

THE GOSPEL OF CHRIST

SPREADING THE SOUL-SAVING MESSAGE OF JESUS

1 CORINTHIANS LESSON 1 (Chapters 1-2)

Introduction by narrator accompanied by a cappella singing:

THE GOSPEL OF CHRIST. Spreading the soul-saving message of Jesus. And now, Ben Bailey.

Where there are problems in the church, you can be sure there are people there acting like spiritual babies. And where there are spiritual babies in the church, there will always be church problems. Welcome to our study of the Book of 1 Corinthians. In Paul's letter to the church at Corinth he writes to them to deal with certain problems that are going on in the church. But the main reason these problems were occurring was because some Christians were acting like spiritual babies. Think about the problems they were facing. In chapters 1 and 2 we see problems related to division over human wisdom. In chapters 3 and 4 we see preachers being elevated to places where they should not have been. In chapter 5 we see gross immorality in the church. In chapter 6 brethren were suing one another. In chapter 7 we see problems related to marriage. In 1 Corinthians, Paul dealt with the problem of worship to idols, problems over miracles, problems over the resurrection of Christ, and problems over giving. Why had all of these problems occurred? The key passage that helps us understand why there were problems in the church in Corinth, and why there are problems today, is found in 1 Corinthians 3:1-3. Here, we find the root of the problems in Corinth.

"I, brethren, could not speak to you as to spiritual people but as to carnal, as to babes in Christ. I fed you with milk and not with solid food; for until now you were not able to receive it, and even now you are still not able; for you are still carnal. For where there are envy, strife, and divisions among you, are you not carnal and behaving like mere men?"

The problem was that people were acting like babies. They had not grown up and matured in Christ as they needed to. Part of the Christian life is that every day we must awake and strive to grow and mature as Christians. One of the strongest rebukes in the Bible is found in Hebrews 5:12—"Though by this time you ought to be teachers, you need someone to teach you again the first principles of the oracles of God; and you have come to need milk and not solid food." They should have been eating of the meat of the Word, but they had not grown as they should have. Jesus taught us to launch out into the deep (Mt. 4:4). We are to hunger and thirst after righteousness (Mt. 5:6). We are to follow in the footsteps of Jesus, which means that we must grow as Christians. Peter described it this way in 1 Peter 2:2, "As newborn babes, desire the pure milk of the word, that you may grow thereby." He said later in 2 Peter 3:18 that we are to "grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ." Where there are church problems, there also will be spiritual immaturity.

The Book of 1 Corinthians was written to deal with these church problems. That is what God expected the church then to do. And we today must act in a similar manner to deal with such problems. What were some of the initial problems? In chapters 1 and 2 Paul was writing to show that it was the Gospel (the power of the cross) that saves men and women, and that we must not be divided over that. We also must not put our faith in human wisdom or the philosophies of men. In chapters 1 and 2 people were trusting men's wisdom

more than God's wisdom—and it was leading to division. Rest assured that the problem of division is a very serious problem. Notice in 1 Corinthians 1:10-13 what the apostle Paul said about such division, and how it directly relates to denominationalism today.

“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. For it has been declared to me concerning you, my brethren, by those of Chloe's household, that there are contentions among you. Now I say this, that each of you says, 'I am of Paul,' or 'I am of Apollos,' or 'I am of Cephas,' or 'I am of Christ.' Is Christ divided? Was Paul crucified for you? Or were you baptized in the name of Paul?”

