

# 1 CORINTHIANS 1

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*Be Intentional*  
Philippians 2:12-13  
Annual Theme 2023

# 1 CORINTHIANS 1

## I. COMMENDATION: THEIR STANDING IN CHRIST (1:1–9)

IN A MOST TACTFUL WAY, PAUL OPENED HIS LETTER BY REMINDING THE BELIEVERS OF THE WONDERFUL BLESSINGS THEY HAD IN CHRIST. HE DOES THIS BEFORE HE REPROVES THEM FOR THEIR SIN, FOR THEY WERE LIVING BENEATH THEIR PRIVILEGES AS CHRISTIANS. THEY WERE NOT WALKING IN A MANNER WORTHY OF THEIR CALLING IN CHRIST (EPH. 4:1FF). HE LISTS SOME OF THEIR SPIRITUAL BLESSINGS THAT THEY WERE IGNORING AND THUS DEPRIVING THEMSELVES OF SPIRITUAL POWER.

### A. *CALLED OF GOD* (v. 2).

THIS MEANS THEY WERE SANCTIFIED (SET APART) AND MEMBERS OF THAT ELECT GROUP, THE CHURCH! THEY WERE NOT LIVING LIKE SAINTS, BUT THEY WERE SAINTS!

### B. *GRACE OF GOD* (vv. 3–4).

GRACE MEANS THAT GOD GIVES US WHAT WE DON'T DESERVE; MERCY MEANS HE DOESN'T GIVE US WHAT WE DO DESERVE. THIS GRACE CAME THROUGH CHRIST BY FAITH.

### C. *GIFTS FROM GOD* (vv. 5 AND 7).

PAUL DISCUSSES SPIRITUAL GIFTS IN CHAPTERS 12–14, BUT IT IS EVIDENT THAT THE CORINTHIANS WERE WONDERFULLY BLESSED WITH SPIRITUAL GIFTS, ESPECIALLY THE GIFTS DEALING WITH UTTERANCE (SEE 14:26). THEY WERE ENRICHED WITH KNOWLEDGE, TOO. YET WITH ALL THEIR GIFTS AND KNOWLEDGE, THEY LACKED LOVE (13:1–3) AND COULD NOT GET ALONG WITH EACH OTHER. SPIRITUAL GIFTS DO NOT TAKE THE PLACE OF SPIRITUAL GRACES.

### D. *TESTIMONY FOR GOD* (v. 6).

EVERYTHING PAUL SAID THAT CHRIST COULD DO FOR THEM CAME TO PASS IN THEIR LIVES. GOD'S WORD CAME TRUE IN THEIR LIVES.

### E. *HOPE FROM GOD* (vv. 7–9).

THEY WERE WAITING FOR CHRIST TO RETURN BUT WERE NOT LIVING IN THE LIGHT OF HIS COMING (1 JOHN 2:28). THOUGH THE CORINTHIANS WERE SINFUL ON EARTH, GOD WOULD BE ABLE TO PRESENT THEM AS BLAMELESS IN HEAVEN. WE SHOULD NOT USE THIS PASSAGE AS AN EXCUSE FOR SIN; RATHER IT SHOULD BE SEEN AS AN ENCOURAGEMENT THAT GOD IS FAITHFUL EVEN THOUGH WE MAY FAIL HIM.

## II. ACCUSATION: THEIR SINFUL STATE AS CHRISTIANS (1:10–16)

NOW THAT HE HAS TACTFULLY COMMENDED THEM, PAUL LAUNCHES INTO HIS DISCUSSION OF THEIR SINS, DEALING FIRST WITH THE MATTER OF CHURCH DIVISIONS. THE SAD NEWS OF THEIR "SPLITS" HAD COME TO HIM FROM THE HOUSEHOLD OF CHLOE, AND ALSO FROM THE FRIENDS WHO VISITED HIM (16:17–18). WHY IS IT THAT BAD NEWS OF CHURCH TROUBLES SPREADS SO RAPIDLY, WHILE THE GOOD NEWS OF THE GOSPEL NEVER SEEMS TO SPREAD QUICKLY AT ALL? THERE WERE DIVISIONS AND CONTENTIONS IN THE CHURCH (3:3, 11:18, 12:25), EVEN AT THE LORD'S TABLE (11:20–34)! PAUL BEGS THEM TO BE "PERFECTLY JOINED TOGETHER" (v. 10), WHICH IN THE GK. IS A MEDICAL TERM

THAT REFERS TO THE SETTING OF A BONE THAT WAS BROKEN OR OUT OF JOINT. WHENEVER CHRISTIANS CANNOT GET ALONG, THE BODY OF CHRIST SUFFERS.

