

CHARLES R. SWINDOLL

SWINDOLL'S LIVING INSIGHTS

NEW TESTAMENT COMMENTARY

1&2 CORINTHIANS



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Swindoll's Living Insights New Testament Commentary, Volume 7

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AUTHOR'S PREFACE

or more than sixty years I have loved the Bible. It was that love for the Scriptures, mixed with a clear call into the gospel ministry during my tour of duty in the Marine Corps, that resulted in my going to Dallas Theological Seminary to prepare for a lifetime of ministry. During those four great years I had the privilege of studying under outstanding men of God, who also loved God's Word. They not only held the inerrant Word of God in high esteem, they taught it carefully, preached it passionately, and modeled it consistently. A week never passes without my giving thanks to God for the grand heritage that has been mine to claim! I am forever indebted to those fine theologians and mentors, who cultivated in me a strong commitment to the understanding, exposition, and application of God's truth.

For more than fifty years I have been engaged in doing just that—and how I love it! I confess without hesitation that I am addicted to the examination and the proclamation of the Scriptures. Because of this, books have played a major role in my life for as long as I have been in ministry—especially those volumes that explain the truths and enhance my understanding of what God has written. Through these many years I have collected a large personal library, which has proven invaluable as I have sought to remain a faithful student of the Bible. To the end of my days, my major goal in life is to communicate the Word with accuracy, insight, clarity, and practicality. Without informative and reliable books to turn to, I would have "run dry" decades ago.

Among my favorite and most well-worn volumes are those that have enabled me to get a better grasp of the biblical text. Like most expositors, I am forever searching for literary tools that I can use to hone my gifts and sharpen my skills. For me, that means finding resources that make the complicated simple and easy to understand, that offer insightful comments and word pictures that enable me to see the relevance of sacred truth in light of my twenty-first-century world, and that drive those truths home to my heart in ways I do not easily forget. When I come across such books, they wind up in my hands as I devour them and then place them in my library for further reference . . . and, believe me, I often return to them. What a relief it is to have these resources to turn to when I lack fresh insight, or when I need just the right story or illustration, or when I get stuck in the tangled text and cannot find my way out. For the serious expositor, a library is essential. As a mentor of mine once said, "Where else can you have ten thousand professors at your fingertips?"

In recent years I have discovered there are not nearly enough resources like those I just described. It was such a discovery that prompted me to consider becoming a part of the answer instead of lamenting the problem. But the solution would result in a huge undertaking. A writing project that covers all of the books and letters of the New Testament seemed overwhelming and intimidating. A rush of relief came when I realized that during the past fifty-plus years I've taught and preached through most of the New Testament. In my files were folders filled with notes from those messages that were just lying there, waiting to be brought out of hiding, given a fresh and relevant touch in light of today's needs, and applied to fit into the lives of men and women who long for a fresh word from the Lord. *That did it!* I began to work on plans to turn all of those notes into this commentary on the New Testament.

I must express my gratitude to Mike Svigel for his tireless and devoted effort, serving as my hands-on, day-to-day editor. He has done superb work as we have walked our way through the verses and chapters of all twenty-seven New Testament books. It has been a pleasure to see how he has taken my original material and helped me shape it into a style that remains true to the text of the Scriptures, at the same time interestingly and creatively developed, and all the while allowing my voice to come through in a natural and easy-to-read manner.

I need to add sincere words of appreciation to the congregations I have served in various parts of these United States for more than five decades. It has been my good fortune to be the recipient of their love, support, encouragement, patience, and frequent words of affirmation as I have fulfilled my calling to stand and deliver God's message year after year. The sheep from all those flocks have endeared themselves to this shepherd in more ways than I can put into words . . . and none more than those I currently serve with delight at Stonebriar Community Church in Frisco, Texas.

Finally, I must thank my wife, Cynthia, for her understanding of my addiction to studying, to preaching, and to writing. Never has she discouraged me from staying at it. Never has she failed to urge me in the pursuit of doing my very best. On the contrary, her affectionate support personally, and her own commitment to excellence in leading Insight for Living for more than three and a half decades, have combined to keep me faithful to my calling "in season and out of season." Without her devotion to me and apart from our mutual partnership throughout our lifetime of ministry together, Swindoll's Living Insights would never have been undertaken.

I am grateful that it has now found its way into your hands and, ultimately, onto the shelves of your library. My continued hope and prayer is that you will find these volumes helpful in your own study and personal application of the Bible. May they help you come to realize, as I have over these many years, that God's Word is as timeless as it is true.

The grass withers, the flower fades, But the word of our God stands forever. (Isa. 40:8, NASB)

> Chuck Swindoll Frisco, Texas

THE STRONG'S NUMBERING SYSTEM

Swindoll's Living Insights New Testament Commentary uses the Strong's word-study numbering system to give both newer and more advanced Bible students alike quicker, more convenient access to helpful original-language tools (e.g., concordances, lexicons, and theological dictionaries). The Strong's numbering system, made popular by the *Strong's Exhaustive Concordance of the Bible*, is used with the majority of biblical Greek and Hebrew reference works. Those who are unfamiliar with the ancient Hebrew, Aramaic, and Greek alphabets can quickly find information on a given word by looking up the appropriate index number. Advanced students will find the system helpful because it allows them to quickly find the lexical form of obscure conjugations and inflections.

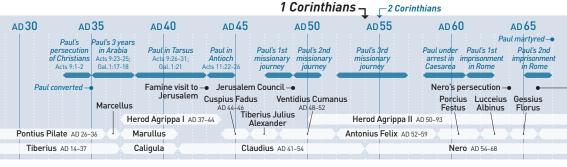
When a Greek word is mentioned in the text, the Strong's number is included in square brackets after the Greek word. So in the example of the Greek word $agap\bar{e}$ [26], "love," the number is used with Greek tools keyed to the Strong's system.

