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WINFIELD BIBLE CAMP - 2003

OUR FAITH: CHALLENGES AND CONSOLATIONS

THE CHALLENGE OF CORINTHIANS

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Study #2: No Flesh should Glory in God's Presence

Reading: 1 Corinthians 1

Thank you, brother Don, and good morning, brethren and sisters.

We looked yesterday, to try and work out if we possibly could, the apostle's relationship with Corinth, how it was he first went to Corinth, what the brethren and sisters were like, and something about the background of the ecclesia and the city. Now we're going to try and learn a little bit more about the message that the apostle taught to the brethren and sisters then, because it's a message which is also important for us!

You may just recall as we started yesterday, we were thinking about the fact that the letters to Corinth do exist in our scriptures, and I mentioned, almost in passing, that there were other letters to Corinth which are not included in the New Testament, so it's just as well if we review, if we possibly can, Paul's contacts with Corinth and just see where the letters that we have got in the New Testament, fit in to that overall pattern. Now we really need to know this because it's very much part of the story.

So what we want to look at are Paul's contacts with Corinth over a period of time. Well, it's during his third missionary journey, we were looking at the second missionary journey yesterday, that he spent a long time in Ephesus. You might just like to go back to the Acts of the apostles and pick this up, the preaching first of all in Corinth took place through the second missionary journey; we were looking yesterday in Acts 18, but during the third missionary journey which is chapter 19, we find that Paul comes in verse 1 to Ephesus. Just as he spent a long while during the second missionary journey in Corinth (longer than any other city during that journey) so during the third missionary journey he spends a long time in Ephesus, longer than anywhere else during that journey. It was while he was at Ephesus that this information about Corinth that we thought about yesterday, came to him. This is where the people of Chloe's household came from, this was the place where the 3 brethren from Corinth came with the letter from Corinth, in order to see the apostle. This was where people were passing through with news from Corinth and taking messages from the apostle back to the ecclesia. It was while he was there, hearing about these serious matters that were in Corinth, he immediately wrote a **letter of advice** because he knew there were serious questions of

immorality in the city.

Now this letter is **not** 1 Corinthians! it's not the 1 Corinthians that we have in our scriptures, this letter of advice that he wrote. Now the reason that we know that, if you look at 1 Corinthians 5, it actually mentions, when he's writing 1 Corinthians, that there had been a previous letter. 1 Corinthians 5 starts with comments about this serious case of immorality, of a man taking his father's wife, and in verse 9 the apostle Paul says, 'I wrote unto you in an, or in my epistle not to company with fornicators', so he's obviously referring to a previous letter, one that preceded what we know as 1 Corinthians; so at the very least, our first letter of the apostle Paul to Corinth is actually the second, and there may even have been more, but we do know there was at least one that predates 1 Corinthians.

Then after that letter which is not in the New Testament, then further information came as we thought, the information from Chloe's people and the letter from the other members of the ecclesia. So it was those further reports that the situation which he tried to address by this letter he mentions in 1 Corinthians 5 verse 9, that he decides it's necessary to take further action. So he receives those further reports, the situation has worsen, there was the denigration of those three brethren, do you remember? we saw their names in 1 Corinthians 16 yesterday. The letter was full of questions, we know that, because in 1 Corinthians 7 verse 1 says, 'Now concerning the things whereof ye wrote unto me', and the little phrase that begins there that begins the chapter, 'now concerning', repeats itself time and again through 1 Corinthians. If you'd just like to turn over the pages to chapter 8 verse 1, 'Now as touching things offered to idols', the Greek phrase is exactly the same as, 'now concerning things sacrificed unto idols'. Verse 4 of chapter 8, 'As concerning therefore the eating of those things sacrificed to idols'; chapter 12 verse 1, 'now concerning spiritual gifts brethren, I would not have you ignorant'; and finally with that little phrase chapter 16 verse 1, 'now concerning the collection for the saints'. So clearly that letter contained a range of questions, that the apostle felt it was necessary to answer. So he hasn't only received these verbal reports, but also a letter with bullet points in; please tell us about this, tell us about that, tell us about the other!' and it was necessary that the apostle should respond.

