

God's Wisdom in an Age of Confusion
Why would Paul go to Corinth?
1 Corinthians

Introduction: Good morning! Welcome to EBC, please open your Bibles...

The state of the world we live in...*an age of confusion*. We are preparing for our new series on the book of 1 Corinthians. For those of you interested in how to think about cultural issues, then I hope this series will be an encouragement to you. Here is what we find in 1 Corinthians:

- *Divisiveness in the church*
- *Authentic Christianity vs. Cultural Religion*
- *God's plan for sexuality/gender vs. the culture's view*
- *What cultural activities can/should a Christian participate in without compromising their faith?*
- *Marriage, divorce, singleness*
- *Are the "sign" gifts still significant for today's church?*
- *The role of women in the church*
- *Do you have to believe in the resurrection to be a Christian?*
- *What will happen when Jesus appears again in human history?*

Today, I want to lay the groundwork for our study of this book by going back to the very beginning of the church in Corinth when Paul arrives there in Acts 18. So, the title of this message is this: *why would Paul go to a place like Corinth?* As we will see, the city of Corinth in Paul's day was not exactly a family values community where you would want to raise your children. In fact, it was a city most religious Jews and even moral philosophers wanted to avoid or spend as little time in as possible. So why would someone like Paul, who takes holiness, purity and his consecration to the Lord Jesus very seriously – why would he risk his spiritual health, and the spiritual health of his teammates, to live in a place like Corinth? Well, turn back to Acts and find out. Let's pray...

What was Corinth like during Paul's day

Corinth, a city on the Isthmus of Corinth in Greece, was of great importance in the ancient Roman world; its strategic location with three harbors made it a hub for trade and commerce, contributing to its wealth and regional influence. The city's prosperity attracted people from different backgrounds and cultures, resulting in a diverse population.

During New Testament times, Corinth was known not only as a thriving city, but also as a center of moral decay, deeply marked by its licentious lifestyle. The city was identified not only by its architectural grandeur or its strategic location on trade routes; it was infamous for a brand of moral corruption so integral to its identity that to be "Corinthianized" meant to be lost in the depths of sensual pleasures, to be swept away by a tide of moral decay so powerful that there was no return. As a result, Corinth earned the nickname "Sin City" in biblical times. The influence of the goddess Aphrodite and the practice of temple prostitution contributed to the city's immoral reputation.

However – Paul looks at Corinth from a different set of lenses – with eyes of faith! He sees Corinth not for its spiritual dangers but its spiritual potential. The question that Paul asks is if the gospel can penetrate the hearts of people like this, and become a beacon of light in a place like that, would this not only open up more avenues for the gospel to spread to other places, but also bring more glory to the Lord Jesus Himself?

Why does Paul think this way, and hold out hope for a place like Corinth? Two reasons:

Paul's vision for God can do in a place like Corinth is shaped by...

#1 - Paul's commission by the Lord Jesus Himself (Acts 26:12-18)

#2 – Paul's prior experience in other cities (cf. Acts 13-17)

In other words, Paul views the city in light of God's bigger plan of salvation for the world and what God has done in and through him over the last few years as he travelled from Antioch to Philippi, to Berea, to Athens. So, let's turn to Acts 18 now and see how Luke records for us Paul's ministry in Corinth...

Exposition of Acts 18: Paul's ministry in Corinth

Paul proclaims Jesus first to Jews, then to Gentiles

Acts 18:1-8

So far, this is nothing new. It's the same thing that's happened in all the previous places he's served. But then something unique happens to Paul in verses 9-11...

Paul receives special encouragement from Jesus to stay in Corinth in order to keep "calling" people to Himself

