

Wednesday Evening Bible Study  
September 20, 2021  
Series - *The Life and Writings of the Apostle Paul*  
The Corinthian Letters  
*The Long Letter* (First Corinthians)  
Text – 1 Corinthians 1 – *Commendations and Carnality*

## Introduction

### Key Verse

*“For the preaching of the cross is to them that perish foolishness; but unto us which are saved it is the power of God.”* (1 Corinthians 1:18)

As we begin examining the first chapter of 1 Corinthians, let us not forget that this was a church with many problems, which Paul would address one by one throughout the letter. This church had been heavily influenced by the carnal culture of the city surrounding them (see Romans 1:18 – 32 – written from Corinth). They were also a divided church with at least four identifiable groups competing for power (see 1 Corinthians 1:12). As we examine portions of each of these chapters, it is important to keep the “big picture” in the back of your mind.

## I. Commendation and Confirmation (vs. 1 – 9)

### A. Paul Certifies his Authority (v. 1)

*“called to be an apostle...through the will of God”*

One of the problems Paul would deal with here in Corinth was that the people were picking and choosing for themselves who their authority was. Some were listening to Apollos, some to other men. Paul had to assure them that not only was he approved and sent by men (Acts 13:2), but also more importantly, he was sent and empowered by God.

*“But the Lord said unto him, Go thy way: for he is a chosen vessel unto me, to bear my name before the Gentiles, and kings, and the children of Israel:”* (Acts 9:15; Ephesians 4:11 - 13)

There is a difference between a disciple and an apostle. A disciple (μαθητής – *mathētēs*) is a disciplined one; a pupil; a student. An apostle (ἀπόστολος – *Apostolos*) was a delegate, a messenger, or an ambassador. Wiersbe calls them “chosen messenger[s] sent with a special commission.”<sup>1</sup> The term typically refers to these twelve who were chosen by the Lord during His earthly ministry. However, the term is also used to refer to other men in the New Testament who achieved this special designation among the brethren.

*“Which when the apostles, Barnabas and Paul, heard of, they rent their clothes, and ran in among the people, crying out,”* (Acts 14:14)

*“But other of the apostles saw I none, save James the Lord's brother.”* (Galatians 1:19)

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<sup>1</sup> Wiersbe, W. W. (1996). *The Bible Exposition Commentary* (Vol. 1, p. 191). Wheaton, IL: Victor Books.

There is also the dispute as to who took Judas' place as one of the twelve.

Turn to Acts 1:1 – 26 – The apostles were told to wait at Jerusalem until the Holy Spirit came, but they decide on their own to find a replacement for Judas. The question is: did God want them to do this?

### The qualifications for apostleship were:

1. They had to have seen the Lord and been a witness to His resurrection:

*"Beginning from the baptism of John, unto that same day that he was taken up from us, must one be ordained to be a witness with us of his resurrection." (Acts 1:22)*

*"Am I not an apostle? am I not free? have I not seen Jesus Christ our Lord? are not ye my work in the Lord? If I be not an apostle unto others, yet doubtless I am to you: for the seal of mine apostleship are ye in the Lord." (1 Corinthians 9:1-2)*

*"And last of all he was seen of me also, as of one born out of due time." (1 Corinthians 15:8)*

2. They were given sign gifts that proved their apostleship.

*"Insomuch that they brought forth the sick into the streets, and laid them on beds and couches, that at the least the shadow of Peter passing by might overshadow some of them. There came also a multitude out of the cities round about unto Jerusalem, bringing sick folks, and them which were vexed with unclean spirits: and they were healed every one." (Acts 5:15-16)*

*"How shall we escape, if we neglect so great salvation; which at the first began to be spoken by the Lord, and was confirmed unto us by them that heard him; God also bearing them witness, both with signs and wonders, and with divers miracles, and gifts of the Holy Ghost, according to his own will?" (Hebrews 2:3-4)*

*"I am become a fool in glorying; ye have compelled me: for I ought to have been commended of you: for in nothing am I behind the very chiefest apostles, though I be nothing. Truly the signs of an apostle were wrought among you in all patience, in signs, and wonders, and mighty deeds." (2 Corinthians 12:11-12)*

3. They had to be called by the Lord.

*"Paul, a servant of Jesus Christ, called to be an apostle, separated unto the gospel of God," (Romans 1:1)*

*"Paul, an apostle, (not of men, neither by man, but by Jesus Christ, and God the Father, who raised him from the dead;)" (Galatians 1:1)*

*"Paul, an apostle of Jesus Christ by the commandment of God our Saviour, and Lord Jesus Christ, which is our hope;" (1 Timothy 1:1)*

So was Matthias the one chosen by the Lord, or was Paul? Was Paul one of the twelve, or was he just another apostle?

It matters because in the New Jerusalem, the walls of the city will be named after the twelve Apostles of the Lamb.

