

- ***READ Acts 18:1-5*** It was during Paul's second great preaching trip that he found himself in the city of Corinth. It was in this city that he became associated with a couple of married believers by the name of Aquila and Priscilla. These disciples had recently come from Italy, and being of the same trade as Paul they began to work together making tents while also being devoted to the spreading of the Gospel. Specifically, we find Paul every Sabbath in the synagogue striving to persuade both Jews and Greeks concerning the Gospel. After some time, Silas and Timothy join Paul in Corinth, and it is at this time that Paul is able to devote himself to the full proclamation of the Gospel without having to worry about the tent making.
- Unfortunately, it was also around this time that the Jews began to really strengthen their resolve against Paul and his teachings concerning Jesus as the Christ. This led Paul to rebuke them for their hard hearts and turn to the teaching of the Gentiles. **(Acts 18:6)** From there we find Paul going into the house next to the synagogue that belonged to a man named Titius Justus. From this point on we find Crispus, the leader of the synagogue believing and being baptized along with his household and many other Corinthians. **(Acts 18:7,8)**
- This was obviously great success, but God desired for Paul to put in even more effort to spread the good news of Jesus. Because of a vision Paul received from the Lord, he labored in Corinth for 18 months teaching the word of God to those who would listen. Sadly, some Jews rose up against Paul and even had him come before the judgment seat. The accusation was that Paul persuaded men to worship God contrary to the law, but Gallio the proconsul of Achaia did not see the accusations against Paul to be worthy of his time. He was not willing to judge upon the issues the Jews faced within their own people. Paul might have escaped but Sosthenes the leader of the synagogue was beaten before the judgement seat while Gallio looked on uninterested. **(Acts 18:9-17)**
- After remaining for a period of time, Paul set off from this city towards Syria. We are not told much more about this church in Corinth, but history tells us that this was a very worldly and corrupt city. It was a city that at one time was home to no less than twelve pagan temples. It was a city known for religious prostitution associated with the temple of Aphrodite. Paul was surely well aware of the dangers that pressed in on every side around these disciples in Corinth so not long after leaving them, perhaps a couple of years, he feels the need to write to them a strong letter of admonition and encouragement. This church was facing many difficult troubles, and they were in need of some strong Apostolic guidance from the man who had witnessed their difficulties first hand.
- There are many issues that can be found addressed within this letter, but the first chapter leaves us with much to chew on all by itself. For example, there are some statements made by Paul in **I Corinthians 1:14,17** that might cause us to scratch our heads. They might even leave us asking questions such as: *Why does Paul thank God that he hadn't baptized many of the Corinthians? & Why does Paul say that Christ had not sent him to baptize, but only to preach the Gospel?* There are some in the religious community who would use these two verses as proof-texts that baptism is not a true and vital part of the Gospel message. If this is the case then we are left with a final question that needs to be answered: *Does this mean that we are wrong when we teach that one must be baptized in order to have sins forgiven and be saved?* I know that the first time I heard these questions raised, I was caught off guard and it took me some strong study to be able to answer these questions, but I do believe them to have an answer and I hope our study of Paul, Baptism, & I Corinthians 1 can help us to be more sure of our understanding of this text and what exactly it is that Paul is trying to teach.

I. Contextual Breakdown:

A. Paul has been informed that there were divisions among the disciples in Corinth. (1:10-12)

1. After a very strong opening in which Paul greatly stresses Christ (which we will get back to in a few moments), the Apostle focuses the readers' minds on the first issue that he felt the need to address: There were divisions within this church. Paul exhorts the brethren to be in agreement with one another in the same mind and in the same judgement. (1:10) He does so based upon the authority of Jesus and His desires that His people all be united as one. (John 17:20,21)
2. Though Paul is not there in person with this group of saints, he has heard from someone within Chloe's household that there were divisions and quarrels among these disciples. The divisions seemed to revolve around the practice of these disciples not seeing themselves not simply as disciples of Christ, but they saw themselves as some being disciples of Paul, other Apollos, others Cephas (Peter), and then some were just of Christ.
3. It has been suggested by some that these divisions were a result of these three men contributing to the divisions by preaching different messages to these brethren when they might have had opportunity. We know that Paul was with these brethren, and we also read of Apollos laboring in the area of Achaia for some time (Acts 18:27), but we can only assume that they would have heard the teachings of Peter second hand. We know of his outspoken nature, so it isn't a stretch to think that Peter would have had influence upon these brethren. Nonetheless, there is nothing in Scripture that gives any indication that these men had been in competition or opposition with one another in their teachings. Something else had to give, which is why we see Paul beginning to question them as to why they were behaving in such a way.