Here Paul makes the point, “Let there be no divisions among you. Speak the same thing, and be of the same mind.” How do we speak the same thing today? We speak the same thing because we go to the same source as our authority—the Word of God. How can we all be of the same mind? Philippians 2:5 tells us that we must all strive to have “the mind of Christ” as found in the Word of God. God has always hated division. Psalm 133:1 says, “Behold, how good and how pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity.” Paul wrote to the church in Ephesus and said that we are to maintain the spirit of unity in the bond of peace—the bond of peace being the Gospel. Jesus is the Head of the church (Eph. 1:22-23). Jesus is the One Who paid the price for the church (Mt. 16:18). It is **His** church. Thus, if we are going to have unity and not be divided, we must look to Him as being the Source of that unity. Do you remember the prayer of Jesus in John 17:21? Jesus prayed “that they all may be one, as You, Father, are in Me, and I in You; that they also may be one in Us, that the world may believe that You sent Me.” One of the things that Jesus badly wanted to get across to the disciples is the fact that there must be unity among believers. As we consider Paul's plea for unity, let us remember that it has a modern-day application. Imagine what was happening in Corinth in the first century. If you were to ask people in that day and age, “Are you a part of the one body of Christ”—the universal church of which we read in the New Testament? They would say, “Yes.” Imagine there is a circle that represents the one body. But instead of everyone being inside that one circle, there is another circle in which people say, “I am of Apollos.” Then there is another one in which people say, “I am of Cephas.” In another, people say, “I am of Paul,” and in another people say, “I am of Peter.” They were all claiming to be part of the “one body,” but they were dividing the body of Christ. Did Paul say that such actions were scriptural? No. Here is what he said: “Let there be no divisions among you!” Christians in the first century tried to divide and follow men, and the Holy Spirit condemned it. Notice, now, the modern parallel today. Were you to ask most people today, “Are you a part of the one body of Christ—the universal church of which we read in the New Testament?” They would say, “Yes, I am part of that bigger collective group—the one body.” But then some would say, “I'm of the Methodist group,” or “I'm of the Lutheran sect,” or “I'm Presbyterian,” or “I'm of the Grace church where we emphasize grace.” Think practically about this. If it was wrong in the first century for people to divide and follow names like Paul, Cephas, or Apollos, then how can we say today that such actions are scriptural? What did God say **then**? He said, “Let there be no divisions.” Denominationalism (the following of men and their ideas, and then naming groups after them) is clearly condemned in the Scriptures.

Notice in 1 Corinthians 1:13 that there are three things that must occur before a person can be a follower of a man. Paul asked, “Is Christ divided? Was Paul crucified for you? Or were you baptized in the name of Paul?” What three criteria must a person meet before he can be a follower of some man? First, Paul asks, “Was that individual crucified for you?” That individual must die as a sacrifice for someone else. Someone might say, “Through the centuries, people have died for the cause of Christ.” No, that is not the kind of sacrifice

of which the Bible speaks. An individual must die as a **sinless sacrifice** to cover someone else's sins. Who can do that today? Romans 3:23 says that "all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God." Isaiah 59:1-2 teaches us that sin separates us from God. Romans 3:10 says, "There is none righteous, no, not one." All people today have sinned and fallen short. Second, an individual must be crucified for another person. Since no man can serve as a sinless sacrifice, no one can serve as a sacrifice in anyone else's place as an offering for sin. Third, the follower must be baptized into that individual's name. Even denominational groups today do not promote those criteria. Yet those are the specific criteria set forth in Scripture for those who would follow someone besides Christ.

In 1 Corinthians 1 Paul also deals with some problems that are related to human wisdom, especially as it relates to trusting men more than God. Notice that here we learn that the power of the Gospel and the message of Jesus dying on the cross was foolishness to some people, yet to those who are concerned about spiritual matters, the cross is God's power to save. Notice the beautiful words of 1 Corinthians 1:21, "For since, in the wisdom of God, the world through wisdom did not know God, it pleased God through the foolishness of the message preached to save those who believe." The cross is the way through which God saves people. The power is in the Gospel—not in me, you, or anyone else. It is the message of the cross that will save people. In Romans 1:16 we are told that the Gospel is "God's power unto salvation." James 1:21 teaches us that we are to "receive with meekness the implanted word, which is able to save our souls." In Acts 11:14-15 we read that Cornelius (a Gentile) had to "hear words by which he must be saved." What words? It was the story of Jesus dying on the cross, and what Jesus then expected Cornelius to do to be right with God. While human philosophy may think that this is crazy, or may teach that a person has to do other things, the same Gospel that was preached in the first century is the Gospel that will save people today. God "made Him who knew no sin to be sin on our behalf" (2 Cor. 5:21). Christ bore our sins in His own body upon the tree (the cross) so that we, having died to sin, might live for righteousness, by whose stripes we are healed. In view of human philosophy, Paul said in 1 Corinthians 1:25 (in striking and ironic language) that God, even on His most-foolish day, would still be wiser than man. And man, on his wisest day, would be foolish in God's eyes. Sometimes we think that the idea of God saving people through the cross and the Gospel is a message of foolishness. But we are instructed to think about the character of God before we think such things. If God were to have a foolish day (which He will not!), He would be ten-thousand times wiser than man on his wisest day. Were man to have a wise day, God would still see that as foolishness. God is the all-knowing, all-powerful God. He is the Supreme Ruler Who is in control in all matters. Job had to learn this lesson. He faced a lot of problems in his life. Job lost his family, his health, all that he owned, and even his friends (except for three men whom the Bible describes as "miserable comforters"). He lost everything. He questioned why such things were happening to him. He wondered why God allowed it, and He even began to question the nature of God. But in Job 42:1-2 Job repented in sackcloth and ashes, and said that he should never have opened his mouth. He realized that he could never begin to understand God's power and wisdom. Job said in essence, "You, God, are great, and I am small. I need to hush and listen to you." How powerful that lesson is for us today. Let's stop trusting in what people say. Let's stop trusting in the foolish philosophy of men and return to the Gospel's saving power. Notice Romans 11:33, and how they strike right at the heart of this message. "Oh, the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are His judgments and His ways past finding out!" Paul said in essence that God is the wisest One ever. We do not even know how to search out the things that God knows. God is in control. It is His message that will save us.

