



1 Corinthians 1

LOCATION:



INTRODUCTION:

- Corinth is located about 40 miles west of Athens. Today Athens is a huge city whereas Corinth is small—roughly 20,000. In Paul’s day, however, it was the opposite—Athens was a relatively small city of culture and the arts, whereas Corinth was the commercial center and had a population of approximately 200,000.
- Corinth had a reputation back then, what was it?
 - What modern city would you compare it to, and why?
- Paul remained at Corinth for a year and a half, during his 3rd missionary journey in the early 50’s AD. This letter was likely written in the spring of AD 56 while he was in Ephesus at the end of this 3rd journey.

- Paul had heard that there were problems / issues / questions back there in Corinth and that led to the writing of this letter. What might you suppose some of those problems / issues / questions were?

- 2 Corinthians was likely written in the fall of that same year (AD 56) and we can see some positive responses from the first letter as well as some additional items that Paul had to deal with.

- Agree / Disagree: *You can never really solve all the issues in a particular congregation—it’s like type 1 diabetes, you have to stay on top of it, but it’s never going away.*

- What would be some of the problems / issues / questions we here at Grace are wrestling with?

- This letter deals with practical issues / issues of propriety in worship / doctrinal issues—and is certainly applicable today!

The Founding of the Flock:

Acts 18:1-17 (note: the EHV is used throughout this series)

1 After this, Paul left Athens and went to Corinth. **2** There he found a Jew named Aquila, a native of Pontus, who had recently come from Italy with his wife Priscilla, because Claudius had ordered all the Jews to leave Rome. Paul went to see them. **3** Because he had the same occupation, he stayed and worked with them, for they were tentmakers by trade. **4** Every Sabbath he led a discussion in the synagogue, trying to persuade both Jews and Greeks.

5 When Silas and Timothy came down from Macedonia, Paul was entirely devoted to preaching the word, testifying to the Jews that Jesus was the Christ. **6** But when they opposed Paul and slandered him, he shook out his clothes and said to them, “Your blood be on your own heads! I am innocent. From now on, I will go to the Gentiles!”

7 He left that place and went to the house of a man named Titius Justus, a worshipper of God, whose house was next door to the synagogue. **8** Crispus, the synagogue leader, believed in the Lord, together with his entire household. And many of the Corinthians, when they heard, believed and were baptized.

9 One night the Lord spoke to Paul in a vision: “Do not be afraid, but keep on speaking, and do not be silent. **10** For I am with you, and no one will lay a hand on you to harm you, because I have many people in this city.” **11** He stayed there a year and six months, teaching the word of God among them.

12 But while Gallio was proconsul of Achaia, the Jews made a united attack on Paul and brought him before the judicial bench. **13** They said, “This man is persuading the people to worship God in a way that is against the law.”

14 But just as Paul was about to speak, Gallio said to the Jews, “If this were some kind of misdemeanor or vicious crime, I would formally accept the complaint of you Jews. **15** But since these are disputes about words and names and your own law, see to it yourselves. I do not intend to be a judge of these things.” **16** So he drove them away from the judicial bench. **17** Then all the Greeks seized Sosthenes, the synagogue leader, and beat him in front of the judicial bench. But none of these things concerned Gallio.

- Describe Paul’s method of conducting evangelism in new places:
- Why did so many of the Jews become so enraged and so vicious against Paul’s ministry?

- Is there a modern equivalent God’s people are facing today?

- Agree / Disagree: *Gallio seems like a pretty good proconsul!*
- What’s our WELS method of conducting evangelism and planting churches in new places?
- Agree / Disagree / Explain: *Mission work is harder to do in our modern times.*

Greeting:

1 Corinthians 1:1-9

1 Paul, called to be an apostle of Jesus Christ by the will of God, and our brother Sosthenes,

2 To the church of God in Corinth—those who have been sanctified in Christ Jesus, who are called as saints—along with all in every place who call on the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, their Lord and ours:

3 Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ!

4 I always thank my God for you because of the grace of God given to you in Christ Jesus. 5 You were enriched in him in every way, in all your speaking and all your knowledge, 6 because the testimony about Christ was established in you. 7 As a result you do not lack any gift as you eagerly wait for the revelation of our Lord Jesus Christ. 8 He will also keep you strong until the end, so that you will be blameless on the day of our Lord Jesus Christ. 9 God is faithful, who called you into fellowship with his Son, Jesus Christ, our Lord.

- What bold claim does Paul make right away, and why would he so often start his letters with it?

- Do you think this “Sosthenes” was the same guy who was publicly beaten in front of Gallio in Acts 18:17?

- Assuming it was the same man, what does this note here at the beginning of the letter tell you?

- Why the blessing in verse 3? Is it just a formality or is there more to it?

- Explain Paul’s thankful attitude in verses 4-9, what is he so thankful for and why?

- How could Paul say they didn’t “lack any gift” when the congregation was a mess and full of problems?

- *Agree / Disagree: We don’t lack any gifts we need as a congregation either.*

- What makes it so hard to believe that?

- The congregation dissolved LONG ago—how could Paul say what he did in verse 8? What did he mean by that?

- *Agree / Disagree: Attitude will make or break a congregation.*

- Can you think of any examples?

- How can we have a positive attitude like the Apostle Paul had?

