

International Bible Lessons Commentary
1 Corinthians 1:9-18; 3:1-9

International Bible Lessons
Sunday, June 29, 2014

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The **International Bible Lesson** (*Uniform Sunday School Lessons Series*) for **Sunday, June 29, 2014**, is from **1 Corinthians 1:9-18; 3:1-9**. **Questions for Discussion and Thinking Further** follow the verse-by-verse *International Bible Lesson Commentary* below. **Study Hints for Thinking Further**, a study guide for teachers, discusses the five questions below to help with class preparation and in conducting class discussion; these hints are available on the **International Bible Lessons Commentary** website. The weekly *International Bible Lesson* is usually posted each Saturday before the lesson is scheduled to be taught.

International Bible Lesson Commentary

1 Corinthians 1:9-18

(1 Corinthians 1:9) God is faithful; by him you were called into the fellowship of his Son, Jesus Christ our Lord.

Before Paul dealt with the problems of disorder in the church in Corinth, he emphasized that God is faithful; that

is, God is dependable, honest, truthful, and trustworthy; God will complete whatever He has promised or begun. Through the preaching of the truth by Paul and others, God had called them into the church; that is, into “the fellowship of His Son,” which included fellowship with other believers in Christ. By the power of the truth and the Holy Spirit, God brought them into fellowship with Jesus Christ as their Lord; that is, into union, into communion, and into a relationship with Jesus Christ, Who they had committed themselves to obey as their Lord. Before Paul appealed to them to change their behavior, he pointed them to Jesus Christ their Lord, Who as their Lord required them to conform lives to His will and purposes.

(1 Corinthians 1:10) Now I appeal to you, brothers and sisters, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that all of you be in agreement and that there be no divisions among you, but that you be united in the same mind and the same purpose.

Paul did not appeal to them on the basis that he was an apostle or that he had been the first to preach the gospel in Corinth. He could have done so, but one of the problems in the church was people focusing their primary attention on the servants of Christ (almost making them into idols) instead of on their Lord Jesus Christ as truly their Supreme Authority and for whose sake they should change their behavior. Paul appealed to them as equal members of the family of God. If each person in the church put Jesus Christ first, if each person put knowing more of Jesus Christ first, if each person put the commands and

purposes of Jesus Christ first so they could do the will of Jesus Christ, then the Holy Spirit would help them come to agreement and overcome their divisions. If they all had the same mind and goals (that is, actively sought to understand the primary ideas, teachings, and leadings of Jesus Christ) and if they all sought to learn and fulfill the purpose of Jesus Christ, they could be united in single-mindedness as the Holy Spirit healed their divisions.

(1 Corinthians 1:11) For it has been reported to me by Chloe's people that there are quarrels among you, my brothers and sisters.

Paul had received a letter with various questions from the church in Corinth, but before he began to answer their questions he wanted to deal with the more serious problems of jealousy and quarreling in the church. We know nothing about Chloe or her people (Chloe is a female name). However, quarrels in the church had become so serious that Paul received a report about them. Quarrels indicate more than a difference of opinion. Church members were involved in ongoing disputes with an unloving spirit. Their disagreements were causing people in the church to split into groups and break fellowship with each other (the opposite of having been called into the fellowship of Jesus Christ as loving brothers and sisters of God's Son).

(1 Corinthians 1:12) What I mean is that each of you says, "I belong to Paul," or "I belong to Apollos," or "I belong to Cephas," or "I belong to Christ."

The same gospel was proclaimed by all of the leaders Paul named (Cephas was the Aramaic name for Peter). Different people in the church may have formed groups based on the different emphases they believed different leaders taught as of vital importance. One group may have claimed that they alone understood the gospel of Jesus Christ and all the others were mistaken. Paul did not accuse any group of heresy, so their disputes may have centered on less important ideas that honest believers may disagree about without causing division in the church or breaking fellowship with one another.

(1 Corinthians 1:13) Has Christ been divided? Was Paul crucified for you? Or were you baptized in the name of Paul?

Since Jesus Christ by His Spirit indwelt each believer in the church in Corinth, their differences could not be the result of Christ being divided or from Christ teaching contradictory ideas. Some of them were not humbly seeking to know the mind and purpose of Christ regarding the issues that divided them. Paul emphasized that Jesus Christ had died on the cross so God could forgive them and cleanse them from sin; therefore, Jesus Christ was more important than any of His servants. Moreover, they had not been baptized in the name of any of Christ's

servants; they had been baptized at the command of Christ by Christ's servants.

(1 Corinthians 1:14) I thank God that I baptized none of you except Crispus and Gaius,

John the Baptist was so well-known for baptizing that the church calls him John *the Baptist*. Jesus commanded His disciples to baptize, but in the Bible none of His disciples were known as baptizers. Egotistic disputes over who baptized whom may have led some believers to think they were better than others. Paul did not think that he should be included in these controversies because he had baptized very few people. It is doubtful that Crispus, Gaius, and the household of Stephanas had created a separate group based on the fact that Paul had baptized them.

(1 Corinthians 1:15) so that no one can say that you were baptized in my name.

