I Corinthians 1:17-31

Introduction:

1. Having studied the first chapter through 1:18 last week, we will overlap a little to begin this week's study.
2. Before anything else in this epistle covering so many things, we deal with the sovereignty of God in grace.
3. These first two verses are essential for all sincere saints to understand the purpose and results of the gospel.

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 Corinth's foolish contentions over preachers.
B. Paul intends to humble the Corinthians, for they were similar to Athens in intellectual pride.
C. Paul intends to humble the Corinthians, for they were glorying in their teachers foolishly.
D. By denying use of wisdom of words, he is rejecting Corinth's learning and esteem of men.
E. Christ did send Paul to baptize in the name of Jesus, but not in Paul's own name or fame.
F. He had the same commission common to the other apostles, which included baptism.
G. He baptized the persons just listed and likely others as well in the many cities he visited.
H. But his principle work was to preach the gospel, and other inferior ministers could baptize.
I. Consider the many converts in Corinth, yet the very few that he baptized (Acts 18:8,10).
J. There was divine wisdom here, for foolish men value the administrator rather than Christ.
K. The Lord Jesus Christ had ordained and taught Paul to be a preacher more than a baptizer.
L. The gospel is the good news of Jesus Christ, which precludes any emphasis on Paul at all.
M. The gospel is the good news of Jesus Christ, including all the doctrine of the New Testament, but it emphasizes the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ (I Cor 15:1-9; I Tim 1:5-11; 6:3).
N. Preaching is persuading men publicly by manifestation of truth (Acts 17:2-3; II Cor 4:1-2).
O. Paul did not use his personality, training, or eloquence to preach Christ, lest he attract men by carnal means and have their faith resting on human oratory and reasoning, and not on Christ.
P. 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.
Q. Paul will elaborate more on this approach to preaching in the very next chapter (2:1-5).
R. 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.
S. The more Christ-centered a church becomes, the fewer unregenerate reprobates it will have in the pews, for the person and doctrine of Jesus Christ is repulsive to the unregenerate.
T. 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.
U. The preaching of the gospel is a two-edged sword – it cuts the wicked and drives them away, and it pricks the regenerate and attracts them (Acts 2:37 cp Acts 7:54).
V. If the message is modified, the gospel loses both blade edges – it does not drive away unregenerate hearers, and it discourages the hearts of God's elect, who are looking for more.
W. This verse condemns most churches today, which have as their aim, purpose, and practice to modify the message and downgrade the worship to attract the carnal and unregenerate.
X. The aim of most churches is to attract the ungodly and lost into their services by carnality.
Y. Most preaching today attracts the unregenerate and discourages the regenerate. God forbid!
Z. Ezekiel dealt with this same problem of compromise during his ministry (Ezekiel 13:22).
AA. Proper gospel preaching reveals both unregenerate and regenerate hearts (II Cor 2:14-17), and the lost rejecting the gospel and the saved receiving it are both a sweet aroma to God!
BB. The cross of Jesus Christ is perfect – it will drive away the perishing and attract the saved.
CC. Preaching salvation in Christ without circumcision was offensive to Jews (Galatians 5:11).

DD. Jesus was made a stone of stumbling and rock of offence, not a candy cane (I Peter 2:7-8).
EE. Anyone meeting the terms of the gospel and believing true gospel preaching is regenerate!
FF. See the extensive sermon outline entitled "Contemporary Christianity" dated July 30, 2000.

