



CHARIS-MATTERS

STUDIES IN FIRST CORINTHIANS

Text

First Corinthians 1:1-9

Topic

Paul reminds the charismatic church at Corinth of their high calling to represent Jesus along their journey to Heaven

Title

“Charis-missionaries”

Introduction

Churches have personalities.

Think about it for a moment. If I or someone else were to ask you to summarize, in a sentence or two, the life of a particular church you are familiar with, you could probably do it. Your summary would be your assessment of that church’s personality.

Our church has a personality. What is it? I’d like to hear from you as to what you think it is. Give it some thought and jot it down; then get it to me, preferably by e-mail. *Do it in twenty-five words or less!*

I’m on this ‘personality-kick’ because of something the apostle Paul said in the opening of his first letter to the church at Corinth. In verse seven of chapter one he gave his ‘personality summary’ of that church. He said,

First Corinthians 1:1-9

“Charis-missionaries”

1 Corinthians 1:7 so that you come short in no gift, eagerly waiting for the revelation of our Lord Jesus Christ,

The church at Corinth was known for the presence and exercise of all the gifts of God the Holy Spirit. They were the charismatic church.

Paul's words are a commendation. Though he will have much to correct in the church at Corinth - including their use and abuse of the gifts of the Spirit - they were to be commended for having a charismatic personality.

Though churches are bound to have their own unique personalities, it stands to reason that any good personality trait ought to be true of every church. As we work through First Corinthians we want, then, to see how we measure-up on the gift-assessment of the apostle Paul. We most definitely want it to be said of us, "you come short in no gift, eagerly waiting for the revelation of our Lord Jesus Christ..."

We begin this exciting assessment in the first nine verses where we see that we are *called into* the church and then *called upon in* the church.

I'll organize my thoughts around two points: #1 You Are Called Into God's Church By His Grace, and #2 You Are Called Upon In God's Church To Exercise His Graces.

#1 You Are Called Into God's Church By His Grace (v1-3)

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

- In verse one Paul spoke of his being "called" to be an apostle.
- In verse two he reminded the Corinthian believers that they were "called to be saints" and that they were the ones who had "call[ed]" on the name of Jesus Christ."
- In verse nine Paul spoke again of their being "called into the fellowship of... Jesus Christ."

These verses help us to understand what is meant by the "call" of God:

- You see that God calls to you through the preaching of the Gospel.
- You respond to God's call and are saved.
- Then you discover your calling to serve God on earth in His church.

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

The apostle Paul is the author of this letter. It was "through the will of God" that Paul had been "called to be an apostle." He didn't get saved and then decide on his own to enroll in apostle school, get his credentials, and go to work. Most of you are familiar enough with his story. He was a persecutor of the early Christians. While on his way to Damascus to arrest and harass the believers Jesus Christ appeared to him and saved him in a very dramatic fashion. Led into Damascus having been blinded by the appearance of Jesus he was healed by a believer named Ananias who also told him that God had chosen him to be an apostle and take the Gospel to "Gentiles, kings, and the children of Israel" (Acts 9:15).

"Sosthenes" was with Paul when he wrote to the church from the city of Ephesus. He was a person well-known to the Corinthians. He had been the ruler of the Jewish synagogue in Corinth when Paul first came to town and started preaching Jesus there at their meetings. He responded to the Gospel "call" and was saved.

A "called" man "calls" other via the Gospel of Jesus Christ. It is God's simple yet effective strategy for saving lost mankind.

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*. God calls, and when you respond you are called out from the world and into fellowship with Jesus and with all other believers.

It was God's "church." This one truth alone, if remembered and applied, would have resolved every difficulty the Corinthians were experiencing.

This “church of God” was “at Corinth.” It’s true that the “church” is universal. It is comprised of all believers from the Day of Pentecost until the resurrection and rapture. But the church is always local as well. God establishes unique local churches and expects Christians to be members.

“Sanctified” means *set apart*. It refers to your entire Christian experience. It lets you know that when you responded to the Gospel God set you apart for Himself to work in you. He who began that good work will also complete it.

All believers are “called saints.” It means you are “saints” by God’s divine call. Paul was called to be a saint then given his calling to serve the Lord as His apostle. You are called to be a saint then discover your calling to serve the Lord. You serve based on God gifting you in ways that please Him.

Every believer is a “saint” at the moment of conversion. It is not something you earn; it is something you are. Realizing your spiritual position solves spiritual problems. **You ought to act like a saint!** You already have the supernatural enabling to act as you ought in every circumstance.

“With all who in every place call on the name of Jesus Christ our Lord, both theirs and ours...” God’s plan - His only plan - is for the called to call others through the Gospel “in every place.”

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

“Grace” is God’s unmerited favor. You were saved by grace through faith. You continue in the Christian life by grace. “Peace” is both the absence of contention and the presence of spiritual prosperity.

Grace and peace can be seen as a measure of the church’s personality. Do both exist in the church? If not, why not? If one or the other is deficient then something is wrong - and that ‘something’ is always someone who is walking in the flesh rather than in the spirit and is thus causing strife.

“God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ” are paired in this sentence in a way that make them both equal as the source of these spiritual qualities. We believe, of course, that Jesus is God come in human flesh - God incarnate, fully God and fully man.

