

1st Corinthians Chapter 1

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Introduction:

1. Corinth was a *region* in Greece, with the *city* of Corinth as its capital. It stood near the middle of an isthmus about six miles wide. The city had two harbors, one facing east and the other facing west. It was well positioned to be a city of commerce. It was also a city of leisure with an influx of foreigners. Corinth was a city of games and Paul makes reference to them in 9:24 and 9:26-27.



2. The main idol worshiped was Aphrodite, the goddess of love, beauty, pleasure, and procreation. Her temple was situated nearby and was a center of religious prostitution. The effect on the morals of the city was to make immorality a way of life. Paul had arrived here to plant the Kingdom of God with no base to work from, but soon made inroads that led to conversions from the Jewish synagogue, then a wider group of Gentiles.

3. By the time Paul wrote this letter, the Corinthian believers were causing division within their fellowship. Some were threatening to take others to court. There was a case of outrageous sexual immorality. Some had been guilty of desecrating the Lord's Table. Others were denying the possibility of a resurrection. The list goes on. Paul is writing to address these views and practices that were so contrary to the will of God.

THE SENDER OF THIS LETTER

(1) This letter is from Paul, chosen by the will of God to be an apostle of Christ Jesus, and from our brother Sosthenes.

- For Paul to begin his letter discussing his spiritual identification may mean that some in the Corinthian church did not accept his authority. The author is clear from his first words. **Paul** was an **apostle of Christ**, but was not one of the Twelve. He was chosen by **God** separately and much later than the Twelve. His specific calling was to take the Good News to the Gentiles, just as he is doing here. Here are Paul's own words:

Now get to your feet! For I have appeared to you to appoint you as My servant and witness. You are to tell the world what you have seen and what I will show you in the future. And I will rescue you from both your own people and the Gentiles. Yes, I am sending you to the Gentiles to open their eyes, so they may turn from darkness to light and from the power of Satan to God. Then they will receive forgiveness for their sins and be given a place among God's people, who are set apart by faith in Me. (Acts 26:16-18 NLT)

Now Paul's readers understand that he is speaking with the authority of **God** in heaven.

- **Sosthenes** may have been his scribe -- Paul's amanuensis. Paul normally had someone on hand to write the words that he spoke. It is possible **Sosthenes** is the former leader of the synagogue mentioned in Acts 18:17.
- Since the original letter was penned on a scroll, the name of the sender was at the beginning so it was not necessary to unroll the scroll to read the signature.

THE RECIPIENTS OF THIS LETTER

(2) I am writing to God's church in Corinth, to you who have been called by God to be His own holy people. He made you holy by means of Christ Jesus, just as He did for all people everywhere who call on the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, their Lord and ours.

- The *destination* of this letter is also clear. **God's** called out assembly in the great city of **Corinth**. The **church** had been established by Paul on his second missionary journey. His third journey included a stop in Ephesus for two or three years and from there he wrote this letter to the **church** at **Corinth**.
- They *are* a **church** because they have **been called by God** to be a **holy people** and **God had made them holy by means of Jesus Christ**. God has done the same thing to **people everywhere who call on the name of Jesus**.
- Some people contend that being **made holy** means that God eradicates a believer's sinful nature, but here His people were **holy**, but still had problems to clear up. Believers are still responsible for corrections.
- **Holy people** everywhere are tied together because we have the same **Lord**.
- **Paul Butler** observes:

At first, reading only the salutation, the idea that a church of Christ might exist in Corinth would present no problem. That Paul addresses the members of that church as "those called to be saints," would be initially acceptable also. By the time one has read to the end of

this epistle, however, he may find it difficult to believe that a church could ever have been formed in such surroundings and, once formed, that it could have survived.

(3) May God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ give you grace and peace. (4) I always thank my God for you and for the gracious gifts He has given you, now that you belong to Christ Jesus.

