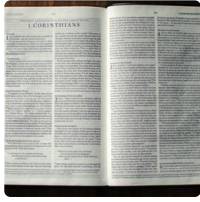


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1 Corinthians 1:10-31



1 Corinthians - Steve Gregg

In this discourse on 1 Corinthians 1:10-31, Steve Gregg emphasizes the importance of unity in the church and rebukes the sectarian spirit that leads to denominationalism. He notes that while Christians may have different opinions on peripheral issues, they should aim for unity in the essence of the gospel. Gregg also highlights the superiority of God's wisdom over human wisdom, asserting that without direct revelation from God, man cannot truly know Him. Finally, he emphasizes that faith ultimately rests on the conviction of the Holy Spirit, rather than human reasoning.

Transcript

Let's look now at the first chapter of 1 Corinthians and we'll begin at verse 10. In our last session we had an introduction to the book and also covered the first nine verses, which are something of the general introduction to the book, such as exists at the beginning of most epistles. We now come to the more special concerns that were the occasion of the writing of this epistle, and that was the matter of problems in the area of unity of the church.

In verse 9, Paul said, God is faithful by whom you were called into the fellowship of His Son. Or the word fellowship means oneness or unity of Jesus. But the church in Corinth was beginning to manifest behaviors that were not reflective of this unity, which Christians possess, as far as Paul was concerned.

He says in verse 10, Now I say this, but 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 Stephanus.

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. Now, of course he is concerned here about division into camps that are identified with particular leaders.

Himself being one of the leaders, Cephas or Peter being another, Apollos we know from the book of Acts, and also he is mentioned later in 1 Corinthians, and of course Christ. Apparently there was already the beginning of divisions into loyalties to various leaders, already taking place at that early stage in the Christian church. This is something that does not shock us as much anymore because we take it for granted.

The church has for four or five hundred years now been divided into numerous denominations, and denominations are essentially loyalties to the teachings of certain leaders. Now, that does not mean that everybody who attends a denominational church is, by being in that church, professing their loyalty to the leader of that church. For example, Mennonites are named after Menno Simons.

But not everyone who is in the Mennonite church would wish to ascribe to everything Menno Simons taught. They may be members of the Mennonite church for other reasons. They may like the people there, they may think the worship is nice, or whatever.

They may not be, in fact, signing their name at the bottom of a list of approval of all the things that Menno Simons said. Lutherans may be the same way about Lutherans. Methodists might be that way about Westerners.

Presbyterians basically look to Calvin as the founder of their denomination. Yet not everyone who is a Presbyterian might agree with Calvin on all points. Virtually every denomination began because someone was dissatisfied with whatever group they were in to begin with and began to teach something else, or began to band with people who had the same complaints.

Eventually, the distinctives of certain beliefs began to characterize the group. Now, that is, in one sense, unavoidable. Unless we're going to put up with heretical teaching in a given church, we must be given the freedom to leave a church that strikes us as being heretical and to associate with Christians who are less heretical.

And I don't think that there's anything intrinsically wrong with that. I think that that was seen in the Old Testament all the time. There was the community of Israel that were the visible church at that time, the whole people of Israel.

But many times the whole nation of Israel was apostate, and there was nonetheless a remnant who would meet together or would see each other and encourage one another. We know, for instance, when Jesus was born and taken to the temple, that Anna was acquainted with a group of people who were looking for the redemption in Israel. No doubt some smaller group within the larger community of Israel that had knowledge of each other and perhaps encouraged one another in their hopes and in their spiritual aspirations.

In Elijah's day and in Elisha's day, when the nation of Israel was corrupt, there were

those who associated with Elijah or with Elisha in what we usually refer to as the schools of the prophets. So the Bible doesn't use that term, they're just called a company of prophets. But they were people, no doubt, who were loyal to Jehovah in the midst of a corrupt society and who met together, it's quite clear, they gathered together to sing and so forth.

And this phenomenon goes on even to this day in the larger visible church. Quite independently from the institution itself, there are those who really feel quite discontented with the spiritual level of some of the institutions they may be in and who gather outside the institution. They may remain in the institution, but in addition to that they meet with others who are not in the same institution, or maybe who are, but they meet non-institutionally for fellowship and so forth.

From these groups, it would not be inconceivable that some new churches would form. Eventually, when groups of people begin to differ significantly from the institution they're in, it is conceivable that the institution itself may ask them to leave. And if they do, then the fellowship they've formed among themselves is likely to continue to be their fellowship and it may end up being to them like a church and a generation later it may be another institutional church itself.

Now, what Paul is concerned about is not so much Christians gathering outside of the ordinary church, but Christians separating themselves from other Christians and saying, we are the true right-on-ones because we follow the teachings of this fellow and he is obviously a better apostle than that fellow. We are of Paul. He is obviously the guy that Paul approved, that God approved.

I mean, he is the guy who planted the church here in Corinth. He was God's man to us. We should be loyal to him.

His teachings are the ones that God wants us to follow. Someone else comes along and says, but Apollos came here after Paul did and he was a lot more reasonable. He was a lot more logical than Paul.

Paul came without enticing words of men's wisdom, but Apollos was a brilliant debater and possibly the more intellectually inclined folks in the church liked Apollos' style better. They said, well, we are going to follow Apollos' way of doing things and preaching the gospel and so forth. And probably there were some who said, well, listen, if we are going to follow individuals, I am going to go with Peter.

He is the guy that Jesus said was to be the one that people were supposed to, you know, the church was going to be built on Peter, right? So, they would be followers of Peter. We are of Theses. And then some people are just going to object to all that and say, you guys are following men, you know.

We are followers just of Jesus. And each of these groups thinks of themselves in distinction from all the others. Now, this is more of a spiritual problem than an institutional problem.

It seems to me, nothing wrong with Christians enjoying the teachings of one person more than the teachings of another person. There are certain radio preachers you would rather listen to than others. The ones you don't like, someone else probably prefers.

It's an amazing thing. I mean, different gifts are definitely designed to meet the needs of different people. And for that reason, there were probably some to whom Apollos did minister more effectively.

There were some to whom Paul ministered more effectively. And so forth. Now, there's nothing wrong with someone saying, you know, I really get a lot more out of Apollos than preaching out of Paul.

But that's a very different thing than saying, I am of Apollos or I am of Paul. I'm on his team. I'm part of his group.

I'm identified with this man. That is the problem because Paul raises the objection, is Christ divided? We're supposed to be devoted to Christ. We're supposed to be associated with him.

It's his name that we bear, not the name of some man. And because of this, Paul objects. Apparently what they were doing is saying that those who were of Apollos were not the same family, the same people as those who were of Paul.

Paul goes on to explain more clearly how he thinks they should be thinking about this in the later chapters. He spends four chapters answering this problem. But his appeal, essentially, is for them to stop thinking this way and to be in unity.

Now, his opening statement there in verse 10 is that he pleads with them in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, meaning as if Jesus was there pleading by him. He was in the place of Christ, speaking in his name, pleading with them that they would speak the same thing and there would be no divisions among you, but that you would be perfectly joined together in the same mind and the same judgment. Now, this is a wonderful ideal.

It would be a wonderful thing if the church today could all think the same thing, be united in the same judgment, the same mind, and have no divisions. But suppose we decided that we were going to aim for that. How are we going to accomplish that today? There are thousands, literally over 4,000 Protestant denominations in this country alone.

And each one exists as a distinct denomination because there is something that they disagree with the others about. In some cases there may be a very, very slight difference between some denominations very much like their own, but they exist as separate

denominations because they either disagree on some theological point or some point of church government or some ethical issue or something like that. And they don't say all the same thing.

They don't all feel exactly the same way. And if we would say, okay, we've got to return to the days when the church was in unity, like Paul says, all speaking the same thing, all making the same judgment, having no divisions among us, probably every group would say, sounds good to me. As soon as you're willing to come around and see things my way, we'll have this kind of unity.

And yet we can't expect everyone to come around to our way of seeing things. Not realistically. It's true, we see things the way we do because we think we're right, and therefore we figure everyone should see it this way.

But we have to remember that we've got no further claim to infallibility than the people who disagree with us do. They are fallible people, we are fallible people. They hold their views for the same reason we hold ours, that they think they're correct.