*"And the wall of the city had twelve foundations, and in them the names of the twelve apostles of the Lamb." (Revelation 21:14)*

There are four lists of Apostles given in the New Testament. (see also Matthew 10:1 – 4; Mark 3:6 – 9; Acts 1:13) Peter's name is always listed first, and Judas' name is always listed last, with the exception of Acts 1:13 where Judas is not listed at all.

Sometimes, there appears to be discrepancies in the lists, but this is due to a man having more than one name. For example the "Judas" in Acts 1:13 is the brother of James and could be the Thaddeus mentioned in Mark 3:18. Bartholomew is likely the Nathaniel of John 1:45.

The apostles were given as a gift to the churches, just as prophets, evangelists, and pastor / teachers were:

*"(11) And he gave some, apostles; and some, prophets; and some, evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers; (12) For the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ: (13) Till we all come in the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ: (14) That we henceforth be no more children, tossed to and fro, and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the sleight of men, and cunning craftiness, whereby they lie in wait to deceive; (15) But speaking the truth in love, may grow up into him in all things, which is the head, even Christ: (16) From whom the whole body fitly joined together and compacted by that which every joint supplieth, according to the effectual working in the measure of every part, maketh increase of the body unto the edifying of itself in love." (Ephesians 4:11-16)*

John Phillips had this to say about Paul's apostleship:

His status was *derived*, not from human hands but directly from the pierced hands of the risen and ascended Lord. He was God's chosen apostle to the Gentile world. This apostleship gave him unique authority over the Gentile churches, even those, such as the Roman and Colossian churches, which he himself had not founded.

If there was a thrill in that title, there was a threat in it, too. Let the listeners to that letter beware. This was not the word of a prophet, an evangelist, a pastor, or a teacher, however gifted and inspired; this was the word of an apostle—and an apostle "by the will of God" no less. An apostle could deal in death as well as life.

There are no apostles left now. They died out with the church's first generation. God made only about a dozen of them and the nursery no longer exists where such men can be bred. Besides, the need for them no longer exists. They were a dying breed even as Paul penned the word. Paul had no wish to exert his apostolic authority and power. He had no desire to deal out death, dismissal, or disease. He would rather use his apostleship to reveal, revive, and restore, but let no one underestimate him. He was "an apostle by the will of God," and neither Moses nor Elijah possessed greater powers than he. He had a whole arsenal of weapons if it came to outright war. There was, however, as he would tell his beloved Corinthians later on, "a more excellent way."<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> John Phillips, *Exploring 1 Corinthians: An Expository Commentary*, The John Phillips Commentary Series (Kregel Publications; WORDsearch Corp., 2009), 1 Co 1:1–9.

**Sosthenes** - Notice also the mention of Sosthenes in v. 1. This may be the same chief ruler of the synagogue who was beaten by the Greeks in Corinth after the Jews made accusations against Paul to Gallio, the deputy of Achaia. (See Acts 18:12 – 17)

### **B. Paul Confirms Their Assembly (vs. 2 - 4)**

Notice that there is nothing stated here by Paul that would indicate that these Corinthians were not true believers. He refers to them as being part of the “church of God,” as being “sanctified in Christ,” and as being “saints.” All of these things refers to their position in Christ. The word “sanctified” means set apart for God’s use:

*"(9) Know ye not that the unrighteous shall not inherit the kingdom of God? Be not deceived: neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor effeminate, nor abusers of themselves with mankind, (10) Nor thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor extortioners, shall inherit the kingdom of God. (11) And such were some of you: but ye are washed, but ye are sanctified, but ye are justified in the name of the Lord Jesus, and by the Spirit of our God." (1 Corinthians 6:9-11)*

Even though this congregation had its problems and were very carnal, they belonged to Christ.

### **C. Paul Commends Their Advancements (vs. 5 - 9)**

1. They were enriched (made wealthy - ἐπλουτίσθητε from πλουτίζω – *ploutizō* [aorist verb]) in utterance (λόγῳ from λόγος – *logos*) and knowledge (γνώσει from γνῶσις - *gnōsis*). (v. 5)

The Corinthian church were given the Word of God and all the knowledge from God that they needed.

2. They came behind (other churches) in no gift. (v. 7)

The gifts of the Spirit are recorded in 1 Corinthians 12, and in Romans 12. The list in 1 Corinthians 12 includes what are referred to as “sign gifts,” which were miraculous gifts such as the gift of tongues, the “working of miracles,” etc. These gifts were transitional in the sense that they were part of the early church, but were eventually done away with when the full canon of Scripture was complete (See 1 Corinthians 13:8 – 13).

Paul stated that the Corinthian church had received all of the gifts that God had bestowed upon other churches. They lacked nothing that they needed in order to fulfil God’s will for them.

