

CHAPTER ONE.

Analysis

A. Salutation and Thanksgiving (1-9).

1. Salutation (1-3).

- a) Paul describes his apostleship in relation to Christ and the will of God.
- b) Sosthenes, the brother who must have been known to the Corinthians.
- c) He speaks of the church as the church of God, made up of sanctified ones who are called saints.
- d) They are associated with all who in every place call on the name of the Lord.
- e) His customary salutation is "Grace and peace."

2. Thanksgiving (4-9).

- a) He reminds the readers that he thanks God for them always.
- b) This thanksgiving is based on the grace of God that had been given them in Christ. It has enriched them in word and knowledge.
- c) The testimony of Christ had been established or confirmed among them with the result that they lacked no gift.
- d) In this manner, they were prepared to await the day of Christ's coming.
- e) Christ would confirm them to the end as blameless in the day of the Lord Jesus Christ.
- f) Assurance of this is given in the faithfulness of God who called them into the fellowship of His Son, Our Lord Jesus Christ.

B. Beginning of the discussion of the problem of division (10-17).

1. Introducing the problem. Following the introduction, Paul develops this topic by rebuking the sin of division. In it he contrasts the word of the cross with the wisdom of the world.

2. Points in this paragraph.

- a) His approach.—This is an exhortation in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ for oneness of thought and of expression of opinion.
- b) Source of his information, and what they were saying.
- c) Series of questions showing the folly of their actions.
- d) Why he baptized only a few of the Corinthian converts: Lest the cross of Christ be made void.

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- C. The word of the cross and the wisdom of the world (18-31).
1. Why he discusses this subject.—He has just mentioned the contrast of the word of the cross and the wisdom of the world. This is at the bottom of the problem of division. This phase of the topic continues through 2:16.
 2. Points of these paragraphs.
 - a) The contrast explained (18-25).
 - (1) Two views of the word of the cross (18-19).
 - (2) Series of questions and answers showing God's view of man's wisdom (20-21).
 - (3) In contrast to the Jews' interest in signs and the Greeks' concern for wisdom, he preached Christ crucified (22-25).
 - b) Appeal to their own lives to support his view of Christ who became wisdom from God, and righteousness, and sanctification (26-31).

Salutation and Thanksgiving (1-9)

Commentary

Text

1:1-9. Paul, called to be an apostle of Jesus Christ through the will of God, and Sosthenes our brother, 2 unto the church of God which is at Corinth, even them that are sanctified in Christ Jesus, called to be saints, with all that call upon the name of our Lord Jesus Christ in every place, their Lord 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 you in Christ Jesus; 5 that in everything ye were enriched in him, in all utterance and all knowledge; 6 even as the testimony of Christ was confirmed in you: 7 so that ye come behind in no gift; waiting for the revelation of our Lord Jesus Christ; 8 who shall also confirm you unto the end, that ye be unreprouvable in the day of our Lord Jesus Christ. 9 God is faithful, through whom ye were called into the fellowship of his Son Jesus Christ our Lord.

Paul.—The life of this remarkable man will forever be an inspiration and a challenge to the followers of Christ. For some of the facts about his early life see Acts 22:3; 26:4-5; Gal. 1:13-14; Phil. 3:4-5.

He is first mentioned in the story of Christianity in connection with the stoning of Stephen. He is the "young man named Saul" at whose feet the witnesses laid down their garments (Acts 7:58). The

name *Saul* means *asked for*. Soon after he began his work as the apostle to the Gentiles, he became known by the name *Paul* (Acts 13:9). It would be a mistake, however, to assume that he got this name from his association with the proconsul, Sergius Paulus (Acts 13:7).

called apostle.—His conversion and appointment to the apostleship are of such importance as to be recorded in three chapters of Acts (9, 22, 26). He never forgot the terrible thing he did in the role of persecutor nor the *grace of God* that made him an apostle of Christ. He saw to it that this grace did not become an empty thing, for, in his own words, he "labored more abundantly than all the apostles" (I Cor. 15:10).

The word *called* suggests the kind of apostle he was. He was summoned by Christ and sent as an apostle to the Gentiles. The words "to be" do not occur in the Greek text. They are supplied by the translators in an effort to make the thought clear. In doing so, however, there is danger of losing sight of the real meaning of the expression: Paul was an apostle summoned by Jesus Christ. Others have taken upon themselves to be apostles (II Cor. 11:13-15), but without divine appointment they could not rightly be called apostles of Christ. While he is an apostle of Jesus Christ, God is the agent in his call to the apostleship, for it was "through the will of God."

the will of God.—It was necessary for Paul to establish his authority at the outset, for he was to give the divine solution to the problems that plagued the church at Corinth. For the defense of his apostleship, see I Cor. 9:1-3. For the defense of the apostolic gospel which he proclaimed, see Gal. 1:11-24.