And you can hardly ask them to come around and just accept your views because you believe they're right, and reject the views that they believe are right. This is the problem we face today. If we are all to speak the same thing, who's going to set the standard of what we're going to speak? Some might say, well, why don't we just go with Scripture? Fine with me, I'm for it.

The problem is, that's what most denominations already think they're doing. It's interpretation of fine points of Scripture. This is what makes it difficult today.

Now, in Paul's day it was much easier to say, now let everyone just say the same thing. Well, what should we say, Paul? Well, I'll tell you what to say. Say this, I'm an apostle, and what I say is what you should say.

But no one around today has the authority that Paul has to say, okay, the whole church should speak the same thing I'm speaking. I'll set the standard and everyone will agree with me. Paul could say that, or Peter, or any of them could say that.

And by the way, Peter and Paul were not preaching different doctrines. They did have different emphases. But what Paul's concern was, was that everybody had the same heart.

And from that, you know, would be seeking to say the same things that the apostles taught. We have the problem today of there being disagreement about what the apostles really did teach, and we don't have them here to ask. We still have the Holy Spirit, however.

The Holy Spirit exists among Christians of many different viewpoints, however. And

although Jesus said the Holy Spirit would guide his apostles into all truth, it's not entirely clear whether all Christians, besides the apostles, are guided into all truth simply by the Spirit of God. I would like to think so, but it hasn't been my experience that all Christians I've known have been led to the same truth by the same Spirit.

All Christians have the Holy Spirit. But what the Holy Spirit teaches us mostly is to love one another. Doctrine is generally taught by persons that God has gifted, apostles and prophets, evangelists, pastors and teachers.

They're the ones who pass along doctrinal information for the most part. The Holy Spirit teaches us to be in unity and love while we're waiting for a unity of belief to develop. And as long as we're under different teachers, of course, which seems unavoidable, there will be different opinions about things.

But how can we apply Paul's principle of unity to our own case? How can the church all speak the same thing? Well, for one thing, we can all agree about what is important. We can all agree what is the essence of the gospel. And Christians do, by the way.

Sometimes cultists and non-Christians point to the disunity among Christians in a great variety of denominations and say, this proves that you guys can't get your act together because you don't even all agree. Well, what this really proves is that we have liberty to disagree on some points. We have liberty as Christians to make up our own minds on peripheral issues.

The fact of the matter, and this is what is not so visible to the onlooker as it is to those of us inside, is that all Christians really do believe the same thing about the gospel. Because anyone who doesn't believe the same gospel we do isn't a Christian. They're a cult.

If a person does not agree that you're saved by grace through faith in Jesus Christ, they're not a Christian. There are people who don't believe those things, but they're not Christians. All Christians believe these things.

In fact, by definition, they believe these things, because if they believe something else, they're not Christians. And the gospel is, in fact, something about which we do all speak the same thing. Now, as far as some of the peripheral things, whether we should baptize by immersion or sprinkling, whether the rapture is before or after or in the middle of the tribulation, whether women should wear head coverings or not, whether once they've always saved or not, I mean, these kinds of issues, we don't all say the same things because not everyone sees them the same way.

We don't have the apostle Paul here or some other human authority that we can look at and listen to on tape or whatever, and he'll just settle the matter with a single decree. But what we can say is, we all agree that Jesus is Lord and that that is what matters

most, and that is the basis of our unity. We can disagree, we can hash out differences of opinion.

Even the apostles did that at the Jerusalem Council. There were differences of opinion expressed. Eventually they all came to an agreement on what they could agree to.

And Christians can do that about certainly the core issues. But look at Ephesians chapter 4, where Paul is also talking about the need for unity. And he says in verse 3, Ephesians 4 verse 3, he says, Endeavoring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.

This is what we're supposed to be doing. Endeavoring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. But down in verse 13 he says, Until we all come to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a mature man or a perfect man, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ.

Now notice, the unity of the Spirit is something that we are to keep. We already have it. It merely needs to be kept.

But in verse 13, the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God is not something we yet possess. That is something that we have yet to come into through maturity. That means there's two kinds of unity.

There's a unity based on the shared life of the Spirit, which we possess and must maintain. The unity of the Spirit. And there's also another level of unity based on agreement of faith and belief and knowledge.

We don't have that yet. Not all Christians do have that. And Paul says, We don't have that yet.

We're looking forward to that. God has given us apostles and prophets, evangelists, pastors, teachers, until we all come into that. In the meantime, though, while we don't have full agreement on all points of doctrine, we nonetheless can and must maintain a unity in the Spirit.

Now, when someone starts saying, I am of Apollos, and what they mean by that is, I am not, therefore, of Paul. I'm of Apollos, not of Paul. That begins to set up a spiritual barrier among Christians that is an attitude thing quite on a different level than a difference of opinion about doctrine.

In fact, it's likely that Paul and Apollos had the same doctrine. It's not likely at all that the differences between those who said, I'm of Paul, and those who said, I'm of Apollos, and those who said, I'm of Cephas, were really doctrinal differences at all. So much as movements where loyalty was being expressed to a particular hero, a spiritual icon, with whom they wished to be associated, instead of simply being associated with the whole body of Christ, with Christ Himself.

And that's an attitude thing, and it exists in denominations today. Like I said, not all people in denominational churches go along with everything the founder of that denomination taught. Nor do all of them have a sectarian spirit.

For example, when I was in Santa Cruz, I spoke in several denominations. I speak in a Methodist church, I speak in a Baptist church, I speak in a Calvary chapel, I speak in a Forsberg church, I speak in a Christian Missionary Alliance church down there. These are denominations.

But the pastors in them, and the people in them, have a tremendous amount of cross-pollination. Even though they are members of the Methodist church, many of them come over to hear me when I speak at the Christian Missionary Alliance church, or whatever. And they don't think of themselves as being disloyal to the church that they're members of, because they see themselves as, in their spirit, they're one with all Christians.

It happens that the church they enjoy worshipping in has a denominational label on it, which maybe would be just as well if it didn't. But, whether it does or not, it does not tell you very much about their divisiveness as people. It doesn't tell you much about their attitude.

What Paul's concerned about was clearly an attitude. An attitude that does exist in some denominational people who say, well, we are of the, we're of the Missionary Baptist denomination, we can't fellowship with people of even any other Baptist denomination. You know, there's over 40 different Baptist denominations.

I actually met a pastor of a Missionary Baptist church, and I think that he represented the whole denomination as far as his attitude. He said, they don't even believe they can fellowship with other Baptists. Only other Missionary Baptists.

And they consider it spiritual fornication if they fellowship with anyone other than the pure, brighter Christ, which is their denomination. Now, this is a classic, you know, sectarianism that sees their own little group as the only people who are really right on, the only ones who really know God in any acceptable manner. And all other Christians are simply, because they're not in their group, they are not saved, and they're not even worthy of fellowship with them.

And that is, you know, disunity at a level far more extreme, of course, than just saying, well, I don't agree with you on the matter of predestination, or something like that. Because it's quite obvious that a group this size can have people representing a wide variety of views, and yet there's a community of unity in the Spirit. And that is, I think, the real concern that Paul had.

Of course, in those days, because Apostles were present to settle matters of dispute,

theologically and so forth, there'd be no reason for people to have different doctrines from each other. Unless they wanted to rebel against what an Apostle said, which would be a bad thing to do. These days, people with different doctrines are not generally rebelling against the Apostles.

Most of them think that they're preaching the pure teachings of the Apostles. They just have different understandings of what they meant. Which is a situation hard to overcome right now, as far as finding some kind of a programmatic unity among Christians.

Not that, I'm not necessarily thinking that we need to get everyone into one big organization, church. What we need to understand, of course, is that we are all part of the body of Christ, and Christ is not divided. It may be that you go to a church that has a denominational label, but that's not a problem, nor is it a virtue.

It's simply a fact that you fellowship with Christians in that one place, but unless you've cut off other Christians from fellowship with you, or you look down on others who have a different denomination, you're probably not making the same error that Paul is speaking of here, that the Corinthians were doing. They were definitely being contentious and sectarian, and seeing their own group as superior to all other groups. Now, one thing he tells them he wants them to have is one mind and one judgment, he says in verse 10.

Now, I want to go off a little bit on this subject of judging, or judgment, making judgments. There's a lot of people who feel that we should not make judgments, that judging is uncharitable, that Jesus didn't judge anybody, and in fact he told us not to judge. Judge not that you do not judge.

