

FIRST CORINTHIANS

Chapter 1:1-9

Introduction

Many of you have had the experience of moving to a new town and needing to find a good church to attend. There are usually several churches to choose from, so you try to find out something about the reputation of each one to help you make your decision.

Let's suppose for a moment that you had moved to Corinth and were looking for a good church. Well, there weren't several to choose from; there was only one – Calvary Chapel of Corinth! Perhaps I shouldn't call it that because, as you asked or attended, this is what you would find out about its reputation:

There were divisions:

1 Corinthians 1:11 For it has been declared to me concerning you, my brethren, by those of Chloe's *household*, that there are contentions among you.

1 Corinthians 1:12 Now I say this, that each of you says, "I am of Paul," or "I am of Apollos," or "I am of Cephas," or "I am of Christ."

1 Corinthians 1:13 Is Christ divided? Was Paul crucified for you? Or were you baptized in the name of Paul?

There was defilement:

1 Corinthians 5:1 It is actually reported *that there is* sexual immorality among you, and such sexual immorality as is not even named among the Gentiles - that a man has his father's wife!

There were disputes:

1 Corinthians 6:6 But brother goes to law against brother, and that before unbelievers!

There was discord:

In chapters seven through sixteen, Paul addresses a series of issues that were causing discord among them: marriage, liberty, church order, spiritual gifts, the resurrection, and the stewardship of their offerings.

That is pretty much the topical outline for the book of First Corinthians: It deals with *divisions* from chapter one verse ten through chapter four; it deals with *defilement* in chapter five and in chapter six verses twelve through twenty; it deals with *disputes* in

chapter six verses one through eleven; and it deals with *discord* in chapters seven through sixteen.

Let's suppose for a moment that you had started the church at Corinth. Would you be depressed? Discouraged? Defeated?

Maybe... *But the person who had founded the church was not!* The author of this corrective letter, the apostle Paul, was also the founder of this church. He said this at the very beginning:

1 Corinthians 1:4 I thank my God always concerning you for the grace of God which was given to you by Christ Jesus,

Paul was thankful. Writing to correct their corruptions, he remained thankful. The tone he sets in these opening verses, verses one through nine, is thankful and hopeful and rich in encouragement.

That is the tone we want to set for our studies through this corrective epistle. Paul held God's church at Corinth in high regard despite their corruptions. **We** must therefore hold God's church at Corinth, or anywhere else, in high regard despite its corruptions.

How could Paul be so thankful and hopeful and rich in encouragement? He could do it because he understood two things: God had *called* them, and God had *commissioned* them. God had sovereignly called them to assemble together, and God had spiritually commissioned them with every resource to resolve their difficulties.

Specifically we'll see these two things: #1 You Were Called To Come Out Of The World And Into God's Church, and #2 You Are Commissioned To Keep The World Out Of God's Church.

#1 You Were Called To Come Out
Of The World And Into God's Church
(v1-3)

You can't miss the emphasis on the word "called" in these opening verses:

1. In verse one Paul speaks of his being "called" to be an apostle.

2. In verse two he reminds the Corinthian Christians that they were “called to be saints,” and that they were ones who had “call[ed] on the name of Jesus Christ.”
3. In verse nine he speaks again of their being “called into the fellowship of... Jesus Christ.”

Before he deals with the problems in the church he reminds them how they came to be a church in the first place. It was because God had called Paul to be an apostle who shared God’s call to salvation with them to which had responded by faith in calling upon the name of the Lord and getting saved! It had been a sovereign and supernatural work from start to finish.

In other words, the church was and is God’s program on earth. It was and is His church. He calls you out of the world and into His church.

Remembering this fundamental point will, by itself, resolve a lot of problems in the church. You are a church, and you assemble as a church, for God – not for yourself! You should therefore be seeking to discover His will for the church, not forcing your will upon it.

Paul speaks of the will of God right at the beginning:

1 Corinthians 1:1 Paul, called *to be* an apostle of Jesus Christ through the will of God, and Sosthenes *our* brother,

Paul didn’t enroll in apostle school right after high school and get his degree and go to work. God sovereignly called him on the road to Damascus and commissioned him to be the apostle to the Gentiles. It was God’s will and he submitted to it.

Sosthenes was with Paul. He was well known to the Corinthians. He had been the Jewish synagogue ruler in Corinth but had himself responded to the call of the gospel message and been saved.

1 Corinthians 1:2 To the church of God which is at Corinth, to those who are sanctified in Christ Jesus, called *to be* saints, with all who in every place call on the name of Jesus Christ our Lord, both theirs and ours:

“Church” means *a called out people*. “Sanctified” means *set apart*. “Saints” is from the same root word as sanctified and means *set apart*

ones or *holy ones*. God calls out to mankind through the gospel message. Those who respond and “call on the name of Jesus Christ our Lord” are set apart from the world to worship and serve the Lord. Each set apart one, each saint, is a part of a far-reaching fellowship of believers all over the earth and all throughout the Church Age.

Does it sound strange to call the Corinthian believers “saints?” Well, it’s no stranger than realizing that *you* are already a “saint!” **Every** believer is already a saint – a set apart one, a holy one. Realizing your spiritual position is the key to resolving your spiritual problems. You ought to *act* holy because you *are* holy! Please understand that it doesn’t work the other way. Acting holy won’t make you holy. You are already holy and therefore have the supernatural ability to act that way.

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

“Grace” is a reminder of God’s unmerited favor in their lives. “Peace” is a fruit of grace. Since the grace of God brought them together as a fellowship they should be able to experience peace among themselves.

