

PREFACE

I have always been grateful for the fact that no one person “led” me to Christ, but that I answered the call of the Spirit because of my parent’s upbringing and example, the teaching and example of other adults in the church, and (probably least of all) by the messages of the pastor. A sensitivity to spiritual things was simply born and bred into me, creating a fertile environment for the eventual call of the Holy Spirit—which I answered at the age of seven. It is true, however, that I am grateful to one person who disciplined and nurtured me back into the fold in the early eighties after a period in the wilderness. By the grace of God my gratitude has remained just that; I did not pedestalize him, I did not “follow” him.

But in at least two, and possibly three cases, that is precisely what was going on in the Corinthian church. Their gratitude had evolved into something darker; gratitude became allegiance.

Read 1 Corinthians 1:11-13.**v11**

For I have been informed concerning you, my brethren,

This was no mere rumor or bit of gossip. The word translated “informed” (also, reported, declared) means “to make plain” by words; we might say, “I have it on good authority.”

by Chloe’s people,

Literally this is “those of Chloe.” The insertion of “people” is the safest, since we know next to nothing about this woman. But certain assumptions can be made—one of which would be that if this referred to a family, Paul would have used the *father’s* name, even if he were deceased. So the insertion of “household,” implying family, may not be the best. Best guess is that this was a business woman, perhaps from Ephesus, conducting trade with Corinth, and (since Paul does not further identify her) is certainly known to the church. And if this woman and those immediately around here are so interested in the health of the Corinthian church, they certainly had a vested interest in it—perhaps some or all as members themselves. Whoever she and her people were, the apostle considered their word trustworthy. And what was this word?

that there are quarrels among you.

quarrels/ing, contentions^{kjvs} = *eris* = of uncertain affinity; a quarrel, i.e. (by implication) wrangling : - **contention**, debate, **strife**, variance.

Paul often includes this word in his several lists of vices, often translated “strife.”

Read Galatians 5:19-23.

And we can safely conclude that there was no immediate elimination of this quarreling, for it is still mentioned in his second letter to the church.

Read 2 Corinthians 12:20.

These “quarrels” were the natural outflow of the “divisions” in the church. What precisely caused the divisions is the challenge before us.

v12

Just as we can acquire an unhealthy devotion to a doctor or surgeon who heals us from a terrible disease or injury, it is possible for a Christian to have an unhealthy devotion to someone who is instrumental in the inception of, or our ongoing relationship with Christ. Gratitude and innocent joy can become something darker—unhealthy not just to us, but to the church itself.

Read v12.

Theories abound as to what Paul means here and the *extent* of these divisions. That is, for example, were they little more than the basis for philosophical arguments and petty squabbles, or were they organized parties, becoming literal sub-churches within the larger Corinthian church? Let’s first briefly consider the four individuals around which these factions gathered.

Note: There is no evidence whatsoever that these individuals—Paul, Apollos, Peter, and certainly not Christ Jesus—instigated these divisions.

Paul: The apostle, a Jew, founded the church, visited it several times, and wrote at least three letters to the church, two of which are in our canon. He was not a physically impressive man, and though he was extremely intelligent and learned, his teaching was not particularly eloquent.

Apollos: We are introduced to Apollos, a Jew from Alexandria, Egypt, in Acts 18, where we learn that, while an effective leader in the early church, he was the opposite of Paul: a charismatic, eloquent speaker, but, though learned, he was at least initially limited in his understanding of the gospel.

Read Acts 18:24-26.

After this vital instruction, Apollos became an even more effective evangelist and speaker. He traveled to Achaia, and while there visited Corinth.

Read Acts 18:27-19:1.

So the evidence would seem to indicate that at least some in the church had seen and heard Apollos, who was, essentially, their second pastor.

Cephas: Cephas (*kay-fas’*) is the apostle Peter’s name translated into Aramaic, and Paul’s usual way of referring to him. There is no evidence that Peter ever visited Corinth. Some commentators claim that those waving the banner of Peter would have been the so-called “Judaizers,” who would, for example, believe that Christians must also follow the Judaic law.

