

Light Reading/Deep Reading of the Bible

1 Corinthians chapter 1

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Why Paul is called the "apostle of the Gentiles"? What is the theology of his origin?

In Christianity, Paul is called the "apostle of the Gentiles" primarily because of his special dedication to preaching the gospel to non-Jews (Gentiles) in the missionary work of the early church.

Paul, whose original name was Saul, was a Jew of the tribe of Benjamin and was born in Tarsus, a Hellenistic city in the Roman Empire (Acts 22:3). He had Roman citizenship, which allowed him to move freely within the limits of the Roman Empire, free from certain legal restrictions. Paul was taught in Jerusalem by the famous rabbi Gamaliel, who was well versed in Jewish law and tradition (Acts 22:3; Philippians 3:5-6). This background enabled him to engage in dialogue with Jews and to provide theological discourse for Gentile integration into the faith. Paul, who was born in Tarsus, was familiar with the Greek language and culture, could write letters in Greek, and explained the gospel to Gentiles using Greek philosophical concepts.

Paul was a Pharisee who persecuted Christians, but he repented when he met the resurrected Jesus on the road to Damascus (Acts 9:1-19). This miraculous experience led him to believe that Jesus was the Messiah and that God had called him to be an apostle to the Gentiles (Galatians 1:15-16). According to the New Testament, Paul's mission came from direct revelation from God. He emphasized in Galatians 1:11-12 that his gospel was not received from men, but from Jesus Christ. In Acts 9:15, God said to Ananias that Paul was "the instrument I have chosen to declare my name before the Gentiles and kings and to the children of Israel."

In the early days of the New Testament church, Peter preached primarily to the Jews, while Paul was sent to preach the gospel to the Gentiles (Galatians 2:7–9). This division of labor reflected the need for the expansion of the early church: the Jews already had a legal foundation and needed the revelation of the Messiah; Gentiles had to start from scratch to know the one true God. Paul was able to prove that Jesus was the Messiah in the Jewish scriptures (Old Testament) while communicating the gospel in a way that Gentiles could understand.

Paul's theology had a profound influence on the spread of Christianity to the Gentiles, and its main features include: Justification by faith: Paul emphasized that people are saved by faith in Jesus Christ rather than by keeping the law (Romans 3:21-28; Galatians 2:16). This was especially important for Gentiles, who were unfamiliar with Jewish law and did not need to first become Jews to receive the gospel. Paul believed that Jesus' redemption applied to all mankind, both Jew and Gentile (Romans 1:16; Galatians 3:28). This broke down the national boundaries of Judaism and made Christianity a universal faith. Paul emphasized that Jesus is the Son of God and that through His death and resurrection mankind was reconciled to God (Philippians 2:5-11; 1 Corinthians 15:3-4). This theology provided a clear core of faith for the Gentiles. Paul sees the church as the body of Christ, made up of both Jews and Gentiles (Ephesians 2:11–22). He taught Gentile and Jewish believers to be one in Christ and to bridge cultural barriers. Paul's theology encompasses eschatological hope, emphasizing Christ's return and ultimate redemption (1 Thessalonians 4:13–18). This provided hope for the future of Gentile believers and inspired them to hold fast to their faith.

Paul wrote a number of New Testament epistles (e.g., Romans, Corinthians, Galatians, etc.) that systematically expounded Christian doctrine, especially on issues related to the Gentile church (e.g., idolatry, morality, and church order). These letters became the cornerstone of Christian theology. Paul's missionary journey (recorded in the book of Acts) traveled throughout Asia Minor, Greece, and other places, and he was adept at adapting the gospel to local cultures and languages, laying the foundation of Christianity in the Roman Empire. Paul's theology resolved the controversy over whether Gentiles were required to obey Jewish laws (e.g., circumcision, dietary regulations). He succeeded in convincing church leaders at the Council of Jerusalem (Acts 15) that Gentiles did not need to keep the law to become Christians, which contributed to the universalization of Christianity.

Paul became an apostle to Gentiles because of his unique origins (Jewish, Roman citizen, Hellenistic background), God's calling, and his passion for the gospel. His theology, centered on justification by faith, universal salvation, and Christ-centeredness, broke the national confines of Judaism and made Christianity a universal faith. His epistolary and missionary work laid the foundation for the expansion of the early church, which has influenced Christian theology and practice to this day.