These opening three verses should be enough by themselves to touch the conscience of any at Corinth who were spiritual! This reminder that they had been called out of the world and into God’s church sets the tone for the whole letter.

They were called to come out of the world and into God’s church. Once in the church,

#2 You Are Commissioned To Keep The World Out Of The Church (v4-9)

The problems in Corinth were the result of letting the spirit of the world get into the church. Corinth was a notoriously idolatrous and immoral city. There was, on a hill called the *Acrocorinth*, the Temple of Aphrodite, the goddess of love. The Temple was supported by the wages earned by one thousand Temple prostitutes who would visit the city of a quarter million people each night. There was the Temple

of Apollo, the ideal of male beauty. Nude statues of Apollo in various suggestive poses fired his homosexual worshippers.

Corinth was an intellectual city. Philosophy and the wisdom of the world permeated its population. Immorality, idolatry, and intellectualism were things of the world that had been let into the church – resulting in divisions, defilement, disputes, and discord.

The solution was simple: **Keep the world out of the church!** In verses four through nine Paul reminds them of their commission to do just that. A “commission” involves both the *authority* and the *ability* necessary to carry out that authority. The Corinthian saints – and you, if you’re a saint – have the supernatural ability to keep the world out of the church because of God’s *grace* in your past, God’s *gifts* in your present, and God’s *guarantees* for your future.

In verse four you see God’s grace in your past:

1 Corinthians 1:4 I thank my God always concerning you for the grace of God which was given to you by Christ Jesus,

This verse looks back to “the grace of God which was [past tense] given to you.” “Which was given” is in a verb tense indicating something that was completed at a particular point in time. In other words, if you are a Christian, sometime in the past you were saved by grace.

God, by His mighty power, saved you. You were going to Hell; now you are a citizen of heaven. You were spiritually dead in trespasses and sin; now you are born again and have received the forgiveness of sin.

Since you were saved by such mighty grace, you can and should expect to be sustained by such mighty grace. In other words, you really don’t need any of the world’s influences. Grace will sustain you, and grace is sufficient for you.

Here is another way of putting it: The world was so bad that you needed to be delivered out of it and put into God’s church. Why, then, go back to the world and let it come into the church? You

shouldn't – and grace is the supernatural ability to keep the world out of the church.

In verses five through seven, you see God's gifts in your present:

1 Corinthians 1:5 that you were enriched in everything by Him in all utterance and all knowledge,
1 Corinthians 1:6 even as the testimony of Christ was confirmed in you,
1 Corinthians 1:7 so that you come short in no gift, eagerly waiting for the revelation of our Lord Jesus Christ,

“Enriched” is from a Greek word where we get our English word “plutocrat” – *an extremely wealthy person*. “Utterance and knowledge” is a summary of the gifts of the Holy Spirit. When Paul had founded the church, his “testimony of Christ” was “confirmed” by the exercise of supernatural gifts. The gifts of the Holy Spirit, as we will see in chapters twelve through fourteen, were still being exercised in their gatherings.

As a fellowship they were blessed with an abundance of supernatural gifts of the Spirit. Why, then, should they look to the world? Why let the spirit of the world move into the church when they had the Spirit of God moving among them? Gifts were a supernatural ability to keep the world out of the church.

In verses seven, eight, and nine you see God's guarantees for your future:

1 Corinthians 1:7 ... eagerly waiting for the revelation of our Lord Jesus Christ,
1 Corinthians 1:8 who will also confirm you to the end, *that you may be* blameless in the day of our Lord Jesus Christ.
1 Corinthians 1:9 God *is* faithful, by whom you were called into the fellowship of His Son, Jesus Christ our Lord.

In the future, Jesus will return. When He does, He will present His church “blameless.” Blameless means *free from any accusation*. When you are raptured or resurrected to stand before the Lord, there will be no accusations against you! In the mean time, Jesus “will confirm [you] to the end.” Confirm has the idea of being sustained. What God has begun in you, He will be “faithful” to complete.

These are all powerful guarantees about your future in heaven. Since your future in heaven is guaranteed, you should live as a citizen of heaven who is passing through this world as a temporary

visitor. You don't need to get caught-up in the world since you are about to be caught-up into heaven! You are therefore able to keep the world out of the church.

The world still creeps into the church today. All of the issues that First Corinthians deals with are in the church today. Some jokingly call this letter First Californians! But it's not limited to California. Anywhere God's church gathers there are bound to be difficulties.

In fact, there are so many difficulties that many individual Christians have lost their respect for the concept of church and rarely, if ever, attend a local church.

That is simply wrong! The church needs to be corrected, but never abandoned. You are here, so it's not my intention of bashing you. But all of you know people who have abandoned the local church; and all of us think about doing so in times of difficulty. Let me share two things:

1. As bad as it might be, it's God's church and He has called you to be a part of it. God hasn't just called you to be a Christian; He's called you into His church. It is His will that we continue to assemble together until He comes.
2. Notice in verse seven that the Corinthians "[came] short in no gift." Every believer has one of more gifts of the Spirit, but of no one can it be said that he or she "[came] short in no gift" *unless* they are a part of a local church. God gave you your gift or gifts for the express purpose of ministering to others in His church. It is simply unScriptural to be a Christian and to not attend a local church.

Conclusion

Paul was able to genuinely give thanks for these carnal Corinthians, even with all of their corruptions. God had called them out of the world into His church; and God had given them every spiritual resource to keep the world out of the church.

As we progress through their many difficulties, we must keep these opening verses in mind. Paul will counsel and correct them – but all on the basis of their calling and their commission.

