

Preview of 1 Corinthians

Corinth ranked among the wealthiest and most prominent cities of Greece in the first century A.D. Her geographical location and excellent harbors enabled Corinth to command the traffic and commerce of both eastern and western seas. As is generally true, however, where learning, lucre, and luxury abound, idolatry, lust, and licentiousness likewise flourish.

When Paul arrived at Corinth on his second missionary journey, he addressed the basic need of the people—their need for Christ (see 1 Corinthians 1:23, 24 and 2:2). In a sense, the Gospel was on trial; if it could prevail here, it could prevail anywhere. The "power of God" did prevail in this wicked city, and Paul spent eighteen months in a fruitful ministry in Corinth.

A few years after his first visit, most likely while Paul was at Ephesus, he wrote this first epistle to the young church at Corinth. Reports had come regarding sin and inconsistencies within the church there. The spirit of the city had invaded the fellowship. The burden and boldness of the letter reveal Paul's untiring interest in maintaining a church that would influence society for Christ. Any church that fails on this point will ultimately be destroyed by influences from her surroundings.

We are among those "that in every place call upon the name of Jesus Christ our Lord," and we find that the plain and practical admonitions of this historical letter apply to us today. It addresses many current issues, such as humanistic reasoning, factions, lawsuits, divorce and remarriage, speaking in tongues, Christian charity, women's place in the church, proper observance of the ordinances, hairstyles, and life after death. This epistle remains inspirational, relevant, and authoritative, as do all the Holy Scriptures!

Lesson 1 2 February 2014

The Preaching of the Cross

Lesson Scope: [1 Corinthians 1 and 2](#)

Lesson Focus

The apostle Paul wrote this letter to the believers at Corinth, as well as to all believers "in every place" (1 Corinthians 1:2). He reminded them that Christ had been confirmed in them and that as they remained watchful for His return; the Lord would also confirm them to the end (1 Corinthians 1:1-9).

The Corinthians needed this opening encouragement to stand fast in unity of mind and judgment, especially since there was evidence of a contentious spirit among them (1 Corinthians 1:10-17). Various members were giving loyalty and favor to different men; some were for Apollos, some for Peter, and some for Christ. Paul gave them the answer to their problem—keeping their focus on Christ and the cross.

Crucifixion is one of the most excruciating death processes—hence the Biblical emphasis on Jesus' degree of condescension, "even the death of the cross" (Philippians 2:8). We are not focusing on a crucifix, but on the Prince of glory who died there. While some of the old hymns of the church seem to focus on the actual cross, for us it must be an en-sign, the banner of self-denial, because only "the way of the cross [Jesus'] leads home."

The message of the cross is the focal point of man's redemption. Although men despise and reject this message, the way of the cross still stands as the only provision for man's salvation.

Lesson Aim: To show the centrality of the cross in the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

Theme Verse: [Romans 1:16](#). For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ: for it is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth; to the Jew first, and also to the Greek.

Lesson Text

"We Preach Christ Crucified"

1 Corinthians 1:18-31 ¹⁸ For the preaching of the cross is to them that perish foolishness; but unto us which are saved it is the power of God. ¹⁹ For it is written, I will destroy the wisdom of the wise, and will bring to nothing the understanding of the prudent. ²⁰ Where *is* the wise? where *is* the scribe? where *is* the disputer of this world? hath not God made foolish the wisdom of this world? ²¹ For after that in the wisdom of God the world by wisdom knew not God, it pleased God by the foolishness of preaching to save them that believe. ²² For the Jews require a sign, and the Greeks seek after wisdom: ²³ But we preach Christ crucified, unto the Jews a stumblingblock, and unto the Greeks foolishness; ²⁴ But unto them which are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God, and the wisdom of God. ²⁵ Because the foolishness of God is wiser than men; and the weakness of God is stronger than men. ²⁶ For ye see your calling, brethren, how that not many wise men after the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble, *are called*: ²⁷ But God hath chosen the foolish things of the world to confound the wise; and God hath chosen the weak things of the world to confound the things which are mighty; ²⁸ And base things of the world, and things which are despised, hath God chosen, *yea*, and things which are not, to bring to nought things that are: ²⁹ That no flesh should glory in his presence. ³⁰ But of him are ye in Christ Jesus, who of God is made unto us wisdom, and righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption: ³¹ That, according as it is written, He that glorieth, let him glory in the Lord.

