



1 CORINTHIANS

CHAPTER 1:1-31 - INTRODUCTION

GREETINGS – Verses 1 to 3

1 Corinthians 1:1 *“Paul, called to be an apostle of Jesus Christ through the will of God, and Sosthenes our brother,”*

a. “Paul, called to be an apostle of Jesus Christ through the will of God...”

- Paul was called by the will of God to be an Apostle of Jesus Christ.

1) An Apostle is known as “A Sent One.”

- Paul was sent as God’s messenger primarily to the Gentiles.
- **Romans 11:13** *“For I speak to you Gentiles, inasmuch as I am the apostle of the Gentiles, I magnify mine office:”*

2) Paul makes it clear to the Corinthians that he was called by God to be an Apostle.

- Paul was not in any way self-appointed; it was God’s Will for Paul to be an Apostle.
- There were some who doubted Paul’s Apostleship.

3) Paul was an Apostle who was “born out of due time...”

- God appeared to Paul on the road that leads to Damascus. Acts 9
- Paul humbly submitted himself to God’s Will knowing that he was not worthy at all to be an Apostle.
- **1 Corinthians 15:8-9** *“And last of all he was seen of me also, as of **one born out of due time.** (9) For I am the least of the apostles, that am not meet to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God.”*

b. “...and Sosthenes our brother,”

1) Sosthenes is with Paul as he writes this letter to the Corinthians.

- It is a great possibility that Sosthenes is the same person mentioned in Acts 18:17.
- Sosthenes was the chief ruler of the synagogue in Corinth and was publicly beaten by the Greeks.

2) It seems that Sosthenes believed the Gospel message Paul preached and now is a fellow-laborer in the work of God with the Apostle Paul.

- Paul calls Sosthenes “...our brother...”
- This may well indicate that Paul is reassuring the Corinthians that Sosthenes indeed has trusted Christ as his own personal Saviour and is now part of the family of God.

AUTHOR: Paul, The Apostle

PLACE: Ephesus

DATE: About 55-56AD

AUDIENCE: The Corinthians

1 Corinthians 1:2 “Unto the church of God which is at Corinth, to them that are sanctified in Christ Jesus, called to be saints, with all that in every place call upon the name of Jesus Christ our Lord, both theirs and ours:”

a. “Unto the church of God which is at Corinth...”

- 1) Paul writes to the church at Corinth and emphasizes the fact that the church ultimately belonged to God.
 - The church didn’t belong to the false teachers who crept in, and it didn’t belong to Paul for that matter.
- 2) God used Paul to reach the Corinthians in his second missionary journey (Acts 18) where he meets Aquila and Priscilla.
 - The Lord ministered to Paul in a vision and encouraged Paul to stay in Corinth.
 - After about a year and a half, Paul travelled for Ephesus. The church was gifted with spiritual gifts; however, they were heavily influenced by the worldly wisdom that was rampant up in Corinth.

b. “...to them that are sanctified in Christ Jesus, called to be saints,

- The letter was written to the church as a whole, and specifically written “to them” who are believers.

1) To them that are “sanctified in Christ Jesus”

- This refers to their position in Christ.
- Believers are positionally set-apart in Christ; they are new creatures in Christ. 2 Corinthians 5:17

2) Called to be saints.

- To be called a saint means that believers were “holy” and part of a “holy nation”. They are individuals who are called out of darkness into His marvelous light.
- In Christ, each believer is a saint who is made holy and set apart from the world to God.

c. “...with all that in every place call upon the name of Jesus Christ our Lord, both theirs and ours:”

- 1) Those who call upon the name of Jesus Christ are believers who are saved and have made Jesus their Lord.



CORINTH

Without question, Corinth was the most important city of Greece. It was the capital of the Roman province of Achaia and was ideally located on the empire’s most important travel route from east to west. Fourth in size among the great cities of the Roman Empire, Corinth was noted for commerce, culture, and corruption. Everyone knew what “a Corinthian girl” was, and “a Corinthian feast” the depth of luxury and license. Corinth was the headquarters for the worship of Venus and for some of the mystery cults from Egypt and Asia.