Christ: Jesus, of course, never visited Corinth, and it is doubtful, although not impossible, that anyone there had ever met Him or heard Him speak. And the words He *did* speak stood against this sort of divisiveness in his followers.

Read John 17:22-23.

So what is really going on here? What does Paul mean when He states, "...each one of you is saying, 'I am of Paul,' and 'I of Apollos,' and 'I of Cephas,' and 'I of Christ'" in v12? To ferret this out requires some reading between the lines and a little bit of guesswork and common sense.

Our first clue is in the repetition of the word "I." These "slogans" read literally as they are translated in the NASB and KJVs: "I am of Paul." But none of our modern translations get it wrong; being "of" Paul means "I am Paul's person," or (as in the NIV and ESV) "I follow Paul." (Fee) And that's the problem.

The second clue is that Christ is included in the slogans. What can be wrong with that! Of course we are to be followers of Christ, disciples of His, so the fact that Paul includes this with the others tells us that their true motives were not along this line.

David Guzik: The Corinthians' boasting about their "party leaders" was really boasting about themselves. It wasn't so much that they thought Apollos was great, but *that they were great for following him.* (emphasis added)

Because Paul includes them, we see that those "of Christ" did not have the right spirit. Sadly this group was probably the most pious and self-righteous, thinking they held a special claim on Christ. (MacArthur)

There is no indication of this being an organized effort, resulting in physical separation, as in the various "parties" meeting in separate homes. Nor were these divisions based on theological, doctrinal disputes.

S. M. Pogoloff: [Commentators] fail to recognize that the smoke of divisions do[es] not necessarily imply the fire of doctrine.

Garland citing T. B. Savage: Savage points out that people in the first century were more interested in show than in doctrine ("The bulk of religious people had little or no theology") and cites as evidence the declaration in Petronius, "No one cares a button for dogma."

Remember that we have already made the case for Paul's emphasis on "wisdom" (*sofia*) in the first four chapters being his response to the Corinthians being enamored with the Hellenistic idea of eloquence and presentation being more important than content. These parties, with the resulting divisions in the church, were not based on doctrinal differences between these four leaders. In the case of the first two names—Paul and Apollos—it could be little more than a loyalty to a favorite pastor: Paul was their first, Apollos their second.

It is a short hop from exaltation of a man to exaltation of self. When we set another human being on the throne reserved for Christ Jesus—and when we "follow" or proclaim allegiance to any fellow human, that process has begun—we are just a few steps away from "following" ourselves.

See what the Corinthians are doing? Do you hear the arrogance, the air of superiority in their slogans? "I follow Paul." "I follow Apollos." We believe *ourselves* better than others when we believe our lord (small "L") better than other lords. This is why Paul includes in his disapproval, those who claim to follow Christ. He understands that what they are really saying is the same as everyone else: *I am better than you, because my L/lord is better than yours.*

We all must be cognizant of the subtle gradations of our relationships with leaders—not just in the church, but in every walk of life—for some may take us down a dangerous path. We must understand the sometimes subtle difference between

- listening to—and following a leader;
- respecting, honoring a leader—and becoming a slavish follower of him;
- submitting to the authority of a God-ordained leader—and obeying his every dictate without question or thought.

Not being aware of this danger is how cults, and cults of personality are formed. When we slavishly follow the teaching of someone like Joel Osteen, who declares that God wants us to be healthy, and God wants us to be wealthy, and that we have within us the power to tell God what to do for us—when we follow this aberrant teaching without checking it against God's word, we have just set a mere (and horribly wrong) man on the throne of Christ.

The apostle Paul warns us about such men, and those who follow them, in his letter to the Romans.

Read Romans 16:17-18.

When we follow false teachers such as this, we are tacitly saying that we know better than Christ.

The church is to be united before the throne of Christ Jesus, and united under His authority. We are to carefully acknowledge the God-given wisdom and authority of our shepherds, but *never* relinquish the responsibility to hold them to the truth of God's word—and the true gospel of Christ found there.

Read Ephesians 1:18-23.