

Paul's Greeting to the Church At Corinth

1 Corinthians 1:1-9

Imagine yourself in the church at Corinth when Paul's letter arrived and is read before the congregation. We sit and listen to each word as though we were hearing it, reading it, for the very first time.

In the first nine verses Paul described the church that God sees. In the rest of the chapter Paul described the church that men see. What God sees, men should see, but unfortunately, that is often not the case.

I. The DESIGNATION of the church (1:2).

➡ The word “church” (Gk. *ecclesia* = “a called out assembly”) has a two-fold application in Scripture:

A. “Churches”—The professing Christians in one geographical location: The church in Jerusalem, Antioch, Corinth, etc.

B. “The Church”—A collective term for “*the body of Christ,*” made up of all believers called out from the world (12:13; Eph. 1:22-23).

1. The church was “*AT Corinth*” geographically, but “*IN Christ*” spiritually and in heaven (cf. Eph. 2:6).

➡ Corinth was founded by Julius Caesar; the church was founded by Jesus Christ. Corinth was a product of the world; the church is a product of the Word. Corinth was about commerce; the church is about Calvary. Corinth was noted for its filth; the church is noted for its faith. Corinth loved pleasure; the church loves purity.

2. “**THE church of God,**” not “a” church of God—“**The church of God**” also existed at Ephesus and Palestine (Acts 20:28; Gal. 1:13).

a) There is one body of Christ, but many different local churches that make up the one body. Paul writes specifically to the church at Corinth, but his letter is also for “*all that in every place call upon the name of Jesus Christ...*”

b) If each local church is a separate body of Christ, then there are many bodies of Christ, not just one.

II. The **DESCRIPTION** of the church (1:2-3).

➡ Before Paul confronts any of the problems in the church, he takes a positive approach to remind them of their position before God.

A. **Sanctified.** Sanctified means "set apart" or "holy" (6:9-11). **Three stages of sanctification:**

1. POSITIONAL—permanent, once for all act when a person is saved. I'm just as saved now as I will be saved in a million years. Nothing can add to that.

➡ Purchased by God's blood (Acts 20:28).

➡ Therefore belongs to God—"*The church OF God which is at Corinth...*"

2. PROGRESSIVE / PRACTICAL —Day-by-day setting apart from sin to God (John 17:17; 1 Thess. 5:22-23; 1 Pet. 1:14-15).

3. PERFECT—This will take place at the rapture when I will be forever set apart from the presence of sin (1 Thess. 3:12-13)

B. **Saints.**

The Roman Catholic doctrine of saints is FALSE: Catholics teach a saint is "a very holy person, one who loved God perfectly and is NOW in heaven, especially one who died with perfect love and did not have to pass through purgatory" (Baltimore Catechism).

1. The word "**saint**" was never a designation of character.

"Saints" is an expression of a believer's relationship to God ("set apart ones").

➡ All of mankind is divided between the "saints" and the "ain'ts." If you "ain't" in Christ, then you "ain't" a saint.

2. The Corinthian church was *called* saints, but were very "un-saintly" in behavior (cf. 1:11; 3:1-3; 5:1).

3. "**Saints**" refers to all believers collectively (Phil. 1:1; Eph. 1:1; Col. 1:2). There are no references in the New Testament to any one individual called a saint. Notice how the Corinthian saints were related with everyone in every place who called upon the name of Jesus Christ (1 Cor. 1:2b).

4. No one in the New Testament was made a saint after death. They were always saints prior to death.
- C. **Confirmed** (1:8). No need to worry about enduring to the end (cf. 2 Tim. 1:12). Salvation is not dependent upon my faithfulness, but God's (1:9). If the Corinthians could have lost salvation, they would have.
- D. The **need** of the church—Grace and peace (1:3).
1. Paul uses this greeting in every epistle and in each case grace always comes before peace: Grace is favor—peace it's fruits.
 2. In salvation, the grace of God comes first in providing salvation, then when accepted it brings peace. There is no peace in anything until grace is present.

III. **The DISTINCTIONS of the church** (1:4-9).

➡ The Church at Corinth had some positive qualities:

- A. **Enriched** (1:4-5).
1. In utterance (eloquence)—Speaking the Word of God (cf. Eph. 6:19; Col. 4:2).
 2. In knowledge—Intelligent, but not in the right things (8:1 cf. 3:16; 5:6; 6:3, 9, 15, 16, 19; 9:24; 10:1; 12:1; 2 Cor. 13:5)
- B. **Confirmed testimony** (1:6). Everything that Paul testified of Christ was true in their lives. They had assurance of salvation.
1. Confirmed by the Apostle Paul's testimony (1:4). Paul thanked God for them, in spite of their imperfections.
 2. Confirmed by their possession of spiritual gifts (1:7)
 3. Confirmed by their baptism (1:13-16). Baptism does not save, but it is a public testimony that you believe you are saved.
- C. **Extremely gifted** (1:7). Gifts are no sign of spirituality. A carnal Christian is gifted. Beware of putting too much emphasis on possessing the gifts and not enough emphasis on God, who gives the gifts.
- D. **Hope in Christ's return** (1:8).

SUMMATION: Verse 9—The Lord Jesus Christ is mentioned in every verse in the first nine verses. It is obvious that Paul is putting an emphasis upon the person of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Paul concludes his introduction with two great statements:

1. **The FAITHFULNESS of God**—*"God is faithful."* Men are not always faithful. But *"God is faithful."*
 - Those three words spell comfort, confidence and courage in a world of fretfulness, faithlessness and fearfulness. They were addressed to a church that was passing through a period of extreme crisis. In spite of all that was wrong in this church, Paul could declare, *"God is faithful."*
2. **The FELLOWSHIP of His Son** — Fellowship has been simply defined as "two fellows in the same ship." It implies a partnership. We are called to be partners with Christ.

KINDS OF PARTNERSHIPS.

- A **business partnership**. In business you own things together with your partner. Everything that I own belongs to Jesus Christ. It belongs to Him as much as it does to me. Therefore, He has an interest in what I own. I probably own some things He does not care for. But whatever I have is His and I should use it for what pleases Him — Car, House, Bike, etc.
- Marriage is a **love partnership**. In marriage we share mutual interests. I'm interested in my wife and she is interested in me. The same is true of our partnership with Christ—I should be interested in Him as He is interested in me. Now that answers questions regarding where I can go and what I can do.
 - Verses 9-10—We cannot be in fellowship with Christ, and out of fellowship with one another.

At this point we can almost see Paul put down his pen and pause. So much for the introduction! That was the easy part. Now for the hard part!

NEXT WEEK: The Problem of Divisions in the Church or "The Church Cliques"

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