

**First Corinthians**  
**Introduction**  
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Corinth was completely destroyed by a Roman general in 146 B.C. and then rebuilt by Julius Caesar in 44 B.C. Corinth had a strategic location as the city was located on the narrow stretch of land that connects the Peloponnese with the rest of Greece as seen below and in the picture to the right. Corinth was located in a very favorable place to be a major port city and indeed it had been such. It had two ports and for a long time it was a rival to Athens. In 146 B.C. Corinth was leveled to the ground by the Roman general Mummius and the site lay desolate for a century. But in 44 B.C. Julius Caesar reestablished the city and gave it the status of a Roman colony. In 27 B.C. it became the seat of administration for the Roman province of Achaia. Soon it reclaimed its past glory and its former reputation for sexual promiscuity. The isthmus was narrow so traffic crosses the city in two perpendicular directions. It crossed from north to south along the road and it crossed from east to west across the isthmus. Since water travel was very dangerous, commercial goods were unloaded on one port, carried by slaves over the isthmus to the other side and then reloaded onto boats to continue the travel. Under Nero there was an unsuccessful attempt to build a canal across the isthmus and it was only in the last century that the canal was completed and it is still there today. Today there is a canal across the region as shown below.



The Corinth Canal cuts through the Isthmus.



Acrocorinth; beyond to the north is the Gulf of Corinth

Situated on a 2000 foot granite mound (shown above) is Acrocorinth, which was used as a place of defense and of pagan worship. It was large enough to hold all of the inhabitants of the surrounding area in time of war and it was also the place of a famous temple for worship of Aphrodite, a goddess of love. There were usually about one thousand priestesses at the temple, whose purpose was worship through sexual relations.

The area was known for its excesses in everything so Paul had walked into an extreme din of demonic activity during his third missionary trip.

On his third missionary journey Paul met a couple with whom he established a long friendship. In Judaism it is forbidden to pay a teacher for teaching so they had to have a trade with which to financially support them. Paul was a tentmaker as was this couple so it was fortuitous (!!!!!) that the couple and Paul were together here and Paul would have some digs. It seemed that the spread of Christianity in the Jewish community led to so much dissension that Claudius ordered all of the Jews out of Rome. It is impossible to determine if the couple had become Christians before leaving Rome but it is very likely that they had been converted in Rome.

In classical Greek the phrase “act the Corinthian” means to practice fornication and the phrase “Corinthian companions” meant a group of harlots. The temple of Aphrodite (Venus is the Roman name) on the acropolis of Corinth even gave religious sanction to sexual promiscuity. At one time there were ten thousand temple prostitutes there. In the reestablished Corinth under Roman rule the city still had considerable sexual misconduct but not to the level of its previous existence. This background helps us understand why Paul had to keep after the Corinth churches for the difficulty they had in maintaining their sexual conduct that the gospel required.

### Chapter One Study

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

**1Cor 1:2 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 upon the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, their Lord and ours:**

**1Cor 1:3 Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.”**

Again, as in his writings to the Galatians, he defends his position as an apostle of Jesus Christ by the will of God and not an apostle of some man-group. Sosthenes was his secretary and brother in Christ who wrote many of Paul’s letters. Of course by the church of God Paul is addressing the ones who have been called out of this world by God. All of these true believers are saints by calling, not by actions. I am a saint and if you are a true Christian you also are a saint. In this country at this time we use the word “saint” in many incorrect ways. Often it is used pejoratively as in a sarcastic statement like: He is certainly no saint! When Paul says that they have been sanctified he is speaking in the positional sense. From the rest of the letter we see that many, if not all, of them were certainly not acting like saints. But our positional state of sainthood has nothing to do with our actions in the world. We are declared saints because of the work of Jesus Christ. Paul calls for grace and peace to be in them from the Father and the Son. Grace is favor and peace is one of the fruits of grace. Grace is not earned but free and is totally a gift from God. The peace of which Paul speaks is the peace that only comes from God:

*Phil 4:7 "And the peace of God, which surpasses all comprehension, shall guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus."*

This peace is not what the world would call peace:

*John 14:27 "Peace I leave with you; My peace I give to you; not as the world gives, do I give to you. Let not your heart be troubled, nor let it be fearful."*

A child of God can have this heavenly peace even in the midst of terrible worldly troubles and the mysterious nature of this peace is a great witness to the world that we are not of this world.

