

# “Perfectly Joined Together?”

- 1 Corinthians 1:1-17 -

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*1 Paul, called to be an apostle of Jesus Christ through the will of God, and Sosthenes our brother, 2 To the church of God which is at Corinth, to those who are sanctified in Christ Jesus, called to be saints, with all who in every place*

*call on the name of Jesus Christ our Lord, both theirs 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 to you by Christ Jesus, 5 that you were enriched in everything by Him in all utterance and all knowledge, 6 even as the testimony of Christ was confirmed in you, 7 so that you come short in no gift, eagerly waiting for the revelation of our Lord Jesus Christ, 8 who will also confirm you to the end, that you may be blameless in the day of our Lord Jesus Christ. 9 God is faithful, by whom you were called into the fellowship of His Son, Jesus Christ our Lord. 10 Now I plead with you, brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you all speak the same thing, and that there be no divisions among you, but that you be perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment. 11 For it has been declared to me concerning you, my brethren, by those of Chloe's household, that there are contentions among you. 12 Now I say this, that each of you says, "I am of Paul," or "I am of Apollos," or "I am of Cephas," or "I am of Christ." 13 Is Christ divided? Was Paul crucified for you? Or were you baptized in the name of Paul? 14 I thank God that I baptized none of you except Crispus and Gaius, 15 lest anyone should say that I had baptized in my own name. 16 Yes, I also baptized the household of Stephanas. Besides, I do not know whether I baptized any other. 17 For Christ did not send me to baptize, but to preach the gospel, not with wisdom of words, lest the cross of Christ should be made of no effect.*



This first letter between Paul the apostle and the church that had been established in Corinth exposes the tragedy...the “dirty laundry” of life not only within that specific fellowship, but in so many fellowships around the world today. It strips away any veneer...any façade, which masks the oft cancerous living and interaction of so many individuals and churches that publically wear a spiritually healthy exterior yet deep down are anything but.

However, as we venture into this letter, we need to be able to differentiate between imperfect Christians traveling naturally through a maturing process of practical sanctification, and those who are in fact worldly and fleshly and even perhaps are “tares in the field of wheat.” Yet let us not miss the critical element in understanding this letter: it was written *to a church*. That may be a rather obvious aspect, but it must not be forgotten as we journey through its pages. It is not aimed at overt unbelievers, although it naturally challenges the reader as to self-evaluation and even brotherly evaluation as to the reality of one’s conversion and certainly ones Spirit-filled state.

This church in Corinth was founded through the endeavor of Paul the Pastor...Paul the *evangelist* really, when he made his way there while on his second missionary journey in Acts 18. He remained there for a year and a half in the house of guy by the name of Justus, living literally right next door to the synagogue, establishing a community, building a fellowship and laying a foundation of leadership.

To say that Corinth was not an easy city to plant a church in would be an understatement. Not that any city...both then and now, ever receives the gospel with open arms. And certainly every modern pastor would claim that their backyard is “hard-plowing” ...perhaps even claiming the *hardest*, when it comes to establishing a fellowship of believers. Yet Corinth would give any of us a “run for our money” and would in reality be hard to top. For Corinth was a *very* wicked city. It was the L.A., the New York, the *Babylon* of that day. The term Corinthian came to mean “evil” or “immoral” in the vernacular of the day. A person who would indulge in the flesh would be said to have been “Corinthianized.” It literally was “sin central” when it came to the Roman

empire. Aphrodite, or Venus, was the goddess worshipped there. Conveniently, illicit sex was a major part of the practice of her worship. The temple of Aphrodite had 1,000 “priestesses,” who were really nothing more than prostitutes who sold themselves for the financial support of the temple and its “pimp” priests. It was in so many ways like any major city center in the west...extreme sexual diversity and laxity, a world of self-promotion, self-help, and self-discovery. It was a world of reckless development of individualism.

Because of the “osmosis” of proximity to all of this, the Corinthian church would come to represent at best, worldly and fruitless Christian living; at worst, the belief that one can *be* a Christian and live by the ways of the world. Today the wider church of God struggles, not with a *city* called Corinth, but a *nation*, if not a *world*. The church has become like Lot and his extended family who believed they could live in the midst of Sodom, and indulge themselves on some level with the fruits of sin, while still remaining in right standing with God. There was no separation for Lot, no separation for Corinth, and shamefully, not much separation for today’s modern church and its attendees.

