

# 1<sup>st</sup> Corinthians 1:1-9

“Jesus, Jesus, Jesus”

Written on Paul’s 3<sup>rd</sup> missionary journey from the city of Ephesus between 55-57A.D., the Corinthian church was a place with problems. If you could pick one church found in the NT to pastor or be apart of, the church at Corinth (believe me) wouldn’t be the one. They were confounded *by*, and confronted *with* just about every problem you might think could exist in a church and possibly even a couple you *wouldn’t* think of. There were doctrinal issues to address, divisions, disputes, defilement, discord, there was an apparent problem recognizing and adhering to authority, immorality in the church, the gifts of the Spirit were being misused and abused, there was just corruption and compromise contaminating the work.

Now, there are those of you who have had the experience of moving to a new town and having to locate a church home. and There are generally several churches and so you inquire of the reputation of a few that you feel like checking out and begin to pursue it from there. But if you were moving to Corinth in Paul’s day, you wouldn’t have several choices, you’d have 1.

and When you discovered what was going on you’d be tempted to stay away altogether and just abandon the assembly of the saints. You’d think that when Paul discovered the depth of the depravity that was permeating through this fellowship that he’d have had it disbanded and simply started a new work. But he didn’t do that, why? Because he understood 2 things, #1 God calls us to assemble together as a body of believers; you’re never going to find a place with out problems when it comes to a local church. At times the problems may surge, at other times it may be fairly serene, but with people inevitably/invariably come problems. We’re all sinners saved by grace, we have this problematic sin nature that’s always hounding us, creating problems for us, and it’ll be a strain and a struggle until we shed this shell of a mortal body and put on immortality, we’ve been sown in corruption, we’ll be raised in incorruption. But until then, problems are part of the package deal; it’s called “Welcome to humanity.” and We don’t throw in the towel on our brothers and sisters, or the assembling of ourselves together when problems arise. It doesn’t need canned, it needs corrected, the church is God’s establishment, not man’s and God has called us to corporate, collective gatherings. Paul understood that, and along with that (God having called us to assemble together) He’s also #2 *commissioned* us with the necessary resources to resolve any problems that may arise. By His grace, and the power of the Holy Spirit whom He has given to us, remember God has called us to unity, one heart, one mind, and one mouth glorifying the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ Now how can we do that if we just jump ship every time a problem arises? We’ve been given the resources to resolve difficulties and we’re to use them.

Now in these 1<sup>st</sup> 9 Vs Paul through the inspiration of the Holy Spirit describes the church in Corinth as God sees it, Vs 10-31 as man sees it. Positionally things are great; practically they’re a real mess. and Really that should be no incredibly unsettling issue for us in that how often it’s exactly that way in our own lives? We’re in Christ, so positionally we couldn’t be better, but the practical aspects and out-workings of our lives are a mess. But God wants to work in us so that who we are positionally, and who we are practically reflect one another.

Though what was happening in this fellowship was a real bummer for them, God has used it to become a real blessing for us. Because some people came as a delegation from Corinth to Ephesus so that they could inform Paul as to the situation that he might address the issues. **and Because of that we have a letter that issues forth the heart of God on how to handle and correct all kinds of practical problems in the body of Christ. Vs 1 begins.**

**Vs1**

So the letter begins in a typical fashion with regards to how letters were written in his day. The letter would begin stating whom it was from (in this case Paul) and then it would state to whom it was addressed (which we see in Vs 2, "The church of God which is at Corinth). To me that makes sense, in our day we do it just the opposite. **We begin a letter by stating to whom we're addressing (Dear Jane Doe) and then we end the letter by stating who it's from, (sincerely, John Doe).** There mode was more like an e-mail or a fax, you saw who it was from before you ever read it, and I like that. Because if you get a letter, the 1<sup>st</sup> thing you do is look to find whom it's from, **this method took care of that right off the bat**

