

## SCRIPTURE LESSON TEXT

**1 COR. 1:1** Paul, called *to be* an apostle of Jesus Christ through the will of God, and Sosthenes *our* brother,

**2** Unto the church of God which is at Corinth, to them that are sanctified in Christ Jesus, called *to be* saints, with all that in every place call upon the name of Jesus Christ our Lord, both theirs and ours:

**3** Grace *be* unto you, and peace, from God our Father, and *from* the Lord Jesus Christ.

**4** I thank my God always on your behalf, for the grace of God which is given you by Jesus Christ;

**5** That in every thing ye are enriched by him, in all utterance, and *in* all knowledge;

**6** Even as the testimony of Christ was confirmed in you:

**7** So that ye come behind in no gift; waiting for the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ:

**8** Who shall also confirm you unto the end, *that ye may be* blameless in the day of our Lord Jesus Christ.

**9** God *is* faithful, by whom ye were called unto the fellowship of his Son Jesus Christ our Lord.

**10** Now I beseech you, brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that ye all speak the same thing, and *that* there be no divisions among you; but *that* ye be perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment.

**11** For it hath been declared unto me of you, my brethren, by them *which are of the house* of Chloe, that there are contentions among you.

**12** Now this I say, that every one of you saith, I am of Paul; and I of Apollos; and I of Cephas; and I of Christ.

**13** Is Christ divided? was Paul crucified for you? or were ye baptized in the name of Paul?

**14** I thank God that I baptized none of you, but Crispus and Gaius;

**15** Lest any should say that I had baptized in mine own name.

**16** And I baptized also the household of Stephanas: besides, I know not whether I baptized any other.

### NOTES

# Divisions in Corinth

Lesson Text: I Corinthians 1:1-16

Related Scriptures: I Corinthians 10:31-33; I Corinthians 12:1-31

TIME: A.D. 55

PLACE: from Ephesus

---

---

**GOLDEN TEXT**—“Now I beseech you, brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that ye all speak the same thing, and that there be no divisions among you; but that ye be perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment” (I Corinthians 1:10).

---

---

## *Lesson Exposition*

### **GRATITUDE FOR THE CHURCH— I Cor. 1:1-6**

**Authority in Christ (I Cor. 1:1).** As he did in many of his letters, Paul identifies himself as the author at the outset of the epistle. There is no reason to question this, as this letter has been ascribed to Paul throughout the entire two-thousand-year history of the church. In addition, the theology and writing style clearly align with the rest of Paul’s epistles.

Paul asserts his divine calling as an apostle right away, and his God-given authority in that role is a persistent theme of this letter. He did not appoint himself to be an apostle for Christ. In fact, he was a persecutor of the church before he ever became an apostle (cf. Acts 7:58; 8:1-3; 9:1-5). He was called to be an apostle by the will of God. He did not seek the appointment for himself, nor was he selected by a church committee. He was selected by Christ Himself (cf. II Tim. 1:11).

The general definition of an apostle is “one who is sent.” But when Paul calls himself an apostle, he means more than that. Apostles in the first-century church had a unique calling and were

specially equipped to preach the gospel, often accompanied by signs and wonders. More important was the fact that Paul’s apostolic authority enabled him to write the very words of Scripture, which meant his messages had authority from God.

**Saints in Christ (I Cor. 1:2-3).** The recipients of the letter, as stated by Paul, were the saints in Corinth. These were people who were being sanctified in Christ Jesus. To be sanctified means to be made holy, set apart from evil, and devoted to God. Every Christian is in the process of being sanctified by the Holy Spirit. We are set apart for Christ once we are saved; then the Holy Spirit sanctifies us through the finished work of Christ. We cannot sanctify ourselves, just as we cannot save ourselves.

A saint is one who is called to be holy; therefore, all believers are saints. We are all linked together with everyone who calls on the name of Jesus, which means there must be unity among believers. Fittingly, Paul addresses the Corinthians as saints to prepare them for his rebuke by reminding them of their calling to holiness and unity in Christ.

