

THE FIRST LETTER TO THE

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CORINTHIANS

WILLIAM MACDONALD




*Developed as a study course by Emmaus Correspondence School, founded in 1942.*

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*The First Letter to the Corinthians*

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# STUDENT INSTRUCTIONS

The city of Corinth was located in the southern part of Greece, west of Athens. Strategically situated on the trade routes of that day, it became a great center for international commerce, and immense quantities of traffic came to this city. But because of the depraved religion of the people, it soon became the center also for the grossest forms of sin and immorality, so that the name of Corinth was a by-word for all that was impure and sensual.

The Apostle Paul first visited Corinth on his second missionary journey. A record of this visit is found in Acts 18. At first he labored among the Jewish people, together with Priscilla and Aquila, his fellow tentmakers. When the Jews rejected the message, he turned to the Gentile people in Corinth. Souls were saved through the preaching of the gospel, and an assembly was formed.

About three years later, when Paul was preaching in Ephesus, he received a letter from Corinth, telling of serious difficulties in the assembly there and also asking various questions as to matters of Christian practice. It was in answer to this letter that The First Letter to the Corinthians was written.

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## **Course Components**

This course has two parts: this study course and the exam booklet.

## **How to Study**

This study has twelve chapters, and each chapter has its own exam. Begin by asking God to help you understand the material. Read the chapter through at least twice, once to get a general idea of its contents and then again, slowly, looking up any Bible references given.

Begin studying immediately, or if you are in a group, as soon as the group begins. We suggest that you keep a regular schedule by trying to completing at least one chapter per week.

## **Exams**

In the exam booklet there is one exam for each chapter (exam 1 covers chapter 1 of the course). Do not answer the questions by what you think or have always believed. The questions are designed to find out if you understand the material given in the course.

After you have completed each chapter, review the related exam and see how well you know the answers. If you find that you are having difficulty answering the questions, review the material until you think you can answer the questions. It is important that you read the Bible passages referenced as some questions may be based on the Bible text.

## **How Your Exams Are Graded**

Your instructor will mark any incorrectly answered questions. You will be referred back to the place in the course where the correct answer is to be found. After finishing this course with a passing average, you will be awarded a certificate.

If you enrolled in a class, submit your exam papers to the leader or secretary of the class who will send them for the entire group to the Correspondence School.

See the back of the exam booklet for more information on returning the exams for grading.

# OUTLINE

- I. Salutation (1:1-3)
- II. Thanksgiving (1:4-9)
- III. Divisions in the church (1:10–4:21)
- IV. Discipline in the church (5:1-13)
- V. Lawsuits among believers (6:1-11)
- VI. Some principles for judging between right and wrong (6:12-20)
- VII. Instructions concerning marriage and celibacy (7:1-40)
- VIII. The question of eating meats offered to idols (8:1–11:1)
- IX. Instructions concerning woman's head-covering (11:2-16)
- X. Abuses in connection with the Lord's Supper (11:17-34)
- XI. The gifts of the Spirit and their use in the church (chapters 12–14)
- XII. Paul's answer to those who denied the resurrection (15:1-58)
- XIII. Instructions concerning the collection (16:1-4)
- XIV. Paul's personal plans (16:5-9)
- XV. Closing exhortations and greetings (16:10-24)



# 1

## DIVISIONS IN THE CHURCH (1:1–2:16)

### Outline

- I. Salutation (1:1-3).
- II. Thanksgiving (1:4-9).
  - A. For gifts given in the past (vv. 4-6).
  - B. For present fullness of gifts (v. 7).
  - C. For future preservation of the saints (vv. 8-9).
- III. Divisions in the church (1:10–4:21).
  - A. Exhortation to unity (v. 10).
  - B. Source of information concerning divisions (v. 11).
  - C. Nature of the divisions (v. 12).
  - D. Divisions rebuked (vv. 13-17).
    - 1. Christ is not divided (v. 13).
    - 2. Only Christ was crucified for them (v. 13).
    - 3. Believers are baptized unto Christ's Name alone (vv. 13-17).
  - E. The folly of exalting men shown by the true nature of the gospel (1:18-3:4).
    - 1. The message of the cross is the opposite of all that men consider to be true wisdom (vv. 18-25).
    - 2. The ones whom God calls by the gospel are not generally the ones whom the world considers great (vv. 26-29).

