

Title: **1 CORINTHIANS: “Is Christ Divided?”**

Text: 1 Corinthians 1:13

Introduction:

(1 Cor 1:1-10) "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, to them that are sanctified in Christ Jesus, called *to be* saints, with all that in every place call upon the name of Jesus Christ our Lord, both theirs and ours: (3) Grace *be* unto you, and peace, from God our Father, and *from* the Lord Jesus Christ. (4) I thank my God always on your behalf, for the grace of God which is given you by Jesus Christ; (5) That in every thing ye are enriched by him, in all utterance, and *in* 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 coming of our Lord Jesus Christ: (8) Who shall also confirm you unto the end, *that ye may be* blameless in the day of our Lord Jesus Christ. (9) God *is* faithful, by whom ye were called unto the fellowship of his Son Jesus Christ our Lord. (10) Now I beseech you, brethren, by 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 perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment."

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Paul began this Epistle to the church at Corinth by reminding them that he is “*an apostle of Jesus Christ through the will of God*” (1:1). That fact had been challenged. So Paul simply states the fact of his apostleship as the basis of his authority in writing to them about their souls and the things of God.

Then (1:2, 4-9), before addressing the many things that had to be addressed, he reminded the Corinthian believers who they were, lest they or anyone else, misinterpret the stern rebukes of this Epistle as declarations of condemnation.

THE CORINTHIAN CHURCH

I cannot imagine a local church anywhere in the world at any time in history plagued with more evil than the church at Corinth.

- Horrid immorality was winked at as a matter of indifference (chap. 5).
- Yet, they embraced the notion that by abstaining from physical pleasure they could make themselves more holy and spiritual (chap 7).
- God’s faithful servant, by whom they were taught the gospel, was scorned.
- Pride caused them to disdain the poor and the weak.
- Those who possessed, or thought they possessed, great spiritual gifts looked down their noses at those they considered less spiritual.

- Though the Corinthian church was probably the wealthiest of the New Testament churches, it was the most miserly in giving.
- They horribly abused the ordinances of God, making the person by whom they were baptized a matter of pride and spiritual superiority, and turning the Lord's Table into a carnal, religious feast
- And they denied the resurrection of our Lord.

All these things divided the local church at Corinth into factions, threatening to destroy it. Yet, when Paul wrote this Epistle to them, he addressed them as "*them that are sanctified² in Christ, called to be saints*" (1:2), assuring them that God would confirm them unto the end and make them "*blameless in the day of our Lord Jesus Christ*" (v. 6).

A NEEDFUL LESSON

I call your attention to these things because they set before us a very, very important lesson, a lesson of which we need to be constantly reminded. — **God's saints in this world are often plagued with moral weaknesses, poor judgment, spiritual evil, and doctrinal error.** So long as we are in this world, God's saints (all of us) are sinners still. We dare not make excuse for our own sins or the sins of others, giving license to evil. **But, even more importantly, we dare not make ourselves judges over our brethren,**

² Literally, "Having been sanctified in Christ, called to be saints."

pronouncing those whom God has sanctified accursed. If men and women profess to believe the gospel of God's free and sovereign grace in Christ, they are to be received and embraced by us as our brothers and sisters in Christ, "*not to doubtful disputations*" (Rom. 14:2).

(Rom 14:4) "Who art thou that judgest another man's servant? to his own master he standeth or falleth. Yea, he shall be holden up: for God is able to make him stand."

GOD'S WORK, NOT OURS

Such judgment is God's work, not ours. **There are many who think they have the ability to distinguish between sheep and goats,** between tares and wheat, between good fish and bad, and try to make it their business to separate the one from the other. **They foolishly and arrogantly think they have the ability to determine who is saved and who is lost.** The fact is — No one has that ability. Our Lord Jesus pointedly tells us to let the wheat and tares grow together (Matt. 13:30).

(Mat 13:30) "Let both grow together until the harvest: and in the time of harvest I will say to the reapers, Gather ye together first the tares, and bind them in bundles to burn them: but gather the wheat into my barn."

