

# 1 Corinthians 01 - Failures of the Corinthian Church; Foolishness of God; The Gospel in Contrast to Human Wisdom

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## 1 Corinthians 1

### I. Introduction (1 Cor 1:1-9)

- (1) Salutation (1:1-3)

**1 Paul, called as an apostle of Jesus Christ by the will of God, and our brother Sosthenes,**

**1 Paul, called as an apostle of Jesus Christ by the will of God, and Sosthenes our brother,**

**1 From: Paul, called to be an apostle of the Messiah Jesus by the will of God, and from our brother Sosthenes.**

**1 Paul called to be an apostle of Jesus Christ through the will of God, and Sosthenes our brother,**

- "Paul" - Paul had an extensive history with the church at Corinth, beginning with when he planted the church after arriving there from Athens (Cf. Acts 18). Paul stayed in Corinth for 18 months.

— He wrote a letter to the church at Corinth from Ephesus (Cf. Acts 19), which is mentioned in 5:9. This was the "previous letter" which we have no record of today.

— Paul then received reports from Chloe's household about disturbances in Corinth (Cf. 1:11), and Paul also may have received a delegation from Corinth (Cf. 16:7) who brought him questions from the congregation (Cf. 7:1).

- Paul wrote 1 Corinthians to respond to these reports. Because of the time Paul spent in Corinth, and the letters he wrote them, we know more about the church at Corinth than we know about any other church in the NT.
- "...called" - he is clarifying that he was literally "a called apostle." Although he is not one of the Twelve, he is on par with them because, like them, he was chosen by God. He was first called as an apostle on the Damascus Road (Acts 9:1-19).
- "...an apostle" - *apostolos*, means "sent one"; Paul calls out his authority as an apostle of Jesus Christ at the outset because it's clear by reading both 1 & 2 Corinthians, the Corinthian church did not appreciate Paul's apostolic authority
- "...by the will of God" - Paul is saying...You Corinthians may not recognize my apostolic credentials, but that doesn't matter to me because I am not an apostle by popular election or by the appointment of other apostles. I'm an apostle of Jesus Christ through the will of God, not the will of man.
- "...Sosthenes" - he was the leader of the synagogue in Corinth after the earlier leader, Crispus, and his household, believed the gospel (Acts 18:8,17). Sosthenes may have been the "synagogue ruler" in Acts 18:17.
- He then took Paul before Gallio. After Gallio rejected hearing the case, the crowd took Sosthenes and beat him. After this, Paul may have cared for and evangelized him. At this time he was with Paul in Ephesus.

**2** To the **church of God** which is in **Corinth**, to **those who have been sanctified** in Christ Jesus, **saints by calling, with all who in every place** call on the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, their *Lord* and ours:

**2** To the church of God which is at Corinth, to those who have been sanctified in Christ Jesus, saints by calling, with all who in every place call on the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, their *Lord* and ours:

**2** To God's church in Corinth, to those who have been sanctified by the Messiah Jesus and called to be holy, together with all those everywhere who call on the name of our Lord Jesus, the Messiah—their *Lord* and ours.

**2** Unto the church of God which is at Corinth, to them that are sanctified in Christ Jesus, called to be saints, with all that in every place call upon the name of Jesus Christ our Lord, both their's and our's:

- "...church of God" - in view of this epistle, this is the local church in Corinth, not the universal church. The NT consistently speaks of the church as people, not buildings. Today we associate "church" with a building where Christians meet. But the ancient Greek word for church (*ekklesia*) was a non-religious word that literally meant an "assembly" of people.
- "...Corinth" - located east of the narrow isthmus that connects the Peloponnesian peninsula to mainland Greece, about 45 miles west of Athens

- It sat at the base of a rock acropolis called Acrocorinth that towered 1800 feet above the city. On top of this acropolis sat the temple of Aphrodite, the goddess of love, which boasted 1000 prostitutes. When a sailor visited, it was popular to "Corinthianize" or have sex with a Corinthian prostitute. What characterizes the world generally described Corinth.
- Corinth was also a major commercial center that controlled commerce between Asia and Italy. It's three harbors gave it control over the traffic between the Ionian and Aegean seas. Additionally, Corinth was home to the Diolkos ("haul across") which enabled ships to port in one harbor and either haul their ship or their merchandise across the peninsula to avoid the grueling 200-mile sail around Cape Melea.
- Corinth was also home of the Isthmian Games which were held near the harbor at Schoenus and attracted thousands of visitors every second and fourth years of an Olympiad. As such, it was a cosmopolitan city where east met west, full of entertainment, sporting spectacles, idolatry, commerce, sophistry, pleasure, and great allure. The church at Corinth faced all of these corrupting influences on a daily basis
- "...those who have been sanctified" - sanctification is the progressive purifying of the believer, the process by which he becomes increasingly holy after an instantaneous "positional" or "forensic" justification. It commonly refers to the initial "setting aside" of an individual for God at his conversion.
- Paul addressed these people as "believers" because that is what they were (Cf. 1 Thess 5:5). They shared a life of God because the Holy Spirit indwelt them (12:13). Paul's notion of sanctification here is "positional" sanctification (past tense), not progressive/practical sanctification (Cf. 6:11; Heb 10:10).
- They were sanctified positionally (as are all believers), but they were not sanctified in their conduct (experientially). They had made little to no progress in their progressive sanctification. They were saints who were sinning.
- We need to bear these things in mind as we read about the church of God in Corinth, because we might otherwise conclude that they were unbelievers in view of their conduct. But never questions the authenticity of their salvation, nor does he ever threaten them they they could lose their salvation. Why? Because it's God's faithfulness that maintains their salvation, not their own (Cf. v4).
- "...saints by calling" - they were saints by virtue of God's calling them through the gospel
- While reading this letter, it will appear strange that Paul is calling them "sanctified saints" since they were not living like ones. But Paul had to tell them who they were in Christ before they could live out their calling.
- In order to properly interpret both Corinthian letters, it is imperative to understand that Paul is writing to a church—full of believers in Christ, saved individuals—but who were not walking according to their calling. The purpose of Paul's two letters is to correct their walk with Christ so that they would be fully rewarded at the judgment (Bema Seat) of Christ.

