

1 Corinthians – Lesson 3

4 I thank (εὐχαριστέω) my God always concerning you for the grace (χάρις) of God which was given to you by Christ Jesus, 5 that you were enriched (πλουτίζω) in everything by Him in all utterance (λόγος) and all knowledge (γνώσις), 6 even as the testimony (μαρτύριον) of Christ was confirmed (βεβαιόω) in you, 7 so that you come short in no gift (χάρισμα), eagerly waiting for (ἀπεκδέχομαι) the revelation (ἀποκάλυψις) of our Lord Jesus Christ, 8 who will also confirm (βεβαιόω) you to the end (τέλος), that you may be blameless (ἀνέγκλητος) in the day (ἡμέρα) of our Lord Jesus Christ. 9 God is faithful (πιστός), by whom you were called (καλέω) into the fellowship (κοινωνία) of His Son, Jesus Christ our Lord.

1:4-9 – Paul began most of his letters with thanksgiving or blessing except *Galatians*. (See *1 Thessalonians 1:2-4*.) Verses 4-8 are one sentence in Greek. The grounds for Paul's continual thanksgiving are given in verse 4: The grace (χάρις) of God given to them by Christ Jesus. Verse 5 – Paul was thankful the Corinthian Christians or saints were enriched (πλουτίζω – “made to abound in something”) in Christ and is going to point out two manifestations of the grace God had abundantly given them. They had been enriched in all speech or utterance (λόγος) and all knowledge (γνώσις) – two words having a lot of significance in this letter with regard to spiritual gifts. Verse 6 explains how and why God had enriched the Corinthians with speech and knowledge – as a confirmation of the testimony (μαρτύριον – *mar-too´ree-on* – witness, testimony or evidence) or good news about Christ which Paul had preached to them. Observe Paul's words to another young church – *1 Thessalonians 1:4-5*. This interpretation would also be consistent with *Mark 16:20*. Verse 7 confirms this to be the meaning as Paul asserts that the church in Corinth is not lacking in any “spiritual” gift (χάρισμα). While this Greek word can simply mean a free gift of something, the overall context of this letter demands the addition of the word “spiritual” to identify what Paul is addressing. The church's possession of these gifts is framed with the eager expectation with which all Christians should live – the return of our Lord Jesus Christ. Paul uses the word “revelation” (ἀποκάλυψις) for our Lord's return much like he did in *2 Thessalonians 1:7-8*. The same Greek word for “wait” – ἀπεκδέχομαι – is used in *Philippians 3:20-21*. Verse 8 is the conclusion to this long sentence that began with verse 4. The same God Who confirmed (βεβαιόω) the gospel in the Corinthians will also strengthen or sustain (βεβαιόω) them until the end so they will be found guiltless (ἀνέγκλητος) at the judgment – in the day of our Lord Jesus Christ. The Greek word for blameless (ἀνέγκλητος) is a compound word meaning “not to be called to account”. This same word – “blameless” – is a qualification for deacons in *1 Timothy 3:10* and for elders in *Titus 1:6*. (See also *Colossians 1:21-22* where it is translated “above reproach”.) The “day of the Lord” is an Old Testament eschatological expression but is assigned to Christ in the New Testament – *Acts 2:20* (quoting *Joel 2:31*); *1 Corinthians 5:5*; and *1 Thessalonians 5:2*. Paul concludes his thanksgiving by reassuring the church at Corinth of God's faithfulness – to strengthen them to the end (*1 Thessalonians 5:23-24*). This faithful God called them into the fellowship (κοινωνία) of His Son (*1 John 1:6-7*). The church of God at Corinth had been called to be saints, called by the testimony about Christ or the gospel (*2 Thessalonians 2:14*) and called to be in the fellowship of Christ.

10 Now (δέ) I plead (παρακαλέω) with you, brethren (ἀδελφός), by the name (ονομα) of our Lord Jesus Christ, that (ινα) you all speak the same thing, and that there be no divisions (σχίσμα) among you, but that you be perfectly joined together (καταρτίζω) in the same mind (νους) and in the same judgment (γνώμη). 11 For it has been declared to me concerning you, my brethren (ἀδελφός), by those of Chloe's household, that there are contentions (εἰς) among you. 12 Now (δέ) I say (λέγω) this, that each of you says (λέγω), "I am of Paul," or "I am of Apollos," or "I am of Cephas," or "I am of Christ." 13 Is Christ divided (μερίζω)? Was Paul crucified (σταυρώω) for you? Or were you baptized (βαπτίζω) in the name (ὄνομα) of Paul?