WARREN W. WIERSBE



- 2) Paul acknowledges the wider fellowship of believers although this letter was written to the believers in Corinth.

- **William McDonald:** *“As saints they were members of a great fellowship: called to be saints, with all who in every place call on the name of Jesus Christ our Lord, both theirs and ours.*

Although the teachings of this Epistle were first addressed to the saints in Corinth, they are also intended for all those of the worldwide fellowship who acknowledge the lordship of Christ.”

1 Corinthians 1:3 “Grace be unto you, and peace, from God our Father, and from the Lord Jesus Christ.”

a. “Grace be unto you, and peace, from God our Father...”

- This opening letter is a reminder of God’s amazing favor upon undeserving people.
- This was Paul’s common greeting.
- Romans 1:7, 2 Corinthians 1:2; Galatians 1:3; Ephesians 1:2; Philippians 1:2; Colossians 1:2; 1 Thessalonians 1:1; 2 Thessalonians 1:2; 1 Timothy 1:2; 2 Timothy 1:2; Titus 1:4; Philemon 1:3.
- Indeed, God is our Father.

b. ...and from the Lord Jesus Christ.”

- Also, a great reminder of the peace that we have with God through our Lord Jesus Christ.
- **Romans 5:1** *“Therefore being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ.”*
- Jesus is our Lord.

THANKSGIVING – Verses 4 to 9

a. 1 Corinthians 1:4 “I thank my God always on your behalf, for the grace of God which is given you by Jesus Christ;”

- Although the church in Corinth had many issues Paul was thankful to God for the grace that was given to them by Jesus Christ.
- In other words, Paul always thanked God for their God-given Salvation.

b. 1 Corinthians 1:5 “That in every thing ye are enriched by him, in all utterance, and in all knowledge;”

- Paul is also thankful for the rich blessings given to them by Jesus Christ, especially in the following two areas:



PROBLEMS IN THE CHURCH

Dirty Disunity

Influenced by human philosophy

Idolatry

Abusing Christian liberty

Fornication

Taking each other to court

Drunkenness

Misuse of the Lord’s Supper

Lack of Love

Misuse of spiritual gifts

Women not under submission

Influenced by false teachers



- 1) By Christ they were given “Utterance” = The ability to speak for God.
- 2) By Christ they were given “Knowledge” = The Revelation of God.
 - God, in His grace gifted the Corinthians with spiritual gifts by Jesus Christ.

c. 1 Corinthians 1:6 “Even as the testimony of Christ was confirmed in you:”

- The testimony of Jesus Christ is revealed through the Gospel which Paul preached to the Corinthians and is confirmed in them through God’s rich blessings by Jesus Christ.

d. 1 Corinthians 1:7 “So that ye come behind in no gift; waiting for the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ:”

- There is a difference between spiritual gifts, and the fruit of the Spirit. For the most part, the Corinthians were gifted (they didn’t lack in this area), however, they did lack spiritual maturity.
- Paul didn’t have any issues with them being gifted, as a matter of fact he thanked God for it.
- They were to use their gifts to build each other up while they waited for the second coming of Jesus Christ.
- **Spurgeon said**, “Should it not show us that gifts are nothing, unless they are laid on the altar of God; that it is nothing to have the gift of oratory; that it is nothing to have the power of eloquence; that it is nothing to have learning; that it is nothing to have influence, unless they all be dedicated to God, and consecrated to his service?”

e. 1 Corinthians 1:8 “Who shall also confirm you unto the end, that ye may be blameless in the day of our Lord Jesus Christ.”

- Jesus is the one who will confirm every believer to the end at His second coming.
- It is in Christ and Christ alone that we can stand blameless before God. 2 Thessalonians 1:10

f. 1 Corinthians 1:9 “God is faithful, by whom ye were called unto the fellowship of his Son Jesus Christ our Lord.”

- 1) The security of the believer is based on God’s faithfulness. God’s faithfulness is based upon God’s goodness and His unfailing promise given to those who believe.
 - **Titus 1:2** “In hope of eternal life, which God, that cannot lie, promised before the world began;”
- 2) It was by the faithfulness of God that all believers are called unto the fellowship of His Son—Jesus Christ our Lord.
 - **1 John 1:3** “That which we have seen and heard declare we unto you, that ye also may have fellowship with us: and truly our fellowship is with the Father, and with his Son Jesus Christ.”

