



The  
PILLAR OF  
TRUTH  
SERIES

# 1 Corinthians

A STUDY WORKBOOK  
*Revised Edition*

Chad Sychtysz

*1 Corinthians Study Workbook*  
(revised edition)

by Chad Sychtysz

© 2020 Spiritbuilding Publishers.

All rights reserved. No part of this book may be reproduced in any form without the written permission of the publisher.

Published by  
Spiritbuilding Publishers  
9700 Ferry Road,  
Waynesville, OH 45068

*1 Corinthians Study Workbook*  
by Chad Sychtysz

Scripture taken from the NEW AMERICAN STANDARD BIBLE®, Copyright © 1960, 1962, 1963, 1968, 1971, 1972, 1973, 1975, 1977, 1995 by The Lockman Foundation.  
Used by permission.

**Spiritbuilding**  
P U B L I S H E R S

# *Table of Contents*

<b>Introduction</b> . . . . .	1
<b>Lesson One:</b> Salutation and Introductory Comments (1:1-17) . . . . .	7
<b>Lesson Two:</b> The Paradoxical Word of the Cross (1:18-31) . . . . .	13
<b>Lesson Three:</b> Reliance on the Spirit Rather Than on Men (2:1-16) . . . . .	17
<b>Lesson Four:</b> Building on Christ, Not Mere Men (3:1-23) . . . . .	22
<b>Lesson Five:</b> The Christian's Attitude toward God's Stewards (4:1-21) . . . . .	26
<b>Lesson Six:</b> Arrogance Corrupts Christian Fellowship (5:1-13) . . . . .	30
<b>Lesson Seven:</b> Worldly Judgments against Christian Brethren (6:1-11) . . . . .	34
<b>Lesson Eight:</b> The Christian Belongs to the Lord (6:12-20) . . . . .	39
<b>Lesson Nine:</b> Instructions Concerning Marriage (7:1-16) . . . . .	43
<b>Lesson Ten:</b> Advice to Those Contemplating Marriage or Divorce (7:17-40) . . . . .	50
<b>Lesson Eleven:</b> The Proper Application of Christian Knowledge (8:1-13) . . . . .	55
<b>Lesson Twelve:</b> Paul's Use of Personal Liberty (9:1-27) . . . . .	59
<b>Lesson Thirteen:</b> Warnings against Overconfidence (10:1-11:1) . . . . .	64
<b>Lesson Fourteen:</b> Christian Women's Respect for Christian Men's Authority (11:2-16) . . . . .	71
<b>Lesson Fifteen:</b> Correction of Abuses of the Lord's Supper (11:17-34) . . . . .	77
<b>Lesson Sixteen:</b> The Unity of the Body of Christ (12:1-31) . . . . .	82
<b>Lesson Seventeen:</b> The Greatest Gift of All (13:1-13) . . . . .	89
<b>Lesson Eighteen:</b> The Proper Use of Spiritual Gifts in the Assembly (14:1-40) . . . . .	95
<b>Lesson Nineteen:</b> The Necessity of Christ's Resurrection (15:1-19) . . . . .	101
<b>Lesson Twenty:</b> The Future Resurrection (15:20-58) . . . . .	106
<b>Lesson Twenty-one:</b> Closing Comments and Salutations (16:1-24) . . . . .	115
<b>Appendix:</b> Women Speaking in the Assembly . . . . .	120
<b>Sources Used in This Study</b> . . . . .	124

Scripture taken from the NEW AMERICAN STANDARD BIBLE ®, Copyright © 1960, 1962, 1963, 1968, 1971, 1972, 1973, 1975, 1977, 1995 by The Lockman Foundation.

Used by permission.



## Introduction

Unquestionably, the apostle Paul’s epistle to the Corinthians (1 Corinthians) is one of the most important and influential books of the New Testament. This epistle is neither a doctrinal treatise (like Romans) nor an ordinary letter (like Philemon). Rather, it is a testament of Paul’s loving patience toward—and forthright admonition of—a mixed group of people who have only recently been converted to Christ. Some of these people are Jews, far more are Greeks (Gentiles), but all of them are still learning to live like *Christians*. Paul had to provide encouraging instruction while simultaneously addressing any unchristian behavior. He could not afford to be too hard or too soft; an expert balance was needed, and this letter is proof that such balance had been struck. Because of this fine contribution to the New Testament, we have excellent guidance on how *we also* can maintain this same balance in our own churches.

**The City of Corinth:** Corinth [“ornament”] was an important commercial city of ancient Greece, being ideally situated on the western end of the isthmus between the Peloponnesian peninsula and the mainland. It was strategically positioned at the intersection of north-south land trade routes *and* east-west sea trade routes, providing safe passage between the Aegean and Adriatic Seas.

