

The Church of the Servant King

www.cotsk.org

Survey of the Bible Series – Paul’s First Letter to the Corinthians

(SB_1Cor_Chap1B)

ALLEGIANCES TO OTHER THAN CHRIST IS SINFUL (1:10-17)

10 Now I exhort you, brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you all agree and that there be no divisions among you, but that you be made complete in the same mind and in the same judgment. 11 For I have been informed concerning you, my brethren, by Chloe’s people, that there are quarrels among you. 12 Now I mean this, that each one of you is saying, "I am of Paul," and "I of Apollos," and "I of Cephas," and "I of Christ." 13 Has Christ been divided? Paul was not crucified for you, was he? Or were you baptized in the name of Paul? 14 I thank God that I baptized none of you except Crispus and Gaius, 15 so that no one would say you were baptized in my name. 16 Now I did baptize also the household of Stephanas; beyond that, I do not know whether I baptized any other. 17 For Christ did not send me to baptize, but to preach the gospel, not in cleverness of speech, so that the cross of Christ would not be made void.

In this pericope, Paul addresses a specific situation that had arisen in Corinth. Paul is not addressing the subject of necessary division of believers driven by a concern for doctrinal purity. To confuse the two is to distort the passage into addressing a topic it does not address.

The fact that Paul opens his letter by addressing allegiances to human leaders is very important to highlight. It is not that the quarrels were the most significant error in the local church in Corinth; rather, it is that the root of this situation resided in self-righteous motivations shaded by the culture of Corinth. Through the emergence of cliques and sectarianism, the believers in Corinth were becoming focused upon superficial matters to the detriment of the big picture – the divine perspective. They were forming allegiances based upon human approbation and power moves instead of focusing on the exaltation of Christ. Paul devotes the bulk of four chapters (1:18-4:21) to this subject.

The presence of such false motivation as a pattern of behavior in these believer’s lives was foundational to all of the other issues that Paul will address. All of the “carnal” practices of the Corinthian believers reflect the human tendency toward personal approbation as a means of measuring approval from God.

Principle: Attempts to establish human power systems through the formation of cliques are driven by insecurity and the desire for approbation from other humans.

Principle: The carnal believer will consciously or unconsciously evaluate his or her status before God based upon his or her perception of how he or she is received by others.

Principle: At the core of Christian integrity is the presence of a desire that Christ be exalted through Christ-like thought and behavior.

Why did this problem arise in Corinth? There are several reasons. First, the Corinthians were Greeks and Greek culture valued logic, philosophy and debate – thus, people were used to aligning themselves with different schools of thought led by prominent individuals. Second, these believers had pluralistic cultural baggage that shaped the human viewpoint thinking that needed to be eradicated by adjustment to the Truth in Phase 2 of their Christian lives. Third, after Paul

visited Corinth for 18 months and sailed from Greece, other prominent Christian leaders visited Corinth who are named, i.e. Apollos and Cephas (Peter).

After Paul departed from Ephesus after his stay in Corinth, he sailed to Jerusalem. He later returned to Ephesus on his third missionary journey. While he was away from Ephesus, a believing Jew named Apollos from Alexandria, Egypt came to Ephesus and impressed Paul's companions, Priscilla and Aquila with his teaching that Jesus was the Messiah (Acts 18:24-28). However, Apollos had not heard of several things that were unique to the Pauline teaching and doctrine. For instance, Apollos did not know of the baptism of the Spirit that identified all believers with Christ. After receiving clarification on these matters from Aquila and Priscilla, Apollos evidently visited Corinth and impressed a number of Corinthians with his eloquent speaking skills – perhaps in significant contrast to Paul's admitted "contemptible" delivery style (2 Cor 10:10). Some Corinthians wanted to be associated with Apollos because of his skill set no doubt since such skills were highly valued in Greek culture.

Others wanted to remain loyal to the founder of the church in Corinth and identified themselves with Paul. At some point, Peter, or others associated with Peter, may have also visited this church in Corinth. Apollos was not an apostle; whereas Peter was an apostle. The evidence of Paul's apostolic credentials were based solely upon a vision that had been shared by no one else. However, this was not so with Peter. Perhaps this is why Paul mentions in 1 Corinthians 9:2 that the very presence of the church in Corinth was the seal of his apostleship in the Lord. Nevertheless, Paul had nothing to say of Apollos but positive comments (1 Cor 16:12).

Finally, there was another group in the church at Corinth that self-righteously claimed the name of Christ Himself – not in the sense that all Christians might, but in a partisan sense. Paul recognized the self-righteous motivation in all of this and highlighted it as being at the root of many of the other issues which had arisen.

Paul mentions water baptism in particular and evidently water baptism was one of the means by which these believers aligned themselves with Paul, Apollos, or Peter. It is fairly obvious also that Paul de-emphasizes the significance of water baptism since he admits to having not baptized but a few and that he was not sent to baptize. This passage has led me to conclude that while water baptism can be performed during the present dispensation, it is really a practice that was part of the Jewish program and it was carried over into the present dispensation during the period of transition – a period during which progressive revelation was rendering certain practices and spiritual gifts unnecessary. Another reason that Paul did not baptize was probably related to his desire to keep Christ central to his ministry.

Crispus was the ruler of the synagogue in which Paul preached when he first came to Corinth (Acts 18:8). Gaius may be the same person as Titius Justus – a Gentile convert who lived next door to the synagogue and opened his home to the church after the Christians could no longer meet in the synagogue (Acts 18:7; Rom 16:23).