And therefore, Christians shouldn't make judgments. Now, there's hardly any book of the Bible that refutes that idea more than 1 Corinthians does. 1 Corinthians is full of advocating making judgments about things.

Spiritual judgments, moral judgments, theological calls. Making judgments about things is treated as something that Christians must do, and all spiritual people do do. Of course, when Jesus said, judge not that you do not judge, he meant, as the context goes on to show, don't judge people for things that you yourself are guilty of, and act like you're so innocent.

If you've got a beam in your eye, don't claim that you're the one that God would expect in someone else's eye. You've got the same problem, only more than they do. That's the context of that.

But Jesus did say in Matthew, or I think it's in John 7, 24, but I may be really wrong about that. I guess I could find out real quick here. Jesus said, do not judge according to appearances, but judge righteous judgments.

John 7, 24. So, he told us not to judge a certain way, but he said, you must make righteous judgments. You must judge righteous judgments.

Well, in Corinthians, in 1 Corinthians, Paul urges the Corinthians continually to be making judgments about things. A person who makes no judgments has no concept of morality, no concept of truth versus error. Anytime somebody tells you something, you will accept it or reject it based upon your judgment you make of the person's integrity and their qualification to speak on the subject, and your judgment on the truthfulness of what is being heard.

You reject many things, I hope, that you hear in the media, and that you hear from various people. You no doubt reject many things you hear. You do so on the basis of having made a judgment about it.

And when you accept something, you do that on the basis of having made a judgment about it, too. You've judged it to be true. Judgments are a normal part of human life, to say nothing of human religious life and Christian life in particular.

Let me show you how frequently Paul advocates the making of judgments in 1 Corinthians. In 1 Corinthians 2.15, Paul says, He who is spiritual judges all things. A spiritual man judges all things.

Alright? Now look over at chapter 5, verse 3. Speaking about the case of the man living in incest. He says in 1 Corinthians 5.3, He says, For I indeed, as absent in body, but present in spirit, have already judged. I've made a judgment about this.

He tells them what they're supposed to do. He's surprised that they haven't judged. In the same chapter, verses 12 and 13.

Chapter 5, verse 12, He says, For what have I to do to judge those who are outside the church? Do you not judge those who are inside? But those who are outside, God judges. Therefore, put away from yourselves that wicked person. They need to make judgments about behavior inside the church.

You don't judge outsiders for the way they behave. Their problems are worse than their behavior. Their problem is their broken relationship with God.

But inside the church, we do make judgments. And we must, Paul indicated. In chapter 6, verses 2 through 5, He is rebuking them for going before the judges of the courts with their disputes.

And he says in verse 5, I say this to your shame. Is it so that there is not a wise man among you? No, not even one who will be able to judge between his brethren. Now, back in chapter 2, verse 15, he said a spiritual man judges all things.

He says, what? Is your church so impoverished that there's not even one person in the church mature and wise enough and spiritual enough to make judgments about things for you? Judging is a necessary part of the Christian life, and people who are wise and spiritual should be making judgments all the time. Must. In chapter 7, in verse 25, Paul says, Now concerning virgins, I have no commandment from the Lord, yet I give judgment.

I make a judgment call on this, as one whom the Lord in His mercy has made trustworthy. He says, God has made me a faithful man by His mercy, and I figure that I can make a call on this that's fairly reliable. I'll make a judgment call, even though God hasn't spoken a distinct command about this to me.

I'll give my judgment on it, and that should count for something, because he's a wise and spiritual man. He says in verse 40 of the same chapter, But the widow is happier if she remains as she is, that is, instead of her marriage, according to my judgment. Again, he's making a judgment about this, which is what must be done on a lot of points.

In chapter 10, verse 15, chapter 10, verse 15, he says, I speak as to wise men. Judge what I say. In other words, wise people do make judgments.

Judge what I say. In chapter 11, verse 13, chapter 11, verse 13, Judge among yourselves. Is it proper for a woman to pray to God with her head uncovered? He's asking them to make their own judgment about this, trusting that as spiritual people, they can judge spiritual things.

In chapter 11, verse 31, he says, If we would judge ourselves, we would not be judged. That's good. He's talking about being judged and chastened by the Lord, as the context shows, but if we just judge ourselves, we avoid some of the problems that we bring on ourselves by failure to do so.

In chapter 14, verse 24, Paul says, But if all prophesy, and an unbeliever or an uninformed person comes in, he is convicted or convinced by all, he is judged by all. That is, by all the people prophesying. If all are prophesying, their words will be a judgment and conviction upon those who come in and hear them do so.

Although, he says, if everyone is speaking in tongues and they don't understand the words, then, of course, it will not be convicting them, but it will seem crazy to them. But in 1 Corinthians 14, 29, Paul says, Let two or three prophets speak and let the others judge. You're not even supposed to judge prophecy.

Now, notice how many times in this one epistle, Paul tells people to judge. Judge in yourselves. I speak unto you as wise men.

Judge what I say. Let the prophets speak two or three and let the others judge. Wise men judge everything.

Is there not a wise man among you who can judge these things? Can judge with his brethren? I give my judgment as one who has been found faithful. Obviously, the concept of Christians making judgments is one of the themes, one of the threads that runs through the whole book of 1 Corinthians. And it seems to be saying that the Corinthians needed to grow up, become more spiritual, become wiser, so that they'd make better judgment calls.

Obviously, the problems they had in their church of tolerating incest, of going to court with their brethren, of flaunting their liberty, even if it stumbled their brethren, abusing the Lord's table, or any of those things, all of those things could be avoided if they were just more wisely making judgments, judging their behavior, judging themselves, judging others in the church as they ought to. And so Paul advocates judgment as an activity that is worthy of Christians, worthy of mature Christians. And so he says in verse 10 of chapter 1, he wants them to be joined in the same mind, in the same judgment.

He wants them to be agreeing with each other in the judgments they make about things. Verse 11 says that someone from Chloe's household had informed him of contentions that exist among them, quarrels that they're having among themselves. And he, as we already commented on in verse 12, he mentions their divided loyalty.

Some are loyal to Paul, some to Apollos. You know, Apollos came to Corinth shortly after Paul left, according to Acts chapter 18. And we are not told in Acts what impact Apollos had there, but we are told that Apollos was a man mighty in speech, a very logical and strong debater, which Paul himself tells us he was not.

He did not attempt to be. Paul was capable of debate, as he proved, for instance, in Athens, but when he came to Corinth, he decided he was not going to use debate. He didn't want the faith of the Corinthians to rest on human reasoning, but on the power of God.

So he says, I determined, in chapter 2 he says, I determined to know nothing among you, but the simplest stuff. Christ to him crucified. And to trust in a demonstration of the spirit and power for your conversion, rather than in strong arguments.

Well, Paul had deliberately avoided logical and philosophical reasoning in his presentation of the gospel. Apollos came in afterwards and probably relied on those things as heavily in Corinth as he did elsewhere. He was a debater.

He was a convincing debater and was able to convince people of the gospel. And no doubt his style was just different in this point sufficiently to attract the admiration of a different temperament in the church who thought that Apollos was more ingenious than Paul or whatever. Others, for reasons unexplained, say they were obsequious of Peter.

Now, Peter had never been to Corinth as far as anyone knows. And therefore, there's no

obvious reason why they would line up behind Peter unless they felt that that was what loyalty to the founders of Christianity demanded. After all, Jesus had given Peter a special place of leadership among the apostles.

And if we're going to line up behind anybody, it ought to be Peter. And then others saw, of course, the following even of that and said, well, listen, isn't Christ the one we're supposed to follow? Now, commentators usually say that those in the fourth category in verse 12 who say, I am of Christ, were equally divisive with the rest. And it is possible.

It's possible that some were feeling, you know, themselves superior to these divisive others. Say, well, you people follow Apollos and Paul or Peter if you want to, but we're going to follow Christ. That's what real Christians follow Christ.

And they could have had the same air of superiority and the same sense of disdain for others, that divisive sectarian spirit, even though they had the right words. You know, we are of Christ. Paul would certainly agree that we are of Christ.

But it's possible that even those that were using that designation for themselves had the same wrong spirit about it as others. I think of several denominations that refuse to be called denominations to this day. The Church of God, Anderson in the end, the Church of Christ are denominations that, well, they deny that they're denominations.