The city of Corinth was built at the foot of a high hill, on the top of which stood a citadel. This hill, which stood on the south of the city, was its defence [*sic*] in that quarter, as its sides were extremely steep. On the three other sides it was protected by strong and lofty ramparts. The circumference of the city proper was about forty stadia, or five miles. Its situation gave it great commercial advantages. As the whole of that region was mountainous and rather barren, and as the situation gave the city extraordinary commercial advantages, the inhabitants early turned their attention to commerce, and amassed great wealth. This fact was, to no inconsiderable extent, the foundation of the luxury, effeminacy, and vices, for which the city afterwards became so much distinguished.<sup>1</sup>

Corinth was on the west side of an isthmus between the Saronic Gulf and the Aegean Sea; Cenchrea was on the eastern side of this isthmus. To avoid sailing around the southern Peloponnesian peninsula, sailors would have their goods carried across this isthmus (about 4.5 miles at its narrowest) on small wheeled platforms from one city to the other. An effort to dig a canal between the two bodies of water was long considered, even as far back as the time of Julius Caesar. No canal was actually completed, however, until French engineers constructed one in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>2</sup>

Corinth’s beginnings date as far back as the 7<sup>th</sup> century BC. It quickly grew into a prosperous and influential city-state; its trademark Corinthian bronze and ceramics were sold on the international market. Its wealth and power peaked under the rule of Periander (ca. 625-583 BC), but thereafter began to decline under pressure from the Athenians. In the Peloponnesian War (431-404 BC), Corinth sided with Athens against Sparta, but the war greatly weakened Corinth to the extent that

1 Albert Barnes, *Barnes’ Notes*, vol. 11 (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, no date; orig. published in 1885 by Blackie & Son in London), “Introduction,” iii.

2 Simon J. Kistemaker, *New Testament Commentary: 1 Corinthians* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1993), 3-4.

it was overtaken by Philip of Macedon (338 BC). Philip's son, Alexander the Great, used the city as a commercial center and tourist attraction; after Alexander's death (323 BC), Corinth emerged as the leading city of southern Greece and the Peloponnese. Nonetheless, during most of the 3<sup>rd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> centuries BC, it submitted to Macedonian domination.

In 196 BC, Corinth was given limited autonomy by Rome, but it rebelled against Roman rule only fifty years later. As a result of this, Rome thoroughly destroyed the city (146 BC), and it became a sparsely-populated ruin for one hundred years. In 46 BC, Julius Caesar declared Corinth a Roman colony, rebuilt the city, and re-populated it with freedmen and poor people who came from every corner of the Mediterranean world. Corinth rapidly regained its prominence, and along with it, unprecedented prosperity. "Its wealth was derived from its commercial traffic by sea and by land, its pottery and brass industries, and its political importance as the capital of Achaia [Greece]. At its height it probably had a population of 200,000 free men and 500,000 slaves."<sup>3</sup>

While Greece was known for its famous philosophies and philosophers, Corinth was not. "Its boast was trade and the arts. Corinthian brass became famous, and Corinthian capitals and pillars are still known in architecture."<sup>4</sup> It was these trades, and the great amount of taxes collected in transporting goods from one side of the isthmus to the other, that made Corinth wealthy and renown.

Unfortunately, its paganism, hedonism, and wickedness also flourished; the term "Corinthian" became synonymous with gross immorality in the Mediterranean world. Not only this, but the city was steeped in idolatry and temple prostitution; Apollo, Poseidon, Athena, and Aphrodite were among some of the principle gods worshiped there. "There were attached [to the temple of Aphrodite] 1,000 priestesses who were sacred prostitutes, and in the evenings they came down from the Acropolis and plied their trade on the streets of Corinth. ... Corinth became a synonym not only for wealth, luxury, drunkenness and debauchery, but also for filth."<sup>5</sup>

**Author and Date of Writing:** The apostle Paul first visited Corinth on his second missionary journey (Acts 18:1ff), circa AD 51 or 52, a visit which followed a relatively poor reception of the gospel in Athens (Acts 17:16ff). Corinth's coarse reputation and brash immorality were undoubtedly intimidating to Paul. By all accounts, it seemed an unlikely place for the gospel to succeed, but Jesus told Paul not to be afraid, "for I am with you, ...and I have many people in this city" (Acts 18:10). As a result of this encouragement, Paul established a church in Corinth and remained there for eighteen months (Acts 18:11). Re-educating the worldly, sensual-minded Corinthians to think and act like Christians was a difficult process; even after all of Paul's instruction, the Corinthians continued to grapple with their deeply-imbedded paganism.<sup>6</sup> Many of the first-generation converts in

---

3 A. Rupprecht, "Corinth," *The Zondervan Pictorial Encyclopedia of the Bible*, vol. 1, Merrill. C. Tenney, gen. ed. (Grand Rapids: Regency Reference Library, 1976), 961.

