

I CORINTHIANS: HANDLING BELIEVERS' PRACTICAL PROBLEMS

II. Handling Divisions Among Believers, 1 Corinthians 1:10-4:21

B. The False Exaltation Of Works Behind Divisions

(1 Corinthians 1:13-2:5)

I. Introduction

- A. The people Paul disciplined in Corinth lived in a city that was famous for its immorality, alcoholism and worldly pursuits (Ryrie Study Bible, KJV, 1978, "Introduction to the First Letter of Paul to the Corinthians: The City of Corinth," p. 1619), so the formidable influence of the city's culture on the Corinthian believers left Paul addressing "(a)berrant beliefs and practices of an astonishing variety" in his letters to them, *Ibid*.
- B. However, in a vision Paul received from God as he ministered at Corinth in Acts 18:10b NIV, God told him, "I have many people in this city," so Paul was to keep on ministering regardless of the trials he faced there.
- C. This epistle is thus timely for us who face our own decadent culture today, so we view 1 Corinthians 1:13-2:5 that reveals a false exaltation of works behind divisions among believers for our insight and application:

II. The False Exaltation Of Works Behind Divisions, 1 Corinthians 1:13-2:5.

- A. After exposing how false views in general had been behind the political divisions that plagued the Church at Corinth, in 1 Corinthians 1:13-31, Paul became more specific, revealing that his divided readers falsely exalted human works in Christian ministry, what had fueled their divisions (as follows):
 - 1. By two rhetorical questions that expect a negative answer, Paul explained that since he had not been crucified for his readers' salvation nor that they had been baptized in his name, the divisions his readers had over whether they followed him or Apollos or Peter were obviously wrong! (1 Corinthians 1:13)
 - 2. Paul then expressed his gratefulness that he had baptized very few of his readers lest any of them might say that he baptized them in his name, 1 Corinthians 1:14-16. In addition, Paul asserted that Christ did not send him to baptize, but to preach the Gospel (1 Corinthians 1:17a), a strong denial of an errant belief that exists in Christendom today that holds that one must be baptized in order to receive eternal life! [Baptism was ordained by the Lord Jesus (Matthew 28:19), but not as a means of salvation. Rather, it is an outward testimony before other people of one's inward faith in Christ, Bible Know. Com., N. T., p. 508.]
 - 3. Then, even in preaching the Gospel (1 Corinthians 1:17a), Paul added that he did not deliver the message with words of human wisdom lest the cross of Christ be made of none effect by diluting the Holy Spirit's spiritually powerful convicting ministry with mere human reasoning and might, 1 Corinthians 1:17b-25.
 - 4. Building on this theme, Paul added that not many of his readers were wise by the world's standards, not many influential, not many of noble birth, for God had chosen the foolish things of the world to shame the wise, the weak to shame the strong, the lowly, the despised, and things not existing to nullify the things that exist, that no mortal human might boast before God of his might or works, 1 Corinthians 1:26-29 NIV.
 - 5. Rather, it is solely by God's work of salvation that we believers are in Christ Jesus, Who by God the Father is made to us wisdom, righteousness, sanctification and redemption, that as it is written in Jeremiah 9:24, He that boasts, let him boast in the Lord, 1 Corinthians 1:30-31.
- B. Paul applied this teaching to his experience in evangelizing his readers at Corinth, demonstrating how that ministry was absent any cause for human boasting, but only of glorying in the Lord, 1 Corinthians 2:1-5:
 - 1. The Apostle Paul reported that when he first came to Corinth to evangelize his readers, he had not come proclaiming to them the testimony of God with "lofty speech or wisdom," 1 Corinthians 2:1 ESV.
 - 2. Rather, he had resolved to appear to his readers as knowing nothing among them except Christ and Him crucified, 1 Corinthians 2:2. Paul had been with them in human weakness, fear, and much trembling, and that his speech and message had not been characterized by "plausible words of wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power," 1 Corinthians 2:3-4 ESV, NIV.
 - 3. This approach by Paul in his ministry with the Corinthians was performed that his hearers' faith might not rest in the wisdom of men, but in the power of God, 1 Corinthians 2:5. The exaltation of human pride, lust and decadence in the culture of Corinth left Paul's readers needing to focus on God's truth separate from human ability, so Paul's approach had proved to be effective for the genuine discipling of his readers.

Lesson: *Paul taught that the exaltation of ungodly human works had caused divisions in the Church at Corinth.*

Application: *May we not exalt human abilities in our ministries but keep our efforts exalting Christ by functioning in humility, simplicity and faith that the Holy Spirit alone might be the One Who causes our ministries to succeed.*