

THROUGH THE BIBLE STUDY

1 CORINTHIANS 1-2

Often churches flatter themselves with the title, “[New Testament Church.](#)” Their members are proud of the fact they go to a NT church... Pastors make it their goal to grow NT believers, and build a NT church...

I use to think I wanted to be part of a New Testament church, until I read Paul’s NT letter to the Church at Corinth. The Corinthian Christians were indeed a NT church, but they were a church fraught with problems.

They were a church divided... (So much so, members were suing each other in the pagan courts.)

Blatant immorality was tolerated.

God-given gender roles were being ignored.

Communion had become an excuse for gluttony.

Spiritual gifts were being abused.

Foundational Christian doctrine, like the resurrection of our bodies from the dead, was being questioned...

And worst of all, love had taken a backseat...

I want our church to embrace NT truths, and see NT expansion, and display NT power... but if being a NT church means being like the Corinthians, forget it!

The city of Corinth had a population of half-a-million. Immigrants from the world over came to Corinth, bringing with them every lewd and wicked practice known to man. Corinth was an evil place. Among the Greeks the phrase, “[playing the Corinthian](#)” was a synonym for drunkenness. Prostitutes were nicknamed “[Corinthian girls.](#)” Corinth had a sordid reputation.

Every night in the city 10,000 so-called “priestesses” left the temple of Aphrodite, on top of the mountain, the acropolis overlooking the city - and hit the streets and alley-ways to prostitute themselves. They turned tricks to raise funds for their pagan Temple. Understand, sexual immorality wasn’t just tolerated in Corinth, it was institutionalized as part of their local religion.

Yet in this den of sin the Holy Spirit used Paul to build a vibrant and Spirit-filled church. On his Second Missionary Journey, Paul spent 18 months in Corinth.

It was after Paul left, that the problems began. Rather than the Church influencing Corinth - Corinth influenced the church. Paul had moved on to Ephesus, when he heard of their issues and penned this letter of correction. It’s been said, “[Boats are made to be in the water, but you don’t want water in the boat.](#)” Likewise, the church is made to be in the world as a witness - but in Corinth the world had gotten inside the church.

Verse 1 begins, “Paul, called to be an apostle of Jesus Christ through the will of God, and Sosthenes our brother...” Acts 18 speaks of Paul’s time in Corinth. When he arrived he held meetings in the Jewish synagogue. The leader of the Jews was a man named Crispus, who’d been converted to Christianity. Crispus was replaced by an enemy of Christ named Sosthenes. This guy sought to stir up trouble for Paul.

Sosthenes brought him before the city counsel on grounds of sedition, but his plot backfired. The Roman proconsul realized this was a religious matter and outside his jurisdiction. He dismissed the charges.

The civil leaders were so upset with Sosthenes for wasting their time, and using them to vent his hatred for Paul, Sosthenes was beaten instead of the apostle.

Now look at how Paul addresses the Corinthian church. He writes with “Sosthenes our brother.” Apparently Sosthenes had concluded, “if you can’t beat them, join them.” He’d been converted. Jews in Corinth were having a hard time keeping a leader for their synagogue. The rabbis were all converting to Christ.

Paul and Sosthenes write “to the church of God which is at Corinth, to those who are sanctified in Christ Jesus, called to be saints, with all who in every place call on the name of Jesus Christ our Lord, both theirs and ours:” Over the centuries of Church history, people have applied the term “saint” to elite, special believers who demonstrate extraordinary acts of faith. But originally every believer in Jesus was called a “saint.” The word means “set apart” or “dedicated.”

Once, two brothers stole a neighbor’s sheep. They were caught and punished. They were both branded on the forehead with the letters “ST” for “sheep thief.”

One brother was so embarrassed he fled town to hide his mark of shame. The other brother took responsibility for his crimes, and despite the stigma, stayed in the community to rebuild a good reputation.

Years later a town newcomer noticed “ST” on the man’s forehead. He asked a local what it meant. The fellow replied, “I’m not sure, but I think it means ‘saint’. All of us should live so that we’re known as a saint.

Paul writes to the saints in Corinth - but also to those “in every place...” even Lilburn and Stone Mountain.