CHRIST IS THE POWER AND WISDOM OF GOD (1:18-25)

18 For the word of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God. 19 For it is written,

"I WILL DESTROY THE WISDOM OF THE WISE,
AND THE CLEVERNESS OF THE CLEVER I WILL SET ASIDE."

20 Where is the wise man? Where is the scribe? Where is the debater of this age? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of the world? 21 For since in the wisdom of God the world through its wisdom did not come to know God, God was well-pleased through the foolishness of the message preached to save those who believe. 22 For indeed Jews ask for signs and Greeks search for

The Church of the Servant King

www.cotsk.org

Page 2 of 4

wisdom; 23 but we preach Christ crucified, to Jews a stumbling block and to Gentiles foolishness, 24 but to those who are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God. 25 Because the foolishness of God is wiser than men, and the weakness of God is stronger than men.

Paul set up a contrast between cleverness of speech and the Cross in verse 17. Next he developed this contrast with a series of arguments.

Boasting in men impacts the essence of the gospel. Paul highlights the fact that the gospel is not a form of *sophia* (human wisdom) valued by the Greeks. The message of the Gospel – that of a crucified Messiah – does not appeal to human wisdom (1:18-25) – then or now.

Second, believers in such “folly” are not considered wise in the eyes of humanity (1:26-31).

Third, Paul's preaching was not impressive in its human wisdom, but it bore powerful results (2:1-5). The power (*dunamis*) of which Paul spoke is invisible, but has visible results or effects. This is why Paul connects the word *dunamis* with *pneumatikos* (a word having the basic meaning of wind or spirit) in 1 Corinthians 2:4.

4 And my message and my preaching were not in persuasive words of wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power. (1 Cor 2:4)

Paul argues, with Old Testament support, that human self-sufficiency, human approbation and the power systems of the cosmos has always been contrary to God's method of working. Such things exalt and glorify their authors – not God.

This passage is one of three key discourses in 1 Corinthians. These three discourses are as follows:

- The wisdom of the Cross (1:18-2:16)
- The nature of the Christian community – unity within diversity (12:4-13:13)
- The resurrection (15)

Each of these passages occurs at an important point within the overall structure of the letter. The discourse on wisdom, situated prominently at the beginning of the letter, supports Paul's urgent appeals for unity (1:10 – 4:21).

The discourse on Christian community returns to the theme of Christian unity after Paul addresses specific problems that are symptomatic of the false theology addressed at the outset of the letter.

The discourse on resurrection, a response to those who claim that 'there is no resurrection of the dead' (15:12), is located prominently at the end of the letter.

The Jews characteristically asked for signs as demonstrations of God's power (cf. Matt. 16:1-4; Mark 8:11-12; John 2:18).

1 The Pharisees and Sadducees came up, and testing Jesus, they asked Him to show them a sign from heaven. 2 But He replied to them, "When it is evening, you say, 'It will be fair weather, for the sky is red.' 3 "And in the morning, 'There will be a storm today, for the sky is red and threatening. 'Do you know how to discern the appearance of the sky, but cannot discern the signs of the times? 4 "An evil and adulterous generation seeks after a sign; and a sign will not be given it, except the sign of Jonah." And He left them and went away. (Matt 16:1-4)

Jesus' executioners hung Him on a tree, the sure proof to the Jews that God had cursed Him (Deut 21:23; Gal 3:13).

23 His corpse shall not hang all night on the tree, but you shall surely bury him on the same day (for he who is hanged is accursed of God), so that you do not defile your land which the LORD your God gives you as an inheritance. (Deut 21:23)

13 Christ redeemed us from the curse of the Law, having become a curse for us-- for it is written, "CURSED IS EVERYONE WHO HANGS ON A TREE" (Gal 3:13)

To anyone relying upon human viewpoint and wisdom, the message of the Cross seemed to be a demonstration of weakness, namely, Jesus' inability to save Himself from death. The Greeks typically respected wisdom as they longed for understanding of why the world operates the way it does.

However, the message of the Cross did not appear to make sense as a source of power and victory. How could anyone believe in and submit to One who was apparently not smart enough to save Himself from suffering execution as a criminal when He was not one? Furthermore how could anyone look to such an One as a teacher of wisdom? This manifested a lack of focus upon the resurrection in the thinking of these Corinthian believers and is the reason Paul addresses this topic in great detail in chapter 15.

THE WISDOM OF GOD IS THE FOOLISHNESS OF THE WORLD (1:26-31)

26 For consider your calling, brethren, that there were not many wise according to the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble; 27 but God has chosen the foolish things of the world to shame the wise, and God has chosen the weak things of the world to shame the things which are strong, 28 and the base things of the world and the despised God has chosen, the things that are not, so that He may nullify the things that are, 29 so that no man may boast before God.

30 But by His doing you are in Christ Jesus, who became to us wisdom from God, and righteousness and sanctification, and redemption, 31 so that, just as it is written, "LET HIM WHO BOASTS, BOAST IN THE LORD."

In order to support his argument, Paul turned to the Corinthians themselves. Their very conversion to Christ as nobodies in this world was serving to contradict the wisdom of this world. Paul's logic is rooted in Jeremiah 9:23-24.

23 Thus says the LORD, "Let not a wise man boast of his wisdom, and let not the mighty man boast of his might, let not a rich man boast of his riches; 24 but let him who boasts boast of this, that he understands and knows Me, that I am the LORD who exercises lovingkindness, justice and righteousness on earth; for I delight in these things," declares the LORD. (Jer 9:23-24)