

Text: 1 Cor 1.1-9

Today we begin our study of the Corinthian epistles chapter by chapter. We will probably have more than one lesson in each chapter, but not as many as we would have if I were preaching through the chapter. In 1996, I had five messages in chapter 1.

Starting with the Big Picture (1 Corinthians Outline)

All commentators agree on the first division but diverge on how to outline after that. I prefer Tom Constable's outline as it orients itself around obvious markers in the text.

I. Introduction (1.1-9)**II. Conditions reported to Paul (1.10-6.20)****A. Divisions in the church (1.10-4.21)**

1 Cor 1.11 ¶ For I have been **informed** concerning you, my brethren, by Chloe's *people*, that there are quarrels among you.

B. Lack of discipline in the church (5.1-6.20)

1 Cor 5.1 ¶ It is actually **reported** that there is immorality among you...

III. Questions asked of Paul (7.1-16.4)

1 Cor 7.1 ¶ Now concerning the things about which you wrote...

1 Cor 8.1 ¶ Now concerning things sacrificed to idols...

1 Cor 12.1 ¶ Now concerning spiritual *gifts*, brethren...

1 Cor 15.1 ¶ Now I make known to you, brethren...

1 Cor 16.1 ¶ Now concerning the collection for the saints...

IV. Conclusion (16.5-24)¹

1 Cor 16.5 ¶ But I will come to you after I go through Macedonia, for I am going through Macedonia;

The Introduction

As we note the features of the introduction, let's keep in mind the first topic, divisions in the church, and the contentious tone that exists in both 1 and 2 Corinthians.

¹ I depart from Constable here, he makes the break in chapter 16 between verses 12 and 13

Verses 1-3 form the greeting, which includes several “standard” expressions of Paul’s. Despite the regular pattern, there are some discernible features:

Paul often identifies himself as an apostle, but here he is “called *as* an apostle of Jesus Christ by the will of God.” What does this “credentialling” suggest as to Paul’s meaning? **authority, but with subtility**

Who is Sosthenes? Consider Acts 18.17. **Uncertain, but could be a former opponent of the Gospel, now a believer and a coworker with Paul. The bare name means something to the Corinthians.**

We talked last time about “sanctified saints” — “set apart holy ones.” This terminology speaks of their spiritual state in the eyes of God, not their behaviour.

“All of mankind is divided between the ‘saints’ and the ‘ain’ts.’ If you ‘ain’t’ in Christ, then you are an ‘ain’t.’ If you are in Christ, then you are a ‘saint.’”²

“The concept of being ‘in Christ’ may be the most foundational and pervasive one in Paul’s theology.”³

Look closely at verse 2. What actions are necessary for those who aren’t Christians (saints) to become Christians? **Believers must call on the Lord (saving faith); the Lord must set them apart (sanctification).**

Verses 4-8 form the thanksgiving, which expresses Paul’s sincere evaluation of their spiritual state.

As you survey these verses, what specific statements inform you about the spiritual condition of those in the Corinthian church?

1. **grace of God given to you (4)**
2. **you were enriched in Him (5)**
3. **the testimony ... was confirmed in you (6)**
4. **you are not lacking in any gift (7)**
5. **you ... are awaiting the revelation of our Lord Jesus (7)**

² J. Vernon McGee, *Thru the Bible Commentary*, v. 5, electronic ed., vol. 5 (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1997), 4–5.

³ Tom Constable, *Tom Constable’s Expository Notes on the Bible* (Galaxie Software, 2003), 1 Cor 1.1.

In light of the long section following, Divisions in the Church (1.10-4.21), what does this imply about Christian life and church life? **Trouble and division are always possibilities among Christians**

What did the Corinthians lack in their Christian experience? **In terms of Christian life, they lack nothing; in terms of Christian growth, they lack maturity.**

In light of the warning in Hebrews 3 about hardened hearts, what spiritual danger are these Christians in Corinth risking? **They are risking hardened hearts and further spiritual problems.**

“What is remarkable here is the apostle’s ability to thank God for the very things in the church that, because of abuses, are also causing him grief. ... Unlike many contemporary Christians, whose tendency is to domesticate the faith by eliminating anything that could be troublesome, the apostle recognizes that the problem lies not in their gifts, but in their attitude toward these gifts. Precisely because the gifts come from God, Paul is bound to give thanks for them. After all, they are good things that have gone sour. In this thanksgiving, therefore, Paul accomplishes two things: he gives genuine thanks to God both for the Corinthians themselves and for God’s having ‘gifted’ them, but at the same time he redirects their focus.”⁴

Where does Paul redirect their focus? **To the source of their gifts, God and Christ; and the goal of their gifts, which the gifts are meant to bring on, the return of Christ.**

Verse 9 is a proposition, expressing Paul’s confidence for the Corinthians growth.

Who guarantees their future, in eternal fellowship with God and Christ? **God who is faithful.**

What does fellowship with Christ involve? **Immediate brotherhood at salvation, continuing partnership in ministry through the Christian life, and deep relationship in the life to come.**

What hinders fellowship with Christ now? **Primarily self-will.**

⁴ Gordon D. Fee, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1987), 36.

G. Campbell Morgan called this verse and 1 Cor 15.58 the “boundaries” of the epistle.⁵

1 Cor 1.9 God is faithful, through whom you were called into fellowship with His Son, Jesus Christ our Lord.

1 Cor 15.58 ¶ Therefore, my beloved brethren, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that your toil is not *in vain* in the Lord.

What is our mission as we learn to work together as a church? **Building up the work of the Lord, the church**

⁵ G. Campbell Morgan, *The Unfolding Message of the Bible*, pp. 389-90, cited in Constable, *Expository Notes*, 1 Cor 1.9.