

1 Corinthians 1:1-9 Summary

1 Corinthians begins in verses 1-3 with a salutation from the author, the Apostle Paul. Paul begins by distinguishing himself as one called and appointed by God to do His will. However, in the beginning of this letter Paul makes it clear that this call is not for him alone but he calls out the church in Corinth as a body of believers who are also called out by God to be sanctified and holy. Paul does not stop with the Corinthian believers and himself as the only ones called out by God but he says that all believers in Jesus Christ have this holy and divine calling to be marked as God's people. This beginning shows that it is God who calls out, not Paul, those who are to be set apart for God's purposes and will. Paul ends his salutation in verse 3 with a blessing for the Corinthian people.

In verses 4-9 of Chapter 1 Paul presents a thanksgiving message to the people of Corinth. The first focus in his message is the grace of God. Paul can call the Corinth Christians, and all Christians for that matter, sanctified and holy because of what he states in verse 4. They received the grace of God and are holy because God chose to make them holy through the work of Jesus Christ. In verse 5 Paul appeals to what the Corinthian people prided themselves in, which was speaking and knowledge. Paul makes sure that they know that these things, along with all things, are from God and not based on human effort. It is ironic that Paul began his letter this way because knowledge and speech were creating division in the emerging Christian community in Corinth.

In verses 7-8 Paul gives an eschatological understanding for the believer in Jesus Christ. It is the call for every believer to have the mindset of waiting for Jesus to come again. The believer is being strengthened not by their own might but by the strength of Christ's sustaining and consistent power as they anticipate his return at the end. Paul also lays aside any boasting in one self in verse 7 stating, "...you do not lack any spiritual gift as you eagerly wait..." Again, it is because of the grace of God we have anything at all. Any knowledge or speaking skills as mentioned in verse 5 that we may have all come from God. Also, in verse 8 Paul makes reference to the day Christ comes as a day of judgment because he states, "...so that you will be blameless..." Therefore, the community of believers must rely on Jesus Christ's work for them in order to be "blameless." It is dependence on God and His grace to allow them to be in His presence when He returns.

And finally in verse 9 Paul gives the reason for the hope of believers as they are told to wait for God. One of the strong characteristics of God is His faithfulness. This would naturally encourage the believers as they are told to wait for Christ's return. Also, Paul emphasizes again that it is God's call that brings us into fellowship with Him and not our own merit. The community of believers are called to a fellowship of waiting and abiding in Christ Jesus.

1 Corinthians 1:10-17 Summary

The fundamental theme of Paul's letter to the Corinthian believers is found in verse 10 of chapter one in 1 Corinthians. Everything else that follows is the application or specifics of how to accomplish the challenge Paul set forth in verse 10. Issues that arose from cultural traditions to social change divided the Corinthian believers and Paul's heart is that they would be united under one head, who is Christ Jesus. Paul's statement of being "perfectly united in mind and thought..." literally means that all would say and think the same thing. Paul also states in the beginning of verse 10 that his authority comes from Jesus and Christ is the author of this letter. It is not Paul's opinion but everything that is penned is from Christ Jesus.

In verse 11 it seems that the divisions are linked to the quarrels that were occurring among the believers. Paul intentionally addresses the believers as "brothers" which is a family term encouraging unity among the believers. The reason for the quarreling is revealed in verse 12. Some believers were associating their faith with a certain person. Focusing on an individual person to associate with a certain philosophy or faith was very common in Roman society. It might seem puzzling when Paul seems to state in a negative sense that some say, "I follow Christ." Isn't that what every Christian should say? However, in this context it seems that the Corinthian believer was taking this a step too far by boasting in the claim that Christ was their leader. It was a prideful statement and belief that they were the only ones who really belonged to Christ and they looked down on others. Paul did not want people to think that Christianity was just a status they attained in their life but that Christ would be reflected in their life style and seen as the central focus their life.

Paul in verse 13 asks rhetorical questions, to which of course he knows the answers. A declaration of loyalty to anyone but Christ is a contradiction to the Christian faith. Christ is not divided. There is only one Lord, Christ Jesus, who deserves all of our attention. We need to be very careful not to associate a name with any ministry we do or are part of. We do not want to even hint of any type of allegiance to a name other than Jesus Christ. Paul in verses 14-16 reiterates his point of not associating the ministry with the person as he explains why he did not want to baptize anyone. Paul knew that it would cause division and he did not want anyone to be loyal to him, which was custom to consider the person who would baptize as a patron.

