SMITH FOR CHRIST

TEACHING THE WORD · LIVING IN THE LIGHT

†
1:18

DEEP DIVE

1 Corinthians

Chapter One, Verses 1–31

The Word of the Cross — a divided church, a crucified Messiah, and the only boast left

NASB 1995 | VERSE BY VERSE | FOUR VOICES | WITH DIAGRAMS

Paul calls a quarrelsome, gifted, proud church "saints," names Jesus ten times before he names the problem, and then sets the cross against every human boast: God saves through a message the world laughs at and calls the people the world overlooks. Read through four teachers — **David Guzik**, **R.C. Sproul**, **C.H. Spurgeon** and **Matthew Henry** — with the Greek behind Paul's key words.

THE PASSAGE

1 Corinthians 1:1–31

saints · slogans · the cross · not many wise

THE METHOD

Verse by Verse

Color-coded by teacher

WHAT'S INSIDE

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Four movements from "saints by calling" to "boast in the Lord"

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"Because the foolishness of God is wiser than men, and the weakness of God is stronger than men." — 1 Corinthians 1:25

SECTION I · THE PASSAGE

1 Corinthians 1:1–31

The Word of the Cross — Saints in a proud city, torn by slogans — and the message that looks like foolishness and saves

† How to Read This Study

This study walks 1 Corinthians 1 in 4 movements, in Paul's own order. Each movement opens with the full NASB 1995 text of those verses, marked with the Berean colors and shapes; then the Greek behind the key words; then the teachers, each in his own color — **David Guzik**, the pastor who walks the text verse by verse; **R.C. Sproul**, the theologian who presses every word for its doctrine; **C.H. Spurgeon**, the preacher who turns the doctrine into a call to the heart; and **Matthew Henry**, the Puritan commentator who gathers it into plain, practical counsel. The figures draw the argument so you can see where Paul is going. Read the Scripture first; then let each voice add its angle.

DAVID GUZIK · Enduring Word
R.C. SPROUL · Ligonier Ministries
C.H. SPURGEON · Metropolitan Tabernacle
MATTHEW HENRY · Commentary · 1 Cor. completed after 1714

HOW THIS STUDY IS MARKED
God — His character & actions
Command / instruction
Key repeated word
Sin / warning
Promise / blessing
Time / place / contrast

KEY VERSE · 1 CORINTHIANS 1:18

"For △the word of the cross is foolishness to ⚠those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is △the power of God."

† Before the Passage

Paul planted the church in Corinth around A.D. 50, coming down from Athens and staying a year and a half (Acts 18:1–11). Crispus, the synagogue ruler, believed with his household (Acts 18:8); the Lord told Paul in a vision, "I have many people in this city" (Acts 18:10). A few years later, writing from Ephesus (16:8), Paul has already sent one letter that is now lost (5:9), has heard from "Chloe's people" (1:11), and has a letter of questions from the church (7:1). First Corinthians answers both — and the first answer, running from 1:10 to 4:21, is about division.

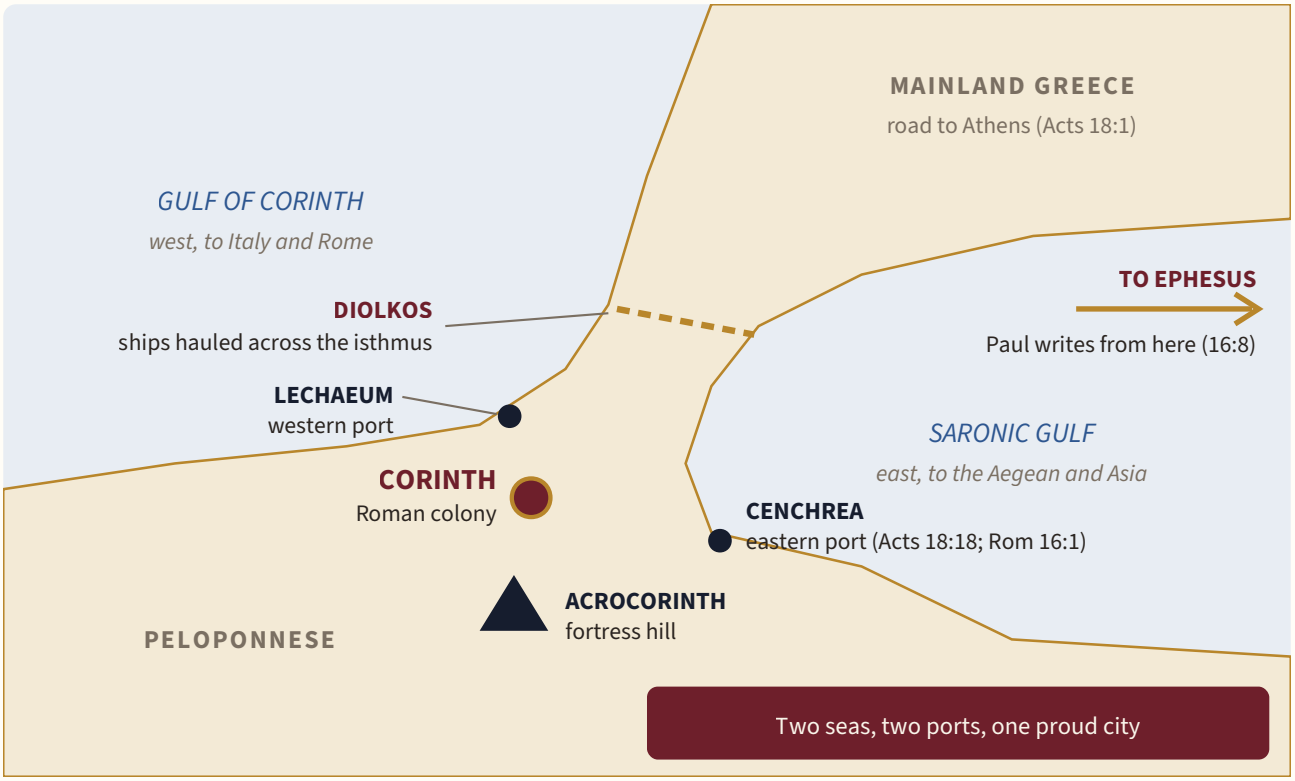
Corinth sat on the narrow isthmus between the Gulf of Corinth and the Saronic Gulf, with a port on each sea — Lechaeum to the west and Cenchrea to the east — and the fortress-hill of Acrocorinth behind it. Ships were dragged across the isthmus on a stone track rather than risk the cape at Malea. Rome destroyed the old city in 146 B.C. and Julius Caesar refounded it a century later as a Roman colony; it hosted the Isthmian Games and

