

**The Curse Of Awesome Leadership  
(1 Corinthians 1:10-17 March 3, 2019)**

# The Curse Of Awesome Leadership

— 1 Corinthians 1:10-17 —



I was a privileged to be member of Grace Community Church in Sun Valley, Los Angeles for four years.

I was privileged to be a pastor there for three years.

In the 26 years since I left – do you know how 99% of people I have spoken to refer to that church?

## **MacArthur's church.**

John MacArthur is the Senior Pastor there and I know full well he hates that people refer to the church that way.

In the past year alone – I have heard people from this church who are visiting the US tell me – I am going to visit Chandler's church, Keller's church, Dever's church and many more.

I also know every one of those pastor's hate that.

I know many from here who are planning to visit call ahead to make sure their favourite preacher is going to be speaking that day – or they will change their itinerary.

I know of people who have moved jobs, cities and even countries to attend those churches.

Now, I understand this – they love the godly, biblical, edifying ministry of these men.

And confession time – I was and still am a bit of a MacArthur fanboy.



Ben Shannon kindly commented that he had no idea who either of these men in the picture are – thank you brother Ben.

But that is me and I moved countries to go to that church and seminary.

Why, because I love John MacArthur's ministry.

But, I'm not the only pastoral fanboy in this church.

We have our own fanboys and fangirls in the church.

I have to tell you – Salli and Rhoi were pretty excited to meet Matt Chandler at the conference last week.

However ... not as excited as one of our former Pastors – John Cook.



In many ways I am a little disturbed by this show of affection – no a lot disturbed.

But the question is – why are we fanboys?

Why do we have such a deep attraction to mere men?

Because we love and appreciate the ministry of these incredibly gifted, godly men.

When you join their church – you know exactly what you are getting – what they teach, what their practices are, what to expect.

We join because that is exactly the ministry we want.

Now imagine for a moment a church where five of the most gifted, godly men on the planet decide to co-pastor the church. They decide the five of them will share the teaching and leadership.

I don't know who your favourites are – so I have chosen a few of mine.

John MacArthur, Tim Keller, Mark Dever, Matt Chandler and John Piper,

If some of you don't know those names – they are among the most gifted church pastors, teachers and leaders on the planet.

Let's call this new venture of theirs:

***Awesome Bible Church!***

You might expect – *Awesome Bible Church* – to be heaven on earth – the greatest church ever!

Maybe ... but not so fast.

I want to suggest how the history of this church would most likely play out.

Initially it would truly be awesome.

These men are totally united on the gospel and the central truths of the faith.

It is why they minister together in groups like **T4G** and **The Gospel Coalition**.

You get to hear these truly gifted men preach and teach every week.

Imagine the service for today March 3, 2019. It has Chandler leading worship, Dever praying, Keller leading communion, MacArthur preaching and Piper on PM service – and the bulletin lists Chandler and Keller as the AM and PM preachers next week.

Who wouldn't be up for that?

But, as godly, as totally remarkable as each of these men are – they have different styles, different gifts, they differ in some theological and practical areas.

It is those differences and distinctives that draw and keep people in their churches.

For example, I went to Grace Community Church – because John MacArthur and his Elders set the teaching, the doctrine and the practice – and I got exactly what I thought I would get in terms of worship – preaching – doctrine.

But in *Awesome Bible Church* – now you have great men with subtle differences and preferences in these areas – and that is five pretty Alpha males we are talking about.

And different people in the flock would naturally and understandably gravitate towards different men.

No fault of any of these pastors – just natural human nature.

There would be the MacArthurites – those who tell everyone I just love the way John spends four weeks preaching through one word – that is just so incredible – and of course he is dead right – the pretrib rapture is the only way to view the end times – not sure why there is debate on this. The other awesomes just need to get on board.

Then the Keller fanboys would respond – are you kidding me! Our pastors should just share the stories that touch the heart and by the way – it is obvious that amill is the way the world ends.

The Dever crew would chime in – wait on – wait on – why is no one talking membership here? A strong membership makes a strong church. The first thing we must do is to talk membership.

To which the Chandler devotees would cry – while we don't want to belittle doctrine, stories or membership – we need to just cut through the peripheral junk and get to the

important stuff – Christ, the gospel, the ministry of the Spirit and church planting. It's all about churches, planting churches, planting churches, planting churches.

And then the Piper enthusiasts would cry – Brethren – brethren – let us just pause while we consider His glory! Glory – glory – glory. Oh my – can't we just tell the nations of His glory.

