Abounding Grace Christian Church

A Study of Paul's First Letter to the Corinthians – Part 1

I. Introduction: Today we begin a new study through the first letter of Paul to the Corinthian Church. The Apostle Paul established the church in Corinth during his second missionary journey around 51 A.D. He wrote this letter about 5 years later around 56 A.D. Most likely Paul wrote the letter while he was ministering at Ephesus during his third missionary journey. In **16:8**, Paul said that he would remain in Ephesus until Pentecost. Paul, along with his team, including, Aquila and Priscilla, who were husband and wife, pioneered the church which was made up primarily of Gentiles (non-Jews). **(cf. Acts 18:1-19).**

II. Purpose of the Letter - Paul wrote this letter to respond to their questions and to correct their wrong doctrine and sin. Though written over 1900 years ago, this letter is as relevant today as it ever was, for it addresses many issues we face today including:

- Church splits
- Sexual immorality in the church
- The role of women in the church
- The use and abuse of Spiritual gifts
- Forgiveness
- Marriage, divorce, and singleness
- False doctrines
- How to live for Jesus in a corrupt world

III. The city of Corinth.

A. Corinth was an important port city of Greece and the Roman capital of that region.

B. In the first century, Corinth had a population of 700,000 people.

1. About 500,000 of those people were slaves.
2. About 200,000 of those people were free.
3. Corinth was an immoral city, having 12 pagan temples, and the most important of them was the temple of Aphrodite.
    a. Aphrodite (called Venus by the Romans) was the goddess of love and sex.
    b. The temple of Aphrodite employed 1,000 male and female prostitutes at any one time.

IV. Who was Paul?

A. Paul was born in Tarsus, an old city, and the capital of Cilicia (what is now, the Southern coast of Turkey) - **Acts 22:3.** This is believed to be the same city to which Jonah attempted to flee **(Jonah 1:3).**

B. He belonged to the sect of the Pharisees, and his father was likewise a member of the same, for Paul called himself **"…a Pharisee, the son of a Pharisee…" (Acts 23:6).** Before his encounter with Christ, he was a dangerous persecutor of Christians **(Acts 8:1-3; 9:1-9).**

C. Paul was also a tent maker by trade **(Acts 18:1-3).** It was a Jewish custom to teach boys a certain trade.

D. Paul was born a Roman citizen. This was a high honor and privilege. It could be bought for large sums of money **(Acts 22:25-29). (Note: The name "Paul" was his Roman name and the name "Saul" was his Hebrew name). Acts 13:9.**

E. Paul's primary calling was to be an apostle to the Gentiles (non-Jews) – **Romans 11:13; Galatians 2:7-8.**

F. Paul received his religious education in Jerusalem and was trained under one of, if not the most, highly respected Pharisees, Gamaliel **(Acts 22:3).** We saw the influence of Gamaliel demonstrated in **Acts 5:33-39.**

G. He wrote 13 epistles that comprise almost one-fourth of the New Testament. Even the apostle Peter referred to Paul's writings as **"Scripture"** and, at times, Peter thought they were hard to understand **(II Peter 3:15-16).**

V. Basic Outline.

A. Introduction - **1:1–9**
B. Paul's response to the report from Chloe's household - **1:10—6:20**
C. Paul's responses to the Corinthians' questions - **7:1—14:40**
D. The resurrection of Christ and Christians - **15:1–58**
E. Conclusion - **16:1–24**

VI. Exposition of Chapter One.

A. **Verses 1- "Paul, called *to be* an apostle of Jesus Christ through the will of God, and Sosthenes *our* brother,…"**

1. **"…an apostle of Jesus Christ…" –** The word **"apostle"** – "**broadly refers to a 'messenger, delegate,' or 'sent one.' In classical Greek, *apostolos* referred to a person of merit sent as an envoy or on behalf of a master in an administrative role."**[1] Here Paul is making it clear that he was a messenger, delegate and a representative of Jesus Christ. From the onset, Paul wanted to establish the fact that he carried authority because it seems apparent in the letter that his authority had been questioned by some. Dr. Stanley Horton writes;

"Even so, some, especially in Corinth, questioned and some rejected his apostleship. Because he was the last of the apostles to see the risen Christ, those who did accept it considered him 'abnormally born' (1 Cor. 15:7–8). Because of this, some challenged his apostolic authority (1 Cor. 9:3; 2 Cor. 11:4–6, 13). Thus, he was careful to declare his apostleship again and again as not "by man, but by Jesus Christ and God the Father" (Gal. 1:1; 2:8; cf. Rom. 1:1; 11:13; 1 Cor. 1:1; 9:1; 2 Cor. 1:1; 12:12; Eph. 1:1; Col. 1:1; 1 Tim. 1:1; 2:7; 2 Tim. 1:1, 11)."[2]

2. **"…of Jesus Christ…"** - **"Christ"** is the Greek translation of the Hebrew ***Messiah*** **("Anointed One")**. This refers to the promised One sent to bring salvation **(Isaiah 42:1; 61:1–3; Luke 4:17–21; John 4:25–26). "Jesus"** is the name given to the baby in Bethlehem by the angel **(cf. Matthew 1:21).** It means; "**Yahweh saves" or "Yahweh is salvation"**
3. **"…through the will of God…" –** Paul reinforces the fact that his apostleship is not by his own choosing, but by God's calling. In **Galatians 1:1**, Paul writes; **"Paul, an apostle (not from men nor through man, but through Jesus Christ and God the Father who raised Him from the dead),"** Too many people today are either appointing themselves or receiving appointment by men to be called apostles. It was never meant to be a title, it was meant to be a job description.
4. **"…and Sosthenes *our* brother,…" –** Very little is known about this man. Dr. Stanley Horton writes:

"A certain Sosthenes was the chief ruler of the Jewish synagogue in Corinth when the Jews dragged Paul before the judgment seat of the Roman proconsul Gallio. Gallio threw the case out of court and the crowd beat up Sosthenes (Acts 18:12–17). Sosthenes was not a common name, so it is probable that the same Sosthenes became a Christian, joined Paul to learn more of the gospel in order to become a good minister of Christ, and is here identified as 'Brother Sosthenes.' Nothing indicates that he had any part in writing the letter, however. He was with Paul and Paul included him in the salutation because he was well-known to the Corinthian church."[3]

B. **Verse 2 – "To the church of God which is at Corinth, to those who are sanctified in Christ Jesus, called *to be* saints, with all who in every place call on the name of Jesus Christ our Lord, both theirs and ours:…"**

1. **"…to those who are sanctified in Christ Jesus, called *to be* saints,…" –** The word **"sanctified"** means; **"*to render* or *declare sacred* or *holy, consecrate*."**[4]

"I am writing to God's church in Corinth, to you who have been called by God to be his own holy people. He made you holy by means of Christ Jesus, just as he did for all people everywhere who call on the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, their Lord and ours." – I Corinthians 1:2 - NLT

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[1] *Mounce's Complete Expository Dictionary of Old and New Testament Words,* William D. Mounce, Gen. ed. (Zondervan Publishers, Grand Rapids, 2006.)
[2] Stanley M. Horton, *I & II Corinthians: A Logion Press Commentary* (Springfield, MO: Logion Press, 1999), 17.
[3] Ibid., 17–18.
[4] Joseph Henry Thayer, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament: Being Grimm's Wilke's Clavis Novi Testamenti* (New York: Harper & Brothers., 1889), 6.