphath or Peter. And somebody else says, I follow Christ. So you imagine the church, the different, the group, the gathered or the different maybe house churches, all kind of saying, well, we're after this guy or well, we're after this guy.

[5 : 23] And Paul's identifying this as saying your focus is completely wrong here. What you're doing is you're, the way you're speaking about these men, you've lost the balance.

You're off beam. And you're building up these men instead of keeping your focus on the one you should be building up and following and the one who you should be all about in your speaking, which is Jesus.

Now, Paul and Apollos and Peter, these were different Christian leaders. They weren't speaking a different gospel. The problem here isn't that there is one man who's got a heresy and another man who's got the truth.

And some of them have got it right and some of them haven't. Bees men taught the gospel. But it seems that people, they maybe just had different emphases.

Some of the commentators suggest it. Maybe in this way that Paul is one who'd been involved in the founding of the church. Some people might have been saying, well, Paul, we are after Paul because he was here at the beginning.

[6 : 25] You know, he's like the good old days. He's always been the one we follow. He's always been our teacher. We would Paul. Apollos taught the same gospel.

There was no problem with Apollos. Maybe that Paul was a more articulate speaker and maybe a more dynamic leader.

And so some are attracted to Apollos. They want to follow Apollos. And Peter, some suggest, well, maybe more conservative, Jewish Christians maybe more tempted to follow Peter.

But you can see what's happening. They're letting their, maybe their personalities or they're just their preferences. What they like to hear in a preacher, what they like to see in a leader, they're letting that become the key issue for them.

And it was affecting their fellowship, their harmony and their unity was endangered. It was becoming fragile.

[7 : 28] And there were arguments and divisions among them because they had these emphases. And so Paul writes to them and he says, as you hold up these men as your leaders and it's inevitable that you're going to speak about them.

You've got to think about the way that you speak about them because at the moment you're all, you're, you're lauding them in completely the wrong way. You're putting them up on pedestals and it's allowing you to form divisions.

So he's trying to refocus them. He's trying to refocus them. Even those who say we follow Christ, some suggest that really they've, they're all focused again because what they're saying is well, we, all these different men, all these different leaders, we don't need any of these people.

We've got Jesus. Jesus tells us what to do. And again, there's a lack of right emphasis here. They're not understanding things properly. And so they're messed up in their thinking.

And I don't know whether we think, well, we're not like that. We don't have. We're not forming factions and going off after different leaders. But I suppose it can be a temptation nonetheless for people today to get carried away with the way we think about our favorite Christian preachers, our favorite Christian leaders.

[8 : 46] And it's just something for us to be careful about the way that we, the way that we view those who all they do is bring the message of Jesus. All they are doing is the ones who bring the gospel and who preach.

It wasn't right for them to be forming these factions and to be isolating Paul or Apollos or Peter as their emphasis. Because as Paul reminds them, as he'd been reminding them right from the start of this letter, the proper focus for them was Jesus.

These men preach the gospel, which was all about Jesus. They were just to bring the gospel about Jesus to these Corinthian believers.

And so how strange for the Corinthian believers then to deflect that message back onto the messengers and to put their attention right back onto the people who just bring the message.

Paul says, get your focus. Get your focus right. He says in verse 13 challenges them with these questions, kind of rhetorical questions.

[9 : 52] Is Christ divided? Or you could think of it like is Christ parceled up? Can we take Jesus and break him up and give him off to different factions so that you can each have your different bits of Jesus?

Absolutely not, of course not. Central to the fellowship of this Christian family and to our Christian family, to any Christian family is that we're called to be Christ's followers.

He is one head of the church and we're united under his name. And the unity of the church is so important, isn't it? Is Christ divided?

Absolutely not. He goes on through these next few verses to start talking about baptism because he recognizes that he's glad in some ways that the emphasis of his ministry wasn't to baptize lots of people because again he sees the danger that some people will think, oh great, well Paul baptized me, if he'd baptised thousands of people, maybe these thousands of people would have started thinking, oh we got Paul's baptism.

And you can see as he goes on through this passage here he tries to, he's not belittling baptism because being baptized into the name of Christ is so important.

[11 : 08] But what he's saying is it's not about me and as he gets to verse 17 Christ did not send me to baptize but to preach the gospel, the gospel about Jesus.

And as he brings this, or as this little section here comes to a close, he uses a word that actually comes up quite a lot in this book, wisdom.

He sent me to preach the gospel not with words of human wisdom. Sometimes if our focus shifts and we put the emphasis back onto the messenger and the preacher and the Christian leader what we're really doing is saying, aren't they so eloquent, aren't they so wise, haven't they got all the wisdom, they're the great teacher that I want to follow.

