



09.25.2019
Welcome
Worship w/Prayer Board

Isaiah 46:9

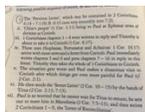


Ann

Homework: Chapter 2 Cross References

Timeline:

We do not have access to the full story nor the full correspondence, so we study looking for clues and connections to fill in what is not said nor provided.



FIRST VISIT IS IN ACTS 18

Power Point: Slide #1

- i. The 'Previous Letter', which *may* be contained in 2 Corinthians 6:14 – 7::1 (N.B. 6:13 runs very smoothly into 7:2).
- ii. 'Chloe's people' (1 Cor. 1:11_ bring Paul at Ephesus news of divisions at Corinth.
- iii. 1 Corinthians chapters 1-4 were written in reply and Timothy is about to take it to Corinth (1 Cor. 4:17).
- iv. Three men (Stephanas, Fortunatus and Achaicus: 1 Cor. 16:17) arrive with more news and a letter from Corinth: Paul immediately writes chapters 5 and 6 and pens chapters 7-16 in reply to this letter. Timothy then takes the whole of 1 Corinthians to Corinth.
- v. The situation gets worse and Paul makes a disastrous visit to Corinth after which things get even more painful for Paul (cf. 2 Cor. 2:1).
- vi. He then sends the 'Severe Letter' (2 Cor. 10-13) by the hands of Titus (2 Cor. 2:13; 7:13).

- vii. Paul is so worried that he cannot wait for Titus to return; he sets out to meet him in Macedonia (2 Cor. 7:5-13), and then writes 2 Corinthians 1-9, the 'Letter of Reconciliation'.

(“Message of 1 Corinthians”, David Prior, pg. 18. The Bible Speaks Today, IVP 1985)

1 Corinthians 1:4-9

Thanksgiving

⁴I give thanks to my God always for **you because of the grace of God that was given you in Christ Jesus**, ⁵that in every way you were enriched in him in all speech and all knowledge—⁶even as the testimony about Christ was confirmed among you—⁷so that you are not lacking in any gift, as you wait for the revealing of our Lord Jesus Christ, ⁸who will sustain you to the end, guiltless in the day of our Lord Jesus Christ. ⁹God is faithful, by whom you were called into the fellowship of his Son, Jesus Christ our Lord.

⁴I always thank my God for you and for the gracious gifts he has given you, now that you belong to Christ Jesus. ⁵Through him, God has enriched your church in every way—with all of your eloquent words and all of your knowledge. ⁶**This confirms that what I told you about Christ is true.** ⁷**Now you have every spiritual gift you need as you eagerly wait for the return of our Lord Jesus Christ.** ⁸He will keep you strong to the end so that you will be free from all blame on the day when our Lord Jesus Christ returns. ⁹God will do this, for he is faithful to do what he says, and he has invited you into partnership with his Son, Jesus Christ our Lord. NLT

- **The Salvation Equation:**

The Salvation Equation: {Grace > Atonement} Man can now respond: + **Repentance** + **Faith** → (and God answers) **Conversion** + **Regeneration** + **Justification** + **Adoption** → **Sanctification**

- Paul speaks forever to them: Past(5-6), Present(7), Future(8-9) = We are family.
- Note how Paul is cognitive of the milieu:
 - **Vs 5 = Poor are rich in him**

1:5 made rich in him Since there was a very large wealth gap in Corinth, Paul emphasizes that riches are found in a life of following Christ; Christ's gifts are what matter. This is Paul's first response to a problem he addresses further in 1 Cor 11:17-34 (compare note on v. 2).

People are poor prior to coming to Christ in the sense that they are removed from the life that God wants them to have in relationship with Him. To Paul, the only life worth living is one for Christ—even at the cost of all things, including wealth and physical well-being. Paul is modeling a life that doesn't revolve around economy but on a relationship with God and others. His life is focused on love as God is focused on love (13:1-3).

- **Knowledge and speech were worshipped/prized culturally (Greco Roman society)**
(Sophists)

speech The Greek word used here, *logos*, refers to that which is spoken (in this instance). The Corinthians highly esteemed both speech and knowledge because of their cultural value (compare 12:8; 13:1-2; 2 Cor 8:7).

knowledge The Greek word used here, *gnōsis*, may refer to an understanding of Christian teaching (compare 1 Cor 12:8; 13:8), but based on Paul's subsequent reference to the testimony of Christ among believers in v. 6, it likely refers to remembrance of how Christ has worked in people's lives.

<p>SOPHISTS: In ancient Corinth, worldly values like honor, prestige, and self-promotion were desired. Traveling bands of speakers called Sophists made their way through Corinth, persuading followers with their rhetoric. The city contained many wealthy benefactors who used their money to advance their reputation. These influences can be seen in</p>

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1 Corinthians (Clarke, *Secular and Christian Leadership in Corinth*; Litfin, *St. Paul's Theology of Proclamation*; Winter, *Philo and Paul among the Sophists*).
Williams, D. (2016). [Corinthians, First Letter to the](#). In J. D. Barry, D. Bomar, D. R. Brown, R. Klippenstein, D. Mangum, C. Sinclair Wolcott, ... W. Widder (Eds.), *The Lexham Bible Dictionary*. Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press.

“This confirms that what I told you about Christ is true. ⁷Now you have every spiritual gift you need as you eagerly wait for the return of our Lord Jesus Christ. ⁸He will keep you strong to the end so that you will be free from all blame on the day when our Lord Jesus Christ returns. ⁹God will do this, for he is faithful to do what he says, and he has invited you into partnership with his Son, Jesus Christ our Lord.” NLT

Vs 7

1:7 spiritual gift Literally “spiritual things”—refers to the gifts described in chs. 12–14.

revelation The Greek word used here, *apokalypsis*, often rendered as “revelation,” can either refer to the second coming of Christ (compare 2 Thess 1:7; 1 Pet 1:13) or to God revealing something directly to a believer through the gift of tongues, prophecy, or a vision (e.g., 1 Cor 14:6, 14:26; Rev 1:1).

Vs. 9 = They knew God is Faithful (Deut 7:9). NOW: Learning to embrace the Jesus Christ part.

Deuteronomy 7:9

⁹“Therefore know that the LORD your God, He is God, the faithful God who keeps covenant and mercy for a thousand generations with those who love Him and keep His commandments;

1 Corinthians 1:10-17**Divisions in the Church**

¹⁰ I appeal to you, brothers,^[a] by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that all of you agree, and that there be no divisions among you, but that you be united in the same mind and the same judgment. ¹¹ For it has been reported to me by Chloe's people that there is quarreling among you, my brothers. ¹² What I mean is that each one of you says, “I follow Paul,” or “I follow Apollos,” or “I follow Cephas,” or “I follow 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 so that no one may say that you were baptized in my name. ¹⁶ (I did baptize also the household of Stephanas. Beyond that, I do not know whether I baptized anyone else.) ¹⁷ **For Christ did not send me to baptize but to preach the gospel, and not with words of eloquent wisdom, lest the cross of Christ be emptied of its power.**

¹⁰ I appeal to you, dear brothers and sisters,^[a] by the authority of our Lord Jesus Christ, to live in harmony with each other. Let there be no divisions in the church. Rather, be of one mind, united in thought and purpose. ¹¹ For some members of Chloe's household have told me about your quarrels, my dear brothers and sisters. ¹² Some of you are saying, “I am a follower of Paul.” Others are saying, “I follow Apollos,” or “I follow Peter,^[a]” or “I follow only Christ.”

¹³ Has Christ been divided into factions? Was I, Paul, crucified for you? Were any of you baptized in the name of Paul? Of course not! ¹⁴ I thank God that I did not baptize any of you except Crispus and Gaius, ¹⁵ for now no one can say they were baptized in my name. ¹⁶ (Oh yes, I also baptized the household of Stephanas, but I don't remember baptizing anyone else.) ¹⁷ For Christ didn't send me to baptize, but to preach the Good News—and not with clever speech, for fear that the cross of Christ would lose its power. NLT

Begs the question: What causes divisions in the church today?

Here is Paul's answer to the Division Problem:

1 Corinthians 1:18-31

Christ the Wisdom and Power of God

¹⁸ For the word of the cross is folly to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God. ¹⁹ For it is written,

“I will destroy the wisdom of the wise,
and the discernment of the discerning I will thwart.”

²⁰ Where is the one who is wise? Where is the scribe? Where is the debater of this age? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of the world? ²¹ For since, in the wisdom of God, the world did not know God through wisdom, it pleased God through the folly of what we preach^[b] to save those who believe. ²² For Jews demand signs and Greeks seek wisdom, ²³ but we preach Christ crucified, a stumbling block to Jews and folly to Gentiles, ²⁴ but to those who are called, both Jews and Greeks, **Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God.** ²⁵ For the foolishness of God is wiser than men, and the weakness of God is stronger than men.

²⁶ For consider your calling, brothers: not many of you were wise according to worldly standards,^[c] not many were powerful, not many were of noble birth. ²⁷ But God chose what is foolish in the world to shame the wise; God chose what is weak in the world to shame the strong; ²⁸ God chose what is low and despised in the world, even things that are not, to bring to nothing things that are, ²⁹ so that no human being^[d] might boast in the presence of God. ³⁰ And because of him^[e] you are in Christ Jesus, who became to us wisdom from God, righteousness and sanctification and redemption, ³¹ so that, as it is written, “Let the one who boasts, boast in the Lord.”

¹⁸ The message of the cross is foolish to those who are headed for destruction! But we who are being saved know it is the very power of God. ¹⁹ As the Scriptures say,

“I will destroy the wisdom of the wise
and discard the intelligence of the intelligent.”^[a]

²⁰ So where does this leave the philosophers, the scholars, and the world’s brilliant debaters? God has made the wisdom of this world look foolish. ²¹ Since God in his wisdom saw to it that **the world would never know him through human wisdom**, he has used our foolish preaching to save those who believe. ²² It is foolish to the Jews, who ask for signs from heaven. And it is foolish to the Greeks, who seek human wisdom. ²³ So when we preach that Christ was crucified, the Jews are offended and the Gentiles say it’s all nonsense.

²⁴ But to those called by God to salvation, both Jews and Gentiles,^[f] **Christ is the power of God and the wisdom of God.** ²⁵ This foolish plan of God is wiser than the wisest of human plans, and God’s weakness is stronger than the greatest of human strength.

²⁶ Remember, dear brothers and sisters, that few of you were wise in the world’s eyes or powerful or wealthy^[g] when God called you. ²⁷ Instead, God chose things the world considers foolish in order to shame those who think they are wise. And he chose things that are powerless to shame those who are powerful. ²⁸ God chose things despised by the world,^[h] things counted as nothing at all, and used them to bring to nothing what the world considers important. ²⁹ As a result, no one can ever boast in the presence of God.

³⁰ God has united you with Christ Jesus. For our benefit God made him to be wisdom itself. Christ made us right with God; he made us pure and holy, and he freed us from sin. ³¹ **Therefore, as the Scriptures say, “If you want to boast, boast only about the Lord.** NLT

Vs. 19

Why this prescription for the Division Problem?

Paul knew two things: Man worships his own understanding and then he worships himself.

