



151st Church of Christ
Small Group Study Guide – 1 CORINTHIANS
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AN IMPERFECT LOCAL CHURCH
A Study in 1 Corinthians

LESSON 2: 1 Corinthians 1:1-17
TEACHER

The Corinthian church was plagued by a variety of problems that had a direct practical impact on the congregation. For example, they tolerated immorality among the members of the congregation, they sued each other in civil courts, and they didn't even observe the Lord's Supper as a single group or spiritual family.

As is often the case, all of these practical problems had doctrinal roots. The visible cause of congregational problems may be practical or a matter of conflicting personalities, but the real problems are doctrinal and spiritual. In this opening section, Paul calls for unity in the congregation as an expression of the great doctrines associated with the fact that we are all saved by the crucified Christ.

THEME VERSE: 1 Corinthians 1:10

Now I plead with you, brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you all speak the same thing, and that there be no divisions among you, but that you be perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment.

OUTLINE

1 Corinthians 1:1-17, Introduction

Lesson outline

- 1 Cor** **1-3, Greeting**
 4-9, Thanksgiving
 10-17, The problem of division

DISCUSSION

1 Cor 1:1-3, Greeting

- 1. Who was Sosthenes? What do we know from him in Scripture? Why might Paul have seen fit to mention him at this point in the letter?**
 - Sosthenes: Little is known of this brother, other than he was with Paul while the letter was being written. It is possible that he was Paul's scribe for the letter, but this is

conjecture. A Sosthenes is mentioned in Acts 18:17 as being the new leader of the synagogue in Corinth. An earlier synagogue leader, Crispus (Ac 18:8), had been converted to Christ, and it is possible that his successor, Sosthenes, was also converted, but this is unverifiable. It seems that Paul's companion was known to his readers.

2. What four attributes of the Corinthian Christians does Paul list in his address? Are they unique to the Corinthians?

- 1) The church (assembly) belongs to God.
- 2) They are sanctified in Christ Jesus (= made holy by Jesus).
- 3) Called to be saints (= called to live holy lives).
- 4) They are linked to all those who call on Jesus (included in a worldwide brotherhood)

Note: "Every place" or "everywhere" probably refers to every meeting place of Christians or to "every place where Christians were found" rather than every town in the empire.

3. How might these attributes relate directly, or serve as an introduction, to Paul's attempt to correct division in the church?

- They emphasize the ownership of God and the oneness of those who belong to God. Paul here sets the tone of unity and the meritorious work of God, not men, in making each and every Christian special – not just a select few.

4. How many times are God and Christ cited in the greeting? What importance might this have considering the situation in Corinth and Paul's message?

- God - 3; Jesus Christ – 4
- This is consistent with Paul's call to be less self-focused and more aware of the relationship they had with each other as a result of God's work through Christ.

1 Cor 1:4-9, Thanksgiving

5. For what was Paul thankful regarding the Corinthians?

- That they had received God's grace.
- God's grace had a saving and unifying impact on them.

6. What was the impact of God's grace? Identify these as 3 pairs of statements, each including a form of cause and effect relationship.

- It had fully equipped them to become what God wanted them to be.
- All of these statements emphasize the fact that the oneness that Paul desired was not at all out of reach for the Corinthians. Regardless of their sinful past (6:9-11) they were fully equipped by God to become mature, spiritually minded Christians.

Verse 4: I thank my God always concerning you for the grace of God which was given to you by Christ Jesus,

Cause: (5) that you were enriched in everything by Him in all utterance and all knowledge,
Effect: (6) even as the testimony of Christ was confirmed in you,

Cause (7) so that you come short in no gift,
Effect: eagerly waiting for the revelation of our Lord Jesus Christ,

Cause: (8) who will also confirm you to the end,
Effect: that you may be blameless in the day of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Note: Verse 9 has another cause and effect statement.

Cause: (9) God is faithful,
Effect: by whom you were called into the fellowship of His Son, Jesus Christ our Lord.

7. We sometimes use the word “fellowship” almost synonymously with “denomination” or “religious group,” as in the phrase, “Members of certain fellowships believe differently.” What was Paul’s meaning for fellowship in v. 9? What are the implications (especially in the Corinthian church context) for Christians?

- We are brought into a partnership with each other and Christ. Obviously, Christian fellowship is more than the social activities of the church. Remembering that Christ has called us into fellowship (partnership, coming together) is a major and fundamental guiding doctrine for the church.
- If we are in Christ, we are in fellowship with God and each other. The church is one fellowship; not several.

1 Cor 1:10-17, The problem of division

Verse 10, the “theme verse”, is the first verse of the main body of the letter after the standard greeting and thanksgiving sections. He pleads for one thing, though he states it 3 different ways.

8. What are those three versions of Paul’s goal?

1) Speak the same thing; 2) Have no divisions; 3) Be joined in mind and judgment.

9. Is Paul’s desire possible?

- Yes. There can be unity, even though there is diversity in any group of people. However, the fact of diversity should never be taken as an excuse to cease seeking greater agreement or to excuse any frictions.

10. Paul is acting on the basis of what someone had told him, rather than firsthand observation. How does Paul avoid an accusation of acting on hearsay?

- He names his source. This was no unnamed, anonymous source.
- By identifying his source, he actually increases the credibility of the information. The Corinthians would recognize the name Chole and would know the accuracy of the observation.

11. In what ways was the Corinthian congregation divided, and in what way(s) might they have appeared to be united?

- They were still meeting as one congregation, so it wasn't a congregational split. But they were not caring for each other and working together as they should.

12. How might their quarreling over favorite preachers have been linked to their baptism?

- Being baptized by a "famous preacher" may have been thought to give prestige to someone. Paul was not concerned about who actually immersed someone, but apparently some Corinthians were.
- It appears that merely identifying who performed their baptisms wasn't the problem. Rather, they were acting as "followers" of those men to the detriment of recognizing their unity in Christ.

13. Why would Paul object to Christians saying, "We are of Christ"?

- They may have considered Christ as one possible leader among many candidates.
- This may have been claimed by some who thought that by so claiming they were showing their superior spirituality.

14. How do Paul's claims in verse 17 serve to reduce his "prestige" among those who might be tempted to say, "I am of Paul"?

- He baptized few, and who did the baptizing didn't matter anyway.
- He preached the simple gospel. He showed no great ability to dazzle. Preaching style should never overshadow the substance of the message. His only claim to fame was the message he preached.
- The Christ of the cross was the only person who mattered or who elevated anyone (cp 1:2 & 4).

15. If Paul wasn't sent to baptize, does that mean that baptism isn't important to salvation? What is the subject of this passage (i.e., the context) that helps us understand Paul's real meaning?

- Baptism should be a unifying event (cf. Romans 6:1-4), rather than a divider. Who performed the baptism isn't important, but the fact and purpose of baptism are important.
- Paul's subject is unity in the Body. The subject is not how one becomes a Christian.
- He doesn't say that baptism is unimportant or optional, but who does the baptizing is not important.

16. Who were Crispus, Gaius and Stephanus?

- Crispus: Could be the former synagogue leader converted in Ac 18:8.
- Gaius: Could be the one with whom Paul stayed when in Corinth, and who sent greetings when Paul wrote to Rome from Corinth (Ro 16:23).
- Stephanus: Mentioned in 1 Co 16:15-17. One of 1st converts in Corinth. Had recently come from Corinth to Ephesus.