

**Lesson 1: “A Wise Encouragement” 1 Corinthians 1:1-9 Craig Crawshaw****INTRODUCTION**

So, imagine that you have felt led to communicate words of correction and rebuke to someone you care deeply about. You know that these words will be difficult for this someone to receive, but you hope and pray that they will be received well, with positive and constructive results. How do you begin?

Well, I think we would agree that you should not begin by “jumping in” at the harshest level. Rather, you would wisely preface your remarks with some positive words of encouragement to hopefully soften and balance the more difficult words to come. And this is exactly what Paul did in his communication to the church at Corinth as he began what we know as First Corinthians.

Paul had a very difficult message to communicate. The Corinthian church to whom he was writing had fallen into many errors of doctrine and practice since Paul has birthed that church only years previously. And they were badly in need of correcting by the apostle Paul, their “father in the faith.”

Paul had a long “laundry list” of corrections to deliver. Here are “the top 10”:

1. The church was divided and badly in need of godly unity of direction.
2. The church was not relying upon the Spirit, but upon the human opinions of its membership.
3. There was gross immorality that was being ignored or dismissed.
4. There were conflicts between members over their past sins, not acknowledging the miraculous change of a new believer in Christ.
5. They were confused about the sanctity of marriage and the roles of husband and wife.
6. They knew they were “set free” but were confused about what that new freedom allowed.
7. They were struggling with how to handle the many temptations around them.
8. They didn’t fully understand the practice and purpose of the communion celebration.
9. They were badly misinformed about the practice and purpose of spiritual gifts.
10. They had many misunderstandings about Jesus’ resurrection and the promised resurrection of their own bodies to come.

These subjects, and more, are the teaching of 1 Corinthians. So, you see that as we go through its pages, there will be much instruction for us personally and for us as a church.

But know above all that God loved these Corinthians, and God loves you. He sent His Only Son Jesus to become a sacrifice and substitute for their sin and yours. And He sent Paul to this heathen Corinthian city to call a people out of darkness to be his own, just as He has sent messengers such as myself to call you out of darkness to be His own as well. Learn the instructions and corrections of 1 Corinthians. But above all, and first of all, receive the invitation of God to be His child by faith.

## CORINTH

Corinth was an important commercial city of its day. Greece (as we know it today) is separated into two parts by only a 4-mile-wide neck of land, with sea on both sides. And Corinth was situated in the middle of that “neck” – with all foot traffic north to south having to pass through it, and all sea traffic east to west having to pass through it. For it was a 202-mile dangerous sea voyage around the southern cape of Malea if east-west passage was not made through Corinth. This made Corinth a metropolitan and world trade center with all the wealth and filth that accompanied such a metropolis.

“She had commercial prosperity, but she was also a by-word for evil and immoral living” says commentator William Barclay. The very word “Corinthian” became a descriptive adjective of the day to describe one as being full of evil and immoral debauchery. And above the city towered the hill of the Acropolis, and on it stood the temple of Aphrodite, the goddess of love. And every night 1000 priestesses who were “sacred prostitutes” descended upon the city to offer their bodies to the weak of morality. Thus, it became a Greek proverb that “it is not every man who can afford a journey to Corinth.”

This was the pagan city that Paul was sent to by God. It is in Acts 18 that we learn Paul stayed here for 18 months (a good memory aid: 18=18). He stayed with Aquila and Priscilla who were tent makers like Paul, and who became great preachers and teachers of the gospel, like Paul. The Jews in Corinth rejected Paul, so Paul built the church of Corinth primarily with Gentiles. So, you can imagine the challenging moral culture from which these converts came. And you can imagine the challenges of teaching these converts the ways of the Lord. Paul met many of these challenges through the letters of First and Second Corinthians.

## OUR TEXT

Today, as we begin our journey through the text of this ancient, but still very relevant letter, let us examine Paul's carefully crafted, positive opening words, which I have entitled “A Wise Encouragement.”

**1 Corinthians 1:1-9** *Paul, called as an apostle of Jesus Christ by the will of God, and Sosthenes our brother, to the church of God which is at Corinth, to those who have been sanctified in Christ Jesus, saints by calling, with all who in every place call on the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, their Lord and ours; grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.*

*I thank my God always concerning you for the grace of God which was given you in Christ Jesus, that in everything you were enriched in Him, in all speech and all knowledge, even as the testimony concerning Christ was confirmed in you, so that you are not lacking in any gift, awaiting eagerly the revelation of our Lord Jesus Christ, who will also confirm you to the end, blameless in the day of our Lord Jesus Christ. God is faithful, through whom you were called into fellowship with His Son, Jesus Christ our Lord.*

## JESUS CHRIST IS LORD

First, I want you to note the many times “Jesus Christ”, “Christ Jesus”, or “Christ” is mentioned in these nine verses. Count them and you will find NINE. And further note how many times the title of “Lord” is included in these nine mentions of our Savior. Count them and find SIX.

This speaks of two important points. (1) This letter (and all of Scripture) is about Jesus and especially about His Lordship – His right to command my complete loyalty and following of His leadership.

And (2) Paul realized the Corinthian church needed a strong reminder that Jesus the Christ and the Lord was the one and only leader, head and authority of their church. This was one of the key issues that divided them (see “laundry list #1 above) and needed strong affirmation.

