

1st Corinthians Chapter 1.

The first Epistle of Paul to the Corinthians.

Bill Holdstock

Corinth was a principle city of Greece and was situated on the isthmus and had two major ports adjoining. There was a large population of Jews in the city due to the banishment of the Jews from Rome by Claudius Caesar. Trade was very brisk to Italy and the west and also to Asia to the east. Not only did Corinth attract trade of every description it also attracted all types of vice. Yet in this sinful city Paul started a Christian church on his first visit chiefly among the Gentiles but many Jews also became followers of the Lord. Acts 18: 7-8 tells us that a Jew named Justus was one who worshipped God and Crispus the Chief Ruler of the Synagogue also believed on the Lord Jesus Christ and his entire household became Christians. This must have been very annoying to the Jews who rejected this new message of the Gospel and of a man dying on a cross to save mankind from their sins particularly as the Jews were very closely involved in that death.

It was at Corinth that Paul met Aquila and his wife Priscilla and became close friends. They were tentmakers the same trade as Paul so Paul stayed with them, and he was able to work and pay his way and not be a burden to his hosts. Aquila and Priscilla preached in the synagogue every Sabbath along with Paul.

Paul preached in this city for nearly two years and was divinely encouraged by a night vision from the Lord telling Paul not to be afraid of the people because 'God had much people in that city'.

Acts 18: 9-11

Then the Lord spoke to Paul in a night vision and said, be not afraid but speak and hold not your peace for I am with you and no man shall set on you for there is much people in this city. And he continued there one year and six months teaching the Word of God among them.

The Jews became very aggressive towards Paul and would not accept Paul's teaching that the Christ that they had killed was in fact their Messiah. So he shook his raiment and said 'your blood be upon your own heads' shaking his raiment was the same as shaking the dust off your feet Matt.10:14.

Aquila and Priscilla left for Antioch.

Sometime after he left it became necessary to write this epistle to them to rectify some serious disorders that had been introduced among them in Paul's absence. Pride soon reared its ugly head, the extreme desire to amass wealth and lust manifested itself in the case of a man sleeping with his father's wife. It is obvious reading this book the Corinthians had found it very difficult to keep themselves holy and pure to the teaching that Paul gave them the last time he visited Corinth. Some were not entirely free from their former sinful inclinations not to need strict caution against fornication pride and lust. False teaching had led them away from the truth of the Gospel and some now disbelieved the resurrection of Jesus Christ which was a very recent part of their history. There was much that Paul needed to redress and correct and he set himself to the task with all wisdom, tenderness and authority.

Through the first four chapters Paul highlights their discord and infighting and prescribes humility as a remedy for the evil that abounds among them. In Chapter 5 he deals with the case of incest. In the sixth chapter he condemns the believers for the wrong use of the law before heathen Judges and at the end of that chapter Paul warns the believers against the sin of fornication. In the 7th chapter he gives advice about marriage and virgins. This is followed in chapter 8 with direction about meats offered to idols and in chapter 9 Paul shares his own testimony. In the tenth chapter he advises them not to eat at the idolaters table and tells them not to eat sacrifices offered to devils but instead to eat with honour and discernment at the Lords Table. In the eleventh chapter he gives direction about their habit in public worship and blames them for gross irregularities and disgraceful behaviour at the Lords Supper. In chapter 12 Paul introduces Spiritual Gifts which were poured forth in abundance at his last visit. There is an important interlude in chapter 13 which instructs on the centrality of love in all that they do. In chapter 14 Paul resumes his discourse on gifts of the Spirit and provides emphasise on the importance of decency and order when ministering these gifts. The fifteenth chapter

is taken up with explaining the doctrine of the resurrection, and the last chapter consists of particular advices and salutations.

As far as God is concerned it is the blood that carries life to the body and He wanted us to have life more abundantly which only He can give. There are many sects who use blood in their rituals in a profane way, they drink each other's blood, and of course in these last days the advent of Satan and vampire worship displayed in films and television plays are an abomination to God their actions distort the truth and lead people away from the truth.

