

THE FIRST LETTER OF PAUL TO THE CORINTHIANS

Collect Prayer for Whitsunday - Pentecost

O GOD, who as at this time didst teach the hearts of thy faithful people, by sending* to them the light of thy Holy Spirit; Grant us by the same Spirit to have a right judgment in all things, and evermore to rejoice in his holy comfort; through the merits of Christ Jesus our Saviour, who liveth and reigneth with thee, in the unity of the same Spirit, one God, world without end. *Amen.*

Some last Notes before we begin

I. The number of Letters to the Corinthians

A. 2-3,-5 who cares - why does it matter

1. Evidence of an ongoing relationship - a pastoral relationship
2. There has been editing to the text -

The authenticity of the Letter is not in question the Chester Beatty Museum has a papyrus that dates to the year 200 A.D. It is virtually complete as we have received it 150 years after Paul wrote the letter.

B. The numbering of the Letters - First because of length - 2nd because it is shorter

II. Some thoughts about Presence and Absence

A. Paul notes his desire to be physically presence with the community while absent from the gathering.

B. His role in the community does not change - Father is still Father even when on a business trip - "What till your Father gets home"

C. In a theological sense Paul is also instructing the faithful concerning the ongoing presence of the Risen Lord

III. Rhetoric - the study and science of effective oral communication techniques

A. In the Hellenistic and Roman Worlds - a highly prized skill

B. Predictable patterns

1. Forensic - concerns the past - (what has happened, how have you responded)
2. Demonstrative - concerned with the present - (What is happening and how are you responding)
3. Deliberative - concerns the future- (future judgments)

The important issue for us is that Paul thought and taught like a Greek - This was not considered an advantage when speaking to Jews -

Note the Apocrypha - not accepted by the Jewish canon because it was written in Greek not Hebrew

The Founding of the Church at Corinth

Acts 18 1-18

¹After this he left Athens and went to Corinth. ²And he found a Jew named Aquila, a native of Pontus, lately come from Italy with his wife Priscilla, because Claudius had commanded all the Jews to leave Rome. And he went to see them; ³and because he was of the same trade he stayed with them, and they worked, for by trade they were tentmakers. ⁴And he argued in the synagogue every sabbath, and persuaded Jews and Greeks. ⁵When Silas and Timothy arrived from Macedonia, Paul was occupied with preaching, testifying to the Jews that the Christ was Jesus. ⁶And when they opposed and reviled him, he shook out his garments and said to them, "Your blood be upon your heads! I am innocent. From now on I will go to the Gentiles." ⁷And he left there and went to the house of a man named Titius Justus, a worshiper of God; his house was next door to the synagogue. ⁸Crispus, the ruler of the synagogue, believed in the Lord, together with all his household; and many of the Corinthians hearing Paul believed and were baptized. ⁹And the Lord said to Paul one night in a vision, "Do not be afraid, but speak and do not be silent; ¹⁰for I am with you, and no man shall attack you to harm you; for I have many people in this city." ¹¹And he stayed a year and six months, teaching the word of God among

them ¹²But when Gallio was proconsul of Achaia, the Jews made a united attack upon Paul and brought him before the tribunal, ¹³saying, "This man is persuading men to worship God contrary to the law." ¹⁴But when Paul was about to open his mouth, Gallio said to the Jews, "If it were a matter of wrongdoing or vicious crime, I should have reason to bear with you, O Jews; ¹⁵but since it is a matter of questions about words and names and your own law, see to it yourselves; I refuse to be a judge of these things." ¹⁶And he drove them from the tribunal. ¹⁷And they all seized Sosthenes, the ruler of the synagogue, and beat him in front of the tribunal. But Gallio paid no attention to this. ¹⁸After this Paul stayed many days longer, and then took leave of the brethren and sailed for Syria, and with him Priscilla and Aquila.

1 Corinthians 1

¹Paul, called by the will of God to be an apostle of Christ Jesus, and our brother Sosthenes, ²To the church of God which is at Corinth, to those sanctified in Christ Jesus, called to be saints together with all those who in every place call on the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, both their Lord and ours: ³Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

1. How is the letter written? In the common Greek form

2. Who is Paul writing to? To the Church and not a person. This denotes a form of communication broader than a letter to a single person.

What do we know about the broader audience? "to those sanctified in Christ Jesus, called to be saints together with all those who in every place call on the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, both their Lord"

3. Is Paul aware at the time he is writing to people of all times and ages?

4. How does Paul identify himself? An Apostle - what is an Apostle?

5. Who is Sosthenes? Why does Paul call him "our brother"? Fellow Christian, fellow Sufferer and now engaged in the ministry of the Church?

⁴I give thanks to God always for you because of the grace of God which was given you in Christ Jesus, ⁵that in every way you were enriched in him with all speech and all knowledge—⁶even as the testimony to Christ was confirmed among you—⁷so that you are not lacking in any spiritual gift, as you wait for the revealing of our Lord Jesus Christ; ⁸who will sustain you to the end, guiltless in the day of our Lord Jesus Christ. ⁹God is faithful, by whom you were called into the fellowship of his Son, Jesus Christ our Lord.

Note - it was customary in a Hellenistic letter for an expression of thanksgiving to a deity to follow after a health wish - this is part of the Hellenistic Signature of Paul

1. Why does Paul say, "I give thanks to God always for you?" - In his pastoral role - He is offering to God on behalf of the Corinthians

2. Is there a purpose to Paul reminding the Corinthians of the gifts they have and are receiving because of their faith? - technique of rhetoric that makes the person pay more attention to what you are going to say next - (Sales person notes past relationship and profits from previous venture to get the customer to pay more attention to the next offering)

3. How are we to interpret the ending of this passage? Why does Paul note the Second Coming of Christ?

This calls to mind the seriousness of the letter and subjects that Paul is going to address. We are not talking about supper next week, but about eternity with or without God.