In verse 17 it seems that Paul believed baptism was secondary compared to the preaching of the Gospel. Baptism was not Paul's focus and because he does not focus on it we can conclude that salvation is not from baptism but on the basic belief in Jesus Christ's work on the cross. The forgiveness of sins is not from baptism; if it were Paul could not state what he did in verse 17, "Christ did not send me to baptize, but to preach the Gospel..." Also, in verse 17 Paul emphasizes that it is not with eloquent words and wisdom that the message of the cross of Christ was presented. Paul was convinced that it was not about saying the correct words about the cross of Christ. Paul relied on the power of God to work rather than relying on his own wisdom or strength to bring a good message.

1 Corinthians 1:18-2:5 Summary

Paul states in verse 18 of 1 Corinthians, “For the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing...” In the Roman and Greek world to speak of crucifying someone was either comical and/or ugly and gruesome. The cross in the first century was not a good symbol. It was a symbol of death and punishment. However, for the believer, hope of redemption is found in the message of the cross: Jesus Christ dying for the payment of their sins. So why is the cross foolishness to those who do not believe?

The cross does not represent forgiveness and hope to the unbeliever, it represents defeat. Paul continues in verse 18 to state that the message of the cross is the power of God for those who believe. The Power of God is the forgiveness of sins and holds the ability to transform lives. Paul is saying here that the cross is the central focus of the Christian. It is from the work of Christ on the cross that we can experience God’s power of love, grace, forgiveness and redemption.

Going on to verses 20-21 Paul expresses that the combined wisdom of the world has been shown as foolishness because it does not understand the message of cross. The Corinthian people were looking for and desiring wisdom, but the Gospel is not about some religious knowledge to be gained or some great philosophy for better living. Instead it is the message that God so loved the world that He would come and die so that those who believe would not perish, but have eternal life with Him. In verse 21 Paul states that the world’s wisdom will not lead to knowledge of God or understanding of the message of Christ. This is very true even in today’s culture. We should not expect that presenting worldly knowledge and philosophies will win people to Christ. It is only through the wisdom and power of God that someone comes to know Christ. In verses 26-27 Paul exclaims that God will use even “the foolish things of the world to shame the wise...” It is never about how well we present the Gospel or how we make it attractive to someone. We must only depend on the simple Gospel message and allow God to do the work of drawing people to Himself. Just as Paul proclaimed in verse 23, “we preach Christ crucified...” This should be our central message to proclaim to the world. We should not proclaim any other agenda but Christ crucified, which is the wisdom and power of God.

In verse 30 Paul declares again that everything hinges on the work of Christ. It is Christ Jesus who gives us wisdom, righteousness, holiness and redemption. If a person chooses to accept God’s wisdom then righteousness, holiness and redemption by God will follow. Paul ends chapter 1 with giving credit to the Creator and Redeemer that deserves all the glory and worship. Verse 31 is a quote that is adapted from Jeremiah 9:24. It seems that Paul had a distinct pattern that he followed to let the Corinthians know that everything is dependant on God and His work on the cross.

In Chapter 2 verses 1-5 Paul states that in presenting the message of Christ he is “anti credentials”. Paul did not want any one to think of him more highly than they ought. Paul’s only desire was for them to know and believe in Christ’s work on the cross. The Christian faith came not from Paul, as some in Corinth would try to associate it with, but it came from God. The proof of the message of the cross is real as seen in how people come to Christ and are transformed by God. It does not matter how well we present the message but only the accuracy of the Gospel being presented. Paul’s abandonment of worldly wisdom, eloquence in speech, and strong presence would naturally lead people to wonder where this power to change lives came from and they would recognize that it is from God. That is Paul’s hope as he states in verse 5, “not with wise and persuasive words, but with a demonstration of the Spirit’s power...”

