

Prayer

Read the chapter

Divide this chapter into units

1:1-10 Intro: A. Epistolary Opening 1:1-3	
B. Thanksgiving 1:4-9	
(Preparation Realization)	
C. Thesis Statement 1:10	
(Propositio—General Purpose): the rest of the book is about this.	
1:11-31: different kinds of wisdom	1:11-17: quarrels
	1:18-25 God's wisdom
	1:26-31: Boast in the Lord

When studying the Bible we must think like a child. We must observe details. We must ask basic questions. We must read like we have never read it before.

Verses 1-3: thoughts/ discussion

1 Corinthians 1:1–3 (ESV)

Greeting

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

² To the church of God that is in Corinth, to those sanctified in Christ Jesus, called to be saints together with all those who in every place call upon the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, both their Lord and ours:

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

This verse is simply telling who wrote this: Paul. This verse also tells who Paul wrote this letter with: Sosthenes.

IVP: 1:1. *Letters in antiquity were not usually coauthored; thus Paul may have authored the letter and Sosthenes served as scribe, writing it down (cf. 16:21); or Sosthenes may have contributed to the letter's contents or (more likely) merely concurred with Paul's message.¹*

- Paul opens this by saying that he is an apostle of Christ Jesus
- Notice he says, “our” brother when talking about Sosthenes.
- Rom 1:1 is similar; 2 Tim 1:1
- I once read some info about Roman letters and the amount of info that could fit onto 1 scroll. This info also told the average letter length in words. Paul really pushed this length. Paul wrote as much as he could or needed to.
- Acts 18:17 references Sosthenes. He was the leader of the synagogue and was beaten while Paul was in Corinth.
- “Sanctified”: We don’t talk like that anymore, do we? What does it mean to be sanctified?
 - Set apart, holy
- Who are we set apart for? Christ, Jesus. This is deep.
 - Do we live like that?
- Notice the appeal to the universal church? All who in every place....
- Romans 1:7 has a similar greeting.

1 Cor 1:4-9: thoughts, discussion

1 Corinthians 1:4–9 (ESV)

Thanksgiving

⁴*I give thanks to my God always for you because of the grace of God that was given you in Christ Jesus,*
⁵*that in every way you were enriched in him in all speech and all knowledge—* ⁶*even as the testimony about*
Christ was confirmed among you— ⁷*so that you are not lacking in any gift, as you wait for the revealing of our*
Lord Jesus Christ, ⁸*who will sustain you to the end, guiltless in the day of our Lord Jesus Christ.* ⁹*God is faithful,*
by whom you were called into the fellowship of his Son, Jesus Christ our Lord.

¹Keener, C. S., & InterVarsity Press. (1993). *The IVP Bible background commentary : New Testament (1 Co 1:1)*. Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press.

- Again, notice the “why’s” Paul says, “I thank God... for...”
 - That in everything....”
- Notice how Paul talks about speech and knowledge. They are enriched by God in speech and knowledge. We cannot discount speech or knowledge. These are both important. Our knowledge is usually inside and that is important. But, our speech, that is important. Christ effects our speech.

1:5. *Opening sections of letters commonly introduced some of the themes that would recur throughout the letter. “Speech” and “knowledge” were important to the Corinthians. In fact, the nearby Isthmian Games (see comment on 9:24–25) included speech contests, and knowledge was associated with philosophical wisdom or the ability to speak extemporaneously on any topic (a skill in which rhetoricians, or public speakers, were trained). Here Paul means spiritual, not merely natural, gifts, but the Corinthians had come to excel in these particular gifts precisely because these mattered most to them in their culture²*

- Gifts of the Spirit (1 Cor 12:8)
- 2 Cor 9:11 is similar. Also, Rom 15:14: Paul compliments the churches
- Verses 6-7: so that (conjunction) you are not lacking in any gift. 1 Cor 12 the spiritual gifts
- Verses 8-9: God will confirm you blameless
- God is faithful.
- 2 Tim 1:8; Rev 1:2 **Testimony is cross referenced.**
- **Romans 8:19 and four other verses deal with the coming of the Lord Jesus Christ**

Verse 10: thoughts, discussion

Thesis for the book

- Romans 12:16; Phil 1:27; Phil 2:3

rhetoricians ***Rhetoric.** The art or study of proper forms and methods of public speaking, highly emphasized in antiquity. Although only the well-to-do had much training in it, the rhetorical forms and ideas they used filtered down to the rest of urban society through public speeches, in a manner similar to that in which television permeates modern Western society.