We need to realize that when it comes to dealing with human wisdom, division sometimes occurs because we allow the eloquence and oratory skills of the messenger to get in the way. Paul said in 1 Corinthians 2:1-3 that it is not the power or eloquence of the messenger that saves us. In fact, preachers need to get out of the way when we preach the Gospel so that people can see the message of the cross. Paul said:

“I, brethren, when I came to you, did not come with excellence of speech or of wisdom declaring to you the testimony of God. For I determined not to know anything among you except Jesus Christ and Him crucified. I was with you in weakness, in fear, and in much trembling.”

Paul said that his speech and wisdom were nothing but foolishness. The Gospel is where the power is. As Paul spoke according to the Gospel, there was power in his words, of course, because they were from God. But it was not Paul's wisdom or eloquence that saved people. We need to realize that the Gospel has the power to save. We need not put our trust in men. We need to put our trust in the Word of God. The messenger desperately needs to get out of the way in order to allow people to see Jesus. It is the death, burial, and resurrection (1 Cor. 15:1-3) that saves. It is the message of the cross. It does not matter how much I may like or dislike someone's speaking style. If that person is preaching the Gospel, that is what is important. The power is in God and in His Word. Paul said that that message should be proclaimed powerfully. Paul said that he did not come to the Corinthians with excellent of speech, but that he did powerfully proclaim the message of Jesus and salvation through the Spirit's word. That is where our emphasis needs to be today. Too many times we are worried about how well a person can entertain us with his speech, or how many good jokes he can tell, when we need to be asking ourselves, “Did that person, when he spoke, speak to me the Holy Spirit's words on salvation?” If he did, that is where the emphasis needs to be. In John 16:13 Jesus promised that the Spirit would come, and that He would guide the apostles into all truth. By the close of the first century we had the faith “once for all delivered” (Jude 3). That faith is found in the Word of God (2 Tim. 3:16-17). It is inspired by God. When someone speaks as the oracles of God (1 Pet. 4:11), we need to listen. Our ears need to be careful what they hear so that we can obey God and put our trust in Him instead of men. The problem in Corinth revolved around eloquence of speech and oratorical skills. But God said, “Do not put your trust in those things. Trust in the message of salvation that is found in Scripture.” We need to test the spirits to see if they are really of God (1 Jn. 4:1). If we do find them to say what God says, then we need to obey it because God said it, not because a man said it (regardless of how good his speaking skills may be).

In chapter 2 Paul deals with the mystery of the Gospel and how it is bound up in God's scheme of redemption—not in men. Paul makes the point in 1 Corinthians 2:7ff. that this mystery is something that God has predetermined. It has been planned from eternity. In 2 Timothy 1:8-10 we learn that it was a work of God before time began. In 1 Peter 1:20 we are told that it was predetermined before the ages. Ephesians 3:10-11 tells us that it was a mystery from eternity that God revealed and made known to princes and principalities through the church. Here is how much God loves us. We are living in hope of eternal life, which God, cannot lie, promised before time began. God knew we would sin. The mystery is that in the mind of God He had already begun to make a way for our salvation. What is this mystery? It is something predetermined from eternity. But 1 Corinthians 2:9 tells us that it is the things that God prepared for those who love Him, and speaks of God's scheme of redemption, and the hope and joy of salvation, as well as the blessings that come to us when we obey the Gospel. What are the things that God prepared for those who love Him? Ephesians 1:3 tells us that all spiritual blessings are ours “in Christ Jesus.” In 2 Peter 1:3 we are told that God has given us “all things that pertain to life and godliness through the

