



WESTMINSTER
PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

“THE TROUBLERS”

John Galbreath
Bible Study Series

Text: I Corinthians 1:4-25
Date: July 18, 1976

About Westminster's Galbreath Bible Study Series:

This lesson is one taken from a sermon preached by John Galbreath at Westminster Presbyterian Church on July 18, 1976.

To complete the lesson, we suggest that you begin by reading the designated Bible passage (I Corinthians 1:4-25).

Next, review the outline of the sermon. Reflect on the chosen scripture and how you would “fill in” the remainder of the message from the chosen passage.

Then, review the study questions posed about the lesson — whether by yourself or in your small group.

Finally, share your thoughts on the Galbreath Bible Study blog on the Westminster Intranet.

I. Introduction

A. The church of Corinth was in trouble

1. Corinth is located at the intersection of the hour glass on the Isthmus of Corinth.
 - a) *Commercial capital of Greece, for all that went North or South passed through, and ships taking the overland across the isthmus – or trans-shipping goods across.*
2. Rome had sacked the city 200 years before, but later rebuilt it with Roman Army veterans.
 - a) *Greek, Cypriot, Jewish, other population settled – a very polyglot city.*
3. Paul spent more time there than any other city outside Palestine, with the possible exception of Ephesus.
 - a) *It was from Ephesus that the letter was written from which we read this morning.*
4. Chloe's servants brought news to Paul of divisiveness within the congregation.
 - a) *It was to this issue that Paul wrote his first letter.*

II. The Conflict

A. Schismata – as a tear in a cloth.

1. "I am of Paul"
 - a) *Paul, raised a Pharisee of the Pharisees, a Jewish legalist had, upon conversation, discovered the freedom in Christ.*
 - b) *At the heart of his gospel was the conviction that in Christ the law was fulfilled, and we are saved, not by our good works, but by faith in Him.*
 - c) *A dangerous belief for those who chose to use it as an excuse for unprincipled living.*
 - (1) Most especially in a city such as Corinth.
 - (2) On a knoll above the city was the temple of Aphrodite, and each night 1,000 sacred prostitutes plied their trade in the name of God.
 - d) *What dismay, that they should use liberty as excuse for licentiousness – and all in the name of Paul!*

B. “I am of Appollos.”

1. Appollos was a Jewish scholar from Alexandria, Egypt.
 - a) *He had come following Paul’s ministry.*
 - b) *As one with strong philosophical background, he had a special appeal to the Greeks – for was not Greece the philosophical capital of the civilization?*
2. The followers of Appollos were making a head trip of the faith.
 - a) *Looking down their noses upon those who found their syllogisms difficult to follow.*
 - b) *In the process of making a philosophy of Christianity, they had robbed it of all personal commitment. An academic exercise for the sophisticated.*
 - c) *Greeks loved academic disputation, and it became one more Greek school of thought.*

C. “I am of Peter.”

1. The Jews were reluctant to see the gentiles make off with what had been their faith.
 - a) *Was not Jesus a Jew? Did He not attend synagogue, and preach from the Torah? Was not Paul a Jewish teacher? Did not Jesus say, “I came not to destroy the law but to fulfill it?”*
 - b) *They wanted to keep Christianity as a Jewish denomination and saw these gentiles as interlopers, perverting the truth faith.*
 - c) *They were trying to insist that gentiles follow the Jewish customs if they could claim to be Christian.*

D. “I am of Christ.”

1. It is difficult to surmise what their particular tack might have been.
2. They claimed exclusivity.

III. The Terms of Our Faith (I Corinthians 1, 2)”**A. “The Church of God which is at Corinth.”**

1. Their congregation was not the church – much less, was their particular group within that congregation.

- a) *If they were part of the church of God, they were part of something far larger, and they must see themselves with a sense of humor.*
- b) *What is the church was not to be determined solely by the ruminations of their clique.*
- c) *They had obligation to hear and to be guided by the whole church.*

B. “To those who have been consecrated in Christ Jesus.”

- 1. In those first ten verses, Paul uses Jesus’s name ten times.
 - a) *They were using the church for their personal needs – the libertarians for their sensuous needs, the intellectuals for their pride, the Jews for their ethnic exclusivity, the “Christers” for their own arrogance.*
- 2. “In the company of those who in every place call upon the name of our Lord Jesus – their Lord and ours.”
 - a) *The beauty of being part of a world church is that no one of us – and no small group of us – is called upon to know all truth for all time.*
 - b) *“Come, hear the witness of believers of past generations – and of fellow believers the world over.”*

IV. The Church Today

A. Division in the church today.

- 1. Next week, we wish to speak of “Holy War” as seen in Ireland and Lebanon.

