**THE MESSAGE OF THE CROSS**

1 Corinthians 1:1-31

Key Verse 18

“For the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God.”

**Introduction**



Paul wrote this letter to the troubled church in Corinth so that they might resume gospel faith. The Christians in Corinth were struggling with their environment, to fit into their culture. They had compromised their Christian life. Paul offered them encouragement to overcome their ongoing struggle to live for Christ. The core of the gospel is the cross of Jesus which is the power of God and the wisdom of God. Though Greek culture tried to invade the Corinthian church, Paul encouraged them to stand firm on the gospel message. Today, the wisdom of men and popular human culture threatens the existence of the church. The cross of Jesus protects the church and provides the power of God for all who are to be saved. Let’s listen to Paul’s message to us. May God bless us to have a powerful spiritual life through the message of the cross!

1. Read verses 1-9. Who wrote this letter, and to whom is it written? (1-3) On what basis does Paul give thanks for the believers in Corinth? (4-7, Act 18:8-11) What does he believe about their future? (8) How could he believe this? (9)

1-1, Read verses 1-9.

Paul, called to be an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God, and our brother Sosthenes, **2** To the church of God in Corinth, to those sanctified in Christ Jesus and called to be his holy people, together with all those everywhere who call on the name of our Lord Jesus Christ—their Lord and ours: **3** Grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. **4** I always thank my God for you because of his grace given you in Christ Jesus. **5** For in him you have been enriched in every way—with all kinds of speech and with all knowledge— **6** God thus confirming our testimony about Christ among you. **7** Therefore you do not lack any spiritual gift as you eagerly wait for our Lord Jesus Christ to be revealed. **8** He will also keep you firm to the end, so that you will be blameless on the day of our Lord Jesus Christ. **9** God is faithful, who has called you into fellowship with his Son, Jesus Christ our Lord.

1-2, Who wrote this letter, and to whom is it written? (1-3)

***Paul, called to be an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God, and our brother Sosthenes, 2 To the church of God in Corinth, to those sanctified in Christ Jesus and called to be his holy people, together with all those everywhere who call on the name of our Lord Jesus Christ—their Lord and ours: 3 Grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.***

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* By the will of God, Paul became an apostle. Paul shows his identity as the apostle of Christ Jesus with spiritual authority given to him by God’s calling.
* Paul pioneered the church of Corinth during his second missionary journey by preaching the gospel message to them for one and half years. (Acts 18:1-11)
* The gospel ministry was prosperous in Corinth. Corinth was a major cosmopolitan city, a seaport and major trade center in Achaia.
* The city of Corinth was filled with the pleasures of sin and was a paradise for sailors. But the Corinthian people willingly accepted Paul’s message of the gospel of Jesus and the church of Corinth was established.
* Then they were purified by the words of God. They were called to be holy.
* The church is not a building but a community of people who call on the name of the Lord.
* The church is universal. It is everywhere. This is evident when we read articles about our UBF ministries around the world.
* It is clear that though we are scattered around the world and come from other cultures and speak other languages, we share a common faith, possess a common hope, and participate in a common mission.
* Now Paul greeted them warmly, “Grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ”

1-3, On what basis does Paul give thanks for the believers in Corinth? (4-7, Act 18:8-11)

***I always thank my God for you because of his grace given you in Christ Jesus. 5 For in him you have been enriched in every way—with all kinds of speech and with all knowledge— 6 God thus confirming our testimony about Christ among you. 7 Therefore you do not lack any spiritual gift as you eagerly wait for our Lord Jesus Christ to be revealed.***

* Though Paul had to deal with many problems in the church, he didn’t begin with words of rebuke. Rather, Paul thanked God for His great works among them.
* Paul affirmed what God had done among them. He was always thankful for their new life in Christ.
* They received God’s grace when they studied the word of God. Acts 18:8-11 describe the pioneering story of Corinthian church. “Crispus, the synagogue ruler, and his entire household believed in the Lord; and many of the Corinthians who heard him believed and were baptized. One night the Lord spoke to Paul in a vision: ‘Do not be afraid; keep on speaking, do not be silent. 10 For I am with you, and no one is going to attack and harm you, because I have many people in this city.’ 11So Paul stayed for a year and a half, teaching them the word of God.”
* Paul devoted himself to teaching the word of God to the Corinthians. Crispus’ entire household believed Paul’s message and many were converted. The church of Corinth was born in this way.
* Sharing the words of the Holy Bible is the best way to win souls for the kingdom. Paul studied the Bible with one family and through their acceptance the church began to grow.
* We too can apply this by expanding the kingdom on each campus through 1 to 1 Bible studies.