Verse 3, “Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.” Grace and peace are called “the twins of the NT.” They go together.

Receive God’s grace and you’ll know God’s peace! Grace extends to us a right standing with God. Peace is its byproduct. You can’t have peace without grace.

Paul continues his greeting in verse 4, “I thank my God always concerning you for the grace of God which was given to you by Christ Jesus, that you were enriched in everything by Him in all utterance and all knowledge, even as the testimony of Christ was confirmed in you...” I love Paul’s phrase, they were “enriched in everything.” This is what Jesus does for us. He enriches and enhances. He not only takes away our sin, but adds to our lives. He fills us with good stuff.

“So that you come short in no gift, eagerly waiting for the revelation of our Lord Jesus Christ...” God had blessed this church with a wide array of spiritual gifts. We’ll talk about them in detail later: [gifts of healings](#), [words of wisdom](#), [discernment](#), [unknown tongues](#), etc.

And Paul says it was through spiritual gifts that [“the testimony of Christ was confirmed...”](#) Think of it this way, the atmosphere always contains a degree of moisture, but we realize that fact most when it rains. Likewise, Jesus is always among us, but His presence is [“confirmed”](#) when we experience spiritual gifts.

Later in this book we’ll learn the Corinthians were misusing and abusing these gifts, but never does Paul suggest they stop using them. The presence of spiritual gifts were viewed as [“the testimony of Christ.”](#)

Verse 8 speaks of Jesus’ second coming... “who will also confirm you to the end, that you may be blameless in the day of our Lord Jesus Christ. God is faithful, by whom you were called into the fellowship of His Son, Jesus Christ our Lord.” Notice the reason we were called by God... the reason He has saved us by His grace is so that we can have “fellowship with His Son.”

Christians do good works - and we serve - and we grow - but those aren’t the reasons we’re saved. We are called to have fellowship with God’s Son Jesus.

In verse 10 Paul tackles the church’s first problem. “Now I plead with you, brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you all speak the same thing, and that there be no divisions among you, but that you be perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment.” The Corinthians had become fragmented. They lacked unity and harmony.

“For it has been declared to me concerning you, my brethren, by those of Chloe’s household, that there are contentions among you.” A sister in Christ, Chloe, wrote to Paul, and told him of the cliques that had formed in the church. There were tribes within the tribe.

Obviously, [it’s okay to have a circle of friends at church, as long as it’s not a closed circle](#). Our emphasis should be on bringing people in, not keeping people out - finding commonality, not fostering division.

When it’s [“us versus them”](#) it becomes deadly. Problems occur when church members polarize. One group thinks they’re better, or more spiritual than other groups. The family of God becomes a family feud.

I read the true story of Paul Loetz. Paul took a terrible fall. He punctured a lung, broke a few ribs, was bleeding internally. He was rushed to the hospital.

While lying in the emergency room, Paul heard two doctors arguing over who would put the tube into his crushed chest. The argument became a shoving match. One doctor threatened to have the security guards remove the other doctor... Finally, the patient managed to cry out, [“Please, somebody, save me!”](#) Two other doctors had to step in and settle the dispute.

And this can happen in a church. God brings hurting people through our doors, but we're too busy trying to out-do, or upstage each other, to provide them help. That's what was occurring in the church at Corinth.

Verse 12, "Now I say this, that each of you says, "I am of Paul," or "I am of Apollos," or "I am of Cephas," or "I am of Christ." The church had divided around their teachers. They had gravitated toward personalities...

One group shouted, "Paul is cool - we're into Paul, he preaches liberty. You guys are all legalists."

The second splinter disagreed, "We like Apollos, he unlocks deep truths. We're more intelligent than you."

A third segment countered, "We follow Cephas, ole Pentecost Pete. You can study the Bible, we'll just flow in the power of the Holy Spirit..." And the final schism thumbed their nose at all the rest, "Who needs a human teacher. We take our orders from Jesus alone."

Yet Paul writes, "Is Christ divided? Was Paul crucified for you? Or were you baptized in the name of Paul?" And the answer to all the above is "no." The church is [the body of Christ](#). Jesus died for us! We're baptized into Jesus! The main thing is Jesus, and we should always keep [the main thing the main thing](#).

