

Themes Of I Corinthians (Part 2)

Party Spirit

Richard T. Ritenbaugh

Given 17-Mar-07; Sermon #818

My last sermon was an introduction to a new series that I have started on the themes of I Corinthians. In that sermon, I described the city of Corinth, showing that in Paul's day it was an important and very wealthy Roman city. It was also a crossroads of trade, and of peoples, and of ideas. Because of that, it was a freewheeling, highly sexualized, multi-cultural society. Does that ring any bells?

I also went through Acts 18:1-18, which is Luke's account of Paul's eighteen-month stay in the city of Corinth. We also went over Paul's typical approach when coming into a new city on how he should preach the gospel to them without causing offense and without being run out on a rail. He had learned, over his years as an apostle, what the best way to do this was—which way would produce the best results. We saw that, too.

Perhaps in Corinth it was the first time that he had put it together like that, because if you read some of the other accounts, you find out that he had been run out on rails, and he had problems in various cities. By the time he got to Corinth, he had gotten wise to it, and started doing it this way—and it seemed to work pretty well.

Obviously, I see a great deal of similarity between what happened in Corinth, and what was in the culture of Corinth in Paul's day, versus the Western World's diverse, tolerant, sensual, anything-goes lifestyle. Though our time has higher technology, far better communication, transportation being quicker and more immediate, and astoundingly more access to ideas and knowledge, despite all of this, the attitudes, the ethics, the mores of both of these cultures, though separated by 2,000 years, are essentially the same.

The scene, the means, and the faces may have changed, but the underlying human nature remains unchanged. Whether you are talking about first century Corinth, or twenty-first century America, Canada, England, France, Europe, Australia, you name it—what is going on between the ears is very much the same. The same problems that Paul dealt with in Corinth are likely to confront us now.

Do church members still act carnally? Do some get involved in sexual sins? Do we see legal and business problems among brethren? Are there still marriage problems among us? Is there concern about our young sons and daughters getting married so close to the time of the end? Do some still worry about being defiled by demons? Do some

members still question having a paid ministry? Are there still problems with hair length, skirt length, and various other things of that nature? Do some desire to disrupt church services and change the format?

The answer to all of these questions (and I could have listed several more) is "yes." We still have similar problems. Every one of these problems is addressed by the apostle Paul in the pages of his epistle to the Corinthians.

In this sermon, and the few that will follow, I will expand on the major themes of I Corinthians. I am not going to get into every one. I just want to warn you, do not expect this to be an exhaustive study of I Corinthians. That is not my intent, but I want to expand on the major themes of I Corinthians. Obviously, there is going to be some spillover in to II Corinthians, because there he is still dealing with some of the same problems. But I plan on pulling out those that I feel affect us at this time today.

The subject of this particular sermon will cover a few of the early chapters of I Corinthians, and that subject, or theme, is "Party Spirit." Some might call it "partisanship".

I want to go back to Acts 18 because, if you will remember, when we ended the last sermon we had left Paul on the dock basically on his way to Ephesus, and then on to Jerusalem (eventually) by the day of Pentecost. By the time you get to verse 24 of Acts 18, the subject has switched a bit from Paul to Apollos. What was Apollos doing at this time?

Acts 18:24-28 Now a certain Jew named Apollos, born at Alexandria [Egypt], an eloquent man and mighty in the Scriptures, came to Ephesus. This man had been instructed in the way of the Lord; and being fervent in spirit [quite zealous], he spoke and taught accurately the things of the Lord, though he knew only the baptism of John. So he began to speak boldly in the synagogue. When Aquila and Priscilla heard him, they took him aside and explained to him the way of God more accurately. And when he desired to cross to Achaia, the brethren wrote, exhorting the disciples to receive him; and when he arrived, he greatly helped those who had believed through grace; for he vigorously refuted the Jews publicly, showing from the Scriptures that Jesus is the Christ.

This is important because after Paul left, there was somewhat of a void in Corinth. Obviously, there was someone there who Paul trusted to keep things going—perhaps

Gaius, or Crispus. It does say that Pricilla and Aquila left with Paul, and evidently Sosthenes, as we saw in I Corinthians 1:1, was also with Paul by the time of its writing.

I will not go so far as to say that the Corinthians were left leaderless, but there was somewhat of a void there. Getting wind of this, Apollos (after being instructed in the truth a bit more accurately by Priscilla and Aquila) wanted to go to Corinth and help them. He was volunteering to go. Priscilla and Aquila, being from Corinth, wrote a letter with the others and asked the people of Corinth to accept Apollos as their minister.

