

## **BIBLE SERIES: "EXPLORING OUR AWESOME BIBLE"**

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### **1 CORINTHIANS 1-3 GOD'S SPIRIT IN US; GOD'S SPIRITUAL TEMPLE**



In this study, we begin with 1 Cor. 1:23-25 regarding *the type* of person God is calling. Paul states, "As for us, we proclaim the crucified Christ, a message that is offensive to the Jews and nonsense to the Gentiles; but for those whom God *has called*, both Jews and Gentiles, this message is Christ, who is the power of God and the wisdom of God. For what *seems* to be God's foolishness is wiser than human wisdom, and what *seems* to be God's weakness is stronger than human strength" (GNB).

For the Greeks, the notion that God came in the flesh and suffered for humans went against all their beliefs. They thought God could not suffer or feel negative things at all or He would not be God. They also rejected humility as a worthy trait. For instance, Aristotle, the famous Greek philosopher, taught that the greatest virtues were pride or "greatness of soul" and self-sufficiency, since they would guard a person from being insulted. For him, humility was a trait fit only for slaves and a God who humbled himself would show Himself to be weak and unworthy of worship. Because of these teachings, most Greeks rejected God's message.

Yet, this truth that God, in His love, was willing to sacrifice His Son for us, and the compelling evidence to support it, would eventually win the battle against the other philosophies of the time. Nevertheless, when Satan saw the great attraction of this message of God's love, he sowed false and pagan beliefs in traditional Christianity and led the majority of people to go astray (2 Cor. 4:3-4).

As historian Jesse Hurlbut says of this deception: "For fifty years after St. Paul's life, *a curtain* hangs over the church, through which we strive vainly to look; and when at last it rises, about A. D. 120 with the writings of the earliest church-fathers, we find a church *in many aspects very different* from that in the days of St. Peter and St. Paul." He later adds, "The *forms and ceremonies of paganism* gradually crept into the worship. Some of the *old heathen feasts became church festivals with change of name and of worship*. About A.D. 405, *images of saints and martyrs began to appear in the churches*, at first as memorials, then in succession *revered, adored, and worshiped*. The *adoration of the Virgin Mary was substituted for the worship of Venus and Diana; the Lord's Supper became a sacrifice in place of a memorial; and the elder evolved from a preacher into*

*a priest*. As a result of the church sitting in power, *we do not see Christianity transforming the world to its own ideal, but the world dominating the church. The humility and saintliness of an earlier age was succeeded by ambition, pride, and arrogance, among churchmen*" (*The Story of the Christian Church*, pp. 26, 52).

Paul then explains to the ordinary Corinthian members they had learned God's truths, not because of their intelligence or education, but due to God's mercy and by being mostly simple folk. He candidly reminds them, "Brothers and sisters, consider what you were when God called you to be Christians. Not many of you were wise from a human point of view. You were not in powerful positions or in the upper social classes. But God chose what the world considers nonsense to put wise people to shame. God chose what the world considers weak to put what is strong to shame. God chose what the world considers ordinary and what it despises—what it considers to be nothing—in order to destroy what it considers to be something. As a result, no one can brag in God's presence. You are partners with Christ Jesus because of God. Jesus has become our wisdom sent from God, our approval, our holiness, and our ransom from sin. As Scripture says, 'Whoever brags must brag about what the Lord has done.'" (1 Cor. 1:26-31, GW).

This is as true today as it was back then. The vast majority of people God calls come from the middle or lower classes. As Jesus said in this regard: "In that hour Jesus rejoiced in the Spirit and said, "I thank You, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that You have hidden these things from the wise and prudent and revealed them to babes. Even so, Father, for so it seemed good in Your sight. All things have been delivered to Me by My Father, and *no one knows who the Son is except the Father, and who the Father is except the Son, and the one to whom the Son wills to reveal Him*. Then He turned to His disciples and said privately, 'Blessed are the eyes which see the things you see, for I tell you that many prophets and kings have desired to see what you see, and have not seen it, and to hear what you hear, and have not heard it' (Luke 10:21-24).

