

1 CORINTHIANS 1

The Folly Of Division

CHAPTER OUTLINE

1. Greeting (vss. 1-3)
2. Thanksgiving for what God has done (vss. 4-9)
3. The folly of division (vss. 10-31)
 - » Exhortation for unity (vs. 10)
 - » The issue defined (vss. 11-12)
 - » Their quarreling was not a result of Paul's work (vss. 13-17)
 - » Their quarreling was revealed as foolishness (vss. 18-31)
 - God's wisdom was deemed foolishness by men (vss. 18-25)
 - The wise had not been called (vs. 26)
 - Thus, boasting should only be in God! (vss. 27-31)

GREETING (VS. 1-3)

Paul first introduces himself.

4. He is "Called... by the will of God", as opposed to self appointment. (see Gal. 1:1; 2Cor. 1:1.)
5. He is "called as an apostle". Paul's apostleship did not come from any man, it came from God.
6. It would seem that some in Corinth were challenging Paul's authority and apostleship. See 4:1-5; 4:15; 9:1-2.

Paul is accompanied by Sosthenes. This could be the same man mentioned in Acts 18:17, but it is impossible to be certain.

Paul next addresses the church. Note how Paul's description of them strikes at many of their problems:

1. of God, not Paul or Apollos. Cf. 3:9.
2. sanctified in Christ Jesus, so why are they engaged in unholy living? See 6:11.
3. saints by calling, Paul was called to be an apostle, they are called to be saints.
4. with all who in every place
 - » Lenski: Here there is the true antidote for

individualism and sectionalism. We are not to be Christians just by ourselves but members together with all the saints of God.

- » An important point we will see is that Paul taught the same thing everywhere (See 4:17; 11:16; 14:33; 14:36.) The will of God in these matters was not limited to a particular time or culture.

THANKSGIVING (VS. 4-9)

Note: "Paul does not give thanks for qualities in the Corinthians like faith and love (contrast 1 Thess. 1:2-3), but for what God's grace has in fact done in them." (Leon Morris in the Tyndale commentary)

What God had done for them...

1. His grace in Christ Jesus (vs. 4)
2. Enriched in all speech and knowledge (vs. 5)
 - » Some see this is as the miraculous speech and knowledge that existed among the Corinthians.
 - » Seems more likely that this speech and knowledge references that of Paul, Apollos and other teachers.
3. Testimony concerning Christ was confirmed in you (vs. 6). By their response to the gospel, cf. Acts 18:8.
4. They are not lacking in any gift, awaiting the revelation of Jesus (vs. 7)
 - » While it may be speaking of miraculous gifts (see 12:4), could also be speaking of the gifts associated with salvation, see Romans 5:15.
 - » The gifts we receive here are a prelude to what awaits, cf. Rom 8:23; Eph. 1:13-14.
5. They would be confirmed blameless (vs. 8)
6. Because God is faithful! It was through Him that they were called into fellowship.
 - » Contrast with vs. 10.

- » Point: this faithful God had brought them into His fellowship, He would confirm them to the end. Would they be faithful to Him?

DIVISION IN THE CORINTHIAN CHURCH (VSS. 10-31)

The Problem Revealed (vss 10-12)

1. Opening appeal for unity (vs. 10)
 - » After all, they were all called into the same fellowship (vs. 9)
 - » Interesting wordplay: divisions (schismata) has a literal rendering of “tear or rent”, as in a garment being torn. Paul’s desire was that they be “made complete” is the same word used for the mending of nets in Matt. 4.21. So, while they are in danger of being torn apart, Paul’s aim is that they be mended back together.
 - » As we will note in the next few verses, their division was based on preferred teachers, and no doubt the perversion of doctrine within each group that led to them not being of the same judgment on many issues. But, this goes against the basic principles of the gospel and our fellowship in Christ where we are to strive for the unity of the spirit (cf. Eph. 4.3).
 - » Contrast Paul’s words here with the prevalent ecumenical theology of today. Differences are celebrated, rather than examined in Scripture. Unscriptural teachings are shrugged off as being OK for that group to practice. A far cry from Paul’s plea to unity among believers. This is not to say that brethren will agree 100% on all things, but their aim is to agree as the Scriptures are studied and understood.
2. Rather than a united church, there were quarrels in Corinth (vss. 11-12).
 - » Quarrels are listed among the “deeds of the flesh” in Galatians 5.19-21 (translated as discord or disputes in many translations). A far cry from being in the “same mind and in the same judgment”
 - » What brought about these quarrels? Vs. 12

would indicate that they arose from preference over teachers.