Remember that Paul had spent 18 months in Corinth. When he left, it was sometime in the spring of AD 52. So it was late spring or early summer AD 52 was when Apollos and Aquila and Priscilla met. You know this because Aquila and Pricilla were the ones who instructed him. It took a while to explain everything and to make sure that they knew that he understood the truth, so there was some amount of time that he had to be instructed and prove himself to them.

After a short time (after that period of being proved), the church sent him to Achaia, of which Corinth is the chief city. He probably stayed there one or two years. We think that Paul wrote I Corinthians sometime in AD 54, or AD 55; no later than AD 56. We also know from I Corinthians 16:12 that Apollos had already left by that time. Paul told them he was sending Timothy to them, and that Apollos might come at some later time, but did not want to come at this time. I think he was probably a bit disgusted by what was going on in the church. He wanted to go somewhere else, and we will understand why he did not want to go there as we go through this series.

Both Paul and Apollos had spent about 18 months each in Corinth at different times. That means that there was plenty of time for some strong relationships to be built. If you think about it, if you were with a certain person or group of people for 18 months of Sabbaths, plus some activities in between—many were within walking distance of each other, despite the fact it was such a large city—they could get together often.

I am sure that when Paul and Apollos were out publicly speaking, members of the church would also be there in support, doing what they could. Relationships developed. They got to know the ministry, and the ministry got to know them quite well. Despite the relatively short time that passed, they had the time to get the measure of each other, and become comfortable with each other. This helps to explain to us Paul's knowledgeable and authoritative style in this epistle.

Even though he had only been there for a year and a half, it had been an intense time and he had gotten to know the people pretty well, and they him. The same surely can be

said for the relationship between Apollos and the brethren. I wanted to show you that there had been close relationships made and developed.

As we begin here, I also want you to notice how often Paul uses the name of Jesus Christ.

I Corinthians 1:1-9 Paul, called to be an apostle of Jesus Christ through the will of God, and Sosthenes our brother, To the church of God which is at Corinth, to those who are sanctified in Christ Jesus, called to be saints, with all who in every place call on the name of Jesus Christ our Lord, both theirs and ours: Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. [Four times so far]. I thank my God always concerning you for the grace of God which was given to you by Christ Jesus, that you were enriched in everything by Him in all utterance and all knowledge, even as the testimony of Christ was confirmed in you, so that you come short in no gift, eagerly waiting for the revelation of our Lord Jesus Christ, who will also confirm you to the end, that you may be blameless in the day of our Lord Jesus Christ. God is faithful, by whom you were called into the fellowship of His Son, Jesus Christ our Lord. [Ten times in nine verses.]

In every verse, there is a reference to Jesus Christ. How involved Jesus Christ is in everything in our lives! This opening is very important to the arguments in the letter. He starts this letter this way, not because he starts every letter this way, but because he has something to tell them, and he has to prepare the ground. Paul did not do anything without purpose and good reason to do something.

He wants them to understand that he believes that they are members of the church of God. That is his statement in verse 2, "To the church of God which is at Corinth, to those who are sanctified in Christ Jesus, called to be saints, with all who in every place call upon the name of Jesus Christ our lord, both theirs and ours." What he is saying is that they, too, are set apart in Christ; that they, too, are called to be a holy people just as much as any other people in the church of God, whether they are in Ephesus, Macedonia, Rome, Caesarea, Antioch, or any part of Asia Minor, Egypt, or Judea—it did not matter. They are all together members of Christ and members of the church of God. All are sanctified, and all are saints, and all are called to be holy.

He wants them to get this idea that, yes, they have been called; yes, they are in the church; and yes, they are unified with the rest of the church through what Christ has done for them, and through the Spirit that He has given them.

He goes on in verse 7, "You come short in no gift. You are no less than they are just because you live in this rotten city of Corinth. You are no less a Christian than those in Jerusalem. The place where you live makes no difference. If Christ is in you, then you are a full-fledged member of His body." He goes on some more about this along about chapter 12.

"God specifically called you out of the world and put you into the body of Christ." He is giving them a pep talk; trying to get them encouraged. He is also setting them up for his arguments. He wants them to remember these things as he harangues them for their problems. Someone more cynical would say that he is buttering them up. He is not buttering them up, but he is telling them the truth. He is trying to get them into an attitude so that they will accept the very strong correction that he has to give them.

He is telling them, "Look. I don't think any less of you. I don't think that you are some sub-member of the church. You are full-fledged members of the church, but you have got some problems. Let us solve them!" He is making them feel good before he has to cut them down to size. He is getting them to understand that they can have a bit of confidence in their calling, even though he is about to give them both barrels a little bit later on.