Isaiah 29:14 (Isaiah 19:12, 33:18, 44:25)

¹⁴ Therefore, behold, I will again do a marvelous work. Among this people, A marvelous work and a wonder; For the wisdom of their wise *men* shall perish, And the understanding of their prudent *men* shall be hidden.”

So see, I will once again do great things with these people, great and wonderful things. And the wisdom of their wise men will be gone. The understanding of their wise men will be hidden.”

(The wisdom of the wise will pass away, and the intelligence of the intelligent will disappear.)

Even as Jesus hung on the Cross, the Jews asked for a power-sign (Matt. 27:40-43). The Greeks made the pursuit of wisdom a meaningless end in itself, as Paul learned at Athens

Matthew 27:40-43

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⁴⁰ They said, “You are the One Who could destroy the house of God and build it up again in three days. Now save Yourself. If You are the Son of God, come down from the cross.”

⁴¹ The head religious leaders and the teachers of the Law and the other leaders made fun of Him also. They said, ⁴² “He saved others but He cannot save Himself. If He is the King of the Jews, let Him come down from the cross. Then we will believe in Him. ⁴³ He trusts God. Let God save Him now, if God cares for Him. He has said, ‘I am the Son of God.’”

1:24 The power of God: The gospel is the revelation of truth, but in the final analysis it is the operation of God’s power with victory over sin and death. Biblical salvation is nothing short of a complete restoration of the universe, with a new heaven and a new earth.

1:24 is the power of God Jesus’ death on the cross reveals God’s power to save people from sin and death, and thus His power to redeem seemingly irredeemable situations (like the problems at Corinth). The description of Christ as the power of God also challenges the Roman Empire’s use of crucifixion as a symbol of its own power. Resurrection hinges on God’s ability (see 1 Cor 15:17, 53–57; compare Isa 53:12).

the wisdom of God Christ can be described as the wisdom of God because His death and resurrection uniquely express God’s mysterious plan of salvation (1 Cor 2:7; 4:1). Christ demonstrates the paradoxical nature of God’s plan to save people from sin: it requires a death to save people from death (compare Isa 53:1).

1:26 A survey of the converts at Corinth proves the mutual rejection between human and divine wisdom. **Only a few came from the world of culture and social sophistication.** The heart of true wisdom is knowing the ways and the will of God, and living in harmony with ultimate, created reality. The human wisdom Paul opposes is not intellect or education, **but a false independence of God and a bent toward self-sufficiency. God rejects human wisdom because of its pride and self-glory.**

Vs 30-31

³⁰ And because of Him you are in Christ Jesus, who became to us wisdom from God, righteousness and sanctification and redemption, ³¹ so that, as it is written, “Let the one who boasts, boast in the Lord.”

³⁰ God has united you with Christ Jesus. For our benefit God made him to be wisdom itself. Christ made us right with God; he made us pure and holy, and he freed us from sin. ³¹ **Therefore, as the Scriptures say, “If you want to boast, boast only about the Lord.”** NLT

1:30 Righteousness, a term taken from the courts, is God’s judicial determination to right every wrong, His gift to the guilty which removes all condemnation and puts them in a state of justification, including full acquittal from all charges against them. **Sanctification** is a symbol taken from the temple, showing the need for cleansing from pollution. It includes a renewal by the power of the Holy Spirit, which allows acceptable living before God and points to our ultimate perfection in His presence. **Redemption**, taken from a background of slavery and debt, speaks of freedom and final deliverance from all aspects of sin, including the resurrection of the body

Vs 31 The LORD’s definition of verse 31:**Jeremiah 9:24**

²⁴But let him who glories glory in this, That he understands and knows Me, That I *am* the LORD, exercising lovingkindness, judgment, and righteousness in the earth. For in these I delight,” says the LORD.

But those who wish to boast should boast in this alone: that they truly know me and understand that I am the Lord who demonstrates unflinching love and who brings justice and righteousness to the earth, and that I delight in these things. I, the Lord, have spoken!

S/G How does one boast only about the Lord (vs 31)?

(Does this mean we cannot say we are good at something? What about kid bragging? What does this mean we are boasting about? Then, HOW does one go about bragging up Jesus?)

Keeping the Main Thing, The Main Thing:

Realize and act upon the knowledge that this is not Heaven (no whining).

Helping Others

Realize we cannot change Supernatural Laws (We will not die, We can decide who will be healed by how we believe and pray [healing is a gift not a right],

(we work at changing some natural ones – Air/Space Travel, etc.)

THESE ANSWERS DEFINE WORSHIP

(Will write what they say on the white board and attach pic)

What is the standard of Christ? Ephesians 4:13

“13 This will continue until we all come to such unity in our faith and knowledge of God’s Son that we will be mature in the Lord, measuring up to the full and complete standard of Christ.”

NOTES:

1:4 I give thanks Statements of thanksgiving are a common feature in ancient letters. Paul thanks God for the Corinthian believers despite their immorality. He is thankful that they’ve come to Christ and are at least staying engaged with the Christian community; this provides the opportunity for God to work in them and through them.

grace of God Refers either to the undeserved gifts the believers have received from God—speech, knowledge, and spiritual gifts (1 Cor 1:5–7; 12–14; 2 Cor 8:7)—or to their receiving salvation.

in Christ Jesus Emphasizes that spiritual gifts and salvation do not come from people but from Christ. This also shows that the believers belong to Christ now that they’ve entered into a relationship with Him.

1:5 made rich in him Since there was a very large wealth gap in Corinth, Paul emphasizes that riches are found in a life of following Christ; Christ’s gifts are what matter. This is Paul’s first response to a problem he addresses further in 1 Cor 11:17–34 (compare note on v. 2).

People are poor prior to coming to Christ in the sense that they are removed from the life that God wants them to have in relationship with Him. To Paul, the only life worth living is one for Christ—even at the cost of all things, including wealth and physical well-being. Paul is modeling a life that doesn’t revolve around economy but on a relationship with God and others. His life is focused on love as God is focused on love (13:1–3).

speech The Greek word used here, *logos*, refers to that which is spoken (in this instance). The Corinthians highly esteemed both speech and knowledge because of their cultural value (compare 12:8; 13:1–2; 2 Cor 8:7).

knowledge The Greek word used here, *gnōsis*, may refer to an understanding of Christian teaching (compare 1 Cor 12:8; 13:8), but based on Paul’s subsequent reference to the testimony of Christ among believers in v. 6, it likely refers to remembrance of how Christ has worked in people’s lives.

1:6 testimony Paul is referring to the work that he told the Corinthians that Christ would do in them; it’s now happening and is providing a witness for Christ in the world. Christ has sent the Holy Spirit to them to transform them (see note on v. 2).

1:7 spiritual gift Literally “spiritual things”—refers to the gifts described in chs. 12–14.

revelation The Greek word used here, *apokalypsis*, often rendered as “revelation,” can either refer to the second coming of Christ (compare 2 Thess 1:7; 1 Pet 1:13) or to God revealing something directly to a believer through the gift of tongues, prophecy, or a vision (e.g., 1 Cor 14:6, 14:26; Rev 1:1).

Revelation as a Concept

1:8 blameless Meaning being free from accusation (compare Col 1:22; 1 Tim 3:10; Titus 1:6–7).

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day of our Lord Refers to the day when Christ will fully inaugurate justice in the world by delivering His followers and purging the world of evil (see note on 1 Thess 4:16; compare note on 1 Thess 5:2).

1:9 fellowship Paul uses the Greek word *koinōnia* here—meaning “to fellowship” or “join together.” God intended for the Corinthian believers to join together because of Christ; instead, they focused on leaders and teachers, which (among many other things) caused division within their church (see 1 Cor 1:11–12).

Koinōnia Word Study

1:10–17 Paul responds to reports he received concerning the Corinthian church dividing itself over different leaders.

1:10 divisions See note on v. 2; note on v. 5; and note on v. 12.

all say the same thing Paul means that the Corinthian believers should all agree on how the Spirit works among them and the type of values that Christ would have them to hold—both of these things Paul clarifies within this letter (see note on v. 2).

1:11 by Chloe’s people Refers to the people in Chloe’s household. In Ephesus, people from Chloe’s household informed Paul of the quarreling in the Corinthian church (compare 16:19).

quarrels among you The divisions among the Corinthian believers were likely based on personalities rather than theological disputes.

1:12 Apollos A Jew from Alexandria who was an eloquent speaker and knowledgeable in the Scriptures. Apollos ministered in Corinth after Paul left (Acts 18:27–19:1). Some Corinthian believers may have preferred his teaching style (and even teachings) over Paul’s (see note on 1 Cor 1:5).

with Cephas The Apostle Simon Peter (John 1:42; Gal 2:9). It is unknown whether he traveled to Corinth. See note on 1 Cor 1:5.

1:13 Has Christ been divided Paul’s rhetorical question challenges the Corinthians regarding the divisions within their congregation. Since Christ is one with His body, the Corinthian church (which Paul calls “the body”; 12:27) should be united. **He also may be critiquing them for ranking Christ among other church leaders**, when Christ actually serves as head over the entire body (compare Eph 1:22; 5:23–24).

1:14 Crispus Probably the synagogue ruler in Corinth. He was likely the first person to accept Christ in Corinth during Paul’s second missionary journey (Acts 18:8).

Gaius Possibly the same Gaius who hosted Paul in Corinth while he wrote his letter to the Romans (Rom 16:23).

1:16 household of Stephanas Paul described Stephanas and his household as the first converts in the province of Achaia (1 Cor 16:15). **In first-century AD Graeco-Roman society, it was customary for the rest of the household to follow the pattern set by the head of the household (Acts 11:14; 16:31–34).**

1:17 to proclaim the gospel Although Paul baptized people as part of his ministry, he believed his primary calling was to preach the gospel (e.g., Rom 15:20; 2 Cor 10:16; Gal 1:8).

be emptied If credit for Christ’s saving work were given to Paul or anyone else, it would be diminishing the power of the gospel and essentially rendering void its purpose in their lives. **The gospel’s purpose is to do what they cannot do on their own: free them from sin and put them in right standing with God.**

1:18–2:5 In this passage Paul explains the true nature of God’s wisdom and the meaning of the cross. The Corinthians failed to grasp both of these issues. This explanation serves as the basis of Paul’s appeal for church unity (1 Cor 1:10), which he revisits in 3:1–4:21.

1:18 foolishness God’s provision of salvation through the crucifixion of a messiah appeared to be foolishness according to the wisdom of the world. The Romans used the cross as a humiliating form of execution reserved for the

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worst criminals—insurrectionists. The Greeks believed that the gods operated above the limitations of people and would not have allowed themselves to be treated as Jesus was. Jews regarded the cross as a shameful punishment and even a curse from God (see Deut 21:23).

who are being saved Although Paul believed that people were made right with God when they entered into a relationship with Jesus, he also viewed God’s work of making people more like Him as an ongoing process.

the power of God See note on 1 Cor 1:24.

1:19 I will destroy Paul quotes Isa 29:14 to further highlight the contrast between divine wisdom and human wisdom.

I will confound In Christ’s death and resurrection, those who have understanding (wisdom) according to people’s standards—those who deem Christ’s resurrection as foolishness—are shown to actually be ignorant.

