

NOTES ON 1 CORINTHIANS

INTRODUCTION: 1:1-9

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

Paul mentions three facts that assert the nature of his commission; (1) he is an apostle of Jesus Christ, (2) his calling is of divine origin (God is the implied subject of the calling), and (3) his apostleship is in accordance with the will of God. All three facts establish his authority.

Although it is quite common for Paul to address himself as an apostle (Ro. 1:1; II Cor. 1:1; Gal. 1:1; Eph. 1:1; Col. 1:1; I Tim. 1:1; II Tim. 1:1; Tit. 1:1), it is of particular importance in this letter, for the church of Corinth is at odds with him. They have judged him (4:1-5) and have questioned his apostleship (9:1-23).

The word “apostle” is a transliteration of the Greek “*apostolos*” (ἀπόστολος). In a very general sense, *apostolos* (ἀπόστολος) refers to “one sent on a mission” or “a messenger.” In this sense *apostolos* applies to more than the twelve.

But *apostolos* (ἀπόστολος) was also a special term for a select group (including the twelve - Acts 1:26; Rev. 21:14; Paul - Gal. 1:19; and others - Ro. 16:7; I Cor. 15:7) of gifted individuals who had seen the resurrected Lord (I Cor. 15:8-9; Paul - Acts. 9:15; I Cor. 9:1) and had been commissioned by God specifically for their mission. This group included at least Paul and the twelve (Judas was replaced by Matthias – Acts 1:21-26) but may have been even broader (James? – Gal. 1:19).

Because of their unique calling, the apostles’ authority was not just limited to a local body, but extended to the church as a whole (Acts 6:1-7; 8:14-15; 9:27; 11:1; 14:4; 15:2-6, 22-23; 16:4). They were foundational in establishing the early church (Eph 2:19-22) for they were eyewitnesses of the resurrected Christ, were recipients of divine revelation (Eph. 3:4-7; I Cor. 4:1), and spoke with the same authority as the OT prophets and Christ (II Pet. 3:1-2; Jude 1:17; Acts 2:42). Their work was often accompanied by wonders and signs that substantiated their ministry (Acts 2:43; 5:12; 14:8-10; II Cor. 12:12; Gal. 1:19) in the same way that miracles substantiated the claims of the prophets of old. Their primary role was to preach the gospel and equip believers for service (Eph. 4:11-12).

Although no specific verse states that the gift of apostleship would end, the fact that they had to be *eyewitnesses* of the resurrection, that their ministry was *foundational* in establishing the church, and that they were the *mouthpieces of Christ* who received direct revelation and composed most of the NT canon, leads us to conclude that the gift ended once these objectives were accomplished and the requisites for apostleship could no longer be met.

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1:2 To the church of God in Corinth, to those sanctified in Christ Jesus and called to be holy, together with all those everywhere who call on the name of our Lord Jesus Christ-- their Lord and ours:

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

Paul calls the assembly in Corinth “the church of God” (a genitive of possession), a title that shows that they are God’s possession and gives them ultimate dignity.

“Church” translates the word *ekklesia* (ἐκκλησία). The word was used in the Greek translation of the OT (LXX) of Israel (Deut. 4:10; I Sam. 14:47; I Ki. 8:14 etc.), but in the NT designates those who placed their faith in Christ, distinct from the nation.

Paul further calls his addressees “sanctified in Christ Jesus.” Their status is grounded in their relationship to God in Christ. By virtue of their union with Him, Christians are set apart for God just as the utensils in the temple were (Fee, 32). It is because Christians are sanctified that they should have “sanctified” behavior (I Pet. 1:14-16). That will particularly be the case of this letter, which is addressed to a community whose “spirituality” and “higher wisdom” have been regularly divorced from ethical consequences (Fee, 32).

Paul also says they were “called holy (i.e. saints).” In the OT the concept of a holy people first appears in Exodus 19:5-6 and refers to those who will share the blessings of the messianic kingdom (Dan. 7:18-27). The concept is now applied to the elect who are grafted into the line of Abraham (I Pet. 2:9-10). “Saints” are people set apart by their union with Christ and are part of the holy community of God.

“Men are uniformly addressed in Scripture according to their profession. If they profess to be saints they are called saints; if they profess to be believers they are called believers; and if they profess to be members of the church, they are addressed as really belonging to it” (Hodge, 4). However, this does not mean in reality that all were saved.

1 Corinthians is not intended to be a catholic epistle (i.e. a letter of a general, or universal scope) for it specifically addresses issues related to the church in Corinth. Therefore, it is difficult to know why Paul added “together with all those everywhere who call on the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.” Perhaps Paul mentions this as a way to gently remind the Corinthian believers that they belong to a larger group though they have taken an independent course (Fee, cf. 11:16; 14:33b-34). Alford suggests that it leads up to what follows (1:10 ff.), namely, that the church did not come into existence by Paul, Apollos, or Cephas, but by calling upon the name of the Lord (Alford, 474).