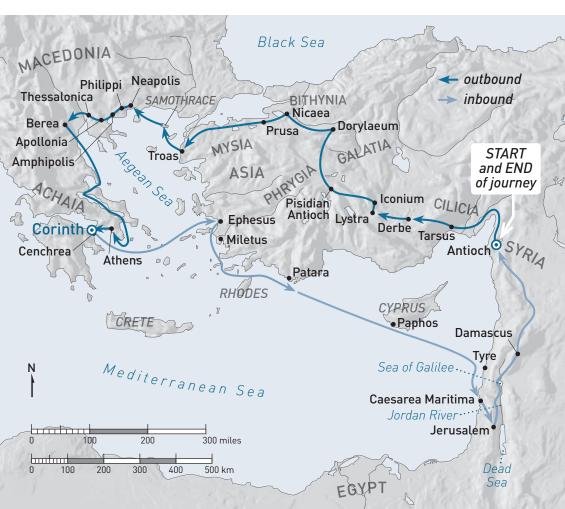
On occasion, a Hebrew word is mentioned in the text. The Strong's Hebrew numbers are completely separate from the Greek numbers, so Hebrew numbers are prefixed with a letter "H." So, for example, the Hebrew word *kapporet* [H₃₇₂₇], "mercy seat," comes from *kopher* [H₃₇₂₂], "to ransom," "to secure favor through a gift."

INSIGHTS ON 1 CORINTHIANS

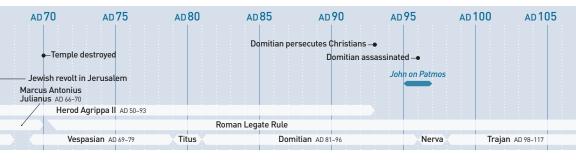
Paul sought to address a growing number of problems dividing the church—effects of its diverse membership of Jews and Gentiles, its rocky beginnings of persecution, and the corrupt religious and moral culture in which it ministered.

As the lights dim on our own culture and our churches begin to look more and more like the disheveled, self-serving church in Corinth, Paul's words to that fragmented church take on greater import and more urgent practicality.





Paul's Second Missionary Journey. Paul and Silas left from Antioch to return to several of the cities where Paul had planted churches on his first missionary journey around AD 47 to 48. They proceeded through Asia to Greece, all the way to Corinth, where Paul would meet Priscilla and Aquila and minister in a church of new Christians in the home of Titius Justus.



1 CORINTHIANS

INTRODUCTION

uring the last few months of 1957, my wife and I were located in San Francisco. To say we were residents would be a bit of an overstatement, because we were lost most of the time! It was decades before GPS navigation, and we were faced with unpredictable roads—some running perpendicular, others diagonally, and still others that felt like navigating through a giant platter of spaghetti. We had to constantly keep a lookout for one-way signs or risk being rammed by a trolley, which often just leaped out of nowhere. Those roller-coaster hills, twisted streets, and fading street signs rendered city maps almost useless. The old, strange buildings and side-by-side houses looked like somebody copied and pasted the same design over and over along the city blocks. As a result, we couldn't find our way around by obvious landmarks. Add to all this confusion a thick peninsula fog with a malicious will of its own. After a few hours of playing hide-and-seek with yourself, you start looking for Alice and the Mad Hatter because you conclude, "This city can't possibly exist on this side of the looking glass!"

It didn't take long before Cynthia and I devised a means to feel our way around that city. She would sit in the passenger seat, open up a map, and never look up as she would gently voice commands like a flesh-and-blood GPS: "Second street, turn right. . . . First street, turn left. . . . Oops, wrong way, turn around." I didn't know where I was, but I believed her. Most of the time as we traveled from point A to point B (often taking unplanned detours through points C, D, and E), we were both in survival mode, hoping the street cars and impatient drivers wouldn't overtake us.

Well, things changed for us late that fall. We were with some friends atop the new San Francisco Hilton, over twenty stories above the

THE BOOK OF 1 CORINTHIANS AT A GLANCE

SECTION	OPENING GREETING AND PRAYER	REBUKING DIVISIONS AND FOLLY	CORRECTING ILLS AND IMMORALITY
PASSAGE	1:1-9	1:10-3:23 4:1-6:20	
		Divisions and	Catastrophes
TUEMEC	Prayer	Rebuke for Sinful Conditions: "Now I exhort you, brethren" (1:10)	
THEMES Blessing Greeting	Plea for Unity Rebuke for Folly	Plea for Purity Rebuke for Immorality	
	Sţ	piritual Flesh	nly
KEY TERMS	Grace Called	Wisdom Folly	Steward Immorality

STRENGTHENING FAMILY AND FELLOWSHIP	ORDERING CHURCH AND WORSHIP	CONCERNING DEATH AND RESURRECTION	CONCLUDING INSTRUCTIONS AND WARNINGS		
7:1-10:33	11:1-14:40	15:1-58	16:1-24		
Difficulties and Controversies					
Reply to Specific Questions:					
"Now concerning the things about which you wrote" (7:1)					
Marriage and Divorce	Women and Worship	Gospel and Faith	Giving and Receiving		
Liberty and License	Gifts and Ministry	Dying and Rising	Reproof and Exhortation		
	Love	Wisdom			
Marry	Edification	Gospel	Collection		
Knowledge	Gift	Resurrection	Maranatha		

streets, and suddenly the layout of that city fell into place. There we stood, gazing over the peninsula with a bird's-eye view, discovering the interconnectedness of it all—the inner logic of the system that was San Francisco. Off in that direction was the Golden Gate. Over there was the Bay Bridge. Between the two was Fisherman's Wharf, and behind us, Nob Hill and Chinatown. Farther south were Daly City and other significant points down the peninsula. Here were the main thoroughfares, parkways, and boulevards. Once we got above the city to see the whole thing at once, San Francisco suddenly made better sense.

