

First Corinthians

January 12, 2025

How to Stop Disturbing Quarrels Among the Saints!

“Stop Following Man’s Theology”

4. With Grace and Peace

With Paul’s greeting, he speaks of his prayer for grace and peace when he says,

³Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

“Grace to you and peace.” Every letter from Paul contains these words somewhere, either at the beginning, end, or both. “Grace” is the gift or blessing brought to man by Jesus Christ. It comes with His kindness, favor, gratitude, and thanks. “Peace” is a state of mind caused by Christ’s gift of wholeness. It is a tranquility only found in the LORD. It brings harmony between individuals, placing them in one accord. It is a course of life. It includes safety and security. It soothes the souls of the saints. “Grace to you and peace” is Paul’s prayer for the sanctified saints and the universal Church. Other churches have reached this lofty goal, but the Church in Corinth had not achieved it when this letter was written. We come to Paul’s gratitude.

B. Paul’s Gratitude

1. For the Grace of God

Paul is grateful for the grace of God when he says,

⁴I thank my God always concerning you for the grace of God which was given you in Christ Jesus....

The faithful saints there in Corinth received that “grace.” That gift or blessing that is brought to them by Jesus Christ out of His kindness, favor, gratitude, and thanks. This refers to the time the *grace* is given and received by each saint.

2. For the Gift of God

Paul is also grateful for the gift of God. Verse 5.

⁵that in everything you were enriched in Him, in all speech and all knowledge,

Paul is grateful for God’s gift to the saints who are “enriched in Him.” The expression means, “You abound in these things; they are conferred abundantly upon you.” What are the things for which the LORD has enriched you? They are “all speech and all knowledge.” “In all speech” means glorifying God in prayer, conversation, and worship. “In all knowledge” means the ability to understand, comprehend, and communicate the Gospel and the things of God with others.

3. For the Testimony of the LORD

Paul is grateful for the testimony of the LORD when he says,

⁶even as the testimony concerning Christ was confirmed in you, ⁷so that you are not lacking in any gift, awaiting eagerly the revelation of our Lord Jesus Christ,

But Paul also has a prayerful gratitude for the testimony of the LORD that was “confirmed” among the sanctified saints. The word “gift” means the *gift of grace or undeserved favor*. It is the Greek *charisma* [grace] endowed on the saints to edify the Church. It empowers the saints to share the holy work with others to carry out the LORD’s plan for His people. They have all they need to do this work while and until the “*revelation of our Lord Jesus Christ...*” which means at His Second Coming. This refers to the period when saints were waiting and working for the LORD.

4. For the Confirmation of the LORD

Paul is grateful for the confirmation of the LORD on each saint's life. Verse 8.

⁸ who will also confirm you to the end, blameless in the day of our Lord Jesus Christ.

In addition to confirming the testimony of the LORD, His Gospel is for the saints to share with the lost. It also confirms the LORD for the saints "*to the end, blameless in the Day of our LORD Jesus Christ.*" This refers to the day when the LORD finally makes saints safe and preserves them when He comes to take them to be with Him. The Apostle Paul has every confidence in these words. Why? He tells us in the next verse.

5. For the Faithfulness of God

Paul is grateful for the faithfulness of God. Paul says,

⁹ God is faithful, through whom you were called into fellowship with His Son, Jesus Christ our Lord.

Why does Paul have every confidence in these words? The LORD called the sinners to be part of His fellowship. When they accepted the call and invited Jesus into their lives, they became saints of the LORD Jesus Christ. As we will see, the number of faithful saints in Corinth may have been small compared to the number of people attending the Church. Why? Saints, indwelt and guided by the Holy Spirit, would know better than to participate in the sinful issues in the Corinthian Church. Now, Paul must delve into the meat of this letter.

II. Issues in the Corinth Church

A. Disturbing Relationship Matters in the Church

1. Paul's Concern

a) Strive for Agreement

Paul's greeting is over. Now, he will discuss the issues in the Corinth Church. He will start with the first disturbing relationship matter. We hear Paul's concern and his plea to strive for agreement.

¹⁰ Now I exhort you, brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you all agree and that there be no divisions among you, but that you be made complete in the same mind and in the same judgment.

