

# **Preface To The First Epistle Of Saint Paul To The Corinthians 1545**

**(1546 and 1530)**

In this Epistle, St. Paul exhorts the Corinthians to be one in faith and love and be careful to learn the chief thing, at which all reason and wisdom stumbles; namely, that Christ is our salvation.

In our day, when the Gospel has come to light, there are many mad saints, — called spirits of sedition, fanatics, and heretics, who have become wise and learned all too quickly, and, because of their great knowledge and wisdom, cannot live in harmony with anybody. One wants to go this way, another that way; as though it would be a great shame, if everyone were not to try something of his own and to put forth his own wisdom. No one can make them see their folly, for, at bottom, they neither know nor understand anything about the really important matters, even though they jabber much about them with their mouths.

So it was with St. Paul, too. He had taught his Corinthians the Christian faith and freedom from the law; but the mad saints came along, and the unripe wise men; they split the unity of the doctrine and made a division among the believers. One would be a Paulist, another an Appollist, another a Petrist, another a Christist; one wanted circumcision, another not; one wanted marriage, another not; one wanted to eat meat sacrificed to idols, another not; some wanted to be free from slavery; some of the women wanted to go with uncovered hair, and so on. They carried it so far that one man abused his liberty and married his stepmother; some did not believe in the resurrection of the dead; some thought lightly of the Sacrament.

Things got so wild and disorderly that everyone wanted to be master and to teach, and make what he pleased of the Gospel, the Sacrament and faith. Meanwhile, they let the main thing go, as though it were long since worn out; — namely, that Christ is our salvation, our righteousness, our redemption. This truth can never hold the road, when people begin to be knowing and wise. That is just what is now happening to us. Now that we, by God's grace have opened the Gospel to the Germans, everyone wants to be the best master and have the Holy Ghost all to himself, as though the Gospel had been preached in order that we should show our cleverness and reason, and seek for reputation. These Corinthians may well be an example for our people in these days, for they, too, need such an epistle. But this is the way things have to go with the Gospel; mad saints and unripe wise-men have to start disturbances and offenses, so that the "approved," as St. Paul says, may be manifest.

Therefore St. Paul rebukes and condemns this dangerous wisdom most severely and makes fools of these saucy saints. He says outright that they know nothing of Christ, or of the spirit and gifts of God, given to us in Christ, and that they should begin to learn. There must be spiritual folk who understand it. The desire to be wise and the pretense of cleverness in the Gospel are the things that really give offense and hinder the knowledge of Christ and God, and start disturbances and

contentions. This clever wisdom and reason can well serve to make mad saints and wild Christians; but they can never, never know our Lord Christ, unless they first become fools again, and humbly let themselves be taught and led by the simple Word of God. This is what he deals with in the first four chapters.

In chapter 5, he rebukes the gross unchastity of the man who had married his stepmother, and would put him under the ban and give him over to the devil. Thus he shows the right way of using the ban; it must be laid upon open vice, with the consent of the believing congregation, as Christ also teaches in Matthew 18:17.

In chapter 6, he rebukes contention and disputing before the courts, especially before heathen and unbelievers; and teaches them that they shall either settle their cases among themselves or suffer wrong.

In chapter 7, he gives instruction concerning chastity and the wedded state. He praises chastity and virginity, saying that they are profitable for the better attending to the Gospel; as Christ also teaches, in Matthew 19:12, concerning the chaste who are chaste for the sake of the Gospel or the kingdom of heaven. But Paul wills that it shall not be forced or compulsory, and that it shall not be kept at the risk of greater sin; otherwise, marriage is better than a chastity which is a continual burning.

In chapters 8 to 12, he discusses, in many ways, how weak consciences are to be led and how men are to conduct themselves in external matters, like eating, drinking, apparel, and taking the Sacrament. Everywhere he forbids the strong to despise the weak, since he himself, though he is an apostle, has refrained from many things to which he had a right. Moreover the strong may well be afraid, because, in ancient Israel, so many were destroyed of those who were brought out of Egypt with miracles. Alongside of this, he makes some digressions of wholesome doctrine.

In chapters 12 and 13, he discusses the many different gifts of God, among which love is the best, and teaches them not to exalt themselves but to serve one another in unity of spirit, because there is one God, one Lord, one Spirit, and everything is one, no matter how much diversity there is.

In chapter 14, he teaches the preachers, prophets, and singers to use their gifts in an orderly manner and only for edification, and not put forward their sermons, knowledge, and understanding to gain honor for themselves.

In chapter 15, he rebukes those who had taught and believed wrongly concerning the resurrection of the flesh.

In the last chapter he exhorts them to brotherly assistance of the needy with temporal support.