

Lenten Devotional February 19, 2018

Scripture

1 Corinthians 1:1-19

¹Paul, called to be an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God, and our brother Sosthenes, ²To the church of God that is in Corinth, to those who are sanctified in Christ Jesus, called to be saints, together with all those who in every place call on the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, both their Lord and ours: ³Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. ⁴I give thanks to my God always for you because of the grace of God that has been given you in Christ Jesus, ⁵for in every way you have been enriched in him, in speech and knowledge of every kind—⁶just as the testimony of Christ has been strengthened among you—⁷so that you are not lacking in any spiritual gift as you wait for the revealing of our Lord Jesus Christ. ⁸He will also strengthen you to the end, so that you may be blameless on the day of our Lord Jesus Christ. ⁹God is faithful; by him you were called into the fellowship of his Son, Jesus Christ our Lord. ¹⁰Now I appeal to you, brothers and sisters, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that all of you be in agreement and that there be no divisions among you, but that you be united in the same mind and the same purpose. ¹¹For it has been reported to me by Chloe's people that there are quarrels among you, my brothers and sisters. ¹²What I mean is that each of you says, "I belong to Paul," or "I belong to Apollos," or "I belong to Cephas," or "I belong to Christ." ¹³Has Christ been divided? Was Paul crucified for you? Or were you baptized in the name of Paul? ¹⁴I thank God that I baptized none of you except Crispus and Gaius, ¹⁵so that no one can say that you were baptized in my name. ¹⁶(I did baptize also the household of Stephanas; beyond that, I do not know whether I baptized anyone else.) ¹⁷For Christ did not send me to baptize but to proclaim the gospel, and not with eloquent wisdom, so that the cross of Christ might not be emptied of its power. ¹⁸For the message about the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God. ¹⁹For it is written, "I will destroy the wisdom of the wise, and the discernment of the discerning I will thwart."

Devotional

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The church should be united, but it isn't. Here in 1 Corinthians Paul directly describes and denounces the contours of division. The church in Corinth has apparently drawn dividing lines according to those by whom different sects of the church have either been baptized or been taught—for example, Paul, Apollos, or Cephas (v. 12).

These divisions are simply not compatible with the calling of the church. They were wrong then, and they are wrong now. Instead of Paul or Apollos or Cephas, we insert labels like "Presbyterian" or "Lutheran" or "Roman Catholic" or "Evangelical" or "Progressive." Categories of understanding a branch of Christian heritage may have their place, but when those labels supplant the primacy of our collective identity as the body of Christ and instead result in tribal sniping and competition, we must remember anew Paul's question, "Has Christ been divided?" (v. 13).

Lent of course is a season of repentance. Have we for too long overlooked the sin of division within the church? Are we in need of repentance of it? How many of us have quietly resented the fact that a congregation whose theology does match our own grows and flourishes? How many of us have been silently pleased when such a congregation hits upon hard times? Such mentalities are not compatible with Paul's appeal, "by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ," to be "united in the same mind and the same purpose" (v. 10).

Prayer

God of Unity, we confess to you our indifference to division and our complicity in it. By your Spirit, we pray, convict us of this sinfulness, and bind our hearts closer to yours in the unity in the gospel. In the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, we pray. Amen.