

1 Corinthians 1:1–31

Christ Crucified: The Wisdom and Power of God

Introduction: A Church in a Confused World

The city of Corinth stood at the crossroads of commerce, culture, philosophy, and moral corruption. It was wealthy, influential, intellectually proud, and spiritually confused. Yet in the midst of that environment, God planted His church. Paul writes this letter not to flatter the Corinthians, but to correct them—to call them away from division, pride, and carnality, and back to the centrality of Jesus Christ and the cross.

What Paul addresses in Corinth is not merely a first-century problem. These same dangers confront the church (ekklesia) in every generation: division, spiritual pride, misplaced confidence, and the temptation to substitute human wisdom for God's revealed truth.

Called by God, Not by Men (1 Corinthians 1:1–3)

Take note of the words “*to be*” in your Bible—they are italicized, which means they weren't in the original text. The translators added them to help the sentence flow in English, but ironically, these added words can cloud Paul's true meaning and should be ignored. Paul introduces himself purely as “called an apostle of Jesus Christ through the will of God.” He wants his readers to know right away that his authority doesn't come from human approval, popularity, or institutional backing. It comes straight from God. Ministry built on any other foundation will ultimately fail.

Paul also includes Sosthenes, likely the same man once hostile to Paul and the gospel. This reminds us that no one is beyond God's reach. Those who oppose Christ today may be under deep conviction tomorrow. What looks like resistance may actually be a heart under pressure, ready to break open.

Paul addresses “the church of God which is at Corinth.” He does not say “the church of Corinth,” as if it belonged to the city or to a particular group. The church belongs to God. It exists *in* a location, but it does not belong *to* that location.

This corrects any mindset that claims exclusivity—any idea that God has only one true expression in a given place. There is one church, one body, one Lord, and every true believer is part of it.

Paul greets them with grace and peace—in that order. Peace with God is impossible without grace. Grace flows from God's generosity, not human merit, and peace is its fruit.

Sanctified Saints with a Shared Lord (1 Corinthians 1:2)

Paul calls the believers “sanctified in Christ Jesus, called saints.” They are not called *to become* saints someday. They are saints now—set apart for God's exclusive use because they belong to Christ.

Sanctification does not mean perfection. It means dedication. God has claimed your life for Himself. To live otherwise is to misuse what has been set apart as holy.

Paul emphasizes unity: “with all who in every place call on the name of Jesus Christ our Lord, both theirs and ours.” Jesus is not divided. He does not belong to one group more than another. Wherever His name is genuinely called upon, He is Lord.

Enriched by Christ, Not Lacking Anything (1 Corinthians 1:4–9)

Paul thanks God for the grace given to the Corinthians and reminds them that they have been “enriched in everything by Him.” In Christ, believers are spiritually wealthy—not because of their performance, but because of His generosity.

Their lives had become living testimony—evidence that Christ was at work in them. They lacked no spiritual gift, yet they struggled with carnality. This reveals an important truth: spiritual gifts are not proof of spiritual maturity.

God is faithful, Paul says. He will “confirm you to the end.” The believer’s confidence rests not in personal strength, but in God’s faithfulness. Jesus will present His people blameless—not because they never failed, but because His blood fully paid the price for their sin.

Divisions Reveal Carnality (1 Corinthians 1:10–17)

Paul pleads for unity. Reports of division had reached him—believers aligning themselves with personalities rather than with Christ.

Some claimed Paul. Others Apollos. Others Peter. Still others claimed Christ in a way that excluded everyone else. Paul confronts them with piercing questions:

“Is Christ divided? Was Paul crucified for you? Or were you baptized in the name of Paul?”

Division in the church always minimizes the cross. Christ alone was crucified. Christ alone saves. Loyalty to personalities, traditions, or labels fractures what Christ died to make one.

Paul makes a startling statement: “Christ did not send me to baptize, but to preach the gospel.” Baptism is important, but it does not save. Salvation is grounded in the gospel—the message of Christ crucified and risen.

The Cross: Foolishness to the World, Power to the Saved (1 Corinthians 1:18–25)

Paul declares the dividing line of all humanity:

“The message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God.”

The world mocks the cross because it confronts human pride. It exposes sin. It declares that salvation cannot be earned.

Jews demanded signs. Greeks pursued wisdom. God offered a crucified Savior.

To many, that was offensive or absurd. But to those who believe, Christ crucified is both the wisdom of God and the power of God.

The cross reveals that God saves not through human brilliance or strength, but through humility, sacrifice, and love.

God's Choice Undermines Human Pride (1 Corinthians 1:26–29)

Paul reminds the Corinthians of their own calling. Not many were wise, powerful, or noble by worldly standards. God deliberately chooses what the world dismisses so that no flesh may glory in His presence.

This is God's pattern. He uses weakness to display strength. He uses simplicity to shame arrogance. Salvation leaves no room for boasting.

Christ Is Everything We Need (1 Corinthians 1:30–31)

Paul brings everything to its climax:

“But of Him you are in Christ Jesus, who became for us wisdom from God—and righteousness and sanctification and redemption.”

In Christ:

- We receive wisdom—God's answer to life's deepest questions.
- We receive righteousness—a right standing with God, purchased by the blood of Jesus.
- We receive sanctification—power to live a transformed life.
- We receive redemption—freedom from sin's bondage and ownership by God.

At the cross, Jesus bore our sin. His blood satisfied divine justice. His resurrection declared that the sacrifice was accepted and that He is truly God, Savior, and Lord.

Therefore, *“He who glories, let him glory in the Lord.”*

Practical Application for Believers

- Examine your loyalties. Are you more attached to labels, personalities, or traditions than to Christ Himself?
- Refuse division. Unity does not require uniformity, but it does require humility and love.
- Keep the cross central. When the cross fades, pride grows.
- Live as one set apart. You belong to God—honor Him with your life.

A Challenge to the Church

The church must resist the temptation to measure success by numbers, gifts, or influence. God measures faithfulness, humility, love, and obedience. Return to the simplicity and power of Christ crucified.

An Invitation to Non-Believers

If the cross seems foolish to you, pause and consider this: Jesus shed His blood to pay for your sin. He took your guilt upon Himself. He rose from the dead, proving He is God, Savior, and Lord.

You cannot save yourself—but you do not need to. Salvation is a gift.

If you will turn to Him, trust Him, and call upon His name, He will forgive you, cleanse you, and give you new life.

Today, let the cross become the power of God in your life.