3. The gospel message exalts God alone and not man (vv. 30-31).
4. Paul's example at Corinth was calculated to glorify God and not himself (2:1-5).
5. Although the gospel does not appeal to human wisdom, yet to those who are mature, it is divine wisdom (2:6-3:4).
  - a. It is divine in its origin (vv. 6-7).
  - b. The wisdom has been hidden by God before the world (v. 7).
  - c. It was unknown to the rulers of Christ's day (v. 8).
  - d. It was revealed to the apostles by the Holy Spirit (vv. 9-12).
  - e. It was given by the apostles to others through the inspiration of the Holy Spirit (v. 13).
  - f. It can only be understood by those who are enlightened by the Holy Spirit (vv. 14-16).

**I**n the first three verses of this chapter, we have Paul's greeting to the church at Corinth that was located in the country of Greece. Verses 4-9 contain Paul's thanksgiving for these believers whom he had led to the Lord. Then in verse 10 he introduces the subject of divisions in the church, a subject that is continued to the end of chapter 4.

### **Greetings from Paul (1:1-3)**

Paul was called to be an apostle of Jesus Christ on the Damascus road. This call did not come from men, or through men, but directly from the Lord Jesus Christ. An apostle is literally "a sent one." The first apostles were witnesses of Christ in resurrection. They also had the ability to perform miracles as a confirmation that the message they preached was divine. Paul could truly say in the language of Ter Steegen:

"Christ the Son of God hath sent me to the midnight lands;  
Mine the mighty ordination of the pierced hands."

At the time Paul wrote, a brother named Sosthenes was with him, and so Paul includes his name in the salutation. It cannot be known with certainty whether this is the same Sosthenes we read about in Acts 18:17, the chief ruler of the synagogue who was publicly beaten by the Greeks. There is at



least the possibility that this chief ruler had been saved through the preaching of the Apostle and was now helping him in the work of the gospel.

The letter is addressed first of all to the church of God that is at Corinth. It is encouraging to remind our hearts at this point that there is no place on earth too immoral for an assembly belonging to God to be established.

The assembly in Corinth is further described as those that are “sanctified in Christ Jesus, called . . . saints” Sanctified here means set apart to God from the world, and describes the *position* of all who belong to Christ. As to their *practical condition*, they should set themselves apart day by day in holy living.

There are some who contend that sanctification is a distinct work of grace whereby a person obtains the eradication of the sin nature. Such a teaching is contradicted in this verse. The Corinthian Christians were far from what they should have been in practical holiness, but the fact remains that they were positionally sanctified by God.

As saints they were members of a great fellowship: “called to be saints, with all who in every place call on the name of Jesus Christ our Lord, both theirs and ours” (v. 2). Although the teachings of this letter were addressed primarily to the saints in Corinth, they are also intended for all those of the worldwide fellowship who acknowledge the Lordship of Christ.

This letter is in a very special way the letter of His Lordship. In discussing the many problems of the assembly and personal life, the Apostle constantly reminds his readers that Jesus Christ is Lord and that all we do should be done in acknowledgment of this great truth.

Paul’s characteristic greeting is given in verse 3. Grace and peace summarize his entire gospel. Grace is the source of every blessing, and peace is the result in the life of a man who accepts the grace of God. Notice that these great blessings come from God our Father and from the Lord Jesus Christ. Paul does not hesitate to mention the Lord Jesus in the same breath with God the Father. This is one of hundreds of similar expressions in the New Testament implying the equality of the Lord Jesus with God the Father.

## **Paul's Thanksgiving (1:4-9)**

Having concluded his salutation, the Apostle Paul now turns to thanksgiving for the Corinthians and for the wonderful work of God in their lives (vv. 4-9).

It was a noble trait in the life of the Apostle that always sought to find something thankworthy in the lives of his fellow believers. If their own lives were not very commendable, then he would at least give thanks for what God had done for them. This is exactly the case here. The Corinthians were not what we would call spiritual Christians. But Paul can at least give thanks for the grace of God, which was given to them in Christ Jesus.

The particular way in which God's grace was manifested to the Corinthians was in their being richly endowed with gifts of the Holy Spirit. Paul specifies gifts of utterance and knowledge, presumably meaning that the Corinthians had been given the gifts of tongues, interpretation of tongues, and knowledge to an extraordinary degree. A. T. Robertson points out that utterance has to do with outward expression and knowledge with inward comprehension.