knowledge of Him who called us.” The mystery is that God, before time began made a way for us to be saved. That salvation culminated in the cross of Christ, which means that we can now receive the things that God had been preparing in the scheme of redemption from eternity—through the Gospel of Jesus Christ. But here is the key. In 1 Corinthians 2:13 Paul tell us how we can know the mystery. The only way to know the things that God has prepared for those who love Him is through the Spirit of God as revealed in the Word of God today. So many people want to talk about a “good feeling” or something they “heard in the middle of the night as God spoke to them.” How can we find out about God’s mystery of salvation? The Scriptures tell us in 1 Corinthians 2:13—“These things we also speak, not in words which man’s wisdom teaches but which the Holy Spirit teaches, comparing spiritual things with spiritual.” Paul said that he was speaking the Holy Spirit’s words concerning these things. If we are going to find that, we must go to the source where those words are recorded. Paul said in 1 Corinthians 14:37, “If anyone thinks himself to be a prophet or spiritual, let him acknowledge that the things which I write to you are the commandments of the Lord.” Hebrews 1:1 clearly says that God, “at various times and in various ways spoke in time past to the fathers by the prophets, has in these last days spoken to us by His Son.” Listen to the way Peter described it. When Peter considered the Mount of Transfiguration, and how God’s voice had boomed down from Heaven to say, “This is My Son in whom I am well pleased,” he thought about that and said that we have the prophetic word more surely,

“which you do well to heed as a light that shines in a dark place, until the day dawns and the morning star rises in your hearts; knowing this first, that no prophecy of Scripture is of any private interpretation, for prophecy never came by the will of man, but holy men of God spoke as they were moved by the Holy Spirit” (2 Peter 1:19-21)

If we are going to know how to be saved, the only way to find out is to go to the Bible. It is God’s power unto salvation (Heb. 4:12). It is living, powerful, and stronger than any two-edged sword.

When we consider God’s mystery, and how it is bound up in the scheme of redemption and revealed to us through the Holy Spirit, we need to realize that we today can know the mind of the Lord. While no one can know the mind of God fully, we do have the mind of Christ revealed to us through the Holy Spirit. You cannot know the mind of a man unless he tells you what he is thinking, which is Paul’s point. He says that we can know God’s mind because He revealed it to us. How? Jesus is “God with us.” In Matthew 1:23 we are told, “You shall call him Immanuel, which is translated ‘God with us.’” Thus, we can know the mind of God in various ways. We can know what God wants us to know about salvation (which is His great plan) through the mind of Christ (1 Cor. 2:16). In Philippians 2:5 we are told, “Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus.” We can have the mind of Christ today by going to the Scriptures to see how Jesus lived His life. Jesus said in John 10:10 that He had come to give us life “more abundantly.” But in order to know the mind of Christ, we must look at the words of Christ as revealed by the Holy Spirit in Scripture. It is interesting, as we look at verse 13, that that is exactly what Paul is pointing to. We can know the things of God because the Holy Spirit has revealed them to us through the words of Jesus and the words of inspired men. John 1:1 says, “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.” Verses 13 and 14 of that same chapter tell us that “the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we beheld His glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father.” Who is that Word? It is Jesus. He came to Earth, lived, and died. He preached a message of salvation. He brought salvation to men and women today. We can **know** that we cannot be saved by following people today. We cannot be saved by human wisdom. But we can know for sure that we **are** right with God when we put our trust in Scripture. John put it this way in 1 John 5:13—“These things I have

written to you who believe in the name of the Son of God, that you may **know** that you have eternal life, and that you may believe in the name of the Son of God.” As we think of God’s message of salvation being in the cross and being bound up in the Word of God today, there are some questions that we ought to ask ourselves. For example, in whom are we putting our trust today? Is your salvation based on what family members, friends, or religious leaders have told you to do? If so, I want to kindly say to you that you cannot be sure that you are right with God. The only way you can **know** you are saved is when you go to the Word of God. In John 8:32 Jesus said that we can know the truth, and that the truth will make us free. We must not trust in people, no matter how good their intentions may be. The Bible says that we are to “trust in the Lord with all our hearts” (Prov. 3:5). In Proverbs 16:25 and Proverbs 14:12 that “there is a way that seems right to man, but the end thereof is the way of death.” So we must put our trust in God and His wisdom. Have you trusted in others, or have you trusted in God?

