

1 Corinthians 1:1-17 "Called & Confirmed"

Anybody here ever found a *perfect* church? If you did, you knew right then & there that you could never join it because you'd ruin it! ☺ Truth be told, there is no "perfect church". Because the church is comprised of people, & people have problems... Perhaps the most notoriously problematic church in biblical history was the Corinthian church...

Some N.T. epistles were written to address majestic theological themes. Romans is like that; Ephesians is like that... 1 Corinthians is *not* like that. 1st Corinthians was written to deal *with* & bring correction *to* divisions, drunkenness, criticisms, contentions, immorality, self-seeking, love that was lacking... Forest fires were in full effect *in* the church *at* Corinth.

But the Corinthian church held a special place in the heart the apostle Paul. Outside of Ephesus, he stayed in Corinth longer than any other place throughout his missionary journeys. He stayed there evangelizing the city & establishing the church for 18 months. – Now, you should know that Corinth was the capital city of southern Greece & was arguably the most important city *in* Greece. It boasted a population of around 700,000 people (approx. 460,000 of which were slaves) & was located on a narrow strip of land (known as an isthmus) that connected the northern & southern parts of Greece (Map).

Because of its location, it was an important trade center. Trade going north & south through Greece would pass through Corinth. The sea around the southern tip of Achaia was so treacherous that rather than go around it, cargo ships would port in Corinth, off load their cargo & have it transported over land to the other side of the isthmus or in some cases, if their ship was small enough it would literally be dragged 4 miles (on rollers) across land rather than sail the 200 miles around that southern section of Greece.

All that to say there was a lot of overnight, or quick couple of day stop off kind of activities that took place in Corinth. It had earned the reputation of a city that had a reckless pursuit of pleasure (kind of a modern equivalent to Vegas). There were temples to Poseidon, Athena, Apollo, Hermes, Isis, Serapis & Asclepius in Corinth. However, most prominently was the worship of Aphrodite. – Her temple was located upon a hill that overlooked the city & housed 1,000 female prostitutes & priestesses who would descend upon the city every night in order to lure men to "worship" through sexual immorality.

Whenever the Greeks would put on a play, if there was a drunk or immoral character, they were always called "the Corinthian".

It was in this “dark” city that God established a beacon of light by leading Paul to plant a church there on his 2nd missionary journey... On his 3rd missionary journey, he was staying in Ephesus when a delegation was sent to him from Corinth w/questions concerning the problems that had infiltrated the church. What Paul wrote back is what we have before us now...

Vs 1

Today, when writing a letter, we state who it's written *too* at the beginning & who it's written *from* at the end. In the ancient world, they stated 1st who it was written *from*, *then* whom it was written *too*.

So we see, “Paul, called to be an apostle of J.C. through the will of God.” You might note the words, “to be” are in italics in your bible. What that means is that they were added by the translators w/the intent to bring clarification. More literally he states quite simply, yet emphatically, “Paul, a called apostle of J.C. through the will of God.”

It's important that we notice that from the very outset of this letter, in fact in the very 1st words of this letter, Paul is putting forth his credentials as an apostle. Because although Paul founded their church, was instrumental in leading them to Christ, & stayed there ministering among them for a year & a half... as you read 1st & 2nd Corinthians it becomes apparent that even though he loved *them*, many of the Christians in Corinth didn't have a whole lot of respect for *him* & his authority as an apostle.

So, from the very beginning Paul reminds them of the *source* of his authority, the kind of apostle he is. He's a “*called*” apostle of J.C. He wasn't appointed by a committee. He didn't win a popular vote. He didn't assume the position of his own initiative... We get the idea as we read some of Paul's letters, that because he wasn't one of the initial 12, that there were those who really held that against him & didn't really acknowledge him in that *same light*. “You're not 1 of the 12 Paul. You didn't walk around w/Jesus. You're not Peter, James or John, c'mon Paul, who do you think you are? Why would I give you that kind of a platform in my life?” Paul says, “I'll tell you why, because I'm a *called apostle of Jesus Christ* just the same.” “I haven't been appointed by the other apostles, I've been called of J.C. (notice) *through the will of God.*” The idea is, “I'm not an apostle by the will of man, but by the will of God.”

If you're not familiar w/Paul's story, you'll want to read the book of Acts to discover it, it's fascinating. Paul wasn't seeking some sort of position of power or influence w/in the church. Quite the opposite, he was seeking to persecute & eradicate the church from the face of the earth!