"Now I exhort you, brethren," is the sure-fire announcement that Paul has some business to handle concerning the issues in the Corinth Church. Disturbing matters in the Church have occurred and become Paul's concern. What is the concern? It is not just one concern; there are several. Since you must start somewhere, Paul begins with the divisions in the Church, and he exhorts the "brethren" to strive for agreement.

Right off the bat, Paul has identified where the problem lies. It lies with the "brethren" in the Church. They are the ones causing the problem of disagreements and divisions. Who are the "brethren?" In all of Paul's letters, the word "brethren" seems to always refer to Jewish saints. "Brethren" is the plural of the word "brother" in Greek. It ought to refer to the Gentile saints, too, but the context of Paul's use seems to always point to the Jewish saints. It seems to never refer to Gentiles or converts to Judaism. As we will see, "brethren" are those of the Jewish bloodline coming from Jacob who had become disciples of the LORD during His time on earth and continued in the faith with the Apostles in the Church or had come to faith in the LORD through the ministry work of the Apostles and their disciples through the years since the day of Pentecost. Paul exhorts that all the "brethren" in the Corinth Church will "*by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, ... all agree and that there be no divisions among you.*" Paul asks the "brethren" to agree to something before explaining what he wants them to agree to. It is like asking someone to "promise to do

something" before you tell them what you want them to do. Paul wants them to agree and stop disagreeing. Disagreement is the cause of divisions in the Church. That's a tall order. You and I know some people who will disagree just to be disagreeable. It is just the fabric of the makeup of their lives. Just look at the makeup of the Sanhedrin, for example.

The Pharisees believed in the resurrection. The Sadducees did not. In Acts 5:33 – 39, the Pharisee Gamaliel used the topic of the resurrection to distract the Sadducees from harming Peter and John. They had Peter and John arrested on the porch of Solomon in the Temple complex because they were teaching about the resurrection of the LORD. Neither the Pharisees nor the Sadducees could deny the LORD's resurrection. The Sadducees just wanted to gag the mouths of Peter and John from continuing to tell the Gospel story of the LORD's resurrection. Later, in Acts 23, Paul used the same tactic of old Gamaliel to stir dissension between the Pharisees and the Sadducees to sidetrack their attention from focusing on him.

When Paul says to the "*brethren*," "*But that you be made complete in the same mind and in the same judgment*," it does not mean that Paul wants them to lay down their opinions, accepting and believing whatever is proposed. That is an impossible task, leading to disaster in the Church. This means that Paul is asking the "*brethren*" to have such a mindset that they will associate with each other with a tone of goodwill and strive toward harmony in the Church despite their disagreement. Paul uses the same word, "*mind*," in Romans 15:5. It conveys the idea of intellect in how one thinks, counsels, or plans in discussions. It is the thing they believe. The word "*judgment*" means the purpose of the "*mind*" in its knowledge, sentiment, or will. It is how they behave concerning what needs to be done. Paul is asking the "*brethren*" to honor the beliefs of others even when those beliefs are opposed to your beliefs. Why does Paul say this to the "*brethren*" in the Church? Chloe had sent word to Paul so he would know the problem.

b) Stop the Quarrels

(1) What Paul Had Heard

In his plea to strive for agreement, Paul asks the Church to stop the quarrels. How did he know about them? He knew because of what he had heard.

¹¹ *For I have been informed concerning you, my brethren, by Chloe's people, that there are quarrels among you.* ¹² *Now I mean this, that each one of you is saying, "I am of Paul," and "I of Apollos," and "I of Cephas," and "I of Christ."* ¹³ *Has Christ been divided? Paul was not crucified for you, was he? Or were you baptized in the name of Paul?*

With Chloe's report, Paul wanted to stop the quarrels in the Church. What Paul had heard was enough to pinpoint the source of the quarrels. We know little about Chloe, but Paul must have known and respected her thoughts. She is only mentioned here in the Scriptures. Three of Chloe's people are mentioned in the last chapter of this letter. Paul says, "*I rejoice over the coming of Stephanas and Fortunatus and Achaicus because they have supplied what was lacking on your part*" (1 Corinthians 16:17). These were Chloe's people. When Paul says they "*supplied what was lacking on your part*," he is not talking about a monetary gift to Paul; instead, he is talking about the information they have delivered to Paul about all the issues occurring in the Corinth Church. He is talking about how the Corinth Church is "*lacking*" in handling all the issues, which is the reason for this letter from Paul.