Another question is this: Have you, in view of the fact that God’s salvation is found in the Gospel of Christ, changed your mind to make it like the mind of God? In Christianity, we must transform our minds and our way of thinking to God’s way of thinking (Rom. 12:2). God said in Isaiah 55:7-12 that His ways are not our ways, and His thoughts are not our thoughts. Have you decided to change your mind, and to say to yourself, “I am not going to live the way I want to because I want to see what God says I need to do to be saved”?

The final question is this: Have you obeyed the message of Jesus—the message of the cross—concerning salvation? If not, you cannot be saved. In John 14:6 Jesus said, “I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me.” If you put your trust and salvation in some book, some idea of men, or what you’ve always thought or felt, then I want to kindly say to you that your salvation is not sure. You are not saved by the grace of God and the cross of Christ because you have not obeyed the Gospel. More than anything we want you to have salvation. We want you to put your trust in the message of God and the cross of Christ. You can do that today. Jesus taught that we must be willing to believe in Him. In John 8:24 Jesus said, “If you do not believe that I am He, you will die in your sins.” Jesus also taught us that we must be willing to repent of our sins so that we turn from our evil ways and turn to God. In Luke 13:3 Jesus said, “Unless you repent you will all likewise perish.” Jesus also taught that we must confess Him before men (Mt. 10:32-33; Rom. 10:10). And, the Savior said that to have salvation, we must be baptized. Jesus said, “He who believes and is baptized will be saved; but he who does not believe will be condemned” (Mk 16:16). Have you been immersed in water for the forgiveness of your sins (Acts 2:38)? If not, the message today is this: Stop trusting in human wisdom, and start trusting in the message of the cross because it is the way of salvation. May God help us to put our trust in His Word, and never in the word of men.

Narrator accompanied by a cappella singing:

THE GOSPEL OF CHRIST is brought to you by loving, caring members of the church of Christ. The McLish Avenue church of Christ in Ardmore, Oklahoma, oversees this evangelistic effort. For a free CD or DVD of today’s broadcast, please write to:

THE GOSPEL OF CHRIST
607 McLish Ave.
Ardmore, OK 73401

You may call **580-223-3289**. Please visit us on the web at www.thegospelofchrist.com. We encourage you to attend the church of Christ, where “the Bible is loved and the Gospel is preached.”

STUDY QUESTIONS FOR 1 CORINTHIANS LESSON 1 (CHAPTERS 1-2)

1. According to 1 Corinthians 3:1-3, what did the apostle Paul consider to be the root of the problems that were occurring in the church in Corinth?
2. One of the strongest rebukes in the Bible is found in Hebrews 5:12. What is the essence of that rebuke?
3. What did Jesus say in Matthew 5:6?
4. According to 2 Peter 3:18, what should every Christian strive to do on a daily basis?
5. What, according to 1 Corinthians 1:10-13, was happening in the church in Corinth that was causing problems related to division?
6. What does Philippians 2:5 tell us that we should do?
7. In one word, what is Psalm 133:1 about?
8. For what did Christ pray in John 17:21?
9. In 1 Corinthians 1:13, what three questions did Paul ask in an attempt to reunify the Christians in Corinth?
10. What is the main point behind Paul's comments in 1 Corinthians 1:21?
11. According to Romans 1:16, what is the Gospel?
12. What important point is contained in Romans 11:33?
13. What point was Paul making in 1 Corinthians 2:1-3?
14. In 1 John 4:1, what did John urge Christians to do?
15. In 1 Peter 1:20, Peter discussed the time when God first decided to send Christ to Earth. When was that?
16. According to Ephesians 3:10-11, through what medium is "the manifold wisdom of God" made evident?
17. According to Ephesians 1:3, where are "all spiritual blessings" to be found?
18. According to 1 Corinthians 2:16, what are Christians to possess?
19. According to 1 John 5:13, it is possible for Christians to know something. What is that "something"?
20. According to 1 Corinthians 2:13, what is the ultimate source of the material that we find in the Scriptures?