

1st Corinthians 1:

Ian Gibson (January 2014)

v1-3: Opening salutations to the saints at Corinth

v1: Paul's credentials for writing the epistle

Paul writes with divinely given apostolic authority, he was an apostle (sent one), directly commissioned by the risen Christ, by divine calling & by the divine will.

We need to hold fast to the foundational apostolic teachings (see Eph 2v19-22, 2nd Tim 2v2).

"Sosthenes our brother", a man the Corinthians knew well (see Acts 18v17).

v2: The recipients of the letter, what they were collectively, individually & positionally

Collectively they gathered as **"the church (Gk: ekklesia) of God which is at Corinth"**, i.e. a company called out from the world, to gather together as an assembly of believers in the Lord Jesus.

- The universal Church comprises all true believers in the Lord Jesus Christ in this day of grace, from the birth of the Church on the day of Pentecost (Acts 2) to the rapture of the Church (1st Thess 4), i.e. **"the church which is His body"** (Ephesians 1v22-23), those that comprise **"My church"** (Matt 16v18).

- A gathered company of believers, who assemble to meet regularly in a given locality as **"church (assembly) of God"**, gathering in accordance with NT teaching & practice.

The singular **"church of God which is at Corinth"** comprised a plurality of believers, **"them that are sanctified in Christ Jesus, called ... saints"**, i.e. the church is not the building, but the gathered company of believers.

The term **"church of God"** speaks of:

- **divine origin / derivation** - a divine institution, not a man-made invention.
- **divine ownership / possession** - the local assembly belongs to God alone (see Acts 20v28).
- **divine character** - occupied with divine things, a place where divine Persons are pleased to dwell today.
- **divine testimony** - a testimony for God in a given locality, i.e. great privilege & responsibility.

Individual believers in the assembly are positionally **"sanctified in Christ Jesus"**, i.e. set apart to God & Christ.

Sanctification practically based upon our occupation with the risen & exalted Christ (see Jhn 17v19, Col 3v1-2).

Also positionally **"called ... saints"**, i.e. holy / sacred ones; the local assembly is to comprise only believers.

Practically, we are to be a holy people, keeping separate from a sinful defiling world (see 1st Thess 4v3,7)

The power of the gospel & God's grace had wrought a great change in these Corinthians (see ch6v9-11).

The Lord Jesus must also be given His rightful place in the assembly, i.e. **"with all that in every place call upon the Name of our Lord Jesus Christ (Newberry)"**. We gather unto His Name, acknowledging His authority, submitting to His sovereign Lordship and pre-eminent place in our midst (see Matt 18v20).

There can be a basis for fellowship between different local assemblies, based upon gathering to the same Lord.

v3: The common salutation of Paul, sending grace and peace

We have these unfailing divine resources **"from God our Father and from the Lord Jesus Christ"**.

We ought to give Him His full title, He is **"Jesus Christ our Lord"** (v2,v9), our **"Lord Jesus Christ"** (v3,v7,v8,v10).

v4-6: Paul's thanksgivings for the saints at Corinth

v4: Thanksgiving for what God had in His grace given to them

There must be the evidence of "*the grace of God*" in the life of every true believer in the Lord Jesus Christ.

v5: Thanksgiving for being enriched in Christ

Paul takes "*every thing*" concerning them out of their hands, and attributes it to God & Christ alone.

The aorist past tense, "*ye have been enriched in Him*" (JND); it was all given at the moment of salvation.

Paul is thankful to God for how they had been enriched by God "*in all utterance* (word of doctrine), *and in all knowledge*". They were priding themselves in these things, but any such ability was divinely given to them.

v6: Thanksgiving for the testimony of Christ confirmed in them

The operation of any gift they possessed (see v7) was confirmation of "*the testimony* (witness) *of Christ*" in them. We have such a privilege of being "*the testimony of Christ*", even in a world that has rejected Him.

v7-9: The faithfulness of God to the saints at Corinth

v7: A full provision for testimony from a faithful God, until the Lord comes again

They had received a full endowment of divinely given gift, to function as a testimony for God and Christ.

