

1 Corinthians 1 (Part 1): 1-17 • Called to be Saints

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We are going to be starting the Book of 1 Corinthians. Let me begin by showing you where it is on the map, because maybe this will help some of you a little bit.



You can see Italy, or at least the bottom of the boot of Italy up in the upper left hand corner. And that'll give you a sense of where things are, perhaps the geography of the world. And there's this blinking red dot right there where the city of Corinth was. And of course that's all modern day Greece.

Now guess what you'll find if you go there today, you'll find Corinth. It's there. It's not on the original site. There is very little remaining of the original city of Corinth. There's a... Well, it was razed, and razed, razed, demolished, and built up, and demolished, and built up many times over the years. And there are ruins that are there today and groups go with tours.

But there is still a city believe it or not, called Corinth in that basic area. It was a port city as you could see on the map when it was there, right on the water. And as a port city it was a place where there was a great deal of trade that came and went through the city. And whenever you have a place that brought in a lot of trade and a lot of people coming and going, you always had two things it was a guarantee of having two things: money and immorality. And believe me, Corinth had them, had both of them big time.

And in fact, the city was known for almost constant drunkenness. Whenever a drama or a play in those days was created with a character from Corinth they were always a drunk. Because that was just, that was what people thought of. In fact, if you wanted to really insult someone back then, you would call them a Corinthian. That was, it was so insulting because the character of the people was so immoral, an evil, that to call someone a Corinthian, whether they'd ever set foot in Corinth or not was irrelevant. They simply, you were a Corinthian if somebody wanted to really insult you.

And as far as sexual immorality went, Corinth let me tell you something, the United States of America has nothing on Corinth. Although there's a great deal of similarities. They actually had a Greek verb for fornicate that was derived from the name of Corinth.

And no doubt the city employed a large number of prostitutes to take care of all of the sailors who came and went into that seaport. But there was also a great deal of sexual immorality that occurred in the city of Corinth in the name of religion. Because over the years, throughout the centuries, there existed a temple to the Greek goddess Aphrodite, who was the goddess of love, which basically was a nice way of saying the goddess of sex.

And although that temple had been demolished during the time that Paul was there, the roughly 1,000 cult prostitutes still were there and still continued to ply their trade every night. They would come down from the hills into the streets of Corinth. And the men and women prostitutes would encourage people to continue to worship the goddess Aphrodite with various sexual acts.

And this was Corinth. This was the place where Paul came and brought the gospel. In fact, we read in the Book of Acts about that, but it was a terrible place to live, frankly, for the sake of all of the immorality and all of the stuff that went on.

William Barclay the old Scottish commentator, for all of his other interesting quirks, was really a great historian. He says something about Corinth here. He says,

In addition to these cruder sins, there flourished far more lesser known vices, which had come in with the traders and the sailors from the ends of the earth, until Corinth became not only a synonym for wealth and luxury, drunkenness and debauchery, but also for filth.
—William Barclay

In addition to these cruder sins, (And he's referring to the cult prostitutes that still existed during the time of Paul, he says,) there flourished far more lesser known vices, which had come in with the traders and the sailors from the ends of the earth, until Corinth became not only a synonym for wealth and luxury, drunkenness and debauchery, but also for filth.

It was just, it was a morally filthy place to live, frankly. And it was into that city that Paul came. We read about it in the Book of Acts. He came to... After he'd been in Athens, he came and spent time in Corinth. It was in fact in Corinth that he met a Jew by the name of Aquila, who along with his wife, Priscilla, were tent makers by trade. (Acts 18:2) Exactly what Paul had been trained to do as far as a trade goes.

And so Paul worked with Priscilla and Aquila while he was there in Corinth. They'd actually been kicked out of Rome by the Emperor because he decided he didn't like the Jews and he was going to get rid of them so he kicked them out. They came to Corinth to live and there Paul connected with them. And that became a cool connection because he ministered with them for a good many years afterwards.

Paul would spend his time just milling through the city telling people about Jesus. On the Sabbath day, he would go into the synagogue and reason with the Jews about who the person of Jesus was. And then when opposition arose and it always did, it was in Corinth in the midst of that opposition that Paul received a vision from the Lord.

