

## Chapter 1

### The Greeting 1:1-3

*v1 This letter is from Paul. It was God's plan to choose me to be an apostle of Christ Jesus. This letter is also from our Christian 'brother' Sosthenes. v2 We are sending this letter to you, the members of God's church in Corinth. God has chosen you to be his holy people because Christ Jesus has made you holy. He has done the same for all those everywhere who worship our Lord Jesus Christ. He is their Lord and ours. v3 We pray that God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ will give you grace and peace.*

Verse 1 'Christ' is the Greek word for Messiah. It means the king that God would send to his people. Paul emphasises that he is an apostle because of God's plan. He describes himself in this way in other letters. But it was important for him to state his authority to the Christians at Corinth. Paul's words in 1 Corinthians 9:1-23 show that some Christians at Corinth doubted whether he was an apostle. They doubted his right to tell them the truth and to give them advice.

Sosthenes may have been the same person as the ruler of the synagogue in Corinth. People had hit him in front of the ruler Gallio (Acts 18:12-17). Sosthenes had become a Christian and he had travelled with Paul to Ephesus. He may have acted as Paul's secretary. Paul calls him 'our brother'. So, the Christians at Corinth must have known him.

Verse 2 Paul had written to the church 'of the people in Thessalonica'. Here he speaks about the 'church of God' in Corinth. Paul did not want the Christians at Corinth to feel proud about themselves. So, he reminds them that the church belongs to God. They are like God's field, God's building and God's workers (3:9).

The Greek word for 'church' is 'ecclesia'. It means the people whom God 'called out' to be his own people. Their behaviour must be different from the way many Christians at Corinth were behaving. God has made them 'holy' because they trusted Christ. Paul says to them what he has said to Christians everywhere. The Christians at Corinth are only one part of God's church.

Verse 3 Paul does not use the usual greetings that began and ended letters. He prays that they will know peace. This peace comes as people know the grace of God. Grace is God's love that they do not deserve. And they cannot earn God's love. God has shown his love by Jesus. When they know that love, they will feel safe. God has forgiven them. So they will have inner peace.

Paul here unites Jesus Christ with God the Father. Jesus really is God. And Jesus works with God the Father to save his people.

### Thanksgiving 1:4-9

*v4 I always thank God for you. I thank him because of his grace. He gave this grace to you by means of Christ Jesus. v5 God has blessed you in every way because of him. He has made you speak and understand the truth more completely. v6 You know very well the message that we gave you about Christ. v7 Therefore there is no spiritual gift that you do not have. You wait eagerly for our Lord Jesus Christ to come again. v8 God will keep you strong in your faith to the very end. Then you will be without blame on the day when our Lord Jesus Christ returns. v9 You can trust God. He has chosen you to share life with his Son, Jesus Christ our Lord.*

Verses 4-7 Paul thanks God because they have accepted salvation as God's gift. And that gift comes by Jesus Christ. Paul speaks about God's spiritual gifts to the Christians at Corinth. He mentions how they speak. And he mentions how they understand. The letter shows that the Christians at Corinth had become very proud of these gifts. Paul writes about understanding or knowledge in chapter 8 and 'speech' in chapter 14. Here, he says that their gifts show that they have believed the good news about Jesus. The words 'grace' and 'gift' show that they have no right to praise themselves.

Verses 8-9 Paul also reminds the Christians at Corinth that God will keep their faith strong. He will do so until Christ returns. God has chosen them to share Christ's life.

