

The Hindrance of Division

1 Corinthians 1:10-18; Matthew 5:21-24

This morning we continue our study called “Unhindered” where we are focusing on the fact that God wants us to live unhindered, free from obstacles and distractions that will prevent us from living a victorious life in Christ. We can all understand what it means to be hindered in something. It means that we are prevented, deterred, or impeded by something. We use this word in many ways. We may say, “I intended to be on time for my meeting, but the road work hindered me from arriving on time.” Or “I was planning to attend the soccer game, but I was hindered because I became ill.” Or “I wanted to experience something, but I was hindered from doing so.” There are many ways that we use the word, but each time we are describing an obstacle or situation that hindered our plans or progress. Fortunately for us, most of the hindrances are minor in nature and the effects are insignificant. However, there are some hindrances that can be quite costly and quite severe. I am convinced that many Christians are living their lives ineffectively because they are hindered. A Christian is someone who has believed in Jesus Christ and confessed Him as Lord and Savior. This means that they have received God’s gift of eternal life by faith. However, this doesn’t automatically mean that they are living the abundant, victorious life that is available to all who have received eternal life. There are many Christians who are living their life defeated, discouraged, and disheartened. Simply put, there is something in their lives that is hindering them from living the life that Jesus has called them to.

There are many things that may cause us to be hindered. These things hinder us from being effective in our prayers and from other aspects of Christian growth. Paul understood this personally. In 1 Thessalonians 2:18 Paul confessed that he wanted to go to the city of Thessalonica to preach the Gospel and minister to the people, but he sadly said, “Yet Satan hindered us.” He knew what it was like to be prevented and deterred from something. He also understood how Satan uses various hindrances to get us off course to divert us away from the path that God wants us to go. This is why he would look at the Christians in **Galatians 5:7** and say, “You were running well; who hindered you from obeying the truth?” Paul was saying, “You were doing so well. You were living for Jesus. You were honoring Him in your life and actions, but something happened. Something or someone hindered you, and you’re now going the wrong the direction.” Some of the hindrances we face, like unexpected circumstances and trials, we have absolutely no control over. However, most of the things the Bible identifies as hindrances are things that we do have control over. We can’t control what may happen to us or what may come against us, but we can control how we respond. The quickest way I know to discover the specific things that will hinder us is to study the things that hinder us from growing in a right relationship with the Lord. Last week we learned that the first hindrance is the hindrance of disobedience to God’s Word. **Proverbs 28:9** says, “He who turns away his ear from listening to the law, even his prayer is an abomination.” You can’t grow in the Lord without a healthy prayer life, and God says, “If you reject my Word, I will not even hear your prayers.” Disobeying God’s Word is a terrible hindrance that we must make sure is not present in our life. Today we come to the second hindrance that we must deal with – The Hindrance of Division.

Over and over again throughout God's Word we see that God wants us as believers to be unified. **Colossians 3:14-15** commands, "Beyond all these things put on love, which is the perfect bond of unity. Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, to which indeed you were called in one body; and be thankful." Similarly, in **Philippians 2:2** Paul commands, "Make my joy complete by being of the same mind, maintaining the same love, united in spirit, intent on one purpose." Unity is not something that occurs naturally. It is something that is available in Christ, but it is only possible as each of us yield to the Holy Spirit and constantly die to self. **Psalm 133:1** summarizes the beauty of unity saying, "Behold, how good and how pleasant it is for brothers to dwell together in unity!" But, how is this possible? How can we get there? How can we overcome this overwhelming hindrance? I believe God will show us in our time together today.

