

THIS CHANGES EVERYTHING

From Chaos to Order - 1 Cor. 11-14

5-7-23

In February of 2013, I was a senior at IU, engaged to Renee, wondering what the heck I was going to do to make good on my promise to her parents to provide for her and build a life together. So on this particular Friday morning I was doing my usual routine that semester of meeting up with some old roommates of mine at the Starbucks in the Student Union between classes, and I got a call from Tim Thompson asking me if I could come down that weekend to Camp Illiana to help him with a men's retreat. I asked how soon I'd need to leave and his response: "two hours". Well. I had class for the next hour, so I rushed home, threw some clothes in a bag and drove the hour and a half down to camp, which ended up being the catalyst that launched me into full-time vocational ministry.

I met a guy named Kevin Brimner at the retreat who was speaking that weekend, and he was looking for a worship pastor for his church in Newburgh, IN. The Spirit really pressed on me that weekend, in a more tangible way than I remember in any other time in my life, and so I pursued that opportunity. And in April, I said yes to that calling.

So then, ten years ago today, the first Sunday of May, early afternoon around 1pm, I stood in the chapel just down the hall, surrounded by family, friends, Tim Thompson, Tom Ellsworth, and several of our still now Elders, and I was formally ordained into ministry. If you'd have asked me then if on my ten year anniversary in ministry I'd be preaching at the church that helped form and shape so much of who I am today, I'd tell you that you were nuts. But God has a funny way of working.

You see, that phone call on that rainy Friday morning ten years ago changed everything. Saying yes in that moment changed everything. Those prayers & affirmations from the leaders of Sherwood Oaks ten years ago changed everything for Renee & I.

And that is all possible because, 2000 years ago, a rabbi from Nazareth changed everything.

If you've missed the last few weeks or are just checking in with us, we've been in this series now for 5 weeks studying through the book of 1 Corinthians, a letter Paul wrote to the early church in Corinth all about how to live in light of the resurrection of Jesus,

which is the pinnacle moment of our faith and the moment that was so significant that our entire calendar as a human race became oriented around the life of Jesus.

Let that sink in for a moment.

This week we're going to cover a lot of ground in the book, but we're going to look at the main point Paul was trying to convey and stay out of the weeds a bit here. We're going to be in chapters 11-14, so on your own, you should go back and read these chapters later. But let me catch us all up just a bit here. We've discussed topics from the resurrection of Jesus back on Easter (which is actually the end of the book) divisions in the church over which leader they liked best, distortions about sex & the holiness of our bodies, and last week how to lay down our rights in order to love each other well.

Which that word right there, LOVE, that is the focus again today. We really can't talk enough about it, because LOVE CHANGES EVERYTHING.

Literally. It shapes people, nations, schools, governments, cities, neighborhoods, careers, all of it! 2000 years ago this kind of love was a radically new concept. Yes, the Hebrews were given commands to "Love God, and love your neighbor as yourself." But during the Last Supper the night before Jesus was crucified, he issued a new command around love.

John 13:34 says this...

*"A new command I give you: Love one another.
As I have loved you, so you must love one another." (John 13:34)*

Andy Stanley, a pastor in Atlanta has this to say about that statement:

"This new brand of love was extraordinarily personal for the men seated around that table. When we read 'love as I have loved you,' we think of the cross. They didn't. They thought back over the previous three years. Each man in the room could remember a moment when Jesus had loved him particularly well."

For these disciples, this command moved "love" from an ethereal, abstract "be kind to your neighbor" to a tangible, practical "remember how I treated you when you did this thing" kind of love.

And the result of that new kind of love? Well Jesus continues...

*"By this everyone will know that you are my disciples,
if you love one another." (John 13:35)*

How many people have honestly come up to you in your life and said, "Hey, I saw how you treated that person" or "I heard how you spoke to that guy. You must follow Jesus."? I think if we were honest with ourselves, the answer is far fewer times than it should be. I believe a big part of the reason the world can't see our love for others is that, just like the Church in Corinth and so many others back then and since then, we at times struggle to love each other well.