Paul's first letter to the church in Corinth can be just as perplexing as a Texan's first drive through the streets of San Francisco—if one doesn't first take time for a bird's-eye view of the whole and place it in its biblical and historical context. Believe me, the twists and turns in the chapters and verses of 1 Corinthians can lose even the most skilled preachers and teachers. Many expositors get snared by the fatal flaw of immersing themselves in the details of the book before getting an overview. This principle holds true for every book of the Bible, but it's especially vital for 1 Corinthians. So, let me be your guide as we look at the first-century city of Corinth and Paul's ministry there, and then survey the letter. Once we learn the major boulevards and landmarks of this grand letter, we'll be ready to explore the interesting streets, intersections, and neighborhoods without getting lost.

KEY TERMS IN 1 CORINTHIANS

agapē (ἀγάπη) [26] "love," "benevolence"

The Greek noun $agap\bar{e}$ is rarely found outside Jewish and Christian writings, though verbal forms of the word were used of love in general. The Greek culture celebrated $er\bar{o}s$, which, while used in various contexts, often connoted the intoxicating, impulsive romantic love between men and women. They also honored philia [5373], the warm, noble affection of deep friendship. But $agap\bar{e}$ remained an undeveloped term in Greek literature. Its use, especially of God's love in Jewish and Christian literature, marked it as an unconditional love that rests on a decision to seek another's highest and greatest good. This unmerited and selfless affection describes God's love toward people as well as Christians' responsibility to reflect that love toward others (see 4:21; 8:1; 13:1-13; 14:1; 16:14). Paul's "love chapter" (13:1-13) paints a vivid and beautiful picture of what $agap\bar{e}$ is and is not.

pneumatikos (πνευματικός) [4152] "spiritual" sarkikos (σαρκικός) [4559] "fleshly"

Though the adjective *pneumatikos* can refer to other nonmaterial things (Eph. 6:12), in the New Testament it most often relates to the Holy Spirit. Thus, things that come from the Holy Spirit such as gifts, blessings, or revelations are called "spiritual" (Rom. 1:11; 7:14; 1 Cor. 2:13; Eph. 1:3), and people who are empowered by the Holy Spirit in their lifestyle are called "spiritual" (1 Cor. 2:15; 3:1; 14:37; Gal. 6:1). It is sometimes contrasted with *sarkikos* or the related word *sarkinos* [4560] (both meaning "fleshly"; cf. 1 Cor. 3:1, 3) to emphasize a heavenly, divine origin as opposed to an earthly, human origin. Paul uses these opposites to illustrate the carnal, immature condition of the Corinthians, who should have been striving for spiritual maturity.

sophia (σοφία) [4678] "wisdom"

Not only was *sophia*, "wisdom," sought after and praised in the Greek mind, but "wisdom" had a rich meaning in the Hebrew Scriptures as well. Wisdom involves far more than mere knowledge of facts. It advances even beyond skillful living or the emphasis on practical virtue as seen in Greek philosophy. Rather, "wisdom" in the Christian sense is a gift from God (Jas. 1:5) closely associated with the presence and working of the Holy Spirit, producing supernatural discernment and prudence. Because true wisdom comes from God, it is often regarded as "folly" by Gentiles.

CORINTH

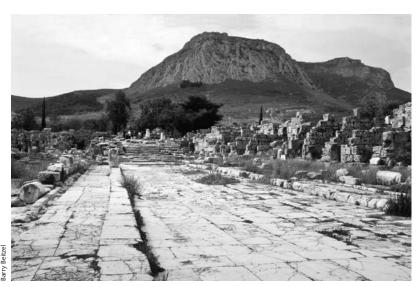
In New Testament times, Corinth governed the Roman province of Achaia, which comprised almost the entirety of Greece. As a locus of political power, it hosted the residence of the regional governor, or proconsul. The city had been rebuilt by Julius Caesar in 44 BC and repopulated with freedmen from around the Roman Empire, ending the desolation the city had endured at the hand of the Romans when it had been destroyed in 146 BC.

This influx of outside ethnicities made Corinth very diverse and pluralistic—one of the early cosmopolitan cities. It was a booming place of commerce where many religions existed side by side, and many syncretistic belief systems resulted. The city housed numerous temples to various deities, including a temple to Aphrodite, the fertility goddess. Corinth featured both the cult prostitution associated with such temples and the street prostitution that one frequently finds in such booming port cities.

Corinth was extremely wealthy because of its strategic geographical location. It lay on the isthmus connecting the southern mainland of

Greece, the Peloponnesian Peninsula, to the northern border of Greece and the provinces of Macedonia and Epirus, thus commanding access both to the Adriatic Sea on the west and the Aegean Sea on the east. Due to the turbulent waters south of the Peloponnesian Peninsula, many merchants either dry-docked their ships in the harbor on one side to unload their goods and transport them overland to the other harbor, or they paid to have the ship hauled overland—no insignificant task. Corinth's strategic location along both the overland and marine trade routes brought the city great commercial prosperity, increased even more by the city's own industries, such as its bronze and terracotta works.² As an indication of its commercial importance, in the first century the city boasted a marketplace larger than any in Rome itself.³ The cream of prosperity flowed into Corinth's cup.