And if you don't believe that is exactly how things would go – bless you – you are clearly a new Christian and you haven't experienced the joys of the subtle and blatant divisions that happen in even the best of churches.

And if you were offended – because I didn't totally side with your favourite pastor – then you really need this morning's message.

Listen up – the problem with *Awesome Bible Church* is that we think it is awesome because of the incredible gifts of these men **not** because they will point us to the incredible grace of Jesus Christ.

So what we are going to learn this morning is this:

**The curse of awesome leadership is the temptation to give your allegiance to a man rather than to Christ.**

**The curse of awesome leadership is the temptation to give your allegiance to a man rather than to Christ.**

The great danger of powerful, charismatic, gifted leaders is that we can find ourselves following them rather than the One they point to – Jesus.

To see how this fleshes out – turn with me to 1 Corinthians 1:10.

Last time I told you that:

# Cross-Centred Wisdom



## For Flawed Saints

Throughout this whole book – the answer Paul gives to the problems of these deeply flawed saints is cross-centred wisdom.

Put your eyes and heart on Christ and His cross and only then will you have a platform to deal with the issues that arise in churches.

I also told you that this letter divides up fairly basically.

**Introduction 1:1-9**

**Response to reports 1:10-6:20**

**Response to questions 7:1-16:9**

**Conclusion 16:10-24**

After the introduction we have the response to the reports which came from Chloe's people.

These reports dealt with two issues:

**Divisions and Disorders.**

This morning Paul begins to address this first problem – **Divisions**.

And this section divides up like this:

**Division comes when we follow human power and wisdom and the cross is emptied of its glory 1:10-17**

**Unity comes when we follow divine power and wisdom and the cross is displayed in its glory 1:18-4:21**

When Jesus and the cross cease to be the centre of our lives, our passions, our aspirations – when human wisdom and power in some form replace Christ – division, disorder, sin, confusion – is an *inevitable and unavoidable result*.

And crucially – the answer – the solution – is to step back and make sure the cross is the centre of our life as Christians and these other problems will be shown for what they are distractions from the real ministry – and we can deal with them.

This morning we will deal with this first section.

**Division comes when we follow human power and wisdom and the cross is emptied of its glory 1:10-17**

Paul begins with his:

**Summary – Division and Unity 10**

Look at verse 10:

Now I urge you, brothers and sisters, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that all of you agree in what you say, that there be no divisions among you, and that you be united with the same understanding and the same conviction.

Paul tells us that there are divisions in the church – and urges them to become united.

The word for *divisions* is where we get our English word schisms.

The word *united* is an interesting word. It means healed or restored to useful service. It is used of a broken bone being set. It is used of a torn net being repaired.

The idea is that there are schisms in the church which are tearing it apart and these schisms need to be repaired.

How? Paul says the healing will come when they:

Agree in what they say ... when they are united with the same understanding and the same conviction.

I read this and think – Paul – my dear brother – you cannot be serious? You want us to all think the same!

I can't get my family to agree on what we should have for dinner?

I don't know if I am the only one or does this have a familiar ring?

My wife Dena asks – Ok everyone – what do you want for dinner?

No one answers.

Finally I say – Oh I don't care – anything is great honey.

Dena – OK – Pumpkin soup it is then.

Me – Oh – well actually I do care. I don't want Pumpkin soup.

Dena – OK – Pizza it is.

My daughter Heather now chimes in – I'm not really up for Pizza.

Ok – Curry chicken?

My son Pete – No way!

Dena – I'm making Pumpkin soup – if you don't like it – feel free to call Uber Eats.

Unity is hard.

Look – maybe if you are an Apostle you can say – by the power invested in me on the Road to Damascus – I say – thou shalt agree with me.

But I can't do that.

I don't know how many church committees and groups you have ever been a part of – but you get a group of Christians together and say – congratulations – you are now the church renovation committee. Then stand back and watch the sparks fly over colours, budget, style.

When we originally renovated this church – a committee was formed. I can say without contradiction that no two people on that committee were even in same part of the rainbow in regard to preferred colour schemes.

Finally, to end it – I hired an outside colour expert and said – whatever she picks is it – no correspondence entered into – or I guarantee twenty years later we would still have bare walls.

12 months ago we made the foolish decision to reconsider our church logo – and I should have realised that seven pastors and elders meant twenty opinions – seven of us, and of course seven wives – and then some kids and others chime in too.