And the Lord spoke to him in that vision saying, don't be afraid, keep talking, keep sharing, keep testifying. (Acts 18:9-10) Here's what the Lord said about Corinth. He said, "*for, I have many people in this city...*". And you read that you're like, wow, what a crazy thing for God to say about people in Corinth. To say, I have a lot of people here in this cesspool of just sinful debauchery and junk. God had a lot of people in Corinth, so, there you go.

But just because there were God's people living in the city of Corinth doesn't mean that those people didn't struggle with getting touched by their culture. Because they did. And in fact, the great portion of this letter is going to be taken up with Paul's confrontation to the church of Corinth, of those various issues that they struggled with.

These people living in this place of great sin and debauchery... By the way, I don't know if debauchery is a word you use every day. I seriously doubt it. But it simply means to live after one's passions. It means to live after one's sensual delights. In other words, we would say today to live for the thrill or the titillation of our senses. And that's the way the people in Corinth lived. And that was the environment.

And yet... And these people, even the believers we're touched by that. Just like we are. We live in a culture today that is very much sexually active. The whole culture is sexually active. And it is so changed in just the last, well, good grief, the last 50 years, the last 30 years, the last 20, the last 10. In the last year, things have changed in terms of just the environment or the atmosphere of sexual promiscuity and perversion and confusion that rules the day in our culture today.

I mean, gee my kids are for the most part are all grown. My oldest child is in her early thirties and youngest is almost ready to leave the teen years. And the way we parented our kids wouldn't even work anymore with you guys that are raising little babies today. You know what I mean?

You can't raise babies today like I raised my kids because of just the perversity of the sinful environment of our culture. When I was a kid, sexual immorality existed just like it does today, but it was behind closed doors. We had to go looking for it. We had to go find those doors. We had to put our hand on the knob. And most of those doors were locked. Didn't mean we weren't good at picking the lock because we did. But it took some doing, you know what I mean? But at least it was behind closed doors.

Today there is no door. It's in the streets. Kids don't have to go looking for sexual perversity and sexual immorality. There's no locked door. There's no door locked to pick anymore. It is literally in the streets for everybody to see. All you have to do, you don't have to open a door, you just have to open your eyes. It's everywhere.

I mean, things have changed in our own culture. And how does that affect us as believers? Well, it affects us greatly, doesn't it? I mean, sexual immorality has

touched all of our lives, frankly. Let's just face it. There's no paragons of sexual virtue, probably, in this room. And we know what it is to live in a culture that has been sexually perverse. And we've seen it touch us. You think it doesn't touch us? Of course it does. And it touched the people in Corinth, too.

And so, Paul is going to spend time talking to them about what it means to be a believer. And what it means to live a life of purity and holiness in the midst of a sexually perverse culture. And so, as you can tell by my opening comments here, this is a very relevant letter to you and I living in the United States of America. And we're going to... We're going to see some real practical type stuff as we go through this. Not to say that all of God's Word isn't equally relevant, but particularly as it relates to just the environment in which we live on a daily basis.

So let's get into this letter. 1 Corinthians 1:1. It begins by saying,

"Paul, called by the will of God to be an apostle of Christ Jesus, and our brother, Sosthenes," (ESV)

Now in ancient times, they did things exactly backwards to the way we write letters today. We begin a letter by saying dear so and at the very end of the letter, we sign our name, sincerely, me. They didn't do it that way. In ancient letters, the sender was the first thing you would see at the top of the letter. So the letter began by giving the name of the sender; then came the name of the recipient; and then there was usually a common greeting; and then some niceties that would follow before the bulk of the letter got started.

Paul begins, you'll notice here, by naming himself and a brother by the name of Sosthenes, who may very well have been the person to whom Paul dictated this letter. We know that Paul's eyesight was quite bad and that he needed to dictate his letters to people. And he was in a habit of doing that.

But I want you to notice the first thing Paul... He didn't just say, Paul to the church in Corinth. I want you to notice here exactly what he says. He says, *"Paul, called by the will of God to be an apostle of Christ Jesus,..."* And right there, you know what kind of a letter we're dealing with.

Whenever somebody comes out right away and gives you their calling card, in a sense of saying, I didn't ask for this, but I was called by God to be an apostle, you know you're basically in for a trip to the woodshed. And that's exactly what's going to be happening here in this letter.

