Explore the Bible Lesson Preview
June 6, 2010
"Four Ways to Promote Church Unity"
Background: 1 Corinthians 1:1 - 3:23
Lesson: 1 Corinthians 1:10, 21-31; 3:9-10, 16-17

Motivation: Unity occurs in the church when mature believers understand God's purpose and endeavor to carry it out. Strife occurs when immature believers ("carnal", "babes") divide into factions and follow self-serving agendas.

Paul appeals for unity based on God's purpose, God's wisdom, God's direction through His Spirit, and God's judgment.

Examination:

I. I'm Thankful For You (1:1-9)

A. Author: "Paul... an apostle of Jesus Christ...and Sosthenes" Paul founded the church at Corinth with Aquila and Priscilla on his Second Missionary journey.

Sosthenes did not help write the letter, but was either a scribe or courier.

If he is the same person mentioned in Acts 18:17, then he was a converted ruler of the synagogue at Corinth who was beaten in Paul's place.

B. Date: 56-57 A.D.
C. Place: Corinth was the capital of Achaia and at the crossroads of important land and sea trade routes. It was prosperous, idolatrous and immoral.

D. Occasion: The Corinthian church was experiencing internal problems and sent a cry of help to Paul. Much of the letter is devoted to answering questions and solving problems. In the first ten verses, Paul refers to Jesus' name no less than ten times, thus laying the foundation for the answers to their problems. (cf. 3:11)

E. Themes: In Paul's prayer (3-9), he previewed many of the issues that will be discussed in full later in the book:

1. **God's grace** (3-4) - All that has been given the Corinthian Christians (eternal life, a church, sanctified lives, and Christian fellowship) was given as a grace gift by God. With the grace came accountability and responsibility.

2. **God's riches** (5-6) - Unintelligible languages were a divisive factor in the church (14:2, 4, 9, 19, 28, 33, 40). God reminds us that we are not dependent upon outside utterances to enrich; God is our source of enrichment (Rom. 8:26).

3. **God's gifts** (7) - Spiritual gifts will be a major theme of 12-14.

4. **God's return** (7-8) - In both letters to the Corinthians, Paul cleared up misconceptions concerning Christ's return.

5. **God's fellowship** (9) - All we have is due to God's faithfulness not our own. He called us to Himself. His desire is for us to be unified in Christ.
II. But You Have A Problem (1:10-17)

A. The Problem (10-11)

1. **Broken Fellowship** *(that you be perfectly joined together)* (10) - This medical expression usually refers to the knitting together of a broken bone or the healing of a dislocated joint. Broken fellowship is unnatural and unhealthy.

2. **Torn Fellowship** *(There are contentions among you)* (11) - The Greek word *schismata* is also translated "strifes" and is usually used of a tear in clothing.

Divisions in the church ruin the appearance, destroy the function and lessen the value of the fellowship.

B. The Parties (12) - We can speculate on these parties:

1. **Party of Paul** - Gentile; emphasizing grace; possibly erred in moral laxity.

2. **Party of Peter** - Jewish; emphasizing Jewish law; possibly erred in legalism.

3. **Party of Apollos** - Since Apollos was of Alexandria, his followers may have subscribed to an allegoric school of interpretation that emphasized the mind; possibly erred toward intellectualism.
4. **Party of Christ** - This may have been a self-righteous group who believed they were the sole possessors of the truth; possibly erred toward super-spiritualism.

C. **The Purpose** *For Christ did not send me to baptize, but to preach the gospel.* . . *(17)*

In the face of factions, Paul made a beeline to the cross.

The church is not about us, our feelings, our beliefs, and our desires.

It's all about Christ and the mission he gave us.

Rarely does one see church members who are committed to soul winning running around stirring up dissension; they're so concerned with the lostness of men, the finality of judgment and the soon return of Christ that they won't spend time and energy on peripheral arguments.