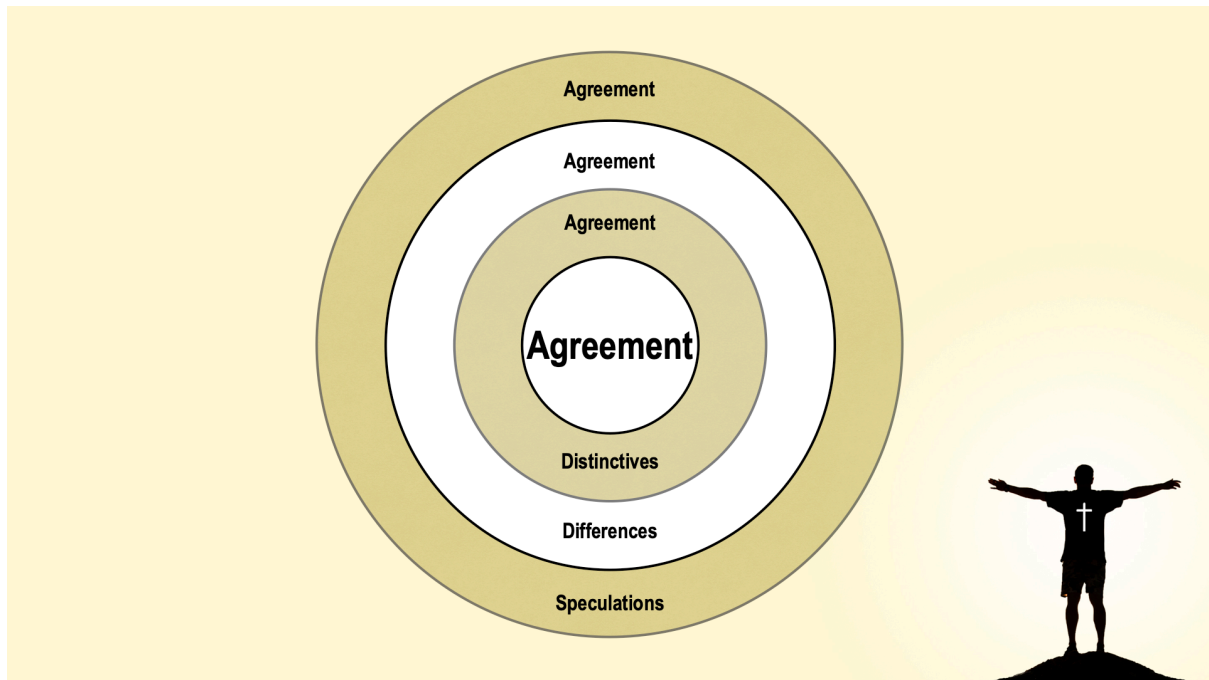
Not a hope of unity. I have learned that for some – a cross-less logo is perilously close to blasphemy while for others a cross in a logo is so first century and out of touch – we would be fools to label ourselves as non-Millennial and go with anything but an abstract symbol.

Yet, Paul blithely throws out – hey imploding divided, immature Corinthian church – it will be OK if only you all say the same thing.



I want to scream – Paul – are you kidding me?

Look – at first glance it does appear that he is saying that the way to get unity is that – we just have to agree on everything.



Major doctrines – minor doctrines – we agree.

We agree on who wrote the book of Hebrews.

We agree on music tastes.

We agree on how to school our kids.

We are **Agreement Bible Church** baby – no disunity here.

Let me assure you of this – if there is an **Agreement Bible Church** – a church where superficially everyone is in agreement – I can guarantee that at the heart of this church is one very strong personality – who is unchallenged in his authority.

I am the pastor – I speak for us. You don't like it – you leave – because the rest of us are in agreement.

If you are a dispensational, baptistic, semi-pelagian and love Thai food – then welcome brother.

The rest know where the door is.

Here is what I want to tell you with absolute conviction.

This doesn't work and I should know.

Our church once found its unity in a very tight theology.

We had a very long, detailed doctrinal statement – and it flashed – if you are not on the same page as us – you won't feel comfortable here.

I thought – if we have everyone on the same page – we have unity.

Here is the issue. Dave D'Amour and I are about as closely aligned theologically as two flawed men can be.

But, in some peripheral areas we have areas of disagreement and preference.

We quickly realised that if our unity comes from holding exactly the same doctrine, practices and preferences – then whenever there is disagreement – people choose sides.