1:20 wise person Refers to a Greek philosopher. Such people were highly regarded for their analytical skills and persuasive speech.

scribe An expert in the Mosaic law (compare Matt 5:20). The term may also refer to a “city secretary” (see Acts 19:35).

the debater A person trained as a skilled rhetorician or public speaker.

1:21 foolishness of preaching Paul is using rhetoric to mock those who are rising up against his teachings (1 Cor 1:12). It doesn’t make sense for some Corinthians to consider Paul’s preaching as foolishness because it was through his preaching that people were brought to Christ and their church was founded (Acts 18:1–11).

1:22 Jews ask for sign miracles In Jewish tradition, miraculous deeds functioned as a sign of authority and legitimacy from God (see Mark 8:11–12; John 2:18–20).

Greeks seek wisdom Greeks were renowned for their love of new ideas (see Acts 17:20–21). They were also the founders of philosophy and even worshiped gods of wisdom like Athena.

Wisdom and Related Terms

1:23 a cause for stumbling **The message about a crucified messiah would have offended Jewish people.** According to Jewish tradition, a person hung on a tree (e.g., a cross) was considered to be cursed (Deut 21:23). Jews would not have expected God’s chosen Messiah to experience such a horrific execution.

1:24 is the power of God Jesus’ death on the cross reveals God’s power to save people from sin and death, and thus His power to redeem seemingly irredeemable situations (like the problems at Corinth). The description of Christ as the power of God also challenges the Roman Empire’s use of crucifixion as a symbol of its own power. Resurrection hinges on God’s ability (see 1 Cor 15:17, 53–57; compare Isa 53:12).

the wisdom of God Christ can be described as the wisdom of God because His death and resurrection uniquely express God’s mysterious plan of salvation (1 Cor 2:7; 4:1). Christ demonstrates the paradoxical nature of God’s plan to save people from sin: it requires a death to save people from death (compare Isa 53:1).

1:26 consider your calling Refers to God’s call to be saved by accepting His work through Christ and entering into a relationship with Him.

1:27 foolish things of the world See note on 1 Cor 1:18.

the strong Paul is likely referencing the upper-class Corinthians who considered themselves superior (compare 11:17–34). Those who live by common wisdom rather than God’s revelation in Christ are choosing to depend on their own strength over God’s.

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1:28 insignificant of the world Paul is likely referencing God’s choice to bring salvation by sending His Son in the way He did—as a poor man from an unimportant region in the frailty of human form—rather than in the triumphant image of a god. This emphasizes that God does not value people based on status or wealth; all people are given the opportunity to be saved and have the right to be at God’s table and be cared for (compare 11:21–22, 33–34).

1:29 boast Some Corinthians may have placed their confidence in their rhetorical skills or spiritual gifts (compare ch. 14). Paul challenges them to depend on God’s work in the cross rather than their self-sufficiency.

Humility Devotional

1:30 wisdom See note on v. 24.

righteousness See note on Rom 1:17.

sanctification See note on 1 Thess 4:3; compare note on Rom 6:19.

redemption Jesus paid the price for sin: death (Rom 6:23). This evokes the OT understanding of “redeemer” or *go’el* (see note on Ruth 2:20 and note on Job 19:25).

Go’el Word Study

1:31 The one who boasts Paul paraphrases Jer 9:24.¹

1:4 Paul rejoices in the grace of God at work in their past (vv. 5, 6), present (v. 7), and future (vv. 8, 9). Jesus Christ is validating the eternal purposes of God for His people.

1:5 Enriched: No one is impoverished by becoming a Christian. The particular wealth Paul has in mind is in the realm of spiritual gifts. Noteworthy is his introductory mention of **utterance**, affirmed as enriching, even though he will later bring severe correction regarding their manner of employing vocal gifts.

1:6 The changed lives of the Corinthians gave divine confirmation to Paul’s **testimony** to Christ (see 2 Cor. 3:1-3).

1:8 Blameless: Paul’s confidence of final approval is based on God’s faithfulness.

1:10 The first problem addressed is the rivalry and strife that resulted over preference for religious leaders based on their **assumed superior wisdom**. Probably most were claiming to be of the “Paul-party” (v. 12). As a recipient of revelation, no one stood as close to the fountainhead of Christianity as Paul. He expressed gratitude that he had **baptized** only a few, lest anyone could claim baptism **in the name of Paul** and assume undue allegiance to him or privileged position before others. The gospel has to do with Jesus Christ, and one’s allegiance belongs *to* Him and all position is *in* Him.

1:10 See section 4 of Truth-In-Action at the end of 1 Cor.

1:18–25 Message of the cross: A mutual antagonism exists between the wisdom of this world and the wisdom of God, and the conflict shows up supremely in the Cross of Christ. God works most wisely and most powerfully in ways directly opposite human expectations. Even as Jesus hung on the Cross, the Jews asked for a power-sign (Matt. 27:40-43). The Greeks made the pursuit of wisdom a meaningless end in itself, as Paul learned at Athens (Acts 17:21).

1:20 Where is the wise?: The deep gap between human and divine ways is evidenced throughout human history, as the quotation from Isaiah in v. 19 and the four questions in v. 20 show. The pro-Egyptian policies of Israel in Isaiah’s day seemed to be the only reasonable recourse, but it was completely contrary to the divine plan of salvation (Is. 29:14).

¹ Barry, J. D., Mangum, D., Brown, D. R., Heiser, M. S., Custis, M., Ritzema, E., ... Bomar, D. (2012, 2016). *Faithlife Study Bible* (1 Co 1:4–31). Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press.

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Straight Talk on The Problem Of Division

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1:24 The power of God: The gospel is the revelation of truth, but in the final analysis it is the operation of God's power with victory over sin and death. Biblical salvation is nothing short of a complete restoration of the universe, with a new heaven and a new earth.

1:25 See section 2 of Truth-In-Action at the end of 1 Cor.

1:26 A survey of the converts at Corinth proves the mutual rejection between human and divine wisdom. Only a few came from the world of culture and social sophistication. The heart of true wisdom is knowing the ways and the will of God, and living in harmony with ultimate, created reality. The human wisdom Paul opposes is not intellect or education, but a false independence of God and a bent toward self-sufficiency. God rejects human wisdom because of its pride and self-glory.

1:30 Righteousness, a term taken from the courts, is God's judicial determination to right every wrong, His gift to the guilty which removes all condemnation and puts them in a state of justification, including full acquittal from all charges against them. **Sanctification** is a symbol taken from the temple, showing the need for cleansing from pollution. It includes a renewal by the power of the Holy Spirit, which allows acceptable living before God and points to our ultimate perfection in His presence. **Redemption**, taken from a background of slavery and debt, speaks of freedom and final deliverance from all aspects of sin, including the resurrection of the body.²

1 CORINTHIANS

1 Corinthians 1:9

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

Deuteronomy 7:9

⁹"Therefore know that the LORD your God, He *is* God, the faithful God who keeps covenant and mercy for a thousand generations with those who love Him and keep His commandments;

1 Corinthians 1:19

¹⁹For it is written: "*I will destroy the wisdom of the wise, And bring to nothing the understanding of the prudent.*"

Isaiah 29:14

¹⁴Therefore, behold, I will again do a marvelous work Among this people, A marvelous work and a wonder; For the wisdom of their wise *men* shall perish, And the understanding of their prudent *men* shall be hidden."

1 Corinthians 1:20

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

Isaiah 19:12

¹²Where *are* they? Where are your wise men? Let them tell you now, And let them know what the LORD of hosts has purposed against Egypt.

Isaiah 33:18

¹⁸Your heart will meditate on terror: "Where *is* the scribe? Where *is* he who weighs? Where *is* he who counts the towers?"

Isaiah 44:25

²⁵Who frustrates the signs of the babblers, And drives diviners mad; Who turns wise men backward, And makes their knowledge foolishness;

1 Corinthians 1:30

³⁰But of Him you are in Christ Jesus, who became for us wisdom from God—and righteousness and sanctification and redemption—

Jeremiah 23:5-6

⁵"Behold, *the* days are coming," says the LORD, "That I will raise to David a Branch of righteousness; A King shall reign and prosper, And execute judgment and righteousness in the earth. ⁶In His days Judah will be saved, And Israel will dwell safely; Now this *is* His name by which He will be called: THE LORD OUR RIGHTEOUSNESS.

1 Corinthians 1:31**Jeremiah 9:24**

² Hayford, J. W. (Ed.). (1997). *Spirit filled life study Bible* (electronic ed., 1 Co 1:4–30). Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson.

³¹that, as it is written, “*He who glories, let him glory in the LORD.*”

²⁴But let him who glories glory in this, That he understands and knows Me, That I *am* the LORD, exercising lovingkindness, judgment, and righteousness in the earth. For in these I delight,” says the LORD.³

CHAPTER 1

In this chapter we have, **I. The preface or introduction to the whole epistle (v. 1–9).** **II.** One principal occasion of writing it hinted, namely, their divisions and the origin of them (v. 10–13). **III.** An account of Paul’s ministry among them, which was principally preaching the gospel (v. 14–17). **IV.** The manner wherein he preached the gospel, and the different success of it, with an account how admirably it was fitted to bring glory to God and beat down the pride and vanity of men (v. 17 to the end).

Verses 1–9

We have here the apostle’s preface to his whole epistle, in which we may take notice,

I. Of the inscription, in which, according to the custom of writing letters then, the name of the person by whom it was written and the persons to whom it was written are both inserted. 1. It is an epistle from Paul, the apostle of the Gentiles, to the church of Corinth, which he himself had planted, though there were some among them that now questioned his apostleship (ch. 9:1, 2), and vilified his person and ministry, 2 Co. 10:10. The most faithful and useful ministers are not secure from this contempt. He begins with challenging this character: *Paul, called to be an apostle of Jesus Christ, through the will of God.* He had not taken this honour to himself, but had a divine commission for it. It was proper at any time, but necessary at this time, to assert his character, and magnify his office, when false teachers made a merit of running him down, and their giddy and deluded followers were so apt to set them up in competition with him. **It was not pride in Paul, but faithfulness to his trust, in this juncture, to maintain his apostolical character and authority.** And, to make this more fully appear, he joins Sosthenes with him in writing, who was a minister of a lower rank. Paul, and Sosthenes his brother, not a fellow-apostle, but a fellow-minister, once a ruler of the Jewish synagogue, afterwards a convert to Christianity, a Corinthian by birth, as is most probable, and dear to this people, for which reason Paul, to ingratiate himself with them, joins them with himself in his first salutations. There is no reason to suppose he was made a partaker of the apostle’s inspiration, for which reasons he speaks, through the rest of the epistle, in his own name, and in the singular number. Paul did not in any case lessen his apostolical authority, and yet he was ready upon all occasions to do a kind and condescending thing for their good to whom he ministered. The persons to whom this epistle was directed were *the church of God that was at Corinth, sanctified in Christ Jesus, and called to be saints.* All Christians are thus far sanctified in Christ Jesus, that they are by baptism dedicated and devoted to him, they are under strict obligations to be holy, and they make profession of real sanctity. If they be not truly holy, it is their own fault and reproach. Note, It is the design of Christianity to sanctify us in Christ. *He gave himself for us, to redeem us from all iniquity, and purify us to himself a peculiar people, zealous of good works.* In conjunction with the church at Corinth, he directs the epistle *to all that in every place call on the name of Christ Jesus our Lord, both theirs and ours.* Hereby Christians are distinguished from the profane and atheistical, that they dare not live without prayer; and hereby they are distinguished from Jews and Pagans, that they call on the name of Christ. He is their common head and Lord. Observe, In every place in the Christian world there are some that call on the name of Christ. God hath a remnant in all places; and we should have a common concern for and hold communion with all that call on Christ’s name.