Verse 1.

Paul called to be an Apostle

So after a miraculous conversion, being struck by a great light which blinded him, a fall from his horse and much prayer by Ananias and the Holy Spirit, Paul accepted the call of God as an Apostle. God also showed him that he was to suffer greatly for His names sake, but that did not deter Paul at all. Very different from the 'Gospel' preached today, when was the last time any of us heard that coming to know Jesus would bring hardship and difficulties but it does?

Paul went into exile for a number of years being instructed by the Holy Spirit in prepared for the work God had for him. Paul used the call of God to be explicit in stating his authority which was by the will of God alone, which gives him the right to correct and admonish the church.

An Apostle is a delegate, one sent with full power of attorney to act in the place of another, the sender remaining behind to back up the one sent. Paul also had the blessing of Sosthenes the Chief Ruler of the Synagogue and Crispus who was Chief Ruler of the Synagogue before Sosthenes. It was Sosthenes who had been beaten before the Judgment seat by the Greeks, who disliked the Jews, quite possibly for his new found faith in Christ. Paul was please to call these men Brothers in Christ and include these two as 'trophies of divine grace' that side by side would appeal to the Church at Corinth adding weight to the content of his letters.

Verse 2

This letter was sent to the Church of God in the plural meaning Gods people everywhere, including us today, but then he defines the church as: the people who are sanctified in Christ Jesus. So this letter was to the believers in this city. They probably met in a variety of places, perhaps in different fellowships day by day and larger gatherings once a week. The original New Testament concept of church was not characterized by the meeting place; it was characterized by the assembly of the saints wherever that might be. The Christians in Corinth were saved through Paul's ministry in this city which began around AD52. So Paul was all too familiar with the Spiritual issues, and false doctrines and carnal state of the believers. Paul answered letters that he received from the believers in Corinth concerning many problems they encountered.

Verse 2 continues

...to them who are sanctified in Christ Jesus and called to be saints,

The Greek word *hagiazō* for sanctified means to be set apart, and the Christian, when he or she becomes a follower of Christ is set apart unto God for a sacred purpose. In Ephesians 5:25-27 the Bible tells us that Christ loved the true church and gave himself for it that He might sanctify and cleanse it like the washing with water which is the Word of God, then when clean and holy He can present it to His Father. It is our responsibility as Christians to live separate from the world not allowing ourselves to be contaminated by worldly things. Our minds must be set on God, our thinking holy and pure, our hearts clean and steadfast seeking to please Him. You have to be set apart by God to do this, we cannot be set apart unto God and mix with the world whose thoughts and actions are so anti-God these days.

Our verse continues that if we are sanctified by God we then are Saints. The word Saint has been stolen by the Religious world and they make 'saints' of anybody, mostly men, who have done 'good works' and have become favourites among the hierarchy. Most saints in the Religious world have been dead for many years before they are made saints. That's not God's way, those who accept Jesus as their Saviour and Lord, male or female, are saints of His right away while we are living and we won't have bronze images made of us to be stuck at the entrance of our church in need of a dust every week before the service. It is Jesus who calls us to be saints to be set apart or separated from all things that would get in the way of our devotion and love for Him.

verse 2

...with all who in every place call upon the name of Jesus Christ our Lord.

This Epistle is intended for the correction and education of all followers of Christ not just those at Corinth but all who have named the name of Christ throughout the ages..

...both theirs and ours

In Paul's absence division had occurred, there were some who called themselves followers of Paul and some who called themselves followers of Cephas, others of Apollos or indeed any other eminent leader. Here Paul was calling them to a unity of spirit and he does so gracefully and kindly but firmly. All believers have one and the same Lord (1 Corinthians 8: 6) a reproof of the division of the church at Corinth. It also deals a death blow to Christians who claim that Christ belongs to their sect or denomination only, but the Bible says we are all one in Christ Jesus.