If you talk to people in those denominations, they say, we're not a denomination. That's why we're the Church of Christ. You know, the Church of Christ is not a denomination, it's just the Church of Christ.

It's the Church. There's also a cult referred to as the local church, headed up by a former follower of Watchman Neal, a guy named Witness Lee who lives in Anaheim and started a movement called the local church. And wherever they are located, they just call themselves the church.

The church in Santa Cruz, the church in this town, the church in that town. Which sounds, you know, like they've got terminology that can't be argued against. But what they really mean is they are the only church in that town.

They and they alone are the church. Anyone else is part of a compromised group. Now, there's a sense in which I can appreciate groups saying we don't want to be a denomination.

We just want to be the Church of God. We just want to be the Church of Christ. We just want to be Christ the body.

Do we have to have these names like Wesleyan and Calvinist and Armenian and so forth? We're not of them. I'm not of Calvin. I'm not of Arminian.

I'm of Jesus. We're just the Church of Christ. And these movements often start out, no doubt, with decent motivations.

But as time goes on, they become denominations just like the rest because of the sectarian spirit that creeps in. Again, the avoidance of sectarianism is more a matter of the heart than it is a matter of where you go to church or don't go to church. It does matter to me where anyone goes to church.

As a matter of fact, it depends whether they identify themselves with a human organization under some human founder or whether they identify themselves as members of the body of Christ which is inclusive, not exclusive, of those who are in other groups. What I mean by that, people in the Church of Christ, they say, we're not Baptists. The Baptists are not of us.

You know? I believe I'm a member of the body of Christ. I believe that I'm not a Baptist. But I have no reason to exclude Baptists.

As far as I'm concerned, Baptists are just as much members of the body of Christ as I am. And so are Pentecostals and so are Presbyterians and so forth. So, it's more, I think, being of this group or of that group or of that person is more a matter of heart.

I personally, and I don't have any criticism of people who make a different decision about this, but I personally cannot allow myself to join a church in the sense that we usually use that term. I have no objection to going to the same church all the time. I mean, I can easily see that being in the will of God for a person to go to the same church for years and years every Sunday.

No objection to that. It's more the concept of joining a church that I struggle with. Because joining a church usually means you become a member of that group in a way that you're not a member of the other groups of Christians in town.

Now, it may be a fact that God's leading your life has led you to fellowship more with that group than with the other Christians in town. You can't fellowship on an equal level with everyone in town who's a Christian. And God might well join you in spirit with a group of believers who are partners together and who can mutually edify one another.

But still, it's hard for me to explain what I mean, but even though I'm in fellowship with certain Christians and I'm not as much in fellowship with other Christians, my view of the other Christians is I belong to them as much as I belong to the ones I fellowship with more. I mean, I just belong to Jesus and everyone who belongs to Jesus has as much claim on my time, my money, my gifts, whatever, as the people I see all the time have claim on it. And that's not the way a lot of people think.

They say, OK, I finally have joined such and such a church. My search for a church is now over. You know, I'm of this church.

And what that means is I'm no longer available to be of any of these other churches. I'm not really... I belong to this group in a way that I do not belong to these other groups. And it's hard for me to see how that manages to avoid the mistake of being, you know, I am of Apollos.

I am of Cephas. We're members not of these groups. We're members of Christ.

We're members of his body. And so anyway, I personally think that there's a lot of the Corinthian error in the modern church. But it's not a real new thing.

It's been around for centuries, this problem. It's a human condition. It's a human inclination, I think, to wish to be identified with a particular thing larger than ourselves.

And we, you know, if we see conflict between two denominations, it's hard for us to see how we can be part of both groups. So we have to decide which one's the one we agree with most and which one's the most powerful and which one is the purest or has the longest history or whatever. And we want to find significance by identifying with one of those.

But if that group exists in rivalry with another group, then identity with them encourages a rivalrous spirit between ourselves and people who have made a different decision. And while many modern Christians say, well, we don't have that attitude anymore, unfortunately it survives a certain amount. For example, I have been very regular in attendance most of my life at one church or another.

Usually for several years in the same church. Hasn't been the case recently, but most of my life I've spent very faithful in attendance and so forth to a given church, one at a time usually. But it has never seemed to me that I would be doing a disloyal thing on any given Sunday if I wanted to go to a different church than the one that I usually go to or the one that calls me a member of it.

Or if other people in my church that I go to want to go somewhere else on a given Sunday. It's just never seemed to me as an issue. Why should it be an issue? We don't belong to that group.

We belong to Jesus. And yet I have found that not all Christians, even ones I would have expected to think more along these lines than I do, often they don't have the same assumptions. If you don't go to their church and they become accustomed to you being in their church, if you don't go there some Sunday or two or three Sundays in a row, it's not good enough for them that you've been to church somewhere else.

They feel that you've been unchurched as it were. You're kind of getting uncommitted. Your accountability is breaking down or something like that.

As if being part of that one group and being regular in that one group is what Christianity

calls you to. I don't know of anything in the Bible that suggests such a thing. And if anything, that begins to have that kind of sectarian loyalty that says if you're not in this group, or let's put it this way, if you are supposed to be in this group and you go somewhere else, you're kind of cheating on us.

You're not being loyal to your school or something. This is your team over here. You're not supposed to go and visit around other places because you belong to us.

I don't find that to be biblically true. In fact, I find it to be exactly the kind of thing that probably was happening in Corinth that Paul is against. He says in response to this in verse 13, is Christ divided? Now notice he doesn't say is the church divided? Because to him, Christ and the church are in some senses inseparable.

The church is the body of Christ. It's in 1 Corinthians chapter 12, 12 that he says as a human body has many members, but the many members being many are none the less one body, so also is Christ. Christ is a many-membered body.

Jesus is the head. But we are the flesh and the bones, it says in Ephesians chapter 5. We are the members of him. And when he says, is Christ divided? He's obviously referring to the church.

Is the church, the genuine, true church divided? That's like saying you're cutting Jesus into pieces, dissecting him. Isn't that an abominable thought to you that Christ would be cut in pieces, Christ would be divided up? Was Paul crucified for you? Now, he could say was Apollos or Cephas crucified for you, but he doesn't want to be picking on the followers of these other guys. He doesn't want to sound like he's trying to win these people over to his side.

And those who are on other teams that have not sided with him, he doesn't want to sound like he's jealous, so he just reduces his own. Those that are saying, I'm of Paul. That's who he's addressing these comments to.

What? Was Paul crucified for you? Were you baptized in the name of Paul? Obviously, those words could only have relevance to those who are saying, we are of Paul. And he's saying, no, you're not. You're not of Paul.

You weren't baptized in the name of Paul. Paul wasn't your savior. And then he says, I thank God I baptized none of you except Christus and Gaius, lest anyone should say that I had baptized in my own name, suggesting that he had baptized people into loyalty to him.

And then he remembers, oh yes, I also baptized the house of Stephanas. Besides, I don't know whether I baptized any others. It's been a while.

He couldn't remember how many he had baptized in town there. But he knew it wasn't

very many. He said, for Christ did not send me to baptize, but to preach the gospel.

You know, when we were abandoned, we used to occasionally lead people to the Lord. That's sort of what Christians are supposed to do, we thought. And we would lead local people to the Lord.

Sometimes they'd come out to our meetings and get saved. Sometimes we'd go out and outreach and reach them. And then these people, because we didn't start a church, they'd be funneled into other churches.

Most of the time, when we led them to the Lord, soon afterwards, usually immediately, we'd baptize them in water. We even had a lake on our property, which was suitable for that. It didn't matter if it was winter or midnight or what.

As soon as they came to the Lord, we'd take them out and baptize them. But there were times when persons that we essentially led to the Lord were, for some reason or another, weren't immediately baptized. And they started going to local churches, which we encouraged them to do.

And there was one girl like this that, she came out to the lake once when we were baptizing, and she was on the shore there just watching others be baptized. And I asked her if she wanted to be baptized. We'd led her to the Lord not long earlier, and she hadn't been baptized.

She says, no, I'll wait, I want to be baptized at my church. We said, okay, fine. That didn't bother me at all.

Later on, however, the pastor of the church she was going to raised this as an issue with me. He said, you know, you tried to baptize one of our people. And I said, well, I didn't know they were your people.

