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1 Corinthians

God is faithful, by whom you were called into the fellowship of His Son, Jesus Christ our Lord. 1 Corinthians 1:9

The word "faithful" here is emphatic. In the Greek it is the first word of the sentence. A direct translation would say, "Faithful God by whom you were called..." What God speaks, He will perform. What God determines will always come about. And what God has started, He will complete. He is absolutely faithful. This is also seen, for example, in Philippians 1:6 -

"...being confident of this very thing, that He who has begun a good work in you will complete *it* until the day of Jesus Christ."

God is indeed faithful and it is He "by whom you were called." The word "called" implies more than hearing a voice in the distance. It is the effectual calling noted by Paul in Romans 8. In that chapter, he gives the sequence of events which leads from that effectual calling right up until our being ushered into glory -

"And we know that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are the called according to *His* purpose. For whom He foreknew, He also predestined *to be* conformed to the image of His Son, that He might be the firstborn among many brethren. Moreover whom He predestined, these He also called; whom He called, these He also justified; and whom He justified, these He also glorified." Romans 8:28-30

To God who calls, we are already glorified in His mind. This is the surety of the doctrine of eternal salvation. Though we may err, stray, or forget, God never will. That which has been started will be accomplished. This is wonderful news for those who step out in faith and receive Jesus Christ as Lord.

The calling which Paul speaks of is just that too, it is "into the fellowship of His Son, Jesus Christ our Lord." We move from Adam to Christ. We go from strangers and aliens to friends. We were separate from God and now we belong to Him. As Jesus Christ is the Son of God and we are "in Christ," we are now also called "sons of God." The marvel of what God has done through Jesus will be held in awe for all eternity.

Life application: Jesus Christ is our Lord. Let's live and act as if we really believe it - to the glory of God the Father!

Now I plead with you, brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you all speak the same thing, and *that* there be no divisions among you, but *that* you be perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment.

1 Corinthians 1:10

Paul now transitions from initial greetings and encouragements into the main body and purpose of his epistle. In this first verse of the main body, he begins with the Greek term *parakalo de* - "I exhort, moreover." The participle *de* is what implies the transition to reproof.

Five principle rules should be applied when evaluating Scripture for personal use. There are many others, but these first five should always be at the forefront of one's mind -

- 1) Is this passage descriptive (does it merely describe something)
- 2) Is this passage prescriptive (does this actually tell me something I am to do)
- 3) Context (what is the context of this particular verse or passage)
- 4) Context (see above)
- 5) Context (see above)

As the epistle is being evaluated, we must ensure that we have considered the context of the passage or it becomes a pretext; a falsity. In essence, "Context is king."

When considering whether something is "prescriptive" there are two logical subdivisions to be considered also -

Prescriptive

- a) command (an imperative to do something)
- b) exhortation (a plea to do something)

Understanding why something is either an imperative or an exhortation is needed because we have free-will to consider. When we fail at a command, we are being disobedient and it will definitely affect others, the body, etc in a negative way. When we fail to adhere to an exhortation, we are making bad choices that can have negative impacts on us. The result is usually more self-destructive, as individuals or as a body (even though others outside the exhortation can also be harmed). It is sometimes hard to determine if what we are being told is actually a command or a mere prompting to act without compulsion, but being attentive to the context will normally resolve the matter.

These general rules may seem unnecessary, but they are actually critical to a proper analysis of Scripture. If we remember them, our walk and our doctrine will be greatly enhanced.

So, considering these tenets, let's start into the main body of Paul's letter -

"Now" as noted above is the participle *de* and is the transitional mark.

"I plead with you" implies that what Paul says here is prescriptive but in the form of exhortation. We are encouraged to take action based on a plea. If we do so, things will go smoothly, if we don't then negative consequences are sure to result.

"Brethren" is Paul's way of tying the church together into a unified body and it encourages continued unity within that body. As we'll see in the many verses ahead, disunity, faction, in-fighting, and division are all major problems within the church at Corinth.

"By the name of our Lord Jesus Christ" is given as the highest authority and it is given as the only name upon which we are to be identified. A very, very good example of a major failing in this regard continues on in our Christian world today

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- 1) It occurs denominationally, "I am a Roman Catholic" or "I am a Lutheran." etc. In some instances, there is even the incredibly stupid doctrine that one can "only be saved" if they are members of a particular denomination. This isn't limited to large denominations, but it is taught by many smaller denominations, cults, and aberrant churches around the world. Rather, there is one way to be saved and it is through Jesus Christ, not a denomination.
- 2) It occurs by individual name. "I am a Calvinist" or "I am an Arminian." etc.

Such petty divisions only divide the body. The fact is that both John Calvin and Jacob Arminius were both fallible men with often very-flawed doctrine. To identify oneself in this manner is to reduce one's reliance on the Word of God and the name of Jesus Christ, and to go down a strange path of less-than proper doctrine.