was famous for its money, its temples and its vice. Guzik, gathering Barclay, Fee and Morris, notes that "to live like a Corinthian" was a byword, and quotes Fee: Paul's Corinth was "at once the New York, Los Angeles, and Las Vegas of the ancient world."

The Old Testament is underneath every turn of the chapter. "The church of God" (v. 2) borrows the Septuagint's word for Israel's assembly (Guzik cites Numbers 16:3; Deuteronomy 23:1). Verse 19 quotes Isaiah 29:14, where God promises to overturn the wisdom of Jerusalem's wise men; verse 20's "Where is …?" echoes Isaiah's taunts over Egypt's and Assyria's counselors (Isaiah 19:12; 33:18). The "stumbling block" of a crucified Messiah (v. 23) stands on Deuteronomy 21:23 — "he who is hanged is accursed of God." And verse 31 compresses Jeremiah 9:23–24: let not the wise, the mighty or the rich boast, but let him who boasts boast that he knows the LORD.

Read the chapter as an argument in four steps. Paul first tells the Corinthians who they are by grace (vv. 1–9); then names what they are doing — tearing Christ's body into fan clubs (vv. 10–17); then shows why that pride is absurd: God saved the world through the word of the cross, which the world calls foolishness (vv. 18–25); and finally points them to the mirror — God chose people like them so that no one may boast, and gave them Christ as everything (vv. 26–31). Before he names a single problem, he names the Lord Jesus Christ again and again: "Christ" ten times in the first ten verses.

FIGURE · CORINTH ON ITS ISTHMUS



See why Corinth was rich and proud: it sat on a four-and-a-half-mile neck of land between two seas, with a port on each, and Paul wrote to it from across the Aegean in Ephesus.

I
MOVEMENT

1 CORINTHIANS 1:1–9

Saints at Corinth

Before a word of rebuke — who they are by grace, what grace gave them, and who will keep them

[1] *Paul, called as an apostle of Jesus Christ by the will of God, and Sosthenes our brother,* [2] *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:* [3] *Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.* [4] *I thank my God always concerning you for the grace of God which was given you in Christ Jesus,* [5] *that in everything you were enriched in Him, in all speech and all knowledge,* [6] *even as the testimony concerning Christ was confirmed in you,* [7] *so that you are not lacking in any gift, awaiting eagerly the revelation of our Lord Jesus Christ,* [8] *who will also ✩ confirm you to the end, blameless in the day of our Lord Jesus Christ.* [9] *△ God is faithful, through whom you were ✩ called into fellowship with His Son, Jesus Christ our Lord.*

1 CORINTHIANS 1:1–9

ἡγιασμένοις … κλητοῖς ἁγίοις

HĒGIASMENOIS … KLĒTOIS HAGIOIS · "SANCTIFIED … SAINTS BY CALLING" · G37, G2822, G40

Hēgiasmenois is a perfect participle of *hagiazō* (G37), "to set apart as holy": they *have been* sanctified, and stay so, "in Christ Jesus." *Klētois hagiois* is literally "called holy ones" — *klētos* (G2822, the same word as "called" in v. 1 and v. 24) plus *hagios* (G40). There is no "to be" in the Greek; the KJV's "called to be saints" supplies it, and NASB95's "saints by calling" keeps the sense. Paul does not call them saints because they behave like saints — 1 Corinthians will show they did not — but because God called and set them apart. *Ekklēsia* (G1577), "church," is the called-out assembly.

βεβαιώσει … ἀνεγκλήτους

BEBAIŌSEI … ANENKLĒTOUS · "WILL CONFIRM … BLAMELESS" · G950, G410

Bebaioō (G950) means to make firm, establish, guarantee. Paul uses it twice in three verses: the testimony about Christ "was confirmed" in them (v. 6), and Christ "will also confirm you to the end" (v. 8). What God began He will make stand. *Anenklētos* (G410) is "unaccusable" — not sinless in themselves, but with no charge that will stand in the day of the Lord. It is the word Paul later uses for deacons and elders who must be "beyond reproach" (1 Timothy 3:10; Titus 1:6–7) and for what Christ makes us before God (Colossians 1:22).

πιστὸς ὁ θεός … κοινωνίαν

PISTOS HO THEOS … KOINŌNIAN · "GOD IS FAITHFUL … FELLOWSHIP" · G4103, G2842

Paul puts *pistos* (G4103) first for emphasis: "Faithful is God." The ground of their hope is not their record but His character. He called them *eis koinōnian* — into fellowship, a sharing and partnership (G2842) — "with His Son." This is the first use of a word that will matter in this letter: the cup and the bread are a *koinōnia* in Christ's blood and body (10:16). A church called into fellowship with the Son cannot coherently split into fan clubs — which is exactly where verse 10 goes next. Their gift (v. 7) is *charisma* (G5486), a gift of grace (*charis*, G5485).