- The Corinthians' status as believers in Christ—saved individuals—is evident in both of Paul's letters to them (Cf. 1 Cor 1:2; 3:1,5; 6:11,19-20; 2 Cor 1:1,21-22,24; 3:2-3; 6:14-16; 8:9; 10:15). If your interpretation of any passage or verse in either of Paul's Corinthian letters assumes that his audience is not saved, you will arrive at an incorrect interpretation.
- "...with all who in every place" - Paul wanted the Corinthian church to know they were not alone on an island, they were part of a larger body of Christ and should therefore follow the same pattern which all other churches followed (Cf. 11:16)
- The first nine verses announce who they were in Christ before he begins to address their problems...

- 3** Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.
- 3** Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.
- 3** May grace and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus, the Messiah, be yours!
- 3** Grace be unto you, and peace, from God our Father, and from the Lord Jesus Christ.
- Paul's customary salutation included both grace and peace (Gal 1:3; 2 Thess 1:2)
- Paul described God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ as co-equals because both are purveyors of grace and peace
- Both God's grace and His peace are necessary for a believer to grow in their progressive sanctification. Grace is needed to live the Christian life, and peace is the result of living the Christian life.

#### (2) Thanksgiving (1:4-9)

**4 I thank my God always** concerning you for **the grace of God** which was **given you in Christ Jesus**,

**4** I thank my God always concerning you for the grace of God which was given you in Christ Jesus,

**4** I always thank my God for you because of the grace of God given you by the Messiah Jesus.

**4** I thank my God always on your behalf, for the grace of God which is given you by Jesus Christ;

- "I thank my God always" - Paul often began his epistles with thanksgiving (Cf. 1 Thess 1:2ff; 2 Thess 1:3ff). It's a strong indicator that he spent much of his life giving thanks.

Being thankful is a barometer for how one is doing in the Christian life.

- "...the grace of God" - the grace of God toward the Corinthians was evident because of the wealth of spiritual gifts that they were given (v7)

- "...given you in Christ Jesus" - God's grace is freely given, but it's never deserved! God gave them grace not because of their righteous lifestyle or their achievements, but because He is God.

5 that in everything you were **enriched in Him**, in all **speech** and all **knowledge**,  
5 that in everything you were enriched in Him, in all speech and all knowledge,  
5 For by him you have become rich in every way—in speech and knowledge of every kind

—

5 That in every thing ye are enriched by him, in all utterance, and in all knowledge;  
— "...enriched in Him" – this was the effect of God's grace in the Corinthian church. The Corinthians were a "rich" church, not only materially, but also in their speech and knowledge of Jesus, in their abounding in spiritual gifts, and in that they lived in anticipation of Jesus' return.

— The grace of God in the Corinthian Christians could be seen by *what they said*, by *what they learned*, by a *supernatural element* in their lives, and by their *expectant anticipation* of Jesus' return.

— When Paul looked at the Corinthian church, he could say: "These people proclaim Jesus, they know about Jesus, there are the supernatural gifts of God among them, and they are excited about Jesus' return." Whatever problems they had, these are some pretty impressive strong points. Can even this much be said about many churches today? We may pride ourselves on not having the problems of the Corinthian Christians, but do we have their positives?

— Yet, these positives were no great credit to the Corinthian Christians themselves. They were not the spiritual achievements of the Corinthians, but the work of the grace of God in them.

— "...speech" – *logos*, human eloquence, highly prized in Corinth

— "...knowledge" – *gnōsis*, depth of understanding, also highly prized in Corinth

— Gifts of speech, such as the gift of tongues and the gift of knowledge, were being used for self-promotion rather than the common good. Paul addresses their misuse of spiritual gifts in chapters 12-14. But regardless how Corinth misused these gifts, the gifts in and of themselves were good, so Paul was thankful for them in Corinth.

6 just as the testimony concerning Christ was **confirmed** in you,  
6 even as the testimony concerning Christ was confirmed in you,  
6 while our testimony about the Messiah has been confirmed among you.  
6 Even as the testimony of Christ was confirmed in you:

— "...confirmed" – *bebaioō*, the testimony of Christ was confirmed/established in them through audible or visual phenomena (Cf. Gal 3:2-5; Heb 2:3-4)

— Their reception of these gifts corroborated the truthfulness of the gospel; giving these gifts was one of the ways God "confirmed" the gospel message in the early church (Cf. Gal 3:2-5; Heb 2:3-4)

7 so that you are not lacking in any gift, as you **eagerly await** the **revelation** of our Lord Jesus Christ,

7 so that you are not lacking in any gift, awaiting eagerly the revelation of our Lord Jesus Christ,

7 Therefore, you don't lack any spiritual gift as you eagerly wait for our Lord Jesus the Messiah to be revealed.

7 So that ye come behind in no gift; waiting for the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ:

- The result of the gospel being confirmed in them was that they were not lacking in any spiritual gift

— Paul's focus here is thanksgiving for God's grace in giving the Corinthians such great spiritual gifts (Cf. Eph 1:3-14). They were weak in their spirituality, but strong in their giftedness. They were blessed by the Spirit, but not walking by the Spirit (Cf. Gal 5:16). Paul praised them for their gifts, but not their behavior.