He says in

verse 4-9

I thank my God always on your behalf for the grace of God which is given you by Jesus Christ. That in everything you are enriched by Him, in all utterance and in all knowledge. Even as the Testimony of Christ was confirmed in you: So that you come behind in no Gift waiting for the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. Who shall also confirm you unto the end that you may be blameless in the day of our Lord Jesus Christ, God is faithful by whom you were called unto the fellowship of His Son Jesus Christ our Lord.

Paul says the Corinthian church was rich in knowledge and utterance; they had many good preachers able to expound with eloquence the knowledge they had. The Corinthian church prided itself of their 'utterance' and 'knowledge' but Paul pointed out that the gifts of the Spirit were missing because there was a lack of true intimacy with God brought about by the lack of the Word of God in their church. Many today have the flower of utterance but have not got the root of knowledge of a crucified Jesus or that intimacy with Him so what they do have will only lead to dryness of discourse.

Verse 6-7

Even as the Testimony of Christ was confirmed in you, so that you come behind in no Gift waiting for the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ.

The preaching of the Word of God by the Apostle at the beginning had enriched the Corinthian church so that the Testimony of Christ, being the Gospel, had been confirmed by the use of various gifts of the Holy Spirit and miracles including speaking in tongues and interpretation of tongues. If we want the move of the Holy Spirit and miracles in our churches we must note that it begins with the preaching of the Word of God from the Word of God.

Hosea 4: 6 This is God talking.

My people are destroyed for the lack of knowledge: because you have rejected knowledge I will also reject you, that you shall be no Priest to me: seeing you have forgotten the law of your God, I will also forget your children.

This is a very important verse; God's people are being destroyed for not knowing God's Word and living by it. In Revelation 1 verse 6 we are pleased to read that God will, on our accepting Him as Saviour and Lord make us kings and priests unto God. We may boast of being a priest or a king in the Kingdom of God and well we might it is a privilege to be so. But what about this verse in Hosea, God is warning us that if we neglect His Word, neglect to read it and do what it says we will be rejected of God Himself! Not only that, our children will also suffer because we have not passed on God's Word to them. Paul's teaching of God's Word at his first visit enabled the Corinthians to enjoy the gifts through the inward power of the Holy Spirit and also experience miracles accompanying such teaching. It would appear those gifts were lacking on his second visit replaced by dissension and splits.

Isaiah 48:17

I am the Lord who teaches you what is best for you, who directs you in the way you should go.

How can the Lord teach us except through His Word the Bible, and He says He will teach us what is best for us. If we don't read it and it is not read on Sundays how will we know what is God's best for us, and how will we know the way to go?

Amos 8:11-12

Behold the days come says the Lord God that I will send a famine in the land, not a famine of bread, nor a thirst for water but of hearing the Word of the Lord. 12 And they shall wander from sea to sea, from the north even to the east they shall run to and fro to seek the Word of the Lord and shall not find it.

In his book 'Nearing Home' Billy Graham writes 'the Bible is not an option; it is a necessity if we are going to be rooted in Him'. Only Jesus is able to say 'I am the way the truth and the life, no one comes to the Father except through me'. The prosperity of a people or a nation is dependent on the Word of the Lord, be deprived of that and the people are left without direction and will drift aimlessly.

1 Corinthians 1: 4-8

I thank my God always on your behalf, for the grace of God which is given you by Jesus Christ that in everything you are enriched by Him in all utterance and in all knowledge even as the testimony of Christ was confirmed in you. So that you come behind in no gift waiting for the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Paul encouraged the Corinthians that the Gospel that he taught them that enriched them when with them the first time was the teaching that would present them blameless at the coming of Jesus at the end.

Unity.

Verse 10

Now I beseech you brethren by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ that you all speak the same thing and that there be no divisions among you: but that you be perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgement.

