

Challenges Christians Face

The Salutation of 1 Corinthians

1 Corinthians 1:1-3

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The Salutation of 1 Corinthians

Scripture

Today is the first Sunday of 2011. It is also the first Sunday of a new series of sermons on *The First Letter of Paul to the Corinthians*. I plan to preach at least 50 sermons on 1 Corinthians.

I regard it as an extraordinary privilege to study and teach the Word of God. There are times when I think to myself, *I can't believe that I am getting paid to do this!* And even though I have a number of other pastoral duties, such as shepherding, counseling, evangelizing, discipling, administering, and so on, I am immeasurably grateful for the joy of spending time in the Word of God. And so, echoing Pastor John MacArthur, “the dominant thrust of my ministry is to help make God’s living Word alive to his people.”¹

The apostle Paul embarked on three missionary journeys (46-47 AD; 48/49-51 AD; and 52-57 AD). Aided by Priscilla and Aquila, Paul planted the church during the 18 months he spent in Corinth in the early 50s during his second missionary journey.

After a brief trip to Judea and Syria, Paul settled in Ephesus for three years (52-55 AD). While there he wrote two letters to the Corinthians, the first of which is lost. The second letter he wrote is the current letter we have and which we call *The First Letter of Paul to the Corinthians* (written between 53 and 55 AD).

The original (and now lost) letter apparently dealt with sexual immorality, a persistent problem for the Corinthian church (5:1-13; 6:12-20). Sometime later, Paul received an oral report indicating that the Corinthians had not only misunderstood his first letter (5:10) but were plagued with serious problems of division, sexual immorality, and social snobbery (1:10; 5:1; 11:18). Around the same time, a letter arrived from the Corinthians that displayed considerable theological confusion about marriage, divorce, participa-

¹ John MacArthur, *1 Corinthians* (Chicago, IL: Moody Press, 1996).

tion in pagan religions, order within corporate worship, and the bodily resurrection of Christians (7:1; 8:1; 12:1; 15:12, 35).

In response to these troubling developments, Paul felt compelled to write a substantial letter to Corinth, making the case that much of their conduct was out of step with the gospel.² This is the letter we know as *The First Letter of Paul to the Corinthians*, and which we will be studying for the rest of the year.

First Corinthians is a pastoral letter to a spiritually troubled church. The letter is highly relevant today, as it deals with such issues as the relationship between Christians and their surrounding pagan culture, divisions within the church, the ordering of church practices such as the Lord's Supper, and the use of spiritual gifts. The letter also deals with matters of personal morality, such as sex, marriage, celibacy, and love.³ That is why I am calling this series of messages: *Challenges Christians Face*.

So, are you ready to study *The First Letter of Paul to the Corinthians*? I hope so. Let's begin by reading the salutation in a message I am calling, "The Salutation of 1 Corinthians."

Let's read 1 Corinthians 1:1-3:

¹ Paul, called by the will of God to be an apostle of Christ Jesus, and our brother Sosthenes,

² 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:

³ Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. (1 Corinthians 1:1-3)

Introduction

The salutation of letters written in ancient times followed the standard formula of that day: A, to B, greetings! The salutation of 1 Corinthians followed the same standard formula.

² Crossway Bibles, *The ESV Study Bible* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2008), 2187-88.

³ Crossway Bibles, *The ESV Study Bible* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2008), 2190.

In his definition of “salutation,” M. G. Easton quotes Josias Porter who apparently spent some time in the Middle East:

Eastern modes of salutation are [often] so prolonged as to become wearisome and a positive waste of time. The profusely polite Arab asks so many questions after your health, your happiness, your welfare, your house, and other things, that a person ignorant of the habits of the country would imagine there must be some secret ailment or mysterious sorrow oppressing you, which you wished to conceal, so as to spare the feelings of a dear, sympathizing friend, but which he, in the depth of his anxiety, would desire to hear of. I have often listened to these prolonged salutations in the house, the street, and the highway, and [often] I have experienced their tedious monotony, and I have bitterly lamented the useless waste of time.⁴

The salutation of 1 Corinthians is certainly not a useless waste of time. Indeed, it is very instructive.

Lesson⁵

In today’s lesson, I want to examine the salutation of 1 Corinthians. We will look at:

1. The Greeters in the Salutation (1:1)
2. The Greeted in the Salutation (1:2)
3. The Greeting in the Salutation (1:3)

I. The Greeters in the Salutation (1:1)

First, notice the greeters in the salutation.

We read in verse 1: **“Paul, called by the will of God to be an apostle of Christ Jesus, and our brother Sosthenes.”**

The opening line of the letter says who is sending the letter.

⁴ M.G. Easton, *Easton’s Bible Dictionary* (Oak Harbor, WA: Logos Research Systems, Inc., 1996).

