

**United in Christ: Overcoming the Challenges of Diversity**  
**Studies in 1 Corinthians**  
**The Messenger of the Gospel is God's Servant**

**Intro: In our lessons so far we've seen that the Corinthian church was divided because they were being influenced by values that were a part of their culture. Because they weighed the wisdom of their teachers by human standards (what they knew and how they spoke) they had resorted to comparing preachers and divisions grew out their loyalty to those who had taught them. As we have seen so far, Paul has met their issues methodically and powerfully. He had to correct their whole mindset piece by piece.**

They needed to understand that God did not save them by human wisdom but by what human wisdom could have never conceived, by the message of the cross.

They needed to understand that God saved them in that way in order that He might eliminate the kind of human glory and boasting that they were practicing.

Consequently Paul points out that his preaching was in harmony with God's purposes. He determined to knowing nothing but Christ and to speak not with words of human wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and power.

However to say that men like Paul and Apollos did not speak with human wisdom did not mean that the message they preached was not wise.

The Corinthians needed to understand that the message that they preached was God's wisdom revealed by the Holy Spirit and which was not given in words of human wisdom but in those taught by the Spirit so that they would be accepted by spiritual men.

**So if it was important for the Corinthians to understand that the message of the gospel was God's wisdom, then it was also important for them to understand that the messengers of the gospel were God's servants!**

**But first Paul must make the Corinthians think about themselves and their attitudes toward his message. To that end he must now remind them of why it was that they did not appreciate the wisdom with which he had spoken to them and how they should see those who taught them the gospel.**

**Why the Corinthians had not seen the "wisdom" in Paul's message**

*And I, brethren, could not speak to you as to spiritual men, but as to men of flesh, as to babes in Christ. I gave you milk to drink, not solid food; for you were not yet able to receive it. Indeed, even now you are not yet able, for you are still fleshly. For since there is jealousy and strife among you, are you not fleshly, and are you not walking like mere men? For when one says, "I am of Paul," and another, "I am of Apollos," are you not mere men? (1 Cor. 3:1-4)*  
Paul's remarks here continue the historical narrative that he began in 2:1. Paul had come to Corinth determined to avoid the use of human wisdom though it was an important element in the culture. He knew nothing but Jesus Christ and

Him crucified; he did not speak with human wisdom, for it was not in words of human wisdom that the Holy Spirit revealed the message.

The Corinthians lacked the spiritual maturity to appreciate the wisdom of Paul's message.

They had not been "spiritual men" but "men of flesh"

They had not "mature", but "babes in Christ." Consequently, they had to be fed "milk" rather than "solid food."

They were still fleshly, the evidence of which was their continuing jealousy and strife. They were exalting themselves based on who was the greater teacher, "I am of Paul! I am of Apollos."

These were the kinds of things you would expect from those who championed their favorite speaker in the marketplace or agora.

Though Paul spoke a wisdom among those who are "mature" (1 Cor. 2:6), the Corinthians were not mature enough, or spiritual enough to appreciate it. And Paul has already given the reason why in 2:14.

### **How the Corinthians were to see the men who taught them**

*What then is Apollos? And what is Paul? Servants through whom you believed, even as the Lord gave opportunity to each one. I planted, Apollos watered, but God was causing the growth. So then neither the one who plants nor the one who waters is anything, but God who causes the growth. Now he who plants and he who waters are one; but each will receive his own reward according to his own labor. For we are God's fellow workers; you are God's field, God's building. (1 Cor. 3:5-9)*

Paul now seeks to correct the Corinthians misguided view of preachers.

Having exalted the men based on their perceived wisdom, they exalted themselves over one another!

Paul urged the Corinthians to see their teachers as servants of the Lord.

*"servants through whom you believed"*

Paul urged the Corinthians to see their teachers as servants who worked in partnership in the same field in the same field for the same master.

*"I planted; Apollos watered"*, i.e. they were partners in the work.

Which is more important? The one who plants or the one who waters.

Both are essential for the crop. Thus, Paul says:

*"He who plants and he who waters are one"* i.e. they are united in common purpose, to bring about fruit for the landowner (God).

Paul urged the Corinthians to see their teachers as men dependent upon the blessing of God. Note how Paul stresses the preeminence of God in evangelism:

*"we are God's fellow-workers"*, what gave value to what Paul and Apollos did was the fact that they were working with God!

*"even as the Lord gave opportunity to each one"*, what prevented them from exalting themselves over the other is the fact that what they did was the result of the opportunity that the Lord provided for them.

*"God was causing the growth."*, whatever good came from their work, it was God who produced the results, that the preachers.

*“each will receive his own reward”*, i.e. from God., i.e. they are accountable to the Lord.

*“you are God’s field; you are God’s building”* i.e., God was one who owned the field. God was the one who owned the temple.

## **Meaning and application**

### **How these points speak to the Corinthian problem**

The Corinthians in using the standard of human wisdom to evaluate their teachers were missing the real wisdom they spoke. They were carnal and immature. So they first needed to grow up and put behind them their worldly conceptions of wisdom, so that they could appreciate the real wisdom that was being made available to them through the apostles.

The Corinthians in putting so much stress on their teachers were taking the emphasis off of the Lord who had saved them. They were His people; He is the one who should be glorified, not men.

Thus the Corinthians would not be united until they started view things spiritually and exalting God rather than the men who taught them.

### **How these points speak to us today**

Paul’s message to the Corinthians has timeless value for us today.

We too must beware of the dangers of carnal thinking and evaluating the message of the gospel in terms of worldly standards. We will not appreciate the wisdom of God’s message until we approach it with maturity and spirituality.

1 Cor. 3 is God’s prescription for “preacheritis.” Preachers/teachers must be kept in perspective. They are servants of the word working along with other teachers in God’s field.

Whatever growth occurs is not their doing, but God’s. Their reward is to faithfully present the message of God, to get out of the way, and let God’s word produce its results!

**Conclusion: This text holds an important message to help us maintain our unity in Christ. We must keep a spiritual mindset. We must keep those who teach in perspective. We must value the message of the gospel. We must keep God and His Son preeminent in our hearts. If so, then we’ll be able to stay unified.**