

1 Corinthians 1

Introduction

Acts 18:1 tells us that Paul left Athens and went to Corinth. Verse 11 tells us that he spent a year and a half there. Why did He spend so long there when people weren't listening to him? Acts 18:9-10) tells us that he stayed so long because God told him to. He was under God's protection.

Acts 18:9 One night the Lord spoke to Paul in a vision: "Do not be afraid; keep on speaking, do not be silent. 10 For I am with you, and no one is going to attack and harm you, because I have many people in this city." 11 So Paul stayed in Corinth for a year and a half, teaching them the word of God.

Corinth was a typical Greek city. It had numerous temples to Greek gods. It had at least 12 temples including a temple to Aphrodite, the Greek goddess of Love. They even had temple prostitutes. The Corinthians were an immoral people. The Corinthians highly valued wisdom and philosophy.

As you can imagine, when Paul left the Corinthians, some problems developed. Remember when Paul left, he left the church in the hands of relatively new Christians. Even if they were converted in the first week of Paul's arrival, they would have been Christians for a year and a half.

As we go through 1 Corinthians, we will discover that the five main problems were:

- a. Divisions – Who to follow. – Chapters 1-4
- b. Sex – Immoral behavior – Chapters 5-7
- c. Food – Religious sacrifices – Chapters 8-10
- d. The Gathering – How to worship – Chapters 11-14
- e. The Resurrection – Does it happen? – Chapters 15

With each problem in the Corinthian church:

- a. Paul describes the problem.
- b. Then he responds to the problem with some part of the Gospel

He explains how they are not living what they say they believe. This letter is all about learning to think about all aspects of life through the lens of the Gospel or WWJD.

Chapter 1

Read verses 1-4

Paul starts in verse 1 reminding the Corinthians who he is, specifically a called apostle. An apostle is someone who has received a commission from Jesus himself. He also makes sure that

they know who he received his commission from which was God through Jesus. Paul was not an apostle that had received his commission while Jesus was alive but He received it while traveling on the Damascus Road. He specifies that he was called by God.

1 Corinthians 1:1 lists Sosthenes as potentially a co-author with Paul. Paul mentioned someone with the same name in Acts 18:17. *“Then the crowd there turned on Sosthenes the synagogue leader and beat him in front of the proconsul; and Gallio showed no concern whatever.* Most theologians believe that Sosthenes was just a common Greek name and that they are not the same person but they aren’t sure. He could be Paul’s scribe for the letter.

In verse 2, Paul calls them a Church. Sounds like a trivial thing but he wants them to know that they are not a group of individuals but a community of believers. He reminds them and us that as believers in Jesus as the Christ, our Lord, we are sanctified or set apart for His service. Bill and Gloria Gaither wrote a hymn, “Family of God”, this is the same idea.

The NIV says that they were *“called to be his holy people” (saints)*. If you look at different translations, the NASB gets verse 2 correct. English translators have added “to be”. Just as Paul was a “called” apostle, they were “called” saints by God.

“Notice the contrast: The church of God (something good), which is at Corinth (someplace bad). Understanding the tension between the *church* and the *city* is important to understanding the letter of 1 Corinthians. The bottom line is this: is the *church* influencing the *city*, or is the *city* influencing the *church*?” (Guzik)

In verse 3, he prays for grace and peace for them. This is a common greeting that Paul uses in his letters. I say he prays because the Bible tells us that if we ask for anything in His name then He will give it to us. Grace and true peace can only be given by God/Jesus. Our communication with God is through prayer. Wishing for grace and peace doesn’t cut it.

When I learned about evaluations at Owens Corning, I was taught to start and end with positive reinforcement, regardless of how things are in the middle. Paul learned the same thing. In verse 4, he says that he thanked God for them.

Read verses 5-9

He tells them how Jesus changed their lives (5-9).

- a. They have God given grace, unmerited favor through their faith in Jesus.
- b. They have grown in all speech and all knowledge, including their testimony.
- c. Their church does not lack any spiritual gifts,
- d. They are eagerly Jesus’ return.
- e. They will be found blameless in the day of our Lord Jesus Christ.
- f. He reminds them that God is faithful to those who are faithful to Jesus.

John MacArthur says that the *day of our Lord Jesus Christ* is different from the Day of the Lord. The Day of the Lord is when Jesus comes to earth to punish those that have rejected Him. All New and Old Testament references talk about God pouring out His wrath. The *Day of our Lord Jesus Christ* refers to a time when we as believers will see Jesus face to face. Paul wants the Corinthians to know that because they have been found blameless, they will not have to endure the terrible Day of the Lord. They will have met Jesus before that day.

“In these first 10 verses, Paul refers to Jesus in every verse, for a total of 11 times. In this emphasis on Jesus, Paul promotes the sure cure for the problems of the Corinthians: getting your eyes off self and on Jesus.” (Guzik)

Read verses 10-17

In verse 10, Paul goes right into their first problem, there are divisions in the Church. Since they were taught by different teachers, they were following the different teachers instead of Jesus. Verse 12 said that some stuck with Paul’s teaching, some followed Apollos and some followed Peter.

In my years at the Alexandria Baptist Church, I have seen people leave our church after the pastor left. I have seen churches divided because of disagreements about a pastor or membership politics. This is no different than what was happening in Corinth.

Paul hits the nail on the head in verses 13. He says, “Is Christ divided? Was Paul crucified for you? Were you baptized into the name of Paul?” In verse 14 he goes so far as to say, I am thankful that I only baptized a few of you because you would think that you were baptized in my name.