I thought they were Christ's people. His thinking was totally foreign to me. I couldn't even imagine how he was thinking.

He said, well, she goes to our church, and if she wants to be baptized, we want to baptize her among the family here. She's part of our family. And I thought it was a real strange idea.

I won't tell you my exact words because I don't remember, but I thought it was real peculiar. And his mentality was, I had a hard time getting a fix on how he was thinking. It was like, I just never thought that way.

She was our convert, but I didn't consider that she had to be baptized by us. And even if she was baptized by us, she wasn't baptized into our organization or something. Like, baptism brings her into our group.

As far as I understood, people are saved into the body of Christ. They're baptized into the body of Christ. Paul said in 1 Corinthians 12, 13, by one spirit, were we all baptized into the same body, into one body.

And when we are baptized, we're not baptized into some loyalty to a particular group. Nor is some little group that we happen to be attending on Sunday mornings baptized the whole of our Christian family. The whole family is everyone who's a Christian.

And if we are baptized in the presence of Christians, it doesn't matter that they're the same Christians we meet with on Sunday morning, it might be nice. It might be nice that the people who have gotten to know us can be there at the baptism. But I just, he was offended that I had asked her if she wanted to be baptized.

I didn't even baptize her because she decided not to be baptized on that occasion. I left that up to her. I didn't try to pressure her.

Then he just thought I was, you know, muscling it into his territory or something. Even though she was our convert, she was his parishioner, she was in his church. And it was clear to me that this pastor's attitude was we own her.

We baptize her. She belongs to us. Our church owns her.

And I thought, this is, how much closer could you get to the attitude Paul is rebuking than this? Were you baptized into the name of this denomination? Into the name of this pastor? Into the name of this congregation? I mean, Paul raises the question as if the answer is so obvious he doesn't need to answer it. It's a rhetorical question. Of course you weren't.

And yet, some people think about their church members and the ones they baptize in just that way. Paul, of course, is pointing out that when you were baptized, you were all, whether you're now a saint, I don't know, Paul, Apollos, Theophis, or whatever, all of you when you were baptized were baptized into Christ. And in that respect, you all have a unity of one baptism and one spirit and so forth.

So, where does the disunity come from? How can anyone divide Christ up like that? He says, I thank God that I didn't baptize more people than I did. Now, this raises an interesting issue. Why didn't Paul baptize more people? He did plant the church.

The first converts in Corinth were his converts. Didn't the Great Commission include the command to baptize? Preach and baptize? Make disciples and baptize? Why didn't Paul baptize more? Well, there's, of course, there's three possibilities. The first one, I don't accept at all as probable.

Some would say, well, Paul didn't think baptism was that important. I don't believe that that is the correct view. I mean, obviously, he speaks to his listeners as if they all have

been baptized.

He assumes that. Obviously, he considered that all Christians would be baptized so it can hardly be that he baptized so few because he didn't think it was very important for people to be baptized. The other possibility is, well, there's more than one.

Maybe his companions baptized. You know, Timothy and Silas when they joined him there in Corinth or Priscilla and Nicola. Maybe they participated and did the baptizing.

Maybe he just did some of it, very little of it, but he left most of that work to others so that he could go out and bring in more fish for them to clean. I mean, he'd go out and evangelize and he'd bring them on home and others would baptize them. Which is a possibility.

The other possibility, which is very much like that, only slightly different, is that he may have baptized the first converts and then had the other ones baptize the new converts come in. He may have been discipling some of the early converts in leadership so that he quickly delegated what would be originally his job to do to baptize the first converts he made, but he got these other people evangelizing and baptizing and so forth so that he could delegate that and begin to release some of the responsibilities of leadership in the church to some of the older Christians that were coming up in the ranks. One way or the other, Paul made sure the Christians were baptized.

They were either baptized by Paul's companions or else by his earliest converts. The only ones that he baptized were apparently the first ones to be converted. And that would be Christus, who was the ruler of the synagogue, and Gaius, who we know from other places is called the... He's the host of the whole church.

In Romans 16, 23, he is at the home of Gaius in Corinth, apparently, when he wrote Romans. And in Romans 16, 23, it says, Gaius, my host, and the host of the whole church greets you. Apparently the whole church in Corinth met in Gaius' home.

that is how some have understood it. Some feel that Gaius had a huge enough house that the entire church in the whole town met there in his home. Others have felt maybe what this means is that he was just hospitable.

And the whole church worldwide, any representative of the church coming to Corinth would find a room prepared in the house of Gaius. He's a great host, a great hospitable person. Anyone in the whole church is welcome at his house.

It's not clear exactly in what sense he was the host of the whole church. But he was Paul's host when he wrote Romans. And he was one of the first converts in Corinth.

And Paul baptized him and a few others. Also Stephanus in his household apparently in verse 16. Now, why did Paul delegate baptizing? He says, because Christ did not send

me to baptize but to preach the gospel.

Verse 17. Now think about that a moment. Christ didn't send me to baptize had not Paul read the Great Commission? As I recall, the Great Commission says go make disciples of all nations baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son of the Holy Spirit and teaching them to observe all things whichever I have commanded you.

Now, if the Great Commission does say baptize, how could Paul say Christ did not send me to baptize? And why does Paul delegate the baptizing to others? I think what this points out to is something that we need to sometimes have pointed out to us is that not everything that Jesus said to his apostles is applicable across the board to all Christians. The Great Commission, as we often quote it, is a saying that Jesus gave to a group of disciples, very possibly, it may have only been his apostles or it might have been his apostles and a few others. And since Paul was not among them, he could claim that that precise commission was not given to him.

Now, God has a commission for everyone and it's going to be consistent with his general purposes of the commission he gave to the apostles. But he doesn't commission everyone to go into all the world. Suppose I thought that he did.

Suppose I read what Jesus said to the apostles and he said go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature. I'd say, well, Jesus commanded it, I'd better do that. I'd better go into all the world.

Well, let's see, how many countries are there? 240 some odd. How many plane tickets do I need to go to all the world? Maybe I'd better get a satellite ministry, radio ministry or something if I'm going to go to all the world because it's going to take a lot of travel to get to all those places. It seems obvious that not every individual is going to go to all the world.

Even the ones who are sent to foreign countries usually don't go to all the world, they usually go to one place or a few places in their lifetime because no one man can go to all the world. It's quite clear that the Great Commission is given to the church corporately to be fulfilled corporately with each member doing a particular task that is part of a whole thing. Not every Christian is to get a plane ticket and go to another country.

Many are, but not all are. Not every Christian is involved in baptizing. Paul said he wasn't sent to baptize.

Not every Christian is even evangelist. He gave some evangelists and some pastors and teachers and apostles and prophets and other things too. The giftings differ, but the corporate mission is to get people saved and disciples throughout the whole world.

That is accomplished not by me saying, okay, that command applies to me personally. I need to go out and baptize everyone. But, I mean, it's possible some of you have never

baptized anyone.

And that is not necessarily disobedience. Because that may not be what you were personally sent to do. The apostles were.

That is the twelve that Jesus said that to. And the church corporately is supposed to make sure people get evangelized, baptized, disciplined, taught, to observe everything Jesus said. But that doesn't mean that every individual is involved in the same activities.

The church as a whole has a commission upon it to reach the world and disciple the world. Individuals find their place within that larger commission in terms of their special gifting and calling. It's interesting that Paul could say he was not sent to baptize, which means that he did not see the Great Commission as enunciated in Mark 16 or in Matthew 28 as particularly applicable to his job description.

He had another commission. He received his commission when Jesus met him on the road to Damascus. He received specific instructions.

Jesus didn't mention baptizing. Now Paul knew that people had to be baptized and he baptized them when necessary when there was no one else to do it. He baptized Christos and Gaius and the household of Stephanas and a few others.

But he didn't consider baptism to be his particular job description. As long as he gets someone else to do that part, he'd just as soon go out and preach and let others baptize. The commission, as I said, is the corporate responsibility of the church.

Each individual's calling is going to be consistent with that corporate commission. But it may not be that every individual is out there on the streets preaching or going to all the world or doing the actual baptizing or even very much involved in doing the teaching, which is part of the Great Commission. Though each of us might do some of that, there are many callings that are consistent with that, which, when all the members of the body are doing their share, causes the whole body to fulfill its commission in the world of converting, baptizing, and discipling people.