Along with economic prosperity came peace. Upon regaining financial stability, Corinth again began to host the Isthmian Games, in which Greeks and Romans from all over the Empire competed not only in athletics but also in drama, music, and oratory. The Isthmian contests were held every two years and lasted several days, being conducted in Corinth's huge stadium as well as in its two theaters—one outdoors that seated eighteen thousand people and another indoors that held three thousand. These games were not only popular but also known for their extravagance and licentiousness. The games, of course, brought tourism, which, combined with trade and travel, necessitated



Ruins of Corinth along Lechaion Road with the Acrocorinth in the background

the establishment of a banking system that further increased the city's wealth. Archaeological research in the past century has provided abundant evidence of the city's splendor, revealing the existence of wealthy neighborhoods, public and private dining, recreational facilities, and upscale rental properties.⁴

PAUL'S MINISTRY IN CORINTH

The year was AD 50. After a full year of hard travel over land and sea from Antioch, across Asia Minor, and through Macedonia, preaching the gospel with Silas and Timothy, Paul pressed ahead into Athens, the center of Greek philosophy and culture (Acts 15:40–17:15). Having just escaped the ire of Jewish agitators who had hounded him since he was in Thessalonica (Acts 17:1-13), the battle-weary apostle's arrival in Athens could have brought him some much-needed R & R—had he not felt driven by an inescapable passion for proclaiming the risen Lord.

Observing the army of idols assembled in all the public places of Athens, Paul felt "provoked" in his heart and immediately began engaging Jews and Gentiles alike with the truth of Jesus Christ (Acts 17:16-17). Among his listeners were Epicurean and Stoic philosophers—the intellectual elites of the day. They arranged an ad hoc hearing at the Areopagus, also known as "Mars Hill" (Acts 17:19-21). There Paul's preaching gained a number of new believers in Christ, including Dionysius the Areopagite, a member of the city's cultural and social elite (Acts 17:34).

From the famous city of Athens, where even Paul's critics exhibited common courtesies, Paul crossed the narrow Isthmus of Corinth. That two-day journey along the coast of the Saronic Gulf marked a transition from the famous to the infamous—from what most consider the center of Greek intellectual culture to what we would see as the pit of Greek immoral corruption: *from Athens to Corinth*. Nevertheless, Paul's zeal to spread the gospel far outweighed whatever apprehensions he may have had about the abject depravity he was sure to find in that cesspool of self-indulgence.

At the beginning of what could have easily become a dark and demoralizing ministry in Corinth, God provided two bright lights—Aquila and Priscilla. Paul met this Jewish couple, who recently had left Italy when the emperor Claudius ordered all Jews out of Rome (Acts 18:2). In God's providence, the two men shared the trade of tentmaking (Acts 18:3). Drawn together by their Jewish heritage, common trade, and status as displaced residents, Paul, Aquila, and Priscilla struck up



Rome prized Corinth because it controlled a strategic intersection of trade. Rather than brave the treacherous journey around Capel Malea, shipowners preferred to drag their ships, cargo and all, across the narrow Isthmus of Corinth. When Paul traveled from Athens to Corinth, he made a similar journey.

a friendship that would last the rest of Paul's life (see Rom. 16:3; 1 Cor. 16:19; 2 Tim. 4:19). Paul discipled them during the week and preached every Sabbath in the synagogue, "trying to persuade Jews and Greeks" that the Messiah anticipated by the Jews was, in fact, Jesus of Nazareth (Acts 18:4-5). Before long the Jewish leaders turned against Paul and he left the synagogue (Acts 18:6-7).

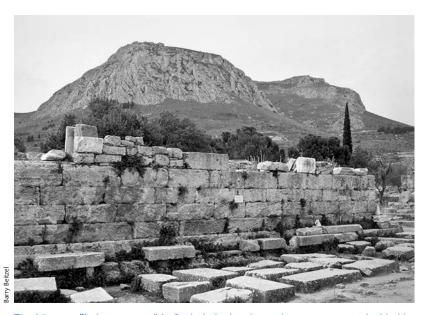
Among Paul's first disciples in Corinth was a Gentile, Titius Justus, a God-fearer whose home hosted the first Corinthian congregation of Christians (Acts 18:7). Also among this group was Crispus, the president of the synagogue, who converted to Christ with his entire household. So, from the very beginning, both Jews and Gentiles comprised the foundational leadership of the church in Corinth (Acts 18:8). Not wanting this budding work to perish and encouraged to press on by a vision of the Lord (Acts 18:9-10), Paul spent a year and a half "teaching the word of God among them" (Acts 18:11).

The bourgeoning work in Corinth, however, soon caught the eye of the enemy, who once again stirred up religious opposition from Jewish legalists (Acts 18:12). Likely believing they would find an ally in Gallio, the newly appointed proconsul of Achaia, Paul's Jewish adversaries brought Paul before the tribunal, charging him with preaching an illegal religion. Yet their hopes at a hearing were dashed when Gallio told the Jews that he refused to meddle in matters of "words and names and your own law" (Acts 18:15). This resulted in a frustrated outbreak

of violence against believers in Corinth, which Gallio ignored (Acts 18:16-17).

In the fall of AD 51, Paul left Corinth with Aquila and Priscilla, setting sail for Ephesus (Acts 18:18-19). Those disciples-turned-colleagues remained in Ephesus to carry on their budding ministry while Paul himself traveled on to Caesarea, Jerusalem, and then to his home church in Antioch (Acts 18:22). Aquila and Priscilla's heart for their Corinthian brothers and sisters only grew stronger during their time in Ephesus. In fact, when a well-educated Jew named Apollos arrived in Ephesus boldly preaching what he knew about Jesus, the missionary couple discipled that young teacher, equipping him for a fruitful ministry in Corinth. Acts 18:26-28 describes how Apollos was prepared and sent to Corinth to serve as an influential teacher and apologist in that city:

But when Priscilla and Aquila heard him, they took him aside and explained to him the way of God more accurately. And when he wanted to go across to Achaia, the brethren encouraged him and wrote to the disciples to welcome him; and when he had arrived, he greatly helped those who had believed through grace, for he powerfully refuted the Jews in public, demonstrating by the Scriptures that Jesus was the Christ.



The $\emph{b\bar{e}ma},$ or "judgment seat" in Corinth, is the place where cases were decided by Roman law.