So he now writes (and I put it in parenthesis), he now writes a 'second' letter, which we know as 1 Corinthians, and I'd just like to go back to 1 Corinthians 4, he not only sent the letter, which probably was returned with those 3 brethren, but he also sends in addition, Timothy, 1 Corinthians 4 verse 17, 'For this cause have I sent unto you Timothy, who is my beloved son and faithful in the Lord, who shall bring you into remembrance of my ways, which be in Christ, as I teach every where in every ecclesia'. Now at this stage, (this is something that the teenagers and I are looking at the moment), at this stage it seems that Timothy was about 20 years old, and I'd like to ask you, if you, knowing an ecclesia with a raft of problems like Corinth had got, would send a young brother aged 20, in order to take a message and to be the apostle's representative? It shows the sort of brother that Timothy was, but having sent Timothy, if you'd just like to turn over now to 1 Corinthians 16, it's almost as if the apostle had second thoughts, and you need to read these verses with a little bit (I was going to say,

'imagination', I really mean 'drama') of drama in order to pick up just the feelings of the apostle, having now sent Timothy off, and it seems as if Timothy went in advance of the letter. Verse 10, 'Now if Timothy come, see that he may be with you without **fear**: for he worketh the work of the Lord, as I also do. Let no man therefore, despise him (which, of course, they'd be likely to do; who's this young whipper-snapper, that the apostle Paul has sent? who's this young man? now why has he sent this callow youth?) So they despised him for his few years; 'let no man then despise him, but conduct him forth in peace, that he may come to men'. I want him to return, the apostle Paul is saying. Then he adds this little phrase, 'I look for him with the brethren', he says, 'I shall be out there watching, and make sure you send Timothy back safely otherwise you'll have to answer to me'. You can understand, can't you now? Paul's concern having sent Timothy off to undertake that work, this difficult work of trying to persuade Corinth into better ways, and he was now worried lest he had sent Timothy on too difficult a task. So the letter goes and Timothy is there to answer any questions that might be raised as a result of the apostle's advice.

So we know we have to ask this question, well then, with the writing of the first letter to Corinth, were all the problems solved? Was the case of immorality resolved? were the difficulties over the teaching of the resurrection resolved? Was there now a proper sort of demeanor at the memorial meeting? were the sisters recognizing their true role in Christ? were the brethren and sisters controlling their use of the spirit gifts? were they no longer going to the Gentile law courts in order to resolve their disputes? were all the marriage difficulties resolved almost like waving a magic wand? and just by asking the questions, we realize what the answer is, of course, don't we? NO, the problems weren't solved! when Timothy returns and others who came back, he would look for him with the brethren, we've just read in 1 Corinthians 16, Paul discovered, rather than improving some aspects of the conditions in Corinth were deteriorating rapidly. This was a great grief as far as Paul was concerned, what could he do about it??

Well, he sends another letter; you say, 'ah, now we've found 2 Corinthians', well, before you run ahead of yourselves, the answer to that is, no, we haven't yet found 2 Corinthians. This letter that I'm speaking about now was a very stern and sharp letter; we know that because that's the way the apostle describes it and it was intended to bring brethren and sisters to their senses. This is the 3rd letter in the sequence: the first letter is the one that we haven't got in our New Testament, the 2nd letter is the letter we know as 1st Corinthians, this 3rd letter is a letter of stern and sharp rebuke. He was particularly furious about something that happened when Timothy was there, if you just turn to 2 Corinthians 7, remember, we can't learn anything about this 3rd letter in 1 Corinthians, because that's already been sent and received and some action is being taken on it, there may however be some references in what we have as 2 Corinthians to this 3rd stern, sharp letter.

Well in 2 Corinthians 7 going in at verse 5, 'When we were come to Macedonia, our flesh had no rest, but we were troubled on every side; without were fightings, within were fears. Nevertheless God, that comforteth those that are cast down, comforted us