Verse 9 is perhaps *the* theme of I Corinthians. It is the thing that he wants them to hold on to throughout his epistle: God is faithful!

God does not make mistakes when He calls a person. God will do everything that He can to bring those whom He calls to perfection. We do not need to worry that God might fall asleep, or that He might forget us, or that He might get distracted—He has the power and character to finish what He starts. He is going to get the job done so we can have a great deal of faith in the fact that God is faithful.

We can have unassailable confidence that despite their problems (which is the proverbial shoe about to drop on them), God will help to sort them out. With this bit of encouragement and pep talk—"Remember this, God is faithful!"—he plunges into their first major problem.

I Corinthians 1:10 Now I plead with you, brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ. . .

Look at how he starts this. He is pleading, and he invokes the name of our Lord Jesus Christ. He is coming at them from a position of both humility and of great strength. He is

backed up by Jesus Christ's name.

I Corinthians 1:10-17 Now I plead with you, brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you all speak the same thing, and that there be no divisions among you, but that you be perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment. For it has been declared to me concerning you, my brethren, by those of Chloe's household, that there are contentions among you. Now I say this, that each of you says, "I am of Paul," or "I am of Apollos," or "I am of Cephas," or "I am of Christ." Is Christ divided? Was Paul crucified for you? Or were you baptized in the name of Paul? I thank God that I baptized none of you except Crispus and Gaius, lest anyone should say that I had baptized in my own name. Yes, I also baptized the household of Stephanas. Besides, I do not know whether I baptized any other. For Christ did not send me to baptize, but to preach the gospel, not with wisdom of words, lest the cross of Christ should be made of no effect.

Clearly the church at Corinth had split into several factions—at least three, maybe four. These three or four factions were identified by Paul by the names of the ministers that these people claim to support. It is the people claiming to support them.

The members in the church at Corinth were in all likelihood still meeting together on the Sabbath as one church. That is why there was such a problem, you might say. These people were all getting together, but they had formed cliques in the congregation, at least three, maybe four, and each of these cliques were loyal to the leadership of a certain man above the leadership of others. One of these cliques said, "I follow Paul." Another one said, "I follow Apollos." Still another says, "I look to Peter. He is the chief apostle." And others perhaps said, "Well, I follow Christ!"

Worse than that, these factions had begun to come into conflict with one another. Paul says that these were contentions. This is not quite as bad as "schisms." Basically it was quarrels—arguments, dissensions, disputes. They had not quite come to blows yet (you might say that there had not been the shedding of blood amongst them), but they had come to the point where they had been debating one another so much that heat had started to come into their relationships. (It was not a good heat.) It was just under the surface. They had not come to blows, but they were at the point where the arguments were getting hot. That is what Paul is worried about here.

In their case, as opposed to what has happened to us today, the ministry had little or nothing to do with this. In Corinth, the people were the ones who had drawn themselves

into these cliques, and the ministry had really no awareness it was happening until Chloe's family spilled the beans. Remember, Paul had left, Apollos had left, and Peter was not even on the scene being someplace else all the time—Judea, Babylon, or wherever. I do not know how leaderless they were, but you can be sure that these factions had leaders. They had done this without the knowledge of the apostles and the evangelist Apollos.

Paul, Apollos, and Peter were essentially speaking the same thing. They were unified. They were of the same mind and judgment. But in Corinth, the people, in their carnality, were being the respecters of persons and arranging themselves into factions under their favorite teachers as their banners. They had begun to struggle for dominance in the congregation.

That is the scene. What does Paul do? How does Paul approach this? The first thing he tells them is to speak the same thing. That is the very first thing that he needed to let them know. He begs them to present a united front in preaching the gospel, promulgating the truth, and making a proper witness. He asked them to be unified in doctrine—in what they believe. That, at the very least, needed to be present there in Corinth.

They had to all believe the same things in the faith. Their faith had to be the same that Jesus taught, what Paul had taught them, and what Apollos had taught them. They had to make sure that their belief system was unified. That was most important. That should be their first priority. If they could do nothing else, they should all believe the same thing and speak the same thing.

If we all have and all promote the same doctrines, we can work on the divisions. If there are problems within the church causing a separation of members into groups, and if they all believe the same doctrines, there is a chance that we can overcome whatever offense had caused the separation because are all starting from the same spot. We are all starting from the same faith. We all believe the same thing, and we can all come and sit down and say, "This is what Scripture says...this is what needs to be done...we can overcome the faults and divisions."

If one or more of the parties veer off into false doctrines or something that is not part of the faith that was delivered to us through Christ and the apostles, then reunifying becomes almost impossible. What it would take is not only repentance of the attitude, but somebody would have to repent of these false teachings and these false beliefs. That is even harder to do. Obviously, there has been some idea that has made them go in that false direction.

