

# Series on First Corinthians

I'll be starting a series of sermons on 1<sup>st</sup> Corinthians by Doug Hamilton, the preacher at the Junction City Church of Christ, in KS.

But before that I want to give some background on the Apostle Paul, author of the Corinthian letters, up to the time he first visits Corinth and starts the church there. I want to look at three periods of Paul's life leading up to his time in Corinth.

1. Saul's first occurrence and conversion
2. Some events on Paul's 1<sup>st</sup> missionary journey
3. And Paul's first travels through Macedonia/Greece on his 2<sup>nd</sup> missionary journey up to his arrival in Corinth.

## Some background information on Paul

Saul, the apostle Paul, is the writer of 1 Corinthians. In the first century AD it was common for Jews to have two names, one their Hebrew name and the other their Latin or Greek name. This was especially true of those who had Roman citizenship as he did. Saul was Paul's Hebrew name, our English name Paul was Paulus in Latin and Paulos in biblical Greek.

The Greek language at this time was in many ways like English is today. It was the common language in use in the western world (otherwise known as the Roman Empire) at the time. Latin was the official language used by the Roman government for official business, but Greek was the common language. People with different native languages from all over the empire could communicate with each other by each speaking Greek.

Saul is first mentioned in Acts chapter 8:1 in connection with the stoning of Steven. Where it says:

### **Acts 8:1 (NIV)**

And Saul approved of their killing him. On that day a great persecution broke out against the church in Jerusalem, and all except the apostles were scattered throughout Judea and Samaria.

Steven was one of the seven men chosen by the church in Jerusalem to care for their Grecian widows. The Apostles laid their hands on the seven chosen and imparted miraculous gifts to them. As a result, Acts 6 tells us:

### **Acts 6:8-10 (NIV)**

Now Stephen, a man full of God's grace and power, performed great wonders and signs among the people. <sup>9</sup> Opposition arose, however, from members of the Synagogue of the Freedmen (as it was called)—Jews of Cyrene and Alexandria as well as the provinces of Cilicia and Asia—who began to argue with Stephen. <sup>10</sup> But they could not stand up against the wisdom the Spirit gave him as he spoke.

The opposition were unable to counter the wisdom with which Stephen spoke, empowered by the Holy Spirit.

So, what does the opposition do? Agree with the superior wisdom? And change?

No:

### **Acts 6:11-13 (NIV)**

Then they secretly persuaded some men to say, "We have heard Stephen speak blasphemous words against Moses and against God."<sup>12</sup> So they stirred up the people and the elders and the teachers of the law. They seized Stephen and brought him before the Sanhedrin.<sup>13</sup> They produced false witnesses, who testified, "This fellow never stops speaking against this holy place (ie the temple) and against the law.

As a result, Stephen is brought before the Sanhedrin, he is given an opportunity to defend himself, which he does. But like those that stirred up the situation and brought charges, the Sanhedrin doesn't listen to the defense but condemns Stephen to be stoned to death.

And then we read that "Saul approved of their killing him."

As the persecution against the church progresses we read in Acts chapter 9.

### **Acts 9:1,2 (NIV)**

Meanwhile, Saul was still breathing out murderous threats against the Lord's disciples. He went to the high priest<sup>2</sup> and asked him for letters to the synagogues in Damascus, so that if he found any there who belonged to the Way, whether men or women, he might take them as prisoners to Jerusalem.

### **In discussing this passage in his work, *The Narrated Bible*, F. LaGard Smith writes**

*"Saul will later become one of the most widely known and widely read of all the apostles. He will make three major missionary journeys, establishing churches throughout what is known today as Turkey, Greece, and Italy. He will write at least 13 inspired letters of Scripture [out of the 27 books of the New Testament, that's almost half] and preach Christ to high government officials. And he will suffer perhaps as much persecution for the sake of the Lord as any other who has defended Jesus' name. But for now Saul is known only as the great persecutor of the Lord's church. He is feared by all who regard the name of Jesus as precious.*

→ So, I ask: What changed Saul? What happened that caused this great persecutor of the Lord's church to become such a champion for the cause of Christ? One of the proofs that the scriptures are what they claim to be... the word of God, is the behavior exhibited by the 1<sup>st</sup> century Christians. There are only three possibilities about these claims:

1. The writings are lies & myths.
2. The writings are the works of insane people.
3. Or the writings are true.

→ Paul was an actual historical person. We know from secular history that Paul lived, that he persecuted the early church and that he then became a major champion of the same church he once persecuted.