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SO THAT WE CAN LOVE THE OTHER IN LIFE.**

Let me say that again, because that's really the key takeaway for the whole morning. If you hear nothing else, hear this:

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SO THAT WE CAN LOVE THE OTHER IN LIFE.**

Who is "the other"?

Anyone and everyone you run into outside the walls of this church. I mean, forget about loving those that we disagree with or who think differently than us if we as a Church can't seem to figure out how to get along with the people that we are supposed to share the most core, important things in common with.

So how do we start?

So let's dig into this text. For our purposes we're gonna start about halfway thru chapter 11 and hit all the main topics that Paul addresses here. This whole section of text is directed specifically at worship gatherings. Times when the church would gather for worship, teachings, meals, and serving together.

So right away in chapter 11 Paul addresses this communion time as having become a point of contention. Just to help paint some context here, most of the times it was commonplace in the early church to have a full blown meal as part of the worship gathering each week. Members would bring food & drink to share in and that was "communion". Common meal. In verse 20 he says this:

"So then, when you come together, it is not the Lord's Supper you eat, for when you are eating, some of you go ahead with your own private suppers. As a result, one person remains hungry and another gets drunk."

(1 Cor. 11:20-21)

You see, Those with more wealth and greater freedom of time were arriving early, gorging themselves, and then carrying on while the poorer working classes arrived later and had little left to eat or drink. Drunkenness and starvation. Not two words you would expect to hear as descriptive of a church event!

Then in chapter 12 Paul talks about the various spiritual gifts that are given to the church. Things such as wisdom, prophecy, speaking in tongues, healings, which some may sound strange to us today. To give us more accessible language today, Paul might have written things like some are gifted at hospitality, some at teaching, some at generosity, some at serving, some at leading, all traits that are talked about elsewhere as well. But regardless, part of the issues in Corinth were that some people were elevating particular gifts above others, and then using that scale to look down on or look up to particular people in the church. And this was causing more divisions and more chaos. So Paul spends this time uplifting each gift and each member of the Body of Christ, reminding them that the Church is in it together. In verse 24 he writes...

"But God has put the body together, giving greater honor to the parts that lacked it, so that there should be no division in the body, but that its parts should have equal concern for each other. If one part suffers, every part suffers with it; if one part is honored, every part rejoices with it." (1 Cor. 12:24-26)

You know, this right here for me is one of the key reasons why I think the Church today struggles to remain relevant presence in culture. We so often are great at celebrating others when they look, act, think, or speak the way that we do. But when they don't, when they do something a different way than we do, when they are wired to process the world differently or see the world differently, when people say things that maybe aren't sinful but aren't the way we would speak, we struggle to champion them. Maybe for you this difference arises in family traditions. Especially after marriage, merging two families into one new one can be tricky, balancing traditions and expectations. We like uniformity, but we struggle with unity in diversity. In theory, being around people that are exactly like you all the time SOUNDS nice, but inevitably is a short-lived happiness that results in a monochromatic life separated from the technicolor wonders of creation. So, as Paul encourages the church here, let's learn to celebrate the beauty in the diversity of God's creation.

Skip over chapter 13 for just a second, we'll come back to that, and look at chapter 14. This whole chapter deals with order of worship, or as we sometimes call it, the liturgy of the church gatherings. Paul talks about prophecy and tongues first, and how it is better to prophesy in church more than it is to have a bunch of people speaking in tongues. This is because no one else can understand tongues unless someone is interpreting. Prophecy would be more or less what we would equate today to the sermon or teaching time. He mentions how each person would come to church with something to say, and it was getting harder and harder to keep services flowing in an "easy-to-follow" fashion. And this in turn was making it hard and alienating for the new believers in the room or the "visitors" to follow along.

Let's read just this snippet of chapter 14 starting in verse 26....

