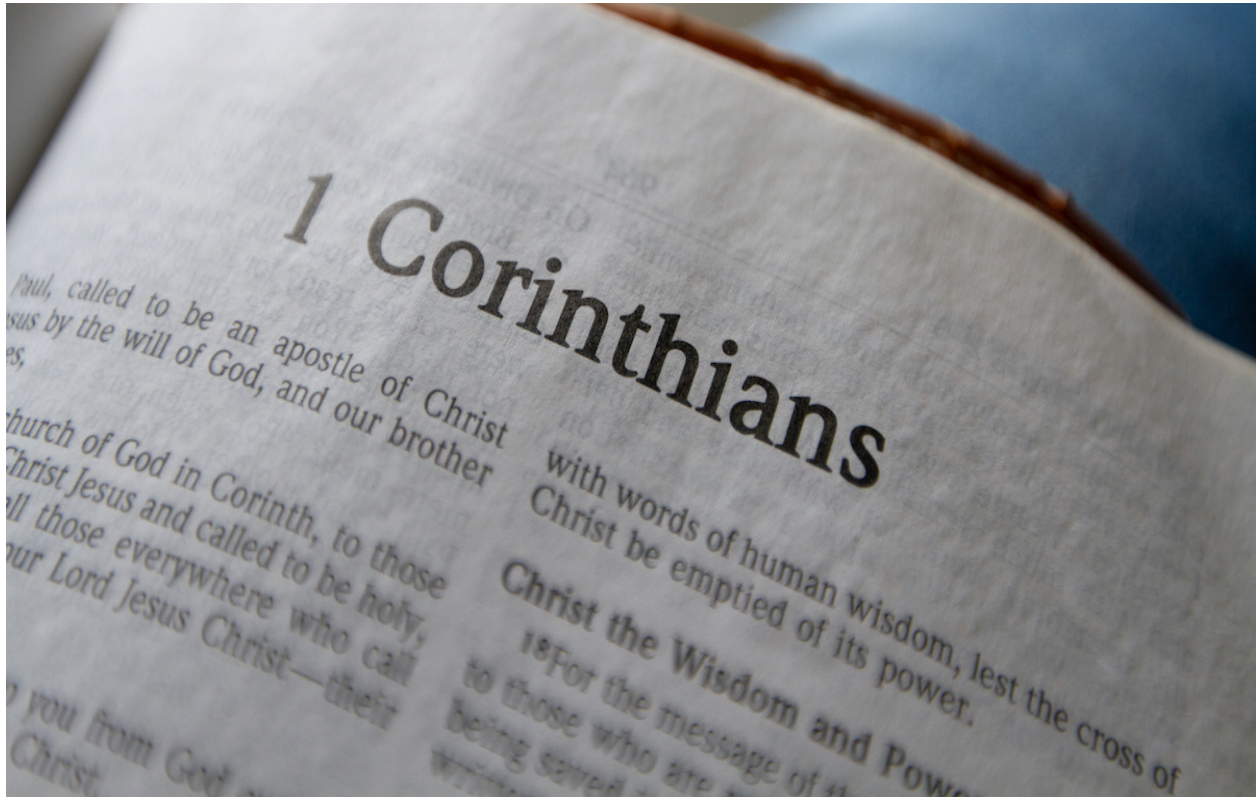


A House Divided

1 Corinthians 1

1 and 2 Corinthians Part 2



T. M. AND SUSIE MOORE

A Scriptorium Study from The Fellowship of Ailbe

A House Divided: 1 Corinthians 1
1 and 2 Corinthians Part 2
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Introduction to *1 Corinthians 1*

It is the devil's primary strategy to divide God's people, first from Jesus and then from one another.

Exhibit A: The churches in Corinth. God called them "into the fellowship of His Son". Satan divided them from God and fixed their focus on human beings. It was fine with the devil that those human beings were all apostles and real saints. As long as the focus was on them, not Jesus.

God calls us into fellowship with Jesus and one another. If working for such fellowship within and among our churches is not a priority for us (Eph. 4.3), then we're going to struggle to make much headway in seeking and advancing the Kingdom of God.

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We hope you find this study instructive and helpful to equip you for your walk with and work for the Lord. Thank you for joining us.

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1 Grace and Peace

Pray Psalm 132.13-18.

For the LORD has chosen Zion;
He has desired *it* for His dwelling place:
“This is My resting place forever;
Here I will dwell, for I have desired it.
I will abundantly bless her provision;
I will satisfy her poor with bread.
I will also clothe her priests with salvation,
And her saints shall shout aloud for joy.
There I will make the horn of David grow;
I will prepare a lamp for My Anointed.
His enemies I will clothe with shame,
But upon Himself His crown shall flourish.”

Sing Psalm 132.13-18.

(Finlandia: *Be Still, My Soul*)

God dwells among us, and He will forever, to meet our needs and clothe us with His grace.
He has to us sent Jesus Christ, our Savior—Beloved, eternal light and resting place.
His foes are banished from His Presence ever, but we shall reign with Him before His face.

Read and meditate on 1 Corinthians 1.1-3.

Preparation

1. How did Paul refer to the believers in Corinth?
2. What did he intend for them in his letter?

Meditation

In Ephesus (1 Cor. 16.8), Paul received a visit from three members of the Church in Corinth. These—Stephanas, Fortunatus, and Achaicus (1 Cor. 16.17)—were probably leaders in the community. They came with a list of questions the Corinthians wanted Paul to address. But Paul also learned from them that the fabric of church life in Corinth was beginning to fray.