Sosthenes.—Who was this man, Sosthenes, who is called "brother"? He must have been a person who was well known to the Corinthians, as suggested by the prominent mention of him in the opening words of the letter. His name does not occur again in the epistle. The fact that he is mentioned in the salutation does not suggest that he shared in any way in giving the inspired directives that were designed to lift the church of Corinth out of its sorry plight. In Acts 18:12-17, mention is made of a ruler of the synagogue by the name of Sosthenes. It is not possible to prove that he is the same man mentioned in *First Corinthians*, but he could have been.

Paul was well aware of the strong opposition to him at Corinth. It may be that he mentioned Sosthenes to show that he had friends in Corinth who trusted his leadership as an apostle of Christ.

the church of God.—Paul addressed them as the church of God although they were splitting into various factions and proclaiming loyalty to various men. As God's church, they had been called into the fellowship of His Son. The disgraceful conduct that characterized so many of them was completely out of harmony with the thought of the name, church of God. But they were God's church, for the price of their redemption, the blood of Christ, had been paid for them as well as for any other congregation. Their mission, therefore, as the church of God, was to glorify God, not men.

The word *church* referred to the assembly of free citizens called out from the masses to exercise the privileges of citizenship and freedom. But when Paul used the term *church of God*, he lifted the word far above its ordinary meaning and put it in the realm of those who are separated from the world of sin by the blood of Christ and called through the gospel into the assembly of saints to enjoy the privileges of freedom in Christ and citizenship in the heavenly kingdom.

Almost every word in this greeting strikes a blow at the sinful practices that had crept into the church at Corinth.

sanctified.—The word means separated from sin, purified, or set apart for the service of God. The form of the word used here suggests that this separation had taken place in the past and that its effect had carried over to the present. It does not imply that they could no longer commit a sin; it does clearly imply that they were to live a life of consecration in harmony with the fact that they had been set apart to a pure life. This had been accomplished by the blood of Christ at the time of their baptism. "And such were some of you: but ye were washed, but ye were sanctified, but ye were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, and in the Spirit of our Lord" (I Cor. 6:11). See also Heb. 9:13-14; I Pet. 1:2; II Thes. 2:13-14; Eph. 5:26-27.

What an awful violation of this principle is seen in the conduct of the Corinthians as reported in chapters five and six!

called saints.—The word *saint* is from the same root as the word *sanctify*, and it is related to the root word which means pure. In the O. T. it is applied to that which was set apart for the service of God. That which was set apart had to be free from blemish; the term, therefore, came to mean freedom from blemish, spot, or stain, first in the physical, and then in the moral realm. See I Cor. 6:19-20 for the appeal for the Corinthians to live a life of separation from sin.

call upon the name of the Lord.—The form of the expression indicates that it was in their own interest that they called upon the Lord. It was out of man's despair that he called upon God for help. How

strange that men who had called on God from this point of view should now be saying, "I belong to Paul," or "I belong to Cehpas."

The first reference to men who called on the name of the Lord is given in Gen. 4:26. Evidently, men realized that their only hope of survival was to turn away from the wickedness of Cain and turn to God who alone could save them. In the days of Joel, the prophet, a similar situation prevailed in the life of the nation of Israel (Joel 2:39). Israel was facing almost certain destruction, and Joel reminded them that "all who call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved." Peter quoted this prophecy on the Day of Pentecost (Acts 2:21) and showed that there is a sense in which it applies to the sinner whose only hope of salvation is in Christ. See Acts 4:12. Another example is found in Acts 22:16. Ananias had said to Saul, "Get yourself baptized and wash away your sins *because* you called upon His name." Saul, at last, had accepted the truth of Stephen's message; he could go no further in his opposition to Christ. Consequently, when Jesus spoke to him on the Damascus road, he said, 'What will you have me to do, Lord?' There was no other alternative; for him, it was "repent or perish." All Christians came to be spoken of as those who were calling on the Name of the Lord. He was their only hope.

This is far more than appropriating a name for themselves, or piously saying, "Lord, Lord" (Matt. 7:21); it was the desperate cry of the sinking sinner, "Lord, save me" (Matt. 14:30).

theirs and ours.—This, as the American Version indicates, is a reference to the word *Lord* which does not occur in the Greek in this phrase. It is possible that it may refer to *place*, and if so, it suggests that calling upon the name of the Lord was not limited to any one place; but men in every place, even where Paul was, were calling on His name.

Grace to you and peace.—This is something more than a mere salutation. It seems to breathe a prayer for the strife-torn congregation at Corinth: Let God's unmerited favor be with them; let His peace abide with them.

