

STUDY ON THE BOOK OF CORINTHIANS

First Corinthians - Introduction & Chapter 1

Introduction

Corinth was an important cosmopolitan city located in the Roman province of Achaia (the southern part of modern-day Greece) on a large isthmus about fifty miles west of Athens. It was situated along a major trade route and had a thriving economy. For this reason, large numbers of sailors and merchants from every nation flocked to the city of Corinth. During the first century, it was one of the largest cities in the Roman Empire and by the end of the second century it had become one of the richest cities in the world.

Corinth was a strategic centre of influence for the gospel since those travellers who heard the gospel there could carry it to all parts of the world. The city of Corinth, however, was one of the wickedest cities of ancient times. Immorality, unscrupulous business dealings, and pagan practices abounded. Of the scores of heathen religions that were practiced in the city, the most well-known was the worship of Aphrodite, the goddess of love and beauty. The temple of Aphrodite stood on the most prominent point in the city, a hill called Acrocorinth, and housed one thousand "temple prostitutes."

Paul was able to establish a church in Corinth during his eighteen-month residence there (about AD. 52-53) on his second missionary journey (Acts 18:1-11; 1 Cor. 2:1, 2). Paul lived and worked as a tentmaker with two other Jewish converts, Aquila and Priscilla, who had recently come from Rome (Acts 18:1, 2). When Paul left Corinth, a man named Apollos ministered there after Aquila and Priscilla had more completely expounded the gospel to him (Acts 18:26, 27; 19:1; see 1 Cor. 1:12; 16:12).

Three years after this, Paul wrote this letter from Ephesus to the Corinthian believers. Later, Paul received a report from the members of the household of Chloe concerning the bad conduct of some in the church (1 Cor. 1:11). Many of the members had recently been converted from paganism and were having difficulty breaking habits of their former lifestyles. There were such deep divisions among them that some of the believers were bringing lawsuits against one another and allowing unbelieving judges to settle the disputes (chap. 6).

Paul reprimanded the church for failing to discipline certain of its members who were guilty of gross immorality (chap. 5). He also gave them counsel regarding some of the common marriage problems and instructed them in the proper conduct of those who were unmarried (chap. 7). In addition, Paul discussed the eating of meats offered to idols (1 Cor. 8; 10:18-31), abuses of the Lord's Supper (1 Cor. 11:17-34), spiritual gifts (chaps. 12; 13), conduct in the formal assemblies for worship (1 Cor. 11:2-16; 14:1-40), and the resurrection (chap. 15).

1 Corinthians 1

The Greeting

Paul called to be an apostle of Jesus Christ through the will of God, and Sosthenes our brother, unto the church of God which is at Corinth, to them that are sanctified in Christ Jesus, called to be saints, with all that in every place call upon the name of Jesus Christ our Lord, both theirs and ours: Grace be unto you, and peace, from God our Father, and from the Lord Jesus Christ. I thank my God always on your behalf, for the grace of God which is given you by Jesus Christ; That in everything ye are enriched by him, in all utterance, and in all knowledge; Even as the testimony of Christ was confirmed in you: So that ye come behind in no gift; waiting for the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ: Who shall also confirm you unto the end, that ye may be blameless in the day of our Lord Jesus Christ. God is faithful, by whom ye were called unto the fellowship of his Son Jesus Christ our Lord. (1 Corinthians 1:1-9)

One main theme in these verses relates to being “Called”:

- Paul was called to be an apostle of Jesus Christ through the will of God.
- The church of God which is at Corinth are called to be saints.
- All that are in every place that call on the name of Jesus Christ are also called to be saints.
- We are all called unto the fellowship of His Son Jesus Christ our Lord.

In the gospels, there is a distinction between the klētoí, the called ones, and the eklektoí, the chosen ones, relative to both service (Matt. 20:16) and salvation (Matt. 22:14). The “called ones” in the gospel are usually those call and have not responded to the call yet while the chosen are those who have responded to the call.

Generally, in the epistles, hoi klētoí, "the called," are the eklektoí, "chosen" (Rom. 9:24; 2 Thess. 2:13, 14; 1 Pet. 2:9) those whom God "called out of darkness into His marvellous light." Klēsis, with Paul and Peter, is more than an invitation; it is an invitation responded to and accepted, and it is so because "the called [hoi klētoí]" are already "the chosen [the eklektoí]". See Rom. 8:28; 2 Thess. 2:13, 14.