As *The Bible Knowledge Commentary* states, "If God had chosen on the basis of such [lofty] criteria, He would have passed them by. But when God

called, he turned the world's standards upside down and usually chose *the ordinary* rather than the *outstanding* in order that no one may boast before Him but only in the Lord...In the wisdom of God the plan of salvation was accomplished by a crucified Christ *hidden from the wise and learned but revealed to simple believers.*"

Paul explains his example as preaching with humility by focusing on Christ and not in himself. He says, "And I, brethren, when I came to you, did not come with excellence of speech or of wisdom declaring to you the testimony of God. For I determined not to know anything among you except Jesus Christ and Him crucified. I was with you in weakness, in fear, and in much trembling. And my speech and my preaching were not with persuasive words of human wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power, that your faith should *not* be in the wisdom of men but in the power of God" (1 Cor. 2:1-5).

Paul knew that the Corinthians, being Greeks, were famous for praising the oratory of philosophers like Plato and Aristotle, and orators like Demosthenes. In contrast, Paul wasn't trying to impress the Corinthians with his oratory, but let the message of what God had done for them be the most important matter.

He continues, "However, we speak wisdom among those who are [spiritually] mature, yet not the wisdom of this age, nor of the rulers of this age, who are coming to nothing. But we speak the wisdom of God in a mystery, the hidden wisdom which God ordained before the ages for our glory, which none of the rulers of this age knew; for had they known, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory" (1 Cor. 2:5-6).

Remember, it had been some of the ruling classes of the Roman and Jewish world that sentenced Jesus to death. God had decided from the beginning to reveal His great truths and His plan of salvation not to the rich and wise of the world, but to the simple but sincere and humble. Paul explains that the normal person, no matter how intelligent or powerful, cannot understand the spiritual truths of God unless He directly calls them.

As Paul explains, "But as it is written: 'Eye has not seen, nor ear heard, nor have entered into the heart of man the things which God has prepared for those who love Him.' But God has revealed them to

us through His Spirit. For the Spirit searches all things, yes, the deep things of God. For what man knows the things of a man except the spirit of the man which is in him? Even so no one knows the things of God except the Spirit of God. Now we have received, not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God, that we might know the things that have been freely given to us by God" (1 Cor. 2:9-12). He adds, "We don't speak about these things using teachings that are based on intellectual arguments like people do. Instead, we use the Spirit's teachings. We explain spiritual things to those who have the Spirit" (1 Cor. 2:13, GNB).

Note here that Paul draws a clear parallel between *the spirit which is in man* and *the Holy Spirit which is in God*. Now, our spirit is in us, but it is *not* a person distinct from us. Likewise, Paul explains that the Spirit of God is in God, but it is *not* a person distinct from Him. As Christ points out about this relationship, "If anyone loves Me, he will keep My word; and My Father will love him, and *We will come to him and make Our home with him*" (Jn. 14:23). Thus, nothing is said here about a third Person dwelling with the believer. All of this is a clear refutation of the idea that the Holy Spirit is a person, as some teach about the unbiblical Trinity.

Also vital is what it takes to understand Scripture. He says those who have God's Spirit *can understand* what is being taught by one who also has God's Spirit. So, it is not based on human wisdom but on having the spirit of God in us.

Then, he concludes this topic: "Someone living on *an entirely human level* rejects the revelations of God's Spirit, for they make *no sense to him*. He can't understand the revelations of the Spirit because they are *only discovered by the illumination of the Spirit*. Those who live *in the Spirit* are able to carefully evaluate all things, and they are subject to the *scrutiny of no one but God*. For who has ever intimately known the mind of God well enough to become his counselor? Christ has, and we possess Christ's perceptions" (1 Cor. 2:14-16, TPT).