If we try to separate the good from the bad, we will do so basing our judgment upon the outward appearance. We have no other basis of judgment. That means, our judgment is always wrong (1 Sam. 16:7).³

(1 Sam 16:7) "But the LORD said unto Samuel, Look not on his countenance, or on the height of his stature; because I have refused him: for *the LORD seeth* not as man seeth; for man looketh on the outward appearance, but the LORD looketh on the heart."

If it were left to us we would always run off the sheep and hug the goats, pull up the wheat and cultivate the tares, throw out the good fish and keep the bad (Matt. 13:28-30). **Our business is to cast out the gospel net, gathering in fish, both good and bad**, as the Lord determines, knowing that where Christ plants his wheat Satan plants tares and where Christ gathers his sheep Satan brings in goats. **It is the business of God's church and his servants to faithfully preach the gospel**. As we do, God will, by the preaching of the gospel separate "*the precious from the vile*" (Jer. 15:19, gather his wheat into his barn and bind up the tares for the burning. The gospel fan is in our Lord's hand. "*He will thoroughly purge his floor, and gather his wheat*

³ I do not suggest or imply that we are to embrace as our brothers and sisters in Christ those who deny the gospel of God's free and sovereign grace in Christ. Anyone who does not believe the gospel of Christ is lost, no matter what he professes, how loudly he claims to believe on the Son of God, or how pious and devoted he may appear to be in his outward behavior (2 John 9-10).

into the garner; but he will burn up the chaff with unquenchable fire” (Matt. 3:12).

FOUR LETTERS

It was during Paul’s two years in Ephesus that he became aware of the problems in Corinth and began corresponding with them about their problems. He actually wrote four letters to them. Two of them were not inspired and are lost. 1st and 2nd Corinthians, his second and fourth letters, were written by divine inspiration and are preserved for us, for our learning and edification.

In the first letter he had written, which he mentions in 1 Corinthians 5:9, Paul had obviously rebuked the saints at Corinth sharply because of the many things by which they brought reproach upon the name of Christ and the gospel of his grace. But the evil practices continued. However, it did at least get their attention, and they wrote to Paul asking him a number of questions (7:1), which he answers by divine inspiration in this Epistle.

PROBLEMS ADDRESSED

Before answering their questions, Paul confronted the issues dividing the church, urging them to unite their hearts in the cause of Christ for the glory of God (1:10-6:20).

(1 Cor 1:10) "Now I beseech you, brethren, by 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 perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment."

He asked, in verse 13, — "*Is Christ divided?*" Of course, the answer is, "No." Therefore, God's people must not allow anything to divide them. Let us ever bend over backwards, swallowing our shameful, sinful pride (the cause of division), to promote the unity of God's church (Eph. 4:1-6; 1 cor. 3:16-17).

(Eph 4:1-6) "I therefore, the prisoner of the Lord, beseech you that ye walk worthy of the vocation wherewith ye are called, (2) With all lowliness and meekness, with longsuffering, forbearing one another in love; (3) Endeavouring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. (4) *There is* one body, and one Spirit, even as ye are called in one hope of your calling; (5) One Lord, one faith, one baptism, (6) One God and Father of all, who *is* above all, and through all, and in you all."

(1 Cor 3:16-17) "Know ye not that ye are the temple of God, and *that* the Spirit of God dwelleth in you? (17) If any man defile the temple of God, him shall God destroy; for the temple of God is holy, which *temple* ye are."

The problems dividing the saints at Corinth were basically twofold.

1. The members of the church were divided according to their admiration of one preacher or another (1:10-4:21).

Some claimed to be followers of Apollos the great orator, others of Peter the apostle to the Jews, others of Paul the apostle to the Gentiles, and others of Christ. Roger Ellsworth correctly observes, — “These ‘Christ-boasters’ were claiming that Christ belonged exclusively to them.” In fact, it appears that each group thought it had a corner on divine truth the others all lacked.

The cause of the division was clearly an infatuation with carnal, worldly wisdom and an utter failure to understand that the preaching of the gospel is the wisdom of God. The Corinthians vainly imagined (as many do today) that men and women could be persuaded to believe on Christ, converted and attain spiritual knowledge by carnal means.