1-4, What does he believe about their future? (8)

***8 He will also keep you firm to the end, so that you will be blameless on the day of our Lord Jesus Christ.***

* Paul knew them very personally and expressed his confidence for their future. As the shepherd of the Corinthian Christians, Paul was confident that God would consider them blameless when Christ returned.
* This guarantee was not because of their own works or merit, but because of what Jesus had done for them through his death and resurrection.
* Paul was sure of the 2nd coming of Jesus Christ. He was not focusing on the present situation of the world, but the future glory at the second coming of Jesus.

1-5, How could he believe this? (9)

***9 God is faithful, who has called you into fellowship with his Son, Jesus Christ our Lord.***

* His confidence also came from the fact that God is faithful. The world changes, friends change, children change, but God never changes.
* He keeps his promises even sacrificing his own son on the cross. We can trust God because he is the same yesterday, today, tomorrow, and forever. (Heb. 13:8)
* This unchanging attribute of God assures us that we will be blameless on the day of Jesus coming.

1. Read verses 10-17. What is Paul’s appeal to them? (10) What report had he received about them? (11-12) How did Paul bring them back to the proper perspective? (13-16) What was the focus of Paul’s ministry? (17)

2-1, Read verses 10-17.

I appeal to you, brothers and sisters, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that all of you agree with one another in what you say and that there be no divisions among you, but that you be perfectly united in mind and thought. **11** My brothers and sisters, some from Chloe’s household have informed me that there are quarrels among you. **12** What I mean is this: One of you says, “I follow Paul”; another, “I follow Apollos”; another, “I follow Cephas”; still another, “I follow Christ.” **13** Is Christ divided? Was Paul crucified for you? Were you baptized in the name of Paul? **14** I thank God that I did not baptize any of you except Crispus and Gaius, **15** so no one can say that you were baptized in my name. **16** (Yes, I also baptized the household of Stephanas; beyond that, I don’t remember if I baptized anyone else.) **17** For Christ did not send me to baptize, but to preach the gospel—not with wisdom and eloquence, lest the cross of Christ be emptied of its power.

2-2, What is Paul’s appeal to them? (10)

***I appeal to you, brothers and sisters, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that all of you agree with one another in what you say and that there be no divisions among you, but that you be perfectly united in mind and thought.***

* After giving thanks, Paul immediately turns to the question of division among the church members. Paul appealed to them so that they might heal their divisions.
* Paul addressed them as brothers. Paul reminded them that they were Christian brothers. Paul believed that they are part of God’s family.
* This is in line with Jesus’ definition of the family in Mark 3:35, “For whoever does the will of God, he is my brother and sister and mother."
* When we do the will of God, we become members of God’s family and become brothers and sisters. So Christians share a unity that runs even deeper than that of blood brothers and sisters.
* There should be no division if we are brothers and sisters as the members of the body of Christ. So Paul appealed to them that they should agree and be united in mind and thought.
* This seems impossible to follow. It is hard to be united in mind. Then Paul said that we have to be united in thought.
* How can we do that when we are all different in our mind and thought? Here “to agree with one another” does not mean that everyone has to behave exactly the same.
* We will not completely agree on every issue, but we can work together harmoniously if we agree in the name of the Jesus Christ.
* We should speak and behave in a way that will reduce arguments and increase unity. We should focus on like-mindedness, not on the differences in our fellowship.
* Petty differences should not divide the church. There is no place for pride or a know-it-all attitude. We are to have the mind of Jesus.

Philippians 2:2 says,

“Then make my joy complete by being like-minded, having the same love, being one in spirit and purpose.”

Ephesians 4:1-3 reads,

As a prisoner for the Lord, then, I urge you to live a life worthy of the calling you have received. **2** Be completely humble and gentle; be patient, bearing with one another in love. **3** Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace. **4** There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called to one hope when you were called; **5** one Lord, one faith, one baptism; **6**one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all.

* It is only possible when we have the same love, the same spirit, and the same purpose in Jesus. When Jesus is in the center of our life and adopt his complete humility, we can be united in mind and thought.
* Though we may have a differing viewpoint, we can agree in the name of Jesus. Once we agreed among us in the name of Jesus, we should support the decision made in Jesus though we did not agree in the beginning.
* Though we are diverse in race, culture, ethnicity, and nationality, we can work together in the name of Jesus because we are brothers and sisters in Christ. All things are possible in Christ.

2-3, What report had he received about them? (11-12)

***My brothers and sisters, some from Chloe’s household have informed me that there are quarrels among you. 12 What I mean is this: One of you says, “I follow Paul”; another, “I follow Apollos”; another, “I follow Cephas”; still another, “I follow Christ.”***

* In this diverse Corinthian church, some said, “Hey, men! Paul is my favorite preacher who is a founder of this church. So I follow Paul.”
* Another said, “I don’t agree with you. Peter (Cephas) is my favorite preacher. He is the first disciple of Jesus. So I follow Peter.”
* Someone else said, “Hey! How about Apollos! He is an eloquent and popular preacher. So I follow Apollos.”
* Though these three preachers were united in their message, their styles of message delivery and personalities attracted different people who followed them.
* At this time the church was in danger of dividing because of their preferences of different preachers. When the church members follow any favorite human messenger, there is danger of division. This is the root of the problem.
* When we follow a human leader over another, due to our preference or favoritism, we can be divided.