I thank my God always.—Knowing the conditions that existed in Corinth, one wonders how Paul found it possible to "thank God always concerning" them. He was thankful for God's grace that had enriched them so that they lacked no necessary instruction to enable them to prepare for the "revelation of our Lord Jesus Christ." There was a solution for the problem of the Corinthian church. Note the reference to God's grace.

the grace of God which was given to you.—This is a reference to the unmerited favor of God that had supplied the Corinthians with the miraculous power (see chapters 12 through 14) through which divine instruction in righteousness had been given them. These miraculous gifts were necessary in the absence of the written Word. They, however, abused this favor, for they quarreled over the relative value of tongues over other spiritual gifts.

enriched in him.—This enrichment had to do with *utterance* and *knowledge* in connection with the confirmed testimony of Christ. *Utterance* is the word or message of wisdom (I Cor. 12:8). *Knowledge* is the ability to know or to understand the meaning of the divinely revealed message. The Corinthians knew and understood God's revealed will for them; nevertheless, they disregarded it. Consequently, it was necessary for Paul to write this letter to correct the many errors in their thinking and conduct.

testimony of Christ was confirmed.—Paul had preached to them the message about Christ. It had been established or confirmed by the miracles that accompanied the preaching. See Mark 16:20; Heb. 2:3-4.

ye became behind in no gift.—The failures in Corinth were in no way caused by the lack of inspired instruction or its confirmation by miraculous demonstration. They had all the advantages of the other churches. Their disgraceful conduct, so unbecoming to a Christian, was entirely their own responsibility.

revelation of our Lord Jesus Christ.—This refers to Christ's second coming.

confirm you unto the end.—The established message about Christ would establish the faithful in Christ. It was adequate to direct them in Christian character and conduct; there was no need for them to fail to enter the rewards of the saints in heaven. Those who were failing were doing so in spite of all that Christ was doing to present them before the Father as irreproachable.

unreprovable in the day of our Lord.—No one in the Day of Judgment will be able to lay anything to the charge of God's chosen ones, the ones who choose to obey His will and remain faithful unto death (Romans 8:33; Rev. 2:10). This is a strong reason why Christian people should strive to live a life that glorifies God in the body (I Cor. 6:20; Titus 2:11-12). The "day of our Lord" is the day of His coming to judge the world. The phrase "on the Lord's day" (Rev. 1:10) is not only different in form but in meaning also: it refers to the first day of the week.

fellowship.—This interesting word occurs many times in the New Testament in a variety of forms. The root idea is partnership, association, or participation. Those who are associated with Christ are to share with Him in the proclamation of the Word of the Cross and in the discharge of the other obligations of the saints of God.

Problem of Division (10-17)

Text

1:10-17. Now I beseech you, brethren, through the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that ye all speak the same thing, and that there be no divisions among you; but that ye be perfected together in the same mind and in the same judgment. 11 For it hath been signified unto me concerning you, my brethren, by them that are of the household of Chloe, that there are contentions among you. 12 Now this I mean, that each one of you saith, I am of Paul; and I of Apollos; and I of Cephas; and I of Christ. 13 Is Christ divided? was Paul crucified for you? or were ye baptized into the name of Paul? 14 I thank God that I baptized none of you, save Crispus and Gaius; 15 lest any man should say that ye were baptized into my name. 16 And I baptized also the household of Stephanas; besides, I know not whether I baptized any other. 17 For Christ sent me not to baptize, but to preach the gospel: not in wisdom of words, lest the cross of Christ should be made void.

Commentary

through the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.—This earnest appeal to the Corinthian brethren in the name of Christ was designed to make them think seriously of the real problem they faced in connection with their divisions. They were Paul's brethren in Christ, even though they were doing many things contrary to the principles of Christianity. Accepting this basis of agreement meant that they could move on to the divine solution of their problems. Each word in the divine name has significance in relation to the problem in Corinth. *Lord* implies servants who are to obey; *Jesus* implies that sinners are to be saved by His grace; *Christ*, which means prophet, priest, and king, implies the necessity of believing His Word, accepting His sacrifice for sin, and obeying Him, for all authority in heaven and on earth belongs to Him (Matt. 28:18-29). He is the only one through whom men must be saved (Acts 4:12). The divine name is, in itself, a strong appeal to abandon the sectarian names of men who were leading the factions in Corinth.

all speak the same thing.—It is often said that no two people ever see a thing exactly alike. This is offered as an excuse for the sin of division. What if the rule were applied in the field of Mathematics? The Scriptures condemn division as one of the works of the flesh (Gal. 5:20). Division destroys the temple of God (1 Cor. 3:16-17). It was possible for the Corinthians to say the same thing about Christ, as Paul clearly shows by the questions and their implied answers in verse 13.

be perfected together in the same mind and in the same judgment.—This expression was used in political circles to urge groups to compose their differences. This, most likely, is the sense in which it is to be taken here. The expression is used throughout the N. T. with various applications. Fishermen used the term when they spoke of mending their nets, or preparing them for use. It was a medical term meaning to set a dislocated joint. Read Gal. 6:1 where it is translated "restore" with this in mind. It was used to describe the outfitting of a ship to get it ready for a voyage. It is rewarding to think of all these usages in relation to the problem in Corinth.