→ What would cause such a person to change sides? Wealth, fame, popularity, pride? I want you to keep this question in mind when we review his VERY FIRST missionary journey and see if any

worldly motivations were enough to do what he did.

### Smith continues

*"The events which lead to the radical change in this man Saul are truly remarkable. In one sense his conversion experience is like that of any other believer who commits his life in faithful obedience to Christ. But Saul is destined to become **a special apostle** for the Lord, and that necessitates his ability **to testify to the resurrection of Jesus**. Therefore Saul's conversion involves **a personal appearance by Jesus himself**. Later in his ministry, in response to those who will question his apostleship, Saul (then to be known as Paul) will refer to this [conversion] experience as the basis for his apostleship and the beginning of his special mission for Christ.*

*"Unaware at this point of what the future holds for his life, Saul is seen now relentlessly searching out believers in Jesus (whose sect is known at this time simply as 'The Way') in order to arrest and persecute them."*

## Saul's Conversion accounts

There are three accounts of Saul's conversion recorded in the NT. All of them are in the book of Acts. Acts 9:1-30 (initial account narrated by Luke); 22:3-16 (Paul's defense before a riotous crowd in Jerusalem); and 26:9-18 (Paul's defense before Roman governor Festus and King Herod).

There are a number of events recorded in the NT in multiple places especially events recorded in the Gospels. When you have multiple passages of the same event it is very helpful to combine them and get the entire picture, all the information given of the event presented.

So combining these three passages in Acts of Saul's conversion we get something like:

Following the initial account:

### Luke's account, Acts 9:1,2

Meanwhile, Saul was still breathing out murderous threats against the Lord's disciples. He went to the high priest <sup>2</sup> and asked him for letters to the synagogues in Damascus, so that if he found any there who belonged to the Way, whether men or women, he might take them as prisoners to Jerusalem.

### To the riotous crowd (years later), Acts 22:2-5

Then Paul said: <sup>3</sup> "I am a Jew, born in Tarsus of Cilicia, but brought up in this city [Jerusalem]. I studied under Gamaliel and was thoroughly trained in the law of our ancestors. I was just as zealous for God as any of you are today. <sup>4</sup> I persecuted the followers of this Way to their death, arresting both men and women and throwing them into prison, <sup>5</sup> as the high priest and all the Council can themselves testify. I even obtained letters from them to their associates in Damascus, and went there to bring these people as prisoners to Jerusalem to be punished.

### To Festus & Agrippa (even later), Acts 26:9-12 (NIV)

"I too was convinced that I ought to do all that was possible to oppose the name of Jesus of Nazareth. <sup>10</sup> And that is just what I did in Jerusalem. On the authority of the chief priests I put many of the Lord's people in prison, and when they were put to death, **I cast my vote** against them. <sup>11</sup> Many a time I went from one synagogue to another to have them punished, and I

tried to force them to blaspheme. I was so obsessed with persecuting them that I even hunted them down in foreign cities.<sup>12</sup> “On one of these journeys I was going to Damascus with the authority and commission of the chief priests.

#### **Luke’s account, Acts 9:3-5 (NIV)**

As [Saul] neared Damascus on his journey, suddenly a light from heaven flashed around him.<sup>4</sup> He fell to the ground and heard a voice say to him, “Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me?”<sup>5</sup> “Who are you, Lord?” Saul asked. “I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting,” he replied.

#### **To the riotous crowd (years later), Acts 22:6-8**

“About noon as I came near Damascus, suddenly a bright light from heaven flashed around me.<sup>7</sup> I fell to the ground and heard a voice say to me, ‘Saul! Saul! Why do you persecute me?’<sup>8</sup> “‘Who are you, Lord?’ I asked. “‘I am Jesus of Nazareth, whom you are persecuting,’ he replied.

#### **To Festus & Agrippa (even later), Acts 26:13-15**

About noon, King Agrippa, as I was on the road, I saw a light from heaven, brighter than the sun, blazing around me and my companions.<sup>14</sup> We all fell to the ground, and I heard a voice saying to me in Aramaic, ‘Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me? It is hard for you to kick against the goads.’<sup>15</sup> “Then I asked, ‘Who are you, Lord?’ “‘I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting,’ the Lord replied.