1:10 – Paul begins to address the divisions within the Corinthian church and their antagonism toward him. This discussion will continue to the end of chapter 4. Despite their many differences, Paul addresses them as brothers (**ἀδελφοί**) and the term should probably be viewed as inclusive of the female members of the congregation or sisters. The Greek particle **δέ** appears as the second word in the text and is translated **"Now"** as the opening word of verse 10 in the NKJV. It functions as a conjunction to connect Paul's thanksgiving with the body of the letter. **"I plead"** translates the beautiful compound Greek word **παρακαλέω** (**παρα** + **καλέω**) – meaning "to call to one's side" which can also be translated "to encourage". In *1 Thessalonians 4:10* and *1 Thessalonians 5:14*, it is translated "urge" and "exhort" respectively in the NKJV. Paul's plea is by the name or by the authority of "our" Lord Jesus Christ. This is not simply a request – it is an appeal using his divine apostolic authority (*cf. 2 Thessalonians 3:6*). Paul's appeal is introduced by the conjunction **"that"** (**ινα**) which appears only at the beginning in the Greek text. Translators have put **"that"** in two more times for clarity since **ινα** controls all three verbs that follow. Paul's first plea is that they all **"speak the same thing"**. His second plea is that there be no divisions (**σχίσμα** – literally, "a tear" as in *Mark 2:21*) among them. Some good examples of this word are found in *John 7:40-43; 9:16; and 10:19-21*. And the third plea is that they be perfectly joined together (literally, "mended" or "put in the proper condition" or "knitted together" – *Mark 1:19*) in the same mind and judgment. Paul has basically said the same thing in two positive ways and one negative: "Speak the same thing – be perfectly joined together in the same mind (thought or attitude) and in the same judgment (purpose or intent) – that there be no **σχίσμα** (divisions or tears in their oneness)".

1:11 – Although, as we learned in the introductory material, the Corinthians have sent a letter with questions for Paul, the apostle had to first address another situation he had learned about from someone outside the congregation. He had heard from Chloe's people (literally, "them of Chloe") that there was quarreling or contentions (**εἰς**) among the brothers and sisters at Corinth. Once again, Paul addresses the church as brothers (**ἀδελφοί** – and, understood, "sisters") – this time modified by the personal pronoun "my". Perhaps Chloe's people provided all the information Paul used for the first six chapters of this letter. The identification of Chloe is a mystery, but she must have been known by the saints in Corinth – perhaps residing in Ephesus with business in Corinth. *Eris* is the ancient Greek goddess of strife and discord. Interestingly, only Paul uses this Greek word for quarreling or contention (**εἰς**) in the New Testament. It is definitely a work of the flesh in *Galatians 5:20* and is also found in *1 Corinthians 3:3; 2 Corinthians 12:20; 1 Timothy 6:4; and Titus 3:9* plus three other times.

1:12 – Once again, the Greek particle **δέ** is the second word in the original and provides a transition. With "Now I say this", Paul is going to give examples of their quarreling or

contentions. On the one hand, one says, “I am of Paul” and, on the other, one says, “I am of Apollos” or “I am of Cephas” or “I am of Christ”. This does not seem to be partisanship due to doctrinal reasons. Rather it’s more like a case of severe *preacheritis*. Whether Cephas (or Peter) ever visited Corinth or not is unknown. Apollos for sure followed Paul at Corinth (*Acts 19:1*). There is no indication that any of these three men were supportive of these contentions. Most likely Paul threw in the “I am of Christ” party to emphasize how ridiculous this would be!

1:13 – Paul now switches to rhetoric with three questions all demanding an emphatic “No!” for an answer. Following the suggestion of a “Christ party” at Corinth, Paul asks if Christ has been fragmented to coincide with the four groups in the previous verse. (For this Greek word **μερίζω** translated “divided”, see *Matthew 12:25-26*.) There is only one body of Christ (*Ephesians 4:4*) but there was a sense in which the Corinthians were dividing his body with their partisan spirit. The next two questions with regard to Paul are introduced by the Greek particle **μή** that serves as a marker of expectation for a negative answer to a question. These two questions deserve a negative answer both rhetorically and grammatically. The absurdity of Paul being crucified (as well as Apollos or Cephas is implied) addresses those who follow Paul (or Apollos or Cephas). The saints at Corinth had been called into the fellowship of Christ by God. Jesus purchased the church with his blood on the cross (*Acts 20:28*) and our allegiance is to Him. Paul knew how baptism was first taught in Corinth – that they were baptized into the name of Christ (*Matthew 28:19; Acts 19:5; Romans 6:3-4*). Those who are baptized in the name of Christ are authorized to wear His name – Christian – and have agreed to submit to His will.