- "...eagerly await" - *apekdechomai*, believers are always told to "wait" for the Rapture, not "watch" for it, as there are no preceding signs (Cf. Phil 3:20-21; 1 Thess 1:10; Titus 2:13; James 5:7)

- "...revelation" - an allusion to the Rapture; the early Christians eagerly awaited Christ's return

8 who will also **confirm** you to the end, **blameless** on **theday of our Lord Jesus Christ**.

8 who will also confirm you to the end, blameless in the day of our Lord Jesus Christ.

8 He will keep you strong until the end, so that you will be blameless on the Day of our Lord Jesus the Messiah.

8 Who shall also confirm you unto the end, that ye may be blameless in the day of our Lord Jesus Christ.

- "...confirm" - *bebaioō*, same word used in v6; here it's probably better translated as "strengthen" or "establish"

- "...blameless" - *anegkletos*, irreproachable, without guilt, impeccable; without accusation (Cf. Col 1:22; 1 Tim 3:10; Titus 1:6-7)

— It does not imply complete equality of believers at the Judgment Seat of Christ, nor does it mean that Christians do not sin. It means that every believer will stand before the Lord guiltless, unimpeachable, because God has imputed the guilt of our sins to Christ, and He bore them (Cf. Rom 5:1; 8:1).

- "...the day of our Lord Jesus Christ" - 6x in the NT, always refers to the Rapture (5:5; 2 Cor 1:14; Phil 1:6,10; 2:16; Cf. Col 3:4; 1 Thess 3:13; 5:23)

— "the day of Christ" - in all six NT references is described as relating to the reward and blessing of the Church at the Rapture, and in contrast with the expression "the day of the

Lord," which is related to judgment upon unbelieving Jews and Gentiles, and blessing on millennial saints (Zeph 3:8-20)

— It never refers to the Day of the Lord, which is a phrase referring to the period beginning with the Tribulation and extending through the Millennium

**9 God is faithful**, through whom you were called into **fellowship** with His Son, Jesus Christ our Lord.

9 God is faithful, through whom you were called into fellowship with His Son, Jesus Christ our Lord.

9 Faithful is the God by whom you were called into fellowship with his Son Jesus the Messiah, our Lord.

9 God is faithful, by whom ye were called unto the fellowship of his Son Jesus Christ our Lord.

- "...God is faithful" - Paul's confidence that the Corinthian believers would one day stand without guilt before the Lord did not rest on their ability to persevere faithfully to the end...it rested on God's ability and promises to preserve them

— God had called them into fellowship with His Son, and He is faithful to complete His work

- "...fellowship" - *koinonia*, fellowship, communion, communication

— The Corinthians' fellowship with Christ began when they trusted Him as their Savior, but Paul's main concern was that they would enjoy deeper, more intimate and satisfying fellowship with Christ if they dealt with the things that were limiting that fellowship

— The church in any place has a debt to the people who live there to proclaim the gospel to them (Rom 1:14-16). Paul wrote this entire epistle out of an underlying sense of the church's responsibility for "the city" where it existed.

In the first nine verses, Christ is mentioned in every single verse. This shows Paul's focus of the epistle early on: the Corinthians should focus on Christ and Him crucified in order to overcome their carnal living.

## II. Conditions reported to Paul (1 Cor 1:10—6:20)

### (1) By Chloe's household: divisions (1:10—4:21)

Paul received reports from Chloe and the bearer of the letter that party divisions, incest, lawsuits, and prostitution were taking place among the members of the church at Corinth. All of Paul's solutions to these issues rest on Christ's finished work.

#### (A) Reality of the problem (1:10-17)

**10 Now I urge you, brothers and sisters, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you all agree** and that there be no **divisions** among you, but that you be **made complete**

in the same **mind** and in the same **judgment**.

**10** Now I exhort you, brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you all agree and that there be no divisions among you, but that you be made complete in the same mind and in the same judgment.

**10** Brothers, in the name of our Lord Jesus the Messiah, I urge all of you to be in agreement and not to have divisions among you, so that you may be perfectly united in your understanding and opinions.

**10** Now I beseech you, brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that ye all speak the same thing, and that there be no divisions among you; but that ye be perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment.

- Paul had received a report that the Corinthians had divided into factions focusing on specific teachers (v11-12)

- "Now" - a transition to the main body of the letter

- "...urge" - a strong exhortation that falls short of a direct command, but maintains essential force. Paul was an apostle of Jesus Christ (v2) thus he had authority in the church and the right to command the Corinthian church in this matter. But instead, with a loving heart, he begs and pleads with them to be unified as believers.

- "...brothers *and sisters*" - believers; a term of familial affection

- "...by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ" - Paul is speaking and "urging" the Corinthian church in the name of Jesus Christ. The Corinthians should view Paul's words as if Jesus were speaking them in their presence.

— This is the tenth reference to Jesus Christ in the first ten verses of this letter. Clearly Paul is focusing these carnal Corinthian believers on the One who is calling them out of carnality.

- "...you all agree" - *pas autos*, literally means to "say the same thing"

— The problem was that the Corinthians were all saying different things (v12)

- "...divisions" - *schisma*, tears, rips; they were tearing themselves apart, ripping up the body of Christ. It began by quibbling, following personalities, wrangling over non-essentials.

- This opening issue that Paul addressed with the Corinthians is the most crucial in the letter because the nature of this issue had its root cause in false theology, which exchanged the Cross for "triumphalism". Triumphalism is the belief that Christians are triumphing today over sin and its consequences, to the exclusion of persecution and suffering.

— It is sometimes, as in Corinth, a result of an over-realized eschatology, which says that believers have entered into certain blessings of salvation that in reality lie ahead of us during the end times. Kingdom Now and the Prosperity Gospel are two current example of triumphalism. Bad theology usually lies behind bad behavior.