But when Jesus confronted him on the road to Damascus, & called him to be His witness, everything instantly & radically changed in his life. He went from being the foremost *persecutor* of the church to the foremost *preacher* of the gospel. But that's what Jesus does, isn't it? He confronts us, He calls us, He changes our lives... Paul was a "called apostle" of J.C. "Apostle" meaning "a special ambassador" or "representative" of J.C. to the world & to the church. –

"& Sosthenes our brother,". It would seem that this is more than likely the same "Sosthenes" mentioned in Acts 18:17. You might want to read Acts 18 in conjunction w/all this. When Paul came to Corinth, he began preaching in the synagogue. The ruler of the synagogue was a man named "Crispus". The short of the story is that Crispus was saved. But because he came to believe on J.C. he was fired from (or perhaps quit) his job as the ruler of the synagogue. – His replacement was a man named Sosthenes...

Ultimately Sosthenes had Paul brought before the Roman magistrate, accusing him of persuading people to worship God contrary to the Law of Moses. The Roman magistrate (however) didn't want anything to do w/settling religious disputes & he dismissed the case... the pagan Greeks being fed up w/Jewish problems took Sosthenes & beat him right then & there & the Roman magistrate ignored the whole scene!

Flash forward a couple of years & now we find Sosthenes saved & serving alongside Paul the apostle! & We say, "Wait, what!?" But because Luke doesn't record for us the story, we have to wait & see how he went from persecuting Paul to serving alongside Paul when we can ask him ourselves in heaven!

But the take away is this; often times it's people who are most vehemently opposed to you who are the most convicted by the Spirit & the closest to conversion! Once they've been "beat up" enough by the world, they'll come around.

Vs 2-3

Who's the letter *from*? Paul, a called apostle. An ambassador of J.C. Who is it *to*? The church of God, at Corinth. The main thing we want to recognize in that statement is that the church doesn't belong to man, it belongs to God. He's the One who has purchased it (Acts 20:28) w/His own blood. – As a believer, you've been bought at a price, not w/silver or gold, but w/the precious blood of Christ. We're not our own, we're His. Therefore, we're to glorify God, both in our body & in our spirit which are His.

It's the church of God, at Corinth. What a contrast. "The church of God" (something good, something holy, something pure), "which is at Corinth" (someplace bad, someplace defiled & dark).

I point this out because it helps us understand the tension between the city & the church, which helps us understand the letter of 1st Cor. – At the end of the day the question is this: is the church influencing the city, or is the city influencing the church?

& To make a quick application, it's the same question that confronts us today. Are we influencing the world around us? Or is the world around us influencing us? Think about that. Are you *affecting* the world around you, or is the world around you *infecting* you? Is your light "so shining" or being snuffed out?

"To those who are sanctified in Christ Jesus, called to be saints". The church belongs to God, it's *in* Christ Jesus. & This is what's critical for you & me as Christians & another take-away we get from 1st Cor. Because if you'll notice, as much as Paul is a called apostle, he says that *they* are called *saints*. Not, he's calling them saints, like, "How you doin saints?" But that they've been *called*, God's calling upon their lives has caused them to be saints.

Now; when we read of all the problems/precarious predicaments they find themselves in; we might wonder if they're even *saved*! Paul says, not only saved... *saints*! How is that possible? Because they're *in* Christ Jesus. Ladies in gentlemen, that's what it means to be a Christian. Let me put it this way. For them, being *at* Corinth, really wasn't that important. For you & me, being *at* Calvary Chapel Joplin isn't entirely essential. What's absolutely *imperative* is that you're *in* Christ Jesus.

Here's the point: being a saint (set apart in holiness to God) has zero to do w/what I *do*, it has everything to do w/what He's *done*. – Now, having said that, if we're *in* Christ, there's not going to be a sense of freedom *to* sin, a proper working out of grace in our lives is a freedom *from* sin (& we'll see that as we work our way through this letter). Paul will make clear throughout this epistle that a true understanding of grace, of what it means to be *in Christ* will be made manifest by Christlike character being developed in our lives.

Because as it pertains to "sanctification" there's more than one dynamic to it. There's what we call "positional sanctification" & "practical sanctification". *Positional* sanctification is what you receive the moment you believe on the Lord J.C. There is a transaction that takes place whereby Jesus removes the ramifications of your sin & replaces it w/all the benefits of His righteousness. He "imputes" or "accredits" you w/His righteousness. You are now, "Sanctified" before God. You have a position before God that is absolutely perfect, sinless (being in Christ Jesus).