Once I read the awful story of a man who killed his wife, and ran her body through a wood chipper to destroy the evidence. As repulsive as that sounds, this is what the Corinthians did to the Body and Bride of Christ. Their divisiveness had chipped up the church.

It's sad when the church fractures into cliques that think they're more spiritual than everyone else. In Corinth the pride of its members had attached to celebrity. Some were ["of Paul"](#) - others ["of Apollos."](#)

Pastors and Bible teachers are given by God to point us to Jesus, not to become a point of division. Jesus is our one rallying point. He is the commonality greater than all our differences. Jesus Christ is our unity.

I love a quote by Edwin Markham, ["He drew a circle that shut me out. Heretic, rebel, a thing to flout. But love and I had the will to win. We drew a circle that took him in."](#) Let's try our best to unite and not divide.

Verse 14, "I thank God that I baptized none of you except Crispus and Gaius, lest anyone should say that I had baptized in my own name. Yes, I also baptized the household of Stephanas. Besides, I do not know whether I baptized any other." Here's a verse that gives me hope! Paul confesses he couldn't remember who he'd baptized. He lost track. It's always embarrassing when I ask a person if they've been baptized, and they reply, ["Pastor Sandy, you're the one who baptized me."](#)

Well, while in Corinth Paul baptized only a couple of believers. Apparently, he suspected what might happen, so he guarded against divisions over baptism.

He writes in verse 17, “For Christ did not send me to baptize, but to preach the gospel...” This is interesting, Paul distinguishes between baptism and the Gospel. Obviously, in his mind, they were separate issues.

This is important since there are Christian denominations today, like the Church of Christ, who teach that water baptism is mandatory for salvation.

Yet if this were true, it’s hard to imagine Paul being so cavalier and nonchalant about the subject.

He says, “I didn’t baptize any of you...” “I came to preach the Gospel, not baptize...” John 4:1-2 tells us not even Jesus baptized people. His disciples handled the baptismal duties. Baptism is our response to the Gospel - but it’s not included as part of the Gospel. **The rite of baptism is important, but it is not essential.**

Paul preached the Gospel, and “not with wisdom of words, lest the cross of Christ should be made of no effect.” Paul’s teaching wasn’t full of abstract theories, or philosophical ideas, or academic arguments.

He heralded the cross of Christ.

Paul declared a brutal reality. When the Corinthians heard him speak of “the cross” there would’ve been an initial resistance - a repulsion. Roman crosses were bloody and barbaric. Crucifixions were rated "R" for violence. The cross was indeed, a harsh message.

Paul says he didn’t soften the blow. He proclaimed Christ crucified - this is what our sin deserved and what the love of God willingly suffered. Paul allowed the message of the cross to smack us right between the eyes. It was an affront to our human sensibilities.

Verse 18, “For the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God.” The Jews were impressed with power - the Greeks were into philosophy. And the cross was an affront to them both.

That the Almighty would subject Himself to death appears foolish, even weak in human eyes. Yet God went out of His way to save us in a way that insulted the sources of our pride: both strength and wisdom.

“For it is written (and here Paul quotes Isaiah 29:14): “I will destroy the wisdom of the wise, and bring to nothing the understanding of the prudent. Where is the wise? Where is the scribe? Where is the disputer of this age? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of this world? For since, in the wisdom of God, the world through wisdom did not know God, it pleased God through the foolishness of the message preached to save those who believe.” In essence, God packaged His glorious, heavenly salvation in a brown paper sack.

Rather than appeal to human tastes and values, the cross mocked them. The Greeks were into wisdom and the Jewish heroes all exhibited power; yet the cross

appealed to neither wisdom or power. For God to die, it seemed like a mistake, a defeat. For the Almighty to subject Himself to a cross appeared foolish and weak.

Yet God worked in a way that contradicted human values. The cross forces us all to humble ourselves - to come to God on His terms, rather than our own.

Verse 22, "For Jews request a sign and Greeks seek after wisdom, but we preach Christ crucified, to the Jews a stumbling block and to the Greeks foolishness, but to those who are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God."

To the Jews a martyred Messiah was a "stumbling block." The Greek word was "scandalon" or "scandal." To think God would hang from a cross was sheer scandalous, even blasphemous to the Jews - and to the Greeks it was preposterous. It didn't make sense.