As is typical in Paul's letters, he opens this epistle with a prayer for grace and peace for his audience. Grace and peace are like holy partners. Without God's grace, we could never attain the peace that only comes through Christ. It is also through this grace that we can find peace in all our circumstances. We cannot survive without the grace and peace of God.

**Gratitude in Christ (I Cor. 1:4).** As we will see throughout this quarter, the Corinthian church was far from perfect. Corinth was a city where immorality ran rampant, and the cultural immorality penetrated the church as well.

Nevertheless, although Paul often had stern rebukes for this church, he never treated them as anything less than brothers and sisters in the Lord (cf. Acts 18:8-10). He desired to bring them to obedience in Christ and strengthen their fellowship with the Lord. He was grateful that God had poured out His grace on them through Jesus Christ.

**Enriched in Christ (I Cor. 1:5-6).** Paul wanted the Corinthians to be enriched in Christ in every way, including in their speech and knowledge. Paul focused on these two things because they were both highly revered in Corinth and had possibly become an area of pride for the church members. He wanted them to understand that they were gifted in these areas only because of God's grace, not their own abilities.

## **GRACE IN THE CHURCH— I Cor. 1:7-9**

**Gifted by grace (I Cor. 1:7).** The purpose of spiritual gifts is to edify the church as a whole. Spiritual gifts are never given so a person can use them for personal gain or benefit. We all benefit when each believer uses his or her gift in a way that brings glory to God and blessing to the church. We cannot earn these gifts, nor can we choose which ones we receive. The

Holy Spirit grants them according to His purposes (cf. 12:11).

When we use our gifts according to God's purposes, we are enriched by the Holy Spirit (vs. 5). We need not fear that we are ill-equipped; God will give us whatever we need to fulfill His will.

We must use our spiritual gifts faithfully and selflessly until Christ returns. As we serve the Lord in this present day, we eagerly await His return. The return of Christ could happen at any time, and we should always work with this in mind. Until He returns, however, we must rely on the presence and power of the Holy Spirit to work in and through us as we faithfully obey the will of God.

**Righteous by grace (I Cor. 1:8-9).** Many Christians make the mistake of trying to produce godliness on their own. There is simply no way we are ever going to produce good works of our own volition. We often find ourselves doing what we know we should not do and not doing what we know we should do (cf. Rom. 7:18-19).

We will never be able to stand before God blameless on any merit we achieve. We must rely on God to sustain us. We are never going to be good enough (or good at all, for that matter) by attaining a level of greatness or purity in our own strength or morality. If you find yourself trying really hard to be obedient only to fall flat on your face time and time again, take heart. You can (and must) trust God to hold you up and sustain you.

We do not have to worry about the staying power of God's grace; He is faithful to do what He said He would do. God cannot lie (Num. 23:19; Titus 1:2; Heb. 6:18), so we can have full confidence in everything in His Word. He has called us into the fellowship of Jesus Christ and will equip us to stay there. It is His faithfulness, not ours, on which His promises stand.

## **HARMONY IN THE CHURCH— I Cor. 1:10-16**

**Quarreling in the church (I Cor. 1:10-11).** Paul now turns his attention to the first major issue that he deals with in this letter: divisions. He makes an appeal by the name of Jesus Christ to each person in the Corinthian church to be united in Christ. The church is not an individual effort, nor is it merely a collection of like-minded people striving for a common goal. The church is unique because it is the body of Jesus Christ on earth and represents Him to the world.

In order to prevent divisions from taking root, Paul tells the church to “be perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment” (vs. 10). This does not discount the fact that the church is made up of many different personalities, nor does it mean that we will agree on every little point.

The report of division came from a group within the Corinthian church led by a woman named Chloe. This group had reported to Paul that there was a lot of conflict in the church. Yet even while addressing this, Paul refers to the people as his brothers, showing that we are still family even when we strongly disagree with one another. We should follow this pattern in our own conflicts by lacing our words with grace.