But Paul wants it known very clearly to the people of Corinth, I'm not doing this because I want to, I'm not doing this because I'm in a bad mood or I'm just, critical of you people or something like that. I'm doing this because I'm called, I am called by God to be an apostle. And sometimes being an apostle, just like being a pastor means you get out your staff and you smack the sheep. Not in a sense of beating them, but in a sense of corrective discipline that is required when they get off course. Just like a shepherd would take his staff and just give a little boop to the hind quarters of that animal to get them back into line because they're wandering away.

And the Corinthians were wandering off on many levels to the point where Paul wrote this corrective letter to the church there in Corinth. So, he reminds them, I'm called by the will of God. I didn't pick this. You can't pay Paul enough to be an apostle. But before he lowers the boom on them here, so to speak, he's going to complete the traditional way of addressing a letter.

Verse 2 includes that part of the recipients. He says, *"To the church of God that is in Corinth, to those sanctified in Christ Jesus, called to be saints together with all those who in every place call upon the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, both their Lord and ours."*

I find this very interesting in the sense that Paul could have said just, Paul an apostle to the church in Corinth. All right, let's get to it. But he doesn't do that. And I find this very interesting. He starts off by saying. To the church in Corinth who are sanctified, who are called to be saints.

Now, if you guys know what Corinthians, the Book of Corinthians is all about, this first letter, that he is going to call them on the carpet about all kinds of things: sexual immorality, division, they were taking each other to court. They were literally suing one another in the church. They were being unloving, uncaring. It just... The list went on and on. These people were really messed up and they were being super spiritual too. And he's going to spend about 3 chapters correcting their super spirituality, that wanted to be seen by other people, but didn't really care about those people.

And yet it's about that very group of people, Paul says, you're sanctified in Christ and you're called to be saints. Some of you have been raised in a Roman Catholic tradition, and some of you who have, you know about saints. You've heard about saints and you know that saints are, according to the Roman Catholic church, individuals who have been, who have met a certain criteria of standards that then the church, that once done, apparently, the church will then

vote them in as a saint. You're now a saint because you've done this, you've done that, you've done this, and now you're considered a saint.

And we have saint this... I mean, Paul was, today in Roman Catholic terms, Paul is considered a saint. Saint Paul, Saint Peter, the Bible knows nothing of that definition for the term, saint. I'm not trying to bash Roman Catholicism. I'm just telling you the truth.

The Bible says, now get this, that we're all saints, all of us. If you're in Christ Jesus, you are a saint. And the word saint basically means, set apart one, or "holy one." And it doesn't mean you're holy in all of your ways, because... And that's what causes this to be such a problem in people's minds. We tell them, hey, the Bible says you're a saint. And they go, pffft. (Pastor Paul makes a sound of unbelief)

And the reason is, they know. They know what kind of life they live. They know that they're basically they mess up on a regular basis. It's like, dude, do you even know how many times I sin in a given day?

No no no no no! See your designation as saint has nothing to do with how many times you sin or don't sin for that matter. The appellation of saint is something that is given to you by virtue of the fact that you are in Christ. That you have come to Him, and you've accepted what He did on the cross. You're born again, and so now you're a saint.

I know it sounds weird and we like... Because we think of saint, as a verb, about acting saintly. Well he doesn't act very saintly. Well, it's not about acting saintly, it's really more of a noun. It's what you are in Jesus. Okay, and that's what the Bible says.

And that's what Paul is saying to even these people in Corinth who were pretty messed up as it relates to being influenced by their culture and the world around them. He says, you know what though, you're sanctified and you're called to be saints. I like that. I like that because that puts things back where they need to be.

You and I are so adept at looking in the mirror and looking at each other and making judgment calls that color who we are. The fact of the matter is you are who you are in Christ, regardless of what you see in the mirror or what you see in your actions. And that's an important distinction to make. So whether we're talking about being sanctified, which means to be set apart, or calling one another saints, which means holy ones, the reality is, it is what we are in Jesus.

Verse 3,

Grace and peace *"Grace to you (rather) and peace from God our father and the Lord Jesus Christ."*

And of course I have to stop you there. And it always bears repeating that Paul places the wish for grace before the wish for peace whenever he writes his letters. It's never peace and grace. It's always grace and peace. And the reason for that is because peace comes from grace. You don't get peace until you have grace.