Paul says, "We're okay. We can deal with this if we are all speaking the same thing. Then, we are starting from a set of principles that we all agree with, and we all can come to a conclusion on this. We can go forward in unity." But if someone starts preaching something that cannot be found in Scripture and makes this a rallying cry, the two parties are going to have a very hard time coming together again.

He pleads with them that they be perfectly "joined" together. This is a Greek word that expresses mending or knitting something that had been rent or broken. If you have a piece of cloth that becomes torn (rent), you mend it with needle and thread, and you can make it usable again. Or, if a bone breaks, a doctor would set it and it would knit back together so that it could be usable again. That is the idea of this word.

Paul uses the word "perfectly" which says that, "not only are you to repair or mend the problem, but do it perfectly." By the time this is over, you should see that things are back like they were so that you cannot even see that a rent or tear ever existed—perfectly knit together—so that those looking in from the outside would never know that there had been a problem.

The same verse (10) alludes to unity of opinion and understanding. This harkens back to speak the same thing. "In the same judgment" refers to unity of purpose and action. This means making the same decisions so that we can go forward. We have to be unified in our attitudes, opinions, and our understanding. We all have to come up with the same conclusion. Then we can take the same steps beyond all this.

Notice what he does not say in all of this. He does not say, "Let's all be friends again and put this behind us. Let's just smooth this over and pretend it didn't happen, and go forward from here." This would be a losing strategy because nothing would have been solved. Paul wants to get to the underlying problem here.

Instead, Paul implores them to make the deep and painful changes of attitude and approach. He does not give them an easy standard to live up to. He takes them right to the very pinnacle of Christian virtue and action. He says that he wants them to do the right thing completely and perfectly.

He recognizes that some would have to swallow a lot of pride and admit a great deal of wrong. They would have to repent very deeply. They would have to make radical changes in their lives to overcome this, but he does not shrink away from demanding that they take the difficult road. He gives it to them straight.

This is only in the first chapter, the first ten or twelve verses! He buttered them up and

encouraged them, and then he told them to hold on to the fact that God is faithful. He told them this for a purpose because he knew that the things that he was going to tell them that they had to do was going to take all the faith that they had. Overcoming factions is hard work. It is not going to be solved with easy platitudes or easy actions. It is going to be a tough road to walk, and it is going to require of all parties involved a great deal from them.

If the Corinthians wanted real unity, every person, each individual, must make real changes in their lives and in their heads—their attitudes. Unity is hard because we are so individualistic in attitude. Human nature wants everything for the self, not for the group, not for God, not for someone else, but only for the self. And so unity with other people who are very different in many respects is difficult.

This was something that was on Paul's mind a lot. If you turn to Ephesians 4, he speaks about this subject again. He gives us an idea of what it takes. Ephesians was written about five years after I Corinthians. It is a subject that is still on his mind.

Ephesians 4:1-6 I, therefore, the prisoner of the Lord, beseech [similar approach] you to walk worthy of the calling with which you were called, with all lowliness and gentleness, with longsuffering, bearing with one another in love, endeavoring [meaning with great activity] to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called in one hope of your calling; one Lord, one faith, one baptism; one God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in you all.

Here he is pointing through all these things that they need to understand to God Himself. We have to come to the unity of God. This is the same unity He has with the Son. And what is it going to take? He lists the things here—lowliness, gentleness, longsuffering, bearing with one another in love, being peaceable, not hostile.

Being unified is not easy. It takes a great deal of work, endeavoring, and self-abasement with real *agape* love—the love of God. Paul is still talking about this in the epistle to the Philippians. This was written about the same time as the book of Ephesians. He is still thinking about unity and imploring the church to be of one mind.

Philippians 2:1-4 Therefore if there is any consolation in Christ, if any comfort of love, if any fellowship of the Spirit, if any affection and mercy, fulfill my joy by being like-minded, having the same love, being of one accord, of one mind. Let nothing be done through selfish ambition or conceit, but in

Themes of I Corinthians (Part 2) by Richard T. Ritenbaugh (<http://www.cgg.org>)

lowliness of mind let each esteem others better than himself. Let each of you look out not only for his own interests, but also for the interests of others.

We have to have that outgoing concern that Mr. Armstrong talked about so much. Paul shows here that we must get rid of any kind of spirit of competition [selfish ambition] and self-promotion. We have to get rid of these things.

Remember my sermon from this past Feast of Tabernacles? The message was: It is not about us. It is about God, about Christ, about the church of God, about the Kingdom of God, and about eternal life. We are just a cog in all that.