- Paul mentions Jesus Christ by name 9 times in the opening 9 verses. Why do you think he did that?
 - Do you think it has anything to do with the fact that he offers this flock no specific praise (like he did for the Romans, the Ephesians, the Philippians and the Colossians, for example)?
- Agree / Disagree: *Those members of Chloe's household (v.11) were gossiping.*
- Agree / Disagree: *Divisions and factions will naturally occur in any church or group of people—unless true unity is fought for and pursued relentlessly.*

Divisions in the Church:

1 Corinthians 1:10-17

10 Brothers, I am making an appeal to you using the name of our Lord Jesus Christ. I ask that you all express the same view and not have any divisions among you, but that you be joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment. 11 For the news I heard about you, my brothers, from members of Chloe's household, is that there are rivalries among you. 12 What I mean is that each of you says, "I belong to Paul," or "I belong to Apollos," or "I belong to Cephas," [Peter] or "I belong to Christ." 13 Is Christ divided? Was Paul crucified for you? Or were you baptized into the name of Paul? 14 I thank God that I did not baptize any of you except Crispus and Gaius, 15 so that no one can say that I baptized you into my own name. 16 (I also baptized the household of Stephanas. Besides them, I do not know whether I baptized anyone else.) 17 For Christ did not send me to baptize but to preach the gospel—not with the wisdom used in speeches, so that the cross of Christ would not be emptied of its power.

- This is the first issue Paul tackles right away in this letter. Why might he give it such priority?

- How can we maintain unity in our flock and synod?

- Agree / Disagree: *Our country is beyond hope when it comes to unity at this point.*

- Why was Paul happy that he only baptized a few people there?
- How could Paul possibly say that he wasn't sent to baptize? Didn't he know the Great Commission?
 - What WAS he saying?
- How would you answer the person who quoted these verses to say that Baptism isn't really all that important?
- What was the "wisdom used in speeches" that Paul mentions here?

God's Wisdom vs. Human Wisdom:

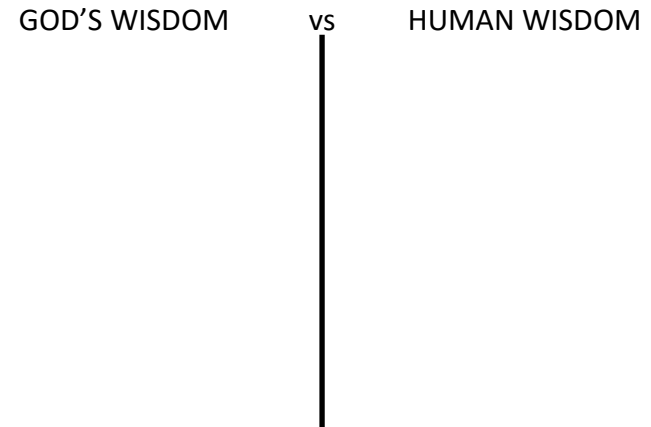
1 Corinthians 1:18-25

18 For the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved, it is the power of God.

19 In fact, it is written: "I will destroy the wisdom of the wise; the intelligence of the intelligent I will bring to nothing."

20 Where is the wise man? Where is the expert in the Jewish law? Where is the probing thinker of the present age? Has God not shown that the wisdom of this world is foolish? **21** Indeed, since the world through its wisdom did not know God, God in his wisdom decided to save those who believe, through the foolishness of the preached message. **22** Yes, Jews ask for signs, Greeks desire wisdom, **23** but we preach Christ crucified—which is offensive to Jews and foolishness to Greeks, **24** but to those who are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ is the power of God and the wisdom of God. **25** We preach Christ crucified, because the foolishness of God is wiser than men, and the weakness of God is stronger than men.

- Compare and contrast the 2 different kinds of wisdom here: (focus on the modern human wisdom of our day)



- Agree / Disagree: *Even saying the "foolishness of God" and the "weakness of God" is borderline blasphemous.*

- Why did Paul speak this way?

- Are we surprised / offended when people consider us conservative Bible believing Christians to be fools? Should we be?

- What's the right way to handle that mockery?

- List as many ways as we can think of that God's way of doing things (His wisdom) is the polar opposite of how the world looks at things:

- Explain what the "message of the cross" is and includes:
- How (in what ways) has God (and will God) carry out the prophecy from Isaiah 29:14 that Paul quotes in verse 19?
- How (verse 20) has God shown the wisdom of the world (both Jewish and Greek) were foolishness?

God's "Foolish" Choice:

1 Corinthians 1:26-31

26 For example, consider your call, brothers. Not many of you were wise from a human point of view, not many were powerful, and not many were born with high status. 27 But God chose the foolish things of the world to put to shame those who are wise. God chose the weak things of the world to put to shame the things that are strong, 28 and God chose the lowly things of the world and the despised things, and the things that are not, to do away with the things that are, 29 so that no one may boast before God. 30 But because of him you are in Christ Jesus, who became for us the wisdom from God, namely, our righteousness and sanctification and redemption. 31 God did this so that, just as it is written, "Let the one who boasts boast in the Lord."

- Paul speaks of a general truth that in God's Church people are more frequently *not* among the elites of society.
 - Why do you suppose that is?
 - Jesus said something that also reflects this principle—what was it?
 - Agree / Disagree: *Christianity is more appealing to dumb people than to the highly educated.*
 - What Paul is talking about here is not really about the wealth or power God's people may have—but more about _____.
- What does it look like for God's people to "boast in the Lord"?

CONCLUSION:

- Connect the dots in Chapter 1: Where does Paul begin (and why) and where does he go next (and why) and where does he then wind up at the end of the chapter (and why)?

- Explain: Paul thinks and writes more as a gentile than as a Hebrew. (*Is that somewhat surprising, and if so why?*)

- Agree / Disagree: *The biggest problem facing Christianity today is that people / pastors / churches are getting sucked into human "wisdom".*

- Point to some examples of it happening:

- What, in this chapter, is most applicable to our Christian lives today (and in our congregation) and why?

CLOSING PRAYER: