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1 Corinthians

I thank God that I baptized none of you except Crispus and Gaius...

1 Corinthians 1:14

In what seems an unusual statement at first, Paul notes his great thanks to God that he didn't baptize any of those at Corinth with the exception of a few he will name. He will give the reason in the verses ahead though and we will see that it bears directly on what he has said in the previous three verses concerning divisions and contentions.

If Paul was the one to have baptized all of these people, then those who were instigating the contentions could state that he was setting himself up as some type of figurehead to be more greatly honored or followed. Instead however, he pursued his job without looking for the notoriety that he could have attached to it by being the "chief baptizer" of the flock.

Baptism is one of the most precious and memorable moments in a believer's life and it certainly is an honor to participate in the baptism of someone. This is why families often gather around, pictures are taken, and special care is often used to decide who will get the honor of conducting the rite. It could be comparable in importance to choosing who will marry a couple or perform a funeral.

Regarding this highly notable honor of conducting baptisms, Paul states that "I baptized none of you except Crispus and Gaius." Crispus was the ruler of the synagogue in Corinth as is noted in Acts 18:8 -

"Then Crispus, the ruler of the synagogue, believed on the Lord with all his household. And many of the Corinthians, hearing, believed and were baptized."

This baptism by Paul certainly made sense. As the ruler of the synagogue and a person in a prominent position to convince others of the truth of the gospel, he himself would then be qualified to perform the rite on others. It would make no sense to not baptize him because then who would do so? But once he was baptized, then he could take over this solemn responsibility for the others who chose Christ.

Concerning Gaius, there is a Gaius seen in Acts 19 during a time of trouble in Ephesus. Then, a "Gaius of Derbe" is noted in Acts 20. Paul notes a Gaius in Romans 16:23 also. And finally, there is a Gaius to whom the letter 3 John is written to. The Gaius being referred to by Paul here is certainly the one mentioned in Romans and he may be the one whom John wrote to. He was Paul's host and so he probably baptized him personally because of the care he had taken for him as his host.

As a side note to Paul's statement here, baptism in the New Testament always follows conversion. The doctrine of "infant baptism," though going back to very early times, is not a scriptural tenet. The claim by adherents to infant baptism is that it is comparable to the Old Testament rite of circumcision. This is a complete misreading of the precept and cannot be so identified with any teaching in the Bible.

Abraham first believed God and then he was given the rite of circumcision for those who followed him. As Abraham is the example of justification by faith, it only follows that those who are justified by faith will receive their external sign after, not before, that justification. Paul's writings in 1 Corinthians, and his statements even here in the first chapter, fully support the concept of baptism only *after* faith in Christ.

Life application: In whatever capacity we serve the Lord, as an evangelist, a teacher, a preacher, or whatever, it should be for the honor of the Lord, not to promote self notoriety. Paul is an excellent example to follow in this. He was constantly redirecting those around him to Jesus. In the end, the Lord sees our works and will reward us for them.

...lest anyone should say that I had baptized in my own name.

1 Corinthians 1:15

Paul had a unique commission which transitioned the church from almost a solely Jewish entity into one which was quickly growing in gentile converts. At some point, a majority of gentiles would inevitably exist, thus the church would be considered a gentile entity. And this would have been brought about by the instruction and writings of Paul. If he were to have been out baptizing people in large numbers, others who disliked this move to gentile predominance could easily make the charge that Paul had baptized these people into his own name.

Thus, this would become "the church of Paul" regardless of whether he directed the disciples to Christ or not. As noted in verses 10 and 12, such divisions exist in today's church. Rightly or wrongly, we identify ourselves among a host of lines. Some are by name - "I am a Lutheran." Some are by doctrine - "I am a Baptist." Some are by a member of the Godhead other than Jesus, "I belong to the Church of the Holy Spirit."

Within the church there is misdirection, there is division, and there is boasting in individual names. Paul tried to waive this type of thing off from the start by not making the work of Christ about himself. Instead, he proclaimed Christ and made his sole boasting in the cross of Christ (Galatians 6:14). In some ways, divisions are inevitable and even healthy. When Paul and Barnabas divided over an argument, they were able to accomplish twice the work that had previously been done.

