

1 Corinthians 1:1-3 Invited to Walk Close to God Falls Ch. AM 12/31/2023

The city of Corinth was the New York, Las Vegas and Los Angeles of the first century. The parallels between the culture and life then and modern America are striking. To be a Christian and a church in Corinth was much like being a Christian and a church in twenty-first century America. There is much to learn.

Paul wrote 1 Corinthians about 20 years after the death of Jesus, followed by His resurrection and ascension to heaven. It was about 55AD.

Paul had previously started the church in Corinth, but then left to do missionary work elsewhere. Later, it was issues back in the church in Corinth that caused Paul to write. Many of the issues prompting Paul to write to the church then are facing the church today.

Let me recap Paul's relationship to the church in Corinth, from the beginning, which is all recorded in Acts 18:1-18a. Paul was going from city to city bringing the gospel. Paul had been ministering over in another city named Athens, when Christ sent Paul to Corinth to start a church. When Paul first arrived in Corinth, Paul went to work full-time to support himself in a regular job as a maker of leather tents. In God's providence, it was there at work, that Paul met a couple named Aquila and Priscilla. On Sabbath-days, Paul as a Jewish Rabbi, went to the Jewish synagogues and preached, taught and reasoned to the Jews how Jesus is the Jewish Messiah, the Christ. The Jews opposed this new rabbi Paul, so Paul decided to stop synagogue ministry to Jews, and instead to speak only to Gentiles. Paul started up meetings in a house right next to the Jewish synagogue.

Interestingly, the Jewish synagogue ruler, a Jew named Sosthenes, came to believe in Christ, and so did many citizens of Corinth. Then, in a vision, the Lord spoke to Paul that he should not fear, that he should keep on speaking the gospel, that God was with Paul, and that God had many people who would be converted in Corinth. So, Paul stopped his pattern of quickly moving on from city to city, and Paul instead stayed in Corinth and taught for a year and a half. During that time, the Jews brought Paul into court with the charge that he had started an illegal religion. The government official ruled that two teachings about beliefs of religion were not illegal, but rather were simply a religious dispute. He declared it not a public matter, and not a policing issue for the court to handle, and had them all dismissed from his courtroom.

However, before leaving the courtroom, the Jews turned on their new synagogue ruler and they beat him, right in front of the court! The government officials did not stop the beating. It was after all these events, that Paul remained a longer time in Corinth! Previously, God had Paul moving from one city to the next, but now God had Paul stay within Corinth for 18 months. That is a quick recap on Paul's relationship with the recipients of this letter!

**Because Christ has sanctified us through His death and resurrection, He**

**invites us to walk close to Him.**

**1. Called to be God's people within a sinful city. (v.1-2a)**

In verse 1, Paul was reminding the people of Corinth that He was called by God to be an Apostle of Jesus.

The point in the beginning of verse 2 is to say that it is not just Paul who was called, but that God also called a whole church of believers into existence, even in dark place. So, verse 2 tells us the people to whom the letter is addressed, "*To, the church of God that is in Corinth, to those sanctified in Christ Jesus,...*"

Corinth was known for its vigorous worship of false gods, and its rampant immorality. It was sin city.

One immediate lesson for us is that Christ builds and cares for His church in the middle of a sinful society! Christ sent the apostle Paul to Corinth to build the church of Jesus Christ there.

All of this was God's strategy. God is patient and wise. What was important to see in Corinth was that the gospel can go to all the nations, to all peoples, not just to the Jews. Paul left the synagogue to speak to the Gentiles!

The strategy of God for the salvation of souls was seen in the death of Christ on the cross, followed by His resurrection. After Christ ascended back to heaven, and sent the Spirit, the apostles and missionaries were to spread the good news around the sinful world from city to city and from town to town.

So, when Paul left the synagogue in Corinth, where did Paul go? Next door! What was next door? A house. Believers met together, including the synagogue ruler Crispus, who was converted, and then lost his position as synagogue ruler.

The house church was made up of Paul, a Hebrew of Hebrews who followed Christ, and Crispus, a former synagogue ruler who gave up his position in the synagogue to go next door and worship in a house church, and a worshiper of God named Titius Justus, and other Corinthian people who believed and were baptized. There was fruit coming and a church gathering from God's Word being preached.

God told Paul do not be afraid, but go on speaking and do not be silent. God wanted His Word to go out. God did not want the Jews to silence Paul's preaching ministry. In Acts 18:10, God said, "*I am with you.*" What a comfort to Paul the messenger! God also made a promise to protect Paul, saying, "*no one will attack you to harm you.*" (Acts 18:10) And we are told the reason. Because God has many people in Corinth. God would do more than build the church there. Also, Corinth would become a new headquarters for missions. Paul left the synagogue, but did not leave the city of Corinth for a while. This was a defining moment for the spread of God's Word. Paul's heart broke for his fellow Jews, and yet he continued to teach those who would listen and become God's people, for He loved God and God's Word, and God's people. The opposition of the Jews in Corinth

did not thwart God's purposes to cause fruit in that place. God was calling His people from darkness to light, from living in sin to being sanctified in Christ.

