

FACTIONS IN CORINTHIAN HOUSE CHURCHES

For it has been reported to me by Chloe's people that there are quarrels among you, my brothers and sisters. What I mean is that each of you says, "I belong to Paul" or "I belong to Apollos," or I belong to Cephas," or "I belong to Christ."

--1 Corinthians 1:11-12

You are a member of one house church that meets together each evening to share a meal followed by worship and study. Your leader is Chloe, who runs a weaving shop in Corinth. You used to meet in her shop, but the group got too large, so now you meet in the home of Erastus, who is a clerk in the treasurer's office in Corinth and is wealthier and aspiring to a higher social status. You have more space to meet, but new problems have arisen, especially relating to the evening meal.

THOSE WHO BELONG TO PAUL

Your faction is led by Chloe herself. You care deeply about the unity of the house church, but big obstacles have arisen. For one, it seems that the assembly cannot wait until everyone comes and then eat the common evening meal together as a Supper of the Lord.

Most of you are manual laborers; some are slaves, some are shopowners or work for some skilled artisan making statues or bronze objects, spinning, sewing, etc. You can never raise your social status.

You generally agree with everything that Paul said in his letter in chapter 11:17-34. However, he comes on a bit strong, and you are not sure how the Apollos faction will take Paul's language.

Your task is to present Paul's view and show how his insistence on everyone eating together is the way to follow Jesus's practice of eating with all kinds of people—*together*.

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THOSE WHO BELONG TO CHRIST

Everyone in your faction shares one thing in common: you are either a slave or a former slave. Some of you were abandoned at birth to die, but were rescued and raised as slaves. You previously worshiped one of the goddesses, Isis or Demeter, but did not find any relief from the daily burden of life as an abused slave, often raped by your owner or sent to be part of a house of prostitutes.

Through baptism into the body of Christ, you have experienced a life-transformation. Paul's message of "in Christ there is no longer slave or free, no longer male and female" has brought hope and a growing sense of self-worth.

You have embraced Christ's Spirit's presence in your midst, and you demonstrate this by prophecy and speaking in tongues. With nothing to lose (except a possible beating?), you have become fearless, and you argue with those of Apollos who do not provide enough food for the common meals. You think that "in Christ" everyone ought to eat the same food together.

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THOSE WHO BELONG TO APOLLOS

Your leader, Apollos, who comes from the great intellectual center of Alexandria in Egypt, arrived in Corinth after Paul had left. You are especially attracted with his eloquent speaking abilities.

Apollos's message is not a great deal different from Paul's, but he is less blunt and seems more accepting of your present lifestyle. Those in your faction hold positions in Corinth's civic government, not top positions, but responsible ones. Your social status is higher than people in the other factions. You have a chance at upward mobility, something not possible for the other believers in your group.

Consequently, you have become the patrons of the house church. You do favors for the others—help them get work if needed, sometimes give food handouts to those in poverty—but part of the reason you do this is to gain public honor for yourselves. It's nice when people of lower social status line up in front of your house each morning to publicly greet and honor you.

Because you do not do manual labor, you can start your meals in the late afternoon in Erastus's dining room. The problem is that most people must work until the sun sets and they come hungry. Often there is not much food left for them. Why can't they come on time?