"What then shall we say, brothers and sisters? When you come together, each of you has a hymn, or a word of instruction, a revelation, a tongue or an interpretation. Everything must be done so that the church may be built up." (1 Cor. 14:26)

Everything in their gatherings should serve a purpose, and that purpose was to "build up". The purpose of gathering as a church was to grow in faith and practice, not make it more complicated. Paul goes on to give some instructions specific to this time and place about how many people should speak and whatnot, then closes that section with these words...

"For God is not a God of disorder but of peace" (1 Cor. 14:33)

I love that. The ESV translation says it this way: God is not a God of confusion, but of peace. That's really where the title for these week comes from: chaos to order. Could easily be "confusion to peace" as well. That language of "chaos & order" goes all the way back to Creation in Genesis. That's what the Spirit of God did: brought order to the chaos. That's what the Holy Spirit was sent to do after Jesus' resurrection & ascension: help us bring order back to creation as the Church. Our gatherings should reflect that. They're meant to be flag-in-the-ground moments that center us on God's presence, His Word, His Kingdom, and His mission. Worship Gatherings should bring order to the chaos of our lives. If they aren't doing that, then either A: The church is doing something not helpful, or B: something in your life is stopping you from letting the Holy Spirit do a good work in you.

Sometimes it's both.

Churches aren't perfect. We as pastors and leaders aren't always going to do everything great on Sundays. There have been a lot of worship sets I've led that I've walked off afterwards and thought "whew, glad that's over and I hope everyone was sleeping!"

Let's talk about lights for a minute, just peel back the curtain on the creative process here that our team goes through when designing the lighting for services. You notice we have a fair amount of lighting on the stage and colors and stuff that we use each week in different ways. We use these tools to help accent the space and add creativity to the room. Why?

Just like any other form of art (architecture of ancient cathedrals, paintings, the music itself, poetry), its worship manifested in an artistic medium that reflects the beauty and creative nature of God.

In short: God is creative, he made us to reflect that creativity. This is one way we do it.

Now I know it's not everyone's "cup of tea", and I don't expect it to be. Each creative element speaks to some people and not to others. That's fine. But in order to not be a distraction and to be the best stewards we can with these tools, we set rules with our different lights of how we should program them. Things like "make sure the house lights are at least on 20% brightness at this point, and make sure the moving lights don't point directly at the congregation for more than a passing moment, and don't run the blinders at 100%. Yes, they are called blinders...and here's why.

Demonstrate + tell story of first dynamic lighting moments in Newburgh.

So while ideas and moments in church don't always go the way pastors intend, we do take Paul's call to "build up" seriously, and do our best to steward this time together well, learning each week. That's why our guiding vision for our worship arts ministry and really for our worship gatherings is this: we want to create "transformational spaces" & "clear pathways for people to respond to the Gospel." We want people to experience Jesus, because that's where transformation really happens, and when the Spirit moves, we want to be ready, not a hindrance, so we work hard to make sure our language and action steps and team members are clear and available to everyone whether you've been attending church for your whole life or you started coming today.

That's one way we work to love people well in our church.

And I've seen this church love well in so many ways. Both "one another" and "the other".

I've seen that love in Pastors & Elders who gave their time to invest in a young, scrappy college student with aspirations of being a worship leader. It's still wild to me that I'm leading & serving alongside so many who were here 14 years ago when I first came to Sherwood Oaks as a freshman at IU.

I've seen that love in Tim who not only allowed me to intern for a summer here, but let me live with him during that time. (Don't ask him about what kind of roommate I was!)

I've seen that love in guys like Kevin Brimner who gave a 22-year-old naive student a shot at leadership.

I've seen that love in so many who financially and prayerfully supported our family while we helped to plant a church in Portland for two years.

I've seen that love in leaders like Matt Limbrick who, when he was on the worship arts team, hired me on the heels of a tough season and said "just lead worship. I got your back with everything else."