DAVID GUZIK · Enduring Word

Guzik notes that Paul plants his credentials in the first words — literally "a called apostle" — and with them his answer to Corinth's doubts: an apostle through the will of God, not by popular election. Sosthenes may be the beaten synagogue ruler of Acts 18:17. "The church of God" at Corinth is something good in someplace bad, and the question for the whole letter is "is the church influencing the city, or is the city influencing the church?" "The Corinthians were called saints, not called to be saints," on the ground of God's promise, "I have many people in this city." Paul thanks God for grace given, not for their achievements, and rests their future on God: He will confirm them because He is faithful. Guzik counts Jesus named eleven times in ten verses — the sure cure is "getting your eyes off self and on Jesus."

C.H. SPURGEON · Metropolitan Tabernacle

Spurgeon preached verse 6 as "Confirming the Witness of Christ" (*Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit* 50, published 1904), with the Corinthians in view: richly gifted, spiritually unwell. His warning — which Guzik also quotes — is that "gifts are nothing, unless they are laid on the altar of God." Christ stands at the end of the long line of God's witnesses: "Christ is the very King of witnesses"; "Christ's testimony was final." A believer confirms that witness first within, through answered prayer and help in affliction, and then before a watching world: "Christians have Argus, with a hundred eyes, staring at them." In *All of Grace*, on verse 8, he calls confirmation "the work of the Holy Ghost": "Holy acts are confirmed till they become habits," and "To be kept holy is better than merely to be kept safe."

MATTHEW HENRY · Commentary · 1 Cor. completed after 1714

Henry reads the greeting as a defense, not a boast: some at Corinth questioned Paul's apostleship, and "It was not pride in Paul, but faithfulness to his trust, in this juncture, to maintain his apostolical character and authority." The blessing has an order — "first grace, then peace": God reconciles sinners to Himself before He gives them His peace. Their gifts of utterance and knowledge were real, and Henry notes how seldom the two meet: "Many have the flower of utterance that have not the root of knowledge, and their converse is barren." The hope of verses 8–9 rests on Christ's keeping and God's faithfulness, and the blamelessness it promises comes "not in rigour of law, but from rich and free grace." "If we approve ourselves faithful to God, we shall never find him unfaithful to us."

II
MOVEMENT

1 CORINTHIANS 1:10–17

Has Christ Been Divided?

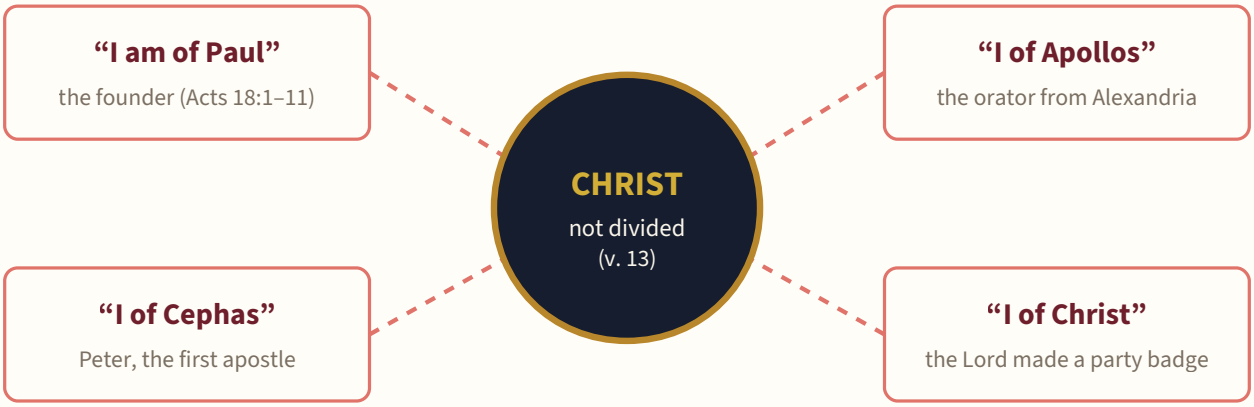
Four slogans, three questions, and an apostle glad he baptized so few

10 *Now I exhort you, brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you all agree and ⚠ that there be no divisions among you, but that you be made complete in the same mind and in the same judgment.* 11 *For I have been informed concerning you, my brethren, by Chloe's people, that there are ⚠ quarrels among you.*
12 *Now I mean this, that each one of you is saying, "I am of Paul," and "I of Apollos," and "I of Cephas," and "I of Christ."* 13 *⚠ Has Christ been divided? Paul was not crucified for you, was he? Or were you baptized in the name of Paul?* 14 *I thank God that I baptized none of you except Crispus and Gaius,* 15 *so that no one would say you*

> *were baptized in my name.* [16] *Now I did baptize also the household of Stephanas; beyond that, I do not know whether I baptized any other.* [17] *For Christ did not send me to baptize, but to preach the gospel, not in cleverness of speech, so that the cross of Christ would not be made void.*
>
> 1 CORINTHIANS 1:10–17

FIGURE · FOUR SLOGANS AND THREE QUESTIONS

FOUR SLOGANS, ONE LORD · 1 CORINTHIANS 1:12–13



THREE QUESTIONS, ONE ANSWER (v. 13)

Has Christ been divided?	Paul was not crucified for you, was he?	Were you baptized in the name of Paul?
one Christ, one body	*Christ alone died for you*	*into Christ, not a man*

Every slogan tears at the same body — even "I of Christ" when it is used to stand above the brothers — and each of Paul's three questions has only one answer.

σχίσματα … κατηρτισμένοι

SCHISMATA … KATĒRTISMENOI · "DIVISIONS … MADE COMPLETE" · G4978, G2675

Schisma (G4978), from *schizō*, "to split," is a rip — the word Jesus used for the worse tear in an old garment patched with new cloth (Matthew 9:16; Mark 2:21). Our "schism" comes from it, but the picture is not two polite opinions; it is torn cloth. Paul's remedy is *katartizō* (G2675), "to put in order, restore, make complete" — the word for the disciples "mending their nets" (Matthew 4:21), and, Barclay notes (in Guzik), a medical word for setting a broken bone. The perfect participle means "be in a mended state." Unity in verse 10 is not everyone thinking alike on every detail; it is a torn thing set back together around the same mind and judgment.