by the coming of Titus. And not by his coming only, but by the consolation wherewith he was comforted in you, when he told us your earnest desire, your mourning, your fervent mind toward me; so that I rejoiced the more. For though I made you sorry with a letter (and it's this 3rd letter, I believe, that the apostle is referring to) though I made you sorry with a letter, I do not repent, though I did repent: for I perceive that the same epistle hath made you sorry, though it were but for a season. Now I rejoice, not that ye were made sorry, but that ye sorrowed to repentance: for ye were made sorry after a godly manner, that ye might receive damage by us in nothing. For godly sorrow worketh repentance to salvation not to be repented of: but the sorrow of the world worketh death. For behold this selfsame thing that ye sorrowed after a godly sort, what carefulness it wrought in you, yea, what clearing of yourselves, yea, what indignation, yea, what fear, yea, what vehement desire, yea, what zeal, yea, what revenge! In all things ye have approved yourselves to be clear in this matter. Wherefore, though I wrote unto you, I did it not for his cause that had done the wrong, (and it seems that the apostle here is referring to one particular member of the Corinthian ecclesia) not for his cause that had done the wrong, nor for his cause that suffered wrong, (and I think that's a reference to Timothy, I think that Timothy was savaged by a brother in Corinth as the apostle Paul's representative) but that our care for you in the sight of God might appear unto you. Therefore, we were comforted in your comfort: yea, and exceedingly the more joyed we for the joy of Titus, because his spirit was refreshed by you all'.

So what I think happened, and these verses in 1 Corinthians 7 are referring to it, is that Paul was particularly upset by the way in which the brethren and sisters in Corinth treated Timothy and Paul himself makes a painful visit. He's written this letter that was sent with Titus, he now goes and makes this painful visit to Corinth, where he's not listened to by the particular aggressive brother in Corinth, who's been such a trouble maker there, and now as we see in 2 Corinthians 7, he's writing what we have as 2 Corinthians, because when Titus returns he reports that many in the ecclesia had listened to Paul's counsel. There's still a little group, a group of people who have clustered around this one brother who are still problem makers; so although many had listened there were still some (they were claiming to be superior apostles, in fact, there's a word that appears in 2 Corinthians which the apostle seems to have coined specially to describe these people). It's a word which is '**super apostles**' (hyper apostles because that's the Greek word that's used) and just as you can be hyperactive, so these were hyper apostles, they thought they were better than anyone else and they thought in particular they were better than the apostle Paul. They didn't think anything of him, highly critical of everything that he said and did! The letter of 2 Corinthians is just a heartfelt appeal from Paul; he just lays himself bare before them and makes an appeal in the hope that this particular hard-nosed group that's created such a problem, might yet be won for Christ.

Now let's put all of that together, shall we? and just see a sequence of visits and letters that Paul has with Corinth. So the first **visit** to Corinth when many of the brethren and sisters are converted to Christianity, took place during the 2nd missionary journey, that's Acts 18. Then we've discovered that there's a **letter** which doesn't appear in our New

Testament, and it was written by Paul probably from Ephesus about the serious moral problems that existed in the city. That letter achieved little it seems, and so they, the Corinthian ecclesia themselves, ask the apostle various questions; they send him a **letter**, that's the one the 3 brethren mention in 1 Corinthians 16, bring to him, to which our 1st Corinthians is an answer. So we've now put in another **letter** and that is, the one we have in the New Testament, 1 Corinthians. So of those 3 letters, the first and the third are from the apostle Paul, the middle one is from Corinth to Paul, and we don't have that one either, all we've got are Paul's answers to their questions.

Then what follows? Well, that stern, sharp **letter** of rebuke that the apostle has to send; the letter that he almost regrets sending, but felt it was necessary to send and which was followed up you may recall, by his short **visit**. So Paul makes this short visit during his 3rd missionary journey and it's actually mentioned in Acts 19. It's after that, that we then get this **letter** that we know as 2 Corinthians; so all together, 4 letters from the apostle, 1 letter from Corinth, 2 visits from the apostle Paul, and constantly all the way through 2 Corinthians he's referring to the possibility that he might visit them on the third occasion, so we know there had got to be 2 preceding visits and those are the two in blue on that slide. So if you can somehow hold that framework in mind, that's Paul's contact with Corinth and Corinth's contact with him, then it will help you to see where the various parts fit in, when we're reading passages, either from 1 Corinthians or from 2 Corinthians. Remember there are the other letters and the different visits which have to take their place.

