



1 Cor. 1:1-3

Introduction and Overview of First Corinthians

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

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:

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

I have long wanted to preach through 1st Corinthians, because I believe it to be a letter that is particularly applicable to the church in the modern era. Now by that, I'm not saying that there are any books of the bible that aren't timeless, but in 1st Corinthians, the parallels between the strengths and weaknesses and struggles of this church and those of the modern day church are striking, in some ways its almost like Paul was writing a letter to us today rather than the first century. And I hope you'll begin to see some of those parallels as we go on.

Let's start first with some background so that you'll better be able to understand what is going on in the letter. Paul is writing a letter to the Church in Corinth. Corinth was a big city in Greece to the west of modern day Athens. Those of you who are familiar with the New Testament know that in it Greece is only seldom called "Greece," it is more commonly referred to by the name that the Romans used for the province which included most of it. Does anyone know what that name is, by the way? It's Achaia.

Well just as Athens is the modern day capital of Greece, Corinth at the time Paul was writing was the capital of Achaia. Corinth had been destroyed by the Romans in 146 BC during the Roman conquest, but it had been rebuilt about a century later by Julius Caesar. Now before its destruction by the Romans, Corinth had had quite a reputation in the ancient world. But not a good reputation, it was a place where there was tremendous vice and immorality. And unfortunately, after the Romans had rebuilt it, it was almost like the city fathers, had set out to reacquire their prior reputation. Now any big city is going to attract vice and immorality. And the bigger and wealthier a city is, the more immoral it tends to get. For instance, if you just travel around the cities of this area, you'll find that Fayetteville as one of the largest also tends to have the most vice.

But it wasn't just the bigness or the importance of Corinth that made it a hub of immorality, it was also the fact that the pagan religious atmosphere of Corinth, did not improve the general morality of the city, it dragged it down. The worship of the Corinthians included male and female cult-prostitution, and we need to remember that the Temple in Corinthian society was more than just a place that you could choose to go or not go as you wished. The temple was at the very hub of the culture, as David Jackman put it: ***"Pagan temples were at the heart of Corinthian social life, functioning as meeting places, markets, and restaurants"***

Now that it is going to be critical for you to remember, for so many different reasons. For instance, it will explain why meat sacrificed to idols is going to be a concern. Where did the city dwellers get their meat from? They bought it at the temple, it was taken from animals ritually sacrificed to Greek gods. It was also the civic center for the town, were you showed your pride as a citizen, were you mingled with one another. And if ritual prostitution was considered to be a “normal” part of Corinthian life, that is going to make it very difficult for Christians in Corinth. It’s going to be a little easier for the converts of Judaism, because they were used to being set apart and only going to the synagogue not the temple and already abiding by dietary restrictions. But breaking away from all of that as a convert is going to be very difficult. It’s going to include a radical change of life, as well as being set apart from your family and your fellow citizens. There is no way that a consistent faithful Christian in Corinth is going to be able to avoid seeming weird and even unpatriotic to other Corinthians.

As we go through this letter, we are going to find that that is going to be one of the major problems for the church, avoiding the pull of the culture that the church was in, avoiding the vices and even the theology and philosophy that everybody else thought was normal. But I think that that will be good for us to consider, because to a certain extent, because we too live in a culture that is to a certain extent toxic to orthodox Christianity, and getting more hostile to it by the day. I think that one of our major problems now and as time goes on, is going to be avoiding the siren call of the culture. Avoiding making the church look like the culture around it.

Now not all the problems of the church in Corinth are the result of the culture, a lot of them are due for instance to the rise of Schism and parties within the church. Paul may have founded this church in about 51AD, but there were a lot of people within it who had decided they did like his leadership style or his teaching and were starting to associate themselves with other personalities in the church. Paul is going to have to write to rebuke them for all of these practices and to answer some of the major doctrinal questions that the church had.

