

Message #3

I Corinthians 1:1-3

It was common for one writing a letter to begin it by giving his name and by introducing the recipients of the letter.

PROBLEMS IN A CHURCH BEGIN TO GET STRAIGHTENED OUT AS GOD'S PEOPLE BEGIN TO GET THEIR FOCUS BACK ON GOD AND ON JESUS CHRIST AND HIS AUTHORITY.

IDENTIFICATION #1 – Paul identifies himself. **1:1a-c**

Way #1 - Paul wants to be identified as a called apostle. **1:1a**

The adjective “called” stresses that Paul had become an apostle by divine, sovereign selection. Charles Hodge says this does not just refer to an external invitation or calling, but to an effectual invitation and calling. In other words, Paul did not become an apostle by his choice, but by God’s choice. Paul writes that God had even called him from his mother’s womb to this apostleship (Gal. 1:15). So from the opening words of the letter, he is stressing the sovereign work of God.

The word “apostle” specifically means one who has been fully authorized and commissioned in both mission and message. An apostle was a gift God gave to His church (Eph. 4:11-12). In the spiritual gift order, it is the highest gift one could hold (I Cor. 12:28). To reject him or his teaching meant a rejection of a God-ordained, God-gifted, God-picked, God-willed servant of God.

Way #2 - Paul wants to be identified as a called apostle of Jesus Christ. **1:1b**

Jesus Christ is the key subject of the first ten verses of the book. In fact, Paul names Jesus Christ ten times in the first ten verses (**1:1, 2 (twice), 3-4, 6-10**). The particular construction, which reads “of Jesus Christ” in English, indicates that Jesus Christ was both the source and the object of Paul’s apostolic ministry. Paul’s life was totally dedicated to Jesus Christ. It is what he was all about. His focus was totally on Him. He wanted to be identified as one whose apostleship originated from and was dedicated to Jesus Christ.

Way #3 - Paul wants to be identified as a called apostle by God’s will. **1:1c**

People who are carnal will NEVER know God’s will for their lives, but people who are spiritual will ALWAYS know God’s will for their lives. It was not what he willed; it was what God willed that made him an apostle.

Time and time again Paul stressed that he was an apostle by the will of God (II Cor. 1:1; Gal. 1:1; Eph. 1:1; Col. 1:1; I Tim. 1:1; II Tim. 1:1). Paul had this gift of apostle not because he wanted it or deserved it or earned it; he was an apostle because God willed it.

Apparently some in Corinth were questioning this because Paul emphasizes this much in the letters to the Corinthians (I Cor. 9:11; II Cor. 10:2, 7, 10; 11:1-2, 13). Paul wanted these Corinthians to realize his apostleship was not self-promoted but God-ordained.

IDENTIFICATION #2 – Paul identifies Sosthenes. **1:1d**

By use of an article “the” before brother, we may assume that Sosthenes was a specific brother whom the Corinthians could identify and respect. The term brother is used in a spiritual sense to refer to a brother in the family of God.

It seems that this most logically refers to the Sosthenes of Acts 18:17, who had been a Jewish leader and who was beaten up in Corinth because of his zealot-like defense of Judaism some five or six years before this letter was written.

IDENTIFICATION #3 – Paul identifies God’s Church. **1:2**

The word “church” is a word which is a combination of two Greek words and it means called out. Paul is writing Scripture for those who have been called out, for those who are saved. The Word of God has been written for the believer. It is written for the church and is to be taught in the church to the believer.

Reality #1 - The Church is God’s Church. **1:2a**

The church is a church “of God.” This particular grammatical construction (a genitive construction) means that God is the One who originated the church and the One who owns it. Charles Hodge said it well when he wrote: “It is called the church of God because it belongs to Him. He selects and calls its members” (Charles Hodge, *I Corinthians*, p. 3). Any true N.T. church in any location has not been founded by man, but by God. It is not owned by a pastor, he is to teach it, or board, they are to govern it, or any man or woman, they are to be part of it; it is owned by God! It has been raised up by God and is accountable to God.

Reality #2 - The Church is a sanctified Church. **1:2b**

The word “sanctify” is one that means set apart.

- 1) There is positional sanctification—each believer is positionally set apart as a child of God forever at the moment he believes.
- 2) There is progressive sanctification—each believer progresses in his relationship with Jesus Christ by setting himself apart from sin and worldliness.
- 3) There is ultimate sanctification—each believer ultimately is separated from this world and goes to live with Jesus Christ forever.

Reality #3 - The Church is a saintly Church. **1:2c**

The word “saints” is a word that, according to G. Abbott-Smith, refers to something that has been dedicated to God as something very sacred (*Greek Lexicon*, p. 5). In spite of all their sins, they were still saints.

Harry Bultema made an interesting observation in his commentary when he wrote these Corinthians were saints because they had been called by God, not because they joined a church in Utah.

Reality #4 - The Church is a universal Church. **1:2d**

IDENTIFICATION #4 – Paul identifies God’s blessings . **1:3**

Grace is the amazing act of God that saves an undeserving, unmeriting sinner from his deserved condemnation. Peace is the positional and practical tranquility that comes from being in a proper relationship with God.

When a church or an individual is carnal, it has not lost its salvation; it has lost its focus. It needs to get the focus back on God.