Other points to note from this introduction:

1. This letter was written by Paul and Sosthenes (referred to as our brother)
2. That in everything ye are enriched by him, in all utterance, and in all knowledge; Even as the testimony of Christ was confirmed in you: So that ye come behind in no gift; waiting for the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ: Who shall also confirm you unto the end, that ye may be blameless in the day of our Lord Jesus Christ.
 - a. From point 2, we see that Paul testifies to the grace that was on the church in Corinth that in everything, they were enriched by Him.
 - b. And that they came behind in no gift.

Unity

Now I beseech you, brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that ye all speak the same thing, and that there be no divisions among you; but that ye be perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment. For it hath been declared unto me of you, my brethren, by them which are of the house of Chloe, that there are contentions among you. Now this I say, that every one of you saith, I am of Paul; and I of Apollos; and I of Cephas; and I of Christ. Is Christ divided? was Paul crucified for you? or were ye baptized in the name of Paul? I thank God that I baptized none of you, but Crispus and Gaius; Lest any should say that I had baptized in mine own name. And I baptized also the household of Stephanas: besides, I know not whether I baptized any other. For Christ sent me not to baptize, but to preach the gospel: not with wisdom of words, lest the cross of Christ should be made of none effect. (1 Corinthians 1:10-17)

From the verses above, we can see that the house of Chloe wrote to Paul about the state of the church he left behind. They had started great but now, there are divisions and high-level carnality going on and Paul has to address this issue.

Paul’s Questions:

1. Is Christ divided?
2. Was Paul crucified for you?
3. Were you baptised in the name of Paul?

These questions should give context to how we as the body of Christ view Christianity, the Church and our relationship with the same.

Paul ended this section with “Christ sent me not to baptise...” but to preach the gospel. This statement reveals that although Paul will baptise where necessary, the ministry of baptism was not core to his ministry.

The Preaching of the Cross (Focus of Paul’s Ministry and therefore ours)

For the preaching of the cross is to them that perish -- foolishness; but unto us which are saved it is the power of God. For it is written, I will destroy the wisdom of the wise, and will bring to nothing the understanding of the prudent. Where is the wise? where is the scribe? where is the disputer of this world? hath not God made foolish the wisdom of this world? For after that in the wisdom of God the world by wisdom knew not God, it pleased God by the foolishness of preaching to save them that believe. For the Jews require a sign, and the Greeks seek after wisdom: But we preach Christ crucified, unto the Jews a stumblingblock, and unto the Greeks foolishness; But unto them which are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God, and the wisdom of God. Because the foolishness of God is wiser than men; and the weakness of God is stronger than men. For ye see your calling, brethren, how that not many wise men after the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble, are called: But God hath chosen the foolish things of the world to confound the wise; and God hath chosen the weak things of the world to confound the things which are mighty; And base things of the world, and things which are despised, hath God chosen, yea, and things which are not, to bring to naught things that are: That no flesh should glory in his presence. But of him are ye in Christ Jesus, who of God is made unto us wisdom, and righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption: That, according as it is written, He that glorieth, let him glory in the Lord. (1 Corinthians 1:18-31)

The preaching of the cross:

Perishing	Saved
Foolishness	Power of God
God has made foolish the wisdom of the world	Salvation through the foolishness of preaching
Jews need a sign; Greeks want wisdom	We preach Christ Crucified
Preaching is stumbling block and foolishness	Christ is the power of God & wisdom of God

These verses should confirm our identity, our confidence and our difference. We are not like the world neither should we desire to be like them. Paul said: “For you see your calling...”

For ye see your calling, brethren, how that not many wise men after the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble, are called: But God hath chosen the foolish things of the world to confound the wise; and God hath chosen the weak things of the world to confound the things which are mighty; And base things of the world, and things which are despised, hath God chosen, yea, and things which are not, to bring to naught things that are: That no flesh should glory in his presence. But of him are ye in Christ Jesus, who of God is made unto us wisdom, and righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption: That, according as it is written, He that glorieth, let him glory in the Lord.

- You and I are the foolish things of this world.
- You and I are the weak things of the world.
- You and I are the base things of the world.
- You and I are the despised
- You and I are things which are not... that no flesh should glory in His Presence.