- In chapter 1 (vv. 18-25) Paul declares that it is only by the preaching of the gospel that God calls out, saves, and teaches his elect. — This, and this alone, is “*the power of God and the wisdom of God.*”
- In verses 26-31 he tells us that the instruments God is pleased to use as his voices in this great work are themselves nothing. — He uses nothings and

nobodies to call out his elect specifically for the purpose “*that no flesh should glory in his presence.*”

(1 Cor 1:26-31) "For ye see your calling, brethren, how that not many wise men after the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble, *are called:* (27) But God hath chosen the foolish things of the world to confound the wise; and God hath chosen the weak things of the world to confound the things which are mighty; (28) And base things of the world, and things which are despised, hath God chosen, *yea*, and things which are not, to bring to nought things that are: (29) That no flesh should glory in his presence. (30) But of him are ye in Christ Jesus, who of God is made unto us wisdom, and righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption: (31) That, according as it is written, He that glorieth, let him glory in the Lord."

- In chapter 2 **he tells us that the power of the gospel preached** is neither in the intellectual ability or rhetorical ability of the preacher, but in the gospel message itself (2:1-5).

(1 Cor 2:1-5) "And I, brethren, when I came to you, came not with excellency of speech or of wisdom, declaring unto you the testimony of God. (2) For I determined not to know any thing among you, save Jesus Christ, and him crucified. (3) And I was with you in weakness, and in fear, and in much trembling. (4) And my speech and my preaching *was* not with enticing words of man's wisdom, but in demonstration of the

Spirit and of power: (5) That your faith should not stand in the wisdom of men, but in the power of God."

- In chapters 3 and 4 **Paul shows us clearly who God's servants are and how they serve the cause of Christ.**

He has shown that God's servants are all **men with one message**, — "*Jesus Christ and him crucified.*" In chapter 3 he tells us that they are all totally insignificant and meaningless in themselves. We are but hoes and hoses by which God tills, and plants, and waters his garden.

(1 Cor 3:4-8) "For while one saith, I am of Paul; and another, I *am* of Apollos; are ye not carnal? (5) Who then is Paul, and who *is* Apollos, but ministers by whom ye believed, even as the Lord gave to every man? (6) I have planted, Apollos watered; but God gave the increase. (7) So then neither is he that planteth any thing, neither he that watereth; but God that giveth the increase. (8) Now he that planteth and he that watereth are one: and every man shall receive his own reward according to his own labour."

Yet, he carefully points out that those instruments God uses are to be respected as his instruments of good to the souls of men. God's servants are not to be idolized; and they are not to be despised. They are to be respected, honored, and received as God's servants; and each is to be equally respected, honored and received as

God's servant. Though nothing in themselves, Paul says, we are "*ministers by whom ye believed*" (3:5) and "*laborers together with God*" (3:9).

Then he tells us that the only labor that shall be of any lasting value is gospel preaching. God's servants all have one Foundation upon which to build and the church and kingdom of God is built on that one Foundation, which is Christ. Everything that passes for religious exercise, everything else that is brought into the church, every other means by which anyone attempts to build the church and kingdom of God is just wood, hay, and stubble and will be burned in the fire of God's wrath.

In the 4th chapter Paul asserts that God's servants are but stewards in the house of God. As such they must have no concern for any man's approval or disapproval, but of God's only, knowing that all things will soon be revealed in their true light (4:1-5).

(1 Cor 4:1-5) "Let a man so account of us, as of the ministers of Christ, and stewards of the mysteries of God. (2) Moreover it is required in stewards, that a man be found faithful. (3) But with me it is a very small thing that I should be judged of you, or of man's judgment: yea, I judge not mine own self. (4) For I know nothing by myself; yet am I not hereby justified: but he that judgeth me is the Lord. (5) Therefore judge nothing before the time, until the Lord come, who both will bring to light the hidden things of darkness, and will

make manifest the counsels of the hearts: and then shall every man have praise of God."