⁵ I am indebted for the outline of this message to John G. Butler, *Analytical Bible Expositor: I & II Corinthians* (Clinton, IA: LBC Publications, 2009), 9-11.

A. *The Apostle (1:1a)*

The first greeter is the primary greeter. He is the author of the letter, and he is the apostle Paul. Notice three things about him.

1. His Authorship

First, notice his authorship. The letter begins with an identification of the author: “**Paul.**”

Apart from Jesus, **Paul** is my favorite person in the Bible. He was born about the same time as Jesus in the city of Tarsus, the capital of Cilicia, a Roman province in southeast Asia Minor. His Jewish name was “Saul,” and his Roman name was “**Paul.**”

According to Jewish custom, **Paul** learned a trade before beginning a more direct preparation for the sacred profession of Pharisee. The trade he acquired was the making of tents from goats’ hair cloth, a trade which was one of the commonest in Tarsus.

His preliminary education having been completed, **Paul** was sent at about thirteen years of age to the great Jewish school of sacred learning at Jerusalem as a student of the law. Here he became a pupil of the celebrated rabbi Gamaliel, and here he spent many years in a careful study of the Scriptures. During these years of diligent study he lived “in all good conscience,” unstained by the vices of that great city.

After the period of his student-life expired, he probably left Jerusalem for Tarsus, where he may have been engaged in connection with some synagogue for some years. Since Tarsus had the finest university in the world, Paul also likely continued his education. In time he had the equivalent of two Ph.D. degrees.

Soon we find him back again at Jerusalem, shortly after the death of Jesus. Here he now learned the particulars regarding the crucifixion, and the rise of the new sect of the “Nazarenes.” He became one of the chief persecutors of the Christians. He was present at the stoning of Stephen, the first martyr of the Christian church.

He was on his way to root out the Christians in Damascus

when he was confronted by and eventually converted to the Lord Jesus Christ. Immediately after his conversion he retired into the solitude of Arabia for the purpose of devout study and meditation on the marvelous revelation that had been made to him.

Coming back after three years to Damascus, Paul began to preach the gospel “boldly in the name of Jesus,” but was soon obliged to flee from the Jews and go to Jerusalem. Here he stayed for three weeks, but was again forced to flee from persecution. He returned to his native Tarsus, where, for probably about three years, we lose sight of him.

After some years in Tarsus he then went to preach the gospel in Antioch. It was from the church in Antioch that **Paul** and Barnabas were sent on the first missionary journey. It was from this point on that **Paul** planted churches and wrote letters to churches, many of which we now possess.⁶

2. His Authority

Second, notice his authority. We read, “Paul, **called by the will of God. . . .**”

Paul understood that he did not call himself to service. He did not volunteer to serve God. Instead, he had been **called by the will of God** into service. After he was confronted by Jesus on the road to Damascus, Jesus said to him, “But rise and enter the city, and you will be told what you are to do” (Acts 9:6). After several days the Lord told Ananias that he was to go and minister to Paul. After some protestation by Ananias, the Lord said to him, “Go, for he is a chosen instrument of mine to carry my name before the Gentiles and kings and the children of Israel” (Acts 9:15).

3. His Apostleship

And third, notice his apostleship. We read, “Paul, called by

⁶ M.G. Easton, *Easton's Bible Dictionary* (Oak Harbor, WA: Logos Research Systems, Inc., 1996).

the will of God **to be an apostle of Christ Jesus.**”

This is an official office with extraordinary authority in the Early Church. It is inseparably related to Jesus Christ. **Apostle** means “messenger.”⁷ It was a unique office for the early spreading of the gospel. There is no such thing as apostolic succession.

B. The Associate

The second greeter is an associate of Paul and some think the amanuensis of Paul for this letter.

1. His Description

First, notice his description. We read that his name is **“Sosthenes.”**

The name was a common name. But he was not a common Christian. In fact, he was a very dedicated one. Although some commentators have speculated that he was the same man as the Sosthenes in Acts 18:17, there is no proof of that.

2. His Designation

Second, notice his designation. He is called **“our brother.”**

He was not an apostle. But to be designated **“our brother”** is a wonderful title because it means that he was a believer in Jesus.

II. The Greeted in the Salutation (1:2)

Second, notice the greeted in the salutation.

We read in verse 2: **“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.”**

⁷ M.G. Easton, *Easton's Bible Dictionary* (Oak Harbor, WA: Logos Research Systems, Inc., 1996).

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Those greeted in this letter comprise two groups of people.

A. *The Church in Corinth (1:2a)*

The first group was the believers in Corinth.