“Grace to you and peace” is Paul’s normal greeting. “Grace is the source, peace is the consummation” (Edwards in Plummer, 4). The favor of God leads naturally to peace of mind. Enmity with God has ceased and reconciliation has followed (Plummer, 4). “In a sense these two words sum up Paul’s whole theological outlook. The sum total of all of God’s activity

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toward his human creatures is found in the word 'grace'; God has given Himself to them mercifully and bountifully in Christ" (Fee, 34-35).

To Paul, Christianity is *Christ* centered; he is an apostle of *Christ*, the church is sanctified in *Christ*, believers call upon the name of *Christ*, and grace and peace find their source in *Christ*. In fact, Christ is mentioned 10 times in the first 10 verses and 17 times in the first chapter. One should not overlook how comfortable Paul feels in linking God and Jesus together as co-sources of grace and peace, making Jesus equal to the Father.

1:4 I thank my God always concerning you, for the grace of God which was given you in Christ Jesus,

1:5 that in everything you were enriched in Him, in all speech and all knowledge,

1:6 even as the testimony concerning Christ was confirmed in you,

Paul thanks God for the grace that He bestowed upon the church of Corinth. Grace is favor and the blessings that flow from such favor. Just as we can have a favorable attitude toward someone, we can also give favors, as when we speak of receiving someone's favor (Hodge, 6).

"By Jesus Christ" limits and explains what "favors" Paul has in mind; they are those favors that come from our union with the Savior.

The church had been enriched in every way because of the grace that it had received. As the epistle will eventually unveil, Paul's emphasis was wholly different than that of the church. He emphasized the *graciousness* of God's activity and gave glory to God; they emphasized the *activity* itself and sought glory for themselves.

The abundance of God's grace was seen in their "speaking and . . . knowledge." "Speaking and knowledge" most likely refer to two general categories of spiritual gifts: speaking gifts (tongues, prophecy, teaching) and gifts of knowledge (Hodge, 6). Both appear as gifts of the Spirit in chapters 12-14. Though the church misused, abused, and boasted in the gifts that God had given them, Paul was grateful because the grace of God was seen in the gifts.

The spiritual gifts that were distributed among the believers in the church were evidence that the testimony about Christ (the gospel) was confirmed (established) in them. That is, the gospel was shown to be at work in their lives by the manifestations of the Holy Spirit working among them.

Considering that the abuse of spiritual gifts is one of the very things that is causing Paul grief, it is amazing that he is able to be sincerely thankful. Many Christians prefer to resolve conflicts by finding ways to eliminate anything that is troublesome; Paul recognizes that the problem is in the abuse, not the gifts themselves. It says a lot about Paul's character when he can be thankful for those who are so arrogant and hardened toward him.

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1:7 so that you are not lacking in any gift, awaiting eagerly the revelation of our Lord Jesus Christ,

Verses 6 and 7 recapitulate what was said in verses 4 and 5.

I thank God for the grace which was given you (4)
in that you were enriched with specific spiritual gifts (5).

Just as historically

the testimony concerning Christ (the gospel) was confirmed in you (6)
so that you are not lacking in any gift (7)

Verse 7 describes the result of the full establishment of the gospel. The reception of the gospel resulted in a shower of “spiritual energies” (Findlay, *Expositor’s GT*, 760). That is, the reality of the Corinthians’ faith was seen in that the gifts of the Spirit were bestowed upon them in abundance. Faith and the blessings of faith are often connected in the Bible.

The return of Christ (“the revelation of our Lord Jesus Christ”) pops up unexpectedly, but it shows that it is always in the forefront of Paul’s thinking. Christians are characterized as those who love His appearing (II Tim. 4:8) and as those who wait for Him (Heb. 9:28).

Elsewhere, Paul said that the Day of Christ’s return will be so great that our present trials will appear trifling in comparison (Ro. 8:18-23). The first fruits of the Spirit that Christians now enjoy are a foretaste, or a pledge, of the fullness to be received when Christ comes again (Ro. 8:23; Eph. 1:14). The gifts of the Spirit are a taste of the fullness that will come as well. These may have caused the Corinthians to long for Christ’s return as Paul did (Hodge, 9) or they could have created a desire for a spiritual experience that exceeded their desire to see Christ (Fee, 42). Which was the actual case is not clear.

1:8 who shall also confirm you to the end, blameless in the day of our Lord Jesus Christ.

1:9 God, who has called you into fellowship with his Son Jesus Christ our Lord, is faithful.

