

1 Corinthians

Introduction & Chapter 1:1-17

February 11, 1996

- **1 Corinthians Outline:**

- Chapter 1 Ungodly divisions result from man's wisdom.

- **Introduction**

The city of Corinth was set in a peculiarly advantageous location. Not only did the main land route between East and West pass through it, but several sea routes converged upon its two harbors. It consequently became very prosperous and was honored by being chosen the capital of the province of Achaia and the seat of the Roman proconsul. Although surpassed in culture by Athens, it was nevertheless proud of its political status and mental acuteness. It was never famed for its contribution to the arts or philosophy, but it became infamous for vice and particularly licentiousness. Its name, in fact, became a by-word for profligacy. This was not helped by the fact that Corinth was the center for worship of the goddess Aphrodite, whose worship is known, at least in earlier times, to have been of a very immoral kind. Its population was cosmopolitan, comprising Romans, Greeks, Orientals and Jews. It was thus a strategic center for the Gospel.

The establishment of the church is discussed in Acts 18. Paul came to Corinth on his second missionary journey, after a less than successful visit to Athens. He made his home with two exiled Jews from Rome, Aquila and Priscilla, and began his evangelistic work in the synagogue. Paul appears to have worked there for a year and a half (Acts 18:11). After leaving Corinth, Paul proceeded to Antioch via Ephesus.

- **Authorship** Traditionally Paul as substantiated by internal proof.
- **Time of Writing** ~54 - 55 ad.
- **Recipients** Jewish and Gentile believers at church in Corinth.
- **Purpose**

In a number of places, Paul appears to be responding to a list of questions from the Corinthian church regarding a myriad of topics. The primary sin to be dealt with was probably division and the many ways that sin manifests itself. The fact that the church was surrounded by sexual immorality, is obvious by the number of issues that pertain to personal holiness and abstention from such activity.

In this first section of the letter, Paul starts off by reassuring the church that he believes that they are true believers. This is his foundation that he lays before he launches into addressing the numerous problems that were occurring at the church.

- **1 Corinthians 1:1-17**

Paul, called to be an apostle of Jesus Christ through the will of God, and Sosthenes our brother,² To the church of God which is at Corinth, to those who are sanctified in Christ Jesus, called to be saints, with all who in every place call on the name of Jesus Christ our Lord, both theirs and ours:³ Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

- As is customary for Paul, he opens the letter by identifying himself. He states that he is an Apostle by the will of God. Paul's calling wasn't something he forced or maneuvered, it was something to which God called him.
- Christians are those who are first sanctified and who are called to be holy. Paul acknowledges that the recipients of the letter are sanctified. Despite the many problems that Paul is about to address in this letter, he still believes that the Christians are sanctified. Those who are true believers are set apart from unbelievers by God; this is a completed event. But that setting apart does not mean that God has brought us to full maturity; this is the process of sanctification. God is the author of this process because He has called us to be holy.

⁴ I thank my God always concerning you for the grace of God which was given to you by Christ Jesus,⁵ that you were enriched in everything by Him in all utterance and all knowledge,⁶ even as the testimony of Christ was confirmed in you,⁷ so that you come short in no gift, eagerly waiting for the revelation of our Lord Jesus Christ,⁸ who will also confirm you to the end, that you may be blameless in the day of our Lord Jesus Christ.⁹ God is faithful, by whom you were called into the fellowship of His Son, Jesus Christ our Lord.

- The Corinthian church was a church filled with problems but also note that the church had all of the Spiritual gifts that there were. The presence of Spiritual gifts is not a sign of spirituality. God can equip someone with a gift and they can still be filled with pride. Spirituality is not measured by giftedness but rather by the fruits of the Spirit.
- We are not saved by grace but sanctified by works. God is the one who has saved us and God is the one who will ensure our growth in maturity because we are confirmed in Christ by God to the end. We are simply working out that which God is working into our lives. If He weren't working anything in, there would be nothing for us to work out.

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

- Paul's first imperative comes in the form of a plea: that they be like minded and unified in their thinking. Paul is identifying the prideful schisms which can result anytime you are working with people. These divisions are not the result of the church staying clear of the ungodliness of the world but rather are the result of being self centered.

11 For it has been declared to me concerning you, my brethren, by those of Chloe's household, that there are contentions among you.¹² Now I say this, that each of you says, "I am of Paul," or "I am of Apollos," or "I am of Cephas," or "I am of Christ."¹³ Is Christ divided? Was Paul crucified for you? Or were you baptized in the name of Paul?¹⁴ I thank God that I baptized none of you except Crispus and Gaius,¹⁵ lest anyone should say that I had baptized in my own name.¹⁶ Yes, I also baptized the household of Stephanas. Besides, I do not know whether I baptized any other.¹⁷ For Christ did not send me to baptize, but to preach the gospel, not with wisdom of words, lest the cross of Christ should be made of no effect. NKJV

- Notice here that Paul doesn't respond to this situation in a legalistic manner; he doesn't tell them that they should take on the name of Christ rather than of Paul or Apollos as though it was just simply the wrong name by which they were dividing. Instead he reminds them of their position in Christ and as such are one with all of those who are named by him as the Saints.
- Paul's primary concern isn't that they were using improper labels. His primary concern is the sin of factionalism or a party spirit. The way to rid themselves of this sin is in the prior verses; they were to be like minded. There are those in the world that think the way this is done is by some kind of Christian lowest-common-denominationalism. This foolishness thinks that if we can just find some ground (no matter how incidental it may be) where we all agree then we would have unity. Unity does not come by denying that there are important things to talk about.
- Paul wants us to be doctrinally rigorous but our doctrine must include a doctrine of unity. However, if we reduce our doctrine down to some trivial level of agreement then we run the risk of developing a fragmented worldview which doesn't take into consideration some of the more complex doctrines to be discussed. We might spend all of our time in devotional passages like Psalm 23 and 1 Corinthians 13 but even then we would misunderstand those verses.
- Obviously, this unity has limits. As we learned when we studied unity, there are times when the division is necessary but it is only because there is some situation where sin is involved.
- Unity doesn't occur because we all agree to some set of rules. We could say with our mouths that we embrace some set of doctrines while in truth bear fruit which is in contradiction to our confession. Analogously, it is more important that we are unified based on what is *in* the bottle rather than just all having the *same label*.
- Paul's last point in this section ties in with the fact that he was called by God. He is not saying in these verses that it was bad to baptize. But if Paul's calling was to proclaim the gospel, then things that might divert his attention (even something spiritual like baptism) should be set aside so that he might serve God in a pleasing manner and be party to the accomplishments that He has planned for him.