When you come face to face with God's grace, it puts you at peace. If you don't know God's grace, you don't have peace. And the peace I'm talking about, the peace that Paul is talking about, is the peace that rests in the knowledge that what Jesus did on the cross is done. In fact, a person who understands grace, understands like no one else, those 3 words that Jesus said on the cross when he said, *"It is finished."*

The person who understands grace knows, there's nothing else I can do. There's nothing more I can do. I don't have to strive. And even though I'm a mess up and I make mistakes and I fail on a fairly regular basis, God still loves me. He still accepts me and He's never going to leave me nor forsake me. Because I'm a good person. No! Because of grace. And when they get ahold of grace...

And grace is one of those things that smacks you upside the head. And when you get ahold of it, when you really embrace it, changes your life. It literally changes your life. Because you realize, you know what, God, You are just so cool. I don't deserve anything. And yet You give it to me. And I never will deserve. I never will measure up to the goodness of God. And yet He loves me and calls me His child! Isn't that a kick?

And He says, I'm giving you eternal life and I'm giving you My Spirit. And I'm giving you all these wonderful promises of the days to come. And I'm going, why are you doing this, God? He says, because I love you. That's grace. That's grace.

There's a lot of people that don't understand grace, believe me. I'm willing to even bet there's a good number of folks in this room that are still struggling. And struggling to apprehend that idea of grace. And if you're one of them, I want to just encourage you, just hang in there. You'll get it. It doesn't come through intellectual pursuit or anything like that. Just get into the Word and ask God to teach you. Ask Him to personally teach you about His grace.

You say, well, how do I know if I've really apprehended grace?" Depends on whether you have peace. If you have peace, then you have. If you know that God loves you, and He's never going to leave you and forsake you, or anything like that, if you know that your sins are forgiven and you don't have to work to stay saved, then you've stumbled and embrace grace.

I say stumbled over it. We do. It smacks us, we fall down on our knees and we just bathe in it. And it's wonderful! But if you are, if you're struggling... And again, I'm not putting anybody down. I deal with people on a regular basis who struggle. And they read things in the Word of God and they're convicted in such a way as to make some wonder, am I really born again? Am I really saved? And they struggle.

But you know why they struggle? Because their eyes are on themselves. But grace comes by taking your eyes, and this is hard, off yourself, putting them on Him. Because you see your salvation does not rest with you. It rests with Him. Right? The fact that I am going to heaven when I die, or when the Lord comes and gets me with the rapture or whatever, the fact that I am saved and going to heaven has nothing to do with me. It has everything to do with Him.

And so when you understand that, when you mess up or when you sin, you don't sit there and go, oh God, maybe I'm not saved. You just go, yeah, this is me again. And it's not that you take sin lightly or casually, but you know what to do with it. You come to the cross. Jesus, I know You love me. I know You're never going to stop loving me, even though I mess up. I know that. And that makes me want to live for You more. That makes me want to live my life for You. That's grace. Grace is wonderful!

Paul starts off this letter, wishing them that very thing. May you have grace and may you have the corresponding peace that goes along with that grace. Stop fighting and struggling and straining to be saved and just rest in God's love for you.

Verse 4,

"I give thanks to my God always for you because of the grace of God that was given you in Christ Jesus, 5 that in every way you were enriched in him in all speech and all knowledge- 6 even as the testimony about Christ was confirmed among you- 7 so that you are not lacking in any gift, as you wait for the revealing of our Lord Jesus Christ, 8 who will sustain you to the end, guiltless in the day of our Lord Jesus Christ."

I love how Paul begins by commending them. Again, this letter is going to be filled full of what is going to amount to being a spanking spoon. But, he commends them and he says, I thank God for you guys because you've been filled with God's grace.

And he even cites one particular area where they have excelled over many of the other churches of the time. He said, you know what, you guys don't lack any gift. And he's talking about spiritual gifts. Now, they don't lack in any spiritual gift. But he's going to spend 3 chapters correcting them on how they used those spiritual gifts, and that's chapters 12, 13, and 14. And we'll get to it and we'll talk about it when we get there.

What do we learn from that? We learn that you walk into a church where spiritual gifts are active, it doesn't mean they're being used properly. It doesn't mean they're being used biblically. It just means they're being used. They're being utilized in some way, shape, or form. And if you walked into the Corinthian church, you would have said, whoa! This is the ancient version of a charismatic, Pentecostal type church. These people are rocking and rolling. And they were operating in the gifts of the Spirit.

