**The Church at Corinth**

**A Church Facing Inner Problems - #1**

**Introduction to 1 Corinthians**

**First: The Church**

1. A divided community over the leadership (1:10-21)
2. A mixed community of Jews and Gentiles (1:240
3. Some of noble origin (1:26)
4. Some of the refuse of the society, slaves (1:28; 7:21)
5. Still some of them were infants in faith (2:1-3) and these were the cause of division
6. Some were sexually immoral (3:17-16; 5:1-13; 6:15-20; 10:8)
7. Ignore the church and go to the Roman Courts to get a verdict (6:1-7)
8. Problems with eating meat that was sold in the market by the priests of the pagan gods (8:10-13)
9. Misuse of the Lord’s Supper (10:15-22; 11:17-34)
10. Disputed attitudes to women (11:1-16)
11. Division over the gifts of the Holy Spirit (12:1-31)
12. Doubt about the resurrection (chapter 15)

Are there more problems that we can add to this list?

**Second: The People**

Paul addressed all those who were part of all these problems directly or just related to this community. Paul never denied their belonging to the church but called them all:

1. Saints (1:2)
2. Belonging to Christ (3:23)
3. Sanctified by the Spirit (6:11)
4. Baptized into one body the body of Christ (12:12-13)
5. The body of Christ and the members of the body of Christ (12:27)

**The Oldest Greek Text of the Letter**

1. P15, 3rd cen. At the Egyptian Museum in Cairo it contains (7:18-8:14)

2. P46, is the most famous Chester Beatty Library, Dublin about 200, it contains, 1:1-1-9; 29-4-14; 14:16-15:15; 15:17-16:22)

**Place of Writing**

The letter that we now know as 1 Corinthians was written in Ephesus about the year 56 A.D. and before that year’s feast of Pentecost (1 Cor 16: 8, 19). Echoes of the letter to the Corinthians were found in other letters of Paul such as Colossians 2:5 (*absent in the body, but present in the spirit*), Ephesians 3:8 echoes 1 Corinthians 15:9-10 (*God’s grace given to the least of the saints*); 1 Timothy 1:20 echoes 1 Corinthians 5:5 (*delivering one to Satan*); 1 Timothy 2:11-12 and 1 Cor 1:10-12, women silent in the church).

The early fathers of the church provided us with long quotations from the book that are much older than the Greek Papyri that we possess now. These include writings of Clement of Rome about 96 A.D., Ignatius of Antioch about 107 A.D., the Gnostic Marcion who died in 160 A.D. and was the first one to put together the NT from a Gnostic point of view, had included first Corinthians in the letters of Paul according to the witness of Tertullian (against Marcion 3:5:4), and Irenaeus, bishop of Lyon (140-200). So we are looking at the period before 200.

**Old Commentaries**

1. The oldest commentary on the Latin translation was named after Ambrosiaster. This is the name given to the writer of a commentary on St. [Paul's](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Paul_of_Tarsus) epistles, valuable for the [Latin](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Latin) text of the [New Testament](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/New_Testament). This commentary was erroneously attributed for a long time to St. Ambrose. The commentary itself was written during the papacy of [Pope Damasus I](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pope_Damasus_I), that is, between 366 and 384 A.D., and is considered an important document of the Latin text of Paul before the [Vulgate](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Vulgate) of [Jerome](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jerome), and of the interpretation of Paul prior to St Augustine. A complete English translation was published by IVP, in two volumes, 2009.

2. Greek commentaries are those of Didymus the Blind of Alexandria (313-398 A.D.), and Severian of Gabala (400 A.D.).

3. The next full-length work to appear in Greek was the sermon series of John Chrysostom (347-407), who became patriarch of Constantinople but was exiled by the court because of his boldness in criticizing its corruption. Each homily of his concludes with a long section relating to Christian daily life. These homilies are now on the Web: The fathers of the church.