Only one thing is required of stewards — Faithfulness. God's servants are not required to brilliant or even smart, impressive or even mediocre, successful or even useful in the eyes of men. The one thing required of them is that they be found faithful, faithful to God, faithful to his glory, faithful to the gospel, and faithful to the souls of men. If one man is more useful or less useful than another as the steward of God, more talented or less talented than another, there is no cause for pride or division. God alone make the difference (4:7).

(1 Cor 4:7) "For who maketh thee to differ *from another?* and what hast thou that thou didst not receive? now if thou didst receive *it*, why dost thou glory, as if thou hadst not received *it?*"

2. **The other problem and cause of division at Corinth was worldliness, the love of this world** (5:1-6:20).

Worldliness, contrary to popular religious opinion, is not dressing like the world, eating and drinking like the world, or doing business where the world does business. Worldliness is the love of the world. Nothing is more dangerous to our souls than that which our Lord calls "*the care of this world and the deceitfulness of*

riches...and the lusts of other things” (Matt. 13:22; Mark 4:19).

It was the love of the world that caused the Corinthian believers to wink at one of their own living in incest with his father’s wife. Such a thing was commonly accepted in the Roman world, and they did not wish to offend or appear judgmental of ungodliness.

Paul demanded that the man be put out of the assembly, so that he might be converted from the error of his ways and to prevent him from corrupting the lives of others by the church’s obvious approval of his conduct. As Christ our Passover was sacrificed for us, we must sacrifice ourselves to him if we would keep the feast of faith and of the Lord’s Table “*with the unleavened bread of sincerity an truth.*” Sometimes that means saying publicly, “We do not approve of the evil the world embraces,” and thereby courting the world’s frowns and sneers.

Lust after material wealth, love of the world, further stirred strife in the church, so much so that they were suing one another in courts of law (chap. 6). Men who were destined to sit in judgment over angels were bickering about money and property before unbelievers!

How does Paul seek to correct the evil? Does he bring out the whip of the law? Never! He was addressing believers who live by a far higher rule and are motivated by a far higher principle. He corrects the evil of their

conduct by reminding these Corinthian saints of what God had done for them in Christ by his marvelous grace (6:9-11, 19-20).

(1 Cor 6:9-11) "Know ye not that the unrighteous shall not inherit the kingdom of God? Be not deceived: neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor effeminate, nor abusers of themselves with mankind, (10) Nor thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor extortioners, shall inherit the kingdom of God. (11) And such were some of you: but ye are washed, but ye are sanctified, but ye are justified in the name of the Lord Jesus, and by the Spirit of our God."

(1 Cor 6:19-20) "What? know ye not that your body is the temple of the Holy Ghost *which is* in you, which ye have of God, and ye are not your own? (20) For ye are bought with a price: therefore glorify God in your body, and in your spirit, which are God's."

QUESTIONS ANSWERED

Beginning in chapter 7, Paul answers the question the Corinthian church had asked in their letter to him.

ASCETICISM — Someone had persuaded some of these saints that if they would deprive themselves of natural, physical pleasure they would be more holy and spiritual. The particular thing about which they raised question was marriage. Would a brother or sister be more spiritual and useful if he or she chose not to enjoy

the privilege of marriage? If so, then should married couples live as celibates? Should those who are married get a divorce, so that they can be more devoted to the Lord?

Ridiculous as these questions may appear to us, they were serious to the Corinthians. Once a person embraces the idea that evil is outside himself, there is no limit to the incredible extremes to which he will run to make himself appear more holy, devoted, and spiritual than another. I once knew a man who moved his family into a remote mountainous place, more than a hundred miles from the nearest neighbor (literally). When I asked him why he had done so, he answered, “I want to keep myself and my family holy”!

The essence of Paul’s reply to such foolish notions is just this. Holiness is not outward, but inward. Marriage, the privileges of marriage, and all other things in this world, except those things prohibited by God in his world, is perfectly lawful and right. God did not save you to make life in this world miserable, but useful and meaningful.

MEATS OFFERED TO IDOLS — The same thing applies to meats offered to idols (chap. 8). If the Corinthian believer went to the meat market and bought a piece of meat, he did not need to ask whether it was meat left over from a pagan religious ceremony. If the person selling the meat made a point of the matter, or if one of his weaker brethren pointed out the fact that that

was the case, he ought to choose something else to avoid offense.

