

## 1 CORINTHIANS 1:1-3 PAUL AND THE CORINTHIANS

Last week, as we were in between book studies, we did a message that dealt with all the problems that our world and culture have with Christianity. Christianity has distinct doctrines that differ with all other religions. It is unique and is the only way to heaven and it leaves no room for compromise. Sometimes the church seems to compromise and is no different than the world as it is tempted by all the world has to offer. Sometimes the culture squeezes the church into its mold and it seems like we are losing the war. Evolution, homosexuality, pornography, education, and politics seem to be hoodwinking the church. Instead of being the salt and light that we need to be, we sometimes, don't seem to be turning the world upside down, as the early church was known to do. We live in a post modern world and the world of no absolutes seems to be making an effect on us. This has happened to the church throughout the 2000 years that have passed. From the message from last week, we can now hook up with that as we begin a new study.

We start a new book of the Bible this morning. It is 1 Corinthians, a book we did as a church about 20 years ago. Even though this epistle was written 2000 years ago, it is very current for the church today as we look at the present conditions around us, as far as the morals of the culture goes. The times that we live in certainly resemble the ancient city of Corinth, and that is not a compliment. This letter addresses the church with an eerie relevance. It is almost like we have gone back in a time machine. We will see the same kind of culture, with its shameful immorality, materialism, arrogance and pride, pluralism of religions, all kinds of marriage problems, people suing each other, and divisions and schisms in the church. The church of that time was addressed by the apostle Paul, rebuking and admonishing the Christians of the pagan city to be transformed to God's way of living. The Word of God is to bring sinful people to repentance and a desire to live out the truth. It hasn't changed, as we will see the lessons in this great book are timeless.

### 1. INTRODUCTION

#### A. THE CITY OF CORINTH

Isthmus of Corinth This was a fascinating place as we understand it was quite a strategic area. Today, it is a little town, but in the time of Paul, it played a huge role in the Roman empire. Greece is divided into two parts. There is a north part and a south part. The northern area is very large and then indents to only 4 miles wide and then gets very big again in the southern part. That is an isthmus and separates two seaports, one at Corinth and the other port at the Saronic Gulf. Right in the middle of that isthmus is Corinth. All traffic had to go through Corinth and if you were going to Athens, you would be going right through this city. This was quite a vital location for the city of Corinth.

Major trade center Consequently it became a great trade center of the world. North and south traffic went through here and so did east and west traffic. If a ship was on the west coast and wanted to go to the east coast and on down to the Mediterranean Sea they would have to go all the way around the Peloponnese and that would be an extra 250 miles and it was very treacherous. Since it was only 4 miles across to the other side, they would take the ship up on land and put it on rollers and roll it across land for 4 miles and put it back in the sea.

Today, there is a canal there. It actually took hundreds of years to complete. You can see why that would be a place that was of major importance for trade.

Entertainment In Greece there were 2 famous games at that time. The Olympics, and the isthmian games. The isthmian games took place in Corinth, so it was very famous for its sports and entertainment, attracting people from all over the known world. The city became very large, 100,000, as Caesar brought in many free men from Rome, Greeks also came, as well as Jews. The games and other activities attracted thousands of people. The games and festival was a major tourist attraction, one of the greatest attractions in the world. It had public interest and economic activity.

Acropolis This is a mount with a building on it. Athens had one of these too. Just south of Corinth was acrocorinthus, a hill that jutted about 2000 feet up. It helped secure the city if there was an attack. At this acrocorinth, was the Temple of Aphrodite, the Greek goddess of love. This temple has a thousand priestesses who were prostitutes and they came down into the city every night and plied their trade. That was worship to them.

Culture The city became known as a place of debauchery. If one did what would be evil in another city, it was said to be to corinthianize. It was the Las Vegas and New Orleans of the day. It was a vile city.

They had too much money, too much luxury, and too much indulgence.

1 Corinthians 6:9 gives us an idea what went on there.

In fact, one scholar writes of the Corinthian culture as "a postmodern pragmatism of the market with its related devaluation of truth, tradition, rationality, and universals",

Corruption Prosperity and vice went side by side. It was very evil, and we need to keep in mind, this is where the church was as Paul wrote to them. The church was so messed up by what was going on in Corinth, that they were no different than the surrounding culture.