I am with Dave on this. Nah – Craig makes more sense.

So if unity is based on agreement down to the last jot and tittle – then I don't even know one married couple who could co-exist in the same church.

If the history of the church tells us anything – seeking unity on the basis of perfect agreement always ends when someone with a different view rises up to challenge the dominant leader and someone else says – I'm with him.

And 100,000 church splits later we have not learned this lesson.

So that **cannot** be what Paul is saying.

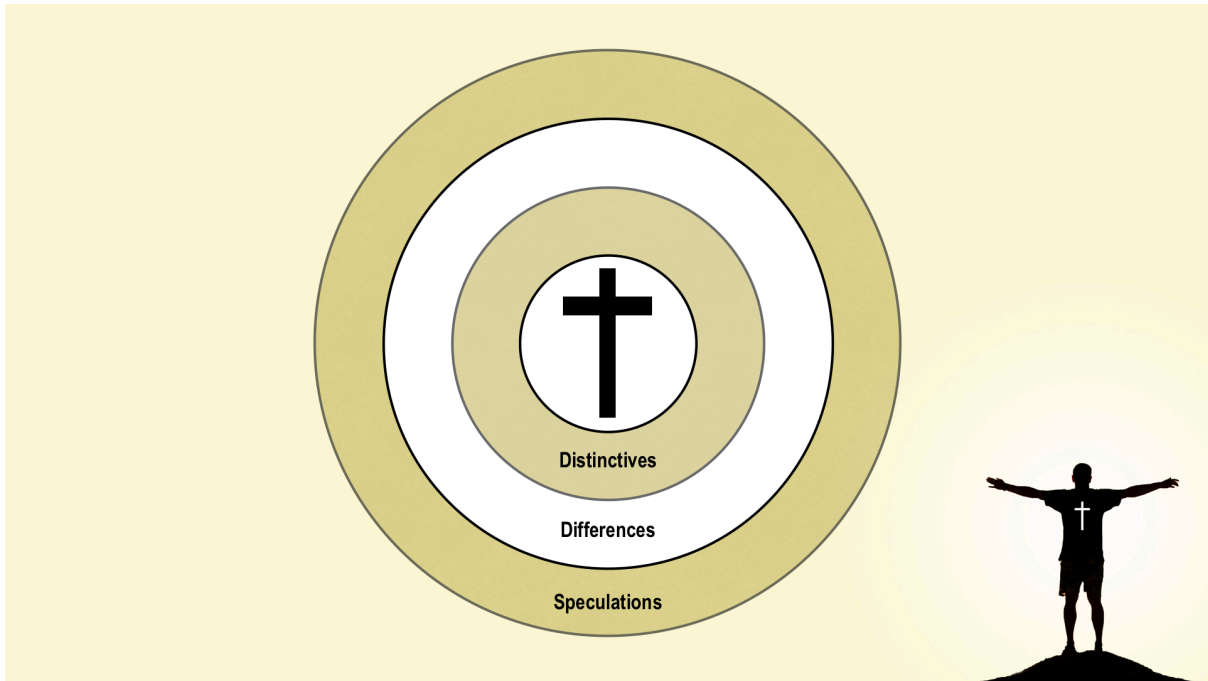
If you read on through to the end of chapter 2 you realise that is **not** what Paul is saying here in verse 10.

True unity comes through seeking the mind of Christ in regard to the truths of the cross.

In chapter 2 Paul says the Spirit of God conveys the mind of Christ to the people of God.

In between these verses, Paul repeatedly refers to the word of the cross – the wisdom of God – the wisdom of the Spirit. And as we will see he ties these to the cross.

Here is what it becomes clear that Paul **is** saying.



Because we are flawed and our minds corrupted – the reality is that in this life we all come to various positions in regard to distinctives and differences and speculations.

But as we will see in chapter 2 – in regard to salvation – the crucial issues of the gospel, Jesus, the cross – the Spirit of God reveals these essential truths to a child of God and saves them.

In this we will all speak the same.

In this we find our true unity.

You are **not** saved by saying the same thing about spiritual gifts or baptism – you **are** saved by saying the same thing about Christ and His cross.

So in comparison – these other issues pale compared to the essentials of the gospel.

Maybe I can put it this way.

If the person sitting next to you was bought with the blood of Christ – is destined for eternity – is united with Christ – that trumps whether they agree with your idea of end times or schooling or music.

When you read chapters 1 and 2 – it is pretty clear that is where Paul is heading.

