

Wheelersburg Baptist Church 3/30/11 Wednesday Evening
1 Corinthians 1:1-9

This evening we're beginning a journey through the book of 1 Corinthians, which we introduced last time. We'll be taking an inductive, discussion-oriented approach.

God specializes in taking His people from where they are to where they should be. Perhaps the book of 1 Corinthians illustrates this better than any other.

Discuss: How so?

Let's begin our trek...

I. We meet the author of the letter (1).

A. Paul wrote it.

Q: How does Paul identify himself in this letter?

1. *He was called to be an apostle.*

Q: When and where did that happen? What makes Paul's call to be an apostle distinct?

2. *He was called by the will of God.*

Q: What does that indicate?

B. Sosthenes assisted him.

Q: Who was he? We can't be sure. There is a Sosthenes mentioned in Acts 18:17, a synagogue ruler.

II. We meet the recipients of the letter (2-3).

Read vv 2-3.

A. We learn some general truths about the church (2a).

1. *It's God's church.*

It is the church *of God*. It's not Paul's church.

2. *There is one church.*

It is the *church*, not churches, in Corinth.

Note: In his letter to the Galatians, Paul begins, "To the churches in Galatia (1:2)." Paul begins his letters of Ephesians and Philippians, "To the saints..."

3. *The church has a geographical location.*

It is the church *in Corinth*.

B. We learn some specific things about the church (2b-3).

Just what is a church? Paul gives four characteristics (this isn't exhaustive; there are other characteristics, but these are vital to state for this particular church, in light of the problems they were facing which Paul will address later in the letter)

1. *The church is made up of sanctified people.*

Q: Sanctified how? "In Christ Jesus"—a key phrase we'll consider later more carefully

2. *The church is made up of called people.*

Q: Called to be what? (see also Eph 1:4)

3. *The church is made up of people who call on the name of the Lord.*

Q: What's the significance of the term "Lord" here?

Notice the significance of the word "call" in this section.

Christians are both "called" and people who "call."

4. *The church is made up of people who are recipients of grace and peace.*

This is more than a mere formality in greeting. Why does Paul often begin his letters with this statement?

III. Paul begins the letter by putting the spotlight on God (4-9).

This is key. Paul's going to deal with some heavy issues in this letter. But before he does, he puts the attention on God. Why is that important to do?

A. Paul thanked God (4-7).

For what? Because of three activities in our behalf...

1. *He gave us grace in Christ (4).*

2. *He enriched us (5).*

Again, notice the preposition, "In Him." All that we enjoy is ours because of our identification with and association *with Christ*.

Throughout his epistles Paul emphasizes the union of believers with Christ. Right here he states we are *in Christ* (vv 2, 4, 5), *with Christ* (v 9), and the fact that we receive grace and peace *from Christ* (3).

a. This affects our speaking. (lit. reading, "in all word"—Greek word *logo*)

b. This affects our knowledge.

3. *He confirmed us (6-7).*

a. We don't lack any spiritual gift.

Keep in mind he's talking to the whole church, not to the individual Christian. No one Christian possesses all the gifts. But the church possesses all it needs.

Discuss: Why does Paul establish this point here?

b. We are waiting for Christ to be revealed.

Q: What kind of perspective are we supposed to live with?

B. Paul affirmed his confidence in what God would do (8).

Two things...

1. *He will keep us strong to the end.*

Q: To the end of what?

2. *He will present us blameless on the day of Christ.*

Keep in mind to whom Paul is speaking? What was true of the church receiving this letter? Lots of problems, and Paul will deal with them forcefully shortly.

But even Christians with problems are secure, not because of themselves, but because of God.

Discuss: How could you use this verse to help a young Christian who's struggling with doubts about their salvation?

C. Paul emphasized the God-centeredness of our salvation (9).

1. *He called us into fellowship with His Son.*

This is a reference to the effectual call of God (see Rom 8:28ff). This is what happened the day you were saved. God *called* you into fellowship with His Son.

J. I. Packer comments on the meaning of the “effectual call of God.” I’ll read the explanation, and then we’ll explore the texts he cites:

“What is being spoken of here is the many-sided reality of Christian conversion, involving illumination, regeneration, faith, and repentance. It is being analyzed as a sovereign work of God, “effectually” (i.e., effectively) performed by the power of the Holy Spirit. The concept corresponds to Paul’s use of the verb *call* (meaning “bring to faith”) and *called* (meaning “converted”) in Romans 1:6; 8:28, 30; 9:24; 1 Corinthians 1:24, 26; 7:18, 21; Galatians 1:15; Ephesians 4:1, 4; and 2 Thessalonians 2:14, and contrasts with the idea of a merely external and ineffective invitation, as found in Matthew 22:14.

“Original sin renders all human beings naturally dead (unresponsive) to God, but in effectual calling God quickens the dead. As the outward call of God to faith in Christ is communicated through the reading, preaching, and explaining of the contents of the Bible, the Holy Spirit enlightens and renews the heart of elect sinners so that they understand the gospel and embrace it as truth from God, and God in Christ becomes to them an object of desire and affection. Being now regenerate and able by the use of their freed will to choose God and the good, they turn away from their former pattern of living to receive Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior and to start a new life with him.”¹

2. *He is faithful.*

Q: How does it affect you to know that God is *faithful*?

¹Packer, J. I., *Concise Theology*, (Wheaton, Illinois: Tyndale House Publishers, Inc.) 1993.