

Session 2: 1 Corinthians, Chapter 1

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Questions from Session 1:

1. Where does God draw the line with the wickedness in a nation's life as to its relevance and its usefulness in God's work?

What about a city? What about a church?

What about an individual?

2. How long do you think America has in being a relevant entity for the good of God's work?

The church?

3. "Are you...and Am I making a difference in the world in which we are living?

1 Corinthians 1:1-3, "Paul, called to be an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God, and our brother Sosthenes, ² To the church of God in Corinth, to those sanctified in Christ Jesus and called to be his holy people, together with all those everywhere who call on the name of our Lord Jesus Christ—their Lord and ours: ³ Grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ."

- The name of Jesus Christ occurs 10 times in the first 10 verses.
- A difficult letter about a difficult situation was being written to a church in which he helped establish....Paul's first and repeated thought was of Jesus Christ.
 - ✓ Sometimes in the Church we try to deal with a difficult situation by means of a book of laws...and in the spirit of human justice;
 - ✓ Sometimes in our own affairs, we try to deal with a difficult situation in our own mental and spiritual power....
 - ✓ Paul did none of these things; to this difficult situation he brought Jesus Christ into the picture....His work was presented first.

It was in the light of the Cross of Christ and the Love of Jesus that Paul sought to deal with his problem...in the church at Corinth.

- **This introduction tells us about three (3) things:**

- (1) **It tells us something about the Church.**

Paul speaks of the Church of God which is at Corinth.

To Paul....there is one Church...made of spirit-filled believers with problems.

(2) This passage tells us something about the individual Christian.

Paul says three (3) thing about him/her:

(a) He is consecrated in Jesus Christ.

Consecrated means “to set apart for God”.

The Christian has been consecrated to God by the sacrifice of Jesus Christ.

(b) He describes the Christians as those who have been called to be God’s Dedicated People.

The word “hagios”...means saints. A person that has been devoted to the possession and the service of God.

The root of the word means “separation”....different...

Specially belonging to God and set apart for His service.

(c) Paul addresses his letter to those who have been called in the company of those who in every place call upon the name of the Lord.

The Christian is called into a community whose boundaries include all earth and all heaven. We must open our eyes and see the world around us that is hungry for an answer to life’s question....”What is this all about??”

(3) This passage tells us something about Jesus Christ.

Paul speaks of our Lord Jesus Christ, and then, as it were; He then corrects himself and adds *their Lord and ours*.

No man, no Church, has exclusive possession of Jesus Christ.

He is our Lord...but He is Lord of all men...all we have to do is choose to accept Him as Lord. No forced effort by Jesus...by the Father...

It is the amazing wonder of Christianity that all men possess all the love of Jesus Christ, that “God loves each one of us as if there was only one of us to love.”

Oh, the love that drew salvation’s plan!

Oh, the grace that brought it down to man!

Oh, the mighty gulf that God did span At Calvary.

Mercy there was great and grace was free,

Pardon there was multiplied to me,

There my burdened soul found liberty...at Calvary.

Who in the world was Sosthenes?

Note: **Sosthenes** (Greek, "safe in strength") was the chief ruler of the synagogue at Corinth, who, according to the New Testament, was seized and beaten by the mob in the presence of Gallio, the Roman governor, when he refused to proceed against Paul at the instigation of the Jews (Acts 18:12-17).

Some theories:

- A convert to the faith and co-author of the First Epistle to the Corinthians. Note: We do know that Paul signed the letter (autographed by Paul)... "So that you (the church at Corinth) can be sure that the letter comes from me." (1 Corinthians 16:21).
- Alleged that Sosthenes is a later name of Crispus, who is mentioned in Acts 18:8 and 1 Corinthians 1:14. [1]
- Sosthenes...the apostle joins with him as a brother in Christ, and very probably a ministering brother, and a companion of his.
- He might be well known to the Corinthians, and respected by them;
- Paul chose to join him with him, to show their agreement in doctrine and discipline, and in advice to them, which might have the greater weight with them; see Acts 18:17.

Paul is considered by most theologians to be the author of both Corinthian letters.