The fact that they had these gifts was a confirmation of God's work in their lives, and that is what the Apostle Paul means when he says, "Even as the testimony of Christ was confirmed in you" (v. 6). They heard the testimony of Christ, they received it by faith, and God testified to the fact that they were truly saved by giving them these miraculous powers.

As far as the possession of gifts was concerned, the Corinthian assembly was not inferior to any other church. But it should be noticed here that the possession of these gifts was not in itself a mark of true spirituality. Paul was really thanking the Lord for something for which the Corinthians themselves were not directly responsible. Gifts are given by the ascended Lord without regard to a person's own merit. If a person has some gift, he should not be proud of it but use it humbly for the Lord.

The fruit of the Spirit is another matter entirely. This involves the believers own surrender to the control of the Holy Spirit. The Apostle could not commend the Corinthians for evidence of the fruit of the Spirit in their lives, but only for that which the Lord had sovereignly bestowed on them—something over which they had no control.

Later in the letter the Apostle will have to reprove the saints for their abuse of these gifts, but here he is content to express thanks that they had

received these gifts in such unusual measure.

The Corinthians were waiting for the revelation of our Lord Jesus Christ. Bible students are not agreed as to whether this refers to Christ's coming for His saints (1 Thessalonians 4:13-18), or the Lord's coming with His saints (2 Thessalonians 1:6-10). In the first case it would be a revelation of Christ only to believers, whereas in the second it would be His revelation to the whole world. Both the rapture and the glorious appearing of Christ are eagerly awaited by the believer.

In verse 8 Paul expresses the further confidence that the Lord will preserve the saints unto the end, that they might be unreprouvable in the day of our Lord Jesus Christ. Once again it is striking that Paul's thanksgiving is concerned with what God will do rather than with what the Corinthians have done. Because they have trusted Christ, and because God confirmed this fact by giving the gifts of the Spirit to them, Paul was confident that God would keep them for Himself until Christ's coming for His people.

Paul's optimism concerning the Corinthians is based upon the faithfulness of God Who called them into the fellowship of His Son. He knows that since God had gone to such tremendous cost to make them sharers of the life of the Lord Jesus, He would never let them slip out of His hands.

### **Rebuke for Divisions (1:10-17)**

The Apostle is now ready to take up the problem of divisions in the church (1:10-4:21). He begins with a loving exhortation to unity. Instead of commanding with the authority of an apostle, he beseeches with the tenderness of a brother. The appeal for unity is based on the Name of the Lord Jesus Christ, and since the name stands for the person, it is based on all that the Lord Jesus is and has done. The Corinthians were exalting the name of men; that could only lead to divisions. Paul will exalt the Name of the Lord Jesus, knowing that only in this way will unity be produced among the people of God. "Speak the same thing," means to be of one mind and of one accord. It means to be united as to loyalty and allegiance. This unity is produced when Christians have the mind of Christ, and in the verses to follow the Apostle Paul will tell them in a practical manner how they can think Christ's thoughts after Him.

News concerning the divisions in Corinth had come to Paul from the house of Chloe (v. 11). In naming his informers, Paul lays down an important

principle of Christian conduct. We should not pass on news about our fellow believers unless we are willing to be quoted in the matter. If this example were followed today, it would prevent most of the idle gossip that now plagues the Church.

Sects or parties were being formed within the local church, each one claiming its distinctive leader. Some acknowledged preference for Paul, some for Apollos, some for Cephas or Peter, and some claimed to belong to Christ, probably meaning that they *alone* belonged to Him, to the exclusion of others (v. 12).

Paul's indignant rebuke of sectarianism is found in verses 13-17. To form such parties in the church was to deny the unity of the body of Christ. To follow human leaders was to slight the One Who had been crucified for them. To take the name of a man was to forget that in baptism, they had acknowledged their allegiance to the Lord Jesus.

The rise of parties in Corinth made Paul thankful that he had baptized only a few in the assembly there. He mentions Crispus and Gaius as among those whom he had baptized. He would never want anyone to say that he had baptized in his own name. In other words, he was not trying to win converts to himself or to make a name for himself. His sole aim was to point men and women to the Lord Jesus Christ. On further reflection Paul remembered that he had also baptized the household of Stephanas, but he could not think of any others (vv. 15-16).