Let's reread verses 12 and 13 to review the reason for the first disagreement in Corinth.

¹² *Now I mean this, that each one of you is saying, "I am of Paul," and "I of Apollos," and "I of Cephas," and "I of Christ."* ¹³ *Has Christ been divided? Paul was not crucified for you, was he? Or were you baptized in the name of Paul?* (1 Corinthians 1:12-13).

Do not let this verse pass you by. Paul has identified four splinter personality “groups” among the *“brethren.”* The faction of Paul, the faction of Apollos, the faction of Cephas [Peter], and Christ are all identified. Only the faction of Christ is the true faction.

We know Paul. But who is Apollos? He was a Jew from Alexandria, Egypt. The Scripture says he spoke eloquently and knew the [Old Testament] Scripture well. He was a disciple of John the Baptist (Acts 18:24-28). When he ran into Aquila and Priscilla in Ephesus, they quickly noticed his lack of knowledge of the development of the Church and the evangelistic ministries in the world. He was a quick learner, soaking up all Aquila and Priscilla taught him. Aquila and Priscilla had started the Church in Corinth before Paul arrived on this second missionary journey. Leaving Corinth to report on the second evangelistic journey to his home Church in Antioch, Paul took Aquila and Priscilla. At the port, Paul sent them into Ephesus, where they started a Church in their home. Paul did not start the Church; the couple did. Paul went on to Antioch, Syria, to deliver his report. While Paul was gone, Apollos arrived in Ephesus to meet Aquila and Priscilla. Before Paul returned to Ephesus on his missionary journey, Apollos left Ephesus and journeyed to Corinth, where he became part of the Church in the city (1 Corinthians 3:6). It might have been because of Apollos’ Greek culture and intellect that he had become more acceptable to the Jew in Corinth. Within a year or so, Apollos left the Church to evangelize in other areas and eventually meet up with Paul again. In Chapter 16:12, Paul tries to send this letter with Apollos to Corinth, but Apollos has other plans; however, at some time in the future, he will arrive in Corinth again. Paul calls Apollos *“our brother”* in chapter 16:12 to show their unity in the faith as opposed to the divisive factions occurring in the Church with the arrival of this letter. In Titus 3:13, Paul tells us that Apollos would meet with Titus on the island of Crete. Paul wants Titus to ensure Apollos is well-supplied with all his basic needs. When Apollos left Corinth, he was elevated in the minds of some of the *“brethren”* that they became a faction in the Church. No doubt, they were the converts under Apollos’ ministry.

You know Cephas; his other name was Peter. He was the chief of the Apostles who opened the doors of the Church to the world on the Day of Pentecost. In Corinth, these *“brethren”* had exalted Peter over Paul, insinuating that Paul’s need to support himself as a tent-maker was not dignified (1 Corinthians 9:4-6; 2 Corinthians 11:9-10). Now we know why Paul sternly identified himself as an Apostle in verse 1 of this chapter. Later, he will spend a whole chapter defending his reasons for being an Apostle (1 Corinthians 9). Undoubtedly, the core of this faction had come to Corinth during the scattering of the Church after the death of Deacon Stephen years before.

Then there was the true faction, the right faction, which held to Christ. But they, too, were wrong because they despised Paul, thinking he had inserted himself into the Apostleship groups. For this, too, Paul will defend his Apostleship in this letter (1 Corinthians 9).

To all the factions, Paul asks three questions. *“Has Christ been divided? Paul was not crucified for you, was he? Or were you baptized in the name of Paul?”* Enough said! Paul wanted nothing to do with the glory. He was not jealous of the others. He had focused his eyes in the right direction – Jesus. Paul was of “Christ” in deference to the other three groups. No doubt Paul knew the names of the leaders of each of the other three factions but refused to call them by name. Instead, he identified the other three factions by whom they looked to instead of the LORD. Paul, Apollos, and Peter were all great bond servants of the LORD. They were all in the trenches of evangelism with a focus on converts. They were not the problem. The personality followers were the problem.

