

# 1 Corinthians 1

## 1:1

Paul is “called” by God to be an apostle. He may be comparing himself to those who had called themselves to be the “super apostles” that changed the message of God to match culture.

The Corinthians may have disagreed with Paul being called an “apostle” when compared to the greater ones.

Sosthenes was the synagogue ruler from Corinth who replaced Crispus, the original ruler who went with Paul (Acts 18:8) when many of the Jews left the synagogue to start the church in the home of Justus Titus.

Sosthenes, the Jewish synagogue ruler was beaten by the Corinthians Gentiles after he had taken Paul to court. (Acts 18:17)

## 1:2

First and Second Thessalonians were addressed as: “To the church of the Thessalonians in God.”

First and Second Corinthians is addressed as: “To the church of God in Corinth.”

This may be saying that the Thessalonian church was in fellowship with God, but...

The Corinthian church was God’s church in fellowship with the Corinthian culture (world) instead of God.

They were “sanctified in Christ Jesus” which means they had experienced a conversion and been saved.

But, now they needed to add to their conversion the growth into a mature, holy lifestyle.

Paul does not neglect to include them in the whole body of believers which is the universal church.

This will be brought up later in the book when they are told to get in line with the churches. See **1 Cor.4:6-7**

## 1:3

## 1:4

A note of thanksgiving to God for the grace given to the Corinthians through Jesus Christ.

Note here that this letter is written to believers (Christians, saved people).

This is not an evangelical letter seeking conversion, but a call to come to the Truth (not worldly wisdom) and live a holy, fruitful life (not a culturally acceptable experience)

The “grace” (charis) they have received has given them salvation which is also identified as:

- the spiritual blessings (Eph. 1:3),
- inheritance they have been qualified to share in (Col.1:12),
- living hope (1 Peter 1:3)

## 1:5

This verse gives an identification of the “grace” that was given

“enriched” (επλουτισθητε) is aorist indicative passive of πλουτιζω which means “to make rich, to make exceedingly rich. In fact, this is the word used by Josephus to describe what happened to Salome, Herod the Great’s sister, when Herod died and she received her share of his estate from his will.

Paul uses this word sarcastically in **1 Cor 4:8** (4:8-13) which may indicate that this was one of the Corinthian philosophical terms that they were using. Paul, as was common in his letters, simply stole their word and Christianized it for his own use. This word is used again in 2 Cor. 8:9 and 6:10.

The two areas that have been “enriched” (πλουτιζω) or where they have been made exceedingly wealthy are:

- a. speaking – (logos) –
- b. knowledge – (gnosis)

The first chapter of 1 Corinthians provides the context. Both these words occur more in 1 and 2 Corinthians than anywhere else. It appears that the Corinthians were confident in their worldly speaking and their worldly knowledge. This meant they had no need for the words or knowledge of the cross, the word of God or the apostolic message (we call Scripture.)

## 1:6

The proof that the Corinthians had the ability to understand actual “words” of truth and to process with true “knowledge” of God is in the fact that they understood Paul’s testimony to them in Acts 18. Paul uses this as a reference to what they have and the potential they could be running with.

“Because” or “Just as” – is *kathos* and means “just as” and “inasmuch as.” This word means that Paul is giving an explanation of what he has just written.

“confirmed” (Βεβαίωω) is a legal term found used in the papyri of this time that guaranteed security of possessions, testimony, or any legal proof or security. Βεβαίωω, “confirm” means “to make firm”, “to make stable,” “to confirm,” “to authenticate,” “to guarantee,” “to verify,” “to prove to be true and certain.”

Paul uses their own ability to judge truth correctly and hear God’s words in order to receive God’s knowledge by the fact that Paul’s testimony was received and accepted by them. The Corinthians can’t reject Paul without also rejecting their own spiritual conversion and the things they have already accepted as truth. If they change their mind concerning Paul and his gospel they are basically saying they do not have the ability to judge truthfully.

## 1:7

“Therefore” or the conclusion is you are saved, you do have ability to judge correctly and you are in possession of the true message. And, because of this:

- you are equipped for life here in time
- you are waiting for Jesus to return (be revealed)

“spiritual gift” – used to refer to these things in Scripture and most likely is used in an all-inclusive manner here:

- salvation – Rom. 5:15
- God’s goodness in all he gives – Rom. 11:29
- Manifestations of the Spirit – 1 Cor. 12:4

## 1:8

Paul builds on the eschatological reference to keep things in perspective and focus on the goal.

“keep you strong” – is a repeat of the same word used in 1:6 - “confirmed” (Βεβαίωω) is a legal term

“end” – telios – can mean “complete” and “perfection”, but the context is temporal time here or “the end.”

“blameless” – Romans 8:33

“day of our Lord Jesus Christ” –

## 1:9

God called you and God is faithful to take you to a successful end.

## 1 Corinthians 1:10-17

Paul ends the section of thanksgiving to God.

