



## Reflections

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*1 Corinthians 1:10-18*

### Scottie Gonzalez

It was my first summer workout with the ESD high school football team and it was the summer before freshman year so I didn't know anyone at my new school. My brother, Steven, introduced me to the coaches and other players, and I soon realized that I was no longer a big eighth grade football player, but now a small freshman starting from the bottom again. It was 4 pm and Coach Sanders blew the whistle and told the skills players to put on cleats and go to the field to run routes and do all the fun stuff, and told the linemen to go inside to lift weights, and workout until they threw up like linemen are supposed to do. I was on my way to the field when I realized that I was the only one without cleats. I wasn't sure what to do so I decided to try to catch Steven before he got inside and ask him what to do.

What I think happened next was, coach Sawyer, the defensive line coach in charge of the indoor workouts, took one look at me without my cleats, then took a look at my brother who was twice my size, and thought to himself "Hmm, Steven is big, so Scottie should come inside so he can double in size and play linemen just like him."

Not knowing his master plan, I agreed to go inside for the day and then join the receivers the next day when I had cleats. The summer went by and by the time the season came I was still working out with the linemen. I had played defensive line in middle school so I thought that doubling in size wasn't the worst thing that could happen, so I just went along with it and played defensive end on JV. If my coach wanted me to try to gain weight and be a lineman like my brother, then I wasn't going to argue because in the end, our goal was the same, I wanted to do whatever was necessary for my team to win.

Two years went by with me as an undersized lineman, working out to try to put on 100 pounds. The problem didn't come until my Junior year when I was ready to be on varsity. Looking at myself now, no I surprisingly did not reach 260 pounds, so coach Sawyer's plan to make me change from a skinny receiver to a large lineman surprisingly didn't work out.

Our common goal, for our team to win, was still the same so I had to give up on his vision for me to be an enormous lineman and face the fact that I was skinny. I finally gave in and moved to receiver. I had much more fun and felt that my contribution to our team was even greater when I did my part as a receiver, and let the big guys do their part as linemen. Rather than trying to change something that I didn't have control over, like my metabolism, I worked at being the best receiver I could so that I could do my part for the team.

In our scripture, Paul starts off by saying “Now I appeal to you, brothers and sisters, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that all of you be in agreement and that there be no divisions among you, but that you be united in the same mind and the same purpose.” He is calling on us, as Christians, to unite on this common purpose of following Jesus. Paul then asks, “Has Christ been divided?”

Following the inauguration on Friday, I think that this is the perfect message that our country needs to hear. Because no, Christ has not been divided, yet our nation seems divided. We seem to join a side and decide that our way is right and everyone else is wrong. We forget that we are all one nation with a common goal. We all want the best for our country.

It is sometimes difficult for us to understand why someone might have a different vision of this country that they believe is right, while we believe something different.

When my coach thought that I should gain 100 pounds, at first I tried to change for him and conform to his vision. It took me two years, but I finally realized that our goals *should* be the same, because we were on the same team. His goal was to change me completely, but my goal was to work to change what I could to help my team win. It took courage, but I needed to remind him of what our common goal should be, and then put in the work to do what I could for this goal.

Paul asks, has our common purpose changed as Christians. When we realize that we are all brothers and sisters with the same God, we should have no division. Paul can't stop war all together, or break down all division, but he can remind his people that they need to be “united in the same mind and the same purpose”. Sometimes all we can do is remind others of what our shared goal and purpose should be, then continue to work on what we can control to reach our common goal.

## **Jayda Parrish**

As I prepared for this sermon I spent a while trying to figure out where I could even begin. So I did what any other teenager my age would do and turned to the internet for a little bit of guidance. In the scripture of Corinthians, the apostle Paul writes to Christians living in Corinth and he tells them this: “Now I beg you, brothers, through the name of our Lord’ and that you all speak the same thing and that there be no divisions among you, but that you be perfected together in the same mind in the same judgement.

In relativity to our world today, as much as we would like to believe that we are at the climax of opening our hearts and minds toward the opinions of others, we have yet to find a method to do this that requires us to actually listen to what those with opposing views have to say without placing judgement on those who do so. We would like to believe that we are receptive to the thoughts shared with us that completely differ from our own. With beliefs like these, it can be hard for us to see what could potentially unify us rather than divide us. I believe it is the willingness to compromise that makes unity possible.

In Corinthians 1:10-12, the unity of the church at Corinth is threatened by dissensions. Paul's words suggest, not that groups have separated and are meeting apart, but that cliques are manifesting themselves within a single congregation. His main concern is clear: no clique can own Christ or claim to be his favorite; no apostles word or action can eclipse Christ's lordship. Ten times already in this letter Paul has named Christ. This name alone is the rallying point for Christian unity.