Verse 8 ends the long sentence that Paul began in verse 4. The Corinthians had been *confirmed* in the gospel by the presence of the gifts of the Spirit so Paul was confident that *they* would also be *confirmed* in the end (i.e. either when they meet Christ at death, at His return, or at the final judgment). “The end” is the consummation of the Christian life, not the termination of it. Whoever God pledges His Spirit to, He also pledges to save in the end.

In the Bible God is said to confirm (*bebaioo* - βεβαιόω) His promises either when He fulfills them, when He acts in such a way to prevent them from failing (Ro. 15:8), or when He demonstrates their truth (Mk. 16:20). He is said to confirm His people when He renders them steadfast in their belief and obedience to the truth (II Cor. 1:21) (Hodge, 8).

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In the day of the Lord Jesus Christ, the day in which men will be judged, the Corinthians will be found blameless (free from guilt, no charge can be laid against them). As Paul continues, he will exhort the believers with the strongest language for their ungodly attitudes, but he is still confident that they will be confirmed in that future day. His confidence is found in the subject of the verb – God (Although Christ is the nearest antecedent (v.7), ⁽¹⁾ God is the implied subject of the passive verbs in the context, and ⁽²⁾ He is the one who “confirms” them in verse 6 and will *also* confirm them in the end. ⁽³⁾ If this were a reference to Christ, it would make Paul say ‘Christ shall confirm you in the day of Christ’, which seems unlikely. ⁽⁴⁾ God is expressly mentioned in the last verse (v.9), and ⁽⁵⁾ because perseverance in the Bible is specifically said to be the work of the Father elsewhere, it seems that the Father is in view here as well.). Paul did not place his faith in the Corinthians’ ability to be blameless, but in the God who saved them. As verse 9 says, **God** is faithful. When we consider the dangers from without and the dangers from within, we feel that nothing but the power of God and the righteousness of Christ can secure our salvation so that we will be blameless in the day of Christ (Hodge, 10).

It is quite encouraging that Paul knew these believers would be blameless before God in spite of their blame-worthy conduct. Paul’s confidence of this, however, is based on the character of God, not the reliability of the believer. As Hodge so accurately says, “The apostle’s confidence in the steadfastness and final perseverance of believers was founded neither on the strength of their purpose to persevere, nor on any assumption that the principle of religion in their hearts was indestructible, but simply on the fidelity of God. If God has promised to give certain persons to His Son as His inheritance, to deliver them from sin and condemnation, and to make them partakers of eternal life, it is certain He will not allow them to perish” (Hodge, 10). Paul knew that this was so because all whom God calls, He also justifies and glorifies (Ro. 8:30).

God is the One who calls men into fellowship with Christ. Fellowship involves both union and communion. The original word means “participation.” Because we are positionally united with Christ (union), we will partake of His glory (Ro. 8:17, 30) but we are also privileged to commune with Him through the Spirit (communion). The addition of “our Lord” “invests the Christian communion with present grandeur and certifies its hope of glory; Christ’s glory lies in His full manifestation as Lord and its glorification is wrapped up in His” (Findlay, Expositor’s GT, 762). “Fellowship” is directly antithetical to the divisions mentioned in verse 10.

Paul was *called* to be an apostle (1:1) but every believer is also *called*. Both our salvation and our vocation in the body of Christ are a result of God’s working.

“Finally, it must be noted again that God is the subject of all the actions of the thanksgiving. And in every case that work is mediated by or focused on ‘His Son Jesus Christ our Lord.’ . . . Everything God has done, and will do, for the Corinthians is done expressly in ‘Jesus Christ our Lord’” (Fee, 46).

From these opening remarks alone much can be learned about both Paul’s theology and pastoral care. Even though the book will reveal that there are those in the church who are at odds with Paul, there are divisions, there is sin, abuse and misuse of spiritual gifts, and a

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misdirected focus on God, Paul can honestly be grateful for the work of the Spirit that came when the gospel was preached. Paul demonstrates by example what our response toward fellow believers should be when we are confronted with similar issues. Paul would have to address and correct the abuses but he did so with an attitude of love and concern toward those who were in error.

After opening his letter Paul focuses his attention on his first concern that is not based on a letter he had received from them but upon what he has heard from other sources.

A DIVIDED CHURCH – 1:10-4:21

1:10 Now I exhort you, brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you all agree, and there be no divisions among you, but you be made complete in the same mind and in the same judgment.

Verse 10 has one exhortation, namely, “that you all agree.” This is then explained (i.e. defined; *hina* - ἵνα) negatively and positively. Negatively, there were to be no divisions. Positively, they were to be of the same mind and same judgment.

The purpose of Paul’s exhortation is to bring about a change of mind.