1 Corinthians 2:6-16 Summary

In this section Paul switched gears and began talking about a secret wisdom of God that is only for the mature. In the previous section Paul focused very much on the message of the cross and it's foolishness to those who are perishing. Most would think Paul is contradicting himself. However, I believe Paul was using the cultural language to show them that their wisdom was not worth anything but the wisdom that came from God was to be treasured.

In verse 7 Paul explains that God's secret wisdom had been hidden. For, though this Gospel was, in a certain sense, announced by the prophets and prefigured by the law, it seemed that even the most intelligent of the Jewish rulers did not have adequate knowledge of it. Therefore it was still a mystery to them and others until it was revealed by the preaching of the apostles. One could say that it was "hidden" because it is a wisdom that the world did not and could not grasp. In verse 8 Paul says that "none of the rulers of this age understood it..." which were the Jewish leaders at the time of Christ. Paul's motive in stating this was to show that the leaders were not at all tuned into God's wisdom and ways and which lead them to crucify the Lord of Glory as it states in verse 8. The application is that we as believers should not put any weight on what people may think of us who believe in the plan of God. For the wisdom of the world is folly, but God's wisdom and plan will last forever and gives hope that will be fulfilled.

In verse 9 Paul quotes Isaiah 64:4. This verse continues on with the message as in verse 7 that we do not speak or preach the wisdom of this world, but the mysterious wisdom of God, of which the prophet Isaiah spoke of as well. These words have been applied to the state of glory in a future world, but they certainly belong to the present state, and express merely the wondrous light, life, and liberty which the Gospel communicates to those who believe in the Lord Jesus Christ.

In verses 10-13 Paul describes the process by which God has revealed this wisdom through His Spirit. Paul compares the revelation of God's wisdom through the Spirit to the idea that man cannot truly know another man's thoughts. Only the man's spirit can know his true thoughts and it is the same way in trying to understand the thoughts of God. Paul exclaims in verse 13 that we must not use our own wisdom or understanding when grappling with the wisdom of God. This is very true in all of life. There are many times when we do not understand why things happen but we must trust in God and be led by His Spirit to gain a much better perspective on what the outcome may be.

In verses 14-16 Paul contrasts the difference between the "natural man" and the "spiritual man". The "natural man" depends upon his own human wisdom and does not receive the things of the Spirit. The "spiritual man" is led by the Spirit of God and has the mind of Christ. To have the mind of Christ is to allow our thoughts to be focused on who Christ is and what He did on the cross; permitting the message of the cross to influence all of your thinking and decision making process throughout life. I agree with Richard B. Hays in his Commentary when he states, "To have the mind of the Lord is to participate in the pattern of the cross" (Hays, p. 47).

1 Corinthians 3:1-23 Summary

Paul begins chapter 3 of 1 Corinthians by explaining how he must address the Christian in Corinth. The Christians in verse 1 were wrapped up in the world and this prevented Paul from speaking to them as spiritual people. Their worldliness or carnality indicated that they were still infants in their life with Christ and unable to receive a deeper message, or as verse 2 states "solid food". The divisions that Paul had to deal with were caused by this carnality of living. Verses 3-4 describe the evidence of their worldly behavior: jealousy, quarreling, claiming their faith yet acting like mere men.

One thought that quickly comes to mind as I read the first 4 verses of chapter 3 is that the Corinthian people who were in Christ still struggled with sin. Throughout scripture Paul proclaims that we are no longer slaves to sin, but we should be progressively growing and maturing in faith. Paul addresses this with the Corinthian believers in these beginning verses of chapter 3. This lets me know that we begin as infants in Christ and then grow in our walks with Christ allowing more of Him and less of our own strength and wisdom to influence our lives. Also in this process we progressively learn to turn from sin.

In verses 5-10 Paul was trying to help the Corinthian believers see the folly of exalting preachers over anyone else. Paul wanted the Corinthians to know that they should never boast in a person. The preachers are only servants of God. Any results are due to what God is doing in a person and not from the words said or actions done by a person. The Christian is called to walk in humility. The purpose of the believer's life is to exalt Christ.

Paul continues by explaining the different functions in the work of God and how they relate to each other. In verses 5-8 Paul depicts certain roles that are played in the process of sharing the Gospel with a person. We do the planting or the watering but God makes the seed grow. Ministry would be futile if we did it on our own strength and wisdom. Seeds might be planted but they will be worth nothing if God is not in the picture.