Paul put his epistle in context. All understood that God had called him to the apostolate. His words carried the authority of God. He was joined by Sosthenes, one of their own company who had accompanied Paul to Ephesus (v. 1). Thus, both the apostle and a member of their own community agreed together on the content of this letter.

Next, he reminded them of who they were: set apart (“sanctified”) as “saints” and part of the worldwide Body of Christ (v. 2). That would be the foundation of all he had to say to them. They had a position to honor and maintain, and others beyond Corinth were looking to them as brethren, “all who in every place call on the name of Jesus Christ our Lord”.

Finally, Paul wished grace and peace for the Corinthians, which he knew only “God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ” could grant them (v. 3). He would have some difficult things to say in this epistle, but he did not want to be misunderstood: Everything he said was by the grace of God and intended for their peace.

Treasures Old and New: Matthew 13.52; Psalm 119.162.

Paul is taking up the mantle of Elijah, Elisha, Ezra, Nehemiah, Haggai, Isaiah, Jeremiah, and a plethora of other prophets who “had some difficult things to say” to their letters’ recipients.

Their work was not like that of the 1967 self-help book by Thomas Harris, *I'm OK—You're OK*. No, they had important things to convey. Making the people feel all squishy inside, about how well they were doing, was not one of them. Why perpetuate wrong thinking? Why not try and help?

“Open rebuke is better than love carefully concealed.”

“Faithful are the wounds of a friend, but the kisses of an enemy are deceitful.”

“As iron sharpens iron, so a man sharpens the countenance of his friend” (Prov. 27.5, 6, 17).

Paul, as did all the others, wanted to preserve proper Kingdom/Church living through its godly participants.

“A righteous man who falters before the wicked is like a murky spring and a polluted well” (Prov. 25.26).

That “faltering” participant was not one others would find winsome and appealing, nor would they follow him to the next murky, polluted water hole. He wanted to sharpen them, not dull them with unworthy platitudes. Are pastors today guilty of telling their flock “You’re OK” when they’re clearly not OK?

What the Corinthian church needed (as do we) were people, like David, who asked:

“Who may ascend into the hill of the LORD?

Or who may stand in His holy place?

He who has clean hands and a pure heart,
who has not lifted up his soul to an idol,
nor sworn deceitfully.

He shall receive blessing from the LORD,
and righteousness from the God of his salvation.

This is Jacob, the generation of those who seek Him,
who seek Your face” (Ps. 24.3-6).

Turns out, everybody doesn’t get a trophy.

“But those who wait on the LORD shall renew their strength;
they shall mount up with wings like eagles,
they shall run and not be weary,
they shall walk and not faint” (Is. 40.31).

“I have fought the good fight,
I have finished the race,
I have kept the faith” (2 Tim. 4.7).

So, “let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, looking unto Jesus...” (Heb. 12.1, 2). Taking up the mantle of all those who have preceded us in the work; as we, too, are called to be saints, sanctified to do the will of God (1 Cor. 1.1-3). Forgiven and growing daily unto His likeness (1 Cor. 13.12).

For reflection

1. What do you hope to gain from our study of 1 and 2 Corinthians?
2. What does it mean to you to be “sanctified” and a “saint”?
3. How will it be evident today that God has called you to be sanctified?

Grace signifies the free favor, mercy, and compassion of God, by which he freely pardons sins without our contribution of good works, accepts us ungrateful sinners, and proclaims us righteous and heirs of eternal life. Peace signifies spiritual and physical blessings; certainly, it includes the gift of the Holy Spirit, peace of conscience, renewed righteousness and life, gladness in God, and the inheritance of eternal life. Tilemann Hesshus (1527-1588), Explication of 1 Corinthians 1:3

Pray Psalm 132.8-12.

Pray that God will grow you in the righteousness of Jesus and fill you with the joy of His salvation. Renew your commitment to Him and His covenant, and call on Him to prepare you for the day ahead.

Sing Psalm 132.8-12.

(Finlandia: *Be Still, My Soul*)

Arise, O LORD, come to Your resting place; Your holy Presence meet with us in might.
Clothe us with righteousness in Jesus' grace, and we will shout to Your divine delight!
For David's sake, turn not away Your face, but look upon us in Your holy light.

Remember, LORD, the oath You swore to David; do not turn back, do not deny Your Word:
"One of your sons, with your throne I will favor, if he shall keep My cov'nant evermore,
and walk within My testimonies ever, thus he shall ever rule by Israel's LORD."

2 God Is Faithful

Pray Psalm 139.15-18.

My frame was not hidden from You,
When I was made in secret,
And skillfully wrought in the lowest parts of the earth.
Your eyes saw my substance, being yet unformed.
And in Your book they all were written,
The days fashioned for me,
When *as yet there were* none of them.
How precious also are Your thoughts to me, O God!
How great is the sum of them!
If I should count them, they would be more in number than the sand;
When I awake, I am still with You.

Sing Psalm 139.15-18.

(Ripley: *Hallelujah, Praise Jehovah, O My Soul*)

All my unformed frame You witnessed when You destined all my days.
Precious to me, LORD, Your precepts; all Your wondrous Word I praise.
More than sand, Your thoughts to me, LORD, far too vast their sum for me!
When the morning breaks upon me, in Your Presence I shall be.

Read 1 Corinthians 1.1-9; meditate on verses 4-9.

Preparation

1. What had God given to the Corinthians?
2. What was the effect of that gift?

Meditation

Here is a theme we will encounter consistently throughout 1 and 2 Corinthians: the grace and faithfulness of God (vv. 1, 9). This theme runs through all Paul's epistles, but it seems especially urgent in 1 Corinthians. Paul knows these people. He knows they have allowed divisions to come into the church. That some are puffed up against others, looking down on their fellow church members, looking away from blatant sin.