Paul begins the body of the letter

Introduces the first problem.

Reveals the source of his information

Begins to shift from the problem (divisions over leaders) to establishing a doctrinal foundation upon which to deal with the problem and correct their thinking and actions

## 1:10

“appeal” is παρακαλεω means to entreat, to encourage, and is used as a polite command.

“brothers” combined with “in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ” places them in a fellowship with Paul but in an official capacity.

“in the name of” will become an issue in a few verses concerning baptism

“That” is followed by three verbs:

- a) agree with one another
- b) may be no divisions
- c) may be perfectly united

Literal Greek says:

“in order that the same thing you say all, and not be among you divisions, but you may be having been joined together in the same mind and in the same opinion.”

What Paul is not talking about is variations, diversity or a need for uniformity.

1 Corinthians 12 and Galatians 2:1-10

What Paul is talking about is divisions which is the Greek word σχισμα from σχισματα “skisma” and means “split, division and is a picture of destruction of unity through force and was used to refer tearing a garment or a political factions struggling for power.”

“perfectly united” or “knit together is used in Mark 1:19 for mending and restoring nets.

“Mind” refers to the general principles

“Thought” or “opinion, judgment” refers to the special application of the general principles.

**1:11**

Chloe’s household included those listed in 1 Cor. 16:15-17 – Stephanas, Fortunatus and Achaicus

**1:12**

**1:13**

**1:14**

**1:15**

**1:16**

**1:17**

### **First Corinthians 1:18-25**

The division of these verses:

- a) 1:18-25 – the message of the cross (Paul’s text verse – Isaiah 29:14)
- b) 1:26-31 – the people who heard the message (Paul’s text verse – Jeremiah 9:3-24)
- c) 2:1-5 - the person who brought the message
- d) 2:6-16 – what really is spiritual and what really is wisdom? (Paul’s text verse – Isaiah 64:4)

The answer to “**What is really spiritual?**”

- Spiritual here are those with the Holy Spirit or all believers.

The answer to “**What is wisdom?**”

- Wisdom is using the “power” (presence) of the Spirit to see life and the world from the divine perspective.

The APPLICATION of real “spirituality” and real “wisdom”:

- The spiritual person with the wisdom of God will be able to embrace values, morals, future plans, priorities and world views that agree with God’s Word, God’s character and are often different and unrecognizable for the natural man using natural wisdom.

The Avenues that Paul uses to prove his point:

- a. the means was the cross. . . . .it was simple 1:18-25
- b. the people were the Corinthians . . . .they were simple 1:26-31
- c. the preacher was Paul . . . . .he was simple 2:1-5

Indeed human wisdom is not greater than God's wisdom.

But the cross was not even a dispensing of God's wisdom to men.

The cross does not count on men receiving the wisdom of God and so become wiser.

The cross baffles men. Men do not receive a higher level of wisdom and so be able to say, "Ah, now I have figured it out."

The cross baffles the Jew. The cross baffles the Gentile. The cross runs contrary to the wicked and is not the hope of the self-righteous.

To crucify the messiah or to sacrifice the hope of the world was not a concept in the realm of man.

The Corinthians had tried to move on from the simple message of the cross to something more profound and worthy of their time and reputation.

Imagine in the great philosophical culture of Greece to hold to the gospel message.

It was simple. It was unimaginable. So it was unreasonable to the Greek mind which made the gospel foolish.

The Corinthians had tried to move on from the gospel message as quick as they could and find with in the Christian message something more worthy of their intellect.

### 1:18

Two groups in Paul's division of people:

- a. those who are perishing
- b. us who are being saved

Previously to the Jew there were two groups:

- a. the Jew
- b. the Gentile

To the Greek there were two groups:

- a. the Greek/Roman
- b. the Barbarians

### 1:19

Isaiah 29:14 – here in 29:1 Ariel (lit. "altar hearth" referring to temple altar) is Jerusalem are caught up in an endless cycle meaningless religious activities. Their attitude will put them into a stupor. When the words are read they cannot understand so the revelation of God is reduced by men to simply following rules. Men cannot understand God without God's presence.

In Rabbinic style Paul reaches for a text verse to build his argument around.

### 1:20

Is Paul's open invitation addressed to his now imaginary scholars and wisemen that he will debate?

Wise man = Greeks

Scholar = is "γραμματευσ" which is the Jewish term for the experts in the Law such as the Rabbis and the teachers of the law. This word is not used among the Greeks for their lawyers, etc.

Philosopher = means "debater" and is only used twice in all of Greek writing (here and in Ignatius.) It is a personal word aimed at the Corinthians.

Paul has challenged his opponents:

- a. The Greeks
- b. The Jews
- c. The Corinthians

Has not God made foolish the wisdom of the Jews and the Greeks and even the Corinthians?