While Apollos served in Corinth, Paul returned to Ephesus (Acts 19:1) and began to correspond with the Corinthian church sometime between AD 53 and 55. Paul had written an initial letter to the Corinthian church not long before the letter we call 1 Corinthians. That letter, probably brief, warned the believers "not to associate with immoral people" (1 Cor. 5:9). The teaching of that first letter apparently was misunderstood or misapplied, however, because Paul saw the need to clarify what he meant (5:10-13). We don't have the prequel to 1 Corinthians, probably because 1 Corinthians itself contains all the information originally written in the first letter, but in greater depth. Yet Paul also sought to address a growing number of problems dividing the church—effects of its diverse membership of Jews and Gentiles, its rocky beginnings of persecution, and the corrupt religious and moral culture in which it ministered.

As the lights dim on our own culture and our churches begin to look more and more like the disheveled, self-serving church in Corinth, Paul's words to that fragmented church take on greater import and more urgent practicality.

OVERVIEW OF FIRST CORINTHIANS

Paul's first letter to the Corinthians consists of seven parts, including a brief introduction. In contrast to 2 Corinthians, which focuses on themes related to ministry and Paul as a gospel minister, 1 Corinthians focuses on healthy church life—both by addressing problems and by calling believers onward in sanctification and the exercise of spiritual gifts. Let's familiarize ourselves with a broad overview of the letter.

Opening Greeting and Prayer (1:1-9). As is typical with Paul's letters, 1 Corinthians begins with a general greeting from Paul and Sosthenes (1:1), quite likely the one-time leader of the synagogue in Corinth (Acts 18:17), but now Paul's ministry companion. In this introduction, Paul extends praise where praise is due (1 Cor. 1:4-7), expressing his confidence that God ultimately will confirm their faith to the end (1:8-9). This brief opening, however, quickly leads to a sudden and desperate plea for unity.

Rebuking Divisions and Folly (1:10–3:23). In the first of many rebukes, Paul takes aim at the divisions that had formed among the believers in Corinth. He writes, "Now I exhort you, brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you all agree and that there be no divisions among you, but that you be made complete in the same mind and in the same judgment" (1:10). Part of the problem with the Corinthians

was their failure to realize that Christianity is not based on human wisdom, but on revelation from God, given through the person and work of Jesus Christ and through the Holy Spirit (2:1-16). The wisdom of God makes human wisdom seem like folly. And because the ministry of the gospel is ultimately the work of God, not men, the formation of parties based on personalities such as Paul, Peter, and Apollos is rendered ridiculous, as all these men are merely co-laborers through whom God works His miraculous building project (3:1-23).

Correcting Ills and Immorality (4:1–6:20). Regrettably, disunity was not the only problem in Corinth. After reasserting his authority as an apostle of Christ (4:1-21), Paul challenges the Corinthians on an issue of gross sexual immorality: "that someone has his father's wife" (5:1). In what follows, Paul outlines the principles and process of church discipline, intended to purge the church of wickedness and purify its people (5:11-13). Besides this, the Corinthian Christians didn't hesitate to sue one another in secular court (6:1-8), and some failed to accompany their conversion to Christianity with a converted lifestyle of sexual purity (6:9-20). In other words, in many ways those churchgoers in Corinth were living more like Corinthians and less like Christians!

Strengthening Family and Fellowship (7:1–10:33). Chapter 7 transitions from urgent matters that had come to Paul's attention through messengers (1:11; 5:1) to important matters concerning which the Corinthians themselves had written (7:1). First he addresses issues regarding marriage, singleness, and divorce (7:1-40). Then he answers their questions regarding consuming meat sacrificed to idols and concern for the weaker brother (8:1-13). Using his own lifestyle as an example, Paul urges the Corinthians to selflessly surrender their personal rights for the sake of the gospel (9:1-27). He concludes this section with a reminder of the utter incompatibility of the worship of God through Jesus Christ with the worship of idols and their demonic false gods (10:1-33).

Ordering Church and Worship (11:1–14:40). Paul then focuses his attention on the chaotic character of their worship. The Corinthians had failed to exhibit proper order through submission to Christ and to one another (11:1-16), which resulted in self-centered divisions and factions even in the observance of the Lord's Supper (11:17-34). Unsurprisingly, the Corinthians had also exercised spiritual gifts in ways that exhibited personal pride rather than humble deference for one another—the exact opposite of the purpose for which the Holy Spirit gives His gifts (12:1–14:40). Only an attitude of true, selfless, unconditional love could cure their self-centered approach to the Christian life (13:1-13).

Concerning Death and Resurrection (15:1-58). If the love chapter in 1 Corinthians 13 is the practical pinnacle of the letter, without a doubt the theological summit of Paul's treatise is 1 Corinthians 15. He begins by reiterating that which is "of first importance"—the message of the gospel of the person and work of Jesus Christ (15:1-11). From this fountainhead of Christian theology—the atoning death and life-giving resurrection of Christ—Paul dives into the depths of the doctrine of our own future resurrection (15:12-58). So vital is this treatment of the faith of the gospel and the hope of the resurrection that this chapter comprises a complete section in our outline of Paul's book.

Concluding Instructions and Warnings (16:1-24). Finally, Paul concludes with a few minor matters, concerning neither rebukes nor controversies. He directs them on the proper collection for the saints in Jerusalem (16:1-4). With a few personal remarks, Paul speaks of Timothy's coming to the church in Corinth—emphasizing the value he placed on personal presence and face-to-face interaction (16:5-12) in addition to his authoritative letter. He concludes this great epistle of strong reproofs with an exhortation to stand firm in the faith, with love for the Lord and hope for His coming (16:13-24).

OPENING GREETING AND PRAYER (1 CORINTHIANS 1:1-9)

We catch the first glimpse of the riches of the church in Corinth in the greeting of the book (1:1-9). Here we learn of the writer and his recipients (1:1-3), the original riches of the church (1:4-7), and then the promised reward for their endurance (1:8-9). When we see the depths to which the church had declined even in the midst of such spiritual wealth, however, this positive description serves merely as a solemn preamble to a sobering tragedy.