They were to have the same attitude of mind so that when they expressed an opinion all would say the same thing. This would prevent the divisions among them which were produced by one of them saying, "I am of Paul," while another said, "I am of Apollos." Composing their differences meant getting back to the position where they could be in the same frame of mind and all say the same thing when they expressed an opinion or judgment.

by them of Chloe.—Paul had received his information about conditions in Corinth from those who were in some way connected with Chloë. Were they servants in her household, or were they members of her family? We cannot answer these questions. Evidently, they were aware of the problems and believed that Paul should be informed. Their action is to be commended, for when problems arise in a congregation the correct thing to do is to turn to the inspired Word of God for the solution.

contentions.—The divisions (splits) in the church resulted from the strife over leaders. Some were saying that they belonged to Paul; some, to Apollos; some, to Cephas; some, to Christ. Is this last group composed of the true Christians in Corinth or to a wrangling party arrogating to itself the divine name? The context seems to imply the latter. It is possible to use the name of Christ in a sectarian manner.

Is Christ divided?—Certainly Christ is not divided. He alone died on

the cross to save the world. Only the sinless Lamb of God could become sin on our behalf (II Cor. 5:21). Certainly, Paul wasn't crucified for them; hence, there was no excuse for anyone of them to claim that he had been baptized in Paul's name.

A moment's reflection on these three questions shows how ridiculous the divisions in Corinth were. Two of them are so framed as to require a negative answer. Thus, all must speak the same thing in answering these questions.

I baptized none of you.—Why did Paul thank God that he had baptized none of the Corinthians, except the few mentioned? This does not suggest that he considered baptism of no importance. See Rom. 6:1-11; I Cor. 10:1-2; 12:13. The evident meaning is that he was thankful that he had personally baptized this limited number so as to avoid the very criticism that was being made that people were being baptized in his name. If he had not taught them to get themselves baptized, there never would have been a question about the one into whose name they had been baptized. All of them knew that they had been baptized into the name of Christ, for He was crucified for them.

Crispus, Gaius, Stephanas.—"Crispus, the ruler of the synagogue, believed in the Lord with all his house; and many of the Corinthians hearing believed, and were baptized" (Acts 18:8). The identity of Gaius is not certain, but see Acts 20:4. Stephanas was the first convert of Achaia (I Cor. 16:15).

For Christ sent me not to baptize.—Careless reading of this statement might lead some to believe that Paul did not consider baptism important. A similar statement is found in John 4:1-2. "The Pharisees had heard that Jesus was making and baptizing more disciples than John." John adds the explanation: "Jesus himself baptized not, but his disciples."

After Paul had baptized a few, they could have taken up the task of baptizing the rest while Paul continued to proclaim the good news. Baptism was a part of the proclamation of the gospel. See Matt. 28:18-20; Mark 16:15-16. The facts of the gospel which deal with the death, burial, and resurrection of Christ are symbolized in the act of baptism, for baptism is a burial and a resurrection (Rom. 6:4).

lest the cross of Christ should be made void.—"Words of wisdom" that left out the sacrifice of Christ made the cross an empty thing. Paul's aim was to avoid the philosophical speculations of the day and to preach Christ in such a manner that men would desire to be baptized in His name. That gave meaning to the cross of Christ.

*The Word of the Cross and the Wisdom of the World (18-31)**Text*

1:18-31. For the word of the cross is to them that perish foolishness; but unto us who are 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 will I bring to nought.

20 Where is the wise? where is the scribe? where is the disputer of this world? hath not God made foolish the wisdom of the world?

21 For seeing that in the wisdom of God the world through its wisdom knew not God, it was God's good pleasure through the foolishness of the preaching to save them that believe. 22 Seeing that Jews ask for signs, and Greeks seek after wisdom: 23 but we preach Christ crucified, unto Jews a stumbling-block, and unto Gentiles foolishness; 24 but unto them that are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God, and the wisdom of God. 25 Because the foolishness of God is wiser than men; and the weakness of God is stronger than men.

26 For behold your calling, brethren, that not many wise after the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble, are called: 27 but God chose the foolish things of the world, that he might put to shame them that are wise; and God chose the weak things of the world, that he might put to shame the things that are strong; 28 and the base things of the world, and the things that are despised, did God choose, yea and the things that are not, that he might bring to nought the things that are: 29 that no flesh should glory before God. 30 But of him are ye in Christ Jesus, who was made unto us wisdom from God, and righteousness and sanctification, and redemption: 31 that, according as it is written, He that glorieth, let him glory in the Lord.

Commentary

the word of the cross.—The divisions in the church at Corinth were being perpetuated by those who were putting "the wisdom of the world" above the gospel of Christ. By contrasting the two, Paul condemns the party spirit. The contrast is plain: it is between "them that perish" and those "who are saved"; it is between "foolishness" and "the power of God."