- Paul then prays for the holy people at Corinth to have **grace and peace**. **Grace** strikes a note with Gentiles in the church and **peace** is a word used by Jewish people.

There were many teachings and practices in the Corinthian church that were not according to the will of God. Paul **Butler** says:

No matter how wrong some of these Corinthians were about doctrine and practices, so long as they were willing to receive his divinely-inspired instruction and grow toward it, he said they were “sanctified in Christ Jesus.”

They still **belonged to Jesus**. Paul found a way to be **thankful** for them.

THE CHURCH HAD GIFTS FROM GOD

(5) Through Him, God has enriched your church in every way -- with all of your eloquent words and all of your knowledge. (6) This confirms that what I told you about Christ is true.

- The Corinthian church, though less than six years old, had a full array of the gifts of the Holy Spirit. These were only *helps along the way* to maturity and *did not represent* maturity itself.
- The gifts did **confirm** what Paul had **told** them about **Christ**.

(7) Now you have every spiritual gift you need as you eagerly wait for the return of our Lord Jesus Christ. (8) He will keep you strong to the end so that you will be free from all blame on the day when our Lord Jesus Christ returns.

- **Christ** will **return** and they are equipped with every **spiritual gift** and will be free of **blame** on the **day** of **Christ's return**. They can look forward to His coming without concern for their guilt.

(9) God will do this, for He is faithful to do what He says, and He has invited you into partnership with His Son, Jesus Christ our Lord.

- The truth that believers -- even those with deficiencies -- are in partnership with the **Lord Jesus Christ** is almost inconceivable. The **partnership** is not just with other believers, but **Jesus**.
- In many idol temples, an added function was banking because their building were safe. That **God** will keep His word might remind some readers of broken promises from the bankers at the pagan temple.

GET RID OF DIVISIONS

(10) I appeal to you, dear brothers and sisters, by the authority of our Lord Jesus Christ, to live in harmony with each other. Let there be no divisions in the church. Rather, be of one mind, united in thought and purpose.

- This is the target subject of this chapter: Their **divisions**.
- Paul **appeals** to them to live in **harmony**. Though he speaks with the direct **authority** of the **Lord Jesus Christ**, he can do no more than **appeal**. The change and correction must come from their willingness to make changes.
- He goes beyond harmony. Paul is not asking for pleasant disagreement. They are to seek to be of **one mind, united in thought and purpose**.
- Paul identifies a **division** they presently have next:

(11) For some members of Chloe's household have told me about your quarrels, my dear brothers and sisters.

- **Chloe** may have been a lady in business and her representatives traveled. (Nearly identical language describes Lydia in Acts 16:14-15.) Paul visited with them at Ephesus where he is dictating this letter.
- He wisely identifies his source so he cannot be accused of a baseless criticism. Most churches have people who love to repeat anonymous criticism. Paul avoided this trap.

(12) Some of you are saying, "I am a follower of Paul." Others are saying, "I follow Apollos," or "I follow Peter, " or "I follow only Christ."

- The **followers of Paul**. They might have said, "**Paul** baptized me and my family. He established this congregation so he must be the final authority even when he's away."
- The **followers of Apollos**. They might have said that "Apollos was once the minister here and is an outstanding debater and public speaker. Acts 18:24-28. He's our man."
- The **followers of Peter**. They might have said that "**Peter** was one of the original Twelve Apostles commissioned by Christ." He would have appeal to the believers with a Jewish heritage.
- The **followers of Christ**. This group might have been correct *or* they may have had an air of superiority.

(13) Has Christ been divided into factions?

Was I, Paul, crucified for you?

Were any of you baptized in the name of Paul?

Of course not!

- **Paul** asks three ridiculous questions to highlight the impossibility of the divisions. To all of them he concludes "**Of course not!**"

(14) I thank God that I did not baptize any of you except Crispus and Gaius, (15) for now no one can say they were baptized in my name. (16) (Oh yes, I also baptized the household of Stephanas, but I don't remember baptizing anyone else.)