KEY TERMS IN 1 CORINTHIANS 1:1-9

klētos (κλητός) [2822] "called," "named," "invited" kaleō (καλέω) [2564] "to call," "to name," "to invite"

A noun or verb with the root kal- is found four times in the opening greeting and prayer of 1:1-9. It refers to an effectual calling, naming, or summons. Paul was "called" $(kl\bar{e}tos)$ into service as an apostle (1:1; cf. Rom. 1:1), and the Corinthian believers were "called" $(kl\bar{e}tos)$ to be holy saints (1 Cor. 1:2) by "calling on" $(epikale\bar{o}$ [1941]) the name of Jesus Christ (1:2), with whom they were "called" $(kale\bar{o})$ into fellowship (1:9). Paul's multiple uses of this term are intended to reinforce the authenticity of the Corinthians' place of salvation in the body of Christ.

charis (χάρις) [5485] "grace," "undeserved or unmerited favor," "cause of delight"

In Greek literature other than the New Testament, this term is closely associated with the word for "joy" and designates good will, favor, pleasure, or delight, as well as the qualities that elicit such dispositions and the actions generated as a result. Much of the New Testament uses the word in this basic sense. Paul, however, uses the word to describe God's unending goodness toward His chosen people and His loyal, abiding love that translates into His faithfulness despite His people's disobedience. In this technical use, "grace" for Paul—who uses this word more than any other New Testament author—specifically refers to undeserved and superabundant blessings that God bestows upon His people—it is this grace that brings salvation and sanctification.

Starting with Spiritual Riches 1 CORINTHIANS 1:1-9

¹Paul, called *as* an apostle of Jesus Christ ^aby the will of God, and Sosthenes our brother.

NASB

²To the church of God which is at Corinth, to those who have been sanctified in Christ Jesus, ^asaints by calling, with all who in every place call on the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, their *Lord* and ours:

³Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

⁴I thank ^amy God always concerning you for the grace of God which was given you in Christ Jesus, ⁵that in everything you were enriched in Him, in all speech and all knowledge, ⁶even as the testimony concerning Christ was confirmed ^ain you, ⁷so that you are not lacking in any gift, awaiting eagerly the revelation of our Lord Jesus Christ, ⁸who will also confirm you to the end, blameless in the day of our Lord Jesus Christ. ⁹God is faithful, through whom you were called into fellowship with His Son, Jesus Christ our Lord.

1:1 ^aLit through 1:2 ^aOr holy ones 1:4 ^aTwo early mss do not contain my 1:6 ^aOr among

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

²I 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.

⁴I 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. ⁶This confirms that what I told you about Christ is true. 7Now you have every spiritual gift you need as you eagerly wait for the return of our Lord Jesus Christ. 8He will keep you strong to the end so that you will be free from all blame on the day when our Lord Iesus Christ returns. 9God 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.

1:2a *Corinth* was the capital city of Achaia, the southern region of the Greek peninsula. **1:2b** Or *because you belong to Christ Jesus*.

The life of Edgar Allan Poe is one of the most tragic of all American writers. Within a brief span of forty years he literally went from riches to rags. Raised by foster parents who loved him deeply, he received an education that matched his genius in his field of interest. He attended private schools in England, studied at the University of Virginia, and even spent a period of time as a cadet at West Point.

In his heyday, few rivaled Poe's genius as a literary critic, editor, poet, and author of short stories, especially his dramatic thrillers. Most of us have read his spine-tingling tales, *The Pit and the Pendulum*, *The Tell-Tale Heart*, and *The Raven*. Indeed, Poe's works have left their mark on American literature and life.

Yet the mark left by his lifestyle is another tale worth telling. Losing his young bride to tuberculosis, Poe descended into a deep pit of despair, which he attempted to assuage through drugs, alcohol, and the occult. Depression and insanity plagued his short life, eventually leaving him unconscious in the gutter of a windswept street in Baltimore. He never regained consciousness, and four days later he died.

Poe began his life with brilliance, giftedness, opportunity, fame, and riches. Yet the end of his life overflowed with bitterness, poverty, moral depravity, and spiritual destitution. From prestigious bard to penniless bum—that was the tragic tale of Edgar Allan Poe.

This ruinous journey from riches to rags happens not only to individuals but also to churches. The church at Corinth stands as a tragic example. Its rich beginning made it seem invincible: a dynamic and diverse membership gilded with spiritual gifts at a crossroads of commerce and culture that poised them for a powerful impact in world missions. Yet like Poe, within a brief period of time the church at Corinth declined into mediocrity and chaos, as the weight of sin pulled its members deep into the mire of shame.

— 1:1-3 —

As is typical in his epistles, Paul identifies himself in the opening of the letter, reminding the Corinthians of his position as an apostle of Jesus Christ (1:1). No doubt just the mention of his name, "Paul," would have caused the believers in Corinth to flash back to years before, when he helped them take their first baby steps in the faith. They knew him quite well; so why would Paul need to remind them that he had been "called (*klētos* [2822]) as an apostle"? The occasion of this letter would necessitate a series of severe criticisms, rebukes, words of strong admonition, and detailed instructions. By reminding the Corinthians that he was not only their founding pastor of yesteryear but also an apostle of the universal church, he would firm up his authority at a time when it most likely would be resisted.

The apostle Paul had seen the resurrected Christ with his own eyes and received his apostolic commission directly from the Savior Himself (Acts 26:13-19), who confirmed it also to the prophet Ananias

(Acts 9:15). Afterward, Paul had the authority and power to heal, to discern good and evil, and to speak boldly, free from doctrinal error (Acts 9:22; 13:9-10; 19:11-12; 1 Cor. 2:13). As an apostle, Paul answered to no higher human authority, only to God directly. He manifested a healthy independence. He valued God's favor far more than the favor of men (Gal. 1:10).