1 Corinthians 1:4-9, "*I always thank my God for you because of his grace given you in Christ Jesus. ⁵ For in him you have been enriched in every way—with all kinds of speech and with all knowledge—⁶ God thus confirming our testimony about Christ among you. ⁷ Therefore you do not lack any spiritual gift as you eagerly wait for our Lord Jesus Christ to be revealed. ⁸ He will also keep you firm to the end, so that you will be blameless on the day of our Lord Jesus Christ. ⁹ God is faithful, who has called you into fellowship with his Son, Jesus Christ our Lord.*

The necessity for “Thanking God for His grace.”

Three things stand out in this passage:

1. The promise which came true.

Paul had preached to the Corinthians that Christ could do certain things for them...and now he claims that all he said that Christ could do has come true.

- Enriched in every way
- In your speaking (utterance)

- In all your knowledge
- The testimony about Christ is confirmed in you
- You do not lack any spiritual gift.

2. They were given every spiritual gift.

- Not from our own achievement...Gift from God.
- Not to be used as we want to use them, but as God wants to use them.
(Not for the profit or prestige, but the glory of God and the good of men).

3. There is the ultimate end...The Day of the Lord.

- The day in which Jesus would come back in all His power and glory.
- It was Paul's belief....and should be ours...that when the ultimate judgment comes, the man who is in Christ can meet it unafraid because he will be clothed...not in his own merits...but in the merits of Christ so that no one will be able take it away...
- We will stand blameless in the sight of our faithful God.

To God Be the Glory!

1 Corinthians 1:10-17, “I appeal to you, brothers and sisters, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that all of you agree with one another in what you say and that there be no divisions among you, but that you be perfectly united in mind and thought. ¹¹ My brothers and sisters, some from Chloe’s household have informed me that there are quarrels among you. ¹² What I mean is this: One of you says, “I follow Paul”; another, “I follow Apollos”; another, “I follow Cephas”; still another, “I follow Christ.”¹³ Is Christ divided? Was Paul crucified for you? Were you baptized in the name of Paul? ¹⁴ I thank God that I did not baptize any of you except Crispus and Gaius, ¹⁵ so no one can say that you were baptized in my name. ¹⁶ (Yes, I also baptized the household of Stephanas; beyond that, I don’t remember if I baptized anyone else.) ¹⁷ For Christ did not send me to baptize, but to preach the gospel—not with wisdom and eloquence, lest the cross of Christ be emptied of its power.”

Paul tries to mend the situation that had arisen in the Church at Corinth.

Remember...He was writing from Ephesus.

Some members (servants probably) from the house of Chloe...

Reported that there were some divisions in the church (dissention and disunity).

Two times Paul addresses the Corinthians as “BROTHERS.”

Why do you think he did that?

Two (2) reasons (at least):

1. Softens the rebuke that is given...not with a rod of discipline as a schoolmaster might do...but with an emotion of love and concern.
2. He wanted them to understand that “brothers” in Christ don’t do that...argue, gossip, cause confusion and disrupt the real reason for being a Christian.

They should live in brotherly love.

Paul uses two (2) phrases to try and bring them together:

1. Make up your differences....speak the same thing....agree with one another....**Stop arguing amongst yourselves so that there will be real harmony**...

This is used to help two hostile parties reach agreement (compromise).

2. Wishes them to be KNIT TOGETHER....a medical term used of knitting together bones that have been fractured or joining together a joint that has been dislocated.

THE DISUNION IS UNNATURAL AND MUST BE CURED FOR THE SAKE OF THE HEALTH AND EFFICIENCY OF THE BODY OF THE CHURCH.

Paul “hit the nail on the head!”

Churches are dying due to unhealthy actions within the church.

We have enough problems on the outside of the church than to have to deal with problems within!

This shows immaturity within the members of the church.

What Paul means:

Four factions or orders...followers of different leaders....

Four parties....who have not broken away from the church.

Divisions.....or “possibility of first denominational differences.”

QUARRELS AMONGST YOU...Paul uses the term meaning “rents in a garment”...tears.

The church is in danger of becoming as unsightly as a torn garment.