Not with words of human wisdom, why, well as he explains, lest the cross of Christ be emptied of its power. There to remember the gospel that they received and believed in is from God to them.

It's his power at work amongst them. And so what is an appropriate response for these people and what's an appropriate response for us is simply to having received the gospel to give back to God all the glory.

[12 : 28] And in our speaking to do that and in our thinking and in all just our understanding of the gospel and our understanding of how that affects our lives and how it affects the way we speak give God all the glory.

Let's not give ourselves the glory. So the first impact the Paul is seeking to make is on their speaking as they process how properly to deal with the fact that they have these leaders, they have great leaders and they should be thankful to God for them but to get the focus correct.

Speaking about men. The second impact moving through the chapter is from verse 18 onwards where Paul starts to switch his attention to the cross.

Paul wants to impact what is said and what they say about the cross of Christ, about the cross of Jesus Christ. Now please don't think, well that's obvious and don't think, well that's a given of course he wants to help them to remember that the cross is important.

Well Christians after all because remember again as we were saying this morning or for those of you who weren't here this morning that Corinth, the way that Corinth was it wasn't as if the Christians were a majority.

[13 : 55] Not many people accepted the Christian message. The cross of Jesus Christ was offensive to lots of people and so for those who followed Christ and who were Christians and who based their hope for life on the cross of Jesus Christ they were an anomaly and they may well have faced rejection and worse.

So Paul is saying in our speaking about the cross let's get it right, let's remember the importance of it and don't take it as a given.

It's the absolute core of who they are. You'll see as we go through this passage that he starts to contrast the way that maybe people in the surrounding town would have viewed the Christians.

He speaks about the Jews and the Gentiles or the Greeks, again there were Jews in the church, there were Gentiles and Greeks in the church and they'd come from that background to follow Christ.

But those who rejected Christ did so because they saw the crosses wrong, they couldn't grasp it. They looked at the Christians and thought what are you believing in? What on earth are you following a crucified God, a crucified savior?

[15 : 19] That doesn't make any sense, you're foolish, you're stupid. You see the emphasis that we have from verse 22 onwards. Actually, let me just read from verse 21 because in verse 21 Paul starts to talk about the wisdom of God.

Contrasted with the wisdom of men where we can so often get it wrong when we're left to our own devices and when we follow what we think is impressive or good.

Paul says, for since, verse 21, for since in the wisdom of God, the world through its wisdom didn't know Him, God was pleased through the foolishness of what was preached to save those who believe.

And he starts to use this idea that the cross is foolish to the world, but through this apparent foolishness, this is God's way.

He uses what seems weak to bring His salvation. So in verse 22 Jews demand miraculous signs.

[16 : 23] Greeks look for wisdom, there's that word again, but we preach Christ crucified. In other words, these people were saying, well what you're telling us that God is doing, He doesn't measure up to what we think He should do.

That's nonsense to say that we'll be saved by a crucified God who hung on a cross for our sins. It wasn't impressive enough what the Christians proclaimed that God had done just didn't measure up.

And I think people today maybe reject the cross for maybe different reasons or at least they start earlier in their objections because the whole idea of needing somebody to die for our sins is offensive to many people, isn't it?

Many of your friends would probably say if you said to them, Jesus is my savior, is He yours? Who are you talking about needing a savior?

You can't tell me I need a savior. And so maybe our culture objects even earlier to this whole concept. The objection here to the cross, what these people were speaking about the cross was that it was foolish.

[17 : 41] Now there is a pressure there on the Christians. If you're surrounded at work by everybody else you know saying you are out of your mind for believing this, there's a pressure on you.

There's a social pressure. There's a relational pressure. You're the only person who says that you believe in a crucified savior.

But the emphasis here, Paul is reminding them, the impact he wants to bring, he wants to move them into this place of understanding.

Verse 23, we preach Christ crucified. Now Paul preached Christ crucified. He's already said as such in verse 6.

He's spoken about how as he preached to the Corinthians, that gospel message was confirmed as they received it and believed and received the gifts of the Holy Spirit.

[18 : 39] So in verse 6, because our testimony about Christ was confirmed in you. So Paul is somebody who preached Christ. But here he's speaking to them and saying we preach Christ crucified.

Everybody else around you might not, everybody else around you might think you're ridiculous and foolish. But Jesus, the crucified savior, is at the core of who we are.

Remember that. Remember that. Because for us, if it wasn't for Jesus Christ crucified, if it wasn't for Jesus taking our sins upon himself, what is said in verse 8, he will keep you strong to the end so that you will be blameless on their day of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Wouldn't be possible. Because Jesus went to the cross, when we look forward to the coming again of Jesus, we can look forward and know that we'll be blameless.

