

July 2025

## **What's the Point....of 1 Corinthians?**

### **Mark Garner**

*The church in Corinth had a wide assortment of problems, and it was also confused by numerous spiritual matters. In this letter to the church, we see the apostle Paul address many of these subjects, as he advises the believers in Corinth how to deal with them. Yet, more importantly, each time he reminds us of the significance of developing a spiritual perspective.*

### ***Main Themes***

Running through the epistle is the contrast between wisdom and foolishness, along with the reminder that what the worldly call wisdom is indeed unreliable; as Paul writes, "has not God made foolish the wisdom of the world" (1 Corinthians 1:20). Spiritual wisdom includes an awareness of the things that have lasting spiritual value, as well as the humility of accepting God's perspectives. As the apostle says, "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" (1 Corinthians 1:18).

### ***Wisdom From God (Overview Of 1 Corinthians)***

First, despite the many problems in the church in Corinth, Paul addresses them warmly (1 Corinthians 1:1-9). When he addresses their problems directly, he carefully explains how they should handle them, and how they can come together (1:10-17), by focusing on Jesus and his message. For Jesus alone has been crucified for us, and through him alone we can be saved.

Paul then shows us that the message of the cross is inconsistent with worldly thinking (1:18-31). While the world makes distinctions between 'good' and 'bad' persons, and between the 'strong' and the 'weak', the gospel tells us that we are all weak sheep who have all gone astray, and we all depend completely on God's grace. The apostle then reminds them of how he himself decided to "know nothing . . . except Jesus Christ, and him crucified" (1 Corinthians 2), reminding them as well of the priceless blessings that come only by humbly following Jesus.

The apostle Paul reminds them that everything in their lives and ministries needs a trustworthy, enduring, secure foundation. He encourages them to see the message of Jesus Christ as the only way to salvation, and to accept God's words as the standard of truth, instead of relying on human wisdom and ingenuity (1 Corinthians 3 & 4).

With this in mind, Paul helps them know how to use the perspective he has discussed to address some problems in the Corinthian church (1 Corinthians 5-6), as well as to respond to some spiritual questions they had asked (1 Corinthians 7-14). In this section there are two particularly memorable chapters, as the apostle helps us understand what it means to be part of the body of Jesus (chapter 12), and then teaches us about what love means to God (chapter 13).

Then comes a discussion of the resurrection both of Jesus himself and also of ourselves (1 Corinthians 15). This chapter has many thoughts worth pondering, as it discusses things from God's own perspective. Then the epistle closes with a few personal greetings and requests (1 Corinthians 16). Throughout the book, we see how consistently Paul encourages us to set aside human preconceptions, and to let God renew our minds and spirits with his boundless truths.

## **What's the Point....of 1 Corinthians?**

### **Caleb Dillinger**

When it comes to asking the question, “What should a church NOT do when they interact with one another?” 1 Corinthians rises to the top of the list. The Corinthian church, to be fair, was in a tough place. Culturally, idolatry and other religious practices vied for their attention. Historically, the Corinthian church was established without a New Testament like we have, and heard voices from Paul, Peter, Apollos, and still others. The general makeup of the church would be Gentiles (non-Jews), which means purity and the basic concept of righteousness according to God via the Old Testament was foreign. So, as you read 1 Corinthians and realize they are struggling with a variety of sins, you should not be surprised.

What is surprising is the opening premise of the letter: Paul writes to the “saints”, the “holy people” of the church of Corinth. Then he proceeds to give thanks for the grace of Jesus extended to them. THEN he begins a long list of problems: division and quarrels, judgment, idolatry, misuse of Spiritual gifts, abuse of the Lord’s supper, sexual sins. Grace and sainthood recognized first; sin and repentance called on second. This is essential in our understanding of the depth of the grace of Jesus.

One of the overarching themes in the letter is the immaturity of the believers in Corinth. It is not that they don’t believe in Jesus – they are actually immature in their belief! Paul uses this letter to try to address some of the issues he sees in their immaturity. Some key pieces to maturity will include the Holy Spirit and proper use of the Spirit’s gifts (i.e. not selfish or disruptive use of God’s power), humility, respect, and attention to detail. Paul points to his example as an apostle and disciple, as well as the example of Jesus throughout this letter.

1 Corinthians is also important in understanding church diversity. Men and women, various gifts of the Spirit, married and unmarried, those with diverse beliefs on practices – the church NEEDS everyone (see 1 Cor. 12 for more!). To cover all these differences, one essential ingredient is raised to the forefront: love. Prophecy is better than speaking in tongues, but both are useless without love. Taking the Lord’s supper is important, but arrogant to do so without love. Love, Paul writes, is superior (see 1 Cor. 13).

So what’s the point of reading 1 Corinthians? If you struggle with worldly temptations, if you’re frustrated with the church today, if you wish there was wisdom on what to do – then you’ve found enough reasons to read 1 Corinthians in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. That’s the point.