In other words, the idol is nothing and its meat is nothing. We are at perfect liberty to use and enjoy anything in God's creation for its intended purpose. But we must not use our liberty in a way that puts a stumbling block before our brethren.

PAUL'S APOSTLESHIP — Many at Corinth questioned Paul's credibility as an apostle. He displays the folly of those who had been converted under his ministry, who had learned the things of God from his lips in chapter 9.

He had labored with his hands at Corinth, making tents for his livelihood, lest any should accuse him of serving himself and preaching for personal gain. But he found that men determined to find an accusation will find one. Some at Corinth used Paul's willingness to labor for his own bread as a reason to be suspicious of his genuineness as an apostle of Christ. So he seized the opportunity to teach them and us that God's servants ought never be allowed, much less required, to provide for themselves. They are to be provided for and supported through the generosity of God's people (9:7-14).

(1 Cor 9:7-14) "Who goeth a warfare any time at his own charges? who planteth a vineyard, and eateth not of the fruit thereof? or who feedeth a flock, and eateth not

of the milk of the flock? (8) Say I these things as a man? or saith not the law the same also? (9) For it is written in the law of Moses, Thou shalt not muzzle the mouth of the ox that treadeth out the corn. Doth God take care for oxen? (10) Or saith he *it* altogether for our sakes? For our sakes, no doubt, *this* is written: that he that ploweth should plow in hope; and that he that thresheth in hope should be partaker of his hope. (11) If we have sown unto you spiritual things, *is it* a great thing if we shall reap your carnal things? (12) If others be partakers of *this* power over you, *are* not we rather? Nevertheless we have not used this power; but suffer all things, lest we should hinder the gospel of Christ. (13) Do ye not know that they which minister about holy things live *of the things* of the temple? and they which wait at the altar are partakers with the altar? (14) Even so hath the Lord ordained that they which preach the gospel should live of the gospel."

Yet, a faithful man will never allow the unfaithfulness of others to keep him from doing what God has called him to do (v. 16).

(1 Cor 9:16) "For though I preach the gospel, I have nothing to glory of: for necessity is laid upon me; yea, woe is unto me, if I preach not the gospel!"

WORSHIP — The Corinthian church had so perverted the ordinances of our Lord that every aspect of worship in their public assemblies was wrong. They appear to have mixed both the laws and ceremonies of the Old

Testament and the practices of their pagan neighbors with the worship of God, much like churches do today.

In chapter 10 Paul tells us that all that happened to Israel in the history recorded in the Old Testament happened to teach us spiritual, gospel truths.

- As the Jews were baptized symbolically with reference to Moses, we have been baptized with reference to Christ.
- The Rock that followed them through the wilderness was Christ.
- The Water of Life that flowed to them from the smitten Rock portrayed the grace of God flowing to sinners through the Lamb of God smitten and crucified by the law of God as our Substitute.
- As that Rock could be smitten but once, so Christ was *“once slain to put away sin by the sacrifice of himself.”*
- As God was faithful to bring his chosen through all their temptations and trial into the land of promise, so he is faithful to keep and preserve his elect today.
- As Israel in all their sacrifices professed themselves to be one with the altar, so all who worship God in Christ are one with Christ, and we symbolically show that oneness at the Lord’s Table (10:16-17).

(1 Cor 10:16-17) "The cup of blessing which we bless, is it not the communion of the blood of Christ? The bread which we break, is it not the communion of the

body of Christ? (17) For we *being* many are one bread, and one body: for we are all partakers of that one bread."

Chapters 11-14 address the matter of order in the worship of God. Paul had been asked about the role of women in public worship, the observance of the Lord's Supper, and spiritual gifts. All these things the Corinthian church was perverting. Paul commands that **women** are to keep silent in the church and show proper respect for men before God, particularly for their own husbands. He told the church to **observe the Lord's Supper in faith**, discerning the Lord's body, in remembrance of Christ, not as a religious party. And he required that in all things **the worship services** of the public assembly were to be in a decent, reverent, orderly manner.