If we are unified with the body of Christ, all those good things follow. But in order to be unified, we have to do something. We have to get rid of sins like self-promotion, ambition, competition, and we have to put on such things as lowliness and humility. We have to begin looking out for other people, at least as well as we look out for ourselves.

What Paul says that this all does is, if we are truly unified, if we are truly humble, and we are truly seeking to do what is right, we will produce real Christian service, which is what he goes on to in the next section, showing that Christ, with His incarnation, His sinless life, and His sacrificial death showed us how to be Christians—how to serve and be in unity with others of like mind. That is what verses 5 through 11 (I Corinthians) are all about.

Even though Jesus was the Great God of the Old Testament—the One who had done all these wonderful things—He decided that in order to bring about God's purpose, He would divest Himself of everything that He needed to divest Himself of in order to become a man, and be our example, all the way to the point of the cross. That is the sort of example that we have to follow if we are going to produce unity among ourselves.

We all have to follow that example. It is fine for one person to do; however, you will only be unified with Christ at that point. We are talking about unity among many. If many are to be unified, that same many have to all do these same things. We all have to have the right and proper attitude; we all have to start out looking for each other's interests; we all have to show humility; we all have to do this, that, and the other thing, as shown in the Word of God what a godly person does.

Then we will be unified. We will not be perfect—not by a long shot—not until we are changed. But if we all begin doing these things, we will become unified, moving toward

the same goals.

Getting back to the idea of what was happening in Corinth, and what happens here in the twenty-first century, there is a paradox in this in what Paul tells us to do. Those who follow Christ's example will be unified with each other, but they will eventually be separated from those who refuse to do this.

There will be some who refuse. Not everyone in the church is truly converted. Do we not know from the Parable of the Wheat and the Tares that Satan comes in and sows various ones of his agents among the people or field of God? They sprout and take root, and they remain for a long time looking just like God's plants (people).

When God's plants mature, God's plants and Satan's agents look very different. And that is how you tell who is who—by their fruits.

At some point—we do not know when that is; it may be sometime soon; it may be when Christ returns, a separation will occur in the congregation, and in the whole church—either the fractious ones who are carnal minded will force the humble ones out, or the humble will flee of their own accord to worship in peace and unity. One of those two things will occur. The holy people will be either forced out, or they will flee, all because they are trying to be unified with the church, with Christ, and with the Father.

That is the paradox. In becoming unified under Christ, there will be separation. That is the truth of the matter. Let us go back to I Corinthians 11 and see just one verse. Paul says,

I Corinthians 11:19 For there must also be factions among you, that those who are approved may be recognized among you.

Fractures in the church clarify, or make evident, those who are spiritually sound. The phrase "those who are approved" means those who are of proven character. These trials of factions, trials of divisions, God allows to occur so that He can see which ones are really spiritually mature—which ones truly are His own children. He knows, obviously, but He needs them to go through these things so that they show their true character—so they develop their true character, the character of God.

What we have here is a statement from Paul that he was not surprised at all that there were factions in the church. He would then do his utmost to make sure that he solved the problem, and the result of all that would be, "We will show who is right and who is

wrong, who is truly converted and who is a tare, and who is strong and who is weak."

It may not be that the people who do not pass the test are not converted, but they may just be very carnal. Probably down the road, God will throw the test at them again to see which way they fall. He does not just give us one test, and that is it—we are out the door. Rather, He works with them, too.

That is what Paul is showing here. It is the principle of life in God's church. There *will be* divisions. God mandates them in a way so that we can see amongst ourselves who is strong and unified with God, and then He can see how far along the path of spiritual maturity we have come.

We should not get all bent out of shape when there are problems in the church. They are going to happen. We have the Word of God right there. I Corinthians 11:19, there are going to be factions and schisms in the church. What we do with them, and about them, will prove our mettle—or not.

I told you I wanted to explain this phrase in I Corinthians where Paul says, "I am of Christ. . ." because there are two ways of looking at this.

I Corinthians 1:12 Now I say this, that each of you says, "I am of Paul," or "I am of Apollos," or "I am of Cephas," or "I am of Christ."

First, there was a "Christ Faction" in Corinth. That would make a fourth faction. If that was the case, then what we had in Corinth was a group who snootily and self-righteously declared that they would follow no man, but only Christ.

We have seen this pop up in our own time. Some have forsaken all ministerial leadership and gone off on their own. They say, "I am an independent Christian. I won't get into any of these groups, because I follow Christ alone." So they fellowship alone, and eventually they are all alone.