Concerning water baptism, **Believer's Study Bible** comments, p. 1624:

1:17

*Here is a clear differentiation between water baptism (the initial witness of the believer to his faith in Christ) and the gospel itself.*

The foundation of faith is in the work of Christ on the cross.

The atoning work of Christ is that which saves us and should be the main thrust of our preaching.

**III. Here's The Solution** (1:18-31)

A. **God's Wisdom Superior To Jewish Belief** - The Jews struggled with the idea of a crucified messiah for two reasons:

1. **A Requested Sign** - The *Day of the Lord* in Old Testament prophecy was accompanied by spectacular signs in the heavens and on earth *(Joel 2:28-31).*

In Jesus' day the people wanted dramatic signs *(Matt. 16:4).*
2. **A Repugnant Stumbling Block** - Deut. 21:22-23 clearly taught that "he that is hanged (on a tree) is accursed of God." (Gal. 3:13, 14)

A crucified messiah was totally foreign to their beliefs.

Jewish people had to abandon faith in their preconceived ideas and transfer trust to Christ by faith in God. (I Peter 2:6-8)

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B. **God's Wisdom Superior To Greek Thought** - While the Jews struggled to reconcile prophecy, the Greeks were wrapped up in understanding wisdom.

Paul uses the terms "foolish" and "foolishness" five times in this section meeting the Greek argument head-on.

God's plan does not have to follow our logic.

The Greeks prized fine oratory; the gospel is delivered through preaching (preaching can refer to a sermon or a one-to-one presentation).

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C. **God's Wisdom Is Superior To Earthly Glory** (26-31) - Corinth was a city of wealth and power. Probably most of the Corinthian church was on the lower rungs of the ladder of success (26).

God delights in taking the lesser lights of culture and turning them into shining lights of His grace.

Verse 30 is a topical sentence in the plan of salvation: by being "in Christ" we have wisdom , righteousness
IV. God's Wisdom Is Based On His Power (2:1-16)

A. Paul's Example (1-5)

1. He was **focused** - Paul did not emphasize "excellence of speech" or "wisdom", but rather focused on the "testimony of God". We cannot let the good become worst enemy of best. (Gal. 6:14).

2. He was **transparent** - "Weakness" and "trembling" may be used in a spiritual sense of reverence.

Some believe that it refers to Paul's "thorn in the flesh" (II Cor. 12:7).

Regardless, Paul was honest, vulnerable, and open about his own limitations.

3. He was **dependent** - "not with persuasive words . . . but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power" (5). The issue is our trust: We cannot let the good become worst enemy of best. (Gal. 6:14).
hat your faith should not be in the wisdom of men but in the power of God

Paul had the pedigree and the PhD. (2 Cor. 10:7-11); but, he was careful to live what he taught about dependence. (2 Cor. 3:5).

B. Profound Excitement "the things which God has prepared for those who love Him" (9). The word *mystery* is used twenty-seven times in the New Testament.

Mystery religions were popular in this era; but, they focused on knowing secret, hidden, privileged knowledge.

Paul's use of the word refers to "that which had been silent has now become vocal." (Thru the Bible, McGee, vol. 5, p. 14).

The excitement comes from the disclosure.

Verse 9, "Eye has not seen, nor ear heard . . ." does not refer primarily to heaven, although it's often used in that context.

The primary meaning, taken in context, is that God has wonderful things in store for us now.

C. Powerful Experience (10-16)

1. **God's Revelation** "But God has revealed them to us . . ." (10) Confined as we are to earthly bodies, we cannot by ourselves understand the things of God. (11, 12) We are dependent on His revelation.

2. **Spirit's Illumination** . . .*they Holy Spirit teaches*. (13) What a comfort to every Bible teacher!
We are not in the battle alone; God’s Spirit communicates truth to our hearers. (I Cor. 6:19-20)

**Believer’s Study Bible**
, p. 1625:

2:13

“Paul claims that his very words are inspired. hence, inspiration is ‘verbal,’ extending to the very words chosen by the authors of Scripture under the direction of the Holy Spirit.