The Corinthians have lost their proper focus, and Paul intended to help them get it back. He reminded them of the grace that came to them from God in the Good News of Christ Jesus (v. 4). Jesus brought them into the new world of His Kingdom and, by His Spirit, opened wide vistas of understanding, knowledge, and speech (v. 5). The realization and expression of this confirmed the faith of the Corinthians, opening to them all the good gifts of God to meet all their needs as they awaited Christ's return (vv. 6, 7). When He returns, He will confirm those who are His (v. 8). Until then, God, Who called them into the fellowship of His Son, is faithful and will keep them there (v. 9).

It's all about God and His grace and faithfulness. We are all equally beneficiaries of His matchless love. His Spirit indwells us and is forming us into the likeness of Jesus Himself (2 Cor. 3.12-18). If we keep our focus on God and His grace and faithfulness, we'll be able to overcome every trial, adversity, stumbling block, failure, or shortcoming. The Corinthians needed to know this from the get-go, and Paul made sure they did.

Treasures Old and New: Matthew 13.52; Psalm 119.162

Paul gives good guidance about how to pray for those who have either fallen away, or who are blatantly not following the teachings of God, while pretending to be in the way. Either way, it's hard to be thankful.

But Paul said, “I thank my God always concerning you for the grace of God which was given to you by Christ Jesus” (1 Cor. 1.4). We don’t thank God that they are living the way they are, we thank God for what we know assuredly He has done for them in the past. And the potential always there for change.

David, through Nathan’s nudge, came face to face with his sin. And repented. Turned away from it and moved forward in God’s forgiveness and grace. “For I acknowledge my transgressions, and my sin is always before me. Against You, You only, have I sinned, and done this evil in Your sight—that You may be found just when You speak, and blameless when You judge...Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a steadfast spirit within me...Restore to me the joy of Your salvation, and uphold me by Your generous Spirit” (Ps. 51.3, 4, 10, 12).

Paul is nudging the Corinthian church to take a hard look at their doings and repent—to come back to “their proper focus”.

Each one of us is either dealing with this condition in our own lives; or knowing and loving others who are captive to self and sin. But we have Paul’s words to lean on and pray through, as we eagerly wait for the revelation of our Lord Jesus Christ, who will confirm us and others to the end... “God is faithful” by whom we, and they, were called into the fellowship of His Son, Jesus Christ our Lord (1 Cor. 1.8, 9).

So let us pray with anticipation. We are thankful for the gift of salvation, and we know, beyond a shadow of a doubt, that the Holy Spirit is powerful to do His work of convicting hearts of sin, and then the healing work of sanctification. Jesus promised, “I will send Him [the Helper] to you. And when He has come, He will convict the world of sin, and of righteousness, and of judgment...” (Jn. 16.7, 8).

And we know that “the Word of God is living and powerful...” (Heb. 4.12). It is of paramount importance that all believers read the Word of God daily because this is how the Holy Spirit convicts us of sin and leads us into a proper understanding of a life well lived in the Kingdom.

“Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path” (Ps. 119.105).
“God is faithful” (1 Cor. 1.6, 9). And He enriched us so that we may:
Walk worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing Him,
being fruitful in every good work and
increasing in the knowledge of God;
strengthened with all might,
according to His glorious power,
for all patience and longsuffering with joy;
giving thanks to the Father who has qualified us
to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in the light. (Col. 1.10-12)

“I thank my God always concerning you for the grace of God which was given you by Christ Jesus” (1 Cor. 1.4). For that we can always be thankful.

For reflection

1. The Corinthians had many problems, but Paul’s attitude was gracious and grateful. How can you develop more of that attitude toward the people in your daily walk with and work for the Lord?
2. God is faithful. He doesn’t save us to let us flounder. How should knowing this encourage you in working your Personal Mission Field today?
3. Whom will you encourage today with a word of thanksgiving or a reminder of God’s grace?

*[H]e qualifies his congratulations in such a way as to give them no occasion to be puffed up, as he traces up to God all the benefits that they possessed, that the entire praise may redound to him, inasmuch as they are the fruits of his grace. John Calvin (1509-1564), *Commentary on 1 Corinthians 1.4**

Pray Psalm 139.1-10, 23, 24.

Praise God for the grace He has shown you from before your birth and through all your days. Praise and thank Him for His Presence with you always. Devote yourself and your day to the Lord, to follow in all the ways the Spirit leads.

Sing Psalm 139.1-10, 23, 24 .

(Ripley: *Hallelujah, Praise Jehovah, O My Soul*)

You have searched me, LORD, and known me, when I sit and when I rise;
from afar, my thoughts discerning, all my path before You lies.
Every word, before it's spoken, You behold and know it well.
Both behind me and before me, Your sweet Presence I can tell!

Such a blessing is more wondrous than my searching soul can know.
From Your ever-present Spirit there is nowhere I can go.
Whether high above the heaven or below the earth in hell,
even there Your hand shall lead me and Your Right Hand hold me well!

Search my heart, O LORD, and know me, as You only, LORD, can do.
Test my thoughts and contemplations, whether they be vain or true.
Let there be no sin in me, LORD, nothing that Your Spirit grieves.
Lead me in the righteous way, LORD, unto everlasting peace!

3 A Plea for Unity

Pray Psalm 119.25-27.