Paul explains that Christ did not send him primarily to baptize, but to preach the gospel (v. 17). This does not mean for a moment that Paul did not believe in baptism. He has already mentioned the names of some whom he did baptize. Rather, it means that his main business was not to baptize; he probably entrusted this work to others, perhaps to some of the Christians in the local church. This verse, however, does lend its testimony against any idea that baptism is essential to salvation. If that were true, then Paul would be saying here that he was thankful that he saved none of them except Crispus and Gaius. Such an idea is untenable.

In the latter part of verse 17, we find Paul making an easy transition to the verses that follow. He did not preach the gospel with wisdom of words, lest the cross of Christ should be made of no effect. He knew that if men were impressed by his oratory or rhetoric, then to that extent he had defeated himself in his efforts to set forth the true meaning of the cross of Christ.

It will help us to understand the section that follows if we remember that the Corinthians, being Greeks, were great lovers of human wisdom. They regarded their philosophers as national heroes.

Some of this spirit had apparently crept into the assembly at Corinth. There were those who desired to make the gospel more acceptable to the intelligentsia. They did not feel that it had status among scholars, and so they wanted to intellectualize the message. This worship of intellectualism was apparently one of the issues that was causing the people to form parties around human leaders.

Efforts to make the gospel more acceptable are completely misguided. There is a vast difference between God's wisdom and man's, and there is no use trying to reconcile them.

### **The Cross vs. Man's Wisdom (1:18-25)**

Paul now shows the folly of exalting men, and emphasizes that to do this is inconsistent with the true nature of the gospel (1:18-3:4). His first point is that the message of the cross is the opposite of all that men consider to be true wisdom (1:18-25).

The message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing. As Barnes has so aptly stated, "The death on the cross was associated with the idea of all that is shameful and dishonorable; and to speak of salvation only by the sufferings and death of a crucified man was fitted to excite in their bosoms only unmingled scorn." The Greeks were lovers of wisdom (that is the literal meaning of the word "philosophers"). But there was nothing in the gospel message to appeal to their pride of knowledge.

To those who are saved, the gospel is the power of God. They hear the message, they accept it by faith and the miracle of regeneration is wrought in their lives. Notice the solemn fact in this verse that there are only two classes of people, those who perish and those who are saved. There is no in-between class. Men may love their human wisdom but only the gospel leads to salvation.

The fact that the gospel would be offensive to human wisdom was prophesied by Isaiah (29:14). There God is quoted as saying, "I will destroy the wisdom of the wise, and will bring to nothing the understanding of the prudent." "The words are God's denouncement of the policy of the 'wise' in Judah in seeking an alliance with Egypt when threatened by

Sennacherib” –S. Lewis Johnson in *The Wycliffe Bible Commentary*. How true it is that God delights to accomplish His purposes in ways that seem foolish to men. How often He uses methods that the wise of this world would ridicule; yet they achieve the desired results with wonderful accuracy and efficiency. For example, man’s wisdom assures him that he can earn or merit his own salvation. The gospel sets aside all man’s efforts to save himself and presents Christ as the only way to God.

Paul next hurls out a defiant challenge (v. 20). Where is the wise? Where is the scribe? Where is the disputer of this world? Did God consult them when He devised His plan of salvation? Could they ever have worked out such a scheme of redemption if left to their own wisdom? Can they rise to disprove anything that God has ever said? The answer is an emphatic “No.” God has made foolish the wisdom of this world.

Man cannot by his own wisdom come to the knowledge of God. For centuries God gave the human race this opportunity, and the result was failure. Then it pleased God by the preaching of the cross, a message that seems foolish to men, to save those who believe. The thought here is not so much the foolishness of preaching as the foolishness of the thing preached, that is, the Cross. Of course, we know that it is not foolishness, but it seems foolish to the unenlightened mind of man. Godet says that this sentence (v. 21) contains a whole philosophy of history, the substance of entire volumes. The student should not hurry over it quickly, but ponder deeply its tremendous truths.

It was characteristic of the Jewish people to seek for a sign (v. 22). Their attitude was that they would believe if some miracle were shown to them. The Greeks on the other hand loved wisdom. They were interested in human reasonings, in arguments, in logic. But Paul did not cater to their desires. He says, “We preach Christ crucified.” As someone has said, “He was not a sign-loving Jew, nor a wisdom-loving Greek, but a Savior-loving Christian.”