Paul now gets to the root of the problem. He had been told by them of the house of Chloe, who were a religious family converted to the Lord and some of whom were sent to Paul to inform him of the contentions that prevailed in the church. Paul graciously mentions the family but not any individuals by name; he implies that the information ought rather to have come to him from the presbytery leaders but they had consulted him about matters of less urgency than the divisions and contentions that were splitting the Corinthian church which was the root of the problem. Paul had greater confidence in the house of Chloe than the Corinthian church leaders who wrote to Paul about marriage, the eating of things offered to idols, the decorum of the women in religious assemblies. But they said nothing about the enormities and disorders that had crept in and had created such splits and divisions. They were spreaders of tales and pleased to highlight someone else's sin. Pride lay at the bottom of this and made them factious. They had quarrelled about their ministers; they broke into parties and set their favourite ministers up at the head of their factions. Some were for Paul, some were for Apollos, some for Cephas or Peter and some were for Christ only. How far will pride carry Christians in opposition to one another!

Verse 13

Is Christ divided?

Paul entreats the church to aim for unity in the name of Jesus Christ and to remind them in verse 9 that God is faithful and it was by Him they were called unto fellowship of God's Son Jesus Christ our Lord. Can Christ be cut into different sects or parts to cater for obstinate, sinful, wayward man who want to go their own way but take the bits of Christ and His message with them that suit them? There is but one Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ therefore Christians should be of one heart and mind.

Was Paul crucified for you?

In the Greek text there is a strong answer required of this pertinent question. The context reads, 'was Paul crucified for you'? And Paul says 'surely you will not say so'. 'You cannot possibly think so'.

In the former question speaking of the majesty of Christ the Anointed One of God it is impossible for Him to be divided. In the latter question and in comparison, Paul's insignificance to the Christ of the cross makes it impossible that Paul should be the head of redemption.

Or were you baptised in the name of Paul?

To be baptised by immersion into water shows our willingness to follow Christ by death, burial and resurrection into the water just as Christ died, was buried and rose again. To be baptised in or into the name of a person implied that the one being baptised was to be the disciple of him into whose name he was baptised. Paul was asking 'were you devoted to my service or engaged to be my disciples by such a sacred act'?

This is born out in John 1:15 and Mathew 3: 7-12 where John's doctrine was that of repentance pointing men to Christ and baptising new converts in the name of Jesus before Jesus came on the scene. He was known as John the Baptist. He was not 'collecting' people to start a church, or get a company of people around him he was carrying out his commission in pointing men to Jesus and baptising them in that Name the one 'Who will come after me' and to make disciples of them by baptising them in Jesus name until Jesus came.

Paul said the same thing to the Corinthian Church he said '*were any of you baptised in the name of Paul, I thank God that I baptised none of you*'. In Paul's entire ministry he only ever pointed men to Christ. In the establishing of the church on his first visit no doubt he did baptize the new converts, Crispus, Gaius and Stephanas being among them but he claimed that preaching the Gospel was his first calling.

Verse 18

For the preaching of the cross is to them who perish foolishness; but unto us which are saved it is the power of God.

In our modern world even the most intelligent would dismiss the cross as foolishness. Our verse says 'to them who perish' but it is better rendered 'those who are perishing', in other words even as the Gospel is being preached, those that listen and reject the message are living a death. A very good friend of ours knew of our belief in Jesus he acknowledged our faith and respected our way of life. On his deathbed with only hours to live I asked him if he wanted to get right with God. Even at the last he turned his head away and shut his eyes and rejected my offer to pray for him. We left the hospital and never saw him again and unless he repented later in our absence his choice was to die without Christ. To him it was foolishness to let me pray with him so according to our verse he perished...without Christ.

But to us who are saved, or as the Greek text puts it 'are being saved' or 'in the way of Salvation' it is the power of God. God's powerful instrument of salvation is the highest exhibition of God's power and love for mankind. (Rom; 1:16).

Isaiah 29:14

For it is written I will destroy the wisdom of the wise and will bring to nothing the understanding of the prudent.

