

FIRST CORINTHIANS

“LET ALL THAT YE DO BE DONE
IN LOVE” 1 COR. 16:14

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Unless otherwise noted, all Scripture quotations are taken from the American Standard Translation of 1901.

FOREWORD

I do not claim to be an expert on the First Corinthian letter. I will say that I have tried to fully use my best resources to put together a commentary that (1) gives the correct exposition of the text, (2) provides various points of application, (3) is thorough but simple enough for all to use, and (4) does not skip the hard passages.

This volume is being sent forth with the intention of helping people better understand the book of First Corinthians, a fascinating New Testament epistle. As with the previous commentary on Romans, the material in this book has actually been taken into an adult Bible class and taught. The adults who listened to this information were not only patient as we explored the text, they often provided valuable feedback which was used to finalize this commentary. I also received some outstanding help from a monthly preacher's meeting in Columbia City, IN. My proof readers have once again worked for free and they have again engaged in a herculean task to help ready this book for publication. I am deeply indebted to all the sources that helped make this commentary possible. My greatest appreciation, of course, is to God for allowing this volume to be published and distributed.

The end of this book has a special study on "New Testament Christianity." This material is a written explanation of how I usually study with those who want to become Christians. Although this special study might seem long, this entire study can be presented in about an hour. The first 20-30 minutes should be devoted to showing people what they must do to become a Christian. The next 30-40 minutes consists of describing the church built by Jesus (Mt. 16:18). I have presented this information in various parts of the United States as well as some foreign countries and it has been well received in each of these places. Out of all the methods I have used to teach the gospel to people, the special study on New Testament Christianity is my preferred way to teach people how to be saved.

If you have any suggestions or you find an error, feel free to offer feedback by e-mail: comment@abiblecommentary.com. You may also visit www.abiblecommentary.com for the status of future commentaries. If you enjoy this book, please let others know about the resources from abiblecommentary.com.

The next book from abiblecommentary.com, if the Lord wills, will be a full length commentary on the 4 accounts of Jesus' life (Matthew, Mark, Luke and John).

INTRODUCTION

The letter we call “First Corinthians” warns us to expect problems in the place where we worship. Readers barely get through the opening verses before reading: “*For it hath been signified unto me concerning you, my brethren, by them (that are of the household) of Chloe, that there are contentions among you*” (1:11).

Today people often have some complaints about the place where they worship; Christians may not like something about their preacher, their elders, or some of their fellow saints. Sometimes Christians are discouraged because their brethren fail to demonstrate love. There are also instances of jealousy, strife, envy, gossip, and sexual sin. Christians are frustrated by those who refuse to “abound in the work of the Lord” (1 Cor. 15:58). Every congregation has its own unique set of church problems and the book of First Corinthians tells us to remain “steadfast, unmovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord” because “our labor is not in vain” (1 Cor. 15:58).

When church problems do arise, the First Corinthians letter also encourages us to remember that we are still “brethren.” In spite of the numerous problems at Corinth, Paul referred to the Corinthians as “brethren” almost 40 times (1:10, 11, 26; 2:1; 3:1; 4:6; 5:11; 6:5, 6, 8; 7:12, 14, 15, 24, 29; 8:11, 12, 13; 9:5; 10:1; 11:2, 33; 12:1; 14:6, 20, 26, 39; 15:1, 6, 31, 50, 58; 16:11, 12, 15, 20). In two places (10:14 and 15:58) he referred to the Corinthians as “*beloved*” (*agapetos*). The Corinthian congregation was literally riddled with moral and doctrinal issues, but Paul still held these Christians in high esteem. In fact, in the final words of this book (16:24), Paul said the Corinthians were still “in Christ” and he wished that the “grace of the Lord Jesus Christ” be on them (16:23).

We are not perfect and the place where we worship will certainly not be perfect. The book of First Corinthians, however, encourages us to do the best we can in the place where we worship and to work on correcting anything that is contrary to the faith “once delivered to the saints” (Jude 3). May we be people who *watch, stand fast in the faith, act like men, and be strong* (1 Cor. 16:13).

Brad Price

January 1, 2010

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

Paul authored this epistle and it was sent to the Christians at “*Corinth*” (verse 2). Corinth was a city with an interesting history. “In 146 B.C. the ancient city of Corinth was burned to the ground by a Roman army for its participation and leadership in the rebellion of the Achaian League (a group composed of the principal city-states located in Achaia, the southern peninsula of Greece). At that time, many of the citizens of Corinth were either killed or sold into slavery, and for a century afterward the city lay in derelict” (Baker Commentary on the Bible, p. 958). Corinth followed Roman laws and culture and Greek philosophy and art. Its “religious composition varied greatly, including worship of the Roman and Greek gods, the mystery cults from Asia and Egypt, and Judaism. Because of all its commercial strength, the city possessed wealth. These riches brought all kinds of people to populate the area: the educated and sophisticated; people seeking their fortunes; prostitutes and criminals. The Corinthian church itself contained people who had been sexually immoral, idolaters, adulterers, male prostitutes, homosexuals, offenders, thieves, greedy, drunkards, slanderers, and swindlers (see 6:9-11)” (Holman, 7:13). It is, therefore, not surprising to see an emphasis on sanctification in the second verse.

“In the year 44 B.C., however, the city was refounded on the orders of Julius Caesar, who sought to redeem the strategic and economic potential of the site with a new colonial population made up of freedmen (manumitted Roman slaves), army veterans, and former residents. Because of its location, near the narrowest part of the isthmus connecting Macedonia (the northern mainland of Greece) and Achaia, and because of the hazards associated with sea travel, particularly in the winter, when the possibility of conveying cargo across the narrow isthmus must have appeared as an exceedingly attractive alternative, the city quickly regained its former prosperity, and under Augustus, in 27 B.C., it was the capital of the senatorial province of Achaia” (Baker Commentary on the Bible, pp. 958-959). Corinth was known for its metallurgists, workers who specialized in bronzework. It was also known for the biennial isthmian games—games that were second in importance to those in Olympia. By the time Paul came to Corinth, the population was 500,000 (Gromacki, p. x) and the culture was a mix of Romans, Greeks and Jews.

This book is a favorite New Testament book for many, and it is also a book that is immensely practical for all ages. As the Holman New Testament Commentary (7:2) noted, this book deals with: The importance of unity in the church, a proper understanding and respect for church leaders, the importance of church discipline, lawsuits, prostitution, marriage and divorce, Christian freedom and responsibility, interaction with the secular world, proper roles and honor in worship, love, and ministering to the physical needs of others. Willmington (p. 169) noted how out of all Paul’s letters, “Romans is no doubt the most important, but 1 Corinthians is probably second in importance. This is so because of its great section of the resurrection of Christ and the believer (1 Cor. 15), and, if for no other reason, because of its sheer bulk! First Corinthians is by far the longest epistle written by Paul.” Too, there “is almost no modern-day local church problem that is not covered in 1 Corinthians. The church was filled with theological and personal problems” (ibid).

How many other congregations can we find who pervert the doctrine of baptism (chapter 1), brag about the little human wisdom they have (chapter 1), are carnal to the core and destroy their local assembly (chapter 3), deceive themselves (3:18), are guilty of pride (4:18), openly accept sexual sin (chapter 5), sue fellow Christians (chapter 6), are confused about marriage (chapter 7) and abuse Christian liberty (chapter 8)? Additionally, this congregation refused to follow instructions about male headship and the Lord’s Supper (chapter 11), did not act in love (chapter 13), did not follow the rules about spiritual gifts (chapter 14), and considered false teachings about the resurrection (chapter 15). The Corinthians even had issues with their weekly offerings (chapter 16).

According to the first verse, Paul was an “*apostle*” (*apostolos*). This term described someone who was sent. The background and origin of *apostle* “are found in the maritime language. It occurs in connection with sea voyages and military expeditions; later it designated the fleet itself. From this the term came to signify a group of men who were sent on a special task, for example, a group of settlers” (CBL, GED, 1:400). Paul and others were *sent* by the Lord to help establish and build up the church created by Jesus (Mt. 16:18). Along with the Corinthians, this congregation had been established by Paul (Acts 18:1-4) in

about 52 A.D.

Although the Lord had commissioned him, there were times when Paul had to prove he was a spokesman for God. This letter was written because one of these times had arisen. The 9th chapter in this book hints that Paul's authority was questioned. The book of Second Corinthians demonstrates how Paul zealously defended his authority to the Corinthians. In this letter Paul made it clear he was an apostle and his apostleship was *God's "will."* This tells us Paul did not usurp this position. Neither did he somehow *apply* for the job of an apostle. Paul was an apostle because God selected and appointed him to this position. God called Paul to be an apostle, but Paul was not compelled to accept this office. He was able to choose whether or not he wanted to be an apostle and a Christian (Acts 26:19).

Another person known to the Corinthians was "*Sosthenes.*" Many believe he was an *amanuensis* (someone who wrote this letter as Paul dictated it; compare Rom. 16:22). If Sosthenes was not an amanuensis, he may have been one of Paul's co-workers. Paul frequently mentioned his co-workers in his letters (Gal. 2:1; Phil. 4:21; 2 Tim. 4:11).

Sosthenes was a common first century name. This name also appears in Acts 18:17; there Luke described how someone with this name was beaten by a Jewish mob because he failed to make a case against Paul.

If the Sosthenes in Acts 18 is identical to the Sosthenes in 1 Cor. 1, a remarkable conversion took place. Paul's companion was the very man who had previously tried to prosecute him because of Christianity. If the two names refer to the same man, Sosthenes' opposition to the gospel had been replaced by an active promotion of the gospel. The fact that only this man's first name is mentioned indicates the Corinthians were very familiar with him. It is not too unrealistic to believe Luke and Paul described the same man.

The way Paul and other writers began their epistles was just like the other documents in the first century. Willis (First Corinthians, p. 1) cites some examples of how some uninspired documents began: "Theon to Heraclides his brother, many greetings and wishes for good health....Hilarion to his sister Alis very many greetings, likewise to my lady Berous and Apollonarian." For a cross-reference, see Acts 23:26.

Another key word in the first verse is "*called*" (*kletos*). This term occurs eleven times in the New Testament (Mt. 20:16; 22:14; Rom. 1:1, 6, 7; 8:28; 1 Cor. 1:1, 2, 24; Jude 1; Rev. 17:14). People are called through the gospel (2 Thess. 2:14). The people who are *called* are those who *obey*. *Called* "is a virtual synonym for the Christian or the apostle" (CBL, GED, 3:358). A similar point is found in the word "*believe.*" Many times Paul used the word *believe* and this term denotes *obedience* (see this point briefly explained in the commentary on Rom. 1:5-7).

Paul had been *called* (selected) for this work so the great commission (Mt. 28:18-20) could be fulfilled. Paul realized he was not called to a convent or monastery. There was no *call* to isolate himself from the world. He was called to go into the world and win souls for Jesus and we have this same obligation. The Expositor's Greek Testament (2:757) noted how this calling was not "by merit or by human choice." God personally selected him for a special mission.

One of the amazing things in this book is how it begins. In the first ten verses Jesus is referenced either directly or indirectly ("*in him,*" verse 5). Serious problems existed in this congregation and Paul was calling the Corinthians back to the fact that they had to recognize the power and authority of Jesus. Today this same point is extremely important. Most problems as well as all doctrinal error can be traced back to a single point of commonality: the authority of Jesus. People do not respect His authority or do not fully submit to it (compare Mt. 28:18). Too many think of authority in terms of their local preacher, their "church headquarters," some "well known religious leader," or even "the church." Again and again in the New Testament, our authority is Christ. Consider the opening words in the letter we know as "Hebrews": *God, having of old time spoken unto the fathers in the prophets by divers portions and in divers manners, hath at the end of these days spoken unto us in (his) Son, whom he appointed heir of all things, through whom also he made the worlds.*

1:2: *unto the church of God which is at Corinth, (even) them that are sanctified in Christ Jesus, called (to*

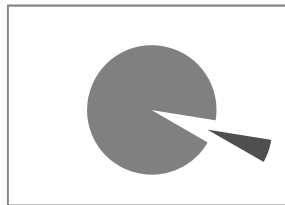
be) saints, with all that call upon the name of our Lord Jesus Christ in every place, their (Lord) and ours:

Sometimes people ask preachers about “their church.” This verse shows that preachers do not have a church. Even Paul did not *have a church*. The church belongs to God. Paul said the church is Christ’s “body” (Eph. 1:22-23) and this body belongs to deity.

Paul’s statement about the church is not unusual when compared to his other letters, but in relation to Corinth, it may have additional significance. This chapter describes some of the division within the Corinthian congregation. It seems Paul used his opening remarks to immediately deal with the strife. He showed that the church belongs to Christ instead of men, and this fact prepared his readers to realize following men and dividing up into various groups is wrong.

If the Corinthians had understood and applied the fact that the church belongs to Christ and following someone besides Jesus is wrong, the division would have ended. This is still true. Jesus built only one church (from Mt. 16:18 notice that the word *church* is singular); if this fact were understood and applied today, religious division would not exist or it would be very limited.

This verse also shows that Christ’s church is not limited to a single location. The Corinthian church was one congregation of the one church built by Christ (compare Rom. 16:16). Jesus built a single body of people and this group has many congregations and locations. The following graphic helps illustrate the point.



A pie may be cut into one or more pieces, but there is still only one pie. The same is true of Jesus' church. There may be many "slices" (congregations), but each congregation is part of the one church built by the Lord. Christ is the head of this church because He purchased it with His blood (Acts 20:28).

Some have said all the various denominations are part of Christ's "one church," but this belief cannot be harmonized with the Bible. In Jn. 15:5, Jesus said He is the vine and His people are the branches. Since a single vine does not produce different fruits, the one church built by Christ cannot consist of different beliefs and practices. This point is also demonstrated by the parable of the sower (Mk. 4:3-20). When the seed (the word of God) is sown, it cannot produce a variety of religious plants (i.e. denominations).

A principle from the earliest of time (Gen. 1:25) is "everything brings forth after its kind." If truth and only truth is sown, the church of the New Testament will always be the result. If some truth and some error are sown, the result will *not* be a local congregation that models the church Jesus built. When some truth and human tradition or man-made councils or earthly headquarters are combined, we will have the result that is now throughout the world: thousands of different denominations.

If the modern concept of denominationalism is right (God accepts nearly any religious body designated as *Christian*), why did Paul dedicate so much energy to correcting the division at Corinth (compare verse 13)? If religious division is good (and this is what modern denominationalism says), Paul should have left the Corinthians alone in this regard. He should have congratulated them on their diversity and encouraged it. Paul refused to leave the problem of religious division alone. He also promised to address the lack of unity, if the Corinthians refused to correct this problem themselves (2 Cor. 10:1-6, 8-11).

There is only "one faith" (Eph. 4:5), and this faith is practiced in every congregation of Christ's church. When we become a Christian as the Bible describes we are members of "*the church of the Lord*" (Acts 20:28) and the "*temple of God*" (1 Cor. 3:16-17). The church consists of those who are "*in Christ Jesus*" (verse 2). People enter into Christ through baptism (Gal. 3:27).

After people are baptized for the forgiveness of their sins (Acts 2:38), 1 Cor. 1:2 says they are "*sanctified in Christ Jesus*" (separated from sin; set aside for service to God). Other definitions for *sanctify* (*hagiazō*) are *consecrate, dedicate, or purify something*. This same term is found in Heb. 13:12—a text that shows the cost for our sanctification. *Sanctification* comes through Jesus' blood, and according to 2 Cor. 7:1, it is an on-going process ("*perfecting*" in this verse is a present tense verb). Sanctification begins when we are saved and continues throughout the Christian life. Because sanctification is an on-going process, Christians can be called "*saints*." "Sainthood was not part of their future destiny, a goal that might not be realized because of their sin; rather, it expressed their present standing" (Gromacki, p. 4). Christians are not "sinless" in the sense they have never sinned; they are, however, people who should *sin less* because they have been taught and obeyed the truth. For additional information about *saints*, see the commentary on Phil. 1:1.

