

## 1 Corinthians 1:1-17 – Chapter Study

### INTRODUCTION

This is a great time to be studying 1 Corinthians because there are lots of parallels between the issues the Apostle Paul wrote about & our own time.

### I. GREETING 1:1-9

In Acts 18 we learn Paul planted the church in Corinth.

He spent a year & a half there, far longer than he usually spent in one place.

The reason he spent so long in Corinth was because like the city of Ephesus, he realized it would be an important center & distribution point for the Gospel.

It was in Corinth that he met & became good friends with the dynamic couple Aquila & Priscilla.

Some time later, while building the work in Ephesus just across the Aegean Sea from Corinth, Paul wrote them a letter to encourage them in the faith.

That letter was lost.

*This* letter, called 1 Corinthians is actually the 2<sup>nd</sup> letter he wrote them.

He sent it because he'd received a report from one of the church members of Corinth about some disturbing stuff going on there.

The Church itself had also written him asking for clarification about some practical issues which he deals with.

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Paul follows the traditional form of a letter in that time - Who it's from, who it's too, & a word of thanksgiving.

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

Paul has a reason for *why* he begins in this highly formal way, though the Corinthians knew him well.

He has some very strong words to say to them so he reminds them of his role as an Apostle.

The Greek is even *stronger* than the English; literally it says

**Paul, a called-apostle**

His point is that he didn't merely carry a title conferred on him by man.

His role & office were bestowed by God.

Which means it was his duty to lead & theirs to follow.

Paul knows he needs to remind them of this up front because word had reached him that his authority was being undermined in Corinth. That was part of the problem he had to deal with.

Paul will describe the role of an apostle more fully in ch. 15.

For now, we need to know that the word "apostle" carried a clear meaning to the Corinthians.

The Greek word *apostolos* referred to a "special ambassador", someone personally commissioned & sent out by a king as his official representative, wielding all the king's authority.

Though Paul wasn't one of the original 12, he was selected by Christ Himself to take the place Judas Iscariot vacated.

His conversion & calling took place in a dramatic vision on the Road to Damascus.

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Visiting Paul in Ephesus as he composed this letter was a man named *Sosthenes*.

He's mentioned in Acts 18:17 as the ruler of the synagogue in Corinth.

When Paul first arrived in Corinth, Crispus, the ruler of the synagogue became a believer.

When the usual brueha occurred & Paul was booted from the synagogue, Crispus went with him and was replaced by this guys Sosthenes.

The Jews then appealed to the Romans authorities & tried to get Paul beaten.

But the governor refused to get involved in a religious debate and tossed the case out.

There were some Greeks watching all this who had a mean streak of anti-Semitism & saw the governor's action as an open door to exact some payback – so they beat Sosthenes as the leader of the Jewish community.

Well, here he is, some time later, a believer & a companion of Paul's.

The reason Paul mentions him here is because he was well known to the Corinthians, and because he was probably acting as Paul's scribe, penning these words as Paul dictated.

## **2 - To the church of God which is at Corinth,**

We are so used to the word '*church*' referring to a Christian congregation that we can forget it carried a very different meaning to the people of Paul's day – especially the Corinthians.

The word comes to us from both Greek language & history.

It's the word *ecclesia*, & referred to the members of a Greek city who were official citizens.

Not everyone was a citizen; you had to have a certain status in order to be a citizen.

And if you were, you would occasionally assemble outside the city at a special location to discuss matters of importance to the city.

Thus the name – *ecclesia*. Ek = Out / Kaleo = to call.

The word had come to mean the *assembly of citizens*.

Originally the *ecclesia* wasn't at all a religious group, it was a collection of like-minded individuals who shared a common identity as citizens & had a mission to bless & protect their city.

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When Paul describes the believers at Corinth collectively as the church of God, he's using a term that would emphasize both their unity & mission – things that had been lost sight of among them.

## **to those who are sanctified in Christ Jesus, called to be saints,**

As we'll see, another problem in the church at Corinth was immorality.