- "...made complete" - *katartizō*, to repair; same word used to describe the mending of nets
- "...mind" - thinking
- "...judgment" - opinion
- The thinking and opinions that Paul wanted to "make complete" or repair, was as it relates to the theology of Christ and the cross

### **The Failures of the Corinthian Church**

1. The spirit of "the city" invaded the church: every evil thing in the church to which Paul referred was prevalent in Corinth—intellectual freedom (see note after v13), moral laxity (intellectual permissiveness led to the lowering of moral standards; when people view any idea as legitimate, there are few moral absolutes), and personal selfishness (everyone did what was right in their own eyes; there was very little concern for other people or their welfare).
2. The church failed to recognize its uniqueness: the Christians had not grasped and retained some central truths, which identified the root of their Christianity.
3. They forgot the central importance of the cross. This was a message that was not subject to debate; it rested on eyewitness testimony and divine revelation, not human speculation.

The church fails when it adopts the ideas and activities of its environment rather than those revealed for it in God's Word. In view of this, Paul constantly appealed to his readers to be what they were in reality. We are not the people that we were. We are saints (1:2). We need to remember that and act accordingly. We do not need to *catch* the spirit of our age...we need to *correct* the spirit of our age. When the Church catches the spirit of its age, it catches a disease and becomes anemic, weak, and sickly. We avoid catching this spirit by staying spiritually healthy and by a constant intake of God's Word.

11 For I have been informed concerning you, my brothers *and sisters*, by **Chloe's** people, that there are **quarrels** among you.

11 For I have been informed concerning you, my brethren, by Chloe's people, that there are quarrels among you.

11 My brothers, some members of Chloe's family have made it clear to me that there are quarrels among you.

11 For it hath been declared unto me of you, my brethren, by them which are of the house of Chloe, that there are contentions among you.

- "...Chloe" - she is otherwise unknown; she evidently had a household or business that included people who traveled to Corinth, and had returned to Ephesus with reports of

conditions in the Corinthian church

— Paul wrote this epistle from Ephesus, so evidently "Chloe's people" returned to Ephesus from Corinth and informed Paul of the condition of the Corinthian church

- "...quarrels" - arguments creating divisions. This was evidence of licentiousness: they were turning their freedom into an opportunity (a "license") for the flesh (Cf. Gal 5:13).

12 Now I mean this, that **each one of you** is saying, "I am with **Paul**," or "I am with **Apollos**," or "I am with **Cephas**," or "**I am with Christ**."

12 Now I mean this, that each one of you is saying, "I am of Paul," and "I of Apollos," and "I of Cephas," and "I of Christ."

12 This is what I mean: Each of you is saying, "I belong to Paul," or "I belong to Apollos," or "I belong to Cephas," or "I belong to the Messiah."

12 Now this I say, that every one of you saith, I am of Paul; and I of Apollos; and I of Cephas; and I of Christ.

- The Corinthians tended to appreciate some teachers more than others, based on their own personal qualities or blessings they had imparted

- "...each one" - Paul is finding fault with each person individually

- "...you" - plural, indicates that it was each individual in the church

- "...Paul" - it was natural for the Corinthians to appreciate Paul, who founded the church and spent 18 months with them

- "...Apollos" - followed Paul in Corinth, and was effective in refuting the arguments of Jewish unbelievers and in proclaiming Jesus as the Messiah; he was a gifted apologist and speaker (Acts 18:24-28)

- "...Cephas" - the Aramaic surname of Apostle Peter; there is no scriptural record that Peter ever visited Corinth, though he may have. Since Peter was an apostle to the Jews, it is understandable that many Jewish Christians venerated him.

- "...I am with Christ" - this group did not profess allegiance to a human leader, but instead to Christ alone. They appear to have regarded themselves as the most spiritual element in the church; they devised their own brand of spiritual elitism, which made them no better than the others.

One of the features of "Paul," "Apollos," Peter ("Cephas"), and "Christ," that made them attractive to various segments of the Corinthian church was evidently their individual oratorical styles. Later, Paul pointed out that the Corinthian Christians were viewing things through *carnal* eyes, namely, seeing things as unsaved people do (3:1-4). Paul did not emphasize or place confidence in the *method* of his preaching, but rather in the *message* of "the Cross." He did not want to draw attention away from the gospel message to his style of delivering that message.

### **13 Has Christ been divided? Paul was not crucified for you, was he? Or were you baptized in the name of Paul?**

13 Has Christ been divided? Paul was not crucified for you, was he? Or were you baptized in the name of Paul?

13 Is the Messiah divided? Paul wasn't crucified for you, was he? You weren't baptized in Paul's name, were you?

13 Is Christ divided? was Paul crucified for you? or were ye baptized in the name of Paul?

- "Has Christ been divided?" - the last group was using "Christ" as the name of a party within the church; those doing so "cut Him off" from the other members of the church, claiming to be exclusive followers of Christ

— If that were the case, the others groups (Paul, Apollos, Cephas) weren't identified with Christ, thus Christ had been "divided"

- "...Paul was not crucified for you, was he?" - next, Paul addressed his own supporters: how foolish of them to elevate him over Christ, since Christ was the One who completed what was most important

- "...were you baptized in the name of Paul?" - the obvious answer is No, they had been baptized in the name of Christ (Acts 2:38; 8:16; 10:48; 19:5). Paul asking these rhetorical questions points out the foolishness of these divisions based on personality or oratorial skills.

— To be publicly baptized in the name of someone was to be identified with them. If they had been baptized in the name of Paul, then it would've been proper to say "I am of Paul." But since they were not baptized in Paul's name, they were giving him undue importance in identifying with him instead of Christ.