Dividing from a church because it is straying from the truth of Christ is a good thing. However, in the process of division, care needs to be taken that the division doesn't produce another idol. Paul's example is one that will keep such things

from occurring. His continuous boasting in Christ is the right approach at all times and in all seasons!

Life application: He who boasts, let him boast in the Lord Jesus Christ.

Yes, I also baptized the household of Stephanas. Besides, I do not know whether I baptized any other. 1 Corinthians 1:16

As Paul is putting forth his thoughts for the epistle, he realizes that when he had just stated that, "I baptized none of you except Crispus and Gaius..." wasn't exactly correct. And so he amends his thoughts here using the Greek term *de*. As Vincent's Word Studies indicates, "The *de* ... has a slightly corrective force." It would then be something like writing, "I only like chocolate ice cream. Oh, and I also like vanilla and strawberry too." It isn't an untruth, but a thought based on reflection.

In the process of his thoughts came the reminder of "the household of Stephanas," and suddenly he realized that he had "also baptized" them. In 1 Corinthians 16:15, Paul will call the household of Stephanas "the firstfruits of Achaia." They had readily come to Christ at the first preaching of the gospel and Paul had baptized them. Because it was at such an early point, certainly before any formal church or meeting place had been established, it had slipped his mind. Then, to ward off any other omissions as intentional deceit, he finally adds in, "Besides, I do not know whether I baptized any other."

There could have been someone that he had simply forgotten about. Maybe there was someone there in Stephanas' household that wasn't a member of the family or servants who could later state that what Paul said wasn't accurate. He has thus preempted such a charge. In the coming verse, he will explain further the reason for his detailed words concerning baptism.

This is a good verse to stop and consider what "household" means in connection with "baptism." This is especially needed because the doctrine of "infant baptism" is often tied to this and several other verses because the term "household" seems all inclusive. The word rendered "household" is *oikos* and generally covers the two greater concepts of a) a house, the material building, and (b) a household, family, lineage, nation. Depending on the context, it refers to any of the following: descendants, families, family, home, homes, house, household, households, itself, palaces, or place.

In Titus 1:10, 11 Paul makes the following statement -

"For there are many insubordinate, both idle talkers and deceivers, especially those of the circumcision, whose mouths must be stopped, who subvert whole households, teaching things which they ought not, for the sake of dishonest gain."

Speaking of those who are disruptive and destructive, he says that they "subvert whole households." In this, he uses the adjective translated as "whole" in order to show that entire households can be swept up into false teachings. If the term "households" was intended as all-inclusive for baptism (including infants), one would think that a similar adjective would be used. Being baptized into the faith is surely as important as being apostatized!

Therefore, the term "household" which is a general term, should be considered in a general sense unless it is accompanied by an adjective to further refine what is being stated. It is only a presupposition at best to state that infant baptism is intended by passages such as this one. Further, because baptism reflects a personal commitment to the Lord, it should be on the more conservative interpretation of "household" that an interpretation should be made; it is general in nature, not specific and all-inclusive.

Finally, the wording in today's verse which shows that Paul isn't completely sure of a matter (meaning who he had baptized) in no way diminishes the doctrine of "divine inspiration." Just because something isn't known by the human author of

an epistle has no bearing on whether or not the Holy Spirit knows. There are ten jillion times ten jillion things (and more!) known to the Holy Spirit which are unknown to any human. What He chooses to include in His word is at His prerogative, including human failings and uncertainties.

Life application: Seemingly insignificant verses found in the Bible often contain some of the most theologically important concepts for us to consider. As you read the Bible, take time to think on "why" certain things are mentioned and why the Holy Spirit allowed their inclusion in the Bible. Don't listen to liberal-minded scholars who would try to diminish the importance of what is stated, but think on what God is conveying to you. Every word is pure and perfect and is given to us to learn more about God's wonderful plan for us.

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.

1 Corinthians 1:17

In Matthew 28:19, 20 we read what is known as the Great Commission - "Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you."