Anyway, at the end of verse 17, when Paul says that he was sent to preach the gospel, he says, Now, with this statement, not with the wisdom of words, he introduces an idea that is going to dominate at least the next chapter, if not the next two chapters or more, and that is that his policy of evangelism was not to engage, at least in Corinth, was not to engage in philosophical debates, which Greek people loved, by the way. The Greeks loved philosophical debate, and Paul made it his policy not to do it that way. Now, Paul didn't always have that policy.

When he first came to Greece, he actually did engage in such debates. Now, look at Acts chapter 17. In Acts chapter 17, when Paul came to Athens, it says in verses 16 and 17, And certain Epicurean and Stoic philosophers encountered him, and some said, what

does this babbler want to say? Others said he seems to be a proclaimer of some foreign gods, because he preached to them Jesus and the resurrection.

So, they took him and brought him to the Areopagus, which is a place where philosophers would go to reason and defend their philosophical positions. And they said, may we know what this new doctrine is of which you speak, for you're bringing some strange things to our ears. And so, Paul stood up and spoke to them, and he did speak in an apologetic way, in the sense, using the term apologetic, not making apologies, but making an apologia, making a defense.

He did use the wisdom of words. He even quoted Greek philosophers and so forth to prove his point. However, notice, he didn't win many converts.

He tried to be reasonable with these people. He tried to convince them by logic and by philosophy. However, it didn't work with these people.

It says in verse 32, And when they heard of the resurrection of the dead, some mocked, while others said, we'll hear you again on this matter, which they didn't, apparently. So, Paul departed from among them. However, some men joined him and believed.

Among them Dionysius, the Areopagite, and a woman named Damaris, and others with him. Sounds like not very many. Only two people whose names Luke could recall, and maybe a few others.

That's not a very successful outreach for Paul. And I think, when Paul came to Corinth next, chapter 18, verse 1, after these things, Paul departed from Athens and went to Corinth. And he found a certain Jew named Aquila, born of Pontus, who had recently come from Italy, his wife Priscilla, etc.

Now, verse 4, And he reasoned in the synagogue every Sabbath and persuaded both the Jews and the Greeks. He's still following reasoning and persuasion at this point. Initially, when he came to Corinth.

But when Silas and Timothy had come from Macedonia, Paul was constrained in the Spirit and testified to the Jews that Jesus is the Christ. Now, it seems like he took another approach for some reason when Silas and Timothy arrived. He just felt in the Spirit to do something different.

Until then, at Athens and in Corinth, he had been reasoning with them. But now he just decided to testify. Just to testify and declare the truth that Jesus is the Christ.

Now, we know from 1 Corinthians 1, 6, which we looked at in our previous thing, that this testimony of Christ was confirmed by signs and wonders that Paul performed. And his policy then, at that point in Corinth, was not to resort to enticing words of men's wisdom, but to an appeal to the demonstration of the Spirit and power. And so he tells the

Corinthians in chapter 2, When I came to you, I didn't come with excellence of speech, declaring to you the testimony of God.

He depended largely, in those 18 months he spent in Corinth, he came depending not on argument. He did at first reason, but shortly thereafter, he resorted to a different policy. Just testimony.

Just testifying the testimony of Jesus. And it worked. There was demonstration of power.

God confirmed the testimony of signs following. And there was a powerful outbreak of the gospel, which did not happen in Athens. And it would seem that possibly Paul's failure in Athens to get a big response through his reasoning with people, it may have formed his evangelical strategy for Corinth.

After a while he realized that this is not getting anywhere. You know, you don't fight fire with fire. These people are intellectuals and they're expecting an intellectual argument.

But the problem is they're used to hearing intellectual arguments of every conceivable kind. They just hear them for fun. They're not looking for truth.

I'm just going to testify that Jesus is the Lord. That Jesus is the Christ. And they have to submit to him.

It just got straightforward. Instead of arguing the point. And that began to get results.

And so that is what Paul did when he came to Corinth. Now, he alludes to that in 1 Corinthians 1.17. He says, Christ sent me to preach not with wisdom of words, lest the cross of Christ should be made of none effect. For the message of the cross is foolishness of those who are perishing.

I can't make it seem intelligent to people who are philosophers. It doesn't seem intelligent. It's foolishness to them.

Why should I try to make it academically acceptable to them when they're not... It seems foolish to them, the whole concept. I'll just proclaim it and let the power of God confirm it. It's foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God.

For it is written, I will destroy the wisdom of the wise and bring to nothing the understanding of the prudent. Where is the wise? Where is the scribe? Where is the disputer of this age? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of the world? Now, certainly Paul seems to have a different attitude here than he did when he was preaching on Mars Hill because he actually quoted the disputers of this age and the scholars of this age. Now he says, who cares about them? They just look stupid to God.

God's... God's way of doing things seems foolish to man, but actually it makes them

foolish. It makes them look foolish. It's made their wisdom foolish because by wisdom they haven't grasped what's going on.

And he says that in verse 21. For since in the wisdom of God the world through wisdom did not know God, it pleased God through the foolishness of the message preached to save those who believe. Now, what he's saying is that God is not impressed by the reasoning of human philosophers.

Their wisdom, though it may be the best that man can produce, is really grossly inferior to anything God knows. God's message is foolishness to them anyway, and their wisdom is foolishness to him. Why is that? Because they reason from different presuppositions.

A person can be ever so logical, but if he starts with the wrong premise and he argues flawlessly from that wrong premise he's going to reach wrong conclusions. And you might not be able to find any chink in his logical reasoning at any point. You say, well, he must be right because that point logically and necessarily follows that one, which follows necessarily that one.

So he must be right. But the problem is where they started. The presupposition is at the beginning.

God knows where to start reasoning. Man doesn't. Man often reasons with man at the center of things, man's well-being.

I mean, for example, when people say, well, how can God be good and there be evil and suffering in the world? Obviously, that sounds like a logical objection to the goodness of God, but it's beginning with the wrong premise, though it's not stated. The premise is man's suffering must be bad. Therefore, God needs to justify Himself somehow and explain Himself why He lets us suffer.

But see, the premise is wrong. Who's to say man's suffering is bad? Who's to say that man's suffering isn't a perfectly just and good thing? Not only just because it's deserved, but good because it's therapeutic, spiritually. You think suffering is one of those philosophical issues that philosophers reason with and so forth, and eventually they reason God out of the picture because He can't be all good and all powerful and allow suffering.

But they've started in the wrong place. Christians themselves question, how do you answer that? How in the world can God be all good and all powerful and still allow suffering? It's a mystery. No, it's not that much of a mystery.

Suffering, whatever God allows, is in His hands something He can use for good. God doesn't have to justify it. It is whatever He does is good.

And that's the starting point in our thinking and in God's thinking is good is not based on

what man likes. Good is based on what is consistent with the character of God. And that's the starting point.

Man's wisdom is always going to miss it. It's always going to be way far afield in its conclusions and be foolish. Not because man didn't reason carefully and logically, but because he started with the wrong premises at the beginning.

And therefore, even though man may be very wise and employ the rules of logic flawlessly, he can end up with a foolish conclusion that God, because He knows where He should have started reasoning and where the center of truth emanates from, God sees the foolishness of man's propositions that man can't. And through this wisdom, through this human reasoning and philosophy, man was not able to know God. Was not able to come to the knowledge of God.

God is able to be known because He has revealed Himself and for no other reason. If God had not disclosed Himself, if He hadn't come down or spoken through the prophets at least, there'd be no way any man could know Him. Job said, can any man by searching find out God? Well, the philosophers of the Greeks, to whom God had never revealed anything directly, as He did to the Jews through the prophets, all they had was reasoning.

Now, there's a lot of Christians who actually think that Plato and Socrates and some of those Greek philosophers that were before Christ, that they actually did have revelation from God. And I'm not just trying to talk about liberals who say that kind of thing. I mean, there are true evangelical Christians who believe that God did speak to other societies besides Israel.

That Jesus is the true light that enlightens every man that comes in the world. And men like Socrates, who said things very much like what Jesus later would say. You know, that He said so because God had revealed it to Him.

Well, it's hard to know exactly how to assess that statement because no doubt all truth is God's truth. And if someone happened to get some of it and say some true things, we could argue that He said them because God enlightened Him to see those things. However, Socrates didn't know God.