#### **Luke’s account, Acts 9:6-9**

“Now get up and go into the city, and you will be told what you must do.”<sup>7</sup> The men traveling with Saul stood there speechless; they heard the sound but did not see anyone.<sup>8</sup> Saul got up from the ground, but when he opened his eyes he could see nothing. So they led him by the hand into Damascus.<sup>9</sup> For three days he was blind, and did not eat or drink anything.

#### **To the riotous crowd (years later), Acts 22:9-11**

My companions saw the light, but they did not understand the voice of him who was speaking to me.<sup>10</sup> “‘What shall I do, Lord?’ I asked. “‘Get up,’ the Lord said, ‘and go into Damascus. There you will be told all that you have been assigned to do.’<sup>11</sup> My companions led me by the hand into Damascus, because the brilliance of the light had blinded me.

#### **To Festus & Agrippa (even later), Acts 26:16-18**

‘Now get up and stand on your feet. I have appeared to you to appoint you as a servant and as a witness of **what you have seen** and **will see of me**.<sup>17</sup> I will rescue you from your own people and from the Gentiles. I am sending you to them<sup>18</sup> to open their eyes and turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan to God, so that they may receive forgiveness of sins and a place among those who are sanctified by faith in me.’

#### **Luke’s account, Acts 9:10-19**

In Damascus there was a disciple named Ananias. The Lord called to him in a vision, “Ananias!” “Yes, Lord,” he answered.<sup>11</sup> The Lord told him, “Go to the house of Judas on Straight Street and ask for a man from Tarsus named Saul, for he is praying.<sup>12</sup> In a vision he has seen a man named Ananias come and place his hands on him to restore his sight.”<sup>13</sup> “Lord,” Ananias answered, “I have heard many reports about this man and all the harm he has done to your holy people in Jerusalem.<sup>14</sup> And he has come here with authority from the chief priests to arrest all who call on

your name.”<sup>15</sup> But the Lord said to Ananias, “Go! This man is **my chosen instrument** to proclaim my name to **the Gentiles** and **their kings** and to the people of Israel.<sup>16</sup> I **will show him how much he must suffer for my name.**”<sup>17</sup> Then Ananias went to the house and entered it. Placing his hands on Saul, he said, “Brother Saul, the Lord—Jesus, who appeared to you on the road as you were coming here—has sent me so that you may see again and be filled with the Holy Spirit.”<sup>18</sup> Immediately, something like scales fell from Saul’s eyes, and he could see again. He got up and was baptized,<sup>19</sup> and after taking some food, he regained his strength.

### **To the riotous crowd (years later), Acts 22:12-16**

“A man named Ananias came to see me. He was a devout observer of the law and highly respected by all the Jews living there.<sup>13</sup> He stood beside me and said, 'Brother Saul, receive your sight!' And at that very moment I was able to see him.<sup>14</sup> “Then he said: 'The God of our ancestors has chosen you to know his will and to see the Righteous One and to hear words from his mouth.<sup>15</sup> You will be his witness to all people of what you have seen and heard.<sup>16</sup> And now what are you waiting for? Get up, be baptized and wash your sins away, calling on his name.'

## **After Saul’s Conversion**

After Saul’s conversion he will be forced to flee to Tarsus, his home town in Cilicia. He spends three years in the wilderness of Arabia being taught by revelation from Jesus. Galatians 1:12,17-18.

Those scattered by the persecution of Stephen (Acts 7,8) proclaim the word as they went, [but] only to the Jews. Some went to Antioch (in Syria) and began telling Greeks also the good news about Jesus. Acts 11:19-21

As a result the church in Jerusalem sends Barnabas to Antioch (in Syria). When he saw what was happening in Antioch, Barnabas went to Tarsus to get Saul and brought him back to Antioch. For a whole year Barnabas and Saul met with the church and taught great numbers of people. [**This is where and this is when**] The disciples were first called Christians. Acts 11:22-26.

