

First Corinthians 1

Introduction:

1. You should read Acts 18 to obtain an inspired history of the formation of this church by the apostle Paul.
2. This expository series is chosen to (a) let the Spirit introduce various subjects and (b) help guide your Bible reading.
3. The excesses and weaknesses of the church at Corinth are reflected well in the state of the churches in this country.
4. The pride, human wisdom, wealth, luxury, and sexual immorality in Corinth were very comparable to America in 2004.

Outline of Chapter 1:

1. Salutation (1-3)
2. Commendation (4-9)
3. Exhortation to unity (10-16)
4. Explanation of gospel (17-25)
5. Character of the elect (26-29)
6. Sovereignty in salvation (30-31)

1:1 Paul and Sosthenes write a letter to correct errors and encourage faith of the Corinthians.

- A. Paul was an apostle of Jesus, the highest office in the church, by the will of God, not man.
- B. No man has the right to a church office as other vocations are chosen (I Tim 3:1; Heb 5:4).
- C. Sosthenes was the converted chief ruler of the synagogue, beaten by the Greeks (Acts 18:17).
- D. Together they formed an authoritative duo in correcting the church and teaching the truth.

1:2 The letter was directly for saints at Corinth, but could also serve others and their children.

- A. The church is commonly named by its Founder and Head, and by its location or membership.
- B. This is not one of the many varieties of the Church of God, a denomination founded by men.
- C. The word “church” does not mean a building here, but rather a local congregation of saints; and neither is it some universal church, for it is limited to the congregation at Corinth.
- D. Corinth was a proud, wealthy, educated, and lascivious city in Achaia, in southern Greece.
- E. It was one of the most lewd and wicked cities of the time, which makes it similar to America.
- F. Paul and Apollos spent much time at Corinth with this large church (Acts 18:1-28; 19:1).
- G. Paul reminds them, many with horrible lives before conversion (6:9-11), that they were sanctified, made holy, in and by Jesus Christ. God forgives sinners by Jesus Christ. Glory!
- H. Churches members are legally and vitally sanctified – made holy (Heb 10:10-14; I Pet 1:2).
- I. Church members are also practically called to be saints by choosing to live holy (I Pet 1:15).
- J. Their salutation included all sincere believers in every place, which includes us (Col 4:16).
- K. The identity of true religion and churches and saints is worshipping Jesus as Lord (12:3); which is far more than merely mouthing the words, as it includes the power also (II Tim 3:5).
- L. Jesus is the Lord of all God’s people, without distinction, their Lord and our Lord; which unites us from the ends of the earth with those who are already in heaven (Heb 12:22-24)!
- M. “Their’s” refers to all those in every other place, and “our’s” to Paul’s and the Corinthians’.
- N. Note the contrast with local or regional pagan deities, like Diana at Ephesus (Acts 19:34).

1:3 Paul salutes them by a variation of his common themes – God’s grace and peace in Christ.

- A. We depended on God’s grace for salvation, and we are still dependent on it for living.
- B. Demerited favor, the definition of grace, began our salvation, keeps it, and will finish it!
- C. The presence of the Holy Spirit speaking peace to our souls is precious (Rom 5:5; Gal 4:6).
- D. The turmoil of our two men living in a world of temptation and persecution calls for peace.

1:4 As was Paul’s manner, he opened his epistles with some thankworthy commendation.

- A. There may not have been too much to commend them for, but they were saved by grace!

- B. If we knew better this city's depth of depravity and idolatry, we might appreciate the praise!
- C. And the merciful supply of grace had supplied them with abundant gifts of the Spirit.
- D. A commendation prepared them for the apostle's numerous corrections that were coming!

1:5 **God's grace in Christ had supplied their spiritual needs by gifts of the Spirit for revelation.**

- A. What does the grace of God do in a life? It enriches everything we do with power and joy!
- B. They had enriched utterance, in that they were blessed with many tongues and prophecies.
- C. They had enriched knowledge, in that they were blessed with many prophets and teachers.
- D. Prior to the completion of the New Testament, churches were dependent on supernatural revelatory gifts for the edification and instruction of the saints (I Cor 12:28; 13:8-12).