Paul described Jesus as *Christ Jesus* (in 2b the ASV says *the Lord Jesus Christ*). Some think Jesus' name is "Jesus Christ." That is, *Jesus* is His first name and *Christ* is His last name. This is incorrect. *Christ* was equivalent to the Hebrew word for *Messiah*. *Jesus Christ* meant *Jesus the Messiah*. *Christ Jesus* meant *The Messiah Jesus*. Paul also spoke of Jesus as "*Lord*," a term meaning the exact opposite of a slave. Jesus is supreme and is currently reigning at the right hand of God (15:25-27). Because Jesus is Lord, He tells people what to do and all are expected to obey Him.

Paul wrote to the people who were *at Corinth*. This city was a wicked and vile environment as well as a kind of "boomtown" in the first century. Corinth was a city of sin and permissiveness. It was so untamed that archaeological digs in the area have uncovered drinking containers that say, "Cure for Hangovers." The existence of the New Testament church at Corinth proves that the church of Christ can exist in any city or culture. As the Beacon Bible Commentary (8:308) said, "Here is the gospel for a city with all its corruption and licentiousness, vice and ignorance—a gospel that is completely adequate for every situation when it is intelligently preached and intelligently understood."

At the end of this verse we find these words: "*with all that call upon the name of our Lord Jesus Christ in every place, their (Lord) and ours*." Aside from Corinth, there were Christians throughout Greece and Asia Minor. Too, as noted in the earlier comments on this verse, Paul began to lay a

foundation for unity in the opening verses of this book. First century Christianity had a system of faith that was designed, in part, to bind God's people together (compare 1 Cor. 4:17; 7:17; 11:16; 14:33, 36). For a special study on *calling upon the name of God*, see the commentary on Acts 9:12-14

A final thought comes from the expression *church of God*. Throughout this book we read about many problems at the Corinthian congregation. In spite of many flaws, at least at this time, these brethren were still considered to be in fellowship with the Lord. God's grace gives people time to repent (Rom. 2:4). If people—even God's people—do not repent they will perish (1 Pet. 3:20; Rev. 2:5, 21). Another warning to God's people is found in Rev. 3:3. We do not know exactly where or when the “cut off point” is when disobedient Christians and congregations are finally cast off from God, but there definitely is such a point (Rom. 11:22). Rather than see “how much we can get away with” (Rom. 6:1-3), we want to test ourselves to ensure we are conforming to God's will (2 Cor. 13:5).

1:3-4: *Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. 4 I thank my God always concerning you, for the grace of God which was given you in Christ Jesus;*

The blessings stated in these two verses come from God, and Paul wanted the Corinthians to enjoy them. Though some think it is odd that Paul wanted God to bless this problem-ridden church, this request shows that both Paul and God were not ready to give up on these Christians. These believers were given time to repent and reform. They were going to continue to receive “*grace*” (*charis*) and “*peace*” (*eirene*) from heaven. However, it was up to the Corinthians to insure these blessings were correctly used. The word *grace* described something “conferred freely, with no expectation of return, and finding its only motive in the bounty and freeheartedness of the giver” (Trench, p. 168). God the Father is the source of grace; Jesus is the channel through which it comes. The blessing of *peace* “implies inner security without friction. It also means inner peace and outer poise, a sense of harmony and well-being because guilt is gone and the power of sin is broken. Peace is a sense of meaning and purpose which comes from centering one's life on doing God's will” (Beacon Bible Commentary, 8:310). Rather than just an absence of strife, *peace* also contains the idea of positive blessings.

The information in the 4th verse shows that Paul was grateful for the Corinthians. Though there was immorality, division, and abuses of the Lord's Supper in this congregation, Paul still had good thoughts about these brethren. He could not honestly give thanks for the *condition* of the congregation, but he was grateful the church existed in the city of Corinth. This may have surprised the Corinthians (perhaps they expected him to be ashamed of them, disgusted with them, or angry). Paul penned this letter by inspiration so this example is an excellent one for us to follow. We should have spiritual concern and love for all people, even when fellow Christians slip into error and are guilty of wrongdoing (Gal. 6:1). When we can find something to praise and commend we should, though this does not mean endorsing wrongdoing. True love means helping people overcome error and also pointing out what is right (good). Paul was very concerned about the Corinthians as well as all the other churches (2 Cor. 11:28). Notice, too, the slight translation difference in 4b regarding *grace*. Grace is given “*in*” (ASV) Christ (as a spiritual blessing, Eph. 1:3). Grace is given “*by*” (KJV) Christ through His death (Rom. 5:17).

1:5: *that in everything ye were enriched in him, in all utterance and all knowledge;*

This verse should be read in conjunction with verse 26. Paul knew these Christians were not from the *upper crust* of Corinthian culture. Most of them were poor or from the middle class. Because of their social status, the Corinthians would have found the promise of “*enrichment*” (*ploutizo*) quite appealing (this verb is used only here, 2 Cor. 6:10, and 2 Cor. 9:11). It described riches, wealth, and abundance. The Corinthians were originally *enriched* at their conversion (see how this word is used in 2 Cor. 6:10). They were also blessed by the spiritual gifts described in the 12th-14th chapters of this book and enriched in their Christian lives (1 Cor. 1:4-7; 2 Cor. 9:11). Here *enrichment* means the Corinthians were “*richly furnished*” (Thayer, p. 519). They had received *God’s grace* (4a) and were *in Christ Jesus* (ASV, 4b). Compare 2 Cor. 8:9. *Enrichment* shows that Christians abound in riches, but this wealth has come at a great cost. We only have spiritual wealth because Jesus went to the cross. The noun form of *ploutizo* (*enrichment*) can be found in Lk. 1:53; 12:21; Rom. 10:12; 1 Cor. 4:8; 2 Cor. 8:9; 1 Tim. 6:9, 18; Rev. 3:17, 18; 18:3, 15, 19. It was as if the Corinthians were in possession of a great (and heavenly) treasure.

Another part of the Corinthians’ *enrichment* is found at the end of verse 5. These Christians were blessed in the areas of “*utterance*” and “*knowledge*.” The word *utterance* (*logos*) was related to speaking. Synonyms for this word would include “message, proclamation, declaration.” Paul knew the Corinthians had plenty of capable speakers who could present information about God’s word (this may be understood as speaking *with* or *without* the supernatural gifts described later in this book). This same point appears later in 14:26, 27, 29, 30, and 31. Though it is rare for modern congregations to have several men who are willing and capable speakers, the Corinthians were richly blessed with an abundance of such men.

The other gift possessed by the Corinthians was *knowledge* (*gnosis*). This word indicates the Corinthians had a “mental grasp” of the things related to Christianity. They had “intellectual insight” about their faith. They “understood the will of the Lord” (Eph. 5:17), though they did not always do what was right. Today we are to seek this same type of understanding because God’s word is “the word of the kingdom” (Mt. 13:19), the way to be “blessed” (Lk. 11:28), information that cannot be altered (Jn. 10:35), a means of “grace” (Acts 20:32), inseparably linked to “faith” (Rom. 10:8, 17), part of our “purification” (1 Pet. 1:22), the Spirit’s “sword” (Eph. 6:17 and Heb. 4:12) and “works” in us (1 Thess. 2:13). It lasts “forever” (1 Pet. 1:25), is called “the truth” (2 Cor. 6:7), is “good news” (1 Pet. 1:25), and helps make us righteous (Heb. 5:13). People are *called* through the gospel (2 Thess. 2:14).

From now until the end of time, studying the Bible is God’s way to increase our knowledge of spiritual things (compare 2 Tim. 2:15). While this is true for us, the Corinthians did not have a New Testament because this portion of the Bible was in the process of being written. The Corinthians’ *knowledge* (beyond what Paul had communicated to them, 1 Cor. 15:1-5) came through *prophets* (people who had the gift of knowledge, 14:29) and was tested by those who could *discern spirits* (14:29b). The information in 1 Cor. 14 suggests there were several Christians at Corinth who had spiritual gifts. The abilities that existed in this congregation (both natural and miraculous) were outstanding, and these supernatural gifts allowed the Corinthians to fully know and follow God’s will. In 1 Cor. 13, the miraculous gifts are described as “*in part*” and are contrasted with the “*perfect*” (i.e. the fully revealed Scriptures).

Because the Corinthians had so many wonderful teachers, the problems at Corinth should not have existed. These Christians had too much talent (natural and supernatural), knowledge, and abilities to be misled and a letter like this should have been unnecessary. This congregation should have prospered and done a great work for God. But, as this book shows, sins such as pride and lust were able to overcome talent and God’s gifts. Satan was able to hinder the work of God even though these Christians had all of the tools they needed to overcome him (such happens because man has freewill, not because man or Satan is more powerful than God). Another pressing problem at Corinth was a lack of true love (1 Cor. 8:1; 13:1-8, 13; 14:1; 16:14). It is very difficult to teach people if we are not setting the right kind of example (compare Tit. 2:7 where the subjects of our personal “example” and “teaching” or “doctrine” are joined together).

1:6: *even as the testimony of Christ was confirmed in you:*

This verse is very similar to 1 Thess. 1:5. When Paul and the other apostles went into an area to preach and teach, they “confirmed” (*bebaioo*, to confirm, establish, guarantee) their teaching with miracles (compare 1 Cor. 2:3-4). This same word is used in places like Mk. 16:20 and Heb. 2:3 as well as verse 8 of this chapter. The Corinthians had received confirmation when the gospel was presented to them; in this verse *confirmed* appears to have a legal sense attached to it (Kittel, 1:600-603). This confirmation was a *guarantee* the information about “Christ” was absolutely correct. In this verse there are really two key ideas: “guarantee” and “accomplishment.” The gospel was “accomplished” at Corinth in that it was preached (and a congregation was founded), and it was “guaranteed” (proven to be true). “Through their vigor in certifying the facts for which they bear the guarantees, in communicating grace and performing miracles, the apostles sanction the truth of the message; their proclamation inspires confidence” (Spicq, 1:282). When this letter was written the Corinthians still had these gifts and their continued use of them continued the confirmation. Today our *confirmation* about the Lord and all the other things related to Christianity comes through the Scriptures (Jn. 20:30-31). Compare, too, Jn. 5:39.

The Corinthians, unlike some other first century Christians, did not doubt the message preached by Paul. While other believers did waver in their faith about Jesus or Christianity (the letter to the Hebrews is a good example of this), the Corinthians had no difficulty believing in Jesus. They were fully convinced about the gospel being true. Instead of faith problems, the Corinthians had difficulties in the areas of worship and Christian living. This fact shows that not every congregation has the same exact problem(s), but virtually all have some type of shortcoming.

The word translated “testimony” (*marturion*) is found twenty times in the New Testament; it is associated with the idea of bearing witness to something. “The meaning is almost always *testimony, evidence, proof*” (Exegetical Dictionary of the New Testament, 2:393). Here the idea is “a statement that is brought out as testimony” (Gingrich and Danker, p. 494).

1:7-8: *so that ye come behind in no gift; waiting for the revelation of our Lord Jesus Christ; 8 who shall also confirm you unto the end, (that ye be) unproveable in the day of our Lord Jesus Christ.*

These two verses are related to the preceding material. Spiritual *gifts* allowed these Christians to know and prove that God was with them. Paul did not want the Corinthians to be “*lacking*” (*hustereo*) in any “*gift*” (*lacking* meant “be in need of, lack, or do without”—Exegetical Dictionary of the New Testament, 3:409). See how this same word is used in Mt. 19:20; Lk. 15:14; 22:35; 2 Cor. 11:9. Since other verses show that the Corinthians abounded in spiritual gifts, it appears the Corinthians’ *lack* was the ability to properly use their supernatural gifts. Members of this congregation abounded in many ways, not the least of which was supernatural abilities (this is further indicated later in the book, chapters 12-14, where there is a special discussion of the supernatural abilities).

The end of verse 7 is related to verse 6. The Corinthians’ faith had been *confirmed*; they were 100% sure Christianity is true (for information about this word see the commentary on verse 6). Thus, these Christians were “*waiting for the revelation of Jesus.*” *Waiting* (*apekdechomai*) is found less than ten times in the New Testament; it has the sense of intense waiting and eager expectation (Rienecker and Rogers, p. 386). “The test of the true or false Christian is his waiting for, or dreading the revelation of Christ” (Bengel, 2:167).

“The prefix *ap/apo* emphasizes the distance between the state of waiting and the time of fulfillment of what is hoped for” (Brown, 2:245). Christians are to patiently and faithfully wait until the Lord returns (compare Phil. 3:20). God’s people wait because they are convinced Christianity is true and they believe the Lord will return at the proper time. The information in verse 8 shows that God had continually been with the Corinthians since their conversion. God would also “*confirm*” them to the “*end*” and make them “*unreprovable*” (“*blameless,*” KJV). God starts the process of salvation (verse 4) and sees it to the end (Phil. 1:6).

Unreprovable (*anenketos*) meant “irreproachable” or “unaccused” (this word is associated with elders

in Tit. 1:6). In the present passage it means God's people will be far more than *innocent*. When a Christian appears before God, he or she is actually "unaccused." The saved will be literally "irreproachable" before the face of God because, here, *unreprovable* has a "legal sense" (Brown, 3:924). Even the devil will be unable to make an accusation or charge against a Christian (the "real opportunity" for Satan and his helpers to attack us is while we live on the earth). *Unreprovable* also shows that God will not desert His people. He has never deserted those who have been faithful to Him and He never will. Even when Christians become faithless God remains faithful (2 Tim. 2:13). Those who are faithful to God are promised salvation to the "uttermost" (Heb. 7:25).

When God spoke of *forgiveness* in the Scriptures, He meant it. When the "*day of the Lord Jesus Christ*" comes (the end of verse 8), Christians will stand before the throne of God and no one will be able to sustain or even launch an accusation against a single saint (additional information on this point may be found in the commentary on 1 Thess. 5:23). God will *confirm* (verse 8a) and vindicate the character of Christians because they will have confirmed the truth about the Lord (this brings to mind Mt. 10:32-33). This is a great incentive to be a faithful Christian. *Confirm* (*bebaioo*) first occurs in Mark's gospel (Mk. 16:20). Here it has the sense of "firmness, fixity, solidity" (Spicq, 1:282).

Concerning *day of the Lord Jesus Christ*, the Expositor's Bible Commentary (11:105-106) said, "The day of Christ Jesus is a phrase occurring with only slight variations six times in the NT, three of them in Philippians (1 Cor 1:8; 5:5; 2 Cor 1:14; Phil 1:6, 10; 2:16). The expression is similar to the 'day of the Lord' (1 Thess 5:2) and the OT 'day of Jehovah' (Amos 5:18-20). However, in contrast to the OT emphasis on judgment, the 'day of Christ Jesus' is mentioned in all cases with reference to the NT church. It will be the time when Christ returns for his church, salvation is finally completed, and believers' works are examined and the believer rewarded." A common theme in the New Testament is looking forward to the Lord's next and final return (Tit. 2:13; 2 Pet. 3:10, 12; Heb. 9:28).

While God wants His people to stay faithful until they die or the end of time comes, the New Testament affirms Christians can fall away and be spiritually destroyed (1 Cor. 10:6-12). When people apostatize, God is always close by and ready to receive the backsliders back into His fellowship (Lk. 15:7; 11-24). If a Christian is eternally lost, the fault will be with him or her, not God. God wants to *confirm* people. Our job is to stay faithful no matter what the cost (Rev. 2:10). We need to recognize our susceptibility to apostasy because temptation and the trials of life can severely shake or undo our faith if we are not careful (compare Mk. 4:3-19).

When Paul dealt with the Corinthians' problems he treated one issue at a time. He tried to help correct many problems and was confident the Corinthians would work to correct the problems and be saved. He thus focused on God's faithfulness and not the Corinthians' need to repent or perish in the opening verses of this letter. The consequences for not repenting are described later. Compare Lk. 13:3.

