

*1 Corinthians 1:1-3***PREFACE**

We have spent the last two sessions looking at the physical, geographical setting for the Corinth church and this letter, as well as a brief survey of the letter's content—what was going on in the church to require the counsel Paul writes in the letter. Now we get down to it, examining the content of the letter itself. And we begin by reading Paul's salutation to the church in Corinth.

Read 1 Corinthians 1:1-3.

As usual, Paul includes far more in his brief salutation than a polite replacement for our "Dear So-and-so..."

SALUTATION**v1**

Paul, called as an apostle of Jesus Christ by the will of God,

Paul begins his letter with the standard greeting of the time, but here, as in some of his other letters (cf., *Galatians, Ephesians, Timothy epistles*), he emphasizes not just his *calling* to the office, but the fact that the call came "by the will of God." Paul was not "called" by a local assembly, as today, but by the Lord God Himself, to be a universal apostle (i.e., *sent out as a messenger, but more than just that, "as an emissary of the Lord" (MacArthur)*), preacher, pastor, teacher to *all* believers. Nor did he seek the office; indeed, the Damascus road experience with its aftereffects makes clear that his conversion and calling were not his idea—nor his choice.

Out of all the reasons Paul could and probably did have for reminding the church of his authentic apostleship, foremost would be to put to rest dissension regarding his authority. Some were asking: Was he *qualified* to be speaking and teaching as he did? Later in this letter he will expand on this at length in Chapter Nine.

Read 1 Corinthians 9:1-2.

His greeting continues by telling them who is with him.

Who is Sosthenes?

...and Sosthenes our brother

We must never underestimate the power of the gospel to change the hearts of men—as Paul succinctly defines it in v23, "Christ crucified." The Lord Jesus had encouraged the apostle in a night vision to continue preaching in Corinth, "for I have many people in this city"—meaning, there are many souls in Corinth that will soon be mine (Acts 18:10). One of those was Crispus, the leader of the local synagogue (Acts 18:8), who was converted and baptized by Paul (v14). Another of those converts may have been the *next* synagogue leader, whose name was Sosthenes, and who was attacked by a mob in the presence of the Roman proconsul Gallio.

Read Acts 18:17.

No one can say with certitude that this was the same person referenced in v1, for Sosthenes was a fairly common Greek name. But one clue that he probably was is that Paul refers to him as “our brother” (lit., *the* brother, but regular Greek idiom for “our brother”), suggesting the this individual would be familiar to the readers of this letter. If true, this would mean that after the first leader of the synagogue, Crispus, became a Christian, his replacement was converted as well!

Sosthenes may have been Paul’s amanuensis, or he may have just been a member of his team present while the letter was being written. No one can say.

v2

In v2 of Paul’s salutation he does more than just announce the intended recipients of the letter; he reminds them who they are, and the community of which they are a part.

To the church of God which is at Corinth

Prepositions are important in interpreting Paul’s mind, and interpreting God’s word in general. Pay close attention to them. For example, look at how Paul addresses the church in Thessalonica.

Read 1 Thessalonians 1:1.

Note that: “the church *of* the **Thessalonians** *in* **God**.” Now compare that to the Corinthian letter:

To the church of God which is at Corinth,

Note that: “the church *of* **God** *in* **Corinth**.”

So what? Well, here we have a window into Paul’s mind and intentions—and a window onto the root problem in Corinth. *I’ve been part of a church whose members—in particular, its older members—considered it **their** church, **their** building, **their** club. And it wasn’t pretty; in fact, it was downright ugly.*

Right off the bat, in the opening lines of this missive, Paul is hinting at one of the more important reasons he is writing. It wasn’t necessary for him to say this to the Thessalonians, but to the church in Corinth he is saying, *The church does not belong to you, Corinthians. Nor does it belong to me, or Apollos, or Cephas. It belongs to God. Stop thinking so much of yourselves. Stop subdividing the church into factions based on who is your favorite teacher.* Paul will bring this up again; for example, in Chapter Three he will write,

For we are God’s fellow workers; you are God’s field, God’s building.
(1 Corinthians 3:9)

Moreover, in a letter to a church riven with factions Paul will not take sides, nor does he even mention individual leaders in the church. The entire letter is addressed to the entire church.

to those who have been sanctified in Christ Jesus

If the church does not belong to them, they also had no hand in their sanctification—here probably referring to their salvation. They didn't do it; Jesus did (**remember, gospel = "Christ crucified"**).

This distinction is made all the more clear when we are privy to the lifestyle and behavior of the members of the Corinthian church (as we are from our first two sessions).

sanctified = *hagiazō* = from <G40> (*hagios*); **to make holy**, i.e. (ceremony) **purify or consecrate**; (mentally) to venerate :- hallow, be holy, sanctify; **set apart**.

Nothing—absolutely *nothing* in their past or present could do this. Only Christ Jesus. And, once again, don't miss the preposition. Paul could have said that they had been sanctified *by* Christ Jesus; perfectly true. But he says "in" Christ Jesus. There again is that wonderful, fascinating description of the supernatural relationship we have with our Lord.