DIRTY DIVISION – Verses 10-17

a. **1 Corinthians 1:10** *“Now I beseech you, brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that ye all speak the same thing, and that there be no divisions among you; but that ye be perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment.”*

- Paul calls the Corinthians to be unified by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.
- Using the name of Jesus Christ affirms the authority of Paul’s appeal and reminds the church about the Lordship of Christ.

1) ALL SPEAK THE SAME THING = This must be based upon plain and clear doctrinal truth.

2) NO DIVISION = a split, rent, schism, separation.

- Paul is beseeching them to stop pulling each other apart, tearing up the body of Christ.
- There must be complete unity and harmony when it comes to the truth of God’s Word.
- God didn’t give us His Word to “agree to disagree”; we must agree on the foundational truths of God’s Word.
- There are some things in Scripture that are unclear, and we should never be divided on them, nor make them a point of contention.

3) PERFECTLY JOINED TOGETHER = to repair or mend what is broken.

- When something is broken or torn apart, we endeavor to put it back together in a perfect way.
- *Barclay on joined together: “A medical word used of knitting together bones that have been fractured, or joining together a joint that has been dislocated. The disunion is unnatural and must be cured.”*

i. **In the “Same Mind”** = the thought life, the intellect.

- They must have the same thinking concerning the way things must be done biblically.
- This does not mean Christians have to think the same on everything, but they **MUST** think the same on the main things that truly matter according to God’s Word.
- **Albert Barnes** *“This cannot mean that they were to be united in precisely the same shades of opinion, which is impossible.”*
- **Romans 15:5** *“Now the God of patience and consolation grant you to be likeminded one toward another according to Christ Jesus:”*
- Christians ought to have the mind of Christ in all matters that matter. Amen!
- **Philippians 4:2** *“I beseech Euodias, and beseech Syntyche, that they be of the same mind in the Lord.”*

ii. **In the “Same Judgment”** = Purpose, outcome, conclusion, verdict, resolve.

- The Church must be unified in vital decisions they make according to a biblical standard.
- **Acts 15:22** *“Then pleased it the apostles and elders, with the whole church, to send chosen men of their own company to Antioch with Paul and Barnabas; namely, Judas surnamed Barsabas, and Silas, chief men among the brethren:”*
- **Acts 15:25** *“It seemed good unto us, being assembled with one accord, to send*

chosen men unto you with our beloved Barnabas and Paul,”

- **Acts 15:28** *“For it seemed good to the Holy Ghost, and to us, to lay upon you no greater burden than these necessary things;”*
- The Spirit of God leads the Church of God into genuine unity based on the Word of God.
- **Ephesians 4:3** *“Endeavouring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.”*

b. 1 Corinthians 1:11 *“For it hath been declared unto me of you, my brethren, by them which are of the house of Chloe, that there are contentions among you.”*

- Paul heard disturbing news from the “house of Chloe” that the Church at Corinth were divided and had contentions among themselves.
- 1) The household of Chloe was most probably a family who lived in Corinth and belonged to the church.
 - We are not certain who of the family went to Paul, however, the account reveals to us that they approached Paul out of concern for the church.
 - 2) How can a person tell the difference between “gossip/talebearing” in comparison to discussions/concerns/conversations about certain issues?
 - i. Paul mentions the household of Chloe thus indicating that they were open and transparent. They were not afraid to have their name mentioned.
 - They also went to the right person to help deal with the problem, and not make it worse.
 - This also reveals that this household did not want to take sides in any way, but rather, they wanted the matter to be resolved. Amen!
 - This indicates to us that they had a heart for God’s people and desired to see the church united and not divided.
 - ii. The most awful thing that can happen in a church is to have various cliques and people showing partiality for selfish reasons and vain glory.
 - **Galatians 5:26** *“Let us not be desirous of vain glory, provoking one another, envying one another.”*

c. 1 Corinthians 1:12 *“Now this I say, that every one of you saith, I am of Paul; and I of Apollos; and I of Cephas; and I of Christ.”*

- 1) There seems to be about four divisions in the church who had their favorite apostle they wanted to follow. Keep in mind that the Apostles are not in any way divided; it was the people who were dividing them.
 - It could be that some of the Corinthians preferred the personality, style, ability, gifts, of one over another.
 - If this is the case, they were not spiritually mature enough to understand that the Lord is the one who made these Apostles their own unique person, and it was the Lord who gave them the gifts and abilities to work together to fulfill the purpose of God in the life of the church.