"We Speak the Wisdom of God"

1 Corinthians 2:7-16 ⁷ But we speak the wisdom of God in a mystery, *even* the hidden *wisdom*, which God ordained before the world unto our glory: ⁸ Which none of the princes of this world knew: for had they known *it*, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory. ⁹ But as it is written, Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which God hath prepared for them that love him. ¹⁰ But God hath revealed *them* unto us by his Spirit: for the Spirit searcheth all things, *yea*, the deep things of God. ¹¹ For what man knoweth the things of a man, save the spirit of man which is in him? even so the things of God knoweth no man, but the Spirit of God. ¹²

Now we have received, not the spirit of the world, but the spirit which is of God; that we might know the things that are freely given to us of God. ¹³ Which things also we speak, not in the words which man's wisdom teacheth, but which the Holy Ghost teacheth; comparing spiritual things with spiritual. ¹⁴ But the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God: for they are foolishness unto him: neither can he know *them*, because they are spiritually discerned. ¹⁵ But he that is spiritual judgeth all things, yet he himself is judged of no man. ¹⁶ For who hath known the mind of the Lord, that he may instruct him? But we have the mind of Christ.

Questions for Study

"We Preach Christ Crucified"

1. What are the answers to the questions in 1 Corinthians 1:20?
2. What hinders the calling of the worldly-wise, the mighty, and the noble?
3. Explain how glorying in the Lord is related to what Jesus "is made unto us" by God.
4. Why does this passage emphasize preaching Christ crucified? (See also 1 Corinthians 2:2.)

"We Speak the Wisdom of God"

5. What hidden wisdom did the princes of this world not know?
6. Contrast the spirit of the world with "the spirit which is of God."
7. What does it mean to have the mind of Christ?

Analyzing the Passage

The Gospel, the simple message concerning Christ and the cross (1 Corinthians 1:17), is the Good News. The cross, representing the life of self-denial exemplified by our blessed Lord Jesus, becomes the ensign of self-denial for the believer.

Preaching includes both teaching and warning. The preaching of the cross affects both believers and unbelievers. No man who receives the knowledge of Christ crucified remains neutral.

Foolishness, as it is used in 1 Corinthians 1:18, 23, means "something that is absurd or ridiculous; that which is lacking in common sense, judgment, or discretion." That is how the unsaved, Jew and Gentile

alike, viewed the preaching of the cross. The Jews stumbled over the crucifixion of Christ. They rejected Him Isaiah 53 as speaking of their promised Messiah. It did not fit their vision of a Messianic King ruling as many Old Testament prophecies spoke of Him. Because of this stumbling, although they sought a sign, they missed the very miraculous sign of Jesus' resurrection. The Gentiles, steeped in philosophy and humanistic reasoning, mocked the preaching of Christ as strange babbling (Acts 17:18, 32).

God knows no foolishness; the meaning of 1 Corinthians 1:25 is that the most elementary truth with God is far wiser than the wisest ideas of the world's wisest men.

The words called and calling (1 Corinthians 1:24-26) seem to indicate a state of being. Verse 24 speaks of the believers' state. In verse 26 the brethren's state is contrasted with that of the unbeliever. God will not reveal Himself to, or use, one who remains in a state of unbelief. But through His Spirit, He reveals things to those who love Him (1 Corinthians 2:9-10).

Principles and Applications

"We Preach Christ Crucified"

1. The cross is God's power unto salvation (1 Corinthians 1:18). "And I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all men unto me" (John 12:32). "Who his own self bare our sins in his own body on the tree, that we, being dead to sins, should live unto righteousness: by whose stripes ye were healed" (1 Peter 2:24). This drawing power is effective in the initial salvation experience, and it continues to be effective as one remains conscious of Christ's saving love in His sacrifice on the cross.