Paul starts with – I urge you – **in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.**

One Lord – Jesus. Our allegiance is to Him and Him **alone.**

One mind – Christ's. His wisdom **alone.**

Agree in what you say regarding the Lord Jesus.

In our church we have people with different views on spiritual gifts, end times, how reformed the Bible tells us to be.

But – when we are speaking about Jesus – we had better agree in what we say.

If you and I do not say the same regarding Him being God, the second person of the Trinity, Lord and Saviour, the only way of redemption – then one of us is not saved.

If we do agree then even if we disagree with on every one of the more peripheral areas – you are still my brother – my sister – and I love you in Christ.

We find our unity in Christ.

Now, do not hear me say that doctrine and practice is unimportant. Far from it. The Elders have laboured to try and work out distinctives that the leaders of our church must hold – but our essential unity is **not** found there it is found in Christ and His gospel.

The problem is that our sin, our pride, our flesh wants to say – unity should be found in some other place – some area of human power – and Paul knows that will only lead to division.

What lies at the heart of divisions? The *first* danger:

### **The cult-like effect of human power and wisdom 10-12**

When you put any man or woman – no matter how godly at the centre of your authority and devotion – your faith and your church are in serious jeopardy.

Verses 11–12:

For it has been reported to me about you, my brothers and sisters, by members of Chloe's people, that there is rivalry among you. What I am saying is this: One of you says, "I belong to Paul," or "I belong to Apollos," or "I belong to Cephas," or "I belong to Christ."

We really don't know much about Chloe.

Was she part of the church in Corinth and sent word to Paul in Ephesus?

Was she a merchant in Ephesus whose people trade in Corinth and brought word to Paul?

We don't really know. All we know for sure is – Chloe's people saw the divisions and disorders in the church – were shocked and conveyed news of that to Paul.

The first thing they conveyed was news of rivalries based on personalities.

What personalities? I think the best way to translate verse 12 is:

What I am saying is this: One of you says, “I belong to the Paul group,” or “I belong to the Apollos group,” or “I belong to the Cephas group,” or “I belong to the Christ group.”

What Paul is saying is that there were factions based on allegiance to men – and as I will explain that actually includes the Christ group.

If I surveyed you as to the most gifted pastors and preachers in the world today – I think certain names would keep coming up.

If you lived in 55AD in one of the churches of the known world and I asked you who were the most gifted pastors and preachers in the world – I think certain names would keep coming up.

Maybe the Apostle John. Maybe the Apostle James.

But very likely Paul, Apollos and Cephas – which is another name for the Apostle Peter – these names would keep coming up.

Certainly there is not a church that would not know of at least Paul and Peter.

Paul was the Apostle to the Gentiles. No one had a testimony quite like Paul’s. Church planter extraordinaire. The man was a genius with a grasp of theology second to none – yet with a humility that led him to suffer like few others.

If you wanted a celebrity preacher to come to your church in 55AD – I think Paul would be at the top of the list.

Peter – was the rock – one of the disciples Jesus loved. A pillar of the Jerusalem church.

Then there is Apollos – the hot new thing in the Christian world. Acts 18 says he was eloquent and mighty in the Scriptures.

If there were YouTube and podcasts in the first century – Apollos would have killed it. He was a gifted preacher.

These are clearly three of the most gifted and godly pastors in the world of 55AD.

At least two of them were well known in Corinth.

We know Paul planted that church – and was there for 18 months pouring out his heart to them.

We know Apollos came after Paul and built up this church as their pastor.

Peter. We do not know whether this reference is here because Peter visited the church and ministered there and is personally known to the church – and it is just not recorded

anywhere in Scripture – or whether Peter’s reputation and teaching found fertile ground among some in the church in Corinth.

The point is – here are very gifted, godly men – yet the fruit of their ministry in that church is – factions.

I do not for a moment believe Paul is implying any of these men intentionally stirred up divisions and factions in the church.

Read chapter 3 – he is glowing in reference to Apollos’ ministry.

But these are three very different men.

Listen to how Paul describes himself in 1 Corinthians 2:4:

My speech and my preaching were not with persuasive words of wisdom.

Or in 2 Corinthians 10:10:

For it is said, “His letters are weighty and powerful, but his physical presence is weak and his public speaking amounts to nothing.”

He is brilliant. Clearly from Acts he can speak OK – but he is probably more of a theologian than a gifted persuasive speaker.