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

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 declares and reveals the power of God in Christ to a regenerated heart and mind.
L. The gospel was never designed to bring eternal life; it only brings it to light (II Tim 1:9-10).
M. The gospel was never designed to make elect; for it was only for the elect (II Timothy 2:10).
N. Consider Paul's great ambition to preach the gospel to the believers in Rome (Rom 1:15-16), why is there a total lack of interest in preaching in the brothels and prisons and coliseum?
O. 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. All other men, those not already saved, will consider the gospel ridiculous foolishness.
P. The verse does not say either "which will be saved" or the preaching "was" the power of God, for it is plainly declaring that a great change must occur before hearing the gospel.
Q. As Paul explained in context, God's calling – appointment or ordination – to eternal life must occur first for the gospel to be perceived by hearers as the power and wisdom of God (1:24).
R. What is the power of God perceived in the gospel of Christ? Virgin birth, incarnation, His miracles, destruction of Satan, resurrection from the dead, etc., etc. Any more questions?
S. The proper preaching of the gospel is sweet incense in the lost and saved (II Cor 2:14-17), for the lost rejecting it justify their own damnation and the saved receiving it prove their life.
T. Peter's preaching of Christ crucified and Jewish guilt pricked one crowd to obedience; Stephen's almost identical message cut another crowd to murderous action (Acts 2:37; 7:54).
U. It is not the difference in presentation that causes belief and joy, but the difference in hearers!
V. If a man is born again by the Holy Spirit, he rejoices at hearing the preaching of Jesus Christ!

1:19 **<u>Paul defended his explanation of the sovereignty of God in the gospel by quoting Isaiah</u>**.

A. The quotation here is taken from Isaiah 29:14, where God ridicules the wisdom of Jerusalem.
B. Similar divine disrespect for man's wisdom is found in Eliphaz's words in Job 5:12-14.
C. It is God's sovereign right to overthrow the wisdom of man in revealing the truth to others.
D. The gospel confounds and contradicts the learning and wisdom of man, which is consistent with God's disrespect for man's intellectual and other abilities throughout human history.
E. The wisdom of the wisest natural man, squared and the cubed, is still far less than nothing!
F. God has chosen to save His elect by Himself, and the gospel is exclusively for them only.
G. Human learning is a detriment to discovering and understanding divine truth. Grasp this!
H. It is offensive to God and brings His judgment when men think themselves wise. Grasp this!
I. God has revealed His wisdom unto babes, for it seemed good in His sight (Matt 11:25-27).

1:20 **Paul further mocked human learning and wisdom by rhetorical and sarcastic questions**.

A. These words are Paul's words more than a quotation, though loosely based on Isaiah 33:18.
B. Rhetorically, where is the wise? What have they learned and understood with their wisdom?
C. Rhetorically, where is the scribe? What have books or the Law of Moses done for man?
D. Rhetorically, where are the disputers? What has philosophical speculation accomplished?
E. Rhetorically, has not the God of heaven turned man's learning and wisdom into utter folly?
F. Find a wise man in the world's opinion: he knows nothing at all about anything important; in fact, he is entirely insane by his presuppositions and the vain babblings of his conclusions.
G. Find a scribe in the world's literature, a man well read and educated: he also knows nothing.
H. Disputers are the critics of the world. Consider higher and lower textual criticism, for God has absolutely confounded these blasphemous men who sit in judgment on the word of God.
I. Their "superior translations" are full of idiotic errors, as II Sa 21:19; Mark 1:2; Gal 3:16; etc.
J. Educated men think the universe originated with a big bang of chaotic gas, humanity came from monkeys, abortion is humane but seal hunting is not, capital punishment is wrong, rap is music, Picasso was an artist, athletes and actors should pontificate on politics, etc., etc.!
K. What has man accomplished in learning over the 6000 years of his existence? Nothing! The world today is more intellectually bankrupt than at any time in human history in all matters of morality and true wisdom. Everywhere you look today, man displays his gross ignorance.
L. Automobiles and motherboards only impress fools. True knowledge has disappeared.
M. The blessed God has no respect for human learning (I Tim 1:6; 4:7; 6:20-21; Rom 1:22).
N. If you want to be wise, then you need to humble yourself as a fool (3:18-20; Isaiah 66:1-2).
O. All Christian children should be trained to ridicule the world, "But the emperor is naked!"
P. God reveals His deep things to babes, who will come trembling (Ps 119:18; Matt 11:25-27).
Q. Much more of this contrast in wisdom between the saints and sinners is in chapter two.

1:21 **God omnisciently knew men would never find Him, so He revealed Himself by the gospel**.