- Paul was relying on his **memory** to recall the people that he had **baptized**. He is thankful that there were so few because of this practice that had surfaced of following men.

(17) For Christ didn't send me to baptize, but to preach the Good News -- and not with clever speech, for fear that the cross of Christ would lose its power.

- Most anyone can **baptize**. It is a mechanical event and does not require special gifts or much knowledge. Jesus avoided **baptizing** others while Paul didn't have twelve disciples to handle the need.

Jesus knew the Pharisees had heard that He was baptizing and making more disciples than John (though Jesus Himself didn't baptize them -- His disciples did). (John 4:1-2 NLT)

THE MESSAGE IS FOOLISHNESS TO SOME, THE POWER OF GOD TO OTHERS

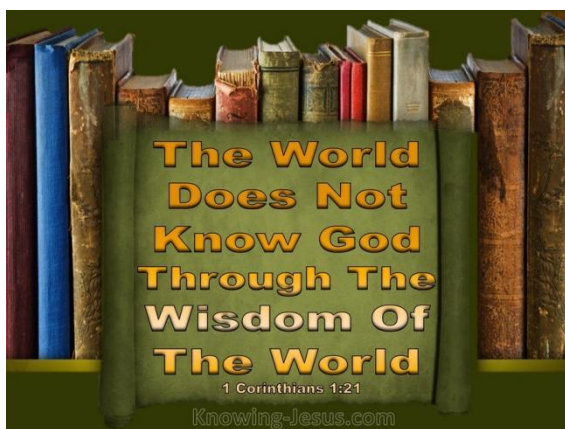
(18) The message of the cross is foolish to those who are headed for destruction! But we who are being saved know it is the very power of God.

- After calling attention to **the message of the cross** in verse 19, Paul shows that the **message** is being received in two ways. It is **foolishness** to some and the **power of God** to others.
- To most people, it makes no sense that one man should die as a substitute for the sins of others. But those who reason that way will eventually *lose* everything.
- Those people who are being saved by the death of Jesus will *gain* everything.

(19) As the Scriptures say, "I will destroy the wisdom of the wise and discard the intelligence of the intelligent."

- Paul quotes from Isaiah to show this plan had a deep history in Scripture.

Because of this, I will once again astound these hypocrites with amazing wonders. The wisdom of the wise will pass away, and the intelligence of the intelligent will disappear." (Isaiah 29:14 NLT)



(20) So where does this leave the philosophers, the scholars, and the world's brilliant debaters? God has made the wisdom of this world look foolish.

- The wise people of the world would **never** have chosen a path like **God** has chosen. How often He uses methods that the **wise** of this **world** would ridicule, yet they achieve the desired results with wonderful accuracy and efficiency.

(21) Since God in His wisdom saw to it that the world would never know Him through human wisdom, He has used our foolish preaching to save those who believe.

- The world, using their conventional **wisdom**, can never have a personal relationship with **God**. His way is to have

the message of Jesus **preached**. That is what Paul was doing now and what he had been doing in the past.

(22) It is foolish to the Jews, who ask for signs from heaven. And it is foolish to the Greeks, who seek human wisdom.

- **The Jews asked for a sign from heaven.** Jesus spent much of His ministry performing **signs** for **Jewish** people, but in the face of these miracles, they still asked for a **sign from heaven**.

When the Pharisees heard that Jesus had arrived, they came and started to argue with Him. Testing Him, they demanded that He show them a miraculous sign from heaven to prove His authority.
(Mark 8:11 NLT)

- **Greeks, who seek human wisdom.** **Gordon Lyon** says it succinctly:

Greeks particularly, and Gentiles more generally, looked for wisdom; i.e., for rational, natural, scientific or philosophical explanations for all events. They therefore refused to accept the demonstration of God's supernatural and divine power effected in raising Christ from the dead. They were forced, therefore, to deny the resurrection, or to explain it away. (Acts 17:18-21,32)

(23) So when we preach that Christ was crucified, the Jews are offended and the Gentiles say it's all nonsense.