First Corinthians chapter 1 is the beginning of the apostle Paul's letter to the Corinthian church, which is intended to deal with the problems within the church and lay the foundation for the gospel. Paul greeted the Corinthian church as an apostle, thanking God for his spiritual gifts, emphasizing God's faithfulness and Christ's grace to strengthen them as they await the Lord's return. Paul points out that the church was divided and that believers were at odds over following

different leaders (e.g., Paul, Apollos, and Cephas). He called for unity and emphasized that Christ is the sole foundation of the church and that evangelism does not depend on human wisdom but on the grace of God. Paul's exposition of the message of the cross may seem foolish to the world, but it is the power and wisdom of God. God has chosen the lowly of the world to shame those who think they are wise, so that they cannot boast but the Lord. This chapter emphasizes the unity of the church, the cross of Christ as the center of the gospel, and the wisdom of God over man. Paul laid the theological foundation for subsequent discussions on church issues such as morality, doctrine, and order.

We pray

Dear Heavenly Father,

Thank you for sending Paul to be Your chosen disciple and apostle and to use Him to spread the gospel to all nations. Through His letters and teachings, we learn more about Your grace, truth, and strength of faith in Jesus Christ.

Thank you for using Paul to plant the early church and show us how to live as followers of Christ. His bravery, humility, and deep love for You continue to inspire us today.

May we, like Paul, be faithful to our calling and never be ashamed of the gospel. Please help us live with the same passion and purpose so that more people can know You.

In Jesus' name pray,

Amen.

1 Corinthians 1

Amplified Bible

Appeal to Unity

1 Paul, called as an apostle (special messenger, personally chosen representative) of Jesus Christ by the will of God, and our brother ^[a]Sosthenes,

²To the church of God in Corinth, to those sanctified (set apart, made holy) in Christ Jesus, who are selected *and* called as saints (God's people), together with all those who in every place call on *and* honor the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, their *Lord* and ours:

³Grace to you and peace [inner calm and spiritual well-being] from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

⁴I thank my God always for you because of the grace of God which was given you in Christ Jesus, ⁵so that in everything you were [exceedingly] enriched in Him, in all speech [empowered by the spiritual gifts] and in all knowledge [with insight into the faith]. ⁶In this way our testimony about Christ was confirmed *and* established in you, ⁷so that you are not lacking in any *spiritual* gift [which comes from the Holy Spirit], as you eagerly wait [with confident trust] for the revelation of our Lord Jesus Christ [when He returns]. ⁸And He will also confirm you to the end [keeping you strong and free of any accusation, so that you will be] blameless *and* beyond reproach in the day [of the return] of our Lord Jesus Christ. ⁹God

is faithful [He is reliable, trustworthy and ever true to His promise—He can be depended on], and through Him you were called into fellowship with His Son, Jesus Christ our Lord.

¹⁰ But I urge you, believers, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that all of you be in full agreement in what you say, and that there be no divisions *or* factions among you, but that you be perfectly united in your way of thinking and in your judgment [about matters of the faith]. ¹¹ For I have been informed about you, my brothers and sisters, by those of Chloe's *household*, that there are quarrels *and* factions among you. ¹² Now I mean this, that each one of you says, "I am [a disciple] of Paul," or "I am [a disciple] of Apollos," or "I am [a disciple] of Cephas (Peter)," or "I am [a disciple] of Christ." ¹³ Has Christ been divided [into different parts]? Was Paul crucified for you? Or were you baptized into the name of Paul? [Certainly not!] ¹⁴ I thank God that I did not baptize any of you except Crispus and Gaius, ¹⁵ so that no one would say that you were baptized into my name. ¹⁶ Now I also baptized the household of Stephanas; beyond that, I do not know if I baptized anyone else. ¹⁷ For Christ did not send me [as an apostle] to baptize, but [commissioned and empowered me] to preach the good news [of salvation]—not with clever *and* eloquent speech [as an orator], so that the cross of Christ would not be ^[b]made ineffective [deprived of its saving power].

The Wisdom of God

¹⁸ For the message of the cross is foolishness [absurd and illogical] to those who are perishing *and* spiritually dead [because they reject it], but to us who are being saved [by God's grace] it is [the manifestation of] the power of God. ¹⁹ For it is written *and* forever remains written,

"I will destroy the wisdom of the wise [the philosophy of the philosophers],
And the cleverness of the clever [who do not know Me] I will nullify."

²⁰ Where is the wise man (philosopher)? Where is the scribe (scholar)? Where is the debater (logician, orator) of this age? Has God not exposed the foolishness of this world's wisdom? ²¹ For since the world through all its [earthly] wisdom failed to recognize God, God in His wisdom was well-pleased through the ^[c]foolishness of the message preached [regarding salvation] to save those who believe [in Christ and welcome Him as Savior]. ²² For Jews demand signs (attesting miracles), and Greeks pursue [worldly] wisdom *and* philosophy, ²³ but we preach Christ crucified, [a message which is] to Jews a stumbling block [that provokes their opposition], and to Gentiles foolishness [just utter nonsense], ²⁴ but to those who are the called, both Jews and Greeks (Gentiles), Christ is the power of God and the wisdom of God. ²⁵ [This is] because the foolishness of God [is not foolishness at all and] is wiser than men [far beyond human comprehension], and the weakness of God is stronger than men [far beyond the limits of human effort].