Back in the 1970s, I witnessed the most amazing personality Church I have ever seen. In the little Beverly Hills Baptist Church in Oak Cliff, Texas, the pastor was Howard Conatser. In every way, he was a showman in the Barnum and Bailey Circus style. Under his charismatic leadership, the Church quickly outgrew its little 250-seat auditorium. My best friend and best man at my wedding, the late Jimmy Kelley, was the Church pianist at the time. I was well aware of the workings of Conatser, as Jimmy told me. It wasn't long before the Church filled the multi-thousand-seat Bronco Bowl each Sunday and grew to about 5000 quickly. Nevertheless, it was an explosion of growth. But when Conatser died on June 19th, 1978, the Church cratered under the leadership of Conatser's Associate Pastor, who took his place. Within a few months, the Church was back at its original location on Sundays. The days at the Bronco Bowl were over. The considerable staff had to be paired down. The personality Church dwindled faster than it grew. Such is the case with the Church built on the pastor's personality and not the LORD.

Paul could not have expected to ever experience such growth like that in Dallas in the '70s, but Paul knew something very well. He and Peter were like-minded about this one thing. The Apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors, and teachers were never to take credit for the work of the LORD. It was His work. It was His Church. The Holy Spirit guided it. All salvation belonged to the work of the LORD, and not one Apostle, prophet, evangelist, pastor, or teacher should ever boast that the growth was their doings and not the work of the Holy Spirit.

(2) What Paul Had Done

We come to Paul's admittance to what he had done in Corinth.

¹⁴I thank God that I baptized none of you except Crispus and Gaius, ¹⁵so that no one would say you were baptized in my name. ¹⁶Now I did baptize also the household of Stephanas; beyond that, I do not know whether I baptized any other. ¹⁷For Christ did not send me to baptize, but to preach the gospel, not in cleverness of speech, so that the cross of Christ would not be made void.

After defining the root of the divisions in the Church and asking his three questions, Paul states his position in the ministry of the Church in Corinth. He baptized a few, not many. He was there to preach the Gospel of the LORD, crucified and risen from the grave for the sins of all people. In addition, he preached without "cleverness of speech," meaning not with artificially ornamented words invented by human wisdom. Paul wrote this phrase to counter the faction of those who followed Apollos, who no doubt was the largest group since it had not been long since Apollos left Corinth. He was the latest of the shiny objects in the Corinth Church that had drawn the attention of the "brethren." He had not intended to be the shiny object. The people did that to him; it was not his desire or plan. Such is the case with the new shiny itinerant preachers who come through the Churches even today.

Back in the days when revivals were popular in the Churches, full-time evangelists would come for a week of revival services. Most were terrific, like Allen Buchanek, whom I had the privilege of serving in my first revival meeting in April of 1974. In 1962, on his way home, as he drove by the Sinclair Refinery in Pasadena, Texas, gas had leaked, and his car set the fuel afire. Allen was burned beyond recognition. His co-worker, whom he was taking home, was killed. After three months in the hospital, he walked out. Sharron Grammer took an interest in him and invited him to her church in Deer Park, Texas. There, he heard a young evangelist named James Robinson, and he was saved. Allen became an evangelist, too, telling of the greatness of the LORD who saved him by fire. His preaching mantra became "Saved by Fire." Later, Allen and Sharron married. At that time, in the 70s, the messages of Robinson and Buchanek were spot-on for the

LORD. Many were saved under their ministries. Allen died last year (2023). His service was held with the congregation where I served with him at that revival in 1974. These are examples of the good evangelist. Both were just down to earth in their messages with no fancy rhetoric.

However, I cannot say the same for all evangelists. In my life, many evangelists have caused more problems in the Church in one week than all the problems in the rest of the Church combined. After serving with three, I took note of their kindred characteristics. First, their theology was sketchy, and that is a kind way of saying it. Second, the messages were about “them,” and you were wrong in everything you believed. But away from the pulpit, behind the scenes, I saw the real men, who they really were. Third, they were demanding. Fourth, they were not friendly at all. Fifth, they would not accept a check for payment; it had to be in cash. (This, alone, caused me to wonder about their payment of taxes to the government each year. Were they evading taxes? Come to find out, yes, they were.) Sixth, and the worst, they did not have time or desire to share the Gospel with individuals, only to groups from the pulpit. Finally, seventh, their messages were filled with “*cleverness of speech*.” These were in direct opposition to Paul’s message.