A little later, the Holy Spirit will call Barnabas and Saul to be set apart to go on what becomes their 1<sup>st</sup> missionary journey. Acts 13:1-3. It is on the first stop on this first journey, on the island of Cyprus, when Saul is teaching the Roman proconsul Sergius Paulus that Saul’s name changes to Paul. Acts 13:6-12.

## **Highlights of 1<sup>st</sup> Missionary Journey**

- Acts 13:2, Holy Spirit has church set apart Barnabas & Saul for His work
- Acts 13:4, Holy Spirit sends them out to Seleucia and then sail to Cyprus.
- Acts 13:5, Arrived in Salamis, Cyprus and proclaimed the word
- Acts 13:6, Traveled the island to Paphos, proconsul Sergius Paulus.
- Acts 13:9, Then Saul, who was also called Paul, filled with the Holy Spirit...
- Acts 13:13, From Paphos they sailed to Perga in Pamphylia (John Mark left)
- Acts 13:14, From Perga they went to Pisidian Antioch

- Acts 13:16-48, Paul preaches gospel on the 1<sup>st</sup> Sabbath they are there. Some of the sermon is recorded, it is well received. On the 2<sup>nd</sup> Sabbath, however vs 44, the Jews become jealous and reject it, Paul goes to gentiles who accept it, they then travel to Iconium.
- Acts 14:1,6 A great number of Jews and Greeks believed, but the disgruntled **Jews plot** and cause them **to flee** to the Lycaonian cities of Lystra and Derbe.
- Acts 14:8-10, In Lystra, Paul heals a lame man. They are mistaken for gods.
- Acts 14:11,12, Barnabas they called Zeus, and Paul they called Hermes because he was the chief speaker.
- Acts 14:14-17, Paul & Barnabas deny they are gods and explain God better to them Acts 14:19, Then some Jews came from Antioch and Iconium and won the crowd over. **They stoned Paul** and dragged him outside the city, **thinking he was dead**. Acts 14:20, But after the disciples had gathered around him, he got up and **went back into the city**. The next day he and Barnabas left for Derbe. Acts 14:21-22, They preached the gospel in that city [Derbe] and won a large number of disciples. Then they **returned to Lystra**, Iconium and Antioch, <sup>22</sup> strengthening the disciples and encouraging them to remain true to the faith. "We must go through many hardships to enter the kingdom of God," they said.

## After the 1<sup>st</sup> missionary journey

Paul returns to Antioch in Syria, his home church. Acts 14:24-28. F. LaGard Smith again gives some insight here.

**He says,**

*"The tour through ancient Asia Minor [that is, their 1<sup>st</sup> missionary journey] ends somewhere around AD 47. Paul and Barnabas probably settle back into concentrated efforts at teaching in the local area [to Antioch], but their respite is not to last for long. By AD 48 there is trouble in the church. Certain Jewish Christians from Jerusalem go north to Antioch, teaching the Gentile Christians that they must be circumcised, in addition to being baptized, in order to be obedient to God. To the Jews the rite of circumcision is a sign of the covenant relationship which they have with God, so it is only natural that they should think the same act would be required of Gentile Christians. But their more serious misconception lies in their belief that circumcision is required as part of keeping the Law of Moses. They are not only urging Gentiles to be circumcised, but demanding that they keep the entire law, just as the Jewish Christians are continuing to do.*

*"The problem posed by these so-called 'Judaizing teachers' will continue to divide the church in the ensuing years, and it will be a subject for discussion in several of Paul's later letters. For now, however, the problem is temporarily solved by a conference at Jerusalem in which Paul and Barnabas meet with the apostles and elders [of the Jerusalem church]. After reviewing the work of the Holy Spirit in leading the way to Gentile evangelism, and after consulting Scripture for prophecy concerning the Gentiles, they all agree that circumcision (and by implication, the law itself) is not binding on the Gentiles. This message is sent to Gentile Christians, along with a warning that they avoid certain idolatrous practices common among pagan Gentiles. As a result of this agreement, **unity will finally prevail, at least temporarily.**"*

# Paul's 2<sup>nd</sup> Missionary Journey

Some time after this Paul will travel on his 2<sup>nd</sup> missionary journey. It is on this journey that he first comes to Corinth.