"That you all speak the same thing" is supportive of what was just said by Paul - "By the name of our Lord Jesus Christ." If the members of the church uphold, exalt, and rely on the Person and work of Jesus Christ, then they will naturally tend to "speak the same thing." However, there are always going to be differences of opinion on what a Bible verse says when the main rules above aren't properly handled. And so again, in order to "speak the same thing" we need to always consider the five principle rules of interpretation - prescriptive, descriptive, and context, context, context. By doing this, we will properly handle the word of God and be more inclined to always speak the same thing.

Continuing on, Paul exhorts the Corinthians to have "no divisions among you." The word in Greek here is *schismata*, "schisms." It is a word that indicates a tear or a breach. In classical Greek the word was specifically used when noting the tearing of material. When a garment is torn, there is no longer one piece, but two. These two pieces are no longer at harmony with one another and cannot be used for the same purpose they once were. However, with a properly wielded needle and thread, they can be repaired.

Paul is addressing, and will continue to address, major schisms within the church at Corinth. However, his epistle is just that intended fix - the metaphorical needle and thread. When divisions of a similar type arise today, we can use this same epistle, dating back now 2000 years, to fix the same old problems which arise. For example, "Come on people, drop the name "Calvinist" from your Bible study!

To finish his thought today, he begins with "but." In contrast to this, do that. And the "that" is for them is to "be perfectly joined together in the same mind and the same judgment." Instead of factions, divisions, back-bitings, in-fightings, and other schisms, he implores them to be "joined together" as one cloth, without tear and without the need of mending. They are to be of the "same mind" as they together resolve the difficult issues of running a harmonious and loving congregation.

By using the Bible, we can do this today; without the Bible as our instruction, it will not occur. But to be of the "same mind" concerning the Bible, we also need to be of "the same judgment." There is only one proper conclusion to be made from all biblical passages, but to come to the same judgment, there needs to be a putting away of pride, a more thorough knowledge of the whole body of Scripture, and a complete reliance on what is actually intended for a passage, even if it seems contrary to what we may wish or desire. Our desires are irrelevant. When God determines, we should always agree.

Life application: Paul's letter to the Corinthians will address numerous real problems. These problems didn't end with the publication of the epistle. Why? Because people run ahead without giving heed to the word of God. What we need for proper doctrine and correct living is found right there in the Bible. Let us hold fast to it and always apply it to our lives.

For it has been declared to me concerning you, my brethren, by those of Chloe's household, that there are contentions among you. 1 Corinthians 1:11

The word "for" is used as a connector to the previous verse and to then build upon that thought. In verse 10 we read -

"Now I plead with you, brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you all speak the same thing, and *that* there be no divisions among you, but *that* you be perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment."

Based on this, "For it has been declared" is now stated. Paul wanted the Corinthians "perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment" but they weren't in such a state. And so in order to resolve the wayward condition they were in, he was writing this epistle of instruction. "Concerning you" means the Corinthians and it is to them specifically that he is writing. This letter may or may not have been intended as an encyclical, but either way it is specifically meant for this church at this time. However, it is also intended as a guide for any other church facing similar circumstances and so God ensured it would be kept and eventually included in His word.

Despite the rebuke that is coming, Paul next enters the thought "my brethren." He isn't questioning, nor will he question, the salvation of individual believers. And he never does in any of his epistles. Paul works under the assumption that if a person is saved, they are forever saved. There is no such thought in his writings, or in the rest of the Bible, that one can "lose" their salvation. Verses which seem to imply this are always mishandled and out of context. He is writing to his brethren for their instruction and reproof.

With the endearing term "my brethren" now stated, he enters into the main reason for his thoughts. It was declared to him "by those of Chloe's household, that there are contentions among you." Chloe is otherwise unknown in the Bible, but she is a woman of such note that including her name indicates that what is declared isn't amiss, but is correct. It isn't actually Chloe who brought these things to Paul's attention, but those of her household. However, by noting Chloe, it is inferring that those in her household would be of the same caliber and reliability. Perhaps they are family or servants speaking on her behalf to Paul. If they are bringing a report of "contentions" from her, then the report is certainly true.

This word "contentions" is the Greek *erides*. It means that there are altercations occurring within the church and these were arising because of the "divisions" noted in the previous verse. When people divide and disagree, it will inevitably lead to altercations. If not resolved, there will certainly be worse problems which will arise and eventually a complete division of the church could result. Paul desires that they unite in harmony rather than divide in contention.

Life application: Divisions in the church are sure to come. If they are because of a tradition, then drop the tradition. Anything added to God's word which causes a division isn't worth the trouble. If the division is something doctrinal, then... to the word! God has given us what we need in His word to rectify any doctrinal issue. Be prepared to search the word while working in love to calm the contention.

Now I say this, that each of you says, "I am of Paul," or "I am of Apollos," or "I am of Cephas," or "I am of Christ." 1 Corinthians 1:12

Divisions... Paul referred to them in verse 10 and then what they resulted in (contentions) in verse 11. Now he explains the divisions that he has heard about. "Now I say this" is his way of saying, "Now this is what I mean..."