¹⁰I appeal to you, brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that all of you agree and that there be no dissensions among you, but that you be united in the same mind and the same judgment. ¹¹For it has been reported to me by Chloe's people that there is quarreling among you, my brethren. ¹²What I mean is that each one of you says, "I belong to Paul," or "I belong to Apollos," or "I belong to Cephas," or "I belong to Christ." ¹³Is Christ divided? Was Paul crucified for you? Or were you baptized in the name of Paul? ¹⁴I am thankful that I baptized none of you except Crispus and Gaius; ¹⁵lest any one should say that you were baptized in my name. ¹⁶(I did baptize also the household of

Stephanas. Beyond that, I do not know whether I baptized any one else.) ¹⁷*For Christ did not send me to baptize but to preach the gospel, and not with eloquent wisdom, lest the cross of Christ be emptied of its power.*

1. Now that Paul has asserted his authority as an Apostle and the Pastoral relationship with the Church at Corinth, how are we to understand him addressing the faithful as brethren, or brothers and sisters?

The Greek word *Adelphoi* is a vocative form in the masculine plural, we can understand it used as the masculine was used in English to denote as pronoun either male or female - in the vernacular it might be compared to addressing a mixed crowd as you guys. What is important is that Paul is addressing not only the males in the church but also the females.

This change to the familiar family language is used to personal relationship and to note his kinship with the community.

2. Paul notes several groups or affiliations within the church at Corinth, how do you understand these groups?

*The house Church - The way in which Christian met for study or worship was in private homes - This is true but not a issue with these divisions

* Perhaps it is about the person that baptized the people. Many of us remember fondly the priest who baptized us or the Bishop who Confirmed us - Partly true, Paul even mentions Baptism, but the bigger issue is still not been stated.

* Is it the teaching of the various people Paul mentions? Yes

Paul's - Those who followed the teachings of Paul - No Jew or Greek Slave or free - but all part of the one body

Apollos' - Apollos was a proponent of Jewish Wisdom thinking

Christ's - a group of Pseudo- Gnostic Christians who trusted in the Holy Spirit to give them the special knowledge

Cephas' - Strongly conservative Christian Jewish followers - circumcision necessary and following the law strictly- exclusionary

A Note about, the House Church and the "Community at Corinth"

While we may wish to consider the church at Corinth like the Church at St, Louis Park, that is a gathering of likeminded Anglicans in one place on Sunday Morning, it was not. The fact of meeting in homes limited the number that could be accommodated at any one time. There were probably several homes in which people met on a Sunday Morning for worship or daily for prayer and study. The natural cultural and economic differences would have led to different hospitality and customs. (Consider our coffee hour vs. other churches you have attended)

The second issue we need to remember is that people were no different in Corinth in 50 A.D. than they are today. The educational level, the individual commitment to faith and the personal experiences of the individual people would all lead to differences in their faith and the faith experience they shared with others. There was no "Golden Age" for the church.

In verse 17 Paul refers to eloquent wisdom. What is he referring to ?

This is his denial of using rhetorical techniques to convince people Jesus is the Christ. We note that he is using a rhetorical technique to deny using rhetorical techniques.

¹⁸For the word of the cross is folly to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God. ¹⁹For it is written,

“I will destroy the wisdom of the wise,
and the cleverness of the clever I will thwart.”

²⁰Where is the wise man? Where is the scribe? Where is the debater of this age? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of the world? ²¹For since, in the wisdom of God, the world did not know God through wisdom, it pleased God through the folly of what we preach to save those who believe. ²²For Jews demand signs and Greeks seek wisdom, ²³but we preach Christ crucified, a stumbling block to Jews and folly to Gentiles, ²⁴but to those who are called, both Jews and

Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God. ²⁵For the foolishness of God is wiser than men, and the weakness of God is stronger than men. ²⁶For consider your call, brethren; not many of you were wise according to worldly standards, not many were powerful, not many were of noble birth; ²⁷but God chose what is foolish in the world to shame the wise, God chose what is weak in the world to shame the strong, ²⁸God chose what is low and despised in the world, even things that are not, to bring to nothing things that are, ²⁹so that no human being might boast in the presence of God. ³⁰He is the source of your life in Christ Jesus, whom God made our wisdom, our righteousness and sanctification and redemption; ³¹therefore, as it is written, "Let him who boasts, boast of the Lord."

Wisdom and Power - in this passage Paul sets up a parallel he does not use wisdom and foolishness, but wisdom and power it is not a comparison of opposites rather it is an explanation of the complementary nature of God's Wisdom and God's Power.

1. What is Paul telling us about the nature of the Gospel, "The Good News"?
Is it good news for everyone?

The Gospel is divisive. The followers of The Way will be accused in the Acts of the Apostles of turning the world upside down. The Gospel does just that. Paul is continuing as he preaches universal salvation through faith.

2. How do we understand what Paul is teaching about the Cross of Christ?

This is part of the Kerygma of Faith. The Kerygma is the basic essential elements of faith as taught by the Apostles. The summary of the Kerygma is the Apostles Creed.

This is also the continuation of the parallel - the foolish, those who do not believe or trust in themselves find the Cross a stumbling block. They are wise to world, but foolish as it relates to their salvation.

Why was Crucifixion seen as the worst death?

* A horrible prolonged death usually after flogging (Roman Citizens could not be flogged)

* Reserved for mutinous soldiers, seditious, or slaves

* Those who were crucified often received no burial

* For Jews the law Deut. 21:22-23 notes that one crucified is under God's wrath.

Is Paul talking only about divisions in the here and now or eternal divisions?