The Jews would've preferred a salvation that came through strength. The Greeks would've been drawn to one that came through wisdom. Both would've liked to be saved by traits they valued and even idolized.

But the cross is about love, sacrifice, and humility. And these are the doors to God through which He knows we need to enter. Thus, God devised salvation so that it requires a humble heart and a simple faith.

"Because the foolishness of God is wiser than men, and the weakness of God is stronger than men." The cross is God's secret weapon. Human values like brains, braun, and beauty bow before God at the cross. He chooses to save us in a way that defies all three. What's foolish and weak to us, is the power of God.

Once, a seminary, founded by godly men, had a stone arch over its entrance. It was engraved with the words, "We Preach Christ Crucified." In time ivy grew up over the arch, until the greenery covered the word "Crucified..." The arch read, "We preach Christ." Over the years the ivy kept growing, until it covered, "Christ." Today the arch simply reads, "We preach."

And this is analogous of the modern church. We've gone from preaching Christ crucified to feel good sermons. We've lost confidence in the cross, and thus we've been emptied of the power and wisdom of God.

At some point the church tried to sanitize Christianity. Clean up the blood and gore. Make Christianity more acceptable to human tastes. To not offend, we stopped talking about sin and the need for the cross. We spoke only of Jesus' humanitarianism and kindness. We substituted cute anecdotes for the message of the cross. And today's Christianity now lacks power. We've forgotten the foolishness of God is wiser than men.

The cross mocks human values, and attacks human pride, and so does the church. The church consists of people whom God has called out of the world, but rather than choose the powerful and beautiful, God has filled His church with nobodies. And as proof, Paul points to the Corinthian believers... "For you see your

calling, brethren, that not many wise according to the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble, are called.”

The Queen of England was once asked how she was converted to Christ. She replied, “by an 'm'.” When asked what she meant, she said, “I'm thankful God said 'Not many noble,' rather than 'not any noble'.”

Verse 27, “But God has chosen the foolish things of the world to put to shame the wise, and God has chosen the weak things of the world to put to shame the things which are mighty; and the base things of the world and the things which are despised God has chosen, and the things which are not, to bring to nothing the things that are...” God chooses the simple not the smart - the weak not the strong - the humble not the noble - and why? The answer is in verse 29, “that no flesh should glory in His presence.” All the glory goes to God. His salvation is of mercy, not merit.

Today, people still admire **wisdom**, and **power**, and **privilege**. That's why God chooses **the cross**; for it's an affront to all three. And this why He's chosen **the church!** For the type of people God chooses also baffles our reasons - and undermines our notions of power - and turns upside down our concepts of rank.

God chooses, not the smart, but the simple - not the mighty, but the frail - not the upper-crust, but the down-and-out. He wants to make sure that every knee bows before Him, and “**no flesh glories in His presence.**”

You could say, that **our great God uses the bottom of the barrel to show that He's on top of the world!**

Verse 30, “But of Him you are in Christ Jesus, who became for us wisdom from God - and righteousness and sanctification and redemption - that, as it is written, “He who glories, let him glory in the LORD.”

Here, Paul quotes Jeremiah 9. Jesus is our wisdom, our righteousness, our sanctification, our redemption!

Jeremiah 9:23-24 states, “**Thus says the Lord: “Let not the wise man glory in his wisdom, let not the mighty man glory in his might, nor let the rich man glory in his riches; but let him who glories glory in this, that he understands and knows Me, that I am the Lord...”**

All that we are, and do, and ever hope to be is because of our Lord Jesus. To Christ be the glory!

Chapter 2, “And I, brethren, when I came to you, did not come with excellence of speech or of wisdom declaring to you the testimony of God.” Paul is staying consistent with his theme... God works in ways that deliberately mock our pride and force us to humility.

He's talked about the **cross**... the **church**... now he turns to the **courier** himself. Paul speaks of his ministry as an example of how God works in ways contrary to human **smarts**, and **strength**, and **status**.

In Chapter 2 Paul describes the methods of his own ministry... How he relied on simplicity of speech and in a power outside of himself in his sharing of the Gospel.

