

THE GOSPEL PROJECT – CHRONOLOGICAL LETTERS TO GOD’S PEOPLE THE GOD WHO DIRECTS HIS PEOPLE *Toward Unity in the Cross*

Why can't everyone just 'get along' within the church family? After all, we are the body of Christ – His precious bride. However, when we consider human nature, we realize that disunity started early in human history. In the first family, Cain killed his brother, Abel, over jealousy concerning a sacrifice to the Lord. The letters to God's people in the New Testament teach us how to avoid getting caught in Satan's trap of disagreeing among ourselves over things that amount to nothing. Last week we looked into problems in the Galatian church brought about by Peter of all people. Today, we move to problems in the Corinthian church where support for different personalities overshadowed the gospel of Christ. Unity within the church is important. Let's make sure that our unity is found in Christ alone! **Unity is grounded in Christ, not human personalities.**

Read 1 Corinthians 1:10-17 (ESV) ¹⁰ *I appeal to you, brothers, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that all of you agree, and that there be no divisions among you, but that you be united in the same mind and the same judgment.* ¹¹ *For it has been reported to me by Chloe's people that there is quarreling among you, my brothers.* ¹² *What I mean is that each one of you says, "I follow Paul," or "I follow Apollos," or "I follow Cephas," or "I follow Christ."* ¹³ *Is Christ divided? Was Paul crucified for you? 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 may say that you were baptized in my name.* ¹⁶ *(I did baptize also the household of Stephanas. Beyond that, I do not know whether I baptized anyone else.)* ¹⁷ *For Christ did not send me to baptize but to preach the gospel, and not with words of eloquent wisdom, lest the cross of Christ be emptied of its power.*

In Paul's second letter to the Corinthians, he described his sufferings for Christ. However, it was not only physical things like beatings and imprisonment that he mentioned. He said in **2 Corinthians 11:28 (ESV)** ²⁸ *And, apart from other things, there is the daily pressure on me of my anxiety for all the churches.* From this we see that Paul was beleaguered by problems in the churches. During those days if someone spoke of 'living like a Corinthian', people understood they were living a wild and indulgent lifestyle. Paul founded the church in Corinth on his second missionary journey and he became concerned that the believers in Corinth were living more like Corinthians than Christians.

What do churches in our times quarrel over? Here are just a few.

1. Fight over whether or not to build a children's playground or to use the land for a cemetery.
2. A church argument and vote to decide if a clock in the worship center should be removed.
3. A 45-minute heated argument over the type of filing cabinet to purchase: black or brown; 2, 3, or 4 drawers.
4. A petition to have all church staff clean shaven.

5. A church argument over the discovery that the church budget was off \$0.10. Someone finally gave a dime to settle the issue.
6. Business meeting argument about whether the church should purchase a weed eater or not. It took two business meetings to resolve.
7. A church member was chastised because she brought vanilla syrup to the coffee server. It looked too much like liquor.
8. A dispute in the church because the Lord's Supper had cran/grape juice instead of grape juice.

What drivel! What a waste of time when people are dying without Christ and going into eternity without a Savior. Paul's great business was proclaiming the cross. Should our focus be any less than that?

David Jeremiah comments, "Whenever there are problems in a church or a marriage or any significant relationship, the first thing to slip out the back door is the steady, timeless, sacrificial love that Jesus modeled." Recall in Christ's letter to the Ephesian church in Revelation how Jesus complimented the Ephesians on their hard work and sound doctrine but also told them they had left their first love. We need to strive to do everything we do with a heart that displays the love of God!

Paul did not want there to be divisions in the Corinthian church. The Greek word he used was schismata from which we get our word schism. Schism is a synonym for break or rupture. Schismata can also be translated as dissensions. Dissension was arising among the brothers and sisters in Corinth.

One sign of immaturity within a congregation is quarreling over personalities This is the only time that the name of Chloe is mentioned in the Bible. When we are willing to complain, we should be willing to put our name with the complaint and back it up like Chloe's family did. From the mention of Chloe, we realize that Paul was not 'working from an anonymous tip'.

So what was really going on at Corinth? They were playing favorites. We have already studied how Apollos was a dynamic speaker and because of his personal eloquence he drew quite the following! Cephas who we learned last week was Peter probably was not near the orator as Apollos. But, he was one of those guys who appealed to emotions and spoke from the heart and he gained his own little following!

Paul reveals that he was not impressed when people preferred him over the others. Paul was probably not a "touchy feely" type of leader. Some likely considered his sermons as too deep and too long. Paul's calling the Corinthians to task for taking his side reminds me of an incident when I was in the first grade. The first two days of school I cried and cried for my mother. On the third day of school, my mother came to school at lunch and 'chewed me out' for crying. I decided that since my own mother protested my crying for her it was time to stop it. Like my mother did with me, Paul was helping those who were clinging to him to grow up!

Also in the group were some 'self-righteous ones' who claimed to follow Christ. Most likely they were acting arrogant saying they had transcended earthly teachers. Possibly, this group was connected to the early Gnostics. The Gnostics professed to have a deeper wisdom and superior spirituality than other folks. They taught that the one true God would not enter our world.