The way Paul dealt with the problems at Corinth is a model for us. There are many times when we should deal with problems one at a time. Whether the problems are moral, doctrinal, or personal, taking things step by step is usually best. Jesus used this same principle in Mt. 18:15-17.

1:9: *God is faithful, through whom ye were called into the fellowship of his Son Jesus Christ our Lord.*

Paul told the Corinthians they were in "*fellowship*" with God. This fellowship existed because God *calls* people (2 Thess. 2:14) and His call is made universally (Jn. 3:16) by our taking the gospel message to the world (Mk. 16:15). When people respond in obedience to this call (the gospel), they become *brethren* (Matt. 12:50). This relationship is the most important one we will ever have or create. Because Jesus is *God's Son*, the *Christ*, and the *Lord* (verse 9), He is someone we need in our family. We want to be related to the Lord no matter what it costs. In addition to being called into *fellowship* (*koinonia*) with God's Son, the Bible says we are called into sharing His *suffering* (1 Pet. 4:13). The term for *fellowship* is used in some other places that are quite interesting. Christians are to have *fellowship* with one another (Acts 2:42; Gal. 2:9). This term is translated "contribution" in Rom. 15:26. Paul spoke about *Communion* (fellowship) with the blood of Christ during the Lord's Supper (1 Cor. 10:16). Righteousness and sin have no *fellowship* with each other (2 Cor. 6:14). Christians have *fellowship* with the Holy Spirit (2 Cor. 13:14)

as well as the *Father* (1 Jn. 1:3).

Any of the references in the preceding material might be expanded, but only one is more fully developed here (1 Cor. 10:16). Most who profess an interest in Jesus and Christianity believe in having fellowship with the Lord. Jesus said He is the vine (Jn. 15:1) and we must have an on-going connection to Him or we will die (Jn. 15:5-7). In view of what Jesus said and most believe (fellowship with Christ is an absolute must), it is very perplexing to see that most religious groups do not engage in the act of Communion (the Lord's Supper) each week. Paul specifically said Christians have fellowship with Christ during this feast (1 Cor. 10:16). If this is true, how can believers not have the Lord's Supper each Sunday? When this point is considered people should begin to realize that there is evidence for having the Lord's Supper each Sunday and that every Sunday observance of the Lord's Supper is actually God's will. For more information on having the Lord's Supper each Sunday, see the introductory commentary for 1 Cor. 10:16 and the commentary on 1 Cor. 11:20.

The information in verse 9 also provides information on the limits of Christian fellowship. If Jesus is in fellowship with a person, we must be in fellowship with that person. Those who are outside the Lord's fellowship must not be fellowshipped by us. Whatever breaks a man's fellowship with God should be the basis for our breaking fellowship with someone (2 Jn. 9; 1 Jn. 2:24). Can we list some religious organizations that are not in fellowship with God and, therefore, not suitable for us to fellowship?

A good sermon may be preached from the first three words in this verse: *God is faithful*. Concerning the word *God* Willmington (p. 170) noted: "We are all thankful for a faithful wife, husband, bank teller, teacher, doctor, etc. But how much more to rejoice over the fact that the most faithful of all is God!" The verb "*is*" shows that God is faithful at the present time. His faithfulness did not end with the Old Testament era or the first century. The third word ("*faithful*") suggests this quality is an all-encompassing quality. God is faithful in every way. He cannot lie, go back on His word, "revise the rules," let His people down, etc. Neither can God start something and refuse to finish it as this would be a violation of His faithful nature.

1:10: *Now I beseech you, brethren, through 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 perfected together in the same mind and in the same judgment.*

At the beginning of this verse Paul used a conjunction (*de*) which is translated "now." This conjunction expresses a very strong contrast, and the contrast is between Paul's thankfulness (verses 1-9) and the division described in the rest of this chapter.

Greeks were accustomed to *wisdom teachers* (teachers who established their own schools and had their own followers). These groups were like cliques, and it appears the cultural practice of clever educators had influenced and affected the church at Corinth. Christians at this congregation may have been inclined to rally behind a teacher who was especially dear to them or had taught them the gospel. Perhaps some of the converts stood behind their individual teachers and this caused rivalry in the church. Instead of being united as God's people, at least some of the Corinthians behaved like the divided unbelievers in their culture and this was evident to all by their separating into various groups. Compare Jn. 17:21.

Even though there was division at Corinth, Paul realized unity was still possible. This must be true because Paul was able to write one letter (this letter) to four different groups. Willis (p. 21) observed, "There were tears in the garment, but there was still only one garment."

W.E. Vine (2:8) commented on how four different words are used in the New Testament to describe a lack of unity and/or disagreement. These words are given below and they are listed from the least to the most serious.

- *Stasis* – A strong disagreement; dissension (Acts 15:2; 23:7, 10).
- *Dichostasia* – A "standing apart" (Gal. 5:20; Rom. 16:17).
- *Schisma* – A severe tear (1 Cor. 11:18; Jn. 7:43; 9:16; 10:19).

➤ *Hairesis* – A mature and established separation (Acts 24:5; Tit. 3:10).

Paul used the third word (*schisma*) to describe the Corinthians. This term meant there were serious dangers, but the problems had not reached the worst stage. In secular Greek this third word sometimes described “‘ploughing’ (rending the ground)” (Brown, 3:543). Here as well as 11:18 the term may be understood as describing cliques (Brown, 3:544).

Paul addressed the various factions as “*brethren*.” The Corinthians needed to realize they all had the same spiritual father. This was the beginning point for church unity. To insure this point was presented with authority, Paul appealed to the “*name of our Lord Jesus Christ*.” Thayer (p. 448) defined *name* (*onoma*) as “to beseech one by employing Christ’s name as motive or incentive.” Kittel (5:278) said the “name of Christ is an instrument of admonition.” Paul did not ask for unity based upon his authority as an apostle; he appealed to deity. He went to the part of the Godhead that died on a cross. Today people often appeal to others in “the name of common sense,” “the name of decency,” “the name of humanity,” or “even the name of Allah.” There is really only one true source of authority and this is Jesus. When commenting on Paul’s usage of *name* in Col. 3:17, Kittel (5:274) said, “The whole life of the Christian stands under the name of Jesus.” For Christians who are doing what they ought not, an “appeal to Jesus” should be enough to cause them to reconsider their actions.

If the Corinthians knew much about the Lord (and they did, verse 5), they may have remembered Jesus’ great prayer for unity in Jn. 17:20-21. If for no other reason, Paul was able to appeal to Jesus because the Lord is the head of the church (Col. 1:18). Since Christ is the head, how dare men try to associate this role with mere men, even if that man were an apostle! True unity would allow the Corinthians to “*speak the same thing*” (Paul used a present tense—continuous tense verb) to describe this speaking. Notice, too, that Paul said “*all*” were to *speak the same thing*. He did not want “some” of the congregation, “most” of the church, or even “almost all” to be saying the same thing. Paul wanted complete harmony and unity. This point is usually never considered in the denominational realm and sometimes it is not applied in the church built by Christ. Whether it is taught or not, this is God’s explicit will and it is something we must do (follow). (Willis First Corinthians, p. 22) said, Paul wanted these brethren to “*be at peace*” or “*make up their differences*.”

The idea of *speaking the same thing* is repeated three times in this one verse. If God wants His people to *speak the same thing*, then speaking *different things*, and this is certainly true concerning unity and doctrine, will always be wrong. How can we *not* be unified if we truly all follow the same Lord, the same message from God, and all are pursuing the kind of Christian life described in the New Testament? In the Old Testament we are told that it is “good” for brethren to “dwell in unity” (Ps. 133:1). Jeremiah predicted that God’s plan for the New Testament era would be a people who had “one heart” and served God in “one way” (Jer. 32:39).

The second expression of unity is found in the words: “*that there be no divisions among you*.” The word *divisions* (*schisma*) was used to describe a tear in a piece of material; this same word is used in Mk. 2:21 (“*rent*”) to describe the tearing of wineskins. This word is also found later in this letter (11:18 and 12:25).

Paul chose his words very carefully, and at this point in the epistle he did not allege that division existed at Corinth. This can be illustrated by a parallel statement: *that there be no hate among you*. This statement does not tell us if hate actually exists. The wording may cause us to wonder if hate exists, but there is not an actual charge of hatred. Division did exist at Corinth, but this problem is not specifically addressed until verse 11. The material prior to verse 11 only hints at one of the big problems at this congregation. Chrysostom (The Church’s Bible, p. 19) said, “I have always maintained that one should deliver criticism gently and little by little. Here Paul does just this. When he is about to embark on a subject full of perils, which could tear up the church from her foundations, he uses gentle language.”

At the end of verse 10 there is the third expression related to unity. Paul wanted these Christians to be “*perfectly joined*” (*katartizo*). This term is in the perfect tense, so it has the idea of coming together and staying together permanently—division would forever cease. Spicq (2:271) noted how this term has a “basic sense” meaning “restore to a condition, to make an object fit for its purpose, prepare it and adapt it

to its usage, hence to adjust and perfect. This arranging or adapting to an end applies to things, to persons, or to members of a society.” This is the word used to describe the repair of torn fish nets (Matt. 4:21 and Mk. 1:19). The images of torn cloth and fish nets in need of repair showed the Corinthians there was a problem. Unity was definitely needed and Paul wanted things to be fixed. This word is also found in Heb. 11:3 (“*framed*”) and Heb. 10:5 (“*prepared*”). These additional references illustrate the type of the unity that the Corinthians were to pursue and maintain. Outside the New Testament this word was used in architecture for restoring the walls of a city or sanctuary (Spicq, 2:272). Other uses of it cited by Spicq include a master of a house offering a room to a guest after it had been made ready. It described a woman assembling fabric and finishing the garment so it was “ready to wear.” It was even used of meals; when food had been prepared, the lady of the house said “it is ready.” In the medical field surgeons and bonesetters used this word to describe putting a dislocated body part back in its place. If Paul had only used this word there would have been no doubt that God wanted harmony in the first century church just as He desires it today.

Paul’s instructions concerning unity are in conflict with what is taught and done in the denominational world. At the present time there are literally tens of thousands of denominations because those who profess to be Christians have many different beliefs and practices. Most who call themselves Christians belong to a denomination. Some of the more common denominational divisions are categorized as “Pentecostal, Catholic, Protestant, and Eastern Orthodox.” Different doctrines and practices abound, and the differences between them are not minor. Beliefs vary about what happens after death, heaven, hell, the future of the earth, church organization, worship, the role of women, moral issues such as homosexuality, etc. According to the prevailing view of most in the world, Christianity is a system of religion that “runs the gamut.”

In spite of a wide range of varying beliefs and practices, few are bothered by the lack of harmony and religious disagreements. There are even those who think religious division is good. It has been said that a lack of unity results in “having a place for everyone.” Or, “With so many churches to choose from, at least one group will appeal to people.” The lack of unity in the religious world and the desire for diversity are completely contrary to the New Testament. God requires people to be involved with “*sound doctrine*” (1 Tim. 1:10) and has even said sound doctrine is directly joined with “*godliness*” (1 Tim. 6:3). We cannot be godly without God’s doctrine. Accepting “some of the truth” is not enough. If we worship in a place that teaches and practices religious error, we are not “*holding to*” sound doctrine and the pattern in God’s word (2 Tim. 1:13). We commit the same kind of sin Jesus specifically condemned while on the earth (Mk. 7:6-9—see section 21 of the Gospels commentary). When an individual or even a congregation refuses to follow sound doctrine, God says a rebuke is necessary (Tit. 1:13). Preachers (Tit. 2:1) as well as every other Christian are bound to follow sound doctrine.

Some have seen the lack of unity in the denominational world and decided a “unity-in-diversity” approach is needed. Such an approach is not unity; it is toleration. A unity-in-diversity attitude is also wrong because it violates what Paul told the Corinthians. Paul did not say differences were to be tolerated; he said these Christians were to be *of the same mind*. God wants His people to *speak the same thing, have no divisions, and be perfectly joined together*. These things can only be accomplished when everyone agrees to completely and fully follow God’s word and use nothing but the Bible as their religious guide. For additional information on this point see the twelve point study in the commentary on Rom. 15:5-6 as well as the commentary on Rom. 16:14-16.

It has been said that Paul condemned what has now become modern denominationalism in verse 10, but this is incorrect. In the first century there was only one church (the church of Christ, Mt. 16:18; Rom. 16:16). What we now know as “Christian denominations” is very new; these groups did not exist in the first century. What we do have in these two verses are the *seeds of denominationalism*, and this fact makes Paul’s remarks even more striking. If the divisions within the local Corinthian congregation (the seeds of what has now become full grown) were wrong, what must we say about modern day denominationalism and multiple religious bodies with varying doctrines? Jesus answered this question in Mt. 15:13: If a religious group has not been established by God, it will be “rooted up.” Many talk about the “head of their church,” but the true church has only one head: Christ. If we have a head other than

Him, it is the wrong one. If we have a head other than Him, we have more heads than God has authorized.

1:11-12: *11 For it hath been signified unto me concerning you, my brethren, by them (that are of the household) of Chloe, that there are contentions among you. 12 Now this I mean, that each one of you saith, I am of Paul; and I of Apollos: and I of Cephas; and I of Christ.*

Though the church at Corinth was divided, Paul still felt the need to refer to these Christians as his “brethren.” Paul was still spiritually related to these people and this relationship justified his becoming involved in their problems. Choosing to help the Corinthians was a very courageous act because division is often an explosive issue. Some problems cannot be left unattended, and this is certainly true for issues that affect local congregations (compare Phil. 4:2).

Paul wanted these Christians to know he was very aware of what was happening in Corinth so he told them about a report from the “household of Chloe.” The ASV says this had been “signified” unto the apostle and the KJV says “declared.” Outside the New Testament this word (*deloo*) was associated with “official, legal evidence. Thus, Paul has been given solid proof of the Corinthian divisive spirit which doubtless was confirmed by the church messengers (16:17)” (Gromacki, pp. 10-11). In this verse this term means “matters that come to light publicly” (Exegetical Dictionary of the New Testament, 1:294). Paul chose to identify the source of his information, and his decision offers an important point for our time. When someone says to us something like, “I have been told that people are upset,” it is usually wise to identify the source of the information or who is involved in the matter. Identifying the source of information or the parties involved often lends or increases credibility when dealing with problems. Paul did not *specifically* name those who provided this report to him, but he did give enough information to prove the report was credible. We can and should do the same.

When Paul spoke of Chloe’s household he used a definite article that is plural. This means more than one person in Chloe’s household had told Paul about the division (these household members could have been her children, slaves or both). Paul did not act on the word of one person. He had a good foundation before he discussed this subject, and this fact provides another helpful lesson for people and especially Christian people: We must ensure we have all the facts before making allegations or taking action (for some additional information on this thought see the commentary on “sober-minds” in the exposition of Tit. 2:6). It is interesting to note that the Corinthians had written to Paul and asked some questions (1 Cor. 7:1), but apparently nothing in their letter discussed the division within the congregation—that information apparently had to come from another source. It is always good to remember that as we deal with people important points and facts are sometimes omitted. Another “report” about this congregation is described in 1 Cor. 5:1.

We do not know anything about the woman named “Chloe.” Perhaps she was a resident of Corinth. Maybe she lived elsewhere. This is the only reference to her in the New Testament. At the end of this letter (1 Cor. 16:17) we encounter three names; some have thought these three men were Chloe’s sons. We have no assurance she was a Christian, but it is not hard to believe she was a member of the Corinthian congregation.