ἔριδες … μεμέρισται

ERIDES … MEMERISTAI · "QUARRELS … HAS BEEN DIVIDED" · G2054, G3307

Eris (G2054) is strife, rivalry — it is listed among the deeds of the flesh in Galatians 5:20 and comes back in 3:3 ("since there is jealousy and strife among you, are you not fleshly?"). Verse 13's *memeristai* is the perfect of *merizō* (G3307), "to divide into parts, parcel out" — the verb of Jesus' saying that a kingdom "divided against itself" cannot stand (Mark 3:24). Has Christ been parcelled out, a share for each faction? The grammar of the slogans is possessive genitive: *egō eimi Paulou*, "I belong to Paul."

κενωθῇ ὁ σταυρὸς

KENŌTHĒ HO STAUROS · "THE CROSS … MADE VOID" · G2758, G4716

Kenoō (G2758) is "to empty" — the same verb as Philippians 2:7, where Christ "emptied Himself." Here it is the cross that could be emptied: drained of its power by "cleverness of speech," *sophia logou*, literally "wisdom of word" (KJV "wisdom of words"), the polished rhetoric Corinth prized. *Stauros* (G4716) was the Roman execution stake. Paul's point is not that preaching should be careless, but that the gospel can be preached in a way that leaves the hearer admiring the speaker and untouched by the cross.

DAVID GUZIK · Enduring Word

Guzik stresses that Paul pleads rather than commands, and that *schismata* "properly means 'tear or rend'" — the Corinthians were ripping the body apart. Against the tear he sets Barclay on "joined together": "A medical word used of knitting together bones that have been fractured." Each party claimed to be the ones "really right with God," the Christ party most of all: "Spiritual elitism is terrible, no matter whose name it is practiced in." Their boasting was self-boasting — "It wasn't so much that they thought Apollos was great, but that they were great for following him." On baptism he argues that Paul could not thank God he baptized few if baptism were essential to salvation, while quoting Hodge that to neglect it is "a dangerous act of disobedience." And cleverness can empty the cross: "How sobering this is!"

R.C. SPROUL · Ligonier Ministries

Sproul's message "Christ Crucified" (Ligonier's 2000 National Conference, *Upsetting the World*) takes 1 Corinthians 1:17–25 as its text, beginning with this verse's refusal of persuasive speech, and he carries it into 2:1–5: Paul came to Corinth in weakness, fear and trembling, resting on the Spirit's power rather than human wisdom. Then he turns it on the modern church: "the greatest threat to the church in our day is based in our profound desire to be acceptable to the secular culture." He presses the same charge on Christian scholars — "the greatest moral weakness of Christian professors is their intimidation by the world" — who shy from unpopular doctrines for fear of seeming academically unacceptable. Corinth's temptation is ours: to make the cross respectable, and so to empty it.

C.H. SPURGEON · Metropolitan Tabernacle

Spurgeon's "The Word of the Cross" (No. 1611, 31 July 1881) is on verse 18, but he opens on verse 17's warning against the "wisdom of words" — polished rhetoric that can veil, dilute or decorate the gospel until the cross loses its force. "The cross of Christ is sublimely simple; to adorn it is to dishonour it." The power, he insists, lies in the cross itself and in the Holy Spirit who works through it, not in the preacher's eloquence, logic or cleverness; "the cross hath not many words, but one." Paul's refusal in verses 13–17 to let his own name, his baptizing or his speaking stand beside the cross fits that conviction exactly.

MATTHEW HENRY · Commentary · 1 Cor. completed after 1714

Henry finds the root under the factions: "Pride lay at the bottom, and this made them factious" (Proverbs 13:10). They "set their ministers at the head of their several factions" — Paul perhaps as the most spiritual teacher, Apollos as the most eloquent, Cephas for his age or as apostle of the circumcision — and some were "for none of them, but Christ only." His counsel is measured: "In the great things of religion be of a mind: but, when there is not a unity of sentiment, let there be a union of affections." Ministers "are not to be put in Christ's stead." Paul is not thankful for neglecting baptism but for avoiding a bad construction; he was sent "not so much to baptize as to preach."

III
MOVEMENT

1 CORINTHIANS 1:18–25

Foolishness to the Perishing

The power of God to the saved — signs, wisdom, and Christ crucified

> 18 For △ the word of the cross is ⟲ foolishness to ⚠ those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is △ the power of God. 19 For it is written, "I WILL DESTROY THE ⟲ WISDOM OF THE ⟲ WISE, AND THE CLEVERNESS OF THE CLEVER I WILL SET ASIDE." 20 Where is the ⟲ wise man? Where is the scribe? Where is the debater of this age? Has not God made ⟲ foolish the ⟲ wisdom of the world? 21 For since in the ⟲ wisdom of God the world through its ⟲ wisdom did not come to know God, God was well-pleased through ◷ the foolishness of the message preached to save those who believe. 22 For indeed ◷ Jews ask for signs and Greeks search for ⟲ wisdom; 23 but △ we preach Christ crucified, to Jews a ⚠ stumbling block and to Gentiles ⟲ foolishness, 24 but to those who are the called, both Jews and Greeks, △ Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God. 25 Because the ⟲ foolishness of God is wiser than men, and the weakness of God is stronger than men.
>
> 1 CORINTHIANS 1:18–25

> "Therefore behold, I will once again deal marvelously with this people, wondrously marvelous; And the wisdom of their wise men will perish, And the discernment of their discerning men will be concealed."
>
> ISAIAH 29:14

FIGURE · ONE MESSAGE, THREE HEARINGS

ONE MESSAGE, THREE HEARINGS · 1 CORINTHIANS 1:22–25

WHO HEARS	JEWS	GREEKS	THE CALLED
WHAT THEY WANT	ask for signs (v22) — power on demand — a new Exodus	search for wisdom (v22) — a God who fits our reasoning	both Jews and Greeks (v24) — not wiser or stronger than others
WHAT THE CROSS IS	"a stumbling block" — a Messiah cursed on a tree (Deut 21:23)	"foolishness" — salvation by an executed man	"the power of God and the wisdom of God" — Christ Himself

WE PREACH CHRIST CRUCIFIED (v23)

God's foolishness is wiser than men | God's weakness is stronger than men

Read down each column: Jew and Greek bring their demands and find an offense or a joke; the called, from both, find Christ Himself.