So as we look at all that Paul has said in this section, and really in this whole letter to Corinth, I think we can sum up Paul's words to the church in this question. This question really does change the whole way we approach any situation in life. It should cause us to stop and think, or to RETHINK our actions...

What does love require?

Right in the middle of this section of text we've been looking over, chapter 13, Paul penned some of the most world-changing words. This is "the Way", as it was called then, that outlived the greatest empire the world had known in Rome. This was the concept that left such a profound mark on human history that calendars, holidays, governments, and cultures reordered themselves around it. This was the "new command" that Jesus had given those disciples in the Upper Room fleshed out into practical words for the new baby church that was forming to live by.

Listen to these words...

If I speak in the tongues of men or of angels, but do not have love, I am only a resounding gong or a clanging cymbal. If I have the gift of prophecy and can fathom all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have a faith that can move mountains, but do not have love, I am nothing. If I give all I possess to the poor and give over my body to hardship that I may boast, but do not have love, I gain nothing.

Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. It does not dishonor others, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs. Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres.

Love never fails. But where there are prophecies, they will cease; where there are tongues, they will be stilled; where there is knowledge, it will pass away. For we know in part and we prophesy in part, but when completeness comes, what is in part disappears. When I was a child, I talked like a child, I thought like a child, I reasoned like a child. When I became a man, I put the ways of childhood behind me. For now we see only a reflection as in a mirror; then we shall see face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall know fully, even as I am fully known.

*And now these three remain: faith, hope and love.
But the greatest of these is love. (1 Cor. 13)*

This isn't just catchy prose to read at your wedding. This wasn't even geared towards married couples. This is the strategy that rewrote human history and brought order to the chaos. Love. So profound right? It sounds so simple. Just love one another? That's the big secret???

Then why aren't we, 2000 years later, seeing "every knee bow and every tongue confess Jesus Christ as Lord?"

Could it be that we still as followers of Jesus struggle to love one another? Maybe that's why there's so much chaos still in this world. If we truly believe Jesus changes everything, and that the Church is meant to be the bridge between the Hope of the future Kingdom and the reality of the present brokenness, then I'd say the Church has got some work to do. Because Jesus isn't the problem. He did his part, and left us pretty clear, simple instructions on how to finish the work:

Love one another as I have loved you.

We can't love the other if we can't love one another.

The message and hope of the Resurrection won't change everything THRU us if it doesn't first change everything IN us. And love for our fellow believer, regardless of preferences, differences, or context, is a great indicator of the Resurrection at work in our lives, partnered with our love for those outside of the Church. And Jesus promised that, after he ascended to Heaven the Helper, the Holy Spirit, would come and

empower his Church to live as He had commanded them. The very presence of God would take up residence in our bodies, in our lives, and would work through us to finish the work of Creation and bring order to all the chaos that still runs rampant in the world. And over the next three weeks, we're gonna talk more about the Holy Spirit, so make plans now to join us for those conversations.

Look at these words from Paul again for a moment...

*****not read aloud, just on screen*****

Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. It does not dishonor others, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs. Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres. (1 Cor. 13:4-7)

As I was reflecting on my ten years in vocational ministry, the beginning and end of this passage struck me. "Patience" and "perseverance". That sums up so much of what love is for me. It's patience and perseverance. There have been a ton of high, mountain-top moments in ministry for me, and I celebrate that there has been so much good I've witnessed already. But there have also been a lot of valley-low moments that I've had to lean into the Holy Spirit for strength and endurance. Nothing says "love" more than enduring for the long haul with a community of people, wrestling through the tough times and giving thanks in the good times. I'm so grateful to be at a place in ministry where I'm staring down the next 30-40 years in ministry, and I see so much potential in this church for that time. And our family is here for it all.

Bring it on!

So I ask again: what does love require of you?

Jesus said: Love one another as I have loved you.

By this, the world will know you are my disciples.

By this, the other will come to be part of the "one another".

And that changes everything.