Paul exhorts the Corinthians **by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ**. The “name” includes the character and reputation of Jesus. “In modern mass advertising, the ‘name’ carries with it an image and a kind of guarantee, and this resonates with the ancient usage” (Thiselton, 115) The Corinthians’ love and reverence for the authority of Christ should cause them to yield to Paul’s appeal. They were not to obey just to do Paul a favor but out of their respect for Christ. Following rules is burdensome. Following Christ “renders obedience easy and elevating” (Hodge, 12). Paul’s mention of the name of the Lord also focuses their attention on where their unity really lies.

The Greek word for divisions is *schisma* (σχίσμα) from which the English word schism is derived, although here it does not mean “faction” or “party” as in English. It is used of rending a garment (Matt. 9:16; Mk. 2:21) or of plowing a field. It was used metaphorically of a split opinion (John 7:40-43; 9:16; 10:19-21 illustrate this). Division can be a difference of opinion (Jn. 7:43) or alienation of feeling or inward separation (Hodge, 12). In I Corinthians 12:25 Paul speaks of the fact that since God composed the body, Christians should be careful not to tear it apart. A body with legs and arms torn from it ceases to function.

The divisions revolved around at least four issues.

(1) Believers in the church were rallying behind certain teachers (even though this does not mean that the teachers were seeking to rally people – 1:10-12; 3:3-4, 21). That is, there was a power struggle going on within the church.

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Hebrews 13:17 tells believers to “Obey your leaders, and submit to them; for they keep watch over your souls, as those who will give an account. Let them do this with joy and not with grief, for this would be unprofitable for you.” Leaders are surely not infallible in their decisions; nevertheless, God has placed them in a position of authority. Submission to their direction provides unity to the church. When, however, the church divides itself among different leaders division is inevitable.

- (2) The division was somehow being carried on in the name of wisdom (chapters 1-3).
- (3) The division was caused by boasting and pride (1:29-31; 3:21; 4:6-7, 18, 19).
- (4) The division included a questioning of Paul’s authority (1:16-17; 2:1-3:4; 4:1-21).

Divisions occur for other reasons as well. In Romans 16:17 Paul warned about divisions in doctrine. There is no room in the church for those who disagree upon what is clearly taught in Scripture, but in areas that are not clear there should still be unity of purpose (Phil. 1:27).

The original word for “made complete” (καταρτίζω - *katartizo*) is literally “to mend or repair.” It is used in Matthew 4:21 (cf. Mk. 1:19) of mending a torn net. Figuratively, it means to be united. Believers are made complete when they are of the same mind and judgment. “Mind” can refer to either intellect (way of thinking) or feelings (disposition, opinion). It is having a common outlook or attitude about something (Thiselton, 119). To be “in the same judgment” speaks of unity in the Christian community (Thiselton, 120). Christians should be in agreement with the purposes of the “community” to which they belong.

It is not enough to simply say the same things while disagreeing in our hearts. Christian unity should be genuine. There is never a perfect church, but people who strongly disagree with the doctrine, direction, or leadership of the church they attend cannot be happy or productive in their own Christian lives or be of any positive service to the congregation (MacArthur, 29). But more importantly, they do not glorify God in their hearts, which is the ultimate purpose of unity (Heb. 13:17; Eph. 4:3). We are to be “one in beliefs, standards, attitudes, and principles of spiritual living” (MacArthur, 28).

1:11 For I have been informed concerning you, my brethren, by Chloe's people, that there are quarrels among you.

Verse 11 explains the reason for the exhortation in verse 10.

Chloe’s “people” were most likely not her family, for family members went by the name of the father even if he was deceased. Rather, they were probably business associates or slaves acting on her behalf who traveled between Corinth and Ephesus and knew about what was happening in the church. What was reported to Paul was that there were quarrels – suggesting that there was emotion and aggressive speech involved in the conflicts. The reason for these quarrels is stated in verse 12.

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1:12 Now I mean this, that each one of you is saying, "I am of Paul," and "I of Apollos," and "I of Cephas," and "I of Christ."

Quarrels were developing over strong preferences toward various leaders, although it was unlikely that the leaders desired to gather a personal following. This was surely true of Paul who was rebuking the church for their attitudes. Apollos doesn't seem to be at fault either for in 16:12 Paul has favorable feelings toward him. Although Peter had problems in the past (Gal. 2:11-14), it is very doubtful that he would try to rally believers to himself knowing that he was causing division.

Apollos was an eloquent speaker who was learned in the Scripture and whose deficiencies in the faith were corrected by Paul's companions (Acts 18:24-28). Paul saw the work of Apollos as being in harmony with his own (3:5-9).

Peter was a pillar and leader in the early church and would easily draw a following, especially if some were saved and baptized by his ministry.

"I follow Christ" is the most problematic expression for three reasons as Fee explains (58):

- (1) First, placing the name of Christ in the same context as other church leaders is unusual.
- (2) Secondly, the probability would be that all groups believed that they were following Christ, and lastly
- (3) Christ is the One who Paul would want them to follow.