The antidote to the creeping disease of arrogance and pride and self-importance that infects so many churches today is to keep reminding ourselves what Paul writes in this first chapter. Not only are we *in* Christ (and He in us), but God—not us, but God—is responsible for it all. This is the point he drives home near the end of this chapter, expanding on what he says in v2.

Read 1 Corinthians 1:26-31. (in ESV)

saints by calling [called to be holy]

We are sanctified (i.e., **set apart as holy**) *in* Christ Jesus; our righteousness, our redemption, our wisdom, our holiness have nothing to do with us, but are all because of our being *in Christ Jesus*. And we are in Christ only because God *chose* us to be in Him—as Paul says in v2, we are "saints by calling," or "called to be holy."

Because of this, he says in v31, all we can do is "boast in the Lord." We have no grounds to boast in ourselves. Just as Paul did not *achieve* his apostleship (v1), so they do not achieve holiness, but receive it (Garland).

Sidebar: We should point out, however, that while *positionally* the Corinthians are holy, called "to reflect God's character," "this is not their strong suit; in too many ways they look far more *like* Corinth than they do God's holy people *in* Corinth" (Fee).

with all who in every place call on the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, their Lord and ours

Paul is not yet prepared to let loose of his theme; he has more to say. His purpose in these opening lines of the letter is to build the case for *context*. When I was but a boy, and had said or done something stupid—or at least ill-advised—my dad would say that I needed to "get my head screwed on straight." Perhaps more than in any letter (excepting Galatians) we have of Paul's to the churches, that is his purpose in writing to the Corinthians: for them to get their head screwed on straight.

As part of this goal, Paul has just made the point that their church belongs not to them, but to God; that God is responsible for it all—including their sanctification in Jesus Christ. His point? *It's not about you, guys!*

Now he extends this by reminding the church that they are not alone—that they are not the only “saints by calling”; many others, “in every place” have been called as well. They may be living in a city that is the Roman jewel of Achaia, it may be a crossroad that draws throngs to marvel and wonder, but in *God's* economy they are but one among many. Corinth—and, more specifically, this church in Corinth—is not the navel of the world, the center of the universe. There are many others “who in every place call on the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.”

This is the warning. But his remark is also a note of reassurance, of strength and confidence in unity.

- Yahweh encouraged the dejected prophet Elijah, who thought he was the only righteous man left, with the news that there remained at least 7,000 in Israel that had not bowed to Baal (1 Kings 19:18).
- The servant of Elijah's successor, the prophet Elisha, thought all was lost when he arose one morning to discover that Dothan was encircled by horses and chariots of their enemy, the king of Aram. He ran back to Elisha and cried, “Alas, my master! What shall we do?” Here was Elisha's reply:
Read 2 Kings 6:16-17.
- While he was in Corinth the apostle had been encouraged by Jesus Himself when He informed Paul to find strength in the fact that “I have many people in this city” (Acts 18:10).

When we are “in Christ” we are never alone. There are individuals and communities “in every place” who “call on the name of the Lord Jesus Christ”—who pray to Him, who worship Him, who publicly proclaim His name. Jesus Christ is, as Paul emphasizes, “their Lord and ours.”

This is no small thing; this is not just Paul's boilerplate. In the first ten verses of this letter Paul declares the title “Christ”—Messiah, the anointed one—ten times to emphasize His kingship, His lordship over the Corinthians. Remember, what is the root cause of the church's problems, its error? Not that the church is in Corinth, but that there is too much Corinth in the church (Fee). By emphasizing the Lordship of Christ over their lives, and by pointing out to them that their church is not standing alone, but is surrounded by many of those who call upon the same Lord, Paul is (among other reasons) using this as a lever to pry them free from the influence of their city.

Garland: Paul wants to bind the Corinthian Christians to other believers across the world, however remote, and to cut them off from any deleterious allegiances to their unbelieving neighbors closer at hand.

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

All of verse three may be boilerplate in practice (cf., [Romans](#), [Ephesians](#), [Galatians](#), [Philippians](#), [2 Thessalonians](#) and [2 Corinthians](#)) but it is not boilerplate in spirit. He closes all these salutations the same because it makes an important point.

The Christian life begins with God's grace, and the Christian *knows* peace, *has* peace, only because this grace has entered his life. Both have only one source: "God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ." Fee puts it well, and thus I close.

Fee: In a sense, [this standard greeting] sums up the whole of Paul's theological outlook. The sum total of all of God's activity toward His human creatures is found in the word "grace"; God has given Himself to them mercifully and bountifully in Christ. Nothing is deserved; nothing can be achieved. And the sum total of those benefits as they are experienced by the recipient's of God's grace is found in the word "peace," meaning "well-being, wholeness, welfare." The one flows out of the other, and both together flow from "God our Father" and were made effective in human history through our "Lord Jesus Christ."