and He's got some serious correcting to do so he reminds them of his apostolic authority from the very get go. As I mentioned a moment ago they apparently had an authority problem, and if it wasn't with everyone, they seemed to have a bit of a problem with Paul even though he was the one who founded the church. **But Paul here reminds them that that really doesn't matter, he's not an apostle based upon the election of man, he didn't go to the seminary of apostleship having graduated with a masters degree in "Apostleology." He's been called an apostle of Jesus Christ, and he is who he is through the will of God.** He's writing in much the same vein as he did to the Galatians when he said, "*Paul, an apostle (not from men nor through man, but through Jesus Christ and God the Father who raised Him from the dead),*" Gal 1:1 Because some men had been through that region debunking him and he'd fallen in the popularity poles of man in that area as well. But it's not a popularity contest, it's about being endowed with authority from God Himself in order to exact the necessary means to bring about correction and godly order/instruction in a given situation, and Paul had that. **He was a called apostle; you might note that the words "to be" are in italics, that means that they aren't there in the Greek but that they were added by the translators for clarification. Unfortunately often times translators confuse a text rather than clarify it. It's literally, "Paul, a called apostle of Jesus Christ" It's not what he was "to be" it's what he was.** He had a very candid vividly clear call upon his life; remember there he was on his way to Damascus with orders from the high priest to incarcerate any he may've found who were of "the way" which was an early term for Christianity. He was a radical persecutor of people who loved Jesus. **and The book of Acts records for us how he was called of Jesus Christ by the will of God, he wasn't looking for Jesus, he didn't choose Jesus, but Jesus sought him and chose him, just He did you, and just like He did me. and Though you find the story of Paul's conversion in Acts Ch 9 as he recounts it in Ch 26 he expounds a little more.** Let's turn quickly to Acts 26:12-18

You see he was called of Christ for this very purpose, to open the eyes of those who were lost, in the dark (spiritually speaking) to turn them from the power of Satan to God, that they might receive the forgiveness of sins and an inheritance among those who are sanctified by faith in Christ. God gave him the authority to establish and instruct believers in Jesus Christ on His behalf.

So, Paul, a called apostle (or ambassador) of Jesus Christ through the will of God, how important it is that we be able to say that we are what we are by the call of Jesus Christ through the will of God in our lives. Perhaps you're a called stay home mom of Jesus Christ through the will of God, or a called construction worker of Jesus Christ through the will of God, or a called physician, or salesman or whatever it may be, what's important is that you be able to say, "of Jesus Christ through the will of God." God has you where you are for a reason, be it to set godly standards in the home and raise your children in a manner that accords with the principles of God's Word. Or to demonstrate Him in a positive way through a good work ethic, to share with the lost that you may come in contact with at your place of employment, there's all kinds of reasons why you may be where you are.

But recognize the call of Jesus through the will of God upon your life wherever you may be that you might serve Him whole heartedly in that capacity.

"and Sosthenes our brother." Now this is kind of interesting because it seems that this Sosthenes is the same Sosthenes mentioned in Acts 18 where you find the account of Paul's time spent in Corinth. and What's interesting about that is that when Paul began to preach Jesus in the city, he got the same response he was accustomed to getting, both riot and revival. He was preaching in the synagogue and got pretty much rejected by the Jews, so he shook the dust off his garments before them, said, "Your blood be on your own head; I am clean. From now on I'm going to the Gentiles." and He went into the house of a Gentile named Justus who lived right next door to the synagogue. and He began preaching to the Gentiles and a revival started breaking out (and he was seeking to provoke the Jews to jealousy like he mentions there in Romans.) Well, long story short the ruler of the synagogue wound up getting saved, a man by the name of Crispus. Well guess what, he was duly fired from his position upon believing in Jesus Christ and Paul stayed in Corinth establishing the church for a year and a half, longer than in any other city outside of Ephesus. Well a new governor by the name of Gallio came to town the Jews sought to take Paul to court. They were all, "This guy persuades men to worship God contrary to the law!" and Just as Paul was preparing to defend himself Gallio intervenes and says, "What does your religious affairs have to do with my governing of this city?" and He drove them from the judgment seat, then we read that they all took this guy who spearheaded the campaign against Paul (be it the Jews or the Greeks, or both we're not certain) (the new ruler of the synagogue) and they beat the tar out of him. His name... Sosthenes. and It seems like after all that, him trying to appease the Jews, failing, being beaten, Paul just preaching the love and grace of Jesus, that Sosthenes got saved. and Here he is with Paul, his beating became a blessing in that it became a pivoting point in his life whereby he was a little disillusioned by the way the Jews handled him Vs the way Paul reacted and responded, the love he shared and showed.