## B. BEGINNINGS OF THE CHURCH

Paul's 2<sup>nd</sup> missionary journey Paul founded the church there. Of all cities to start a church, Paul got it started here.

Aquila and Priscilla were people he met there in Corinth who were solid Christians.

Paul's ministry there Acts 18. We must turn here as we do mainly the introduction this week. This is where it all started. Paul was discouraged when he arrived there. He had been at Philippi and met some women by the river as they worshipped and they became converted. Paul and Silas were later arrested and an earthquake happened at the jail. The jailer became a Christian. Paul was later chased out of town and he went to Thessalonica and he was run out of there. He then went to Berea. Who had some hearty souls who searched the scriptures diligently. Then along came those pesky Thessalonians and he had to run again. He went to Athens and gave the Mars Hill sermon. There wasn't much success there as he left discouraged and wound up in Corinth. This is where we pick up at 18:1

Apollos Paul and Aquila and Priscilla helped this orator to be much more adept at preaching the Word as they sharpened his doctrine.

Date of the letter 55 A.D.

## C. REASONS FOR THE LETTER

Spiritual decline of the church—Martin Lloyd-Jones came up with 3 reasons for it.

Carnality—There was antinomianism in that they had risen above the law. They acted more Corinthian than Christian. The culture consumed them in their behavior.

Pride-Their intellect made them conceited. They had a pride in knowledge. This should always be in our own minds in that we can so easily become prideful. We need to humble ourselves and realize the more we learn the more we find out what we don't know.

Unbalanced spirituality-They were a gifted church and they knew it. They were consumed with the showy gifts. They had an unhealthy interest in the spectacular.

Sins of the church

Doctrines

## **2. AUTHORITY OF THE APOSTLESHIP OF PAUL 1:1**

Paul starts off the letter like the Greeks always did, identifying himself. That is like the way when we call someone on the phone. We make it known who we are, we don't wait until the end of the call and then say sincerely yours, Dennis. Paul, then establishes his authority as an apostle. In all of his letters he continually identified himself as an apostle. Paul also identified his calling as an apostle from Jesus Christ. He is not doing this for his glory as someone who might put a lot of titles before his name. It is saying, this is something worth paying attention to. This letter has authority. He is saying, I'm an apostle and you need to listen to this. What I am about to say is coming from Jesus Christ by the will of God.

APOSTOLOS---2 Cor 5:20, Eph 6:20

He is a sent one, an emissary, an ambassador, a messenger of Jesus Christ.

John MacArthur came up with five reasons Paul did this.

### **A. EQUAL TO THE TWELVE**

Paul had a relation to the twelve. Originally there were 12 apostles. We know what Judas did. When he killed himself, there were only eleven. Peter recognized that they needed a replacement to complete the number of 12. Matthias was chosen to be the twelfth according to Acts 1. This group became the foundation of the church as they were the ones who led the early church in teaching doctrine. They had the voice of authority in the church. Paul, as an apostle, came later. He had not walked with Jesus in His ministry. In fact, he was an enemy of the church for the first few years. The requirements to be an apostle was that they had to have seen the risen Lord and had to be directly chosen by the Lord. That is the reason there are no apostles today. The apostles are the foundation and they had to see the resurrected Lord and be directly chosen by Him. Some people would say he was not one of the twelve, so he would always have to establish his authority. When the Lord appeared to him on the road to Damascus, Paul saw the resurrected Christ and was appointed to be an apostle specifically by Him. Paul was not boasting, in fact he said he was the least. 1 Cor 15:9-10

### **B. THE CHALLENGE BY FALSE TEACHERS**

False teachers constantly harassed him and declared he was not an apostle. Again, he had to defend his apostleship. They said he had no credibility or authority. Paul went through much persecution from these false teachers as they discredited him.

### **C. IN GOD'S POWER AND WISDOM**

1:24, 2:4

Paul also used this title because of his relationship to Jesus Christ. Because of the doubters of him, He wanted to insure them that he really did represent Christ by being an official apostle. The churches had gotten bad information from the false apostles and teachers, so they just were not sure who Paul was. Paul had to keep establishing his authority.