- A sample of the **Jews** being **offended** by the **preaching of Christ** happened right in the Corinthian synagogue:

But when they opposed and insulted him, Paul shook the dust from his clothes and said, "Your

**blood is upon your own heads -- I am innocent.
From now on I will go preach to the Gentiles."**

(Acts 18:6 NLT)

- A sample of **the Gentiles saying it's nonsense** when **Paul** preached on Mar's Hill at Athens:

When they heard Paul speak about the resurrection of the dead, some laughed in contempt, but others said, "We want to hear more about this later."

(Acts 17:32 NLT)

(24) But to those called by God to salvation, both Jews and Gentiles, Christ is the power of God and the wisdom of God.

- Beside *offended* **Jews** and *laughing* **Gentiles** there is another class: those of faith whom **God** has **called to salvation**. Here is genuine **power** and genuine **wisdom**.

GOD'S WISDOM IS SUPERIOR

(25) This foolish plan of God is wiser than the wisest of human plans, and God's weakness is stronger than the greatest of human strength.

- **J. W. McGarvey** says:

But believing Jews saw in Jesus a power of God far transcending all their dreams of an earthly Messiah, and believing Greeks found in him a divine wisdom higher than all their ideals of truth, goodness and holiness.

Thus God vindicated his so-called foolishness as wiser than all man's wisdom, and his so-called weakness in Christ as stronger than all the conceptions of an earthly Messiah.

(26) Remember, dear brothers and sisters, that few of you were wise in the world's eyes or powerful or wealthy when God called you.

- Some of the believers at Corinth were **wise in the world's eyes** and some were men and women of **wealth** when God called them to faith. Paul did not say "*none*" but "*few*."

(27) Instead, God chose things the world considers foolish in order to shame those who think they are wise. And He chose things that are powerless to shame those who are powerful. (28) God chose things despised by the world, things counted as nothing at all, and used them to bring to nothing what the world considers important.

- It has been **God's** way to use things considered **foolish** and trivial to win.
 1. Moses used his *shepherd's staff* to open the Red Sea. Exodus 14:16
 2. Joshua used *ram's horns* to bring down the walls of Jericho. Joshua 6:5.
 3. God used *hornets* to drive the Amorite kings out of the land of promise. Joshua 24:12 NIV & NKJV.
 4. Jesus picked a dozen men as His disciples. They were students of the Old Testament, but not intellectual giants. After they had witnessed two miracles of feeding 5,000 on one occasion and 4,000 on another, they were still greatly concerned about where they would get food. Jesus said "**Don't you understand yet?**"

(29) As a result, no one can ever boast in the presence of God. (30) God has united you with Christ Jesus. For our benefit God made Him to be wisdom itself. Christ made us right with God; He made us pure and holy, and He freed us from sin.

- Jesus had claimed to be **wisdom itself**:

The queen of Sheba will also stand up against this generation on judgment day and condemn it, for she came from a distant land to hear the wisdom of

Solomon. Now someone greater than Solomon is here -- but you refuse to listen. (Matthew 12:42 NLT)

- It's clear from the four examples in verse 28 that the power is with **God**.

(31) Therefore, as the Scriptures say, "If you want to boast, boast only about the LORD."

- Paul is quoting from Jeremiah. Here is the full passage:

This is what the LORD says: "Don't let the wise boast in their wisdom, or the powerful boast in their power, or the rich boast in their riches. But those who wish to boast should boast in this alone: that they truly know Me and understand that I am the LORD who demonstrates unfailing love and who brings justice and righteousness to the earth, and that I delight in these things. I, the LORD, have spoken!" (Jeremiah 9:23-24 NLT)