No problem between Paul, Cephas and Apollos. They were on track.

But:

Followers of:

- 1. Paul**...probably mostly gentiles. Saved...but felt that the gospel of freedom gave them rights to do ungodly things...but they were saved.
- 2. Apollos**...Jew from Alexandria...eloquent speaker...came from a very intellectual and philosophical family. The followers were intellectuals who were fast turning Christianity into a philosophy rather than a religion.
- 3. Cephas**...Jewish form of Peter's name. Most likely Jews that sought to teach that a man must still observe the Jewish law. Legalists who exalted law...and, by so doing, belittled grace.
- 4. Christ**....claimed that they were the only true Christians at Corinth. Fault was not in saying that they belonged to Christ, but in acting as if Christ belonged to them.

Paul....was not belittling baptism. Baptism was into the name of Jesus. Professed Jesus to be Lord.

“Into the name” implied utter possession. Possessed by Christ.

Paul claimed that he set before men the Cross of Christ in its simplest terms.

No rhetoric or cleverness can win the souls to Jesus....or make our life more “holy” because of our “words of wisdom.”

Present the cross and “He will draw all men unto Him.”

The Holy Spirit is the One that takes the story to the next level of understanding.....with our heart instead of the head.

1 Corinthians 1:18-25, “*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.* ¹⁹ *For it is written: “I will destroy the wisdom of the wise; the intelligence of the intelligent I will frustrate.”* ²⁰ *Where is the wise person? Where is the teacher of the law? Where is the philosopher of this age? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of the world?* ²¹ *For since in the wisdom of God the world through its wisdom did not know him, God was pleased through the foolishness of what was preached to save those who believe.* ²² *Jews demand signs and Greeks look for wisdom,* ²³ *but we preach Christ crucified: a stumbling block to Jews and foolishness to Gentiles,* ²⁴ *but to those whom God has called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God.* ²⁵ *For the foolishness of God is wiser than human wisdom, and the weakness of God is stronger than human strength.”*

THE STORY OF CHRIST CRUCIFIED.... A STUMBLING BLOCK TO THE JEWS AND FOOLISHNESS TO THE GREEKS

Both to the cultured Greek and the self-righteous Jew the story that Christianity had to tell sounded like the sheerest folly....and without a doubt, ignorant thinking.

Paul begins by making free use of two (2) quotations from Isaiah (Isaiah 29:14 and 33:18). This was to show how mere human wisdom is bound to fail.

He cites the undeniable fact that:

- For all its wisdom the world had never found God....and
- They were still blindly and gropingly seeking Him.

That very search was designed by God to:

- Show men their own helplessness,
- Prepare the way for the acceptance of Him who is the one true way.

What then was the Christian message?

If we study the four (4) great sermons in the Book of Acts (Acts 2:14--39; 3:12—26; 4:8—12; 10:36—43) we find that there are certain constant elements in the Christian preaching:

1. There is the claim that the great promised time of God has come;
2. There is a summary of the life, death and resurrection of Jesus;
3. There is a claim that all this was the fulfillment of prophecy;
4. There is the assertion that Jesus will come again;
5. There is an urgent invitation to people to repent and receive the promised gift of the Holy Spirit.

To the Jews the message was a stumbling block. Why?

Two reasons:

1. **To them it was incredible that one who had ended life upon a cross could possibly be God's Chosen One.** They knew that their law said, "He that is hanged is accursed by God." (Deuteronomy 21:23).
This, to the Jew, disproved that Jesus was the Son of God. Even with Isaiah 53 before their eyes, the Jew had never dreamed of a suffering Messiah. The cross was, indeed, a barrier as to a belief in Jesus.
2. **The Jew sought for signs.** When Paul was preaching, there were many false Messiahs...Theudas (A.D. 45) (thousands of people sold their homes and believed he would part Jordan by mere commandment...A.D. 45, a man from Egypt had great words to say and 30,000 people followed him out to the Mount of Olives...and by mere commandment the walls of Jerusalem would fall down....
That was what they were looking for...

In Jesus they saw one who was meek and lowly, one who deliberately avoided the spectacular, one who served and ended upon the cross....an impossible picture of the Chosen One of God.

