

Text: 1 Cor 1.10-17

As we move through Corinthians, we will keep our place by referring to the broad outline I started with last week. This week, I'll just show the first divisions, so we orient ourselves to the themes as the argument develops.

Starting with the Big Picture (1 Corinthians Outline)

All commentators agree on the first division but diverge on how to outline after that. I prefer Tom Constable's outline as it orients itself around obvious markers in the text.

I. Introduction (1.1-9)

As a **REVIEW**, what did the introduction tell us about the spiritual condition of the Corinthians? (4-9)

1. grace of God given to you (4)
2. you were enriched in Him (5)
3. the testimony ... was confirmed in you (6)
4. you are not lacking in any gift (7)
5. you ... are awaiting the revelation of our Lord Jesus (7)
6. God will confirm you to the end (8)
7. God called you to fellowship in Christ (9)

The main take-away: Paul considers that the Corinthians are **true believers in Christ**.

II. Conditions reported to Paul (1.10-6.20)**A. Divisions in the church (1.10-4.21)**

1 Cor 1.11 For I have been **informed** concerning you, my brethren, by Chloe's *people*, that there are quarrels among you.

Divisions Revealed (10-12)

What two words identify the first problem Paul addresses in 1 Corinthians? (10-11)

divisions, quarrels

What three words identify Paul's desire for the thinking of the Corinthians? (10-11)

agree, same mind, same judgment

The word for divisions is the source of the English “schism.” However, it’s original usage has to do with tearing or rending of cloth, or the breaking of ground by a plow. If the Corinthians aren’t thinking the same, what is Paul’s desire for them? (Consider “made complete” in v. 10, compare Mk 1.19)

Paul desires a mending of divided minds, a restoration of an original peace.

The woman mentioned in v. 11 is Chloe, otherwise unknown. “Chloe’s people” would be employees of hers (or slaves). They evidently traveled between Ephesus and Corinth and could have been based in either city. Chloe must be known to the Corinthians. They are not among the representatives of the Corinthian church (Stephanas, Fortunatus, Achaicus, 16.15-17) who visited Paul with the questions Paul takes up beginning in ch. 7.

What is the nature of the quarrels reported by Chloe’s people? (see v. 12)

They are quarreling over something in the name of various leaders.

Were any of these leaders party to the quarrels? In other words, had they started the quarrels and tried to get as many Corinthians as possible on their “side”? **no**

Does Paul mean that every Christian in Corinth was involved in this argument? **no**

Compare 3.4-9, is Paul pleased that some Corinthians are using his name in this way? **no**

Paul was the founder of the church in Corinth, it is natural that some would have a loyalty to him. Apollos followed Paul, a gifted leader and orator, so some might have come to make him their favorite. We have no record that Peter ever visited Corinth, but he is also well known as the apostle to the Jews, so possibly Jewish Christians might make him their favorite, though Paul does not raise the Jewish/Gentile issue *at all* in Corinthians. All Christians are loyal to Christ, so in this quarrel, what might make Jesus the champion of some against the rest? **This reveals that the dispute was more about the Corinthians than the leaders — these saw themselves as better than those who merely followed men, and each “partisan” saw themselves as superior to the others.**

“At bottom it is only the word ‘I’, in the sentences ‘I belong to Paul’ etc. against which he argues.”¹

¹ Munck, Paul, 150, in Gordon D. Fee, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1987), 59.

Paul's Opening Apologetic (13-17)

The opening rhetorical question (13) might seem to suggest that these parties are dividing the body of Christ, the local church. This would allow the party saying, "I am of Christ," to say, "See, we were right, you lot are wrong." Consequently, how can this question be tied directly to their claim? **Their claim is most ridiculous, as if Christ has been partitioned from the rest of the church and belongs only to them.**

On the other hand, if Christ has been divided out, that would put Paul (and the others) in a too high position. How do the next two questions (13) attack this notion? **Paul isn't the center of the gospel, nor the one in whose name they are identified through baptism.**

Stepping outside the main topic, divisions in Corinth, what does the baptism question suggest about its importance in the life of the church? **Baptism is the way you identify with your Saviour.**

Baptism is "God's specified way for the believer to identify publicly with his or her Savior (Matt. 28:19; cf. Acts 8:16; 19:5; Rom. 6:3; Gal. 3:27). It implies turning over allegiance to the One named in the rite."²

In vv. 14-16, Paul notes that he personally had baptized very few people in the Corinthian church. What reason does he give for the importance of this point? **No one could form a party based on that particular connection to Paul.**

Another side note: what does Paul's "jogged memory" in v. 16 suggest about the process of inspiration? **The apostle wrote in his own personality and vocabulary, while at the same time the Holy Spirit worked in him as he wrote.**

Paul uses the topic of baptism to turn the discussion to the gospel. The gospel is the central issue in the theology of the church, not the men who deliver the gospel message. In this way, he makes preaching superior to baptism. Why does he do that? **Belief in the gospel is more important than the sign of belief.**

What does Paul compare the gospel to in v. 17? **Cleverness of speech (lit. wisdom of word)**

² Tom Constable, *Tom Constable's Expository Notes on the Bible* (Galaxie Software, 2003), 1 Co 1.12.

This phrase becomes a central theme of 1.18-2.16, what does this suggest about the central issue in the Corinthian “divisions over men”? **that the Corinthians value wisdom too highly**

The gospel “is *not a philosophy to be discussed, but a message of God to be believed.*”³

What effect does wisdom have on the preaching of the cross? **It makes it void, or empty.**

What does this contrast suggest about the seriousness of the “divisions over men”? This is more than merely party spirit, this is a gospel issue that will take four chapters to counteract

“The crux of the Corinthians’ party spirit lay in their viewing things like unbelievers did, specifically Christian preachers and teachers. They failed to see the important issues at stake in ministry and instead paid too much attention to external, superficial matters. This was a serious condition, so Paul wrote many words in the following section to deal with it (1:18–4:21). This is still a major problem for many Christians worldwide who have been too influenced by the attention given to celebrities in their respective cultures.”⁴

³ G. G. Findlay, “St. Paul’s First Epistle to the Corinthians,” in *The Expositor’s Greek Testament*, ed. William Robertson Nicoll (Grand Rapids, Mich: Eerdmans, n.d.), 767.

⁴ Constable, *Expository Notes*, 1 Co 1.17.