²Keener, C. S., & InterVarsity Press. (1993). *The IVP Bible background commentary : New Testament (1 Co 1:5)*. Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press.

Phil 1:27

Only conduct yourselves in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ, so that whether I come and see you or remain absent, I will hear of you that you are standing firm in one spirit, with one mind striving together for the faith of the gospel...

Verses 10-17: thoughts or discussion

1 Corinthians 1:10–17 (ESV)

Divisions in the Church

¹⁰ I appeal to you, brothers, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that all of you agree, and that there be no divisions among you, but that you be united in the same mind and the same judgment. ¹¹ For it has been reported to me by Chloe's people that there is quarreling among you, my brothers. ¹² What I mean is that each one of you says, "I follow Paul," or "I follow Apollos," or "I follow Cephas," or "I follow Christ." ¹³ Is Christ divided? Was Paul crucified for you? Or were you baptized in the name of Paul? ¹⁴ I thank God that I baptized none of you except Crispus and Gaius, ¹⁵ so that no one may say that you were baptized in my name. ¹⁶ (I did baptize also the household of Stephanas. Beyond that, I do not know whether I baptized anyone else.) ¹⁷ For Christ did not send me to baptize but to preach the gospel, and not with words of eloquent wisdom, lest the cross of Christ be emptied of its power.

- Quarrels among them. Does this relate today?
- Paul comes back to this in chapter 3
- Acts 18:24: Apollos was mighty in the Scriptures. A Jew. He was eloquent. He was a good speaker.
 - These people were looking on the outside appearance
- Cephas translates "Peter" or "rock"
- Acts 18:8 talks about the baptisms and people coming to Christ in Corinth. Crispus and Gaius are mentioned there.

^a Eph 4:1

^b Phil 1:5

^c 1 Cor 16:13; Phil 4:1

^d Acts 4:32

¹ Lit *soul*

^e Jude 3

- Notice the recurrence of questions in verse 13...
- Verses 14-15: Paul is glad that he only baptized a few [why]“so that”
- Stephanas is represented again in 1Cor 16:15 and 17
- Verse 17 and chapter 2:1, 4, and 13. Look how Paul talks about preaching God’s wisdom and not human wisdom
- 2 Cor 10:10 and 11:6 deal with Paul’s personal appearance
- There were philosophers who said they have to dumb down in order to accept the Gospel. This is not intuitive.
- **1:12.** People often gravitated toward particular teachers. Philosophers encouraged emotional attachment to themselves as a necessary part of developing morally and intellectually. Rabbis had their own schools, and disciples normally propagated their teacher’s views. Paul probably mentions “Cephas” and “Christ” only hypothetically (cf. 3:5–6); his point is that any division is wrong, even one based on the claim to be of Christ alone and so rejecting Paulinists and followers of Apollos.
- **1:13.** Paul here uses a common technique in argument: *reductio ad absurdum*, reducing an opponent’s position to its natural but absurd conclusion.³
- verse 16: The IVP says that a household usually followed the religion of the household.

Verses 18-25 thoughts or comments

1 Corinthians 1:18–25 (ESV)

Christ the Wisdom and Power of God

¹⁸For the word of the cross is folly to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God. ¹⁹For it is written,

*“I will destroy the wisdom of the wise,
and the discernment of the discerning I will thwart.”*

Rabbis ***Rabbi**. Jewish teacher. Sometime after A.D. 70 the term became a technical one for those ordained in the rabbinic movement, which probably consisted primarily of Pharisaic scribes. (To accommodate customary usage this commentary sometimes applies the term to Jewish teachers of the law in general, although such common usage may have technically been later; it also applies the term to the teachings of Jewish legal experts collected in rabbinic literature.)

disciples ***Disciples**. Students of rabbis or philosophers, normally committed to memorizing and living according to their master’s teachings.