### **D. THE VERY EXISTENCE OF CHURCH AT CORINTH**

He wanted the readers, themselves, in Corinth to be convinced that he was writing with authority. The fact that the church exists is enough proof that He was sent by God.

#### E. SPECIAL RELATIONSHIP AS EMISSARY TO GOD

He was sent by God, Himself, for it was by His will that Paul was in this position. Paul was saying that he was not an independent agent, but was sent from the royal throne of heaven. He came in God's power and authority. It was not in his own authority or will.

What were the duties of the apostles? 1. Preach the Gospel (1:17) 2. gave themselves to prayer. (Acts 6:4) 3. Gave themselves to the Word (Acts 6:4) 4. perfecting of the saints (Eph 4:11) 5. Perform miracles to verify what they were (2 Cor 12:12)

Sosthenes is introduced with Paul. He was kind of a secretary for Paul in writing this letter. Paul dictated it and Sosthenes penned it, then Paul would sign it. Sosthenes knew the Corinthian situation. Turn to Acts 18. He was the synagogue leader and he led the chase to get Paul. The people in Corinth would have known who he was. What a conversion, from synagogue leader, to now helping Paul write to the church at Corinth ! This is powerful.

### 3. THE SAINTS

#### A. THE CHURCH OF GOD

This is God's church, not the Corinthian's church. Grace Community Church is not the church of Dennis Helton, but the church that is God's. I have a big responsibility of taking care of it and feeding the flock but it is not mine. Your job is to minister to other believers and take the good news to the lost and bring them in so we can disciple them.

#### B. SANCTIFIED

1. Position Despite the fact of their many sins, they are sanctified and called saints. No matter the many sins they had, they were holy. They had been made holy by God. Holiness is not a matter of works. Holiness is done by God. Heb 2:11, 10:14, Acts 26:18

You saints who have been made holy. That would have been convicting. God had done all that work and there they were in all that sin.

Christians and pastors especially have looked at their churches and their people, so often sunk so deeply in the very sins the Corinthian Christians indulged - bitter divisions over this or that, people regularly failing to live up to their calling as Christians, even sometimes it being hard to tell what difference there is between their lives and the lives of pagans around them, except perhaps that they go to church regularly - and it is easy in such times to despair, to wonder if God has disappeared, if his grace has been withdrawn, if he is no longer doing anything at all in our corner of the world.

But, then, we remember the church in Corinth and all of its ugly sins. That was a church of real Christians, we know because Paul says it was. That was a church founded by no one less than the great Apostle Paul. That was a church highly favored with miraculous demonstrations of the Holy Spirit and gospel power. And, yet, it had the same problems that we find today in our churches and in our hearts. So, we think, with a sigh of relief, that perhaps our sins and our failures do not after all mean that we are not Christians or that the Lord has deserted us. I know that I have turned to the mess that was the Corinthian church more than a few times in my ministry to remind myself that when the Spirit of God is at work it is by no means the case that everything will be as it ought to be, even in the lives of those who are genuinely reborn and who are sincerely followers of Jesus Christ. We may be a mess in this way or that, but then living churches founded by the Apostles themselves were also. Robert Rayburn

What we find in the Bible is honesty for it is actually written by God. We would want to cover up the sin. We have to think of the sins of such people as Adam, Noah, Abraham, Jacob, Moses, David, and Solomon. Holy men of faith, yet they were sinners.

What we see in 1 Corinthians is real life as the way it is. Life is seen with its disappointments and struggles and failures. But we are under the supreme authority of Jesus Christ and the cross. Here is where we can work out our salvation with fear and trembling.

2. Practice—As a result of being made holy, Christians are commanded to be holy. Be ye holy for I am holy.

Even with this imperfect life we can serve the Lord and bear witness to the lost world the grace of God that saves sinners from their sin.

Christians will stumble and even fall but God always picks us up in our brokenness and makes us strong in our weakness.

As C.S. Lewis brilliantly described this in his work, *Miracles* (155), "A new nature is being not merely made but made out of an old one. We live amid all the anomalies, inconveniences, hopes, and excitements of a house that is being rebuilt."

