**United in Christ  
11/1/2020**

**1 Corinthians 3:1-9 (ESV)**

But I, brothers, could not address you as spiritual people, but as people of the flesh, as infants in Christ. I fed you with milk, not solid food, for you were not ready for it. And even now you are not yet ready,for you are still of the flesh. For while there is jealousy and strife among you, are you not of the flesh and behaving only in a human way? For when one says, “I follow Paul,” and another, “I follow Apollos,” are you not being merely human?

What then is Apollos? What is Paul? Servants through whom you believed, as the Lord assigned to each.I planted, Apollos watered, but God gave the growth. So neither he who plants nor he who waters is anything, but only God who gives the growth. He who plants and he who waters are one, and each will receive his wages according to his labor. For we are God's fellow workers. You are God's field, God's building.

**Big Idea: True unity cannot be found in a culture-centered world but only found in a Gospel-centered life**.

It goes without saying that we live in a divided culture. Even within the Church, we are deeply divided along many lines. The challenges the Corinthians faced, and Paul’s exhortation serve as instruction and correction for us in 21st Century America as we navigate our own bitter rivalries and factions. The questions before us: How do we move toward maturity and unity in Christ? What keeps us allied to ways of this world vs. surrendered to the rule of God’s Kingdom?

* “When we make the choice to embrace the culture *around us*, we will stop pursuing spiritual transformation *in us*.”In his message, Justin noted that the divisions in the church had led to lack of growth and maturity in the body: “They had become not an image of the invisible God but had remained an image of the visible culture. They were not following God’s will but their own desires.”
  + What are some of the ways we follow the Corinthians’ bad example in the American church?
  + What aspects of the culture around us have we embraced that are harmful to our growth?
* “I think it’s important to note that Paul is not in the conversation of conversion because he wants their behavior to be better, but he wants their lives to be transformed. Paul is dealing with some deep-rooted habits of culture and simply modifying the behavior is not enough, but real Christ-centered, God-honoring, Spirit-working transformation is the only solution, and Paul is an example of this kind of transformation.”
  + Talk through the story of Paul’s conversion from a persecutor of the church to the greatest missionary of the church. Then read Philippians 3:7-11.
  + What was Paul like prior to his conversion (reference for this is Acts 8:1, 9:1-18)? What cultural trophies did Paul make boast about? How did he feel about those trophies after his encounter with Jesus?
  + How can we “imitate Paul as he imitates Christ”?
* What does this gospel-centered life look like? Justin gave us three characteristics to ponder: “We need to knock out unholy habits and embrace holy habits; we need to recognize blind spots; we need to be in communion with God.”
  + Galatians 5:19-24 contrasts the works of the flesh with the fruit of the Spirit. In what ways can you cooperate with the Holy Spirit to knock out the works of the flesh that you struggle with?
  + If we are blind to our blind spots, how can we identify them? What steps can we take to develop more awareness of those things that are hindering our walk with the Lord?
  + In vv. 6-7, Paul points out that it is God who gives the growth, not Paul, or Apollos or any other human teacher. Justin called growth a gift – and sometimes a gift that is uncomfortable or doesn’t fit correctly. In other words, growth hurts sometimes! But it is a necessary process for maturity. How can we help each other embrace the hard parts of this gift? What are the rewards that await us if we surrender ourselves to the process?