For it is written.—The quotation is from Isa. 29:14. It is freely applied by the apostle to the situation at hand. In the time of Isaiah, the wisdom of the worldly statesmen failed to protect Judah against the invasion of the Assyrians. The quotation is thus applied to the situ-

ation in Corinth: "the wisdom of the world" could not possibly save men from destruction in the spiritual realm. That can only be done through the word of the cross.

the power of God.—It is through the gospel that the power of God is channeled into the mind of those who hear the message. The force of the facts of the gospel (the life, death, and resurrection of Christ) changes unbelief into faith. The force of the motives of the gospel (the goodness of God, Rom. 2:4, godly sorrow for sin, II Cor. 7:10, and, among others, the consideration of the impending judgment, Acts 17:30-31) changes the will, and that change of the will is repentance. Submission to the command of the gospel to be baptized into Christ brings the penitent believer to the blood of Christ which washes away sin (Mk. 16:15-16; Rom. 6:4; Acts 22:16; Heb. 9:14; 10:22).

This power of God to save the believer was demonstrated in the resurrection of Christ (Eph. 1:19-20). It is the same power that raises the one dead in trespasses and sin to the new life in Christ (Eph. 2:4-6). It is "the power that worketh in us" (Eph. 3:20), that is, the power of the gospel to save and to equip the believer to "quench all the fiery darts of the evil one" (Eph. 6:16).

the wise, the scribe, the disputer of this world.—Paul calls upon the wise (the Greek) and the scribe (the Jew) and the debater of the world (both Greek and Jew) in such a manner as to show that none of them could offer anything to save man from his sin. The reason is clear: "the world in its wisdom did not know God."

the foolishness of preaching.—The word of the cross, although looked upon by those who were perishing as foolishness, was the power of God to save the believer. *Foolishness* does not refer to the act of preaching, but to the message that is proclaimed, that is, the word of the cross. While the basic facts of the gospel are the death, burial, and resurrection of Christ, the gospel is not limited to these facts, for it takes the whole Bible to tell the whole story of the whole counsel of God about salvation through His Son. In the O. T. it is seen in prophecy, promise, and type. In the N. T. it is seen in the facts of the life of Christ; in the history of conversion to Christ; in the explanation of the essentials of righteousness; in the application of the gospel to daily life; and, finally, in the prophecy of the victory of Christ and of those who accept His gospel.

to save them that believe.—God reaches the mind of the unconverted sinner through the message of the cross. When God created man, He created him with the capacity to respond to His commands. It re-

quires no miracle of "illumination" to enable man to understand what God says in the Bible. That is why the word of the cross can save the believer. Followers of Christ are to proclaim it; sinners are to believe it; and God will save those who believe it. These three issues should be carefully noted: (1) God made foolish the wisdom of the world; (2) the world through its wisdom didn't know God; (3) in the wisdom of God, God was pleased to save the believer through the foolishness of the message that was preached.

Jews ask for signs.—See Matt. 12:38-40; John 2:18; 6:30; Matt. 27:42.

Greeks seek after wisdom.—See Acts 17:21; I Cor. 2:6-9.

unto Jews a stumbling block.—The Greek word which is translated *stumblingblock* referred to the trigger of a trap, and then to the trap or some means of causing one to stumble. The crucified Messiah was like this to the Jew. The Jewish concept of Messiah led them to think of an earthly kingdom such as existed in the days of David and Solomon. How could Christ crucified be their expected leader? They failed to understand that His kingdom was not of this world. They would have been glad to make Him their king in opposition to Caesar, but He refused the temporal crown. They turned against Him, and in the end they cried out, "We have no king but Caesar." See John 6:14-15; 19:15; Matt. 21:42-44.

unto Gentiles foolishness.—When Paul preached Jesus and the resurrection in Athens, the philosophers called him a "babbling"—one who had no real system of philosophy like theirs, but who was like the little birds seen in the marketplace picking up bits of food here and there. Compared to their systems of wisdom, this seemed like foolishness. (Acts 17:18).

Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God.—In contrast to the Jews and Greeks who rejected the message of the cross, Paul points out those—both Jews and Greeks—who accept Christ as the power of God and the wisdom of God. Those who are called are the ones who respond to God's call through the gospel (I Thes. 2:13-14). Christ is the power of God, that is, He is the one who exercises God's power to save the believer. The gospel has a logical force, the force of the facts of the gospel to produce faith; it has an emotional force, the force of the motives of the gospel to produce repentance; it has a redemptive force, the force of the blood of Christ to cleanse from sin. Christ is the wisdom of God, that is, He is the one who has revealed the divine wisdom that has to do with salvation; in other words, what to do to be saved and how to live the Christian life. He

is the personal revelation of God, and through His office as prophet, He caused the written revelation of God, the Bible, to be written.

foolishness of God.—As the context indicates, this expresses man's attitude toward the things of God. But, as Paul indicates, what man deems foolish and weak in God's plan to save the sinner is wiser and stronger than man. David's conquest of Goliath illustrates the point. *behold your calling.*—The words that follow explain Paul's reference to the "foolishness" and "weakness" of God. A glance at their own station in life was enough to show the Corinthians that the word of the cross had made its greatest appeal to those of the lower class. While it is true that the early church was made up largely of those from the lower classes, it does not follow that others were excluded. Crispus and Sosthenes were rulers of synagogues, and Dionysius, a convert at Athens, was known as the Areopagite, a member of the high court of Athens. It was not, however, until the fourth century that the world was to see a professed Christian—at least, one who favored Christianity—on the throne of the Roman Empire.