Once a church had a painting of the crucifixion right behind the pulpit. The pastor was a big man and would block its view. One Sunday, the pastor was absent.

In reference to the pastor a child asked his mother, "Where's the guy who stands so we can't see Jesus?"

Paul always tried to avoid that being said of him. Rather than rely on his oratory skill or keen insights Paul's goal was to point people to Jesus. A pastor's worse mistake is to use the pulpit for self-promotion, or to show-off. Don't ever block anyone's view of Jesus.

Verse 2, "For I determined not to know anything among you except Jesus Christ and Him crucified." It's often said, "Timing is everything." Here, the timing of Paul's writing may help us with its interpretation...

Remember Paul came to Corinth immediately after his visit to Mars Hill in Athens. There he tried to reason with the philosophers, but with little success. It seems he came to Corinth with a different strategy. Rather than argue philosophy he proclaimed **Christ crucified**.

He writes on, "I was with you in weakness, in fear, and in much trembling. And my speech and my preaching were not with persuasive words of human wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power..." Paul didn't rely on his eloquence or intelligence. In fact, he made a point of being plain! He preached Christ crucified not **himself amplified**.

Yet miracles flowed from this trembling little specimen of a man. It was obvious to everyone who saw him that Paul's power came from the Spirit of God.

Helena Modjeska was a famous actress at the turn of the 20th century. Once at a party she was asked to perform. She presented an amazing oratory in her native Polish tongue. The crowd was riveted to every word. Her presentation was powerful, emotion-packed, and soul-stirring... It was later revealed that all Modjeska had done was recite the Polish alphabet.

There are preachers who impress us with their oratory, but don't really say anything! They can say "nothing" better than you've ever heard it said before!

Paul had waxed eloquent among the Athenians - and it got him nowhere. I'm not saying he made a mistake in Athens. There is a time and a place for philosophical argument, but Athens had taught Paul a lesson.

At the crux of a person's salvation is **Christ crucified!** A person can have all his intellectual questions answered, but without facing the cross of Jesus he remains unmoved... On the other hand, a doubter can come full of skepticism, and be shaken to his or her core by the power of the cross. The crux is the cross! This is what we need to emphasize in our sharing!

When Paul came to Corinth he was weak physically, and drained emotionally. Constant opposition had rattled the apostle. Fear was threatening his faith.

But in Acts 18:9-10 we're told that while in Corinth, God came to Paul's rescue. God came and spoke to him in a night vision, and assured Paul of His protection.

In Corinth, Paul didn't present himself powerfully and persuasively - he preached the simple Gospel - and it was the Holy Spirit who demonstrated His power.

Paul reminded the Corinthians of his style - and its purpose in verse 5... **“That your faith should not be in the wisdom of men but in the power of God. However, we speak wisdom among those who are mature, yet not the wisdom of this age, nor of the rulers of this age, who are coming to nothing.”** Paul grew weary of the wisdom spouted by this world. He learned to trust in God's power, over human wisdom. Man's wisdom surely comes to nothing. It fades and ultimately fails.

“But we speak the wisdom of God in a mystery, the hidden wisdom which God ordained before the ages for our glory, which none of the rulers of this age knew; for had they known, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory.” Paul is saying God's wisdom has never been conventional thought. Men don't think the way God thinks... **strength through weakness, wisdom through foolishness, riches through poverty, healing through suffering, life through death, victory through defeat...** The paradox of the cross is illogical to men.

That we knew nothing of God's wisdom was most apparent the day the Jewish leaders called out for Jesus' blood to be shed, and ordered His execution.

Verse 9 quotes Isaiah 64. “But as it is written: “Eye has not seen, nor ear heard, nor have entered into the heart of man the things which God has prepared for those who love Him.” Usually you hear this verse at funerals where it's applied to the wonders of heaven, “eye has not seen...” And heaven will be wonderful.

But this verse also speaks of life right now! God loves to surprise us! He has blessings prepared for us, that are only discerned by His Spirit! What we have experienced to this point pales in comparison to the what God still has for us... if we learn to walk by faith.

For it's through His Spirit that God conveys His blessings, verse 10, “But God has revealed them to us through His Spirit. For the Spirit searches all things, yes, the deep things of God.” Imagine this, God is broadcasting amazing things for your spiritual eyes to see... but you've got to be tuned to the right channel.