PAUL EXPLAINS WHY THEY WERE DIVIDED: THEY HAD THEIR EYES ON MEN INSTEAD OF ON CHRIST. THEY WERE TRUSTING IN THE WISDOM OF MEN (2:5); THEY WERE GLORYING IN THE WORKS OF MEN (3:21); AND THEY WERE COMPARING ONE SERVANT WITH ANOTHER AND BOASTING ABOUT MEN (4:6). IN CHAPTER 3, PAUL PROVES THAT THIS INFATUATION WITH MEN WAS A MARK OF CARNAL LIVING, EVIDENCE THAT THESE “SPIRITUAL CORINTHIANS” WERE ACTUALLY BABES IN CHRIST.

THERE WERE FOUR FACTIONS IN THE CHURCH. ONE GROUP FOLLOWED PAUL, AND THEY MAY HAVE BEEN PREDOMINANTLY GENTILES, BECAUSE HE WAS THE APOSTLE TO THE GENTILES. ANOTHER GROUP FOLLOWED APOLLOS, THE LEARNED ORATOR (ACTS 18:24–28), PROBABLY BECAUSE THEY ENJOYED HIS WONDERFUL SPEAKING. THE THIRD GROUP, PROBABLY JEWS, LEANED TOWARD PETER, THE APOSTLE TO THE JEWS (GAL. 2:7), AND THE FOURTH GROUP TRIED TO PROVE IT WAS MORE SPIRITUAL THAN THE REST BY FOLLOWING “CHRIST ALONE” AND REJECTING HUMAN LEADERS. PAUL EXPLAINS THAT CHRIST IS NOT DIVIDED; WE ARE ALL PART OF THE ONE BODY (12:12–31). CHRIST, NOT HUMAN LEADERS, DIED FOR US; AND WE ARE BAPTIZED IN THE NAME OF CHRIST, NOT THE NAMES OF HUMAN LEADERS! PAUL GOES ON TO SAY THAT HE IS HAPPY HE DID NOT BAPTIZE MORE BELIEVERS IN CORINTH THAN HE DID, LEST THE DIVISION BE EVEN WORSE. PAUL’S ASSOCIATES IN THE MINISTRY DID THE BAPTIZING, SINCE PAUL’S SPECIAL COMMISSION WAS TO EVANGELIZE. THIS FACT DOES NOT MINIMIZE BAPTISM IN ANY WAY. IMAGINE HOW DIFFICULT IT WOULD BE FOR AN EVANGELIST TODAY TO TAKE TIME TO EXAMINE CANDIDATES AND BAPTIZE THEM. (THE WORD “SENT” IN 1:17 IS THE GK. WORD THAT MEANS “SENT WITH A SPECIAL COMMISSION.”) ACTS 18:8 INFORMS US THAT MANY OF THE CORINTHIANS BELIEVED AND WERE BAPTIZED, SO PAUL DID PRACTICE WATER BAPTISM.

### **III. EXPLANATION: THE REASON FOR THE DIVISIONS (1:17–31)**

THE CORINTHIAN BELIEVERS WERE DIVIDED AND NOT LIVING UP TO THEIR STANDING IN CHRIST BECAUSE: (1) THEY WERE MIXING THE GOSPEL WITH THE WISDOM OF THE WORLD, AND (2) THEY WERE GLORYING IN MEN AND WERE CONFUSED ABOUT THE MEANING OF THE GOSPEL MINISTRY. IN CHAPTERS 1–2, PAUL DEALS WITH THE WISDOM OF THE WORLD IN CONTRAST TO THE WISDOM OF GOD, AND IN THESE VERSES HE GIVES SEVEN PROOFS TO SHOW THAT THE GOSPEL IS SUFFICIENT FOR ALL PEOPLE.

#### *A. PAUL’S COMMISSION (v. 17).*

HE WAS SENT TO PREACH THE GOSPEL ALONE, NOT THE GOSPEL PLUS MAN’S PHILOSOPHIES. HOW WE MUST GUARD AGAINST MIXING ANYTHING WITH THE GOSPEL!

