

First Corinthians

January 5, 2025

Preface

In Paul's day, Corinth was a relatively new city. The Romans destroyed it in 146 BC. About 36 BC, a colony of freedmen (former slaves) from Rome began rebuilding it. The town was populated by Romans, Greeks, Jews, free men, and prisoners. Caesar sent the prisoners to help with the digging of the Corinth Channel.

When Paul finally arrived at Corinth on his second missionary journey, Aquila and Priscilla were already there (Acts 18:1-4). Late in 49 AD, Claudius was tired of the disputes and constant tumult among the Jews of the Synagogue and the Jews of the Church involving the argument over "Chrestus" or Christ. He ran all Jews out of Rome because of the ruckus. Aquila and Priscilla made their way to Corinth and established a Church in their home there. It was already established when Paul and Luke arrived.

Paul needed to earn a living in Corinth, so he began working alongside Aquilla as a tent-maker. He had never worked as a tent-maker before. It will be a temporary job for him until donations from Churches in other towns arrive. At the same time, he was "reasoning" in the synagogue every Sabbath to persuade Jews in the city to accept the LORD (Acts 18:4).

As stated, Paul did not have to make tents for very long because an offering from Macedonia allowed him to devote full-time to the Gospel ministry (Acts 18:5). Luke did not mention the gift, but Paul did in his letters to Thessalonica, Corinth, and Philippi (1 Thessalonians 3:6; 2 Corinthians 11:9; Philippians 4:15).

Paul's labor in the synagogue was not in vain. In Corinth, Titus and Crispus accepted the LORD. Silas and Timothy helped with Titus's baptism, and Paul baptized Crispus and Stephanas. (1 Corinthians 1:14-17).

While Paul was in Corinth on this first stay, he wrote two letters to the Church in Thessalonica. Timothy delivered the first letter in 52 AD. Later that year, or possibly in 53 AD, Paul wrote his second letter to the Church there in Thessalonica. The first letter was misunderstood, especially concerning the second return of Christ. The Thessalonians were teaching that the day of Christ was about to happen. Paul corrected that teaching, announcing that two other things must occur first: the Great Apostasy of the Church and the arrival of the man of lawlessness, called the leader of the beast empire in the Revelation. (2 Thessalonians 2:1-12).

From Corinth, after many days, Paul, along with Aquilla and Priscilla, as well as Luke, headed to Antioch, Syria, by way of Cenchrea and Ephesus first (Acts 18:18b). In Ephesus, Paul left Aquilla and Priscilla. They started a Church in their home there. (Acts 18:19). Paul continued to Antioch, Syria, and his home Church to give his missionary report. It was either late 53 AD but no later than the middle of 54 AD.

Paul's third and last missionary journey began in 54 AD. While on his way, he stopped in the province of Galatia for medical treatment because of the thorn in his flesh. On previous journeys, Paul had started several Churches in the Galatia province. They knew him well.

While Paul was in the Galatia province, Aquila and Priscilla met Apollos in Ephesus. Apollos needed to be updated on Christ's cause and the Church's development. Aquila and Priscilla enlightened Apollos, and then he headed to Corinth (Acts 19:1).

Soon after Apollos departed for Corinth, Paul arrived in Ephesus, where he stayed for at least two years and three months (Acts 19:8-10). He concentrated on sharing the Gospel in the synagogues for three months. Then, he began teaching and answering questions about Christ, using the Medical School of Tyrannus theater as his teaching arena.

Paul desired to go to Macedonia from Ephesus and then on to Jerusalem, but news reached Paul that changed his plans. DISTURBING MATTERS of abuse and contentions had arisen in Corinth because of the ministry of Apollos. A letter was written to Paul concerning Apollo, with news from the household of Chloe along with news from Stephanas and his two friends (1 Corinthians 1:11; 1 Corinthians 16:17). This news spurred Paul to write two letters to correct the DISTURBING MATTERS that had sprung up, remedy the abuse, and correct the disorderly conduct in the Church. Paul sent this letter to Corinth (1st Corinthians) with Titus and an anonymous believer in 57 AD (2 Corinthians 2:13; 2 Corinthians 8:6, 16-18).

Paul wrote a Second letter to the Corinthians from Macedonia in 57 or 58 AD. In 58 AD, he returned to Corinth and wrote a letter to the Romans.

First Corinthians was not Paul's first letter to the Church in Corinth. In Chapter 5:5, we learn that Paul had already addressed the immorality in the Church in Corinth. Again, in Chapter 7:1, we learn that Paul had written a letter about relationships between a man and a woman. The two references could imply the same letter or may have been two separate letters. In Second Corinthian 2:3-9 and 7:12, Paul mentions a letter he wrote with many tears so that the Church could make corrections before he arrived. Surely, Paul speaks of this First Corinthian letter because he hopes the problems of the DISTURBING MATTERS will be resolved before he comes (1 Corinthians 16:5).

The outcome of the Church in Corinth is a sad story. Paul addressed many DISTURBING MATTERS in this letter.

He must deal with the quarrels among the members.

He must deal with the beliefs among the members.

He must deal with the immaturity among the members.

He must deal with the requirements of each member.

He must deal with the immorality among the members.

He must deal with the legal matters among the members.

He must deal with marriage relationships among the members.

He must deal with idolatry among the members.

He must prove his Apostleship to the members.

He must deal with misunderstandings about the work of the Holy Spirit among the members.

He must deal with the importance of love among the believers and the lost.

He must deal with how to handle believers who wanted to testify in the Church but did not speak the languages of the Church members.

He must deal with hope in the Gospel and the reason for the Gospel.

He must deal with the Second Coming of Christ.

Finally, he must explain and defend the resurrection of believers.