1:6 **God had graciously confirmed the testimony of Jesus Christ with gifts of the Holy Ghost.**

- A. When apostles, including Paul, preached, God granted signs and wonders to confirm them.
- B. These miraculous signs and revelations confirmed the gospel (Heb 2:3-4; Acts 2:1-13; 8:6-8).
- C. The testimony that a man had risen from the dead was confirmed by many obvious miracles.

1:7 **The Corinthians had the most spiritual gifts of any church in the New Testament.**

- A. There was no other church ahead of them in any spiritual gift; they had them all abundantly.
- B. We shall see these gifts listed and explained as we come to that section of the epistle (12-14).
- C. This verse by itself condemns the arrogance of the Charismatics, who revel in spiritual gifts.
- D. For the church at Corinth, superior in spiritual gifts, was filled with many heresies and sins.
- E. A gift of ability or office does not prove a man's soul, as King Saul and Judas show plainly.
- F. The goal of a true church is waiting for Christ's coming (I Thes 1:10; II Tim 4:8; Tit 2:13).
- G. The event toward which all true saints look with desire and expectation is Christ's coming.

1:8 **The grace of God would continue to enrich and confirm them until Christ's coming.**

- A. Obedience on the part of these saints is implied, for only the obedient will be blameless.
- B. Practical obedience is essential and necessary for God to confirm souls unto His coming.
- C. Consider those already dead at Corinth (11:30). They were certainly not blameless at all!
- D. Lot was a just and righteous man, but his carnal lifestyle left him full of blame before God.
- E. It is the positive purpose of the apostle to speak of those things he desired for the church.
- F. Paul would later tell these same people not to receive the grace of God in vain (II Cor 6:1-2).
- G. And he also told them his earnest efforts to labor to be accepted by God (II Cor 5:8-11).
- H. It is the duty of expositors to rightly divide Bible texts like this, for the matter at hand is active pursuit of holiness by saints, not a fatalistic performing of it by God (I Thess 3:11-13).

1:9 **It is the faithfulness of God that preserves us and perfects us in preparation of that day.**

- A. God is faithful – we are not, in comparison! The Corinthians were not faithful, but God was!
- B. Paul clearly saw saints' obedience and God's faithfulness to preserve them (I Thess 5:23-24).
- C. See the sermon outline dealing with the above verses from the study of First Thessalonians.
- D. God will do His part in perfecting us, but we must be doing our part as well (Philippians 1:6).
- E. God's faithfulness, power, and Spirit are available for those walking faithfully in the Spirit.

1:10 **Paul now thoroughly exhorts them to unity, before correcting them for divisions and strife.**

- A. As Christ's servants, ministers are not lords over God's heritage, so Paul beseeches them.
- B. However, ministers are Christ's ambassadors, so Paul invokes His fearful and glorious name.
- C. In all spiritual matters, a church must be perfectly joined together in one mind and judgment.
- D. Of course, this unity does not apply to all minor and personal matters of one's private life.
- E. However, church unity does include charitable respect for all members' liberties (8:9; 10:29)!

- F. Church unity is a goal for members to fervently pursue (Ep 4:1-3,15-16,31-32; Col 3:12-15).
- G. A house divided cannot stand (Matt 12:25), and ministers waste precious time (I Thess 5:13).
- H. Paul even named two individuals at Philippi that needed to settle their differences (Phil 4:2).
- I. A man without charity toward all others, regardless of attainments, is nothing at all (13:1-3).
- J. A glorious church is where all personal differences have been eliminated (Psalm 133:1-3)!
- K. It is ridiculous and reprehensible when blood-bought church members quarrel and fight.
- L. Therefore, in all matters of church judgment, we will be unanimous. Variance is excludable!
- M. And we will be unanimous in all minor matters, by the minority submitting to the majority.