II. Of the apostolical benediction. *Grace be to you, and peace, from God our Father, and from the Lord Jesus Christ.* An apostle of the prince of peace must be a messenger and minister of peace. This blessing the gospel brings with it, and this blessing every preacher of the gospel should heartily wish and pray may be the lot of all among whom he ministers. Grace and peace—the favour of God, and reconciliation to him. It is indeed the summary of all blessings. *The Lord lift up his countenance upon thee, and give thee peace,* was the form of benediction under the Old Testament (Num. 6:26), but this advantage we have by the gospel, 1. That we are directed how to obtain that peace from God: it is in and by Christ. Sinners can have no peace with God, nor any good from him, but through Christ. 2. We are told what must qualify us for this peace; namely, grace: first grace, then peace. God first reconciles sinners to himself, before he bestows his peace upon them.

³ Jones, D. A. (2009). *Old Testament Quotations and Allusions in the New Testament* (Ge 3:15–Je 9:24). Bellingham, WA: Logos Bible Software.

III. Of the apostle's thanksgiving to God on their behalf. Paul begins most of his epistles with thanksgiving to God for his friends and prayer for them. Note, The best way of manifesting our affection to our friends is by praying and giving thanks for them. It is one branch of the communion of saints to give thanks to God mutually for our gifts, graces, and comforts. He gives thanks, 1. For their conversion to the faith of Christ: *For the grace which was given you through Jesus Christ*, v. 4. He is the great procurer and disposer of the favours of God. Those who are united to him by faith, and made to partake of his Spirit and merits, are the objects of divine favour. God loves them, bears them hearty good-will, and bestows on them his fatherly smiles and blessings. 2. For the abundance of their spiritual gifts. This the church of Corinth was famous for. They did not come behind any of the churches in any gift, v. 7. He specifies *utterance and knowledge*, v. 5. Where God has given these two gifts, he has given great capacity for usefulness. Many have the flower of utterance that have not the root of knowledge, and their converse is barren. Many have the treasure of knowledge, and want utterance to employ it for the good of others, and then it is in a manner wrapped up in a napkin. But, where God gives both, a man is qualified for eminent usefulness. When the church of Corinth was enriched with all utterance and all knowledge, it was fit that a large tribute of praise should be rendered to God, especially when these gifts were a testimony to the truth of the Christian doctrine, a confirmation of the testimony of Christ among them, v. 6. They were *signs and wonders and gifts of the Holy Ghost*, by which God did bear witness to the apostles, both to their mission and doctrine (Heb. 2:4), so that the more plentifully they were poured forth on any church the more full attestation was given to that doctrine which was delivered by the apostles, the more confirming evidence they had of their divine mission. And it is no wonder that when they had such a foundation for their faith they should live in expectation of the coming of their Lord Jesus Christ, v. 7. It is the character of Christians that they wait for Christ's second coming; all our religion has regard to this: we believe it, and hope for it, and it is the business of our lives to prepare for it, if we are Christians indeed. And the more confirmed we are in the Christian faith the more firm is our belief of our Lord's second coming, and the more earnest our expectation of it.

IV. Of the encouraging hopes the apostle had of them for the time to come, founded on the power and love of Christ, and the faithfulness of God, v. 8, 9. He who had begun a good work in them, and carried it on thus far, would not leave it unfinished. Those that wait for the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ will be kept by him, and confirmed to the end; and those that are so *will be blameless in the day of Christ*: not upon the principle of strict justice, but gracious absolution; not in rigour of law, but from rich and free grace. How desirable is it to be confirmed and kept of Christ for such a purpose as this! How glorious are the hopes of such a privilege, whether for ourselves or others! To be kept by the power of Christ from the power of our own corruption and Satan's temptation, that we may appear without blame in the great day! O glorious expectation, especially when the faithfulness of God comes in to support our hopes! He *who hath called us into the fellowship of his Son is faithful, and will do it*, 1 Th. 5:24. He who hath brought us into near and dear relation to Christ, into sweet and intimate communion with Christ, is faithful; he may be trusted with our dearest concerns. Those that come at his call shall never be disappointed in their hopes in him. If we approve ourselves faithful to God, we shall never find him unfaithful to us. *He will not suffer his faithfulness to fail*, Ps. 89:33.

Verses 10–13

Here the apostle enters on his subject.

I. He exhorts them to unity and brotherly love, and reproves them for their divisions. He had received an account from some that wished them well of some unhappy differences among them. It was neither ill-will to the church, nor to their ministers, that prompted them to give this account; but a kind and prudent concern to have these heats qualified by Paul's interposition. He writes to them in a very engaging way: *"I beseech you, brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ; if you have any regard to that dear and worthy name by which you are called, be unanimous. Speak all the same thing; avoid divisions or schisms"* (as the original is), "that is, all alienation of affection from each other. *Be perfectly joined together in the same mind*, as far as you can. In the great things of religion be of a mind: but, when there is not a unity of sentiment, let there be a union of affections. The consideration of being agreed in greater things should extinguish all feuds and divisions about minor ones."

II. He hints at the origin of these contentions. Pride lay at the bottom, and this made them factious. *Only of pride cometh contention*, Prov. 13:10. They quarrelled about their ministers. Paul and Apollos were both faithful ministers of Jesus Christ, and helpers of their faith and joy: but those who were disposed to be contentious broke into parties, and set their ministers at the head of their several factions: some cried up Paul, perhaps as the most sublime and spiritual teacher; others cried up Apollos, perhaps as the most eloquent speaker; some Cephas, or Peter, perhaps for the authority of his age, or because he was the apostle of the circumcision; and some were for none of them, but Christ

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only. So liable are the best things in the world to be corrupted, and the gospel and its institutions, which are at perfect harmony with themselves and one another, to be made the engines of variance, discord, and contention. This is no reproach to our religion, but a very melancholy evidence of the corruption and depravity of human nature. Note, How far will pride carry Christians in opposition to one another! Even so far as to set Christ and his own apostles at variance, and make them rivals and competitors.

III. He expostulates with them upon their discord and quarrels: “*Is Christ divided?* No, there is but one Christ, and therefore Christians should be on one heart. *Was Paul crucified for you?* Was he your sacrifice and atonement? Did I ever pretend to be your saviour, or any more than his minister? Or, *were you baptized in the name of Paul?* Were you devoted to my service, or engaged to be my disciples, by that sacred rite? Did I challenge that right in you, or dependence from you, which is the proper claim of your God and Redeemer?” No; ministers, however instrumental they are of good to us, are not to be put in Christ’s stead. They are not to usurp Christ’s authority, nor encourage any thing in the people that looks like transferring his authority to them. He is our Saviour and sacrifice, he is our Lord and guide. And happy were it for the churches if there were no name of distinction among them, as Christ is not divided.

Verses 14–16

Here the apostle gives an account of his ministry among them. He thanks God he had baptized but a few among them, *Crispus*, who had been a ruler of a synagogue at Corinth (Acts 18:8), *Gaius*, and *the household of Stephanas*, besides whom, he says, he did not remember that he had baptized any. But how was this a proper matter for thankfulness? Was it not a part of the apostolical commission to baptize all nations? And could Paul give thanks to God for his own neglect of duty? He is not to be understood in such a sense as if he were thankful for not having baptized at all, but for not having done it in present circumstances, lest it should have had this very bad construction put upon it—that he had baptized in his own name, made disciples for himself, or set himself up as the head of a sect. He left it to other ministers to baptize, while he set himself to more useful work, and filled up his time with preaching the gospel. This, he thought, was more his business, because the more important business of the two. He had assistants that could baptize, when none could discharge the other part of his office so well as himself. In this sense he says, *Christ sent him not to baptize, but to preach the gospel*—not so much to baptize as to preach. Note, Ministers should consider themselves sent and set apart more especially to that service in which Christ will be most honoured and the salvation of souls promoted, and for which they are best fitted, though no part of their duty is to be neglected. The principal business Paul did among them was to preach *the gospel* (v. 17), *the cross* (v. 18), *Christ crucified*, v. 23. Ministers are the soldiers of Christ, and are to erect and display the banner of the cross. He did not preach his own fancy, but the gospel—the glad tidings of peace, and reconciliation to God, through the mediation of a crucified Redeemer. This is the sum and substance of the gospel. Christ crucified is the foundation of all our joys. By his death we live. This is what Paul preached, what all ministers should preach, and what all the saints live upon.

Verses 17–31

We have here,

I. The manner in which Paul preached the gospel, and the cross of Christ: *Not with the wisdom of words* (v. 17), *the enticing words of man’s wisdom* (ch. 2:4), the flourish of oratory, or the accuracies of philosophical language, upon which the Greeks so much prided themselves, and which seem to have been the peculiar recommendations of some of the heads of the faction in this church that most opposed this apostle. He did not preach the gospel in this manner, lest *the cross of Christ should be of no effect*, lest the success should be ascribed to the force of art, and not of truth; not to the plain doctrine of a crucified Jesus, but to the powerful oratory of those who spread it, and hereby the honour of the cross be diminished or eclipsed. Paul had been bred up himself in Jewish learning at the feet of Gamaliel, but in preaching the cross of Christ he laid his learning aside. He preached a crucified Jesus in plain language, and told the people that that Jesus who was crucified at Jerusalem was the Son of God and Saviour of men, and that all who would be saved must repent of their sins, and believe in him, and submit to his government and laws. This truth needed no artificial dress; it shone out with the greatest majesty in its own light, and prevailed in the world by its divine authority, and the demonstration of the Spirit, without any human helps. The plain preaching of a crucified Jesus was more powerful than all the oratory and philosophy of the heathen world.

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II. We have the different effects of this preaching: To those who perish it is foolishness, *but to those who are saved it is the power of God*, v. 18. *It is to the Jews a stumbling-block, and to the Greeks foolishness; but unto those who are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God*, v. 23, 24. 1. Christ crucified is a stumbling-block to the Jews. They could not get over it. They had a conceit that their expected Messiah was to be a great temporal prince, and therefore would never own one who made so mean an appearance in life, and died so accursed a death, for their deliverer and king. They despised him, and looked upon him as execrable, because he was hanged on a tree, and because he did not gratify them with a sign to their mind, though his divine power shone out in innumerable miracles. The Jews require a sign, v. 22. See Mt. 12:38. 2. He was to the Greeks foolishness. They laughed at the story of a crucified Saviour, and despised the apostles' way of telling it. They sought for wisdom. They were men of wit and reading, men that had cultivated arts and sciences, and had, for some ages, been in a manner the very mint of knowledge and learning. There was nothing in the plain doctrine of the cross to suit their taste, nor humour their vanity, nor gratify a curious and wrangling temper: they entertained it therefore with scorn and contempt. What, hope to be saved by one that could not save himself! And trust in one who was condemned and crucified as a malefactor, a man of mean birth and poor condition in life, and cut off by so vile and opprobrious a death! This was what the pride of human reason and learning could not relish. The Greeks thought it little better than stupidity to receive such a doctrine, and pay this high regard to such a person: and thus were they justly left to perish in their pride and obstinacy. Note, It is just with God to leave those to themselves who pour such proud contempt on divine wisdom and grace. 3. To those who are called and saved *he is the wisdom of God, and the power of God*. Those who are called and sanctified, who receive the gospel, and are enlightened by the Spirit of God, discern more glorious discoveries of God's wisdom and power in the doctrine of Christ crucified than in all his other works. Note, Those who are saved *are reconciled to the doctrine of the cross*, and led into an experimental acquaintance with the mysteries of Christ crucified.

