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# Grace Not Lacking?

## 1 Corinthians 1:1-9

Everyone has story...

Everyone has a history...

Every story has a backstory...

### The Church's History

Paul planted this church around 52 AD. He wrote the letter around 57 AD while he was in Ephesus. How did this church come into existence? We have the story of its founding in **Acts 18:1-17**

#### ***Initial Ministry as Bi-Vocational (v. 1-4)***

<sup>1</sup> After this Paul left Athens and went to Corinth. <sup>2</sup> And he found a Jew named Aquila, a native of Pontus, recently come from Italy with his wife Priscilla, because Claudius had commanded all the Jews to leave Rome. And he went to see them, <sup>3</sup> and because he was of the same trade he stayed with them and worked, for they were tentmakers by trade. <sup>4</sup> And he reasoned in the synagogue every Sabbath, and tried to persuade Jews and Greeks.

Paul leverages his vocational skills and his standing as a Jewish Rabbi to preach the gospel in Corinth. He works through the week in the tent shop of Aquila and Priscilla and on Saturday goes to the Synagogue and preaches about Christ from the Old Testament.

#### ***Intensive Ministry as Supported (v. 5-6)***

<sup>5</sup> When Silas and Timothy arrived from Macedonia, Paul was occupied with the word, testifying to the Jews that the Christ was Jesus. <sup>6</sup> And when they opposed and reviled him, he shook out his garments and said to them, "Your blood be on your own heads! I am innocent. From now on I will go to the Gentiles."

Joined by Silas and Timothy who bring financial support from the church at Philippi, Paul is now freed to dedicate himself to Word. He continues to focus his Christ-centered preaching on the Jews. They decisively reject the man and the message. So he leaves the synagogue and turns to the Gentiles.

#### ***Strategic Ministry to the Gentiles (v. 7-11)***

<sup>7</sup> And he left there and went to the house of a man named Titius Justus, a worshiper of God. His house was next door to the synagogue. <sup>8</sup> Crispus, the ruler of the synagogue, believed in the Lord, together with his entire household. And many of the Corinthians hearing Paul believed and were baptized. <sup>9</sup> And the Lord said to Paul one night in a vision, "Do not be afraid, but go on speaking and do not be silent, <sup>10</sup> for I am with you, and no one will attack you to harm you, for I have many in this city who are my people." <sup>11</sup> And he stayed a year and six months, teaching the word of God among them.

Paul begins a Christian gathering next door to the synagogue at a Roman's home (assumed from his name), a gentile, God-fearing Titus Justus. Some think that he was the "Gaius my host" referred to in Romans 16:23. The connection between Gaius and Crispus in Acts 18:7-8 and 1 Corinthians 1:14 is certainly significant.

The Lord also saves the elder of the synagogue and his family. As the opposition rises, the Lord tells Paul to keep preaching because the Lord has many of his elect in Corinth. For 18 months more, Paul continued to preach the Word in the church at Corinth. During this time, Paul wrote the letter to the Romans.

### ***Legal Persecution by the Jews (v. 12-17)***

<sup>12</sup> But when Gallio was proconsul of Achaia, the Jews made a united attack on Paul and brought him before the tribunal, <sup>13</sup> saying, "This man is persuading people to worship God contrary to the law." <sup>14</sup> But when Paul was about to open his mouth, Gallio said to the Jews, "If it were a matter of wrongdoing or vicious crime, O Jews, I would have reason to accept your complaint. <sup>15</sup> But since it is a matter of questions about words and names and your own law, see to it yourselves. I refuse to be a judge of these things." <sup>16</sup> And he drove them from the tribunal. <sup>17</sup> And they all seized Sosthenes, the ruler of the synagogue, and beat him in front of the tribunal. But Gallio paid no attention to any of this.

The Jews drug Paul before Gallio, the Roman proconsul (magistrate). As soon as they indicated that this a dispute within Judaism, Gallio refused to hear the case and threw them out. The effect of his decision was, at least for a while, to associate Christianity with Judaism and the legal protection afforded to Jews.

Since this effort was led by Sosthenes, the new leader of the synagogue, the angry Jews took him and beat him (nice group of godly Jews, yes?) All we know is that between this event and the writing of the letter, Sosthenes came to know the Lord. He was sent to Ephesus to carry the letter from the church to Paul.

What is the church like? Gleaning through the book gives us this picture of a troubling church from David Prior.

It was a large church—many Corinthians were converted to Christ. It was full of cliques, each following a different personality. Many Christians were very snobbish: at fellowship meals the rich kept to themselves, and the poor were left alone. There was very little church discipline: a lot of laxity was allowed, both in morals and in doctrine—an all-too-common combination. They were unwilling to submit to authority of any kind and the integrity of Paul's own apostleship was frequently questioned. There was a distinct lack of humility and of consideration for others, some being prepared to take fellow-Christians to court and others celebrating their new-found freedom in Christ without the slightest regard for the less robust consciences of fellow-believers. In general, they were very keen on the more dramatic gifts of the Spirit and were short on love rooted in the truth. [Prior, p. 19]

## The Church's Call (v. 1-3)

The letter opens with the standard form of the day. Because letters were written on scrolls, the author identifies himself at the beginning. But Paul often has more to say in the salutation that appears at first.