In spite of the wording, the context is clear that the Corinthians who were claiming to follow Christ were as much at fault as the others. What they were implying when they said "I am of Christ" is conjectural. The most popular view seems the best: this was a group who tried to rise above the others by claiming that their loyalties were not attached to mere men; they were simply "Christ's." The result was that they created a spiritual elitism and saw themselves as being above the others.

Even though it would be hard to imagine that every single person in the church had taken sides, "each one" in the church was *affected* by the general divisive attitude that prevailed.

1:13 Has Christ been divided? Paul was not crucified for you, was he? Or were you baptized in the name of Paul?

There is only one head and one body (I Cor. 6:17; 12:12-13; Ro. 12:5; Eph. 4:4-6; Jn. 17:21-22). Just as Christ cannot be divided, so His body should not be divided. A *divided body* is an oxymoron. A body that is torn into pieces is not a body at all.

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Our allegiance to Christ is based on the relationship He sustains with us. Because He was crucified for us, we are His possession. No teacher bears that relationship to us. Paul was never crucified for anyone. Neither were Apollos or Cephas (the Aramaic of the Greek, Peter). “To elevate a human teacher to the point where the allegiance shatters the body of Christ means that we have lost sight of the infinite and overwhelming worth of a crucified Savior. (See Matthew 23:8.) . . . [we forget that] our sin is so great that we needed to be saved by nothing less than the horrid execution of the Son of God, and so did our teachers! . . . The cross breaks the back of all boasting. And so the cross undermines the deepest basis of disunity and lays a new foundation for unity” (Piper, Sermon on Jan 18. 1988, Desiring God)

Furthermore, no one was ever baptized in any of these teachers’ names. Being baptized in the name of someone signifies identification with that person. Baptism among the Jews was a rite of initiation identifying oneself with a particular leader. So Christ made baptism a symbol of personal commitment to Himself. “In effect, the initiate, by his submission to baptism, declared himself to be a disciple of Christ and committed himself to the kind of lifestyle pertinent to that declaration” (GTJ Vol. 2/2; 1981, p. 288).

“When the Lord’s people quarrel and dispute and fight, they reflect against the Lord before the world, they weaken His church, and worst of all they grieve and put to shame the One who bought them – who died to make them one in Him” (MacArthur, 32).

1:14 I thank God that I baptized none of you except Crispus and Gaius,

1:15 that no man should say you were baptized in my name.

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

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

Crispis was a leader of the synagogue who was converted by Paul (Acts. 18:8). Paul only baptized a few others; Jesus baptized none (Jn. 4:2). To have been baptized by Christ would have brought with it the temptation to boast or to create one’s own following.

Verse 17 helps to clarify the relationship of baptism to salvation. Neither Paul nor Jesus baptized anyone and yet both preached the gospel. If the gospel included baptism, surely they would have baptized their converts. However, the real purpose of verse 17 is transitional not instructional. In it Paul moves from an exhortation about “divisions” into the theme of 1:18-2:5, namely, how genuine Christianity stands in opposition to the wisdom of the world. The cross, then, becomes the antidote to the self-centered factionalism in the church. It is more than an antidote for past sins; it provides the basis for Christian identity and the power to transform the Christian’s life (Thiselton, 147).

Paul did not preach the gospel with human wisdom, manipulative rhetoric, or as a philosophy. He did not depend upon clever ways of saying things to get people to accept it. Had he done so, the gospel would have been received on a false pretense and its power would have been

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made void. “. . . to treat the gospel of the cross of Christ as a vehicle for promoting self-esteem, self- fulfillment, and self-assertion turns it upside down and ‘empties’ it of all that it offers and demands” (Thiselton, 145-146). Rhetoric may win the mind and even the will, but a proclamation of a gospel that doesn’t change a person in the depth of their spiritual nature has not been communicated adequately. If the gospel itself is the message of power, to change it to make it more appealing is to strip it of its power. “If men are persuaded by eloquence they are not persuaded by Christ crucified” (Barrett, 49).

Paul’s comments should make every Christian think of how we communicate the gospel to the unbelieving world. “There is a sad irony in the seeming success of many Christian churches and schools. The irony is that the more you adjust obscure Biblical doctrines to make Christian reality more attractive to unbelievers, the less Christian reality there is when they arrive. Which means that what looks like success in the short run, may, in the long run, prove to be failure. If you alter or obscure the Biblical portrait of God in order to attract converts, you don’t get converts to God, you get converts to an illusion. This is not evangelism, but deception. . . One of the results of this kind of "success" is that sooner or later the world wakes up to the fact that these so-called Christian churches look so much like them and the way they think that there is no reason to go there. If you adjust your doctrine to fit the world in order to attract the world, sooner or later the world realizes that they already have what the church offers. . . Christianity is not being rejected in modern society – what is causing the decline of public support for The Church is the insistence of church leaders themselves in representing secular enthusiasm for humanity as core Christianity. At first the world is drawn to a religious form of "enthusiasm for humanity," but then it wears thin and they realize that they can find it more excitingly on TV”

(sermon by John Piper, Ro 9:1-5, November 10, 2002 - John Piper. © Desiring God. Website: desiringGod.org).