At the end of verse 11 Paul said he had received information about “contentions” (*eris*). When this word was used in a “non-moral” context it meant “the clash of sounds of the musical scale” (Willis, p. 25). In the New Testament it describes people clashing with each other. It pictures people on one side of something lining up against people on another side. The opposition might be based upon envy, ambition, the desire for prestige, or a quest for prominence. There was probably as much a “party spirit” in the church at Corinth as there is among the Democrat and Republican parties in the United States. Here the Exegetical Dictionary of the New Testament (2:52) said it means “quarrels” or “factions in the church, which are traced back to an attachment of individuals to a specific apostle or teacher or to Christ (v. 12).” Gromacki’s definition (p. 11) is also quite good: “This word means more than just a difference of opinion; it connotes quarrels or wranglings.” “The contentions, therefore, were not quiet and subtle; they had progressed to a shouting, hot-temper stage. The believers were acting and talking like unsaved men (cf. 3:3), not like saints within the church of God.” In Gal. 5:20 this word is rendered “strife” in the ASV and

“variance” in the KJV. Paul classified it as a “work of the flesh.” It is only used about a dozen times in the New Testament, but it is often found in key texts (Rom. 1:29; 1 Cor. 3:3; 2 Cor. 12:20; Phil. 1:15; Tit. 3:9).

In her book *The Key to a Loving Heart*, Karen Mains has a parable entitled “The Brawling Bride.” This parable describes a climactic moment in a wedding ceremony. Both families have been seated. The groom and his attendants are in place and the minister is waiting. The bridesmaids are positioned and the wedding march begins to play. Down comes the bride and the guests gasp as they see the bride limping. The future wife’s gown is ripped and covered with mud. One of her eyes is swollen and purple. Her hair is messy. It is said that the groom in this parable is Jesus. Then the author asks this question: “Doesn’t the Lord deserve better than this?” God does not want a beaten-up bride or a bride ripped apart by division (compare Eph. 5:27). The author’s question would have been appropriate for the people at Corinth because the church is the Lord’s bride (Eph. 5:27).

The 12th verse suggests the divisions in Corinth may not have actually involved Paul, Apollos, and Peter (compare 1 Cor. 4:6). Paul may have used these names as examples. Doing this may have helped the apostle keep a bad situation from getting worse. Agitating a bad situation is rarely a good thing. In support for understanding the thought literally we may point out Paul and Apollos had both been at Corinth (Acts 17:33 + 18:1, 19:1).

If the divisions at Corinth were actually based around the men Paul listed, it should be understood that Peter, Paul, and Apollos were not in disagreement with each other. That is, Peter did not preach one message and have his own set of followers, Paul did not preach another gospel and still others followed him, etc. There were sometimes difficulties between the apostles (Peter was rebuked by Paul, Gal. 2:11-15), but Peter endorsed Paul’s writings (2 Pet. 3:15) and all the apostles taught the same message. Paul and Apollos were friends (1 Cor. 16:12). The Corinthians could not, therefore, rightly say their factions were caused by or attributable to the apostles. The Corinthians may have used the apostles’ names for the division, but the apostles did not support this lack of unity. Today we may extract this critical point from what Paul said: If it was wrong for people to call themselves after the apostles or other key figures in the first century church, what about being part of a religious group today that does a similar thing?

The CBL (First Corinthians, p. 267) suggests “four major divisions had developed: One group followed Paul, with whom we are familiar already; one followed Apollos, who differed not in message but apparently in method, having a more rhetorical, eloquent style. His method of presentation was very popular with those of Greek background. One group followed Cephas or Peter, the ‘hero’ of Pentecost and a true apostle (these were probably conservative Jewish-Christians). Another group said they followed Christ. These may have been ultraconservative followers, or individuals who were trying to satisfy their ego by convincing themselves that their religion was more pure and spiritual than anyone else’s.” A second possibility is that the last group had some false ideas about freedom; they rejected all information from people like Paul because they viewed Jesus as a way (system of religion) without rules. A third suggestion about the *of Christ* party is that this claim was being made by *all the groups*. Those who followed Peter said they were *of Christ* and those who had attached themselves to Paul may have been making this same claim. It is difficult to determine who the “*of Christ*” party was (verse 12). Perhaps the best possibility is that this group was just as bad as the rest, but it chose to use Jesus as the basis for the division instead of a well-known first century preacher. Whatever the exact nature of the faction, there was division! An interesting point about this division is offered by Holman (7:9): “It is possible that the use of the singular ‘I’ as opposed to the plural ‘we’ in this context indicates that these groups were not organized, solidified factions. The problem may have been much more individualistic.”

Interesting suggestions have been made concerning those who followed Paul. Perhaps this group “was a combination of simple and earnest believers and the ‘old guard,’ made up of the founding fathers, or charter members. Their concern may have been basically spiritual. But the fact that they exhibited the factious spirit also indicated that they may have desired to use their seniority to exert priorities on the leadership of the church” (Beacon Bible Commentary, 8:315). Willmington (p. 172) proposed the *Paulite* group said, “‘We are of Paul and therefore better than you! Anyone knows Paul is a great *doctrinal* preacher, and that’s the only kind to have.’ Those who claimed to follow Apollos might have said

‘Apollos is an *eloquent* preacher and can preach circles around Paul any day.’ Those who felt strongly about Peter may have said ‘We are of Cephas and you can brag about doctrine and eloquence all you want to, but there’s just nobody as down-to-earth and *practical* as Peter.’ The final group may have said ‘We are of Christ, and therefore look to *no human preacher* to lead us and feed us.’” The Expositor’s Greek Testament (2:762) adds: “the party cries are quoted as from successive speakers challenging each other.”

Secular history says many traveling philosophers came to Corinth. These men developed small schools and bands of students and the students were faithful to their teachers. It appears the Corinthians did a similar thing in the church and this created at least some of the strife. At this congregation the problem must have been especially severe because verse 12 says, “*each one of you says*.” This may be a hyperbole (an exaggeration for emphasis). If it is not, it means that every Christian at this congregation was involved with the division.

When Paul spoke about the lack of unity he put his name first. This prevented anyone from accusing him of being partial. “Paul hit his own fan club first! It is easy to rebuke a group if they are wrong, especially, if that group is against you anyway, but it is another thing to criticize sharply those who sing your praises the loudest” (Willmington, p. 172). Paul’s example is still relevant. When a wrong is being addressed, and our name is associated with the problem, we should be quick to recognize and acknowledge our responsibility or involvement in the matter. We should act uprightly and be honest in all things.

1:13: *Is Christ divided? was Paul crucified for you? or were ye baptized into the name of Paul?*

The first four chapters in this book deal with the problem of division, and this subject consumes the most space of any subject discussed in this epistle. Gromacki (p. 12) offers a good outline of how Paul addressed this point: “his involvement in their lives (1:13-17); the difference between human and divine wisdom (1:18-25); the nature of God’s calling to salvation (1:26-31); the wisdom taught by the Holy Spirit (2:1-13); the three types of men in the world and in the church (2:14, 15; 3:4); the place of men in ministry (3:5-9); their responsibility to build on their spiritual foundation (3:1-17); their utilization of all ministers (3:18-4:2); the judgment of their motivation by God (4:3-5); the real position of God’s servants (4:6-13); and Paul’s apostolic authority over them (4:14-21).”

In this part of the letter Paul revealed one of the causes for the factions—preachers were being elevated above Jesus. Paul was not crucified for us, so it would be wrong to be called a “Paulite.” How could the “chief of sinners” (1 Tim. 1:15) die for mankind? Peter was not crucified for us, so we must not use a religious designation that glorifies him (this fact has not yet been learned by Catholicism). Rather than die for us, Peter had previously denied the Lord in the most emphatic of ways (Lk. 22:61-62).

The Expositor’s Greek Testament (2:765) makes the point in this way: “The readers had been baptized *as Christians*, not Pauline, Apollonian, or Petrine Christians. Paul’s horror at the thought of baptizing in *his* name shows how truly Christ’s was to him ‘the name above every name.’” “The glory of Christ is not to be shared with his servants, nor the unity of his body to be divided, as if Christ were ceasing to be one” (Bengel, 2:168). The questions in this verse leave no doubt concerning how they should be answered: *absolutely not!*

The word translated “*divided*” (*merizo*) described a kind of division that could destroy something (see how this term is used in Mt. 12:25). In commenting on how this word is used in this verse the Exegetical Dictionary of the New Testament (2:408) said, “it becomes clear that Christian salvation includes unity, consistency, completeness, and exclusiveness.” Thayer’s definition of the term (p. 400) is even fuller: “has Christ himself, whom ye claim as yours, been like yourselves divided into parts, so that one has one part and another another part?” Such definitions are exactly right because Christ is one; He cannot be divided up into various sects, parties and denominations. While the religious world seems to revel in a wide variety of belief systems, all of which it regards as “Christian,” this is not how Paul described the faith of the New Testament. God has only one spiritual body (Eph. 2:14-15). There is only “one head” for this spiritual body (Col. 1:18). There is also only *one plan* for this spiritual body and this single plan must be strictly adhered to (Gal. 1:8-9). All other systems and plans are “doctrines of men” (Mt. 15:9) that

blindly guide people to destruction (Mt. 15:14) and all these systems will one day fail (Mt. 15:13).

Even though all can readily grasp the problem and sin of division at Corinth, what can be said about a similar sin today—the existence of denominationalism? Martin Luther was not crucified for us so why should, would or could we wear his name? No *object* was crucified for us, so why should we use the name of a religious item such as “baptism” (*Baptist*) to describe ourselves? We may be “methodical” in our actions, but where is the authority to be known as *Methodists*? The church has “universal appeal,” but *Catholic* is not the New Testament designation for the church. In the New Testament church there are “elders” (also known as presbyters), but the right designation for the church is not *Presbyterian*. There is no authority to call or refer to ourselves as the *Community Church*, the *Light of Life Church*, the *Apostolic Church*, *Pentecostal Church*, or something else such as “*Free, Independent, Orthodox, Liberal, Conservative, African, Brethren, Anglican, Southern, Association, Conference, Confessional, Evangelical, Reformed, Amish, Mennonite, Old Order, Missionary, Congregational, Wesleyan, American, Primitive, Abundant Life, House of Prayer, Salvation Army, Vineyard, Calvary, Grace, Shakers, Witnesses*, etc. Can a religious group rightfully bear any other name (designation) than the name of the Lord (or deity)? Is there a name superior to the name of Jesus (Acts 4:12)? Some say how a congregation is designated is unimportant. If this is true, Paul had no right to condemn the Corinthians for using designations that honored people besides Jesus. If it was wrong for the Corinthians to go by designations God had not authorized, it is still wrong today.

There is no “official name” of the New Testament church, but there are Bible designations. In Acts 20:28 the Bible says “church of the Lord.” In 1 Cor. 1:2; 10:32; 11:22; 15:9; 2 Cor. 1:1; Gal. 1:13; 1 Tim. 3:5 it is “church of God.” Colossians 4:16 speaks of the “church of the Laodiceans” (Christ’s church that met at Laodicea). A similar use is found in 2 Thess. 1:1 and 2 Thess. 1:1. In 1 Tim. 3:15 the Bible says “the church of the living God.” Hebrews 12:23 says “the church of the firstborn.” Sometimes the plural is used: “churches of the Gentiles” (Rom. 16:4); “churches of Christ” (Rom. 16:16); “churches of God” (1 Cor. 11:16); “churches of the saints” (1 Cor. 14:33); “churches of Galatia” (1 Cor. 16:1); “churches of Asia” (1 Cor. 16:19); “churches of Macedonia” (2 Cor. 8:1); “churches of Galatia” (Gal. 1:2); “churches of Judaea” (Gal. 1:22). Never is an object or a single person like Peter, John, etc. used to designate the church; congregations were identified by their association with deity, location, or the relationship God had with His people.

At the end of verse 13 there is a reference to *baptism*. The Corinthians had not been baptized “*into the name of Paul*.” They were immersed *into Christ* (Gal. 3:27). *Baptism* (*baptizo*) meant to “dip, plunge, or submerge.” This term is also used in verse 13, 14, 15, 16, and 17 as well as the Great Commission (Mt. 28:19 and Mk. 16:16). In the Septuagint this word is found in 2 Kgs. 5:14 where it is translated “dipped.” Colin Brown (1:145) said *baptizo* is “a technical term for baptism” (see how *baptizo* is used in Acts 2:38, 41; 8:12, 13, 16, 36, 38; 10:47, 48; 16:15; 18:8; 19:3; 22:16; Rom. 6:3; 1 Cor. 1:13, 14, 15, 16, 17; 12:13; Gal. 3:27). Jesus used *baptizo* to describe His suffering (Mk. 10:38; it is also found in Mt. 28:19; Mk. 16:16, etc). Since the word *baptism* described an immersion, Paul described baptism as a “burial” in places like Rom. 6:4 and Col. 2:12. Notice how the “cross and baptism claim us for Christ” (Bengel, 2:168). Peter affirmed this same truth on the Day of Pentecost (Acts 2:38).

Just as in the first century, conversion to Christ requires baptism in water and this baptism is for the forgiveness of sins (Mk. 16:16; Acts 2:38; 1 Pet. 3:20-21). A chart showing Bible conversions and how baptism must be part of the process may be found in the commentary on Rom. 10:9-11. A second chart showing why baptism must be by *immersion* (a dipping or going underneath the water) may be found in the commentary on Acts 2:38-39. When Paul described the baptism of the Corinthians, he used a preposition (*eis*); this is translated “*into*” Christ (ASV) or “*in*” Christ (KJV). In Gal. 3:27 this same preposition is again associated with baptism and there the KJV translators rightly rendered it “*into*.” In order to become a Christian we must be *baptized into Christ*. For 1 Cor. 1:13, *into* is the right sense of the thought.

Barclay (First Corinthians, pp. 17-18) said, “baptism was *into the name of Jesus*. That phrase in Greek implies the closest possible connection. To give money into a man’s name was to pay it into his account, into his personal possession. To sell a slave into a man’s name was to give that slave into his absolute and

undisputed possession. A soldier swore loyalty into the name of Caesar; he belonged absolutely to the Emperor. This phrase *into the name of* implied absolute and utter possession. In Christians it implied even more; it implied that the Christian was not only possessed by Christ but was in some strange way identified with Him, was literally in Him (see my commentary on Rom. 6, BP). All that Paul is saying is, ‘I am glad that I was so busy preaching, because if I had baptized it would have given some of you the excuse to say that you were baptized into my possession instead of into Christ’s.’”

1:14-17: *I thank God that I baptized none of you, save Crispus and Gaius; 15 lest any man should say that ye were baptized into my name. 16 And I baptized also the household of Stephanas: besides, I know not whether I baptized any other. 17 For Christ sent me not to baptize, but to preach the gospel: not in wisdom of words, lest the cross of Christ should be made void.*

The beginning of verse 14 caused Bengel (2:168) to say, “The Providence of God reigns often in events, the reason for which is not seen until afterwards.” This is a brilliant observation, and the conversions at Corinth may indeed have been associated with God’s providence.

Also in verse 13 is a reference to baptism (*baptizo*). This topic is introduced in verse 13 (see the commentary on that passage) and here it is discussed in more detail. Paul said he had not baptized *many* of the Corinthians, but he had baptized some of them (“*Crispus and Gaius*”). Crispus was converted early in Paul’s work at Corinth (Acts 18:8 says he was a synagogue ruler). We do not know when Gaius was immersed.

The name Gaius occurs a few other times in Scripture. In the book of Third John the first verse makes reference to a *Gaius*. There was a *Gaius* from Derbe who went with Paul from Macedonia to Asia (Acts 20:4). A *Gaius* accompanied Paul during the third missionary journey and was seized during a riot (Acts 19:29). This Gaius may or may not have been one of the persons described in the preceding references. In verse 16 a third name is mentioned; additional information on this man is given below, but here we may note that his name is separated from the other two in verse 14. It has been suggested that “his name was mentioned as an afterthought, perhaps at the prodding of Stephanas himself” (Gromacki, p. 16).

The information in verse 15 shows *why* Paul was glad he had only baptized a few of the Corinthians. Paul did not permit anyone to make this claim, but some were apparently doing just that. The only consolation Paul found in this situation was that only a few could say, “I was baptized into the name of Paul.” Because a limited number of people had been immersed by the apostle, only a very few could use Paul’s name to promote a *Pauline faction*.