What are you looking for....One that can heal the sick, raise the dead, and have great oratory skills that can persuade men and women to follow him?

To the Greeks, the message was foolishness! Why?

Two reasons:

1. The Greek idea of God was a “total inability to feel.”

The Greeks argued that if God can feel joy or sorrow or anger or grief it means that some man has for that moment influenced God and is therefore greater than He.....so, they believed God was above this; that He was incapable of feeling so that none may ever affect Him. A God who suffered was to the Greeks a contradiction in terms. Plutarch....declared that it was an insult to God to involve Him in human affairs. The very idea of incarnation, of God becoming man, was revolting to the Greek mind.

2. The Greek sought wisdom.

They loved the man with a clever mind and cunning tongue, a mental acrobat, a man who with glittering and persuasive rhetoric could make the worse appear the better reason; the man who gloried in the stimulus of “the mental hike (high).”

The wise man, the Greek would say, is a man that was a master of the silver tongue and could persuade other men to think. The Greeks were intoxicated with fine words....and to them the Christian preacher with his blunt message seemed a crude and uncultured figure, to be laughed at and ridiculed rather than be listened to and respected....

But...Paul said, “What looks like God’s foolishness is wiser than men’s wisdom; and what looks like God’s weakness is stronger than men’s strength.”

THE GLORY OF THE SHAME

1 Corinthians 1:26—31, “Brothers and sisters, think of what you were when you were called. Not many of you were wise by human standards; not many were influential; not many were of noble birth. ²⁷ But God chose the foolish things of the world to shame the wise; God chose the weak things of the world to shame the strong. ²⁸ God chose the lowly things of this world and the despised things—and the things that are not—to nullify the things that are, ²⁹ so that no one may boast before him. ³⁰ It is because of him that you are in Christ Jesus, who has become for us wisdom from God—that is, our righteousness, holiness and redemption. ³¹ Therefore, as it is written: “Let the one who boasts boast in the Lord.”

Paul glories in the fact that, for the most part, the Church was composed of:

- The simplest people
- The humblest people.

But...the Church was not made up of ignorant...slaves.

There were many great and wise servants of God:

- Dionysius at Athens (Acts 17:34)
- Sergius Paulus, the proconsul of Crete (Acts 13:6—12)
- The noble ladies of Thessalonica and Beroea (Acts 17:4—12)

- Erastus, the city treasurer, probably of Corinth (Romans 16:23)

Towards the end of the 2nd century Pliny, the governor of Bithynia, wrote to Trajan the Emperor, saying that the Christians came from every rank in society.

But....most Christians were simple and humble folk.

Paul finished this passage with a quotation from Jeremiah 9:23, 24 (Read).

As Bultmann put it, the one basic sin is “a desire for recognition.”

It is only when we realize that we can do nothing and that God can and will do everything that real religion...no, real Christianity begins.

It is a fact of experience that the man who thinks that he can take on life all by himself is certain in the end to be shipwrecked.

There are Four (4) great things which Paul insists Christ is for us:

1. He is wisdom.

It is only in following him that we walk aright and only in listening him that we hear the truth. He is the expert in life.

2. He is righteousness.

In the writing of Paul “righteousness” always means a right relationship with God. Of our own efforts we can never achieve that. It is ours only by realizing through Jesus Christ that it comes not from what we can do for God, but what He has done for us.

3. He is Consecration.

It is only in the presence of Christ that life can be what it ought to be. The Christian walks with him and only in that company can a man keep his garments unspotted from the world.

4. He is deliverance.

A man used to complain that men flocked to the doctors and to the dentist but never to the man who could cure their souls.

Jesus Christ can deliver a man from past sin, from present helplessness, and from future fear. He is the emancipator from slavery, from self, and from sin.

THE QUESTIONS FROM THESE FOUR (4) TRUTHS ABOUT WHO CHRIST IS FOR US!

Do you really want God’s wisdom for your life?

Do you really want to have a “right relationship with God?

Are you consecrated enough to walk in the steps of Jesus?

Do you really want to be delivered from the grasp of the enemy?