However, this doesn't mean that Paul is being disobedient in his words to the Corinthians. Rather, he has already indicated that he baptized some at Corinth and surely others elsewhere. In addition to this, there are those who are evangelists, there are those who disciple, there are those who serve in other ways, etc. Even Jesus is noted as not being the one to baptize others during His ministry. This is seen in John 4:1, 2 - "Therefore, when the Lord knew that the Pharisees had heard that Jesus made and baptized more disciples than John² (though Jesus Himself did not baptize, but His disciples)."

Paul's primary mission then wasn't to baptize. He probably had others do this. It was time consuming, especially because full immersion baptism is what the Bible

implies. Also, it is intended to follow acceptance of Christ. Paul, as an evangelist, would move often whereas those in the church would be available to baptize new converts at a convenient time and location, even if Paul moved on. And also, as he already noted in his previous comments, baptizing people can lead to divisions and strife. This would be especially so if a competent visitor came to town. If he was gaining converts and baptizing them also, then there would be a division in allegiances; something that actually occurred at Corinth even without baptisms being added in.

Rather than being one who baptized, Paul said his commission was "to preach the gospel." And this is what he tirelessly did. The record of Acts especially shows that Paul preached to kings, jailers, nobles, and common folk. He preached at an open-air stadium and in synagogues. He preached with words and he preached with actions. He preached to Jew and he preached to Gentile. He met each person on their level and he never missed the chance to tell the wondrous news of salvation through Jesus Christ. This was his main calling and the motivation behind his very life.

And as he preached, he did so "not with wisdom of words." In other words, he used the common language and experiences of those around him. It is noted that the Greeks were a society of deep philosophy and mental contemplation. They were often practiced in smooth oral deliveries and were able to tie in high emotional peaks in order to capture the attention and hearts of their listeners. This is very common in modern churches once again. There is an appeal to emotion and there is a high value placed on flashy deliveries and impressive effects to pull the audience in.

But Paul dismissed these tactics. The message of Christ isn't one of philosophical depth or emotional manipulation. It is a message of the consequences of sin and the mercy of God in dealing with those consequences through the cross of His own Son. For this reason, Paul dismissed the dramatic "lest the cross of Christ should be made of no effect." In other words, if people can be satisfied in their lives without the cross, then that satisfaction would seemingly negate the need for it. But the cross demonstrates that there are real consequences for sin and that a real penalty is therefore demanded.

Paul's only desire was that his message would be clearly and competently stated so that those who heard it wouldn't be misdirected by a false gospel and a belief that the cross was somehow unnecessary for them. In fact, Paul's desire to stick to the very basics when transmitting his message made him appear extraordinarily boring. In his second letter to the Corinthians, we read this from his hand -

“For *his* letters,” they say, “*are* weighty and powerful, but *his* bodily presence *is* weak, and *his* speech contemptible.” 2 Corinthians 10:10

This almost sounds like a theologian who is locked away in a library and only comes out once in a while to share his new discoveries - "weighty and powerful" letters, but "contemptible" speech because he never bothered with training in flashy oration. But this is exactly what is needed in our Christian world today, not ostentatious sermons with showy backdrops, but sound theology and words directed to Jesus and His work.

Life application: There is one Lord and one gospel. The good news is that Jesus Christ went to the cross to pay our sin debt and that there is no other way to heaven than through His work. Sin has real consequences that must be considered in light of His cross. Let us not get so caught up in the hype of a gaudy church presentation that we miss the wonder of God's word.

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

"For the message of the cross" is a phrase which needs to be considered in the context of what Paul just noted, which was "the preaching of the gospel." In Greek, he now states *Ho logos gar ho tou starou* - For the doctrine (word) of the cross..." In this phrase, the second article is definite and it is emphatic. The message is the essence and the very purpose of the cross he is referring to.

Therefore, the cross is the gospel, but it isn't the piece of wood which is erected in the form of an instrument of torture. The cross has been used on criminal and martyr alike thousands upon thousands of times. On the day Christ was crucified, there were two others on crosses next to Him. The instrument of the cross itself then isn't what Paul is referring to.

It also is not the message of the one who follows Christ, picking up and carrying his cross daily. In other words, it isn't the burden that we have as a follower of Christ. Though it may seem foolish to the world around us that we would be willing to give ourselves in this way, this is not what Paul is referring to either.