To the Jews, Christ crucified was a stumbling block. They looked for a mighty military leader to deliver them from the oppression of Rome. Instead of this, the gospel offered them a Savior Who was nailed to a cross of shame. To the Gentiles, Christ crucified was foolishness. They could not understand how One Who died in such seeming weakness and failure could ever solve their problems.

But strangely enough, the very things that the Jews and the Gentiles sought are found in a wonderful way in the Lord Jesus. To those who hear His call and trust in Him, both Jews and Gentiles, He becomes the power of God and the wisdom of God (v. 24).

Actually, of course, there is neither foolishness nor weakness with God. But the Apostle is saying in verse 25 that what seems to be foolishness on God's part, in the eyes of men, is actually wiser than man at his very best. Also, what seems to be weakness on God's part, in the eyes of men, turns out to be more powerful than anything that man can produce.

### **The Gospel's Appeal (1:26-31)**

Having spoken of the gospel itself, the Apostle now turns to the people whom God calls by the gospel (vv. 26-29). He reminds the Corinthians that not many wise after the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble are called. It has often been pointed out that the text does not say "not any" but "not many." Because of this slight difference, one titled English lady used to testify that she was saved by the letter "m."

The Corinthians themselves had not come from the upper intellectual crust of society. They had not been reached by high-sounding philosophies but by the simple gospel. Why, then, were they putting such a premium on human wisdom and exalting preachers who sought to make the message palatable to the worldly-wise?

If men were to build a church they would seek to enroll the most prominent members of the community. But verse 26 teaches us that what men esteem so highly, God passes by. The ones whom He calls are not generally the ones whom the world considers great.

God chose the foolish things of the world that He might put to shame them that are wise; and the weak things of the world that He might put to shame the things that are strong. "The more primitive the material, the greater—if the same high standard of art can be reached—the honor of the Master; the smaller the army, the mightier—if the same great victory can be won—the praise of the conqueror" —Sauer.

God used trumpets to bring down the walls of Jericho. He reduced Gideon's army from 32,000 to 300 to rout the hosts of Midian. He used an ox-goad in the hand of Shamgar to defeat 600 Philistines. With the jawbone

of an ass, He enabled Samson to defeat a whole army. And our Lord fed over 5,000 with nothing more than a few loaves and fishes.

To make up what someone has called “God’s five-ranked army of fools,” Paul in verse 29 adds the base things of the world, the things that are despised and the things that are not. Using such unlikely materials, God brings to naught the things that are. In other words, He loves to take up people who are of no esteem in the eyes of the world and use them to glorify Himself. These verses should serve as a rebuke to Christians who curry the favor of prominent and well-known personages and show little or no regard for the more humble saints of God. God’s purpose in choosing those of no account in the eyes of the world is that all the glory should accrue to Himself and not to man. Since salvation is entirely of Him, He alone is worthy to be praised.

Verse 30 emphasizes even further that all we are and have comes from Him, not from philosophy, and that there is therefore no room for human glory. The verse might be paraphrased as follows: “But by Him (God) you are placed in Christ Jesus, who was made unto us wisdom from God, and righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption.”

First of all, Christ is made unto us wisdom. He is the wisdom of God (v. 24), the One whom God’s wisdom chose as the way of salvation. When we have Him, we have a positional wisdom that guarantees our full salvation. Secondly, He is our righteousness. Through faith in Him we are reckoned righteous by a holy God. Thirdly, He is our sanctification. In ourselves we have nothing in the way of personal holiness, but in Him we are positionally sanctified, and by His power we are transformed from one degree of sanctification to another. Finally, He is our redemption, and this doubtless speaks of redemption in its final aspect when the Lord will come and take us home to be with Himself, and when we shall be redeemed—spirit, soul and body.

“Wisdom out of Christ is damning folly—righteousness out of Christ is guilt and condemnation—sanctification out of Christ is filth and sin—redemption out of Christ is bondage and slavery” –Traill.

A. T. Pierson relates verse 30 to the life and ministry of our Lord. “His deeds and His words and His practices, these show Him as the wisdom of God. Then come His death, burial, and resurrection: these have to do with our righteousness. Then His forty days’ walk among men, His ascension up on high, the gift of the Spirit, and His session at the right hand of God, have to do with our sanctification. Then His coming again, which has to do with our redemption.”