³Keener, C. S., & InterVarsity Press. (1993). *The IVP Bible background commentary : New Testament (1 Co 1:12-13)*. Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press.

²⁰ Where is the one who is wise? Where is the scribe? Where is the debater of this age? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of the world? ²¹ For since, in the wisdom of God, the world did not know God through wisdom, it pleased God through the folly of what we preach to save those who believe. ²² For Jews demand signs and Greeks seek wisdom, ²³ but we preach Christ crucified, a stumbling block to Jews and folly to Gentiles, ²⁴ but to those who are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God. ²⁵ For the foolishness of God is wiser than men, and the weakness of God is stronger than men.

1:18. *Greeks believed that some gods had died and returned (usually they were vegetation deities who returned annually), but they relegated this belief to ancient myth and sometimes even allegorized the myths. Romans regarded crucifixion as a death appropriate for slaves; Jews also saw it as shameful (Deut 21:23). Those viewed as “saviors” were normally gods, kings, wealthy benefactors or miracle workers. Roman society was built around power and status; power was concentrated in the male head of the household, in wealthy and aristocratic families, and so forth. Associating power with a crucified man—the epitome of weakness—thus made no more sense to ancients than it does to modern people outside Christ.⁴*

- Foolishness: look at 2:14 and 4:10
- Romans 1:16: Paul says: “I am not ashamed of the Gospel...”
- The Greeks and Romans had pride in their great wisdom yet they didn’t understand the Gospel
- Contrast of “foolishness” with “power of God”
- Contrast “perishing” with “being saved”
- Isa 29:14

Verse 20: Job 12:17; Is 19:11f; 33:18

- There is an Old Testament theme of God making the people who are wise by the world’s standards into the people not as wise.
- May be a little sarcasm from Paul here.
- Movie “Expelled”
- Verse 21

⁴Keener, C. S., & InterVarsity Press. (1993). *The IVP Bible background commentary : New Testament (1 Co 1:18)*. Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press.

- John 12:31: the ruler of the world will be cast out. Who is the ruler of the world? Satan
- James 4:4: Friendship with the world is enmity with God
- **1:21.** *In Greek comedy the hero pretended to be stupid, but he proved to be wise in the end; in contrast to this hero was the fool who claimed to be wise and wanted credit for the wise man's triumph, but was rebuffed. Plato said that human wisdom was worthless, and people should seek God's wisdom instead.*
- **1:22–23.** *Greeks were known for their love of learning. Greeks and Jews alike might desire attesting miracles, but Paul keeps Jews and Greeks distinct here for rhetorical effect. On the foolishness of the cross to both, see comment on 1:18.⁵*
- Verse 22
 - Matthew 12:38 the Pharisees asked for a sign from Jesus
 - The Greeks were all about wisdom
 - Notice contrast: wisdom of God—the world in its' wisdom didn't know God. God was well pleased through the foolishness of the message preached to save those who believe
 - Who is in charge of salvation? God is doing this.
- Verse 23
 - Again the conjunction: But... we ...
 - Why is Christ crucified a stumbling block to the Jews? cursed
 - Why is Christ crucified foolishness to Greeks? The King crucified....
 - Deut 21:23
- Verse 24:

Plato **Plato**. A student of Socrates whose idealism and dualistic worldview became influential in subsequent Greek thought. He flourished in the fourth century B.C.

rhetorical ***Rhetoric**. The art or study of proper forms and methods of public speaking, highly emphasized in antiquity. Although only the well-to-do had much training in it, the rhetorical forms and ideas they used filtered down to the rest of urban society through public speeches, in a manner similar to that in which television permeates modern Western society.

⁵Keener, C. S., & InterVarsity Press. (1993). *The IVP Bible background commentary : New Testament (1 Co 1:21-22)*. Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press.

