

PAUL'S FIRST  
LETTER TO THE  
CORINTHIANS

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*Spiritual "equipment" for the contest of life.*

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## Lesson 1 1 Corinthians 1-2

(Note: These thirteen lessons are designed for two class periods on each lesson.)

### **Introduction:**

- A. Corinth was known for its wealth, vice, and culture. “To live like a Corinthian” meant to live in luxury and licentiousness. “Because of the immorality common to the city, the church which was established there was destined to have morality problems. Perhaps the description of the Gentile degeneration which appears in Romans 1:28-32 which Paul wrote was inspired by what he saw while he stayed in Corinth; we do know that he wrote Romans while he was in that city, Romans 15:26; 16:1” (A Commentary on Paul’s Epistle to the Corinthians, Mike Willis, p. ii).
- B. The church was established during the second journey of Paul, Acts 18:1-11. It was composed of some Jews (verse 8), but primarily of Gentiles, 1 Corinthians 12:2.
- C. The letter was written from Ephesus (1 Corinthians 16:8, 9) during the third journey of Paul, probably 55 or 56 A.D.
- D. The occasion of the letter: They had written to ask him some questions (see 7:1, 25; 8:1; 12:1; 16:1), and there were several problems that needed to be corrected.
- E. Introduction and greeting, 1:1-9.
  - 1. If this Sosthenes is the same one as Acts 18:17, a remarkable case of conversion is implied, however, the identity of this Sosthenes is not certain.
  - 2. The church of God at Corinth, 1 Corinthians 3:9, 16; 1 Timothy 3:15.
  - 3. Sanctified indicates a separation to the service of God, cp. 6:11.
  - 4. Saints refers to those who were sanctified, set apart. They had been set apart along with others who had obeyed the gospel of Christ, 2 Thessalonians 2:14.

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### **Discussion:**

- A. Condemnation of the party spirit, 1:10-17.
1. Paul besought them to:
    - a. Speak the same things, 1 Peter 4:11.
    - b. Have no divisions, John 17:20, 21.
    - c. Have the same mind, 1 Corinthians 2:16; Philippians 2:5.
    - d. Have the same judgment. This refers to the manner of deciding a question. They should judge from the same view-point.
  2. Their preacher-it was condemned by three questions:
    - a. Is Christ divided? (His spiritual body could no more be divided than His physical body.)
    - b. Was Paul crucified for you?
    - c. Were you baptized in the name of Paul?
  3. Paul was glad he had not baptized many of them lest they say he had baptized in his own name.
    - a. This does not deny the necessity of baptism, but condemns division.
    - b. The passage teaches that two things would be essential for them to be of Paul - (1) Paul crucified and (2) baptism in his name.  
(The same two things would be essential to be of Christ.)
- B. The word of the cross versus the wisdom of the world, 1:18-2:16.
1. The gospel is: to the perishing, foolishness - to the saved, the power of God
  2. Proof that man considered the gospel nonsense, 1:22-25.
    - a. Jews ask for signs, Matthew 12:39-40.
    - b. Greeks seek wisdom, Romans 1:20; 3:25, 26.
    - c. Reactions to the word:
      - To the lost Jews - a stumbling block.
      - To the lost Gentiles - it was foolishness.
      - To saved Jews and Gentiles - it was the wisdom and power of God.
  3. The fact that God's weakness is stronger than men is shown by His choices, 1:26-31.
    - a. Not many: wise (after the flesh; according to human standards); mighty (those with power; probably with positions of power); noble (well-born or high-born).
    - b. But He chose: foolish (devoid of learning); weak (destitute of influence); base (those with no reputations).
    - c. The great purpose - that no flesh should glory, or boast before God.
  4. Paul's message, 2:1-5.
    - a. It was NOT: in rhetorical skill nor in human wisdom - but in weakness, 2 Corinthians 10:10.
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- b. The message was “Christ and Him crucified” - in order that their faith should not stand in the wisdom of men, but in the power of God.
- 5. God’s wisdom and its revelation to man, 2:6-16.
  - a. The mystery was something that was once hidden but is now revealed, Colossians 1:24-29.
  - b. The gospel did not originate with men, 2:9-13; 2 Peter 1:20, 21; 2 Timothy 3:16, 17.
  - c. The natural man is one governed by his senses or human reasoning. The spiritual man is able to discern the things revealed by Christ because he accepts them as God’s revelation.
  - d. “For one who does not have the mind of Christ to pass judgment on the one who does is equivalent to thinking himself to be smarter than God, and therefore, qualified to instruct Him. This is absurd. Therefore, Christians ought not to be very concerned at the world’s estimate of them” (Willis, p. 86).

### **STUDY QUESTIONS:**

1. Describe the environment in which the Christians in Corinth lived.
2. When, and from where, did Paul write this letter?
3. What was the first problem that Paul discussed, and how did he resolve it?
4. Why did he say that he was glad he had not baptized many of them?
5. Through what means did God plan to save men?
6. What was the attitude of many Jews and Gentiles toward this message?

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7. Why did God choose the foolish, weak, and base things?
  
8. What did Paul use to appeal to them, and why?
  
9. What was it that eye did not see, ear did not hear, and heart did not conceive?
  
10. Define mystery and describe what it was.
  
11. How do we know it (i.e., the mystery)?
  
12. What is the difference between the natural and spiritual man?

**Thought questions:**

1. Paul was not sent to baptize. Some say this proves that baptism is not part of the gospel. Answer this.
  
2. Give some reasons why God's wisdom may be thought to be foolish.
  
3. Some say the natural man is one who is lost and that he cannot understand the gospel until he is saved. Answer this.