Paul could not remember all of the names of those he baptized; baptizing was not his primary calling, nor the primary calling of any of the apostles. Jesus had called Paul to preach about salvation by grace through faith in Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior. The apostles taught that Jesus Christ is the Way, the Truth, and the Life, and fellowship with Jesus Christ is far more important than focusing on the person who baptized someone.

(1 Corinthians 1:16) (I did baptize also the household of Stephanas; beyond that, I do not know whether I baptized anyone else.)

Believers through the centuries have sometimes turned their eyes from Jesus Christ to the person they admire as a great preacher, an inspirational teacher, or the founder of a theological system. In some cases they find it much easier to learn a system of theology from scholarly books than try to understand, study, and apply the mind and purpose of Jesus Christ as revealed in the Bible. The study and prayerful application of the Bible is far more important than who baptized you. Paul did not think it was important for him to try to remember or keep a record of all the names of the people he baptized.

(1 Corinthians 1:17) For Christ did not send me to baptize but to proclaim the gospel, and not with eloquent wisdom, so that the cross of Christ might not be emptied of its power.

Eloquent words of wisdom, skillful presentations, logical arguments, and inspirational stories can all be used by the Holy Spirit to call believers into fellowship with Jesus Christ when the true gospel is also presented, but Paul did not use any of these methods when he brought the good news of Jesus Christ to the city of Corinth. Christ sent him to proclaim the gospel: the fact that Jesus Christ died on the cross as the atonement for their sins and rose from the dead, and that those who believed in Him would receive the forgiveness of sins and the gift of eternal life. When

Paul proclaimed the truth of the gospel, the Holy Spirit empowered the truth to lead people to faith in Jesus Christ. No one could claim they were saved because of Paul's eloquent wisdom or because Paul had baptized them.

(1 Corinthians 1:18) For the message about the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God.

If Jesus Christ had only died as a martyr, the message about the cross may not have seemed so foolish to those who are perishing. Those who are perishing think it is foolish to think that their behavior and sins are important to God; that justice, mercy, and love are so important to God that He sent His only begotten Son to die on the cross in their behalf so He could forgive them and cleanse them from sin and grant them life eternal if they would repent and trust in Jesus Christ as Lord. They will continue to perish if they continue to believe the message about the cross is foolishness. The message about the cross is the power of God to those who are being saved: believers know by experience the peace and joy that comes from God's forgiveness of their sins; they have freedom from the power of a sinful life; they honor Jesus Christ as their Lord; they know He has a place in heaven for them.

1 Corinthians 3:1-9

(1 Corinthians 3:1) And so, brothers and sisters, I could not speak to you as spiritual people, but rather as people of the flesh, as infants in Christ.

When Paul spoke and wrote to the church in Corinth, he could not speak or write to them as though all of them were spiritual people or spiritually mature. He had to write to them as infants in Christ, as “people of the flesh,” as people who were spiritually immature, as people who remained self-centered and self-directed instead of Christ-centered and Christ-directed. Though believers in Christ receive the Holy Spirit, many in the church had remained spiritual babies because they centered their attention on themselves and on having their needs met just like babies. They allowed their desires, emotions, and ideas to rule their lives instead of Jesus Christ as their Lord and Savior, and their focus on having their selfish needs met had led some of them into the most despicable sins (as Paul wrote about later in his letter). Paul could not write the church as though everyone had the right priorities; that is, the priorities of Jesus Christ.

(1 Corinthians 3:2) I fed you with milk, not solid food, for you were not ready for solid food. Even now you are still not ready,

The milk Paul had fed them was the basic, elementary, introductory truths of the Christian faith that had called them believe in Jesus Christ. At first, he had to feed them,

because as infants they could not feed themselves. Unhappily, they did not mature to the level of wanting to learn how to feed themselves the truth of God from the Scriptures and mature Christian leaders. They did not want to make the effort to chew solid spiritual food; that is, to think on and apply the deeper truths of God that Paul, Apollos, Peter, and others could have fed them with the Holy Spirit's help from the Hebrew Scriptures and the teachings of Jesus Christ.

(1 Corinthians 3:3) for you are still of the flesh. For as long as there is jealousy and quarreling among you, are you not of the flesh, and behaving according to human inclinations?

Paul had evidence that they were still spiritual babies: they were jealous of one another and they quarreled among themselves. They followed their feelings. They behaved according to their inclinations instead of according to the will of Jesus Christ their Lord. They had no interest in the deeper realities of God that can only be learned from doing the will of God in the power of the Holy Spirit. If they became involved in Christian endeavors or worship, they did so because these efforts made them feel good, not for the sake of Jesus Christ and to glorify God. Therefore, their Christian gatherings became occasions for jealousy, quarreling, and choosing up sides as they battled one another. They made themselves and others in their groups more important than Jesus Christ.

(1 Corinthians 3:4) For when one says, “I belong to Paul,” and another, “I belong to Apollos,” are you not merely human?

Some people who claim to be Christians focus on becoming specialists in a theology or teaching that leads them to quarreling with others. They sometimes try to give indisputable reasons why their favorite person and their ideas are better than others; and in addition, that those who differ with them are wrong and may not even be Christians. Paul had to grapple with this problem in Corinth, and Paul declared that such people were thinking from a mere human point of view instead of seeking God’s point of view as revealed in the Hebrew Scriptures and the teaching of Jesus as they had been taught by Paul, Apollos, and others.