And so we don't say, when we apply this to ourselves just now, we don't say to people, or maybe we do, maybe we struggle with this. Maybe at times in my life I've struggled with it.

[19 : 54] We say to people, I go to church. It's great. I have lots of friends there. And we do good things. And we have our mothers and toddlers. And we like singing. And we can sometimes, I think, have a danger of talking about church and all that it brings to us.

And people maybe even like that. I've had people say to me in the past, well, I'm not a Christian, but I like to come to church because I like the sound of your community, which is great. And all to the good.

And at the center of who we are, we're to be reminded is we're people who are utterly dependent on a crucified savior.

Jesus Christ was crucified for us. And that's our identity. That's our identity. And so when we think about our culture, in many ways so similar to the Corinthian culture, with so many views and religions and so many objections to Christianity, then we are challenged, I think.

We are challenged to remember that do we speak about the cross? I don't mean in a morbid way. I don't mean that as soon as anybody talks to us, we have to kind of hit them with all of our theology about crossing, give them a decision to make right there and then.

[21 : 11] But we should be glad to speak about the cross. It's so counter cultural, but it's our salvation. It's what Jesus has done for us. It's what makes us who we are.

It's what brings us together. It's what unites us tonight in Jesus, all that he has done for us. So the question is, are we defined by the cross or are we in denial about the cross?

Are we embarrassed about it? Paul says about the gospel of the cross in Romans chapter one, I'm not ashamed of the gospel because it's the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes.

It's the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes. So in their speaking, the Corinthians were to remember the cross and in our speaking, in our testimony and before maybe a watching world, people who are observing what these Christians say, what they think and what they're like at work, our testimony is to be about Jesus.

So the second thing then is speaking about the cross. But the third thing I want to just think about is that the identity that the Christians were to have impacted the way they thought about others, their Christian leaders.

[22 : 28] It was to impact the way they spoke about the cross, but it was also to impact the way that they spoke about themselves.

You'll see towards the end of the chapter. Paul reminds them that if it's true that they are so utterly dependent on this Savior, crucified for them.

And if it's true, as we see again as you look throughout this first chapter, that all of what we have is because of God, all of the way that God has intervened into our lives is because God decided to, because he called us, because he saved us, because he's enriched us in every way, because he's given us spiritual gifts, because he's given us the fellowship and he's given us our Savior Jesus is because of him.

Then it's not about us. So why would we boast? Why would we boast? We'd bring ourselves up and build up our own little corner of the world and think that we're the greatest.

Again. And form factions. He says in verse 26, Brothers, think of what you were when you were called. Not many of you were wise by human standards. It's humbling to hear it sometimes, isn't it?

[23 : 47] But we're not necessarily people of any great repute. We're not in the world's eyes, important people, but it's not that that sets us apart to be in God's family.

It's not our status. It's not our worldly standing. Nothing about us. It's not our popularity amongst our friends.

It's all because of God. Verse 27, God chose the foolish things of the world to shame the wise. God chose the weak things of the world to shame the strong. He chose the lowly things of this world and the despised things and the things that are not to nullify the things that are.

Again, this is just showing how God turns things upside down. He doesn't bring his salvation through an impressive big political figure Messiah who triumphs in a military way or in a political way.

He doesn't do that. He doesn't use us as great important people. But Jesus came in many ways, not as people expected and yet he is the power of God.

[24 : 57] And God calls us ordinary people to be transformed into the likeness of Jesus. And that is the great truth that we have. And so when we get down to verse 29, our speaking about ourselves should definitely be impacted by that.

The way that we speak about ourselves, the way that we think about ourselves. Verse 29, so that no one may boast before him. Doesn't it seem so ridiculous when we get our perspective right?

If we understand that before a great and awesome God who's called us to be his people and saved us by nothing that we've done, but because of his mercy and his goodness, are we then going to turn around and say, aren't I a good person?

I'm an I impressive, aren't I an impressive Christian? And I think we have to pray and ask the Lord to guard our hearts against that because it's a subtle thing, it's a dangerous thing and it can sneak up on us.

You can so easily, I can so easily compare myself with others. You see what other people are doing around about you and you say, well, at least I'm not like that.

[26 : 19] Well, I'm a more faithful Christian than they are or whatever. He's reminding them here, no one may boast before him. And you're speaking, don't boast about yourself.

Verse 30, it's because of him that you are in Christ Jesus. Let's give thanks for that because it's not based on ourselves or what we think about ourselves because we're often so deluded, aren't we, in the way that we think about ourselves.

It's based on what Jesus is doing. And then really, just as we come to the end of the chapter, just to pick up on the last verse, but please don't think of this verse, verse 30 is kind of tagged on the end here.