and Let that encourage you because Sosthenes was vehement against Christ, taking Paul to court and all the rest, yet the very one that seemed so far from hope, is seated there saved (more than likely penning this letter for Paul). You see often times the one's that are so hostile against Christ are the one's under the heaviest conviction *from* Christ, and many times they're not far from breaking.

It's those docile, "Oh, I'm glad for you," people that drive me crazy. But when someone is provoked, responding, reacting, even negatively, you know something is stirring, pray *for* them, be a witness *to* them, it just may be that God is up to something regarding them.

Vs2

Several things we want to note here briefly. Notice 1<sup>st</sup> of all he's drawing their attention to the overall unity of the church, it's not man's church, or a state church, or a national church, it's God's church. and You're either apart of it, or you aren't, it's not the church of Corinth, it's the church of God, this particular portion of it is *at* Corinth. We're the church of God *at* Joplin, as is all kinds of other assemblies meeting today in the name of Jesus Christ There's only one church (God's church) it's not the building, we the people of God are the church of God. and The church of God is at Springfield, is at Branson, is at Tulsa, anywhere and everywhere on the planet that people are gathering in the name of Jesus Christ is where the church of God is at. Here Paul is writing to the church of God which is at Corinth.

Now Corinth was a radically wealthy city, and it was a radically wicked city, likened unto N.Y. or Las Vegas, or Los Angeles, New Orleans, (pre Katrina) something like that.

There were temples to Poseidon, Apollos, Athena, Hermes and others in the city, the most famous being Aphrodite who employed 1,000 temple priestesses (prostitutes) who would descend upon the city every night seeking to solicit sexual interaction in the name of worship to Aphrodite. The city was famous for its pottery, and Corinthian brass which was a mixture of gold, silver and copper and was more expensive than gold itself was. It was a booming city located on a sea port with several hundred thousand people in it. If you look on a bible map you'll find it on the isthmus on the southern portion of Greece. and One of the things that kept it booming was the fact that at the narrowest portion of the peninsula it was only 4-5 miles from the Aegean sea to the Adriatic Sea, but to sail around the coast was around 200 miles and it was incredibly dangerous sailing. So they devised a method whereby ships would pull into the harbor, unload their cargo and literally be towed over rollers 4-5 miles to put in on the Adriatic sea sailing on to Rome. Well, it took a couple/few days to do that, so there were always sailors in the city, looking to stay a few nights, and they'd engage with the prostitutes, looking to party and just completely defile themselves. They were renown for being on the lowest rung of the moral ladder. Any time there was a play that included a Corinthian they were always depicted as drunk, and to be told, "You live like a Corinthian" would be a pretty radical insult. It was the sin city of their day, their slogan could've been, "What happens in Corinth, stays in Corinth." So they were a booming metropolis, radically wealthy, but radically wicked, they were also really into oratory skills. They held there every 2 years what was called the "Isthmian Games" which were 2<sup>nd</sup> in stature only to the Olympics, but one of the events in the games was that of oratory, debate, eloquent articulation, and there were schools to be trained in the art of oratory there in the city. That's why we find Paul referencing his speech later on in the letter, he says, "...my speech and my preaching were not with persuasive words of human wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power, that your faith should not be in the wisdom of men but in the power of God." 1 Cor 2:4-5