²⁶ Just look at your own calling, believers; not many [of you were considered] wise according to human standards, not many powerful *or* influential, not many of high *and* noble birth. ²⁷ But God has selected [for His purpose] the foolish things of the world to shame the wise [revealing their ignorance], and God has selected [for His purpose] the weak things of the world to shame the things which are strong [revealing their frailty]. ²⁸ God has selected [for His purpose] the insignificant (base) things of the world, and the things that are despised *and* treated with contempt, [even] the things that are nothing, so that He might reduce to nothing the things that are, ²⁹ so that no one may [be able to] boast in the presence of God. ³⁰ But it is from Him that you are in Christ Jesus, who became to us wisdom from God [revealing His plan of salvation], and righteousness [making us acceptable to God], and sanctification [making us holy and setting us apart for God], and redemption [providing our ransom from the penalty for sin], ³¹ so then, as it is written [in Scripture], "He who boasts *and* glories, let him boast *and* glory in the Lord."

1 Corinthians Chapter 1 – Detailed Overview and Theological Influence

◆ Summary of 1 Corinthians 1

Author: Apostle Paul

Audience: The church in Corinth

Purpose: To address divisions in the church and re-center believers on Christ as the foundation of unity and wisdom.

◆ Detailed Breakdown

1.1–3 – Greeting

Paul greets the Corinthian believers, identifying himself as an apostle by the will of God. He includes Sosthenes, possibly a co-author or fellow leader. He blesses them with grace and peace from God and Christ.

1.4–9 – Thanksgiving for the Corinthians

Paul thanks God for the grace given to the Corinthians in Christ, especially spiritual gifts like knowledge and speech. He affirms that God will sustain them to the end and reminds them of their calling into fellowship with Jesus Christ.

Key Theme: God’s faithfulness to those He has called.

1.10–17 – Rebuke of Divisions

Paul begins the letter’s main issue: **factionalism**. Believers were aligning themselves with different leaders—Paul, Apollos, Cephas (Peter), or Christ—causing disunity.

Verse 13: “Is Christ divided? Was Paul crucified for you?”

Paul reminds them that the gospel is not about personality cults but about the **message of the cross**. He minimizes the importance of who baptized whom, emphasizing instead the gospel message.

1.18–25 – The Wisdom of the Cross

Paul contrasts the **“foolishness” of the cross** with human wisdom. To the world, the message of a crucified Savior seems foolish, but to believers, it is the **power of God**.

Verse 18: “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.”

He reminds them that God deliberately used something “foolish” and “weak” by the world’s standards to shame the strong and the wise.

1.26–31 – God’s Choice of the Lowly

Paul reminds the Corinthians that many of them were not powerful or noble by worldly standards. Yet, God chose the lowly to nullify the proud, so no one can boast before Him.

Verse 31: “Let the one who boasts, boast in the Lord.”

◆ Theological Themes and Influence

1. Unity in the Body of Christ

Paul strongly opposes division within the church. Theologically, this points to the **essential unity of the church in Christ** (cf. Eph. 4:4–6). Unity is not based on human leadership but on the shared foundation of the gospel.

2. Christ-Centered Gospel

Paul refuses to build the church on human personalities or eloquence. The focus is the **message of Christ crucified**, which becomes central to Christian theology: salvation through the atoning death and resurrection of Jesus.

3. God’s Wisdom vs. Worldly Wisdom

This passage lays a foundation for later Christian critiques of **secular philosophy and human pride**. It teaches that true knowledge and salvation come through what the world considers foolish—Christ crucified.

Influence: This shaped later Christian doctrines on **revelation, faith, and apologetics**, emphasizing that belief is not based on human logic alone but on divine calling and grace.

4. Election and Calling

Paul emphasizes that God **chooses the weak, lowly, and despised** to display His glory. This ties to doctrines of **grace, election, and justification by faith**, which would be central to Reformation theology, especially for theologians like Martin Luther and John Calvin.

◆ Key Theological Impact

- **Ecclesiology (Doctrine of the Church):** Emphasizes unity under Christ, not under leaders or traditions.
- **Soteriology (Doctrine of Salvation):** Reinforces that salvation comes through the cross, not wisdom or works.
- **Christology:** Highlights Jesus as the central figure of the gospel.

- **Ethics and Christian Living:** Boasting is in the Lord alone; humility is essential in Christian identity.
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◆ **Summary Statement**

1 Corinthians 1 is a powerful theological declaration that **true wisdom and unity are found in Christ alone**, not in human leaders or philosophies. It critiques pride and elevates the humility of the cross as the center of Christian life and faith.