- Paul's purpose for these questions was to get the Corinthians to correct their theology of Christ. Their worldly behavior was the result of poor theology. It is important to correct one's theology in order to correct one's behavior.

One of the symptoms of Corinthian cultural influence was intellectual freedom. There was much interest in intellectual speculation in Corinth. The phrase "Corinthian words" was a synonym for elaborate language in Paul's day. Corinth glorified human wisdom. The Corinthians discussed and debated all sorts of opinions. Each intellectual leader had his group of disciples. Discussion of every subject under the sun prevailed with great diversity of opinion. Unfortunately, this spirit had invaded the church. There was a veneration of human wisdom among the Christians. They had chosen their own Christian leaders whom they viewed as celebrities (1 Cor 1). Intellectual restlessness prevailed in the church, as well as in the city. The believers sampled Christian teaching like the general populace dabbled

in philosophical argumentation. This extended to such fundamental doctrines as the Resurrection (1 Cor 15).

14 I am thankful that I baptized none of you except **Crispus** and **Gaius**,

14 I thank God that I baptized none of you except Crispus and Gaius,

14 I thank God that I did not baptize any of you except Crispus and Gaius,

14 I thank God that I baptized none of you, but Crispus and Gaius;

- Paul now digresses his argument to further point out the foolishness of following any man except Christ

- "...Crispus" - the ruler of the synagogue where Paul preached on his first visit to Corinth (Acts 18:8)

- "...Gaius" - may be Titius Justus, a Gentile convert who lived next door to the synagogue and opened his home to the church after the Christians could no longer meet in the synagogue (Acts 18:7). He was evidently wealthy since he had a large home that could accommodate "the whole church (Rom 16:23).

15 so that no one would say you were baptized in my name!

15 so that no one would say you were baptized in my name.

15 so that no one can say that you were baptized in my name.

15 Lest any should say that I had baptized in mine own name.

- The reason why Paul was thankful that he baptized very few people is so that no one could say they were baptized in his name, rather than in the name of Jesus

— If water baptism was essential for salvation, it would seem natural that Paul would have emphasized its importance by personally baptizing more than only two believers in Corinth. But he deliberately did not baptize most of his converts so there would be no question as to whose disciples they were. This was one way he kept Christ central in his ministry.

— He believed baptism was important, but each baptism was just as valid whether he, or any other believer, administered it. See [Soteriology 10 - Baptism \(John 3:5\)](#) for additional reasons why baptism is not required for salvation.

16 But I did baptize the **household of Stephanas** also; beyond that, I do not know if I baptized anyone else.

16 Now I did baptize also the household of Stephanas; beyond that, I do not know whether I baptized any other.

16 (Oh yes, I also baptized the family of Stephanas. Beyond that, I'm not sure whether I baptized anyone else.)

16 And I baptized also the household of Stephanas: besides, I know not whether I baptized any other.

- As Paul was writing this letter, or dictating it, the Holy Spirit brought to his remembrance some additional people whom Paul baptized. There were many converts from Paul at Corinth whom Paul did not baptize.
- "...household of Stephanas" - the first converts in the Roman province of Achaia (16:15)

17 For Christ did not send me to baptize, but to preach the gospel, not with **cleverness** of speech, so that the cross of Christ would not be made of no effect.

17 For Christ did not send me to baptize, but to preach the gospel, not in cleverness of speech, so that the cross of Christ would not be made void.

17 For the Messiah did not send me to baptize but to preach the gospel, not with eloquent wisdom, so the cross of the Messiah won't be emptied of its power.

17 For Christ sent me not to baptize, but to preach the gospel: not with wisdom of words, lest the cross of Christ should be made of none effect.

- Paul contrasts impressive oratory and the cross...

- Paul's point, again, is not that baptism is not important, but that preaching the gospel is more important than just baptizing, and baptism does not save us. If water baptism was part of the gospel, Paul would've surely baptized everyone who believed.

- "...cleverness" - *sophia*, normally translated "wisdom"; used 16x in the first three chapters of this epistle

— The people of Corinth prized wisdom, which for them was manifested in oratorical skill. It focused more on the wit, charm, or cleverness of the message rather than the message itself. Paul says that when he preached the gospel to the Corinthians and they came to faith in Christ, he did the opposite: he wasn't concerned about how he delivered the gospel, he cared about the gospel message itself.

— The Corinthians bad theology led to bad behavior. They competed to be the most stylistic, charming speaker rather than focusing on the message itself. But Paul was not willing to sacrifice the preaching of the cross (the message itself) for eloquence, charm, or wit because the saving power of the cross is not only for the unsaved, but for those who are "being saved" (sanctification).

— For the Corinthians, clever oratory was the height of wisdom, but Paul says that it voids the saving power of the cross of Christ by resting it on something other than grace alone

In v17, Paul used a figure of speech called *litotes* for emphasis. In *litotes*, a writer makes a negative statement to emphasize the positive alternative. For example, "No small storm" (Acts 27:20) means a very large storm. Paul would never say what he did in this passage if baptism were necessary for salvation.

(B) The gospel contrasted with human wisdom (1:18—2:16)

(a) The gospel contrasted with the surrounding culture (1:18-25)

**18 For the word of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God.**

**18** For the word of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God.

**18** For the message about the cross is nonsense to those who are being destroyed, but it is God's power to us who are being saved.

**18** For the preaching of the cross is to them that perish foolishness; but unto us which are saved it is the power of God.

- Paul now develops what he said in v17 by contrasting "the word of the cross" with "cleverness of speech"

- "...word of the cross" - the gospel (v17); it is impossible to preach the gospel without presenting the message of the cross

— Preaching a high moral standard is not preaching the gospel; preaching the universal fatherhood of God is not preaching the gospel; preaching the universal brotherhood of man is not preaching the gospel. The gospel = the message of the cross.