Contrast that with Apollos. Here is what Luke says in Acts 18:24–25:

Now a Jew named Apollos, a native Alexandrian, an eloquent man who was competent in the use of the Scriptures, arrived in Ephesus. He had been instructed in the way of the Lord; and being fervent in spirit, he was speaking and teaching accurately about Jesus.

This is a man who moves people by the power of his words.

And then there is Peter – impulsive, passionate and raw.

These men are different.

Add in the fact that we know that not every leader in the early church saw eye to eye on everything.

Paul and Barnabas parted ways.

We see Paul confront Peter in Galatians 2.

So they have differences in style, emphasis and in some less central areas.

What seems to have happened is that certain men and women in Corinth have latched on to some teaching or emphasis of one of these men – and given it significant weight.

Significant enough that if you disagree we have a problem – and since – for example – Paul agrees with me – you have a problem with Paul as well – so get on board.

Here is what history tells us keeps happening.

If you have a view, a group, a faction – and you want legitimacy – attach the name of a spiritual giant to your faction.

In the second century – factions and views sprung up – and to gain legitimacy – they wrote documents and said it came from an Apostle – for example – The Gospel of Peter.

Even today – when I am discussing a doctrine or a practice – it is not uncommon for someone to say – well John MacArthur said this – or Al Mohler holds that – and the expectation is that settles it.

Or if they want to pull out the really big guns – haven't you read Calvin **and** Spurgeon on this – they are with me – so don't contradict me.

It seems that some men or women in the church had views they thought should be more central – they found an echo in one of these prominent teachers – and they used the names of Paul, Apollos, Peter and even Christ – to give legitimacy and authority to their faction.

What these factions taught or held – is ultimately speculation.

But perhaps the more theological were drawn to Paul.

The flashier more eloquent ones to Apollos.

Perhaps some Judaisers or some more aligned with Jews were drawn to Peter.

The hardest ones to nail down are the Christ party.

On level you say – hey shouldn't we all be in the Christ party? Isn't that what Paul says in chapter 2 and 3?

We think Paul misspoke and this verse should read like this:

What I am saying is this: One of you says, "I belong to the Paul group," or "I belong to the Apollos group," or "I belong to the Cephas group," – what you should be saying is "I belong to the Christ group."

It doesn't. So what is Paul saying?

At first glance it might sound like – this party gets it right and makes Christ the centre.

That is **not** what Paul is saying.

Clearly from the context, this is still a man-centred group – but this group is using Christ as a shield.

I guarantee that at the heart of this group there is a man, a woman or a group – not Christ.

They reduce Jesus from Lord and Saviour to a mere teacher.

Then they twist His teaching to fit their view – and use His name to give their faction legitimacy.

Brethren – we notice that our Lord Jesus never spoke against homosexuality – so those who teach homosexual marriage is wrong – you are opposing Christ.

Christ Himself was celibate – so by the example of God-incarnate celibacy is the superior way to live our lives.

Jesus only ate the last Supper with the 12 not the 120 – so the table of the Lord is not for every riff-raff.

What Paul is describing is some sort of theological one upmanship.

I hear it all the time.

Well Matt Chandler agrees with my view of baptism.

Really? Well John Calvin agrees with mine!

You are both wrong – the Apostle Paul lines up with what I am saying.

Grow up will you – you are all clearly wrong because my view is Jesus' view – and His is the only one that really counts – so I'm right.

What Paul is saying here is this. Jesus was perfect – but this group does not have Jesus as a spokesman but a mere man.

And even if Paul, Peter and Apollos did say what these groups allege – the truth is that even the most godly and gifted – including himself – is flawed.

No one gets it all right.

If two Apostles can argue – then we know they are not infallible.

If you give your allegiance to them rather than Christ – what you end up with is a cult not a church.

If you give your allegiance to them rather than Christ – to disagree with them becomes legitimate grounds for division.

But no man is worth dividing over.



There is an adage:

**Never meet your heroes, because they're sure to disappoint you.**

That is so true.

I don't know who your heroes are theologically, pastorally, mission-wise, Christian living wise.

Paul, Peter.

Calvin, Luther, Spurgeon.

Elizabeth Elliot.

Hudson Taylor.

Here is what I can tell you – every one of them was sinful and had personality flaws and had issues.

Most biographies whitewash their flaws – but all of them had huge glaring weaknesses – as we all do.

There is only one true hero – and He died a cursed death on a cross.

Every human hero has feet of clay.