### **Arguments in the Church 1:10-17**

*v10 Brothers and sisters, I appeal to you all to agree with each other. I appeal on behalf of our Lord Jesus Christ. Then there will not be divisions among you. You will be in complete agreement in all that you think.*

*v11 My brothers and sisters, some people from Chloe's house have told me that there are quarrels among you. v12 Here is what I mean. One of you says, 'I belong to Paul'. Another person says, 'I belong to Apollos.' Another person says, 'I belong to Peter'. And still another person says, 'I belong to Christ.' v13 We cannot divide Christ. Paul did not die on the cross for you. I did not baptise you in the name of Paul. v14 I am grateful to God that I did not baptise any of you except Crispus and Gaius. v15 No one can say that I baptised you in my name. v16 (Yes, I also baptised those who live in the house of Stephanas. I do not remember if I baptised anyone else.) v17 Because Christ did not send me to baptise. He sent me to preach the good news. He told me not to use words of human wisdom. Clever words*

*would take the power away from the cross of Christ.*

Verses 10-11 Paul uses the word 'brothers' twice. He speaks as one who loves them. They should love each other, because they are Christian brothers and sisters. They belong to the same spiritual family. God is their father.

'In complete agreement' translates a medical word. It is about a way to join bones together that are broken. So, they must mend the broken unity of the church. Then the 'body' of the church will be healthy.

Chloe may have been a business woman whose servants had travelled from Ephesus to Corinth. They had brought back news about the quarrels in the church at Corinth.

Verse 12 Paul speaks about four groups:

1. Those who used Paul's name. They may have been Gentiles. They were perhaps using Paul's teaching about Christian freedom as an excuse to behave badly. One group liked Paul. But other people opposed him.

2. Those who used Apollos's name. Apollos was a Jew from Alexandria. He knew the Scriptures and he could speak very confidently. He had visited Ephesus. Aquila and Priscilla had taught him more about the Christian faith. The Christians in Ephesus then encouraged him to go to Corinth. There he was very successful when he preached the gospel (Acts 18:24-28).

3. Those who used Peter's name. We do not know whether Peter ever visited Corinth. But the people there knew that he travelled with his wife (1 Corinthians 9:5). His supporters probably said that he had been the leader of the 12 apostles whom Jesus chose. Jesus had called him a 'rock'. Jesus had made a special resurrection appearance to him (Luke 24:34; 1 Corinthians 15:5).

4. Those who used Christ's name. Those people probably said that they were the only real Christians in Corinth. But the words may be Paul's own remark about the situation. 'I, Paul, belong to Christ'.

Verses 13-16 Paul uses the word 'Christ'. He wants to make the Christians at Corinth understand about the church. It is like Christ's body in the world. The church cannot act as Christ's body if it is in pieces. A body in pieces is not alive.

Only a few people could say that Paul had baptised them. Crispus had been the ruler of the synagogue in Corinth (Acts 18:8). Gaius must have had a large house. He could be Paul's host and welcome 'the whole church' (Romans 16:23). As he wrote, Paul remembered Stephanas. He was the first person to become a Christian when Paul came to Corinth (1 Corinthians 16:15, 17). But Paul could not remember anyone else that he had baptised. He did not want anyone to think that a person had decided to belong to him. Baptism was not 'in his name', but 'into the name of Jesus'.

Verse 17 Paul's work was to preach the gospel. Who baptised whom was not the most important point. It was important for the Christians at Corinth to know the real nature of the gospel. The message was simple. Christ died on the cross. To speak with clever words and ideas would attract attention to the speaker. Then the message of the crucifixion would lose its power to save people.

### **The gospel and human wisdom 1:18-25**

*v18 The message of the cross seems foolish to those who are dying. But it is God's power to us whom he is saving. v19 Because God said by Isaiah (Isaiah 29:14), 'I will destroy the wisdom of those who are wise. I will bring to nothing the clever ideas of those who are clever.'* **v20 Find me the wise**

*person. Find me the expert in the law. Find me the great thinker of this time. God has made the wisdom of the world foolish. v21 God in his wisdom planned that the world would not know him through its own wisdom. But God was pleased to save those who believe. They believe through the foolish message that we preach. v22 Jews demand wonderful signs. Greeks look for wisdom. v23 But we preach about Christ's death on the cross. That offends Jews. And Gentiles think that it is nonsense. v24 But Christ is God's power and wisdom to those whom God has called, both Jews and Gentiles. v25 The foolish things of God are wiser than human wisdom. The weakness of God is stronger than human strength.*

Verses 18-21 The world considers that some people are wise. But these wise people cannot use their human wisdom to understand God's ways. They think that the message about a crucified Messiah is foolish. They want God to act in ways that seem wise and powerful to them. But God saves those who are willing to trust him.

