



## **1 CORINTHIANS: WEEK 1**

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## 1 CORINTHIANS – SMALL GROUP SERIES

### THEME: LOVE & FORGIVENESS

#### WEEK 1: The Apostle Paul and the Church

**Bible:** *When we tell you these things, we do not use words that come from human wisdom. Instead, we speak words given to us by the Spirit, using the Spirit's words to explain spiritual truths. 1 Corinthians 1:13 (NLT)*

**Bottom Line:** True humility takes the focus off you and, instead, points to Jesus.

#### INTRODUCTION

1 Corinthians is the seventh book of the New Testament. It was written around 56 AD.

1 Corinthians is the first of two letters Paul wrote to the church of Corinth.

The church of Corinth was in Ancient Greece, not far from the city of Athens.

The people of Corinth were struggling with the sins and corruption in the world around them as well as their own standards.

Many in the church were lowering their standards due to their confusion as to what it truly meant to be free in Christ.

This letter the Apostle Paul wrote was to help the church of Corinth to understand what it truly meant to be free in Christ and what standards they should be holding.

Apostle Paul the writer of 1 Corinthians was originally named Saul of Tarsus.

As Saul, he would help capture and arrest Christians.

It wasn't until Saul was on the road to Damascus, where he was blinded and later healed that he became a believer of Christ.

Paul is known as one of the most influential leaders in the history of the Christian church.

#### TEACH

Many of us grow up fearing that God is an angry God who easily gets angry at everything we do.

Many times, this causes a separation between us and God because we fear His anger and disappointment in us.

There are many different reasons why this happens.

Sometimes it's a misunderstanding of stories from the Bible.

Or it is from life experiences on how we are raised by authority figures in our life such as parents, teachers, pastors, and others.

The bottom line is that God is not easily angered, and He is more loving and forgiving than anyone we would ever know.

The way Paul reacts to the church's sins reflect how God reacts to our own sins.

Paul showed love, compassion, and forgiveness towards the church of Corinth, just as God does towards us every single day.

In Paul's letter, you do not see any anger towards the church of Corinth.

On the contrary, Paul is very humble and goes into detail as to why he is writing to them the way he is.

Paul wants the Corinthian church members to stop sinning, but he does not push them or make them feel bad.

He treats them as if they are still children learning and needing the support of their parents to be set on the right path.

Paul glorifies God in all he says towards the church of Corinth because he wants the church to learn and grow closer to God.

Paul never takes credit for anything; he gives all glory and credit to God.

Working on God's behalf, Paul shows the Corinthian church--and us—that God is a loving and forgiving God.

## **DISCUSSION QUESTIONS**

1. How do you see God when you make a mistake?

Is your view of God one of anger and disappointment or forgiveness and love?

2. When you think of forgiveness what comes to mind?

Give an example of a time you had to forgive someone? Was it hard or easy to forgive?

3. Give an example of someone in your life who is very loving and forgiving?

How does this person show the heart of God in their actions towards you and others?

### **Read 1 Corinthians 1: Divisions in the Church**

*1 This letter is from Paul, chosen by the will of God to be an apostle of Christ Jesus, and from our brother Sosthenes.*

*2 I am writing to God's church in Corinth, to you who have been called by God to be his own holy people. He made you holy by means of Christ Jesus, just as he did for all people everywhere who call on the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, their Lord and ours.*

*3 May God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ give you grace and peace.*

*4 I always thank my God for you and for the gracious gifts he has given you, now that you belong to Christ Jesus.*

*5 Through him, God has enriched your church in every way—with all of your eloquent words and all of your knowledge.*

*6 This confirms that what I told you about Christ is true.*

*7 Now you have every spiritual gift you need as you eagerly wait for the return of our Lord Jesus Christ.*

*8 He will keep you strong to the end so that you will be free from all blame on the day when our Lord Jesus Christ returns.*

*9 God will do this, for he is faithful to do what he says, and he has invited you into partnership with his Son, Jesus Christ our Lord.*

*10 I appeal to you, dear brothers and sisters, by the authority of our Lord Jesus Christ, to live in harmony with each other. Let there be no divisions in the church. Rather, be of one mind, united in thought and purpose.*

*11 For some members of Chloe's household have told me about your quarrels, my dear brothers and sisters.*

*12 Some of you are saying, "I am a follower of Paul." Others are saying, "I follow Apollos," or "I follow Peter," or "I follow only Christ."*

*13 Has Christ been divided into factions? Was I, Paul, crucified for you? Were any of you baptized in the name of Paul? Of course not!*

*14 I thank God that I did not baptize any of you except Crispus and Gaius, 15 for now no one can say they were baptized in my name.*

**16** *(Oh yes, I also baptized the household of Stephanas, but I don't remember baptizing anyone else.)*

**17** *For Christ didn't send me to baptize, but to preach the Good News—and not with clever speech, for fear that the cross of Christ would lose its power.*