In verses 10-12 Paul compares the foundation of faith to the foundation of a building. Paul describes himself as a builder, building into the building of faith. The foundation must be Jesus Christ. In verse 12 Paul lists what a man might use as building materials for his house of faith but the issue Paul is referring to is not the building material but the foundation. The foundation is the most important (Jesus Christ). And if Jesus is the foundation then the entire building will stand. Verses 14-15 refer to the final judgment of Christ at the end. The symbolic image of judgment by fire is given in verse 15. Rewards will be given to believers for how they chose to live on this earth. This of course should not be our reason for doing good, but this shows the love of God to reward his followers just the same as stated in Ephesians 6:8.

In verses 16-17 Paul warns the believer not to defile the temple of God which is our body. We must never forget that we are the dwelling place for the Lord almighty. We should not only honor God with our actions but with our whole bodies as Paul exclaimed later in 1 Corinthians 6:20. Paul reiterates in verses 18-23 not to glory in the wisdom of this world or in approval from men. We should always keep this in consideration to ensure that we are not looking to men for approval or significance. It is in Christ alone that we truly find our worth and identity.

1 Corinthians 4:1-21 Summary

In verses 1-5 in 1 Corinthians chapter 4 Paul confronts the Corinthians on how they had passed judgment on him. Paul states again, as he did in 1 Corinthians 3:5, that people should view him and other apostles as servants of Christ. These servants of Christ are required to be good stewards of the mysteries of God, which is the gospel message, and uphold faithfulness to God in their lives. Verses 1-2 are Paul's commission to be a witness to all people with the Gospel.

It seems that the Corinthians are questioning his authority. Paul then goes on in verses 3-5 and states who will judge Paul. It is not Christians or any human court that should pass judgment on Paul. Judgment should not even be passed by one's own self, but rather the judgment should and will come completely from the Lord. Therefore we must leave it in God's hands as Paul explained in verse 5. It is difficult at times not to pass judgment or to think that revenge needs to take place. God calls all believers to trust and to eagerly wait upon Him and not to take things in their own hands as Paul proclaimed further in Romans 12:19.

Paul then in verses 6-13 gives some lessons in humility. Paul had to remind the Corinthian people that they are not the source of what they possess in verse 7. If we take credit for what we have we take God off the throne of our lives and are ungrateful to Him. In verses 9-13 Paul presents himself and all the apostles as examples of being humble and letting go of any sense of personal pride. Paul in verse 10 in an ironic way contrasts the apostles with the pride of the Corinthians to prove that it is not about honor and strength, but about God. At the end of verse 13 Paul goes as far as to call himself and other Apostles scum and rubbish of the world. Paul uses this strong language to emphasize that to be a follower of Christ means to share the same cost that Christ did of being scorned and rejected by the world. Paul in Romans 8:17 proclaimed that as children of God we share in Christ's sufferings. It seems that many in the American culture who choose to follow Christ do not realize that there could be a sacrifice involved. Many would simply think that God is now on their side and there would be blessings from above that they should receive. However, Paul's view of the Christian life is much different. He shows that if you truly want to belong to Christ you will not have a trouble free life on the contrary your life will be characterized by laying it down and giving up of all you have for the cause of Christ. Your life will not be your own as Paul later states in 1 Corinthians 6:19.

Now going on in verses 14-21 Paul writes that his purpose is not to shame them for their life style but to warn them. He is sending Timothy to remind them of what is proper and he himself will come to deal with those who are arrogant (or some translations say "puffed up"), if necessary. In Paul's instructions from these verses he states in verse 16, "Therefore I urge you to imitate me." At first glance this statement seems very arrogant. Why would anyone want to point to himself to show how to live for Christ? However, in the context of the Corinthian culture, the believers were having a hard time knowing how to live the Christian life and a living example of how to walk out the Gospel was necessary. Paul's words in verse 16 are a challenge to all believers to be a witness for Christ by the way we live our life day by day. One of the greatest challenges I face when sharing the Gospel with others is dealing with how they view the church. People always look at the people in the church to get their view of Christianity rather than looking to Christ. We want to point people to Christ and our lifestyle should resemble Christ in what we do and say.