We watched our friend climb the ladder of success in the business world to become the Director and CEO of a very large corporation. He was popular, his advice sort after, he helped many increase their income through the financial world he played the stock market to great advantage and died a very rich man. All his life he thought he could do without Jesus, he became a success on his own, but on his deathbed his business friends could not help him, those he had helped could not help him now. His money could not buy him health or extension of life, and right at his last breath he was offered Jesus who could give him eternal life but he still rejected Him.

Jesus said He will destroy the wisdom of the wise and bring to nothing all that man has built for himself and loves so much. All that man puts before God will be brought down to nothing it will not be of any use to us when we take our last breath. But with Jesus in our hearts he promises us eternal life with Him.

Verse 20

Where is the wise? This is the first of three classes of learned people in that day.

Where is the scribe? The scribe was from the Jewish theologians of that day.

Where is the disputer of this world? This speaks of the Greeks who sort mythical and metaphysical interpretations to most things.

The wise, the scribe, the disputer of this world referred mostly to the Jews and better understood by them. The wise man whose office it was to teach others. The scribe signifies any man of learning as distinguished from the common people, and the disputer of this world is the propounder of questions: the seeker of allegorical, mystical, metaphysical interpretations of scripture by Jewish Rabbis and Greek philosophers. All these are characters well known to the Jews so there is no doubt that Paul was addressing this part of his letter to the Jews. As we saw earlier in this chapter the church at Corinth prided themselves on the knowledge they had, it was imbedded in their way of life. However the Lord had something to say about all this.

Isaiah 29: 14

Therefore behold I will proceed to do a marvellous work among this people even a marvellous work and a wonder: for the wisdom of their wise men shall perish and the understanding of their prudent men shall be hid.

This verse says that despite the unbelief of men God's work will be carried out, unbelief will cause millions to perish eternally still some will accept Jesus as Lord and receive eternal life.

The wise men of this world, the philosophy of the Greeks, men who had cultivated their minds to the uttermost could never by any amount of learning wisdom or industry find God or understand Him without the work of the Holy Spirit. It is by the foolishness of preaching, by the preaching of Christ crucified which the Gentiles called foolishness because it was in opposition to all their doctrine that God saved the world. Even today our friend turned his head to the truth and in doing so called our words foolishness, that foolishness was in fact God's wisdom and His power to the salvation of them that believed.

Has not God made foolish the wisdom of this world?

In these verses God is showing us that all the wisdom and knowledge that the Jews and Greeks had gained, all the education and learning that exalted them above the common people God called it foolishness. In the light of where they would spend eternity that is just what it is. These guys were no better than our friend was, he was wise, very knowledgeable and successful but when it came to what really matters, where he would will spend eternity, he lost it. God made foolish all his earthly wisdom wealth and knowledge. That does not mean you cannot be successful and if you are God would reduce your success to nothing. The most important thing in the heart of God is 'you must be born again', you must put God first in your life then he will bless your success. Your eternal destiny is far more important to the Lord than earth's riches and success.

Verse 21

For after that in the wisdom of God the world by wisdom knew not God. The meaning of this verse is that all the wise men of the world, all the refined Greek philosophers who studied and possessed every advantage that human nature could provide they could not find or understand God.

It is the work of the Holy Spirit that leads men to God and all the philosophising, science or earthly wisdom cannot bring a man to Jesus. Only by the acceptance of the shed blood of Christ on Calvary's cross, which the world calls foolishness can redeem a man from Hell and give him a crown of life in eternity and Jesus said it is by the foolishness of preaching that will save them who believe.

Verse 22

For the Jews require a sign and the Greeks seek after wisdom.

The Jews have always believed that their Messiah would return to take the throne and make Israel a great nation again. Even in the garden of Gethsemane the disciples were expecting Jesus at the last minute to raise an army to fight the Romans. One of them tried to force the issue and with his sword cut off a soldier's ear. But Jesus replaced the ear and told them all that His Kingdom was not of this world. A crucified Christ was a stumbling-block to the Jews, they looked on Him as inferior and a great disappointment in spite of the many miracles He had done showing His divine power. They could not understand why Jesus did not stand up for Himself and get an army together and kill them all! They wanted a sign, anything to show the Jews that military might or something like it would prevail at any moment.

