

Series: 1 Corinthians
Title: Problems and their Remedy
Text: 1 Corinthians 1: 1-10
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Corinth was a large, wealthy, affluent city in southern Greece. It was also very wicked. There were many pagan religions and much philosophy, full of vice and moral perversion. It was a city that lived for pleasure.

Yet, in Acts 18, the Lord told Paul to stay there and preach “for I have much people in this city.” (Acts 18: 10) So Paul preached for almost two years and Christ established the Corinthian church.

But after Paul left, false preachers moved in and disorder erupted. Paul wrote this epistle around the year 55. It had been about 5 years since Paul first preached at Corinth. By God’s grace, Paul was determined to correct their errors and re-establish order in the church.

For this message, as we read verses 1-10, we will see how Paul hints at the problems that he will address later and how he gives the remedy to correct these problems by pointing them to God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ by whose grace we are saved.

FIRST PROBLEM—APOSTLE OR NOT?

The false preachers who began to influence the church at Corinth were saying that Paul was not an apostle of Jesus Christ. So Paul begins this letter, “Paul, called *to be* an apostle of Jesus Christ through the will of God,…” (1 Cor 1: 1)

This is more than an opening salutation. His opening is direct and with purpose. In Galatia, the same slander was being reported. He began his epistle to the Galatians, “Paul, an apostle, (not of men, neither by man, but by Jesus Christ, and God the Father, who raised him from the dead;)” (Ga 1:1)

While on the road to Damascus, Christ Jesus called Paul directly—that was a requirement to be an apostle. Apostles were called and sent directly by Christ. The word “apostle” means “messenger” or “missionary”, one “sent” to preach the gospel. Paul, like all the apostles, was given divine authority immediately from Christ.

Therefore, his call & apostleship was “through the will of God.” Christ said, “I and my Father are one.” (Jn 10: 30) God the Father chose Paul in Christ, God the Father predestinated Paul to be conformed to the image of Christ, God the Father ordained Paul to be an apostle of Christ. Therefore, through the will of God, Christ called Paul to be his apostle.

In chapter 15, Paul said Christ was crucified, died and rose again according to the scriptures. Then he wrote,

1 Corinthians 15: 7: After that, he was seen of James; then of all the apostles. 8: And last of all he was seen of me also, as of one born out of due time. 9: For I am the least of the apostles, that am not meet to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God. 10: But by the grace of God I am what I am: and his grace which *was bestowed* upon me was not in vain; but I laboured more abundantly than they all: yet not I, but the grace of God which was with me. 11: Therefore whether *it were* I or they, so we preach, and so ye believed.

Brethren, we have no apostles today. No one is called in person by Christ today. But every true preacher of the gospel is called and sent by Christ through the will of God. (Eph 4: 10-16) The last thing I ever wanted to

do was to put myself in a pulpit. I wanted to know Christ called me. For any man who might have a desire to preach, I would highly recommend he wait on the Lord. If it is God's will, God will open the door. I love the fact that I visited here for so long before this church called me to be your pastor.

SECOND PROBLEM—TRUE DOCTRINE OR NOT?

Also, false preachers put a question mark on Paul's doctrine by saying that Paul was no longer preaching the truth. This may be one reason why Paul writes, "and Sosthenes *our* brother." (1 Cor 1: 1)

This helps convey to the Corinthian believers that Paul's doctrine was true. Believers at Corinth knew that Sosthenes was a faithful brother in Christ. Sosthenes would not have been in Paul's company had Paul not been preaching the truth.

In Acts 18, while at Corinth, through Paul's preaching Christ called a man named, Crispus, chief ruler of the synagogue. (Acts 18) The Jews replaced Crispus with Sosthenes. But through Paul's preaching, Christ called and saved Sosthenes, too. So Sosthenes was known by the Corinthians for his faithful defense of the gospel of Christ. The Greeks hated the gospel so much, they tried to get the governor to silence Paul. When the deputy did nothing, right there in court before the judgement seat, they beat Sosthenes. (Acts 18: 16-17)

So Sosthenes was one Christ had made steadfast in the gospel. The brethren at Corinth knew what Christ had done for him. Now, they know Sosthenes is with the apostle Paul. And Paul calls him, "our brother."—Paul's brother and their brother. So Corinthians would know that despite the slander of the false preachers, Paul was a faithful brother in Christ.