1:11 **Members of Chloe's family had reported to Paul about the contentions at Corinth.**

- A. Helping rulers is no more backbiting, talebearing, or whispering than calling the police.
- B. It is a duty of ministers to search out such hearsay before judging (Deut 13:12-18; Pr 25:2).
- C. Paul does everything openly and honestly, even mentioning their names, for full disclosure.
- D. As when a child informs a parent about a sibling, the parent must make inquisition and judge.

1:12 **Paul himself identifies their problem of contentions as dividing over favorite preachers.**

- A. Rather than deal with a vague charge of "contentions," Paul specifically states them clearly.
- B. The church had divisions within it based on preacher preferences of Paul, Apollos, and Peter.
- C. Of course, the spiritually proud claimed to be of Christ, though all three men taught Christ!
- D. For Peter to be one of the preacher favorites shows the first devilish urges in his direction!

1:13 **Paul corrected their foolish notion of dividing the church and putting importance on men.**

- A. He first appeals to their understanding of Jesus Christ's body, the general church of all elect.
- B. He then compares himself very unfavorably with Jesus Christ, for there is no comparison.
- C. And he appealed to their baptisms in the name of Jesus Christ, rather than his pitiful name.
- D. There is no room for division or preacher preferences in the religious unity of Jesus Christ.

1:14 **He expressed thanksgiving that he had only baptized a few, lest he have a greater following.**

- A. These words are an oath in God's name, but Paul was justified due to the serious matter.
- B. He baptized Crispus and Gaius during his 18 months at Corinth. He quickly remembers them.
- C. Crispus was the chief ruler of the synagogue at Paul's arrival. He and his family were converted (Acts 18:8). Sosthenes was the chief ruler later, who also believed (Acts 18:17).
- D. Paul lived with Gaius later (Ro 16:23). Is this Gaius an opponent of Diotrophes (III Jn 1:1,9)?

1:15 **He plainly stated the reason for his happiness at not having baptized any more of them.**

- A. Contrary to superficial use of these verses, Paul was not sarcastically condemning Corinth.
- B. He was glad only a few Corinthian saints could look to a baptism administered by himself.
- C. He stated in very clear terms that he feared their excessive association with their teachers.
- D. It is a minister's prudence to avoid any activities that promote his name even near Christ's.

1:16 **He also remembered he had baptized the family of Stephanas, and he believed that was all.**

- A. There is comfort in inspired language like this, for it recognizes the frailty of human recall.
- B. Stephanas and his family were the first converts in Achaia; they were gospel addicts (16:15).
- C. Stephanas himself had visited Paul and brought assistance overlooked by the church (16:17).
- D. When Paul says he does not know something, we recognize God's inspiration of such words.

1:17 **Paul stated his ministry as the gospel of Christ, without promoting or depending on man.**

- A. This verse begins a parenthesis, a rabbit trail, concerning the preaching of the gospel, which does not end until 3:1, where he takes up again their foolish contentions over preachers.

