

To Exalt Christ

To Equip, Encourage, Exhort and Edify God's Elect

The Church Challenged – 1 Corinthians 1:10-18

Last week in 1 Corinthians 1:1-9 the apostle Paul gave us a 9-verse theological fly-over of the church at Corinth, the church God called into being through the preaching ministry of Paul. He described the church as sanctified, being **made** progressively holy in Jesus Christ. Paul said they were called **to be** holy, to be what they were declared to be through justification by faith alone in Christ alone. They were the recipients of God's grace and peace.

They were enriched in speech and knowledge thus being able to articulate the gospel and their faith which they now had knowledge of and understanding. Paul assured them that God would keep them strong to the end so that they would be blameless on the day Christ returns.

We marvel at the richness, the fullness, the depth, the breadth of those first nine verses. There is so much there for them and us, because what they had, we also have right now. Paul laid on them the full nine yards of rich Biblical top soil of what it means to be called to faith, called to be people of God.

Something we did not note last week is the number of times Paul mentions Jesus Christ – nine times in nine verses. Paul's whole life from the time of his conversion was built around and focused upon the Lord Jesus Christ and the gospel.

When Paul spoke imperatively, commandingly in Romans 12:2 that one "*be transformed by the renewing of their mind*" Paul knew what it was to have his mind renewed, his thinking changed in regard to Christ. For the rest of his life Paul was laser-focused on Christ and the gospel. It was why he wrote his letters – to keep the churches, the people focused on Christ. This morning, we see the church at Corinth challenged and Paul's attempt to meet that challenge. We begin with –

The Appeal – 1 Corinthians 1:10

In **verse 10** Paul writes – "*I appeal to you brothers, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that all of you agree with one another so that there may be no divisions among you and that you may be perfectly united in mind and thought.*"

Paul puts Christ front and center. His appeal to them is in the name of “*our Lord Jesus Christ*.” By using the word “*our*”, Paul seeks to remind them and thus unify them, that Christ is theirs & his Lord and Savior. They are bound together under the same banner of the cross and the empty tomb.

He wants them to agree so there will be no divisions. Satan is the great divider. He started in the Garden in Eden by putting a divide between truth and falsehood, God and mankind. God told Adam and Eve they would die if they ate from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. Satan told them they would not die. Adam by obeying Satan thus became the federal head or representative of the human race through his fall into sin.

Paul is appealing to the church to be unified, that they agree, no divisions, but, as he said, “*perfectly united in mind and thought*.” I remember a technical cartoon many years ago from my work. It showed a group of engineers standing around a drawing board. The chief engineer says – “*We are not looking for perfection, as long as it gets to Mars and back*.” Paul however **is** looking for perfection. He wants them perfectly united in mind and thought. We believe in, we worship and serve God who is perfect. Part of that image of God in us is perfection.

The glory of God as defined by Jonathan Edwards, 1703-1758, an American preacher and writer, is “*the shining forth of his perfections*.” We were made in the image of God according to Genesis 1:26-27 thus we have built within us, a capacity, an ability for perfection. Paul is tapping into that capacity, that ability for perfection in relation to their minds & their thoughts. If their minds & thoughts are perfectly united then as Paul would tell the church at Rome, “*they will be able to test and approve what God’s will is – his good, pleasing and **perfect** will*.” Romans 12:2. That is Paul’s appeal. Now comes –

The Argument – 1 Corinthians 1:11-12

What is the argument at Corinth? Paul says in verses 11-12 – “*My brothers, some from Chloe’s household have informed me that there are quarrels among you. What I mean is this: One of you says, “I follow Paul”; another, “I follow Apollus”; another, “I follow Cephas”; still another, “I follow Christ*.”

Chloe is thought to be a Christian woman who lived in Corinth and attended the church there. From her house Paul is informed of arguments or quarrels among church members. This is never good considering the church exists in a pagan society and culture that runs the gamut from atheism to pantheism, much like our society

today. The church in Corinth would be small in number in comparison to the city of 500,000. Anything to discredit it would be damaging. The argument however is not about the message but the messengers.

When Paul wrote to the church in Galatia it was to combat the perversion of the gospel. In Galatians 1:7 Paul wrote – *“Evidently some people are throwing you into confusion and are trying to pervert the gospel of Christ.”* That is not the problem at Corinth. The problem is personnel – many preachers, all with the same message, the same gospel, but the focus is not so much on the gospel or Christ, but on the preachers.

Some followed Paul. Paul had come originally with the gospel which he defined for the church in 15:1-4. He told them – *“I want to remind you of the gospel I preached to you...For what I received I passed on to you of first importance: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures.”* That message was foundational and fundamental, never to be altered, watered down or compromised in any way.