However, on the "practical" side. We still have a sin nature that wars against the Spirit. We're not sinless (practically speaking). But as we grow, we're learning to sin, less & less.

So recognize that *in Christ*, we're set apart (sanctified) *from* the world *to* God. Our time, our talents, our treasures, everything that we are, is His.

As is true (notice) for all who in every place call on the name of J.C. our Lord. What Paul is laying out for *them*, he wants to teach *us* as well.

Vs 4-9

We love the fact that even though Paul will spend the majority of this rebuking sin & correcting error, he finds it 1st w/in his heart to rejoice *over* them & give thanks for them *before* God.

& We love the pattern that Paul establishes. Commendation before confrontation & exhortation. He points out the positive before shedding light on the negative. It's important when confronting someone w/a sin situation that they know that you love them, you're *for* them & you're grateful for the work of God *in* them. You're not there to simply tear into them, to dismantle them & leave them beaten & bruised.

Paul gives God thanks... for a # of things. 1st of all, for the *grace* of God when was given to them *by* (or again "*in*") Christ Jesus. Guys, every good thing that enters into the equation of our lives is the result of God's grace toward us. Both materially & spiritually. We're saved by grace, we grow by grace, we're strengthened by grace, our lives become a continual testimony of the sufficiency of God's grace.

Paul can't really say, "I thank God for the righteous lives you're living." Or, "Your faith is incredibly evident." But God's grace is on display for all to see. So Paul magnifies God's grace *in* them.

& Says, "... you were enriched in everything *by* Him in all utterance & all knowledge." Which again, is an overflow of God's grace toward them. When he speaks of utterance & knowledge, he's referencing spiritual gifts; tongues, prophecy, word of knowledge, interpretation of tongues & so forth (which we'll get into later on in this book).

But I want to highlight the phrase, "Enriched in everything by Him." I just want to go on record stating that Jesus enriches your life in every way. My marriage is enriched by Christ, friendships enriched by Christ, fellowship is enriched by Christ, my attitude toward work is enriched by Christ, my understanding of serving at church or elsewhere, enriched by Christ. Jesus elevates every aspect of our lives. Our study of the word of God is enriched by Christ...

Paul says, "You come short in no gift, eagerly waiting for the revelation of our Lord J.C." So, for all their shortcomings, the work of God is still on display in their lives...

Spiritual gifts, a proclamation of Jesus & an expectant anticipation of His return.

Whatever problems they had, we have to admit, these are some pretty impressive strong points. We may want to pride ourselves on not having these people's *problems*, but the question is, do we have their *positives*? Are the gifts of the Spirit at work among us, do we speak to people around us *about* Jesus, are we excited about the return of Jesus.

Now; again we say, these things aren't really to *their* credit, it's the work of God's grace *among* them. Nevertheless, these are great things to have credited *to* them.

Let's also see this. Spiritual gifts were flowing in this fellowship, yet they were still carnal. What's my point? Spiritual gifts at work *in/through* me, is no indication of my personal spiritual maturity. – Think about that. How often we equate a word of wisdom or knowledge, perhaps God grants healing through a laying on of hands & we think, "My, that person must be really holy, or mature spiritually to be used of God in such a capacity." That's faulty logic. The gifts of God magnify *not* how great *we are*, but how *gracious He is*.

Suffice it for now to say that it's entirely possible to be gifted *by* God, yet virtually fruitless, & totally unpleasing *to* God.

But even so, we note Paul's confidence that God will take care of their weaknesses & strengthen them, that is, "confirm them" (Vs 8) till the end, making them blameless in the day of our Lord J.C. – How can he rest in such confidence concerning a people riddled w/so many problems? It's in Vs 9. "God is faithful." God has *called* them, therefore God will *confirm* (that is, unconditionally establish) them.

What a great word of encouragement today. "God is faithful." Man isn't always faithful, God is faithful. If He's called you, He'll confirm you. Again, the key in your making it, my making it to heaven isn't found in my greatness, but rather God's faithfulness. When Asaph uttered the words of Ps 73, he said, "*I was so foolish and ignorant; I was like a beast before You. Nevertheless I am continually with You; You hold me by my right hand. You will guide me with Your counsel, And afterward receive me to glory.*"¹ He was sober to the fact of who he was as opposed to who God *is*. I am foolish, so often driven by the dictates of my flesh (like a beast). But **You** hold me by my right hand, *You* guide me w/*Your* counsel & afterward receive me to glory. It's not because of what I've done, it's because of who *You* (God) are. Faithful to *Your* word, to *Your* promises... To the Philippians Paul put it like this, "*...being confident of this very thing, that He who has begun a good work in you will complete it until the day of Jesus Christ.*"² You see, salvation; has nothing to do w/how great I am & everything to do w/how gracious God is.