- 2) Each of these Apostles had a significant part to play in the building up of the body of Christ.
- i. **I am of Paul** – Paul was a bold preacher of the Word, and he was key in planting the church by preaching the Gospel to them. **2 Corinthians 11:5-7**
 - **Their possible attitude:** Paul is a strong leader, and Paul was the one who started the church.
 - ii. **I of Apollos** – Apollos, who was an eloquent man and mighty in the Old Testament Scriptures, had come to Corinth after Paul and watered the church by encouraging them with the Word. **Acts 18:24**
 - **Their possible attitude:** Apollos is very smart and knowledgeable, and he knows the Scriptures better than anyone else.
 - iii. **I of Cephas** – Peter was with the Lord Jesus from the beginning and was used by God to plant the first Church in Jerusalem.
 - The church would have heard about Peter and his teachings, but it is not certain that he visited Corinth.
 - However, Paul does mention Peter again in 1 Corinthians 9:5, which indicates that the Corinthians were somewhat familiar with Peter. **1 Peter 5:1**
 - **Their possible attitude:** Peter was one of the first Christians; he has a lot to offer and knows more about the Lord's earthly ministry than anyone one else. We also heard that he has the keys to the kingdom of heaven.
 - iv. **I of Christ** – Christ is the One who gave His life for the church; He is the builder of the church, and the Head of the church. **Matthew 16:18**
 - This group seems the most spiritual as they do not want to follow any man but Christ.
 - Although they do not want to follow any man; they failed to understand that Christ used the Apostles to lay the foundation. They were tools being used to help build the church.
 - **Their possible attitude:** We follow no man but Christ; He is our only teacher and shepherd.
 - v. We may appreciate others, praise God for them, and even honor/respect men; but they should never be worshiped or used to create division in the body of Christ. **1 Timothy 5:17**
 - Jesus Christ is the only One who should have the place of preeminence in the world and in the church. **Colossians 1:18.**
 - **Warren W. Wiersbe:** *"Instead of emphasizing the message of the Word, the Corinthians emphasized the messenger. They got their eyes off the Lord and on the Lord's servants, and this led to competition...It is sinful for church members to compare pastors, or for believers to follow human leaders as disciples of men and not disciples of Jesus Christ."*
 - **It has also been said,** *"The Corinthians' boasting about their "party leaders" was really boasting about themselves. It wasn't so much that they thought Apollos was great, but that they were great for following him."*

d. 1 Corinthians 1:13 “Is Christ divided? was Paul crucified for you? or were ye baptized in the name of Paul?”

- Paul now asked a series of rhetorical questions (with obvious answers), intending for the Corinthians to reflect on their behavior.

1) “Is Christ divided?” – NO!

- Christ has not been divided into different parts passed out to four classes of people.
- The Apostles were not preaching three different Christs or teaching error.
- So, Christ is not divided – the Apostles were not divided – why are you divided?

2) Was Paul crucified for you? – NO!

- i. Paul was not crucified for them, but rather Paul preached Christ crucified.
 - Paul’s question is a soft rebuke to his own vehement followers; Paul was not looking for that kind of “following”.
 - This is how some people follow Mary; they make her to be a goddess. We often have to ask the Catholics, “Did Mary die for you on the Cross?”
- ii. Paul didn’t want a following that caused a schism in the body of Christ. The kind of following Paul was looking for were people to follow his example in following Christ. Paul desired people to be Christians – Christ-followers.
 - However, in comparison to false teachers, Paul would rather the Corinthians follow Paul in the right biblical teaching than false teachings.

3) Or were ye baptized in the name of Paul?” – NO!