Our tendency today is to take the position that if we are just a bit better behaved than the world, then we are ok in our standing before God. Yet Paul is clearly not going acquiesce to that position. For the first 11 chapters of this book, he would address the problem of carnality that had found its way into the church in Corinth, and moreover, on some level, *accepted* by the church community at large. No, Paul was not providing for any compromise on this matter. After all, this was not happening in the unbelieving pagan world, but in the midst of those who *believed and presented* themselves as faithful, and held themselves to be a righteous example of God’s church. Like the church today, it was clear that they loved God’s *forgiveness* of sin, but failed to ever significantly find His *deliverance* from sin. They were...*once again like us so often*, excusing their shortcomings and had grown accepting of their failings.

One thing that seemed to so perpetuate this situation was the embracing of simple arrogant pride. Until Paul arrived, it was hard to find an ounce of humility in Corinth, and that attribute also found its way into the operation of the church. Now Paul in this letter would “throw down” on that very issue and would bring real and faithful living to that church in Corinth. It is easy today to be theologically sound on the *standing* of redemption, but purposely ignorant concerning the *practice* of redemption. Many desire to be *forgiven* of sin, but there are far less who truly want to be *free of sin*.

Let us also purpose to note that throughout this letter to the church to Corinth, Paul stresses the life of the body of Christ, the critical participation of every believer in God’s church. This is so important in an age where at every opportunity it seems that modern Corinthians will attempt to find any method to circumnavigate the God-ordained plan for the church. To “reinvent” the church in our own image. We have conveniently decided that church should be all about feeling good, slick entertainment, and democratic vote, even though it never was described as such anywhere in scripture. We have established home churches and other aberrant gatherings which have conveniently abandoned tithing, service, missions, fellowship, body-life, pastoral authority, church discipline and responsibility, and honestly most everything scripture says church is to be. Paul, throughout all his letters, teaches us clearly what the dynamic of the church was and *is* to be. Likewise, this specific letter has much to say concerning what we are to be as a church, and what a church is to be to us.

The fellowship there had questions of Paul. It was clear that the instruction on the issues they ask about had been previously received on a theological level, they had not been received and acted upon such in a physical and practical level. This situation again, is not an anomaly, but tends to be the way we as humans receive scriptural instruction.

**1:1** Despite their generally poor spiritual condition, Paul does not begin this letter with a slap to their heads. Such is a righteous beginning, for He clearly wanted to do more than scold them into submission. He wanted them to have the “go-to” answers, even before he began to detail the problems. Thus he reminds them how great is the gift of their salvation, and speaks of the power behind a sanctified life and the access they have to God

through Jesus Christ. In other words, he begins by pointing out that they have within them...within their salvation, the very real ability to live a fruitful, holy, and separate life.

He does however begin also by exerting his authority. Paul was called by God, so he had the badge, the credibility, and the latitude to say the things he was going to say. An apostle is a “delegate, a messenger, one sent forth with orders.” Thus Paul’s calling and position was more than the corporate invitation made to all mankind like salvation is. He was hand-selected and Spirit anointed. He was divinely chosen and empowered. Let us pause to take note that he was not merely chosen and called, but HE likewise *chose and answered*. It was the will of God for Paul to play this roll in his life, but in order to fulfill such, it had to also be the will of Paul. He had to die to himself and become a slave to Christ.

**1:2** Paul wrote this letter with a guy named Sosthenes at his side. This is quite interesting because this was likely Sosthenes the ex-high priest, who used to be an enemy of the church. (Acts 18) When attempting to come against the church, those whom Sosthenes thought would *support* him ended up *beating* him. So somewhere along the way, he found Christ himself. Often those who seem to be the farthest away are those who are, in fact, nearest to surrender unto the Lord.

Paul addressed this letter “To the church...” Paul was addressing them all, corporately and individually. No one would be excused from the accountability and responsibility that comes with a redeemed life and with belonging to a family of God called church. Being part of a church means responsibility and accountability. This is not a club. This is also not a drive through fast food joint where we come to be served tasty junkfood and drive out after with no aspect of participation. That’s why *we* have and nurture church membership. This was the church of *GOD*. That means it was and is *His* church, not ours. It is both a gift and a responsibility to be a part of it. But He is and always will be the head and the pilot.

From the beginning, Paul declares his position. He calls these people both “sanctified” and “saints.” Both terms have a critical impact that cannot be ignored. To be sanctified means, “set apart for the exclusive use.” In this case, this is the use by God our Father. Note the word “exclusive.” To be a part of the kingdom and therefore part of a church means you are *His*. It’s not a democracy, it’s a military unit. So if you are *in*...if you ever were...means you don’t get to decide it’s too hard and too dangerous and just pack it in and go home. That’s called AWOL. It also means you rebelling against the General and you are in sin, and there is no two ways about it and no, you are not the exception. What kept me on the field all these years is the epiphany that the alternative isn’t even an *option* for me. Sometimes I would start to think I actually had a choice! But soon God reminded me that I...*like Paul*...am “compelled.” I’m a *slave*! I don’t get to *choose*...!