**1Cor 1:4 "I thank my God always concerning you, for the grace of God which was given you in Christ Jesus,  
1Cor 1:5 that in everything you were enriched in Him, in all speech and all knowledge,  
1Cor 1:6 even as the testimony concerning Christ was confirmed in you,  
1Cor 1:7 so that you are not lacking in any gift, awaiting eagerly the revelation of our Lord Jesus Christ,  
1Cor 1:8 who shall also confirm you to the end, blameless in the day of our Lord Jesus Christ.  
1Cor 1:9 God is faithful, through whom you were called into fellowship with His Son, Jesus Christ our Lord."**

Paul spends the first nine verses of this text commending these Christians. He is clear how thankful he is that God has given them grace in Christ Jesus. Of course grace is something that is not earned but given to the person solely as an unearned gift of love. I was taught that grace stands for "God's Riches at Christ's Expense" and that is still exactly how I would describe it. Jesus paid the total price for my transgressions so that I could then be given all of God's riches. Paul in verse five says that in everything they were enriched in Jesus.

**1Cor 1:10 "Now I exhort you, brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you all agree, and there be no divisions among you, but you be made complete in the same mind and in the same judgment.  
1Cor 1:11 For I have been informed concerning you, my brethren, by Chloe's people, that there are quarrels among you.  
1Cor 1:12 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."  
1Cor 1:13 Has Christ been divided? Paul was not crucified for you, was he? Or were you baptized in the name of Paul?  
1Cor 1:14 I thank God that I baptized none of you except Crispus and Gaius,  
1Cor 1:15 that no man should say you were baptized in my name."**

After some very nice greetings Paul now gets to the reason for his letter and there are some severe problems in this church. He exhorts them to be of one mind concerning the

Gospel message. It does not matter who the person was who brought them the Gospel message. But some of the people were saying that they were of Apollos and some were saying that they were of Paul. Such sayings might correspond to someone today saying that they were of Billy Graham but Billy Graham was just as careful as Paul to always make sure that everyone knew that the true Gospel message is about Jesus Christ only and the work that He did for His people. Billy Graham, Apollos, and Paul did not do any work that would earn anyone a place in Heaven. Only the work of Jesus Christ can save anyone and that message needs to be clear. Paul did not want anyone to think that just because some particular person baptized them that such an act had anything to do with their salvation. Today people are also following the teachings of some particular TV evangelists and they think that their teachings are the Gospel. The teachings of everyone must be judged by the total Bible message and we must not idolize any teacher.

**1Cor 1:16 “Now I did baptize also the household of Stephanas; beyond that, I do not know whether I baptized any other.**

**1Cor 1:17 For Christ did not send me to baptize, but to preach the gospel, not in cleverness of speech, that the cross of Christ should not be made void.”**

Paul says that he was not sent to baptize and you may ask, what about the Great Commission?

*Matt 28:18 “And Jesus came up and spoke to them, saying, “All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth.*

*Matt 28:19 “Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit,*

*Matt 28:20 teaching them to observe all that I commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age.”*

Note to whom Jesus is speaking: He is speaking to all of His disciples as a generic group. He is not saying that each of them is to baptize and teach but that it is the goal of the group to baptize and teach. We know that all are not given the gift of teaching so all are not to teach. But Paul was given a great gift of teaching so that he was not also required to be involved in the baptism of people.

What is one of the most important characteristics we expect in a minister in today’s church setting? I would say that it is the person’s ability to speak with cleverness of speech and to be very charismatic. Does the cross of Christ require that the presenter be wise in the use of speech and presentation techniques? If the cross requires man for it to be effective then Jesus failed, which is what Paul meant when he said that the cross would become void! Our search for a minister is often based upon our false concept of a worship service being man-centered rather than God-centered. If the search committee cannot discern when a person is spirit-filled and God-centered in his presentation of the Gospel then you need a new search committee. Paul, as should all ministers of the Gospel, was concerned with a clear presentation but he knew that people are not mentally convinced to become Christians. Christianity is not a set of rules to obey or a philosophy to be adopted mentally. The beginning of a Christian is his spiritual birth, or his born

again experience. Once God acts to change the person's heart then he can believe the Gospel, trust in Jesus Christ as his Lord, and then begin the walk of being transformed in this world into a faithful disciple of Jesus.