Apollos was a Jew from Alexandria, Egypt who was a convert under John the Baptist. If anyone knew who Jesus was, it was John the Baptist thus a great teacher for Apollos. Apollos contended for the faith in Corinth. Cephas or Peter’s witnessing the crucifixion & resurrection of Christ made him a special messenger. Others followed Christ. That was most desirable.

We cannot blame Paul or Apollos or Peter for people wanting to follow them. They had been given the message of the gospel and they were good at delivering it. John Chrysostom, 347-407 AD was an influential church father and gifted preacher. He was always being applauded for his sermons. On one occasion he preached a sermon about not applauding and guess what – they applauded him. He, like Paul or Apollos or Peter, was not out for applause, but instead for the application of the gospel and Christ to the lives of the people.

But note that some did follow Christ. That is what Paul wanted. John Calvin, 1509-1564, made this comment – *“The unity of the church consists in this one thing – that we all depend upon Christ alone and that men occupy an inferior place, so as not to detract in any degree from his pre-eminence.”*

That was Paul’s point and Calvin’s and Chrysostom’s. They wanted Christ to have the pre-eminence or as Paul put it in Colossians 1:17-18 – *“He is before all things and in him all things hold together. And he is the head of the body, the church;*

he is the beginning and the firstborn from among the dead, so that in everything he might have the supremacy.” Paul wants Christ to be supreme, pre-eminent. Next Paul presents –

The Aim – 1 Corinthians 1:13-18

Here Paul aims to take the focus off the preachers, including himself, and put it on Christ. He begins in verse 13 with three rhetorical questions – *“Is Christ divided? Was Paul crucified for you? Were you baptized into the name of Paul?”*

“Is Christ divided?” No. Even in his incarnate state of being divine and human there is unity as both natures are mingled together with no separation. The apostle & gospel writer John, put them together succinctly & concisely in John 1:14 – *“The Word became flesh....”* The Word, as John described it in John 1:1, *“was **with** God and the Word **was** God.”* Verse 1 affirms his divinity. Verse 14 affirms his humanity. The apostle Paul brought the two natures together equally well in Philippians 2:6-8 – *“Who, being in very nature God...being found in appearance as a man...became obedient to death – even death on a cross.”* Divinity cannot die, but humanity can & did in Christ. He needed both to accomplish our salvation.

“Was Paul crucified for you?” No. No one can claim for themselves that unique and unparalleled sacrificial work which belongs to Christ alone, because no one else has ever died for the sins of even one person, let alone the countless elect of God.

“Were you baptized into the name of Paul?” Paul admits to baptizing some but never in his own name. That would violate the Great Commission Jesus gave after his resurrection. In Matthew 28:18-20, based on the fact that all authority in heaven and on earth had been given him, Jesus said – *“Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.”* The Great Commission given by Christ affirmed the Trinity and the equality of the three persons of the Trinity. It also contended that baptism was to be only in the names of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit because baptism claimed that person for God.

Paul in verses 14-16 gives some rambling thoughts about who he baptized or did not baptize. But in verse 17 Paul declares his Christ-given aim – *“For Christ did not send me to baptize, but to preach the gospel – not with words of human wisdom, lest the cross of Christ be emptied of its power.”*

No one will ever be saved by baptism. The only means of salvation is by faith in the gospel as personified, as established in and by Jesus Christ. Baptism is a sign but not the substance of salvation. Church membership is a sign but not the substance of what it means to be saved. IOW it is not the gospel, plus any of these works or more – it is the gospel alone. It is Christ alone, by faith alone, by grace alone – three of the five Solas of the Reformation - Sola Christus, Sola Fide, Sola Gracia.

Paul was sent by Christ to preach the gospel. He preached, “*not with words of human wisdom, lest the cross of Christ be emptied of its power.*” IOW Paul was saying that when he preached it was God in Christ speaking through him. He was merely the conduit through which the electrifying message of the gospel was conveyed. The power was not in him, but in God who gave him the words. Our words are inadequate. God’s words are not – they are sufficient, just as Christ is sufficient.

In verse 18 Paul sums it up – “*For the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved, it is the power of God.*” Here Paul is calling us back to what might be considered old-time religion in which preachers spoke in terms of heaven and hell, of those perishing eternally and those being saved eternally. That is what it comes down to in the reality of the cross, the message, the aim of the cross.

It still towers over the wrecks of time as the old hymn *In the Cross of Christ I Glory* says. It has not lost its power to save because the power behind the cross is the power of God which Paul preached & by which lives were eternally changed. Is yours one of them? Amen.

Soli Deo Gloria