4 R. C. H. Lenski, *The Interpretation of St. Paul's First and Second Epistles to the Corinthians* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 1998; © 1937 and 1963 by Augsburg Publishing House), 12.

5 William Barclay, *Letters to the Corinthians* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 1975, 2002), 3; bracketed words are mine.

6 After Paul's epistles to the Corinthians, "The church reemerges into literary history at the close of the 1st century AD. In about the year 97, Clement of Rome wrote a letter, which survives, to the church. It reveals that the church was still vexed by many of the same problems about which Paul wrote to them" ("Corinth," *Zondervan Encyclopedia*, 964).

the church at Corinth were probably men and women from the lower classes of society (1 Cor. 1:26-31, 6:9-11). Yet, some of the first converts were Jews (Acts 18:8), and these men provided at least some measure of moral and congregational stability.

After he left Corinth, Paul began hearing from trustworthy sources that there were divisions within its church. Apparently, there was a certain element among the Corinthian believers that had arrogantly concluded that they no longer needed Paul's instruction, even though they conducted themselves with spiritual immaturity. About this same time, the Corinthians had written to Paul with questions concerning various issues (including marriage, spiritual gifts, and the resurrection). These two situations—the divisions (and those who caused them) and the written questions—were the occasion for the writing of what we call “First Corinthians.” (In fact, Paul had already written the Corinthians once before—a letter that has since been lost to history; see 5:9.) There has never been any serious questioning of Paul's authorship of this letter. Its text raises no major concerns; its canonicity (or, placement in the sacred writings deemed inspired by God) has never been an issue with early church scholars and historians.<sup>7</sup> “Even the most radical critics of today will not challenge either the canonicity or authenticity of this book.”<sup>8</sup>

Paul's earnest intention was to revisit Corinth, but he sent Timothy and Erastus to them first (Acts 19:22, 1 Cor. 16:5-11), and also Titus. (Titus was the likely deliverer of this first epistle to the Corinthians.) Paul waited anxiously for word from Titus as to how this letter had been received (2 Cor. 2:12-13), since it dealt with a number of difficult topics and required Paul to be rather forceful in some of his comments. After an agonizing delay, Paul finally learned that the Corinthians (in general) had received his letter in the spirit in which it had been written, and had repented of their sins (2 Cor. 7:6-9). There remained, however, a group of “false apostles” who challenged Paul's apostolic authority (2 Cor. 11:12-13), and Paul's response to these men is largely the subject of the epistle we know as Second Corinthians. It appears that Paul did not actually visit Corinth again until after the writing of this second epistle.

Paul spent nearly three years in Ephesus (Acts 20:32), and near the end of this time period is when it is believed that he wrote 1 Corinthians. In that letter, he said that he would remain in Ephesus until the coming Pentecost (late spring), and then would make a roundabout trip to Corinth by way of Macedonia (16:5-8). This puts the date of writing no later than the early spring of AD 57, about a year before his arrest in Jerusalem.

**Purpose and Theme:** In his letter, Paul revealed the Corinthians to be a very worldly-minded people struggling to adapt to a holy, spiritual existence. In all fairness, they still had only a limited exposure to the teaching of the gospel, and had come out of deviant lifestyles (6:9-11).<sup>9</sup> Furthermore, they did

<sup>7</sup> F. F. Bruce, “Corinthians, First Epistle to the,” *Zondervan Encyclopedia*, 972.

<sup>8</sup> Mike Willis, *A Commentary on Paul's First Epistle to the Corinthians* (Fairmount, IN: Cogdill Foundation, 1979), vii.

<sup>9</sup> “The Corinthian church was a carnal church. Many of its members were but recently converted from paganism and found it difficult to separate themselves from their old life. As a result the epistle is largely corrective and exhortatory, rather than doctrinal. Paul severely condemns their carnal practices and childish sectarianism. ... It is almost completely occupied with Christian conduct and behavior” (M. R. DeHaan, *Studies in First Corinthians* [Grand Rapids: Zondervan



not have a copy of the NT to reference as we do today. They did, however, have miraculous gifts by which to receive prophecies, confirmation of divine truth, and other needed information. Yet, even with this, they still remained “fleshly” in their thinking (3:2-3). They had problems with leadership (or, the lack of it), schisms, social/cultural influences, moral issues, church assembly decorum, and doctrinal teachings. Specifically, they:

- were prone to the petty and divisive spirit that is common among the ungodly (1:10-17).
- gravitated to the sophisticated oratory style of Greek rhetoricians rather than the simplicity of the gospel of Christ—the “word of the cross” (chapters 1 – 2).
- tended to put more stock in mere *men* than in Christ (chapter 3). In doing so, they threatened to undermine the work of their own congregation.
- prided themselves on being independently wise, and therefore no longer in need of Paul’s instruction (chapter 4). Yet, their actions betrayed this, as they continued to think in a way that was spiritually immature and short-sighted.
- allowed an immoral situation to go unreprimanded in their own midst, despite their claim to wisdom and maturity (chapter 5).
- would rather take their own brothers in Christ to a secular court rather than to allow wise Christian men to decide matters of justice for them (6:1-11).
- did not see the grave spiritual destruction that immorality causes (6:12-20), but assumed that what was done in the body had little bearing upon their spiritual well-being.
- had a number of questions about marriage (and celibacy), including the marriage of a believer with an unbeliever (chapter 7).
- prided themselves on their knowledge of God at the expense of the conscience of their fellow brother in the Lord (chapter 8).
- misunderstood the use of Christian liberties (chapter 9).
- thought themselves to be immune to the seduction of pride, the deception of their heart, and the temptation of idolatry (chapter 10).
- misunderstood (and/or had questions on) the role of women in the assembly (11:1-16).
- turned the Lord’s Supper into a common meal—an event in which they divided over class, economic status, and other worldly distinctions (11:17-34).
- boasted in their spiritual gifts rather than use them for the encouragement and edification of the church (chapter 12, 14).
- put more emphasis on temporary gifts than on godly love (chapter 13).
- allowed outside influences, as well as their own misunderstandings, to undermine the reality and importance of the resurrection of the dead (chapter 15).
- had questions on “the collection for the saints” (16:1-4).

While Paul’s letter does deal with some issues that are no longer immediately relevant to us (such as the use of miraculous gifts), it provides a wealth of critical instruction to all Christians.

More clearly than any other part of the New Testament, they [i.e., 1 and 2 Corinthians] show Christianity in conflict with heathenism. We see what method Paul adopted in founding

the church in the midst of a refined and corrupt people, and how he answered questions of conscience arising out of the relationships of Christians to the heathen around them. The cases may never occur again, but the principles involved in their decisions serve as lights to the church in all ages. Principles relating to church discipline, social relations, public worship, the nature of the church and of the sacraments are here unfolded not in an abstract form so much as in their application. These letters, therefore, in reference to all practical measures in the establishment of the church among the heathen and to its conduct in Christian lands, are among the most important parts of the Word of God.<sup>10</sup>

Indeed, it is difficult to imagine our understanding of Christ's church without this information. Not only this, but Christians today continue to grapple with many of the same problems facing the Corinthians: divisions, worldliness, spiritual immaturity, improper use of Christian liberties, the failure to exercise godly love properly, issues dealing with proper conduct and reverence, teachings on the resurrection, etc. "The world refuses to believe our testimony and our message of Christ, because it sees so little of Christ in us. The world forms its estimate of the Lord Jesus only from observing those who claim to be His followers."<sup>11</sup>

It is hard for us to imagine the weight of responsibility placed upon Paul in having to deal with the childlike mentality of the Corinthian church without coming across as angry, patronizing, or condescending. "We perceive the difficulty of the task imposed upon the Apostle, who must guard from so many perils, and guide through so many difficulties, his children in the faith, whom else he had begotten in vain; and we learn to appreciate more fully the magnitude of that laborious responsibility under which he describes himself as almost ready to sink, 'the care of all the churches.'"<sup>12</sup> The church in Corinth did not exist in a vacuum, uninfluenced and undistracted by worldly behavior and human (specifically, Greek) philosophy. We can see God's hand in preparing a man like Paul to deal with a church like the one in Corinth.

...[T]hese Epistles [1 & 2 Corinthians] abound in variety of topics, and show the extraordinary versatility of the mind of the writer, and his practical wisdom in dealing with delicate and complicated questions and unscrupulous opponents. For every aberration [i.e., deviation] he has a word of severe censure, for every danger a word of warning, for every weakness a word of cheer and sympathy, for every returning offender a word of pardon and encouragement. The Epistles lack the unity of design which characterizes Galatians and Romans. They are ethical, ecclesiastical, pastoral, and personal, rather than dogmatic and theological, although some most important doctrines, as that on the resurrection, are treated more fully than elsewhere.<sup>13</sup>

---

10 Charles Hodge, *A Commentary on 1 Corinthians*, electronic edition (database © 2004 by WORDsearch Corp.), "Introduction."