¹ *The New King James Version*. (1982). [Ps 73:22-24]. Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

² *The New King James Version*. (1982). [Php 1:6]. Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

& In the end; all glory & honor & praise will go to Him alone.

Vs 10

The more we come to know of the apostle Paul the more impressed w/him we become. He's an *apostle of J.C.* He doesn't need to *plead* w/anybody. He can *command* w/all the authority of Jesus Himself! Yet he doesn't do that. Love compels him to plead, to beg them to be unified as believers.

Btw Paul references J.C. 11 times in these 1st 10 Vs. The centrality of Christ in the resolve of every issue becomes un-mistakenly evident. But he says, "Listen, I'm begging you, speak the same things, have the same mind, no divisions, no tearing or ripping apart of the body of Christ. The plea isn't for an elimination of diversity, but a harmony in the body. Rather than emphasizing their own opinions that they share the mind of Christ.

Vs 11-13

Couple things real quick. I love the fact that he brings Chloe to the forefront w/regard to legitimizing the problems. Listen; if you're going to make an accusation or bring me some sort of incriminating information against someone but not allow me to use your name when I look into it, then I'm probably not going to pursue it.

There was contention, quarreling among them. Paul says, "What I mean by that is this." & He begins to detail how the Christians at Corinth began to divide against one another by identifying themselves under different preachers/teachers that had come through.

Some were like, "Paul planted the church! I'm w/him!" Others were like, "He's not really much of a wordsmith, I love the appeal, the eloquence, the ability of Apollo to keep my attention. I'll follow that man to the ends of the earth!" Others were, "Peter was the one whom Jesus gave the keys to the kingdom! He was the original leader, the evangelist extraordinaire! I'm w/him!" Then there was the most spiritual of all... "We don't follow any *man*, we'll follow no footsteps but those of Jesus Himself!" (Essentially freeing themselves of any responsibility or accountability to man even though God established such order. They were too spiritual for *any* of that). & Honestly, it's not that they were saying those men were so great, but that they were so great for following them!

& Listen, it's not that it's wrong to make distinctions between churches, or styles, or pastors & preachers. One man's approach or character won't really appeal to every person so God has all kinds of different people, different personalities & that's great!

The problem is when I elevate the man rather than receive from the message.

We're all on the same team... Is Christ divided? No. Was your preacher crucified for your sins? No. So why elevate the man beyond the messenger status that God has given him? It's J.C. whom we exalt, whom we worship, whom we glorify. You weren't baptized into anyone else's name!

Vs 14-17

Evidently some were anchoring themselves to the fact that Paul himself baptized them (as though that validated something more godly for them). Paul says, "Hey, I thank God that I didn't baptized *anyone*, other than these few guys. & If there was anyone else, I don't even remember..."

& BTW. If this section of scripture doesn't serve as a proof text for the fact that baptism is not necessary for salvation, I don't know what does. It would be nothing short of blasphemy for Paul to *thank God* that he didn't baptize people if you couldn't be saved apart from it... & It's not that baptism isn't important. It is. It's simply that it's not essential to salvation. It's the outward declaration/demonstration of the inward transformation of my heart.

"For Christ did not send me to baptize, but to preach the gospel..." Not w/clever speaking, not trying to dazzle people, or wow them w/my words. Show them how smart I am by using words they need a dictionary to understand.

"Lest the cross of Christ should be made of no effect." Wow... The gospel is the power of God unto salvation. But I can neutralize its impact. I can detract from the message of J.C. & Him crucified by drawing everyone's attention to myself, keeping your focus on *my words* rather than *His work*.

The goal is never to win or wow the mind, it's to change the heart. & I can't do that; faith comes by hearing & hearing by the word of God. The centrality of Christ is such a key. So may Jesus be magnified & God be glorified both in our lives & in this place... Amen? Amen.

Prayer Points:

Father as we launch now into this letter we call 1st Cor, may You quicken us, challenge us & change us. That we repent of carnality, grow in maturity & model unity for the glory of Your name. Having called us, we trust You to confirm us to the end, thank You for Your grace.

Salvation can be yours, believe on the Lord J.C. Turn from your sin, trust in Him today. If God is calling you, be reconciled today through the blood of the cross of Christ.