**He says,**

"Apparently not long after writing his letter to the churches in Galatia [which F. LaGard Smith believes was after the conference in Jerusalem and before Paul's 2<sup>nd</sup> missionary journey], Paul decides that it is an appropriate time for a personal visit. Through such a visit Paul hopes to observe how the churches are developing and lend the weight of his actual presence to resolving the circumcision question about which he has written. Accompanying Paul from Antioch is his fellow minister, Silas, who was one of the two representatives sent to Antioch following the Jerusalem conference. After traveling through northern Syria and Cilicia, they proceed to Derbe and then on to Lystra, where they find a disciple named Timothy. Their meeting is the beginning of a close and productive relationship between the older apostle and this young man, who is to become Paul's protege.

"With Timothy now added to their number, Paul and Silas continue traveling through the regions of Phrygia and Galatia. Being directed by the Holy Spirit, Paul passes by Mysia and spends some time in Troas, where Luke indicates that he joins Paul's company. Then, through a vision, Paul is again given directions — this time to go to Macedonia, a province in what today is Northern Greece. There, in the city of Philippi, Paul converts a godly woman named Lydia and establishes a congregation with which Paul will have perhaps one of his closest associations over the ensuing years. Some of the great mutual affection undoubtedly arises from an experience in which Paul and Silas are imprisoned, only to be released miraculously from their chains and thereby given opportunity to convert both their jailer and his household.

"Apparently leaving Luke behind at Philippi, Paul, Silas, and Timothy travel on to Thessalonica, where they spend three weeks with only marginal results, and then go on to Berea, where their preaching is received with great eagerness by both Jews and Greeks. But opposition stirred up by Jews from Thessalonica forces Paul to leave Silas and Timothy temporarily and proceed alone to Athens, the capital of ancient Greece [and the intellectual capital of the Roman Empire]. There Paul engages the Epicurean and Stoic philosophers in discussion and, standing among their pagan altars, gives a classic discourse concerning the true and living God. Thereafter Silas and Timothy apparently join Paul in Athens for a brief time, but are then sent to Thessalonica.

→ Paul's speech to the philosophers is interrupted when he talks of Jesus' resurrection from the dead. They stop his speech. The Bible says:

## **Acts 17:32-34 (NIV)**

When they heard about the resurrection of the dead, some of them sneered, but others said, "We want to hear you again on this subject."<sup>33</sup> At that, Paul left the Council.<sup>34</sup> Some of the people became followers of Paul and believed. Among them was Dionysius, a member of the Areopagus, also a woman named Damaris, and a number of others.

"After remaining alone for some time in Athens, Paul journeys west to Corinth,... Paul supports himself in the trade of tentmaking, together with Aquila and his wife, Priscilla, who have recently come from Italy."

→ It is here in Corinth that Paul receives a vision...

### **Acts 18:9-11 (NIV)**

One night the Lord spoke to Paul in a vision: “Do not be afraid; keep on speaking, do not be silent. <sup>10</sup> For I am with you, and no one is going to attack and harm you, because I have many people in this city.” <sup>11</sup> So Paul stayed in Corinth for a year and a half, teaching them the word of God.

This is the guy who stoned in Lystra to the point they thought he was dead. But kept on going. The one that when the people in Lystra think that Barnabas & Paul are gods, they call Paul, Hermes, because of his speaking ability. The one who was imprisoned in Philippi and kept on going. Who gives an eloquent speech in Athens and is essentially rejected and is shaken to the point that in the very next city God thinks it is necessary to give him a vision to not be afraid... What suggests to me that it is his rejection in Athens, the intellectual capital of the Roman Empire that impacts him so?

### **1 Corinthians 2:1-5**

And so it was with me, brothers and sisters. When I came to you, I did not come with eloquence or human wisdom as I proclaimed to you the testimony about God. <sup>2</sup> For I resolved to know nothing while I was with you except Jesus Christ and him crucified. <sup>3</sup> I came to you in weakness with great fear and trembling. <sup>4</sup> My message and my preaching were not with wise and persuasive words, but with a demonstration of the Spirit’s power, <sup>5</sup> so that your faith might not rest on human wisdom, but on God’s power.

However, with God’s support Paul stays in Corinth for a year and a half and is successful teaching the word of God.

It is to this church that Paul writes 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> Corinthians.

## **Invitation**

We are extending the invitation, now, to anyone who is subject to it. Come,... while we stand and sing.