Paul’s statement about baptizing only a few at Corinth in verse 14 has been misused to undermine the necessity of baptism. Such reasoning, however, is very peculiar because verse 15 specifically shows why Paul was glad he had only baptized a few of the Corinthians: *lest any man should say that ye were baptized into my name*. The issue was not baptism, but *into whose name they had embraced* when being immersed. Some have used arguments, such as the following, to say that baptism is not required for salvation.

Verse 14: If God requires baptism for salvation, Paul would have been “thankful” for baptizing *many* people. Paul was “thankful” he had only baptized a *few*; therefore, baptism is not required for salvation.

Verse 16: If baptism is required for salvation, Paul would have remembered who he had baptized at Corinth. Since Paul did not remember much about the baptisms at Corinth, baptism cannot be related to or required for salvation.

Verse 17: Paul was sent to preach, not baptize people. If baptism is necessary to salvation Paul *would* have been sent to baptize. Since Paul was sent to preach and not baptize, God requires preaching and not baptism.

All the arguments that supposedly prove that baptism has no part of salvation in verses 14-17 are negated by their immediate context. Paul hinted at the division in this congregation in the first ten verses and then specifically spoke of the factions in verses 11-13. Paul said he was grateful he had not baptized anyone *based upon this division* (if he had not baptized many, many could not claim they were followers of him). Because the Corinthians were dividing into sects and following people other than Jesus, Paul was thankful for baptizing only a small number of people. Certainly any Christian and especially any preacher today shudders at the possibility of someone saying they are a follower of “Joe, Bob, Sam, or Bill,” or someone else because true Christians “preach not themselves but Christ” (2 Cor. 4:5).

We are not given a specific reason why, but the Bible explicitly says Jesus did *not* baptize people (Jn. 4:2). Rather than performing even a single baptism Himself (and very probably creating some type of rift—people could have said Jesus baptized them instead of an apostle or an “ordinary Christian”), John said Jesus left this task to His disciples. What Jesus managed to avoid turned out to be a problem for Paul and his work among the Corinthians.

Additional reasons for rejecting the arguments against baptism in this section of the letter are found in other parts of the New Testament. One of these additional passages is Acts 18:8, a verse that describes the beginning of the Corinthian congregation. Paul came, preached as he described in 1 Cor. 1:17, and “*many of the Corinthians hearing believed, and were baptized.*” At Corinth, those who accepted the message were baptized because baptism is the final step in becoming a Christian; just as water separated the righteous from the unrighteous in the time of Noah, Peter said it has a “like” purpose today (1 Pet. 3:20-21). Paul did not perform many of the baptisms, but that didn’t matter because the one who did the immersing was unimportant (perhaps Paul’s traveling companions did it—Silas and Timothy—or even people from Corinth performed the baptisms). No passage in the New Testament says a Christian must do the baptizing. Apostles were just like any other Christian in that they were “fellow-servants” (1 Cor. 3:5-9).

Earlier in verse 12 Paul said two things had to occur in order for a person to be “*of Paul.*” First, Paul had *to be crucified for sinners* (verse 13). Second, those who were baptized (immersed) had to be *baptized into Paul’s name* (verse 13). Only Jesus was crucified for our sins. When we look to the Bible for information on baptism, we find that people must be baptized into Christ (Gal. 3:27). If Jesus is our only sacrifice for sin (Heb. 9:26; 10:12), then we must be baptized into Him and no other. In the eyes of God it is impossible to be *of Paul, of Peter, of Matthew*, or some other modern religious leader (this even includes the “Pope”).

In order to be *of Christ* (12b), the two conditions Paul described in verse 13 **must be met**: Jesus had to be *crucified for sinners* and we *must be baptized into* (*in*, KJV—this is the preposition *eis*) *the name of Christ* (verse 13). Just as Jesus had to die so we could be part of Him, so we must be baptized to be joined with Him. Baptism in water is just as crucial as Jesus’ death on the cross. Baptism is not, as many claim, a “work of merit.” Jesus called faith a “work” (Jn. 6:29) and baptism may be viewed in this same way. Baptism is an act of obedience; it is not a meritorious work, an act that allows us to boast or something similar.

In the New Testament readers find information about being *baptized into Christ* (Rom. 6:3). Because

we are baptized into Christ for the remission of sins (Acts 2:38) (and this is baptism in water—see this point developed in the commentary on Eph. 4:4-6), the Bible teaches us to wear the name of Christ. In Rom. 16:16 God’s people are described as “*the churches of Christ*.” Peter said the saved are known as “*Christians*” (1 Pet. 4:16), a name that openly honors Christ. If we go by the word *disciples*, we only need to ask who we follow (we are *disciples of Christ*). If we lay claim to the word *servant*, we only need to ask who we serve—Christ! In Acts 4:12 we find that salvation is “in no other name.” If Acts 4:12 is true, why would we ever dare lay hold of a name other than the precious name of Jesus? Why would anyone ever designate themselves by something other than a divine description? This point is developed in more detail in the commentary on verse 13.

Many say our religious “name” (description) doesn’t matter, but such a view is hardly reconcilable with the information in this chapter. It is here that Paul said some names are wrong! Is it not still wrong to claim to be *of someone* if that person is not Christ and Christ alone? If not, when did God change? Is it not odd that Paul paid so much attention to names (descriptions), but most modern churches commonly name a church or its members after a man or an object?! We must be like Paul—reject human names and descriptions and use the ones God has given (Phil. 2:9-10).

If as a Bible student we are still not convinced about the importance of this point, please take a moment to carefully consider what Paul said in 1 Cor. 3:3-4: “*for ye are yet carnal: for whereas there is among you jealousy and strife, are ye not carnal, and do ye not walk after the manner of men? For when one saith, I am of Paul; and another, I am of Apollos; are ye not men?*” Religious division and calling ourselves after a man or something such as an object is classified as *carnal*. Thayer’s definition for *carnal* (p. 569) is that they were not “governed” by “the Spirit of God.” If it was wrong for the Corinthians to behave in this manner, how can it possibly be right today? Jesus must be our sole authority (compare Col. 3:17). Until people accountable for their sins initially identify with Him in baptism, they are not “in Him” and are thus unsaved (2 Tim. 2:10) and have none of the spiritual blessings in Christ (Eph. 1:3). Once we are *in Him*, we must continue this relationship by abiding in His word (Jn. 8:31; Col. 1:23; 1 Tim. 4:16).

In verse 16 Paul referred to the “*household of Stephanas*.” These Christians had become children of God after Paul had baptized them, and this fact has also been misapplied. Proponents of infant baptism have said this statement proves infant baptism is a Biblical practice (i.e. God’s will). It is argued that infants must have been part of the *household* and the entire household was baptized. If this was done in first century times, it is to be done today.

Verse 16 offers no proof of infants being in this household. We do not know who was in this household; the text is completely silent about infants or underage children being present. Today there are many “households” that have no children or no young children. The word *household* described those who live in a house and the number of people in a household can range from one to many. Small children were sometimes in these homes and sometimes not. Later in this book (1 Cor. 16:15) we find another reference to a “household,” and this reference says the household *devoted themselves to the ministry of the saints*. Should we conclude there were infants in this household and these infants cared for the people of God? If not, we cannot use this same type of reasoning in the first chapter.

At the end of verse 16 is a small but important point about inspiration. Paul was inspired (Jn. 16:13; 1 Cor. 2:13), but he could not remember if he had baptized anyone else at Corinth. This reveals the Holy Spirit did not give inspired writers an infallible memory for every event or item in their life. The Spirit did bring to mind all the things that Christ taught (Jn. 14:26), and He did keep the writers free from error when the Scriptures were written. However, the Holy Spirit, when it was appropriate, did allow for memory lapses if events were unimportant or irrelevant to matters being discussed. Being inspired did not mean the writers were also omniscient (all-knowing or all-remembering).

Those who argue that Paul’s inability to remember who he had baptized (i.e. he had forgotten) makes baptism unnecessary might test their argument in this way: A husband fails to recall his anniversary. Is the anniversary unimportant? If we forget to take medicine does that mean the prescription is unimportant? When people must resort to Paul’s forgetfulness to claim that baptism is not required for salvation, they unknowingly undermine their belief. For the Corinthians who were somehow following Paul, the comment about him not remembering who he had baptized must have been a terrible blow.

Those who have become convinced that baptism is wholly unrelated to salvation have also appealed to verse 17. While this verse has been dealt with above, other passages in the Bible may also be used to know what Paul meant. Jesus specifically connected the preaching of the gospel in the Great Commission with baptism (Mt. 28:18-20; Mk. 16:15-16). Did Paul have and did he preach a gospel different from the one given by Jesus in the Great Commission (Gal. 1:8-9)? Certainly conversion example after conversion example in the book of Acts includes baptism (see the chart located in the commentary on Rom. 10:9-11). Luke even documented how people were baptized at inconvenient times (Acts 16:30-33).

Since verse 17 does not deny the necessity of baptism, what do the words mean and why did Paul express the thought as he did? Concerning the first question, the words tell us that no particular person must do the baptizing. Those in the first century did not need an apostle or “special church officer” to baptize them. This fact is further substantiated by the information in Acts 6:1-2. There was a good work that needed to be done (widows needed to be fed), but the apostles let others do it. Paul may have baptized some of the first converts, but once the church was established, he turned this task over to others. As noted in the preceding comments, Jesus did a similar thing (Jn. 4:1-2). From Acts 10:47-48 we may infer that even Peter may have been hesitant to baptize people. In contrast to this Biblical pattern, a common denominational practice is using a “church official” or another “authorized designee” who must do the baptizing so it is “official.” In churches built by men this may be the way things are done, but it is not the right way in the church built by Christ.

Regarding the second question (why is the thought expressed as it is), the answer is found in a grammatical tool known as *relative negation*. Relative negation allows writers to stress one truth above another. A “lesser” truth is compared to a “greater” truth and the *lesser truth* is denied. This denial does not harm the greater truth or mean the lesser truth is false. Rather, the lesser truth is so well established that everyone acknowledges it is true. Because all know it is true, denying it allows the emphasis to be put upon the greater point. This is best illustrated by some examples. Patrick Henry, a well known figure in the American revolution, used relative negation. He said, “I am *not* a Virginian *but* an American.” Is this statement true or false? Was Patrick Henry *not* a Virginian? He was from Virginia and everyone knew it. He denied this lesser truth everyone knew so he could affirm something greater (He was an American). Paul did this same thing to stress his preaching the gospel. He took a widely accepted truth (baptism has a part in the salvation process) and denied that he was sent to baptize so he could preach the gospel. Some may want to know if there are other examples of relative negation in the Bible. There are, and here are a few examples:

- Mt. 18:22 –Jesus said forgiving a brother *seven times* is not God’s will. Is it really wrong to forgive someone seven times? Jesus took a truth all would come to accept when Christianity was instituted (forgiving someone seven times is good), and then denied it so a greater truth (forgive someone unlimited times) could be affirmed.
- Mt. 6:34 –The instruction to *take no thought* cannot be literal because of Lk. 14:28. Jesus denied this readily accepted truth in our day to day lives (we are to make provisions for life) so He could affirm a greater spiritual truth (we are to make provisions for the soul).
- 1 Jn. 3:18 –This passage is self-explanatory and it again shows that lesser but widely accepted truths are sometimes denied so greater truths can be affirmed.
- Another passage illustrating relative negation is Jn. 4:21-23 (compare this with Acts 2:42 to show that worship *did* occur in Jerusalem). Jesus’ comments about the location of worship did not prohibit worship in Jerusalem. Rather, the Lord denied an accepted truth (worship in Jerusalem) to show something greater (God may be worshipped in any location).
- Other verses that use relative negation are Lk. 14:12-13; 1 Cor. 4:20; 1 Pet. 3:3-4; Mt. 10:28.

As previously stated, Paul used relative negation in verse 17 to deny one truth (he was not sent to

baptize—something people knew to be true) and affirm a greater truth (he came to preach the gospel). Preaching the gospel is the *greater truth* for this reason: if people do not hear the truth, what purpose will baptism serve? Who will be baptized if preaching is not done (Rom. 10:14-15)? An exact parallel would be this: Paul was *not sent to mow the grass* but to *plant the grass*. Does this statement mean mowing grass is unnecessary? Both items are crucial, but the first is denied so the second can be emphasized.

If readers still struggle with relative negation perhaps another illustration from the life and teachings of Jesus (Mt. 9:13) will be useful. Matthew recorded how the Lord said, “*I am not come to call the righteous* (not the *self righteous* but people who were really trying to do what was right, BP), *but sinners to repentance*.” Jesus’ primary focus was finding the “sick” (people who wanted and were looking for spiritual help, Mt. 15:24). This parallels the information in 1 Cor. 1:17: “*For Christ sent me not to baptize, but to preach the gospel*.” If verse 17 means baptism is not required, Jesus was with people who *did not need Him because they were righteous without Him!* Still another wonderful example of relative negation from the Lord’s life is Jn. 6:27: Jesus said *we are not supposed to work for food that perishes* (i.e. the food we need to survive). Is this literally true? The rest of the verse (the greater truth) speaks of seeking out *spiritual food*. Jesus denied a lesser truth (we need to work for food—this is a critical truth just as baptism is a critical truth) so the Lord could emphasize another point.

Many act as if somewhere in verses 14-17 Paul said baptism has no part in the salvation process; this statement is never made. Neither is it implied. We also do not find Paul saying he was glad “only a few at Corinth had been baptized.” His appreciation was only related to *his* not doing much of the baptizing.

At the end of verse 17 Paul said his mission was to preach the gospel and avoid involvement with “*the wisdom of words*.” *Wisdom (sophia)* occurs more often in this book than any other in the New Testament. It is found throughout the first three chapters and then finally used in 1 Cor. 12:8. This appears to be connected with the wisdom teachers who were popular in the area of Corinth. Barclay (New Testament Words, p. 264) suggests it was the “wisdom of words which in the end do nothing but obscure the Cross.” It seems the Corinthians were treating the gospel as some type of philosophy. This helped create factions and even affected the contents of the gospel (later the Corinthians were told to “*hold fast*” the gospel they had received, 1 Cor. 15:2). Paul knew this wrong behavior had to be stopped. Christianity is not a philosophy; it is a “*gospel*” (good news) that is preached (verse 17). This system from God is a body of facts to be believed, commands to be obeyed, and promises to be received. It is a system that reveals salvation through Jesus Christ. The Expositor’s Greek Testament (2:766) offers this fine comment: “To dress out the story of Calvary in specious rhetoric, or wrap it up in fine-spun theorems, would have been to ‘empty (*Κενωθη*) the cross of Christ.’” How does this compare to the plays and skits being used in modern churches? *Cross of Christ* can be compared to Gal. 6:12, 14 and Phil. 3:18. Here it should be understood as a synonym for the *gospel*. It describes all that Jesus did. In the next verse Paul speaks of the “*word of the cross*” (ASV) or “*preaching of the cross*” (KJV).

At the very end of verse 17 Paul spoke of Christ’s cross being “*made void*” (the KJV says “*none effect*”). This is from a single term (*kenoo*) and it “shows how ‘empty’ of its power the Cross would be if the effectiveness of its message depended upon man’s wisdom and persuasive speech” (CBL, GED, 3:326). This should remind us of Acts 4:13: “*Now when they beheld the boldness of Peter and John, and had perceived that they were unlearned and ignorant men, they marvelled; and they took knowledge of them, that they had been with Jesus.*”

When people think the gospel is a “success” because of great speeches, special programs, drama presentations or something similar, the cross is *of none effect*. Jesus once said He would “draw all men unto Himself.” Then Jesus specified how this would be done: by (through) the cross (Jn. 12:32). We present this simple message, in the same type of way Paul and others presented it, for God has chosen to “save the world through the foolishness of preaching” (verse 21 paraphrased). Anything less than this puts the gospel in second place. Where God is concerned, *second place* for the gospel is *last place*. Paul preached the content (the gospel) and presented it in the right way (no worldly wisdom). God requires teachers to teach in a *way* that is right (not all methods of teaching are authorized) and we must teach *what* is right. *Kenoo* (“none effect”) “serves as a transition to Paul’s discussion of wisdom and foolishness in 1:18-2:16” (Exegetical Dictionary of the New Testament, 2:282). For more information on this point,

see the commentary below on 1 Cor. 1:20-21.