What should be expected when the gospel is proclaimed? The answer comes in the verses that follow.

The Gospel - a contradiction to wisdom – 1:18-2:16

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

Verses 17 and 18 are tied together by the repetition of the word *logos* (λόγος), translated as “speech” in verse 17 and as “word” in verse 18. Paul is contrasting two “words”: the word (the *logos*, the speech) that belongs to human wisdom and the word (the *logos*) whose content is the gospel. Paul did not preach with clever speech (*logos* - λόγος), for the power of salvation is not found in human reasoning; rather, it is found in the word (i.e. the proclamation, or message - *logos* - λόγος) of the cross. The “cross” serves as Paul’s definition of the gospel.

To those who are lost, the message (the *logos*) of the cross is foolishness (cf. Jn. 3:18), for human wisdom cannot understand it. To those who will receive salvation, it is a message (the

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logos) of power (Ro. 1:16-17) that transposes “man into a wholly new state of one who has accepted and appropriated the promise” (Thiselton, 155). It is through the gospel that God’s saving activity is actualized and the person is transformed (Thiselton has an excellent section on the power of the cross – 155-159). Christian identity is found in identifying with the crucified Messiah.

οὐκ ἐν σοφίᾳ λόγου, ἵνα μὴ κενωθῇ ὁ σταυρὸς τοῦ Χριστοῦ.

not in wisdom of word (*logos* λόγος); lest the cross of Christ be invalidated

Ὁ λόγος γὰρ ὁ τοῦ σταυροῦ τοῖς μὲν ἀπολλυμένοις μωρία ἐστίν,

for the word (*logos* - λόγος) of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing

Paul speaks of believers as “being saved.” This does *not* mean that they are not saved when they first believe or that salvation is a process, rather, it describes a present condition of salvation. Christians are saved in a past point of time (Ro. 8:24) but salvation also characterizes their life now (Eph. 2:5, 8). Our present salvation will also be consummated in the future (Ro. 13:11). In the present context, the saved are those who are called (v. 24) and believe (v. 21).

(cf. II Cor. 2:15-16; 4:3; II Thess. 2:10).

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

Verse 19 explains why the wise of the world are not able to understand the cross (as in verse 18, “for” is explanatory – γὰρ *gar*). By using the foolishness of the cross, God lays aside human wisdom.

Paul refers to Isaiah 29:14 in substance though does not quote it directly. There the prophet said, “the wisdom of their wise men shall perish, and the discernment of their discerning men shall be concealed.” The passage falls in a context where people are warned that it is foolish to try to match wits with God (cf. Isa. 40:12-14, 25). In Isaiah’s day the wisdom of the wise failed to keep Assyria from invading Israel and conquering the nation. Human wisdom has not changed. It could not save a nation; neither can it save men from eternal destruction. (see Thiselton p.161 for four general principles Paul uses when quoting the OT)

**1:20 Where is the wise man? Where is the scribe? Where is the debater of this age?
Has not God made foolish the wisdom of the world?**

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“Where is the wise man?” is a statement that fits the Greeks’ mentality (cf. v. 22), but is applicable to all men of all ages that depend upon human wisdom to find truth (cf. Acts 6:9; 9:29; 28:29 for its application to Jews as well). A scribe was one who was learned in the law. He not only copied it but also interpreted it. The debater could be a Gentile or a Jew. When this age closes and God opens the doors into the age to come, the self-centered wisdom of man will come to an end.

In Isaiah’s day, men’s wisdom had failed to figure God out. God had judged Israel and Egypt in spite of man’s wisdom in trying to prevent it. Isaiah asked, “Where were all the wise men now?” (33:18; 19:11-12). That is, in light of the fact that God nullified their wisdom, what do they have to say now? Paul is making a similar challenge in relationship to the cross. Hasn’t the cross proven that the wisdom of men was nullified? What can the wise say now? God has not reasoned with the world as to how men would be saved, He has acted.

1:21 For since in the wisdom of God the world through its wisdom did not come to know God, God was well-pleased through the foolishness of the message preached to save those who believe.

Paul continues to argue the insufficiency of human wisdom in understanding the gospel.