Now, Paul was an inspired Apostle, but he obviously couldn’t be everywhere at the same time, and know what was happening in every church that he planted. The reason he wrote this letter was in response not only to letters sent to him asking questions, but alarming reports sent to him by faithful members in the church who were obviously concerned about the divisions that were developing within it. It might have been that they were on the verge of a church split. Paul’s letter then will exhort, encourage, and also rebuke when necessary. So this will form the background to what we are reading.

Paul starts out in his greeting by calling himself an Apostle of Jesus Christ. He is establishing his authority to write the things he is about to write. Now kids, the word APOSTLE literally means *a messenger* in Greek.

And a messenger is like a mailman, someone who delivers messages to people. Now let me ask you a question, does your mail deliver letters to you that he wrote himself? No! He delivers the letters other people write to you. The mail man doesn’t write a letter saying “*please pay this bill*” he delivers a message from the Credit Card agency saying that to your mommy and daddy. He delivers other people’s messages. Now this is important to remember, because although Paul wrote this letter, he says he is an Apostle a messenger of someone else. *Who is he a messenger for? JESUS*. Paul is writing the message of Jesus to the church.

He also points out that he didn’t take this authority himself, he didn’t one day decide to become an Apostle, rather he points out HE WAS CALLED. Paul was called to be Christ’s messenger on the

Damascus road. And that was a big change. It wasn't Paul's will that made that change, it was God's will for his life. That calling that appointment was what gave him authority.

Gal. 1:15 But when it pleased God, who separated me from my mother's womb and called me through His grace,

16 to reveal His Son in me, that I might preach Him among the Gentiles, I did not immediately confer with flesh and blood,

He is writing to the church of God in Corinth, the word that he uses there is *Ekklesia*, meaning assembly, these are the people whom God has called out to Himself, he has set them apart.

But he hasn't set them apart in the Amish sense, they are still in the midst of the society, in the world, but hopefully not of it. Because God's will is that they would not only be called out, but sanctified, that is made Holy. It is God's will that

Romans 8:29 For whom He foreknew, He also predestined to be conformed to the image of His Son, that He might be the firstborn among many brethren.

30 Moreover whom He predestined, these He also called; whom He called, these He also justified; and whom He justified, these He also glorified.

We often make it seem like the only purpose in our calling, was that we might be Saved. But that is just the beginning of the Christian journey. One of God's primary purposes in the salvation of the saints is that we would be transformed. Changed. That we would grow less and less like the World.

Romans 12:2 And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God.

This is the objective of our salvation,

Eph. 2:4 But God, who is rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us,

5 even when we were dead in trespasses, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved),

6 and raised us up together, and made us sit together in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus,

7 that in the ages to come He might show the exceeding riches of His grace in His kindness toward us in Christ Jesus.

8 For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God,

9 not of works, lest anyone should boast.

10 For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them.

They did not do this for themselves rather just as Paul was called to be an Apostle, they were called to be saints.

He then points out the critical point that this salvation isn't merely intended for the people of Corinth, rather it is for all who are called of God, from every tribe and tongue:

Rev. 5:9 *And they sang a new song, saying: "You are worthy to take the scroll, And to open its seals; For You were slain, And have redeemed us to God by Your blood Out of every tribe and tongue and people and nation,*

He only is the savior of the world:

1 John 1:14 *And we have seen and testify that the Father has sent the Son as Savior of the world.*

Acts 4:12 *"Nor is there salvation in any other, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved."*

Christ alone is the source of the grace and peace of God to his people.

They and we are just one part of that great assembly that is being grouped together, and if we realized that, how many fewer problems we would have. How much less schism and party spirit there would be.

That then is the great application we have *one common faith,*

NKJ Ephesians 4:1 *I, therefore, the prisoner of the Lord, beseech you to walk worthy of the calling with which you were called,*

2 with all lowliness and gentleness, with longsuffering, bearing with one another in love,

3 endeavoring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.

4 There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called in one hope of your calling;

5 one Lord, one faith, one baptism;

6 one God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in you all.

No Lone Rangers

No Islands

No possibility of separating ourselves from the body