In his greeting, Paul also includes "Sosthenes our brother" (1 Cor. 1:1); the Greek text says simply, "Sosthenes the brother." We can't be sure what role Sosthenes played in writing 1 Corinthians. Some believe he served as Paul's secretary, called an *amanuensis*, who wrote Paul's dictated words. The name appears in Acts 18:17 as "the leader of the synagogue" in Corinth. If this is the same person, he obviously had been converted to Christ and later joined Paul in Ephesus. In any case, the Christians in Corinth knew this man by name. Throughout the letter, Paul mostly refers to himself in the first person singular, "I," indicating that he meant the letter to be understood as coming from him, not from Sosthenes or from both of them as a ministry team.

Following a style typical of ancient epistles, Paul next identifies the recipients of the letter (1 Cor. 1:2). He first calls them "the church of God" (1:2). The Greek word for church, ekklēsia [1577], refers to an "assembly." It can sometimes mean a general social or political assembly (Acts 19:32, 41), but from the tip of Paul's pen that generic term for an ordered gathering carries significant theological weight. It most often refers to a local membership of a church in a particular city—the people of a specific congregation (Rom. 16:1; 1 Thes. 1:1; Rev. 2:1, 8, 12, etc.), but it can also indicate the "regional church" made up of all the believers and local churches in a named region (Acts 9:31; 1 Cor. 16:19). The term is also used for the entirety of Christianity spread throughout the whole world (Eph. 1:22–23; 3:10; Col. 1:18, 24). Clearly, the church in Paul's mind is not brick and mortar, stained glass, pipe organs, and padded pews, but the body of people saved through faith in Christ and called together to live in community with one another. In fact, at its root the Greek word *ekklēsia* means "called out." In application to the church, the idea is of a special group called out from the world to be part of a new corporate body under the headship of Christ. So, in a very real sense, we bring the church with us when we enter our places of worship; and we take the church with us when we return to the world. We believers *are* the church.

Paul also addresses the Corinthians as "sanctified in Christ Jesus" (1 Cor. 1:2). This means they were "set apart by God to be his holy

people."³ For the sake of clarity, theologians speak of "justification" as the past, one-time event of our salvation; "sanctification" as the ongoing transformation that continues throughout a believer's life; and "glorification" as the future consummation of our salvation when we are resurrected in glorified, imperishable bodies. Though the Bible clearly portrays these past, present, and future aspects of salvation, it does not always use consistent language to describe each of these phases. Paul uses the term "sanctification" (1:2) to refer to the initial, unrepeated "setting apart" of people in the eyes of God, also called "positional sanctification." The result of this permanent setting apart is that believers are now "saints by calling" (1:2).⁴ Related to "sanctified," the saint is one who is devoted, consecrated, pure, and holy in God's eyes, uniquely set apart for His use regardless of the saint's practical holiness from day to day.

Paul acknowledges that his letter to the Corinthians would have a much broader application to "all who in every place call on the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, their Lord and ours" (1:2). Because every believer throughout the world is part of the same universal body of Christ and because the Holy Spirit that spoke through Paul's letter to the Corinthians speaks to all believers of every age, Paul's words to the local church in Corinth are able to transcend the geographical and historical boundaries in which they were originally written. In other words, this letter is as much for you and me in the twenty-first century as it was for the Corinthians in the first.

Paul reveals the Corinthians' deepest needs: "grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ" (1:3). Though this is a common greeting in Paul's epistles (Rom. 1:7; 2 Cor. 1:2; Gal. 1:3; etc.), the blessing of "grace" and "peace" would have had particular meaning for Christians and for the Corinthian church in particular. Paul is not referring to the saving grace that transferred them from spiritual death to spiritual life (as in Eph. 2:8-9; Col. 1:13), nor to the eternal peace a saved sinner has with God through justification by faith in the finished work of Jesus Christ (Rom. 5:1). The "grace and peace" Paul mentions should have brought to mind those virtues of the Christian life that must be present to maintain church harmony. As the rest of this letter will demonstrate, Paul wants the Corinthians to be known as gracious saints who lived at peace with one another.

In the next section (1 Cor.1:10-17), we'll see exactly why the Corinthian Christians especially needed a measure of grace and peace from the hand of God. Yet before reprimanding them for the things they

did wrong, Paul first praised the troubled church for the things they did right.

A well-known principle of interpersonal communication skills says that whenever we need to confront or correct someone, we should begin by pointing out the things we appreciate about that individual.⁵ For expert communicators, this kind of approach flows naturally because they have a genuine concern for the person's well-being. It shouldn't surprise us to see this wise, tactful approach exhibited in the writing of the apostle Paul. In view of Paul's sincere estimation of the spiritual goodness of the church in Corinth, one commentator writes:

Paul looks at the Corinthian church as it is *in Christ* before he looks at anything else that is true of the church. That disciplined statement of faith is rarely made in local churches. The warts are examined and lamented, but often there is no vision of what God has already done in Christ. If the first nine verses of this letter were excised from the text, it would be impossible for any reader to come to anything but a fairly pessimistic view of the church at Corinth.⁶

Paul isn't just blowing smoke when he lists the five positives of the church in Corinth. As the church's founding apostle, Paul had spent considerable time teaching, preaching, training, and shepherding those new believers. He knew many of their strengths firsthand, and he had learned of their more recent failures and shortcomings only by word of mouth. So, before launching into his letter of strong rebuke, Paul writes, "I thank my God always concerning you" (1:4), and then proceeds to name some things about the Corinthian church for which he was very grateful.

