

The Church of the Servant King

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Survey of the Bible Series – Paul’s First Letter to the Corinthians

(SB_1Cor_Chap1)

CHAPTER 1

PAUL’S GREETING (1:1-3)

1 Paul, called as an apostle of Jesus Christ by the will of God, and Sosthenes our brother, 2 to the church of God which is at Corinth, to those who have been sanctified in Christ Jesus, saints by calling, with all who in every place call on the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, their Lord and ours: 3 Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

Paul's description of himself as one whom God had called as an apostle of Jesus Christ reminded his original readers of his privilege and authority. In some translations (e.g. KJV and NKJV), the prepositional phrase “to be” has been inserted in front of “apostle” (v. 1) and “saints” (v. 2). Paul was an apostle by appointment of God. Believers became “saints” at a point in time. This is a reference to position – not experience. Paul appeals to position and will address experience as we progress in his letter.

You may recall from our study of Galatians and other studies that Paul never addressed the unbelieving Jews who opposed his message (i.e. the Judaizers) as “saints.” This largely Gentile audience in Corinth was addressed as “saints.” This was true in spite of the erroneous thought and life choices that were being made by the Corinthian believers.

Point: There is no support in these verses for the Calvinist TULIP formulation of soteriology – especially “perseverance” of the saints. Note Paul’s appeal to position – not experience.

Principle: Believers of the present dispensation especially, enjoy a “set-apart” status (sanctification) as a result of their decision to place their trust in Christ and His work – not as a result of their “works.”

Principle: You cannot definitely conclude that a person is a believer or an unbeliever based upon their present lifestyle or pattern of behavior.

Application: Note throughout Paul’s letters that there is a central theme that is pervasive – believers are exhorted to live out or work out or exercise their salvation and the privileges associated with it.

Sosthenes was probably the same Sosthenes who was the ruler of the synagogue in Corinth (Acts 18:17). He was with Paul in Ephesus when Paul penned this epistle. Though Luke did not record his conversion in the book of Acts, Sosthenes quite clearly became a believer, assuming this was the same man. Probably he was the same man, and Paul referred to him because the Corinthians knew him well.

The saints in other places were probably those in local churches in places other than Corinth. Peter, Apollos and many others evangelized and led many to believe that Jesus was in fact the promised Redeemer-Messiah. This seems probable in view of “every place” (NASB) or “everywhere” (NIV) and in view of how this verse ends. Paul wanted his readers to remember

that they were part of a large body of believers (cf. 12:12); they were not the only members of the universal Body of Christ. As such, Paul was appealing to unity of faith in spite of who may have led them to Christ (see verse 10 and following).

Everywhere that Paul traveled, the sufficiency of salvation by grace alone and through faith alone was being challenged by a false gospel that promised bondage and slavery to works and effort and deeds that could never provide one assurance of salvation. As we have seen in our study of Paul's salutation in his letter to the Galatians and the believers in Thessalonica, Paul opens his letter with a desire for "grace" and "peace" to be their experience in life. Paul knew that if one is not confidently at rest in the fact that they are eternally saved by grace alone, then there could never be an experience of peace in that person's life.

As we have seen already and will see again, these words had resonance with Jew and Gentile alike. They would have reminded Jews especially and Gentiles who had a God-fearing or proselyte background of Yahweh's words in Numbers 6:22-26.

22 Then the LORD spoke to Moses, saying, 23 "Speak to Aaron and to his sons, saying, 'Thus you shall bless the sons of Israel. You shall say to them:

24 The LORD bless you, and keep you;

25 The LORD make His face shine on you,

And be **gracious** to you;

26 The LORD lift up His countenance on you,

And give you **peace**.'

27 "So they shall invoke My name on the sons of Israel, and I then will bless them." (Num 6:22-26)

SPIRITUAL GIFTS AT CORINTH (1:4-9)

4 I thank my God always concerning you for the grace of God which was given you in Christ Jesus, 5 that in everything you were enriched in Him, in all speech and all knowledge, 6 even as the testimony concerning Christ was confirmed in you, 7 so that you are not lacking in any gift, awaiting eagerly the revelation of our Lord Jesus Christ, 8 who will also confirm you to the end, blameless in the day of our Lord Jesus Christ. 9 God is faithful, through whom you were called into fellowship with His Son, Jesus Christ our Lord.

Note Paul's reference to Jesus as "Christ Jesus" instead of "Jesus Christ." This placed the emphasis upon Jesus as the Messiah and connected the Gentile believers in Corinth to other believers from other places who may have been converted through the evangelism of other men such as Peter and some of the other Jewish apostles – including those in Jerusalem. This is a very important observation and point.