What we want to do in particular this morning, is to look at how the apostle Paul dealt with the really serious issues that existed in Corinth; because what we can learn from this, if this was the apostle Paul's approach to ecclesial problems and difficulties, how can we approach any similar difficulties that may arise and affect us or our ecclesia and all local ecclesias to us. So let's go back, shall we? to 1 Corinthians 1, the chapter that we read together, and remember that we looked yesterday at a list of concerns and out of that list of problems we showed the 10 most serious problems that existed in Corinth, the major one in the apostle's mind was **this case of partisanship**; that there were schisms in the ecclesia, there were little groups, little cliques of people all gathering together around their own individual leaders, and there was clear blue water between each of them. They were having nothing to do with each other, they were critical of the other groups and in particular they were critical of the apostle Paul, although it may be that at least one of the groups was a supporter of the apostle Paul, and they were constantly quoting things that he'd said which riled the other groups. You can understand how something like that could happen, can't you?

Well, Paul's approach, first of all is, don't look at them as a human being would look at them, don't look at them with men's eyes, always try and look at an ecclesial problem **from Christ's point of view**. What does the Lord Jesus think about this? What would Jesus do about it? and of course, we're able to ask that question because we see the Lord's comments about ecclesias. We can read through, for example, the letters in Revelation chapters 2 and 3 and see what the Lord thinks about issues that arise in

ecclesial life. We have His gracious teaching recorded for us in the gospels, and so we do know what the Lord's mind is about many of the issues that arise in ecclesial life. The first question that we should ask ourselves is, what would the Lord think? what would His point of view be about this particular issue? What the apostle does, if you look at verse 10 of 1 Corinthians 1, He **pleads** now with those who are involved, in this great prayer that he offers up, 'I beseech you, brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that ye all speak the same thing, and that there be no divisions among you'. This particular issue, the issue of a divided ecclesia we do know what the Lord would think about it! Did not the Lord Himself pray, in that wonderful prayer recorded for us in John 17, that His disciples should be one, even as He and His Father are one. So that's why the apostle can pray here, that there should be no divisions amongst the brethren and sisters in the ecclesia in Corinth. So this prayerful beseeching in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that's the emphasis, it is in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ; so you see, what he's trying to do is to lift the ecclesia to see themselves and their activities through the Lord's eyes rather than through their own.

Just to drive this point home, I don't know whether you've noticed but in the first 10 verses of 1 Corinthians 1, the apostle uses Jesus' name 10 times. (Now I don't know whether you like colouring things in your bible, but you could just colour the name of Christ, just follow through the first 10 verses and there are 10 mentions) and it just confirms, doesn't it? that what the apostle is doing is constantly reminding them about Christ. What this indicates to us, is that ecclesial problems are more likely to arise, the less our minds are focussed on the Lord Jesus. The surest antidote to issues arising is always talking and thinking and speaking about the Lord and His teachings and the purpose of God that's centred in Him. That's what the apostle Paul is trying to tell us, that's what he was trying to tell the ecclesia in Corinth and it's a vitally important teaching. You see, we can talk about all sorts of other things, we can talk about other things and claim that we're speaking scripturally, but the whole focus of scripture is upon the Lord Jesus. Unless we see the Lord on every page and in every verse, then we're missing something, that has to be the focus; take our eyes away from that focus and other things will start to crowd in and difficulties will arise, so that's why the apostle is beseeching them by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ to speak the same things and there be no division amongst you.

Then he goes on in that verse 10 (this is a crucial verse in this chapter), 'But that ye be perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment', and it's that little phrase **perfectly joined together** that becomes so important; there's the Greek word, 'katartizo' - (2675) to be perfectly joined together and he's beseeching them to speak the same thing, there should be no divisions, and they must be of the same mind, same judgment, they are to be perfectly joined. It actually picks up an idea from the construction of the tabernacle in Old Testament times, where each part of the tabernacle had it's own jointing system so that the various parts could be perfectly joined together. As the children of Israel were constructing the tabernacle, they were to learn from that, that the tabernacle was to be **one, it was to be one tent**, although they were many and their craftsmanship was in each of the parts of the tabernacle, they

were now being brought together and joined together, fixed together, connected together, a tenon into a socket, and interestingly when the scriptures use that phrase, for **a tenon** they use the Hebrew word which means 'a hand', so **hand in hand** the individual parts were to join together and that describes **fellowship to us**. Fellowship is hand in hand, that's how we stand with our brethren and sisters, there is that contact, that close contact between us; that's how it should be within ecclesial life and that's how it should be between ecclesias. Ecclesias should join together as it were, hand in hand with each other. That's the message that the apostle is trying to get across to the brethren and sisters in Corinth.