Notice also in v. 7 the reference to their waiting for the Lord’s return. The expectancy of the return of the Lord is an important factor in keeping us inside of the will of God. The church that is looking for the Lord’s return will remain faithful to Him. Paul will have much more to say about the return of the Lord as well as the resurrection of the saints in chapter 15. Those that are faithfully “waiting” for the Lord will also abound while they wait:

*"Therefore, my beloved brethren, be ye steadfast, unmoveable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, forasmuch as ye know that your labour is not in vain in the Lord." (1 Corinthians 15:58)*

### 3. They were a work in progress. (vs. 8 - 9)

Notice that although God would have much to say to this church by way of rebuke, he began with commendation. That is a lesson we should learn as we deal with people. God had confirmed them (v. 6) and would continue to confirm them (βεβαιώσει from βεβαιώω – *bebaioō*, meaning “establish”):

*"Rooted and built up in him, and **stablished** (same word as confirm in 1 Corinthians 1:6 & 8) in the faith, as ye have been taught, abounding therein with thanksgiving."* (Colossians 2:7)

Paul told the Philippian Church:

*"(3) I thank my God upon every remembrance of you, (4) Always in every prayer of mine for you all making request with joy, (5) For your fellowship in the gospel from the first day until now; (6) Being confident of this very thing, that he which hath begun a good work in you will perform it until the day of Jesus Christ:"* (Philippians 1:3-6)

## II. Carnality Expressed through Division (vs. 10 – 16)

### A. Loss of Coherence (v. 10); not “with one accord”; not “of one mind”

(Romans 12:16; 15: 5 & 6; 2 Corinthians 13:11; Philippians 1:27; 2:2; Ephesians 4:1-6)

One of the signs of a good church is that they are “in one accord.”

*"Be of the same mind one toward another. Mind not high things, but condescend to men of low estate. Be not wise in your own conceits."* (Romans 12:16)

*"(5) Now the God of patience and consolation grant you to be likeminded one toward another according to Christ Jesus: (6) That ye may with one mind and one mouth glorify God, even the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ."* (Romans 15:5-6)

*"Finally, brethren, farewell. Be perfect, be of good comfort, be of one mind, live in peace; and the God of love and peace shall be with you."* (2 Corinthians 13:11)

*"Only let your conversation be as it becometh the gospel of Christ: that whether I come and see you, or else be absent, I may hear of your affairs, that ye stand fast in one spirit, with one mind striving together for the faith of the gospel;"* (Philippians 1:27)

*"Fulfil ye my joy, that ye be likeminded, having the same love, being of one accord, of one mind."* (Philippians 2:2)

Turn to Ephesians 4:1 – 6

Paul admonishes them to be “perfectly joined together” (κατηρτισμένοι from καταρτίζω – *katartizō*), which has the idea of mending something that was torn apart.

### B. Lots of Contention (v. 11)

*"Only by pride cometh contention: but with the well advised is wisdom."* (Proverbs 13:10)

*"Let nothing be done through strife or vainglory; but in lowliness of mind let each esteem other better than themselves." (Philippians 2:3)*

Note – Chloe may have been one of Paul's allies within the church who was reporting to him. It is interesting that Paul did not protect the identity of those that told him. If more people were to reveal those who made the accusations against others two things would happen: One, there would be less accusations; and two, the accusations that are made would not be frivolous.

### **C. Leadership to Choose From (vs. 12 – 16; 3:1 – 9)**

Paul did not want himself or any other man exalted. He demanded their acceptance of His authority; but he only sought to exalt Christ. We have a lot of "man elevating" going on today as well.

Wiersbe states this regarding spiritual gurus:

*"Another answer is that human nature enjoys following human leaders. We tend to identify more with spiritual leaders who help us and whose ministry we understand and enjoy. Instead of emphasizing the *message* of the Word, the Corinthians emphasized the *messenger*. They got their eyes off the Lord and on the Lord's servants, and this led to competition."<sup>3</sup>*

## **III. Correction through Preaching the Word (vs. 17 – 31)**

### **A. The Supremacy of Preaching over Man's Wisdom (vs. 17 – 25)**

The Word of God must be preached by the man of God in the fullness of the Spirit of God. (see Paul at Athens - Acts 17:16 – 18:5)

Illustration – A preacher was trying to argue salvation with an atheist, and he was losing badly. He could not come up with any clever arguments to refute the man's belief system, so he just kept repeating: *"He that hath the Son hath life; and he that hath not the Son of God hath not life."* (1 John 5:12) The man could not sleep. The Holy Spirit kept reminding him of that verse over and over again, and he finally trusted Christ.

### **B. The Supremacy of God's Preference (the called) over Man's Qualifications (vs. 26 – 31)**

God does not call the qualified, He qualifies the called. Why does God choose "not many wise, mighty, and noble"?

*"That no flesh should glory in his presence." (1Corinthians 1:29)*

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<sup>3</sup> Warren W. Wiersbe, *The Bible Exposition Commentary*, vol. 1 (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1996), 569.