<sup>1</sup> Paul, called by the will of God to be an apostle of Christ Jesus, and our brother Sosthenes, <sup>2</sup> To the church of God that is in Corinth, to those sanctified in Christ Jesus, 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 Author (v. 1)

The letter is from the authorized Apostle, Paul. He has been called by God's will. It was God's sovereign choice that set Paul aside for salvation and for service as an apostle. This he has been appointed by God. He has authority to speak for God to the church. What he will write is God's Word to them and to us.

Paul is with the approved brother, Sosthenes. Sosthenes has come to Ephesus with a letter from the church to Paul. Further, he seems to be giving Paul a feel for just how troubled the church was.

### The Recipients (v. 2)

The recipients are the called out assembly gathered in Corinth. Here is the church in Corinth. With no clear exception in the Scriptures, there is only one church in each city. With all the of the failures and troubles at Corinth, Paul never does two things that are the default now. He never sends people to another church – "since the church is so bad, go to the church across town." He does not send them away to start a new church *as an alternative to the troubled one* – "since the church is so bad, it is time to start a new church that is better." I am not saying that there is never a case to do either – but we are too quick to not work through to solve problems Biblically.

In spite of their troubles, Paul still recognizes their standing before God. They are sanctified in Christ Jesus and called to be saints. The Bible primarily thinks of sanctification as a one-time act of the Spirit that sets us apart from the world and places us into Christ. Though this church has many spiritual and sin struggles, the true members have been sanctified. They have been placed into Lord Jesus Christ. The challenge is to be conformed to Christ and transformed into who they really are. They have been called to become saints, that is, to be sanctified ones. The Bible consistently calls Christians saints. Christians are never called "sinners". They are saints. Now they do sin. They do many foolish and sometimes wicked things. They struggle with sinful thoughts and attitudes. But they do not do so because they are *sinners*. Christians sin because they are still subject to temptations. But they have been saved, sanctified and thus are no long sinners before God, but rather called to be saints.

Their connections are referred to by the words "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:"

They are called to be saints locally. There is an important "we are God's people together" in a local gathered church. We are here face-to-face with other of God's sanctified saints.

The emphasis is on their being saints globally. They are connected together with all who call on Jesus' Name. This is an important thought. It means that...

...they cannot live as though other Christians do not matter.

...they have spiritual responsibilities to other churches.

...they all have one Lord who has called them and speaks to them through the Apostles.

### ***The Greeting (v. 3)***

In Paul's letters, this is a standard greeting. He takes the normal Greek word for "greetings" and uses a form of it that transforms it into a uniquely Christian greeting, "Grace to you." He also takes the Hebrew greeting, "Shalom" and simply speaks it in his own language, "Peace from God..." As he is often having to deal with the troubles between Jews and Gentiles in the Christian churches, he has now take a Gentile and a Hebrew greeting and transformed them into uniquely Christian speech.

He sends them grace and peace, that which God supplies to His people. He graces them in order to enable them. He grants them with God and with each other so that they may have fellowship.

But there is something more here. We see in the repeated words, one of which is not obvious in English. It is in the word "calling".

Paul is called to be an Apostle.

Christians are called to be saints.

Christians are the church, the called out assembly, in a locale.

Christians call upon the Name of the Lord.

Paul is making a point about this idea of being "called". He is deeply self-aware of God's initiative in his own call to be an Apostle. He is also highlighting the call of the Christians at Corinth, both individually and corporately. He seems to be saying this: 'God called me to be an apostle, God called each one of you to be saints, to enjoy the fellowship of his Son, Jesus.' If God had never issued this call, Paul would not have become an apostle. If God had not called each person who was saved in Corinth, they would have never known Christ. They would have never come to share in him and be God's special people, His saints. Paul is declaring that God calls each person individually so that that person in turn calls on the Lord, becoming part of the saints, sanctified ones and called out assembly. [Adapted from Prior, p. 20]

### **The Church's Grace (v. 4-9)**

Paul looks at the Corinthian church as it is *in Christ* before he looks at anything else that is true of the church. In doing so, Paul is beginning to make an important and much needed reorientation. All that God had done for the church (at Corinth) had turned their heads and swelled their hearts. But having an abundance of God's graces *is all about God* not all about us. In this way Paul uses his commendation and confidence in them to shape his correction of them.

<sup>4</sup> I give thanks to my God always for you because of the grace of God that was given you in Christ Jesus, <sup>5</sup> that in every way you were enriched in him in all speech and all knowledge— <sup>6</sup> even as the testimony about Christ was confirmed among you— <sup>7</sup> so that you are not lacking in any gift, as you wait for the revealing of our Lord Jesus Christ, <sup>8</sup> who will sustain you to the end, guiltless in the day of our Lord Jesus Christ. <sup>9</sup> God is faithful, by whom you were called into the fellowship of his Son, Jesus Christ our Lord.

