

# 1 Corinthians Bible Study

## Section 2 (1:10-2:16)

### **Sin #1: Divisions in the Church (sectarianism) 1:10-18**

1. Paul pleads with his brethren in Corinth (1:10):
  - a. Paul relates to the church members as equals in their position with Christ with him.
  - b. By addressing them as brethren, Paul gives assurance that they are still in Christ.
  - c. Paul does not plea in his own name, but in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ. He does not demand submission to himself but appeals in the name of the Lord.
  - d. Jesus Christ is Lord. The church at Corinth should not just call Him Lord but must obey Him as Lord.
  - e. Paul's plea for correction:
    - i. Speak the same things; be in unity of speech.
    - ii. Take action to ensure there are no divisions in the church.
    - iii. Choose to be perfectly joined together to achieve unity of mind and judgment.
2. Reports from Cloe's household (1:11-13):
  - a. Contentions (conflict, rivalry, strife, discord).
  - b. Everyone has formed into at least three competing sects.
    - i. Paul: Apostle to the Gentiles, founder of the Corinthian church.
    - ii. Apollos: an eloquent orator and respected teacher of biblical truth.
    - iii. Cephas (Peter): An original disciple and close companion of Jesus. He was the first spokesman for Christ following His ascension. The divisions in Corinth were serious and may have led to a permanent split of the body.

### **Paul's Defense #1: Limited Baptisms 1:10-11**

1. Paul did not create the divisions by his own words or actions (1:14-18):
  - a. In hindsight, Paul is thankful that God called him to only baptize a few believers:
    - a. Crispus and Gaius
    - b. Household of Stephanas
  - b. Paul certainly did not baptize in his own name or seek a following for himself.
2. Paul was called on by Jesus Christ to preach the gospel and appoint others to baptize believers in the name of Jesus Christ:
  - a. Paul's [initial] preaching was not in the wisdom of words, but in the simple truths that Jesus died for our sins (15:1-4) and is Lord of all.
  - b. The cross (penal substitutionary atonement) was at the heart of Paul's message to unbelievers (this stands in direct contrast to the "seeker-sensitive" and "prosperity gospel" churches of our day).
    - i. The message of the cross is the only God-honoring separation or division the church should be focused on or tolerate.
    - ii. The cross is foolishness (nonsense) to those who are perishing.
    - iii. It is the power of God for salvation to those who are being saved.

## **Paul's Defense #2: He limited his teaching to God's Wisdom (1:19-2:16)**

1. God's wisdom is supreme; man's independent wisdom is folly by comparison (1:19-25).
  - a. Paul quotes Isaiah 29:14 to show that God has promised to destroy man's false wisdom and to bring to nothing faulty understanding of divine truth.
  - b. The cross shows how the foolish the very best of man's wisdom is to discern and understand theology or divine truths.
    - i. Where is the wise person who understood the prophecies detailing that God's Suffering Servant would die as a sacrifice for mankind's sins? There isn't one.
    - ii. Where is the wisdom of the scribes, caretakers of the very words Jesus perfectly fulfilled by going to the cross? The scribes' wisdom failed spectacularly in 32AD.
    - iii. Where is the disputer of this age? Why are they still denying truth by rejecting the cross, the empty tomb, and the power of the gospel to save from sins?
    - iv. God has made the wisdom of the world (mankind's collective wisdom and worldviews) completely foolish in light of the cross.
  - c. God is pleased to save the souls who will believe in His wisdom (the cross and the gospel) but they must utterly reject the wisdom of the world that denies Christ.
    - i. Accepting Christ as Lord means we also accept His wisdom (He has proven to be perfectly reliable in ways that are beyond our comprehension).
    - ii. The Jews, the ones specifically entrusted to protect and preserve God's Word, requested a sign rather than accepting and understanding the Word of God committed to them for centuries.
    - iii. The Greeks seek after wisdom in a fruitless effort because they exalt the wisdom of man and ignore the wisdom of God. The cross was not sophisticated enough for the self-proclaimed elite intellects of the world.
  - d. By contrast, followers of Christ believe and preach the "simple" message of Christ crucified (penal substitutionary atonement) as true wisdom that leads to salvation for all who believe.
    - i. Christ crucified is a stumbling block to the Jews who will not let go of the false belief that they are saved by their bloodline descendants of Abraham.
    - ii. Christ crucified is foolishness to Greeks. They prefer to have long philosophical debates about how the world works and what divine influences may be operating in the invisible world. Accepting the "simple" truth of God Himself becoming a man and dying for our sins is foolishness to them.
  - e. But those who are called and respond to the message will readily accept the message of the cross because it perfectly reveals the power and the wisdom of God. God's calling and offer of salvation is not based on race, nationality, economic status, or levels of education and intelligence. Rather it goes out to all who will respond to His call to repentance of sin and to accept Jesus Christ as Lord (Acts 2:38).
2. The evidence is clear; God does not conform to the world's way of thinking:
  - a. Look around the church at Corinth (or anywhere else) and see for yourself