And there was nothing wrong with the standpoint of the gifts of the Spirit, it was their use of them, which was unbiblical, which was irreverent in some cases and was very carnal. And Paul is going to address that issue. But for now he says, I thank God for you and I thank God that He's blessed you.

It's interesting. There are some people who believe that their gift is a gift of correction. I mean, I've actually met people like this years ago. Years ago when we were up in Washington, we had a person meet us at the door. Never been to the church before. This is when I was on staff at a church. I was one of like 4 staff pastors. And this guy came at the door and introduced himself as someone who was called by God to bring correction. And we were all like, oh yay, knowing of course that we probably needed just as much correction as any church.

But so many times when people have that heart to correct, it's really a critical spirit. I mean, Paul corrects here in the Book of 1 Corinthians. This is a hugely corrective letter, as I've already stated. But I wish those people who feel like they have a gift or a calling to bring correction in the body of Christ, would take a page out of Paul's book. And they would start off with encouragement and say, I thank my God for you and you guys have been blessed. And I see evidence of the grace of God flowing in this fellowship. Now, here's some areas where there needs to be order. Where there's chaos... But do you see how it just,

the pill goes down a whole lot better when you start it off with a little bit of grace and encouragement. And Paul does that here.

I want you to notice again, verses 7 and 8. Let me read that again. He says, "*so that you are not lacking in any gift, as you wait for the revealing of our Lord Jesus Christ, (and then look at verse eight) who will (will, will! That positive word I want to emphasize that will) sustain you to the end, guiltless in the day of our Lord Jesus Christ.*"

This, I love this. I love this about the apostle Paul. Again, people, he is going to spend the rest of this letter correcting these people. And in some cases he's going to get very strong with them in that correction. And yet at this point in the letter, he affirms something. And that is the fact that, God is able to sustain them and to present them finally guiltless before the Father on the day that Jesus returns. You know what that tells me? It tells me Paul hasn't lost faith in God's ability to finish what He started with His church.

Why do I bring that up? Cause it's so easy to lose faith. Cause... listen, I've been a pastor for a lot of years. And I see the warts and the wrinkles in the body of Christ. Just like you do. And we've got lots of them, don't we? You get your eyes on that, you start looking at that, I mean focusing on that, you know what's going to happen, you're going to become discouraged. Ultimately, you're going to become angry, and then you're going to become bitter. And then you know what you're going to do? You're going to leave church and never come back.

And I'm willing to bet, all of us know somebody who stays away from church because they've looked at the church, they've seen the failings of the church, and they've said, I'm not going back there. Those people are a bunch of hypocrites. Well, duh! We're a bunch of sinners who need Jesus, right? Hypocrisy? Sure, that's in there too. Just put that one in with the mix.

Hey listen, we never made any pretense about that. We never came out and said, we are the holy ones of God. We never said that. You know what we said? We said, we're a bunch of mess ups. I need Jesus and that's why I'm here. How about you? Right? Isn't that why you're in church today? Jesus, I need You, like, bad!

So, we're not trying to, we're not trying to... Oh, I was thinking of some crazy way of saying it. We're not trying to deceive anybody related to the reality of who we really are. But you listen, who we really are, if you sit and focus on that, you will get discouraged.

I love the fact that Paul says here to them, listen, listen to me, guys, and he knows he's got his spanking spoon right back here and he's about to pull it out. But for right now, he says, I know, that I know, that I know, God is going to have His way with you. I know, that I know, God is going to win in the end. I know that He is going to bring you guys to where He wants you to be. Because I have more faith in God, than anything else. And all these other things that I see with my eyes, my faith in God trumps them all.

And that's what it's got to be for you and I, you guys. When we look at the church and we see her in all her glory, and that's facetiously spoken, we have to let the faith that we have in Jesus trump what we see. We have to say, "Yeah, that's a mess. That's a train wreck, but God. That doesn't look good at all. The way that person treated that individual right there and the way they did this, that was not good at all, but God.

And we have to learn to commit things and people and situations to the work of the Holy Spirit and say, hey, it's not my problem, it's God's problem. And you know what? He's got a big spanking spoon and He knows how to use it. And we have to allow Him the freedom.

And Paul says, and I love these words. He says, He will, God will sustain you to the end. And He will present you guiltless on the day of our Lord Jesus Christ. I love that. I love it because it's a declaration of faith in the midst of a church that really was a moral train wreck. And there were so many things going on bad here.