Paul urges us to remember that human personality, human giftedness, persuasive speaking – these are very powerful tools – but they must **never** replace Christ and the cross.

Here is the real issue:

If you replace Jesus and the cross as the centre of your life and allegiance – with anything – even good things like godly preachers – a godly spouse – a godly church – then it is a form of idolatry.

**Only** Christ is worthy of our passion, our allegiance, our lives.

In fact the *second* danger is:

**The cross-emptying effect of human power and wisdom 13-17**

Verse 13:

Is Christ divided?

No! Again and again in his epistles Paul gives a picture of unity. 1 Corinthians 12, Galatians 3, Ephesians 4 – he pictures many diverse groups – different races, sexes, social statuses, religions – all finding their unity in Christ.

Listen to Ephesians 4:4–6:

There is **one** body and **one** Spirit—just as you were called to **one** hope at your calling—**one** Lord, **one** faith, **one** baptism, **one** God and Father of all, who is above all and through all and in all.

**One** body.

Not one body divided into parts.

The church is not the Paulites, the Petrites, the Apollos', the Baptists, the Presbyterians, the Asian church, the African church, the persecuted church, the affluent church. No it is **one** body.

What divides Christ? Finding your unity in any man, woman or group.

And then to make his point – Paul uses himself as an example.

Was Paul crucified for you?

No! So why are you giving me your allegiance?

In Galatians 2 we saw that it is at the cross that the great exchange occurs. Christ's death allows for us to be united with Him such that we receive His righteousness and He bears our sins and failings.

It is the cross that saves us, washes us, cleanses us and unites us.

No human leader can do that.

Or were you baptized in Paul's name?

No! Baptism not only signifies our union – it signifies our allegiance.

We are baptised in the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit.

We bow the knee and follow God alone.

Paul is directly addressing the Paul faction.

These are his guys – but he wants them to know that they are so wrong.

He is saying you are putting me in the place only Jesus must go.

And the Apollos faction, the Peter faction – every faction makes that same mistake.

This can only lead to divisions and cults.

Only Jesus and the cross can be at the centre of our lives.

Verses 14-16:

I thank God that I baptized none of you except Crispus and Gaius, so that no one can say you were baptized in my name. I did, in fact, baptize the household of Stephanas; beyond that, I don't recall if I baptized anyone else.

Paul says – wow – if you guys are prone to form little Paul factions – I am so glad I did not inadvertently fan that error by baptising more of you.

You might have been drawn even further into giving your allegiance to me if I baptised you.

I have been at a number of large well-known churches where the Senior Pastors do very few if any baptisms.

Why? Because they hear what I hear.

Oh, but I want to be baptised by Matt Chandler or John MacArthur.

I don't want to be baptised by some associate pastor – I want the big guy.

It is almost as if who baptises you matters more than what baptism means – and it means that you are united with Christ.

Over the years I have had a number of people delight in telling me who baptised them – it is almost a point of pride – I must be important because I was baptised by someone important.

And I feel like screaming – do you even know what baptism means? Don't you know that what really matters is that you were baptised into Christ?

Verse 17:

For Christ did not send me to baptize, but to preach the gospel—not with eloquent wisdom, so that the cross of Christ will not be emptied of its effect.

Now on one level Jesus did send Paul to baptise – He sent us all. In the Great Commission Jesus said:

Go, therefore, and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them ... and teaching them.

What Paul means is – Jesus did not send me to baptise in such a way that people place their allegiance in me.

It is not the act of baptism that is crucial – it is believing the gospel – and choosing to follow Christ.

Jesus sent me to preach the gospel of Christ and Him crucified.

Jesus sent me to preach the gospel of Christ as Lord – our allegiance is to Him.

And I am not to do it with eloquent speech – such that they are tempted to follow me rather than follow Jesus.

Basically, Paul says if my ministry makes men converts to Paul – rather than converts to Christ – the cross – which unites all men as one – is emptied of its power – I have made a little faction – I have divided the body of Christ – and the church is in serious trouble.

This is no minor issue. The cross saves. The cross unites us to Christ.

To empty the cross of its power is to cut ourselves off from our only source of hope.

So, what is the lesson here?

**The curse of  
awesome  
leadership is  
the temptation  
to give your  
allegiance to a  
man rather  
than to Christ**



**The curse of awesome leadership is the temptation to give your allegiance to a man rather than to Christ.**

History tells us this is unbelievably easy to do. And the godlier, the more talented, the more passionate the man is – the easier this is.