μωρία … ἀπολλυμένοις … σῳζομένοις

MŌRIA … APOLLYMENOIS … SŌZOMENOIS · "FOOLISHNESS … PERISHING … BEING SAVED" · G3472, G622, G4982

Mōria (G3472) is silliness, nonsense — our "moron" is from the same family — and in the New Testament it appears only in 1 Corinthians (1:18, 21, 23; 2:14; 3:19). The verb *mōrainō* (G3471), "made foolish" (v. 20), is the one Paul uses in Romans 1:22: "Professing to be wise, they became fools." Both participles in verse 18 are present tense: *apollymenois* (G622), "those who are perishing," and *sōzomenois* (G4982), "us who are being saved." Two groups on two roads, both still moving — and the cross is what sorts them. To one it is *mōria*; to the other, *dynamis theou*, "the power of God" (G1411).

σκάνδαλον … σημεῖα

SKANDALON … SĒMEIA · "STUMBLING BLOCK … SIGNS" · G4625, G4592

Skandalon (G4625) was originally the trigger-stick of a trap, then anything that trips a man up and brings him down — our "scandal." A crucified Messiah was not merely hard for a Jew to believe; it was an offense, because Deuteronomy 21:23 says "he who is hanged is accursed of God" (see Galatians 3:13). The Jews "ask for signs," *sēmeia* (G4592) — the demand they put to Jesus Himself (Matthew 12:38; John 6:30). The Greeks "search for wisdom," *sophia* (G4678), the word of the chapter: "wisdom" seven times and "wise / wiser" five times in the NASB95, every one from verse 19 on (v. 17's "cleverness of speech" is *sophia* too).

κήρυγμα … εὐδόκησεν … συζητητής

KĒRYGMA … EUDOKĒSEN … SYZĒTĒTĒS · "MESSAGE PREACHED … WAS WELL-PLEASED … DEBATER" · G2782, G2106, G4804

Kērygma (G2782) is the herald's message — the content proclaimed, not the act of preaching. NASB95's "the foolishness of the message preached" (v. 21) catches that better than the KJV's "the foolishness of preaching": what looks foolish is the news of a crucified Savior. God "was well-pleased," *eudokēsen* (G2106) — the verb of the Father's voice at the Jordan, "in whom I am well-pleased" (Matthew 3:17). He chose this way gladly. The "debater of this age," *syzētētēs* (G4804), the man who argues everything out, appears only here in the New Testament.

DAVID GUZIK · Enduring Word

Guzik makes the offense concrete: in the first century, saying "message of the cross" was like saying "message of the electric chair – except worse!" The tenses matter — perishing, being saved — and "Each of us is definitely moving in one of those two directions." He quotes Fee: the Jews' idolatry was that they had God "completely figured out," the Greeks' was to think of God as "ultimate Reason." "Christ crucified was the ultimate oxymoron." Paul knew the scandal firsthand, once enraged that one cursed by God should be honored as Messiah, and the Alexamenos graffito shows how Greeks laughed. Yet "God did not respond to the polling data." His warning to preachers is the ivy-covered arch that once read "we preach Christ crucified" until only "we" was left.

R.C. SPROUL · Ligonier Ministries

Sproul opens with Archimedes — "Give me a lever long enough and a place to stand, and I can move the whole world" — and answers that "the cross was the lever that turned the world upside down." "For all outward appearances, it seemed to display the weakness of Christ. And yet the apostle says, it was the power of God." He walks round the cross with those who watched it: Caiaphas saw political expediency, Pilate a way to quiet the mob, the centurion the Son of God. One event, seen three ways — which is verse 18. What a man sees in the cross depends on whether God has opened his eyes; without that revelation no one sees redemption there, and to them, he says, "it was foolishness."

C.H. SPURGEON · Metropolitan Tabernacle

Spurgeon came back to these verses again and again. In “Christ Crucified” (Nos. 7–8, 11 Feb 1855) his Jew is the ceremonialist — “Christ crucified, is to the Jew—the ceremonialist—a stumblingblock” — and his Greek the polished man of learning; both stand for the uncalled in every congregation. The difference is the call: many hear the general call, but the effectual call “is always a special one.” “Christ is to me the wisdom of God. I can learn everything now.” In “Christ: The Power and Wisdom of God” (17 May 1857) he answers both demands — “Christ’s gospel is a thing of divine power,” and “Christ is wisdom, as well as power.” And in “The Word of the Cross” he will not let anyone be written off: “Do not say of any man that he cannot be saved.”

MATTHEW HENRY · Commentary · 1 Cor. completed after 1714

For Henry, Christ crucified is “the foundation of all our joys. By his death we live.” The Jews stumbled because they expected “a great temporal prince”; the Greeks laughed — “What, hope to be saved by one that could not save himself!” Isaiah 29:14 is fulfilled in “the triumphs of the cross over human wisdom”: “When God would save the world, he took a way by himself.” The world’s wisdom could not bring it home to God, so He saved by “the foolishness of preaching—not such in truth, but in vulgar reckoning.” What looks foolish is the message itself: “Our living through one who died, our being blessed by one who was made a curse, our being justified by one who was himself condemned.”