things that are not.—God chose the things that are spiritual—righteousness, peace, and joy in the Holy Spirit (Rom. 14:17)—rather than eating and drinking. He chose the Christian virtues rather than the Jewish practices. He chose righteousness, sanctification, and redemption (I Cor. 1:31) rather than wickedness, uncleanness, and slavery to sin—characteristics of Gentile conduct.

no flesh should glory before God.—No human being can boast of his accomplishments before God. Man cannot save himself; he can be saved only by God's grace through faith expressed in obedience. The Christian belongs to God because of his relation to Christ Jesus. By using what man calls weak and foolish, God has made it impossible for any man to boast that he could have performed Christ's redemptive work on the cross. Christ alone made that sacrifice.

wisdom from God.—Christ is the personal revelation of God; He is "the word made flesh." Through His office as prophet, He is the author of the written revelation. See I Cor. 2:6 for further comment on this wisdom.

righteousness.—This word is used in three ways in the N. T. It refers to the fact that God is right; to the standard of conduct that God demands of man; and to the status of one whom God considers right in His sight because his sins have been forgiven.

Christ is the righteousness of God in relation to all three connotations. He was without sin (John 8:46; Heb. 4:15; 7:26; II Cor. 5:21); in His conduct He always did the will of His Father (John

5:19); righteousness (remission of sins) is made possible through the blood of Christ (Rom. 3:21-25).

redemption.—Christ is our redemption, that is, He is the one who has provided our release from slavery to sin (Rom. 6:16-18). He is all that is needed. He alone by His Spirit through the apostles revealed the wisdom that is proclaimed in the message of the cross.

Summary

The interesting account of the beginning of the church in Corinth is given in Acts 18:1-17. Luke states in simplest terms that Paul left Athens and came to Corinth. There he found Aquilla and Priscilla who had recently come from Rome. The work began in the synagogue of the Jews, but Paul was soon forced to move to the house next door which belonged to a man by the name Titus Justus. Luke also records the conversion of Crispus, the ruler of the synagogue. Encouraged by the vision from the Lord, Paul stayed in Corinth for a year and six months teaching the Word of God. Persecuting Jews brought Paul into the court of Gallio. His indifference to the quarrels of the Jews probably saved Paul from the beating which was given to another, Sosthenes, the ruler of the synagogue.

Paul visited Corinth a second time, during his third missionary tour (Acts 19:21; 20:2-3).

The problems that were faced in starting the work in Corinth set the pattern for its subsequent history. Corinth was destined to become a problem church. First Corinthians was written to straighten out their problems. There were problems of division and derelictions; there were problems of marriage and meats used in idolatrous worship; there were problems that related to women's costume in public and abuses of the Lord's supper; there were problems about spiritual gifts; there were problems connected with the doctrine of the resurrection. The problems at Corinth were very similar to the problems of the church today. First Corinthians, therefore, becomes an important book for those who seek to adjust present problems in the light of divine revelation.

Paul appropriately begins the epistle with a reference to his apostleship. He is an apostle of Jesus Christ through the will of God. He writes with the authority of one sent By Christ and upheld by the will of God. This assures his readers that they will find in this letter the divine solution to their problems. Paul lifts the solution of the problems of the church out of the hands of wrangling men and puts it where it belongs, within the limits of the authority of Jesus Christ as expressed in the writing of His inspired apostle.

CHAPTER ONE

Sosthenes, who must have been well known to the church at Corinth, is associated with Paul in the greeting to his fellow-Christians at Corinth.

Although they were guilty of conduct so unbecoming to a Christian, Paul addresses them as those who were sanctified and called saints. Thus, he upholds the ideals to which he attempts to lift them through his inspired instruction. The Corinthians were not the only ones who were sanctified and called saints, for with them Paul includes all those who, because they recognized their utter dependence on Christ for their salvation, called upon the name of Jesus Christ.

Paul's customary salutation of grace and peace sounds the deep spiritual tone of the letter.

Before taking up the problems that are to be discussed in the epistle, the apostle pauses to thank God for the spiritual enrichment of the Corinthians. God had supplied them with the information they needed as brethren in Christ and the ability to use this information when they spoke. They had received the established testimony about Christ so that they lacked nothing; they, therefore, did not need to turn to worldly wisdom for help as they awaited the day when Christ would be revealed. Such testimony would establish them to the very end as unreprouvable followers of Christ. This assurance was furnished them by the faithful God who had called them through the gospel into close association with His Son.

As Paul takes up the problems which are to be discussed in the epistle, he mentions first the matters which had been reported to him by the household of Chloe. From this source he had learned of their divided state and their consequent derelictions in such matters as immorality, litigation and abuse of the body.

