

Date: **October 15, 2009**
Reading: **1 Corinthians 1-4**

The Corinthians had “preacher-it is.” The apostle Paul, who was responsible for the beginning of



a congregation in Corinth (Acts 18:1-18; 1 Corinthians 4:15), had received a report about the Corinthians indicating that they were aligning themselves with various preachers. “I am of Paul” or “I am of Apollos” or “I am of Cephas” – Paul asked the telling questions: Is Christ divided? Was Paul crucified for you? Were you baptized in the name of Paul? Although Christ had prayed for unity among His disciples, the disciples at Corinth were clearly divided (John 17:20-21)!

Aligning oneself with some preacher of the gospel cheapens the gospel. The message preached is thus treated as though it was the personal property of the one preaching it. “No!” said Paul. In these early chapters of First Corinthians, the apostle affirmed that the gospel is foolishness according to man’s wisdom (1:18-25). The gospel doesn’t belong to any human being; it is not human wisdom, but rather divine wisdom (2:6-13). Even the manner of Paul’s preaching at Corinth demonstrated that the power is not in the preacher, but in the message (2:1-5).

The identity of the gospel as divine wisdom is abundantly clear in chapter 2. Paul claimed that God had revealed His hidden wisdom to the apostles through the Holy Spirit (2:7-12). The Holy Spirit even taught the apostles the very words to be used to convey the hidden wisdom of the gospel.

It is certainly not wrong to appreciate the work that a preacher does (as one would appreciate the labors of others also), but Paul explained that a preacher is just a minister, one who serves (3:5). Those who preach the message are laborers, but God gives the increase (3:6-9). They are stewards, individuals who are entrusted with that which does not belong to them (4:1). No one should boast in a preacher (3:21), for Christians belong to Christ (3:23)!

The way the Corinthians were treating those who had taught or baptized them reminds me of children who receive a valuable gift...and then play with the box that it came in.

How blessed we are to have free access to the revealed wisdom of God! Others may think that it is foolishness, but to us who are being saved, it is the power of God to salvation!

Happy reading,
Allen

Reading: 1 Corinthians Chapters 1 & 2

Truly preaching “Jesus Christ and Him crucified” will...

- **Call us into the fellowship of God’s Son**, our Lord. (1:1-9) With this fellowship come myriad treasures, such as apostleship (for some, like Paul), sanctification and sainthood (for all), and spiritual blessings (grace, speech, knowledge, eagerness, confirmation, blamelessness – Compare the list in Ephesians 1.).
- **Unify those who believe in Him**. (1:10-17) Denominationalism is contrary to the very essence of discipleship, in addition to thwarting Jesus’ will, as expressed in John 17:20-21.
- **Confound Jews and Gentiles alike**. (1:18-25) The cross trips up the Jewish sign-seekers (who were never really convinced by all God’s signs and wonders, anyway) and destroys the renowned wisdom of the Greeks.
 - **The gospel’s theology**: Omnipotent God serves His creation through one glorious and selfless act of ultimate sacrifice. **In this is the demonstration of the Spirit and of the power of God!**
 - **The Greeks’ mythology**: A pantheon of fairly impotent gods serve themselves through an unending stream of shameful and selfish antics of ultimate egoism. (The Greeks’ various *philosophies* fare no better when contrasted with Christianity!) **The wisest ideas of any world religion are simply the expressions of the weakness and foolishness of the wisdom of men.**

And,

- **Give believers cause to glory**.
 - We glory, **not in ourselves, but in the Lord**. (1:26-31)
 - We glory **because the mystery of the gospel was pre-determined before the ages for our glory**. (2:6-7)
 - We glory **because God allows us to understand things which most people in the world miss**. We who are spiritual can understand the things which God has freely given us (2:10-16), while “natural” people, including the rulers of this age, did not know (and so unwittingly played into God’s will, 2:6, 8) and *cannot receive*, because they seem foolish to them. (2:14)
 - We glory **because the Spirit teaches us, in spiritual words, the deep things of God**. *We have the mind of Christ!*

That’s why Paul determined “not to know anything ... except” that topic, which is the core of the gospel. (2:1-5)

For Further Study:

Scriptural names for the church. “The church of God which is at Corinth.” (1:2) Let us avoid becoming overly attached to the description, “church of Christ.” There are several other descriptions of God’s church! (Ephesians 1:23; 2:19; 1 Thess. 1:1; Hebrews 12:23; etc.).