### **1:21**

Paul begins his argument with a statement all sides can agree on:  
“the world did not discover God through a system of wisdom.”

#### **Explanation:**

Distinguish between knowing God exists (Romans 1) and understanding what God is doing (1 Cor. 1:21)

The world knows God exists that is why all cultures are religious and why false religions develop.

Paul is not saying people do not know of God.

Paul is saying once people recognize God though natural means they cannot simply “know”

God or understand his ways and his plans.

After recognizing God’s existence it is up to man to pursue God for his revelation.

As Romans 2:7 says.

In Romans 1:21-28 men fail to do this. Instead they create gods in their own images from their own imaginations. They make gods who think like men think.

“Foolishness of what was preached” refers to the proclamation of that second step to knowing God – the proclamation and the hearing of his word.

Those who recognize and accept (“believe”) the revelation from God are saved.

### **1:22**

Jews want to see a sign something they can physically see and trust in. Their Messiah would manifest physically and change the world. Today’s Jew is looking for a natural man who is a political leader to improve their world through a process.

Greeks want to hear something they consider to be wisdom from their own understanding. Herodotus says, “All Greeks were zealous for every kind of learning.” The Greeks had advanced logic and Sophia to the place that the world was abandoning the gods.

But a preacher is going to present God’s revelation. It is neither a physical manifestation nor is it something that agrees with men’s lower, natural reasoning. It is a revelation from God.

Thus, the preacher’s message appears to be and is counted as “foolish”:

- a. This does not mean it is foolish, illogical, anti-reality, senseless, uneducated, fictional, etc.
- b. It means men in their senses and in their thinking cannot find it. They must hear it from God.

### **1:23**

Crucified Messiah was not the sign the Jews were waiting for. The two things, “crucified” and “Messiah” cancel each other out.

The Jews did not crucify for public display but they did stone and then hang the body for public display. (Deut. 21:23)

“Christ crucified” does not fit the Jewish perspective. Thus Paul’s attitude in Gal. 1:13-14 and 3:13.

The Greeks considered Christianity along the same lines as all the other religions that had been dismissed as legends, superstitions. Belief in Jesus was to them as foolish as belief in Zeus or Hercules.

### **1:24**

It seems that God may have made a mistake.

If the Jews want a sign then give them the victorious Messiah

If the Greeks want wisdom then give them some wonderful logic.

But, that would be catering to men's natural abilities and understanding.

This is the level that idols (satan) meets man.

God is beyond man's understanding and plans.

Through the cross God has entered the world of man with a greater plan, a greater nature and a greater life. If man could understand it, then man would have thought of it.

### **1:25**

Conclusion is agreeable to all:

God is better on a bad day than men are on a very, very good day.

Point: The Corinthians need to lose the thought that the gospel message is too simple for them. That attitude simply means they have no idea what they are talking about.

### **1:26**

"Brothers" is the start of a new point in Paul's writing. It will be a new point but a continuation of his theme. In the eyes of the world and its pursuit of greatness, wisdom and stability the Word of God and the Kingdom of God are not understood.

The world sees all of God and his plan as: Simple message, Simple people, Simple preacher.

Boasting becomes the new theme:

- a. the Corinthians were boasting one leader verse another
- b. Paul goes to Jeremiah 9:23-24 for his text verse in this second point

"Called" is a reference to their point of salvation. When they were "called" to receive the offer of salvation none of them were called because they deserved it.

"Called" is from the word "καλεω". The root word is "καλ" and so our English word "call". The word means "to call anyone, to invite, summon".

Theologically it is used of the Divine call to partake of the blessings of redemption.

It does not mean the call or invitation cannot be rejected.

Throughout scripture men have rejected God's call.

"Not many" is not exclusive but it is limiting. Meaning there were among them some considered by the world to be wise, influential and noble.

"Human standards" is the word "sarka" or "flesh". It the first use of this by Paul.

They themselves have nothing to boast about in the natural but yet they are judging Paul by this Human standard. Paul is simply turning it around and applying it to them. Their only strength is the fact that they accepted God's call.

"Wise" is "Sophia"

"Influential" ("powerful) is the word for power "dunamis"

Both these terms have already been used.

Jeremiah 9:23 uses two of these but Jeremiah uses "rich" as the third word.

Paul instead chooses to use the word "well born" which refers to born into the upper class of wealth.

Many of the Corinthians were probably wealthy, but few were born into the noble class.

Some of the Corinthian believers were of the upper class by birth: Crispus, Gaius, Erastus, Stephanas

Paul's point was it did not take special qualifications to receive the call to the gospel.

**1:27**

**1:28**

“the things that are not” (μη οντα) There is not a more contemptible expression in Greek thinking that was possible for Paul to use. The lack of “being” was the worse it could be.

“nullify” (καταργεο) is an eschatological term. It means “to put out of action, to make inactive, to reduce to nothing”

**1:29**

**1:30**

**1:31**