Some see verse 30 as an outline of the entire letter, as follows:

Wisdom	Chapters 1–4
Righteousness	Chapters 5–10
Sanctification	Chapters 11–14
Redemption	Chapter 15
Postscript	Chapter 16

God has so arranged it that all these blessings should come to us in the Lord Jesus Christ. Paul’s argument therefore is, “Why glory in men? They cannot do any one of these things for you.”

### **Paul’s Example at Corinth (2:1-5)**

The Apostle now reminds the saints of his ministry among them and how he sought to glorify God and not himself. He came to them proclaiming the testimony of God, not with excellency of speech or of wisdom. He was not at all interested in showing himself off as an orator or as a philosopher.

This shows that the Apostle Paul recognized the difference between ministry that is soulish and that which is spiritual. By soulish ministry, we mean that which amuses, entertains, or generally appeals to man’s emotions. Spiritual ministry, on the other hand, presents the truth of God’s Word in such a way as to reach the heart and conscience of the hearers.

The content of Paul’s message was Jesus Christ and Him crucified. “Jesus Christ” refers to His Person, while “Him crucified” refers to His work. The Person and work of the Lord Jesus form the substance of the Christian evangel.

Paul, in verse 3, further emphasizes that his personal demeanor was neither impressive nor attractive. He was with the Corinthians in weakness and in fear and in much trembling. The treasure of the gospel was contained in an earthen vessel that the excellency of the power might be of God and not of Paul. He himself was an example of how God uses weak things to confound the mighty. Neither Paul’s speech nor his preaching were in persuasive words of wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power. Some suggest that his speech refers to the material he presented and his preaching to the manner of its presentation. Others define his speech as his witness to individuals and his preaching as his messages to groups. According to the standards of this world, the Apostle might never have won an oratorical

contest. Notwithstanding this, the Spirit of God used the message to produce conviction of sin and conversion to God.

Paul knew that there was the utmost danger that his hearers might be interested in himself or in his own personality rather than in the living Lord. Conscious of his own inability to bless or to save, he determined that he would lead men to trust in God alone rather than in the wisdom of men. It is fitting that all who proclaim the gospel message or teach the Word of God should make this their constant aim.

### **The Nature of the Gospel (2:6-16)**

First of all, wisdom shown in the gospel is divine in its origin (vv. 6-7). “*We speak wisdom among those who are mature,*” that is, among those Christians who are full-grown or mature. Yet it is not wisdom as the world reckons it, nor would it be wisdom in the eyes of the princes or rulers of this world. Their wisdom is a perishable thing which, like themselves, is born for one brief day.

We speak God’s wisdom in a mystery (v. 7). A mystery is a New Testament truth not hitherto revealed, but now made known to believers by the apostles and prophets of the early Church age. This mystery is a wisdom that has been hidden, which God foreordained before the worlds unto our glory. The mystery of the gospel includes such wonderful truths as the fact that now Jews and Gentiles are made one in Christ; that the Lord Jesus will come and take His waiting people home to be with Himself; and that not all believers will die but all will be changed.

The rulers of this age (v. 8) may refer to demonic spirit beings in the heavenlies or to their human agents on earth. They didn’t understand the hidden wisdom of God (Christ on a cross) or realize that their murder of the Holy Son of God would result in their own destruction. If they had known the ways of God they would not have crucified the Lord of glory.

The process of revelation, inspiration, and illumination are described in verses 9-16. They tell us how these wonderful truths were made known to the apostles by the Holy Spirit, how they, in turn, passed on these truths to us by inspiration of the Holy Spirit, and how we understand them by the illumination of the Holy Spirit.

## **1. Revelation (2:9-12)**

The quotation in verse 9 from Isaiah 64:4 is a prophecy that God had treasured up wonderful truths which could not be discovered by the natural senses but which in due time He would reveal to those who loved Him. Three faculties (eye, ear and heart or mind) by which we learn earthly things are listed, but these are not sufficient for the reception of divine truths, for there the Spirit of God is necessary.

This verse is commonly interpreted to refer to the glories of heaven, and once we get that meaning in our minds, it is difficult to dislodge it and accept any other meaning. But Paul is really speaking here about the truths that have been revealed for the first time in the New Testament. Men could never have arrived at these truths through scientific investigations or philosophic inquiries. The human mind, left to itself, could never discover the wonderful mysteries that were made known at the beginning of the gospel era. Human reason is totally inadequate to find the truth of God.