The believers in Corinth had divided into factions based on style of preaching or in some other way. One would say, "I am of Paul" and another would say, "I am of Apollos." Paul was probably more theologically adept than the rest, having been a Pharisee who was well-grounded in Scripture. Apollos, who is mentioned in Acts 18:24 as "an eloquent man and mighty in the Scriptures," may have been a better orator and maybe could have woven a message together which was inspiring and interesting.

But there were other divisions besides these two. Someone else claimed "I am of Cephas." Cephas is another name for the Apostle Peter. He had been with Jesus from the beginning. He had received his instruction from the Lord and was one of the "inner circle" along with James and John at all of the high points in Christ's ministry. He could easily have become an object of adoration because of these things. He had seen the miracles, he was there at the resurrection, he beheld the ascension. And he was also the "Apostle to the Jews." Because of this.... well, "He is my man."

And yet, there was another faction, "I am of Christ." This sounds right (and it is, if truthful), but it can also be interpreted in a negative way as well. If someone isn't holding to proper doctrine and says "I am of Christ" then those who follow him will be led astray. To say "I am of Christ" then must be followed up with proof of that claim or it is worse than fire in a hay pile. It is what leads to cults, feelings of superiority, bondage, and never coming to know the truth. Therefore, one must be extremely careful when evaluating such a claim.

Paul is going to continue to discuss this in the verses ahead and will not leave the matter without a full explanation of what is appropriate. But from what he has said in this verse alone, it is apparent just how wrong this attitude is. And yet, even though it is clearly presented in the Bible, we still fall into this same trap today.

How many thousands of people identify their doctrine with John Calvin (Calvinism)? How many identify their allegiances with a pope? How many claim total adherence to the doctrine of Christ and yet are actually deeply entrenched in cults? This is the reality of the world we live in. We get swept up in idol worship of a great orator; we get sidetracked by someone who is supposedly theologically competent, but we don't check what they say. Maybe we get so caught up in a denomination that we feel salvation comes only through it. This may sound nuts, but it is more prevalent than one might think.

Let us not make such errors. God has revealed Himself in His Son, Jesus Christ. The Bible is what tells us of Him and His work. Therefore, let us continually return to the fountain of Scripture and check our doctrine against it. When we place our allegiance in a man, we will always be disappointed. When we put our hope and trust in Christ as He is revealed in Scripture, we will always be edified and in a right standing with God.

Life application: It is fine to hold a pastor in high esteem. In fact, the Bible says that we should render them "double honor" (1 Timothy 5:17) if they "labor in the word and doctrine." However, let us not place them on a pedestal as an idol. Rather, we need to never forget that our allegiance is to Jesus Christ. May we never divide Christ as we see has happened at the church in Corinth.

Is Christ divided? Was Paul crucified for you? Or were you baptized in the name of Paul? 1 Corinthians 1:13

Based on the divisions which have arisen in the church at Corinth which were noted in the previous verse, Paul now asks, "Is Christ divided?" Is there one head of the church or not? If there is, then why are we making divisions which don't actually exist within the body? Is it right to follow after a teacher, preacher, apostle, pope, etc. as if that person was the object of our faith? The answer is obviously "No."

But there is another consideration to the opening of this verse, Vincent's Word Studies notes that "Some of the best expositors render [this] as an assertion." In other words, and based on the structure of the Greek, they place this not as a question - "Is Christ divided?", but as a statement of fact - "Christ is divided." The Corinthians had already lost the object of their faith and they had already brought the divisions. Now, it was up to Paul's instructions to return them to the proper path. In order to do this then, he continues with the second thought of the verse - "Was Paul crucified for you?"

His question is rhetorical and it demands a negative response. The cross of Jesus Christ is the only acceptable crucifixion for the sins of anyone, including Paul. The crucifixion of Paul would have simply been the end of Paul without the crucifixion of Christ. And Christ was not only crucified for Paul, but He was crucified for all. To somehow place an allegiance in Paul only diminishes the importance of the cross of Christ. Only He was sinless and only His blood can atone for the sins of the world.

What follows then is another rhetorical question, with another obvious "No" for a response. "Or were you baptized in the name of Paul?" If Paul wasn't crucified for anyone, then no one was baptized in the name of Paul! Baptism is a picture of the work of Christ. One is immersed as a picture of the death (which resulted from the crucifixion) of Christ. Paul wasn't crucified for anyone; Paul didn't die for anyone; therefore, no one was baptized into Paul.

The work of God in resurrecting Jesus is the second half of the picture of baptism. One isn't merely submersed and left under the water. They are raised out of the water as a picture of the newness of life found in the resurrection of Christ. Paul's newness of life came from Christ. And the same is true with anyone who has been reborn by the Spirit. Therefore to "follow Paul" or to "follow Calvin" or to "follow Pope Francis" is simply nuts. Only Christ has accomplished the work necessary to save a soul.

Life application: Let us not divide Christ, but let us always honor Him alone. At best, let us acknowledge the instruction of others without exalting them in an unnecessary way.