1:18: *For the word of the cross is to them that perish foolishness; but unto us who are saved it is the power of God.*

The ASV offers an easier understanding of this verse than the KJV. Paul spoke of the “word” (*logos*) “of the cross.” In the KJV the text says *the preaching of the cross*. The *word of the cross* is a contrast to the “wisdom of words” in verse 17. The *word of the cross* (the facts of Christianity) is God’s message of salvation to the world. It is an explanation of what Christianity is all about as well as an encouragement to obey this message. “It is both the crowning point of a life of self-renunciation and also the ordained instrument of salvation” (Rienecker and Rogers, p. 387). This is the message everyone needs to hear, but Paul knew not everyone is willing to listen (18b).

Some view the *word of the cross* (salvation from sin) as “foolishness” (*moria*). This word described people who were “scorned, who get no attention, rather than dangerous madmen who must be combated” (Spicq, 2:540). Spicq also showed (same page) how this word is used in various forms in 1 Cor. 1:18-27: “‘The language of the cross is nonsense (*moria*) for those who are en route to perdition...Has God not smitten the wisdom of the world with nonsense (*emoranen*)?...It pleased God, through the nonsense (*dia tes morias*) of preaching to save those who believe...a crucified Christ, nonsense (*moria*) to the Gentiles, but the power of God and the wisdom of God....God’s nonsense (*to moron*) is wiser than men....’ Is there anything more absurd for a reasonable person to hear than a preacher’s declaration that a Jew who was poor, condemned to death by the highest political and religious authorities of his nation, was crucified like a slave? He is risen! This is the Son of God, and he has saved the world! The proclamation of this ignominy is not folly—it is nonsense.”

Some think the message of Christianity is absurd. Why would a supremely wise God send someone from heaven to die as a state-executed criminal for sin—a problem we cannot see? Bengel, although his work is from the 1700’s, made a point that is still true today: “Ignorance of the mystery of the cross is the foundation, for example, of the whole Koran.” The Muslim does not understand Christianity as the Bible describes it.

Since the start of the church (an event described in Acts 2), many have refused to accept Christianity (for additional information about this rejection see the following verses). Those who reject God’s message will “perish” (*apollumi*, a word describing eternal destruction and ruin). The Exegetical Dictionary of the New Testament (1:136) defined this word as “being lost before God.” This word is a verb and it is in the *present* tense. By using the present tense Paul showed the “*perishing*” is *not* limited to the future. If people reject Christianity their *perishing* begins in this life. The present tense is also used when Paul described salvation. It is as if all accountable people are walking on a spiritual path; one road leads to eternal life and the other to eternal ruin. Each day of our life we get closer and closer to the final goal. Until we draw our final breath, free-will allows us to change courses—either leave the road of salvation or leave the path of destruction.

Only two classes of people are described in verse 18: those who are *saved* and those who *perish*. All people fall into one classification or the other; there is no “middle ground” or “third place to go.” This same type of choice was given to the Hebrews (Josh. 24:15) and Jesus repeated it in Mt. 12:30. We can have only one master (Mt. 6:24); if that is not God, it is Satan and eternal ruin. Our spiritual condition determines how we view the cross of Christ.

Some have asked how *perishing* can begin to occur in this life. If we look at those who do not believe in and practice Christianity, we can answer this question with illustration upon illustration. Christianity teaches things like forgiveness, even when that may not be something we feel like doing. With the unsaved, a person often feels no divine obligation to forgive, so they hold on to the wrong and then a type of “chain-sin” begins to occur (anger, bitterness, hate, gossip, etc). The end result is that the person who suffered the wrong actually suffers more than the one who created the problem in the first place. When Christ and the gospel are rejected, lives are frequently ruined, destroyed, or not as full and complete as they could be. Christianity makes life better, fuller, and much more enjoyable. By simply living the

Christian life, many have avoided significant problems faced by the unsaved in the realms of dating, marriage, raising children, poor career choices, etc. It is also the only way to avoid eternal punishment.

At the end of verse 18 Paul referred to the “*saved*” (*sozo*), and he again used the present tense. This tense tells us salvation is a process. According to Rom. 8:24, salvation may be viewed as a *past* event. In the present passage (1 Cor. 1:18), the tense of salvation is *present*. In Ephesians 2:5, salvation is described by the *perfect* tense (this tense tells Christians they can and should have confidence about their salvation). Salvation is also spoken of as a *future* event (Rom. 10:9). In the Bible salvation is pictured as something past, experienced in the present, and reserved for the future. When someone refers to salvation with only one tense, they only tell part of the story.

In order to be saved, there must be “*power*” (*dunamis*). Paul identified this power in Rom. 1:16 as the gospel. When writing to the Ephesians (6:17), Paul said the Spirit’s sword (an image of power) is “*the word of God*.” Whoever wrote the Hebrew letter (Heb. 4:12) said this sword is “*living and active*” as well as sharper than any sword known to man. Peter said the gospel purifies us when we obey it (1 Pet. 1:22-23). In view of all these verses, our power is found in the word of God (Mt. 4:4), not the “*wise words of the world*” (verses 19-21). Jesus once compared the gospel to a “*seed*” (Lk. 8:11) and said it “*sanctifies*” us (Jn. 17:17) if we “*obey it*” (Rom. 6:17-18). We are “*begotten*” by God’s word (1 Pet. 1:23) and it “*saves our soul*” (Jas. 1:18). This word is the “*gospel of our salvation*” (Eph. 1:13). When it comes to God’s word, we are to be “*swift to hear*” (Jas. 1:19). God’s power of the gospel changes sinners to saints (1 Cor. 6:9-11), and blasphemers into preachers (1 Tim. 1:12-15).

Although *wise words* (philosophies and philosophers) existed in the first century and abounded just as they do now, this type of knowledge is not the way to God. The only power to save mankind is the gospel. The gospel is *the word of the cross* (18a) and we must say true wisdom, learning and understanding (i.e. all spiritual knowledge) can be found in only one place: *in Christ*. This specific point is made in Col. 2:3 (“*in whom are all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge hidden*”). If all true spiritual knowledge is found in the Lord, it cannot be found anywhere else.

1:19: *For it is written, I will destroy the wisdom of the wise, And the discernment of the discerning will I bring to nought.*

In the previous two verses Paul argued that salvation is based upon God’s power, not the wise words of philosophers. Here he appealed to the Old Testament to prove his point (“*For it is written*”). If an inspired apostle turned to the Scriptures to prove his point, how can we do anything less? Paul went back to the time when Israel had formed an alliance with Egypt (Isa. 29:14). See, too, what is said in Isa. 30:1-11. Israel hoped this association would protect her from invasion by Assyria. As seen in Isa. 30, God said Israel’s alliance would fail. One major reason for the failure was Israel’s basing their plan on *the wisdom of the world* instead of relying upon God. King Sennacherib of Assyria did invade Israel and Judah was reduced to a state of poverty and helplessness. Now, thousands of years later, worldly wisdom still leads to failure. Additional information about the word *wisdom* (*sophos*) is found in the commentary on verse 20.

The people of Israel eventually realized they had turned to the wrong source for help. The quotation in verse 19 shows that God was displeased with Israel’s union with Egypt; a treaty with another nation was not the right way for Israel to seek protection. In fact, all the earthly alliances made between Judah (Southern Israel) and foreign nations were nothing but trouble. King Hezekiah attempted to make peace with the nation of Assyria (2 Kgs. 18:14-16) as he thought this arrangement would guarantee safety. It also failed. Instead of keeping Judah safe, the Assyrians attacked the southern section of Israel. If God had not intervened and killed 185,000 of the soldiers, Judah would have been overtaken (2 Kgs. 19:32-36). Trusting in human wisdom and man-made plans has always been a mistake. By appealing to the Old Testament Paul showed that God’s rejection of human wisdom did not begin with the Corinthians. Heaven has always been displeased with man’s attempts to “*find his own way*” (Jer. 10:23). Depending upon self or other forms of human strength (Rev. 3:17; Deut. 8:12-14) instead of looking to God will always be wrong.

In America, it appears many are content to follow the path taken by the Israelites and the Corinthians. Many are still trying to devise human schemes and plans to deal with problems. These plans, often laid very carefully and at great cost, are more often than not solutions and strategies that deliberately exclude God (compare Jas. 4:13-15). Whenever a nation or an individual decides there is a “better plan than the God and His gospel” (or a plan somehow cuts out God and His gospel), it is in serious trouble. A similar thing may be said of religion. Many seek some type of *wisdom* to meet a perceived religious need. Multitudes have sought out helpers from talk-show hosts to monks to fulfill spiritual yearnings. While some of what is in the world has made people feel better or even great, anything besides the gospel of Christ is not the “bread of life” (Jn. 6:48) that leads to the “abundant life” (Jn. 10:10).

In the 1800’s George H. Walser, an atheist, founded a community in Missouri with the name “Liberal.” In the 2000 census Liberal, Missouri, had a population of 779 people. As of this writing there were still street signs reminding visitors of this town’s history. Walser wanted a community that excluded all forms of religion; this town actually shunned religious people. Rather than construct church buildings, taverns and saloons were built. As one might guess, this experiment failed in the most miserable way. Crime and immorality became so rampant religious people were welcomed. Those living in this community eventually realized that if there is not a solid basis for morality, a point is reached where “everything goes” (is tolerated). Sadly, many have not learned this and other historical lessons about the world’s wisdom.

There are some key words in this verse. *Destroy* (*apollumi*) is the same term used in verse 18; here it is defined as “the punishing intervention of God” (Exegetical Dictionary of the New Testament, 1:136). At the end of verse 19 the ASV says *discernment of the discerning* because Paul used the same word (first as noun and then as an adjective). The noun (*sunesis*) is translated “understanding” in the KJV. This is the same term to describe Jesus’ “understanding” when He was twelve and in the temple (Lk. 2:47). Here it means “insight.” The related form of this word is then used in its adjective form (*suetos*) and the KJV renders it “*prudent*.” Here as well as Mt. 11:25; Lk. 10:21; Acts 13:7, it “describes the wise that were not enlightened by the Heavenly Father” (CBL, GED, 6:197). All such people will be “*brought to nought*” (*atheteo*). This may be thought of as both a “repudiation” and a “refusal” (Spicq, 1:39).

1:20-21: *Where is the wise? where is the scribe? where is the disputer of this world? hath not God made foolish the wisdom of the world? 21 For seeing that in the wisdom of God the world through its wisdom knew not God, it was God’s good pleasure through the foolishness of the preaching to save them that believe.*

In order to show how ineffective the worldly *wisdom* (strategy) described in the previous verses is, Paul asked these three questions:

- Where is the “*wise*” (*sophos*)? Paul answered this question in verse 19. *Wise* described people who were clever and skillful—people who excelled in human wisdom. The word *wise* occurs 19 times in the New Testament, and 10 of these places are found in 1 Cor. 1 and 1 Cor. 3 (1:19, 20, 25, 26, 27; 3:10, 18—twice in this verse, 19, 20). The Beacon Bible Commentary (8:318) defined *wise* as “the proud, self-styled intellectual—the Greek sophist—who could argue any point with apparent sincerity.”
- Where is the “*scribe*” (*grammateus*)? *Scribes* were initially Jewish secretaries who prepared and issued decrees in the name of the king (2 Sam. 8:17; 20:25; 2 Kgs. 12:10; 19:2). Later they became known as experts in Jewish law and they transcribed, expounded and even administered the Old Testament law. Kittel (abridged edition, p. 127) refers to them as “the rabbinic scholar or theologian.” Today we might refer to them as “Bible scholars.” Jesus frequently called these men (as well as the Pharisees) *hypocrites* (Mt. 23:14, 15, 23, 25, 27, 29). “To become an official member of a scribal guild involved a long and exhaustive training period. Normally it began around age 15 when the student began learning the expositions of the Law that were later collected in the Talmud. The preparation continued for around 12 years, but the right and authority to teach others (to be a rabbi) were acquired only after one became 40 years old” (CBL, GED, 1:644). *Wise* may have also described a stubborn interpreter of the Jewish law or a Greek who was highly educated.
- Where are the “*disputers*” (*suzetetes*)? *Disputers* is only found here in the New Testament. It described those who studied questions so they could argue. It has been defined as “debater” (Exegetical Dictionary of the New Testament, 3:284), and it included both Jews and Gentiles (compare Acts 9:29; 17:18; 28:29). Today this kind of personality still exists; there are people who like to debate things and challenge ideas, especially in the area of religion. Though this term does not necessarily mean something bad, Paul used it in a negative way. It is broad enough to include Jews and Gentiles.

Paul described the so-called *wise men* of his day and made it clear that the most brilliant men in the world are no match for God. When men come before God, all are humbled like Job was (Job 38:3; 42:1-3, 6). No one can answer God’s questions or match His wisdom.

The *wisdom of the world* is so shallow and disappointing God has “*made foolish the wisdom of the world.*” *Foolish* (*moraino*) is the same term used in Mt. 5:13; there it describes salt that has “lost its flavor.” See, too, how Paul used this word in Rom. 1:22. Here it means man’s salvation is completely unrelated to wisdom from the world. What the world offers is completely different from what God offers. The Expositor’s Greek Testament (2:768) wisely observed, “The world and God are at issue; each counts the other’s wisdom folly.”

The ASV and KJV use the word *world* twice in verse 20 and this translation fails to indicate a distinction in the Greek text. When Paul spoke of the “disputer of this *world*” (20a) he used a word meaning “*age*” (a point in time). The word translated “*world*” at the beginning of verse 20 (*aion*) reveals that philosophies in the world last for an *age* (period of time). Stated another way, philosophies are like fads. They last for a while and along comes something else that people embrace. There are always new trends and ideas. America has certainly seen many different “ages” (times) as new ideas and beliefs emerge and overpower beliefs and ideals from the past. Some of the *new ways* include an age of atheism, materialism, mental health, modernism, post-modernism, etc. The first word translated *world* leaves no doubt that the human philosophies so prevalent in the world are subject to change. They do not last now just as they have not lasted in the past.

The second word translated *world* in verse 20 (*kosmos*) describes the *present order of things*. Think of this second term as describing a person’s culture. Included in this second word would be all that is involved in a society’s beliefs, trends, and ideas. Paul used *kosmos* (“world”) to describe the beliefs

existing in his day, and the beliefs to which the Corinthians were exposed.

In addition to the preceding comments on the *wisdom* in the world (20b), Barclay (New Testament Words, p. 264) suggests Paul had in mind “the kind of wisdom which knows well how to get on in this world and how to amass the treasures of this world, but has no knowledge of things that matter.” This same idea is found in verse 26; 2:6; 3:18.

The 21st verse provides additional information about man’s wisdom and philosophies. Human wisdom does not cause people to “*know God*.” The Greek’s *wisdom* failed to tell people about God, though there were many great thinkers and philosophers. Most who are familiar with ancient history instantly recognize names like Herodotus, Socrates, Aristotle, Plato, and Hippocrates. Grecian culture excelled in human wisdom. However, when Paul went to Athens, the Grecian *city of learning*, he found that these ancient “wise men” knew absolutely nothing about the true God (Acts 17:16-34). This was why Paul could here affirm that human wisdom cannot lead people to God. God has given the world enough proof to believe that He exists (Rom. 1:9f). The creation shows there is a Creator (Rom. 1:20), but creation does not reveal the degree of God’s power, who or what the Divine Power is, whether the Creator truly loves man, etc. Human wisdom is not able to answer some of life’s most important questions. One of the questions human wisdom cannot answer is, “Why are we here?” Only the Bible offers satisfactory answers to man’s most probing questions.