My soul clings to the dust;
Revive me according to Your word.
I have declared my ways, and You answered me;
Teach me Your statutes.
Make me understand the way of Your precepts;
So shall I meditate on Your wonderful works.

Sing Psalm 119.25-27.

(Festal Song: *Rise Up, O Men of God*)

My soul clings to the dust; revive me by Your Word!
My ways I have declared to You; teach me Your statutes, LORD!

Make me to understand Your precepts and Your ways,
as on Your works I meditate with wonder and with praise!

Read 1 Corinthians 1.1-13; meditate on verses 10-13.

Preparation

1. What problem was affecting the churches in Corinth?
2. What did Paul seek for them?

Meditation

Division and disunity within the Body of Christ are hindering the progress of Christ's Kingdom. Jesus prayed that His followers might all be one, so that in their oneness they would reflect the unity of the divine Trinity and show the world the power of love (Jn. 17.21).

But division and disunity appeared early in the Christian movement. Paul confronted it here in the house churches at Corinth. The problem was not that there were various churches, meeting in homes across the city. The problem was that those churches were fostering disunity rather than working hard to maintain the unity of the Spirit of God in the bonds of peace (Eph. 4.3).

The believers were quarreling with one another (v. 11), as if to follow Paul or Apollos or Cephas were the high-water mark of Christian faith. Even those who boasted about following Christ appear to have done so in a divisive manner. The believers should have been one in voice and mind and judgment (v. 10), followers of Jesus and servants of God. Instead, they allowed division to enter the Body of Christ in Corinth. This was the most serious problem reported to Paul, and he addressed it first, with a stinging rhetorical question (v. 13). For without unity, no amount of other counsel or correction would have any lasting effects.

In our day we think nothing about our disunity. Rather than climb together the heights of oneness in the Lord, we cling to the dust of division. Churches do almost nothing together. Denominations tout their superiority over others. Believers do not come together locally to worship, witness, or work for the Kingdom. Division and disunity hinder the progress of the Kingdom, and very few pay attention to the words of Jesus and Paul in this matter. Disunity is Satan's greatest scheme for hamstringing the Church.

Jesus wants His Body to practice oneness. Paul calls us to unity. How much longer will we ignore them both?

Treasures Old and New: Matthew 13.52; Psalm 119.162

Jesus said, "Every kingdom divided against itself is brought to desolation, and every city or house divided

against itself will not stand...He who is not with Me is against Me, and he who does not gather with Me scatters abroad” (Matt. 12.25, 30).

Our daughter Kristy is using her massive basketball skills of yore to teach and coach middle and high school kids in her town. She is busy spreading the love of Jesus to these young lives who need her guidance. What if she told her point guard to make sure and always give the ball to the opponent? Or maybe it would be good for the team if her players blocked each other from shooting a basket? Or perhaps it would be smart to tell the players to stay in the key for as long as they chose? Just hang out there, no problem. I’m pretty certain that would not surge her teams on to victory and would make the game kind of pointless.

So why is the church so divided when Jesus and Kristy would tell you that is not a winning strategy?

Paul, having heard there were contentions and divisions in the church, wrote, pleadingly that they would:

1. Speak the same thing with no divisions in beliefs of salvation.
2. Be perfectly joined together with the same mind on all issues regarding Jesus.
3. Use the same judgment in all decisions concerning matters of the Law (1 Cor. 1.10).

“Behold, how good and how pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity!” (Ps. 133.1).

“I, therefore, the prisoner of the Lord, beseech you to walk worthy of the calling with which you were called, with all lowliness and gentleness, with longsuffering, bearing with one another in love, endeavoring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called in one hope of your calling; one Lord, one faith, one baptism; one God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in you all” (Eph. 4.1-6).

No team will win if it is playing against itself.

No kingdom or country will stand if divided from within.

No church will survive with divisions of beliefs about the Law and Jesus (Jn. 14.6).

Let us plead for unity in the churches we attend, and for fellowship with all believers worldwide; so that the Kingdom of the Lord Jesus Christ will not scatter, but stand firm, to the end.

*In Christ there is no East or West,
In Him no South or North,
But one great fellowship of love
Throughout the whole wide earth.*

*In Him shall true hearts everywhere
Their high communion find;
His service is the golden cord
Close-binding all mankind.
(John Oxenham, 1908)*

For reflection

1. Why did Jesus and Paul consider unity so important for Christians?
2. What should you do to promote Christian unity?
3. How does serving Christ bind us with other believers?

*But let us see what he requires as to Christian unity. If any one is desirous of nice distinctions — he would have them first of all joined together in one mind; secondly, in one judgment; and, thirdly, he would have them declare in words that agreement. John Calvin (1509-1564), *Commentary on 1 Corinthians 1.10**

A House Divided: 1 Corinthians 1

Pray Psalm 119.28-32.

We should be weighed down with woe about the disunified state of Christ's Body. Pray that God will convict us of our divisiveness and lead us to choose the way of truth and oneness. Ask Him to show you what you can do to work for the unity of the Spirit among the churches of your community.

Sing Psalm 119.28-32.

(Festal Song: *Rise Up, O Men of God*)

My soul weighs down with woe, I need Your strength, O LORD!
Remove from me all lying ways; grant me Your holy Word!

I choose the way of truth; Your judgments I proclaim.
Your testimonies I embrace, LORD, put me not to shame!

Command my course, O LORD; Your gracious truth impart.
I cling to You and know You will enlarge my seeking heart.

4 Focused

Pray Psalm 71.1-3.