**18** *The message of the cross is foolish to those who are headed for destruction! But we who are being saved know it is the very power of God.*

**19** *As the Scriptures say, "I will destroy the wisdom of the wise and discard the intelligence of the intelligent."*

**20** *So where does this leave the philosophers, the scholars, and the world's brilliant debaters? God has made the wisdom of this world look foolish.*

**21** *Since God in his wisdom saw to it that the world would never know him through human wisdom, he has used our foolish preaching to save those who believe.*

**22** *It is foolish to the Jews, who ask for signs from heaven. And it is foolish to the Greeks, who seek human wisdom.*

**23** *So when we preach that Christ was crucified, the Jews are offended and the Gentiles say it's all nonsense.*

**24** *But to those called by God to salvation, both Jews and Gentiles, Christ is the power of God and the wisdom of God.*

**25** *This foolish plan of God is wiser than the wisest of human plans, and God's weakness is stronger than the greatest of human strength.*

**26** *Remember, dear brothers and sisters, that few of you were wise in the world's eyes or powerful or wealthy when God called you.*

**27** *Instead, God chose things the world considers foolish in order to shame those who think they are wise. And he chose things that are powerless to shame those who are powerful.*

**28** *God chose things despised by the world, things counted as nothing at all and used them to bring to nothing what the world considers important.*

**29** *As a result, no one can ever boast in the presence of God.*

**30** *God has united you with Christ Jesus. For our benefit God made him to be wisdom itself. Christ made us right with God; he made us pure and holy, and he freed us from sin.*

**31** *Therefore, as the Scriptures say, "If you want to boast, boast only about the LORD."*

## **TEACH**

In verses 1-9, Paul begins his letter to the church of Corinth by sharing how they all are followers of Jesus Christ and that they all have authority and spiritual gifts through the Holy Spirit and from God because of his son Jesus Christ.

Paul goes on to address the issue that there is a division in the church.

The church is divided on who to follow.

In verses 13-17, Paul addresses this division in the church by explaining that nobody should be following anyone but Jesus, Himself.

Paul doesn't even want them to follow him (Paul) because he was only sent to preach the Good News about the cross.

Paul continues to address the division in the church by discussing the issues of knowledge, wisdom, and intelligence.

In verse 19, the Scriptures say, "I will destroy the wisdom of the wise and discard the intelligence of the intelligent."

Here, Paul is quoting the Book of Isaiah from the Old Testament.

Paul explains to the church that knowledge and intelligence from the world are foolish.

The world is not where the church needs to get its education.

Just because people may be considered wise by the world's standards does not mean they are wise in God's eyes.

True knowledge comes from God, and a wise person seeks council from God rather than the world.

## **DISCUSSION QUESTIONS**

1. Paul writes about division in the church of Corinth. What types of issues do we see causing division today in churches around us?
2. Corinthians 1:19 says, "I will destroy the wisdom of the wise and discard the intelligence of the intelligent."

Paul is quoting the Old Testament from the book of Isaiah. Paul explains that our knowledge about God should not come from the world around us but from God.

How do we know that what we have been taught is from God? How can we "fact check"?

3. Paul writes that the church should be of one mind. It is hard to imagine two or three people thinking alike, but the whole church?

How can the church work together to think alike, and what tools do we have to help us to do so?

### **Read 1 Corinthians 2-3: Paul's Wisdom and Message to the Church**

*1 When I first came to you, dear brothers and sisters, I didn't use lofty words and impressive wisdom to tell you God's secret plan.*

*2 For I decided that while I was with you I would forget everything except Jesus Christ, the one who was crucified.*

*3 I came to you in weakness—timid and trembling.*

*4 And my message and my preaching were very plain. Rather than using clever and persuasive speeches, I relied only on the power of the Holy Spirit.*

*5 I did this so you would trust not in human wisdom but in the power of God.*

*6 Yet when I am among mature believers, I do speak with words of wisdom, but not the kind of wisdom that belongs to this world or to the rulers of this world, who are soon forgotten.*

*7 No, the wisdom we speak of is the mystery of God—his plan that was previously hidden, even though he made it for our ultimate glory before the world began.*

*8 But the rulers of this world have not understood it; if they had, they would not have crucified our glorious Lord.*

*9 That is what the Scriptures mean when they say, "No eye has seen, no ear has heard, and no mind has imagined what God has prepared for those who love him."*

*10 But it was to us that God revealed these things by his Spirit. For his Spirit searches out everything and shows us God's deep secrets.*

*11 No one can know a person's thoughts except that person's own spirit, and no one can know God's thoughts except God's own Spirit.*

*12 And we have received God's Spirit (not the world's spirit), so we can know the wonderful things God has freely given us.*

*13 When we tell you these things, we do not use words that come from human wisdom. Instead, we speak words given to us by the Spirit, using the Spirit's words to explain spiritual truths.*

**14** But people who aren't spiritual can't receive these truths from God's Spirit. It all sounds foolish to them and they can't understand it, for only those who are spiritual can understand what the Spirit means.