If your thinking is stuck on material concerns - if you think merely on a physical level - you'll miss out on the truths of God's Spirit. We need to be spiritually minded.

“For what man knows the things of a man except the spirit of the man which is in him? Even so no one knows the things of God except the Spirit of God.” Realize, **God is known on the spiritual level.**

Today, your body language and facial impressions might convey to me an interest in what I'm saying, but your mind could be focused on this afternoon's game. Only the spirit of man knows the mind of man.

And likewise, only the Spirit of God knows the mind of God. This is why if I want to know God I need to cultivate a friendship with God's Spirit. The mysteries of God are hidden from the mighty, but are available to minions like us, through the ministry of God's Spirit.

Verse 12, "Now we have received, not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God, that we might know the things that have been freely given to us by God." We're given God's Spirit not just to inhabit us, but to reveal stuff to us and use us for His glory.

Ever had an urge to pause and pray for a friend? Or you were compelled to go out of your way to speak to a stranger? These kinds of inner urges can come from God's Spirit. We have received God's Holy Spirit.

And we can expect His Spirit to be active in us. God has blessings for us and others that are freely given.

To me one of the tremendous thrills of the Christian life is to be on the receiving end of a divine communiqué. At first you're scared. You feel a bit foolish. You're not completely sure that what you're feeling is from God - but you step out in faith, act on the impulse, and you see God's hand at work. When this begins to happen, your life becomes an adventure!

Verse 13, "These things we also speak, not in words which man's wisdom teaches but which the Holy Spirit teaches, comparing spiritual things with spiritual." Here is how you learn to recognize the voice of God's Spirit - by "comparing spiritual things with spiritual."

You compare the inner urge you're feeling with the nature of Jesus that you're learning - is this something the Lord would do? If so, it's probably from the Lord.

You compare the still small voice you are hearing, with the Bible you are reading - are they compatible? God's Spirit authored Scripture. They won't contradict.

You compare what you're sensing spiritually with your spiritual gift or calling - does what the Spirit say harmonize with where God is already guiding me?

We learn to identify these spiritual subjectives by scrutinizing them up against spiritual objectives!

We know that God never contradicts Himself. Thus, if your inner prompting doesn't reflect Jesus, or if it contradicts His Word; then you know it's not from God.

"But the natural man does not receive the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him; nor can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned." Paul's been talking about the [spiritual man](#). This is the person in tune with God's Spirit...

But the **natural man** is limited. He lacks God's Spirit. The mind of man unaided by God's Spirit can't explore the things of God. The natural man is deaf to spiritual communiqués. He or she is earthbound in their deliberations - they're limited to their own senses. A whole spiritual dimension is closed off to him or her.

"But he who is spiritual judges all things, yet he himself is rightly judged by no one." Since the spiritual man has access to resources unavailable to the natural man - he or she will be doubted and misunderstood.

This is why it's frustrating to share what God is doing in your heart with a lost friend or spouse who doesn't know Jesus. It doesn't compute to them. They're not privy to the info and sensitivities available to you...

Verse 16 "For "who has known the mind of the LORD that he may instruct Him?" But we have the mind of Christ." The Phillips translation renders verse 16, **"Who has known the mind of the Lord that he may instruct him?' Incredible as it may sound, we who are spiritual have the very thoughts of Christ!"** What a marvelous concept! **We have the very thoughts of Christ!**

Don't think you have to turn off your mind, and enter a trance-like state to communicate with God's Spirit. That's not how God usually works. God has given us a mind. His Spirit now wants to enlighten our intellect.

Through the Spirit our minds are exposed to God's thoughts. We're made privy to heaven's perspective.

Can you dream of a bigger blessing, **"we have the mind of Christ"**? The unbeliever has lost his mind. He's not in his right mind. But we have the mind of Christ!

Notice, Paul is discussing three types of people...

The **natural man** - who doesn't know God at all. Then the **spiritual man** - who's in contact with God's Spirit...

And in Chapter 3 Paul will bring up the **carnal man**. He's the man or woman who knows God, yet lives as if he doesn't. We'll study the carnal person next week...