God’s wisdom involves concealing knowledge of Himself from those who seek to know Him through human wisdom (Acts 17:30; Ro. 11:32 cf. Acts 14:16; Ro. 1:24). “The world” is the mass of unbelieving humanity. In their fallen state, separated from God, they have no resources available to them to seek or know Him. Man’s wisdom is “fallible, temporary, short-term, and self-absorbed” (Thiselton, 169). “A God discovered by human wisdom will be both a projection of human fallenness and a source of human pride, and this constitutes the worship of the creature, not the Creator” (Fee, 73).

Knowledge of God is tied to faith in the message of the cross, not the reasoning and intellect of man. As Paul says, it saves those “who believe.” “Belief” explains how God works salvation through foolishness. Salvation is attained by appropriating it through faith (Ro. 1:17; 3:25).

Faith is not just an intellectual assent to facts; it is a complete confidence or trust in God and His saving work through Christ. It is placing no confidence in one’s own righteousness, goodness, or ability to please God, but places its confidence in what Jesus did on the cross. God desires faith and that is the only vehicle through which He reveals Himself.

The message preached (emphasis on the message, not the proclamation of it) is the word of the cross, a message that is foolishness to the world, but one that God is well-pleased with.

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**1:22 For indeed Jews ask for signs, and Greeks search for wisdom;
1:23 but we preach Christ crucified, to Jews a stumbling block, and to Gentiles
foolishness,**

The Jews demanded that God provide some sort of supernatural sign in order for them to believe. They wanted external evidences to ground their faith in. They felt if something happened that would dazzle their minds they would know that it was true (Matt. 11:38-39; 12:39-40; Mk. 8:11; Lk. 11:16; 16:31; Jn. 6:30; Acts 17:18, 21, 32). Part of this is based on Jewish messianic expectations of a Deliverer who would vindicate who He was by the signs that accompanied Him. Therefore, the cross was a blasphemous scandal to the Jews (Deut. 21:23, Gal. 3:13). Jesus, the one to whom Christians pledged their complete loyalty, died like a common criminal. But part of Israel's rejection of the cross was based on the fact that throughout her history Israel has refused to take God on trust alone. The belief that God "must present His credentials in the form of visible and identifiable acts in which His claim upon men, and His ability to meet their need, are validated. . . [is] often very religious in form. . . [but is] fundamentally skeptical and essentially egotistical" (Barrett, 54).

Greeks were an advanced civilization and would only accept something as true if it could be proven on rational grounds. They demanded rational proof to base their faith upon. To the Greek those who believed in a crucified Savior believed a hopeless contradiction (Ro. 9:33; I Pet. 2:8).

Both Jews and Greeks alike have a prerequisite to belief. But God doesn't respond to their demands. Instead, He offers the message of the cross. For that reason Paul preaches Christ crucified, the power of salvation.

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

The crucified Messiah was the ultimate display of both God's wisdom and power. But it is only available to those who are called, for only those who are called believe. To be called doesn't just mean to be invited; rather it is the action whereby God irresistibly draws men to Himself. For them the wisdom and the power of the gospel is visible in the message of their crucified Lord.

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

Paul concludes his argument by saying that God is both stronger and wiser than men.

The doctrine of the cross, though appearing as foolishness to the unbelieving, reveals more wisdom than could ever enter the mind of man. Likewise, the power of the gospel which comes through the cross is stronger than the greatest power men can muster, even though they

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perceive it as weakness. Through the cross God has nullified the wisdom of humanity for it accomplished something that human wisdom could not obtain.

**1:26 For consider your calling, brethren, that there were not many wise according to the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble;
 1:27 but God has chosen the foolish things of the world to shame the wise, and God has chosen the weak things of the world to shame the things which are strong,
 1:28 and the base things of the world and the despised, God has chosen, the things that are not, that He might nullify the things that are,
 1:29 that no man should boast before God.**

Verses 26-29 remind the Corinthians of their humble origins. God's choosing them had the same purpose and design as the cross. Just as the foolishness of the cross nullified the wisdom of the world, so the choosing of the lowly nullifies the world's wisdom. God's purpose in choosing the despised of the world is so that every reason for boasting is removed. Man is forced to trust completely in God (v. 31; 2:5).

Paul wants the Corinthians to "consider their calling," that is, he wants them to consider what they were like at the time that God called them to be saved. Not many were wise according to human standards (The "flesh" is often used by Paul. Here it refers to human existence that is tied to the world rather than God- Gal. 5; Ro. 8), not many were influential (i.e. "mighty"), nor did many come from noble birth or hold prominent positions in society. Yet these are the kinds of things that the people in the world value and boast in. These were also the things that the Corinthians wanted. But Christian honor comes from a different source.