Verse 9; he's going to end this nicety stuff by saying, *"God is faithful,"* And that ought to be the refrain of every born again Christian. When you and I look at the sin that has affected this world and all of its ways, we need to say, yeah, but you know what? God is faithful. And he says, *"God is faithful, by whom you were called into the fellowship of his Son, Jesus Christ our Lord."*

All right, niceties are over, time to address problems. Verse 10,

"I appeal to you, brothers, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that all of you agree, and that there be no divisions among you, but that you be united in the same mind and the same judgment. 11 For it has been reported to me by Chloe's people that there is quarreling among you, my brothers. 12 What I mean is that each of you each one of you says, "I follow Paul," or "I follow Apollos," or "I follow Cephas," (which is the Greek form of Peter) or "I follow Christ." Is Christ divided. Was Paul crucified for you? Or were you baptized in the name of Paul?"

Stop there. Of all the issues, of all the things that Paul could begin this letter to address, and there were many things, he began with this thing of division. I find that very interesting. And I... And it's because division is so dangerous. It's hugely dangerous within a fellowship. And Paul is going to give some insights here in these verses as to what caused their division.

Notice that it didn't form around some doctrinal, theological thing. Like we've had plenty of those crop up in the last couple of thousand years where churches have split. We've divided over all kinds of crazy things, and some of them, frankly, not so crazy.

Paul tells us why these people are beginning to form factions. It's all over playing favorites and having their favorite apostle. He's my favorite. And so they're saying, some of you say, I follow Paul. Some of you say, I follow Apollos. Apollos, yeah. Oh, what a speaker that Apollos was. Oh man! And we know that in the Book of Acts, it says that, Apollos was an incredible speaker. He dazzled people with his speaking ability. (Acts 18:24-25)

But Paul, he's the man who started the church so I follow Paul. He's the man who came here, put the flag in the ground, and said, yes, this is where we're going to start a church so I'm staying with Paul. No, Paul is... No. Peter is the guy. He's the rock. Right? No... And then you have the super spiritual people, we just follow Jesus.

And so you got these factions going on where they're all just...(Pastor Paul mimics tug of war) And Paul's like, you guys, is Christ divided? Is He literally separated that you are creating these factions? I call it the American Idol syndrome, where we just have to have somebody to idolize, to look up to. Frankly, whenever the church has done this, whenever we have elevated leadership in the church, it's always bad.

You guys remember those old churches back in England. And they had them in New England states back when the pilgrims came over. Have you ever seen churches in like the New England states or gone to England? The pastor, or rector, or whatever they happen to call him. He would climb these long, huge steps. It would be like, if I climbed steps, and I stood up 20 feet above you guys. and there was my pulpit. And I had looked down on you people, you. Yeah, you little people. And talk to you from there. And it was... And that was a picture of how they elevated the leadership.

And it, and of course it found it's huge expression in Roman Catholicism. You want to confess your sins, you got to go through me. Right? The priest. You

want to take communion, you got to receive it from my hand or it isn't happening. What is that? What is that all about? It's all about elevating position. It's all about making people, human beings, something more than they were ever intended to be.

What does Paul say when he writes his letters? He goes, hey guys, I'm just like you. In fact, he writes to Timothy, I love this. He says, here's a true saying, Jesus Christ died to save sinners of whom I am the worst. (1 Timothy 1:15) That was the apostle Paul! He wasn't trying to create some kind of a situation where people looked at him and went, whoa! He was like, guys, I am a sinner saved by grace just like you. And I'm a worse sinner than all of you! That was the apostle Paul. I love that heart in him.

But this American Idol syndrome was going on in Corinth to the point where Paul says, was Jesus, was He divided? Was I crucified for you? Were you baptized into the name of Paul?

And then he goes on to say, which is really interesting in verse 14, he says, *"I thank God that I baptized none of you except Crispus and Gaius, 15 so that no one may say that you were baptized in my name."* He says, "Yeah, I'm glad I didn't baptize any of you guys. Are you guys to be thinking, oh, how cool I was baptized by Paul, so that means I'm more saved than you! Or something dumb like that.