We do need to be exercised in the use and practice of our gift, as the Spirit of God would lead.

But we also appreciate that the presence of gift does not equate with spirituality (see ch3).

Spirituality is not expression of divinely given gift, but expression of Christ & the Spirit of God in my life.

We are eagerly anticipating the imminent coming again of our Savior, "*waiting for the coming* (i.e. revelation / unveiling) *of our Lord Jesus Christ*", after which God won't be relying any more upon divinely-given gift operating in His saints, in order that there be testimony for God in this world.

When He comes again in glorious manifestation, with His rewarded saints, it will be evident then how well we used the gifts God bestowed upon us.

v8: A secure salvation from a faithful God, in view of a day of review & reward

This confirms the eternal security of every believer, a faithful God will confirm every believer "*unto the end*", so that they will be "*blameless* (unimpeachable, JND) *in the day of our Lord Jesus Christ*".

At the Judgement Seat of Christ, the saints will be assessed & rewarded in terms of the use we made of the gift given to us; "*Every man's work shall be made manifest: for the day shall declare it*" (ch3v13).

v9: Called by a faithful God, to enjoy the fellowship of His Son

Paul declares "*God is faithful*"; we can depend absolutely upon such a faithful God (see also ch10v13).

We have been called by a faithful God "*unto the fellowship of His Son Jesus Christ our Lord*", i.e. the large sphere of Christian fellowship, connected with the Church universal, the family of God (see also 1 John 1v3,7).

- **Christian fellowship** – we are called into this by God, at the time of our salvation.
- **Assembly fellowship** – we are received into this by the local assembly, at time of reception.

In Corinth, the 2 fellowships effectively parallel; we live today in a far more confused religious environment.

v10-16: Paul's anxious care for the saints at Corinth, regarding divisions amongst them

v10: Paul does not use apostolic commandment, rather he beseeches & exhorts his "**brethren**", and "**by the Name of our Lord Jesus Christ**", that they "**be perfectly joined together**", rather than marked by schisms.

v11: Paul had been made aware of these "**contentions**" (strifes, JND) by "**them of Chloe**". The gifted men were dividing the assembly, but a godly sister was the means of saving the assembly from self-destruction.

v12: Paul implicates "**every one of you**" in aligning themselves under different servants, or some were claiming a special share of Christ above others, i.e. "**I of Christ**".

v13: Paul asks 3 rhetorical questions, to bring them back to a proper allegiance to Christ alone.

- Q1: "**Is (the) Christ divided?**" He is the whole undivided Christ for all of the saints of God equally. Likewise, the assembly which is characteristically "**body of Christ**" (ch12v27) cannot be divided.
- Q2: "**was Paul crucified for you?**" Christ's death alone was their basis for fellowship, and He was crucified for all equally.
- Q3: "**were ye baptized in the name of Paul?**" Their baptism, that symbol of fellowship, was equally for all in the Name of Christ.

Paul will come back to this matter in ch3v3-4,v21-22; their divisions were obvious evidence of their carnality.

v14-16: It is with a measure of relief to the apostle, and cause for his thanksgiving to God, that there were few who could align themselves with Paul based on him baptizing them.

v17-25: Paul's preaching of the gospel and the cross of Christ at Corinth

v17: Since "**Christ sent me not to baptize**", taken in conjunction with v14-16, is definitive proof that baptism is not a necessary requirement for soul salvation, though clearly baptism is a vital ordinance for every believer.

In his preaching, Paul wanted nothing to take away from the central message of "**the gospel**", and thus he preached "**not with wisdom of words, lest the cross of Christ should be made of none effect**".

The Greeks loved wisdom (v22), words that appealed to their intellect & the flesh; but it was the simple preaching of "**the cross of Christ**" alone that would save them.

Paul never altered his message, nor the style of his preaching, to appeal to men in such a way. So we do not compromise the message we preach, to try to accommodate the world; it may only produce empty profession.

