

Paul's First Letter to the Corinthians (now lost) (c. 52 or 53)

1 Corinthians 5:9–11

9 I wrote to you in the letter not to associate with sexually immoral people.

10 By no means *did I mean* the sexually immoral people of this world or the greedy people and swindlers or idolaters, since then you would have to depart out of the world.

11 But now I have written to you not to associate with any so-called brother, if he is a sexually immoral person or a greedy person or an idolater or an abusive person or a drunkard or a swindler—with such a person not even to eat.

Paul's Third Missionary Journey—Timothy and Erastus Sent to Macedonia (early 54)

Acts 19:21–22

1 Corinthians 4:17; 16:8–9

21 Now when these *things* were completed, Paul resolved in the Spirit to go to Jerusalem, passing through Macedonia and Achaia, saying, “After I have been there, it is necessary *for* me to see Rome also.”

22 So *after* sending two of those who were assisting him, Timothy and Erastus, to Macedonia,

he himself stayed *some* time in Asia.

4:17 Because of this, I have sent to you Timothy, who is my dear and faithful child in the Lord, who will remind you of my ways in Christ Jesus, just as I teach everywhere in every church.

16:8 But I will remain in Ephesus until Pentecost, 9 for a great and effective door has opened for me, and *there are* many opponents.

Paul's Second Letter to the Corinthians – Part 1 (early 54)

1 Corinthians 1–4

Address and Greeting

1:1 Paul, called *to be* an apostle of Christ Jesus through the will of God, and Sosthenes our brother,

2 to the church of God sanctified in Christ Jesus that is in Corinth, called *to be* saints, together with all those who call upon the name of our Lord Jesus Christ in every place, their *Lord* and ours.

3 Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

Thanksgiving for Corinth's Spiritual Gifts

4 I give thanks to my God always concerning you, because of the grace of God which was given to you in Christ Jesus,

5 that in everything you were made rich in him, in all speech and all knowledge,

6 just as the testimony about Christ has been confirmed in you,

7 so that you do not lack in any spiritual gift *as you* eagerly await the revelation of our Lord Jesus Christ,

8 who will also confirm you until the end, blameless in the day of our Lord Jesus Christ.

9 God *is* faithful, by whom you were called to fellowship with his Son Jesus Christ our Lord.

Reaction to Chloe's Report of Factions in the Church

10 Now I exhort you, brothers, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you all say the same *thing* and there not be divisions among you, and that you be made complete in the same mind and with the same purpose.

11 For it has been made clear to me concerning you, my brothers, by Chloe's people, that there are quarrels among you.

12 But I say this, that each of you is saying, “I am with Paul,” and “I *am* with Apollos,” and “I *am* with Cephas,” and “I *am* with 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 give thanks that I baptized none of you except Crispus and Gaius,

15 lest anyone should say that you were baptized in my name.

16 (Now I also baptized the household of Stephanas. Beyond that I do not know if I baptized anyone else.)

17 For Christ did not send me to baptize, but to proclaim the gospel, not with clever speech, lest the cross of Christ be emptied.

The Foolish Wisdom of the Cross

18 For the message about 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 intelligence of the intelligent I will confound.” [[Isa 29:14](#)]

20 Where *is* the wise person? 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 know God, God was pleased through the foolishness of preaching to save those who believe.

22 For indeed, Jews ask for sign miracles and Greeks seek wisdom,

23 but we preach Christ crucified, to the Jews a cause for stumbling, but to the Gentiles foolishness,

24 but to those *who are* called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ *is* 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*.

God's Choice of the Foolish

26 For consider your calling, brothers, that not many *were* wise according to human standards, not many *were* powerful, not many *were* well born.

27 But the foolish *things* of the world God chose in order that he might put to shame the wise, and the weak *things* of the world God chose in order that he might put to shame the strong,

28 and the insignificant of the world, and the despised, God chose, the things that are not, in order that he might abolish the things that are,

29 so that all flesh may not boast before God.

30 But from him you are in Christ Jesus, who became wisdom to us from God, and righteousness and sanctification and redemption,

31 so that, just as it is written, "The one who boasts, let him boast in the Lord." [[Jer 9:24](#)]

Paul's First Visit to Corinth

2:1 And I, *when I* came to you, brothers, did not come with superiority of speech or of wisdom, proclaiming to you the testimony of God.