He believed in the gods. And therefore, it's quite clear that God did not disclose Himself to Socrates. Socrates might have known some true things, but he didn't know God.

By wisdom, without direct revelation from God, by wisdom alone, man cannot know God. He can know that there is a God, but there's very severe limits on how much he can know about God's own character and person and dealings without God pulling back the curtain and saying, here I am, here's who I am, here's what I'm like, here's what I do. And God has done that in Old Testament times through the prophets and since that time

in Christ.

And we have a disclosure of God, which maybe doesn't make much sense to philosophers who are reasoning without God in their reckoning. Balaam had revelation from God, that's true, and he was not a Jew. I believe there are people who knew God and did receive revelations from God.

But Balaam didn't know God through reasoning or through wisdom. St. Paul's addressing a Greek audience about their Greek attitude toward wisdom. Remember, wisdom, Sophia, was like a goddess to the Greeks.

And there was nothing so shameful for man that he'd be anything other than eminent in wisdom. He had to be a wise man to be an honored person. And so to appear wise on the side of your fellows as a Greek was a very important thing.

If you wanted reputation in Greece, you had to be reputed for being philosophically astute, and profound, and sophisticated. That's just the way the Greeks thought. And Paul says that, by the way, in verse 22, he says, The Jews request the sign, but the Greeks seek after wisdom.

That's just a Greek thing. It's the disposition of the Greeks, they seek after wisdom. But the problem is, they're seeking after wisdom, they're not seeking after the truth revealed in Christ.

He's talking about the pagan Greeks, of course. And he's saying, The reason I do not resort to wisdom is because those who are eminent in wisdom have never found God through it. They may have discovered that there is a God, but they've never really gotten to know God.

And he says that in verse 21, Since in the wisdom of God he has so constructed things, that the world, through wisdom, did not know him. Therefore, please God through the foolishness of preaching. Or, New King James says, of the message preached to save those who believe.

Now, what he's saying is that only the wisest people could be great philosophers. If God had made himself accessible through that means, then only those who were intellectually endowed, and who were privileged to have careful philosophical instruction, and who had the temperament to make them deep philosophical thinkers, only they could really know God. God just assumed that he was known in some other way.

Just known by faith. Those who'd be willing to believe the testimony that was preached to them the testimony of Christ, like simple children, that he'd save them that way. And in his wisdom, he withheld the access to knowledge of him from those who would resort only to human reasoning.

And to human philosophy. That is not the means by which God is to be known. And therefore, it's not the thing that Paul resorted to, or depended upon in his preaching.

He says in verse 22, The Jews request a sign, and the Greeks seek after wisdom. But we preach Christ crucified to the Jews assembling block, and to the Greeks foolishness. But to those who are called, meaning Christians, both Jews and Greeks, Christ, the power of God, and the wisdom of God.

Because the foolishness of God is wiser than men, and the weakness of God is stronger than men. Now what I understand Paul to be saying here when he says to the Jews Christ is assembling block, in verse 23, he's referring back to verse 22 where he says the Jews request a sign. The Jews were frequently asking Jesus for a sign.

And he said to them, a wicked and adulterous generation seeks after a sign. Paul says, yeah, that's my people, the Jews, we seek after a sign. We're a wicked and adulterous generation.

And Christ didn't give them a sign. Jesus said, I'm going to give you no sign. Except the sign of Jonah.

But that sign was something that was assembling block to the Jews. He didn't give them a sign like, Elijah gave them a fire coming out of heaven. He didn't give them a sign of some kind of stupendous sort that everybody could see, even the skeptics, in order to get them to believe.

As a matter of fact, his resurrection, which is the only sign he said he was going to give them, he didn't appear after his resurrection to any of the unbelievers, only to believers. With the possible exception of James, his brother, who may have been an unbeliever still when Jesus appeared to him. But as near as we can tell, Jesus did not appear and show himself risen from the dead to unbelievers to convert them.

That's a stumbling block to the Jews. They want to see a sign so that they will believe. Christ stumbles them by not giving them such a sign.

Instead, he gives them what they can see. It doesn't look to them like a sign of God's power at all. What they saw was him crucified.

How could the Messiah be crucified? That's a stumbling block to them. It's not what they expected. Therefore, the gospel preached without Christ crucified doesn't present the kind of sign that would convince Jews.

If anything, it stumbles them. It scandalizes them. That the Messiah would die is not part of the program that they expected.

And as far as the Greeks are concerned, it seems foolish to believe in a man who's died.

And if you suggest he rose from the dead, it seems more foolish still because the Greeks don't believe that physical matter is redeemable or is good. And therefore, to raise the dead body would seem to be foolish or even worse, wicked.

Remember, shortly before Paul wrote this, shortly before he came to Corinth, in fact, he had preached in Athens and it was his very mention of the resurrection of Christ from the dead that caused them to laugh him out of the pulpit there on Mars Hill. It's foolishness to the Greeks to talk about the resurrection. And to talk about being saved by somebody dying.

These things, philosophically, did not appeal to the Greek mind. Now, you might say, well, then maybe we shouldn't use apologetics today. Because, after all, isn't that resorting to human wisdom? That depends on if you're resorting to human wisdom or not.

You can use apologetics without resorting to human wisdom in the sense of trying to... You certainly shouldn't think that by apologetics you're going to argue someone into actual regeneration. People can't be regenerated by arguments. They're not even regenerated by information.

They're regenerated by a work of God in the Spirit when they surrender their hearts and their selves to God. When they deny themselves and take up their cross. That's not a logical thing to do but it's not illogical either.

It's more of a volitional thing. It has to do with the choice. It has to do with values.

It has to do with desire. It has to do with faith. Those are different issues than philosophy and wisdom.

But, though the decision is made on a level other than reasoning, it is not made without reasoning and it's not contrary to reasoning. And the thing is that many people, because of misunderstanding more than anything, misunderstand the Scriptures, do not allow themselves to even desire to believe it because they have been convinced that it's unreasonable and foolish. Now, the Greeks thought it was foolish for a different reason than most modern people do.

Most modern people think, I mean, they don't have the Greek idea that matter is evil and spirit is good. That was a Platonic idea. It no doubt exists somewhat in our society but our society still is of the impression, at least many unbelievers are, that they have some Christian presuppositions that Jesus, maybe even Jesus did rise from the dead.

At least it's not philosophically inconceivable. Maybe miracles are hard on us to accept in our rationalistic age, but philosophically it doesn't seem like an evil or silly thing to raise a dead body. It just seems like an impossible thing.

That wasn't the problem of the Greeks. The Greeks weren't worried about impossibilities. They believed in a spiritual realm, a supernatural realm.

Miracles happening was not their problem. The problem was philosophical. Why would God raise matter from the dead when matter is evil? You see, the objections are totally different now, of a different sort.

The problem now is a belief. People don't believe in the supernatural in our society anymore. I mean, if they did believe it, they'd have no trouble believing in the resurrection of Jesus.

The resurrection of Jesus is not a philosophical problem. It has to do with whether the supernatural can be tolerated or not, whether miracles can happen or not. And therefore they tend to think of any belief in the supernatural as irrational.

And I see nothing wrong with showing people that believe in the supernatural, particularly in the Bible and its supernatural origin, and in the supernatural nature of Christianity, and the truthfulness of it. I see no reason to discard those procedures. But at the same time, it's important to know that our faith is not going to rest on those arguments.

A person doesn't get saved because they heard good arguments. They get saved if the Holy Spirit convicts them and they respond in faith and in repentance. Arguments may set their mind at ease, however, about some things.

And I must say that apologetics have been good for me because although I know Jesus personally, obviously we don't have a sense, a felt sense of His presence equally at all times. And there are times when He seems far away. Even David complained about that a great deal.

Though by faith he believed God was with him, he often complained that God seemed far away and was hiding Himself. And at times like that, where you don't have any emotional or subjective encouragement in your faith, it's good to know that if someone fails you and says, well, how do you know that stuff is even true? That you know objectively it's true. Well, because the tomb was empty and there's just no argument that works except the resurrection of Christ to explain the phenomena.

I mean, that may be human reasoning. And it is not what my faith is resting on. But there are times when it's a tremendous bolstering to faith when there are not other supports to it.

