

Day 83, 1 Corinthians 1

by David Servant

The sermon emphasizes the importance of unity in the body of Christ and the need to proclaim the simple message of the gospel, 'Christ crucified'.

Scripture: 1 Corinthians 1:10-30

Topics: "Church Unity", "The Gospel"

Description

David Servant preaches on the importance of unity in the body of Christ, highlighting how divisions based on denominational labels can hinder the church's witness to the world. He emphasizes the need to focus on the simple message of the gospel, 'Christ crucified,' without diluting it to make it more appealing to human wisdom. Servant encourages believers to find their wisdom, righteousness, sanctification, and redemption in Jesus, boasting in Him alone.

Transcript

We've started reading 1 Corinthians now because Paul wrote it during his three-year sojourn in Ephesus. Concerning his ministry there, Paul wrote to the Corinthians, "A wide door for effective service has opened to me" (16:8). Having just read about his very fruitful ministry in Ephesus, we know what Paul was talking about!

The date of this letter is around 55 A.D., 25 years after the day of Pentecost. Therefore, after 25 years of the church's existence, the New Testament epistles were five in all: James, Galatians, 1 and 2 Thessalonians, and 1 Corinthians. Four of those letters were written to specific churches for specific reasons. All of this is to say, once again, that the central focus of the early New Testament churches was obviously not the epistles, but the teaching of Christ. The epistles were supplementary, and were often corrective in nature, and that is certainly true of Paul's letters to the Corinthians.

About four years after he founded the church in Corinth, Paul learned that divisions had surfaced---divisions that foreshadowed splits that would characterize the Church for the next 2,000 years. The Corinthian believers were breaking into factions based on their favorite church leaders. The difference between then and now is this: Then, the teachers over whom they were dividing were in doctrinal agreement, and each would have been horrified to learn of the divisions that were occurring in Corinth over them; now, however, church leaders lead the divisions.

Claiming to be "of Christ" can be just as carnal as claiming to be "of Peter" or "of Paul" (1:12), if one's label is designed to distinguish himself from others in the body of Christ. As soon as one adopts a title other than Christian, one sets himself apart from other members of the body of Christ. How tragic it is that we continually advertise our lack of unity to the world by the labels permanently planted in front of our church buildings.

Those of us who want to please Christ should work to build unity in His body, even with those who have adopted distinctive denominational and doctrinal labels, lest we be guilty of being little one-church (or worse yet, one-person) denominations. Pray that the labels of all true believers will be discarded!

According to Paul (1:17), it is possible to void the cross of Christ by means of speech that is clever, or more literally, wise (Greek: sophia). How so? If the simple message of the gospel, what Paul calls "the word of the cross," is enhanced to make it more appealing, softened to make it more acceptable, or altered in any way, it is effectively voided. We should proclaim "Christ crucified" (1:23) even if it seems foolish to some.

Indeed, as Paul said, "The word of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing" (1:18). This was especially true in ancient Greece, of which Corinth was a part, where the philosophies of Socrates, Plato, and Aristotle were held in high esteem. Yet human philosophy and its partner, pride, cannot hold a candle to God's truth, as Paul so eloquently stated. And God, who humbles the proud but exalts the humble is well-pleased to choose "the foolish things of the world to shame the wise" (1:27), "so that no man may boast before God" (1:29).

Those of us who have believed the gospel are not shamed by the world's condescension, because we have experienced transforming and saving power. To us, all the world's wisdom, religions and philosophies amount to nothing by comparison. We have found "the treasure hidden in a field" (Matt. 13:44)! Jesus has become our wisdom, righteousness, sanctification and redemption, and we boast in Him (1:30-31).

Tragically, the modern gospel has indeed voided the cross. The message of "Christ crucified" has become the message of "Christ falsified," altered to make it more appealing to those who would otherwise reject it.

Let us then, with Paul, not be ashamed of the gospel of Christ. It is "the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes" (Rom. 1:16). I believe it!

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