

1 Corinthians 1:1-17 Bible Study

Launch: What do you enjoy most about being part of a church? What things do you find frustrating/disappointing/hard?

1 Read 1 Corinthians 1:1-9. If you just read this introduction, how might you think the rest of the letter might flow? Does Paul seem to think things are okay at Corinth?

Sounds quite positive and encouraging... you could think it's going to be a warm letter...

Look up a few of the following verses to get a feel for some of the issues facing the church at Corinth.

3:3-4	11:20-21
5:1	14:20
6:6-8	15:34

What surprises you about this introduction, given what you have seen from the rest of the letter?

There are a lot of problems in the church! And Paul will work through many of them in the chapters ahead. But he starts with a reminder of who they are, and what God has done for them. Notice they are still God's church. They have been sanctified (set apart)... he still calls them a church who will be blameless (in Christ) on the last day.

2 Fill in the table below.

	What the Corinthian church has?	How the got it?
v2	<i>Holiness (=been sanctified = been set apart by God to be his holy people)</i>	<i>In Christ Jesus (and by responding by calling on the name of Jesus)</i>
v4	<i>Grace</i>	<i>Given them in Christ Jesus</i>
v5	<i>Enriched in every way (incl. speech and knowledge)</i>	<i>In 'him' = Christ Jesus</i>
v7	<i>Every spiritual gift</i>	<i>(presumably links to v5 – 'in him' = Christ Jesus)</i>
v9	<i>Fellowship with Jesus</i>	<i>God has called them into it.</i>

3 *A church is a gathering of God's people in a place. In the New Testament, 'church' is most often used to refer to a particular group that gather regularly in a location (e.g. in Philippi, Corinth, Ephesus).*

Who does each local church belong to? What does it mean that they have been sanctified and called to be holy (v2), and how does this show what every church should focus their attention on?

This (and all churches) are God's church (v2).

Being sanctified means that God has set them apart as belonging to him. Notice that they weren't his before (i.e. there were in that all things he created are his, but they weren't in the sense of salvation or having fellowship with Jesus).

What does it look like to be God's? If he has made us his, what does he want from us? How do we act as if we belong to him? (Notice that calling on the name of Jesus is a key element of being his people – and this calling is a 'present, ongoing calling', not a one-off thing). But what else does it look like for us?

4 How can Paul say that they have been 'enriched in every way' (v4) and 'do not lack any spiritual gift' (v7). Who does this apply to? What does it say about the importance of gathering together as a church, and about individuals' contribution to a church?

It's a big statement. God has given them everything they need.

This is broken open a bit more when we realise it is the (local) church that has everything, not individuals. (Yes, Eph 1:3 hints that we all have every spiritual blessing in Christ even as individuals – although there is something corporate there too in the 'us'. So this is a bit different – together as a church, every church has every gift they need).

Thus, being alone we will be deficient. We need each other. And we all contribute to the church. To not be there is to deprive others, as well as to deprive yourself. All of us are to be involved as God's gift to the gathering.

5 Read 1 Corinthians 1:10-17. Who is the focus on in verse 1-9? (cf. the 'how' column of the table).

What seems to be the problem in the church at Corinth that Paul picks up in v10-17, and what do you think causes it? (hint: is it a problem with the various leaders or with the Corinthians?). ¹

Notice that every verse has Jesus in it! Jesus (and God's work through Jesus) is very central.

¹ Note that we'll come to the issue of various leaders and factions etc in a few chapters time, so don't spend too much time on this topic today!

*In the next section, we see that the Corinthians are being very individual. There are divisions (lit. 'schisms') based on personal preferences = "I follow...". The focus isn't on the different leaders (they all agree) – the focus is on the **disunity** in the **believers** who are finding ways to divide because of their own self-focus.*

6 Pick a few of the following things to think about for further application:

- A. How often do you thank God for the church he has given you? What do you thank him for? Why might you not think to thank him often?

More of a personal question, but good to see if people are willing to share.

Focus is on thanksgiving.

- B. Are you confident that God is faithful (v9)? How is it helpful to know that God *has* called/saved us, *is* saving you (giving us everything we need while we wait for Jesus' return), and *will* keep you to be blameless at the last day?

Important to help us wrestle with how well we trust God and his faithfulness.

But the other issue associated with this is whether we trust that God is at work bringing about salvation? We can easily believe that God saves us and then leaves the rest to us – to keep trusting Jesus. But he is actively involved in all of it – keeping us right until the end. Not that this absolves us of any responsibility, or course!

Notice also, in context, the importance of a local church in being cared for by God – being given every gift we need to help 'keep' us.

- C. What will it look like for us to be 'perfectly united in mind and thought' (v10)?

It's a great principle, but often hard to imagine in reality!

Ultimately, it is a united effort to focus on Jesus. Firstly for salvation (v2) – remember we continue to call on him – but subsequently in submitting to him as our Lord (and the one we belong to) by honouring him in how we think and act and listening to what he says.

There will be things we do differently (which is okay). We need to work out when we are free to express our unity by being different... (which could lead into the final question of denominations – but try not to get distracted by that discussion unless it will be helpful).

- D. Do you ever focus on what you haven't been given in life, rather than what you have? Do you wish you had more from God? How is it helpful to know that *as a church*, we have every gift?

A general question moving to a specific. The goal being to help us be thankful for God's wisdom in having a body where each part contributes, rather than 'lone-rangers' who do it all on their own. It's not necessarily wrong to ask God for particular gifts (especially if it is because you want to be able to serve others somehow), but often it is unhelpful and too self-focussed. The more we recognise that our dependence on God is often expressed in our dependence on meeting with other Christians, the more we will value others and their ministry... as well as recognise that we are God's gift to others too.

- E. What do you make of the reality of denominations? How does the call to unity (v10) help us think wisely in our context about how we think about/interact with other churches?

I class denominations in the 'necessary evil' category. By which I mean that, because we live in a sinful world and we are sinful, it can be pragmatically appropriate to huddle together because of some issues which are not gospel issues (i.e. don't affect salvation) but make it hard to work together if we disagree.

But ideally, this would not be the case. Even here at Kallaroo, we have people (and even ministers!) who have different views on the out-workings of things like baptism or what age kids should be in up-front roles, etc – but they are not significant issues, and our unity in the Gospel far outweighs any problems caused by different views.

Humility and grace are really important in being a united church.

We need to show grace to other churches (incl. in other denominations). In many cases, we have far more in common (including the most important things of faith in Jesus, and having been set apart by him as his people) that we disagree on.