That verse 9 does not refer to heaven is proved by the statement that “God has revealed them to us through His Spirit” (v. 10). In other words, these truths foretold in the Old Testament were made known to the apostles of the New Testament era. The “us” refers to the writers of the New Testament. It was by the Spirit of God that the apostles and prophets were enlightened, because the Spirit searches all things, yea, the deep things of God. In other words, the Spirit of God, one of the members of the Godhead, is infinite in wisdom and understands all the truths of God and is able to impart them to others.

Even in human affairs no one knows what a man is thinking but he himself. No one else can possibly find out unless the man himself chooses to make it known. Even then, in order to understand a man, a person must have the spirit of a man. An animal cannot fully understand our thinking. So it is with God. The only one who can understand the things of God is the Spirit of God.

The “we” of verse 12 refers to the writers of the New Testament, although it is equally true of all the Bible writers, of course. Since the apostles and prophets had received the Holy Spirit, He was able to share with them the deep truths of God. That is what the Apostle means when he says in this verse, “Now we have received, not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God, that we might know the things that are freely given to us of God.” Apart from the Spirit of God, the apostles could never have received

the divine truths of which Paul is speaking and which are preserved for us in the New Testament.

## **2. Inspiration (2:13)**

Having described the process of revelation, by which the writers of Sacred Scripture received truth from God, Paul now goes on to describe the process of inspiration, by which that truth was communicated to us. Verse 13 is one of the strongest passages in the Word of God on the subject of verbal inspiration. The Apostle Paul clearly states that in conveying these truths to us, the apostles did not use words of their own choosing or words dictated by human wisdom. Rather, they used the very words that the Holy Spirit taught them to use. And so we believe that the actual words of Scripture, as found in the original autographs, were the very words of God (and that the Bible in its present form is entirely trustworthy).

At this point a howl of objection arises since what we have said implies mechanical dictation, as if God did not allow the writers to use their own style. Yet we know that Paul's writing style is quite different from Luke's, for example. How, then can we reconcile verbal inspiration with the obvious individual style of the writers? In some way that we do not understand, God gave the very words of Scripture, and yet he clothed those words with the individual style of the writers. Remembering that, we should have no trouble with the idea of mechanical dictation. But why should we have trouble anyway? When an executive dictates a letter to his secretary, he wants it transcribed exactly as he gives it. He does not want her to inject her own ideas or expressions. If an executive has that right, should we deny it to God?

The expression "comparing spiritual things with spiritual" can be explained in several ways. It may mean (1) teaching spiritual truths with Spirit-given words; (2) communicating spiritual truths to spiritual men; (3) comparing spiritual truths in one section of the Bible with those in another. We believe that the first explanation is the one that best fits in the context. Paul is saying that the process of inspiration involves the conveying of divine truth with words that are especially chosen for the purpose by the Holy Spirit. Thus the New International Version translates, "... expressing spiritual truths in spiritual words."

It is sometimes objected that this passage cannot refer to inspiration because Paul says, "we speak," not "we write." But it is not uncommon to find the verb "to speak" used of inspired writings (e.g., John 12:38, 41; Acts 28:25; 2 Peter 1:21).

### 3. *Illumination (2:14-16)*

Not only is the gospel divine in its revelation and divine in its inspiration, but now we learn that it can only be received by the power of the Spirit of God. Unaided, the natural man cannot receive the things of the Spirit of God. They are foolishness to him. He cannot possibly understand them because they can only be spiritually understood.

“The wise Christian wastes no time trying to explain God’s program to unregenerate men; it would be casting pearls before swine. He might as well try to describe a sunset to a blind man or discuss nuclear physics with a monument in a city park. The natural man cannot receive such things. One might as well try to catch sunbeams with a fishhook as to lay hold of God’s revelation unassisted by the Holy Spirit. Unless one is born of the Spirit and taught by Him, all this is utterly foreign to him. Being a Ph.D does not help, for in this realm it could mean ‘Phenomenal Dud’!!” –Vance Havner.