**15** Those who are spiritual can evaluate all things, but they themselves cannot be evaluated by others.

**16** For, "Who can know the LORD's thoughts? Who knows enough to teach him?" But we understand these things, for we have the mind of Christ.

### **Chapter 3**

*Dear brothers and sisters, when I was with you, I couldn't talk to you as I would to spiritual people. I had to talk as though you belonged to this world or as though you were infants in Christ.*

**2** I had to feed you with milk, not with solid food, because you weren't ready for anything stronger. And you still aren't ready, **3** for you are still controlled by your sinful nature. You are jealous of one another and quarrel with each other. Doesn't that prove you are controlled by your sinful nature? Aren't you living like people of the world?

**4** When one of you says, "I am a follower of Paul," and another says, "I follow Apollos," aren't you acting just like people of the world?

**5** After all, who is Apollos? Who is Paul? We are only God's servants through whom you believed the Good News. Each of us did the work the Lord gave us.

**6** I planted the seed in your hearts, and Apollos watered it, but it was God who made it grow.

**7** It's not important who does the planting, or who does the watering. What's important is that God makes the seed grow.

**8** The one who plants and the one who waters work together with the same purpose. And both will be rewarded for their own hard work.

**9** For we are both God's workers. And you are God's field. You are God's building.

**10** Because of God's grace to me, I have laid the foundation like an expert builder. Now others are building on it. But whoever is building on this foundation must be very careful.

**11** For no one can lay any foundation other than the one we already have—Jesus Christ.

**12** Anyone who builds on that foundation may use a variety of materials—gold, silver, jewels, wood, hay, or straw.

**13** *But on the judgment day, fire will reveal what kind of work each builder has done. The fire will show if a person's work has any value.*

**14** *If the work survives, that builder will receive a reward.*

**15** *But if the work is burned up, the builder will suffer great loss. The builder will be saved, but like someone barely escaping through a wall of flames.*

**16** *Don't you realize that all of you together are the temple of God and that the Spirit of God lives in you?*

**17** *God will destroy anyone who destroys this temple. For God's temple is holy, and you are that temple.*

**18** *Stop deceiving yourselves. If you think you are wise by this world's standards, you need to become a fool to be truly wise.*

**19** *For the wisdom of this world is foolishness to God. As the Scriptures say, "He traps the wise in the snare of their own cleverness."*

**20** *And again, "The LORD knows the thoughts of the wise; he knows they are worthless."*

**21** *So don't boast about following a particular human leader. For everything belongs to you— **22** whether Paul or Apollos or Peter, or the world, or life and death, or the present and the future. Everything belongs to you, **23** and you belong to Christ, and Christ belongs to God.*

## **TEACH**

In chapter 2 verses 1-5, Paul addresses the church of Corinth by reminding them how he came to them humbly in hopes to glorify the power of God.

He did not come to them to boast about his abilities or wisdom but only the love of Jesus.

Paul continues in verses 6-9 to explain that, with more mature believers, he uses wisdom and knowledge that he has received from the Lord.

Paul is very clear that this knowledge is only from God and not from the world around him.

In Chapter 3, Paul tells the church that he still must talk to them in a very humble manner because the church of Corinth is still living in sin.

They are living like the people of the world and are not yet ready to be filled with the knowledge that comes from God.

Paul goes on to speak about the separation in the church.

There is jealousy among the believers of Corinth.

Many are boasting about what they have done and making their works about themselves.

Paul tells them that they all are servants of God, and it does not matter who did what if they are all working together for God and not for themselves or the world.

Starting in verse 10, Paul uses examples about building on a foundation to help drive his point. Paul laid the foundation, which is the gospel of Jesus.

He wants the church to only build on the foundation of Jesus and not on anything else.

Verses 12-17 go on to explain this idea of work.

Paul attempts to explain to the church that any work that is done apart from God is not good and will not be rewarded in heaven but that all good work done through and with God will be rewarded in heaven.

Paul tells the church members of Corinth to stop being fools by living by the world's standards, but to instead humble themselves and live by God's standards.

In the last few verses of chapter 3, Paul reminds the church members that they are to only follow Jesus Christ and no other.

## **DISCUSSION QUESTIONS**

1. Paul tells the church members that they are living in sin, but he does it with humility. How do you think the church felt being addressed in such a kind and loving way?
2. How would it have been different if Paul had treated the church with anger and contempt?
3. Paul's humility and kindness towards the church of Corinth reflects how God behaves towards us when we are living in sin. How does that make you feel towards God?