2 For I decided not to know anything among you except Jesus Christ and him crucified.

3 And I came to you in weakness and in fear and with much trembling,

4 and my speech and my preaching *were* not with the persuasiveness of wisdom, but with a demonstration of the Spirit and power,

5 in order that your faith would not be in the wisdom of men, but in the power of God.

The Spirit's Revelation of God's Wisdom

6 Now we do speak wisdom among the mature, but wisdom not of this age or of the rulers of this age, who are perishing,

7 but we speak the hidden wisdom of God in a mystery, which God predestined before the ages for our glory,

8 which none of the rulers of this age knew. For if they had known *it*, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory.

9 But just as it is written, "*Things* which eye has not seen and ear has not heard, and have not entered into the heart of man, all that God has prepared for those who love him." [[Isa 64:4](#)]

10 For to us God has revealed *them* through the Spirit. For the Spirit searches all *things*, even the depths of God.

11 For who among men knows the things of a man, except the spirit of the man that *is* in him? Thus also no one knows the things of God except the Spirit of God.

12 Now we have received not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who *is* from God, in order that we may know the things freely given to us by God,

13 *things* which we also speak, not in words taught by human wisdom, but in *words* taught by the Spirit, explaining spiritual *things* to spiritual *people*.

14 But the natural man does not accept the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him, and he is not able to understand *them*, because they are spiritually discerned.

15 Now the spiritual *person* discerns all *things*, but he himself is judged by no one.

16 "For who has known the mind of the Lord; who has advised him?" [[Isa 40:13](#)] But we have the mind of Christ.

A Correct Understanding of Christian Service

3:1 And I, brothers, was not able to speak to you as to spiritual *people*, but as to fleshly *people*, as to infants in Christ.

2 I gave you milk to drink, not solid food, for you were not yet able *to eat it*. But now you are still not able,

3 for you are still fleshly. For where *there is* jealousy and strife among you, are you not fleshly, and do you not live like *unregenerate* people?

4 For whenever anyone says, "I am with Paul," and another, "I *am* with Apollos," are you not *merely* human?

5 Therefore, what is Apollos and what is Paul? Servants through whom you believed, and to each as the Lord gave.

6 I planted, Apollos watered, but God was causing *it* to grow.

7 So then, neither the one who plants nor the one who waters is anything, but God who is causing *it* to grow.

8 Now the one who plants and the one who waters are one, but each one will receive his own reward according to his own labor.

9 For we are God's fellow workers; you are God's field, God's building.

10 According to the grace of God given to me, like a skilled master builder I laid a foundation, and another is building upon *it*. But each one must direct his attention to how he is building upon *it*.

11 For no one is able to lay another foundation than the one which is laid, which is Jesus Christ.

- 12 Now if anyone builds upon the foundation *with* gold, silver, precious stones, wood, grass, straw,
13 the work of each one will become evident. For the day will reveal *it*, because it will be revealed with fire, and the fire itself will test the work of each one, of what sort it is.
14 If anyone's work that he has built upon *it* remains, he will receive a reward.
15 If anyone's work is burned up, he will suffer loss, but he himself will be saved, but so as through fire.
16 Do you not know that you are God's temple and the Spirit of God dwells in you?
17 If anyone destroys God's temple, God will destroy this one. For God's temple is holy, which you are.

How to Regard Self and Others

- 18 Let no one deceive himself. If anyone thinks *himself* to be wise among you in this age, let him become a fool, in order that he may become wise.
19 For the wisdom of this world is foolishness with God, for it is written, "The one who catches the wise in their craftiness," [\[Job 5:13\]](#)
20 and again, "The Lord knows the thoughts of the wise, that they are futile." [\[Ps 94:11\]](#)
21 So then, let no one boast in people. For all *things* are yours,
22 whether Paul or Apollos or Cephas or the world or life or death or things present or things to come, all *things are* yours,
23 and you *are* Christ's, and Christ *is* God's.
4:1 Thus let a person consider us as servants of Christ and stewards of God's mysteries.
2 In this case, moreover, it is sought in stewards that one be found faithful.
3 But to me it is a very little matter that I be judged by you or by a human court, but I do not *even* judge myself.
4 For I am conscious of nothing against myself, but not by this am I vindicated. But the one who judges me is the Lord.
5 Therefore do not judge anything before the time, until the Lord should come, who will both enlighten the hidden things of darkness and will reveal the counsels of hearts, and then praise will come to each one from God.