So Paul starts off by reminding them they'd been called to *holiness*.

## **with all who in every place call on the name of Jesus Christ our Lord, both theirs and ours:**

One of the major problems in Corinth was sectarianism, which is a manifestation of pride.

So Paul insists on their seeing themselves as part of the wider Body of Christ.

## **3 - Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.**

This was Paul's favorite greeting.

He paired the common Greek greeting – "Charis!" = Blessing; Grace

With the classic Hebrew greeting "Shalom" = Peace.

Because in Christ, Jew & Gentile become one.

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One of the ways you discover the intent of the author of the NT letters is to look for repeated words or phrases.

Paul uses the phrase "the Lord Jesus Christ," 17 times in 1 Corinthians.

This isn't the Son of God's first, middle, & last name.

*Lord* is His title. *Jesus* is his given name. *Christ* is His office & mission.

*Lord* means Master and was the OT title for God.

*Jesus* is the name given Him by his parents at the direction of Gabriel.

It means, "Yahweh is salvation."

*Christ* is the Greek translation for the word Messiah, which means "anointed one" & referred to the Redeemer promised all the way back in Gen. who would deliver creation from the curse of sin & death.

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## **Corinth**

At this point, it would be good to describe the city of Corinth.

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It was located at an exceedingly important site; a 4½ mile wide isthmus linking Central & Southern Greece.

It had 2 excellent harbors - one on the Ionian Sea to the west, the other on the Aegean to the east.

Since sailing around the southern end of Achaia was dangerous, merchants considered it better to offload their cargo at Corinth, & haul it overland on a road called **Diolcus** to the other port.

Most of the time, they just hauled the *entire ship* across.

This took longer but was less expensive than finding a new ship.

This meant all N-S & E-W trade had to pass thru Corinth.

The result was a wealthy & diverse city.

People from all over the world were found there as ships were hauled the 4½ miles from one port to the other, a process which took days.

As a result, there were dozens of different religions represented in Corinth because as people waited, they wanted a place to worship.

There were temples, shrines, & cults galore.

All the Greek & Roman gods had major temples there.

But the city's chief deity was Aphrodite, the Greek goddess of sensual love.

She was serviced by a thousand ritual priestesses whose main role was to have sex with patrons.

Some of these different groups had merged or loaned each other different beliefs & practices making strange hybrid religions that were picked up by visitors and carried to their homes in far flung places around the empire.

Every 2 years, a sport contest known as the *Isthmian Games* were held in Corinth. They were 2<sup>nd</sup> only to the Olympics.

It was an *eclectic* city, & as is true with many ports, it had a reputation for immorality.

After long days & weeks at sea, sailors would reach port, get paid & head into town to live it up.

Corinth was known around the Roman Empire for its *loose* moral climate.

It was Las Vegas, Hollywood, San Francisco, & Amsterdam all rolled into one.

In fact, so debauched was it that if you wanted to call someone a complete moral reprobate, you called him a "Corinthian."

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As we'll see in the weeks to come, the immorality of Corinth had infected the church there.

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#### **4 - I thank my God always concerning you for the grace of God which was given to you by Christ Jesus,**

Things were pretty crazy in the church at Corinth but Paul wisely begins by identifying things to be *thankful* for.

He's going to say some pretty hard stuff, so he begins by pointing out the positive.

This is an important principle we all ought to take to heart.

As brothers & sisters in Christ, we're called to look out for one another.

When we see something that needs correction, we ought to speak up, *in love*.

But it's best to begin with the positive.

Use the hamburger method of confrontation: [Bun-Meat-bun.]

Paul lists some of the things God's grace had done for them . . .

**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,**

**7a - so that you come short in no gift,**

When the Gospel first took hold in Corinth, the power of the Spirit had been strong in signs & wonders.

The gifts & manifestations of the Spirit had been abundant & there'd been a solid evidence of dramatic conversion among them.

