

# 1 Corinthians Bible Study

## Section 1 Introduction, 1:1-9

### Historical Background

1. Author: Paul
2. Date / occasion: most likely when Paul was on his third missionary journey and ministering at Ephesus between 54-56AD
3. Purpose:
  - a. A call to unity in the spirit as a church. The Corinthian church was severely divided into sectarian cliques that glorified man and not God.
  - b. A call to moral purity among all members of the church, and discipline for those who were sinning worse than unbelievers.
  - c. A response to specific questions the church had written to Paul for clarification on.
4. Background of the church at Corinth
  - a. The capital city of Achaia, located on the southern tip of Greece
  - b. A significant amount of commercial traffic by land or sea came through Corinth
  - c. A populous city of about 500,000 people with a multicultural demographic: Greeks, Latins, Jews, Egyptians, Syrians and Asiatics.
  - d. Corinth was passionate about their sporting events, and they held the Isthmian Games, second only to the Olympics in the first century Roman empire.
  - e. The city of Corinth was morally corrupt with citizens and travelers regularly engaging in partying, drunkenness, sexual immorality. To “Corinthianize” was to engage in the lowest forms of sin and debauchery.
  - f. The local temple to Aphrodite, the goddess of love, housed 1,000 prostitutes.
  - g. Paul journeyed to Corinth initially after being expelled from Philippi, Thessalonica, and Berea, and may have been alone and at a low point when he entered the synagogue to proclaim the gospel of Jesus Christ. He was forced out of the synagogue also but moved his ministry next door to a house owned by Justice.
  - h. Aquila and Priscilla joined with Paul at Corinth and become co-laborers with him.
  - i. Paul was at Corinth for eighteen months and he had a significant relationship with the Corinthian church as a result.
5. History of Paul’s contact with Corinth
  - a. Paul founded the church at Corinth
  - b. Paul wrote a letter (5:9) that is perhaps lost and not Scripture (or is included in 2 Corinthians)
  - c. Paul receives disturbing news of division and moral corruption within the church from the household of Chloe (1:11), and he has received a letter from another in Corinth asking for a response (7:1)
  - d. Paul responds to the above by writing 1 Corinthians

- e. Paul receives word that Corinth is in decline and he hurries to visit the church, and is disappointed in what he finds there (2 Cor. 12;14, 1:15)
- f. Paul writes his severe letter and sends it to Corinth by Titus (2 Cor. 2:4, 7:8).
- g. Paul is anxious to hear back on how his letter was received and he goes out to meet Titus in Macedonia. This seems to be when Paul writes 2 Corinthians.
- h. Paul makes his final visit to the church (Acts 20:1-4)

### Outline of 1 Corinthians

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| 1. Greeting and reminder of the facts            | 1:1-9      |
| 2. Responses to Chloe's letter on divisions      | 1:10-4:21  |
| 3. Incest and immorality occurring in the church | 5:1-6:20   |
| 4. Response to the questions on marriage         | 7:1-40     |
| 5. Response to Christian liberties and rights    | 8:1-11:1   |
| 6. Response to questions on public worship       | 11:2-34    |
| 7. Response to questions on Spiritual gifts      | 12:1-14:40 |
| 8. Response to questions on the resurrection     | 15:1-58    |
| 9. Final thoughts and concerns for the church    | 16:1-24    |

## Paul's Greeting (1:1-3)

1. Paul was known by the church at Corinth. He established the church there and he was writing a letter back to them at their request.
2. He was called to be an apostle of Jesus Christ
  - a. Through the will of God, Paul did not request to be called but rather it was God who initiated the call upon Paul.
  - b. Because Paul was altogether unlike the other apostles, Paul was frequently challenged by critics on his calling and his apostleship.
  - c. Many of Paul's letters offer a defense of his calling as an apostle, but his defense is more direct and thorough to the Corinthians than in his other epistles.
  - d. Paul is an apostle of Jesus Christ. His doctrines and his authority to establish the proper functions of the church descend only from God. This is fact is vital to the message of the letter as a whole.
  - e. In terms of his salvation status, Paul considers himself equal to all other believers. In terms of his apostleship and his calling, Paul has been given a greater responsibility and burden than the believers in the churches he established, even if he is least among all the apostles.
  - f. Paul will not accept any challenges from men concerning his authority and calling.
3. Sosthenes our brother.
  - a. A fellow laborer in Christ with Paul, equal in relationship to Christ
  - b. Possibly the one who carried the letter from Corinth to Paul at Ephesus
  - c. Possibly the ruler of the synagogue who was beaten in Acts 18:12-17.
4. To the church of God which is at Corinth
  - a. First and foremost, this was a church of God.
  - b. As bad and as sinful as the Corinthian church had become, God had not disavowed them individually or as a called-out assembly of believers.
  - c. The church was located in Corinth, but they were a connected part of the church of God around the world. What happened in the church at Corinth impacted the church everywhere.
5. To those who are sanctified in Christ Jesus, called saints
  - a. Unlike Paul's pastoral epistles, this letter was written to every believer in Corinth
  - b. Sanctified means "set apart." Perhaps more than in any other city, the Corinthian church needed to demonstrate that they were set apart from their unsaved neighbors.
  - c. Sanctification is both a gift and a process.
    - i. Accepting Christ by faith means we are declared sanctified by God.
    - ii. Believers are also called to actively be sanctified as a process. That is to choose daily to live the life of Christlikeness where we reject sin and walk with God.