SHOW TEXT (1 Corinthians 1:10-18, 26-31)

Unfortunately, there are many passages of Scripture that we could study to see the sad effects of division. Scripture is the authority on the subject, but we don't have to know all of the Bible to understand how division impacts us. Division can tear apart a marriage, family members, a business, a community organization, a presidential staff, a nation, and even a church. When we aren't on the same page with one another it can cause all sorts of chaos, confusion, and conflict. I imagine we've all be there on some level. Here in 1 Corinthians we learn that Christians aren't immune from this struggle. In fact, Paul starts off in the first 9 verses of the chapter addressing the church in Corinth as fellow believers. As we read of their testimony of faith, we are immediately encouraged. The letter starts as a letter from a pastor to his beloved family. However, by the time we get to verse 10 of the first chapter, we immediately discover the purpose of the letter. The church in Corinth was young and there were many believers, but they were immature believers. They were baby Christians living in the midst of a culture that was very wealthy, very privileged, and very pagan. In the Roman world the city of Corinth was known for its wickedness where everyone did whatever they wanted to do. They did what was right in their own eyes. Sadly, this mindset was also seen in the church. This led to all sorts of conflicts and divisions. In fact, by any standard, the church at Corinth became the most corrupt church of the entire New Testament. There were divisions just about everywhere Paul looked. I believe these first verses of the letter show us why we have divisions in our lives, and in a moment I believe God will show us what we are to do if we are aware of a division in our life:

I. The Cause of Divisions (1 Corinthians 1:10-18, 26-31)

Have you ever thought about the root cause of conflicts and divisions? Someone might say, "Pastor, that's easy. The devil causes divisions." To an extent that may be true, but the truth is that we make it easy for him. We struggle enough with our own flesh, that he doesn't have to work too hard to cause divisions. ****ILL:** "Suzie, you know the devil made you do it." When she responded she said, "The devil made me say a bad name and pinch his arm, but pulling his hair was my idea." We can't make the devil our excuse. We must take responsibility for our own actions. I believe Paul tells us four root causes for the division at Corinth, which still apply to us today:

A. We Are Following Our Own Passions (vs. 11)

We see the presence of divisions among the believers in verse 10 when Paul said, “There should be no divisions among you.” However, we begin to see the first cause of why these divisions existed in the following verse. Paul says, “There are quarrels among you.” The word “quarrels” means “contentions, rivalries, and arguments.” It is a word that describes the aggressive expressions given as a result of the divisions that they are experiencing. Obviously, this shouldn’t be present in the life of a church, but here it was. And, I imagine, we probably don’t have to look far to find it in our own lives. Why does this occur? The Bible answers this question in **James 4:1**. In fact, listen to the verbiage. It says, “What is the source of **quarrels and conflicts** among you? Is not the source your pleasures that wage war in your members?” In other words, it is our own fleshly passions and desires within us that cause conflicts and divisions. When I allow my will and my wants to be of more importance than the needs of others, then conflict will occur. When we feed our selfish desires, it leads to all sorts of wrong actions with dangerous results. **James 3:14, 16** says it well, “But if you have bitter jealousy and selfish ambition in your heart, do not be arrogant and so lie against the truth...For where jealousy and selfish ambition exist, there is disorder and every evil thing.” Unfortunately, this is exactly what was happening in the church at Corinth. In fact, in the following chapters, Paul had to address their lazy attitude about sexual sins, their public treatment of others through lawsuits, their compromising view of the liberty they had in Jesus, the bullying that was taking place about spiritual gifts, etc. It has been well said that, “**Those who are at war with themselves will be at war with everyone.**” This was certainly true in Corinth. There was division at every corner because of the selfish and sinful passions that were ruling their lives.

B. We Are Focused on Personalities and Personal Preferences (vs. 12)

Because their own selfish passions were their motivation, it led to all other sorts of division in the church. In fact, even spiritual things became a point of conflict. Notice what they were fighting about. They were fighting about who was their leader and who they gave allegiance to. Think for a moment about these men. Paul was the great missionary leader. The Corinthians all knew who he was, and he was well respected as the emerging leader in the Church. Then after Paul left Corinth, the church was pastored by Apollos who shepherded the people. He labored diligently to help the people grow in their faith and make disciples there in Corinth. Then the Bible mentions Peter. We don’t have any record that he even visited Corinth, but the Corinthians likely knew of him because of his preaching on the day of Pentecost when the church was established. Then we read of Jesus, Who, of course, is both the builder and the head of the Church. So, picture the argument. Some are saying, “I’m with Paul. I like him. I agree with him because he is taking the Gospel everywhere.” Others are saying, “I’m with Apollos. He’s our pastor. Look at how he cares for us and teaches us. I am growing because of him.” Then others said, “I’m with Peter. He is the one who preached at Pentecost and the church was founded. We wouldn’t even have a church if it weren’t for him.” Then the super-spiritual said, “Well I’m with Jesus. After all, we wouldn’t even be saved if it weren’t for Him and He is the head of the Church.” In other words, based upon their personalities and preferences they debated and divided over an irrelevant, ridiculous issue. God wanted them to be unified. Paul’s most