There is a sense in which you only need these three verses to settle any church difficulties! You’re in God’s church and should therefore act like the saint you are as you walk in grace seeking peace.

The church - and by that I mean the local church - is precious to God the Father and to the Lord Jesus Christ. We are to find a local church and ‘join’ it. We don’t need ‘formal’ membership to join; but not having ‘formal’ membership doesn’t mean we are not members of one another.

It is as members of one another that we discover our gifts and serve the Lord. As we see who God has brought together and how He has gifted us a church personality begins to emerge. Though each local fellowship will be somewhat unique by God’s own design, we don’t want to discount anything God might have for us. And that brings us to the theme of the next few verses.

#2 You Are Called Upon In God’s Church To Exercise His Graces (v4-9)

As we work through this letter we’re going to see a lot of sad things happening between the believers: divisions, defilements, disputes, and discord. ***Don’t let that influence your thinking about spiritual gifts.*** Yes, the Corinthians were abusing certain gifts of the Spirit. But at least they were using them and Paul’s answer was to correct their abuse.

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

Could you be thankful for a church filled with the kind of contention I just indicated? Maybe not, but you could and should be able to thank God that the members were saved.

This verse looks back to their conversion to Jesus Christ. “Was given” means they were saved by grace at a point in the past.

Have you been saved?

Everybody starts out spiritual. By our own lack of diligence and vigilance we can fall back being spiritual to being what Paul will later call “carnal.”

Paul looks back at their foundations as a church in the next three verses.

1 Corinthians 1:5 that you were enriched in everything by Him in all utterance and all knowledge,

“Enriched” describes an extremely wealthy person. Their wealth was in “all utterance and all knowledge.” This phrase, “utterance and knowledge,” is most definitely referring to the “gift[s]” of the Holy Spirit mentioned in verse seven. Paul considered the gifts of the Spirit a great wealth to be enjoyed by the fellowship of believers.

Notice that by their spiritual gifts they were “enriched **in everything**.” In other words, the exercise of the gifts touched every aspect of their lives - not just the worship service when people might be using certain gifts.

Let me give you an example. We are in this building largely because of a word of wisdom given to our leadership by the Holy Spirit when we were considering building on our land. As a result of heeding that word from God we were able to move forward, buy this property, and still own the land!

We should not be narrow in our understanding of the gifts of the Spirit. Their proper, biblical exercise touch us in many ways - both at and away from church services.

1 Corinthians 1:6 even as the testimony of Christ was confirmed in you,

Paul preached the Gospel. He called it the “testimony of Christ” because it focused on who Jesus was and what He accomplished. Paul’s testimony of Christ was “confirmed” by signs and wonders he performed as an

apostle. It was then “confirmed” in the Corinthians by various manifestations of the Holy Spirit in their midst.

Paul was unapologetic about supernatural gifts of the Spirit. He kept them in perspective but he did not minimize them in any way. They were to be expected in the church. There are those who go to great lengths to teach that certain gifts have ceased. They have not.

1 Corinthians 1:7 so that you come short in no gift...

“Gift” is *charismati*, where we get our use of the term charismatic. We almost can’t use the word to describe the gifts of the Holy Spirit because it has come to identify a church whose personality is extreme when it comes to the exercise of the gifts.

It’s a good word! I consider our church *charismatic*. To the extent it isn’t charismatic in the truest biblical sense, we want it to be. We should not want to come short when it comes to the gifts of the Holy Spirit.

1 Corinthians 1:7 so that you come short in no gift, eagerly waiting for the revelation of our Lord Jesus Christ,

The Corinthians were premillennial. They were daily expecting the imminent return of Jesus to resurrect and rapture the church.

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.

There is an “end” game. You can read the playbook - it’s the last book of the Bible. When Jesus resurrects or raptures you, you will be presented “blameless.” You will be given a new, glorified physical body; you will be without sin; you will be rewarded.

In the mean time Jesus “will also confirm you to the end.” “Confirm” is a legal, technical term that means something like ‘guarantee.’ What God has begun in you He guarantees that He will finish.

1 Corinthians 1:9 God is faithful, by whom you were called into the fellowship of His Son, Jesus Christ our Lord.

“God is faithful” and can be counted on to get the Corinthians home to Heaven. They ought to therefore, along the way home, consider what we like to call ‘the big picture.’ They were one local expression of the larger church on earth, called “the fellowship of... Jesus.” There was a certain image to maintain for the sake of their Lord.

These are powerful guarantees about your future, heavenly citizenship. Live as a citizen of Heaven as you are passing through the earth.

We might use our own nation as an example. People come from all over the world to America. They long to be American citizens, to enjoy the freedoms and blessings of our nation.

In a much greater way, people ought to want to be citizens of Heaven. It’s up to us to promote that citizenship by properly representing Jesus Christ.

What is our personality as a church? Could it be said of us that we come behind in no spiritual gift?

We’ll see that we are not as conservative as people might think. Gifts are being exercised all the time, even some of the more typically charismatic of the *charismati*.

But I do think we drift towards conservatism in the area of the gifts in a way that might not be allowing us to find every area of our lives “enriched.”

We want to be like the Corinthians in some ways and we want to make sure we are very much unlike them in other ways!

As always it will require honest self-examination and self-evaluation.

We need to be up to the task. These are the last days and it’s no time to be walking in the flesh, walking carnally, when God has so much for us spiritually.