The Greeks looked on believing this was all foolishness. They stood to one side and laughed at a crucified Christ being the Saviour of the world. They looked for wisdom in all this, but there was nothing in the doctrine of the Cross that suited them they looked upon it with scorn and contempt.

Verse 24

But unto them which are called both Jews and Greeks (or Gentiles) Christ the power of God and the Wisdom of God.

It did not matter what the Jews thought or wished for or how much the Greeks philosophised over the situation, Jehovah God knew that to bring mankind back to Himself He had to give His only Son to a death on a Cross with all its humiliation pain and suffering.

Verse 24 says

But to them which are called.

The Gospel of Salvation is open to everyone and it says *to them who are called*.

Some use this verse to prove selection but this is not so. The Bible makes it very clear that *God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son that whosoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life.* (John 3:16)

We are all called, I am called, you are called, I have answered that call with a yes, what is your answer to God's call?

Verse 26

For you see your calling Brethren, how that not many wise men after the flesh not many mighty not many noble are called.

Paul was telling the Corinthians to take particular note of their calling by God, which was full of grace love and blessedness. The word 'Men' is not in the original so Paul seems to allude to the Corinthians in particular as a church. However the meaning of this verse applies to us all. So Paul says to the church not many wise, not many mighty, not many noble are called telling them in opposition to the high worldly notion of the Jews who believed the Divine Spirit never rests upon any man unless he is wise, powerful or rich. The Holy Spirit did rest on some of the Corinthian church but these were humble before God who wished to obey the commands of God and follow Him. This was born out by the call of the disciples, most of whom were humble fishermen and there was not one noble rich or wise man among them. It is God who equips when He calls.

Verse 27

But God has chosen the foolish things of the world to confound the wise and God has chosen the weak things of the world to confound the things which are mighty.

Whenever man wishes to accomplish something or change what is normally accepted he uses force and power. That is not God's way; He calls what we do and the way we do it foolish. As we have seen in our study the Greeks had their philosophers, wise men, scribes and Pharisees who could not look at anything except through the eyes of philosophy. But God choose the weak things, the foolish things to confound the wise. The Cross was considered weak and foolish but that was God's way of Salvation to you and me. All they saw in Christ's death was weakness. They dismissed Jesus as nothing along with all the other criminals that hung on a cross that day, and in spite of all their wisdom and philosophy missed the very means Christ had to bring millions to Himself for all eternity.

Verse 29

That no flesh should glory in His Presence.

Satan (the one cast out of heaven for trying to usurp God's glory) introduced sin to the world he is the mastermind of sin and tempts man to entertain sin and its pleasures. That path will lead to destruction and everlasting death. Jesus came to the world to make a way of escape and to offer man eternal life and to forgive man for his wrong choice. To do that He willingly died on a Roman Cross so that all who would accept Him as Saviour would receive eternal life. Why would any person want to take the glory away from Christ, but sadly they do. Jesus knew they would so He warned against it, in the story of redemption there is no pretence for boasting on behalf of man. The Cross must always be the object of our faith in Him.

Verse 31

That according as it is written He who glories let him glory in the Lord.

Jeremiah 9:23-24

Thus says the Lord, let not the wise man glory in his wisdom, neither let 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 which exercise loving-kindness, judgement, and righteousness in the earth: for in these things I delight says the Lord.

Adam Clark Bible commentary says.

‘As all good is from God let him that has either wisdom, strength, riches, pardon, holiness or any other blessing whether temporal or spiritual acknowledge that he was nothing but what he has received.’

Our boast is in the Lord all praise, honour, and glory be unto Him who saved us and washed us from sin and set our feet on the rock Christ Jesus. Who else could have done that?

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Be blessed

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