*DAILY DEVOTIONS*

January 13 - 18

*First Corinthians Chapters Three and Four*

**Monday, January 13 1 Corinthians 3:1-9**

*“I couldn’t talk to you as I would to spiritual people”*

Paul suggests that the reason he has not shared more of the divine wisdom with them is that they have not been spiritually mature enough to receive it; they remain “infants in Christ.” While they had experienced new birth, instead of growing up and maturing they had remained in a state of spiritual infancy. In this condition they were neither able to cope with the adult problems that confronted them nor receive mature teaching from Paul about God.

For Paul at Corinth it was easy to tell who was maturing and who was not: Where there was a spirit of love and unity they were mature in Christ, and where there was strife and jealousy they were infants in Christ. This is a much better system for judging maturity than many people use today. We have a tendency to equate being spiritually mature with how people talk or with the activities in which they participate. But Paul tied spiritual maturity to character and attitude where the Spirit of God was creating in Christians the fruit of the Spirit (“love, joy, peace, patience, etc.” Galatians 5:22-23).

*I desire to grow spiritually as a Christian, Lord, and not remain a “babe in Christ.” Amen.*

**Tuesday, January 14 1 Corinthians 3:10-17**

*“The foundation is Jesus Christ”*

Paul considered himself the wise master builder of the Corinthian church by virtue of his having begun the work there and having nurtured it during its first year and a half. But even as he began to write about the great care which needed to be exercised in building upon that foundation, he felt the need to remind the church what the foundation was – Jesus Christ. And while the church might have a variety of builders and different materials, Jesus was its only foundation. This was the church’s real basis of unity then, and it remains so today.

Paul concedes the possibility of different qualities of spiritual work being laid upon the original foundation, and his writing suggests that it is not always possible at the time to tell the difference between the various kinds of work that are done. That which seems deep may actually be quite shallow, and something that creates great excitement may just as soon be forgotten. But, when Christ returns, what has been done in the church will be judged.

*Our church’s foundation is you, Jesus, and you are the source of our unity. Amen.*

**Wednesday, January 15 1 Corinthians 3:18-23**

*“Stop deceiving yourselves”*

The chapter closes with Paul repeating his appeal to banish divisiveness. The quarrelsome Corinthians are deceiving themselves into thinking they are wise by following society’s standards of self-promotion, when in fact they must become foolish by the world’s standards and embrace godly wisdom. The futile end of those who fail to take this corrective action is underlined by two Scriptures: Job 5:13 and Psalm 94:11. In both Old Testament contexts, sinful, godless behavior is in view, so it is clear that Paul is not condemning all wise people, merely those who think they can be wise without God.

A final reason for the futility of such attitudes is that the Corinthians already have everything they could legitimately need or want in Jesus. Paul shows them this by turning their slogans upside down. They do not belong to Paul or Apollos or Peter; those leaders, as servants, belong to them, as does everything else in creation, present and future, inasmuch as they are in Christ who shares in all the Father’s wise provision for his children.

*In Christ, Father, you have given me all I need. Amen.*

*DAILY DEVOTIONS*

January 13 - 18

*First Corinthians Chapters Three and Four*

**Thursday, January 16 1 Corinthians 4:1-7**

*“Regard us as servants of Christ”*

With this chapter Paul concludes his appeal for unity among the Corinthian factions. He brings the discussion full circle: having begun with the wrong way to treat the apostles (overly exalting them), he now elaborates the right way to consider them. They should not be pitted against one another as if they were rival leaders, but recognized as “servants” and “overseers.” Together, these two words describe Paul, Apollos, Peter, and their peers as answerable primarily to God but with authority over their charges.

The key task of an overseer is faithfulness to his master, not kowtowing to every demand of his underlings. The Corinthians’ view of Paul matters little *relative* to God’s view of him. Even his own self-estimation pales against this divine evaluation. All human judgments not only lack God’s omniscient perspective but also remain premature. Only when the Lord returns and judgment is given will all the facts be known and all the thoughts and intentions of human hearts disclosed (see for example Matthew 10:26), enabling a wholly fair evaluation of Christians’ behavior.

*You alone, Lord, are capable of accurately judging human motives. Amen.*

**Friday, January 17 1 Corinthians 4:8-13**

*“You claim to be so wise in Christ”*

Paul shifts tone abruptly and unleashes a bitter criticism, dripping with irony and sarcasm. They see themselves as “wealthy” and “royal” spiritually, wise in their own eyes, but their view of their maturity is arrogant and misguided. In their “wisdom” they have somehow come to believe that all of the blessings of the messianic age have already arrived. If that were true, then Paul and his companions would have been experiencing the same freedom from imperfection that these Corinthians claimed.

Instead, Paul uses two metaphors to illustrate the apostles’ situation: first, he imagines himself and his companions as prisoners of war in a victory procession by the opposing army; second, he envisions the frequent outcome of such capture – thrown to the gladiators or wild animals in the sporting arena. He then proceeds to provide a more straightforward list of hardships. He closes this section with a remarkable model of how to respond in godly fashion to ungodly treatment and echoes several sayings of Jesus from the Sermon on the Mount.

*I would rather be a fool for you, Jesus, than wise in the world’s eyes. Amen.*

**Saturday, January 18 1 Corinthians 4:14-21**

*“I am not writing these things to shame you”*

As abruptly as Paul’s sarcasm began, it now equally abruptly gives way to tender tones. The right way for Corinth to view its apostles in general, and Paul in particular, is as special relatives. Their local leaders are their current spiritual teachers, but Paul is their spiritual father. This parental imagery accounts for Paul’s concern and strong warnings. He encourages them to imitate him, just as a father in the ancient world regularly taught his sons a trade by modeling it as they studied under him as apprentices.

He would like to be personally present again to model correct Christian living, but he believes the Lord wants him to stay in Ephesus a little while longer (1 Corinthians 16:8-9). So he has sent Timothy as his personal surrogate. Paul closes this four-chapter section of his letter with a final warning. He is coming soon, Lord willing, even though some in Corinth are saying that he will not. If he speaks gently to them in person, it is out of love. But if necessary he will come, metaphorically speaking, with the rod of discipline.

*As your beloved child, Father, you discipline me that I may become like Christ. Amen.*