**1Cor 1:18 "For the word of the cross is to those who are perishing foolishness, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God.**

**1Cor 1:19 For it is written, "I will destroy the wisdom of the wise, And the cleverness of the clever I will set aside."**

**1Cor 1:20 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?**

**1Cor 1:21 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.**

**1Cor 1:22 For indeed Jews ask for signs, and Greeks search for wisdom;**

**1Cor 1:23 but we preach Christ crucified, to Jews a stumbling block, and to Gentiles foolishness,**

**1Cor 1:24 but to those who are the called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God.**

**1Cor 1:25 Because the foolishness of God is wiser than men, and the weakness of God is stronger than men."**

These eight verses clearly categorize the people in the world. There are two categories of people in the world: those destined for eternal damnation and those destined for an eternity of praising God and receiving His blessings. Note carefully verse 24, for it is only those who are called by God who can recognize the truth of the Cross. Those of us who have lived in the world as Christians for some time can readily identify with verse 18. I have known many people who think that I am foolish for believing in the work of Jesus Christ but I know that the Cross is the power of God. Many of the people who view the Cross as foolishness also think that they are very clever and wise. They have bet their entire future on their wisdom and they are blind to the truth. God is still in the process of doing away with the wisdom and cleverness of the worldly people and one day His light will wash away the darkness of their thoughts. I have attended some debates between atheists and Christians and the process often does not look good for our side and that is usually because the Christians have become impotent because of their reliance upon their knowledge rather than the wisdom of God. But one day truth will prevail. There is no comparison between the wisdom and strength of God and that of man for God created man and the Creator is always better in every way that the creature.

Those whom God has reborn so that they can believe and trust in God will always recognize the wisdom of the Cross even if preached through the mouth of a weak messenger. The power is in God and not in the words of His people. The Greeks have always valued wisdom but unless they are awakened by God they will not recognize true wisdom. The Jews have always looked for signs but God gives the Cross. Sometimes we Christians also foolishly seek signs when we have all that we need in the Word of God. There seem to be two categories of unbelievers: those who will only believe if they see some miraculous sign and those who will only believe if some philosophical discussion

will convince them of the truth. Of course, the knowledge of God only comes through His revelation and not through the cleverness of man.

**1Cor 1:26 “For consider your calling, brethren, that there were not many wise according to the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble;  
1Cor 1:27 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,  
1Cor 1:28 and the base things of the world and the despised, God has chosen, the things that are not, that He might nullify the things that are,  
1Cor 1:29 that no man should boast before God.  
1Cor 1:30 But by His doing you are in Christ Jesus, who became to us wisdom from God, and righteousness and sanctification, and redemption,  
1Cor 1:31 that, just as it is written, "Let him who boasts, boast in the Lord."”**

When Paul talks about your calling, he is referring to the calling from God during which God gave them faith (the enabling power of God) so that they could trust in Him and believe in Him. Faith is still one of the most misunderstood concepts in Christianity. It is not something that we develop but it is a gift from God. Faith is not belief and faith is not trust. God’s gift of faith allows us to believe and to trust in Him. Although God does call people of all walks of life He does not depend upon the wise to come to Him on their own. People who have great educations are called to Him and at that point they realize that they had nothing within themselves to boast about in reference to God. I had a Ph.D. in Chemical Physics and was an Assistant Professor of Chemistry and Physics at a research university when God called me. I immediately knew that all I had learned in science was of no use in the kingdom of God. God was the Creator of the molecules that I was trying to understand! So my calling was a very humbling affair just as it had to be for everyone. It was entirely of His doing that I am in Christ Jesus. I had nothing to do with that process. It was Jesus who became my wisdom, redemption, righteousness, and sanctification. Praise the Lord for His work in my life and in the lives of all true children of God! I boast only in the Lord!

*Eph 2:8 “For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God;*

*Eph 2:9 not as a result of works, that no one should boast.*

*Eph 2:10 For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them.”*

## References

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