- Luke 11:49: Christ is the Wisdom of God.
- Verse 25:
 - Notice the contrast: foolishness of God is wiser than men

Cross reference for verses 26-31:

1 Corinthians 1:26–31 (ESV)

²⁶ For consider your calling, brothers: not many of you were wise according to worldly standards, not many were powerful, not many were of noble birth. ²⁷ But God chose what is foolish in the world to shame the wise; God chose what is weak in the world to shame the strong; ²⁸ God chose what is low and despised in the world, even things that are not, to bring to nothing things that are, ²⁹ so that no human being might boast in the presence of God. ³⁰ And because of him you are in Christ Jesus, who became to us wisdom from God, righteousness and sanctification and redemption, ³¹ so that, as it is written, “Let the one who boasts, boast in the Lord.”

Commentaries for verses 26-31:

Commentaries:

Fee: the New International Commentary on the New Testament: pages 80-88

- Fee says, “His point in getting them so to consider themselves is that in calling out a people for His name God showed no regard for their present values--- worldly wisdom or merit. Indeed, in calling *them* He chiefly chose those who are a living contradiction to those values.” (Page 79) This may relate to question 5.
- On page 80, Fee looks at Jeremiah 9:23 to make the case that not many of them, before, their conversion belonged to the wise and influential in Corinth.
- On page 80, Fee says that Munck has mustered a considerable amount of evidence to show that part of the “boast” of the sophists was precisely that they belonged to the “wise, powerful, and well born.”
 - This works with questions 5 and 1. It seems that I can infer from this evidence that the sophists in the Corinthian area might have had trouble with boasting.
- **Concerning question 5:** On page 81 Celsus is quoted. He wrote this more than a century later:
 - “There injunctions are like this. ‘Let no one educated, no one wise, no one sensible draw near. For these abilities are thought by us to be evils. But as for anyone ignorant, anyone stupid, anyone uneducated, anyone who is a child, let him come boldly.’ By the fact that they themselves admit that these people are worthy of their God, they show that they want and are able to convince only the foolish, dishonorable and stupid, and only slaves, women, and children.” Footnote shows that this is quoted by Origen in *Contra Celsum*

- I think from this we can infer that the majority of Christians were not high in status or wealth. That certainly doesn't mean that some weren't.
- Fee does give information on page 81 that in recent years people have argued that there were many early Christians who were rich. However, E.A. Judge and G. Theissen have been more judicious saying that a truly unique feature in Christianity was its nonhomogeneous character having slaves, free, etc. (Question 5)
- On page 82 Fee does say that in saying "not many" Paul recognizes that some of them were well off by human standards. Some had their own houses and according to 1Cor 11:17-22 were abusing the Lord's Table. (Question 5)
- On page 83, Fee is discussing verses 27-28 and says, "In typical rhetorical language..."
 - From this I may infer that Paul's use of rhetoric is normal. **Question 2.**

Witherington's commentary:

- Concerning question 5, Witherington comments on page 22 that there were "not many" who he is writing to who are wise, powerful or of Noble birth. So, some but probably few were members of the higher social status. This group probably included one or two government officials. When Paul talks about the powerful he certainly could be talking about political officials but 2Cor deals with the patron client relationship so in this case Witherington thinks Paul is referring to those with money. "In Greco-Roman society money would be given by the powerful to their dependents and this transfer of cash downwards in the social scale is the main instrument by which the status of power is asserted." (page 22)
- 7:21-23 suggest that there were slaves in the community and 11:22 also suggests that there were many poor in the community
- 1 Cor 16:15 and 19 shows that these few wealthy people could provide a great influence by using their homes as a meeting place.
- 1 Cor 16:2 and 2Cor 8-9 gives evidence that Paul did believe that there was disposable income or assets among his Corinthian converts. So, the social status of the Corinthians probably went from poor to well off. Withering doesn't believe there were any Roman aristocrats, although there were only a few in Corinth.
- Witherington says that a Pauline congregation generally reflected a fair cross section of society. However, he thinks the Corinthian Christians were better off than those in Macedonia.
- But wealth was not all. In a Roman society there was the hierarchy of family lineage, etc as well. It appears that some in Corinth had the high family status. Some of them may have had a higher attributed status than achieved status.
- Corinth's elite included freed slaves and veterans and the veterans may have been more dominant (pages 23-24).
- Many of the city's top officials in Paul's day were the children of former slaves. They could gain wealth to get to the top.
- "Paul's words in 1 Cor. 1:26 would have been a pointed reminder to such status-hungry people of their origins." (page 24)

