

1. Understanding a Common Cause of Division Among Christians

Today, we are beginning a new series of topics on the book of 1 Corinthians. The church in Corinth had many problems as the result of immaturity. We want to help our physical and spiritual children learn to help Christians who are struggling because of spiritual immaturity. Sometimes, our children may be struggling in their own lives as they go through the process of growing to spiritual maturity. Either way, this book gives us many practical lessons about how to help our children grow to spiritual maturity or to equip them to help others grow to spiritual maturity.

In 1 Corinthians 1:1-3, we read, “Paul, called *to be* an apostle of Jesus Christ through the will of God, and Sosthenes *our* brother, 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: Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.” In this introduction, Paul reminds us that all Christians are called to be saints. This is true in whatever part of the world we live. At the moment of salvation, we were changed from sinners to saints. However, it is only as we grow to spiritual maturity that we learn to act like saints in all areas of our lives.

Paul began by explaining to the Corinthians what God has done to help each person grow to maturity so that they could become mature even though they lived in a city that was filled with idol worship and all of the sin that went along with that idol worship. In 1 Corinthians 1:4-9, we read, “I thank my God always concerning you for the grace of God which was given to you by Christ Jesus, that 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, who will also confirm you to the end, *that you may be* blameless in the day of our Lord Jesus Christ. God *is* faithful, by whom you were called into the fellowship of His Son, Jesus Christ our Lord.” In these verses, we see several things that the Lord has done to help every Christian grow to spiritual maturity. These include:

1. God gave us His grace by Christ Jesus in the past.
2. God enriched us in everything by giving us all that we need in the present.
3. God made it possible for us to speak the Word of God.
4. God made it possible for us to understand the Word of God.
5. God established the testimony of Christ in us at the moment of salvation.
6. God gave us one or more gifts to serve His body, the church.
7. God gave us a hope for the future – the coming of Christ to take us to heaven.
8. God will cause us to be blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ.
9. God is faithful and has called us into the fellowship of His Son.

The Lord has done all of these things for each of us and for each of our children that have placed their faith in Christ. However, that does not mean that Christians will not experience problems in their lives, especially if they do not grow to spiritual maturity. In 1 Corinthians 1:10, we see one of the things that hinders and prevents growth to spiritual maturity. That verse says, “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.” The word that is translated “perfectly joined together” means *to mend or put back together something that is broken*. We see that Paul pleaded with the Corinthians as a father would with his beloved children that they would resolve the divisions that were in the church.

Paul focused on a key thing that is important to restore unity in any church. He pleaded with them that they would all learn to speak the same thing. Here, we see that they were to be in agreement about what they taught and how they taught it. Ephesians 4:15 says, “But, speaking the truth in love, may grow up in all things into Him who is the head—Christ.” First, unity will only develop in a local church as the people learn to base their beliefs on the Word of God and not their own opinions. This requires systematic teaching of the Word of God. Second, unity will only be developed or restored as people learn to speak the truth to one another in love. People learn to speak in love as they learn to be led by the love of Christ instead of driven by the fear of people.

Paul told how he had learned about the divisions that were in the church at Corinth. Some of the members of the family of Chloe had met Paul and told him what was happening in the church. They reported to Paul that there were contentions in the church. The word that is translated “contentions” is most commonly translated by the word “*strife*.” That is the way it is translated in 1 Corinthians 3:3 where we read, “For you are still carnal. For where *there are* envy, strife, and divisions among you, are you not carnal and behaving like *mere* men?” In this verse, we see that Paul said the kind of conflict that was happening in the church at Corinth was like the conflict that went on between people who were not even Christians. This often happens when many of the people in a local church are not growing to spiritual maturity.

Paul went on to write and explain what kind of divisions were developing because of this lack of spiritual maturity. 1 Corinthians 1:12-13 says, “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 people were choosing various Christian leaders and claiming to be followers of those particular leaders. Some claimed to be followers of Paul. Others claimed to be followers of Apollos. Another group claimed to follow Peter. Then, there was still another group that probably said they were more spiritual than the rest, because they didn’t follow any man but only followed Christ.

Paul began his response to those who claimed to be followers of a particular teacher by asking if Christ is divided. Romans 12:4-5 says, “For as we have many members in one body, but all the members do not have the same function, so we, *being* many, are one body in Christ, and individually members of one another.” These verses remind us that we are all part of one body. Ephesians 4:15 says, “But, speaking the truth in love, may grow up in all things into Him who is the head--Christ--.” This verse reminds us that there is only one head and that is Christ. Any time that a group of people in a church begin to follow some other leader instead of recognizing Christ as the head of the church, there will be conflicts and divisions. Paul reminded the people in Corinth that he had not been crucified for them and they had not been baptized in his name.

In fact, Paul goes on to point out a very important lesson for us as well as for the people in Corinth.

1 Corinthians 1:14-16 says, “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.” Here, we see that Paul chose to let other believers do most of the baptizing so that people would not put their loyalty to him above their relationship with Christ. Acts 18:8 tells us that Crispus and his entire household were among the first in the city of Corinth to place their faith in Christ. Romans 16:23 says that Paul stayed at the home of Gaius the second time that he came to the city so he was probably also one of the first people in Corinth to place his faith in Christ.

However, once there were a few Christians that had been baptized in Corinth, Paul had them baptize the others who became followers of Christ. In this way, Paul modeled a very important principle. He quickly involved the new Christians and helped them to become recognized as a leadership team in the local church. It was people from the local congregation that began to do the baptizing instead of Paul. As a result, when Paul moved to other cities, he left a leadership team to carry on the leadership of the churches. We see this illustrated in Acts 14:23 where we read, “So when they had appointed elders in every church, and prayed with fasting, they commended them to the Lord in whom they had believed.” One of the key responsibilities of any leader is to develop a leadership team for a local church so that those leaders will continue to lead the church.

Paul explained why he did what he did and why he did not do certain things in 1 Corinthians 1:17. That verse says, “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.” Here, we see that Paul said that there were two things that the Lord did not send him to do. Christ did not send him to do all of the baptizing. Christ did not send him to show off his wisdom and intelligence. If Paul would have done all of the baptizing, the church would not know what to do when he moved on to establish churches in other cities. If Paul would have tried to show the people that he had great wisdom and intelligence, others would not have felt that they could lead the church when the Lord moved Paul to the next city.

Instead, Paul said that what he was sent to do was to preach the Gospel. God had sent him to make the message of the cross effective among the Gentiles. This will be explained more fully in our next topic. However, this is a great reminder to each of us as we help our physical and spiritual children become effective in their service for the Lord. We want to help them remember that, as they talk to people who are not Christians, it is important to remember that the Lord has commissioned every Christian to share the message of the death and resurrection of Christ. That is the message that will change and transform lives. May the Lord richly bless you as you help your physical and spiritual children learn to share the message of the cross effectively.