In chapter 3, Paul returns to his concern about their party spirit. He says, "And I, brethren, could not speak to you as to spiritual people but as to carnal, as to babes in Christ. I fed you with milk and not with solid food; for until now you were not able to receive it, and even now you are still not able; for you are still carnal. For where there are envy, strife,

and divisions among you, are you not carnal and behaving like mere men? For when one says, 'I am of Paul,' and another, 'I am of Apollos,' are you not carnal? Who then is Paul, and who is Apollos, but ministers through whom you believed, as the Lord gave to each one?" (1 Cor. 3:1-5).

Paul tenderly uses the analogy of a farmer to explain to the Corinthians that as ministers, they are only the means, not the end that God uses to help them grow spiritually. Paul brought the Word of God to Corinth, which Jesus compared to a seed sown in the ground (Luke 8:11). Later, it was Apollos who continued Paul's work after he left, continuing to water the seed with his preaching and pastoral care for the members. But a minister should never take credit for the spiritual growth of members, for it is actually God who causes them to grow spiritually. In other words, without that direct spiritual relationship between the member and God, the minister labors in vain.

What happens then, and whose responsibility is it? Paul provides the answer in the second analogy he uses—the *construction of a building*. He says, "For we are God's fellow workers; you are God's field, you are God's building. According to the grace of God which was given to me, as a wise master builder I have laid the foundation, and another builds on it. But let each one take heed how he builds on it. For no other foundation can anyone lay than that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ. Now if anyone builds on this foundation with gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, straw, each one's work will become clear; for the Day will declare it, because it will be revealed by fire; and the fire will test each one's work, of what sort it is. If anyone's work which he has built on it endures, he will receive a reward. If anyone's work is burned, he will suffer loss; but he himself will be saved, yet so as through fire. Do you not know that you are the temple of God and that the Spirit of God dwells in you?" (1 Cor. 3:9-18).

The second analogy is that of the minister as an architect who serves to lay the foundation of the spiritual building, which is faith in Christ's sacrifice (what Paul calls "the cross of Christ"), repentance, baptism, and the laying on of hands to receive God's Spirit (see Acts 2:38). After laying the foundation, the building begins (what Paul calls "builds on," which today is called the "superstructure" or the

main part of the building), which is compared to the spiritual development of the member within the Church. The member, through his or her relationship with God, can create a certain spiritual quality in his or her life within the Church, which is the temple of God. Normally, the spiritual quality of the materials should improve over time. Successfully passing a test of faith should produce that spiritual "gold" within one—of a much more valuable spiritual character before God (1 Peter 1:6-7). Of the six materials mentioned here, three survive the fiery test that Paul says "each one's work" will be tested. Three materials do not survive the fire. Straw, or better translated as "stubble," was used to bind pieces of wood and for thatching, and is the first to perish. Therefore, a "stubble" faith is very short-lived. Christ describes this type of faith: "He who received seed on rocky ground is the one who hears the word [of God] and immediately receives it with joy. Yet he has no root in himself and endures for a time, for when affliction or persecution arises because of the word, he immediately stumbles" (Matthew 13:20-21).

The second material is straw, which has a little more substance and strength, but still burns easily. The third is wood, which burns more slowly, but still does not survive a prolonged fire. If the quality of faith can only be compared to these three substances, there is a grave danger of not surviving future trials.

On the other hand, if the quality of faith has become more solid and mature; it is compared to the three last materials that survive the harshest trials. Precious stones don't burn, but they do crack. Faith survives, but it is weakened. Silver doesn't break, but it does tarnish and no longer has its original luster. Only gold is better off after the fiery trial than before, because the only thing that burns away are the impurities, and thus the resulting gold shines brighter than ever.

Paul thus mentions that if the minister's work in the Church survives the trials, they will have a reward. God will know whether they are fit for greater responsibilities in His kingdom. But if the congregation disintegrates after a great trial, or if it ends being the final trial during the end times, they cannot expect a reward or many responsibilities in the kingdom of God, even if they themselves have enough faith to enter it. Let us all be warned!