Proper emphasis on preaching. “Christ did not send me to baptize, but to preach the gospel...” (1:17) There are other examples of this way of phrasing a point. “Not... but” is intended to emphasize or highlight the second thing, rather than to flatly deny the first things. Other examples: Matt. 10:34; 20:28; Mark 9:37; John 1:13; 6:27; 11:4; 12:44; Acts 5:4; Romans 8:9.

So much more could be said from these rich chapters, but hopefully these short notes will add a blessing to the readers.

Reading: 1 Corinthians Chapters 3 & 4

Wisdom vs. Carnality:

- **In the context of his discourse on spiritual wisdom, Paul** again addresses the divisions, quarrels and contentions among the Corinthians. Three times in the first four verses he **accuses them of being carnal** (fleshly, immature, underdeveloped).
- **Carnality is the one basic flaw that characterizes and explains all of the Corinthians' problems.** For starters, from chapters 1 and 3, we see that **the seeds of denominationalism had been sown in the Corinthians' carnal hearts!** Consider this as Paul addresses the many and varied symptoms of this condition throughout the book. (Brother Bill Hall recently made a compelling argument that their fundamental problem was a lack of love. Carnality breeds selfishness, which is the opposite of love, so maybe these views aren't all that different.)
- **For a parallel passage** contrasting spiritual- and earthly wisdom, **see James 3:13-18.**

Perspective on Our Work:

- **Neither the evangelist nor the teacher is anything.** (3:7) See Luke 17:10.
- **God should get all the glory, because everything and everyone belongs to Him.** (3:21-23) He gives grace for our various ministries. (3:5, 10) We are *God's* workers, in *God's* field (3:9), being fitted together to form *God's* building (3:9), *God's* temple (3:17) on the foundation of Jesus Christ. (3:11) Remember, we are "the church of God" (1:2) and God adds to it. (Cp. Acts 2:47)
- **We can't convert anyone; only God can do that.** ("The law of the Lord is perfect, converting the soul...") We simply do His work, being careful how we do it. (3:10) He gives the increase. (3:5-7)

Unity:

- If the Spirit of God dwells in us, we will know that we are all one. (3:8, 21-23) *Do we revel in unity? Are we satisfied with unity?*
- Ironically, while **the Corinthians** claimed to be *following* the men who had taught them the gospel, chapter 4 makes it clear that they **were running ahead of their teachers.** They were thinking beyond the Scriptures (4:6); they had forgotten that everything they had spiritually had been given to them (4:7); they had come to despise the apostles (4:3, 6-21); and they were not following the apostles' examples. (4:16-17) **The apostles**, who were humble in their own sight (4:1), **were actually being despised by the Corinthians!**
- **Paul** reminds them that he was more than a teacher, he **was their spiritual father.** He inserts a reminder of his apostolic authority, but **emphasizes his love** for them and his desire to be able to behave gently toward them.

Let us maintain the proper perspective on ourselves and our work, and let us pursue wisdom and unity.

May God bless you as meditate on and apply His word.

Date: October 16, 2009

Reading: 1 Corinthians 5-8

There are many things which bring pleasure into our lives, things for which we feel a good deal of satisfaction. Sometimes, however, people are proud of the oddest things. Take, for instance, the Corinthians. They were proud of their acceptance of an immoral man in their congregation.

There was a member of the congregation who “had his father’s wife,” probably his stepmother. He was committing sexual immorality that wasn’t even accepted by the Gentile world (5:1). Rather than mourn that such sin was being committed by one of them, the Corinthians were proud, apparently boasting about their “open-mindedness” (5:6).

Paul, on the other hand, was concerned about the man’s soul and instructed the Corinthians to “deliver such a one to Satan for the destruction of the flesh” (5:5). Later in the same chapter, the apostle helps us understand what he meant when he commanded the Corinthians not to keep company with any brother who is sexually immoral, to “put away from [them]selves the evil person” (5:9, 13). Paul wrote that they were not even to “eat with such a person” (5:11).

Paul had to clarify for the Corinthians that his instructions were intended to apply to the relationship between Christians, not people of the world (5:9-11).

The Corinthians were probably not the first to be proud of their willingness to protect a sinner, nor were they the last. It is not unheard of in our day for members of a congregation to be unwilling to withdraw themselves from a sinner when congregational discipline is indicated. They sometimes “pride” themselves on their “mercy” and “understanding.” Still, it is hardly “merciful” to encourage a sinner in his evil ways nor is it particularly “understanding” to place “congregational peace” over a sinner’s eternal salvation.

