

First Core Devotional: United Through Christ

Passage: 1 Corinthians 1:10 - 2:16

Themes: Unity, the Wisdom of God, the Cross, Holy Spirit

Background and Summary: *This is for Core leaders and co-leaders only in order to provide you with some background information and is not meant to be read out in Core.*

In 1:10-17, we discover the purpose of the Apostle Paul's first letter to the Corinthians. Some people from Chloe's household have visited Paul and told him of the problems in the Corinthian church. The matters in chapters 1 and 2 are all responses to what has been reported to Paul.

Paul begins by focusing on the problem of division in the church. In 1:10-12, Paul acknowledges that members of the church are splitting into groups. These divisions could be the result of the large mix-raced population in Corinth, differences in their understanding of certain teachings on the resurrection, freedom, and sexuality, or based on their preference of certain teachers/preachers who could speak eloquently. It is important to note that the division here is not just a matter of personal preference. Rather, the Corinthian's are in fact quarreling/fighting with each other (1:12). There also appears to be some bad blood between the church and Paul himself. Some of the Corinthian's are actually opposed to Paul.

Although Paul responds by specifically spelling out the problem of division, the beginning of his answer (1:18-3:4) does not seem to speak to the problem of division at all. Instead, Paul exposes the Corinthians' inadequate understanding of the gospel, a gospel that is no way based on human wisdom but in every way stands in contradiction to it. A key word used in this section is "wisdom" or "wise". The use of "wisdom" in Paul's argument makes it almost certain that wisdom is a part of the problem of division. We can suspect that the Corinthian's are carrying on in their division over leaders and their opposition to Paul in the name of wisdom. Paul clearly states that God is out to set aside the wisdom of this world (1:18-22, 27-28). Paul identifies three ways in which God has accomplished this:

1. Through the cross (1:18-25). The heart of the gospel - a crucified Messiah - stands in total contradiction to human wisdom. Christ through the cross has "become for us wisdom from God" (1:30).
2. Through God's choice of the Corinthian believers (1:26-31). The gospel is not a new form of worldly wisdom. If it were, then why would God have chosen the pagan Corinthians to become His new people? It is unimaginable. God chooses those who have little to commend them from the worldly standpoint.

3. Through the weakness of Paul's preaching (2:1-5). The gospel is not concerned with eloquent/wise speech. Its power comes from its message. Paul's confidence came from the Holy Spirit's guidance, not from his keen intellect or speaking ability.

Under the inspiration of the Spirit, Paul assures the Corinthians in 2:6-16 that the gospel is indeed wisdom, but it is wisdom revealed by the Spirit to God's new people. The Corinthians are to be spiritually mature, recognizing that God's wisdom always surpasses worldly wisdom and understanding (1:18-2:5)

Introductory Question:

- Where are some places in the world that you can clearly see disunity? Where have you experienced disunity in your own life? What was the cause of it and what were the outcomes?

Passage: For leading this devotional read **1 Cor: 1-3, 10, and 18** aloud, focusing only these specific verses.

Discussion Questions:

- What is the source of division in the Corinthian church that Paul is referring to? Why are the Corinthians dividing (1:12)?
- What is the message of the cross? Why would this message be foolish to someone today? (1:18)

Response Question:

- The Christians in Corinth favored speakers who could preach eloquently over Paul who was a very ordinary preacher. Likewise, it is easy for us today to become attached to a favourite spiritual leader. How can we guard ourselves from making the same mistakes as the Corinthians in placing church leaders on pedestals?