11 DeHaan, *Studies*, 14.

12 W. J. Conybeare and J. S. Howson, *The Life and Epistles of St. Paul* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1964), 380; their citation is from 2 Cor. 11:28.

13 Philip Schaff, *History of the Christian Church*, vol. 1 (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1995), 758; bracketed words added.

## General Outline

- Salutation and Introductory Comments (1:1-17)
- The Paradoxical Word of the Cross (1:18-31)
- Reliance on the Spirit Rather Than on Men (2:1-16)
- Building on Christ, Not Mere Men (3:1-23)
- The Christian's Attitude toward God's Stewards (4:1-21)
- Arrogance Corrupts Christian Fellowship (5:1-13)
- Worldly Judgments against Christian Brethren (6:1-11)
- The Christian Belongs to the Lord (6:12-20)
- Instructions Concerning Marriage (7:1-16)
- Advice to Those Contemplating Marriage or Divorce (7:17-40)
- The Proper Application of Christian Knowledge (8:1-13)
- Paul's Use of Personal Liberty (9:1-27)
- Warnings Against Overconfidence (10:1 – 11:1)
- Christian Women's Respect for Christian Men's Authority (11:2-16)
- Correction of Abuses of the Lord's Supper (11:17-34)
- The Unity of the Body of Christ (12:1-31)
- The Greatest Gift of All (13:1-13)
- The Proper Use of Spiritual Gifts in the Assembly (14:1-40)
- The Necessity of Christ's Resurrection (15:1-19)
- The Future Resurrection (15:20-58)
- Closing Comments and Salutations (16:1-24)

## Lesson One: Salutation and Introductory Comments (1:1-17)

Paul identifies himself as “an apostle of Jesus Christ by the will of God,” immediately re-establishing his role and authority (1:1). This is important and necessary, since some Corinthians thought they were as knowledgeable or capable as he was, and therefore no longer needed his instruction. Paul reminds them that he was personally “called” to be an apostle, and this calling was according to *God’s will*, not human will. In other words, this was not a responsibility that he chose for himself, but one which was given to him (Acts 9:15-16, 26:16-18, and Col. 1:25). Compare this with his salutations in other epistles

Concerning “Sosthenes,” nothing else is known about him unless he is the same man mentioned in Acts 18:17. “However, against this identification is the fact that Sosthenes was a rather common name and there is no evidence linking the two.”<sup>14</sup> While Sosthenes gives his endorsement to this letter, it will become immediately clear that Paul is its author, and he wields his own apostolic authority throughout it. It is also possible that Paul dictated this epistle to Sosthenes to write it; regardless, the letter is authenticated with Paul’s characteristic signature (16:21).

**Recognition of the Corinthian Church (1:2-9):** The “church of God which is at Corinth” (1:2) identifies a singular, self-governed *earthly* congregation and not the entire *spiritual* body of Christ (compare Col. 1:18, for example). Christ’s church is comprised of spiritual souls; the church at Corinth is comprised of physical people. The two (Christ’s church and the church at Corinth) are not interchangeable, are not in the same context, and do not operate in the exact same way. Christ is the “head” of His church by virtue of His identity (as its Redeemer) and His authority (as the Son of God). Whether He serves as the “head” of the church at Corinth is determined by the faithfulness of those who comprise that congregation. Christ’s fellowship (1:9) is not automatic or assumed; it can only be present when people agree to the terms of that fellowship. The synonymous phrases Paul uses to describe the congregation is as follows:

- ❑ **“the church of God which is at Corinth”:** While “church of Christ” is used only once in Scripture to identify a congregation of believers (Rom. 16:16), “church of God” is used numerous times: Acts 20:28, 1 Cor. 10:32, 11:16, 22, 2 Cor. 1:1, 1 Thess. 2:14, 2 Thess. 1:4, and 1 Tim. 3:5.
- ❑ **“those who have been sanctified in Christ Jesus”:** The collection of Christians at Corinth could not be legitimately recognized by Christ’s apostle unless they *belonged* to Christ. The church at Corinth was identified *with* Christ through having been sanctified *in* Christ, namely through the work of God’s Spirit (6:11; see 1 Pet. 1:2).
- ❑ **“saints by calling”:** “Saints” literally means “holy ones,” which describes not only the (ideally) virtuous nature of such people (1 Pet. 1:13-16, Rev. 19:8) but also their access to the Father

---

14 Willis, *Commentary*, 5.

through Christ (Eph. 2:17-19).<sup>15</sup> “Holiness is more than a state. For believers, sanctification is both a definitive act of God and a lifelong process.”<sup>16</sup>

- ❑ **“those who...call upon...Christ”:** To “call upon the name of the Lord” means to appeal to Christ for the salvation that He offers (Acts 4:12). God calls people through His gospel (2 Thess. 2:14), but one must make a proper *response* to the gospel. This response must be manifested through obedient faith, a demonstration of which includes (but is not limited to) belief, confession (Rom. 10:9-10), repentance, and baptism (Acts 2:38, 22:16).