Such a concept has been almost lost in today’s modern church. It is truly rare to meet an individual that thinks in this way...that understands that the “gifts and callings of God are irrevocable” and we don’t just get to hang back and find a comfortable seat in the peanut gallery and just watch it all roll by. Paul places *all* in the church on that equal and demanding plane of accountability.

“*called to be saints*” If you are not sure of your personal and individual calling, you can be sure of this one: you are called to be a saint. This word does not mean perfect, as in the sense of the modern use of the word, but those who *believe* are called to *live like it*. This is a simple idea, which seems to have been lost as the church has saddled up next to the world.

**1:3** “*God our Father and the LORD Jesus Christ.*” Once again, from the beginning, Paul was establishing the tone and the direction he was heading. This letter was and *is* for *believers*, and Paul establishes the relationship he bases as its foundation. Christ is the *Lord*, whether we choose to receive Him in that role or not.

**1:4** Paul thanks God, as we all should with every living breath, for the grace *given* to us by Christ. Note that this has been *given*; not earned, not deserved, not bought. This is given freely by a Savior who loves us even

when we are unlovable, which is quite likely most of the time. Paul, the consummate shepherd, thanks God. Not just for the grace bestowed upon himself, but for the grace bestowed upon the people as well.

**1:5-7** Paul also thanks God for the gifting He bestowed upon this church. Despite all the problems Paul would address concerning the church in Corinth, he acknowledged God had been faithful on *His* side of the relationship. It's easy to forget this sometimes and blame God for what is completely a personal man-caused condition. It's easy to blame God...or blame others...or blame the church, for what is 100% on you...

It's notable that Paul readily acknowledges that the gifts of the Spirit were present and prevalent in that group of believers, *despite* their overall condition. Consequently, we would never want to think because we *today* corporately manifest those gifts, that such spiritual presence reflects our overall condition and standing in Christ. The presence of such gifts in a person or a church is not necessarily evidence of their spiritual health. The presence of these gifts means that *God* is faithful, not necessarily that *we* are!

The "*testimony of Christ*" ...His reality and our true position with Him, if they are where they should be, won't be primarily expressed in the exercise of supernatural spiritual gifts but rather will be seen in our practical lives and everyday living. Words are cheap; our lives tell of the reality of our hearts. Expressing such when times are good and the road is easy says nothing. It is when things are hard and the pressure is on, that truly speaks of our reality....our true state.

**1:8-9** This passage is another way of saying that "he is faithful even when we are not." (2 Tim 2:13) Our text here speaks the phrase "that you may be blameless." Blameless? That's a heavy idea. But the Bible speaks of two types of "sanctification." **Positional sanctification:** That which God declares to be fact without an evidence-based reality: we are right with God because we have been born again and we are standing upon work of *CHRIST*, not our own work. But then there is **Practical sanctification:** The true reality of what we are, based upon what is manifested in our lives. This is to be... *if we are indeed a born again, Spirit-filled individual*, an ever-growing, ever-maturing aspect of our faith! Such is an innate and absolute part of a redeemed life and if it is not happening, we can therefore understand that something is very wrong, and we need to sit up and take notice.

God *will* do *His* part. However, He didn't redeem us so we could stay as we were before salvation. Change *will* occur. We will be becoming more like Him every day. Col 2:10 says we are "complete **in** Him." These verses seem to confirm that blessed standing. As long as you are truly standing *in* Him!

**1:10** Here we have the '**concept of the day**'; *perfectly joined together*. The fellowship and participation that each of us is to have in our local church is to be one of unity, peace, intimate and critical cohesion, and mutual "other-centered" priority. These principles are reiterated repeatedly throughout scripture. Thus, we are without excuse when we fail into divisions, church splits, gossip, and petty complaining. We are without excuse when we hold a bitter spirit and cling to bad heart toward one another. It does not mean that everyone is going to *be* or *think* just like me or just like you! It means that we find harmony and unity despite our differences. It means that we all come under authority, accountable to each other, and other-centered in our relationships. This means that *everyone* has to change, not just the "other guy."

**1:11** Paul wasn't dealing in gossip and whispers in the dark. He *was* however watching and he *was* listening. Every pastor/leader can ill afford to be ignorant of issues within the local church that have the potential of doing damage to the body or the greater name of Christ.

Furthermore, despite the often knee-jerk response to such a practice, Paul wasn't afraid to name names. He was a matter-of-fact, no nonsense kind of man that met issues head on and sought to resolve them clearly and quickly. It was and *is* a leadership quality that we should seek to emulate.