In You, O LORD, I put my trust;
Let me never be put to shame.
Deliver me in Your righteousness, and cause me to escape;
Incline Your ear to me, and save me.
Be my strong refuge,
To which I may resort continually;
You have given the commandment to save me,
For You *are* my rock and my fortress.

Sing Psalm 71.1-3.

(Solid Rock: *My Hope Is Built on Nothing Less*)

In You, O LORD, I refuge claim; O let me never be ashamed.
In righteousness deliver me; incline Your ear and hear my plea.

Refrain v. 3

A Rock of habitation be; command Your Word to rescue me;
my Rock and Fortress ever be!

Read 1 Corinthians 1.1-17; meditate on verses 14-17.

Preparation

1. For what did Paul give thanks? Why?
2. What was his calling?

Meditation

The lesson from these verses is clear: Know what you are sent to do and do only that.

Paul wants it to be clear that he did not contribute to the spirit of division which had arisen in Corinth. He was not interested in attaching people to himself, for example, by baptizing them all. Others who followed him apparently kept a running tab of who and how many they had baptized. Was this a way of touting their ministry over that of others?

It is the practice of churches and ministries these days to find things to quantify. Converts, baptisms, new members, budgets, and so forth. Some of that can be helpful. But mostly it runs the risk of compromising the church's mission as the Body of Christ. Jesus gives the increase where increase matters (Acts 2.47). We should leave that in His hands and not count our numbers as though they said something significant about us.

Paul was sent to preach. And not in clever words or words accessible only to those trained in the ways of wisdom. The Gospel is not rocket science. It's the straightforward message of Jesus and the cross and the resurrection and His coming again. Paul was focused on his calling, not on counting noses at the end of the day. Jesus, he knew, would bring the power of His cross to bear on whom He would. And He did.

Paul had a specific calling from the Lord, just as each of us does. He was sent by Jesus, just as each of us is. He was to proclaim the Gospel by words and deeds, just as we are. We have no control over what God does with our labors. Like Paul, our duty is to focus on what we've been sent to do, and to make sure we do nothing to add to the shallow, schismatic, and self-vaunting tendencies of the age.

Treasures Old and New: Matthew 13.52; Psalm 119.162

To those of us who claim to be unable to minister properly or effectively, God says, "Good! You really can't;

and I'm glad you understand that. But I can, and together we will get this Good News out!"

Moses tried this very excuse: "O my Lord, I am not eloquent, neither before nor since You have spoken to Your servant; but I am slow of speech and slow of tongue" (Ex. 4.10). So the LORD said to him, "Who has made man's mouth? Or who makes the mute, the deaf, the seeing, or the blind? Have not I, the LORD? Now therefore, go, and I will be with your mouth and teach you what you shall say" (Ex. 4.11, 12; Prov. 20.12).

Whenever we are inclined to plead exemption from something we know God has called us to do, He does not try and dissuade us from that thought, He merely changes our focus to Himself and His power to overcome all our weaknesses. "My grace is sufficient for you, for My strength is made perfect in weakness" (2 Cor. 12.9).

Our job is to be willing: "Preach the word! Be ready in season and out of season. Convince, rebuke, exhort, with all longsuffering and teaching" (2 Tim. 4.2). All done in His power, strength, and authority.

We are never called to overshadow the Gospel. As John said, "He must increase, but I must decrease" (Jn. 3.30). The majesty of Jesus' life, death, and resurrection speaks for itself. We need only say it and get out of the way. He will draw whom He chooses to Himself—sans our oratorical skills.

Focused... "For the love of Christ compels us..." (2 Cor. 5.14).

*And can it be that I should gain
An interest in the Savior's blood?
Died He for me, who caused His pain?
For me, who Him to death pursued?
Amazing love! How can it be
That Thou my God, shouldst die for me?*

*Amazing love! How can it be
That Thou, my God shouldst die for me?*
(Charles Wesley, 1738)

The cross of Christ loudly and clearly speaks!

For reflection

1. Have you ever said to the Lord, "Lord, I just can't do that"? What would the Lord say to you?
2. What can you do to maintain focus on the Lord when you're out and about in your Personal Mission Field?
3. Whom will you encourage today to keep their focus on Jesus and His cross and resurrection?

He rejoices, however, that it had happened otherwise, and acknowledges it as having been so ordered, in the providence of God, that they might not take occasion from that to glory in him, or that he might not bear any resemblance to those ambitious men who endeavored in this way to catch followers. John Calvin (1509-1564), *Commentary on 1 Corinthians 1.14*

Pray Psalm 71.14-18.

Ask God to give you a renewed focus on His calling for you. Pray for those to whom He sends you. Pray that He will keep you focused on *your* work, not *His*. And make sure, whatever you do, Jesus is exalted by it.

Sing Psalm 71.14-18.

(Solid Rock: *My Hope Is Built on Nothing Less*)

But as for me my voice I raise to sing in hope and constant praise!
With saving grace my voice will swell Your never-ending grace to tell.

Refrain v. 3

A Rock of habitation be; command Your Word to rescue me;
my Rock and Fortress ever be!

O LORD, I praise Your righteousness Who me from youth have taught and blessed.
Forsake me not when I am old, 'til I Your mercies all have told!

Refrain

5 Common Denominator

Pray Psalm 125.4, 5.

Do good, O LORD, to *those who are* good,
And to *those who are* upright in their hearts.
As for such as turn aside to their crooked ways,
The LORD shall lead them away
With the workers of iniquity.
Peace *be* upon Israel!

Sing Psalm 125.4, 5, 1.