Sometimes they fellowship with a sequence of groups and do not give their allegiance to any of them. They just go and fellowship for a few weeks or months, and then they bring up the thing that separates them from anyone else, and they are asked not to come back because they are causing division. So they go to another group, and the same process repeats itself until they are not welcome anywhere. Then they truly are independent. Nobody wants them.

These are ones who never allow themselves to be tied down to anything, especially not to following a man. As the tone of my voice has shown, this is not a good thing. Self-righteousness shows a terrible lack of humility and submission to Christ's Headship over the church of God. These people seem to have forgotten that it says very clearly, in this particular epistle I might add, I Corinthians 12—saying, "Christ Himself has set each one of us—including the ministry—where He pleases." Not where we please, but where He pleases.

God has us right where He wants us to be. When we say, "I won't follow a man ever again," we are really saying, "I won't submit to what Christ has appointed in His own church. I'm going to do what I want to do." Pretty soon, he will become a church of one. Or three, me, myself, and I. That is the ultimate end of an independent Christian. He will be so far away from everyone that he will eventually cut himself off from God Himself through self-righteousness.

Yet, I do not think this is what Paul meant. It may be there, you can see it there, but the Greek text says something a bit different. The grammar shows that the way the sentence is constructed Paul is actually showing the distinction between what the Corinthians were saying and what *he* would say. Let me read to you what I think would be a better translation of this. "Now, each of you says, 'I am of Paul,' or 'I am of Apollos,' or 'I am of Cephas.' But I say this: 'I am of Christ.'"

This means that there were only three groups, and that everybody in the church had gone and pledged allegiance to one of these three groups, and he said, "You're all wrong! I taught you to follow Christ."

That sounds better to me because remember that I pointed out as we kept going through verses 1 through 9 how many times he referred to Jesus Christ. He was priming them for this. "Look! Jesus Christ did this for you, and did that for you, we're in this with Jesus Christ, we've done this because of Jesus Christ, etc." Ten times in nine verses. He pleads to them in verse 10, through our Lord Jesus Christ. By the time he gets to verse 12, he is saying, "You've all said that you are for all these different men, including me, but I say, 'I am of Christ!'"

I think that this is the case because he then goes on to say that Christ is not divided. He also says that Christ died for us, meaning He redeemed us and we owe Him our lives. Then he also says that we are baptized into the name of Christ, being dedicated to Christ.

And then, regarding himself, he says that Christ sent him to preach the gospel to them.

Who is in charge? Christ is the Head of the church. Not Paul. Not Apollos, though he could speak well, and convince them of arguments, and not Peter, even though he was head of the organization.

Christ is in charge. Christ is the head. God is faithful. He has put the best person in charge. We should all be lining up loyally behind Him.

That is how we keep our heads straight about what is going on because we are always looking to Christ. If Christ zigs, we zig. If Christ zags, we zag. If Paul zigs,...we zig with Christ. If Apollos goes off, we do not follow him.

Keep your eyes on Christ. You will more than likely come to right decisions about the work of God, and about the church of God. It is the ministry's job to always be pointing everyone to that direction.

In other words, Paul is saying, "You're not of Paul. You're not of Apollos, and you're not of Peter. We're all in this with the head of the church—Christ. He's our Lord and Master. His servants—Paul, Peter, Apollos (I could name a whole slew of them down unto this day)—are merely servants. They work for Him. They do what He tells them to do."

In I Corinthians 4, he is talking about the ministry, and has been since the beginning of chapter 3:

I Corinthians 4:1 Let a man [a church member] so consider us [the ministry], as servants of Christ and stewards of the mysteries of God. Moreover it is required in stewards that one be found faithful.

If you want to follow a man under Christ, follow one who has shown himself to be a faithful steward of his responsibilities. But do not follow him for what he *supposedly* is. Do not follow him for his large following, or for his speaking skills, or for this, that, and the other thing. The only thing that matters is if he has been faithful to the job that Christ has given him to do.

Has he been pointing people to Jesus Christ, and beyond that to God the Father? That is the mark of a true minister! That is one who is worthy of honor and respect. That is all that matters.

Is he doing his job? Is he living the truth? Is he a good example? Is he pointing people to Christ? A true minister of God does not draw people to himself. He always draws

them to Christ, and then the Father. Turn back to I Corinthians 1 again.

I Corinthians 1:22-23 For Jews request a sign [accompanying the gospel], and Greeks seek [the gospel preached] after [Greek] wisdom; but we preach Christ crucified . . .