Now don't be misled regarding a statement like that, it wasn't that Paul *couldn't* articulate eloquently, remember he was a highly trained, incredibly intelligent individual. But he says, "I didn't engage that way, didn't want to 'wow' you with words, didn't want you to focus on *how* I was speaking, but upon *what* I was saying. I didn't want to wow you with words, but with the cross of Jesus Christ" But it was into this depraved, den of iniquity that Paul planted the church there in Corinth, talk about a beacon of light in a dark place. As a matter of fact he wrote Romans from Corinth, so when there in Ch 1 he speaks of men professing to be wise having become fools, worshipping the creation rather than the Creator. and Because of that God gave them over to a debased mind to do those thing which are not fitting, and he speaks of immorality, homosexuality, wickedness, murder, envy, maliciousness, deceitfulness, evil mindedness, undiscerning, untrustworthy, inventors of evil things, unloving, unforgiving and all the rest; he's painting a portrait for you as to what life was like in the city of Corinth right there as he was writing *from* Corinth. and Now with all these problems present in the church, the idea seems to be, "Is the church influencing the city, or is the city influencing the church?"

But here's what I want you to see, even though they had all these practical problems in the church Paul calls them, "sanctified" and "saints." That was their position in Christ, and guess what, it's yours and mine to. What does it mean to be "sanctified?" It speaks of being set apart for the exclusive purpose and service of God. Paul's trying to remind them of who they are in Christ, we have a tendency to forget, so we drift from our position and do things that are unfitting practically. The word "Sanctified" calls to mind those vessels in the tabernacle, and in the temple, what made those vessels (be they made of gold or whatever) any different than any other?

What caused them to be holy? They were set apart to be used for the service of God exclusively. What makes you different as a vessel than any other vessel that may be out there? You've been set apart for God's service, and His use exclusively, how were you set apart? Through Christ Jesus (look at Vs 30 of this Ch) you've been set apart *to* Him, to be used exclusively *by* Him, you're called saints. Again the words "to be" aren't there, it's not what you'll be perhaps one day if your works are good enough, in Christ you've been set apart, you're a saint. There's no 2 ways about it you're either a saint or you ain't and if you're in Christ you're a saint. Regardless of how your life might be working out practically (currently) positionally you're sanctified, you're a saint, and God wants to work in you to bring your position and your practice into harmony.

So Paul is writing to them and he's writing to all of us in every place who call on the name of Jesus Christ our Lord.

**Vs3**

We could spend some time here but we won't suffice it to say that this isn't a reference to the saving grace of God, or peace *with* God. But rather the sustaining, sanctifying grace of God, and the peace *of* God that God gives us having made peace *with* Him through the cross of Jesus Christ But in Paul's letters we have these 2 coupled together and always in this order, and that's because you really can't experience the peace of God, until you've 1<sup>st</sup> experienced the grace of God. Until you're willing to receive God's grace, you'll never know God's peace.

## Vs4-7

Now Paul has a lot of problems to point *out* and deal *with*, but before he *corrects their problems* he *commends their positives*, commendation before exhortation, he commends them before he corrects them. Something we do well to take note of and learn to apply, he didn't just tear into them with out regard for them. He could've justifiably began to exhort them regarding carnality, compromise, contamination, division, discord, disputes and all the rest. **But he didn't do that, he began to draw on the positive things. Recognize those realities 1<sup>st</sup>, "I thank God for the grace He's given to you, you've been enriched *by Him*, you're constantly talking *about Him*, excited about and looking forward to *seeing Him*, you've been blessed with the gifts of the Spirit *through Him*."** Unfortunately most people who think it's their job to offer correction, do so condescendingly or critically, they don't find anything to commend people *by* or encourage them *with* initially; consequently they go away feeling beat down rather than built up.

Check out these positive aspects of the Corinthian church, God had poured His grace out upon them immensely, as a result of that they were enriched incredibly. **Not only was the city wealthy materially, but the church was enriched spiritually, the word "enriched" speaks literally of a tycoon, they've had their socks blessed off spiritually. Both in utterance and in knowledge, in other words they're both learning, and sharing the things they've come to know, the testimony of Christ is confirmed in them.** and They come short in no gift (meaning all the gifts of the Spirit were present among them) and they're excited to see Jesus face to face, they're eagerly waiting for the revelation of our Lord Jesus Christ So though we'll learn of all kinds of carnal compromise and unfortunate activity going on in the church at Corinth, what we can say about them is that they proclaim Jesus, the know about Jesus, the supernatural gifts of God are among them and they're excited about the prospect of Jesus' return. **So whatever problems they had, we've got to give this to them, these are some pretty impressive attributes. How many churches could be qualified in this way today? We may not have their problems, but do we have their positives?**