powerful statement on the subject is **Ephesians 4:1-6**, “Therefore I, the prisoner of the Lord, implore you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling with which you have been called, with all humility and gentleness, with patience, showing tolerance for one another in love, being diligent to preserve the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. There is one body and one Spirit, just as also you were called in one hope of your calling; one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all who is over all and through all and in all.” The conflict they were having was ridiculous. Can you imagine the scene? “Well, I’m with Pastor Matthew because he starts all his words with the same letter. Well, I’m with Pastor Michael because he loves sci-fi and Narnia. I’m with Pastor Terry because he loves Chick-fil-A and drives like a madman. I’m with Pastor Scott because he has long hair and looks more like Jesus. I’m with Pastor Marty because he is the most educated and talks in the same tone all the time. I’m with Chris because he’s the rookie who loves sports and has the gift of sarcasm.” Paul is showing them that their personal preferences and personal commitments are not what matters. What matters is that they have truly believed in Jesus and that they are living for Him – not merely by what they claim, but by how they conduct themselves in their lives. This brings us to the third cause.

C. We Are Forgetting Our Purpose (vs. 18)

Paul clearly points the people to Jesus. He asked, “Was Paul crucified for you?” In other words, did I die on a cross for you? How about Apollos? Or Peter? The obvious truth is that only One died on the cross for the sins of the world and only One rose again from the grave having paid the debt of our sins – Jesus. He then goes on to describe how the message of the Gospel is the power of God to save souls and change lives. I submit to you today that one of the major reasons that we get in petty squabbles over things that don’t matter is because we lose sight of our purpose. Believers, our calling is to go into all the world, to make disciples of all nations and baptize them. This is our purpose. This is the reason that we aren’t yet in heaven. This is our calling. When we lose sight of that and began to focus internally, we begin to have all sorts of issues. Why? Because we are different. Notice God is not calling us to uniformity where we look the same, talk the same, like the same things, etc. We are very different. ****ILL: Ice Cream Flavors Poll? Music Poll?** In verse 10 when Paul calls us to have the same mind, he isn’t saying that we are going to have the same mind about everything. He is talking specifically about the Gospel – the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus. The Gospel is the good news that if we believe in Jesus we will be rescued from our sin, reconciled to God, and remade a brand new creation. This is the heart of the Gospel. If we are committed to this, it will rid us of most of the divisions that we face. Someone says, “Well, pastor, I know this, but I still have conflict.” We must understand that it isn’t enough to merely know it in our heads and even believe it in our hearts. If we are going to overcome conflict, we must also be committed to sharing it with others and showing it to others. We share it when we tell others the Good News, but we show it when we live out the evidence of a life that has been changed. If you don’t know how to show the Gospel authentically to others, then you likely do not really know it personally in your life. Remember what Jesus said in **John 13:34-35**, “A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another, even as I have loved you, that you

also love one another. By this all men will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another.”

D. We Are Filled with Pride (vs. 26-31)

We will deal with this topic in more detail later, but it really comes down to this. Why do we have so many divisions? Because of the pride in our hearts. From verses 26-31 Paul has to remind the people that they may have had street-smarts before Christ, but they didn't have wisdom. They may have known certain facts about the world, but they had no true knowledge until Christ came into their lives and changed them. Why did Paul remind them of this? Because he knew the source of their division. Everyone thought of themselves as wise, strong, smart, noble, and even mighty. Paul had to remind them that they were none of those things without Jesus. That's why he concludes, “Let him who boasts, boast in the Lord.” Don't boast in yourselves. Don't put yourselves on a pedestal. Don't think you are better than others and put yourself before them. This is likely what Peter had in mind when he addressed the men of the early church in **1 Peter 3:7** saying, “You husbands in the same way, live with your wives in an understanding way, as with someone weaker, since she is a woman; and show her honor as a fellow heir of the grace of life, so your prayers will not be hindered.” In other words, don't look down on her or treat her less than. You humble yourself and put her needs before your own. Paul said it well in **Philippians 2:3-5**, “Do nothing from selfishness or empty conceit, but with humility of mind regard one another as more important than yourselves; do not merely look out for your own personal interests, but also for the interests of others. Have this attitude in yourselves which was also in Christ Jesus.”