III. We have here the triumphs of the cross over human wisdom, according to the ancient prophecy (Isa. 29:14): *I will destroy the wisdom of the wise, and bring to nothing the understanding of the prudent. 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?* v. 19, 20, All the valued learning of this world was confounded, baffled, and eclipsed, by the Christian revelation and the glorious triumphs of the cross. The heathen politicians and philosophers, the Jewish rabbis and doctors, the curious searchers into the secrets of nature, were all posed and put to a nonplus. This scheme lay out of the reach of the deepest statesmen and philosophers, and the greatest pretenders to learning both among the Jews and Greeks. When God would save the world, he took a way by himself; and good reason, for *the world by wisdom knew not God*, v. 21. All the boasted science of the heathen world did not, could not, effectually bring home the world to God. In spite of all their wisdom, ignorance still prevailed, iniquity still abounded. Men were puffed up by their imaginary knowledge, and rather further alienated from God; and therefore *it pleased him, by the foolishness of preaching, to save those that believe*. By the *foolishness of preaching*—not such in truth, but in vulgar reckoning.

1. The thing preached was foolishness in the eyes of worldly-wise men. Our living through one who died, our being blessed by one who was made a curse, our being justified by one who was himself condemned, was all folly and inconsistency to men blinded with self-conceit and wedded to their own prejudices and the boasted discoveries of their reason and philosophy.

2. The manner of preaching the gospel was foolishness to them too. None of the famous men for wisdom or eloquence were employed to plant the church or propagate the gospel. A few fishermen were called out, and sent upon this errand. These were commissioned to disciple the nations: these vessels chosen to convey the treasure of saving knowledge to the world. There was nothing in them that at first view looked grand or august enough to come from God; and the proud pretenders to learning and wisdom despised the doctrine for the sake of those who dispensed it. And yet *the foolishness of God is wiser than men*, v. 25. Those methods of divine conduct that vain men are apt to censure as unwise and weak have more true, solid, and successful wisdom in them, than all the learning and wisdom that are among men: "*You see your calling, brethren, how that not many wise men after the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble, are called*, v. 26, etc. You see the state of Christianity; not many men of learning, or authority, or honourable extraction, are called." There is a great deal of meanness and weakness in the outward appearance of our religion. For, (1.) Few of distinguished character in any of these respects were chosen for the work of the ministry. God did not choose philosophers, nor orators, nor statesmen, nor men of wealth and power and interest in the world, to publish the gospel of grace and peace. Not the wise men after the flesh, though men would apt to think that a reputation for wisdom and learning might have contributed much to the success of the gospel. Not the mighty and noble, however men might be apt to imagine that secular pomp and power would make way for its reception in the

world. But God seeth not as man seeth. He hath chosen the foolish things of the world, the weak things of the world, the base and despicable things of the world, men of mean birth, of low rank, of no liberal education, to be the preachers of the gospel and planters of the church. *His thoughts are not as our thoughts, nor his ways as our ways.* He is a better judge than we what instruments and measures will best serve the purposes of his glory. (2.) Few of distinguished rank and character were called to be Christians. As the teachers were poor and mean, so generally were the converts. Few of the wise, and mighty, and noble, embraced the doctrine of the cross. The first Christians, both among Jews and Greeks, were weak, and foolish, and base; men of mean furniture as to their mental improvements, and very mean rank and condition as to their outward estate; and yet what glorious discoveries are there of divine wisdom in the whole scheme of the gospel, and in this particular circumstance of its success!

IV. We have an account how admirably all is fitted, 1. To beat down the pride and vanity of men. God hath chosen *the foolish things of the world to confound the wise*—men of no learning to confound the most learned; *the weak things of the world to confound the might*—men of mean rank and circumstances to confound and prevail against all the power and authority of earthly kings; *and base things, and things which are despised*—things which men have in the lowest esteem, or in the utmost contempt, to pour contempt and disgrace on all they value and have in veneration; *and things which are not, to bring to nought (to abolish) things that are*—the conversion of the Gentiles (of whom the Jews had the most contemptuous and vilifying thoughts) was to open a way to the abolishing of that constitution of which they were so fond, and upon which they valued themselves so much as for the sake of it to despise the rest of the world. It is common for the Jews to speak of the Gentiles under this character, as *things that are not*. Thus, in the apocryphal book of Esther, she is brought in praying that God would not give his sceptre to those *who are not*, Esth. 14:11. Esdras, in one of the apocryphal books under his name, speaks to God *of the heathen as those who are reputed as nothing*, 2 Esdras 6:56, 57. And the apostle Paul seems to have this common language of the Jews in his view when he calls Abraham the *father of us all before him whom he believed, God, who calleth those things that are not as though they were*, Rom. 4:17. The gospel is fitted to bring down the pride of both Jews and Greeks, to shame the boasted science and learning of the Greeks, and to take down that constitution on which the Jews valued themselves and despised all the world besides, *that no flesh should glory in his presence* (v. 29), that there might be no pretence for boasting. Divine wisdom alone had the contrivance of the method of redemption; divine grace alone revealed it, and made it known. It lay, in both respects, out of human reach. And the doctrine and discovery prevailed, in spite of all the opposition it met with from human art or authority: so effectually did God veil the glory and disgrace the pride of man in all. The gospel dispensation is a contrivance to humble man. But, 2. It is as admirably fitted to glorify God. There is a great deal of power and glory in the substance and life of Christianity. Though the ministers were poor and unlearned, and the converts generally of the meanest rank, yet the hand of the Lord went along with the preachers, and was mighty in the hearts of the hearers; and Jesus Christ was made both to ministers and Christians what was truly great and honourable. All we have we have from God as the fountain, and in and through Christ as the channel of conveyance. He is made of God to us *wisdom, righteousness, sanctification, and redemption* (v. 30): all we need, or can desire. We are foolishness, ignorant and blind in the things of God, with all our boasted knowledge; and he is made wisdom to us. We are guilty, obnoxious to justice; and he is made righteousness, our great atonement and sacrifice. We are depraved and corrupt; and he is made sanctification, the spring of our spiritual life; from him, the head, it is communicated to all the members of his mystical body by his Holy Spirit. We are in bonds, and he is made redemption to us, our Saviour and deliverer. Observe, Where Christ is made righteousness to any soul, he is also made sanctification. He never discharges from the guilt of sin, without delivering from the power of it; and he is made righteousness and sanctification, that he may in the end be made complete redemption, may free the soul from the very being of sin, and loose the body from the bonds of the grave: and what is designed in all is *that all flesh may glory in the Lord*, v. 31. Observe, It is the will of God that all our glorifying should be in the Lord: and, our salvation being only through Christ, it is thereby effectually provided that it should be so. Man is humbled, and God glorified and exalted, by the whole scheme.⁴

LISTENING IN ON A PRIVATE CONVERSATION

To read 1 & 2 Corinthians is to read someone else's mail. In contrast to Romans, these letters of Paul are very personal, and perhaps for that reason, very enlightening. What we have here are not fancy ideas dressed up in high-sounding words, **but straight talk for a church working through everyday problems.**

⁴ Henry, M. (1994). [*Matthew Henry's commentary on the whole Bible: complete and unabridged in one volume*](#) (pp. 2244–2246). Peabody: Hendrickson.

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Actually, several letters passed between Paul and the Corinthians, including at least one between 1 & 2 Corinthians (2 Cor. 2:3). As in listening to one side of a telephone conversation, one has to infer what issues and questions made up the correspondence, based on the two letters that survive.

Paul had written a first, unpreserved letter from Ephesus (during his long stay mentioned in Acts 20:31) in which he warned the congregation about mixing with sexually immoral people (1 Cor. 5:9). That was an ever-present danger in Corinth. Most of the believers there had come from pagan backgrounds (12:2), and perhaps some had previously engaged in the idolatrous practices—including ritual prostitution—of the city's dozens of shrines and pagan temples. (The most prominent, the temple of Aphrodite, employed no less than 1,000 temple prostitutes.)

Paul's first letter must have failed to achieve its purpose, because certain problems persisted (1:11; 16:17). Apparently the Corinthians wrote a letter back to Paul, perhaps to justify their behavior, but also to ask him about other matters. He then wrote 1 Corinthians and minced no words in condemning the congregation's divisions and their continued tolerance of immorality. He also addressed their other concerns, as the repeated use of the words, "**Now concerning**," indicates (7:1, 25; 8:1; 12:1; 16:1).

But for all its stern language, 1 Corinthians also failed to correct the abuses. So Paul paid a visit to the church, but he was rebuffed (2 Cor. 2:1). Upon his return to Ephesus, he penned an extremely strident letter calculated to shock the stubborn Corinthians into obedience to Christ. (Most scholars believe that that letter has been lost. But some surmise that it has been preserved in 2 Corinthians as chapters 10–13.)

Paul sent Titus to deliver the bombshell and then waited to hear the outcome. But Titus delayed in returning. As time passed, Paul felt increasingly alarmed that perhaps he had charged the epistle with a bit too much explosive. When he could contain his anxiety no longer, he set out for Corinth by way of Macedonia. But en route he encountered Titus, who, to his relief and joy, reported that the church had at last responded obediently. Heartened by this news, Paul wrote 2 Corinthians to bring healing to the relationship.

Christians today can profit by reading 1 and 2 Corinthians because they get behind the stereotyped images of what the church and the ministry are "supposed" to be. First Corinthians shows that churches are made up of real people living in the real world struggling with real problems. Likewise, 2 Corinthians shows that people in "full-time ministry" struggle with the same problems, doubts, and feelings as anyone else. As we read this correspondence, we need to ask, If Paul came to my church and my community, what issues and problems would he see? And what would he say?

AUTHOR AND SETTING

The greetings of both 1 and 2 Corinthians identify their author as Paul the apostle. There is no serious dispute that he indeed wrote them. The first epistle was probably written from Ephesus (1 Cor. 16:8), perhaps in A.D. 56. The second letter was sent from Mac-edonia some 12 to 15 months later, after Paul had met with Titus and received news of the church's response to his previous correspondence (2 Cor. 2:12–17).