Paul approaches the problem of division with a view to securing his readers acceptance of the inspired solution which he presents: he exhorts them as "brethrens." He urges all of them to say the same thing, instead of saying, "I am of Paul" or "I am of Apollos." He urges them to settle their differences which had caused splits in the church. It was possible for all to say the same thing by adopting the same mental attitude and expressing the same opinion on such questions as these: Is Christ divided? Paul wasn't crucified for you, was he? You were not baptized into his name, were you? It was to avoid possible claim of being baptized into the name of Paul that he refrained from personally baptizing any of the Corinthians except Crispus, Gaius, and the household of Stephenas. Paul determined that the cross of Christ should not become an empty thing.

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Having thus indicated the folly of their divisions, he continues to rebuke the sin of division as he contrasts the word of the cross with the wisdom of the world. Worldly wisdom was a contributing cause of their wrangling disputes, but Paul reminds them that the issue is salvation or destruction, as the Scriptures clearly stated. The world that followed the wise ones of that day did not know God, but God's plan was to save believers through the message of the cross. Both Jews and Greeks failed to see this. Those, however, who did see it discovered that Christ has revealed God's wisdom and exercises God's power to save.

This could easily be verified by looking at themselves. God had not called many of the wise of that day nor many of noble birth. He had chosen the humble and the weak that men might be taught not to boast in their own power, but to glory in Christ who exercises God's power to save. Christ who revealed the wisdom from God is the source of their forgiveness, cleansing, and freedom.

Questions

1. What is the history of the founding of the church at Corinth?
2. Why did Paul write the book?
3. What is the theme of First Corinthians?
4. What are its principal divisions?
5. What is said of Paul's call to apostleship?
6. What is meant by "called apostle"?
7. Who is Sosthenes? Why is he mentioned?
8. What does the word "church" mean?
9. Why is it called "the church of God"?
10. What is meant by "sanctified"? What is implied by this term as to the life of the Corinthian church?
11. How does the expression "called saints" relate to the problem at Corinth?
12. What is meant by "call upon the name of the Lord"? What bearing does this have on the problem?
13. How many times is the word "Lord" used in the first nine verses?
14. What effect would this have on the readers of the epistle?
15. In view of the situation at Corinth, well known to Paul, why speak of "grace and peace"?
16. Knowing these conditions, how could Paul say, "I thank my God"?
17. What was "the grace that had been given them"?
18. What had enriched them?
19. What is meant by "utterance" and "knowledge"?
20. How was the testimony confirmed?

CHAPTER ONE

21. Why did Paul say, "Ye came behind in no gift"?
 22. What is meant by "the revelation of our Lord Jesus Christ"?
 23. What is meant by "confirm you unto the end"? How accomplished?
 24. What is "the day of our Lord Jesus Christ"?
 25. What is meant by "unreprovable"? What would its use suggest to the Corinthians?
 26. What is meant by "called into the fellowship"?
 27. What is meant by each word in the expression, "Lord Jesus Christ"?
 28. What was Paul's purpose in appealing to the Corinthians in this name?
 29. What is meant by "mind" and "judgment"?
 30. What is meant by "perfected together"? How does this relate to the problem at Corinth?
 31. What was the source of Paul's information about conditions in Corinth?
 32. What was the nature of their divisions?
 33. Why did Paul ask, "Is Christ divided?"
 34. How account for Paul's remark about baptism?
 35. Who were Crispus, Gaius, and Stephanas?
 36. How could the cross of Christ be made void?
 37. What two views of the word of the cross does Paul show?
 38. What two views of wisdom are given?
 39. How does the power of God reach our lives?
 40. What is meant by "the foolishness of preaching"?
 41. How can the word of the cross save the believer?
 42. In what were Jews and Greeks interested?
 43. Why was Christ a stumbling block to Jews?
 44. Why was the message of the gospel considered foolishness by the Greeks?
 45. What is meant by the statement, "Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God"?
 46. What did Paul mean by "the foolishness of God"?
 47. Why did Paul say, "beyond your calling"?
 48. What is meant by "no flesh should glory before God"?
 49. In what way are righteousness and redemption related to Christ?
- For Discussion*
1. In what ways are the divisions in the church today like those in Corinth?
 2. How would the remedies for division which Paul presents in First Corinthians work today?

CHAPTER TWO

Analysis

- A. Paul's preaching in Corinth (1-5).
1. What he determined to do at Corinth (1-2).
 - a) It was in accord with what he had just written about wisdom. Paul's own ministry illustrates the same issue as the lives of the Corinthian Christians.
 - b) It was the thing he did when he first came to Corinth. It was an established pattern for his preaching everywhere.
 - c) It was not with excellency of speech or wisdom, that is, not with exalted rhetoric or wisdom of man. It was the simple message of Christ and Him crucified; it was the gospel message which Christ revealed to him by the Holy Spirit.
 2. What his attitude was (3).
 - a) It was one of weakness, fear, and trembling.
 - b) Probably not fear of physical danger or what man might do to him, but fear lest he should fail to please his Lord Jesus Christ.
 3. What his preaching consisted in (4).
 - a) Not persuasive words of wisdom such as characterized the speech of the wise men of Corinth.
 - b) He said it was in demonstration of Spirit and of power, that is, it was in logically proven statements revealed by the Holy Spirit and supported by the miracles that accompanied his preaching.
 4. What his purpose was (5).

