

Text: 1 Corinthians 1:1-3

Title: The Troubled Church: A Series in 1 Corinthians

Truth: Paul writes to believers who have been called to follow Christ.

Date/Location: Sunday January 12, 2020 at FBC

Introduction

To begin studying this letter to the church in Corinth, we must learn the back-story by reading the history in Acts 18:1-17. There we learn about two men named Paul and Sosthenes (Sahs'-theh-nee-z or Sós-thā-nee-z, although in Greek it would be more like Sōhs-thā'-nase), among others.

Paul the apostle teamed up with Aquila and Priscilla in the tentmaking trade. Likely they could do better and more enjoyable business by combining efforts. As Paul worked, he ministered on Saturdays in the synagogue among the Jews. As time went on, Paul boldly proclaimed Jesus as the Messiah, as he had done elsewhere (Acts 17:3). When the Jewish people opposed his message, he was forced to leave and minister to the Gentiles. He was able to do so next door to the synagogue in the home of a man named Justus.

A man from the synagogue—in fact, the leader of the synagogue—named Crispus, came along with Paul. The Lord had given fruit from the ministry of the gospel. The leader of the synagogue was probably relatively well-versed in Scripture and the Spirit of God used the Word and the new gospel additions to it to convert His soul. Others joined him in believing in Messiah. They understood that He was the One who fulfilled the Hebrew prophecies and made atonement for their sins. 1 Cor. 1:14 records that Paul baptized Crispus and a man named Gaius, and a man named Stephanas and his family.

God promised Paul that there was more work to be done in Corinth, and Paul stayed on for 18 more months. Romans 16:23 records several names of a couple more people likely converted during this time.

The Jews eventually raised a stink about Paul, lying to the Roman proconsul (mayor or governor) Gallio about what Paul was doing. Gallio wisely dismissed the case because it was not a matter of secular governance. Obviously the Jews were unhappy about this decision from the proconsul. But the Gentiles were unhappy about the *Jews*—perhaps because they were unsuccessful in their attempt against Paul, or because they were stirring up trouble in the community, or because of general anti-Semitism. Whatever the reason, they took the leading Jew, Sosthenes, and beat him. *I wonder if the other Jews abandoned him to*

this fate. Or, was he disillusioned with the crowd of pagans? It could be that this was a turning point in his life where he recognized the bankruptcy of the belief system to which he belonged. The Christians actually cared for and helped one another, but the unbelieving Gentiles didn't care. They loved violence.

Later on, Apollos came to Corinth and ministered a while (Acts 18:24-28). After he was thoroughly instructed, he brought the *same* message that Paul did. Despite that, factions arose around the two personalities.

Paul wrote to the church one letter that has been lost (1 Cor. 5:9). He then heard from Chloe and other Corinthians who wrote to who wrote to him (1 Cor. 7:1). He wrote 1 Corinthians in reply to it. Following this, Paul quickly visited Corinth but it was an unpleasant experience. After another and very severe letter to them, he received a good report back from Titus. Then Paul wrote 2 Corinthians. So there were at least three visits by Paul to Corinth, and four letters from Paul to Corinth.

Content of 1 Corinthians

The apostle was concerned about a number of problems in the church. These included:

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1. Divisions or factions	1-4	8. Idolatry	10
2. Sexual immorality	5	9. Roles of men, women	11
3. Lawsuits	6	10. Lord's Table	11
4. Sexual immorality	6	11. Spiritual gifts	12-14
5. Marriage, divorce	7	12. Doctrine of resurrection	15
6. Conscience and liberty	8	13. Giving, closing matters	16
7. Paul's apostleship	9		

I. Author, v. 1

A. Paul. The well-known apostle. Bible believers do not question the identification of the human author, though liberal scholars may attempt to do so. The letter bears all the qualities that we would expect from the apostle, and it fits the timeline of his ministry perfectly.

He was called to be an *apostle*, that is, Christ commissioned him as a special messenger. His office was much like the prophetic office in the Old Testament (and carried over into the New), but was unique in the requirement that the person be commissioned by Jesus Christ, was an eyewitness of his resurrection and worked miraculous signs. NT prophets

did not have to meet all these requirements. But apostles did not have more or higher “powers” than prophets.

This calling was the will of God. It was not the will of Paul. He did not make himself an apostle, but God wanted him in that office (Gal. 1:15-16, 1 Tim. 1:12). Pastors today cannot speak with such divine infallibility and authorization, though many of us know for certain that God has designed for us to be in Christian ministry.

Paul wrote from Ephesus (1 Cor. 16:8) during his three-year stay there (Acts 19, 20:31). This places the letter at about 55 AD.