"Has not God made foolish the wisdom of this world?"	1 Cor. 1:20
"But we preach Christ crucified, to the Jews a stumbling block and the to the Greeks foolishness, but to those who are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God."	1 Cor. 1:23–24
"Gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, straw."	1 Cor. 3:12
"All things are lawful for me, but all things are not helpful."	1 Cor. 6:12
"Do you not know that your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit ... and you are not your own?"	1 Cor. 6:19
"I have become all things to all men, that I might be all means save some."	1 Cor. 9:22
"Therefore let him who thinks he stands take heed lest he fall."	1 Cor. 10:12
"God is faithful, who will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able, but with the temptation will also make the way of escape, that you may be able to bear it."	1 Cor. 10:13
"And now abide faith, hope, love, these three; but the greatest of these is love."	1 Cor. 13:13
"O Death, where is your sting? O Hades, where is your victory?"	1 Cor. 15:55

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In one sense, Christianity is a crutch for the weak. But for those who dismiss it for that reason usually do so to deny their own inadequacies. They use that excuse as a way to evade the claims God has on their lives. They cannot accept that He takes wounded, fractured people and makes them whole.⁵

1:1–9 *Epistolary Introduction to the Letter's Main Themes.* The opening verses can be divided into an initial greeting (vv. 1–3) and a report to the letter's recipients on how Paul prays for them (vv. 4–9). Both parts use language that anticipates some of the letter's key themes.

1:1–3 *Greeting: Apostleship, Sanctity, and Unity.* Paul's apostleship and the Corinthians' sanctity and unity are among the letter's most important themes.

1:1 On the meaning and background of **apostle**, see notes on Matt. 10:2; Rom. 1:1. The word occurs 10 times in 1 Corinthians, more often than in any other Pauline letter (1 Cor. 1:1; 4:9; 9:1, 2, 5; 12:28, 29; 15:7, 9 [twice]).

1:2 On **Corinth**, see Introduction: The Ancient City of Corinth. **sanctified ... saints.** These two words are closely related in Greek, one a verb (*hagiazō*) meaning "make holy" and the other an adjective (*hagios*) meaning "holy." Here the adjective is used as a noun and means "holy people." See note on 7:14. Something "holy" is set apart from evil and dedicated to God's service. In the OT, God set Israel apart from all other nations (Ex. 19:5–6). He also gave Israel his law so that they would reveal the holiness of the God who chose them by the way they lived (Lev. 11:44–45). Paul reminds the Corinthians that because they are **in Christ Jesus** God has set them apart as his holy people (see 1 Cor. 1:30; 6:11; 2 Cor. 6:14–7:1), and because they are God's people they should reflect his holiness (Ex. 19:6; Lev. 19:2). Because the Corinthians have a tendency toward self-centeredness and disunity, Paul reminds them that in Christ they are spiritually united to **all Christians in every place** (see also 1 Cor. 4:17; 7:17; 11:16; 14:33, 36).

1:3 **grace ... and peace.** See note on Rom. 1:7.

1:4–9 *Thanksgiving: Speech, Knowledge, and Spiritual Gifts.* Paul is thankful that God has richly blessed the Corinthians with speech, knowledge, and spiritual gifts. Despite some problems with these blessings (8:1–3, 10; 12:12–31; 14:1–40), he considers them gifts from God.

1:4 **thanks.** See note on Rom. 1:8.

1:5 **enriched in him.** In 4:8 Paul will say that the Corinthians' spiritual riches have led to an inappropriate pride. Paul's thankfulness here shows that the problem lay not with the gifts God had given them but with the way the Corinthians used those gifts. The cure is found in a healthy dose of gratitude (4:7). The Corinthians valued especially the gifts of **speech** and **knowledge** (see 8:1–3, 10; 12:8; 13:2; 14:1–40), but because they had used these gifts in wrong and improper ways, the exercise of the gifts led to disunity (8:1–3; 12:29–30; 14:4).

1:7 When Paul tells them, "you were enriched" in Christ "in all speech and all knowledge" (v. 5) **so that you are not lacking in any spiritual gift**, he implies that many spiritual gifts are "enrichments" of speaking abilities, knowledge, or skills that people had before they became Christians. **As you wait for the revealing of our Lord Jesus Christ** implies that spiritual gifts are given as temporary provisions until Christ returns (see 13:10).

1:8–9 **guiltless.** There is no condemnation on the final day for those who, like the Corinthians, are in Christ Jesus (Rom. 8:1). They already have been justified and, in a sense, even sanctified (1 Cor. 6:11; cf. Rom. 5:1), so no one will be able to bring a charge against them at the judgment (Rom. 8:33). The Corinthians have a long way to go before their behavior matches their status before God (1 Cor. 3:2–3a), but Paul is confident that God, who is **faithful**, will make them what they should be.

1:10–4:21 *Divisions over Christian Preachers.* Paul now states one of the letter's primary concerns: the Corinthians' pride has led them to value outward appearance and eloquence over the genuine work of the Spirit.

1:10–17a *The Problem Reported.* Paul begins with a description of the problem of division as "Chloe's people" have reported it to him. The Corinthians are exhibiting a haughty devotion to one or another of three itinerant Christian preachers.

1:11 **Reported** (Gk. *dēloō*) means to "show," "make clear," or "reveal" something. **Chloe's people** (Gk. *tōn Chloēs*, lit., "the ones of Chloe") may have done this by an oral report (5:1; 11:18). Chloe's identity and her location (Ephesus?)

⁵ [Word in life study Bible](#). (1996). (electronic ed., 1 Co 1:18). Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson.

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Corinth?) are unknown, as well as whether these “people” are friends, business associates, family, or from her household.

1:12 Apparently the Corinthian Christians were divided into factions on the basis of who had baptized them (vv. 14–17). Paul knew **Apollos** well (16:12). His rhetorical skills were impressive, and the Corinthian Christians had received him gladly after Paul’s departure (Acts 18:24–19:1). **Cephas** is the Aramaic equivalent of the name Peter (Gal. 2:7–14), and both names refer to Peter the apostle (1 Cor. 15:5; Gal. 1:18; 2:7–14). Unlike Paul (1 Cor. 7:8), Cephas was married and had traveled to Corinth with his wife (9:5). Apparently one faction in Corinth, claiming to be above it all, took the slogan “I follow Christ.”

1:17a not ... to baptize. While Paul considers baptism important (Rom. 6:3; Col. 2:12), it is subordinate to the proclamation of **the gospel**. Hearing and believing the gospel, unlike baptism, is essential to salvation (Rom. 10:17; 1 Cor. 1:21; Eph. 1:13). The Corinthians need to center their lives on the gospel, not on the various preachers in whom they can take pride.

1:17b–4:21 **God’s Wisdom Answers the Problem.** The divisions in Corinth can be healed if the Corinthians see the distinction between the world’s wisdom and God’s wisdom.

1:17b–2:16 *The Nature of God’s Wisdom.* God’s wisdom is displayed in the message of the cross, the calling of the Corinthians, the preaching of Paul, and the wisdom from the Spirit.

1:17b words of eloquent wisdom. The art of rhetorical persuasion was highly valued in the Greco-Roman world, and professional orators frequented large cities like Corinth, giving impressive displays of their ability to entertain and instruct. Paul’s proclamation of the gospel failed to measure up to these standards. This failure, however, served to place the spotlight on the **power** of the message itself (see also 2:1–5), for the Holy Spirit so empowered Paul’s words that they awakened faith in Christ (cf. James 1:18; 1 Pet. 1:23–25) and changed people’s very hearts and lives.

1:18 cross. See note on the crucifixion at Matt. 27:35. **folly.** Paul’s preaching in Corinth focused on the saving fact of Christ’s crucifixion, a method of execution considered so crude it was not even mentioned in polite company. The Corinthians’ fascination with the rhetorical ability of the ministers rather than their message demonstrated that they were living contrary to the power of the cross.

1:22–25 Jesus’ hostile opponents had kept demanding more miraculous **signs** to prove his claims (Matt. 16:1–4; Mark 8:11–12; Luke 11:16; John 2:18–20; 4:48), but they were doing this just to manipulate him, for the signs he had already given were sufficient to leave them without excuse for their unbelief (John 3:2; 12:9–11, 37; 14:11). **Greeks** were viewed in antiquity, in contrast to barbarians, as a cultured people and therefore interested in **wisdom** (Acts 17:21; Rom. 1:14). A crucified Messiah was offensive to an unbelieving Jew (Matt. 16:22; Gal. 3:13; 5:11), and nonsensical to an unbelieving Greek. God’s power to call forth his people, however, works through a deeper wisdom than human beings can recognize (unless God grants them faith). Paul writes that the gospel is preached to all (1 Cor. 1:23), but God calls some effectively to salvation from among both Jews and Greeks (v. 24). On Christ as a **stumbling block** (v. 23), see notes on Isa. 8:11–15; 28:16.

1:26–31 Just as the message and its messenger (Paul) were **foolish** by the world’s standards, so most of those in Corinth who believed the message were foolish by those same standards. God’s transformation of them into his people (by choosing them to be saved) in spite of their humanly unimpressive pedigree excludes all boasting in ancestry, accomplishment, or affiliation with one preacher or another (see also 3:21–22).

1:27 God chose what is weak ... to shame the strong. The themes of the lifting up of the downtrodden and the reversal of human status are prophesied in the OT (e.g., 1 Sam. 2:1–8; Isa. 61:1; cf. Luke 1:52; John 9:39).⁶

The Thanksgiving (1:4–9)

As per the form of the ancient letter, Paul appends a thanksgiving, and again the form begins to creak and strain. The thanksgiving, with its welter of prepositions (11 in all; 6 in vv. 4–5 alone; Paul loved to heap up prepositions!) is more a proemium or introduction to the letter’s main theme than a thanksgiving—something akin to the preacher’s “talking over God’s shoulder.” Here are ranged most of the topics that will make up the body of the letter. **The grace of God ... given you in Christ Jesus; enriched ... with all speech and all knowledge; the testimony** of (or “about”—the genitive is objective) **Jesus Christ ... confirmed among you; you** come behind in no **spiritual gift**, waiting for the revelation of **our Lord Jesus Christ** (vv. 4–6). Not one assertion in this encomium will be left unchallenged; not one parcel of it is without its direct antithesis in the “theology” or “ethics” of someone

⁶ Crossway Bibles. (2008). *The ESV Study Bible* (pp. 2192–2193). Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles.

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at Corinth, an antithesis sufficient to draw Paul's fire. "What have you that you did not receive?" (4:7)—grace had somehow come a cropper. "The kingdom of God does not consist in talk but in power" (4:20); "has not God made foolish the wisdom of the world?" (1:20)—so much for being made rich in speech and knowledge. "I fed you with milk, not solid food; for you were not able to take it" (3:2)—so much for confirmation of the "testimony." "If I speak in the tongues of men and of angels, but have not love, I am a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal" (13:1)—and so much for spirituality or piety. And as for waiting for the revelation, "if the dead are not raised, 'Let us eat and drink, for tomorrow we die'.... Come to your right mind, and sin no more" (15:32, 34).