**Favoritism in the church (I Cor. 1:12-13).** Divisions often occur when people become devoted to their favorite preacher or leader and ignore other godly teachers. When this happens, people become more focused on the messenger instead of the message.

In Corinth, different factions followed Paul, Apollos, and Peter. They were devoted to their favorites, although none of these men encouraged such a following. Paul reminds us that preachers are merely messengers and are not to receive praise that belongs to God alone.

**True perspective on baptism (I Cor. 1:14-16).** Picking up on his final question in verse 13, Paul goes so far as to express his thanks that he did not baptize anyone in the Corinthian church except two men, Crispus and Gaius. While on the surface this may sound like a very unusual statement for a minister to make, Paul wanted to communicate the intensity of his dislike for the favoritism of the Corinthians. Though baptism in itself is commanded by Jesus and is a good and joyous ordinance, Paul was thankful that no segment of the membership had cause to cling to him above other leaders in the church.

—Robert Ferguson, Jr.

## **QUESTIONS**

1. What does Paul assert at the outset of this letter?
2. What was so important about Paul’s claim to apostleship?
3. What does it mean to be sanctified?
4. What is a saint?
5. Why must we rely on God to sustain us and make us blameless instead of trying to sustain ourselves?
6. What was the major issue in Corinth that Paul dealt with first in this letter?
7. How is the church different from a social club or community group?
8. What does Paul’s choice to call the Corinthians “brothers” in verse 11 show us about disagreements in the church?
9. What was the cause of division in the Corinthian church?
10. Why was Paul glad that he had not baptized many in Corinth?

—Robert Ferguson, Jr.

## PRACTICAL POINTS

1. Christian workers know the value of their fellow workers in ministry (I Cor. 1:1-2).
2. Grace and peace for Christian service are only available through faith in Christ (vs. 3).
3. Gifted workers and ministries must be purposeful about giving thanks to God (vss. 4-6).
4. Rely on God's strength daily for a life that is pleasing to Him (vss. 7-9).
5. The Holy Spirit unites people with different backgrounds, interests, and opinions as one body advancing God's kingdom (vs. 10).
6. Some within the church are contentious and divisive, but in the name of Christian unity we should rebuke those who seek to cause divisions (vss. 11-16).

—Cheryl Y. Powell.

## RESEARCH AND DISCUSSION

1. When addressing conflicts between believers, how can it help to remind involved parties of our unity in Christ?
2. What is the relationship between "grace" and "peace"?
3. Why do you think Paul repeatedly refers to Jesus in the first 10 verses of I Corinthians? Discuss.
4. Discuss both the risks and benefits to the kingdom of God of so many Christian denominations operating in our world today.

—Cheryl Y. Powell.

## Golden Text Illuminated

**"Now I beseech you, brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that ye all speak the same thing, and that there be no divisions among you; but that ye be perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment" (I Corinthians 1:10).**

Sadly, the church at Corinth was a shameful picture of disunity. They had split into factions, each following a particular human teacher. Some claimed loyalty to Paul; others to Cephas (the Aramaic name for Peter); and still others to Apollos, "an eloquent man, and mighty in the scriptures" (Acts 18:24), who hailed from Alexandria, Egypt. Another faction claimed exclusive loyalty to Christ. There likely was arrogance behind this claim as well; they may have prided themselves in thinking they followed Jesus more faithfully than the rest.

Now Paul fires off three related commands in rapid sequence. He tells the Corinthians to "speak the same thing," cease their divisions, and be "perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment."

Finally, Paul exhorts the church to be "perfectly joined together," a term that means to repair, to put something back together as it should be. Paul then tells them to have the "same mind" and the "same judgment." He is not suggesting that the church has to agree on everything, but they must agree on the *essential* thing—that Christ alone is the power and wisdom of God (I Cor. 1:24)! Their deep schisms would be healed if they fully trusted in Christ alone.

—Mark Winter.