2. The cross confounds the wisdom of this world (1 Corinthians 1:19,-20). Learned or unlearned, men have yet to grasp what the Prince of glory did in going to "the death of the cross." "Having spoiled principalities and powers, he made a shew of them openly, triumphing over them in [the cross]" (Colossians 2:15). "Beware lest any man spoil you through philosophy and vain deceit, after the tradition of men, after the rudiments of the world, and not after Christ" (Colossians 2:8).

3. God uses the preaching of the cross to bring salvation (1 Corinthians 1:21). "How shall they hear without a preacher?" (Romans 10:14). Preaching is the Bible way of proclaiming the way of salvation. Jesus is

our example (Mark 1:14). Many groups today are replacing preaching with sights, sounds, and symbols that bypass the way of the cross and lead many astray.

4. Christ crucified is God's answer for salvation (1 Corinthians 1:23-24). "And I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all men unto me. This he said, signifying what death he should die" (John 12:32, 33). "And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of man be lifted up: that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have eternal life" (John 3:14-15).

5. The simple message of the cross confounds the philosophies of men (1 Corinthians 1:25-27). This is so, mainly because they do not pour contempt on their pride nor count their richest gains as loss. Education, science, and theory govern their thought patterns. This vanity of mind darkens their spiritual understanding of the simple truths of God's Word.

6. The cross provides for all man's spiritual needs (1 Corinthians 1:30). When Jesus died, the veil of the temple was rent in two. The rent veil is a type of Jesus' flesh (Hebrews 10:19-20), which was rent for us. In Jesus' perfect blood sacrifice, God provided the new and living way for all mankind. "Jesus Christ is made to me ... / Wisdom, righteousness and pow'r, / Holiness forevermore, / My redemption full and sure, / He is all I need."

7. The cross causes us to glory in Christ for our redemption (1 Corinthians 1:31).

"Unto him that loved us, and washed us from our sins in his own blood, and hath made us kings and priests unto God and his Father; to him be glory and dominion for ever and ever. Amen" (Revelation 1:5-6).

"We Speak the Wisdom of God"

8. The way of the cross was God's plan before the creation of the world (1 Corinthians 2:7-8). This was the testimony of John, the revelator, as recorded for us in Revelation 13:8. His testimony harmonizes with 1 Peter 1:19-20. In these Scriptures Jesus is referred to as a Lamb slain before "the

foundation of the world." "Oh, the love that drew salvation's plan! / Oh, the grace that brought it down to man! / Oh, the mighty gulf that God did span / At Calvary!"

9. God, through the Spirit, unveils to believers His plan for man's redemption (1 Corinthians 2:9-12). His Spirit bears witness with our spirits that we are the children of God. "But the Comforter, which is the Holy Ghost, whom the Father will send in my name, he shall teach you all things" (John 14:26). These "all things" are revealed to the believers by studying the Scriptures, by walking in the Spirit, and by associating with a Scriptural brotherhood (Deuteronomy 29:29).

10. Spiritual men reject the philosophies of the world and teach spiritual truth through the power of the Spirit (1 Corinthians 2:13). The first test of any man's teaching is whether it is aligned with the eternal Word of God. The Holy Spirit and the Holy Word always agree. The second test of any man's teaching is what his teaching produces in his own life.

11. Accepting the cross is the path to receiving the mind of Christ (1 Corinthians 2:14-16). "Who ... made himself of no reputation, and ... humbled himself" (Philippians 2:6-8). Jesus endured the cross and despised the shame (Hebrews 12:2). The mind of Christ is the way of self-denial; it is the cross each of us must take up to be God's children. "And if children, then heirs; ... if so be that we suffer with him" (Romans 8:17).

Important Teachings

1. The cross is God's power unto salvation (1 Corinthians 1:18).
2. The cross confounds the wisdom of this world (1 Corinthians 1:19-20).
3. God uses the preaching of the cross to bring salvation (1 Corinthians 1:21).
4. Christ crucified is God's answer for salvation (1 Corinthians 1:23-24).
5. The simple message of the cross confounds the philosophies of men (1 Corinthians 1:25-27).
6. The cross provides for all man's spiritual needs (1 Corinthians 1:30).
7. The cross causes us to glory in Christ for our redemption (1 Corinthians 1:31).
8. The way of the cross was God's plan before the creation of the world (1 Corinthians 2:7-8).
9. God, through the Spirit, unveils to believers His plan for man's redemption (1 Corinthians 2:9-12).