Jim McGuiggan says at this point, “If we didn’t read the rest of the book we’d come away believing that the Corinthian church must have been utterly spotless, a shining example of godly living to all the people of God with whom they have been identified in this marvelous opening. But having read it, we might be led to wonder how Paul could so speak of them.”<sup>17</sup> Thankfully, fellowship with God is not dependent upon flawless human performance. At the same time, to *continue* in His fellowship requires our repentance when His word reveals our moral flaws.

Paul prayed often for the Corinthians (1:4), as he did for others (Phil. 1:3-4 and 1 Thess. 1:2). He reminds them that “in everything you were enriched in Him [Christ]” (1:5),” since “in Christ” is the source of all spiritual blessings (Eph. 1:3). This is no less true today; while we are not given miraculous abilities as were bestowed upon these people, we still gain our knowledge, strength, confidence, and hope through Jesus Christ (Col. 1:9-10, Heb. 10:19-22, et al) *with regard to (or in the context of) our salvation*. Such blessings (“gifts”) come through His word (2 Tim. 3:16-17), the personal example of Christ (John 13:17), and however God chooses to answer prayers (Jas 1:5). “Gifts of grace are a valuable, and indeed indispensable, accompaniment of Christian life, which without them would fail to bear witness to its supernatural origin. They are not, however, the end of Christian life, in which men ‘await the revelation of our Lord Jesus Christ.’”<sup>18</sup>

“[T]he revelation of our Lord Jesus Christ” (1:7) points to a future event, and has no reference in the NT epistles other than the Second Coming of Christ (Phil. 3:20, Col. 3:4, 1 Thess. 1:10, 2:19, 1 Pet. 1:7, et al). Paul consistently regarded Christ’s second advent as a real and literal event that will signal the end of the physical world (1 Thess. 4:13-17, 2 Pet. 3:3-10). Thus, the same God who calls into fellowship those who are saved by the grace of Christ will see their salvation to its end (1:8-9; see Phil. 1:6).<sup>19</sup> “God is faithful” to believers, and those who remain faithful to Him will be confirmed (or, established) and “blameless” (or, innocent) when the Lord appears (Col. 1:19-23).

<sup>15</sup> James Strong, *Strong’s Talking Greek-Hebrew Dictionary*, electronic edition (© WORDsearch Corp., no date), #G40.

<sup>16</sup> Kistemaker, *1 Corinthians*, 35.

<sup>17</sup> Jim McGuiggan, *The Book of 1 Corinthians* (Lubbock, TX: Montex Publishing Co., 1984), 18.

<sup>18</sup> C. K. Barrett, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publ., 1996), 38.

<sup>19</sup> Fellowship—with God *and* His people—is the result of the combined work of divine grace and human faith (Eph. 2:8-9). These two works are not comparable in power or scope, but *are* both necessary. We have fellowship with one another *only when* we all have fellowship with God (1 John 1:1-3). This fellowship makes us all equals before God: we are “fellow heirs,” “fellow members” of Christ’s church (body), and “fellow partakers of the promise in Christ Jesus through the gospel” (Eph. 3:6). Those who remain outside of Christ also remain outside of this spiritual fellowship; those who *are* in Christ and continue to “walk in a manner worthy of the calling with which [they] have been called” (Eph. 4:1) are brothers and sisters—*brethren*—in the Lord, and “sons and daughters” to God (2 Cor. 6:18).

**Divisions in the Church (1:10-17):** To “agree [or, speak the same thing]” (1:10) does *not* mean that human consensus is to govern the church at Corinth. The source of all Christian agreement must conform to the doctrine that defines fellowship with God *and* each other. This unity must also be consistent with Christ’s own oneness or like-mindedness with His Father (John 17:17-23). It is impossible for people to be united *with* God who are not united *by* His doctrine, which has been revealed to us by His Son (Gal. 1:11-12). Divisions (or, schisms; sects; factions) within a church are *always* the result of some or all of its members failing to “preserve the unity of the Spirit” (Eph. 4:3) in their teaching as well as their personal conduct toward one another. Thus, maintaining the “same mind” and “same judgment [or, opinion; sentiment<sup>20</sup>]” has a specific reference, and cannot be applied to *all* contexts. Since Christ is the source of our unity, we must be unified by His example (John 13:13-17, 35-36) and His doctrine (John 8:31-32). No one can be “complete” *in* Christ unless he submits himself to the teaching *of* Christ, and has the same attitude (or, mind) that He had (Phil. 2:5, Col. 1:28).