Many of you have experienced this: living in the house you are remodeling. You know how dirty everything gets, how complicated, how inhospitable your own home becomes. Dust everywhere, cold air rushing in from holes in the wall where windows used to be, bare floors and covered furniture, plastic hanging over doorways, tools everywhere. Well, there is a picture of the Christian life and of God's renewing work in his children. And that is the picture we have in 1 Corinthians.

As one great preacher said about 1 Corinthians:

"It is not for a pattern of the machinery of a church we ought to go back to this early time, but for a spectacle of fresh and transforming spiritual power. This is what will always attract to the Apostolic Age the longing eyes of Christians; the power of the Spirit was energizing in every member, the tides of fresh emotion swelled in every breast, and all felt that the dayspring of a new revelation had visited them; life, love, light were diffusing themselves everywhere. Even the vices of the young church were the irregularities of abundant life, for the lack of which the lifeless order of many a subsequent generation has been a poor compensation." [James Stalker, *Life of St. Paul*, 131]

Think about it. The problems you find in Corinth, the problems that Paul will deal with one by one in his letter, are the problems that are typical of times of the Spirit's powerful working. Were there people who began, in their sinful enthusiasms to follow men instead of Christ himself? Well, so it was at the time of the Reformation and the time of the Great Awakening. Was there the conceit that comes with the sense that one has learned great secrets directly from God or been given powerful experiences of the presence and grace of God? Well, the Great Awakening had no sooner broken out in England than that problem began to surface. Was there a tendency to think that having been so wonderfully saved by the grace of God, it mattered little whether one lived according to the conventions of Christian holiness? There has never been a revival in which that problem

did not come along apace. Was there an unhealthy interest in spiritual phenomena, especially of the more dramatic type? Talk to Jonathan Edwards and George Whitefield about all the problems an unbridled enthusiasm caused them.

No, we do not turn up 1 Corinthians in order to look down our noses at these long ago brethren. In a strange sort of way we look to them with envy, hoping that we might recover and recapture some of that spiritual power that had transformed their lives, the very spiritual power, the existence and reality of which also expressed itself, as it always does in this sinful world, in characteristic vices.

You know what we sometimes say to ourselves, when we hear someone wealthy complain about the troubles that his money brings him, or someone successful and famous complaining about the problems of celebrity. We say, "I wish I had his problems!" Or, we say, "That is a nice a problem to have."

Well, in the same way, I would much rather us struggle with the sort of problems the Corinthians were struggling with than to have a neat, tidy, orderly congregation, in which there is so little moving of the Spirit of God, so little stirring of new life, so little struggle against the world, the flesh, and the devil, that our primary difficulty is keeping everyone awake!

No one was sleeping in the church in Corinth! And if they had sins, which they did, real sins, dangerous sins, terrible sins, sins that had to be rooted out or else, they were at least the sins to which Christians are prone precisely because the grace of God has been so powerfully at work among them, lives have been so profoundly changed, and there has been so much to be excited and enthusiastic about. We'll never escape sin, not in this world, not in this life. But if we must deal with sin, then let the sins we deal with be the sins of life and not the sins of death

C. CALLING---They were called by God, personally and corporately to be saved and holy.

D. CALL UPON THE LORDThe ones who are called, call upon the Lord. Jn 6:44

**4. GREETINGS**A. GRACE—FAVORGrace is the Greek and Peace is the Hebrew greeting, ShalomYou are saints and therefore have grace and peace.B. PEACE----FRUIT This is the peace from God that salvation brings. No more war. We turn, then, to 1 Corinthians, both to learn to root out vices that are characteristic of Christian people living in a culture such as ours and, still more, to recapture that experience of living faith in Christ, that power of his transforming grace that produced those particular vices, those vices that arise in our time and culture, as they did in Corinth in Paul's day, by a kind of fixed law, like a mirage in the desert - the inevitable deflection of the light of gospel truth in the spiritual atmosphere of our time. We want the gospel and its transforming power - if the price is that we must battle to the death certain sins that inevitably surface when the gospel penetrates a culture like ours, well, so be it! Robert Rayburn