What a blessing that God gives us faithful brethren. Our brethren are able to defend us, to comfort us, to help us in the ministry and service to Christ. Always thank God for them.

THIRD PROBLEM—IDOLATROUS RELIGION

The Corinthian church had trouble from the idolatrous religions around them. At the heart of this problem was their failure to recognize the distinction God has put between his church and the rest of the world. Paul hints at this problem, giving us the remedy by reminding them who they were, "Unto the church of God which is at Corinth, to them that are sanctified in Christ Jesus, called *to be* saints,..." (1 Cor 1: 2)

The church belongs to God, not the world. We are "the church of God." God's church is not only chosen by God but bought by God. "The church of God, which he hath purchased with his own blood." (Ac 20:28) The Psalmist wrote, "Remember thy congregation, which thou hast purchased of old; the rod of thine inheritance, which thou hast redeemed; this mount Zion, wherein thou hast dwelt." (Ps 74: 2)

The church of God are "them that are sanctified in Christ Jesus, called *to be* saints." Every member of God's church is sanctified in Christ Jesus by God the Father in divine election, sanctified in Christ Jesus, by God the Son's finished work and sanctified in Christ Jesus by God the Holy Spirit's regenerating and calling.

Sin involves three things: guilt, pollution and separation from God. The guilt of our sin is expiated by the blood of Christ Jesus (Heb 2:11, 10:14, 13:12)

Hebrews 13: 12: Wherefore Jesus also, that he might sanctify the people with his own blood, suffered without the gate. 13: Let us go forth therefore unto him without the camp, bearing his reproach. 14: For here have we no continuing city, but we seek one to come.

Concerning the pollution of our hearts, we are renewed—created anew—in Christ by the Holy Ghost—he gives us a new heart. And concerning our separation from God, when we are called, we are “called saints.” The word means by God’s grace we are rendered sacred, consecrated to the service of God.

So our sanctification is “in Christ Jesus.” In Christ as our head and representative, we are justified by his righteousness. In Christ as a branch is in the vine, we are purified by his Spirit. In Christ by his call, we are separated and consecrated unto his service.

Therefore, brethren, speaking of his church, the apostle Peter said we are not of this world but are a separated, holy people, with a specific purpose to glorify God, “But ye *are* a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, an holy nation, a peculiar people; that ye should shew forth the praises of him who hath called you out of darkness into his marvellous light.” (1Pe 2:9)

FOURTH PROBLEM—DIVISION

The church at Corinth was also divided. They were on assembly. But they were divided into clicks. Paul hints at this problem by reminding them that all God’s saints are one in every place, “...with all that in every place call upon the name of Jesus Christ our Lord, both theirs and ours: Grace be unto you, and peace, from God our Father, and from the Lord Jesus Christ.” (1 Cor 1: 2-3)

“All in every place” who is called and sanctified in Christ, through the will of God, consecrated to be saints, are one with Christ and each other in the church of God. Christ’s body—the true church of God—is not divided. Let there be no schisms in Christ’s body.

It is evident the church of God is one, when you consider what it means, “to call on the name of the Lord.”

First, it means God has given his church the pure language of the gospel, so that with one holy heart—we worship and serve the LORD in spirit and in truth, depending entirely upon God, giving God all the glory and praise in our salvation. God promised that after Christ had finished the work of redemption and was risen to be our Head that then “will I turn to the people a pure language, that they may all call upon the name of the LORD, to serve him with one consent.” (Zeph 3: 9) “And the LORD shall be king over all the earth: in that day shall there be one LORD, and his name one.” (Zech 14: 9) Christ our Head declares before God his Father, “All the ends of the world shall remember and turn unto the LORD: and all the kindreds of the nations shall worship before thee.” (Ps 22: 27) The Lord Jesus began doing at Jerusalem on the day of Pentecost and continues to do so in our day. The result in his people is “I will offer to thee the sacrifice of thanksgiving, and will call upon the name of the LORD.” (Ps 116: 17) “Give unto the LORD the glory due unto his name; worship the LORD in the beauty of holiness.” (Ps 29: 2) This is true of all God’s church in every place.

Secondly, to call on the name of God means every true believer all calls on God “in the name of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.” Christ is our holiness and righteousness, our boldness to enter the holiest in God’s presence. (Heb 10) He said, “And whatsoever ye shall ask in my name, that will I do, that the Father may be glorified in the Son.” (Joh 14:13) That is true of all his people in his church everywhere in every place.