Paul evidently had heard that there was some arguing going on. This is a sure sign that the flesh is ruling instead of the Spirit!

**1:12** Verse 12 gives us the picture that the church there had divided down party lines, or maybe *denominational* lines in this case. Some were claiming allegiance to Paul, some to Apollos (who was a gifted speaker from Alexandria), some claimed Peter was their man, and some gave allegiance only to Christ. We might stand back and say, “Hey, obviously the last group is right,” but that might be a bit premature; they had essentially demoted Christ to the level of an earthly party leader on par with the rest of these men. It can tend to the line we often hear today... “I don’t need a church or a pastor... I have Jesus... I just follow him.” Sounds real good... if you could take away the arrogance and forget about the authority that Jesus himself gave the church! So the “battle of sides” begins, and has continued unabated even to this day. How we want to argue and debate and reason out why we are right and they are wrong. But such only manifests a self-centered heart which places us on the outs immediately despite our position and argument.

**1:13** Paul was attempting to draw these folks out of their comfortable lethargy. A worldly lethargy that, like today, can slowly lull us into self-centered divisions and fleshly distractions. Clearly divisions had arose. Perhaps because they forgot their objective. Perhaps because they got lazy. Perhaps because they thought they were ‘special’ and had arrived at an imaginary elite spiritual plane. Perhaps, like many of us, they felt “entitled” or “owed.” The church *owes* me for all the hard work I have given. *GOD* owes me because of what I have given. I deserve credit more than *that* guy...

Instead of unity and pulling together, they went solo... just what Satan wants. Paul moved to pull the people together so they could see what was important to focus on. How easy it is to lose track of what is truly crucial and to get sidetracked on petty, minor, and selfish aspects. So many people start down that road and never find their way back again. It happens because of our pride, our religious arrogance, and our erroneous idea that the position we personal hold is of course the right and righteous one.

Satan often does not use overt *sin* to waylay us, but rather he uses the flesh to steer us away from the true and narrow path. Today my mind can picture the faces of those who once walked the path of Christ, only to become lost in issues that they decided were more important than what God has said on the matter. The reason for such actions are as numerous as there are those who became so locked in their thinking. Christ wasn’t divided, so when we find ourselves *there*, we know that Christ is *not*.

**1:14-16** Paul immediately took action to remove himself from this fray, and to awake the church to reality. He points out that he did nothing to build an allegiance unto himself. He hadn’t tried to draw people to himself. He was a bond-slave. He worked for ***God and kingdom*** and none of it was for personal gain or position.

**1:17** Paul makes a statement to finish this subject. He clarifies what is critically important.

Today we have seemingly lost track of what we are doing here. We preach current events and “feel-good” sermonettes. We talk the talk, but when difficulty comes along, we bail out. We want “positive” messages on family first, universal prosperity, social justice, and political action. We lean toward the social gospel of personal affirmation, emotions, and identity. We seek churches that will tell us we are ok... we are good as we are; to support our dreams and desires. It seems we seek anything and everything *except* the cross these days. We want a good life here and now, not to die to this world and live truly as a slave to Christ. And we have mastered the art of lying to ourselves to such a degree, we are blind to God’s instructions.

We don’t seek the cross for the same reason men have been reluctant to seek it from the beginning. The reason is that Christ, the Son of God crucified, is a cultural offense and a personally distasteful call upon us. Romans 9:33 *"Behold, I lay in Zion a stumbling stone and rock of offense, And whoever believes on Him will not be put to shame."*

God did not send Paul (or me) primarily to baptize or to make primary any secondary issue of faith. Baptism is an awesome event, and I love to participate in it, but that is not why I'm called. I'm called to preach the gospel and to speak the truth. And not with a mess of Hebrew, Aramaic, and deep theological concepts. It is to be taught pure, simple, and just as the scriptures present it, nothing more and nothing less. When we mess with perfection, we simply taint a work of art.

Men indeed love the gospel, but often only the gospel that *leads* to salvation. Most of the time though, we do not however love the *life* of salvation, which entails seeking after holiness, the rejection of the lusts of the world, dying to oneself, living now in servanthood, and the dedication and lordship of our lives to our Creator.

We love the *idea* of salvation, as we want to be released from the guilt of sin, but truthfully we are far less keen on the idea of being released from the world as a whole. We so fail to grasp that real faith says I am done...every decision and action is His to make and His to glory. Funny how we so often struggle with decisions that aren't even ours to make as Christians! Scripture says we are just passing through, merely sojourners. For the truly redeemed, this world is not our home, and Jesus is calling all the shots...