(St. Gertrude: *Onward, Christian Soldiers*)

LORD, do good and care for those upright in heart.
Those who turn to evil shall from You depart.
Sinful men may increase on their way to hell!
Save Your people, let your peace abound in Israel!
Refrain, v. 1
All who trust in Jesus, strong as Zion stand!
Naught shall ever move them from their promised land!

Read 1 Corinthians 1.1-25; meditate on verses 18-25.

Preparation

1. What was Paul's basic message?
2. How does the world view that message?

Meditation

Here Paul addressed fallout from the divisive spirit that had invaded the churches in Corinth. Each of the conflicting groups (vv. 11, 12) doubtless regarded themselves as “wise” and the others as “fools” because of their “inferior” views. We can easily imagine that disputes were not uncommon between members of these churches, each contending for their group's position.

Paul has shown that his own focus was not on what divides believers, but what alone can bring and keep them together: the cross of Jesus (vv. 14-17). Focusing on the cross taps into the power of God which binds believers together in His Spirit (v. 18; cf. Eph. 4.3). Anything beyond that must not be allowed to divide us. The unbelieving world stumbles at the message of the cross (vv. 22-24) and regards those who cling to that Good News as stumbling blocks or outright fools. Should believers consider one another in such terms? Shouldn't we set aside our pride and hold fast to one another in Jesus and His cross?

Paul was adamant—as Apollos and Peter would have been—that his name or teaching not be used as a club to beat on other believers. “Cling to Jesus!” he insisted. Let the world dispute us, but let us not dispute with one another, lest we all, presuming to be wise, become fools in God's eyes. Jesus—His life, death, resurrection, ascension, reign, and soon return—is the common denominator of “those who believe” (v. 21). Nothing must come between us as brethren in the Lord, for only in our clinging-to-Jesus foolishness will the wisdom of God shine in the world (v. 21), and many believe in Him (Jn. 17.21).

God is wiser than all, including the divisive Corinthians. Let us hold fast together to the foolishness of the cross that, as one Body, we may rise in the strength and wisdom of God (v. 25).

Treasures Old and New: Matthew 13.52; Psalm 119.162

“...but we preach Christ crucified...” (1 Cor. 1.23).

Do you suppose the reason it seems foolish is because it is hard to fathom why anyone would ever willingly die for their enemies? “But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us” (Rom. 5.8). I must admit, I find that overwhelming too.

And who conquers death? Who dies and then summarily comes back to life three days later? Again, it is hard to believe that anyone would do that for their enemies.

And who loves unconditionally, fully, and chooses someone to love that doesn’t love them? “You did not choose Me, but I chose you...” (Jn. 15.16).

Truth be told, it does seem foolish...and yet, we are the recipients of that foolishness—the power of God and the wisdom of God (1 Cor. 1.24).

“Bless the LORD, O my soul, and forget not all His benefits:
Who forgives all your iniquities,
Who heals all your diseases,
Who redeems your life from destruction,
Who crowns you with lovingkindness and tender mercies,
Who satisfies your mouth with good things,
So that your youth is renewed like the eagle’s...
So great is His mercy toward those who fear Him;
As far as the east is from the west,
So far has He removed our transgressions from us.
As a father pities his children,
So the LORD pities those who fear Him.
For He knows our frame;
He remembers that we are dust” (Ps. 103.2-5, 11-14).

That kind of love, from a perfect God, is hard to comprehend.
And yet it is ours to accept. Incredible as it seems.

“Without faith it is impossible to please Him...” (Heb. 11.6).

God’s mercy, grace, and love toward us is hard to believe. In fact, it takes faith to believe. It is so far beyond our human capacity to understand—so antithetical to our own sinful nature—that we cling only to the knowledge that His thoughts are not our thoughts nor His ways our ways (Is. 55.8, 9).

“The foolishness of God is wiser than men, and the weakness of God is stronger than men” (1 Cor. 1.25).

Our beloved and precious Christ, crucified for us: “Let us hold fast together to the foolishness of the cross that, as one Body, we may rise in the strength and wisdom of God.”

For reflection

1. What can you do to keep focused on the cross of Jesus throughout the day? Why should you do this?
2. Just because the world thinks the cross is foolishness does not mean we should keep it to ourselves. Explain.
3. Whom will you encourage today in the common denominator of our faith?

This is the sum and substance of the gospel. Christ crucified is the foundation of all our hopes, the fountain of all our joys. And

by his death we live. Matthew Henry (1662-1714), *Commentary on 1 Corinthians 1.17-25*

Pray Psalm 125.1-4.

Pray for yourself and the believers in your Personal Mission Field, that God will give you a renewed vision of Jesus Christ, exalted in glory, and that He will make you more like Himself each day.

Sing Psalm 125.1-4.

(St. Gertrude: *Onward, Christian Soldiers*)

All who trust in Jesus, strong as Zion stand!

Naught shall ever move them from their promised land!

Like the hills surrounding safe Jerusalem,

Christ surrounds His Church and holds her in His mighty Hand!

Refrain, v. 1

All who trust in Jesus, strong as Zion stand!

Naught shall ever move them from their promised land!

Wickedness shall rest not on this holy land.

Sinfulness shall never come forth from their hand.

Trusting in the Savior, firm in His caress,

ever shall His favor on this holy city rest.

Refrain

6 Playing the World's Game

Pray Psalm 85.4-6.

Restore us, O God of our salvation,
And cause Your anger toward us to cease.
Will You be angry with us forever?
Will You prolong Your anger to all generations?
Will You not revive us again,
That Your people may rejoice in You?

Sing Psalm 85.4-6.