IV
MOVEMENT

1 CORINTHIANS 1:26–31

Not Many Wise

God’s strange choice — and Christ made our wisdom, righteousness, sanctification and redemption

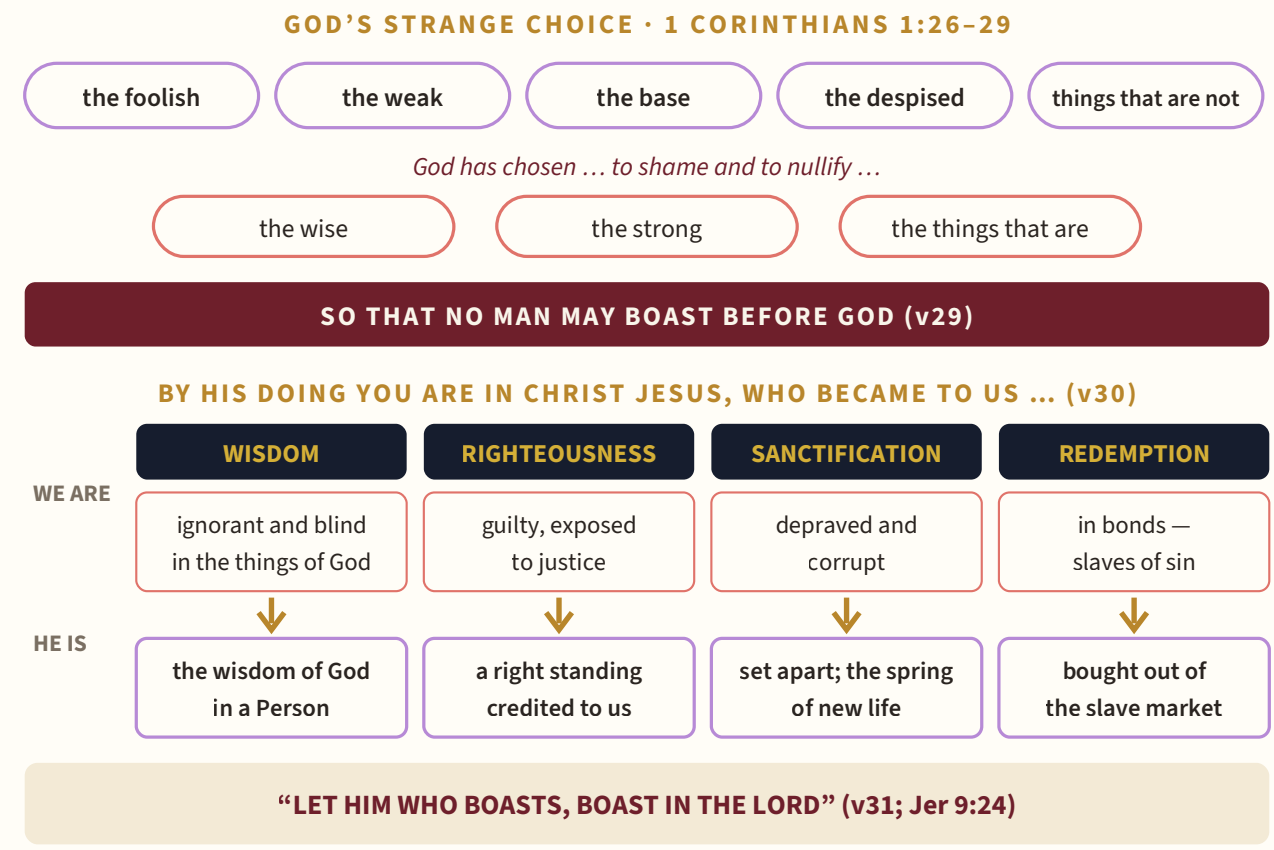
26 *For consider your calling, brethren, that there were not many wise according to the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble;* 27 *but God has chosen the foolish things of the world to shame the wise, and God has chosen the weak things of the world to shame the things which are strong,* 28 *and the base things of the world and the despised God has chosen, the things that are not, so that He may nullify the things that are,* 29 *so that no man may boast before God.* 30 *But by His doing you are in Christ Jesus, who became to us wisdom from God, and righteousness and sanctification, and redemption,* 31 *so that, just as it is written, “LET HIM WHO BOASTS, BOAST IN THE LORD.”*

1 CORINTHIANS 1:26–31

“Thus says the LORD, “Let not a wise man boast of his wisdom, and let not the mighty man boast of his might, let not a rich man boast of his riches; but let him who boasts boast of this, that he understands and knows Me, that I am the LORD who exercises lovingkindness, justice and righteousness on earth; for I delight in these things,” declares the LORD.”

JEREMIAH 9:23–24

FIGURE · GOD'S CHOICE AND CHRIST'S FOURFOLD GIFT



God picks the people the world counts as nothing, removes every ground for boasting, and then gives them Christ as all four things they lack (the "we are" row follows Matthew Henry).

ἐξελέξατο … καταισχύνῃ

EXELEXATO … KATAISCHYNĒ · "HAS CHOSEN … TO SHAME" · G1586, G2617

Eklegomai (G1586) is in the middle voice — God "chose for Himself" — and Paul says it three times in two verses (vv. 27, 27, 28). The choice is personal and deliberate, and it runs against every human ranking. Its purpose is *kataischynō* (G2617), "to put to shame, disgrace" — the same verb of Romans 9:33, where he who believes in Christ "will not be disappointed." God puts the wise to shame by saving the people they despise. Against them stand verse 26's *dynatoi* (G1415), "mighty," and *eugeneis* (G2104), "well-born, noble."