14 I thank (εὐχαριστέω) God that I baptized (βαπτίζω) none of you except Crispus and Gaius, 15 lest anyone should say that I had baptized (βαπτίζω) in my own name (ὄνομα). 16 Yes (δέ), I also baptized (βαπτίζω) the household of Stephanas. Besides, I do not know whether I baptized (βαπτίζω) any other. 17 For (γάρ) Christ did not send (ἀποστέλλω) me to baptize (βαπτίζω), but to preach the gospel (εὐαγγελίζω), not with wisdom (σοφία) of words (λόγος), lest the cross (σταυρός) of Christ should be made of no effect.

1:14-15 – In view of what was going on according to verse 12 with preacher-following, Paul was truly grateful to God that he had baptized so few of the Corinthians. He is not denigrating baptism but is thankful for what Gordon Fee called “a simple, uncalculated historical reality, namely that he baptized so few.”¹ He states that he had only baptized Crispus and Gaius. Crispus is most likely the ruler of the synagogue mentioned in *Acts 18:8*. Gaius is probably the one mentioned in *Romans 16:23* who was host to Paul and the whole church. This seems very plausible if Paul wrote his letter to the church at Rome while he was in Corinth. In verse 15, Paul states the obvious – why he was thankful he had baptized only two of them – that no one could say they were baptized in Paul’s name.

1:16 – Paul interrupts the letter after remembering someone else he had baptized – one of his visitors from Corinth: Stephanas. Probably seeing his visitor nudged Paul’s memory that he had also baptized Stephanas and his household. As Paul closes this epistle, he reveals a little more about Stephanas in *16:15-17* – that he and his household were some of the first converts to Christianity in Achaia. Then Paul confesses he doesn’t know if he baptized anyone else.

¹ Fee, G. D. (1987). *The First Epistle to the Corinthians* (pp. 61–62). Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co.

1:17 – The final sentence of this paragraph begins with the little conjunction **γάρ** – used here as a marker of cause or reason for not remembering if he baptized anyone else: Christ didn't send him to baptize but rather to preach the gospel. Once again, Paul is not denigrating baptism. It seems possible that “who baptized whom” was one of their problems in following one preacher or another. They had not been baptized into Paul's name and he had in fact baptized very few of them. As an apostle sent by Christ Himself, his primary mission was to preach the gospel – the good news of Jesus – not to keep a record of whom or how many he had personally baptized. The Holy Spirit chose the verb **εὐαγγελίζω** – (“to bring good news”) – from which we get evangelize – to designate Paul's mission. This is the same verb used by the angel in *Luke 2:10* for “I bring you good news.” Paul's preaching of the gospel was not with wisdom of words. Here it seems Paul is introducing the real problem at Corinth – an emphasis on human wisdom – which he will address in the next paragraph. The messenger is not to be elevated – the cross is. Words framed by the wisdom of man would cause the cross of Christ to have no effect.

18 For (γάρ) the message (λόγος) of the cross (σταυρός) is foolishness (μωρία) to those who are perishing (ἀπόλλυμι), but to us who are being saved it is the power (δύναμις) of God. 19 For (γάρ) it is written (γράφω):

***“I will destroy (ἀπόλλυμι) the wisdom (σοφία) of the wise (σοφός),
And bring to nothing the understanding of the prudent.”***

20 Where is the wise (σοφός)? Where is the scribe (γραμματεὺς)? Where is the disputer (συζητητής) of this age (αἰών)? Has not God made foolish (μωραίνω) the wisdom (σοφία) of this world (κόσμος)? 21 For (γάρ) since, in the wisdom (σοφία) of God, the world (κόσμος) through wisdom (σοφία) did not know (γινώσκω) God, it pleased God through the foolishness (μωρία) of the message preached (κήρυγμα) to save those who believe (πιστεύω). 22 For Jews request a sign (σημεῖον), and Greeks seek after wisdom (σοφία); 23 but we preach (κηρύσσω) Christ crucified (σταυρόω), to the Jews a stumbling block (σκάνδαλον) and to the Greeks foolishness (μωρία), 24 but to those who are called (κλητός), both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power (δύναμις) of God and the wisdom (σοφία) of God. 25 Because the foolishness (μωρός) of God is wiser (σοφός) than men (ἄνθρωπος), and the weakness of God is stronger than men (ἄνθρωπος).

