

# *Discovering God's Wisdom*

## STUDIES IN FIRST CORINTHIANS

### **Lesson 1** **1 Corinthians 1**

#### ***Searching the Scriptures*** ***for hidden treasure***

***"I rejoice at Your word as one who finds great treasure." Psalm 119:162***

This year we are studying the epistle to the Corinthians written by the apostle Paul. "Epistle" is an important sounding word which simply means *letter*. Paul was writing a letter to his friends in Corinth. The year was approximately A.D. 55; Paul was on his 3<sup>rd</sup> missionary journey and was currently ministering in Ephesus. He had received some news that troubled him: news of division, sin, immorality, lawsuits between believers, marriage problems, difficulties, abuses, and disorderly conduct. Paul's letter was written in response to these problems.

Paul had established this church in Corinth only a few years earlier during his 2<sup>nd</sup> missionary journey. He stayed in Corinth for eighteen months, ministering first in the synagogue and then in the home of a Gentile. Paul loved these people and was concerned about their spiritual welfare. In his letter to them he addressed such doctrinal themes as the nature of the church, the nature of the believers' union with Christ, God's wisdom, proper worship, the Lord's Supper, spiritual gifts, and the resurrection of the dead; along with the practical themes of unity, church leadership, church discipline, lawsuits, marriage and divorce, Christian freedom and responsibility, worship, love, and ministry.

The foremost problem of the Corinthian church was that their focus was wrong. It was misplaced. That fact is seen in every problem they had, most significantly in their problem with unity. They were focusing on themselves, on other people, and on human wisdom, rather than on Christ and the cross. How much of a difference would it make in *your* life if you learned this basic truth that the focal point of Christianity and the Christian life—therefore of the Christian himself—must be Christ and His cross, "*For the message of the cross is...the power of God*" (I Corinthians 1:18), and that Christ is the key to every problem?

We've entitled our series this year, "*Discovering God's Wisdom.*" Jesus Christ is the wisdom of God! Colossians 2:2-3 speaks of "*God's mystery, that is Christ Himself, in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge.*" We want to dig deep as we go about our study this year, seeking to unfold all that our Lord has to teach us of His wisdom through this very practical Christ-centered letter, written by the Holy Spirit for every believer today. Begin your year by asking God to reveal His Son to you through the power of His Holy Spirit and, throughout the year, to help you center your focus on *Jesus Christ and Him crucified!*

**First Day: Read 1 Corinthians 1:1-9**

Note: The Sosthenes mentioned in verse 1 is probably the same one mentioned in Acts 18:17: the synagogue leader who seems to have been the head of the group opposing Paul. If he is the same one, then he eventually came to Christ!

1. Paul sets the stage for all that is to come in his letter by reminding the Corinthians *first* about who they are and what they've been given.

*Who they are:* From verse 2 share what Paul tells them about themselves as Christians.

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*What they've been given:*

- verse 4
- verse 5
- verse 7
- verse 8

2. You may notice that the name of Jesus Christ is given or referred to in every verse in this passage. Paul's emphasis in these verses and throughout his writings comes in the small phrase "in Christ." Share what you think it means to be "in Christ" (verses 2 and 4). You may see John 15:5.

- a. Do you know that you are "in Christ" today? You can *know* this! It is as simple as believing that Jesus Christ is the Son of God who died on the cross for *your* sins, and rose again on the third day (1 Corinthians 15:3-5). Because He died, your sins can be forgiven; because He lives, you can receive new life—*His life!* If you want this new life, read and follow Romans 10:8-10.

3. Ephesians 1:3-14 and 2 Peter 1:3-4 tell us about the blessings we have been given "in Christ." List as many as you can of these exciting truths:

*Ephesians 1:3-14*

*2 Peter 1:3-4*

In 1 Corinthians 1:9, Paul puts the emphasis where it belongs—not on the Corinthians themselves, but on their God: “**God is faithful.**”

4. If a church or a Christian is struggling, how would this fact make a difference in their thought process?
5. How might these things, of which Paul has reminded them in his opening thoughts, be the beginning of encouragement toward unity?

### *Making It Personal...*

6. Do you consider yourself a grateful person? Considering all that has been done for you “in Christ” what should be your attitude toward God and toward life?