### ***God's Enabling Provision (v. 4-6)***

Paul is thankful for the fullness of *God's enabling provision*. Anything that are and have is come from God. It is therefore necessary and compelling for us to be grateful that God has abundantly supplied the gathered fellowship with all that it needs. God's grace filling the church should cause the church to respond with humble gratitude. Yet, sadly, that is not what we are going to find.

God's grace enriched them with all the gifts. This is a simple statement of fact. The saints in the called out assembly in Corinth lacked no gift. They were perfectly enabled to do all that sanctified ones in fellowship with one another and with Jesus are supposed to do. There was nothing that they were required to do that God had not equipped them to do. This is true of any fellowship. Jesus was raised on high and through the Spirit gave gifts to people, gave gifted people to the church and those people are to equip the church for their use of the gifts in serving one another (Ephesians 4:1-16). They were enriched in human knowledge (gnosis) and in speaking. They had deep knowledge and gifted speakers.

God's gospel was attested among them. This phrase is a little difficult. But it seems to be the Apostles testimony, their preaching and teaching about Christ from the Old Testament, was confirmed in the church. In the gatherings of the church, what the Apostle's taught was affirmed as being what the Old Testament taught and anticipated. Further, this testimony as to the truthfulness of the Apostolic teaching about Christ meant that it was to be accepted. This letter written to them was to be gathered up as a part of that confirmed, attested testimony.

But we also detect the first of Paul's irony. Throughout this letter, with growing intensity, Paul uses ironic, yes even acerbic, statements to confront the church. So the church has every spiritual gift, has full knowledge of doctrine and empowered preaching and prophesying, so of course it has no need of Paul. Why should such a wonderful church merit a scathing letter from its founder and the Apostle? Because having it all doesn't guarantee humility or holiness. This greatly gifted church was a mess.

### ***God's Eschatological Purposes (v. 7-8)***

Paul also is confident and commends to them *God's sustaining grace*. That grace will sustain them to the end. The saints will, in spite of all the troubles and failures, come to the end without guilt before God. This is an assurance to them while it is also a challenge to them. They are not guiltless in their attitudes and actions now. God is dealing with that as a Father. But regardless of all that, they will stand before God without guilt. Their sinful attitudes and actions will have all, every one of them, been dealt with at the cross. There will be no legal charge against them. They will be sustained until that glorious and guiltless day. This is designed to stir up genuine repentance and diligent effort to be pleasing God. Saints know their sins are all dealt with. Saints know they have been, once for all,

sanctified. Saints know they still sin. Saints hearing of their future standing before God seek to live up to that standing now.

One commentator has helpfully noted:

{Here is} one of the strongest statements within Paul's letters of his conviction that his converts would be enabled to persevere in their faith until the time of our Lord's return. Paul bases his confidence neither on the strength of his converts' faith nor on his own ability to pastorally maintain them in the faith, but rather on the sustaining and atoning power of Christ and the faithfulness of God, both of which are constantly available to those who have been called into fellowship with the Son (vv. 8-9). [J. Davis in *Evangelical Commentary on the Bible*.]

### ***God's Engaging Faithfulness (v. 9)***

Why is this so? Because of the character of God. God is faithful. He will enable and sustain them in the fellowship with each other and with Christ Jesus. IT does not ultimately depend on them. But that being true, calls them to faithfulness.

I can say it no better than David Prior has. He writes:

God's terminus is not merely the end of each individual's lifespan, which he certainly guards with personal care, but *the day of our Lord Jesus Christ* (8). If we take the teaching on this subject in this letter, we discover that this day marks the full disclosure (literally 'unveiling') both of Jesus Christ as he really is, and of the true quality of our service for Christ (3:10-15), as well as the inner purposes and motives of our hearts (4:5). It is a day, anticipated with joy in each celebration of the Lord's Supper (11:26), when the dead in Christ shall be raised (15:23, 52) to an incorruptible life in what Paul calls 'a spiritual body' (15:44). It is a day, therefore, for which Paul longs in the prayer at the end of his letter (16:22): '*Maran atha*' = 'Our Lord, come!'

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## **Reflect and Respond**

We will seek to be pleasing to God. We will not shrug our shoulders at sin. We may struggle. We may fail. We may have sinful thoughts and deeds. But rest assured, based on God's faithfulness, that we will stand before God one day, blameless and without guilt. Why? Because of Jesus Christ, our savior and our sovereign. He has sanctified us. He has called us. He has gathered us. He has equipped us. He has enabled us. He has chastened us and corrected us. He will sustain us until the final day. So we may not be perfect here, but we are perfected in His sight. One day, His view of us and our personal realities will be merged. His perfection, ours.