- Some commentators think that the Corinthian church might have been appealing to some because of status inconsistencies. People may have thought that joining the church will give them status that they couldn't achieve otherwise. (paraphrased Page 24)
- On pages 113-114 Witherington again addresses this issue of social status. He believes we have to take this for what it is. Corinth was rich with diversity. While he believes that 1Cor 4:10 is ironic.
- 1 Cor 11:18 gives indication that the Corinthians were coming together to have the Lord's supper in one house. In even notable Roman Villas the dining room could accommodate 9-12 people. With adding in the kitchen, atrium and elsewhere in the house there could maybe be fifty or sixty people. Witherington believes that there were about 60 Christians in Corinth. This is based on them all fitting in a house.
- If the previous number is correct than about 10 percent may be wealthy.
- In a classical sense the word calling refers to what one has taken on in their life. (job, etc) in 1:26 Paul may be trying to take them down a peg by reminding them of this calling.
- Not having to do with a question but interesting: Witherington says on page 116 that calling Jesus Wisdom would have been one of the most important developments in early Christianity. It allowed Christians like Paul to think of Jesus in pre existent as well as post existent state.
- Concerning question 4: Witherington quotes W. Bender: "(1)En Christo is probably used here in an instrumental sense ("through Christ") as it is so often is elsewhere in Paul's letters, (2) 1:23f. encourages us to see Christ being identified with Wisdom and power but not with these other term, and, most pertinently, (3) in 2Cor 5:21 one finds instrumental en Christo together with the believer being called the dikaiosune theou (righteousness of God). Furthermore, it is believers, not Christ, who are said in 2Cor3 6:11b to be washed, consecrated, and justified. Paul wished in 1Cor 1:30 to tell his audience not only what Christ is but also what they are through Christ." (Page 117)
 - **Inference:** In Christ is referring to who we are through Christ. 2 Cor 5:21 is a good reference.

The IVP Bible Backgrounds Commentary:

1:26–29. Roman social class was based on birth ("nobility") rather than on wealth; but by either criterion, most of the Corinthian Christians derived from the lower ranks of society, which made up the vast majority of ancient society. Paul's guarded language here ("not many"—NIV) suggests that some, however, were of higher status, no doubt including the owners of the homes in which the churches met. This passage reflects Jeremiah 9:23, paving the way for Paul's explicit quotation of Jeremiah 9:24 in 1 Corinthians 1:31.

NIV New International Version

churches ***Church.** The Greek term used in the New Testament reflects the terms often used in the Septuagint to translate the Hebrew word for the "congregation" (*qahal*) of Israel: "church" (assembly) and "synagogue" (gathering). Although some scholars have suggested that Jesus could not have spoken about the church during his earthly ministry, the Dead Sea Scrolls used the Hebrew term for God's community; hence Jesus could use this word in talking about his future community (Mt 16:18; 18:17). The term was in common use in Greek culture for "assemblies," especially citizen assemblies in cities. (The popular modern surmise that the Greek word for "church,"

- Concerning question 5 I can infer that some of them were higher class but most of them were lower class. Fee and Witherington have more info about this.

Summary:

Through my study of the IVP, Witherington's and Fee's Commentary, as well as the Dictionary of Jesus and the Gospels I was able to find out many things. The largest piece of information that I found had to do with the social class of the Corinthians. It seems that the Corinthians might have been wealthier than the other churches that Paul ministered to. This is evidenced by many passages where Paul is asking for money from the Corinthians to support other churches. It is especially evidenced from this passage. It seems that Paul used a normal style of rhetoric in this passage in order to deepen his point about how God chose them and we are not to boast in ourselves but in Christ. The commentaries were enlightening about this passage.

ekklēsia, means "called-out ones" is thus mistaken; that sense is actually more appropriate for "saints," i.e., "those separated [for God].")