Paul has much to handle in this short letter. Even though Paul invested much in this Church, we are not told if it has completely settled its DISTURBING MATTERS. It was a sinful Church, so it's no wonder Paul wrote this letter and shed many tears as he did so.

Paul did not pen this letter. However, he said he signed his name at the end, using one word — *“Paul.”* With that as the introduction, we have much to learn from Paul.

Chapter 1

Arriving in Ephesus on his third missionary journey, Paul received word from Corinth through Chloe's people concerning the sad state of confusion and sinful deterioration in the Corinth Church. Weeping in tears for the Church, Paul writes this letter. Indeed, it is his second letter to the Corinth Church, as we will find out, but it may be his third. The first letter did not survive. If there was a second letter before this letter, it did not survive. Be that as it may, before dealing with the many issues, Paul must open the letter with the proper greeting to identify himself to the Corinth Church. It was 57 AD.

I. Greetings to the Corinth Church

Paul's greeting begins with his statement that his letter is from the Apostle.

A. Paul's Greeting

1. From the Apostle

“Paul, called as an apostle of Jesus Christ by the will of God, and Sosthenes our brother,

What did I mean when I said in the opening that Paul had to open the letter with a “proper” greeting? I meant that even in the greeting Paul needed to clear up a misunderstanding for the Corinthian Church. First, Paul calls himself an “Apostle of Jesus Christ.” The Greek word Apostle means *emissary or a person sent on a mission.* The Apostles were the thirteen men selected by the LORD Jesus Christ. Twelve were chosen during the Sermon on the Mount; one died, and another was selected while on the Road to Damascus. Paul was the chosen one on the Damascus Road.

Paul says he is *“an apostle ... by the will of God.”* Paul is being particular with his words. He has a point to make. He was selected *“by the will of God,”* not by the will of man. If you will remember, Peter had taken it upon himself to choose a replacement for Judas Iscariot. He did so in the upper room as they were waiting for the Gift of the Holy Spirit to arrive at the end of ten days. The LORD did not instruct Peter to select a replacement. Nevertheless, the people selected Matthias by their will, not the LORD's. Paul wanted his Apostleship firmly planted in the minds of the Church in Corinth. He will go into great detail to prove his Apostleship in Chapter 9. The whole chapter will be devoted to the reason he was an Apostle.

Paul tells us that *“Sosthenes”* is with him in Ephesus. Corinth knew this man well. He was the ruler of the synagogue in Corinth. In Acts 18, we learn that Paul had been brought to the judgment seat in Corinth by the Jews because he was persuading Jews to accept the LORD. Gallio was the proconsul in Greece at the time. He was in Corinth and at the judgment seat. He made the judgment that Paul had committed no crimes. He sent everyone away from the judgment seat, dismissing the case. The Jews were so mad that they beat up their synagogue leader — Sosthenes. Sosthenes had taken the place of Crispus, who became a believer. The beating of Sosthenes was for his ultimate

good. Enraged by his people, Sosthenes became a Christian and a co-worker with Paul.¹ Sosthenes, the oppressor of the Gospel of Christ, became a brother-in-the-LORD of Paul.

But Paul has a word for the saints in Corinth, too.

2. To the Saints in Corinth

To the saints, in Corinth, Paul says,

^{2a} To the church of God which is at Corinth, to those who have been sanctified in Christ Jesus, saints by calling....

Paul addresses the letter to the “*church of God which is at Corinth*.” These, too, are pointed and particular words by Paul. Once we get into the disturbing matters Paul must address, we will understand that the Church in Corinth was far from being the LORD’s Church; instead, it was bathed in the works of sinful man instead of basking in the bath of the LORD’s glorious righteousness.

But Paul was particular in his words. Therefore, he continued to say, “*To those who have been sanctified in Christ Jesus*.” True Church membership is grounded in the relationship with Christ Jesus through “*sanctification*.” The Greek word means *to make holy, to set apart as holy*. While Paul knows that the “*church of God*” is not an actual accurate description of the Corinth Church as a whole, there were those in the Church who the LORD truly sanctified. There always are in every Church. Even in the worldliest Church, some are not worldly but holy as they worship among the thorns of sinful so-called believers.

To this, Paul calls the “*sanctified ... saints by calling*.” What does it mean to be a “*saint*?” A saint is *holy*. If that is the case, what is the difference between being a saint and being sanctified? There is one difference between being a saint and being sanctified. Sanctified refers to the time when a person became a saint—when he became holy and set apart by the LORD.

These saints have responded to the LORD’s calling of them. They have not been chosen or elected by Him; instead, He has come to knock on the door of their hearts and call them out as the beloved calls and invites his bride to join him in the Song of Solomon. As he says, “*Arise, my darling, my beautiful one, And come along*” (Song of Solomon 2:10). In the same way, the LORD invites all to come to Him, He does not demand. It is up to the person to accept the invitation and invite Him into his heart to fellowship. How is the LORD invited in? Paul tells us in the next verse.

3. To the Saints Abroad

Paul’s message is not just for the saints in Corinth but also for those abroad. He continues.

^{2b} with all who in every place call on the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, their Lord and ours:

Paul explains that future saints become saints by calling upon the name of the LORD, just as the saints have entered into a relationship with the LORD since the birth of Adam’s grandson.

“*To Seth, [Adam’s son] to him also a son was born; and he called his name Enosh. Then men began to call upon the name of the LORD*” (Genesis 4:26).

But we also learn that this letter is for the saints in Corinth and those abroad. Wherever *saints* have become *sanctified* by calling upon the name of the LORD, this letter is for them, too. Paul intends for this letter to become the property of all Churches.

¹ 1 Corinthians 1:1