

Divisions in the Church

1 Corinthians 1:1-17

1 Corinthians 1:1-17: *“Paul, called to be an apostle of Jesus Christ through the will of God, and Sosthenes our brother, 2 To the church of God which is at Corinth, to those who are sanctified in Christ Jesus, called to be saints, with all who in every place call on the name of Jesus Christ our Lord, both theirs and ours: 3 Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. 4 I thank my God always concerning you for the grace of God which was given to you by Christ Jesus, 5 that you were enriched in everything by Him in all utterance and all knowledge, 6 even as the testimony of Christ was confirmed in you, 7 so that you come short in no gift, eagerly waiting for the revelation of our Lord Jesus Christ, 8 who will also confirm you to the end, that you may be blameless in the day of our Lord Jesus Christ. 9 God is faithful, by whom you were called into the fellowship of His Son, Jesus Christ our Lord. 10 Now I plead with you, brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you all speak the same thing, and that there be no divisions among you, but that you be perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment. 11 For it has been declared to me concerning you, my brethren, by those of Chloe’s household, that there are contentions among you. 12 Now I say this, that each of you says, “I am of Paul,” or “I am of Apollos,” or “I am of Cephas,” or “I am of 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 lest anyone should say that I had baptized in my own name. 16 Yes, I also baptized the household of Stephanas. Besides, I do not know whether I baptized any other. 17 For Christ did not send me to baptize, but to preach the gospel, not with wisdom of words, lest the cross of Christ should be made of no effect.”*

Background Notes

The church at Corinth was founded during Paul’s second missionary journey in the early 50s AD. Let’s read about it in Acts 18:1-8. *“After these things Paul departed from Athens and went to Corinth. And he found a certain Jew named Aquila, born in Pontus, who had recently come from Italy with his wife Priscilla (because Claudius had commanded all the Jews to depart from Rome); and he came to them. So because he was of the same trade, he stayed with them and worked; for by occupation they were tentmakers. And he reasoned in the synagogue every Sabbath, and persuaded both Jews and Greeks.*

When Silas and Timothy had come from Macedonia, Paul was compelled by the Spirit, and testified to the Jews that Jesus is the Christ. But when they opposed him and blasphemed, he shook his garments and said to them, “Your blood be upon your own heads; I am clean. From now on I will go to the Gentiles.” And he departed from there and entered the house of a certain man named Justus, one who worshiped God, whose house was next door to the synagogue. Then Crispus, the ruler of the synagogue, believed on the Lord with all his household. And many of the Corinthians, hearing, believed and were baptized.”

Paul settled at Corinth for a year and a half on his second missionary journey, preaching and teaching the Word (Acts 18:11). While he lived in Corinth, the Jews who opposed him and his message attempted to get him arrested and tried before the Gentile authorities. In the end, the Gentiles at Corinth vented their anti-Jewish feelings, not against Paul, but against a man named Sosthenes, the leader of the local synagogue. Sosthenes was given a public beating in front of the judgment seat at Corinth (Acts 18). There is a good possibility that this man, Sosthenes, is the same Sosthenes who is mentioned in 1 Corinthians 1:1. If so, he had become a Christian convert, and a companion of the apostle Paul. The incident in Acts 18 may have opened Sosthenes to the gospel.

In any case, after a stay of a year and a half, the apostle Paul left Corinth and moved on to Ephesus with Priscilla and Aquila. Later, during Paul's third missionary journey, when he spent two and a half years in Ephesus, he heard that problems had arisen in the church at Corinth. Some folks from Chloe's family had visited or written to Paul about quarrels in the Corinthian church: *"For it has been declared to me concerning you, my brethren, by those of Chloe's household, that there are contentions among you."*

Verse 17 tells us that three men from Corinth, Stephanas, Fortunatus, and Achaicus, had come to Ephesus and shared both the good news and bad news about conditions at the church at Corinth. We see the good news in the first nine verses.

Paul called the Corinthian believers "saints." This means they were sanctified, or set apart for God's holy use, and that is the position of every believer (v2). Furthermore, the church at Corinth was enriched with spiritual gifts. In fact, they had all the spiritual gifts Verses 5-7: *"...you were enriched in everything by Him in all utterance and all knowledge, even as the testimony of Christ was confirmed in you, so that you come short in no gift, eagerly waiting for the revelation of our Lord Jesus Christ."* So the Corinthian believers had all the spiritual gifts.

There's more good news in verse 7: they were eagerly waiting the return of the Lord. Not only the Rapture of the Church, which Paul will discuss in chapter 15, but also for the revelation of Christ, when the Lord Jesus will return to set up His kingdom on this earth. At that time, they (and we) will be blameless because of the righteousness of Christ which has been imputed to us. Until that time, we are confirmed in the faith (v8). And we cannot lose our salvation, even though we may backslide, just as many of the Corinthians had backslidden. That was the good news.

What about the bad news? The bad news was that many of the Corinthians were worldly and had backslidden. As a result, there were problems in the church at Corinth.