Paul is telling us in 1st Corinthians that he had preached a 2-fold message at Corinth:

- In ch1-2, he preached "**the cross of Christ**" (v17-18), he preached "**Christ crucified**" (v23), "**For I determined not to know any thing among you, save Jesus Christ, and Him crucified**" (ch2v1).
- In ch15v3-4, he preached the death, burial & resurrection of Christ; "**how that Christ died for our sins ... And that He was buried, and that He rose again the third day according to the scriptures**".

The emphasis in the death of Christ is His sin-atonement death, and so His death & subsequent resurrection is the world's salvation, in terms of making salvation available to sinful humanity.

The emphasis in the cross of Christ is that this was the world's verdict upon God's Son, the world gave to our Saviour a cruel & shameful cross, so the cross of Christ is this world's condemnation.

The death of Christ has fitted me for heaven, my sins have been dealt with, God gave to Him my sins.

The cross of Christ finishes me with this world; I have no part with a world that gave Him a shameful cross.

v18-21: The cross of Christ is the great watershed of all humanity, the perishing & the saved

v18: *“the preaching (word) of the cross is to them that are perishing foolishness”*; it is perceived as foolishness to those who reject it.

But *“unto us which are (being) saved it is the power of God”*, i.e. the very power of new creation (see 2nd Cor 4v6). Only the proclamation of the cross of Christ can be the effective vehicle of man’s salvation, and the means by which God’s power in salvation can be made known.

v19: Paul quotes Isaiah 29v14; God declares He will bring to nothing all the wisdom & understanding of men.

God calls His doing of this *“a marvellous work and a wonder”*, i.e. what God did it at the cross of Christ.

To the human mind, there is nothing so reprehensible, degrading & humiliating as crucifixion; that such a sacrifice could be the basis for man’s salvation is the very antithesis of human power & wisdom.

v20: So the cross of Christ is the end of this world’s wisdom; everything that man prides himself in, his wisdom, knowledge & advancement, is all dismissed by God as foolishness.

As believers, we must continue to recognise that God has *“made foolish the wisdom of this world (age)”*.

v21: That *“the world by wisdom knew not God”* was demonstrated in Eden, when Adam & Eve partook of the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good & evil, fruit that was *“to be desired to make one wise”* (Gen 3v6).

Men today still think that such wisdom is to be desired, that it will refine & advance them, but the reality is that man’s wisdom will just make man more independent of God, it will never elevate man to God.

But *“it pleased God by the foolishness of preaching to save them that believe”*; the preaching of Christ is firstly Godward, for His good pleasure. Manward it may be regarded as *“the foolishness of preaching”*, but saintward it is our salvation, it will *“save them that believe”*.

v22-25: The preaching of the cross of Christ in relation to Jews & Gentiles

The Jew characteristically desired *“a sign”*, i.e. external evidences & proofs (see John 6v30); to them, a crucified Christ / Messiah was *“a stumblingblock”*, unpalatable, a scandal, an offence to their pride,.

The Gentiles love *“wisdom”*, intelligent & rationale debate; to them, a crucified Christ is *“foolishness”*.

We do not try to give to men what they want to hear, what they expect or think they require; all we have to proclaim is *“Christ crucified”*, the Person who was upon the cross, His death & resurrection.

To those who are called of God, *“both Jews and Greeks”*, Christ will become to them *“the power of God, and the wisdom of God”* in salvation.

In v23 we preach, that is our responsibility; in v24 it is God who calls, for *“salvation is of the Lord”*.

v25: *“Because the foolishness of God is wiser than men; and the weakness of God is stronger than men”*, i.e. His ways & thoughts are not our ways & our thoughts.

v26-31: The calling of God & the all sufficiency of Christ

The type of people generally who God sovereignly calls & chooses.

Not because of what we are by nature *“after the flesh”*, hence *“not many wise / mighty / noble”* (v26), but mostly the weak, despised, insignificant of this world, *“That no flesh should glory in His presence”* (v29).

Christ alone is all sufficient; He *“is made unto us wisdom, and righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption”* (v30). So all glory must be the Lord’s alone, *“He that glorieth, let him glory in the Lord”* (v31).