And then, he says, oh, that's right. " ¹⁶ *(I... also baptize the household of Stephanus. (Forgot about them, but) Beyond that, I do not know whether I baptized anyone else.)* And I don't think so. And I'm glad I didn't. Look at verse 17.) ¹⁷ *For Christ did not send me to baptize but to preach the gospel, (the good news) and not with words of eloquent wisdom, lest the cross of Christ be emptied of its power."*

Okay. I just need to very quickly go over this verse with you for just a moment before we get done, okay? Because there's important stuff here.

First of all, I want you to notice what Paul says here. *"Christ did not send me to baptize..."* If there was ever a statement made by the apostle Paul that I believe proves that he did not consider water baptism as that which saves a person, it is this statement right here. It doesn't... I'm not saying that Paul did not consider water baptism vitally important, because, I believe he did. But if there was ever a statement that made it clear that Paul did not believe that it was the act of being baptized in water that saves you, it is this statement right here.

Because he is saying to God, and can you imagine, if water baptism was the thing that saved you, would Paul say, I thank God I didn't baptize any of you...? That would be like him saying, I thank God you guys didn't get saved while I was there. That's ridiculous. He was called to bring the gospel. He was called to bring salvation to the Gentiles. Right?

But he's saying it because baptism is not what saves a person. It's what you do when you get saved. And that's why water baptism is a very powerful, integral part of what it means to be a born again Christian, but it is not the element that affects your salvation.

You are saved by grace through faith and this not of yourselves. It is the gift of God so that no one can boast, (Ephesians 2:8-9) and say, I got baptized and I got saved. There's nothing you can do to boast. There's nothing you can do to... All you can do is just say, I was a sinner and He saved me. There's no boasting there. Right? So anyway, that's a very important statement for us to see.

Secondly, I want you to see here in verse 17 that he says that, I didn't come to you with eloquent words, lest the cross of Christ be emptied of its power. And Paul is basically saying here, I didn't come to impress you guys. Paul was a very learned man. He studied under some of the most incredible Jewish rabbis that were in the day.

And he was... He had an amazing learning, but he didn't flaunt it. And he didn't come to Corinth to, with the wow factor to make people think, oh, that Paul, wow! He wanted people to walk away from his time spent with them and say, whoa, that Jesus. Wow! He wanted them... He wanted the fragrance of Jesus to remain after Paul left the scene.

And so he says, I didn't come, with words of eloquence or human wisdom, which might otherwise somehow, empty the cross of its power. And that's an interesting statement. And it implies to you and I, that the cross of Christ can be emptied of its power if we get fancy, or we get clever, or we decide we need to find a new way to convey the gospel.

Do you know the gospel is so simple. And the evangelists who I've watched over the years, were really gifted in sharing the gospel. I am humbled repeatedly when I listened to them about how simple is their sharing of the gospel. You ready for the gospel: you're a sinner; Jesus died for sinners; receive Him and you'll be saved. Whoa! Nobody's going to hear that and go, whoa, that's just mind blowing, from the standpoint of the intellectual complexities.

Really isn't intellectually complex about it at all! Very simple: you're a sinner; Jesus died for sinners; to be saved you need to receive what He did on the cross. That's it.

And that's what Paul says, I came to bring to Corinth. I didn't come to wow you. I came that you might know the way to be saved. Because I did not want to empty the cross of its power, which can happen if we decide we need to get clever, and that sort of thing.

Because you know what the bottom line is? If people are ready to hear the gospel they're going to hear it. Doesn't matter how clever, or how much wow factor, or polish, or PowerPoint presentations, or light shows, or sound systems we put into the mix. It doesn't matter. If their hearts are ready to hear, they're going to hear.

Some of you this morning, your hearts may not be ready to hear the gospel. I just shared the gospel with you. "You're a sinner, Jesus died for your sins, now receive Him and you'll be saved. Some of you aren't ready to hear that. And so for you, you don't hear it. I mean, you hear it in your ears, but it just like, boo, (Pastor Paul mimics missing the point) it just goes through. But for those people who are ready to hear, it's like, it hits you like a freight train. Just the simplicity of those words. It is like a freight train that hits you smack on. And you're like, wow!

And that's what he basically goes on to say. And we're going to end with this. Look at verse 18. He says, Listen, "*...the word of the cross is folly (that means foolishness) to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God.*"

The message of the cross. That simple, powerful, message of the cross, which we are not going to take its power away by being clever, or trying to be fancy, or trying to make it sound like what it isn't. That simple message, Jesus died for you. Jesus died for you. That's the power of God for those who are ready to hear it.