## **2. Called to be saints/holy = invited to walk close to God. (v.2b)**

In verse 2, in the middle of the verse, Paul went on to explain more about calling. This time not the calling of Paul the apostle in verse 1, but rather about the calling of the believers in the church in Corinth in verse 2. In verse 1, Paul was called by the will of God, and we find also in verse 2 that for the believers, their calling was also from God. Their calling to be Christians was from the same God who also had called Paul to be an apostle and a preacher. Their calling as Gentiles to become believers was from the same God who called Paul to minister to the Gentiles. Their calling to become Christians was from the same God who sent Christ to die and rise again for the salvation of the souls of those sinners. The calling was from God to the people in Corinth who believed. What was that calling exactly? To repent of their sins and be converted? Yes, of course, but that had been previously done. To believe on Christ for their souls? Yes, of course, but that had been previously done. Instead, the exact calling was another and related important calling that was an integral outflow from their salvation, and this other calling was also a life-long calling. Look in the middle of verse 2, and I quote, "*called to be saints...*"

What does that mean? To be saints means called to be holy. People who are called by God to live holy lives. God was calling them to live different lives from the lives being lived by the other residents of sin-city. Notice, God was not calling out, not calling them to move away from sin city. God's call to them was not a geographic change, but rather a lifestyle change. Not a change of address, but a change of attitude and behavior. In fact, they were called to remain living there, and stay there permanently. They were not all conscripted to join Paul's traveling missionary team (although a few of them were called to that missionary work - such as Aquila, Priscilla, and probably Sosthenes.) The point remains that the majority of the church members were not called to join in traveling missionary work. They were being called by God to live lives within a sinful society that demonstrate that they have a Savior. They were being called to live lives that show to the people of that city that these believers have a God who is holy. As a result, their God was daily enabling them to live NOW in such a way that reflects them already possessing a future city to which they can go - a future city. Those saints living in Corinth were already citizens of a heavenly city to which they would go in the future, yet they were now assigned by God to keep on living in the earthly city of Corinth.

The majority of the people of Corinth were not walking with God. The other citizens of Corinth were not close to God. To live as a saint of God, to live as a child of God, to live as a citizen of the heavenly city, meant to walk close to God.

That meant listening to God through His Word and through the preachers that God had raised up after Paul left. That meant listening to God through His Word, written down by the Apostle Paul and sent to them in the form of this letter, and the second one to follow. 1 & 2 Corinthians. That meant praying to God. That meant examining the dirty ways of the sensual city of Corinth, and seeing if the dirt had gotten onto God's people who were also living right there in sin city. It meant to repent of their own dirt, and to believe in the cleansing of Jesus and believing in the righteous record of Jesus being given to them. It meant seeking God's strength and wisdom.

### **3. Co-called as God's people, along with Christians everywhere. (v.2c-3)**

*"...called to be saints together with all those who in every place call upon the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, both their Lord and ours: <sup>3</sup> Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ."*

The believers in Corinth had a Lord. Similarly, believers all around the world served the same Lord. The ethic or definition of right and wrong was the same around the world for all of God's people, for all Christians. Right and wrong has been the same in every generation of Christians since the first century in Corinth when this letter was written. The one right standard is set by the Lord. God defines holy living. God says what it means to walk close to God.

And as those who trusted in Christ Jesus, they knew the truth of the gospel. The gospel was that despite their sins, Christ had come close to them right there in the middle of a sinful society.

That is the same good news for us! We live right here in the middle of a sinful society! Christ has come to us. Christ is close by. God is with us. Immanuel. Especially during times of trouble, God is with us and faithful to us, accomplishing His great purposes in His perfect timing.

Christ is a wise and strategic God. Christ is spreading news about His salvation of His people. God has a strategy and a plan. His strategy is a patient strategy. His plan is better than our plan. God has placed us exactly where He wants us, right down to our co-workers and our neighbors.

Christ's Word is powerful. God's Word bears fruit. God has people nearby us in our sinful world that He intends to save. We do not give up praying for the conversion of loved ones, neighbors, co-workers, and citizens of our city. God's work is never in vain. The fruits may seem small. But as we study this letter, we will see how God used a small group to grow His church in a place like Corinth, and then God used the Corinthian church to bless the entire known world.

### **Conclusion:**

Walk close to God. We are safe in the middle of a broken and dirty world. Christ will never leave us, and never forsake us. God never abandons His children. There is nothing for us to fear. He cares for us in the middle of this hurting place,

and we can share this truth with anyone we meet. We have a powerful and caring God, and we tell others about Him. This comes naturally as we walk close to God.

James 4:8, "*Draw near to God, and He will draw near to you.*"