Worship services, Sunday School, Connect groups should never turn into a competition. We had a pest control fellow that came to our house regularly for awhile. He loved his church – but his continual bragging about his church had the tendency to make me feel defensive about my own church. That is not what Christ is about. It is not about a particular church – the focus of all Christians should be on Jesus! Don't let your appreciation for any teacher, preacher, author or church lead you into pride. Our allegiance must be to Christ and our unity in Him.

Please know that Paul was not minimizing the importance of baptism. Baptism was commanded by Jesus. Instead Paul was saying that Christian ministry should be a team effort. The kingdom of God does not rise or fall on any one preacher or teacher, or group of individuals with personal agendas. Paul made it plain that **unity is preceded by God's wisdom shown at the cross.**

Read 1 Corinthians 1:18-25 (ESV) ¹⁸ For the word of the cross is folly 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 discernment of the discerning I will thwart." ²⁰ Where is the one who is wise? 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 did not know God through wisdom, it pleased God through the folly of what we preach to save those who believe. ²² For Jews demand signs and Greeks seek wisdom, ²³ but we preach Christ crucified, a stumbling block to Jews and folly to Gentiles, ²⁴ but to those who are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God. ²⁵ For the foolishness of God is wiser than men, and the weakness of God is stronger than men.

The Jews looked for a Messiah who would bring power and great glory, they stumbled at what they considered the weakness of the cross. They missed the truth of the Old Testament prophecies that their Messiah had to suffer and die before He came into power and glory. Wiersbe asks, "How could anybody put faith in an unemployed carpenter from Nazareth who died the shameful death of a common criminal?" We can put our faith in Jesus because that 'carpenter' rose from the grave exhibiting His power over death! Paul wrote in **Romans 1:16 (ESV) ¹⁶ For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek.**

The Greeks laughed at the cross. They studied the 'profound' writings of the Greek scholars but they saw no wisdom in dying on a cross since they were looking at the cross through human eyes.

Paul called on three different types of men to bear witness: the 'wise' expert, the scribe or writer, and the debater. He asked them one question: Through your studies into man's wisdom, have you come to know God in a personal way? They all must answer no! The fact that they laugh at the cross and consider it foolishness is evidence that they are perishing.

I love this passage. There are those who might think I am crazy or ignorant, or backward for believing in Jesus. But, God's Word says I am not! Jesus spoke of the importance of following Him when He said in **Matthew 16:26 (ESV) ²⁶ For what will it profit a man if he gains the whole world and forfeits his soul? Or what shall a man give in return for his soul?**

The word translated “preaching” in the “the preaching of the cross” is not the ordinary word for “announcing” or “proclaiming” which is frequently used in the New Testament. The word here is “Logos” just like in **John 1:1 (ESV)** ¹ *In the beginning was the Word (Logos), and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.*

There are countless reasons unsaved people consider the preaching of the cross foolish, but they all boil down to the belief they have no need for a Savior. The question is, “Who will they have to stand with them when they pass through the valley of the shadow of death?” They will find themselves facing God’s judgment alone instead of being clothed in the righteous of Christ we receive when we accept Christ as our Savior.

We know that multitudes in this ungodly world still today look at the message of God’s Word and laugh. Most men and women are vain in their thinking. In fact, David said in **Psalm 94:11 (ESV)** ¹¹ *the LORD—knows the thoughts of man, that they are but a breath.* The wise man and woman must embrace our own smallness in the light of God’s greatness. **Unity is furthered by Christians who boast only in the Lord.**

Read 1 Corinthians 1:26-31 (ESV) ²⁶ *For consider your calling, brothers: not many of you were wise according to worldly standards, not many were powerful, not many were of noble birth.* ²⁷ *But God chose what is foolish in the world to shame the wise; God chose what is weak in the world to shame the strong;* ²⁸ *God chose what is low and despised in the world, even things that are not, to bring to nothing things that are,* ²⁹ *so that no human being might boast in the presence of God.* ³⁰ *And because of him you are in Christ Jesus, who became to us wisdom from God, righteousness and sanctification and redemption,* ³¹ *so that, as it is written, “Let the one who boasts, boast in the Lord.”*

Someone has said, each group in Corinth felt superior to the other group convinced that they were smarter and more spiritual than the others. Those who lack power in the world sometimes seek power in the church. They see the church as a place that they can exalt themselves and rule. Let’s be careful that we are not guilty of this.

God chose the foolish things of the world to shame the wise is illustrated in the life of the shepherd boy David - Who would have thought that a small shepherd could slay a huge giant? King Saul’s heart must have sunk low when he saw the one person in the entire camp who was willing to face Goliath. However, there was something about David that caused Saul to have a glimmer of hope. That something was the power of the Holy Spirit in David’s life. God also allowed Joseph to be taken to Egypt and Daniel to be taken to Babylon as slaves - but through the Power of the Holy Spirit they accomplished mighty things for the Lord in their generations.

Paul says that God uses five things to accomplish His work: (1) foolish things, (2) weak things, (3) low things, (4) despised things, and (5) things which are not – meaning those who in the eyes of the world do not even exist. God does this to remove our reasons for boasting. Keep in mind that there are three things that it is okay to boast about. We can boast in our Lord, our own weakness and the cross of Christ. Therefore, it is always fine to say, “Hallelujah! What a Savior!