B. Paul questions the Corinthians concerning the basis of their divisions. (1:13-17)

1. His first question is the most foundational of the questions he poses, *"Has Christ been divided?"* This of course must be the baseline question because if Christ does not invite divisions among His people then everything else becomes moot. I am convinced that Jesus desired nothing of the sort when it came to His people. John 17:20,21 has already been mentioned and rightfully so because Jesus explicitly states, *"I do not ask on behalf of these alone, but for those also who believe in Me through their word; that they may all be one; even as You, Father, are in Me and I in You, that they also may be in Us, so that the world may believe that You sent me."*
2. It is abundantly clear in my mind that it is Jesus's desire that His people be unified as a single body. He wanted for them to be in line with one another even as Jesus and the Father were in line with one another. The purpose of this unity was practically for peace and the opportunity for success, but Jesus also states that this unity was needed because it would show the world who they were in Christ Jesus. From an outsider's perspective, how would these brethren have looked in this current state being divided as they were? They certainly could not view these disciples as being in unity, and that would only hurt the influence they might have upon outsiders.
3. With this foundational principle established, Paul then goes on to show the absurdity of their divisions by asking questions concerning whether any of these men had been crucified for them and whether these brethren were baptized in their name. The crucifixion of Jesus is one of the reasons He is worthy of our devotion, and none of these men had given their lives in such a way. Additionally, none of them had the inherent power and authority to have people baptized in their name.
4. In fact, Paul states that he definitely did not baptize anyone in his own name. It is at this point that we see Paul making these statements that might leave us with questions. He states thanksgiving to God that he had only baptized a few among them, and then he states that baptism wasn't even what he was sent to do among them. He was sent to preach the Gospel in its purity and simplicity, and there was legitimate reason why this was Paul's only endeavor.

C. Paul stresses the fact that it was God's Gospel played out through Jesus that alone has the power to save souls. (1:1-9;18-31)

1. Let's take a moment to backtrack to the beginning of the letter to show that Paul really wanted to stress to these brethren the necessity of being founded in Jesus alone. Throughout the first nine verses there are ten times where Paul focuses in on Jesus. (1:1-9) It is my no means unusual for Paul to focus great upon Jesus, but let's be honest...Paul was trying really hard to speak specifically of Jesus that man times in such a short amount of texts. Why would Paul be doing such a thing? Surely it was because he was setting the stage for what would be a strong emphasis on the need of unity upon Christ throughout the first section of this letter.
2. After Paul highlights the disunity that was present among them, he then focuses their minds again on Jesus, His Gospel, and His cross. *"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."* (1:18) God cared not that those who rejected the Gospel thinking it as being foolishness. Those who would think such a thing would be those who were prideful and too wise in their own eyes to seek God's salvation. To the proud Jews, Jesus didn't fit their idea of what the Messiah should have been. He should, in their eyes, have come from royalty and ruling with grand power, but Jesus was instead gentle and humble in heart. (Matthew 11:29) To the Greeks, it made no sense that deity would offer Himself for the mistakes of those who were beneath Him. (1:19-23)
3. So many people could have and did see the cross of Christ and the Gospel as foolishness, but that prideful perspective was only to their detriment, and God used that pride to separate the faithful from the unfaithful. Paul then reminds these brethren that they had not been called even though they were not wise, mighty, nor noble according to the flesh. They were just regular old folks who could only truly boast in the one thing that was truly worthy of boasting in...Jesus Christ, His Gospel, and His Cross. (1:26-31) These disciples had allowed themselves to be divided by aligning themselves with mere men, and they were in need of taking a step back to realize that they only needed to be united and boasting in the Lord. Jesus was the only chance they had at being saved.

II. Conclusions Based Upon The Context:

A. Paul's main point is that these brethren needed to unite upon their faith in Jesus and only boast in the cross of Christ.