The rule in all these things must be the glory of God and brotherly love (10:31; 12:31- 13:8).

(1 Cor 10:31) "Whether therefore ye eat, or drink, or whatsoever ye do, do all to the glory of God."

(1 Cor 12:31) "But covet earnestly the best gifts: and yet show I unto you a more excellent way."

(1 Cor 13:1-8) "Though I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, and have not charity, I am become *as* sounding brass, or a tinkling cymbal. (2) And though I have *the gift of* prophecy, and understand all mysteries, and all knowledge; and though I have all faith, so that I

could remove mountains, and have not charity, I am nothing. (3) And though I bestow all my goods to feed *the poor*, and though I give my body to be burned, and have not charity, it profiteth me nothing. (4) Charity suffereth long, *and* is kind; charity envieth not; charity vaunteth not itself, is not puffed up, (5) Doth not behave itself unseemly, seeketh not her own, is not easily provoked, thinketh no evil; (6) Rejoiceth not in iniquity, but rejoiceth in the truth; (7) Beareth all things, believeth all things, hopeth all things, endureth all things. (8) Charity never faileth: but whether *there be* prophecies, they shall fail; whether *there be* tongues, they shall cease; whether *there be* knowledge, it shall vanish away."

THE RESURRECTION — In chapter 15 the apostle displays his utter shock that some of the Corinthians had doubts about the resurrection of Christ. He tells us that there is but one gospel and that Christ's resurrection is vital to its message (15:1-4).

(1 Cor 15:1-4) "Moreover, brethren, I declare unto you the gospel which I preached unto you, which also ye have received, and wherein ye stand; (2) By which also ye are saved, if ye keep in memory what I preached unto you, unless ye have believed in vain. (3) For I delivered unto you first of all that which I also received, how that Christ died for our sins according to the scriptures; (4) And that he was buried, and that he rose again the third day according to the scriptures:"

Then he declares that our Lord's resurrection from the dead is an undeniable fact of history (15:5-11). Next, Paul assures us that Christ's resurrection guarantees the resurrection of all God's elect in and by him unto everlasting glory and immortality (15:17-58).

(1 Cor 15:20-25) "But now is Christ risen from the dead, *and* become the firstfruits of them that slept. (21) For since by man *came* death, by man *came* also the resurrection of the dead. (22) For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ shall all be made alive. (23) But every man in his own order: Christ the firstfruits; afterward they that are Christ's at his coming. (24) Then *cometh* the end, when he shall have delivered up the kingdom to God, even the Father; when he shall have put down all rule and all authority and power. (25) For he must reign, till he hath put all enemies under his feet."

(1 Cor 15:51-58) "Behold, I show you a mystery; We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed, (52) In a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trump: for the trumpet shall sound, and the dead shall be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed. (53) For this corruptible must put on incorruption, and this mortal *must* put on immortality. (54) So when this corruptible shall have put on incorruption, and this mortal shall have put on immortality, then shall be brought to pass the saying that is written, Death is swallowed up in victory. (55) O death, where *is* thy sting? O grave, where *is* thy victory? (56) The sting of death *is* sin; and the strength of sin *is* the law. (57) But thanks *be* to God, which

giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ. (58) Therefore, my beloved brethren, be ye stedfast, unmoveable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, forasmuch as ye know that your labour is not in vain in the Lord."

GIVING — As is ever the case with those who look for an excuse to be miserly in giving, the Corinthians asked Paul how much each should give and how. In chapter 16 he tells them and us that our giving is to be done as an act of worship in the house of God, as we gather in his house on the first day of the week, and that the measure of our giving is to be the liberality of love (16:1-3, 13).

Paul closes this Epistle urging us to "*stand fast in the faith and be strong*" (16:13), to do all things in love (16:14) and, to addict ourselves to serving our brethren (16:15). His very last word is a combined word of condemnation against all do not love the Lord Jesus Christ and a benediction of grace upon all who do (16:22-24).

(1 Cor 16:22-24) "If any man love not the Lord Jesus Christ, let him be Anathema Maranatha. (23) The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ *be* with you. (24) My love *be* with you all in Christ Jesus. Amen."