* The Corinthian Christians were under the influence of Greek culture which followed their favorite philosophers. They loved to debate and followed their favorite philosophers like Socrates, Plato Epicureans, or Aristotle.
* The Greek culture invaded the church in Corinth and there was quarreling among them. The church must influence the culture and not the other way around.
* In verses 1-10 Paul mentioned Jesus Christ ten times. Paul made it clear who it is all preachers and teachers should emphasize. If Jesus is the center of our life, there will be no division.
* If self-centeredness is the focal point of our life, we can cause divisions. Jesus warned in Mark 3:25, “If a house is divided against itself, that house cannot stand.” Satan destroys the work of God through “divide and conquer.”
* We can preserve the unity of the family and the church in the name of Jesus Christ.

2-4, How did Paul bring them back to the proper perspective? (13-16)

***13 Is Christ divided? Was Paul crucified for you? Were you baptized in the name of Paul? 14 I thank God that I did not baptize any of you except Crispus and Gaius, 15 so no one can say that you were baptized in my name. 16 (Yes, I also baptized the household of Stephanas; beyond that, I don’t remember if I baptized anyone else.)***

* Paul wanted them to realize the seriousness of their division. So he rebuked them, “Is Christ divided? Was Paul crucified for you? Were you baptized into the name of Paul?”
* Some were boasting that Paul baptized them. Paul said that he could not even remember this.

2-5, What was the focus of Paul’s ministry? (17)

***17 For Christ did not send me to baptize, but to preach the gospel—not with wisdom and eloquence, lest the cross of Christ be emptied of its power.***

* Then Paul cut straight through all the confusion to the core issue: the cross of Christ.
* Paul believed that only when they came back to the cross of Christ could they all be united in mind and thought and could solve their division problems completely.

1. Read verses 18-25. What are the two responses which people can have towards the message of the cross? (18) How does God deal with human wisdom? (19-20) What is the wisdom of God in saving people? (21) What did Paul keep doing despite people’s preference? (22-23) What was his personal confidence? (24-25)

3-1, Read verses 18-25.

**18** For the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God. **19** For it is written: “I will destroy the wisdom of the wise; the intelligence of the intelligent I will frustrate.” **20** Where is the wise person? Where is the teacher of the law? Where is the philosopher 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 know him, God was pleased through the foolishness of what was preached to save those who believe. **22** Jews demand signs and Greeks look for wisdom, **23** but we preach Christ crucified: a stumbling block to Jews and foolishness to Gentiles, **24** but to those whom God has called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God. **25** For the foolishness of God is wiser than human wisdom, and the weakness of God is stronger than human strength.

3-2, What are the two responses which people can have towards the message of the cross? (18)

***18 For the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God.***

* How one responds to the message of the cross may seem to be a light matter to some. It is just exercising your freedom of choice.
* However, there are consequences to every choice and the result is very serious. We will bear the responsibility for our choices before God. Those who regard the cross as foolish will perish.
* According to the Bible, that means that they will live in bondage to sin their entire lives until they find themselves in the fiery lake of burning sulfur for eternity.
* Those who receive the message of the cross are saved from their sin. They no longer live in their sin. They become children of God with eternal life.
* The message of the cross is the power of God for salvation of anyone who believes. (Rom 1:16)

3-3, How does God deal with human wisdom? (19-20)

***19 For it is written: “I will destroy the wisdom of the wise; the intelligence of the intelligent I will frustrate.” 20 Where is the wise person? Where is the teacher of the law? Where is the philosopher of this age? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of the world?***

* There are so many wise men and women, famous scholars and philosophers, even today. They say many good things, but they do not show us the way of salvation. They cannot solve the problem of sin and death, even for themselves.

3-4, What is the wisdom of God in saving people? (21)

***21 For since in the wisdom of God the world through its wisdom did not know him, God was pleased through the foolishness of what was preached to save those who believe.***

* But God cannot be found through human wisdom, but only through the *message of the cross*.
* The pursuit of human wisdom may bring an earthly prosperity or happiness, but it can never bring the very knowledge of the true God.
* Though Paul was highly educated and eloquent in speech, he did not depend on this to attract listeners. He only depended on God humbly, and God worked.