- B. Sosthenes. It seems reasonable, though not absolutely certain, that the Sosthenes of 1 Corinthians 1 is the same as the one in Acts 18. If so, like Crispus before him, he converted to Christ. He had heard of the Messiah from Paul’s preaching. Maybe the OT promises started to make sense to him in the new gospel context to which he had been introduced. He had to be a fairly educated man, and so he made a good helper for Paul. He had suffered for Christ and so had credibility just like Paul. In writing back to the Corinthian church, Sosthenes was a perfect secretary.

II. Recipients, v. 2

A. Church in Corinth.

1. Church of God. The church was God’s idea. It is God’s building (1 Cor. 3:9). It is the community of those who follow Christ in a particular area, who congregate regularly to worship, receive instruction from Scripture, fellowship, evangelize, and obey the ordinances. The word used for church, *ekklesia*, could be used of any assembly of people, even a group of rioters (Acts 19:32). But this was the assembly of God. The amazing thing for the first-generation Christian was that the church was inclusive of both Jews and Gentiles. It was a new thing that was not national and ethnic, but *international* and *cross-ethnic*. Also important is that the church is a *community*, not an organization, which is *connected to God* in a personal way through Jesus Christ and headed by Christ. It is *distributed* and *decentralized*.
2. Sanctified in Christ. This speaks of the believer’s legal standing before God and the world. Christians are set apart to God and Christ, and apart from the world. They are made holy by being set apart to God and set apart from the world. Their standing with the world is entirely different. Their behavior should follow, and necessarily does so at some point though in varying degrees over time. The Corinthian

church had major problems in their conduct. Paul was trying to get them to match up their behavior to their standing.

3. Called as saints. Paul was not writing to extra-special Christians, or as I like to say, “dead super Christians.” He did not have in his mind anything like a canonized, miracle-working, merit-accumulating, prayer-helping dead person. A saint in his mind is anyone who is a follower of Christ. And that is what a saint is—all believers are saints. They are “saint-i-fied” or more commonly, “sanctified.”

4. The location, Corinth, is somewhat secondary. This letter could be written to many churches in many locations. Still, the biblical and historical background of the city (esp. Acts, 2 Corinthians) does help us understand some of the letter more accurately.

B. All everywhere who call on the name of Jesus. It is not that Paul directly intends the letter’s audience to be public or that he is writing to a bunch of churches. It is that Paul is saying the Corinthians call on Jesus just like Christians everywhere else do.

III. Greeting, v. 3

A. As we have said here many times, Paul’s standard epistolary greeting is “grace and peace.” It is more than a standard boilerplate greeting. He adapts the standard Greek “greeting” with the related word *grace* and combines it with the Hebrew greeting of peace (shalom) into a short but theologically rich statement. True grace and peace do not come from thin air or good feelings between people or mere human wishes for success or happiness (Cheers, Regards, Best, even Sincerely, etc.)

B. True grace is unmerited favor. It comes from God and the Lord Jesus Christ. Both of these members of the Godhead are often associated with the dispensing of grace. Divine grace comes from nowhere else, because no one or nothing else is authorized to dispense it. Even messengers of the gospel who are authorized to give the message of life are not the dispensers of grace. That is given directly by God to the believing sinner.

However, Christians can model their Father in heaven by extending grace to one another and to those outside the faith. What is that? It is favor that another person doesn’t deserve. Your enemy doesn’t deserve it. Someone who sins against you doesn’t deserve it. But you give it anyway because your character has been made like Christ. And it is a delight to give. Here we might question the proverb, “it is more blessed to give than receive.” Which is better? My suggestion is to be thankful for both giving and receiving!

C. True peace is only possible, again, from God. Human peace is transient and shallow and often illusory. God's peace wipes away eternal alienation from God because of sin, makes enemies of God into children of God, and gives us harmony not only among ourselves, but within ourselves. It is harmony *and* blessings of all sorts. It is a wish for health and spiritual prosperity.

As to the origin of this peace, consider Acts 10:36-43. It is a great summary of Peter's preaching. The message of peace with God through Christ's offer of forgiveness of sins was so compelling that the people didn't wait for Peter to conclude the message. They believed it immediately.

D. Paul puts God and Christ in parallel. They are equally sources of this grace and peace. This is a not-so-subtle clue of Paul's Trinitarian belief.

Conclusion

The list of recipients in verse 2 means that wider application a no-brainer, both to all churches in the first century as well as in our own day. The assumption of course is that we do in fact call upon the name of the Lord Jesus Christ just like the Corinthians had done. When we acknowledge Christ as Lord and Savior, this means that we are people rescued from the power and presence of sin, the enemy death, and eternal punishment (Romans 10:11, 13). As such, then, Christ is the commonly shared Lord of all Christians everywhere, binding us together in a unity that is unlike any other in creation.

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