Love acts in the best interests of others. Sometimes what a person needs is to be convinced of the seriousness of his sin.

Hopefully we will always strive to do the “loving” thing!

Happy reading,
Allen

Date: October 17, 2009
Reading: 1 Corinthians 9-12

“Therefore, whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God” (10:31).

The division of chapters in our reading schedule could perhaps have been done better. Although 1 Corinthians 8 was included in yesterday’s reading, its subject matter ties it to chapters 9 & 10, part of today’s reading. The chapter trilogy addresses the problem of eating meat sacrificed to idols.

Chapter 8 introduces the subject and notes that the Corinthians needed to be aware of how the exercise of their liberties might affect their weaker brethren. The apostle Paul stated his determination: “if food makes my brother stumble, I will never again eat meat, lest I make my brother stumble” (8:13).



“Easy enough to say, Paul,” some Corinthians might have responded to the apostle’s challenge in chapter 8. “I walk the way I talk,” the apostle essentially answered in chapter 9. Paul noted that he had done just as he was encouraging the Corinthians to do. He had the right to be financially supported as he preached the gospel, but he had given up that liberty/right while at Corinth “lest we hinder the gospel of Christ” (9:12b).

Some of the Corinthians may have assumed that their spiritual relationship with Christ was so strong that they need not worry about the possibility of sin, regardless of their actions. In chapter 10, the apostle reminded these Christians of the spiritual blessings that God’s people of the Old Testament, Israel, enjoyed when they came out of Egypt. They “all were baptized into Moses...ate the same spiritual food...drank the same spiritual drink” (10:2-4). But disaster struck! Most of them (a whole generation!) died in the wilderness. Why? “Lusting after evil things,” they committed idolatry and sexual immorality, tempted God and complained (10:6-10).

Just because one is blessed by God doesn’t mean that it is impossible to fall (become guilty of sin)! Over-confidence is deadly for the Christian (10:12)!

Although we are not any better or worse, spiritually speaking, for eating food (8:8), some of the Corinthians were apparently willing, because of this knowledge, to actually eat meat that had been sacrificed to an idol *in the idol’s temple* (8:10; and by their action also encouraging weaker brethren to eat sacrificed meat)! When they did so, they involved themselves, not just in eating meat, but in idolatry (10:18-21)!

We are extremely blessed with all spiritual blessings in Christ (Ephesians 1:3), but we must understand that it is possible for us to be over-confident, not fully appreciating the danger of temptation, and thus be tripped up by sin.

Rather than be “self-centered” (my liberty, my right!), we must be “God-centered” and measure all that we do in terms of whether God is glorified by our actions (10:31).

Happy reading,
Allen

Date: Monday Oct. 19th, 2009
Reading: I Cor. 13-16

In I Cor. 16:3 Paul says he will send those that the church in Corinth accredited with a letter, to Judea with the money collected. He also points out that he gave the same instructions to the churches of Galatia. By human wisdom it seems a huge waste of man power for each church to send someone to Jerusalem but we see a definite pattern here. We see that each church was autonomous.



An "automaton" is a self-operating machine. It contains within itself everything it needs to function. We say something is "automated" when it can do its work by itself. A church is "autonomous" because God has given each assembly what is necessary for it to function properly within itself. God did not set up a system of big churches and little churches (although, if He had, I think money would probably flow from the bigger churches to support the little churches, instead of the opposite systems we see today). Each church, irrespective of size, can and should function independently.

In I Cor 16 we find that several congregations all helped the saints in Judea but they still did it independently. Brethren in Judea were hungry because of famine, so churches throughout Asia were sending money for their relief. (This is similar to the situation now in Zimbabwe. Many churches and individuals are sending help because of the famine, which affects hundreds of Christians in many areas of that country.) We also find that "if it seems advisable" Paul would go too. Paul was recognizing that it was the Corinthians that had the right to make that decision or request.

We can learn **each church gave money**.

We can learn **the churches did NOT send money to a "sponsoring church,"** who then forwarded the money to Judea. No, each church operated independently. The idea of a sponsoring church is not found within the pages of the New Testament.

There is a certain level of church cooperation found in Scripture, but it falls far short of what so many have done today. There was not banding together of groups of churches for some big project. There was no "mother church" which oversaw smaller child churches. There were assemblies, each having their own responsibility for the work God had given.

Do you see that as the pattern?

God Bless the readers.

David Williams