## CALLING AS SANCTIFIED SAINTS

Second, note the emphasis on the “call” of God.

1. In verse 1, Paul is “called” as an apostle.
2. In verse 2, the Corinthians have been “sanctified” (set apart as holy) “by calling” (of God) as “saints” (from the same word as “sanctified”, i.e. made holy by calling).
3. In verse 9, again the Corinthians are reminded that they are “called” into fellowship with Jesus Christ our Lord.

Clearly Paul wanted to teach and correct, if necessary, that each believer was personally “called” by God into faith in Christ. Yes, each one made a decision to follow Christ – that’s free will. But from God’s perspective, each was “called out” of darkness into the light of truth by God. They are “saints” not by anything they have done in righteousness, but by God’s calling and cleansing of them for His purpose. In other words, their saint “halo” is not a halo of their righteousness, but of God’s righteousness.

Furthermore, that call was “effectual” – meaning it could not be ignored or resisted. Yes, Jesus’ death and conquering of sin was **sufficient** for all. In this sense, Paul could write to Timothy of God that He “desires all men to be saved” (1 Timothy 2:4) and of Jesus that He “gave Himself as a ransom for all” (1 Timothy 2:6).

BUT – Paul wanted the Corinthians (and us, by extension) to know that Jesus’ death and conquering of sin was **effectual** for only some – that is, for those who are the “called” of God. This truth is not to evoke pride, but rather humility and purpose in serving Him who has personally called us.

“Calling” or “free will”? some ask. It is both. I love that Jesus taught both in the same verse.

**John 6:37** *All that the Father gives Me will come to Me, and the one who comes to Me I will certainly not cast out.*

The first phrase is “calling” and the second is “free will.” It helps me to understand them both as being true simultaneousness from two different perspectives. From our perspective as human beings in time, it is all about free will. “Whosoever will can

come.” From God’s perspective outside of time, it is all about the divine call.

The Corinthians thought that they were saved by what they had done in deciding to follow Jesus. Paul wanted them to know that they were saved by what God had done in calling them and setting them apart.

And the “setting apart” was especially important for the Corinthians (and us) to know, because they needed to know that they were called “out of” their immoral culture into God’s culture of morality.

### **NOT LACKING IN ANY GIFT**

When we get to chapter 12, 13 and 14 we will see that one of the Corinthian church’s primary misunderstandings was about spiritual gifts. They were so proud of their gifts, and therefore were seeking more. Paul wanted them to know that they God had already fully endowed them. As Paul said to the Colossian church, “in Him [Jesus] you have been made complete.” (Colossians 2:10).

They had been enriched in speech and knowledge (v. 5) being able to both speak and know the truth of God. And, praise God, this is true for us who are believers as well. (Note 1 Cor. 13:1, where more love is what they needed to seek after.)

The only way they could, or we can “get” more of Christ’s gifts is to meet Christ in the hereafter. For this we are “awaiting eagerly the revelation of our Lord Jesus Christ” (v. 7) “who will also confirm you to the end, blameless in the day of our Lord Jesus Christ” (v. 8).

### **A WISE ENCOURAGEMENT**

Do you see how “wise” Paul was in this encouraging beginning to his letter to the Corinthians? Later in this first chapter we are going to hear Paul talk about the wisdom of God as opposed to the wisdom of man. And throughout the letter we will see Paul appealing to apply God’s wisdom to each aspect of life – both personal and church life. Here, Paul applies this godly wisdom to his greeting. He wisely emphasizes ...

1. The **Lordship** of Jesus Christ
2. The **Calling** of God on our lives
3. The **Setting A part** of our lives from the ways of the world
4. The **Full Endowment** we enjoy as the spiritually gifted of God

**I challenge every follower of Christ to fully and gladly embrace these glorious truths. May the book of 1 Corinthians open up to each of us the wherewithal to BE WISE!**

### **APPENDIX**

Years ago, I came up with the following silly sentence to help me memorize a primary teaching in each of the first 11 chapters of 1 Corinthians. (Chapters 12-16 are much better known, as we will find.) You might take the challenge to memorize this sentence in order to better learn the content of 1 Corinthians 1-11.

## **WISE MINDS FOUND SCUMMY IMMORAL LAWS WEDDING IDOLS to OXEN TEMPTING COMMUNION**

- Chapter 1 – the wisdom **WISE** of God
- Chapter 2 – The MIND of Christ in me
- Chapter 3 – the **FOUND**ation of Christ for life
- Chapter 4 – Paul became as the scum SCUMMY of the earth to serve
- Chapter 5 – Gross **IMMORAL**ity abounded in the Corinthian church
- Chapter 6 – Paul discouraged **LAW**Suits to settle disputes
- Chapter 7 – Paul teaches principles of marriage **WEDDING**
- Chapter 8 – Paul uses things offered to **IDOLS** as teaching principles of spiritual liberty
- Chapter 9 – Paul speaks of **OXEN** not being muzzled when threshing as example of spiritual leaders having freedom to reap material gain from serving
- Chapter 10 – Paul speaks of dealing with temptation **TEMPTING**
- Chapter 11 – Paul teaches on **COMMUNION**