(1 Corinthians 3:5) What then is Apollos? What is Paul? Servants through whom you came to believe, as the Lord assigned to each.

No doubt those who help us see the truth of the Christian faith for the first time or who help us return to faith in Jesus Christ have a special place in our hearts and minds. They are important servants of Christ to us, but Paul does not want anyone to place a servant of Christ in the place of honor that only Christ deserves. Fighting and quarreling and worse can result from putting a person, group, party, idol, or set of ideas in the place of honor that only Christ deserves. As an Apostle, Paul could have truly said, “Believe what I teach because I am an Apostle of Christ,”

but that could have made the problems in Corinth worse. Instead, Paul humbly said he and others were servants of Christ and the Lord had assigned who would come to faith through each of them. They should glorify the Lord, not a servant of the Lord, who called them to saving faith.

(1 Corinthians 3:6) I planted, Apollos watered, but God gave the growth.

Paul went to Corinth first to preach the gospel and Apollos followed Paul. Both did the work of evangelism, and both taught the truth in ways that would help new believers grow in the grace and knowledge of Jesus Christ. Paul and Apollos were of the same mind and had the same purpose. BUT, God gave the growth! Compare Paul's letter about the problems in Corinth with Jesus' parable about the gospel, the word of God, being similar to a seed that is sowed and the different results (Matthew 13:18-23; Luke 8:4-15). Paul wrote that he and Apollos fulfilled different tasks as God had assigned these tasks to them, but they both had the same purpose of leading people to faith in Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior and then helping them mature in their faith. God is the only One Who can make a seed grow or the gospel bear fruit in the believer's life. And as Jesus said, people are responsible for what they do when the seed of the gospel is sowed in their minds: "As for what fell among the thorns, these are the ones who hear; but as they go on their way, they are choked by the cares and riches and pleasures of life, and their fruit does not mature" (Luke 8:14). To grow to spiritual maturity, believers need to look to God in Christ and go His way

instead of their way. In general, Paul wrote that after all he and Apollos had said and done, and after so much time had passed since he had been to Corinth, that the infants in Christ should have become spiritually mature.

(1 Corinthians 3:7) So neither the one who plants nor the one who waters is anything, but only God who gives the growth.

As servants of Christ, Paul, Apollos, and others actively obeyed Jesus Christ when they shared the truth of the gospel. As they obeyed Christ, Christ determined many of the eventual consequences of their obedience. Paul humbly declared that in comparison to God they were not anything, for God did everything through them; however, they were still significant, because God continued to work through them as they obeyed Him. God gave them their gifts for ministry, and they used their gifts as the Holy Spirit directed them. If the seed they sowed took root, God made the truths they had shared grow in the believer's life. The spiritually mature would praise God in Christ and rely on the Holy Spirit to help them understand the Word of God in order to live closer to God. In the Christian life, believers are aware of the struggles and difficult decisions they make to learn more of Christ and remain loyal to Him under great temptations and trials. They know what activities have helped them obey Christ and mature as Christians. At the same time, when looking back over the progress they have made spiritually, they see the hand of God on their lives and working within them to give them the spiritual growth and maturity they enjoy; so, they give

God all the glory for what they have achieved. God gives the growth, but no one can blame God if they remain spiritually immature.

(1 Corinthians 3:8) The one who plants and the one who waters have a common purpose, and each will receive wages according to the labor of each.

Bible teachers such as Paul, Apollos, and Peter wanted to express their love for God and glorify Jesus Christ by sharing with others what He taught them. They wanted others to love Jesus too, as Jesus deserved. They wanted to show and teach how to serve God and others in the power of the Holy Spirit. Their common purpose was serving Jesus Christ by doing exactly what He said. Paul did not describe the wages he would receive. In other letters, he talked about the inheritance of Christians (see Colossians 3:23-24).

(1 Corinthians 3:9) For we are God's servants, working together; you are God's field, God's building.

As God's servants, they followed and obeyed Jesus Christ as their Lord. They worked together and not in competition for groups of followers to be loyal to them personally. They did not think they were better than other servants of the Lord, because the Lord had given them whatever gifts for service they had. The church was similar to a field and also similar to a building, but the field and the building belonged to God and not to God's servants. If

the church in Corinth understood the truths in Paul's letter, they would dissolve their little groups and come together with a common faith in Jesus Christ and a common desire to know and do His will.

Questions for Discussion and Thinking Further

1. In this Bible lesson, name all of the persons and groups that Paul discusses. Some may be listed more than once.
2. How did Paul know that some in the church of God in Corinth were still of the flesh?
3. What did Christ send Paul to do primarily? What did Paul do that he probably considered of secondary importance that he left to others to do?
4. What is foolishness to some but the power of God to others? Who are those who think this is foolishness and who are those who think this is the power of God?
5. How can someone leave the group of those who are perishing?

Begin or close your class by reading the short weekly *International Bible Lesson*.

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