

1 Corinthians 1

Note to the teacher: Use standard reference books to find a photograph of the modern-day canal at Corinth and also pictures of Aphrodite and Poseidon (there were temples to them in Corinth)

Introduction:

-What was the location of the city of Corinth? [Use maps in the back of Bibles, etc.]

-What problems did its location have? A very wicked city, due to the constant traffic of travellers, tourists, sailors, other military people from one port to the other

Note: In recent years, excavations at Corinth have uncovered one city block – 33 taverns were found there

-Nickname for Corinth in ancient times: Cesspool of the World

-Where did Paul give a vivid description of life in Corinth? *Romans 1* (Paul was writing from Corinth)

-Establishment of the church at Corinth? On Paul's Second Missionary Journey, after he preached at Athens

-Date for the letter? In mid-50's AD (*1 Cor. 16.8* – early spring)

-See: *Acts 19.10* – Paul spent 2 years in Ephesus; this is the exact verse when Paul wrote *1 Corinthians*

-*Acts 18.18-19* – Priscilla and Aquila were with Paul in Ephesus

-Evidence of a previous letter? Yes – See *1 Corinthians 5.6, 10-11, 7.1, 8.1*

-Why do we not have a copy of the previous letter? Because it must not have been inspired (See: *1 Peter 1.24-25*)

Theme of 1 Corinthians:

"At first sight *1 Corinthians* seems to discuss a series of points without any coherence. However, one main line runs through the whole epistle. The evils at Corinth were lasciviousness, spiritual pride, and the abuse of Christian liberty in various spheres. The Corinthians took as their starting point the rule that to the Christian all things were permissible; he is free. Paul, on the contrary, expounds the character of Christian freedom.... The life of the believer must be ruled by the principle of love. This love declares how the Christian's freedom is to be used. Paul recognizes the Christian's liberty, but he disapproves the manner in which the Corinthians used it.

"The preaching of Christ had come to the great pagan world and was bearing fruit. The gospel also brings a doctrine of life, and that is to be put into practice. At this point the Corinthians were lacking and Paul preaches how the Christian has to live in a godless, pagan world, because he has found salvation in the work of Christ. Christian love must be the principle that rules all things. Paul teaches us that the church is in the world but not of the world."

-F. W. Grosheide, *New International Commentary on 1 Corinthians*, p. 16

1 Corinthians 1.1-9 – A typical opening of Paul's letters:

1. From whom
2. To whom
3. A blessing

V1 – Any similarities with *Romans 1.1*? "called to be an apostle"

-**Sosthenes?** – See *Acts 18.17* – the leader of the synagogue who was later converted to Christ

V2 – Is the letter addressed to us also? Yes, because we are "saints"

V3 – What was Paul's blessing for the Corinthian Christians? Grace and peace in Jesus Christ

V4-5 – Characteristic of Paul in dealing with church problems? Praises first, then criticizes, then praises again (the "sandwich" approach)

-**What positive things did Paul say about the church at Corinth?** They were enriched in Jesus (in speech and knowledge)

V6 – Reference to *Mark 16.20*? Yes – miracles and signs

V7 – Another compliment? Not lacking in any spiritual gift

-**Another compliment?** Eagerly waiting for the second coming of Jesus Christ

V8 – How can we be blameless in the Day of Judgment? As a result of believing and obeying Jesus Christ

V9 – Theme of the book (*Romans 12.1*)? Christians are supposed to be in fellowship with God

1 Corinthians 1.10-17 – The division or "Party Spirit"

V10 – "divisions" – like fissures in an earthquake

-**What was the basis of the division?** Each person was calling himself after Paul ("old guard" – charter members), Apollos (younger members), Peter (Jewish Christians), etc.

-**Is this happening today?**

-**What religious groups today go by men's names?**

-Lutherans

-Baptists

-Mennonites (Menno Simons, 1496-1561)

-Moravians

-Buddhism

-Confucianism

-Zoroastrianism (about 600 BC)

-Also: St. Luke's Hospital, all kinds of Catholic Churches, etc.

V11 – How had Paul found out about the trouble at Corinth? From Chloe's people

V12 – The four divisions

V13 – What is the question that they should have all been thinking about? Is Christ divided?

-**The answer?** Of course not

V 14 – What was Paul thankful for? That he was not known for baptizing people at Corinth
-**Note:** There are some big-name preachers today who like to brag about how many people they have baptized in their gospel meetings and evangelistic trips, but Paul was not like that

V 15 – Why did Paul not brag about who he had baptized? It would have just made the divisions there worse

V 16 – Had he actually baptized anyone there? Yes, a few

V 17 – Didn't Paul believe in baptism? See *v 14-16*

-His main thrust was to preach – the "visiting minister" does not have to do the baptizing
-the local preacher or other men or the elders could do the baptizing

1 Corinthians 1.18-25

V 18 – Who was the man in the Old Testament who doubted the wisdom of God? Naaman (captain in the Syrian army who had leprosy) – See *2 Kings 5.1-14* (especially *v 11*)

V 19 – The wisdom of the world will destroy us

-Example: The Nazis in World War II – rockets, atomic physics (heavy water), fine machinery, superb aircraft, but 5,000,000 Jews and others were killed

V 20 – "Scribe" – one who has memorized the Scriptures and is an expert in the Old Testament

-**Why is he mentioned here?** A knowledge of the Scriptures does not mean that a person is a faithful Christian

-**Disputers and debaters?** At Athens: Stoics and Epicureans

-**Examples of the "foolishness" of God?** Tails on puppy dogs, the platypus, the archer fish, etc.

V 21 – What does the world see as foolishness? The preaching of the gospel

-**Why does that look foolish to the world?** Because the idea of a man standing before an audience with an open Bible in his hand and presenting a message from this "old and worthless" book seems foolish

-In our day of high-tech advertising and the electronic media, it looks even more foolish, but this was God's plan for offering salvation to all the world until the end of time

V 22-24 – Jews were miracle-hunters

-*Matt. 12.38-41* – Jonah and the big sea creature

-*Luke 13.10-17* – Jesus healed a crippled lady on the Sabbath, but they objected

-**What did the Jews say to Christ on the cross?** "Come down and perform a miracle"

-**What were the Greeks looking for?** "Wisdom" (Socrates, Plato, Aristotle, ancient writers, dramatists, and "thinkers") – see *Acts 17.32*

-Think of the foolishness of the Greeks when Paul preached on Mars' Hill

-They ended his lesson when he mentioned the resurrection; only a few believed, and there is

no evidence that a congregation ever existed at Athens

-The Greeks could not believe that a crucified man could save them – the Greek gods were "strong"

-**Why are highly educated people and famous people generally not interested in the Lord's church?** Because they are too proud of their human wisdom and achievements

V 25 – Example of "foolishness"? – The death of the Messiah on a cross; his spiritual kingdom

-**How great is the thinking of God?** Even his "foolishness" is greater than the wisdom of humans

1 Corinthians 1.26-31

V 26 – The church at Corinth was middle or lower class - **Same today?** Usually

V 27 – But the lack of famous and "great" people in the church shames the wise and famous people of the world

V 28 – The "things that are not"? The "nobodies" of the world

V 29 – **Why can no man boast before God?** Because he has chosen to save the weak and sinful people of the world

V 30 – **What was marvelous at the church at Corinth?** That they had actually been saved through Jesus Christ

V 31 – **What is the only thing that we can brag about?** The power of God working through us

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