### *Digging Deeper*

- ❖ **Corinth:** Using the introduction to 1 Corinthians in your Bible, or a Bible dictionary, share a little background on Corinth. You may also want to look for Corinth on your Bible map.
- ❖ **Optional:** Read 1 Corinthians in its entirety. You may also want to read Acts 18:1-18a, as it tells the story of Paul’s experience in Corinth.
- ❖ Do your best to summarize today’s passage in a couple of sentences.

### *Pearl of Great Price*

**“For the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God.”** 1 Corinthians 1:18

This is your memory verse—begin memorizing it today!

### **Second Day: Read 1 Corinthians 1:10-17**

In verse 10, Paul begins his exhortation to the church in Corinth. Actually, verse 10 is the key verse of the entire letter, in that it contains the first and foremost reason Paul wrote the letter—division in the church.

1. How was the division in this church manifested according to “Chloe’s people”? (v. 11-12)
  - a. Describe what you think was actually happening here.

2. We might think that the “Christ party” (“*I of Christ*”) was the group that was on the right track. But Paul lists it along with the others making it appear that it too was a negative. What might the attitude of the “Christ party” have been?
3. To whom alone is the church to be loyal? How did Paul imply this in verse 13?
4. Why do you think Paul makes a point of saying that his preaching wasn’t *in cleverness of speech*? (v. 17 NASB)

### *Making It Personal...*

5. What is Paul’s exhortation to those who are a part of causing division? (v. 10)
  - a. Does this mean you can’t think for yourself or have any differing points of view over non-doctrinal matters? What does it mean?
6. What can you do to help keep the unity in your church home? (*Are you doing anything that might bring disunity?*)

### *Digging Deeper*

- ❖ Determine who each of these individuals were and why someone might have set their loyalty upon them:

*Paul*—1 Corinthians 1:1, Acts 18:1-8

*Apollos*—Acts 18:24-19:1a

*Cephas*—John 1:42

- ❖ Although this passage is speaking in particular of the divisions within a church body, this problem was a sign of things to come in the church as a whole. Should there be denominations in the church? Share your thoughts on why or why not.
- ❖ Do your best to summarize today’s passage in a couple of sentences.

### **Third Day: Read 1 Corinthians 1:18-31**

So far in his letter to his friends at Corinth, Paul has spoken to them about who they are, what they've been given in Christ, and the underlying cause of the problems in their church. In so doing, Paul points them to the only One to whom their loyalty belongs—Jesus Christ. Paul finishes by making the point that, although he was called to preach the gospel, even his preaching was not done in human cleverness, or with worldly wisdom. All that he did, and even the way he did it, was designed to keep the emphasis on the cross of Christ. The reason he did this follows in the profound portion of Scripture we will study today. It has been said that it would take a lifetime to unpack and apply all that is taught in these verses. We would do well to try!

1. Paul has just spoken of human cleverness (v. 17 NASB). Is the message of the cross “clever” to the unsaved? (v. 18) What is it?
  - a. In human cleverness (or wisdom) what kinds of things might the natural man think he could do to gain salvation and succeed in life?
  - b. What did God do with this kind of wisdom? (v. 20) How? (v. 21)
2. What do verses 18 and 24 say the message (or word) of the cross is to those who are saved? Explain this.
3. What kind of wisdom were the Corinthians obviously following: the wisdom of the world or the wisdom of God (the word of the cross)? How do you know this?
  - a. How does James 3:13-16 confirm this?
  - b. What do you think Paul was trying to communicate to his friends in this passage so far (v. 18-25)?
4. God not only chose to use a *method* to save man that would baffle him, but He even chose and called *things* (people) that would be despised to the natural man. List the things God has and has not chosen.

*He has not chosen* (v. 26))

*He has chosen* (v. 27-28)

- a. Why did God do this?

*Making It Personal...*

The Corinthians had a superiority complex. They thought it was all about them! But Paul reminded them of the real truth of the matter—that by and large they were nothing when they were called into the kingdom of God. Not many of them were wise—some, but not many. Not many were mighty, not many were noble. We must admit the same was true of us! But Jesus, whose teachings are a paradox to the human mind, gives us the right perspective.

