

1 CORINTHIANS – Introduction & Chapter 1

Teacher: Jerry D. Sturgill, Flatwoods church of Christ, Sunday Bible Study, July 2011

INTRODUCTION

A. **AUTHOR:** Paul

1. Internal Evidence:

- a) Paul assigns his name to the epistle, 1:1; 16:21.

2. External Evidence:

- a) This is the first New Testament epistle cited by name in Early Church Literature.
- b) Quoted by Clement of Rome (96 AD), Polycarp (115 AD), Irenaeus (180 AD), Clement of Alexandria (190 AD), Tertullian (200 AD), Cyprian (245 AD).
- c) Alluded to by Ignatius (115 AD), Justin Martyr (150 AD), Shepherd of Hermas (140 AD)

B. **TIME OF WRITING:** 57 AD

C. **PLACE OF WRITING:** Ephesus, cf. 16:8.

D. **PURPOSE OF WRITING:** To address information coming from Chloe's household and answer queries from the letter they had sent to him.

E. **CORINTH:**

It was originally founded about 1350 B.C. and is one of the oldest cities of Greece. The Romans conquered it in 146 B.C. and completely destroyed it because of its rebellion against Rome in an attempt to gain independence. It was then rebuilt from its ruins in 46 B.C. by Julius Caesar as a Roman colony. He repopulated it with veterans and freedmen.

By the 1st century AD, the seaport city of Corinth had a population of about 500,000. It was located at the head of an isthmus which joined northern Greece to the Peloponnesian Peninsula. At its narrowest point the isthmus is only about four miles wide. Small ships were hauled overland by means of rollers rather than sail around the southern tip of the Peloponnesus. Obviously a canal was needed and one was started during the reign of Nero. Later, Jews from the fall of Jerusalem worked on the project. However, the canal did not become a reality until 1893.

Corinth was an extremely evil place. The city's name and wickedness were synonymous terms. To say that one was behaving like a Corinthian was to accuse him of gross immorality. To become "corinthianized" meant a person was living the most licentious, debauched life possible.

Behind the city stood the Acro-Corinth, a hill on which was erected a temple to Aphrodite or Venus, the so called goddess of love. The temple had 1,000 "temple maid servants" called "corinthian girls" who were actually prostitutes.

It was to the church in this culture and mind-set that the apostle Paul sends his letter.

CHAPTER 1

I. GREETING, vv. 1-3.

- A. “Paul, called an apostle” – Paul asserts his apostolic authority.
 - 1. Apostle – “one sent forth with orders”.
 - 2. There are 2 kinds of apostles: a) apostles of Jesus (called and sent by Him), b) apostles of churches, cf. 2 Corinthians 8:23
- B. Church of God – it belonged to God, not to any human leader.
- C. Sanctified – Set apart for divine service.
- D. “with all that in every place...” – Circular letter, applicable to all Christians.
Cf. 1 Thessalonians 5:27; Colossians 4:16.

II. THANKSGIVING, vv. 4-9.

- A. Grace – In this context, is referring to spiritual gifts.
- B. “by Jesus Christ” – “in Christ Jesus” (ASV). It was because of their relationship to Christ that they have received this “grace”.
- C. Utterance – speech, i.e. power to speak various languages.
- D. Knowledge – i.e. knowledge of divine truth, *cf. 12:8, 13:8.*
- E. “...The testimony (declaration of witnesses, i.e. the Gospel)...was confirmed (Mark 16:20; Hebrews 2:4)

III. PROBLEM OF DIVISION, vv. 10-17.

- A. “speak the same thing” – By speaking where the Bible speaks, and Being silent where the Bible is silent.
- B. There was to be no divisions (a rent, tear) but were to be perfectly joined together (knit together).
- C. There were factions within the Corinthian congregation, vs. 12.
- D. “Is Christ divided” – Is Christ a split personality, one teaching here, there another?
- E. “Was Paul crucified for you” – These were assigning Paul a place that belonged to Christ alone!

<p><i>This is a good test for denominations. What do you call yourselves? Follow only Him that died for us!</i></p>

- F. Verses 14-17 – see article at end of handout.

IV. THE GOSPEL IS THE WISDOM OF GOD, vv. 18-31.

- A. “...then that perish foolishness” – To the Jew the cross was a tree of shame and horror; To the Gentiles the cross was a gallows of a slave’s infamy and a murderer’s punishment.
- B. But to one who is saved, the cross is the heart of the Gospel, the vehicle through which God’s power to save is operative.
- C. Paul quotes Isaiah 29:14 then shows the prophecy is fulfilled. The wise (philosopher), the scribe (expert in the Law), the disputer (debater, solve by human reason alone), cannot acquire spiritual wisdom without revelation from God.

- D. “foolishness of preaching” – Not that the act of preaching is foolishness, but rather the content of the message was foolish according to human standards.
- E. The Jews required a sign – miracles; Greeks seeks after wisdom – Looked for greater than their philosophers.
- F. The crucified Christ is both God’s power and God’s wisdom, vs. 24.
- G. God chose the foolish things to confound the wise. God chose the weak things to confound the mighty. God chose the base, despised, and things which are not.
- H. Why? To exclude human boasting (vs. 29). To cause men to glory in the Lord (vs. 31)

WHAT ABOUT 1 CORINTHIANS 1:17?

Some folks point to 1 Corinthians 1:17 where Paul said, “For Christ sent me not to baptize...” in an attempt to eliminate baptism from God’s plan of salvation. Is this what Paul is saying?

1. First consider that if Christ did not want Paul to baptize and Paul had baptized (vv. 14, 16) then would this not be charging Paul with sin? Actually, it has Paul in outright rebellion against Christ. If not, why not?
2. Second consider the context. Paul is addressing division in the Corinthian church (vs. 10), some claiming to follow Paul, Apollos, Cephas (Peter) and Christ (vs. 12). Because of this Paul said, “I thank God that I baptized none of you...” except a few. Why? The reason is in vs. 15, “Lest any should say that I had baptized in mine own name.” What Paul is saying is that he was not sent to be the one to administer baptism, i.e. the physical act. Because of the problems at Corinth he was glad he didn’t. (*Compare with John 4:1-2. What if Jesus personally, physically baptized some, would these possibly have thought themselves above those baptized by disciples? See also Acts 10:48*)

An important question: Is Paul saying that baptism is unnecessary to salvation?

That is not his point and to claim such is to align Paul against other passages of scripture (*Mark 16:16; 1 Peter 3:21; Acts 2:38*), twist the scriptures, and would cause contradiction (*Romans 6:3f; Galatians 3:26-27*).

3. Thirdly notice that the word “baptize” is a verb. The point is on the act of baptism (i.e. on who is doing the immersing) not to remove baptism from the gospel. One should not place “special emphasis” on the one administering baptism.

Since baptism places one “into Christ” where all spiritual blessings are (Ephesians 1:3), Paul is not removing baptism as essential to obeying the gospel. To remove baptism is to remove salvation. (*1 Peter 3:21*)

– Jerry D. Sturgill