The "message" or "doctrine" of the cross is the truth that Jesus Christ, God's only begotten Son, died on the cross as an atoning sacrifice for those who trust His work. To the world, this message is nonsense because they don't see sin as a problem. But the cross of Jesus Christ shows that sin is an infinitely great problem; one of such magnitude that there is no way for us bridge it in order to be restored to God. Instead, God had to provide the bridge. Jesus Christ, fully human, could mediate for his human followers. Jesus Christ, fully God, could mediate to His infinite Father.

But the message of the cross doesn't stop there. It is true that we believe Jesus Christ is the atoning sacrifice for our sins, but the cross is also *the only* atoning sacrifice for sin. Apart from the cross of Jesus Christ, there is no other way to be reconciled to God. Because of this, those who aren't "in Christ" because of His work, are destined for eternal condemnation. This... this is what is foolishness to the world.

The world looks to self for righteousness before God. The cross bestows God's righteousness upon undeserving self - apart from any personal merit. This glorious "message of the cross is" indeed "foolishness to those who are perishing." The verb for "perishing" in the Greek is a present participle which indicates the current process of what is happening - they are "on their way" to destruction. Because they find what God has done for them as foolish, they are

enemies of God and heading towards a bad end. However, until one dies, they have the opportunity to change the course which they have taken.

In contrast to them, Paul then explains the believer's state when he says "but to us who are being saved." There are those who perceive the doctrine of the cross as foolishness and they are on the way to destruction, but there are those who believe this message and they have moved to another category - "being saved."

Again, this verb is a present participle which indicates that we are in the process of what is occurring. Unlike those who don't believe though, this status will not change. The Bible consistently proclaims eternal salvation. And so the believer's on-going process is one with the certain happy end intended by that act of faith in the ability of the Lord to completely save us through His cross.

And this is because the cross to us "is the power of God." As Paul says in Romans 1:16, " For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ, for it is the power of God to salvation for everyone who believes, for the Jew first and also for the Greek."

The message of the cross is "salvation for everyone who believes." It isn't limited in ability only in scope. Anyone who turns and believes can and will be saved. The limiting factor of the cross is a simple lack of faith. One must turn *from* self and *to* Christ, accepting that what God has done is in fact not foolishness, but glorious. From that moment on, God's power can and will save the once wayward soul.

Life application: Sin is what necessitated the cross of Jesus Christ. The cross of Jesus Christ is what is capable of atoning for sin. No other thing can atone for sin. Therefore, there is no other way to be reconciled to God except through the cross of Jesus Christ. Believe in the message of the cross and be saved.

For it is written:

**“I will destroy the wisdom of the wise,
And bring to nothing the understanding of the prudent.” 1 Corinthians 1:19**

As Paul does often in his epistles, he now refers to the Scriptures which testified to the work of Christ, the wisdom of God, and the instruction for proper conduct of the redeemed. "For it is written" implies that God's words have been recorded and are absolutely authoritative. In his quoting of the Scriptures, he turns to Isaiah 29:14 and freely cites it, showing the overall intent without an exact quote.

- 1) "I will destroy" shows God's sovereignty over the matter to be addressed. It also shows His power to accomplish it as well. No power can stand against the tide of God's judgment. In the case of this verse from Isaiah, it is God's decision to abolish what is otherwise worthless, which is...
- 2) "The wisdom of the wise." Isaiah's words were directed to "Ariel," the city of Jerusalem. The people in the city had moved to religion without relationship; to knowledge without wisdom; and to a life of ease without gratitude to the One who provided it. They felt secure; they were "fat, dumb, and happy." Because of this easy life, they felt that nothing could assail them. They boasted that God must be on their side because of the easy life, even though they wanted nothing to do with God. As a side note, this sounds a lot like the nation of America today. This type of behavior in Jerusalem led to God's decision to bring the enemy against them and destroy them –

"I will encamp against you all around,
I will lay siege against you with a mound,
And I will raise siegeworks against you.
You shall be brought down,
You shall speak out of the ground;
Your speech shall be low, out of the dust;
Your voice shall be like a medium's, out of the ground;
And your speech shall whisper out of the dust." Isaiah 29:3, 4

The wise would perish in their "wisdom." The same can be expected for those today who reject God's offer of the cross (refer again to the previous verse of 1 Corinthians for context).