It's not just the last verse, tailing out to the end of the chapter. Because see what Paul says as this chapter concludes. It's because of him that you are in Christ Jesus, who has become for us wisdom from God.

There's that word again, wisdom. Jesus has become our wisdom from God. What does that mean? Jesus has become for us wisdom from God.

[27 : 31] The rest of the verse in many ways explains it. That is our righteousness, holiness and redemption. One commentator kind of explains it is just saying that, well, what is wisdom?

True wisdom. Wisdom isn't just thinking that we're clever. It's not thinking we've got the right philosophy. It's not thinking we've got the right lifestyle or that we're just superior to other people.

Wisdom, true wisdom before God, to be a really wise person, you need to have righteousness, holiness and redemption.

These are things that we need because without them, when we stand before God, we're broken. We can't stand before God. If we're going to stand before God, if we're going to become his people, if we're going to stand in his presence, we need righteousness, holiness and redemption.

These are things that we can't generate by ourselves. We'll not be able to on the final day when the Lord comes to judge the world in righteousness and say, well, Lord, look at my righteousness because our righteousness is like filthy rags.

[28 : 35] The Bible uses that image. So wisdom that we need is this righteousness, holiness and redemption.

That is Jesus. That is Jesus. The wisdom of God was to know that we couldn't do it by ourselves and to provide Jesus as the Savior who is our righteousness and our holiness and our redemption.

That's the good news that we have. The good news again that brings us back to the fact that it's all of God.

And it should change the way we speak because at the tip of my tongue should be praise and thanks and I don't just mean in a singing way.

We often think about praise as singing. In my praying, in my speaking to you, in our speaking to each other, on the tips of our tongues should be thankfulness that Jesus Christ has done this for us.

[29 : 43] He is our righteousness and our holiness and redemption and so He calls us to follow Him and to live a life which recognizes that.

What could be a better thing to speak about than Jesus, our Savior? So it's not a tag on this last verse. It's crucial and it's glorious.

It's great for us to think about this. Jesus then is all in all for us and Paul wanted to write at the start of his letter to the Corinthians to remind them of their identity in Jesus.

And he wanted this identity to impact who they were, what they were like, what they were all about in the way that they lived. And as we think about that then for the Corinthians but also for us, it really becomes impossible for us to think that we would want to, as we get the example here, that we'd want to just build other people up and form factions and follow men or women.

And it becomes inconceivable to think that we wouldn't want to speak about the cross, that we want to keep quiet if everybody else is slandering it. And it becomes inconceivable for us to think about boasting about ourselves.

[31 : 04] How could we boast about ourselves? How could we be self-righteous? How could we think that we can come before God in our own strength? How can we think that we can set ourselves up against each other in our fellowship when we have a right perspective of who Jesus is and how He is our salvation and all that He's done for us?

We can't do these things because Jesus is too great, because He's such a great Savior and that's the perspective that we pray for and that's the perspective that helps us in the way we think and the way we speak.

I just, in closing, I'm going to read one verse. The last verse there in the chapter that we've been looking at finishes with this line, verse 31, therefore as it is written, let him who boasts boast in the Lord.

That verse comes from Jeremiah chapter 9. I just want to read the kind of extended version, as it were, that's found in Jeremiah. It's a great verse. Jeremiah chapter 9, let me read just from verse 23.

This should be our prayer. This is what the Lord says, let not the wise man boast of his wisdom or the strong man boast of his strength or the rich man boast of his riches, but let him who boasts boast about this, that he understands and knows me, that I am the Lord who exercises kindness, justice and righteousness on earth, for in these I delight, declares the Lord.

[32 : 40] Amen. Let's pray. Our Father, we recognize that we so often can go the wrong way.

We can get our thinking all mixed up. We can get our emphases all wrong. And that's a personal level and sometimes even within our fellowships, in our churches.

We see problems and we see divisions. And often, Lord, it's because we've taken our eyes off you. We don't remember all that you are and all that you are to us.

And we pray, Lord, that you would give us the right perspective tonight. We pray that you would make us thankful for your word. Thank you that Paul wrote these words and spoke into the situation that the church in Corinth had.

But they're so relevant for us. Help us, Lord, to think about the way we speak and think about what is at the center of our attention.

[33 : 41] Is it ourselves? Is it other people? Or is it Jesus Christ, our Savior, around which everything else gains perspective?

We ask for your help with this, Lord. We thank you for Jesus and help us not to be afraid or ashamed of the cross. Forgive us when we are. Forgive us when we don't take the opportunities we get to testify to Jesus.

They help us to do that in a loving way and a wise way. There are many barriers to people's understanding of the cross. Give us wisdom. We pray.

But give us opportunities to testify to Jesus. And bless your word. We pray in Jesus' name. Amen.