- B. Christ did send him to baptize in the name of Jesus, but not in Paul's own name or fame.
- C. He had the same commission common to the other apostles, which included baptism.
- D. He baptized the persons just listed and likely others as well in the many cities he visited.
- E. But his principle work was to preach the gospel, and other inferior ministers could baptize.
- F. Consider the many converts in Corinth and the very few that he baptized (Acts 18:8,10).
- G. There was divine wisdom here, for foolish men value the administrator rather than Christ.
- H. The Lord Jesus Christ had ordained and taught Paul to be a preacher more than a baptizer.
- I. The gospel is the good news of Jesus Christ, which precludes any emphasis on Paul at all.
- J. Preaching is persuading men by manifestation of the truth (Acts 17:2-3; II Cor 4:1-2).
- K. Paul did not use his personality, training, or eloquence to preach Christ, lest he attract men.
- L. Both he and Apollos were learned men, Apollos eloquent; and all ministers are to be apt to teach (I Tim 3:2); but they are not to embellish the truth for the natural man by any methods.
- M. Paul will elaborate more on this approach to preaching in the very next chapter (2:1-5).
- N. If the preaching of Jesus Christ crucified is modified with other things, men will believe and profess faith in the tainted combination, bringing unregenerate reprobates into the church.
- O. The more Christ-centered a church becomes, the fewer unregenerate reprobates it will have.
- P. All modern efforts at casual worship and contemporary worship are by design to make the gospel more appealing to the unregenerate, wrecking havoc in the churches of Christ.
- Q. Most preaching today attracts the unregenerate and discourages the regenerate. God forbid!
- R. Ezekiel dealt with this same problem of compromise during his ministry (Ezekiel 13:22).
- S. Proper gospel preaching manifests both unregenerate and regenerate hearts (II Cor 2:14-17).
- T. The cross of Jesus Christ is perfect – it will drive away the perishing and attract the saved.
- U. Preaching salvation in Christ without circumcision was offensive to Jews (Galatians 5:11).
- V. Jesus was made a stone of stumbling and rock of offence, not a candy cane (I Peter 2:7-8).
- W. Anyone meeting the terms of the gospel and believing true gospel preaching is regenerate!
- X. See the extensive sermon outline entitled "Contemporary Christianity" dated July 30, 2000.

1:18 **The response to preaching the gospel depends entirely on the soul condition of the hearers.**

- A. The salvation affecting the hearing of the gospel is the vital phase of salvation – regeneration.
- B. Unless a man is born again, he cannot see Christ's kingdom or hear the gospel (Jn 3:3; 8:47).
- C. A natural man in the flesh cannot receive the gospel (Romans 8:7-8; I Cor 2:14; Gal 5:17).
- D. No matter what methods are used, the unregenerate will not respond (Is 26:10; Luke 16:31).
- E. The gospel of Christ as a way of life is totally hilarious and ridiculous to the unregenerate.
- F. Read how Festus mocked the apostle Paul with too much learning and madness (Acts 26:24).
- G. The gospel cannot save a perishing man, for that man cannot see, hear, believe, or receive it.
- H. The gospel is not literally or actually foolishness (18a): reprobates perceive it as foolishness.
- I. The gospel cannot save a saved man, for that man was saved by God's power before hearing.
- J. The gospel is not literally or actually God's power (18b): the saved perceive His power in it.
- K. The gospel was never designed to bring eternal life; it only brings it to light (II Tim 1:9-10).
- L. The gospel was never designed to make elect; for it was only for the elect (II Timothy 2:10).
- M. The words "are saved" are a passive voice, perfect tense verb construction meaning a past action still true in the present. Only men already saved perceive good things in the gospel.
- N. The verse does not say either "which will be saved" or the preaching "was" the power of God.
- O. What is the power of God perceived in the gospel of Christ? Virgin birth, miracles of Christ, destruction of Satan, resurrection from the dead, etc., etc. Any more questions?
- P. The proper preaching of the gospel is sweet incense in the lost and saved (II Cor 2:14-17).
- Q. Peter's preaching of Christ crucified and the Jewish guilt pricked one crowd to obedience; Stephen's almost identical message cut another crowd to murderous action (Acts 2:37; 7:54).

Conclusion:

1. If you believe the gospel of Jesus Christ and want to follow and obey Him, it is powerful proof you are saved.
2. Let us commit together to never modify the gospel or its presentation from the apostolic methods of Paul.

Additional study:

1. See the sermon, "Why Preach the Gospel?": http://www.letgodbettrue.com/Sermons/pdf/Why_Preach_the_Gospel.pdf.
2. See the study, "When Were You Saved?": <http://www.letgodbettrue.com/bibletopics/Salvation/WhenWereYouSaved.htm>