— To the Corinthians, the crucifixion was a cruel, humiliating, unrelenting instrument of death...so what message, in their minds, could this instrument of death possibly speak?

- This verse gives us two views of the cross: those who are unsaved see the cross as foolishness; those who are being saved (from the power of sin, sanctified) see it as the power of God.

- "...foolishness" - *mōria*, moronic, absurd; from the Corinthian vantage point, a Savior who died a slave's death on an unspeakable cross in order to rectify man's relationship with Almighty God is pure foolishness. To those who reject the salvation of the cross, the idea of being saved through the work of a crucified man is foolish.

— To understand Paul's point, we have to understand what the "cross" meant to people in the first century. It was an unspoken word, something akin to saying the message of the gas chamber or the message of the firing squad—but worse!

- "...those who are perishing" - those who are continually destroying themselves by not believing the message of the cross because they think it is foolishness

- "...who are being saved" - *sōzō*, present tense, referring to believers who are presently in the process of being saved from the power of sin; refers to the second tense of salvation (sanctification). The cross must remain the central focal point after we're saved from the penalty of sin (justification) because we still need to be saved from the power of sin (Cf. 15:2).

- "...the power of God" - though it is a strange message, those who trust in it and are being saved (from the power of sin), the "message of the cross" becomes to them the actual power of God

— The hearing and trusting of the true gospel brings the power of God into your life. The Corinthians needed to regain this perspective and focus on the message rather than the delivery.

19 For it is written: "**I WILL DESTROY THE WISDOM OF THE WISE, AND THE UNDERSTANDING OF THOSE WHO HAVE UNDERSTANDING, I WILL CONFFOUND.**"

19 For it is written, "I will destroy the wisdom of the wise, And the cleverness of the clever I will set aside."

19 For it is written, "I will destroy the wisdom of the wise, and the intelligence of the intelligent I will reject."

19 For it is written, I will destroy the wisdom of the wise, and will bring to nothing the understanding of the prudent.

- Paul quotes from Is 29:14 [LXX] to demonstrate the ultimate end of "those who are perishing"

- "...I WILL DESTROY THE WISDOM OF THE WISE" - Isaiah wrote about God's judgment on Jews who worshiped not from the heart but from rote tradition

— Paul is demonstrating from the OT that it has always been God's method to expose the folly of human wisdom (wisdom that disregards what God has revealed and seeks to explain reality by excluding God). He applied this principle to unbelievers who value cleverness of speech over the actual message, and think the word of the cross is foolishness.

— Paul's point is that ultimately God will judge those who value cleverness of speech over the message of the cross, so there is no benefit for the Corinthians to be so enamored with it

20 Where is the **wise person**? Where is the **scribe**? Where is the **debater of this age**? Has God not made foolish the wisdom of the world?

20 Where is the wise man? Where is the scribe? Where is the debater of this age? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of the world?

20 Where is the wise person? Where is the scholar? Where is the philosopher of this age? God has turned the wisdom of the world into nonsense, hasn't he?

**20** Where is the wise? where is the scribe? where is the disputer of this world? hath not God made foolish the wisdom of this world?

- "...wise person" - a Gentile who could project his worldview with the oratory skill of the day

- "...scribe" - a Jew who considered himself a sage due to his extensive knowledge of manuscripts

- "...debater of this age" - a Jew or Gentile who could defend his position while posing questions that would put his opponent on the defense; a person who wanted to dispute every issue and solve it by human wisdom
- God has made foolish what the world considers wisdom because in the end it will all be destroyed by judgment

21 For since in the wisdom of God the world through its wisdom did not *come to know* God, God was **pleased** through the foolishness of **the message preached to save** those who believe.

21 For since in the wisdom of God the world through its wisdom did not *come to know* God, God was well-pleased through the foolishness of the message preached to save those who believe.

21 For since, in the wisdom of God, the world through its wisdom did not know God, God was pleased to save those who believe through the nonsense of our preaching.

21 For after that in the wisdom of God the world by wisdom knew not God, it pleased God by the foolishness of preaching to save them that believe.

- The world did not come to know God relationally through their own wisdom. This fact, in and of itself, reveals the wisdom of God because it manifests that the message of the cross is the power of God.

— The gospel is the power of God in that it takes something (the gospel), which man in his unregenerated state sees as foolishness, and uses it to transform both his life and his eternal destiny

— Paul is not saying that all the wisdom that unbelievers have produced is worthless. He's saying that the world, through its wisdom, did not come to know God.

— Paul also is not saying that we can know nothing about God from the things that He has made (Cf. Rom 1:18-23). He's saying that we cannot obtain the knowledge adequate for salvation from these things (general revelation does not communicate the gospel).

- "...pleased" - *eudokeo*, determined, resolved

— God was "determined" to use the "word of the cross" (v18) because He considered it "good" that through the "foolishness" of the message He would save (from the penalty of sin) those who believe

- "...the message preached" - *kerygma*, the "word of the cross" (v18); the gospel

- "...to save" - *sōzō*, aorist (past) tense, referring to justification, save them from the penalty of their sins

22 For indeed **Jews ask for signs** and **Greeks search for wisdom**;

22 For indeed Jews ask for signs and Greeks search for wisdom;

22 Jews ask for signs, and Greeks look for wisdom,

22 For the Jews require a sign, and the Greeks seek after wisdom:

- "...Jews ask for signs" - Jews characteristically asked Jesus to perform signs to prove His power came from God (Matt 12:38-42; 16:1-4; Mark 8:11-12; John 2:18; 6:30). They were looking for a miraculous Messianic deliverance, not the "message of the cross."
- They wanted a miraculous sign of messianic deliverance; they were not looking for nor expecting the "message of the cross." Their desire for deliverance wasn't a bad thing, but their rejection of God's way for their deliverance was.
- Even while He was hanging on the cross, they were pressing Him to demonstrate His power by taking Himself down (Matt 27:40,42; Luke 23:37)
- "...Greeks search for wisdom" - Greeks characteristically sought philosophical (human) wisdom because it seemed to make sense of or explain things for them
- Nowhere in the message of the cross did the Greeks see wisdom. They did not value the wisdom expressed in the message of the cross. Their desire for wisdom was not bad, but their rejection of God's wisdom was.