We think following the man is following Christ.

No – the truly godly will always declare – I must decrease and He must increase.

I am not fit to untie His sandal.

Look to Christ alone.

The church at Corinth was founded by Paul, pastored by Apollos. Timothy ministered there. Peter may have.

You might think this church would be awesome – it is not – it is awful. No one was moving across Greece to join this church.

This church became a laughing stock for all history.

What was the issue?

**Any gifted man can move allegiance from Christ to themselves – often unintentionally.**

You get factions, you get divisions, you get disagreements and you get sin.

Look – Paul, Apollos, Peter – I could not imagine the ministry of any of them failing to point the church to Christ – but they were so gifted – they inadvertently drew factions to themselves.

There are lessons in this for pastors and lessons in it for church members.

What are the lessons for pastors?

The lesson is not – be so bad in your ministry people have to look to Christ because they would never look to you.

The lesson is – make sure in everything – He gets the glory.

If I am honest – for too many years I evaluated my sermons by whether people liked them more than whether it drew people to grasp the majesty of Christ and the cross. That is grave pastoral danger territory.

What are the lessons for you?

Here are a couple of questions for you to assess where your allegiance lies:

- Would you come or not come to a particular service – morning, night, mid-week, at another church – based on who was preaching or not preaching?
- Would you base your decision to go on a church plant or not – based on who would lead it?
- Do your favourite pastors, authors, lecturers make you feel the glory of Christ more or the glory of human gifts more?

- When you are deciding on an issue or practice – do you place more weight on what your favourite pastor thinks than on the Bible?

Brothers and sisters, be very careful where you put your allegiance.

Anything but Christ is idolatry.

We all have our heroes and those who we love their ministries.

Listen to the best preachers on the planet – visit their churches – read their books – but if you find your heart drawn more to them than to Christ – you need to search your heart – maybe back off and listen a little more carefully to what they are saying than how they are saying it.

If you leave a sermon, a book, a lecture thinking – wow – that man is awesome – your heart heard the wrong message or you are listening to the wrong person.

If you leave a sermon, a book, a lecture thinking – wow – Christ is awesome – your heart heard the right message.

While the curse of awesome leadership can be giving your allegiance to a man rather than to Christ.

Perhaps you need to enjoy the blessing of more ordinary leadership if it encourages you to give your allegiance Christ rather than man.

I would take a faithful pastor with ordinary gifts who led me to the cross any day over a superstar who led me to himself.

Do not empty the cross of its power.

You will not make sense of this world apart from the cross.

You will not find strength to fight sin apart from the cross.

You will not find unity apart from the cross.

You will not find salvation apart from the cross.

Find the ministry that makes you glory in Christ and His cross and then you have found a truly awesome church.

## **The Curse Of Awesome Leadership (1 Corinthians 1:10-17 March 3, 2019)**

**Main Point:** The curse of awesome leadership is the temptation to give your allegiance to a man rather than to Christ.

### **General Questions:**

1. Why do you think we are drawn to the ministries of godly, gifted, charismatic men and women?
2. What are the blessings of their ministries?
3. What are the dangers of their ministries?
4. Why did factions form in the Corinthian church?
5. What is the basis of the unity Paul urges churches to have?
6. Why is placing anything other than Christ and His cross at the centre of our allegiance a form of idolatry?
7. Why are good things like godly pastors, godly spouses – such insidious and hard to detect forms of idolatry?
8. Why does unity based on anything other than Christ and His cross lead to divisions?
9. Do you think Paul, Peter and Apollos did anything to fan those factions?
10. Do you think Paul, Peter and Apollos could have done anything to stop those factions forming?
11. How do you combat those who attach their view to a man or a group?
12. How can a good pastor deflect allegiance from themselves to Christ?

### **Application Questions:**

1. What dangers from factions does a church like ours face? How do we overcome them?
2. Would you come or not come to a particular service – morning, night, mid-week, at another church – based on who was preaching or not preaching?

3. Would you base your decision to go on a church plant or not – based on who would lead it?
4. Do your favourite pastors, authors, lecturers make you feel the glory of Christ more or the glory of human gifts more?
5. When you are deciding on an issue or practice – do you place more weight on what your favourite pastor thinks than on the Bible?
6. What should you do if your allegiance is more to a man than to Christ?
7. What subtle forms of idolatry are you drawn to?
8. What can our church do to point you more to Christ in its services of worship?