τὰ ἀγενῆ … τὰ ἐξουθενημένα … καταργήσῃ

TA AGENĒ … TA EXOUTHENĒMENA … KATARGĒSĒ · "BASE … DESPISED … NULLIFY" · G36, G1848, G2673

Agenēs (G36) is the opposite of verse 26's *eugenēs*: "without family," low-born, a nobody. *Exoutheneō* (G1848) means "to count as nothing" — the verb Luke uses when Herod treated Jesus "with contempt" (Luke 23:11). And God chose "the things that are not," *ta mē onta*, "so that He may nullify the things that are" — *katargeō* (G2673), to make idle, render powerless, abolish; one of Paul's favorite verbs, used again of death itself, "the last enemy that will be abolished" (15:26).

ἀπολύτρωσις … καυχάσθω

APOLYTRŌSIS … KAUCHASTHŌ · "REDEMPTION … LET HIM BOAST" · G629, G1343, G38, G2744

Verse 30 gives four nouns. Christ became "wisdom from God" — and, the grammar suggests, that wisdom is spelled out in the three that follow: *dikaiosynē* (G1343), righteousness, a right standing with God; *hagiasmos* (G38), sanctification, the setting apart of v. 2; and *apolytrōsis* (G629), redemption — release by a ransom price (*lytron*), a slave-market word. Then *kauchaomai* (G2744), "to boast, glory," three times in vv. 29–31; nearly all of its New Testament uses are in Paul's letters. "By His doing" is *ex autou*, "from Him": the source of our being in Christ is God.

DAVID GUZIK · Enduring Word

"Look at yourselves," Guzik has Paul say. "You're no great bargain." He tells of Lady Huntingdon, who said she was going to heaven by an "m" — not "any noble" but "not many noble." They were chosen "not … because they are so great, but because God is so great." Quoting Calvin, God "brings all of them down to one common level"; He called the lowly first but not exclusively — shepherds, then wise men. In verse 30 wisdom is received in a Person, not by "getting smart"; righteousness is Jesus' deeds and character accounted to us; sanctification is not found by focusing on ourselves; and "Redemption is a word from the slave trade." His summary: "The path for God's glory is Christ crucified; the evidence of God's glory is His choice of the lowly."

R.C. SPROUL · Ligonier Ministries

In the same conference message Sproul insists that the call of verses 24 and 26 is God's work, not the preacher's. Citing Jonathan Edwards, he says, "Without the Spirit taking the scales from our eyes, we would never behold the loveliness of Christ," and admits, "I don't have the power to open anybody's eyes." So he wears the world's label gladly — "what would you rather be than a fool for Christ?" — because "this foolishness is the wisdom of God Himself." And the cross is why Christ is the only Mediator, not one way among many: "We see Christ as the sole Mediator between God and man, because no one else was ever crucified for my sins." By His doing (v. 30), not ours, we are in Christ.

C.H. SPURGEON · Metropolitan Tabernacle

Spurgeon preached verses 26–29 as "God's Strange Choice" (No. 587, 28 Aug 1864): "There is no doctrine more truly humbling than the doctrine of election." God is King and gives no account of His matters, and His choice runs against ours — we pick those who can help us, but "God chooses those to whom he can be the most helpful." "The wise are passed by in the wisdom of God." In "The Fourfold Treasure" (No. 991, 1871) on verses 30–31 he begins with union: "Our life hinges upon union to our Lord." Christ is wisdom — "To know is not to be wise" — righteousness credited, holiness moved by love, and redemption paid now, finished by power at His coming: "You are not yet redeemed altogether." His last word is the text's: "Give all the glory, then, to the Lord alone."

MATTHEW HENRY · Commentary · 1 Cor. completed after 1714

Henry reads “not many wise” two ways: few of the first preachers were philosophers or statesmen — “A few fishermen were called out, and sent upon this errand” — and few of the converts were great. He takes “the things that are not” as the Jews’ common way of speaking of the Gentiles. The design: “The gospel dispensation is a contrivance to humble man.” Then verse 30 turns to glory: “All we have we have from God as the fountain, and in and through Christ as the channel of conveyance.” We are ignorant, guilty, corrupt and “in bonds”; He is made wisdom, righteousness, sanctification and redemption. And the four hold together: “He never discharges from the guilt of sin, without delivering from the power of it.”

V
THEME

CROSS-REFERENCES

The Passage in the Whole Bible

From the curse of the tree to the boast of the cross — where 1 Corinthians 1 reaches back and forward

“for I am with you, and no man will attack you in order to harm you, for I have many people in this city.”

ACTS 18:10

“his corpse shall not hang all night on the tree, but you shall surely bury him on the same day (for he who is hanged is accursed of God), so that you do not defile your land which the LORD your God gives you as an inheritance.”

DEUTERONOMY 21:23

“For as the heavens are higher than the earth, So are My ways higher than your ways And My thoughts than your thoughts.”

ISAIAH 55:9

“For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek.”

ROMANS 1:16

“But may it never be that I would boast, except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, through which the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world.”

GALATIANS 6:14

“He made Him who knew no sin to be sin on our behalf, so that we might become the righteousness of God in Him.”

2 CORINTHIANS 5:21

> *“Listen, my beloved brethren: did not God choose the poor of this world to be rich in faith and heirs of the kingdom which He promised to those who love Him?”*
>
> JAMES 2:5

> *“For I am confident of this very thing, that He who began a good work in you will perfect it until the day of Christ Jesus.”*
>
> PHILIPPIANS 1:6

DAVID GUZIK · Enduring Word

Guzik reads verses 19–21 beside Isaiah 55:8–9: God’s wisdom “is not man’s wisdom multiplied to the highest degree. It is wisdom of a different order altogether.”

MATTHEW HENRY · Commentary · 1 Cor. completed after 1714

Henry sets the hope of verses 8–9 beside 1 Thessalonians 5:24 and Psalm 89:33, and hears in “the things that are not” the old Jewish way of naming the Gentiles, comparing Romans 4:17.