Fellowship, unity, one-mindedness, and singularity of purpose are the ideals. However, the Corinthians manifested spiritual immaturity through their quarrels and schisms (1:11).<sup>21</sup> We do not know who “Chloe’s people” are—Paul allows them a measure of anonymity—but it seems clear that the apostle learned about the divisions among the Corinthians *not* through the letter they wrote to him (see 7:1), but through a third party.<sup>22</sup> Specifically, the Corinthians were dividing themselves by the men who baptized them (1:12). Thus, individual members placed greater emphasis on human distinctions rather than give all glory to Christ (see 1:30-31). “Apollos” is undoubtedly the man of the same name in Acts 18:24-28; being a skilled orator, he would have had a certain appeal to the Greeks in Corinth who put great confidence in the ability to speak eloquently and proficiently. “Cephas” is the Hebrew name for Simon Peter (John 1:42), and would have found a ready audience among the Jews in the Corinthian church. Still others chose Paul as their champion. And (lastly, to emphasize Paul’s point), some even chose to identify with Christ Himself (!). “Strange to say, men still invent Christs to suit their own religious whims. Instead of the Christ that was, and is and ever shall be..., they create a changeable and a variously colored Christ.”<sup>23</sup>

20 A. T. Robertson, *Word Pictures in the New Testament*, vol. 4 (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, no date), 72.

21 Twice, Paul uses the word “brethren [or, brothers]” in this passage (1:10-11). “By the very use of the word, Paul does two things. First, he softens the rebuke which is given, not in any threatening way, but as from one who has no other emotion than love. Second, it should have shown them how wrong their dissensions and divisions were. They were fellow Christians, and they should have lived in mutual love” (Theodore Beza, quoted in Barclay, *Letters*, 17).

22 Based upon the name, and its association with the Greek goddess Demeter, J. B. Lightfoot thinks that “Chloe” is probably a former slave that has been freed. “Slaves and by consequence freedmen seem very frequently to have born the Greek names of heathen divinities” (*Notes on the Epistles of St. Paul* [Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 1995], 152). Kistemaker says: “We would expect that she resided in Corinth, for the text implies that the Corinthians knew her. Also, the news concerning the factions originated there. Another possibility is that Chloe was a businesswoman who lived in Ephesus and that her employees (either slaves, freedmen, or members of her family) regularly traveled between Corinth and Ephesus and were fully acquainted with the church. Whether Chloe was a Christian cannot be determined” (*1 Corinthians*, 45).

23 Lenski, *Interpretation*, 45.

“Has Christ been divided?” (1:13)—we can almost hear the sadness and exasperation in Paul’s voice.<sup>24</sup> The problem was not in their baptism, but in ascribing the importance of their identity to mere men rather than to Christ. In other words, the Corinthians were baptized *rightly*, but they began distinguishing or identifying themselves *wrongly*. “The unity of His body is not to be cut in pieces, as if all did not belong to Him, the One Head.”<sup>25</sup> Another commentator writes: “They looked upon the gospel as another form of wisdom like that of the Greeks [i.e., philosophers—CMS], the Christian evangelists as teachers of wisdom, and themselves as wise for following a particular teacher.”<sup>26</sup> Since *Christ* has not been divided, the *church of Corinth* had no right to be divided—especially over that which was supposed to unite them! In dividing into schisms or party names (i.e., denominations), they succumbed to a worldly mentality. Not only this, but they did so at the expense of their recognition of Christ’s death and resurrection. It is *Christ* who gives their baptism any meaning, not Paul, Apollos, or Cephas (Peter); they were baptized in the name of *Christ*, not the name of Paul or anyone else (Acts 2:38).