Verse 15 tells us that the man who is illuminated by the Spirit of God can discern these wonderful truths even though he himself cannot be understood by the unconverted. Perhaps he is a lowly carpenter, or plumber, or fisherman; yet he is an able student of the Holy Scriptures. “The Spirit-controlled Christian investigates, inquires into, and scrutinizes the Bible and comes to an appreciation and understanding of its contents” –Wuest. To the world he is an enigma. He may never have been to a college or a seminary, yet he can understand the deep mysteries of the Word of God and perhaps even teach them to others.

The Apostle now asks in verse 16 the rhetorical question: “Who has known the mind of the Lord, that he should instruct Him?” (NASB). To ask the question is to answer it. God cannot be known through the wisdom or power of men. He is known only as He chooses to make Himself known. However, those who have the mind of Christ are able to understand the deep truths of God.

First, there is *revelation* (vv. 9-12). This means that God revealed hitherto unknown truths to men by the Holy Spirit. These truths were made known supernaturally by the Spirit of God.

Second, there is *inspiration* (v. 13). In transmitting these truths to others, the apostles (and all other writers of the Bible) used the very words that the Holy Spirit taught them to use.

Finally, there is *illumination* (vv. 14-16). Not only must these truths be miraculously *revealed* and miraculously *inspired*, but they can only be *understood* by the supernatural power of the Holy Spirit.



THE FIRST LETTER TO THE

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CORINTHIANS

**EXAM BOOKLET**  
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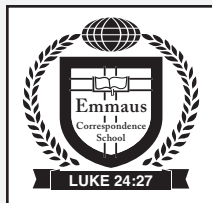
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INSTRUCTOR



*Exam developed by Emmaus Correspondence School, founded in 1942.*



## A NOTE ON THE EXAMS

The exams are designed to check your knowledge of the course material and the Scriptures. After you have studied a chapter, review the exam questions for that lesson. If you have difficulty in answering the questions, re-read the material. If questions contain a Scripture reference, you may use your Bible to help you answer them. If your instructor has provided a Single Page Answer Sheet, record your answer on that sheet. This exam contains the following types of questions:

### **MULTIPLE CHOICE**

You will be asked to write in the letter of the correct answer at the space on the right. Here is an example:

The color of grass is

- A. blue
- B. green
- C. yellow
- D. orange

    **B**    

### **WHAT DO YOU SAY?**

Under this heading we invite you to put into words something you have learned from that chapter, and to share that with us.

### **RETURNING THE EXAM**

See the back of this exam booklet for instructions on returning your exam for grading.

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5. Because of the divisions in the Church at Corinth, Paul was thankful he had \_\_\_\_\_
- A. not been associated with the founding of that Church
  - B. baptized only a handful of its members
  - C. had not taught them some of the more controversial doctrines of the faith
  - D. been hindered from visiting them again
6. Paul's answer to the folly of exalting man is \_\_\_\_\_
- A. the incarnation of Christ because this was something all the conflicting views being propagated at Corinth had in common
  - B. the resurrection of Christ because this is the one unifying and undeniable fact of the faith
  - C. the cross of Christ because this runs contrary to all natural wisdom
  - D. the return of Christ since this is the purifying hope of the Church and should produce true unity
7. All we have is in Christ. Paul summarizes this by stating that Christ is made unto us \_\_\_\_\_
- A. faith, hope, love and honor
  - B. pardon, peace, power and perfection
  - C. joy, peace, goodness and temperance
  - D. wisdom, righteousness, sanctification and redemption
8. When Paul had first preached at Corinth he had \_\_\_\_\_
- A. used oratory with singular persuasiveness and effectiveness
  - B. sought to win the confidence of the Corinthians by a display of his own learning
  - C. attracted many to himself because of his naturally pleasing personal appearance and magnetic personality
  - D. carefully avoided using any methods which would appeal to the flesh

- 9. When Paul quotes “Eye has not seen, nor ear heard, nor have entered into the heart of man the things which God has prepared for those who love Him,” he was referring
  - A. only to the glories which await us in heaven
  - B. primarily to truths concealed in the Old Testament and made known in the New Testament
  - C. mysteries concerning God which will never be known to men
  - D. secret truths into which only truly consecrated believers can enter
  
- 10. The process of communicating the truth of God to us from the Sacred Scripture is known as:
  - A. Revelation
  - B. Inspiration
  - C. Illumination
  - D. Foreknowledge

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

**WHAT DO YOU SAY?**

Paul in verse 18, says, “the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing.” Why do you think this is?

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EXAM BOOKLET