First, the Corinthians were genuinely saved (1:4). The basis of Paul's gratitude is grace (charis [5485])—the goodness and favor God lavished on the Corinthians even though they could never earn it or repay it. Whereas the "grace and peace" from God and Christ mentioned in 1:3 refers to the ongoing grace needed to live the Christian life, the "grace of God" in 1:4 is something that had been given to the Corinthians in the past. The Greek grammar indicates that this particular gift of God's grace was given "in Christ Jesus." This means that Paul had full confidence that the Corinthians had genuinely experienced God's unmerited saving grace, receiving His gift of salvation by trusting in Jesus Christ.

Second, the Corinthians were liberally endowed (1:5). Not only were they saved, but they also were endowed with eloquence and knowledge. They knew the gospel of Jesus Christ. They understood it clearly and could articulate it effectively. If you or I lived in that day and stepped into a meeting of the church in Corinth, we could count on a well-presented message from God's Word. In fact, Paul uses the word "enriched" to describe their condition. This term often refers to monetary wealth, but here it refers to spiritual riches. Imagine having the apostle Paul as the founder of *your* church. Then suppose Apollos, a man "mighty in the Scriptures," continued the work among you. What if Peter himself contributed to your spiritual growth along the way? That's what we would call spiritual riches!

Third, the Corinthians were securely established (1:6). Paul says, "The testimony concerning Christ was confirmed in you." Confirmed means "established," "made sure," "authenticated." Elsewhere in the New Testament the same Greek word refers to the miraculous signs and wonders that God used to confirm the gospel preached by the apostles (Mark 16:20; Heb. 2:3). Paul had personally spent a year and a half of his life establishing a firm foundation for their faith (1 Cor. 3:10). This is the real tragedy of Corinth. It's not as if they had never heard the apostolic testimony concerning Jesus Christ. In fact, they had heard it from the best, and Paul had personally authenticated the earlier soundness of their faith.

Fourth, the Corinthians were spiritually gifted (1:7). Don't miss the "so that" at the beginning of the verse. That little connective refers to the result of the previous verse. As a result of the Corinthians' genuine saving faith, they did not lack any spiritual gifts. That must have been something to behold! Not a single gift was absent, and the positive tone of this section suggests that they had at times been exercising those gifts properly.

Fifth, the Corinthians were prophetically alert (1:7). As they exercised their spiritual gifts, Paul says they were also "awaiting eagerly the revelation of our Lord Jesus Christ." They knew Christ's coming could occur at any moment, so they were engaged in an urgent ministry in light of that prophetic reality. Because eternity drew nearer every day, they lived in earnest anticipation of that moment when they would see His face (compare Rom. 8:19, 23; Phil. 3:20).

The kind of vitality that characterized the Corinthian church results in two rewards that Paul mentions in 1:8-9. The first reward deals with the

believer's future: Christ "will also confirm you to the end, blameless in the day of our Lord Jesus Christ" (1:8). Despite our current status as unrelenting sinners, in eternity we will be *blameless*. The word means to be beyond accusation. This will occur "in the day" Christ returns—that is, at the very time of His coming. We know from other Scriptures that this coincides with the believers' resurrection, when our earthly bodies, subject to sin, suffering, and death, will be miraculously transformed into perfect, immortal bodies like Christ's resurrection body (Phil. 3:21; 1 Thes. 4:16-17; 1 Cor. 15:51-54). In our new, glorified state, nobody in heaven or in hell will be able to hold anything over our heads. We will be perfect and blameless before Him (Jude 1:24).

As we wait eagerly for that glorious day, we can enjoy the second blessing in the here and now: "God is faithful, through whom you were called into fellowship with His Son, Jesus Christ our Lord" (1 Cor. 1:9). Based solely on His sovereign grace (Eph. 2:8-9), God called us into an eternal relationship with Christ that began the moment we first believed. The permanence of this relationship is based not on our own efforts, but wholly on the faithfulness of God. God will "confirm" believers "to the end" (1 Cor. 1:8), and Paul reminds us that "God is faithful" (1:9). So, a second reward of enduring fellowship can be experienced every day of our Christian lives with the promise that He will never desert us nor forsake us (Rom. 8:38-39; Heb. 13:5).

APPLICATION: 1 CORINTHIANS 1:1-9

Starting Great, Finishing Well

We could focus on numerous practical principles based on this opening salutation of 1 Corinthians. But let me emphasize one in particular we need to remember: *a rich and impressive beginning does not guarantee the same kind of ending*.

We all know the saying, "The bigger they are, the harder they fall," but you may not have heard the similar slogan: the bigger they *think* they are, the harder they fall. As Proverbs 16:18 says, "Pride goes before destruction, and a haughty spirit before stumbling."

The Corinthian church began the marathon of the Christian life ahead of the pack in many ways. Nobody in that age could measure up to the church's level of giftedness, enthusiasm, and breadth of diversity.

These, however, resulted in opportunities for a colossal pride, which led to selfishness and envy, which in turn ended in division and conflict. The Corinthians had let their spiritual vitality go to their heads. The result? They got knocked off their high horses by their own pride.

All of us have the same potential for inflated self-importance. Many of God's people have been endowed with great spiritual gifts, magnetic personalities, material wealth, privileged experiences, exceptional training, and excellent opportunities. Rather than taking these things as gifts from God for the purpose of serving Him through building up His church, we listen instead as the world, the flesh, and the devil sing a different song in perfect harmony: "Look what you've accomplished! It's time you get some recognition! Let people know what you're capable of! Show them who's number one!"

Let this be a warning to us. Just as the Corinthian church crumbled into calamity, so can we. If our God-given possessions or positions lead us to pride, God may step in and take these things away. The fact that we may have started out well on our Christian walk doesn't mean that we will finish well. Yes, we will always have the promise of eternal salvation, which can never be taken away (John 10:28), but each day we must renew our commitment to pursue a holy life, free from poisonous pride and crippling carnality.