Unbelievers do not stumble onto Christianity and then in their own wisdom choose Christ. God chooses people; people don't choose God (1:27). This process nullifies the world's wisdom and magnifies the marvelous grace of God. At the same time, God does not choose men *on account of their weakness and ignorance* any more than He does not choose men because they were wise. God's purpose for choosing the foolish things is to shame the wise. He chose the weak to shame the strong. Those who come to Christ are the lowly (the base), the despised, the "nothings" of the world (i.e. the "things that are not" = people that are so insignificant that they are not noticed at all). He chose them in order to nullify "the things that are." (i.e. those who make their presence felt, the opposite of "nobodies"). Social position, money, prestige, rank, ancestry, or brilliance are all erased by the foolishness of God's choice. God brings wellbeing and blessing to the weak, insignificant nobodies of the world. He turns the world's values upside down. "This should render the exalted humble, and the humble content" (Hodge, 26).

[see Thiselton p. 184 for a comparison of Paul's teaching to Jesus' on these points; also cf. Lk. 1:46-55]).

God's sovereignty is seen in the word "that" (v. 28, 29) which is used to express a purposeful, deliberate action by God. God's purpose in choosing the weak, etc. was so *that* He might nullify the wisdom of the world and remove all ground for boasting. "God, it turns out, deliberately

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chose the foolish things of the world, the cross and the Corinthian believers, so that He could remove forever, from every human creature, any possible grounds on their part of standing in the divine presence with something in their hands" (Fee, 84). No man can attribute his salvation to his own wisdom, birth, or anything else that he believes can favorably distinguish him from his fellow man.

[Note: Paul probably uses neuter (base *things*, foolish *things*, *things* that are not), instead of masculine adjectives (men) to state a generalization, as was a common practice in Greek (Barrett, 58).]

"Boast" has the usual connotation of taking pride or glorying in something. However, it can almost be synonymous with trust, or putting confidence in something. Paul uses both senses, but the key to understanding which meaning is intended is simply who or what one boasts in. Proper boasting is in the goodness and mercy of God which eliminates every other form (Cf. 3:21; Rom. 2:23; 3:27).

**1:30 But by His doing you are in Christ Jesus, who became to us wisdom from God, and righteousness and sanctification, and redemption,
1:31 that, just as it is written, "Let him who boasts, boast in the Lord."**

Verses 26-29 reminded the Corinthians that their own calling, like the cross, reveals the foolishness of God that is wiser than man's wisdom. This was purposeful on God's part so that there would be no ground for boasting before God. By way of contrast, verses 30-31 express positively what God has done in saving the believer (Fee, 84-85).

Paul has already said that believers are called by God (1:24, 26). He now states that our salvation is "by God's doing". We owe our existence to a prior work of God who placed us into Christ Jesus. Salvation is His gift.

To be *in Christ* is (1) to be united to Him as our representative in the same way we were represented in Adam (Ro. 5:12-21; I Cor. 15:22). (2) We are also united to Him vitally, as a branch is in a vine, or a member in a body (Jn. 15:1-7). (3) Lastly, we are consciously and voluntarily joined to Christ by faith (Ro. 8:1) (Hodge, 26). Because we are *in Christ*, Jesus has become our wisdom. This wisdom is expressed in three spheres of our salvation – righteousness, sanctification, and redemption (Fee, some see all four words as characteristic of Christ and imparted by Him – Thiselton, 191).

The righteousness Paul is speaking about is not as much an ethical righteousness as a forensic one. It is the picture of man in God's court, guilty before the Judge and facing the punishment for his sin. Yet because he is in Christ, he is declared righteous (Ro. 4:3; Gal. 3:6). Christ Himself becomes his righteousness (II Cor. 5:21) and God sees him not as he is in himself, but as he is in Christ (Barrett, 60). It is the righteousness achieved by the cross which places us in a right standing before God. It is the divine acquittal of the guilt of sin.

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Sanctification, or holiness, moves us into an ethical as well as a positional sphere. Being in Christ sets us apart for God but in the end will effect moral purification in us as well. However, Paul's emphasis is probably that man can draw near to a Holy God because he is holy in Christ (Barrett, 60, 61).

Redemption is the ransom Christ paid by His death that delivered us from the bondage and consequences of sin. In Greek "ransom" has more of the idea of freeing a slave or purchasing back prisoners of war held by the enemy than it does paying for someone who has been abducted. Redemption is our liberation at Christ's expense.

Thus, God gives wisdom, but the wisdom He gives is not found in logic (Gentiles - 1:22) or in higher spiritual experiences (Jews - 1:22). The wisdom God offers is found in the salvation which is in Christ Jesus.

Jeremiah 9:24 concludes Paul's point, "**Let him who boasts, boast in the Lord.**" There is no boasting in human achievement, but there is boasting in Christ (the Lord). The cross, which is foolishness to the world, and the lowly people who are saved by it are evidence of the working of God in ways that direct all glory to Him. These are the things that the Christian glories (boasts) in (Gal. 6:14).