- i. Not many wise according to the flesh (some, but not many).
    - ii. Not many mighty or those with powerful positions and influence (some, but not many).
    - iii. Not many noble who hold status because of family relations/bloodlines (some, but not many).
  - b. Note: the phrase “*are called*” in 1:26 is in italics indicating that this is not in the Greek text. In other words, not many of these groups are represented in the church, not that God only calls a few of them to salvation.
  - c. God has not cherry-picked the most respected and most prominent people from every corner of the world to bring His message of salvation. That might have been man’s approach, but God often selects the most unlikely people to lead under His authority (Abraham, Jacob, Joseph, Moses, Gideon, David, Daniel, fishermen and tax collectors, and Paul the persecutor of the early church).
    - i. God chose the foolish (in the eyes of the world) to put their wisdom to shame
    - ii. God chose the weak/powerless to shame the mighty/powerful
    - iii. God chose the despised to represent who He has given honor
    - iv. God has revealed things that the world cannot see to bring to nothing the things that the world has put their confidence in (Secular Humanism)
    - v. These “foolish” choices were made so that no flesh will dare to bring false glory into His presence. The moment we think we have done something pleasing to God of our own wisdom and power is the moment we fail to acknowledge the true source of all wisdom, power, authority and glory – God Himself.
  - d. It’s all about God, and that’s the greatest news of all!
    - i. Because of God’s wisdom, believers are in Christ Jesus
    - ii. Because of God’s love, believers are in Christ Jesus
    - iii. Because of God’s mercy, believers are in Christ Jesus
    - iv. Because of God’s grace, believers are in Christ Jesus
    - v. Because of God’s sacrifice, believers are in Christ Jesus
    - vi. Do we hear the message? Are we ready to crucify our flesh, that is naturally drawn to the things of this world, and truly make Jesus Lord over every thought, desire, and purpose of our lives? Our life is for Him, not ourselves.
  - e. God is the creator and author of all, and to God goes all the glory:
    - i. All wisdom is from God
    - ii. All righteousness is from God
    - iii. Sanctification (being set apart for the Kingdom of God) is from God
    - iv. Redemption (being saved from the death penalty of sin) is from God
    - v. Therefore, anyone who desires to offer glory must do so only in the Lord
3. Paul is his own example of the above truths (2:1-5)
- a. Paul was not known for the excellence of his speech (speaking, preaching, teaching).
  - b. Paul may have been brilliant, but he did not bring a message that would have impressed a Greek audience that valued deep and weighty ideas out of the mind of man.
  - c. Instead, Paul declared the simple and plain truths about Christ, the cross and the resurrection. He purposely limited his messages to only Jesus Christ and Him crucified.

- d. Paul was not physically strong (perhaps due to suffering much bodily harm in his missionary efforts prior to Corinth). In fact, he says that he came to them in weakness, in fear and in much trembling.
  - e. Paul did not employ the use of persuasion to appeal to human wisdom and intellect. Instead, he demonstrated the power and work of the Holy Spirit to capture the minds and hearts of the Corinthians.
4. Paul is not denouncing the use of godly wisdom and intellectual messages for believers, but that was not how he came witnessed to the carnal Corinthians on his first visit. Paul certainly engaged in deep theological and intellectual writing in this and all other epistles he writes (2:6).
    - a. Declaring the wisdom of God only benefits those who are mature or are maturing in their walk with Christ.
    - b. An unsaved world will not often be persuaded by proclaiming God's wisdom.
    - c. God's wisdom is foreign to an ungodly world
  5. God's wisdom has been present and unchanged from before the beginning of creation (2:7-9)
    - a. God does not overtly display all of His wisdom to the world. He keeps it as a mystery to be discovered by those who are seeking Him.
    - b. None of the ungodly rulers of the age were seeking God and thus they could not discern divine wisdom and the truth about God and Christ.
    - c. If the rulers had known of God's wisdom, they would never have crucified the Lord of glory. In His wisdom God used their wickedness and ignorance to accomplish the greatest event in all of history – the crucifixion of Jesus Christ to redeem all those who would trust in Him for eternal life.
    - d. Paul quotes from Isaiah 64:4 (LXX) to indicate that all of this has been planned by God from before the foundation of the world.
  6. God willingly and graciously shares His wisdom with those who trust in Him (2:10-12)
    - a. Wisdom is primarily communicated by the Holy Spirit, who confirms Scripture
    - b. The Spirit searches (references) all the deep truths of God in order to reveal them to believers who are able to receive them. The Holy Spirit knows the condition of our hearts and He will not offer these truths to those who are unwilling to receive them. It's not about intellectual ability; rather it is about receptivity in the heart.
    - c. Example of man
      - i. Only the spirit in a man knows what is in his heart (well, God also knows)
      - ii. No man can possibly know the things God knows, except God Himself as represented by the Holy Spirit, who is also God.
    - d. Therefore, as believers in Jesus Christ, we have the Holy Spirit sent to us so that we might know the blessings that God has freely given to us to know Him in true wisdom.
  7. Believers have the mind of Christ (2:13-16)
    - a. The Holy Spirit is the teacher of God's truths and He desires to impart wisdom.
    - b. Man can repeat what he has learned from the Holy Spirit who has opened up the truth of God's Word, but God's truths and wisdom can never be claimed to have come from the mind of man.
    - c. The natural man, carnal and unsaved, will not receive what the Holy Spirit teaches to believers because the wisdom of the world tells him they are foolish.
    - d. Spiritual Communication Facts:

- i. God's truth can only be discerned spiritually
- ii. Man's spirit is only able to understand God's truth if the Holy Spirit communicates them directly to his spirit.
- iii. The Holy Spirit will only communicate truth to man's spirit if the man has accepted Jesus Christ as Lord and God.
- iv. The only exception is the ability of unbeliever's spirit to hear the Holy Spirit calling him to faith in the Son of God.
- v. Upon a profession of faith, the Holy Spirit enters the believer and begins the process of revealing God's truth to the believer in proportion to the amount of time spent in prayer, reading God's Word and hearing God's truth communicated through others who have already matured in their wisdom and can share it with others.