Verses 22-23 The Jews thought that the idea of a crucified Messiah was an insult to God. The Romans crucified only slaves and dangerous criminals. And the Jews believed that anyone who hung on a tree as a punishment would suffer God's anger (Deuteronomy 21:23). They did not think that the message in Isaiah 53 was about someone who would suffer for other people.

The Jews also expected wonderful signs when the Messiah came. In the past, God had done wonderful miracles for their nation. So they expected him to perform even greater miracles by his Messiah. Therefore the Jews kept on asking Jesus for a sign to 'prove' that he was the Messiah. But he refused (Matthew 12:38-39; John 6:30).

The Greeks thought that God does not feel human emotions. And they thought that he

cannot change. Therefore, God could not become a man on earth. The idea that ‘the word became a physical person’ (John 1:14) was impossible. The Greeks also liked to discuss ideas. And they liked to speak in clever ways. The message about the gospel was simple. Paul preached it in plain words. A crucified God seemed to be the mad idea of people with little education.

Verses 24-25 But God’s plan was to save all those who believe in Christ. No human wisdom or great effort can bring anyone into a friendship with God. Sin has spoiled that friendship. However, Christ’s death on the cross was not ‘foolish’ and ‘weak’. ‘God’s thoughts are not our thoughts. His ways are not our ways’ (Isaiah 55:8-9). The crucifixion was a sign of God’s wisdom and power. They are greater than any wise efforts that people can make.

### **The Christians in Corinth 1:26-31**

*v26 Brothers and sisters, God called you. Remember what you were then. Not many of you were wise in the opinion of people in this world. Not many of you had power over other people. Not many of you were born into families with an important social position. v27 But God chose what the people in the world call foolish. That makes ‘wise’ people humble. God chose what the people in the world call weak. That makes ‘strong’ people humble. v28 He has chosen those who have no value in people’s opinion. The people in the world think that God’s people and his plans are worth nothing at all. But God will use his plans to destroy the ideas in the present age. v29 God does all this so that no one can boast about himself to God. v30 Because of what God has done, you*

*belong to Christ Jesus. Jesus has become for us the real wisdom from God. He makes us right with God. He makes us holy and he sets us free from sin. v31 So, in the words of Scripture, ‘Perhaps someone wants to boast about something. If so, he should boast about what God has done.’*

Verse 26 Paul reminds them that the church in Corinth has only a few important members. A few of them had more important places in society. Crispus had been the ruler of the synagogue (Acts 18:8). Erastus was an official in the city (Romans 16:23). Gaius had a large enough house to act as host to Paul and other Christians (Romans 16:23). But many of the Christians were slaves. Some of them had once been slaves. Other Christians were ordinary workers.

Verses 27-29 Slaves had no rights. They were ‘things’ that their owners could use as tools. They were ‘nothings’ until the Christian faith made them into persons. Then they gained respect. God chose people like these. He did this to show that he had defeated the world’s false ways to think. God does not depend on what people can offer him. Everyone needs God’s forgiveness. No one can be satisfied with himself in front of God.

Verse 30 God has acted by his Son. Jesus Christ’s death on the cross is God’s wise plan. So those who believe accept God’s plan. By the cross, Jesus sets us free from the sin in our past. He makes us right with God. He helps us to live in a holy way.

Verse 31 Therefore what Jeremiah wrote (Jeremiah 9:24) is true. No one has any reason to boast about himself. He should only be proud about what God has done.

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