

A9 BIBLE STUDY: I CORINTHIANS #1

Scripture of Lesson: I Corinthians 1: 1~31

Paul had brought the gospel to people of Corinth, a busy port city in southern Greece, during his second missionary trip. As a result a Christian church was established. Later he came to hear about some problems with this church and this prompted him to write a letter to the church. This letter was written perhaps from Ephesus or Philippi during his third missionary trip during 55~57AD period. The key theme of this epistle is that the relationship between the church and Christ, the head of the church. Key chapters are Chapter 13 (love) and Chapter 15 (resurrection).

1. Paul's greetings to the church: v. 1~9

In this opening part of his letter to the church in Corinth apostle Paul defines what the Christian church is:

The church of God which is at Corinth, to them that are sanctified in Christ Jesus, called to be saints, with all that in every place call upon the name of Jesus Christ our Lord, both theirs and ours [v.2].

Christians of the church of God are those who have been called into the fellowship through God's election and foreknowledge, saved through God's grace because of their faith in Christ Jesus and are being sanctified in Christ Jesus. The sanctification does not refer to improving the moral character of a person through any philosophic or ethical teaching but 'in Christ Jesus.' God the Son came to the world to set the standard of love, faith and righteousness. Let us not be confused between the divine knowledge and wisdom with human knowledge and wisdom.

We are enriched in utterance and knowledge and our testimonies are established firmly through Jesus Christ [v. 5-6].

Oh, the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are His judgments and His ways past finding out! [Romans 11: 33]

God is generous to share some of His unfathomable store of knowledge with His children, those who fear Him and not just anyone:

The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge, But fools despise wisdom and instruction. [Proverbs 1:7]

God does not delight giving His knowledge to those whose hearts are proud and arrogant:

Because they hated knowledge, And did not choose the fear of the Lord, They would have none of my counsel, And despised my every rebuke. [Proverbs 1: 29-30]

Paul reminds the Corinthian Christians that the purpose of their sanctification is that they may be blameless in the day of our Lord Jesus Christ [v.9]. We might have been saved through our faith. We might even have done many good works to earn men's praises. Yet if our hearts are not molded to the heart of our Lord Jesus, there will be scolding and harsh judgment on the day we stand before Him on the Judgment Day. V. 9 implies that the Corinthian church had something to be criticized by the Lord and needed correction so that they would be blameless on the Judgment Day. We need to look into our hearts to see if the Lord has something to point out for correction.

Discussion point: What has been your experience of increasing in the knowledge of God and of the world in general since you met Christ? How did that come about with you?

2. Division in the church: v. 10-17

In v. 10 Paul besought the Christians at Corinth to “be perfectly jointed together in the same mind and in the same judgment.” Causing divisions in the church started even in the first century here at Corinth! And the dividing has never stopped and is still going on. Paul’s concern was that “*the cross of Christ be made of none effect* [v. 17].”

There are differences of views even among blood siblings, but they do not kill one another because of them. Millions of Christians have been killed for heresy of refusing to accept one set of beliefs and dominion of the Pope’s authority. Millions of Jews have been killed as enemies of Christ. Christians need to rethink this biggest problem in the Christendom of dissension and division. Siblings live in different homes, wear different fashions and eat different foods, but they call one another brothers and sisters. Likewise, Christian denominations need to accept one another as fellow brethren in Christ.

Discussion point: Have you witnessed a conflict or division in your congregation? What are some of the issues of conflict?

3. God’s wisdom in the gospel mission: v. 18~30

The main theme in this part of Chapter 1 is expressed in v. 25:

The foolishness of God is wiser than men, and the weakness of God is stronger than men. [v.1: 25]

The wisdom of this world favors the strong, the mighty and the popular that cavorts to the human likings. But the gospel message is about the crucified Jesus, which is a stumbling block to the Jews and a foolish tale to the Greeks. To the Jews, who were anticipating a powerful savior who would free them from the colonial rule of the Roman Empire, this preacher from Galilee, Jesus, who had been condemned as a criminal and crucified on a cross was a no-winner and did not pass their mental and religious screening at all. To the Greeks, who had established mythology of their powerful and cunning gods like Zeus, Poseidon, Apollo and Hercules, the story of Jesus was a foolish story of a weak and failed philosopher.

And God chose the way of evangelical preaching as homeless preachers moving from town to town seeking those whose hearts were seeking God’s eternal truth in humility and not satisfied with the world’s myths, philosophies and deceptions. Often those who responded to the gospel’s call were the poor, unlearned, the lower strata of people subject to dejection and despise from the rich and the powerful in the society [v. 28]. Paul ascribes this to God’s wisdom to “*bring to naught things that are* [v. 28] *and that no flesh should glory in His presence* [v. 29].” This wisdom of God is being applied towards the ultimate goal God has for His church; Christ is made supreme in wisdom, righteousness, sanctification and redemption [v. 30].

There is much boasting in this world. Every day we face boastings by peoples, political parties, organizations and nations who boast of their achievements, some unusual feats performed, promises that they alone are qualified to fulfill, their unique qualities and doctrines that others do not share, and even admirable charitable programs and acts performed for others. Apostle Paul admonishes that we should glory in the Lord only: “*He who glories, let him glory in the Lord* [v. 31].”

Discussion point: Are churches today keeping in line with God’s wisdom in its evangelical and pastoral work? Are churches of today also following the world’s trend of boasting of their works? What would Christ say about the state of Christian churches today?