- iii. The final act for believers is when we will be sanctified after this mortal life has ceased and we meet God face to face.
- 6. Saints also set apart as holy, pure, and morally blameless. The fact that Paul is calling them saints, despite their multitude of problems and corruptions, means that God loves them as believers even though He is calling them to cease and desist from their sinful behaviors.
  - a. With all who in every place call on the name of Jesus Christ our Lord, both theirs and ours.
  - b. Being sanctified and set apart means from the world, not from the broader church of God in Christ.
  - c. Other believers and other churches all call upon the same savior and Lord.
  - d. It should have been comforting to know that even though the Corinthian church was marred with sin and corruption, they were still positionally in the body of Christ.
- 7. Grace to you and peace from God our father
  - a. Grace, God's unmerited favor.
  - b. Grace always proceeds either peace or truth (John 1:14, 17; Rom. 1:7).
  - c. Grace is a central theme in all of Paul's letters.
    - i. Paul uses grace as his salutation
    - ii. He also uses grace as a benediction
    - iii. No other New Testament writer focuses on the doctrine of grace more than Paul.
  - d. The meaning of grace is that everything we receive from God is entirely unmerited. He owes us nothing, but by His grace He has given us everything according to His own pleasure and goodness:
    - i. Faith
    - ii. Salvation
    - iii. Forgiveness of sins
    - iv. Eternal life in His kingdom
    - v. Spiritual gifts
    - vi. Countless blessings in this life and in the one to come
  - e. Peace with God

- i. Contrary to many misperceptions, God desires to be at peace with us.
  - ii. Lack of peace results from our sinful conduct that attempts to push God away rather than allowing Him to draw us closer
  - iii. Peace, faith and trust all combine to demonstrate our view of God. The less trust and faith we have in the goodness and purposes of God, the less peace we will have in our own lives and in our relationship with God.
  - iv. The question is not, will God make a way for peace, but rather will believers accept His offer of peace, or will we reject it?
  - v. Paul, writing from a Roman prison cesspool, stated that he was content and at peace in Christ, refusing to focus on his external struggles in this life (Phil. 4:11).
- f. The Lord Jesus Christ
- i. The church must place its focus exclusively on Christ and His will.
  - ii. In unity with the Father, Jesus Christ is offering grace and peace to His church.
  - iii. Jesus has specifically commissioned Paul to write the words of this letter.
  - iv. The faithful at Corinth are to rejoice that the Lord has not abandoned or rejected the Corinthian church for their sinful conduct. Instead, the Lord intends to correct them in love and call them back to a place of continuing their sanctification process.

## Thanking God for Spiritual Gifts at Corinth

1. Thanking God for His grace given to the Corinthian church
  - a. Acknowledging again the reality of God's grace to the church
  - b. Jesus Christ is specifically credited with offering them His grace
  - c. The evidence of His grace is manifested in the gifts given to them:
    - i. Enriched – made spiritually wealthy; uniquely furnished.
    - ii. All utterance/speech (logos) – speaking with divine words and power.
    - iii. All knowledge – understanding of divine truths.
    - iv. The gifts in operation in Corinth were intended as proof that God had confirmed and testified of their saving faith in Christ.
    - v. Perhaps exclusive to Corinth at the time, they came short in no spiritual gift. All the gifts may have been present and operating (perhaps when Paul was last there).
    - vi. They were even eagerly waiting for the revelation (appearing/unveiling) of the Lord Jesus Christ. Other churches like Thessalonica were deeply confused about Christ's coming.
    - vii. Paul was confident, despite their shortcomings in holiness, that the Lord would confirm them as being blameless and fully eligible for eternal life when the Day of the Lord comes. This confidence comes from Paul's understanding of salvation by faith, through grace, and not of works that would be merited to them (Eph. 2:8-9).

- viii. God is faithful at all times.
  - 1. God called the Corinthians and He would remain faithful in spite of their sinful conduct (though He certainly does not approve of it and also calls them to repent and have a change of direction).
  - 2. The corrupt Corinthian church has been called into the fellowship of Jesus Christ, the Son of God and our Lord.
  
- d. Paul's acknowledgement of the Spiritual gifts operating at Corinth helps to remind them that they are in fact a church of God (1:1)
  - i. By grace they were saved.
  - ii. By grace they were added to the greater body of Christ.
  - iii. By grace they were enriched with every Spiritual gift.
  - iv. By grace they understood sound doctrine.
  - v. By grace they were eagerly expecting Christ's return.
  
- e. Looking forward.
  - i. From the foundation of the truth of God's grace, Paul next addresses the corruptions that the church must address.
  - ii. Paul pleads with his brethren to hear the Lord speaking through him.
  - iii. He also warns them to purge out those who are grotesquely sinning in the church for the health of the church and to teach the sinners that there are consequences for their behaviors.
  - iv. Warnings or threats?
    - 1. Paul does not overtly threaten the Corinthians that their sins will separate them from God's love and grace.
    - 2. His focus is on correcting and restoring the church back to health.
    - 3. Paul's words are for those who need correction, not a return to salvation.
    - 4. While certainly worldly and sinful, the Corinthians have shown no evidence of having abandoned their faith in Jesus Christ.
    - 5. Nevertheless, there are three discrete warnings that the reader should observe:
      - a. God will destroy defiled temples that are unholy (3:16-17).
      - b. The unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God (6:9-10)
      - c. Take heed of your conduct lest you fall (10:6-12)