1:18-19 – Paul has just said that Christ did not send him to preach the gospel with wisdom of words. The NKJV translators chose “message” instead of “words” in verse 18 because the Greek **λόγος** is singular in both verses. Now he is going to give us the reason as indicated by **γάρ** – for the word or message (**λόγος** – again singular) of the cross is folly or foolishness (**μωρία** – “moronic”) to those who are being destroyed or ruined. On the other hand, to those of us who are being saved, the message of the cross is the power of God. See *Romans 1:16*. Now Paul is going to back this up with prophetic Old Testament scripture – *Isaiah 29:14* – using two plays on words. (He introduces the passage from Isaiah with the standard “It is written” for citing Old Testament passages. Of the 64 occurrences of this phrase in the New Testament, Paul is the source of half of these.) God promised to destroy (**ἀπόλλυμι**) the wisdom (**σοφία**) of the wise (**σοφός**). By displaying the quotation from *Isaiah* as poetry in separate lines, it's easier to recognize the Hebrew parallelism where the second line says basically the same as the first and *vice versa*.

1:20 – Much like the prophet Isaiah, Paul turns to more rhetorical questions once again. See *Isaiah 19:11-12* and *33:18*. In Greek, the verb must be supplied for the first three questions. Trying to identify “to whom” Paul is referring is difficult. While the three Greek nouns for these people are singular, the reference is probably to classes or groups of people. I like Gordon Fee’s explanation: Despite the dismissal of the idea by some, the questions themselves probably reflect the various “wise ones” of the ancient world.² Paul has already touched on the σοφός (“wise ones”) and the scribes are probably the experts in the Jewish law as the same Greek word is used in the gospels. The Greek word συζητητής is a *hapax legomenon* (appearing only once in the New Testament). “Reasoner” or “disputer” seems to point to someone who takes one side of an argument. “This age” probably refers to all three groups of people and not just the “debater”. The final rhetorical question refers to what God has done in Christ Jesus – specifically through the cross. The wisdom of man centers on his self-sufficiency and God has rendered this to be foolishness. Paul will use the remainder of this paragraph to show how God has accomplished this.

1:21 – It was never in God’s plan for man to come to know Him based on their own human wisdom. (This seemingly has nothing to do with God’s revelation in nature as set forth in *Romans 1:19-20*.) Philosophers do not come to know God from their own reasoning. Paul uses *kosmos* as the personification of the human race with all its frailties. The wisdom of man and the wisdom of God are at opposite extremes. However, God in His wisdom chose to do what pleased Him. He chose His own way to save those who would come to know Him. He used not the “foolishness of preaching” (KJV) as an act but rather the foolishness of what was preached or the message as a means of salvation for those who would believe the content of the message. Belief here is more than intellectual assent – it involves an obedient trust in God Himself. Paul will define the foolish message in verse 23.

1:22-25 – Paul continues to answer his final question of verse 20. He divides the perishing into two classes consistent with Jewish thought – Jews and Greeks. The Jews expected the Messiah to be ushered in with great miracles as God had demonstrated His powers in the past. They wanted proof to match their wisdom. See *Matthew 12:38-39; 16:1-4*. Philosophers were highly esteemed by the Greeks (e.g. Socrates and Plato) and Paul had encountered them in Athens shortly before initially arriving in Corinth on his second missionary journey (*Acts 17:18-21*). While seeking wisdom sounds noble, the Greek verbs translated “demand” and “seek” respectively are almost synonymous here and are probably used for variety. The Jews want the facts even though miraculously produced and the Greeks want something compatible with human reasoning. In sharp contrast to what the Jews and Greeks want, Paul and his fellow evangelists (the “we” in Greek is emphatic – *but we*) publicly declare the crucified Messiah. This message of the crucified Christ is a stumbling block (or “scandal”) to Jews because such a person is accursed of God according to *Deuteronomy 21:22-23*. On the other hand, a crucified deity is foolishness or moronic to Gentiles. Once again, Paul highlights a contrast between the Jews and Gentiles who are perishing and those who are being saved (verse 18). The cross may be a stumbling block to the Jews and foolishness to Gentiles but not to those who are being called (“to be saints” – verse 2 above) – both Jews and Greeks.

² Fee, G. D. (1987). *The First Epistle to the Corinthians* (pp. 70–71). Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co.

To those who have been called by the gospel (2 *Thessalonians* 2:14), Christ is both the power and wisdom of God – the very things the Jews and Greeks were demanding in verse 22. Salvation was God’s initiative! Paul can now draw this conclusion: the foolish thing of God (the cross) is wiser than man’s wisdom and the weakest thing of God (the cross) is “stronger than the strongest act performed by mankind”.³ The wisdom and strength of man are no match for God!