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But what had begun as a remarkable evidence of the Spirit's power & presence had become a cause of contention & division among them.

Their *misuse* of spiritual gifts is one of the main reasons he writes.

### **7b - eagerly waiting for the revelation of our Lord Jesus Christ,**

One of the things Paul could *commend* them for was their eager anticipation of the coming of Christ.

Note that – because there are people in the Church today who *declaim* an eager anticipation of the Return of Christ.

They scoff at an imminent Rapture & those who say the Second Coming could occur soon.

They call such eagerness “*escapism*” & criticize it as being irresponsible.

Paul would rebuke them for quenching an eager anticipation of the Lord's appearing!

If he commended the Corinthians nearly 2000 years ago for it, how much more is such an eager anticipation of the return of Christ commendable today?

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Of Jesus, Paul says . . .

### **8 - who will also confirm**

Make firm & sure, to establish.

### **you to the end, that you may be blameless in the day of our Lord Jesus Christ.**

Though there were a lot of major problems in the church at Corinth, Paul had every confidence Jesus would take care of them.

Indeed, if Paul had despaired of seeing things turned around, he never would have written this letter of correction.

It was his confidence in the grace of God to turn them around that he wrote.

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Christian – listen, it doesn't matter how messed up you are – Jesus will complete the work He's begun in you.

He always completes what He begins.

His *garage* is squared away. His *workbench* is clear.

His *To Do* list is all checked off.

### **9 - God is faithful, by whom you were called into the fellowship of His Son, Jesus Christ our Lord.**

Here's a truth that ought to influence every waking moment → God is faithful!

He always keeps His word!

He cannot lie & He does not change!

It was Abraham's whole-hearted acceptance of this truth that resulted in his being declared righteous.

As Paul says in Romans it's our acceptance of it that results in salvation.

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Paul knew the Corinthians. He was well acquainted with them since he'd spent a year & a half with them.

He didn't have a tremendous amount of faith in them in & of themselves, but he had absolute confidence in God's sufficiency to take care of them & deal with the issues that were messing them up.

We need that same confidence, whether we're concerned for our kids or parents, our brothers & sisters, the Church, the nation.

God is able & faithful.

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As he wraps up his greeting, he introduces his purpose in writing them when he says,

### **by whom you were called into the fellowship of His Son, Jesus Christ our Lord.**

The main problem in Corinth was their disunity.

So he reminds them that the call to Christ is a call to fellowship with Him & one another.

Unity isn't an option for the believer. It's part & parcel of following Jesus.

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## II. STATEMENT OF PURPOSE: A CALL TO UNITY 1:10-17

### A. *The Appeal to Unity 1:10*

**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.**

In the next verse Paul tells them word had reached him of the *sectarianism* that was dividing the church at Corinth.

Because he'd planted the church, he was deeply troubled by this turn of affairs.

He'd taught them that unity was both a *command* & a *necessity*.

So he writes – “I beg you, *brohs!* using the authority given me as an apostle of our Master – pull it together & get along.”

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When he says,

**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**

He's not saying they're to be *clones* of one another.

He goes on later to say that there's *variety* in the Body of Christ.

But as we saw last Sunday, that variety is to be *harmonious* & blended into an amiable oneness.

Christian unity is not *uniformity*, it's a harmony wrought from diversity.

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The English translation of v. 10 gives the impression we all have to be of the same opinion on every topic.

That's not what Paul's saying.

What he's calling for is a return to the foundational truth of being a disciple that unity is a fundamental priority we all must work toward & safeguard.

Even when we disagree on some peripheral issue, we can't allow that to weaken the deeper sense of love & loyalty we have for one another.

[Ex: Errol & I]

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Paul's use of the phrase, “**perfectly joined together**” here helps make his meaning clear.

The phrase was used in 2 contexts; *medicine & fishing*.

As a *medical term* it referred to setting a broken bone.

When a rift occurs among believers, as it eventually will, we need to use the pain as a symptom that something is wrong & make it right by taking whatever action is needed to put things back together again.