23 but we preach **Christ crucified, to Jews a stumbling block, and to Gentiles foolishness,**

23 but we preach Christ crucified, to Jews a stumbling block and to Gentiles foolishness,  
23 but we preach the Messiah crucified. He is a stumbling block to Jews and nonsense to gentiles,

23 But we preach Christ crucified, unto the Jews a stumblingblock, and unto the Greeks foolishness;

- "...Christ crucified" - an oxymoron to both the Jews and the Greeks:
  - "Christ" - Messiah, means "power, splendor, triumph"
  - "crucified" - means weakness, defeat, humiliation
- The great Roman statesman Cicero said: "The cross, it speaks of that which is so shameful, so horrible, it should never be mentioned in polite society."
- "...to Jews a stumbling block" - a crucified Messiah was a "stumbling block" (an "offense" or a "scandal") to the Jews because they regarded the Messiah as the Person on whom God's blessing rested (Is 11:2). Instead, Jesus was hung on a tree, which was proof to them that God had cursed Him (Deut 21:23; Gal 3:13).
- But they stumbled over their "stumbling stone" because of their disobedience to the Word (Rom 9:32; Is 28:16; 8:16; 1 Peter 2:8)
- "...to Gentiles foolishness" - the message of the Cross did not seem to make sense: how could anyone believe in or submit to One who was apparently not smart enough to save Himself from execution as a criminal, when He was completely innocent? And how could anyone look to such a person as a teacher of wisdom?

24 but to **those who are the called**, both Jews and Greeks, **Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God.**

24 but to those who are the called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God.

24 but to those who are called, both Jews and Greeks, the Messiah is God's power and God's wisdom.

24 But unto them which are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God, and the wisdom of God.

— "...those who are the called" - believers, in contrast to the unsaved (Cf. Rom 1:7; 8:28); includes both Jews and Gentiles

— These have a very different attitude toward "Christ crucified"

— "...Christ the power of God" - Jesus is the instrument of God's "power" in conquering evil and delivering people from its control (Cf. Rom 1:16)

— "...the wisdom of God" - Jesus is the instrument of God's wisdom in solving a problem that humans in and of themselves could not: how people can be reconciled to God and be in relationship with Him

— The wisdom literature in the OT personified wisdom as God's agent in revelation, creation and redemption: Jesus Christ *is that* wisdom. In Him are hidden all the riches of wisdom and knowledge (Col 2:2-3).

25 For **the foolishness of God** is wiser than mankind, and **the weakness of God** is stronger than mankind.

25 Because the foolishness of God is wiser than men, and the weakness of God is stronger than men.

25 For God's nonsense is wiser than human wisdom, and God's weakness is stronger than human strength.

25 Because the foolishness of God is wiser than men; and the weakness of God is stronger than men.

— "...the foolishness of God" - the crucified Christ, as interpreted by unbelieving mankind (Jews)

— "...the weakness of God" - the crucified Christ, as interpreted by unbelieving mankind (Greeks)

— The manner in which God decided to save mankind from the penalty, power, and presence of sin is simply not the way mankind would've done it. If mankind were asked how God should proceed to save the world, they would certainly not say by sending His Son to die on a cross.

— When people want to draw attention to something, they it shine and glisten; our attention to it is only natural. When God wanted to draw attention to His Son, He lifted Him

up on a cross to die (John 12:32); our attention to it is only supernatural. Thus, it is a demonstration of the power of God.

Paul's purpose in writing these verses (v18-25) was to encourage the Corinthians to value the message of the cross more highly than the oratorical skills of individuals. This was crucial because the word of the cross is still instrumental in our ongoing salvation from the power of sin.

Ever so subtly, we've started to think that success more critically depends on thoughtful sociological analysis rather than on the Gospel; Barna becomes more important than the Bible. We depend on plans, programs, vision statements—but somewhere along the way we have succumbed to the temptation to displace the foolishness of the Cross with the wisdom of strategic planning. I fear that the Cross, without ever being disowned, is constantly in danger of being dismissed from the central place it must enjoy, by relatively peripheral insights that take on far too much weight. Whenever the periphery is in danger of displacing the center, we are not far removed from idolatry.

(b) The gospel evident in the Corinthians (1:26-31)

**26** For **consider your calling**, brothers and sisters, that there were **not many wise** according to the flesh, not many **mighty**, not many **noble**;

**26** For consider your calling, brethren, that there were not many wise according to the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble;

**26** Brothers, think about your own calling. Not many of you were wise by human standards, not many were powerful, not many were of noble birth.

**26** For ye see your calling, brethren, how that not many wise men after the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble, are called:

- "...consider your calling" - Paul now wanted the Corinthians' to consider their low station in life and the strange fact that they, of all people, were in Christ. His purpose is to encourage them to boast only in Christ, not in human wisdom or oratory skills.

- "...not many wise...mighty...noble" - there were only a few in the Corinthian church who came from higher intellectual or influential levels of society. This was in keeping with most of the early converts to Christianity, who were either slaves or freedmen (former slaves who had been freed).