SECTION II · STUDY HELPS

At a Glance

Four voices, one chapter

Four teachers, one chapter. Guzik walks the text with a pastor's eye for illustration; Sproul, from a single conference message on 1:17–25, presses the offense and power of the cross; Spurgeon preached nearly every verse from verse 6 on and turns each into an appeal; Henry gathers it into Puritan counsel. They differ on baptism — Guzik and Spurgeon were Baptist in conviction, Henry and Sproul baptized infants — and they read "the foolish things" slightly differently (the converts, or also the preachers). Sproul is not sourced for verses 1–9.

THE MOVEMENT	GUZIK · the text	SPROUL · the doctrine	SPURGEON · the heart	HENRY · the counsel
I · Saints at Corinth	A called apostle; called saints, not called to be; eyes off self, on Jesus.	Not sourced for verses 1–9; his voice begins at verse 17.	Gifts are nothing unless laid on God's altar; kept holy beats kept safe.	First grace, then peace; blameless by free grace, not rigour of law.
II · Divided?	Schismata is a tear; spiritual elitism is terrible in any name; baptism matters but does not save.	The church's greatest threat is wanting to be acceptable to the culture.	The cross is sublimely simple; to adorn it is to dishonour it.	Pride lay at the bottom; where minds differ, keep a union of affections.
III · The word of the cross	The electric chair, only worse; God did not respond to the polling data.	The cross is the lever that turned the world upside down.	The effectual call makes the difference; Christ is wisdom as well as power.	Our living through one who died — folly only in vulgar reckoning.
IV · Not many wise	Saved by an "m"; the evidence of God's glory is His choice of the lowly.	Only the Spirit opens eyes; better a fool for Christ.	Election humbles; God chooses those He can help most; all glory to Him.	A contrivance to humble man; Christ is the channel of all we have.

1 CORINTHIANS 1:1–31 · A COMPARATIVE READING

† Key Insights to Carry

- **Paul calls them saints before he corrects them.** They "have been sanctified" (a perfect participle) and are "saints by calling." Holiness here is God's act before it is their behavior — and their behavior must catch up with it. THE GREEK
- **The Name comes before the problem.** "Christ" appears ten times in verses 1–10, with Jesus named in almost every verse. Paul does not mention the quarrels until he has filled the page with the Lord they share. THE TEXT
- **Their future rests on God's faithfulness, not their progress.** Christ "will also confirm you to the end, blameless" because "God is faithful" (vv. 8–9). Henry: blameless "not in rigour of law, but from rich and free grace." HENRY
- **Division is a tear, unity is a bone set.** *Schisma* is torn cloth; *katartizō* is the mending of nets and the setting of a fracture. Unity is not uniformity; it is a broken thing put back together around Christ. THE GREEK
- **Party spirit is pride wearing a famous name.** Guzik: "It wasn't so much that they thought Apollos was great, but that they were great for following him." Henry: "Pride lay at the bottom." GUZIK
- **The cross can be preached into emptiness.** Cleverness of speech can make the cross "void" (*kenoō*). Spurgeon: "The cross of Christ is sublimely simple; to adorn it is to dishonour it." SPURGEON
- **The same cross sorts every hearer.** Perishing and being saved are both present tense. Sproul: one event, seen by Caiaphas, Pilate and the centurion — and only those whose eyes God opens see redemption there. SPROUL

- **God was glad to save this way.** *Eudokēsen*, "was well-pleased" (v. 21), is the Father's word at the Jordan. The "foolishness of the message preached" is not God's embarrassment; it is His delight. THE GREEK
- **Not many — not none.** "Not many wise … not many mighty, not many noble" (v. 26). God chose the base and despised so that no one may boast — and He still saves the occasional countess. GUZIK
- **Christ is all four things we lack.** Wisdom, righteousness, sanctification, redemption (v. 30). Henry: "All we have we have from God as the fountain, and in and through Christ as the channel of conveyance." HENRY

† Questions for the Table

1 **Paul called a messy church "saints" before he corrected it. What would change if I saw the men at this table — and myself — the way God has already named us?**

Sanctified, perfect tense: set apart by God before we act like it.

1:2; Acts 18:10

2 **Where do I quietly say "I am of …" — a preacher, a program, a recovery group, a church — in a way that lets me look down on another brother?**

Henry: "Pride lay at the bottom, and this made them factious."

1:10–13; 3:3–4

3 **Is there a brother I have torn away from? What would "setting the bone" look like this week?**

Katartizō: mend, restore, set back in place.

1:10; Gal 6:1

4 **When I share the gospel, do I try to make it sound impressive or reasonable — and empty it — or do I let the cross be the cross?**

Spurgeon: "to adorn it is to dishonour it."

1:17–18, 23; 2:1–2

5 **What "signs" or "wisdom" do I demand from God before I will trust Him?**

Both demands set the terms; God answers with Christ crucified.

1:22–24; Isa 55:9

6 **Which part of my past do I think disqualifies me? How do verses 26–31 answer it?**

God chooses "the things that are not" — so that no one boasts but in the Lord.

1:26–31; Jas 2:5

First Corinthians 1 begins with a church that does not look holy and calls it holy anyway, and ends with people the world counts as nothing holding everything in Christ. Between those ends stands the cross — foolishness to the perishing, the power of God to us who are being saved. Let him who boasts, boast in the Lord.

Teaching the Word. Living in the Light. — Smith For Christ

† Sources

Each teacher's section summarizes the pages below in our own words; short quotations are verbatim from them. Matthew Henry died in 1714 having reached Acts; his *Commentary* on 1 Corinthians was completed after his death by Simon Browne from his notes

and method, and is cited under his name as it is published. Henry's Commentary and C.H. Spurgeon (1834–1892) are in the public domain; Guzik and Sproul are summarized — consult each author's own work.

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