(Lyons: *O Worship the King*)

Restore us, O God, renew us in peace,
and cause all Your wrath against us to cease.
Will You evermore all Your wrath to us show?
Revive us that we may Your joy again know.

Read 1 Corinthians 1.1-31; meditate on verses 26-31.

Prepare

1. What did Paul say about the Corinthians' calling?
2. What are we supposed to "glory" in?

Meditation

Paul continued hammering away at the sin of division which had settled in the churches in Corinth. If they would but look at themselves honestly, they would agree that the categories they had created between the "wise" and the "foolish" had no true foundation, since "not many wise according to the flesh, not many mighty, and not many noble *are called*" (v. 26). That is, Paul intimated, all the Corinthians are foolish and weak and base in the eyes of the world, even nothing at all (vv. 27, 28). So why were the Corinthian Christians embracing worldly attitudes toward one another? Could it be that they were still worldly at heart (a question that will thread implicitly through both these epistles, until Paul puts it to them directly at the end of 2 Corinthians)?

Paul was "telling it slant" here, leaving them to make the right conclusion, which was that, in their boasting in men, and putting one another down for the sake of men, they were not acting like the Body of Christ but like the unbelieving world from which they had been delivered. All believers are the beneficiaries of grace because nothing but grace can bring us to faith and salvation. Whatever their "worldly" status may have been, grace and salvation is the great leveler, so that now they should boast neither in their works nor in anybody else's, but only in the Lord (v. 29). To continue as they were, divided and condemning one another, was to bring the world's game into the church.

All believers share alike in wisdom, righteousness, sanctification, and redemption. But not in Paul or Apollos or Cephas or anyone else. Only in Jesus Christ are we one in these great mysteries (v. 30). God has saved us for oneness in Jesus, that we shall always and only boast in the Lord. He will shame and "bring to nothing" those who judge others (vv. 27, 28). He calls us to glory in the Lord, not in our own views or works.

So let's not play that game in the Body of Christ, whatsay?

Treasures Old and New: Matthew 13.52; Psalm 119.162.

"My brethren, do not hold the faith of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Lord of glory, with partiality."

“Listen, my beloved brethren: Has God not chosen the poor of this world to be rich in faith and heirs of the kingdom which He promised to those who love Him?” (Jms. 2.1, 5)

There is absolutely no place for personal ego in the Christian walk. Why does the church honor one over another? Why is this person’s testimony more spectacular than another’s? Why is one person’s bank account more worthy to be honored than another’s? Why are personal appearances important at all? Why do we honor the world’s successful people over those more commonplace? Why, oh, why do we do this at all? Ever wonder why there is a fear of going to church?

Why don’t we honor those who are godly? Those who love? Those who are hospitable? Those who are faithful? Why don’t we admire those who, most of all, glory in the Lord Jesus Christ?

Don’t we understand that God chose:

Not many wise?

Not many mighty?

Not many noble? (1 Cor. 1.26)

In fact, God chose:

The foolish things

The weak things

The base things

The despised things

The things which are not (1 Cor. 1.27, 28).

God chose us.

And the reason He chose us is so that our only glory goes to Him. Never to ourselves. Never are we to think more highly of ourselves than we ought (Rom. 12.3).

“For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, not of works, lest anyone should boast” (Eph. 2.8, 9).

“Thus says the LORD:

‘Let not the wise man glory in his wisdom,

Let not the mighty man glory in his might,

Nor let the rich man glory in his riches;

But let him who glories glory in this,

That he understands and knows Me,

That I AM the LORD, exercising

Lovingkindness, judgment, and righteousness in the earth.

For in these I delight,’ says the LORD” (Jer. 9.23, 24).

Chosen only to know the LORD and to glory in Him.

For reflection

1. Salvation is by grace, because if it wasn’t, no one would be saved. Explain.

2. What does it mean for you to glory in understanding and knowing the Lord?

3. How can you know when the “world’s game” is creeping into your Christian life? What should you do then?

Paul’s intention is perfectly clear—to accost the pride of man, that no one should take glory in human works and that no one

should glory in himself. Augustine (354-430), *Predestination of the Saints* 5.9

Pray Psalm 85.7-13.

Pray for revival in yourself, your church, and churches everywhere. Pray that God will set our focus on Jesus and not on things that divide us in His Body. Thank and praise Him for Jesus, Who has become wisdom and righteousness and sanctification and redemption for all who believe in Him.

Sing Psalm 85.7-13.

(Lyons: *O Worship the King*)

LORD, show us Your love; restore us, we pray!
And help us to hear the words that You say.
Speak peace to Your people; in truth let us stand.
We fear You; let glory and grace fill our land.

In Jesus God's grace and truth are combined;
both goodness and peace in Him do we find.
Truth springs from the earth as He walks in our midst,
and righteousness flows from the heav'ns as a gift.

The LORD by His grace will give what is good;
our land will produce abundance of food.
And righteousness will go before the LORD's face,
and make of His footsteps a way in this place.

7 A House Divided

Pray Psalm 51.10-13.

Create in me a clean heart, O God,
And renew a steadfast spirit within me.
Do not cast me away from Your presence,
And do not take Your Holy Spirit from me.
Restore to me the joy of Your salvation,
And uphold me *by Your* generous Spirit.
Then I will teach transgressors Your ways,
And sinners shall be converted to You.

Sing Psalm 51.10-13.

(Passion Chorale: *O Sacred Head, Now Wounded*)

Create in me a clean heart, renew me from within!
Take not Your Spirit from me because of all my sin.
Salvation's joy restore, LORD, and keep me in Your hand;
thus shall I tell Your strong Word to sinners in the land.