Not that these positives were a credit to them in what they've done, no, they're a credit to God and the incredible grace that He's shed upon them. See, there's one thing I want you to see before we move on and begin to wind down. **We read here that they came short in *no* gift, the gifts of the Spirit were at work in a major way, healings, tongues, miracles, prophecy, word of knowledge and wisdom, teaching, gifts of administration and evangelism. But here's the deal, here's what I want you to understand, just because the gifts of the Spirit are at work in a person's life, that's not necessarily an indicator that that person is *spiritual*.** They may be quite carnal, we have this tendency to look upon one who is moving in the gifts, perhaps an utterance in tongues, or someone lays hands on you and you're healed, and we go, "Wow, they must fast, and pray, and study and be incredibly close to God." and That may be true, but then again it may not, the bible tells us that the Spirit of God gives gifts to each one individually as *He wills*. **Another way to understand that is that the reasons for Him gifting you or gifting me don't lie *in me* but in Him. It's of His grace, not of my works, or how spiritual I happen to be. God may gift someone who has radical personal problems, why? I don't know, I suppose so that no flesh should glory in His sight as it is written, "He who glories, let him glory in *the Lord*." Not in the fact that he's so spiritual. It's God who does the work from beginning to the end, notice.**

**Vs8**

That word “blameless” literally means, “un-accusable,” “irreproachable.” What’s that mean? That in Christ regardless of your personal problems practically, the fact is positionally that God has cast our sin as far as the east is from the west and He remembers it no more.

We’ve been washed whiter than snow as by the blood of Jesus Christ and Paul is here giving us God’s personal guarantee that He will confirm you to the end. If He begins the work, He’ll finish the work, we spoke last week at the end of Romans of How God is able to establish you, confirm you as un-accusable in the day of our Lord Jesus Christ and I don’t know about you, but I know where I’ve been, what I’ve done, the things that have gone through my mind, and great will be the day that I stand before God’s throne and books are opened, and my name is read and I hear, “What do we have on him?” and Jesus stands forth and says, “Nothing, he’s un-accusable, irreproachable, blameless, washed in My blood, robed in My righteousness.” How can we know that in Christ it’ll go that way (generally speaking)?

**Vs9**

God is faithful, I’m not faithful, I’ll let you down, bum you out, but God is faithful, He follows through, if He’s begun a work, He’ll finish it. He’s not a man that He should lie, He upholds the righteous, is able to present you faultless Before the presence of His glory with exceeding joy. One last thing, Paul has a lot of problems to point out, but he’s been giving us the solution to them all in every Vs. Perhaps you picked up on it along the way, there’s not a single Vs in this introductory portion of 1<sup>st</sup> Cor that doesn’t make mention of Jesus. It doesn’t matter what your problem is, corruption, compromise, carnality, division, discord, discontented, the solution is the same in every situation, Jesus, Jesus, Jesus.

**Prayer Points:**

God we thank You for Your faithfulness, that *You* are able to establish, and affirm us, to present us faultless, un-accusable, irreproachable before Your throne through Jesus Christ our Lord. God give us ears to hear as we study 1<sup>st</sup> Cor, that You would be molding us, transforming us that our practice and our position might compliment one another. Help us that we might influence the world around us rather than being influenced *by* the world around us. God use us for Your glory.

It doesn’t matter where you’ve been or what you’ve been apart of, what you believe your problem may be, Jesus is the solution. Maybe you feel as though your life has been marked by corruption, Jesus is the answer, perhaps you’re discontent and disillusioned with the things of this world, Jesus is the answer. You’re empty and hurting, Jesus is the answer, let me implore you, come to Christ, God is able to confirm you to the end, present you faultless before His throne, but only in Christ, there is no other name under Heaven given among men by which we must be saved. Just open your heart, and ask Christ to come in and forgive you of your sin.