4. The great learned bishop Theodore of Mopsuestia (350-428), was a truly great commentator, but his work survived only in the Catenae (chain of quotations from the fathers of the church). The complete text has disappeared.

5. Another commentary came from Theodoret of Cyr (Cyrrhus) (393-466), a very learned bishop. Now available in English translation, by Robert C. Hill, 2001

**Why Did Paul Write This Letter?**

1. Some members of the church disagreed with one another in partisanship, wanting to be called followers of Paul, of Peter or of Apollos rather than of Christ. Paul strongly disapproved of this sectarian form of life that has nothing to do with the Gospel. This is not just an old problem but is also new one. To these three groups, others disagreed and declared themselves partisans of Christ alone. For Paul, a Christian doesn’t reject the others in the name of Jesus; if they have rejected others they have done that to Christ himself. This is the meaning of being crucified with Christ.

2. There seems to have been a fifth group who had developed a pleasure in eloquence and worldly philosophy (*Sophia*, “wisdom,” the catch word of the time, may be like being “politically correct”), with the result that although they were Christians, they were inclined more to philosophical notions that were regarded as higher that faith in the crucified Jesus Christ, the Crucified Wisdom of God.

3. Some others were puffed up with anger, frustrated because Paul had not been to visit them.

4. Sexual immorality seems to have had a place in the life in the community since it was not condemned by the society.

5. Corinthians were behaving unlawfully and deceitfully toward one another and preferred to seek recompense in the Roman courts.

6. Marriage and celibacy.

7. The gifts of the Holy Spirit were pushed away and Paul had to remind them of the supremacy of love.

**The City of Corinth**

This city is still in existence in modern Greece. In ancient times it prided itself on its great wealth. It was full of orators and philosophers, one of whom was Periander who was considered one of the seven wise men of his time. He upgraded Corinth's port, and built a ramp across the [Isthmus of Corinth](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Isthmus_of_Corinth), the “Diolkos,” which was a paved track nearby, which enabled boats to be moved overland. The shortcut allowed ancient vessels to avoid the dangerous circumnavigation of the Peloponnese peninsula (southern Greece). Corinth was a city of mixed races and different gods and goddess, where magic, sorcery and sexual immorality were wide spread among the population.

**I Corinthians - Text**

***1:1*** *Paul, called to be an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God, and our brother Sosthenes,* ***2****To the church of God that is in Corinth, to those who are sanctified in Christ Jesus, called to be saints, together with all those who in every place call on the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, both their Lord and ours: 3 Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.*

**Notes**

**Verse 1:1** *Paul* is a Greek name, Paulos. He was a Roman citizen (Acts 16:37; 22:25-29; 23:27). The name and the citizenship allowed him to take his plea to the Roman Emperor. The name means “called by the will of God,” (2 Cor 1:1; Gal 1:15) because the church must be reminded that he is an apostle by the will of God so that his teaching comes from the One who send Christ. “By the will of God” is to say that Paul is not one of the false apostles who had not been sent by Christ, and also says that their false teaching is to bring back to enslave humans to works of the Law.

*Apostle* is originally Greek and means “send.”

*Our brother Sosthenes* is a fellow worker, and the use of “brother, ***adelphos*** although Greek, but it has a Hebrew background, “ach” as in (Lev 19:17) but now he is a brother because of the coming of the Son of God as human, (1 Cor 1:10,11,26; 2:1; 3:1; 4:6; 5:11; 6:5; 7:12,14,15, 24, 29; 8:9, 12,13; 10:1; 11:33; 12:1; 14:6,20,39; 15:1,6,31,50,53).

Theodoret of Cyr thinks that Sosthenes was a Corinthian. He is mentioned in Acts (18:17), where Luke says that in the time of Gallio the Greeks arrested him and beat him. (Theodoret, Vol 1, p 165)

**Verse 1:2:** *To the Church at Corinth sanctified in Christ Jesus, called to be saints.* By mentioning those who are already “sanctified” and in the church, this surely means that the letter is addressed not only to those who are already cleansed from their sins but also to those who still await cleansing, though they are among those whom God has called saints are those who are the members of the body of Christ (12:12-13) but still have defects. The church ***Ekklesia***, which means “assembly.” It is not a name of separation, but a name of unity and concord.