Can you relate to these causes of conflict? Do you see how your fleshly passions cause conflict? Can you identify ways that your personal preferences get in the way? Do you see ways that you have forgotten your purpose of sharing and showing the Gospel? Is your pride hindering you from a right relationship with God and others? If you answered “yes” to any of these, I have good news for you. There is a cure. There is a remedy to your conflict. Jesus spells it out for us in Matthew 5.

II. The Cure for Divisions (Matthew 5:21-24)

SHOW TEXT

Jesus gives the illustration of a man who is at the altar praying when suddenly he remembers something. He is trying to focus his attention on God, but something is wrong. His prayers are being hindered. Why? Because he remembers that there is a division that has occurred. Something has happened between him and a “brother” that has caused conflict. The word for “brother” here was a common word. It could have been used to describe a literal blood brother, a fellow Jew, or even a close companion. Regardless of the interpretation, we realize it is someone that he knew who was close to him and there is an offense that has occurred. There was an invisible wedge dividing the two. Personally, due to the context of verses 21-22 I believe that the person at the altar had likely been angry and had either thought something, felt something, said something, or even did something that caused the offense. From the context, it appears the reason he recalled

something is because he was remembering his own action. He was aware of his own sin and that there was “something against him.” It seems likely that the other person had something against him because of the actions he had committed.

In this situation we clearly see that there are two people. There is the one who remembers he has something against him, and the offended brother who is apparently off at a distance hurt because of the other’s actions. Let me ask you, “Whose responsibility is it to seek restoration when conflict and division has occurred? ****ILL:** Well, let’s do a poll here this morning. How many of you think that the person who got angry and was hurtful should seek restoration? How many of you think that the person who was hurt should seek restoration? Well, let me tell you who is right. You both are. **Matthew 18:15**, speaks to the offended, “If your brother sins, go and show him his fault in private; if he listens to you, you have won your brother.” But here in Mathew 5, it seems the other way around. Please understand, this isn’t a contradiction. This is God showing us that both parties must be willing to work together through the offense. What are we to do, though, if we are the offender? What are we to do if we are praying and worshiping and remember that there is an issue between us and someone else? There are four commands that God gives.

A. Get Up

The context here is Jesus saying, “Get up from the altar and leave your offering there.” Think about this for a moment. This would be a very inconvenient thing to do. In that day there would have literally been a long line waiting to give one’s offering to the Lord. This person has waited and waited, and the time has come for their sacrifice. The offering is given. They are there praying when, all of a sudden in their heart and mind, they remember the issue between them and someone else. And Jesus says, “Get up and leave the offering behind.” I can see it now. How would you respond? I’d probably ask for confirmation or try to make excuses or try to bargain with God. I might try to ignore it like nothing had happened. God says, “Get up.” We need to pause in our prayer until we’re at peace. **1 Samuel 15:22**, “Has the Lord as much delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices as in obeying the voice of the Lord? Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice, and to heed than the fat of rams.” God desires our obedience more than anything else we may have to offer Him. David figured this out as well in **Psalms 51:16-17**, “For You do not delight in sacrifice, otherwise I would give it; You are not pleased with burnt offering. The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit; a broken and a contrite heart, O God, You will not despise.” God would rather have a surrendered man or a woman than a self-righteous prayer. He would rather you have a right relationship with Him and with man than for you to have a man-made form of religion. He would rather have us leave and make peace than to lift our hands in praise when we’re in conflict with someone. Step one, “Get up and leave the altar.”

