

## **Sermon: Divided We Fall**

**Text: 1 Corinthians 1:10-3:23**

### **Introduction:**

The Apostle Paul begins his first letter to the church in Corinth with some very encouraging and uplifting words (verses 1-9). He talks about how the church is filled with people who are sanctified and called to be God's holy people. He speaks of grace and peace. I describes how he always thanks the Lord for them in his many prayers, and acknowledges that they are a church filled with people who possess many unique spiritual gifts...including gifts of speech and knowledge. Paul encourages them with the hope that Jesus will keep them firm in their faith "to the end"—and concludes his introductory comments with the uplifting affirmation that "God is faithful, who has called you into fellowship with His Son, Jesus Christ our Lord."

It's easy to imagine that at this point, Paul will launch into an articulate theology of grace as he did in his letter to the Romans, or a defense of the Gospel as he did in many of his other letters. But that's not what Paul does. Not at all. For the next sixteen chapters, Paul pulls no punches in his criticisms of the many ways that the church in Corinth is going down the wrong path. I don't think the word "rebuke" is too strong when we take a close look at what Paul has to say. The letter is a series of warning that are clearly rooted in Paul's deep love and concern for the people. He knows that they're at a crossroads—and if they choose the wrong road, the consequences (spiritually) will be disastrous.

The first thing Paul addresses is the fact that the church is on the brink of a split. People have taken sides, and there are numerous factions within the church. It is not difficult to imagine this happening—because it still happens today. All the time. In fact, we are now living in an overwhelmingly polarized world. People are taking sides on everything. It's the way that Satan works...his tactic is to divide and conquer. I doubt that anything breaks the heart of God more than divisions in a church.

With this in mind, take some time to read through these first three chapters of 1<sup>st</sup> Corinthians. Pay close attention to the things that are threatening to ruin the church. Listen to what Paul has to say about these things, and discuss how important it is for us, today, to be on our guard against these very same things happening to us.

### **Examination:**

- **Read 1 Corinthians 1:10-31**
  - What do you think it means for there to 'be no divisions among you' in the church? (v.10) Does this mean that we can't disagree?
  - Have you ever been a part of a community (church or otherwise) where unhealthy competing cliques arose. What caused this to happen?
  - What's the difference between appreciating and following leaders, verses elevating them to an unhealthy place?
  - What does Paul say is the answer to these divisions? (pay close attention to verse 13)

- Paul states that ‘the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing.’ (v.18) What do you think he means by this?
  - Have you ever seen your foolishness or weakness made strong in God? How?
  - Why do you think that God chooses weak, foolish and despised people for His kingdom work?
  - What do we see in verses 30-31 that eliminates our grounds to boast in ourselves?
- **Read 1 Corinthians 2**
    - Why do you think Paul begins this section with the fact that he didn’t preach with eloquence?
    - What do you think it means when Paul says that his speech and message were demonstrating the Spirit and power? (v.4) What do you think this looked like?
    - What distinction does Paul make between ‘wisdom of this age’ and the ‘wisdom of God’?
    - What role does the Holy Spirit play in discerning or understanding God’s wisdom? Do you think this happens in your own life?
    - What do you think the world thinks about the wisdom of God? Why?
    - What are some things we need to do to grow in the wisdom of God?
- **Read 1 Corinthians 3**
    - Who was it that played the role of teaching you (feeding you with milk) in your early days as a believer?
    - How long do you feel like you were eating spiritual milk? Are you still there?
    - Do you think you needed (or still need) more/less milk before moving onto solid food?
    - The cause of this division that we see in Corinth is the fact that some people saw themselves as followers of Paul—while others claimed to be on “Team Apollos” or “Team Peter”...or simply “Team Jesus”.
      - How much do we see this happening today in the church?
      - Why do you think this happens?
      - I know that Paul didn’t want this to happen—and I doubt that Apollos (the pastor that led the church after Paul moved on to Ephesus) was trying to get people on his “team.” Having said that, do you think that leaders (pastors, etc.) can be guilty of trying to “win” people over to their “side”? Why do you think this happens? What’s the answer or the appropriate response when we see this happening?

**Application:**

What impact does all of this division have as non-believers look at the church “from the outside”? How does this impact the witness that a church ought to have in a community? What can you do about it as you see it happening?