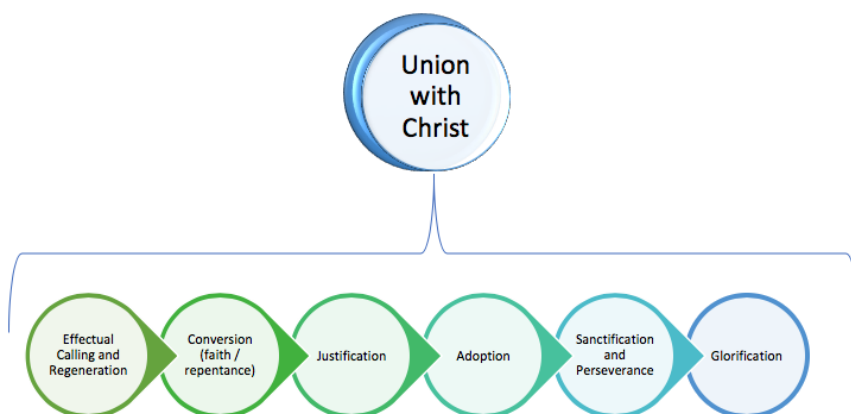
Acts 18:9-11

Why did Jesus need to show up in this personal way to Paul? My guess is that by this time in his mission, with all the stress, travel, persecution, danger, Paul was becoming weary, tired, and maybe a little discouraged. Up to this point, he had not spent significant time in any city – maybe a few months at the most. Yet here, Jesus comes to him and tells him that in this city, this hardened place, this immoral, spiritually dangerous, idolatrous city, that there are many in this city who belong to Him; *they just don't know it yet because they have not yet heard the call of the gospel.*

Protestant theologians have generally explained the process of how one turns to Jesus as the effectual call of the gospel, wherein the Holy Spirit anoints and empowers the words of a human agent – a preacher, evangelist, or just someone sharing their faith and the good news of Jesus, and mysteriously the Holy Spirit zaps them and does exactly what Jesus told Paul would happen in the passage we just read from Acts 26 – their spiritual "eyes" are opened and they turn from darkness to light, from Satan to Christ, and they become a born-again, regenerate, Spirit-filled follower of the Lord Jesus.

So here is a technical term for you: *The calling of God is **general** (the gospel call that goes out indiscriminately to all people through preachers, evangelists, every day people sharing their faith), and **particular** (the gospel call becomes spiritually effectual, wherein the Father calls His people to the Son through the power of the Holy Spirit).*

For those of you who like visuals, let me use this:



01-05-25

Pastor Grant Clay

Now, there is a debate amongst theologians about how the effectual call is initiated in light of the human will. It's a mystery – like Jesus said with the parable of the sower. The seed goes out – the Word of God goes out and for whatever reasons, it falls on different soils.

What makes the good soil good? Well, we aren't told what makes one heart more receptive than another. We are only told that it happens, and it will happen, and God will not lose any that ultimately belong to Him.

And here, Jesus tells Paul specifically that through him, in the most unlikely of places, in the den of idolatry and immorality and societal evil, the word of the gospel will find good soil, and a thriving church will spring up and many will come to believe for eternal life.

And so, Paul stays here, in the most unlikely of places, for over a year – at this point, longer than he's ever stayed anywhere else!

Now, starting next week, we will see how Paul shepherds this church through its challenges, immaturity, and problems. But, as we will see, Paul never gives up on this church. Paul never quits and throws in the towel on them. Why? Because he's an optimist, or glutton for punishment or just really stubborn or naïve?

No, because he believes in what Jesus told him. He believes in the power of the gospel. He believes in the power of the Spirit. And he believes that nothing can stop or thwart or derail God's ultimate plan of salvation. Not all will say yes to the call of the gospel, but many will, and the effectual call of God's word spoken through Paul and those who follow Paul throughout history up unto the present day will continue to do God's work in this world in places like Corinth until all of God's people are brought safely to the shores of the promise of eternity, and His whole church, the bride of Christ, is prepared for eternal glory in His presence forever.

This kind of vision sustained missionaries in the hardest places for generations!

01-05-25

Pastor Grant Clay

Main Idea: The Lord Jesus deploys His human servants to “effectually call” people out from Satan’s dominion and into a saving union with Himself.

Understanding Paul’s Mission and Message

Jesus transforms Paul from being persecutor to an apostle
Acts 26:12-18

Exposition of Acts 18: Paul’s ministry in Corinth

Paul proclaims Jesus
Acts 18:1-8

Paul receives special encouragement from Jesus to stay in Corinth in order to keep “calling” people to Himself.
Acts 18:9-11

Application

Believers have been effectually called by Jesus

Believers are God’s agents to effectually call others to Jesus

Are you resisting the call of Jesus?

Discussion Questions:

1) Why did Paul go to Corinth? (hint: see Acts 26:11-18)

2) Why did Paul stay in Corinth? (hint: see Acts 18:9-11)

3) How does Jesus “effectually” call believers to Himself? Why do you think God chooses to use human instruments to bring the message of salvation to others?

4) How may God want to use your life as an “effectual caller” of others to come to faith in Jesus?