I appeal to you, brothers, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that all of you agree, and that there be no divisions among you, but that you be united in the same mind and the same judgment. (1 Corinthians 1:10)

God of all healing, you know our human sinfulness and how we get into arguments and have differences of opinion that aren't handled well. Help us to learn to handle conflicts in the Body of Christ with dignity, patience, and love. May we always recall your goodness and your love for all people and model that toward one another. In thanksgiving for your grace, we pray in Jesus' holy name. Amen.

Introduction

Paul wrote letters to the churches that he had founded to keep in touch with believers and encourage them in their faith. People of the churches often had questions and problems for which they needed help. They looked to Paul for advice and instruction, especially in times of conflict.

Read: 1 Corinthians 1:1-25

On reading these verses, what are some of your initial impressions and questions? What stands out to you?

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The Biblical Context

Sometimes we look back on the early church and imagine it to be a "golden age" of faith and fellowship — in contrast to our own, where it is easy to see how the problems of the world seem to find their way into the Church and our relationships with others. But Scripture shows us that even in biblical days, Christian congregations experienced strife and conflict.

In some ways, it is reassuring to see that the early believers were sinners just like us and they didn't always agree. Paul wrote his letter to Corinth to a group of people that didn't always get along. Nevertheless, he affirmed that the Holy Spirit was at work in their lives together, just as the Spirit is for us.

Discussion Questions

1. Scholars suggest that Paul wrote his letter from Ephesus, in Asia Minor. From what you read in 1 Corinthians 1, how did it appear that Paul learned of what was going on back in Corinth, Greece?

2. Read Acts 18:1-11, where Paul's initial visit to Corinth is described. Who are some of the people Paul met there? Do you get the impression that there were few or many believers in that city?

3. How would you describe the way Paul begins his letter to the Corinthians? Do they appear to have a good relationship? Why do you think they brought their questions to Paul, so far away?

4. Why does Paul say (v. 14) that he's glad he didn't do many baptisms in Corinth? Does this mean Paul was against baptism? What point is Paul making here?

5. In Galatians 5:20, Paul refers to factions (rivalries, dissensions, divisions) as evidence of human sin. What causes people to break up into groups or opposing parties? Why does this happen even in the Church?

6. In verses 16-17, Paul transitions from talking about disagreements to the subject of wisdom and the "foolishness" of the Gospel. What do these things have to do with each other? What is Paul getting at?

7. In what sense is the word of the cross "folly"? Why would Paul say this? What is he telling us about ourselves? What is he saying about the way God works among us?

8. Read Proverbs 1:2-7. The psalmist says, "The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge." How would you argue that we can't have true wisdom apart from faith?

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