He says this because he talks about the message of the cross, meaning what Christ did in dying for our sins. The Jews thought this was ridiculous. A person put up on a cross or stake was accursed. They did not understand that Jesus Christ was accursed because He took upon Himself all of our sins. But He was not a mere man. He was sinless God as a man. He was able to pay for all those sins. In actuality, the curse did not stick! Yet, it was paid for through Jesus Christ and the sacrifice that He made for us.

We preach Christ crucified. Of course, this was silly to the Greeks because you preach about a dead man, and we found out in Acts 17 that they laughed Paul to scorn when he began talking about the resurrection from the dead.

The Jews thought he was preaching about a cursed man, and the Greeks thought he was preaching about a dead man who had no power whatsoever. But he said that even though it appears to be foolish to these people, we go ahead and preach Christ crucified, because He did not stay there on the cross. He rose from the dead after three days and three nights in the grave, and now sits at the right hand of God; and by His life we are saved.

I Corinthians 1:23-24 . . . to the Jews a stumbling block and to the Greeks foolishness, but to those who are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God.

If you understand, if you are one of the called, you know that the Jews' and the Greeks' arguments are foolishness. They mean nothing. Christ is alive! He is working night and day for our salvation.

I Corinthians 1:30-31 But of Him you are in Christ Jesus, who became for us wisdom from God—and righteousness and sanctification and redemption—that, as it is written, "He who glories, let him glory in the LORD."

Christ is everything to us. Paul is saying that a true minister of God keeps this at the

forefront of his mind at all times. All of his preaching, all of his counseling, all of his organizational skills, everything that he does, has in mind bringing glory to Jesus Christ, and beyond Him, to the Father. That is all that matters.

It does not matter whether he gets a big salary. It does not matter that he has a big house. It does not matter whether he has an impressive title, or whether he has so many people under him, or he has done this, or that, or the other thing. It does not matter if there are millions on their mailing list. It does not matter how many people are listening to him on any kind of telecast, or broadcast. A true servant of God preaches Christ; and his only purpose is to bring glory to God. All the rest is frills. This—Christ—is the same thing that Paul asks us all to speak.

From I Corinthians 1:18, all the way through the whole of the second chapter, he had been digressing, though it had been somewhat on the same argument, but he had not really addressed party spirit in there. He gets to this again in chapter 3:

I Corinthians 3:1-4 And I, brethren, could not speak to you as to spiritual people but as to carnal, as to babes in Christ. I fed you with milk and not with solid food; for until now you were not able to receive it, and even now you are still not able; for you are still carnal. For where there are envy, strife, and divisions among you, are you not carnal and behaving like mere men? For when one says, "I am of Paul," and another, "I am of Apollos," are you not carnal?

Paul comes back to the main point of party spirit and the divisions that the party spirit is causing. His point is that these splits and the infighting exposed two glaring but related facts. First, the Corinthians were carnal-minded and they were immature in Christ. The second fact is related in that they had not grown spiritually. These might seem the same, but they are not quite the same.

They would be expected, as young Christians, to still be carnal-minded.

Remember, I went through the chronology here. Many of them had only been in the church of God for three or four years. They were still very young in the faith. The fact is that they had not grown from their early time. They were still as carnal as the day they were baptized, as it were.

This is not what Paul expected. This is not what Paul had taught them. Paul was very concerned that they had not progressed at all. They were spiritually frozen, stuck, and

treading water. They were doing nothing to move forward. That is why in this next section he begins to explain to them very clearly in easy to understand terms that Christianity contains a process of growth, of building, and of coming to maturity.

Baptism was not enough. Hearing the gospel and agreeing to it is not enough. They had to (Hebrews 6:1) go on to perfection. You get certain things behind you right away. But the rest of your Christian life is devoted to growing, building, and maturing. Paul goes on:

I Corinthians 3:5-11 Who then is Paul, and who is Apollos, but ministers [servants] through whom you believed, as the Lord gave to each one? I planted, Apollos watered, but God gave the increase [pointing to God again]. So then neither he who plants is anything, nor he who waters, but God who gives the increase [deserving of praise and honor]. Now he who plants and he who waters are one [equal, unified, looking to the same goals], and each one will receive his own reward according to his own labor [as expected]. For we [ministers] are God's fellow workers; you are God's field [in whom we are working], you are God's building [being constructed into a perfect building]. According to the grace of God, which was given to me, as a wise master builder I have laid the foundation [the job I was given to do], and another [Apollos] builds on it. But let each one [minister] take heed how he builds on it. For no other foundation can anyone lay than that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ.

God's ministers do not get a pass. They are not "in" just because they are ministers.

"We started with the right foundation." You can only build on the foundation if you continue with that same teaching—the truth—what Christ taught. He says, "Everyone who gets this job, needs to make sure that they're building on it in the same way that Christ would." They cannot make the building start in one manner, but then continue in some other faith.