Should we set the thanksgiving down to pure irony? Not unless we eliminate vv. 8 and 9: **who** (does the relative clause in v. 8 introduce a sentence from an old credo?) **will sustain you to the end, guiltless on the day of our Lord Jesus Christ. God is faithful, by whom you were called into the fellowship of his Son.** The words reflect the basic mood of earliest Christianity. Their context is eschatological, having to do with "last" and thus ultimate things; with judgment and testing by fire, with the "great assize," the "day of the Lord" (in Greek, "day" can also mean "court"—a nuance carried through the Latin to the Middle High German "Diät"). The implication is that whatever Corinth may be now—the church of God sanctified and called—is not perceptible in the present. The "day" will disclose it (3:13). But the accent in all this talk of future judgment and ordeal is on the promise: **he will sustain you** and it is the promise that will not allow us to set down Paul's thanksgiving to mere irony. The abnormal, the absurd, the aberrant is always fascinating, more fascinating than the good, for which reason the interpreters of our epistle, observing Paul in struggle against party strife, libertinism, the parading of spirituality, and the denial of his gospel, have cast Corinth in the role of a rabble. But rabble or no, Corinth was Paul's, and for Paul that meant Corinth was God's, and to Corinth the promise belonged: **God is faithful, by whom you were called.** And with that Paul has not simply closed the ring, returned to the opening lines in his "introduction" ("called to be saints," etc.), but given everything said till now its reason and support. The apostolic appointment and title; Corinth's call and sanctification, its fellowship with all those who "call on the name"; the "grace" and the "peace," the enrichment and the confirmation; the lacking of nothing and the waiting—all are for nothing without the faithfulness of God.

■ **The Parties (1:10–4:21)**

Chapter 1

The Divisions (1:10–17)

This section is crucial to an understanding of the situation at Corinth, and thus to an interpretation of the epistle. But the section is sufficiently cryptic to require the interpretation of the body of the epistle for its understanding. The interpreter is thus trapped in a circle, and the decision to fix the arc where the circle begins will always have something of the arbitrary about it. Let the innumerable hypotheses attest to that. As indicated in the introduction, this commentary rests on the decision that the opponents of Paul addressed in 1 Corinthians were neither Gnostic—if by "Gnostic" is implied adherence to a discrete community organized about a discrete worldview—nor were they interlopers come to alienate Paul from the arch-apostles at Jerusalem. They were rather enthusiasts whose behavior reflected more a kaleidoscope of attitudes and opinions than an integrated, settled "position," opinions in part derived from misinterpretations of Paul and in part from religious notions common to the age which would later congeal into systems rivalling New Testament Christianity, all of it converging on the notion that the Spirit of God gave immunity from the conditions of this world, thus a denial of the event which rooted existence in this world as existence for God and the other—the crucifixion of Jesus of Nazareth, the Messiah, proclaimed Lord by his obedience unto death.

The section opens with an admonition in the form of an antithetical parallelism: **I appeal to you, brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that all of you agree** (Greek, "say the same thing") **and that there be no dissensions among you, but that you be united in the same mind and the same judgment** (v. 10). Reference to the **name** is not an oath calculated to give force to the appeal. In the New Testament, there is nothing of "theurgy," according to which possession of the god's name is equal to possession of his power, so as to compel him to act. Exactly the opposite is true. The name denotes a sphere of power already present and at work. Hence, the words **by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ** (equal to "in the Lord," a phrase which Paul may well have coined), signal the presence and power of the one sent from God, first among those who confess him (cf. 5:4 and 6:11), finally among all who shall confess him (15:25; cf. Phil. 2:9–11), the one who has harnessed Paul to his apostleship, and by whose authority he speaks.

Verse 11 gives the reason for the appeal. From oral report—answers to the Corinthians' correspondence are delayed till chap. 7—Paul has learned that the community at Corinth is torn by **quarrelings** (the noun is in the

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plural). His informants are **Chloe's people** (*Chloe* in Greek means “sprouting” or “blooming,” a cognomen for the Greek or Roman goddess of fertility [Demeter or Ceres], a name given female slaves in the ancient world). Whether or not Chloe was a Christian, lived at Corinth or Ephesus, and was attached to any one of the parties, is impossible to tell. This is Paul's first and last reference to her. Paul next recites what he has heard (“now I say this,” or as the RSV translates, **what I mean is**): **Each one of you says, “I belong to Paul,” or “I belong to Apollos,” or “I belong to Cephas”** (Peter's Aramaic name—restricted to contexts of dispute? cf. 3:23; 9:5; and Gal. 2:11ff.), **or “I belong to Christ”** (v. 12). Attempts to attach to each party a particular stance or posture later attacked in the epistle (“I belong to Apollos” referring to those who despise the “simple” preaching of Paul and strive for a higher wisdom; “I belong to Cephas” to Palestinian-Jewish Christians who had been converted by Peter, come to Corinth from the orient, etc.) have met with little success, for the reason that Paul nowhere addresses the groups, but rather the party spirit as a whole. But it is conceivable that the slogan “I am of Christ” which climaxes the list—at times construed as a gloss by a later hand, or even as a misprint for Crispus(!)—reflects an orientation to the exalted Lord calculated to annul the message of the crucified Jesus, and resulting in that “spiritual” exaltation of the individual against which Paul is struggling throughout the letter. This hypothesis takes support from the verse following, in which Paul describes the absurdity of self-deification by referring to his possible role as savior: **Is Christ divided? Was Paul crucified for you? Or were you baptized in the name of Paul?** (The negative particle prefixed to the question requires an answer in the negative—“certainly not!” The oldest manuscript witness to 1 Corinthians may have prefixed that particle to all three questions, not merely to the last two.)

Why the reference to Baptism here, and what possible connection can it have with the “quarrelings” at Corinth? Have some (the pronoun “each” in v. 12 need not be stretched to include every living soul at Corinth) laid claim to special rank or privilege by virtue of being baptized by Paul, Apollos, or Cephas? Do they believe that the one or the other enjoys a monopoly on deity and its gifts, and that through Baptism by the one or the other they have come to share that monopoly? Paul's demurrer in vv. 14–16 and his later attack on the notion of the sacrament as guaranteeing immunity from the judgment (10:1–13) appear to support the conclusion that the Corinthians construed their Baptism as magic, for which reason the person of the baptizer as conjurer or mystagogue would have been all-important: “I am of Paul; I have been baptized by Paul; he is the medium by which I have acceded to spiritual rank, to oneness with God.” Paul writes: “I thank God” **that I baptized none of you except Crispus and Gaius** (v. 14). Paul regarded holding such activity at a minimum as a divine dispensation. Even the reference to Gaius, not a name but a “pronomen,” a designation for any freedman under the sun, reflects casualness respecting his role as baptizer (was Crispus the one-time ruler of the synagogue referred to in Acts 18:8?). The casualness is heightened when Paul adds: **I did baptize also the household of Stephanas. Beyond that, I do not know whether I baptized any one else** (v. 16). Following the final clause in v. 15—**Lest anyone should say that you were baptized in my name**—the sentence appears to compensate for the memory lapse in v. 14. Was Paul dictating right off here, in final form? And did not Fortunatus and Achaicus belong to that list (cf. 16:17)?

Verse 17, prepared for in v. 13 (“was Paul crucified for you?”—in the Greek: “Paul was not crucified for you, was he?”), and setting the theme for what follows, draws two sharp contrasts, signaled by the adversative in its first, and by the negatives in its second half: **For Christ did not send me to baptize but to preach the gospel, and not with eloquent** (a word of) **wisdom** (the nouns may be linked to “send” or “evangelize”), **lest the cross of Christ be emptied** (reduced to nothing).

But if sent **to preach the gospel** and **the cross of Christ** constitute a pair, “to baptize” and “to empty” do not. The antithesis in v. 17a is not between baptizing and evangelizing, as though Paul were spurning the role of a mere “liturgist,” but rather between the *person* of the baptizer and the proclamation of the gospel. In other words, Christ had not sent Paul to be a party leader. But if the contrast lies here, then the answer to the question, Why the reference to Baptism? deserves further answer.

For Paul, Baptism and cross were linked, inseparable. The Corinthians had been baptized “into the name,” into the presence and power, into the body of the Christ who had died, who even now as exalted made his way in the world as the crucified, as Lord in hiddenness, in nonobservability, his reign under the sign of weakness. It was precisely the Corinthians' Baptism which signaled the antithesis between “cross” and “word of wisdom.” But once that truth had been denied, then the event had been reduced to a spiritual exaltation of the individual. In face of such a reduction or emptying, Paul exclaims: “I thank God I baptized none of you!”

No section in the epistle may be better suited to introduce the reader to Paul's use of traditional literary devices than these verses. The section abounds in rhetorical flourishes. Verse 18 contains an antithetical parallel (**folly to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God**), both clauses ending with the same Greek word. Verse 19 contains another parallel (**the wisdom of the wise, and the cleverness—behavior resulting from theoretical knowledge—of the clever**), this time in chiasma (**I will destroy the wisdom ... the cleverness of the clever I will thwart**). Verse 20 begins with the threefold repetition of the word *where*, and continues with an antithesis (**has not God made foolish the wisdom of the world?**), the second half of the verse in Greek ending on the same syllable as the first. Verse 21 contains an antithesis (**since, in the wisdom of God, the world did not know God through wisdom, it pleased God through the folly of what we preach to save ...**). Both clauses in v. 22 end on the same Greek syllable. Verses 22 and 23a contain an antithesis (**Jews demand signs and Greeks seek wisdom, but we preach Christ crucified**). Verses 23b and 24 contain another antithesis (**stumbling block to Jews and folly to Gentiles, but to those who are called ..., Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God**). Verse 25 forms a chiasma with v. 24b, the beginning of the verse corresponding to the end of v. 24b, and the end of the verse to the beginning of v. 24b (**Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God. For the foolishness of God is wiser ... and the weakness of God is stronger**), and, in Greek, concludes with the same words, the same syllables, and the same sounds. And in all this rhetorical display the most striking is Paul's use of the terms *folly*, *foolishness*, and *wisdom* throughout the section in two altogether different senses. The "folly" of vv. 18 and 23 is the antithesis to the "folly" or "foolishness" of vv. 21 and 25; and the "wisdom" (or "wise man") of vv. 19–22 is the antithesis to the "wisdom" or to what is "wiser" of vv. 24 and 25.

The section takes up and interprets the antithesis first set up in v. 17 (word of **wisdom ... cross of Christ**) and which will dominate the discussion to the end of chap. 3, giving to 1:18–3:23 its "ring" character (1:18: "Folly to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God," and 3:19–23: "For the wisdom of this world is folly with God").

What has divided Corinth? It is not race—"Jews and Greeks" (Paul's cipher for all humanity) are both on either side of the divide (vv. 23–24). Let Lucian, second-century Syrian philosopher, speak for the Greek:

The poor wretches have convinced themselves, first and foremost, that they are going to be immortal and live for all time, in consequence of which they despise death and even willingly give themselves into custody, most of them. Furthermore, their first lawgiver persuaded them that they are all brothers of one another after they have transgressed once for all by denying the Greek gods and by worshipping that crucified sophist himself and living under his laws.

Let Trypho speak for the Jew:

Whether Christ should be so shamefully crucified, this we are in doubt about. For whosoever is crucified is said in the law to be accursed, so that I am exceedingly incredulous on this point. It is quite clear, indeed, that the Scriptures announce that Christ had to suffer; but we wish to learn if you can prove it to us whether it was by the suffering cursed in the law.

It would be an error, however, to interpret Paul's word of the cross as in antithesis merely to Jewish or Greek expectations of salvation. It is to the Christian congregation at Corinth that Paul's word is opposed. The antithesis is thus between two perceptions, two ways of life among "believers," people of faith, and thus, to judge from history, with no greater prospect of reconciliation than between believers and unbelievers.