B. Go

Step 2 is to “Go.” Many say, “Oh, I go all the time. When I face conflict, I go anywhere just to get away. I can’t handle it.” This isn’t what Jesus is talking about. Jesus is saying that we are to go to the one that has been offended. Like a firefighter going into the flames, we are to go into the conflict that our actions have caused. Please understand that Jesus

made no conditions here. He is calling us to go to our brother even when we don't want to, don't feel like it, and maybe even feel like our actions are justified. We're to leave the place of reverence and go find the place of reconciliation with the one we've wronged. The verb tense here suggests an **intense effort**. It brings the idea of making haste to get to someone. ****ILL: Me in Atlanta airport.** With the same urgency we must go to the one we've offended. It's so easy to think that the other person should take the first step, but we must remember that we are not responsible for what others do or do not do, but we are responsible with what God shows us to do. If God puts the burden and situation on your heart, it is for a reason and it is your responsibility. You must get up and go to your brother.

C. Gain Your Brother

Here is the third step. We are to seek reconciliation. In other words, we are to initiate reconciliation whether it is our fault or not. It could be a legitimate complaint or maybe it's ridiculous. It doesn't matter. We should seek reconciliation. The vast majority of us say, "Ok I will go to that person, but I ain't gonna apologize. After all, I didn't do anything wrong." Listen, that is not the spirit of reconciliation. That is a spirit of pride that will ruin you. If you go with that attitude, you are going to cause further offense. In order for there to be reconciliation there must be two key ingredients. **First, there must be humility.** There must be humility on both parties - humility to hear and seek understanding, not merely striving to be understood. **Second, there must be honesty.** There must be honesty to confess and repent of the wrong. So often, issues happen and people get divided and things never get restored. We often think that it's so-n-so's fault when the reality is, it could be our own heart that is deceiving us. I've seen this very thing divide couples, divide family members, and even members of the church. Somebody leaves the church and another party says, "Well, somebody said something and hurt their feelings." Well, that may be true, but ultimately it is the pride in that person's heart that is causing them not to humble themselves and obey God's Word to seek restoration. The need for reconciliation is so strong that God literally says, "Stop worshipping and praying, and go make things right with your brother."

D. Get Right with God

Now that you have obeyed the Lord and sought restoration Jesus says, "Come again and present your offering." In other words, don't stay gone. Come back and offer your praise and prayer. This sounds so simple, but please hear me out this morning. Usually in conflict, Satan uses it to discourage us, and it can be demoralizing. ****ILL:** I've seen this happen numerous times. When it occurs, the devil tells all kinds of lies and gives all kinds of temptation. "Don't go back there. You don't need to be there. Just stay away from there. You know you are just going to deal with more people and problems." What does Jesus say? Get back to the altar! Why? Because our worship is about Him and not about them. Regardless of how you feel, what you are going through, or what lies the enemy may be telling you, Jesus constantly calls us back to Him and to the altar of prayer.

Divisions are bound to occur in every relationship because we have many differences. We also are all imperfect people who have sinned and fallen short of God's glory. As a result, conflict is

inevitable. It is how we handle the conflict that is important. If we handle it according to God's Word, we will grow through it and God will be glorified. However, if we handle it in ways that are against God's Word and will, it will stunt our growth, rob us of joy, hinder our prayers, and bring a reproach on the name of the Lord. We must not let our conflicts and divisions hinder us. We must handle it according to God's will.

So, what about you this morning? Is there someone specific that God has put on your heart? Is there something specific - an action, a word, a tone that you used - that has caused division? If so, then this final point is for you. Today, we each must make a deliberate choice to obey the Lord. We must be intentional if we are to apply what God has shown us today. And, I am convinced that we must do this urgently. It's no accident that you are thinking about a person right now. Don't dismiss the convicting ministry of the Holy Spirit at work in your heart. Remembering and recognizing is the first step to reconciliation. It's God's way of prompting you towards reconciliation and unity. As far as I know, this is the only time God tells you to slip out of church early. Why? Because, **"An offense against your neighbor builds a fence between you and God."** IOW: Our division hinders us in our relationship with the Lord, especially in our prayers. Make the choice today to obey God and seek reconciliation with those you've sinned against.