As a fishing term, it spoke of mending a net so the harvest of the sea could be maximized.

There is little that will more cripple evangelism than disunity among believers.

Jesus said that the single greatest testimony to our genuinely being His is the love we had for one another.

In fact, He placed the success of the Gospel message on our Unity when in John 17 He prayed,  
**<sup>20</sup> “I do not pray for these alone, but also for those who will believe in Me through their word; <sup>21</sup> that they all may be one, as You, Father, are in Me, and I in You; that they also may be one in Us, that the world may believe that You sent Me. <sup>22</sup> And the glory which You gave Me I have given them, that they may be one just as We are one: <sup>23</sup> I in them, and You in Me; that they may be made perfect in one, and that the world may know that You have sent Me, and have loved them as You have loved Me.”**

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At the Battle of Trafalgar, Admiral Lord Nelson overheard 2 English naval officers arguing with each other over some petty squabble.

Just when they were about to come to blows, he turned them around, pointed to the French ships & said, “There's your adversary gentlemen.”

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How it must grieve the Spirit to watch Christians hammering away at one another over silly things while the enemy is sailing circles around them.

If we would put as much energy & interest in working FOR harmony as we do sniping at one another, imagine how much better things would be.

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The story is told of an African child who wandered off into the tall grass & could not be found, although the tribe searched all day.

The next day someone suggested they hold hands & walk through the grass together.

This way they found the child, but due to the cold night, he'd not survived.

In anguish & tears, the mother cried, "If only we'd held hands sooner, my son could have been saved."

### **B. The Report of Disunity 1:11-13**

**11- For it has been declared to me concerning you, my brethren, by those of Chloe's household, that there are contentions among you.**

Chloe was a woman's name. Her mention here means she was well-known to the Church of Corinth.

Since there was a good deal of trade between Corinth & Ephesus, Chloe probably had business contacts in Ephesus & took advantage of a trip there to inform Paul of the problems brewing at Corinth.

The concern was over the "*contentions*" in the church.

The word means *quarrels, wranglings*.

In v. 10 they're called "*divisions*" the Greek word is *schisms* – a word meaning a tear/rending.

All of this presented a picture not merely of mild differences of opinion among the Corinthians but of hardened positions & heated exchanges.

The church was divided into separate camps which shot volleys at each other in a kind of pitched battle.

What they were arguing about is hinted at in the next verses . . .

**12 - Now I say this, that each of you says, "I am of Paul," or "I am of Apollos," or "I am of Cephas [Peter]," or "I am of Christ."**

**13 - Is Christ divided? Was Paul crucified for you? Or were you baptized in the name of Paul?**

The problem in Corinth was, "*The Cult of Personality*" & it seems the whole church was caught up in it. Really, the church was reflecting the wider situation of the city it lived in.

Corinth was divided into different philosophical schools each having it's own teacher/leader.

These school were like competing companies, each vying for a piece of the philosophical pie and trying to attract students who paid a hefty tuition.

The battle of words between them was fierce with the teachers & their students using the most eloquent arguments they could muster.

Which school was winning the debate had become one of the main social topics & chief news stories in Corinth – much like modern sports such as professional football & the Super Bowl.

The Church had taken on the same characteristics as the City.

Paul identifies 4 factions in the Church

There was the "*Camp of Paul*", the father of the church.

These were the die-hard loyalists & first converts.

Then there was the "*Camp of Apollos*."

In Acts 18 we learn he arrived in Corinth after Paul left.

He'd been raised in Alexandria which was a hotbed of philosophical activity; where early church leaders tried to merge Christianity w/classical philosophy.

He was incredibly eloquent & mighty in the Scriptures, considered by all a great teacher.

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He gained a loyal following among the intellectuals, which as we'll see Paul had not really reached when he'd been at Corinth because he changed tactics a bit after having just been at Athens.

Third was the "*Camp of Cephas*" - Peter's **Jewish** name.

