

Bible Study Series - The Epistle of 1 Corinthians

Introduction

Author: Paul

Recipients: The Church At Corinth

Date: 53-55 CE towards the end of his three-year ministry in Ephesus.

Setting: The city of Corinth was formerly a Greek settlement and was rebuilt after the war of 146 BCE. It was situated along a trade route and had a bustling port of call. With this came financial prosperity and economical resourcefulness. It was a center for sports, commerce and military power.

In this setting, the church found itself with many cultural dilemmas which included the lure of wealth, social elitism and the sexual temptation tied to paganism. This young church had to struggle with how to transcend the values and practices of a pagan world while being true to their faith in Christ.

Paul's exhortation was for them to follow the Christ-centered way of humble, loving unity which was built on the cross-cultural reality of the gospel.

An Overview: It is believed that Paul wrote several letters to the church in Corinth but only 1 and 2 Corinthians were accepted for the canon of Scripture. In this letter he addressed a number of theological and practical issues that seemed to have been a major cause of discontent with the congregation. As a result of this the church was fractured and so Paul used this letter to speak about the importance of unity.

It was a church that was blessed intellectually, financially and spiritually. However, some of them allowed such blessing to get to their heads and the result was one of pride. In the letter then Paul reminded them of the centrality of the cross of Jesus Christ, and that an understanding and appreciation of Christ's cross-defined love should replace the puffed-up pride that was crippling the church.

The church was called to return to the message of the gospel, the reality of the cross and resurrection of Jesus Christ, so that through a servant heart of love, unity would be fostered.

Read: 1 Corinthians 1:1-9

Greetings (1 Cor. 1:1-3)

Paul begins by introducing himself as an apostle. Why do you think it was important for Paul to mention that he was "*called*" to be an apostle?

He also introduced a partner in ministry by the name of Sosthenes. Who was this man and what do we know about him? (See Acts 18:12-17).

The Corinthians would have known about the partnership between Sosthenes and Paul, and Paul probably mentioned him here so that the church could understand that there is no

place for lone rangers in ministry. Through partnership much can be achieved as it fosters unity.

Some key terms are introduced here: ***sanctified, called, saints, grace and peace.***

Paul used some of these words to describe the Corinthian believers; they are **sanctified, called** and are **saints**. He seemed to use these terms to set the stage for what he is about to say to them. What do you think each of these mean? Are these concepts we use to describe ourselves today?

It was important for the Corinthians to know that they were **sanctified**, that is *set apart* by God. And this setting apart was to a life of holiness; they are **saints**. This happened because God took the initiative to **call** them, He chosen them, they responded to the call. Therefore, there was no place for them to think they were in the kingdom because of their own doing. They needed to remember it was because of the grace of God.

So notice Paul's use of **Grace and Peace** here. While the typical secular letters of the day would have used "peace and health" in their greetings, Paul tend to prefer "grace and peace." When Christians understand than it is God's grace that has brought us together, there is no place for self-righteousness within the body of Chris; instead it becomes the basis for unity.

Thanksgiving (1 Cor. 1:4-9)

Paul continues with a prayer of thanksgiving for the Corinthian church. Even though they exhibiting sinful and carnal behaviour Paul noticed the good qualities they possessed and acknowledged such in thanksgiving. This church was not only rich materially but also in their:

- Speech and knowledge of Jesus "*...with all kinds of speech and with all knowledge*"
- Spiritual gifts "*...you do not lack any spiritual gift*"
- Expectant anticipation of Jesus' return "*...you eagerly wait for our Lord Jesus Christ to be revealed.*"

In summary then, this church could be identified by *what they said, by what they learned, by a supernatural element* in their lives and by *their expectant anticipation* of Jesus' return.

So although this church was plagued with problems, they possessed some very strong and good qualities. Of course these were not to their own credit but because of the work of God through His grace (v.4)

Something to Ponder:

1. While many persons may be quick and ready to point out the faults and sins of others, it's a good practice to identify their strong points which could become a basis for encouragement.
2. Many of us may pride ourselves on not having the problems of the Corinthian Christians, but do we have their positives?

Glossary of Terms

Apostle – One who is sent and refers to one who is an official representative of another. In the NT, refers specifically to those whom Jesus chose in his lifetime to represent him; and Paul, whom Jesus encountered and commissioned on the Damascus Road (Acts 9:1-16)

Sanctification – The generic meaning of sanctification is "the state of proper functioning." To sanctify someone or something is to set that person or thing apart for the use intended by its designer. The Greek word translated "sanctification" means "holiness." To sanctify, therefore, means "to make holy."

Called – it is used particularly of the Divine call to partake of the blessings of redemption; it is used especially of God's invitation to man to accept the benefits of salvation.

<https://www.blueletterbible.org/search/Dictionary/viewTopic.cfm?topic=VT0000398>

Grace – the unmerited favour of God toward man. Grace is everything for nothing to those who don't deserve anything. Grace is what every man needs, what none can earn and what God Alone can and does freely give.

Peace – The noun (**Shalom**) had many nuances, but can be grouped into four categories: (1) as wholeness of life or body (i.e., health); (2) as right relationship or harmony between two parties or people, often established by a covenant and, when related to Yahweh, the covenant was renewed or maintained with a "peace offering"; (3) as prosperity, success, or fulfilment; and (4) as victory over one's enemies or absence of war. **Shalom** was used in both greetings and farewells. It was meant to act as a blessing on the one to whom it was spoken: "May your life be filled with health, prosperity, and victory."

<https://www.biblestudytools.com/dictionary/peace/>