**Verse 1:2-3** *with all those who in every place call on the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, both their Lord and ours: 3 Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.* What marks a Christian “assembly” is that those who are assembled call on the name of the Lord Jesus and because they invoked in prayer the name of the Lord, grace and peace can come from God and is given in Jesus Christ who is our “peace.” If our peace comes from God’s grace, why are we so proud, since we are saved by grace? How can anyone find grace with God, except through humility? (John Chrysostom, Hom. on First Corinthians 1:3)

**1 Corinthians 4-9 – Thanksgiving**

***1:4*** *I give thanks to my God always (constantly) for you because of the grace of God that has been given you in Christ Jesus,* ***5*** *for in every way you have been enriched in him, in speech and knowledge of every kind—* ***6*** *just as the testimony of**Christ has been strengthened among you—* ***7*** *so that you are not lacking in any spiritual gift as you wait for the revealing of our Lord Jesus Christ.* ***8*** *He will also strengthen you to the end, so that you may be blameless on the day of our Lord Jesus Christ.* ***9*** *God is faithful; by him you were called into the communion of his Son, Jesus Christ our Lord.*

**Notes**

**Verse 1:4** Grace has its origin in God but is given in Jesus Christ (Rom 12:3; 6; 15:15; 1 Cor 3: 10; 2 Cor 8:1; Gal 2:9). “In Christ” means:

a. Secure

b. Not because of merits

c. Not from us and can’t be lost, because Jesus is the Lord

d. “Grace must not be compared to our sins” (Philemon)

**Verse 1:5** … *enriched with speech and knowledge* … Knowledge shows what there is to know; speech goes further and explains it. Here it is the grace that they have received in the preaching of the doctrine of truth, because they have acquired knowledge of God in Christ.

**Verse 1:6**  *… the testimony to Christ is confirmed by …*

1. The revelation of the Fatherhood of God
2. The unexpected redeeming love
3. By the indwelling of God in us

**Verse 1:7** … *lacking no spiritual gift* … Paul is saying, why are you quarrelling? Paul is preparing the Corinthians for the criticism he is about to give them.

“For whoever quarrels seems to have lost his or her awareness that we are clear-headed because of God’s grace. We have fallen into great sins because of God’s mercy.” – Philemon

So Paul wants to start not with unpleasant words, antagonizing his hearers. He starts with the fullness that will be given when the Lord appears, for the Lord will give us the greater gifts that He promised.

The Revelation of Our Lord Jesus Christ in this life does not give us the fullness of everything. Now we enjoy temporary gifts such as forgiveness of sins but later the fullness of the eternal gift of adoption.

**Verse 1:8** *... sustained by Christ who is the Word and Wisdom of God …* Moreover, Christ sustains us not merely for a day or two, but forever.

**Are you afraid of the Day of Judgment?**

The Corinthians were far from being “guiltless,” as we can see from the rest of the letter. Paul says to me and to you, “*He will also strengthen you to the end, so that you may be blameless on the day of our Lord Jesus Christ*”

**Verse 1:9**  *… God is faithful …*  means that we can trust his self-revelation. His Word reveals him. His love saves us even on that Day

**Verse 1:9**  *… called to communion …*  by God’s unfailing faithfulness toward us in this regard, so we ourselves must not be found to be faithless or dishonorable with respect to our adoption. Rather we must remain faithful in it.

A Note from Philemon

George my dear brother,

The Day of Judgment is not something that should make you tremble. If you are afraid of Jesus and afraid of meeting him, this means that you are among those who think that they are saved by their good works. This means that this fear will never go away till you learn to love the merciful Lord.

***Pope’s Notes***

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