Thirdly, to call on the name of the Lord means we are called “by the name of the Lord” in distinction from the sons of men. (Gen 6:2) God is our Father and Christ is our Lord, “Of whom the whole family in heaven and earth is named.” (Eph 3: 15) “This is the name wherewith HE shall be called the LORD our Righteousness”; “This is the name wherewith SHE shall be called the LORD our Righteousness.” (Jer 23: 6; 33: 16)

Paul will address this issue more fully in verse 12. Let's look at it briefly for now. Paul writes, "Now this I say, that every one of you saith, I am of Paul; and I of Apollos; and I of Cephas; and I of Christ." (1 Cor 1: 12) Paul, Apollos, Peter and Christ preached to different assemblies of people, in different places, at different times.

Now at Corinth, some of all their converts are in the same local church. But they are divided, as if they are not one body, one church, because some were converted of Paul, some of Apollos, some of Cephas and some of Christ. They were divided because they were called at different times, in different places, in different congregations.

Men like to argue that the church of God is not universally one by doing word studies on the word "church" and "assembly" and "congregation." But listen to Paul's argument writing under the inspiration of God the Holy Spirit. He writes, "Is Christ divided?" (1 Cor 1: 13) Christ is not divided; his body is not divided. Christ's is the Head, his church is his body. Every chosen, redeemed, regenerated believer is a member of Christ's church and we are one in Christ. The very purpose of Christ's work is to make his people all one in Christ.

Then Paul writes, "Was Paul crucified for you?" (1 Cor 1: 13) Christ was crucified for his church, "Christ loved the church and gave himself for it." (Eph 5: 25) Be sure to remember that Ephesians 5 teaches each believing husband to love our one bride even as "Christ loved the church and gave himself for it." If every individual church is separate then Christ has multiple brides and husbands are taught it is ok to have multiple wives. But the message is clear. Christ loved "the" church. Christ gave himself for "it." Christ's church is his bride. Every member of Christ's church are all redeemed by the same Head, called into the same body, and saved by the same blood. Each local church is independent of other local churches. We do not abuse the truth of Christ's church being universal as do the Roman Catholic's. But we do not do away with the truth simply because false teachers use the truth for vain purposes. If we did that we would have to do away with all truth because in some form or another all vain churches pollute the truth of God.

Paul asks another question, "Or were ye baptized in the name of Paul?" (1Co 1:13) Every true believer in every place is baptized, not in the name of a local church or denomination or of men but we are baptized in the name of Christ. No matter where we are in this world, the members of Christ church all confess that we all died in Christ, were all buried in Christ, and all arose in Christ. It is Christ's name, and Christ's name alone, that we are confessing in believer's baptism.

Brethren, a party spirit, a divisive spirit, is not of God, it is of Satan and sin. It is carnal to use a preacher, a denomination, a local assembly or any carnal thing the eye can see to self-exalt one over the other and promote division. Christ unites his people! The whole eternal purpose of God is unity in and by Christ his Son, "That in the dispensation of the fulness of times he might gather together in one all things in Christ, both which are in heaven, and which are on earth; *even* in him:" (Eph 1:10)

Over time, I have learned three things from men who argue for division like this. One, it is always in defense of a denomination and its doctrine not Christ's glory and not truth! Two, it is chiefly so preachers can improperly use the Lord's Table as a tool for discipline rather than the proper use of "Remembering the Lord." Three, men who will not fellowship with a true preacher of Christ because of an issue like this prove that their denomination and doctrine means more to them than Christ and the family of God.

CHRIST our HEAD teaches all his children, his whole body, in every place to "endeavour to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. *There is* one body, and one Spirit, even as ye are called in one hope of your calling; One Lord, one faith, one baptism, One God and Father of all, who *is* above all, and through all, and in you all." (Eph 4:3-6)

FIFTH PROBLEM—PRIDE OF GRACE

The church at Corinth also had a problem with pride of grace. They were proud of their gifts such as their gift of oratory, of knowledge and other things. This was causing further division. We might find in the church at Corinth, the seed of every division and every divisive doctrine of men that exists in the world today! But Paul reminds us that everything we have, and shall have, is by the grace of God by Christ Jesus. Paul writes, “I thank my God always on your behalf, for the grace of God which is given you by Jesus Christ.” (1 Cor 1: 4)