- 3) "And bring to nothing" means that He will so eradicate what He judges that there will be nothing left of it to remember; it will be completely swept away.
- 4) "The understanding of the prudent." It doesn't matter what the issue is - moral, philosophical, religious, governmental, etc. No matter what the "wise" or "prudent" man conceives, if it is against God's divinely established order, and if it is contrary to the message of the cross of Christ, it will be shown deficient. Such things will be utterly swept away by God.

Life application: What God looks for in His creatures is gratitude, respect for His holiness, a belief that what He has created is good and proper, etc. To shun His word and to shake our fist in His face, particularly against His work in Jesus Christ, can only lead to judgment.

Where *is* the wise? Where *is* the scribe? Where *is* the disputer of this age? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of this world? 1 Corinthians 1:20

Paul now brings in a set of four questions in response to his quoting of Scripture in the previous verse. That verse said -

"I will destroy the wisdom of the wise,
And bring to nothing the understanding of the prudent."

This is reflected in the rhetorical questions of Isaiah 33:18 -

"Your heart will meditate on terror:
'Where *is* the scribe?
Where *is* he who weighs?
Where *is* he who counts the towers?'"

When asking such questions, a dumb silence or an ineffective retort is the expected response. The same is true with Paul's questions here. His first inquiry is to ask, "Where is the wise?" Here he uses the term *sophos* which is equivalent to a sage. This would be the instructor of knowledge; a person who was filled with supposed wisdom and is sought out to answer the deep problems of life for those around Him. But in the end, there are no true answers to the most important questions of life apart from Jesus Christ. This takes us back to what Paul said in verse 18, "For the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God." Only in Christ Jesus are the answers of reconciliation with God and the granting of eternal life to be found.

Building on the terms "the wise" and "the prudent" from his quote from Isaiah, he next asks, "Where is the scribe?" The scribe was originally designated as the person who transcribed the law. Eventually, the term was applied to someone who not only transcribed it, but also was knowledgeable and even a scholar of it. With one exception, the Jewish concept of this word in the New Testament always indicates one who interprets the law. But Paul asks, where is he? On the doctrines of atonement, salvation, peace with God, etc., the scribe is a completely ineffectual interpreter if he looks to the law apart from Jesus Christ.

After mentioning the scribe, we are now asked to consider "the disputer of this age." This is a person we might call a sophist; one who makes an inquiry into the cause of things and how they relate to other things. Their investigations would follow through with the minutest details and bring them together into a grand resolution of the greatest mysteries. They would be the "Sherlock Holmes" of investigating philosophical matters.

In the Greek mind, these would be the ones who could reason out what seemed impossible to reason. Within the Jewish context, it would be those who would

split the hairs of every verse of Scripture, looking for the ins and outs of theological inquiries. Where is such a disputer? Without reasoning life from the context of Jesus Christ, they are lost in a philosophical conundrum and a set of Scriptures which are actually murky and unclear. Nothing, from either a philosophical or scriptural investigation, makes sense without the plan which God has worked out in Jesus Christ. Instead the true purpose of existence and of Scripture are hidden and unattainable.

Finally, as an answer to the first three questions, Paul asks another rhetorical question - "Has not God made foolish the wisdom of this world?" The answer demands a "Yes" response. For all of the immense logic and philosophy which had been contemplated by the Greeks (and many subsequent generations since then), and for all of the intensive study of the Scriptures by the Jews, there remains no final answer to the greatest questions of all. Instead, because they cannot answer the ultimate questions, their great learning actually is futile. God has, in fact, made their wisdom foolish. Why? Because even a mere child can understand the simple gospel and be saved. Apart from Jesus Christ, the greatest minds in human history lack what the little child can know and be granted. Their futile efforts are well-reflected by Isaiah 6:9 -

"And He said, "Go, and tell this people:

'Keep on hearing, but do not understand;
Keep on seeing, but do not perceive.'

Life application: Don't spend all of your life looking for the deeper mysteries of the world without evaluating them through the lens of Christ. Without Him, the greatest knowledge is lacking purpose. Without Him, there can be no true wisdom. But once you understand and seek Him, then all other wisdom finds its proper perspective.