It's interesting but that same word appears in Matthew 4, you'll remember the occasion, this is right at the beginning of the ministry of the Lord Jesus Christ, and we're told in verse 18, that Jesus was walking by the sea of Galilee, and as He walks He sees two brethren, Simon called Peter and Andrew his brother casting a net into the sea, for they were fishers. And Jesus calls to them to turn from that occupation to become fishers of men; and we're told in verse 20, 'straightway they left their nets and followed Jesus. And going on from thence, He saw other two brethren, sons of Zebedee, James and John, they were in a ship with Zebedee their father making sure that their nets were perfectly joined together.' 'Katartizo' is translated in verse 21 of Matthew 4 as '**mending**', so the nets had to be perfectly joined together. So what the apostle is telling the ecclesia in Corinth is that they were like a torn fishing net and some **mending** needed to be undertaken so that this net could once again catch men! Remember, that's one of the twin functions of ecclesial life; ecclesial life has 2 purposes 1. it provides consolation and encouragement for our brethren and sisters and the second purpose of ecclesial life is, 2. that it must be a lampstand shedding forth the light of gospel truth to those that are around us. Corinth was failing miserably against both of those objectives, and it was certainly failing in being able to shed forth the light of gospel truth. So they were like a torn fishing net that needed mending!

But it wasn't only Corinth that was torn apart, by their divisions they were tearing Christ apart, what an awful thing! Now you could understand how the apostle comes to this conclusion, if you just cast your mind back 24 hours. What is it that we were doing 24 hours ago? we were meeting together to break bread, now the whole point of breaking bread is that we being many, recognize that we are one body. It's as if as that loaf is broken into its various pieces, each of us acknowledges that our true place is in the one loaf, and we are partaking of that as the bread is shared amongst us. Now we're not seeking to tear Christ apart at the memorial meeting, but very much the opposite; what we're trying to do is to acknowledge that we are part of Him, and that we'll do nothing to tear Him apart. But the Corinthians were! in their daily ecclesial life, they were **tearing Him apart as they were torn apart, one from another**. If we don't wish to tear Christ apart, then we have to be together as brethren and sisters, despite our differences, despite our difficulties, we have consciously to come together and to be together at every opportunity.

So it was He that they were dividing! just turn to Hebrews 10, and you'll know this verse

very well, but you may not have seen it in this context before; the apostle is saying in Hebrews 10 verse 4 that it wasn't possible under the Old Testament dispensation, for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins. They were but representative of the one perfect sacrifice that will be made, and it was the giving of the life of the Lord Jesus Christ, through which sins will be forgiven, both theirs and ours. 'Wherefore, verse 5, when that One who was to be the sacrifice cometh into the world, He saith, Sacrifice and offering Thou wouldst not, but a body hast Thou **prepared Me**'. That word **prepared** translates that Greek word 'katartizo' (2675), Jesus was a body perfectly joined together; Jesus was complete! this was not a partial offering, **this was everything, it was all that mankind could possibly need**. It wasn't that Jesus was laying down His life just for one group in Corinth and not for the others, it wasn't that Jesus was laying down His life just for those with one colour of skin and not for others, just for men and not for women, just for masters and not for slaves. Jesus was **perfectly joined together**, He was a body prepared! and it's this information that the apostle is trying to impress upon the brethren and sisters of Corinth, and to show how dreadful, how awful their behaviour was and what they were really doing by having these divisions amongst themselves.