God’s church is saved by grace alone! Grace is freely given by God, to whomsoever God chooses and his grace is in and by Jesus Christ! We all sinned and come short of the glory of God; we earned death and eternal damnation only; we have no merit in us, no ability in us, nothing good in our flesh

Therefore, God saves by grace alone, by Christ alone! Christ perfected his people in righteousness! He purchased all spiritual blessings for his church by his precious blood. They are Christ’s gifts to give to whom he will, “Unto every one of us is given grace according to the measure of the gift of Christ.” (Eph 4:7)

Therefore, since salvation begins by God’s grace, since salvation is by the person and work of Christ’s merits alone, God never casts away his people when we fall into error like the Corinthian brethren. Notice, Paul is more concerned for God’s glory in Christ than anything else. Despite all their pride and error, Paul says, “I thank my God always on your behalf, for the grace of God which is given you by Jesus Christ.” That is what grace does in a true believer! It makes us overlook the sin, the pride and the errors of brethren and thank God for his glory, for his grace, given us freely by Christ Jesus!

God freely gives us everything by his free grace, “That in every thing ye are enriched by him,…” (1 Cor 1: 5)

Then Paul lists a few things which the Corinthian’s were proud of, “in all utterance, and *in* all knowledge.” They had gifted preachers, teachers and some had gifts to speak in foreign tongues (which is a gift no longer given in our day). But if we have gifts to preach, teach and know the truth of God, we have no room to boast, it is by the gift of God’s grace by Christ Jesus! That makes a believer love Christ and his brethren more than the gifts. That is when the gifts will be used for the purpose for which God gave them.

Paul says, “Even as the testimony of Christ [the gospel of Christ] was confirmed in you.” (1 Cor 1: 6) Christ is the true witness who testified, who preached, the gospel to us. And Christ confirmed the gospel in us—(Jn 3: 11; 32-33; 8: 13-14) The apostles and all true preachers bear testimony of Christ only—but Christ confirms the gospel in those he redeemed. So we cannot boast in our faith. The gospel is confirmed in us by the grace of God.

Also, all extraordinary gifts are by his grace, “So that ye come behind in no gift.” (1 Cor 1: 7) The church at Corinth was greatly blessed of God with extraordinary gifts; they came behind no other church in gifts. But it was all by grace, not of self

Even our perseverance is the gift of God’s grace, “waiting for the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ: Who shall also confirm you unto the end, *that ye may be* blameless in the day of our Lord Jesus Christ.” (1 Cor 1: 7-8) Every believer waits for the second-coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. But we have no room to boast, perseverance is by God establishing us unto the end. In the end, it is Christ our God who shall present us to himself blameless—holy and without blame—in the day of our Lord Jesus Christ!

Paul concludes, “God *is* faithful, by whom ye were called unto the fellowship of his Son Jesus Christ our Lord.” (1 Cor 1: 9) Believer, we are not faithful: our faith is imperfect, our gifts imperfect and we would

surely fall away if left to ourselves. But God is faithful: he chose us by grace, he redeemed us by his grace, he called us by grace, he gifts us by grace, he keeps us by grace and by grace he will present us to himself and none shall be lost!

This humbles the true believer. God has called each of his sheep into “the fellowship of his Son, Jesus Christ our Lord.” (1 Cor 1: 9) Really get the meaning of this! Fellowship includes union and communion—with Christ and with fellow believers! Each of us here, and every believer all over this world, has one heart beat—we are partakers of the same blood of Christ, partakers of the same Holy Ghost, (2 Cor 13: 13), partakers of the same Life of Christ as members of his body, partakers of the same divine nature and character with the same Christ dwelling in each of us (2 Pet 1: 4), partakers of the same sufferings here and the same glory hereafter. (Rom 8:17, 2 Thess 2:14) We are each preserved by the same sovereign Lord and Savior—our Head—who is All and in all, who fills all in all! (Col 3: 11; Eph 4: 6; Eph 1: 22-23)

So to sum it up, Paul gives the chief lesson of the epistle. This is what he will show and call us unto in this epistle, over and over again. Meditate on every phrase in this sentence, “Now I beseech you,... brethren,... by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ,... that ye all... speak the same thing,... and *that* there be no divisions among you;... but *that* ye be perfectly joined together... in the same mind... and in the same judgment.” (1 Cor 1: 10) This will be the sure and certain accomplishment of Christ in each member of his body in which he dwells. Sin and sinners divide. Christ always unites his people in him!

Amen!