Man has many important questions, and Paul said these questions are answered through “*preaching*” (verse 21). Paul also said preaching is “*foolishness*” (*moria*). This word describes absurdity, extreme folly, or stupidity and it is explained more fully in the commentary on verse 18. The first three chapters in this book (1 Cor. 1:18, 21, 23; 2:14; 3:19) are the only places where this term occurs in the New Testament. An illustration of what Paul meant is found in the life of Noah. The world thought Noah was a foolish man. Some surely believed he was stupid and involved in an absurd project. Only after it was too late (Gen. 7:23) did people realize the preaching had been true. Paul often experienced a similar rejection when he preached the gospel. Even in our day and time preaching is sometimes looked upon as a silly and outdated activity—something to be “replaced.” Even some “religious people” have this view of preaching. Though many have mocked and continue to ridicule preaching, Paul said preaching *pleases God*. God has chosen preaching to be the vehicle He uses to save people from sin. We must do what God has asked because not pleasing Him has serious and very negative consequences (1 Cor. 10:5).

It should be noted that preaching, in and of itself, does not please God. Many things could be “preached” so the emphasis is not on public speaking. Neither is the emphasis on spectacular oral presentations. The emphasis is on the message. The accurate proclamation of the gospel message, not the one proclaiming it, is what matters. When we present the “faith once delivered to the saints” (Jude 3), the “pattern of sound words” (2 Tim. 1:13, ASV), which is “sound doctrine” (1 Tim. 1:10), God will be pleased. God is pleased with the truth and only truth because it alone has the power to free people (Jn. 8:32). Since God’s plan is to save the world through the preaching of the gospel, any group or individual that minimizes or alters this plan is not associated with God. Today it is tragic to find many in the religious world choosing drama and entertainment over preaching. Others have exchanged preaching for worldly pep talks, political speeches and discussion groups. All these things are contrary to what Paul wrote and, therefore, wrong. Jesus said all who come to God must be taught (Jn. 6:44-45) and preaching is part of the teaching process.

Preaching helps create “*belief*” (21b). For preaching to work in the way God intended, certain things are necessary. Preachers must speak forth the word of God with courage (2 Tim. 1:7). If preachers are to succeed, they are to be “men of God” (1 Tim. 6:11), who like Noah, preach “righteousness” (2 Pet. 2:5). They are good examples to the young and old (1 Tim. 4:12). A true gospel preacher realizes the pulpit is no place to “grind an axe,” render “good advice,” or deliver “personal opinions.” It is a place to “preach the word” when people want to hear it and when they do not (2 Tim. 4:2).

At the end of verse 21 Paul added another detail (God will not save everyone). This fact tells us the doctrine of universalism (all will be saved) is false. Paul’s statement also suggests that those who are *ignorant* of the gospel will be lost (a fact clearly stated in 2 Thess. 1:7-9).

John MacArthur (*Qualities of an Excellent Servant*, pp. 31-32) recounted a story from his life that

illustrates modern *wisdom*. “When I was considering completing a doctoral degree in theology, the representative of the graduate program at the college looked over my transcripts and concluded I had too much Bible and theology in my undergraduate work. So he gave me a list of two hundred books of preparatory reading before I could be admitted to the program. I checked out the list with someone who knew the various titles and learned that none of them contained anything but liberal theology and humanistic philosophy—they were full of profane old wives’ fables passed off as scholarship! The college also required me to take a course called ‘Jesus and Cinema.’ That involved watching contemporary movies and evaluating them on whether they were antagonistic to or supportive of the Jesus ethic. The divine Jesus had been reduced to an ethic! I met with the representative again and said, ‘I just want to let you know that I have spent all my life to this point learning the truth, and I can’t see any value in spending the next couple of years learning error.’”

Back in the 1800’s (1834-1892), there was a preacher named Charles Spurgeon. For most of the second half of the nineteenth century, he was England’s most well-known preacher. Spurgeon wrote many things, including an article on “feeding the sheep or amusing the goats.” He affirmed that efforts to “amuse people” failed to meet the “desired end” (the right goal). Spurgeon asked some very thoughtful questions in this piece, including these: Amusing people is never described as a function of the church. If this were something God wanted done, why did not the Lord speak of it? Jesus said to go and “preach the gospel to every person” (Mk. 16:15), but He gave no instructions about entertaining people. God gave the church various office and functions (see Eph. 4:11), and the purpose of them is “perfecting the body of Christ” and “edifying the body of Christ” (Eph. 4:12). Since entertainers are not mentioned, under what category do they fall and what purpose do they serve since the body is “perfected” without them? Spurgeon further pointed out that Christians are to be “salt” and not “candy” (Mt. 5:13). Jesus could have surely increased the attendance at many of the times He spoke by “entertaining” or “putting on a show,” but He did not (Jn. 6:66-67; Mt. 16:1-4). Showmanship is for the world, not the church.

In making this point we do want to remember that the Bible presents for us several different approaches to “preaching” or “teaching” the word of God. Sometimes we teach simply by example (Phil. 1:27; Acts 16:25). When we think about how we will present the word of God, there are various factors we must consider. Part of the teaching process will be governed by age. Young children may be taught using techniques that would be unwise or wholly unsuitable for adults. Skits, crafts, games, feeling “skin” to mimic the story of Jacob and Esau (Gen. 27:23) are not usually the best ways to teach adults. Different techniques will also be required for children who are disabled or mentally handicapped. How the gospel is taught may also have some bearing on who the teacher is (some teachers do well with visual instruction while others best communicate verbally or by written material).

One of the things that helps us distinguish teaching the gospel from entertaining is *intent*. What is the result we are trying to achieve, and what is the result we receive after the instruction has been given? Has the instruction pointed people to Christ or our own cleverness? I was once told about a preacher who presented a sermon and held up a frying pan during his entire lesson. At least one man remembered the frying pan in the hand for years to come, but he did not remember the spiritual point that was made. Jesus gave many memorable illustrations, but what He said was always designed to lead to a conclusion. Illustrations should only illustrate; teaching should have as its core goals helping people understand the word and will of God and then apply and obey it.

Our teaching methods may also vary due to the place and circumstances. How we teach in an outside environment may be different than teaching inside a structure. Our methods may also vary due to culture; some methods work great in some cultures but are dismal failures in others. Corporate worship is designed to be a place where things are orderly (1 Cor. 14:33). Teaching in classrooms should not be chaotic and without discipline, but this is a less structured environment than a worship assembly where order and good decorum are required (1 Cor. 14:26-31).

With entertainment, those in attendance are often little more than spectators. When it comes to spiritual life, there is to be a “teacher/student” arrangement. As with the first Christians, we are to assemble on a regular basis to learn about God’s “doctrine” (Acts 2:42). We are to receive instruction that helps us grow in Christian graces (2 Pet. 1:5-8). Too many groups and too many preachers want to

entertain instead of communicate the gospel that saves man from sin. This is wrong. We may not always teach in the ways that others do (see the introductory commentary on Rom. 14), but we can offer this simple standard of judgment. In 2 Tim. 4:1 a preacher and teacher was told to “preach the word.” Christians can ask if this is being done in the place where they worship. Additionally, Paul said Timothy was to do this “in season and out of season” (when people wanted to hear it and when they did not want to hear it). This preaching included *reproving, rebuking and exhorting*. Whatever format in which we have the gospel presented today, it must meet this criteria. Included in the preaching should be a regular presentation about “repentance and remission of sins” (Lk. 24:47).

1:22-25: *Seeing that Jews ask for signs, and Greeks seek after wisdom: 23 but we preach Christ crucified, unto Jews a stumblingblock, and unto Gentiles foolishness; 24 but unto them that 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.*

God provided the Jews with different miracles from the time of Moses until the time of Jesus and these miracles were of great interest to the Hebrew people. The continued exposure to miracles apparently left the Jewish people with a desire to see more signs. If someone claimed to be of or from God, Jews wanted the claim to be verified by a miracle. When they encountered Jesus, the Jews wanted a *special* type of sign (Matt. 16:1) as well as general signs (Jn. 2:18; Mt. 12:38). Verse 22 suggests the apostles faced this same problem when they began to preach the gospel. *Signs (semeion)* is a term often joined with three other words in the New Testament (*wonder, work, and miracle*). In Classical Greek *semeion (sign)* described things like a signal, boundary, or limit. It was even used to describe birthmarks.

Signs occurs about 75 times in the New Testament, and one of these places is Mk. 16:20. Paul used this word in 2 Thess. 3:17 (“*token*”) to prove the Thessalonian letter was from him. At the end of John’s gospel this term is used to reassure Christians about what they believe (Jn. 20:30). At different times Jesus was asked for the kind of proof described by this word (Mt. 12:38; 16:1). Nicedomus used this word when drawing a conclusion about Jesus (Jn. 3:2). There were cases where this form of proof, though offered in abundance, did not convince those who saw it (Jn. 12:37 and compare this verse to Jn. 11:46-48). The word *sign* describes miracles which “are co-ordinated with the preaching—they are ‘accompanying signs’, by which Christ confirms the word of the witnesses (Acts 14:3; cf. Mk. 16:20)” (Brown, 2:632). Jividen (*Miracles From God or Man?*, p. 3) rightly observed how this term “points to something beyond itself. A street sign is not the street, but points beyond itself to the street it identifies. The miraculous events of the New Testament...are to be seen as pointing to Jesus, His apostles and others to show that God approved of the man and his message. The word ‘sign’ focuses on the purpose of the miraculous event.” Additional information about this term is found in the commentary on Acts 2:22.

The Lord did more than perform signs; He performed *many* signs (Mt. 15:30-31). Even though Jesus gave the Jews more than sufficient proof, they wanted a sign of their choosing—a *sign from heaven* (Mt. 16:1). This meant they wanted a sign *in the heavens* (something visible in the sky). In the past heavenly signs had been offered. Joshua made the sun and the moon stand still and Elijah brought down fire from heaven. Samuel brought forth thunder that scared the Philistines (1 Sam. 7:9-10). The Jews apparently believed the “real Messiah” would be willing to perform a sign that would be visible in the heavens.

Because Paul used the present tense (“*ask*”), he affirmed that the Jews *continually* asked for signs. This shows the miracles of Jesus and the apostles (plus the power of the gospel) were not enough for the Hebrew people. The Jews were like many in our day who always want more. Some are never satisfied with God’s gifts. In the ASV the Jewish request is described with the word *ask*; the KJV says “require” and this is a better translation. Thayer (p. 17) said this term (*aiteo*) contains the “idea of *demanding*” and this is “prominent” in the thought.

While the Jews wanted *signs*, the Greeks (non-Jews) did not. Those outside of the Hebrew faith wanted “*wisdom*” (*sophia*), the same word used in verses 17, 19, 20, 21. This seeking (*zeteo*) is also expressed with the present tense (it was an on-going interest and desire). The non-Hebrews paid attention to philosophy. Thus, if Jesus had come and proclaimed a new type of wisdom, the Greeks would have

found His teachings appealing. Instead of coming with a new philosophy, Jesus came with a message that involved a cross and death by crucifixion. This message did not have a lot of appeal to either the Greeks or Hebrews (23b).

The message of the cross did not sit well with many, but Paul and others preached it anyway (verse 23). “Paul argued that finite, sinful men cannot dictate to an infinite, holy God what they want from God before they will believe” (Gromacki, p. 20). Unlike today when many will “preach what the people want” (Paul once called this having “itching ears,” 2 Tim. 4:3), Paul preached the gospel that is God’s power to salvation (Rom. 1:16). “Instead of working miracles to satisfy the Jews, or propounding a philosophy to entertain the Greeks, ‘we on the other hand, proclaim a crucified Christ’” (Expositor’s Greek Testament, 2:770). This was the only message preached because Jesus is the “propitiation” for the sins of mankind (1 Jn. 2:2).

When Paul came to Corinth he “first preached the death of Christ” (1 Cor. 15:3). Paul again made reference to Jesus’ death here in verse 23, and the tense of *crucified* is perfect (Jesus’ death happened in the past, but the results and benefits continue to the present time). This suggests the *character* of Jesus is a crucified person. The effects of His death continue (compare Jn. 20:27), and this leaves Christians with a duty to remember His death each Sunday by observing the Lord’s Supper (this is explained more fully in the commentary on verse 9 as well as the commentary on 1 Cor. 11:20b). For information about Jesus being crucified, see section 44 in the Gospels commentary.

When the Jews were presented with the gospel they found it to be a “*stumbling block*” (*skandalon*, “an obstacle in coming to faith and a cause of going astray in it”—CBL, GED, 6:60). The Jewish people of Jesus’ day were expecting a political leader, a person who would deliver them from Rome. The idea of a “dead savior” was contrary to their expectations. When they heard the Lord was the answer to their problems, this message was offensive. If the Lord had proclaimed war on Rome and liberation for the Jews, He would have been warmly received. The Jews would have surely rallied to His side had His kingdom been of this world (compare Jn. 6:15).

Lee Strobel (*The Case For Christ*) recited how he interviewed Louis S. Lapidès, a well educated preacher who came from a Jewish family and attended a conservative Jewish synagogue for seven years to prepare for bar mitzvah. In his interview with Strobel he said, “Although we considered those studies to be very important, our family’s faith didn’t affect our everyday life very much. We didn’t stop work on the Sabbath; we didn’t have a kosher home” (pp. 233-234). Strobel asked Lapidès what his parents had taught him about the Messiah and Lapidès replied, “It never came up” (p. 234). Not only was this never discussed in his Jewish home, he did not “remember it being an issue in Hebrew school” (p. 234). Lapidès went on to say (same page) that Jesus’ name was only used “derogatorily” and his “impressions of Jesus came from seeing Catholic churches: there was the cross, the crown of thorns, the pierced side, the blood coming from his head. It didn’t make any sense to me. Why would you worship a man on a cross with nails in his hands and his feet? I never once thought Jesus had any connection to the Jewish people. I just thought he was a god for the Gentiles.” Later in his interview with Strobel (p. 241) Lapidès related how he came to Isa. 53. When he read these words (in view of the fact that someone had told him the coming of Jesus was predicated in the Old Testament), his first reaction was “fraud.” He thought “Christians had rewritten the Old Testament and twisted Isaiah’s words to make it sound as if the prophet had been foreshadowing Jesus.” He asked his stepmother to send him a Jewish Bible to “expose the deception” (p. 241). This was done and the same type of evidence that convinced so many in New Testament times confronted him.

The Greek response to the cross was different; non-Hebrews considered the gospel to be “*foolishness*” (*moros*). The Greeks did not think God was interested in man’s salvation. In their minds any suggestion that God would die for mankind was idle foolishness (Willis, p. 41). Thus, they considered this type of teaching to be outrageous and absurd (Expositor’s Greek Testament, 2:770). Perhaps we can understand the people’s attitude by relating it to capital punishment. What kind of character do we associate with the person who is put to death by lethal injection or sentenced to the electric chair? Do we consider those sentenced to death to be good or evil? What if we’re told that a person who was recently found to be a criminal and then executed was “the savior of the world”? “How could the blood of such a person remove

sin, give righteousness, and guarantee hope beyond the grave? To them, it was absurd” (Gromacki, p. 21). Even the virgin birth would have been ridiculed by many Greeks.

The information in verse 24 was addressed to “*both Jews and Greeks*” (this expression describes all Christians—Greeks were non-Jews). This expression also meant that while many rejected the message of the cross the rejection was not total. At least some have been convinced of the gospel being true and these believers do not view Christianity as *foolishness* or a *stumbling block* (verse 23). Also in this verse is a reference to the “*called*” (*kletos*), a word that has been the basis for many false doctrines. Error has arisen on this point because people have not been shown 2 Thess. 2:13-14. In 2 Thess. 2:14, Paul said people are *called by the gospel*. Unsaved people hear and then “believe” the truth (2 Thess. 2:13b). Notice that brethren in Galatia were being called into something false and this calling was occurring by teaching (information), Gal. 1:6. Paul said he was “called” (Gal. 1:15), but this calling involved his hearing the word of God (Acts 9:6). For additional passages on how the word of God works in the Christian’s life, see the previous commentary on verse 5.