So we'll now ask this question back in 1 Corinthians 1 verse 13, is Christ divided? and it's Moffat's translation that's on the screen here - **Has Christ been parcelled out?** I like that because it does suggest that what the apostle is saying is, not just is Christ divided but has in some way Christ been given, part of Himself to group A, part to group B, part to group C, part to group D, have you all got a different perception of the Lord Jesus Christ? and those perceptions are not going to match at all! But Christ was perfectly joined together, Christ is one, Christ is unique, He is complete and what you're trying to do now by your dividing into separate groups within the ecclesia, is to take a part of Christ and not see the rest. Of course, this is a great danger for us, isn't it? at all times in terms of the scriptures that we will have parts of scripture which are our favourites, they somehow answer to our personalities; you know, we all fall into different personality groups in a sense and there are things which are attractive to us, because of our personality. We can focus on those to the exclusion of other things and yet that's not what God is calling us to do, instead God is calling us **to have a more rounded character than that**. That's the way of the world to say just do those things which will answer your needs, rather than to be more like the Lord Jesus Christ who was perfectly joined together; that's why it's so important for us not to pick and chose which parts of scripture we shall read, or which parts of scripture we shall study. That's why the apostle says on another occasion, 'I've not shunned from speaking to you the whole counsel of God' Acts 20 verse 27, showing both sides of God's character, that God is both merciful to those on whom He will show mercy, and will be vengeful on those on whom His revenge rightly falls; it's the same God and we need to see those two sides of His character and understand them fully. So the apostle says to the ecclesia at Corinth, don't parcel out Christ, don't try and divide Him up, don't take just the part that you think is for your needs and ignore the rest.

What was happening was that these different parties with their party leaders in Corinth

were just acting like brute beasts; look at verse 11, 'For it hath been declared unto me of you, my brethren, by them which are of the house of Chloe, that there are contentions among you'. The word variously translated 'contentions' = variance, debates, strife, quarrelings, it gives a flavour of what was happening in Corinth. It wasn't just that these groups separated and everything was neat and tidy as if somehow they were all sitting at separate tables like you are, (but we're getting on quite nicely, thank you very much); no! they were throwing insults at each other, there were arguments raging within the ecclesia, and that was the information that came to the apostle and it cut him to the quick! He just didn't like it at all.

So Paul gives each of these groups a 'code' name; you see, if you turn to chapter 4 verse 6 the apostle says, 'And these things, brethren, I have **in a figure** (that's where the emphasis is in that verse) **I have in a figure** transferred to myself and to Apollos for your sakes. So back in chapter 1 where he talks about one group being Paul's group, one being Peter's, and one being Apollos's and one being Christ's, it's not that there was a group following Paul although actually there may have been; not that there was a group following Peter or a group following Apollos or you can scarcely thing it, can you? a group claiming to follow Christ. It wasn't that, it's just that Paul has given them these ciphers, that was the name he gave the group. You could actually put names to those which were true names, real names; there were ringleaders of those groups, I doubt there was a Fortunatus group or a Stephanas group, but whatever the names of the brethren in Corinth were, those names were real names and Paul has just changed them in order to preserve the confidentiality of their identity, because he's appealing now for them to change their ways, and how awful it would be if the names had been preserved for posterity, so that we knew who they were, if in fact, ultimately they did change their ways, and started to be perfectly joined together. But the very fact that he gives names to each of the groups, tells us that each group had a leader, a brother who was a leader, around whom the others joined. You know, it's an awful danger, it happened in the history of the brotherhood sadly, that you get brethren who have followings; now you should never put a brother on a pedestal, because it doesn't work. Every brother has feet of clay, you shouldn't put them on a pedestal, you shouldn't follow a brother, but we should be following Christ, He's our Lord and no one should come in the way between us and Him, that's what the apostle is trying to say!

So he asks this question you see, was Paul crucified for you? these brethren aren't your saviours! and as soon as he asks the question, of course, the stupidity of the situation is apparent, isn't it? How can you follow someone who isn't your saviour, the only one you can follow is the one that can save you! the one who can offer you salvation. Paul adds his answer to it as well and says how thankful he was that in his preaching, verse 17, 'for Christ sent me not to baptize, but to preach the gospel', and he said how thankful he was that he had actually baptized very few in Corinth; because you can see what would happen, can't you? You could have those brethren in Corinth who said, 'well, of course, we were baptized by the apostle Paul!' as if somehow their baptism was better than the baptism that was undertaken by someone else. The important thing was that they were all baptized into Christ, not who did the baptizing. It's a very good