- Note: this was not the doing of the teachers as Paul will make clear over the next couple of chapters.
- Likely that preference was based on the teacher that taught each convert the gospel. Paul was first to labor in Corinth (Acts 18.1-17) and was followed by Apollos (Acts 18.27-28). It is doubtful that Peter had travelled to Corinth at this time, but Jewish Christians coming from Jerusalem may have comprised the party of Cephas. For them, Peter stood out as the greatest teacher, and perhaps in their opinion more “Jewish”. The party of Christ may simply stand for the rest, those who had not been directly taught by Paul, Apollos or Peter. It is clear that Paul views them as a particular party and not Christians simply trying to follow Christ (which is what Paul will advocate).

These quarrels were not promoted by Paul (vss. 13-17)

1. It may be that the Corinthian church still viewed themselves as united. After all, they hadn’t split into different assemblies. So, Paul’s words may have come as quite a shock: “Has Christ been divided?” Of course, Christ is not divided, but their quarrels were pointing to an allegiance to something other than Christ.
2. Paul used his experience among them to show that this problem was not created by him, and by extension any of Paul’s fellow laborers. They were not baptized in Paul’s name, in fact Paul’s mission wasn’t to baptize any of them!
 - » One cannot escape the importance of baptism in this passage. This was the first point in Paul’s argument about unity in Christ. They were baptized into Christ’s name, expressing fellowship and allegiance to Him. They were not baptized in Paul’s name, or in any other name. Paul never said baptism was optional or that one could be

in a relationship with Christ without being baptized.

- » In fact, Paul had baptized very few of them. His mission wasn't to baptize people, but to preach the truth of the gospel to them. Very many of them were baptized as a result of hearing Paul's preaching, but he had personally baptized very few, a further indication that he was not trying to build a personal following.
- » This passage also helps to illustrate the dangers of reading a verse outside of its context. Some have used vs. 17 as proof that baptism is unimportant, that only the hearing of the gospel and faith matter. However, when read in context, one clearly sees that Paul was emphasizing his mission of preaching, preaching that would lead to someone being baptized "in Christ's name" and not his own.

The Foolishness Of Their Quarreling (vss. 18-31)

1. The gospel of Christ (God's wisdom) seems foolish to men (vss. 18-25).
 - » The gospel did not make sense to man. We recall how the Athenians mocked the notion of the resurrection (Acts 17.32). An inscription is still visible in Rome of a Christian worshipping a crucified figure that has the body of man with the head of an ass. The inscription reads "Alexamenos worships his god." God's wisdom for redeeming man is mocked as foolishness.
 - » The tragic result of "wise" man rejecting the foolishness of God is that man rejects the one thing that can save him. The Jews rejected the message of the cross because Jesus did not meet their expectation of the Messiah. They stumbled over the cross! The Gentiles viewed Christ's crucifixion and resurrection as foolishness, completely opposed to their wisdom. Both Jew and Greek had become foolish because they rejected God's salvation.
 - » But God's "foolishness" is the manifestation of His power and wisdom. His power in rescuing man from sin, His wisdom in

making a way for all men to be saved.

2. They could see that not many wise had been called (vs. 26)
 - » In pride they had quarreled among each other. Paul sought to humble them. "Look at yourselves! You're not the best and the brightest, at least not according to man's valuation. But you responded to the gospel!"
 - » Note: Paul is not saying that only the foolish had been called. The preceding verses make clear that the gospel had been preached to all, but the wise of this world rejected it's call. These "foolish" Corinthians had accepted the gospel invitation.
 - » Now, they needed to humbly continue to follow the teaching of Christ!
3. Thus, Boasting Should Only Be in God! (vss. 27-31)
 - » This builds off of Paul's point in vs. 26. The Corinthians were not the wealthiest, the most noble or wisest of men. But they had been saved by the gospel of Christ.
 - » Thus, they should not boast in any man! They should not boast in themselves, for salvation had come from God. Note how Paul described them as "foolish, weak, base, despised and "things that are not" in vss. 27-28. That's what they were in the world. But now in Christ they have become part of true wisdom, righteousness, sanctification and redemption (vs. 31). There is no room for man's boasting, save boasting in the Lord (vs. 30-31; Jeremiah 9.23-24).
 - » Furthermore, they should not boast in Paul, Apollos or Cephas (vs. 12), because they were only servants of Christ. Paul will elaborate on this in chapters 2-3.