B. Where rightly perceived, we sense the oneness of the Church.

- 1. In Sasebo, Japan where our planes had fire bombed, not only Buddhist temples but Protestant churches as well, we, the first enemy troops worshipped in the home of our former enemy.
- 2. In Moscow, I have savored the incense, heard the a cappella singing of the Russian Orthodox choir, observed the solemnity of their mass, the warm pastoral message of a church under siege.
- 3. I have sat on the floor of a mud hut on the banks of the Barra and sung hymns composed by men who could not read or write.

4. In Jamaica, I heard a sermon in a church converted from a cabaret – a sermon that would have done justice to Riverside Church in New York.

5. In Hawaii, an authentic full-blooded, barrel-chested Hawaiian, with bare hands, tore the pork from a pig, roasted in the ground by hot stones in his entrails – a festival prepared for the choir of my Marine regiment by members of the first Christian congregation in the Hawaiian islands.

C. In all this, I sense the presence of the same Spirit of Christ.

1. The antidote to disunity lies in our knowledge that we are part of something and someone far bigger than ourselves.

V. Conclusion

I would testify to the oneness in Christ that I have sensed in this fellowship. We have faced many issues. We have come from widely varied backgrounds. Our differences have been shared in integrity and respect.

Study Questions -- Part I*Bible Reading: 1 Corinthians 1:4-25*

1 Corinthians 1:4 through 9 say: ⁴ I always thank my God for you because of his grace given you in Christ Jesus. ⁵ For in him you have been enriched in every way—with all kinds of speech and with all knowledge— ⁶ God thus confirming our testimony about Christ among you. ⁷ Therefore you do not lack any spiritual gift as you eagerly wait for our Lord Jesus Christ to be revealed. ⁸ He will also keep you firm to the end, so that you will be blameless on the day of our Lord Jesus Christ. ⁹ God is faithful, who has called you into fellowship with his Son, Jesus Christ our Lord.

- In what ways has God enriched you? What knowledge has he provided?
- Do you ever feel that you *do* lack spiritual gifts? How do you deal with that feeling?

1 Corinthians 1:10 through 12 say: ¹⁰ I appeal to you, brothers and sisters, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that all of you agree with one another in what you say and that there be no divisions among you, but that you be perfectly united in mind and thought. ¹¹ My brothers and sisters, some from Chloe's household have informed me that there are quarrels among you. ¹² What I mean is this: One of you says, "I follow Paul"; another, "I follow Apollos"; another, "I follow Cephas"; still another, "I follow Christ."

- How can we work to be perfectly united in mind and thought with those in our congregation? In our community?
- What quarrels do we see among Christians that we can work to eliminate?

1 Corinthians 1:13 through 17 say: ¹³ Is Christ divided? Was Paul crucified for you? Were you baptized into the name of Paul? ¹⁴ I thank God that I did not baptize any of you except Crispus and Gaius, ¹⁵ so no one can say that you were baptized into my name. ¹⁶ (Yes, I also baptized the household of Stephanas; beyond that, I don't remember if I baptized anyone else.) ¹⁷ For Christ did not send me to baptize, but to preach the gospel—not with wisdom and eloquence, lest the cross of Christ be emptied of its power.

- In what ways are you expected to preach the gospel?

1 Corinthians 1:18 through 25 say: 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. ¹⁹ For it is written: "I will destroy the wisdom of the wise; the intelligence of the intelligent I will frustrate." ²⁰ Where are the wise? Where is the teacher of the law? Where is the philosopher of this age? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of the world? ²¹ For since in the wisdom of God the world through its wisdom did not know him, God was pleased through the foolishness of what was preached to save those who believe. ²² Jews demand signs and Greeks look for wisdom, ²³ but we preach Christ crucified: a stumbling block to Jews and foolishness to Gentiles, ²⁴ but to those whom God has called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God. ²⁵ For the foolishness of God is wiser than human wisdom, and the weakness of God is stronger than human strength.

- How do you always remember the truth of verse 25?

Study Questions -- Part II

Sermon :

I.A.2.a. What cities today might be equivalent to the Corinth of the time?

II.A.1.c. Are there times when you see people claiming that their faith excuses them from even having to try to live a principled life? How do you counsel people who interpret their faith that way?

II.B.2.a. Are there Christians today who seem to “look down their noses” at other Christians? What would you say to them?

III.A.1.a. In what situations do you think the church needs to have a sense of humor about itself?

III.B.2.a. In what way does it impact your faith knowing that you are not expected to know all of the truth?

III.B.2.b. What can we learn by listening to fellow believers in cultures around the world?

IV.A. In what ways do you think the church in 1976 was divided? Do you think the divisions are greater or smaller today? What can we do to try to eliminate them?

IV.B. Where have you shared the oneness of the Church?

V. How do you share differences with other Christians with integrity and respect?