5. Read the amazing words Jesus spoke to His disciples in the Sermon on the Mount in Matthew 5 and fill in the following statements:

*Blessed are* \_\_\_\_\_  
*For* \_\_\_\_\_ (v. 3)

*Blessed are* \_\_\_\_\_  
*For* \_\_\_\_\_ (v. 4)

*Blessed are* \_\_\_\_\_  
*For* \_\_\_\_\_ (v. 5)

*Blessed are* \_\_\_\_\_  
*For* \_\_\_\_\_ (v. 6)

*Blessed are* \_\_\_\_\_  
*For* \_\_\_\_\_ (v. 7)

*Blessed are* \_\_\_\_\_  
*For* \_\_\_\_\_ (v. 8)

*Blessed are* \_\_\_\_\_  
*For* \_\_\_\_\_ (v. 9)

*Blessed are* \_\_\_\_\_  
*For* \_\_\_\_\_ (v. 10)

*Blessed are* \_\_\_\_\_  
*For* \_\_\_\_\_ (v. 11-12)

- a. Is this your normal way of looking at things? What message do these words of Jesus have for you today?

*Digging Deeper*

- ❖ Do your best to summarize today's passage in a couple of sentences.

**Fourth Day:**

**Deeper Discoveries**

*This portion of the lesson will take a closer look at some of the words in the chapter, including the historical, geographical, and cultural background of the material being studied. You will need to have your tools—or resources at hand: more than one Bible translation, a dictionary or Bible dictionary, concordance, atlas, and encyclopedia. (If you don't have all of these, simply use what you do have to enrich your learning.)*

Using the tools you have at hand, do some digging into the following terms. Start with your dictionary (or Bible dictionary), and then look up the references to add to your understanding. If you have additional resources, you may want to keep digging (making notes in the margins). After you've completed the investigative process, write a definition in your own words. Your investigation in today's lesson will lay the groundwork for tomorrow's study, so be as thorough as you can in your research. The first example is done for you.

**Power of God (1:18, 24)**

How does the dictionary define **power**? *The ability to do or act; capability of doing or accomplishing something.*

Using the following references, note what the Bible has to say about the power of God:

John 10:17-18; Hebrews 12:2; Romans 1:16, Ephesians 1:18-20

*Jesus had the power to lay His life down and the power to take it up again; He had the power to endure the cross for the joy that was set before Him; the Good News about Christ is the saving power of God at work; His power gives us the ability to understand all that He has for us.*

- ❖ Write your own definition: *Jesus Christ is the embodiment of God's saving power, enabling believers to enter into the hope and grace provided through His death and resurrection, and experience the richness of our inheritance as saints.*

**Wisdom of God (1:24, 30)**

Dictionary definition: \_\_\_\_\_

What does the Bible have to say? Isaiah 11:1, 2; Psalm 147:5; Colossians 2:3; Romans 11:33 \_\_\_\_\_

- ❖ Write your own definition: \_\_\_\_\_

**Righteousness (1:30)**

Dictionary definition: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

What does the Bible have to say: Jeremiah 33:16; Hebrews 1:9; Romans 1:16-17; Isaiah 61:10 \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

❖ Write your own definition: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

**Sanctification (1:30)**

Dictionary definition: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

What does the Bible have to say? Hebrews 9:14 and 10:10; John 17:17 and 19; 1Thessalonians 5:23 \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

❖ Write your own definition: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

**Redemption (1:30)**

Dictionary definition: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

What does the Bible have to say? Matthew 20:28; Galatians 4:4-5; Ephesians 1:7; Colossians 1:13-14 \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

❖ Write your own definition: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_



***Fifth Day:***

***Heartsearch***

*Are you walking worthy of your high calling? Are you applying the wisdom of God to your daily life? Get ready for some self-discovery! This portion of the lesson will give you the opportunity to examine your heart, express your mind, and experience your lesson, by applying what you are learning to everyday circumstances.*

Webster’s dictionary defines the word *heart* as: the center of the total personality, esp. with reference to intuition, feeling, or emotion. The word *search* can be defined as: to make intensive investigation. Together they convey the idea of opening oneself up to close scrutiny for the purpose of self-discovery. For the student of Scripture, it means allowing the Lord’s searchlight to penetrate the human spirit in order to reveal what is hidden. In Proverbs 20:27 we read, “The spirit of a man is the lamp of the Lord, searching all the inner depths of his heart.” Knowing it is the Lord doing the searching, and that He has our best interest at heart, puts a different light on the matter. Why go through the process? The believer, who wants to be wholly devoted to God, will allow Him access to each and every part of his life in order to become more like Jesus—that is the process we refer to as sanctification. Are you ready? Let’s get down to business.