Paul concludes verse 17 by saying, “*so that the cross of Christ would not be made void.*” The foundational principle of Christ’s crucifixion for our sins should never be dolled up with human philosophy, reasoning, and eloquence. It is what it is, and the simple explanation of what He did on the cross is powerful enough to lead all to a saving knowledge in Him. All other words get in the way and bury the life-changing message in the mud, which is out of sight to many.

(a) The Power of God in Preaching

Under what Paul had done in Corinth, we come to the power of God in the preaching in Corinth. Verse 18.

¹⁸ *For the word of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God.* ¹⁹ *For it is written, “I WILL DESTROY THE WISDOM OF THE WISE, AND THE CLEVERNESS OF THE CLEVER I WILL SET ASIDE.”*

To drill down into Paul’s position on the cleverness of speech, he speaks of the power of God in preaching. Those who want fancy talk think the simple message is foolishness. They miss the importance of the simple message and will perish in their sins. But, those who put away their desire for the elaborate and eloquent will be transformed and saved by the simple power of God in His Gospel message. Paul quotes from Isaiah 29:14 to reveal what the LORD will do with the wisdom of the wise and the cleverness of the clever. He will set it aside. Paul has restated and paraphrased Isaiah’s words.

“Therefore behold, I will once again deal marvelously with this people, wondrously marvelous; And the wisdom of their wise men will perish, And the discernment of their discerning men will be concealed” (Isaiah 29:14).

The context of the LORD’s words in this passage begins in Isaiah 29:1, where the LORD expressed the sin and stupidity of the inhabitants of Jerusalem [called Ariel]. As such, He will execute His judgment to confound the wise and boastful so they cannot be relied on by the people because their words will turn out to be false. That is how the LORD will set aside the words of the wise in Isaiah’s day. He will cause the wise to “*perish*” and their thoughts to be “*concealed*.” So, too, Paul uses Isaiah 29:14 to suggest that the LORD will cause the words of the wise to “*perish*” and their thoughts to be “*concealed*.”

(b) The Power of God Through Preaching

(i) Makes the World's Wisdom Foolish

From speaking about the power of God in preaching, Paul turns to the power of God through preaching. The two are different. Preaching makes the world's wisdom foolish.

²⁰ *Where 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?* ²¹ *For since in the wisdom of God the world through its wisdom did not come to know God, God was well-pleased through the foolishness of the message preached to save those who believe.* ²² *For indeed Jews ask for signs and Greeks search for wisdom;* ²³ *but we preach Christ crucified, to Jews a stumbling block and to Gentiles foolishness,* ²⁴ *but to those who are the called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God.*

Jews wanted signs, and Gentiles wanted wisdom. But the LORD or His Apostles did not give them that. They gave them the simple story of the cross: Jesus lived it, the apostles told it, and Christ was crucified.

I am reminded of the evangelist Billy Graham. In every message he delivered, no matter what text or story from the Bible he used, after telling the essentials of the passage, Graham turned to the simple message of Christ crucified for the remainder of his time. One of his messages brought my wife to the LORD in the Dallas Crusade in 1971. I was there, too. I did not know her then, but I would meet her seven years later through my friend, Jimmy Kelley.

A buddy was on the bus with me as we traveled back to Waxahachie one night of the crusade. He was super intelligent. He was unimpressed. He could not understand why herds of ignorant people would want to hear such a simple message. It would be forty years before he realized and turned his life over to the LORD. When I spoke with him a decade ago, he confessed that He felt the Holy Spirit calling him to accept the LORD, but, in his defiance, he rejected that call that night. It wasn't foolishness, after all. Paul is simply telling us what he knew to be true. To the Gentiles, the preaching of Christ crucified was their excuse. All know when the Holy Spirit is calling them, and He calls everyone hearing the message of Christ crucified to believe. Then, for the Jews, Paul says the message is a stumbling block. Is it? Oh, yes, it is! Why? The Jews themselves have taught their children and their children's children to stumble over the message of Christ crucified. Why? They were not ready for Christ. He did not come on their human terms. He came on His terms, and they rejected Him. Therefore, Jews reject Him. Be that as it may, not all Jews stumble. Some hear and believe. Why? It is because the foolishness of God makes the LORD's wisdom strong.