27 but God has chosen the foolish things of the world to shame the wise, and God has chosen the weak things of the world to shame the things which are strong,

27 but God has chosen the foolish things of the world to shame the wise, and God has chosen the weak things of the world to shame the things which are strong,

27 But God chose what is nonsense in the world to make the wise feel ashamed. God chose what is weak in the world to make the strong feel ashamed.

27 But God hath chosen the foolish things of the world to confound the wise; and God hath chosen the weak things of the world to confound the things which are mighty;

- Paul's point is that just as the gospel he preached contradicted human expectations, the people He saved in Corinth contradicted human expectation as well...God had chosen the "nobodies" from humble origins rather than the "beautiful people" of Corinth as the bearers of this gospel. They themselves were evidence that God's foolishness confounds ("shames") the wise.

— The OT is full of illustrations of God choosing less than promising material as His instruments: an ox goad (Judges 3:31); a nail (Judges 4:21); trumpets, pitchers and lamps (Judges 7:20); a millstone (Judges 9:53); the jawbone of a donkey (Judges 15:15). God's method did not change with the coming of Christ, nor has it changed since then.

28 and the insignificant things of the world and the despised God has chosen, the **things that are not**, so that He may **nullify the things that are**,

28 and the base things of the world and the despised God has chosen, the things that are not, so that He may nullify the things that are,

28 And God chose what is insignificant in the world, what is despised, what is nothing, in order to destroy what is something,

28 And base things of the world, and things which are despised, hath God chosen, yea, and things which are not, to bring to nought things that are:

- God's methods are not our methods, and His unsuspecting ways are the reason why most people who believe the gospel are not the epitome of wealth, power, and intelligence  
- "...things that are not" - things that are "nothing" in the eyes of the world

— There are two reasons why God chose to work this way:

1. To "nullify" the things that are (v28) - to "render inoperative" the things that the world values
2. So that no one may boast before God (v29) - if a person could boast in his wisdom, might, nobility, or strength, it would detract from God's glory

- "...nullify" - *katargeo*, to set aside, to render inoperative  
- "...things that are" - the things and individuals that the world values highly

29 so that no human may boast before God.

29 so that no man may boast before God.

29 so that no one may boast in God's presence.

29 That no flesh should glory in his presence.

- God has chosen this method so the glory is His alone. This is why God doesn't work in the way the world expects Him to work.

Have you ever looked at the resumes of the men God chooses?

- Moses was 80 years old and wanted for murder
- Jacob was a schemer and a con artist
- Elijah and Jeremiah both suffered from depression
- Hosea couldn't keep his marriage together
- Amos was a farmer with no ministry training
- Peter tried to kill a man with his sword
- John Mark was a quitter
- Paul couldn't get along with his partner Barnabas, and couldn't stay out of prison

30 But *it is due to Him that* you are in Christ Jesus, who became to us wisdom from God, and righteousness and sanctification, and redemption,

30 But by His doing you are in Christ Jesus, who became to us wisdom from God, and righteousness and sanctification, and redemption,

30 It is because of God that you are in union with the Messiah Jesus, who for us has become wisdom from God, as well as our righteousness, sanctification, and redemption.

30 But of him are ye in Christ Jesus, who of God is made unto us wisdom, and righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption:

- "...due to Him" - *autos*, "by His method" meaning that through the process that He has set up (belief by faith alone in Christ alone), you are "in Christ Jesus"
- "...in Christ Jesus" - we are placed "in Christ" at the point of faith through the Baptism of the Holy Spirit (1 Cor 12:13). Whole books have been written about this enigmatic phrase. It's the most intimate, the closest possible connection with our Lord.
- "...and" - *te*, better translated "is" or "even"
- The Greek construction *te kai kai* is epexegetical (explanatory), meaning "the wisdom of God is righteousness and sanctification and redemption"
- "...righteousness" - justification, the imputation of Christ's righteousness that sets us free from the penalty of sin the moment we believe. Christ is our righteousness (2 Cor 5:21).
- "...sanctification" - the impartation of Christ's righteousness that sets us free from the power of sin as we live by faith (Rom 6:19; 1 Thess 4:3-7)
- "...redemption" - glorification, the identification of Christ's righteousness that sets us free from the presence of sin when we receive our resurrection bodies
- From beginning to end, salvation in Christ is the wisdom of God

31 so that, just as it is written: "LET THE ONE WHO BOASTS, BOAST IN THE LORD."

31 so that, just as it is written, "Let him who boasts, boast in the Lord."

31 Therefore, as it is written, "The person who boasts must boast in the Lord."

31 That, according as it is written, He that glorieth, let him glory in the Lord.

- Quoted from Jer 9:23-24...

— The context of Jer 9 is Israel under divine discipline in exile due to their boasting in their wisdom, might, and riches. Paul's point is that the Corinthians' discipline should open their eyes to only boast in the Lord.

— Paul's quote here shows that God structured salvation in such a way that only He can receive the glory for it

— One of the two reasons why God chose the things that are nothing in the eyes of the world, which is stated negatively in v29, is now stated positively

Paul's purpose in these verses was to encourage the Corinthians to appreciate that the majority of people God had called into a relationship with Himself were not wise, mighty, noble, and strong by the world's standards, but rather they were considered insignificant. Thus it was by His other-worldly method that they came to be in Christ, who became to them, through the preaching of the cross, the wisdom and power of God. Therefore, they should boast in Him and not the things of the world such as cleverness of speech, which will eventually be set aside.

### **Foolishness of God**

- Noah and his "barge" (Gen 6-8)
- Samson and the jawbone of an ass (Judges 15)
- Elisha and Naaman the leper (2 Kings 5)
- Moses and the Brazen Serpent (Num 21; John 3:14-16)
- Jonah and the Big Fish (Jonah 2)

The Ultimate Foolishness: A wooden cross in Judea becomes the central point in the history of the universe.