There's no record Peter ever went to Corinth so this group was likely Jews who had been to converted in Jerusalem.

They considered themselves better because their loyalty was to the chief of the Apostles.

4<sup>th</sup> was the "*Camp of Christ*."

These considered themselves better than the others because they eschewed lining up under some mere human teacher.

What they ought to have realized is that if they were truly "of Christ" they would have worked at restoring unity instead of just becoming one more faction at Corinth.

Paul makes this crystal when he asks –

**Is Christ divided?**

Of course not! So if we're truly "in Him" will *we* be divided? No way!

On the contrary, we'll work to establish & protect unity.

Paul asks factiously –

**Was Paul crucified for you? Or were you baptized in the name of Paul?**

That absurd!

There was simply no justifying their foolish & petty loyalties to mere human personalities

Their problem was this: They were not walking in the Spirit! They were walking in the flesh as he goes on to make clear in the following chs.

### **C. Paul's Role 1:14-17**

**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.**

Baptism was held in much higher esteem in the early church than in many places today, specially in the American church.

In much of the rest of the world, baptism is still reckoned as a vital & important part of conversion.

But it's lost that sense of specialness for many in our culture.

The Early church did not consider baptism as an act that saved, but as a **declaration** of a person's joining the community of Christ.

Like an **initiation** rite.

Some of the factions in Corinth lined up under whoever had baptized them.

So Paul was glad he baptized only a handful of the Corinthians.

That way, there'd be few who would feel their main allegiance was to him.

Their loyalty belonged to Christ ALONE!!!

Now – Note what this means **about** baptism.

There are some today who say baptism is necessary for salvation & that if you die without it you're destined for hell.

Hold on! If baptism were **necessary** for salvation, would Paul take comfort he'd baptized **few** at Corinth?

No way! He'd have dunked as many as he could.

Baptism is important because it's an effective means to giving evidence of our commitment to Christ, but it does not save.

**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.**

Paul's mission was to proclaim the Good News of Jesus Christ.

And notice how he *describes* his preaching – “Not with wisdom of words.”

In other words, not with *ingenuity* or *clever rhetoric*.

True Gospel preaching isn't about *human eloquence & verbal fluency*.

It's the proclamation of truth the Spirit takes & applies to the heart.

The philosophical schools in Corinth were forever trying to outdo each other in eloquence & the cleverness of their argument which they false called wisdom.

They tried to *out reason* each other, to overwhelm one other with a barrage of terminology.

But when Paul had arrived in Corinth after just being in Athens, he proclaimed the truth with clarity & simplicity & trusted the HS to apply it to his hearers hearts.

In Athens, he'd faced the intellectual heavyweights of the time & used a skilled argument to persuade them.

He knew his argument was convincing according to the standards of *both truth & reason*.

But the results in Athens had been meager.

As he left the lofty intellectual heights of Athens for the immoral flesh-pit of Corinth, you can't help but wonder if he didn't decide that a more simple approach would be better.

What we ought to glean from v. 17 is the power of the simple Gospel of Grace.

Conversion is not dependent on our ingenuity & creativity in trying to repackage the Gospel to make it “culturally-relevant.”

There's power inherent in the Good News itself.

It's certainly wise to look for elements in contemporary culture that provide contact points for communicating the Gospel. But we don't have to massage the Gospel into some new shape or mold to make it appealing to the Lost.

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I was listening to a podcast yesterday while working out that was an interview with a guy that was saying the exact opposite.

He's written a book on apologetics that says preaching the gospel is passé & out of date & will win no one.

He claims that in our postmodern culture what's needed isn't preaching of the Good News but a new approach to evangelism that shows seekers the Christian Faith is more relevant & satisfying than the other 'metanarratives.'

I wonder if he's ever read v. 17?

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[Preach → Proclaim & live Gospel! Don't get fancy for fancy's sake. Don't shy away from the cross.

Post-modernism NOT a barrier. No worse than the paganism that framed Paul's time. Preach Gospel!]