(ii) Makes The LORD's Wisdom Strong

The power of preaching makes the world's wisdom foolish but also strengthens the LORD's wisdom.

²⁵ *Because the foolishness of God is wiser than men, and the weakness of God is stronger than men.*

Who and what can compare to the LORD God? If He could be weak in anything, which He cannot, He would still be stronger and wiser than any man who had ever lived.

Oh, but Paul indicates that you need to study your calling.

c) Study Your Calling

(1) Wise vs Foolish

While studying your calling, you must compare the wise vs the foolish. Paul says,

²⁶ *For consider your calling, brethren, that there were not many wise according to the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble;* ²⁷ *but God has chosen the foolish things of the world to shame the wise, and God has chosen the weak things of the world to shame the things which are strong,* ²⁸ *and the base things of the world and the*

despised God has chosen, the things that are not, so that He may nullify the things that are,²⁹ so that no man may boast before God.

“*Brethren*,” you saved Jews; look back on how you were called and how you were saved. “*Brethren*,” was the message of Christ crucified wise or foolish to you when you were saved? The wise who believe the preaching is foolishness eventually are brought to shame in their thinking. The strong in this world are made weak.

I think today of a brilliant man, born in 1930—straight “A’s” in school through college. An extremely high-paying job was waiting as he graduated. He rose in the ranks. Money galore. Intelligent beyond anyone else I have ever met. He needed nothing from anyone. He became the president and CEO of the corporation he worked for. He became the boss of everyone there and his own boss. He had all authority and power over all, including the board. As he would say, he did not need the LORD or the “foolish games” played in the Church. But when he reached his 80s, his health failed. He was no longer in control of his life for the first time. He wanted his old life back, but it was not to be. Soon, the stunning, well-dressed man was in a diaper every moment of every day. He could not walk. He could not turn himself. He could not put himself to bed. He sat in a recliner all day. At night, he had to be lifted into bed. The way he was placed in the bed was the way he would be all night. The strong had been made weak. Only then was he ready to hear of Christ crucified. He found out that throughout his life, it was Christ's crucified message that he thought was foolish. He had always believed in the Creation and God. He even believed in Christ crucified. His problem was he did not believe in the foolishness of Christ's resurrection. But that is an integral part of the Christ crucified story. He had focused on the LORD's resurrection as foolish, not His death.

Finally, one night, as he lay in bed, he thought, “If God could create the world and the universe in seven days, surely He could resurrect a Man.” That night, he invited Jesus into his heart to be his LORD. Like Solomon, he had wasted his life without Christ. He always felt the calling of the Holy Spirit. He testified that he always felt the draw to the LORD. But only when he was made weak in the things of this world did, he accept that the foolishness of preaching was not foolishness at all. It was life-changing. He could never boast of his salvation. Once saved, he asked us to share the message with his brother. He wanted to ensure his brother would be with the LORD, too. Made weak, his strength was nullified. So, what is your story? Is it wise vs foolish?

(2) You vs the LORD

Paul takes it further by telling the “*brethren*” to evaluate “You vs the LORD.”

³⁰ But by His doing you are in Christ Jesus, who became to us wisdom from God, and righteousness and sanctification, and redemption, ³¹ so that, just as it is written, “LET HIM WHO BOASTS, BOAST IN THE LORD.”

To round out Paul's defense, all faction groups must cease in Corinth and give all the glory to Jesus. You mean nothing. The LORD means everything. Paul, Apollos, and Peter mean nothing. The LORD means everything. Through the LORD, the saints receive “*wisdom from God, and righteousness and sanctification and redemption.*” Paul then quotes from Jeremiah 29:23ff.

In Jeremiah, the LORD speaks to the sinful Southern Kingdom members who are already in exile in Babylon. Those in exile are saved and safe. Those left behind are lost and doomed to die. Those who chose to follow the LORD through Jeremiah can boast that they are saved because of God's wisdom, His righteousness, sanctification, and redemption. Paul was right; all must boast in the LORD and not in any other man or themselves.