Those who have been brought to the Lord through the gospel know that Jesus is the “*power of God*” (24b). The saved have also come to understand that the gospel is “*God’s wisdom*.” Many Jews considered the Lord’s death to be proof that Jesus was not the Messiah. Here Paul affirmed that the Lord’s death *is* proof of Jesus being the savior. All things were made *through* Jesus (Jn. 1:3), and in Christ are “all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge hidden” (Col. 2:3—in this verse Paul described the spiritual truths now revealed through the gospel). “The saved Jew, who wanted a sign before, can now see the real power of God displayed in Christ’s triumph over sin and death in His death and resurrection. The saved Gentile, who once sought rational arguments, now marvels at God’s sophisticated solution for the problem of evil (cf. Rom. 11:33)” (Gromacki, p. 21).

Verse 25 reminds readers of Isa. 55:8-9. Isaiah said God’s thoughts are not our thoughts and His ways are not our ways. God is far superior to man. He is so far above us that His “*foolishness*” (*moros*) is far “*wiser*” (*sophos*, the same word used in verses 19 and 20) than our best plans and ideas. *Foolishness* describes God’s plan of redemption. He did what many in the world believe to be foolish. We must understand that Paul was not describing “God’s attributes of omnipotence and omniscience” (Gromacki, p. 21). *Foolishness and weakness* are simply synonyms for the death of Jesus and the other events related to the Lord’s life. God is far superior to man no matter how advanced the human race becomes. Because God is far above man, the gospel (which is part of God’s wisdom) is worthy of acceptance and obedience.

In verses 18-25 Paul alleged that the gospel is not a new type of philosophy. This gave him the foundation to prove this assertion in the information that follows. He first did this by describing the type of people at Corinth who had become Christians.

1:26-27: *For behold your calling, brethren, that not many wise after the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble, (are called): 27 but God chose the foolish things of the world, that he might put to shame them that are wise; and God chose the weak things of the world, that he might put to shame the things that are strong;*

According to verse 26, *most* members of the Corinthian congregation were not from the upper class of society (the socially elite). Neither were these Christians philosophers. The Christians at Corinth were from the lower strata of society (common people) who did not hold positions of power and did not have wealth and influence. The Expositor’s Greek Testament (2:771) said the names of the first Christians prove that most of the first converts were either slaves or people who had formerly been slaves. Proof of who the first Christians were also comes from the “inscriptions of the Catacombs” (ibid).

A story is said to have come from a woman of noble upbringing. She used to tell people, “I am saved by an ‘*m*.’” She meant the letter “*m*,” and she was right. In this section of his letter Paul said, “Not *many*.” He did not say “*any*.” Having wealth and nobility makes entering into heaven more difficult (Mk. 10:25), but some who enjoy great material blessings in life will be saved.

There are examples of important people becoming Christians: Acts 17:18, 34 (Dionysius the Areopagite); Acts 13:6-12 (a proconsul, Sergius Paulus—a *man of understanding*); Acts 17:4-12 (devout

Greeks and Greek women of honorable estate); Rom. 16:23 (Erastus the treasurer of the city).

The “*wise after the flesh*” were philosophers (verse 20) and educated men in general; the stress is on the intellect and what men had learned. The word *wise* (*sophos*) occurs in 1 Cor. 1:19, 20, 25, 26, 27; 3:10, 18 (twice), 19, 20; 6:5. In many of these places, and this is true of the present passage, *wise* described people “who utilized human thinking rather than accepting God’s revelation” (CBL, GED, 6:87). For additional information about this term see the commentary on verse 20.

The *mighty* (*dunatos*) “were men of rank and political influence” (Expositor’s Greek Testament, 2:771). Gingrich and Danker (p. 208) say that in this passage *mighty* denotes “powerful, prominent people.” “The converts are for the most part not intellectuals, not in positions of authority, not descendants of the old families of the city” (Spicq, 2:95). The word “*noble*” (*eugenes*) described the wellborn. We might describe this group as the *aristocrats* because *noble* had a “social sense” (Exegetical Dictionary of the New Testament, 2:74). Many of the *noble* would have received nice inheritances.

The three descriptions given by Paul show that the rich, powerful, intellectual, politically connected, free men instead of slaves, etc., had as much right to the gospel as anyone else. Although they had free and full access, they were not interested. Verse 27 states *why* these people had little interest in the gospel. Paul referred to Christianity as a “*foolish thing*” (verse 27). This “*foolishness*” (*moros*, the same word used in verse 25) was in the eyes of the world. God took what the world had little interest in and made it the tool to save mankind. The Cross appears foolish to man because there is nothing “powerful” or “intelligent” about it according to the world’s standards. We must obey the message of the cross, but we cannot save ourselves by works of merit—something many people try to do, but this approach will fail. Only Christ’s blood can justify us (Rom. 5:9).

The fact that most will reject God’s plan for salvation has caused some to ask why God would use a method that most of the world rejects. This question is answered in verse 27. God has a desire to “*shame* (disgrace) *the wise*.” In the KJV this word is translated “*confound*.” *Shame* (*kataischuno*) is used in a positive way in Rom. 9:33 and Rom. 10:11. Here *shame* conveys the right idea and the shame is directed to those who think they are superior to others; people such as this will be disgraced “so that no one may boast before him” (Exegetical Dictionary of the New Testament, 2:258). Paul specifically said “*God chose*” a method that is contrary to how the world thinks and operates. This selection is directly associated with the expression “*in Christ*” in verse 30.

If God’s plan involves and requires things “wise men” consider useless and senseless, will the so-called “*wise men*” not be shamed on the day of judgment? God created a plan that can be understood by all but will be rejected by those with hard hearts (Lk. 10:21). God’s unique approach is interesting from another perspective, too. *Strong men* are often unconcerned about those who are weak. The weak are often ignored and even despised. In the spiritual realm God uses the “*weak things of the world*” to *put to shame* the things that are “*strong*” (27b). This term (*ischuros*) is also used in verse 25. Jesus used this same term to describe the “strong” man’s house (Mt. 12:29) and the “boisterous” wind (Mt. 14:30, KJV). It is also used to describe a “mighty” famine (Lk. 15:14) and a “strong” angel (Rev. 5:2). Whatever person, nation, system, object, etc. that seems to be very powerful to us will never be any match for God.

Adam Clarke proposed that the word *foolish* (verse 27) refers to illiterate men (people like the apostles) who confounded the greatest thinkers in the first century. The *weak* (verse 28) would be those without secular power and authority. The word *base* may have described what was deplorable in the eyes of the Jews.

1:28-31: *and the base things of the world, and the things that are despised, did God choose, (yea) and the things that are not, that he might bring to nought the things that are: 29 that no flesh should glory before God. 30 But of him are ye in Christ Jesus, who was made unto us wisdom from God, and righteousness and sanctification, and redemption: 31 that, according as it is written, He that glorieth, let him glory in the Lord.*

Verse 28 has the words “*base things*” (*agenes*). This word is only used here in the New Testament and it literally meant “*not of noble birth*.” It could be likened to someone who was a lowly social outcast,

perhaps someone who had no family (CBL, GED, 1:44). The description in verse 28 stands in contrast to the nobility mentioned in verse 26. God will use the “non-noble” (the unimportant) to bring down the “noble” (important) things and people of the world. God will use what the world despises and rejects to accomplish His purpose. Also, the “*things which are not*” (things that are worthless or perhaps just “ordinary” in the eyes of the world) will be used to bring “*to nought*” the “*things which are*” (the people and objects which are regarded as important). The word *nought* (*katargeo*) means God will “destroy” all that needs to be destroyed (Exegetical Dictionary of the New Testament, 2:267). Paul also spoke of what is *despised* (*exoutheneo*). For additional information about this term see the commentary on 1 Cor. 6:4.

Willmington (p. 173) offered examples of things that have been “*foolish, weak, and base*” (these terms are in verses 27-28) A bleeding lamb (Ex. 12) appeared to be *foolish*. The same was true for a rock that was hit (Ex. 17) and a brass snake on a pole (Num. 21). Things that appeared *weak* included the rod taken to Pharaoh (Ex. 4), a sling used to attack a giant (1 Sam. 17), and a jawbone to defeat some Philistines (Judg. 15). Among the *base* things in Scripture we find a harlot’s son who became a mighty judge (Judg. 11) and an immoral woman who became a great soul winner for Jesus (Jn. 4). Ellisen (Parables in the Eye of the Storm, p. 99) suggested the parable of the mustard seed (Mt. 13:31-32) is another demonstration of how God acts differently from the world. Ellisen also observed (same page) how God likes to start small to build large. He often uses a “rejected Joseph or Moses to restore His people and build a nation; a despised youngster like David to slay the giant and head the kingdom; a gory cross to build a golden crown; or a group of unlettered, fumbling disciples to teach the nations.”

Based upon this material there will be many on the Day of Judgment who will be surprised. The strong will find that their strength was actually their undoing, and the weak will learn that their *weakness* was actually the strength that brought them to salvation (2 Cor. 12:10b).

God has used things despised by the world because He does not want “*flesh*” (people) to “*boast*” (glory), verse 29. If God uses the simple to destroy the complex, all forms of boasting and pride will be destroyed. God’s system is so contrary to the ways and wisdom of this world that when the Day of Judgment comes, no one will be able to say, “I was saved because of my education. My wealth saved me. My mental abilities got me in. My health and physical abilities allowed me to avoid hell” (Hodge, p. 26).

God’s plan of salvation has completely leveled the playing field. In almost every area of life people have some kind of advantage. In the system called Christianity, all so-called *advantages* disappear. This is conclusive proof that God views the prominent people of society in the same way as factory workers and housewives. Men may put more value on the converted souls of the rich, powerful, well educated and “well connected,” but God does not. Even though this is true, who has not heard of a situation where a housewife or factory worker was treated with less respect than a church going Mayor? Would the President get more attention than the street sweeper? I am reminded of the following story that was once circulated via e-mail (the source of it is unknown).

An elderly couple had worked in Africa for many years. They were returning to the United States on an ocean liner. On this same ship was President Teddy Roosevelt (he was returning from a big game hunting expedition). The missionary couple watched the fanfare given the President and his entourage. When the ship docked in New York, a band was waiting to greet him. The Mayor was there to welcome him. Several newspapers had sent reporters to cover his return.

During the commotion the missionary couple slipped quietly off the ship and found a cheap apartment. They had no pension, were in poor health, and felt discouraged. The husband was especially disturbed. He could not understand how God would allow the President to be treated so well while the years of service he and his wife had offered seemed to be unnoticed and unappreciated. He claimed that God was being unfair to them. He bitterly complained to his wife. She finally turned to him and said, “We’re not home yet.” The people honored by the world are often the ones *not* honored by God. Too, God has often used people that the world views as insignificant or unimportant.

In the 30th verse Paul affirmed that Christians are “*in Jesus Christ*.” This thought is found in other portions of the New Testament (as noted above this expression receives considerable explanation in the commentary on Eph. 1:1-2, 3). Being *in Christ* means the saved are members of the one body (1 Cor. 12:13; Eph. 4:4) and are branches connected to Christ the vine (Jn. 15). We are sheep and the Lord is the

shepherd (Jn. 10). Here Paul said our *in Christ* status is “*of him*.” That is, God is the *source* (origin) of this blessing. There is nothing man can do to bring about salvation or enter into a state of justification without God. Our responsibility is to obey the gospel (2 Thess. 1:8; Heb. 5:9). Upon obedience we are “in Christ” and are given all spiritual blessings (Eph. 1:3). Those who are *in Christ* gain all spiritual blessings *through Christ* (verse 30, “of him”).

The first thing Christians receive through the Lord is *wisdom* (verse 30). This is not the human wisdom Paul condemned in verses 20-21 and 27. This is the *wisdom* leading to salvation (compare Jas. 3:15, 17). Christ is the expert on life; from Him we get the information we need to be saved and stay saved (2 Tim. 3:16-17; 2 Pet. 1:3). Compare, too, Col. 2:3, a verse that says “all wisdom” (spiritual information) is in Christ. In addition to *wisdom*, there is “*righteousness*.” This *righteousness* is justification (a state where no sin can be laid to our account).

When Christians stand before the judgment bar of Jesus, a verdict of “*innocent*” will be announced if they have been faithful to the Lord (compare Mt. 10:32). No faithful Christian will be condemned because Jesus’ sacrifice is more than sufficient to satisfy the terrible debt created by sin. In addition to being acquitted of all wrong, saved people on the Judgment Day will be in a state of “*sanctification*.” This means a Christian’s character will be holy. Both the heart (mind) and life were set apart (dedicated to) God. Those who go to heaven will be considered morally pure because they lived as Christians and the blood of Christ cleansed them from every sin (1 Jn. 1:7).

Only those who are faithful Christians will receive all the blessings found in this chapter (as well as the entire Bible). One of the blessings God has for His people is at the end of verse 30: “*redemption*” (*apolutrosis*). This term was associated with a ransom. It described people who paid a sum of money to make someone free. *Redemption* either described the act of being released or the “state” of someone after having been freed. Jesus’ death was the *ransom payment* for the forgiveness (release) from our sins. This sacrificial payment liberates all Christians from the bondage of sin. Everyone who is in Christ is free (Gal. 5:1, 13). This is not unbridled freedom (such an existence is not free as those who live in this manner are actually servants of Satan). It is freedom under the system—a very generous system—given by Christ.

When Paul said Jesus is our *wisdom, righteousness, sanctification, and redemption*, he meant the Lord is everything we need. This is the same type of teaching found elsewhere in the New Testament (Jesus is our “bread,” Jn. 6:50; a rock, 1 Cor. 10:4; the truth, Jn. 14:6; etc.). Even though the world rejects and scoffs at the idea that Jesus meets all of our needs (and the scoffing is often loud and strenuous), this is the truth. Wiersbe (First Corinthians, p. 572) suggested the words *righteousness, sanctification and redemption* show the three tenses of salvation. That is, “we *have been saved* from the penalty of sin (righteousness); we *are being saved* from the power of sin (sanctification); and we *shall be saved* from the presence of sin (redemption).” Bengel’s comments (2:173) are also superb: “*Wisdom*—Though we were formerly *fools*. . . . *Righteousness*—Though we were formerly *weak*. . . . *Sanctification*—Though we were formerly *base*. . . . *Redemption*, to the uttermost; whereas we were formerly *despised*.” Paul spoke of this same subject in Tit. 1:15 and said faithful Christians are “*pure*.” Even though Christians still sin (Rom. 3:23), by abiding in Christ they are continually washed from sin (1 Jn. 1:7) and are regarded as being without sin. Compare Eph. 5:27.

In verse 31 there is a quotation from the Old Testament (Jer. 9:24). Because glorying in the Lord is equated with an Old Testament prophecy of glorying in God, this is one passage that demonstrates the divine nature of Jesus. The meaning of this verse is well explained in The Church’s Bible (p. 29): “What the prophet said is right, that we should boast in the Lord, since he who boasts in the Lord cannot be put to shame. His works and his magnificence appear in what he has done. Therefore it says, *Let them be put to shame in their idols, which do not cause it to rain and have not made heaven and earth* (Ps. 97:7). The same is true of those who boast in men, who they know have no power. That is why Scripture says, *Hope in man is vain* (Jer. 17:5).” By telling us to *boast in the Lord*, the text implies man is not to do this “in himself, not in the flesh, not in the world” (Bengel, 2:173). MacKnight’s expanded translation reads, “*So that, as it is written, he who boasteth on account of his being a Christian, let him boast, not in the preachers who converted him, but in the Lord, who hath brought him into his church.*”

Introduction to chapter 2:

Paul previously argued that the gospel was not merely a new first century philosophy and he illustrated this point in two ways in the opening chapter. First, he said the central message of Christianity is Jesus' death on a cross, though this was not in harmony with first century expectations and was, therefore, rejected by many (1:13, 18-24, 27-29). Second, he noted how the gospel had its largest appeal to those who were ordinary citizens (1:26), not the aristocrats and philosophers. In this chapter Paul offered a third illustration to further show why the gospel was different. This third illustration is based upon the *presentation* of the gospel. It may be helpful to read the first five verses of this chapter before studying the text.