10. Spiritual men reject the philosophies of the world and teach spiritual truth through the power of the Spirit (1 Corinthians 2:13).

11. Accepting the cross is the path to receiving the mind of Christ (1 Corinthians 2:14-16).

Answers to Questions

1. What are the answers to the questions in 1 Corinthians 1:20?

The answer to the first three questions is found in 1 Corinthians 1: 19, 27-28. God has destroyed their wisdom, understanding, and arguments (disputing) and has confounded their thinking processes with the very things they despise and call weak or base—the spiritual realities of divine truth. The answer to the last question in verse 20 is yes.

2. What hinders the calling of the worldly-wise, the mighty, and the noble?

The world, by its wisdom, cannot know God or understand His infinite wisdom (v. 21). They are men that live for and seek after the flesh (v. 26). God will not grace with His presence one who glories in the flesh (v. 29).

3. Explain how glorying in the Lord is related to what Jesus "is made unto us" by God.

In Jesus' perfect blood sacrifice, God provided the new and living way for all mankind—mercy for sin that is repented of and grace for living in the promise of eternal life. Since the "veil, that is to say, his flesh" (Hebrews 10:20) was rent, the way to God is open. Through our Lord Jesus, "we have access by faith into this grace wherein we stand, and rejoice in hope of the glory of God" (Romans 5:2). Jesus is our wisdom, our righteousness, our sanctification, and our redemption. Words cannot describe the debt of love we owe, but "to him be glory and dominion for ever and ever. Amen" (Revelation 1:6).

4. Why does this passage emphasize preaching Christ crucified? (See also 1 Corinthians 2:2.)

The Scriptures are full of explanations for this. One example is in Romans 5:6-8: "For when we were yet without strength, in due time Christ died for the ungodly. For scarcely for a righteous man will one die: yet peradventure for a good man some would even dare to die. But God commendeth his love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us." We must be reminded again and again of what God

has wrought for us.

5. What hidden wisdom did the princes of this world not know?

It was that which God had ordained before the foundation of the world—that He would send His Son, the Lord of glory, into the world to suffer and to be crucified at the hands of sinful men and to rise again. "O the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! how unsearchable are his judgments, and his ways past finding out!" (Romans 11:33).

6. Contrast the spirit of the world with "the spirit which is of God."

The spirit of the world controls the princes of this world (1 Corinthians 2:6). The spirit of the world cannot know the things of God (1 Corinthians 2:11). The spirit of the world exalts the orations of man (1 Corinthians 2:13). The spirit of the world controls the motives and thought patterns of the natural man (1 Corinthians 2:14).

The "spirit which is of God" reveals the deep things of God (1 Corinthians 2:10). He endows the spiritual man with discernment to make proper judgment in life (1 Corinthians 2:15). He teaches the "all things" of God to those who gladly receive instruction (1 Corinthians 2:16). He enables the believer to better understand God's sovereignty and his own frailty without Jesus Christ (1 Corinthians 2:12).

7. What does it mean to have the mind of Christ?

Jesus said, "I do always those things that please [my Father]" (John 8:29). From Philipians 2 we learn that Jesus made Himself of no reputation, functioned as a humble servant, and was obedient to His heavenly Father. We are to consider His meekness and gentleness (2 Corinthians 10:1) and to follow His steps; for "when he was reviled, [He] reviled not again; when he suffered, he threatened not; but committed himself to him that judgeth righteously" (1 Peter 2:23).

Embodied in the mind of Christ are the two greatest commandments: "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind.... Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself" (Matthew 22:37-39).

Summarizing the Lesson

"Wherefore, holy brethren, partakers of the heavenly calling, consider the Apostle and High Priest of our profession, Christ Jesus" (Hebrews 3:1), "who, when he was reviled, reviled not again; when he suffered,

he threatened not; but committed himself to him that judgeth righteously" (1 Peter 2:23).

Research Guide

1. Read the crucifixion story as given in the synoptic Gospels.
2. Study other Scriptures that highlight the extent of the work of Christ at Calvary: 1 Peter 1 and 2; Romans 5; Colossians 2; Philippians 2; Revelation 1 and 5; and others.