In light of the Corinthians’ divisions based upon who baptized them—and this is a critical point of the apostle’s response—Paul is glad that he only baptized a handful of people (1:14-17).<sup>27</sup> (“Crispus” is undoubtedly the leader of the synagogue in Corinth [Acts 18:8]; “Gaius,” a common name, may be the one mentioned in Rom. 16:23.) “He is not making little of baptism; he is simply glad that no act of his could be misconstrued as annexing anyone for himself and not for Christ.”<sup>28</sup> His statement, “For Christ did not send me to baptize, but to preach the gospel” (1:17), is hardly meant to nullify the need for baptism in the context of salvation.<sup>29</sup> Baptism (or, immersion) in water is essential for salvation (“baptism now saves you”—1 Pet. 3:21); it is impossible to be “clothed with Christ” (Gal. 3:27) or united with Christ (Rom. 6:3-4) otherwise. And yet, while many different men could baptize believers in water, few men could reveal divine doctrine with apostolic authority. Just as the apostles did not want to distribute food to Christian widows—even though they were fully capable of doing so—at the expense of the critical teaching they provided the early church (Acts 6:1ff), so the apostle Paul gave priority to preaching the gospel over immersing people in water.

24 The Greek can also be rendered here as a statement rather than a question: “Christ has been divided!” or “Christ is divided!”; “Some of the best expositors render [this] as an assertion [rather than a rhetorical question]” (Marvin R. Vincent, *Vincent’s Word Studies*, electronic edition [© 2014 by WORDsearch Corp.], on 1:13); bracketed words are mine.

25 Robert Jamieson, A. R. Fausset, and David Brown, *Commentary Critical and Explanatory on the Whole Bible* (1871), electronic edition (database © 2012 by WORDsearch Corp.), on 1:13.

26 Willis, *Commentary*, 24.

27 “The pride of Corinth showed itself largely in philosophical conceit, and the citizens who vaunted their superior intelligence were divided into sects, of whom Aristotle, Plato, Zeno, Epicurus, and later philosophers, were the heads. The church became inflated with this same intellectual vanity, and apparently sought to make Christianity the rival of philosophy by exalting her humble teachers to be heads of religio-philosophical sects, and rivals of Christ himself” (J. W. McGarvey and Philip Y. Pendleton, *The Standard Bible Commentary: Thessalonians, Corinthians, Galatians, and Romans* [Cincinnati, OH: The Standard Publishing Co., 1916], 52. This same mentality is still manifested in churches today, whenever members boast about who baptized them, who their preacher is, or how many generations of Christians are in their church pedigree.

28 Barclay, *Letters*, 20.

29 A parallel situation exists in John 4:1-2, where Jesus taught the baptism of John (the Baptist), even though He Himself was not conducting the baptisms.

To use this passage (1:14-17) as a refutation of the necessity of baptism for salvation is to ignore: its context, which has nothing to do with proving or disproving baptism; all the other passages that positively require such baptism (Acts 2:38, Rom. 6:3-7, Gal. 3:27, et al); all the examples in Acts of those who were baptized after hearing the message of Christ (Acts 8:12, 35-38, 16:14-15, 25-34, 18:8, et al); Paul's own *personal* baptism in response to divine instruction (Acts 9:18, 22:16); and Christ's own commandment regarding the making of disciples to Him (Mat. 28:19). Paul was commissioned specifically with the preaching *of* the gospel (Acts 26:16-18), not to personally participate in every aspect of one's obedience *to* the gospel. "Paul is by no means discrediting baptism. ... [but] had to use all his time and talent to preach the Word and hence left the matter of baptism primarily to others."<sup>30</sup> "[S]o that the cross of Christ would not be made void" (1:17)—which is what the Corinthians were in danger of doing through their petty divisions over men. They were exalting themselves by that which actually dishonored the Lord's great sacrifice on the cross—something Paul would never do.

## Questions

- 1.) Is "church of God" (1:1) as acceptable as "church of Christ" for designating a congregation of God's saints (1:2)? Are these names that are required by divine decree or are these merely *descriptors* that can be used interchangeably?
  
- 2.) For all the corrections and admonitions in this letter, Paul still begins by calling them "saints" (1:2) and refers to them throughout this letter as "brethren" (20 times). What does this tell us concerning:
  - a. Believers who are *ignorant* and *mistaken*, yet are still striving to serve Christ as Lord? (Does Christ still regard these people as Christians?)
  - b. Paul's expectations of those who are ignorant and mistaken? (Is he content to let them remain in this condition?)
  - c. Our own fellowship with such people? (If Paul recognized *his* fellowship with such people, then how should *we* regard them?)

---

<sup>30</sup> Kistemaker, *1 Corinthians*, 51.



- 3.) Does being of the “same mind” (1:10) require that *all* members of a given congregation agree on *every* issue, biblical topic, or spiritual subject? Or, are there *some* topics that we *must* agree on, while others do not require unanimous agreement—and if so, *how do we know* which is which?
- 4.) What do you suppose prompted the Corinthians to call themselves after mere men rather than be identified only with Christ (1:11-12)? How might this same spirit of division still manifest itself within the brotherhood today? Please explain.