A. God looked down on men and saw they would never find Him (Ps 14:2-5; Rom 1:19-23).
B. So God purposed to reveal Himself to His elect by the preaching of the gospel, which men perceive as foolishness, but which is the divine ordained way of communicating knowledge.
C. The salvation here is the knowledge of God by man, not regeneration or eternal life.
D. The salvation here is the practical phase of salvation, which is the education of the elect.
E. Salvation in 1:18 is primarily vital salvation – regeneration; here it is practical – conversion.

1:22 **Though God knew what Jews and Greeks wanted, He sent an offensive gospel to both**.

A. The Jews were obsessed with signs, and the Greeks were obsessed with worldly wisdom.
B. Many churches today take market surveys to so structure their programs, worship, and facilities to appeal to their market niche, because they are appealing to carnal preferences.
C. But God looked at His market survey and did just the opposite, offending all but the elect!

1:23 **The preaching of Jesus Christ crucified was highly offensive to both Jews and Greeks**.

A. The gospel emphasizes the crucifixion death of Jesus of Nazareth at the hands of Rome.
B. The Jews found this repulsive, as they were looking for a Prince to deliver them from Rome.
C. God ordained Jesus to be a stone of stumbling and rock of offence to the Jews (I Pet 2:7-8).
D. The Greeks found it repulsive, as they were looking for an intellectual and refined message.
E. They wanted something compatible with their philosophical explanation of life and eternity.
F. Observe! Though knowing what they wanted, God sent the very opposite to offend both!
G. It is a serious error to modify the message to appeal to known preferences of man (1:17).

1:24 **<u>But the same gospel is received with joy by those who have already been saved by God</u>**.

A. Though the gospel offended by Jews and Greeks, it was received by those called of God.
B. The same people – both Jews and Greeks, who were born again, loved the gospel dearly.
C. The calling here is shown by context to be the choice of God to eternal life (1:26 cp 1:27).
D. It is no different than Paul's call to be an apostle (1:1): God's appointment of him to it.
E. This means the same with "as many as were ordained to eternal life believed" (Acts 13:48).
F. And it is the same with "God has not appointed us to wrath, but to obtain" (I Thess 5:9).
G. Of course, we are called to eternal life by the voice of the Son of God, just as in the resurrection at the last day; but that is not the subject or focal point here (John 5:25-29).
H. The same gospel found foolish by most is found delightful by those chosen to eternal life.
I. Elect and regenerate souls find the gospel a message of God's power and wisdom in Christ.
J. As before, the power of God is seen in the virgin birth, incarnation, resurrection, etc., etc.
K. The wisdom of God is seen in the glorious plan of five phases of salvation to save the elect.
L. The words "are called" are a passive voice, perfect tense verb construction, indicating a past action with the effect still true in the present. The call of God occurred before their hearing!

1:25 **<u>God is able to easily use what the world perceives as foolish to communicate to His elect</u>**.

A. They consider the gospel of Christ as foolishness, but the elect count it precious indeed!
B. The weak means of using fishermen to preach about a carpenter's son overpowers men!
C. Though Jews and Greeks despised the gospel, it told the most powerful man in the universe.
D. Though Jews and Greeks despised the gospel, it told of the wisest man in the universe!

1:26 **<u>Paul tells the church to measure God's election by considering the saints at Corinth</u>**.

A. Paul here continues his humiliation of Corinth and proving of God's sovereignty over men, for the purpose of ending their glorying in man and directing them to glory only in the Lord.
B. By looking around, after Paul had been in Corinth for more than eighteen months, they could plainly see that God had chosen the more base and foolish elements of Corinth for His elect.
C. The calling under consideration is not regeneration or some esoteric effectual call, but it is rather the appointment, ordination, choice, and predestination of men to eternal life.
D. God saves some wise, mighty, and noble men; but He does not save very many of them.
E. There may be a few Abrahams and Jobs, but most are the harlots and publicans of the world.
F. A church of pretty people, and every city has many of them, is clearly not a church of Christ.
G. There should never be any shame in the social status of the church, for Christ ordained it so.

1:27 **<u>God's choice in election is designed to confound and crush the arrogance of natural man</u>**.