His purpose was to preach in such a manner that the faith of his hearers should not be based on the wisdom of men, but on the power of God.
- B. The apostles speak wisdom (6-16).
1. The pronoun "we" suggests that he is speaking of himself and the other inspired apostles.
 2. It was wisdom for those who were fullgrown. Some who took great pride in their own wisdom looked upon the Gospel as foolishness, but Paul considered it to be wisdom for those who were mature enough to appreciate it.
 3. It was not "wisdom of the world or of the rulers of the world." Man's wisdom could not compare with the revealed wisdom spoken by the inspired apostles.
 4. Nature of this wisdom (7-9).

CHAPTER TWO

- a) God's wisdom is in a mystery, that is, God's revealed wisdom would have remained a mystery forever if He had not made it known through the inspired apostles and prophets.
 - b) The rulers of the world, being uninspired, could not have known this wisdom by any means available to them.
5. How the apostles received this wisdom (10-12).
- a) God revealed it to them through the Holy Spirit who searches the deep things of God (10).
 - b) This was the only way by which man could have known this mature wisdom (11-12).
 - (1) The spirit of man knows about the things of man.
 - (2) The Spirit of God knows about the things of God.
 - (3) The inspired apostles received the Spirit which is from God in order that they might know about the things God graciously gave them.
6. The inspired apostles speak the words of this wisdom which the Spirit revealed to them (13-16).
- a) This is not in words which man's wisdom teaches, but which the Spirit taught the inspired apostles (13).
 - b) The "natural" or uninspired man could not receive these things (14). Note: This does not say that man without the aid of the Holy Spirit could not *understand* the message revealed by the inspired apostles.
 - c) They were foolishness to the uninspired man because they must be revealed through the inspired apostles who, by the power of the Holy Spirit, examine or investigate them and speak them so that they may be understood by all who read them (14).
 - d) The inspired apostle (the spiritual one) investigates all things of the wisdom to be revealed through him, but no man passes on his qualifications to be an apostle (15).
 - e) The reason for the apostles' ability to make known God's revealed wisdom is that they have the mind of Christ (16).

Paul's Preaching at Corinth (1-5)

Text

2:1-5. And I, brethren, when I came unto you, came not with excellency of speech or of wisdom, proclaiming to you the testimony of God. 2 For I determined not to know anything among you, save Jesus Christ, and him crucified. 3 And I was with you in weakness,

he spoke the wisdom which God revealed to him through the Holy Spirit. This message of the cross is adequate to equip man for life here and hereafter. Paul was determined to remain true to the trust that had been committed to him. See I Tim. 1:12-17; II Tim. 1:12-14. As an inspired apostle, he was a steward of "the mysteries of God," and that required him to be faithful (I Cor. 4:1-2).

I was with you in weakness.—Paul often admitted his weakness and his dependence on God (II Cor. 12:9-10). His whole ministry was in accord with his remark in I Cor. 1:31, "He that glorieth, let him glory in the Lord."

fear and trembling.—He was not afraid for his own safety. See II Cor. 11:24-32 which tells of the things he had suffered. For the Lord's assurance to him in the face of danger, see Acts 18:9-10. In II Tim. 1:12, he tells of his own confidence in face of suffering. It is quite possible that he uses the term "fear and trembling" in the sense in which it is used in Eph. 6:5 which speaks of the proper attitude of respect and obedience a servant should have toward his master. Paul certainly held this attitude toward his Lord, for, as he preached the word of the cross, his concern was not for the approval of men, but for the approval of the Lord (I Thes. 2:4).

faith stand in the power of God.—The faith of those who were being saved rested on the solid foundation of God's revealed wisdom. It could not rest on the sandy foundation of the wisdom of men, no the miracles wrought through the apostle, demonstrated the matter how cleverly they might present it. God's power, exhibited in sage to be true. For the miracles wrought through Paul, see II Cor. 12:12; Acts 19:11-12.

By no stretch of the imagination could man have devised the scheme of redemption presented in the Bible. By the time the gospel was being preached in the first century, the world had been given ample time to try all of its schemes to save itself: pagan religion; animal and even human sacrifice; philosophies of some of the greatest thinkers the world had produced; and military force. All had failed. Surely the world was ready for the message of divine wisdom. Only God's power channeled into the lives of men through the gospel could save a world "dead in trespasses and sin." (Eph 2:1).

By this careful approach in verses 1-5, Paul has prepared his readers for the next thought of the chapter: Wisdom spoken through the inspired apostles.