3-5, What did Paul keep doing despite people’s preference? (22-23)

***22 Jews demand signs and Greeks look for wisdom, 23 but we preach Christ crucified: a stumbling block to Jews and foolishness to Gentiles,***

* Hebraism came from the Jews, Hellenism from the Greeks. Hebraism sought God through religion. Hellenism looks for wisdom through human reason.
* Jews demand miraculous signs. They valued miracles and divine visions without repentance. They demanded Jesus to prove himself by doing miracles.
* Greeks developed a dominant philosophy and culture. Through Greek culture, the world was “civilized.” Western culture has been derived from Greece.
* But the problem is that proponents of Greek culture did not accept that they were sinners. They tried to reach God through reason.
* They thought the message of the cross was foolish. The cross of Jesus is a stumbling block to the Jews and foolishness to the Gentiles.
* Paul understood the wisdom of staying true to the gospel in his preaching. He faithfully stuck to the message of the cross throughout his ministry.
* According to Acts 18, when Paul pioneered the city of Corinth he devoted himself exclusively to preaching and testifying to the Jews that Jesus was the Christ.
* Some accepted the message and others became abusive, and began to persecute him. Paul was afraid.
* Then the Lord spoke to him in a vision: “Do not be afraid; keep on speaking, do not be silent. For I am with you, and no one is going to attack and harm you, because I have many people in this city” (Ac 18:9,10).
* So Paul kept on speaking. Then God worked through him and there was a great revival in the city of Corinth. Lives were changed. God raised up many disciples.
* Even for us, sticking to the message of the cross is of utmost importance, for it has eternal consequences.

3-6, What was his personal confidence? (24-25)

***but to those whom God has called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God. 25 For the foolishness of God is wiser than human wisdom, and the weakness of God is stronger than human strength.***

* Here we find two aspects to the message of the cross. First, the cross of Jesus is the power of God. Sin holds a certain power over us. Therefore, we need power to save us from the power of sin and death. Otherwise, we will perish.
* So many students are living under the power of sin. They despair because they are slaves of lustful desires, anger, bitterness, pride, or selfishness. No one could save them from this misery.
* But they can be saved by the power of God. Jesus can save us. He solved our sin and death problem through his death and resurrection. God forgave all our sins and brought us back to the kingdom of God.
* Through Jesus’ cross we have eternal life and eternal victory. The cross of Jesus is glorious. The cross of Jesus is the power of God.
* Second, the cross of Jesus is the wisdom of God. We also need divine wisdom to be saved. The cross of Jesus reveals God’s wisdom. And that wisdom is found in Jesus’ Gospel.
* God satisfied his love and justice perfectly in the cross. God punished sin to the full measure in Christ and then raised him from the dead. The cross of Jesus saves sinners. This is God’s wisdom in the cross. This is the wisdom that saves.

1. Read verses 26-31. What kind of people were the Corinthians when they were called? (26) Why did God call people like them? (27-29) Why should we boast in the Lord only? (30-31)

4-1, Read verses 26-31.

Brothers and sisters, think of what you were when you were called. Not many of you were wise by human standards; not many were influential; not many were of noble birth. **27** But God chose the foolish things of the world to shame the wise; God chose the weak things of the world to shame the strong.**28** God chose the lowly things of this world and the despised things—and the things that are not—to nullify the things that are, **29** so that no one may boast before him. **30** It is because of him that you are in Christ Jesus, who has become for us wisdom from God—that is, our righteousness, holiness and redemption. **31** Therefore, as it is written: “Let the one who boasts boast in the Lord.”

4-2, What kind of people were the Corinthians when they were called? (26)

***26 Brothers and sisters, think of what you were when you were called. Not many of you were wise by human standards; not many were influential; not many were of noble birth.***

* Paul reminded them how they were saved. They had been lowly people. Corinthian Christians had humble births and they were unlikely to be wise by human standards.
* But God called them and saved them through Christ Jesus. It was nothing but God’s one-sided grace. They had nothing to boast about.

4-3, Why did God call people like them? (27-29)

***27 But God chose the foolish things of the world to shame the wise; God chose the weak things of the world to shame the strong. 28 God chose the lowly things of this world and the despised things—and the things that are not—to nullify the things that are, 29 so that no one may boast before him.***

4-4, Why should we boast in the Lord only? (30-31)

***It is because of him that you are in Christ Jesus, who has become for us wisdom from God—that is, our righteousness, holiness and redemption. 31 Therefore, as it is written: “Let the one who boasts boast in the Lord.”***

* So Paul concludes, “Let him who boasts boast in the Lord.”

**Conclusion**

Paul gave thanks for their faith in spite of their problems. He encouraged them to agree in the name of Jesus and remember the cross of Jesus to be united in his name. He reminded them that they were saved by the cross of Jesus. They should not become proud but become humble to accept the message of the cross once again to be united as Christians. Paul urges Christians to agree with one another so that there would be no division among believers. May God bless us to keep unity in the name of Jesus and build a strong community that calls on the name of the Lord! “For the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God.” **One word: The message of Cross!**