Greek society and culture placed a heavy emphasis upon knowledge, wisdom and speech as evidenced by the prevalence of philosophy and philosophers throughout Greek history. Paul is emphasizing the manner in which their speech and knowledge had been increased as a result of God's grace. Perhaps eloquent speaking was foremost in their minds (e.g. Apollos the orator – Acts 18:24-28) or they may have tried to vainly display their newfound wisdom in a way that put the focus and emphasis upon themselves (cf. 1:18-25).

We have seen in our study of 1 & 2 Thessalonians that Paul had definitely taught a distinction between the Rapture and the 2nd Advent. Since Paul is addressing Body of Christ believers of the present age, it seems reasonable to conclude that he is referencing the Rapture here in verses 7-8. The "day of the Lord Jesus Christ" (cf. Phil 1:6; Col. 2:7; 1 Thess 3:13; 5:23) seems to be distinct from the phrase "the day of the Lord." The latter is a term both Old and New Testament writers used to refer to the period beginning with the Tribulation and extending through the Millennium.

This coming day is referred to as 'the day of the Lord Jesus' (1 Cor. 5:5; 2 Cor. 1:14), 'the day of Jesus Christ' (Phil 1:6), and 'the day of Christ' (Phil. 1:10; 2:16). ('The day of Christ' in 2 Th. 2:2 should be rendered 'the day of the Lord.')

'The day of Christ' in all six references in the N.T. is described as relating to the reward and blessing of the Church at the rapture and in contrast with the expression 'the day of the Lord' (cp. Isa. 2:12, marg.; Joel 1:15, *note*; Rev. 19:19, *note*), which is related to judgment upon unbelieving Jews and Gentiles, and blessing on millennial saints (Zeph. 3:8-20)."¹

The Greek word translated "blameless" (Gr. *anegkletos* – ἀνεγκλητος) means unprovable, not to be called to account or without accusation (cf. Col. 1:22; 1 Tim. 3:10; Titus 1:6-7).

Remember that in the immediate context, Paul is emphasizing position, not experience. Therefore, Paul is writing from the standpoint of their status as believers, i.e. one of blamelessness. It refers to the fact that every Christian will stand before the Lord guiltless, unimpeachable, because God has imputed the guilt of our sins to the Savior and He has borne them (cf. Rom. 5:1; 8:1).

However, on the other hand, it does not imply that at the judgment seat of Christ, there will be complete equality among believers (cf. 3:10-15; 2 Cor. 5:10). Moreover it does not mean that once God regenerates a person, one never sins again (cf. 1 John 1:6-10).

10 According to the grace of God which was given to me, like a wise master builder I laid a foundation, and another is building on it. But each man must be careful how he builds on it.

11 For no man can lay a foundation other than the one which is laid, which is Jesus Christ.

12 Now if any man builds on the foundation with gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, straw,

13 each man's work will become evident; for the day will show it because it is to be revealed with fire, and the fire itself will test the quality of each man's work.

14 If any man's work which he has built on it remains, he will receive a reward.

15 If any man's work is burned up, he will suffer loss; but he himself will be saved, yet so as through fire. (1 Cor 3:10-15)

10 For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each one may be recompensed for his deeds in the body, according to what he has done, whether good or bad. (1 Cor 5:10)

Once again, contra the TULIP formulation, Paul's confidence that his readers would one day stand without guilt before the Lord did not rest on the Corinthians' ability to persevere faithfully to the end. It rested on God's ability and promises to preserve them. Because of our position, God desires that we exploit our strategic advantage as believers in the form of tactical victories. God had begun the good work of calling them into fellowship with His Son, and He would complete that work (cf. Phil. 1:6; 1 John 1:1-4).

6For I am confident of this very thing, that He who began a good work in you will perfect it until the day of Christ Jesus. (Phil 1:6)

1 What was from the beginning, what we have heard, what we have seen with our eyes, what we have looked at and touched with our hands, concerning the Word of Life- 2 and the life was manifested, and we have seen and testify and

¹ Thomas Constable, "Notes on 1 Corinthians" at www.soniclight.com

proclaim to you the eternal life, which was with the Father and was manifested to us—3 what we have seen and heard we proclaim to you also, so that you too may have fellowship with us; and indeed our fellowship is with the Father, and with His Son Jesus Christ. 4 These things we write, so that our joy may be made complete. (1 Jn 1:1-4)

Paul had confidence in the positional truths to which he alludes in this passage. This allowed Paul to appropriately address the issues of carnality which we shall study in this letter. It is extremely important that the believer understand the distinction between positional reality and experiential practice among believers and within the family of faith. Failure to do so will inevitably lead to legalism, distortions of Truth, and loss of impact in time. Paul's confidence in these truths and these distinctions allowed him to objectively address these issues.