Apostles as Models of the Wisdom of the Cross

- 6 Now I have applied these things, brothers, to myself and Apollos for your sake, in order that in us you may learn not *to go* beyond what is written, lest someone be inflated with pride on behalf of one *person* against the other.
7 For who concedes you *superiority*? And what do you have that you did not receive? But if indeed you received *it*, why do you boast as *if you* did not receive *it*?
8 Already you are satiated! Already you are rich! Apart from us you reign as kings! And would that indeed you reigned as kings, in order that we also might reign as kings with you!
9 For, I think, God has exhibited us apostles last of all, as condemned to death, because we have become a spectacle to the world and to angels and to people.
10 We *are* fools for the sake of Christ, but you *are* prudent in Christ! We *are* weak, but you *are* strong! You *are* honored, but we *are* dishonored!
11 Until the present hour we are both hungry and thirsty and poorly clothed and roughly treated and homeless,
12 and we toil, working with our own hands. *When we are* reviled, we bless; *when we are* persecuted, we endure;
13 *when we are* slandered, we encourage. We have become like the refuse of the world, the offscouring of all *things*, until now.

Appeal to Imitate Their Father Paul

- 14 I am not writing these *things* to shame you, but admonishing *you* as my dear children.
15 For if you have ten thousand guardians in Christ, yet *you do* not *have* many fathers, for in Christ Jesus I fathered you through the gospel.
16 Therefore I exhort you, become imitators of me.
17 Because of this, I have sent to you Timothy, who is my dear and faithful child in the Lord, who will remind you of my ways in Christ Jesus, just as I teach everywhere in every church.
18 But some have become arrogant, as *if* I were not coming to you.
19 But I am coming to you soon, if the Lord wills, and I will know not the talk of the ones who have become arrogant, but the power.
20 For the kingdom of God *is* not with talk, but with power.
21 What do you want? Shall I come to you with a rod, or with love and a spirit of gentleness?

Chronological Notes

1) Date.¹

- A) According to 1 Corinthians 16:8, Paul wrote his second letter to the Corinthians (called 1 Corinthians or Corinthians B) during his third missionary journey when he was well into his 2½ year stay in Ephesus (Summer 52 to Summer 54). The fact that he wanted to stay in Ephesus “until Pentecost” indicates that he was writing early in the year, and so a date in early AD 54 is most likely.

2) Paul and the Corinthians.²

- A) Paul’s history with the Corinthians is complex, but it is possible to reconstruct the course of the apostle’s dealings with this difficult congregation from the available evidence in Acts and 1 & 2 Corinthians with reasonable certainty. As the following list shows, Paul made at least three visits to Corinth and wrote at least four letters, only two of which have been preserved in the Christian canon. The sequence of these visits and letters is as follows:

- (1) First visit—Paul started the church in Corinth in late 49–Summer 51 (Acts 18:1–11).
- (2) Paul wrote the “previous letter” in c. 52 or 53 (1 Cor 5:9–11; “Corinthians A”).
- (3) Paul wrote 1 Corinthians from Ephesus in early 54 (1 Cor 16:8; “Corinthians B”).
- (4) Second visit—the “painful visit” c. Summer 54 (2 Cor 2:1; see 12:14; 13:1–2).
- (5) Paul wrote the “severe letter” c. Summer 54 (2 Cor 2:4; 7:8; “Corinthians C”).
- (6) Paul wrote 2 Corinthians from Macedonia in Fall 54 (2 Cor 7:5; 8:1; 9:2; “Corinthians D”).
- (7) Third visit in the Winter 54/55 (Acts 20:2).

¹ Andreas J. Kostenberger, L. Scott Kellum, Charles L. Quarles, *The Cradle, the Cross, and the Crown* (B&H Academic, 2009): 469–70.

² *Ibid.*, 469.