**Read 1Corinthians 1:26-31 for review.**

Paul said in verse 30: “God made Christ to be wisdom itself.” The world would consider this kind of claim as boastful—and it is! Paul quoted from Jeremiah 9:23-24, where God pointed out to Jeremiah that there are three popular sources of boastfulness: intelligence, strength, and wealth; but that each of these is not worthy of our trust. Only God alone is worth boasting about.

Paul urges the Corinthians to take a closer look at their own assembly of believers. If God were to make His selection on the basis of intelligence, strength, and wealth, He would have passed them all by. But when God called, He deliberately made it clear that His criteria consisted of looking for those who were foolish, powerless, and despised by the world, so that no one can ever boast in themselves, but only in the Lord.

Have you been boasting about the fact that you attend a particular church? Perhaps you’ve been bragging about your pastor? Maybe you’ve thought you were better than others simply because you belong to the family of God (the Corinthians boasted about these same things). Stop and think for a moment. Why did God choose you out of all others to walk with Him and serve Him? You may think you chose Him but, in John 15:16, Jesus told His followers: “You did not choose Me, but I chose you and appointed you that you should go and bear fruit, and that your fruit should remain.” The purpose of fruit bearing is always to glorify God.

1. Fill in the blanks below using Paul’s quote from Jeremiah 9:23-24 (NKJV):  
“Thus says the Lord: ‘Let not the wise man \_\_\_\_\_,  
let not the mighty man \_\_\_\_\_, nor let the rich  
man \_\_\_\_\_; but let him who glories glory in  
this, \_\_\_\_\_, that \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_, exercising \_\_\_\_\_  
in the earth. For in these \_\_\_\_\_,’ says the Lord.”

Occasionally our trust in God will make us vulnerable to accusations of superiority. At such times, we must calmly state that our boasting is not in ourselves but rather in Him.

***“He is the source of your life in Christ Jesus, who became for us wisdom from God, and righteousness and sanctification and redemption.”*** (v. 30 NRSV)

2. Look up the following and summarize the heart of each one in your own words.
  - **He is our wisdom** – Colossians 2:3
  
  - **He is our righteousness** – 2 Corinthians 5:21
  
  - **He is our sanctification** – John 17:17, 19
  
  - **He is our redemption** – Romans 3:24

The spiritual blessings we desire and need are all ours in one Person—Jesus Christ. Because He is our righteousness, we *have been* saved from the penalty of sin. Because He is our sanctification, we *are being* saved from the power of sin. Because He is our redemption, we *shall be* saved from the presence of sin. Herein, God reveals His wisdom by means of these three blessings we have in Christ.

Since we know these things, why do we glory in men? Since we are complete in Christ, and since we have all we need in Him, why then do we engage in the futile exercise of comparing ourselves and competing with one another? The New Living Translation of verse 30 says: “God alone made it possible for you to be in Christ Jesus. For our benefit God made Christ to be wisdom itself. He is the one who made us acceptable to God. He made us pure and holy, and he gave himself to purchase our freedom.” May our lives serve to reflect this wonderful truth.

***Heartsearch:*** Briefly look back over your entire lesson before filling in the following.

❖ *Examine your heart*

What has God put His finger on through your study and brought to light in a new way? (What did you learn about yourself?)

❖ *Express your mind*

What change has this week’s study brought about in your thought process? What difference will this make in how you view your current circumstances?

❖ *Experience your lesson*

What nugget of wisdom from your lesson do you plan to apply to your life?

*Sixth Day:*

## ***Laying Up Treasure***

*“Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth...but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven.  
For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also.” Matthew 6:19-21*

The highest calling of the believer, and the most important way to lay up treasure in heaven, is through intercessory prayer. You will want to give thoughtful consideration to what you record on this page, as it will be the basis for your prayer during group time. The format for this day of your lesson is based upon the ACTS method of prayer: Adoration, Confession, Thanksgiving, and Supplication. In addition to these four, there is space provided for you to keep track of answered prayers, people and things you want to pray for in the coming week, and also a place to write out this week’s Scripture verse from memory.

Using the lesson as your focal point, write out your prayer for each of the following:

*I praise God for* (an aspect of His marvelous character) \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

*I confess to God that I* \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

*I thank God for* \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

*I am asking God* \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

*Praise for answered prayer:* \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

*People/things I want to pray for this coming week:* \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

*Pearl of Great Price:* \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

## *Notes*