

LIFE IN THE LOCAL CHURCH: 1 CORINTHIANS

Week 1: The Church That No One Claims

INTRODUCTION

- I. Authorship — 1 Cor 1:1 tells us that Paul is the author of 1 Corinthians: “Paul, called to be an apostle of Christ Jesus....” Paul wrote 13 of the books in the NT. 1 Corinthians is the 4th.
- II. City of Corinth
 - A. Location — The southern end of Greece is almost an island. A narrow isthmus, averaging four miles wide, separates this peninsula from the mainland. On the southern end of that isthmus at the foot of a 1500-foot mountain (Acrocorinth) is the site of ancient Corinth.
 - B. History — It is one of the oldest Greek cities that Homer referred to as “wealthy Corinth.” The Romans plundered and destroyed Corinth 146 B.C. In 46 B.C. Julius Caesar had the city rebuilt as a Roman colony. In 27 B.C. Augustus Caesar made Corinth the capital of the province of Achaia.
 - C. Commerce — Because of its location Corinth was the center of commerce between the mainland and the southern peninsula. It also commanded the trade between Asia and Italy. Corinth had two ports: Lechaem, leading to Italy, and Cenchreae, leading to Asia.
 - D. Inhabitants — The population in Paul’s day was quite cosmopolitan with Roman colonists making up the majority. There were many other nationalities including native Greeks as well as a large colony of Jews. The population of the larger metropolitan area in Paul’s day was about one hundred thousand (many of whom were slaves), making it the largest city in Roman Greece.
 - E. Culture —The city cultivated various arts and was famous for its pottery, brass, and architecture. Every two years the Isthmian Games were held (probably observed in A.D. 51), which were second in attendance and splendor only to the Olympic Games.
 - F. Morals and Religion — Corinth had a reputation as one of the most wicked cities of the Roman Empire. The chief deity was Aphrodite, the goddess of love. Her temple was located on top of Acrocorinth and was the center of sacred prostitution. Sexual immorality abounded in Corinth.
- III. Paul’s Contacts with the Church
 - A. Paul established the church (1 Cor 3:6, 10; 4:15) on his second missionary journey (Acts 18:1–18), the fall of A.D. 50, spending eighteen months in Corinth.
 - B. Paul sailed from Corinth in the spring A.D. 52 with Priscilla and Aquila, stopping briefly in Ephesus (Acts. 18:18–21). Paul left them in Ephesus while he returned to Jerusalem and Antioch (Acts 18:22).
 - C. Paul departed Antioch on his third missionary journey in A.D. 52/53, passing through Galatia (Acts 18:23), and then on to Ephesus for three years (Acts 20:31).

- D. A previous letter, now lost, was written by Paul dealing with the church's responsibility toward its sinning brethren (1 Cor 5:9). This letter is not extant, but its contents are summarized and clarified in 1 Cor 5:9–13.
- E. Word then came to Paul at Ephesus from the house of Chloe (1 Cor 1:11) and probably from Apollos (1 Cor 16:12) regarding the Corinthians. He also received a letter from the church (1 Cor 7:1, 8:1, 12:1, 16:1), perhaps delivered by Stephanas, Fortunatus, and Achaicus (1 Cor 16:17), who may have waited for a response.
- F. Paul then writes 1 Corinthians from Ephesus in A.D. 55. About that time Paul sent Timothy to Macedonia and then on to Corinth (Acts 19:22; 1 Cor 4:17; 16:10) to assist in their problems, but was not sure whether Timothy would arrive before or after the church would receive 1 Corinthians.

ANALYSIS

I. INTRODUCTION, 1:1–9

A. Salutation, 1:1–3

(1) Paul, called to be an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God, and our brother Sosthenes,

As we go through this letter we will find that the Corinthian church is at odds with Paul, their founder. They are judging him (4:1–5) and probably questioning his authority over them. One source of his authority is the fact that he founded the church.

4:15: “Even if you had ten thousand guardians in Christ, you do not have many fathers, for in Christ Jesus I became your father through the gospel.”

Another source of Paul's authority is his apostleship. His apostleship is by divine “call” and “by the will of God.”

To his own name Paul adds that of “our brother Sosthenes.” He was apparently one of Paul's companions who is well known to the Corinthians.

Paul often joins his name to others in the salutations of his letters (8 times in all). There is no indication that Sosthenes had a part in writing the letter, especially in light of the personal nature of the letter. Sosthenes is not further heard from as a companion or co-worker of Paul, either in this letter or elsewhere.

(2) To the church of God in Corinth, to those sanctified in Christ Jesus and called to be his holy people, together with all those everywhere who call on the name of our Lord Jesus Christ—their Lord and ours:

By his emphasis Paul disallows at the outset one of the Corinthians' tendencies—to think too highly of themselves. In two of his earlier letters to the church at Thessalonica, Paul had written “to the church *of* the Thessalonians *in* God” (1 Thess 1:1; 2 Thess 1:1). Here this letter is addressed to “the church *of* God in Corinth.”

The Corinthians are “sanctified in Christ Jesus and called to be [God’s] holy people.” Paul is obviously speaking of their past initial sanctification, their being set apart. Because they are set apart for God, they must also bear the character of the God who has thus set them apart. The power of sin has been broken in their lives; they are no longer slaves to sin. Therefore, they must not let sin reign in their lives.

The last phrase in v. 2, “together with all those everywhere who call on the name of our Lord Jesus Christ—their Lord and ours,” is designed to remind the Corinthians that they are part of the larger body of Christ, and thus they cannot go off on a tangent and do their own thing.

(1:3) Grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

Paul’s greeting sums up his whole theological outlook. The sum total of all God’s activity toward his human creatures is found in the word *grace*.

The sum total of those benefits as they are experienced by the recipients of God’s grace is found in the word *peace*, meaning “well-being, wholeness.”