practice for anyone who gets involved in mission work, it's not yourself to baptize new converts, but to try and get the brethren in the country where you're working to do the baptizing, otherwise you'll find that brethren in those countries will feel, 'well, I've been baptized by someone from Canada, from the UK, by someone from America, therefore, I'm somehow better than the others', and it's not true! The person that baptizes you is of no importance whatsoever; you may recall towards the beginning of the ecclesial guide, brother Roberts deals with this matter and says, 'does it really concern you who should do the baptizing? what if there isn't anybody there? what if you can't find a brother to baptize you?' and brother Roberts says, 'well, it's better if there is a brother who can do it, but the person who does the baptizing is nothing, it's the fact that you go down into the water declaring your faith, that is the important thing!' That's exactly what the apostle Paul is saying here, isn't it? The message, the preaching of the cross is the important truth and the person's response to it by going down into the water is the vital part for them, not who it is who witnesses that they've been completely covered by the water, that's almost immaterial.

So he says here in verse 18, 'For the preaching of the cross is to them that perish foolishness', the preaching of the cross. Now we sometimes get a little uneasy, I don't quite know why (you might like to tell me later, because I'm much in some uneasiness here), we sometimes get uneasy when we talk about the cross. Now Paul specifically uses that phrase in this verse, the 'preaching of the cross' is to them that perish foolishness; it doesn't say the preaching of **crucifixion**, it doesn't say the preaching of **salvation**, it doesn't say the preaching of **redemption**, he says the preaching of the **cross**! he's deliberately using that word, he's talking about the instruments. He's clearly using that however, to describe everything that happened on the cross, but we have to ask ourselves why it is he's speaking about the cross? 'the preaching of the cross is to them that perish foolishness'.

Well, perhaps it's worth our while to ask where crucifixion came from? Crucifixion wasn't invented by the Romans, it was invented by the Phoenicians but was adopted by the Romans, not because it was the swiftest form of execution, because it wasn't; not because it was the surest form of execution, because it wasn't! Crucifixion was adopted by the Romans for a particular purpose. You see, **it brought shame to the victim and it was bringing horror to anyone who witnessed it**; it was done to adopt an awful phrase which is something to encourage the others, in other words, to encourage anyone who wasn't on the cross to better behaviour, warning them what might befall them if they undertake the same crime as the person who was being crucified. So the hallmark of crucifixion is **shame, utter shame** and, of course, the Lord was prepared to undergo that shame in order to bring salvation to us. That's the great teaching of the cross for us, isn't it? that the apostle is speaking about here, when he talks about the preaching of the cross is to them that perish foolishness.

He goes on to say that it was a stumbling block to the Jews, and we know why it was, Galatians 3 reveals this to us, doesn't it? 'that anyone who hangs on a tree is cursed by the Law'. So therefore the preaching of the cross was a stumbling block to Jews, how

could you have a cursed **saviour**, how could you have a cursed Christ? and it was very difficult for them to understand that, and it required all of Paul's great abilities of logical argument to try and set out how it was that the curse was turned to a blessing, the blessing of Abraham might come not only on Jews but also upon Gentiles. To the Greeks it was folly, how can you accept as a saviour one who has been crucified? one who undertook such a shameful act as that, how can you accept Him as your saviour?

But the whole message, you see, was this, and it was declared by the crucifixion more clearly than by any other means at all, verse 25 'that **God's weakness is stronger than man-stronger than anything that man can do!** Now we're really getting to the nub of the apostle's argument, where he's trying to deal with this problem in Corinth, where they're all divided up into separate groups. We've already thought that it's the priority of the Lord Jesus Christ in their lives that they'd lost sight of, and now he's saying, you're to see the Lord crucified; you're to set your eyes on the cross! Now don't be worried about that at all, if you think about it in the context of which we saw it, that's how the Corinthians were to think of the Lord Jesus Christ. They were to see Him **crucified**, it's interesting, isn't it? how the apostle says, 'I determine to know nothing amongst you save Jesus Christ and Him crucified, that's right at the beginning of 2 Corinthians, so he's actually speaking about the brethren and sisters in Corinth, he's had his method of preaching in Athens about the unknown god, but when he comes to Corinth, what he's going to preach is Christ crucified because he wants to get over this point, **God's weakness is stronger than men!**