26 For (γάρ) you see (βλέπω) your calling (κλήσις), brethren (ἀδελφός), that not many wise (σοφός) according to the flesh (κατά σάρξ), not many mighty (δυνατός), not many noble (εὐγενής), are called. 27 But God has chosen (ἐκλέγομαι) the foolish things (μωρός) of the world (κόσμος) to put to shame the wise (σοφός), and God has chosen (ἐκλέγομαι) the weak things (ἀσθενής) of the world (κόσμος) to put to shame the things which are mighty; 28 and the base things of the world (κόσμος) and the things which are despised God has chosen (ἐκλέγομαι), and the things which are not, to bring to nothing the things that are, 29 that no flesh (σάρξ) should glory (καυχάομαι) in His presence. 30 But of Him you are in Christ Jesus, who became for us wisdom (σοφία) from God—and righteousness (δικαιοσύνη) and sanctification (ἀγιασμός) and redemption (ἀπολύτρωσις)—31 that, as it is written (γράφω), “He who glories (καυχάομαι), let him glory (καυχάομαι) in the LORD.”

1:26 – The explanatory conjunction γάρ (“for”) indicates that what follows will further demonstrate what Paul has been writing concerning the wisdom of God as opposed to the wisdom of the world. He tells the Corinthians to “take a look” (βλέπω – “see”) at themselves or consider their calling. They had been called to be saints (verse 2) and called into the fellowship of Jesus (verse 9) but now Paul is probably referring back to verse 24 where those who had been called by the gospel – both Jews and Greeks – considered Christ the power and wisdom of God. Once again, Paul addresses the Corinthians as brothers and sisters. It appears that Paul wants them to seriously consider who they were before their call. Gordon Fee suggests this paraphrase: “Look at what was involved in the fact of *your* being called by God; who you were when he called you.”⁴ As they ponder their status in life when they heard the gospel message, Paul wants them to realize that not many of them were wise (σοφός) or powerful (δυνατός) or of noble birth according to worldly standards (κατά σάρξ – “according to the flesh”). While there were some wealthy and influential members of the church at Corinth, the majority were not. Paul seems to be drawing from *Jeremiah* 9:23 for his illustration.

11:27-29 – Paul begins with a strong adversative “but” (ἀλλά – also used in verse 17) as he begins to contrast what God chose with what the world would choose. Oh, by the way, the Corinthian saints were chosen just like all the other brothers and sisters in Christ (*Ephesians* 1:4 – same verb used – ἐκλέγομαι). He gives three examples which correlate to the characteristics of the Corinthians in verse 26. The following chart helps make this clearer:

³ Oster, R. (1995). *1 Corinthians* (1 Co 1:25). Joplin, MO: College Press Pub. Co.

⁴ Fee, G. D. (1987). *The First Epistle to the Corinthians* (p. 79). Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co.

Corinthian Status	God's Choice	God's Purpose
Not many wise (<i>sophos</i>)	Foolish things	To shame the wise (<i>sophos</i>)
Not many influential	Weak things	To shame the strong
Not many of noble birth (<i>eugenes</i>)	Lowly things (<i>agenes</i>)	To nullify existing things ⁵

God chose what is foolish, what is weak and what is low and despised to render ineffective the opposites held in esteem by the world. In summary, Paul writes that God even chose things that are not to bring to nothing things that are. God chose the nobodies of the world (e.g., the Corinthians) to bring to nothing the somebodies of the world.⁶ Paul goes on to explain why God did things this way: so that no one (literally “no flesh”) could glory or boast before God. It seems that it was God’s intention to remove any possibility of man’s boasting with regard to his human status in the world. This Greek verb for “glory” or “boasting” (**καυχάομαι**) in the New Testament occurs primarily in Paul’s letters – here for the first time in *1 Corinthians*. Paul possibly chose it here because it appears three times in *Jeremiah 9:23* (LXX).

1:30-31 – This first chapter begins (verse 2) and ends (verse 30) with reference to being “in Christ”. Here Paul states that the Corinthians are in Christ Jesus because of God who has been mentioned by name 13 times in verses 18-29. Earlier in verse 24, Paul had written that Christ is the wisdom of God to those who are being called. Christ had become the wisdom of God to the Corinthians – to those in Christ Jesus. The wisdom of God – Christ Jesus – is further defined as righteousness, sanctification and redemption personified. It is only in Christ that we find these three things for ourselves. Therefore, we can conclude in verse 31 – based upon *Jeremiah 9:24* – that the only place where humans can boast is in the Lord – in Christ Jesus.

⁵ Oster, R. (1995). *1 Corinthians* (1 Co 1:27). Joplin, MO: College Press Pub. Co.

⁶ Winters, H. (1987). *Commentary on First Corinthians* (p. 25). Greenville, SC: Carolina Christian.