In verse 17, Paul said that he only had one job and that was to preach the Gospel.

“How sobering this is! The great gospel of Jesus Christ, the very power of God unto salvation – made empty and of no effect through the pride and cleverness of men! This danger was constantly on the mind of the apostle Paul, and should be constantly on the mind of any preacher or teacher.” (Guzik)

Read verses 18-25

In verse 18, Paul says that “*the word of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God.*” The best that nonbelievers can hope for is to get what they deserve. In their eyes that is fair and just. They worked for it. Some go so far as to think if I take your portion and that is even better. Nonbelievers live in a survival of the fittest world. Believers believe in a loving God that goes even further. God gives us grace, we get what we do not deserve and it cannot be earned.

Remember that wisdom and philosophy were important to these Corinthians. At one time, they had respected each other based on their wisdom. The Greeks liked to argue logic.

In verse 19, Paul quotes Isaiah 29:14. *“I will destroy the wisdom of the wise, And the cleverness of the clever I will set aside.”* God said this at a time in Israel’s history when human wisdom said that alliance with other nations would make them stronger but what they really needed to do was to trust in the power of God to save them.

In verse 20 and 21, Paul says that God has turned what was considered to be wise by the Jewish leaders into something that would make no sense to them. The Jewish leaders had the Law which said what I do matters. God said I sent my Son, trust in Him and you will have salvation. Human wisdom becomes foolish and faith in God’s power becomes all we need.

The world through its wisdom did not come to know God - “There is a constant tendency to think that the smartest and wisest humans will know the most about God. But God cannot be found through human wisdom, but only through the *message of the cross*. The pursuit of human wisdom may bring an earthly contentment or happiness (though this is rare), but in itself, it can never bring the true knowledge of the true God.” (Guzik)

Verse 22 and 23 tell us that the Jews wanted signs or miracles to prove power. The Greeks wanted a show of wisdom to command respect. It is understandable that *preaching* Christ crucified would make no sense what so ever. To the Jews, the crucifixion was a stumbling block but to the Greeks it was just nonsense. Why was the crucifixion a stumbling block for the Jews? As Acts 2:36 tells us, *“Therefore let all Israel be assured of this: God has made this Jesus, whom you crucified, both Lord and Messiah.”* The Jews put Jesus to death.

Jesus did an innumerable number of miracles but the Jews still didn’t recognize His power. Paul was showing the Greeks that their human wisdom was foolishness. To nonbelievers, is there a more ridiculous religion than Christianity? “They are putting their faith in salvation from a man who was put to death on a Roman cross. What kind of power does a God have that could not prevent His human enemies from putting Him to death. That is your route to salvation. It is ludicrous!”

In verse 24, Paul says, *“but to those whom God has called.”* Who are those who are called? Paul says in Galatians 3:28 that *“There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus.”* There are only believers. To the believer, (verse 24) Paul says *“Christ is the power of God and the wisdom of God.”*

In verse 25, Paul tells us or reminds us that God at His most foolish is still greater wisdom than any human on his best day and the same applies to His strength or power. Man is lower than angels and even angels can only hope to be as powerful as God. Just ask Satan.

In verse 26, Paul reminds them of where they were when they were called by God. It sounds a bit like Paul is trying to humble them. Remember that Jesus did NOT come for the rich and noble, His kingdom was/is in heaven. He came to seek and to save lost people.

1 Timothy 1:15 tells us that God had humbled Paul. It says, “. . . *Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners; of whom I am chief.*” His discussion in verses 26-28 points out that what God values are not the same as what man values. God chose (use NLT):

“What the world considers foolish. Things that are powerless to shame those who are powerful. despised by the world, Things counted as nothing at all.”

Why did God choose these things? (Verse 29) So that no one will ever boast in the presence of God.

The Jews throughout the Bible believed that they were entitled to be saved because they were born Jews or because they followed the Law. The wise Greeks believed that they were the wisest and they deserved salvation because of their great wisdom. God turned the tables on them. It is not about man or what man does, it is all about what God did. John 3:16-17.

Paul finishes this chapter with a couple of verses on unification. Every church member should read these verses to remind them that it is all about God and not about me. We are a church and not a group of individuals. We are not a social group. We should have one common goal, the share the Gospel message with the world for God's and their benefit and not for any benefit of our own.

Paul tries to remove all of their pride in whom they serve or follow. He reminds them that it is through the blood that we are saved. It was about Jesus' work on the cross, His death, burial and resurrection.

Verse 30 (NASB) says, “*But it is due to Him that you are in Christ Jesus,*” Paul is saying that God sent His son so that we may have everlasting life and not that God predestined us to be saved.

Paul says that Jesus is our wisdom from God, and righteousness and sanctification, and redemption. We are wise if we know the way to God through Jesus. We receive Jesus' righteousness because we cannot be righteous on our own. We are sanctified or set apart for God's service and Jesus is our redeemer because we cannot save ourselves.

So Paul finished this chapter with, If you are going to boast, then boast in Jesus and what He has done for you. Paul hoped that when the Corinthians stopped boasting about themselves then they could truly be unified in their service to God.

Read Jeremiah 9:23-24 - 23 *Thus says the Lord, “Let not a wise man boast of his wisdom, and let not the mighty man boast of his might, let not a rich man boast of his riches; 24 but let him who boasts boast of this, that he understands and knows Me, that I am the Lord who exercises lovingkindness, justice and righteousness on earth; for I delight in these things,” declares the Lord.*

#