So here again we come to this idea of unity, and not just unity by itself. Christian unity. According to Merriam Webster, unity is the quality of state of being made one, but Christian unity is more complex. In Galatians 5:13-14. Paul writes, "For you were called to freedom, brothers and sisters; only do not use your freedom as an opportunity for self-indulgence, but through love become slaves to one another. For the whole law is summed up in a single commandment, 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.'" Christian unity includes affectionate love, not just sacrifice for those you don't like. It is a feeling of endearment.

In the Parrish household, it is not uncommon for my sister Jasmine and I to have disagreements from time to time. I'm sure my parents would agree and they might even share a few stories after church. The point is, we are sisters first. Yes by blood, but also through the spirit of God. And Yes there is absolutely no way we will ever agree on everything we feel so passionately about, but we will always find common ground. 1. Because we have established a level of respect that we each have for each other. 2. Because we were raised to believe that civil disagreements do involve a civil discussion and 3 ...consequences would soon follow.

What if everyone of us thought of each other in that same light? If we are all one in spirit, we should want the same in abundance of unifying love. During the time of the first Christians, this unity began in the small things. The few people who wanted to live wholeheartedly for Jesus had to learn to pray for each other, love one another, forgive and bear with one another. They had to learn not to cling to their own opinions and understanding, but instead, together, to seek light and wisdom from God and the Bible. From there, the little church could continue to grow. However, as soon as they stopped striving for unity, all sorts of churches, denominations, and movements gradually developed.

In a world so divided, it can be hard to hear the cries of those in desperate need of your attention. Because we spend so much time arguing with each other about seemingly important things, that can take priority over the things that really matter. Each other. The sake of other human beings. So you see, maybe an unwillingness to compromise, comes from a lack of integration in relation to a lack of contrasting ideas with people who challenge our perspective. Instead, provide and be open to receiving knowledge from those who offer an opposing position.

In closing I would like to share one of my favorite quotes spoken by John F. Kennedy, "We do not seek the unanimity that comes to those who water down all issues to the lowest common denominator - or to those who conceal their differences behind fixed smiles - or to those who measure unity by standards of popularity and affection, instead of trust and respect. We are allies. This is a partnership, not an empire. We are bound to have differences and disappointments - and we are equally bound to bring them out into the open, to settle them where they can be settled, and to respect each other's views when

they cannot be settled. God has instilled in each one of us love for one another. How will we embrace this love through unity in diversity?"

Thanks be to God.

## **Brandon Green**

### **Unity**

In the scripture we have heard today, Paul calls for there to be a cease of needless divisions in the church as the people of the congregation are united in the purpose of Christ. Divisions limit the power of Christ and weaken the overall effectiveness of God's influence on humanity, according to Paul. To divide those who are so bounded by a shared love of Christ, with divisions based on negative biases and irrational ungrounded prejudice, is a grave counterproductive mistake in building a strong community around God.

A church that is unified through God, is one that has the strength to influence its community and set an example. But with dissensions that disrupt unity, the strength of a church as a whole will fall and its community will follow.

For a historical example, negative divisions were used by European fascist regimes during the first half of the 20th century to weaken the power of the people. Citizens were separated by creed, race, religion, and political affiliation allowing the general public, the influencers of the political system, to be taken advantage of. Once separated from unity, the people of Europe were weak enough to be overpowered by ruthless dictators.

The politics of our time, to a lesser extent, also show similar sentiments to those that Paul was warning the church of. When I see news and media centered around political discourse, I typically do not see understanding. I don't see people using supposedly "unnecessary" tools such as perspective or calm, collected rationality. Instead I see one sided conversation, an intense lack of perspective, and people on all sorts of sides of the spectrum not only willing to disregard understanding other, but eager to refuse understanding others. And these citizens claim they want to help our country? Doesn't that seem somewhat hypocritical? A country progresses through understanding and peaceful discourse. And these select few individuals, unfortunately, seem to have forgotten the basic goal that our country lives in peace and prosperity. And while these divisions might seem small at the time, I advise you to remember, that it took some sharp attention to these divisions to predict their potentially dangerous outcomes throughout history.

This is what Paul warns about in 1 Corinthians 1 verses 10 through 18. Paul is saying that divisions that work against unity can work against God and the power of the Christian community. That is why this scripture, this theme of today is so important. It can be summed up in a simple equation: unity in Christ equals power in Christ, which means as the math is further simplified, unity equals power. Before you turn away from your neighbor, think about the good that it would do for God and the church to perhaps lend an ear and listen.