This is not a ‘mechanical dictation’ theory, nor does it nullify the personality of the author involved.

On the other hand, Paul's affirmation does guarantee that when the Bible is heard, God is heard.&quot;

2:14

“Before a man is drawn by God to conversion through the Spirit, he is unable to receive or properly understand God's message (cf. John 6:44; Rom. 8:5-8).

This explains why the gospel appears foolish to the unbeliever.

Groping in spiritual blindness makes him unable to comprehend the truths which belong to the spiritual realm.&quot; (2 Cor. 4:4)

3. **Christ’s Examination:** “But we have the mind of Christ” (16) Ultimately, all our thoughts, attitudes and actions must be carefully compared to those of Jesus. As we imitate Him, we show evidence of His mind.

V. **Now Grow Up!** (3:1-23)

In Chapter 3, Paul recapped the warning against divisions (1-10) and against worldly wisdom (18-23). In between he cited another powerful argument for unity and right living: we will be judged by Holy God. **Believer’s Study Bible**, p. 1625: 3:13 “The judgment described in 3:11-17 is for Christians only and transpires immediately after the translation (rapture) of the church into heaven.

In Rom. 14:10 and 2 Cor. 5:10, this judgment is labeled the *bema*
Several important truths about that judgment are presented in this passage:

(1) Only those who have the proper spiritual foundation upon which to construct a life will be able to appear at the *bema*. That foundation is Christ (v. 11).

(2) Once the foundation has been laid, believers build a superstructure throughout the years that God allows. That superstructure may consist of the valuable and lasting - gold, silver, precious stones; or the unworthy and fleeting - wood, hay, straw (v. 12).

(3) On the day of Christ's return, all works will be declared and 'revealed by fire.' This latter expression probably refers to the penetrating, purging, and discerning gaze of Jesus (cf. Rev. 1:14; 2:18).

(4) Those Christian works which are of permanent value abide and become the basis for reward (v. 14).

(5) Those works which are worthless in themselves or which are improperly motivated are destroyed in the fire of Christ's gaze. Consequently, reward may be limited, but the man himself is saved (v. 15). This judgment is not to determine salvation or eternal destiny but to determine rewards. (Rom. 8:1; Rev. 22:12)

Application

1. The **purpose** of the church is to glorify God by proclaiming His Good News and discipling those who respond. *We preach Christ crucified* (1:23).
2. **Spiritual growth** requires spiritual means **"no one knows the things of God except the Spirit of God."** (2:11)

3. God commands **unity** in His church **"If anyone defiles the temple of God, God will destroy him."** (3:17) (Gal. 3:26-29)

**Leader Pack:** Item 1: Lesson Illustrations; Item 2: Map: Paul and First Century Corinth; Item 3: Poster: Unit 1; Item 4: Handout: What is Church Unity?

**Illustrator:** pg. 19 - "Disciples and Apostles"; pg. 35 - "Apollos, The Man and His Ministry";

**Notes:** **"You may access David's Lesson Preview in MP3 format at: http://www.hfbcbiblestudy.org/"**

I Corinthians Lesson 1: "Four Ways to Promote Church Unity"

Written by David Self
Sunday, 30 May 2010 23:00 -

7/4
- July 4
th
weekend, 2 a.m. svc. w/ SBS - no p.m. (Tony Perkins);

7/11
- Lord's Supper in services;

7/11-15
- Houston Project;

7/21
- Midsummer Night Thing;

7/23-31
- HUB Rush Week;

7/30
- Family Mission
Day;

7/30-31
- Spamarama Missions Lock-in;

8/9
- Fuller Seminary Conf. with Dr. Reggie McNeal;

8/13
- Children's Back to School Bash;

8/15
- Promotion Sunday;

8/17
- FBA First Day of School;

8/18 -
HUB Summer Rush Celebration;

8/25-11/17
- Fall Midlink;

8/29
- Summit Up.