Review 1 Corinthians 1.1-31; meditate on verses 9 and 10.

Preparation

1. To what had God called the Corinthians?
2. For what did Paul plead with them?

Meditation

It is the devil's primary strategy to divide God's people, first from Jesus and then from one another.

This pattern began in the garden of Eden. Satan divided Eve from God by making her think she could decide what was best for her, better than He could. Then he divided Eve from Adam as the blame game began: "The woman, she..." That tactic of divide and conquer was so successful (in the short term, of course) that Satan continues using it in a multiplicity of ways.

Exhibit A: The churches in Corinth. God called them "into the fellowship of His Son". Satan divided them from God and fixed their focus on human beings. It was fine with the devil that those human beings were all apostles and real saints. As long as the focus was on them, not Jesus.

Then he divided them from one another by their comparing and boasting and exalting their tribe (vv. 11-13). You can't have a real Body of Christ if all the members are disagreeing and disputing. If you don't have a unified Body of Christ, you have no effective witness in the world (Jn. 17.21). And because the members are cut off from one another and the Lord, you can be sure lots of problems will ensue.

Which is precisely what happened to the churches in Corinth.

God calls us into fellowship with Jesus and one another. If working for such fellowship within and among our churches is not a priority for us (Eph. 4.3), then we're going to struggle to make much headway in seeking and advancing the Kingdom of God.

Oh, and the devil knows this all too well.

Treasures Old and New: Matthew 13.52; Psalm 119.162

Too often, it seems, we use Paul's glorious Love Chapter as a wedding vow, or Valentine—which are nice indeed and appropriate—but this outstanding essay on love pertains to everyone. This is not a list of ooey-goey words that apply only to lovers; it is the gritty truth of what all love requires. And it particularly applies to those in the church—the Body of Christ.

Sadly, so many churches are membered by sounding brass and clanging cymbals (1 Cor. 13.1).

Real love, the kind Jesus lived out for us to see, and that saved us, is:

Longsuffering

Kind

Not envious

Not egotistical

Not self-inflated

Not rude

Not selfish

Not easily offended or angered

Not evil thinking

Not glad about iniquity

Always rejoicing in the truth

Faithful in bearing burdens

Trusting

Hopeful

Steadfast and enduring.

This love never fails (1 Cor. 13.4-8).

Can you imagine a church full of people like that? Wouldn't that be wonderful? And amazing?

We would be that welcoming Body that the "Christ crucified that we preach" (1 Cor. 1.23) spoke about, when He said, "And I, if I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all peoples to Myself" (Jn. 12.32). We would be that Church spoken of by the psalmists, "Beautiful in elevation, the joy of the whole earth..." (Ps. 48.2).

How much of ourselves can we set aside to realize the beauty of God's Plan for the Church? Because if the church is full of chosen foolish, weak, base, and despised people—you and me—then it will take a huge dose of God's grace living within us to love one another as Christ loved us: "This is My commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you" (Jn. 15.12). Yes, that seemingly impossible To Do and To Don't list of Love requirements. Remembering always that, "with God nothing will be impossible" (Lk. 1.37).

Because letting the enemy divide us is not an option.

For reflection

1. How would you describe the unity and fellowship of your church? What can you contribute to making that oneness more vital and vibrant?

2. The place to begin for restoring unity in the Body of Christ is prayer. What opportunities to pray for Christian unity will you have in the week ahead? Make sure you remember to pray for oneness.

3. How is your own fellowship with the Lord? Is anything threatening to short-circuit that fellowship? How should you deal with it?

Fellowship is brotherhood. Just as Paul declares God's unfailing faithfulness toward us in this regard, so we ourselves must not be found to be faithless or dishonorable with respect to our adoption. Rather we must remain faithful in it. Ambrosiaster (fl. 366-

384), *Commentary on Paul's Epistles*

Pray Psalm 51.14-19.

Begin making prayer for Christian unity part of your daily supplications. Pray that your church will experience the true fellowship of Jesus and one another. Pray that the churches in your community will practice their oneness more conspicuously and consistently. Ask the Lord to show you what you can do to heal any divisions and enhance the oneness all believers have in Jesus Christ.

Sing Psalm 51.14-19.

(Aughton: *He Leadeth Me*)

Deliver us, from guilt, O LORD, You Who have saved us by Your Word;
and let our tongues Your mercy bless, and sing of Your great righteousness!

Refrain vv. 15, 18

LORD, open now our lips to raise to You sweet songs of joyous praise!
Thus let Your favor on us fall, and build and strengthen Zion's wall!

No sacrifice, no offering would You have us, Your people, bring;
but broken spirits, cleansed of lies, and pure hearts You will not despise.

Refrain

Now build Your Church, raise high the wall of those who on Your mercy call.
And take our lives and let them be sweet sacrifices, LORD, to Thee!

Refrain

A House Divided: 1 Corinthians 1

Questions for Reflection or Discussion

1. Paul spent the entire first chapter of 1 Corinthians on the problem of division among the churches in Corinth. Why?
2. How does disunity within and among churches compare with Jesus' desire for us (Jn. 17.21-23)?
3. What is every believer's responsibility when it comes to maintaining unity of the Spirit in the bonds of peace (Eph. 4.3)? What does that require of you?
4. Review 1 Corinthians 1.10. What did Paul consider to be essential steps for rebuilding Christian unity among the churches in Corinth?
5. What's the most important lesson you've learned from this part of our study of 1 and 2 Corinthians?

For prayer:

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