Doctrinal Points

1. Spiritual gifts do not make believers spiritual.

Verses 10-13: *"Now I plead with you, brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you all speak the same thing, and that there be no divisions among you, but that you be perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same*

judgment. For it has been declared to me concerning you, my brethren, by those of Chloe's household, that there are contentions among you. Now I say this, that each of you says, "I am of Paul," or "I am of Apollos," or "I am of Cephas," or "I am of Christ." Is Christ divided? Was Paul crucified for you? Or were you baptized in the name of Paul?"

The Corinthian believers were enriched by Christ in everything - in all utterance and in all knowledge (v5). And the church at Corinth had all the spiritual gifts; they did not lack a single spiritual gift (v7). But now in verses 10-13 we learn that the believers at Corinth were not spiritual. In fact, in chapter 3 Paul refers to them as worldly, or carnal. So spiritual gifts do not make believers spiritual.

There were divisions and quarrels in the Corinthian church. As believers, they were not practicing unity. Paul's prayer was they would be of the same mind, and thus be unified.

The different factions at Corinth centered on personalities (v12). "I am of Paul" - "I am of Apollos" - "I am of Cephas (Peter)" - and even of Christ. Those who were saying "I am of Christ" meant that they were of Christ - but their brothers and sisters were not! In verse 13, Paul shows the fallacy of such factions by using himself as an example: *"Was Paul crucified for you? Were you baptized into the name of Paul?"* The obvious answer was "No."

Every Christian has at least one spiritual gift, according to 1 Peter 4:10, but not every Christian is spiritual. A believer is spiritual when the fruit of the Spirit is evident in his or her life: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control (Galatians 5). Is the fruit of the Spirit evident in your life? Are you joyful? Do you exhibit patience in your home or at work? What about self-discipline, or self-control? Is your goodness evident to everyone?

You may be a very gifted believer, and that is truly a great blessing, but if the fruit of the Spirit is not seen in your life, you are not a spiritual believer. Spiritual gifts do not make spiritual believers.

2. Baptism is not necessary for salvation.

Verses 14 through 17: *"I thank God that I baptized none of you except Crispus and Gaius, lest anyone should say that I had baptized in my own name. Yes, I also baptized the household of Stephanas. Besides, I do not know whether I baptized any other. For Christ did not send me to baptize, but to preach the gospel, not with wisdom of words, lest the cross of Christ should be made of no effect."*

The Bible teaches that baptism is an important step in a Christian's life. Believer's baptism is important, but the Bible does **not** teach that baptism is necessary for salvation. Baptism is a step you take **after** you become a Christian. When you are baptized as a believer, you are publicly announcing to everyone that you are now a Christian - that you have identified yourself with Jesus Christ in His death, burial, and resurrection.

Baptism by immersion presents a picture of death, burial and resurrection, and that is why we believe the Bible teaches immersion as the mode of believer's baptism. Going into the water portrays the great biblical truth that believers have

died and have been buried to their old way of life. Coming up out of the water portrays that the believer is now alive in Christ and wants to live his or her life in a new way - for Jesus Christ!

Believer's baptism is not infant baptism. Baptism does not make anyone a Christian, and it is not necessary for salvation. The proper time for believer's baptism is after a person has come to faith, and it is a public testimony that he or she has come to faith.

Some people use Acts 2:38 as a supposed "proof text" for the necessity of baptism for salvation. No. Peter was just giving the logical steps the Jews at Pentecost were to take as they left Judaism to follow Christ -- repent, believe in Jesus, be baptized and receive the Holy Spirit. Acts 2:38 is **not** a proof-text that baptism is necessary for salvation.

Do you think that the apostle Paul could have ever written these verses in 1 Corinthians 1 if baptism was necessary for salvation? After mentioning the relatively few folks that he baptized at Corinth, Paul wrote, "*For Christ did not send me to baptize, but to preach the gospel, not with wisdom of words, lest the cross of Christ should be made of no effect*" (v17). Paul clearly drew a distinction between baptism and the gospel. The gospel of Jesus Christ saves a person when they believe. Baptism follows salvation and it is an important step, but it is not essential for salvation.

Paul could never have written verse 17 if baptism was necessary for salvation. Baptism is not necessary for salvation.

Practical Application

Watch out for a sectarian spirit.

The divisions and factions in the church at Corinth probably started out quite innocently. Some believers favored Paul's great insights into Scripture. Some believers favored the preaching of Apollos, because he was a gifted and powerful speaker. Some believers favored wanted to be identified with Peter because he had been with the Lord from the beginning. But it wasn't long before their "favorite preacher" mentality became a sectarian spirit, and division had come into the church in Corinth!

The same sequence of events can take place today. We all have our favorite preachers and teachers, and it's not wrong to enjoy (and even favor) listening to fellow believers who have been a help to you, and whose ministry has edified you.

But be careful! Watch out for a sectarian spirit. Don't think that you're more spiritual or more special because you favor a particular in-depth teacher. Don't despise Christians who enjoy preachers who use a lot of amusing illustrations! Don't try to look good by favoring speakers who are well known or famous. Be careful, because it's easy to get caught up in a sectarian spirit. You may be only a few steps away from creating factions and divisions! Watch out for a sectarian spirit.