Nothing intrinsic has created the division, nothing given with human intelligence or feeling or strength of will which one could claim to possess to greater degree than the other. Something extrinsic has created the division, an event for which neither Jew nor Greek could furnish the occasion. Despite Paul's "concession" to the subjective response to that event in v. 18 (cf. 2:14), the gulf does not lie in the attitude which the one or the other might take toward that event, as though nothing more than perspective or taste or personal judgment lay on either side of the divide, something over which two could violently disagree but in the end achieve a reconciliation, provided each agreed to allow the other's point of view. It is the event itself which divides, which renders every attitude or position taken toward it, every perception of it subordinate, a reflex or reaction. To this event **the word of the cross** gave witness. Did that phrase, "word of the cross," together with, say, Deut. 21:22–23 ("a hanged man is accursed by God") once belong to the arsenal of the argument of the anti-Christian Paul? And does the Christian theology of Paul take the sharpness, the acuteness of its contours exclusively from the background of an earlier polemic against

Jesus the crucified, at the “word” about whom he once took irreconcilable offense? Those participles in v. 18, **to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved**, point ahead to a decision which made that event what it is. Paul’s quotation of Isa. 29:14 (LXX) in the verse following is not a proof from Scripture of the vanity of philosophy, but a reference to the initiator of that event: “I will destroy the wisdom of the wise, and the cleverness of the clever I will thwart” (v. 19). Corinth had a love affair with wisdom. Paul’s continual reference to *sophia*, “wisdom,” throughout the first four chapters of the epistle gives every indication that some (not all—the pronoun in the prepositional phrase, “to us ... it is the power of God” is not editorial) believed they possessed a knowledge, however they may have arrived at it, which lofted them above the fleshly, earthly, temporal, and historical. Therefore they regarded concentration on the event of the cross which plunged human existence into the conditions of this world as a seduction or temptation to embrace again what they had abandoned, a reversion to a state from which they had been set free. But that division at Corinth was only the reflection in religion or piety of a decision and act which had fixed a gulf within humanity itself. **I will destroy.... I will thwart** (v. 19); **God has made** (v. 20); **it pleased God** (v. 21), and to those who are “called” **Christ is the power of God and the wisdom of God** (v. 24; the repetition of the divine name is not merely for effect). If the subject of the event is ignored for the sake of the division which it creates, then Paul’s description of the reversal of wisdom and folly which have come about through the cross—**(Where is the wise man?... the scribe?... the debater of this age?** [no subtle distinction is to be made between those three] **Has not God made foolish the wisdom of the world?... It pleased God through the folly of what we preach to save.... For the foolishness of God is wiser than men, and the weakness of God is stronger than men**, vv. 20–21, 25)—is reduced to mere rhetoric, a punning on words. Paul’s move from a reference to the subjective appraisal of the action of God in the cross in v. 18, to wisdom and folly’s exchange of roles, signaled in vv. 19–20, a reversal carried through to the end of the section, must not be missed. The rhetoric, Paul’s use of the words *wisdom* and *folly* in two contrary and opposed senses, has been required by the event which turned wisdom to folly and folly to wisdom. Finally, then, the point is not that God has made to be power and wisdom what the world imagines to be their opposite, as though the section ended with a paraphrase of the Magnificat (“He has put down the mighty from their thrones, and exalted those of low degree,” Luke 1:52). The reversal, the standing of folly or wisdom on its head has come about by the fact that God has made his power and wisdom weakness and folly, that is, has deliberately set his saving activity against whatever may be grasped through perception or conception, opposed it to whatever is provable or able to be disproved by appeal to sense or reason (**for Jews demand signs and Greeks seek wisdom**, v. 22).

But did not the incapacity of human wisdom at least furnish the occasion for this foolishness of God? **Since**, Paul writes in v. 21, **in the wisdom of God, the world did not know God through wisdom, it pleased God through the folly of what we preach to save....** The sentence is reminiscent of ancient Jewish speculation, according to which the wisdom of God was hypostasized, given arms and legs, personality and gender, in an attempt to explain what fate it had been forced to suffer in the world. Wisdom, agent of creation, had made her descent, had appeared to the race, but the race rejected her, whereupon she retreated to heaven from which she reappeared, but only to the elect or wise. Chapter 42 in the Similitudes of Enoch reads:

Wisdom found no place where she might dwell;
Then a dwelling place was assigned her in the heavens.
Wisdom went forth to make her dwelling among the children of men,
And found no dwelling-place:
Wisdom returned to her place,
And took her seat among the angels.

Against such a background, v. 21 would imply that the world, created through the wisdom of God, was suffused with wisdom (the phrase **in the wisdom of God** to be construed spatially) so that it was possible, by means of wisdom, to come to a knowledge of God, to relate to God as God. The comment that, of course, Paul would not have allowed that possibility of knowing God to be anything more than an awareness of God as Creator, of God as not-I or not-world, or that the world’s not knowing God through wisdom denotes a conscious, active rejection of that awareness, though true, would still not get at the cause for the **folly of what we preach**. It would merely delay the question, “Who or what was the cause of that wisdom by which God could be recognized only as Creator?” The **since**, the causal conjunction at the beginning of v. 21 gets its come-uppance, its qualification, in the verse’s second half: **It pleased God**—again, there lies the cause for the folly! If the first half of the sentence has its final

Week 3 – 1 Corinthians 1:4-31

Straight Talk on The Problem Of Division

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interpretation at the beginning of the Romans epistle (“ever since the creation of the world his invisible nature, namely, his eternal power and deity, has been clearly perceived in the things that have been made. So they are without excuse,” Rom. 1:20), the second half has its interpretation toward that epistle’s end (“for God has consigned all men to disobedience, that he may have mercy upon all,” Rom. 11:32).

But what of Corinth? If the decision to act in the Christ crucified lay only with God, if that event was the cause for the division between those who are perishing and being saved, were not at least some in Corinth fated for, doomed to, perishing? If a call, however misinterpreted or misapplied, determined the saving or the perishing, and if the Corinthians had been called, then there was still reason for Paul to write the epistle.

Corinth and the Theology of the Cross (1:26–31)

The style of the section is that of the ancient diatribe. Paul is engaging his reader-hearer in dialog, a style of which he will never tire throughout all his correspondence. **Consider your call, brethren**, he writes, “you yourselves are a graphic illustration of my contention:” **Not many of you were wise according to “the flesh”** (the RSV correctly interprets: **according to worldly standards**), **not many ... powerful, not many ... of noble birth** (v. 22). The three members of that negative clause then form the scheme for the three clauses following in vv. 27 and 28: **But**—again the antitheses!—**God chose what is foolish in the world** (in the Greek, the neutral plural with the genitive recurring in these verses denotes a plurality of persons) **to shame the wise, God chose what is weak in the world to shame the strong, God chose what is low and despised in the world, even things that are not, to bring to nothing things that are.** To the Greek, nothing could be more trifling than **things that are not**.

The verses are not an argumentum ad hominem. The threefold verb and its subject make that clear. And, again, the accent does not fall on the antithesis or reversal, but on its initiator: **God chose!** The shaming of the **wise and strong**, or the destruction of the **things that are** may be the “natural” consequence of the manifestation of God’s power in folly and weakness, but they are not the purpose. For what reason, then, had God determined to save through the folly and weakness of the “Christ crucified”? Why this scandal to sense, to those for whom the world must yield some evidence of deity and its intention with the world, at least some “sign” by which that intention could be inferred—a law, a code, or a cultus? Why this affront to reason, to those for whom mind or spirit are somehow linked with deity, so that whatever accords with rationality may be acknowledged to be divine, and whatever does not would be unworthy of it? And why this folly to those for whom deity and its intent can be grasped in a trice, in a sudden “vision” of the self and God as one, and for which the world, history, temporality, the other are an obstacle? The answer to the question has been postponed till now: “For the reason that no flesh (**no human being**, RSV) **might boast before God**” (v. 29). That flotsam at Corinth had suggested it, the correspondence of that ragtag and bobtail crew to the event which had constituted it what it was, had moved Paul to the answer. God had called Corinth out of nothing, and God had fixed his power and wisdom to a nothing, and the connection between these two events was indissoluble. The one nothing was the efficient cause of the other, “that no flesh might boast.”

His reflection moves Paul to a confession in v. 30: “You have your source from God” (literally, “from him you are, you exist”; RSV: **He is the source of your life**). That was always true of Corinth, and would still be true, whatever side of the event and its divide it would stand. But **God is the source of your life in Christ Jesus**. That was not always true of Corinth, for Corinth had been given a second birth, **in Christ Jesus, whom God made our wisdom** (note again the “rehabilitation,” cf. v. 24), **our righteousness and sanctification and redemption**. Earlier, Paul had described Christ as God’s power and wisdom; here he writes that he became such “from God”—the subject of all this activity has never been out of sight! **Our wisdom, ... righteousness ... sanctification ... redemption** (in Paul, the latter term is not to be interpreted literally; no special theory of purchase attaches to it)—are these terms strictly soteriological, limited to the work of Christ who justifies, hallows, and ransoms? If **in Christ** means that Corinth and Paul have been taken up into his history, with the result that whatever may be said of him applies to them as well, the terms are also autobiographical. And if it is true that Paul’s anthropology throughout his epistles often thwarts attempts at systematization, the reason does not lie simply in his Jewish heritage or his preoccupation with eschatology, with apocalyptic thought, but in his understanding of faith as making of Christ and the believer one flesh. What creates the confusion is our attempt to regard Paul’s anthropological terms as retaining the same sense for existence “in” as well as apart from Christ, as though the structures of that existence were identical in either case. Or, it derives from our attempt to define existence from the perspective of the “I” as self-contained, whereas for the apostle Christ had become the subject of believing existence. For that **in Christ**, let a word from a

disciple of Paul serve as its interpretation: “ ‘For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh.’ This mystery is a profound one, and I am saying that it refers to Christ and the church” (Eph. 5:31–32).

Therefore, the section concludes with resuming the thought in vv. 26–29, **as it is written**, “**Let him who boasts, boast of the Lord.**” The quotation is from Jeremiah:

Thus says the Lord: “Let not the wise man glory in his wisdom, let not the mighty man glory in his might, let not the rich man glory in his riches; but let him who glories glory in this, that he understands and knows me, that I am the Lord who practice steadfast love, justice, and righteousness in the earth; for in these things I delight, says the Lord” (Jer. 9:23–24).

The quotation is not exact. Further, the sense of the sentence requires the alteration of object from God to Christ (cf. Gal. 6:14). But the alteration does not merely derive from that dialectic in Jewish use of Scripture according to which the “Book” could be regarded as having a single, unequivocal sense by which life was to be regulated, *and at the same time*, since it was God’s Word, could be conceived as infinitely plastic, allowing for infinite strata of meaning. The alteration is an exhausting of the prophetic word, pulling it out of shape. For Jeremiah, the object of boasting remained aloof: Yahweh would exercise his mercy, justice, and righteousness from heaven against uncircumcised Egypt and Ammon—and Judah with its “uncircumcised heart.” Even the forgiveness which Yahweh would guarantee to the house of Israel and the house of Judah in a “new covenant” would come by way of a surrogate—the Law (cf. Jer. 31:31–34). For Paul, “righteousness, sanctification, and redemption” had taken on flesh and blood in the one whom God had made to be such, in the KYRIOS, the Lord.⁷

⁷ Harrisville, R. A. (1987). *1 Corinthians* (pp. 31–45). Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg Publishing House.