A. In order to humiliate man's arrogance and pride, God has chosen to save the lower class.
B. Paul is driving toward his conclusion that all glory must be in the Lord, not in men (1:29,31).
C. The Corinthian saints endured the ridicule of Jews and Greeks, but the proper understanding of their salvation showed that God had saved them to ridicule both the Jews and Greeks!
D. God has discriminated in His choice to salvation – against the pretty people (James 2:5).
E. So there should be no emphasis or respect given these people (Ps 62:9; Luke 1:52; Jas 1:9).

1:28 **<u>God's choice in election is designed to confound and crush the arrogance of natural man</u>**.

A. The blessed God is under obligation to save no one, and He has chosen to save the pitiful.
B. His choices in election give Him greater glory by rejecting the "more worthy" of the race.
C. The Corinthian saints endured the ridicule of Jews and Greeks, but the proper understanding of their salvation showed that God had saved them to ridicule both the Jews and Greeks!
D. So extensive is this divine choice to humiliate any and all pride in the universe, God chose to save His elect from the lower classes of humanity and entirely bypass the fallen angels!

1:29 **God has so ordered salvation in all respects that no man can give any glory to man**.

A. The eternal phase of salvation – election – is entirely by the grace of God for helpless men.
B. The practical phases of salvation – conversion – is also by the grace of God for helpless men.
C. When men approach God, there is absolutely nothing they can do but give Him all the glory.
D. Since God has chosen the weaker persons of the human race, there is no room for boasting.
E. The difference of heaven or hell will always and only be the free grace of a sovereign God.
F. Any plan or scheme putting the difference in man's ability or act is manifestly of the devil.

1:30 **The perfect plan of salvation for the elect in Jesus Christ is by God and for His glory alone.**

A. The elect are in Christ Jesus by His choice, "of him," (Rom 8:29-30; Eph 1:3-6; II Tim 1:9).
B. Jesus Christ is the perfect Saviour by God's wisdom and power in Him (I Pet 1:20; Ps 89:19).
C. Though God had destroyed any trust in man's wisdom, Jesus Christ is our infinite wisdom.
D. God has made Him our perfect wisdom, righteousness, sanctification, and redemption.
E. In Him are hid all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge, for our benefit (Col 2:1-3).
F. In Him is the perfect righteousness we need to stand accepted before God (II Cor 5:21).
G. In Him is the perfect sanctification we need to stand holy before God (Heb 10:10-14).
H. In Him is the perfect redemption we need to stand purchased before God (Heb 9:12,15).
I. Jesus Christ is perfect for us intellectually, forensically, religiously, and economically!
J. We are completely excluded intellectually, forensically, religiously, and economically!
K. What the Jews and Greeks could not do in these four areas, God did for the elect in Christ!
L. God put us in Christ, and God made Christ perfect for us. Salvation is of the Lord!
M. And the gospel reveals all this to the understanding of only those chosen to eternal life.
N. Here is the most precious information in the universe, but only the elect ever understand it.

1:31 **The end result of God's gracious salvation and Paul's argument is the glory of God**.

A. Paul quotes loosely from Jeremiah 9:23-24, where we are to glory in the Lord Himself.
B. Rather than glorying in Paul, Apollos, or Cephas, all the glorying must be in the Lord.
C. Rather than glorying in any ability or learning or position of man, glory only in the Lord.
D. There is absolutely no room for man to glory in any aspect of His salvation. It is of God!
E. Any plan of salvation that allows any glory to man is absolutely and clearly a heresy!
F. Salvation with human means of any sort for eternal life is patently a heretical doctrine.
G. The seventh proof of unconditional salvation is that it alone gives all the glory to God.

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.letgodbetrue.com/Sermons/pdf/Why_Preach_the_Gospel.pdf.
2. See "Unconditional Salvation,": http://www.letgodbetrue.com/bibletopics/Salvation/Unconditional/SevenProofs.htm
3. See the study, "When Were You Saved?": http://www.letgodbetrue.com/bibletopics/Salvation/WhenWereYouSaved.htm
4. See the sermon, "Why No Invitation?: http://www.letgodbetrue.com/Sermons/pdf/Why_No_Invitation.pdf