- Paul continues to drive his point. When a person is baptized, they identify themselves with the name of the person they are being baptized in.
- Paul was not trying to make a name for himself or desire a following. Paul’s main goal was to point people to Christ.
- **Warren W. Wiersbe:** *“It is wrong to identify any man’s name with your baptism other than the name of Jesus Christ. To do so is to create division. I have read accounts about people who had to be baptized by a certain preacher, using special water (usually from the Jordan River), on a special day, as though these are the matters that are important! Instead of honoring the Lord Jesus Christ and promoting the unity of the church, these people exalt men and create disunity.”*

e. 1 Corinthians 1:14-16 “I thank God that I baptized none of you, but Crispus and Gaius; (15) Lest any should say that I had baptized in mine own name. (16) And I baptized also the household of Stephanas: besides, I know not whether I baptized any other.”

- Paul was not downplaying the importance of water baptism; however, Paul’s main ministry was to preach the gospel. (vs 16)
- The reason Paul thanks God for not baptizing the majority of the believers in Corinth was because of the way they carried on.
- Paul could almost see a false accusation coming from the different groups attempting to accuse him of perhaps taking the place of Christ in the church.
- This may also give us a little more information about how these carnal Corinthians were behaving.

- 1) Crispus had been the ruler of the synagogue in Corinth. Acts 18:8.
- 2) Gaius hosted Paul in Corinth. Romans 16:23.
- 3) The household of Stephanas were the first fruits of the church. 1 Corinthians 16:15

f. 1 Corinthians 1:17 “For Christ sent me not to baptize, but to preach the gospel: not with wisdom of words, lest the cross of Christ should be made of none effect.”

- 1) Paul was sent to preach the gospel.
 - i. Paul was not specifically sent to baptize people; he may have appointed others to baptize.
 - Making this distinction proves the fact that water baptism is not for salvation.
 - Paul did not consider water baptism as an essential component of the gospel.
 - The Gospel is the power of God unto salvation, not water baptism. Romans 1:16
 - Water baptism is part of the great commission, not the gospel.
 - A person does not get baptized to become a Christian; a person gets baptized because they are Christians who have believed the gospel.
 - If “baptismal regeneration” were true, then why did Paul thank God that he only baptized few in Corinth?
 - ii. Baptism is a command for repentant believers. Acts 10:48
 - ***It has been said, “While therefore it is unscriptural to make baptism essential to salvation or a certain means of regeneration, it is nevertheless a dangerous act of disobedience to undervalue or neglect it.”***



WILLIAM MCDONALD

It will help us to understand the section that follows if we remember that the Corinthians, being Greeks, were great lovers of human wisdom. They regarded their philosophers as national heroes. Some of this spirit had apparently crept into the assembly at Corinth. There were those who desired to make the gospel more acceptable to the intelligentsia. They did not feel that it had status among scholars, and so they wanted to intellectualize the message. This worship of intellectualism was apparently one of the issues that was causing the people to form parties around human leaders. Efforts to make the gospel more acceptable are completely misguided. There is a vast difference between God's wisdom and man's, and there is no use trying to reconcile them.



- 2) Paul was sent to preach, simply preach, the Gospel. “...*not with wisdom of words...*”
- i. Paul never preached the gospel with wisdom of words.
 - Paul preached simply and plainly, without any attempt to shine with eloquence or intellect.
 - ii. The wisdom of words undermines the simple gospel.
 - The gospel does not need anything added to it to make it powerful or acceptable.
 - The gospel does not need eloquence of speech; it just needs to be simply explained.
 - The gospel is not difficult to understand but must be declared shamelessly and boldly.
- 3) Paul was sent to preach emphasizing the Cross of Christ. “...*lest the cross of Christ should be made of none effect.*”
- i. This verse proves that a person can preach the gospel in a way that has no effect upon the hearers.
 - *A bible teacher once said, “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.”*
 - ii. The central message of the Gospel is “Christ Crucified.”
 - Paul did not want the message of the crucified Christ to be undermined in any way.
 - If people miss the Cross, they miss the whole message of the Gospel.
 - **The Cross** = Penalty for sin, death, pain, suffering, shame, payment, love, judgement etc.
 - Paul now begins to contrast the effect the cross has upon the hearers.