#### *B. PERSONAL EXPERIENCE (v. 18).*

THE CORINTHIAN CHURCH HAD EXPERIENCED THE GOSPEL’S POWER PERSONALLY.

#### *C. SCRIPTURE (vv. 19–20).*

PAUL QUOTES FROM ISA. 19:12, 29:14, AND 33:18 TO PROVE THAT GOD DOES NOT NEED THE WORLD’S WISDOM; IN FACT, HE WILL DESTROY IT!

#### *D. HUMAN HISTORY (vv. 20–21).*

WITH ALL ITS “WISDOM,” THE WORLD WAS NOT ABLE TO FIND GOD OR SALVATION. WHEN WE TRACE HUMAN HISTORY, WE DISCOVER A RECORD OF MAN GAINING MORE AND MORE KNOWLEDGE, BUT LESS AND LESS REAL WISDOM, ESPECIALLY ABOUT SPIRITUAL MATTERS. REVIEW ROM. 1:18–32 TO SEE HOW THE WORLD TURNED FROM GOD. GOD’S PLAN WAS SO SIMPLE AND UNIQUE THAT IT SEEMED TO BE FOOLISHNESS TO THE WORLD! GOD SAVES THOSE WHO BELIEVE WHAT HE SAYS ABOUT HIS SON.

*E. PAUL’S MINISTRY (vv. 22–25).*

PAUL HAD PREACHED TO JEWS AND GENTILES ACROSS THE ROMAN WORLD. HE KNEW THAT THE JEWS LOOKED FOR MIRACULOUS SIGNS AND THE GREEKS LOOKED FOR PHILOSOPHICAL WISDOM. BUT GOD BYPASSED BOTH WAYS TO MAKE SALVATION AVAILABLE THROUGH A CRUCIFIED CHRIST. THIS MESSAGE ABOUT A CRUCIFIED CHRIST WAS A STUMBLING BLOCK TO THE JEWS, WHOSE IDEA OF THE MESSIAH WAS FAR DIFFERENT; IT WAS FOOLISHNESS TO THE GREEKS BECAUSE IT SEEMED CONTRARY TO THEIR PHILOSOPHICAL SYSTEMS. BUT PAUL SAW THAT THIS “FOOLISH GOSPEL” WAS GOD’S POWER AND WISDOM TO THOSE JEWS AND GREEKS WHO WERE CALLED. CHRIST IS OUR WISDOM AND POWER; HE IS ALL WE NEED.

*F. THEIR OWN CALLING (vv. 26–29).*

“IF GOD NEEDS MAN’S WISDOM AND GLORY,” SAYS PAUL, “THEN WHY DID HE EVER CALL YOU?” THERE WERE NOT MANY MIGHTY PEOPLE IN THE CHURCH AT CORINTH, NOT MANY NOBLES OR WORLDLY-WISE PEOPLE. BUT GOD STILL SAVED THEM! IN FACT, GOD DELIBERATELY HIDES HIS TRUTH FROM “THE WISE AND PRUDENT” AND REVEALS HIMSELF TO THE HUMBLE. REFLECT ON THE HISTORY OF THE BIBLE AND RECALL HOW GOD CALLED THE “NOBODIES” OF HISTORY, MAKING GREAT LEADERS OUT OF THEM—ABRAHAM, MOSES, GIDEON, DAVID, ETC.

*G. CHRIST’S SUFFICIENCY (vv. 30–31).*

EVERY SAINT IS “IN CHRIST JESUS” (v. 30), AND CHRIST IS TO EVERY SAINT ALL THAT HE OR SHE EVER NEEDS. WHEN IT COMES TO SPIRITUAL THINGS, WE DON’T NEED MAN’S WISDOM OR POWER BECAUSE WE HAVE CHRIST. HE IS OUR REDEMPTION, OUR RIGHTEOUSNESS, OUR WISDOM, OUR ALL. TO ADD ANYTHING TO CHRIST OR HIS CROSS IS TO DIMINISH HIM AND HIS WORK AND ROB THEM OF THEIR POWER.

WHENEVER CHRISTIANS TAKE THEIR EYES OFF CHRIST AND START DEPENDING ON, TRUSTING IN, AND GLORIFYING MAN, THEN THEY CAUSE DIVISIONS. SUCH DIVISIONS ROB THE CHURCH OF ITS POWER.