The whole message is one that's going to confound the wise, verse 25, 'the foolishness of God is wiser than men, the weakness of God is stronger than men; you see your calling brethren; how that not many wise men after the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble are called'. So these leaders of the groups in Corinth who thought themselves so wonderful, well, really they weren't! because God does not call the mighty, God does not call the proud, God does not call the noble generally speaking, but what He has done is that His message is much more easily accepted by those who are humble, those who recognize their true position those who realize where they stand in the sight of God. So he now talks about this great principle of how the wise are going to be confounded. He says you find that principle, in the Old Testament first of all and it's found in Jeremiah 9, in some of the most wonderful words in the whole of scripture and it's this passage on which the apostle Paul basis his great teaching, which is the theme for this session this morning, 'that no flesh should glory in God's presence'.

Verses 23 and 24 of Jeremiah 9, 'Thus saith the LORD, Let not the wise man glory in his wisdom, neither let the mighty man glory in his might, let not the rich man glory in his riches: But let him that glorieth glory in this, that he understandeth and knoweth Me, that I am the LORD which exercise loving kindness, judgment, and righteousness in the earth: for in these things I delight, saith the LORD'. So perhaps the groups in Corinth were lead by one man who claimed his wisdom, and another who claimed his might, and another man who claimed his riches, and the apostle is saying, none of those things, not wisdom, not might, not riches, these are not the things that God is seeking,

but what He is seeking is the humble understanding heart of the person who comes to know God! 'This is life eternal, the Lord Jesus says in John 17 verse 3, 'that they might know thee, the only true God and Jesus Christ whom Thou hast sent'.

Then back in 1 Corinthians 1, that principle that God has chosen the weak things of the world and the foolish things to confound the wise and the mighty, that principle was proved in action by Paul's preaching both in Athens and in Corinth. Having tried the wise men and found them wanting, the apostle now turns to Corinth, and determines to know nothing amongst them but Jesus Christ and Him crucified. It was also proved by Paul himself as the Corinthians would bear witness. Was he the silken tongued orator? no, his speech was contemptible! Was he the handsome dashing leader of men? no, he was a pitiful looking person, they said so themselves. What about the arrival? did he come with trumpets blaring? no, he didn't! his arrival in Corinth was totally unremarkable and unremarked, because God chooses the weak things of the world to confound the mighty and the foolish things of the world to confound the wise. For the reason, as verse 29 says, 'no flesh should glory in God's presence'.

So what is it that causes partisanship? what was it that brought these groups to Corinth? Well, firstly, **overemphasis on an individual** which is always to be shunned, if at all possible. Secondly, **a lack of humility to receive divine teaching**, just believing that it's possible to sort things out in our own minds and not to hear what our brethren and sisters are telling us from the Word of God, because as the apostle says in verse 14 of chapter 2, 'the natural man does not receive the things of the Spirit; they are foolishness unto him; neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned'. So if it is the natural man rather than the spiritual man, then we're going to find groups developing around him, if we're not careful. Then lastly, **too ready to apply human solutions to problems which are spiritual**, and ecclesial problems always had a spiritual basis, they might concern natural things, but because they occur in the ecclesia, they are spiritual and they have to be resolved spiritually. So it's not necessarily the person who is well trained in administration in the world who can resolve those things, it's the person who is humble to the Word of God who can resolve spiritual issues because he applies his spiritual mind to them.

Then in this section which runs right the way through to the end of chapter 3, Paul finishes with an appeal **not to be deceived**, one of the apostle's favourite phrases, this is verse 18 of 1 Corinthians 3, 'Let no man deceive himself. If any man among you seemeth to be wise in this world, let him become a fool that he may be wise'. You see, it turns on its head all the things that the world would normally teach us; so worldly wisdom is foolishness with God, therefore, let no one boast in man, whoever that man may be; 'no man is worthy of boasting by another, he says that 'all things can be yours in Christ, the end of verse 21 of 1 Corinthians 3, 'all things are yours whether Paul or Apollos, or Cephas or the world, or life, or death, or things present, or things to come; **all are yours. Ye are Christ's; and Christ is God's**'. So he tries to bring everything to the courts, the bar of judgment of the Lord Jesus Christ, 'I beseech you therefore, brethren **in the name of** our Lord Jesus Christ, that ye be perfectly joined together, and

that there be no divisions amongst you'.