So, I don't think Paul would eliminate apologetics altogether forever. I mean, Apollos used apologetics, and even Paul did in Athens and so forth. He didn't resort to that in Corinth.

He resorted to something else. But that doesn't mean that there's never any situation in which apologetics can work favorably in helping to remove barriers to belief with people. But Paul realized that the Greeks had a basic supposition that was going to be... It would take forever to argue around all the points they objected to, so he just preached the truth and demonstrated miracles and appealed to their conscience on that basis.

And the gospel he preached, he said, was foolishness to the Greeks and assembly blocks to the Jews. But there were some in both categories, Jews and Greeks, who were called of God, who heard the call of the Spirit in their hearts and responded. And he says in verse 24, to those who were called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ is not weakness but the power of God.

And he's not foolishness. He's the wisdom of God. To us.

To others. To Greeks, he's foolish. To the Jews, he's weak and powerless.

But to those of us who are called, he's just the opposite. Because what seems like foolishness of God is actually wiser than man. And what looks like weakness on the part of God is stronger than man.

God operates in a mysterious way and the death of Jesus, which was the ultimate appearance of weakness on his part, was actually the most powerful thing he ever did. Accomplished. Destroying the kingdom of darkness in that very act.

Now, Paul says in verse 26-31, we've got to finish up here pretty quick. For you see your calling, brethren, that not many wise according to the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble are called. But God has chosen the foolish things of the world to put to shame the wise.

And God has chosen the weak things of the world to put to shame the things that are mighty. And the base things of the world and the things which are despised, God has chosen and the things which are not to bring to nothing the things that are. That no flesh should glory in his presence, but of him you are in Christ 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.

The quote is a paraphrase of Jeremiah 9, 24. Now, he says, look around at those who are called, at your calling. Now, your calling means the people that are called with you, the company into which you've been called.

There's not a lot of philosophers here in the church. There's not many mighty, not many noble are called. Now, he did say in verse 24 that those who are called, the Jews and the Greeks who are called, Christ to them is the power of God and the wisdom of God, but there aren't many who are committed to wisdom and power and nobility who have heard that call and responded.

The majority of people who have something to admire in the world about themselves are not hungry for God. Now, I say the majority because there's always exceptions. There are powerful people.

There are intelligent people. There are beautiful people who are attracted to Christ. But the more a person is endowed with worldly advantages, it's just natural, the less likely they will be to stand in need for God because they have learned to depend on these advantages from you.

When you're little, you soon discover whether you're a pretty person, an athletic person, an intellectual type person, a talented person, a rich person. It doesn't take long to discover the pecking order in the schoolyard and also to figure out what categories you belong to and which things are considered your strength in the social bargaining table. If you're a rich kid, there's going to be certain people who will defer to you for that reason.

If you're attractive or athletic, some will defer to you for that reason. If you're strong and endowed in some of these areas, that's going to be to your advantage in negotiations in the world. And you soon learn to trust in these things to pull you through.

A rich old man who will bail you out every time you get into trouble. You know, the way you can bat your eyes to calm down the person who's angry at you every time, you know, or whatever. You've learned how to use yourself to your advantage.

But you see, to the extent that you've learned to do that and you've learned to take advantage of those things, to that same extent you haven't seen any need for God in those same kind of situations that you now can bail yourself out of through your strength or through your intelligence or through your money or whatever. And therefore, the need for God is somewhat obscured by your own ability and your own strength to handle things for yourself. And for that reason, in the church, among those who really are thrown wholly upon God and wholly trusting in God for all things, there are few that have an awful lot of other stuff to trust in.

There are few that have a lot of good crutches and props in the world. There are some. God can reach people of every class.

But Paul was simply observing that there aren't very many of the worldly wise, the worldly noble, the worldly powerful that respond to God. And God chose it to be that way. He's chosen the foolish things and the weak things.

He even goes on to hyperbole to say things that don't even exist, as it were. So that no one can boast in themselves. That no flesh or glory in God's presence.

You see, what God desires is for Christ to be all in all for us. And to the degree that we can be some of what we need for ourselves, to that degree we are not pressured. There's no urgency in having Christ fill that need for us.

And therefore we find that those who do know God best, those who come to Him in greatest numbers, are from the classes of people who don't have a lot of the worldly props to prop them up. And they know their needs the more. And they come to Christ and they recognize Him as all the wisdom they have and all the strength and all the sanctification, all the goodness.

They don't have any of their own. That's what he says in verse 30. He says, but of Him, that is of Christ or of God, you are in Christ, Jesus.

That is, God has caused it to be so that you are in Christ. And Jesus has become for us wisdom from God and righteousness and sanctification and redemption. Jesus is everything, you notice, for us.

We are none of that for ourselves. So that God says in Jeremiah 9, 24, Let him who glories, glory in the Lord. As I say, that quote is actually kind of a condensation of what Jeremiah actually said.

Jeremiah said, and it's very applicable to what Paul is saying here, Jeremiah said in Jeremiah 9, 23, 24, Let not the wise man glory in his wisdom. Let not the rich man glory in his riches. Let not the mighty man glory in his might.

But him that glories, let him glory in this, that he knows and understands me, that I am the Lord who loves justice and loving kindness and mercy and so forth. For in these things I delight, he says. This is what there is to glory in, is knowing God.

Not in wisdom, not in might, not in riches. These are the things that men naturally glory in. These are the things men naturally put their trust in.

But they are warned not to do so. There is no glory in those things. And they certainly are no replacement for God in terms of finding security.

There will be situations where your wisdom or your good looks or your money won't be able to bail you out. But there's no situation that God is not able to help. Jesus has become to us our wisdom, our sanctification, our redemption, all that we need, our righteousness.

And therefore, he is all and must be all to us. And he's more likely to be all to us if there's not too much else that we've got going for us. Now you might say, well, I can't help it.

I was endowed, you know. I was born well off in some of these areas. Does that mean I can't know God? No, Paul just said there aren't many like that.

Maybe you're one of the few. But you can know this, that if you are endowed with those characteristics that the world defers to, then there will always be a struggle to glory in

that rather than in the Lord. It is simply a temptation that you have.

A poor man has one set of temptations. A rich man has another set of temptations. An ugly person has one set of temptations.

A beautiful person has another set. You know, people are tested by disadvantage and by poverty. They're also tested by prosperity and blessing.

We have, each of us, different sets of challenges. But if you are rich or beautiful or strong or intelligent or talented, your struggle will likely be to always remember that those things don't matter. That those things are not anything to glory in.

That you need God, you need Christ as much as anybody else does. As much as the poorest, ugliest, most foolish person. You glory in the Lord.

And, of course, there will always be the temptation to do otherwise if you have something else to lean on. Anyway, Paul has just begun to talk about wisdom. He gets into some really interesting stuff in chapter 2. But I personally think, and I've never met anyone who necessarily teaches this, so I don't know if I'm right or wrong, but I kind of think that Paul might be subtly drawing a distinction between himself and Apollos.

The reason I say that is he has mentioned, of course, those in Corinth who said I'm of Paul, I'm of Apollos, I'm of Cephas, I'm of Christ. He never again brings up those who say I'm of Cephas or I'm of Christ. But he does later talk about those who still say I'm of Paul, I'm of Apollos.

And he says in chapter 3, who is Paul and who is Apollos? And quite a few times in the first four chapters he's going to talk about himself and Apollos. And I think there's a possibility that in talking about how he personally did not come with wisdom and enticing words of argument, he might be subtly making a contrast to his approach and Apollos'. That Apollos, we might deduce, I mean, we're not told this specifically, but what we know about Apollos from Acts would suggest he might have come with enticing arguments and so forth.

And that might be why some people liked him better. And Paul might be partly saying, well, this is why I didn't do what Apollos did. I don't have any confidence in human wisdom and so forth.

I want your confidence to rest in something else. And so while we can't be sure that Paul has sort of got implications about Apollos and what he's saying, there's a good chance that he may and he's giving a reason, he's reasoning why he didn't come that way. He didn't come with apologetics and debate and human reasoning to convince them.

What he used worked better and was more purely the kind of thing that consists of how God wants to reach people, not by appeal to their prideful reasoning, but by appeal to

their conscience, by appealing to, by presenting the truth to them in a demonstration of power. Well, that's about as much as we have time for today.