Each minister has to be careful that he builds on the foundation in the proper way. God will reward them according to their works on how well they follow that instruction—how well they preach Christ, and build the people up in Christ. It is up to each minister to make sure that he builds wisely and properly on that godly foundation that was first laid.

A minister, then, should be given respect or honor according to his faithfulness in building on that foundation in a proper way.

I Corinthians 3:12-13 Now if anyone builds on this foundation with gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, straw, each one's work will become clear; for the Day will declare it, because it will be revealed by fire; and the fire will test each one's work, of what sort it is.

Every minister's work will be tested and tried to see if it is going to endure, to see what kind of quality it is. It is going to be tried and tested in the various divisions and problems within the congregation, and ultimately, with the time of the end. God will find out just how well and wisely those men built on the foundation by the state of their flock.

I Corinthians 3:14-15 If anyone's work which he has built on it endures, he will receive a reward. If anyone's work is burned, he will suffer loss; but he himself will be saved, yet so as through fire.

What this means is that if a minister is faithful, but does not do a good job because of lack of skills, or other, he will be saved himself into the Kingdom of God, but perhaps his work will not. And that is sad. That is one who builds with wood, hay, or straw.

If he were faithful, but just did not do a good job, (there are men like that, who become ministers, yet they do not seem to have quite the talent to become ministers, or they make mistakes) and if they remain faithful, God says they will be saved. Their reward might not be as good, but they will be saved.

Paul is giving us a lesson in the real world. Ministers are not all the same. Ministers have different talents. There will be good ministers, and there will be some who are not so good. If they are faithful, that is good, even if they are not so good at their job of ministering. But if they are not faithful, that is a different thing altogether.

I Corinthians 3:16-17 Do you not know that you are the temple of God and that the Spirit of God dwells in you? If anyone defiles the temple of God, God will destroy him [still talking about ministers]. For the temple of God is holy, which temple you are.

What is he saying? He is saying, "You, as I told you in the first chapter, you are part of the Christian church. You have been called. You have been set apart. You have been sanctified. You are holy, a part of God's temple, a part of the body of Christ. If any man comes into this church and tries to destroy the church one way or another and defiles it,

God is going to get him." We cannot make that judgment. That is God's.

Paul threatens here that God does not like people who try to come in and destroy what He is trying to do. Obviously, there are some who do that. They are called false prophets or false ministers.

II Peter 2:9, 13 The Lord knows how to reserve the unjust under punishment for the day of judgment . . . and will receive the wages of unrighteousness.

This is still all under the idea of party spirit. A minister has to be faithful.

I Corinthians 3:18-23 Let no one deceive himself. If anyone among you seems to be wise in this age, let him become a fool that he may become wise. For the wisdom of this world is foolishness with God. For it is written, "He catches the wise in their own craftiness"; and again, "The LOORD knows the thoughts of the wise, that they are futile." Therefore let no one boast in men. For all things are yours: whether Paul or Apollos or Cephas, or the world or life or death, or things present or things to come—all are yours. And you are Christ's, and Christ is God's.

Here is Paul's advice. He said, "Let's not deceive ourself about what God is doing." When there is a spirit of partisanship, it is easy to do this, to think that God is leading the church one way through a particular person, while all the while, He really is working through another person, or through all of them at once.

He is not divided. He has the ability and power to work through multiple people. He obviously showed that in the first century. He worked with Paul. He worked with Peter, He worked through all the twelve apostles. He worked through the various evangelists. They were all in different parts of the world, but they were all preaching the same thing.

What Paul says is that we should watch out that we are not being deceived by our own feelings, or the pressures from other people; that we need to be wise in this, meaning that we need to look at this through the eyes of faith, and not through any kind of carnal reasoning. We cannot apply worldly wisdom. We cannot apply corporate politics, or business methods, or any other kind of carnal reasoning to the way that God works. God is in charge. He is in control.

We have to apply the wisdom of God, and use the Spirit of God, which is in chapter two,

to understand just what is going on, and follow Christ.

Party spirit (arranging ourselves behind various men) is silly and destructive in God's view. That is, if you are doing it for the man's sake, and not because God is leading that man.

What glory, what reward, what future is there in men? Ultimately, all men die. All men are corrupt. All men are shortsighted. All men are weak. Even God's true servants are servants, and put into their positions for the benefit of God's people, for the benefit of Christ, as he says here, and ultimately for the glory of God.

Paul is telling them that they have to become mature. They must grow up, as it were, and put away the childishness of party spirit.