1. These men had decided that it was a smart thing to align themselves with men, and Paul quickly reminds them that men hold no power. In fact, the wisdom that they might think men possess is only on par with the foolishness of God. They had wasted time differentiating themselves according to who they thought was the proper man to align themselves with when they only needed to align themselves with Jesus.
2. This is why Paul only taught Jesus and His Gospel in its purest and simplest form. He wasn't trying to gain any personal followers with flattering or clever speech. He wasn't trying to get people to look at him and think how great and wonderful he was. He was only concerned with sharing the word of the Cross which is the Gospel so that men might experience the power of God. (Romans 1:16) This was his only endeavor because only in this way could these people find themselves in Christ and experience the righteousness, sanctification, and redemption that is found in Him. These people were in need of unification, and that unification was only going to be found in the Gospel and Jesus. That is the main point of this text.

B. Paul's statement about being thankful that he hadn't baptized many of the Corinthians was made to emphasize his desire to not contribute further to their divisions.

1. While some would say that this statement by Paul shows that he did not consider baptism to be important to the salvation process, the proper understanding of this statement must revolve around the context of there being strong divisions within this church concerning these brethren

aligning themselves with men. Paul questions these brethren as to whether or not these men had died for them or if they had been baptized in the name of men. Of course, the answer is that neither of these things are true or accurate, but they seemed to have been acting like this was the case as they were actively aligning themselves with men.

2. Therefore, it is reasonable to understanding that Paul's statement was made to simply mean that he was glad that there were not more men who had been given the opportunity to use his teaching and baptizing as a means of division amongst themselves. It seems that in his mind he is thinking that the more folks he had baptized then the more opportunities others would have had to try to attach themselves to him as disciples instead of being solely devoted to Jesus. To take Paul's words and use them to make the point that he did not value the role of baptism simply isn't be honest and true to the text.
- C. Paul's mission was not to simply immerse people in water; but to preach the Gospel which leads to faith and the water.
1. However, there is still the statement that Paul makes concerning him not being sent to baptize, but only to preach the Gospel. What are we to do with this statement? I would, again, argue that this statement must be understood in light of the context while also considering the greater context of the New Testament teachings on the subject of baptism.
 2. I would begin by making suggesting that Paul is trying to make the point that he was not sent to simply immerse people. His job wasn't simply to get people into the water. That was not his purpose for being sent by Jesus to the lost. The primary focus of his ministry was to share the Gospel message with those who were in need of salvation. Simply being dunked in water will not save a single soul! Paul knew that and recognized that baptizing was not his mission.
 3. However, Paul stating this as being his mission does not mean that baptism does not play a part in the Gospel. Paul could not be intending to minimize the importance of baptism because that would go against what even he himself is recording as having done upon his own conversion. In **Acts 22:16**, we read of Ananias coming to Paul and questioning him as to why he was delaying his washing away of his sins and calling on Jesus's name. In order to do these things Ananias said that he needed to get up and be baptized. If baptism doesn't have anything to do with conversion and salvation then why would Ananias put these things together and why would Paul obey the command to do such a thing?
 4. Additionally, if baptism does not have anything to do with salvation then why does Jesus include it in the instructions He handed down to His Apostles in **Matthew 28:19,20**? Our Lord commands them to go into all the world to make disciples by baptizing them and teaching them everything that He Himself had taught the Apostles. Further, if this is not what Jesus actually meant, then why did these same Apostles include baptism in their response to the question of what the Jews on Pentecost needed to do in order to be forgiven of their sins of rejecting and killing the Son of God? (**Acts 2:36-38**)
 5. We must take Paul's statement and understand it in light of the immediate context and the context of all New Testament teachings on the subject. When we do such a thing then we will clearly see the role that baptism plays in salvation. Immersing someone in water isn't the goal, but it is the result of the Gospel message being taught, received, and obeyed. This was Paul's focus, and it must be our focus, as well.

The letter to the Corinthians contains many important and yet possibly difficult teachings that can challenge our ability to consider the contexts so that we might be able to have a clearer understanding of what is being written. May we be diligent Bible students who are willing and able to answer the questions that might seem tough on the surface through honest evaluation and consideration of the text so that God might be honored and souls might be taught the truth of His word to their soul's salvation.