1. The Character of the Church

First, look at the character of the church. Paul writes, **“To the church of God. . . .”**

Commentator Charles Hodge says that “the word *church* is used in Scripture as a collective term for the people of God, considered as called out from the world. Sometimes it means the whole number of God’s people, as when it is said that Christ loved the church and gave himself for it (Ephesians 5:25). Sometimes it means the people of God as a class, as when Paul said that he persecuted the church of God (Galatians 1:13). Sometimes it means the professing Christians of any one place, as when mention is made of the church in Jerusalem, Antioch, or Corinth.”⁸

2. The Community of the Church

Second, the community of the church. Paul writes, **“To the church of God that is in Corinth.”**

Corinth was a large city of nearly 750,000 people, of whom some 500,000 were said to be slaves. Easton says that Corinth “was noted for its wealth, and for the luxurious and immoral and vicious habits of the people.”⁹ It was given to idolatry and the gross immorality that went with it. Some in Corinth were saved from this debauchery. Unfortunately, however, the wicked culture of the city had an evil influence upon the church.

⁸ Charles Hodge, *An Exposition of the First Epistle to the Corinthians*. (Bellingham, WA: Logos Research Systems, Inc., 2009), 2-3.

⁹ M.G. Easton, *Easton’s Bible Dictionary* (Oak Harbor, WA: Logos Research Systems, Inc., 1996).

3. The Cleansing of the Church

Third, the cleansing of the church. Paul writes, **“To those sanctified in Christ Jesus.”**

The word **sanctified** means “consecrate.”¹⁰ The Christians in the church at Corinth were consecrated to Jesus Christ.

4. The Calling of the Church

Fourth, the calling of the church. Paul writes that they were **“called to be saints.”**

A **saint** is “one separated from the world and consecrated to God; one holy by profession and by covenant; a believer in Christ.”¹¹

Interestingly, the Greek text says that the believers in Corinth were “called saints” rather than **“called to be saints.”** The words **“to be”** are not found in the Greek text. I prefer the shorter translation. The reason is that every sinner becomes a saint at the moment of conversion. There is no process toward sainthood, which could be misunderstood by the addition of the words **“to be.”**

So, even though I have been a Christian for almost 35 years, I am a saint. But, if you become a Christian today, you will immediately be a saint at the moment of your conversion.

B. The Christians in Achaia (1:2b)

Not many Bible students are aware that this letter was not limited to the believers in Corinth but also included others.

1. The Connection of the Christians

First, the connection of the Christians. Paul writes, **“. . . to-**

¹⁰ Catherine Soanes and Angus Stevenson, *Concise Oxford English Dictionary*, 11th ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004).

¹¹ M.G. Easton, *Easton's Bible Dictionary* (Oak Harbor, WA: Logos Research Systems, Inc., 1996).

gether with all those who in every place. . . .”

Second Corinthians 1:1 helps us here. In the salutation of that letter, Paul clearly designates the others to whom the letter is being sent as “all the saints who are in the whole of Achaia.” Achaia was the province; Corinth the city in the province.

So, this letter was intended not only for the Christians in Corinth but also for the believers in the province of Achaia.

2. The Conversion of the Christians

Second, the conversion of the Christians. Paul writes, “. . . together with all those who in every place **call upon the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.**”

This refers to their calling upon the name of Christ for salvation.

3. The Concord with the Christians

Third, the concord with the Christians. Paul writes, “. . . **both their Lord and ours.**”

These words begin the attack by Paul upon the schism in the church which had some people claiming they were “of Christ” (1 Corinthians 1:12), as though other believers were not. All the redeemed are of Christ!

III. The Greeting in the Salutation (1:3)

And third, notice the greeting in the salutation.

We read in verse 3: “**Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.**”

A. *The Commonness of the Greeting (1:3a)*

First, notice the commonness of the greeting.

Paul says, “**Grace to you and peace. . . .**” This greeting was

common. **Grace** and **peace** was a normal greeting from Paul. The **grace** and **peace** greeting occurs in every letter of Paul.

Grace was the Greek greeting, and **peace** was the Jewish greeting. Some Jews still greet one another with “Shalom,” which means “**peace.**”

B. The Character of the Greeting (1:3b)

Second, notice the character of the greeting.

Grace and peace here are more than just a greeting; they emphasize great truths.

1. The Origin of Grace and Peace

First, the origin of grace and peace. Paul says, “Grace to you and peace **from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.**”

Grace and peace come **from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.** The reason our world demonstrates little grace and has little peace is that they want little to do with God and Jesus.

2. The Order of Grace and Peace

Second, the order of grace and peace. Paul uses this greeting in every letter, and in each case grace always comes before peace.

Commentator Hodge says, “*Grace* is favor, and *peace* its fruits.”¹² In salvation, the grace of God comes first in providing salvation. Then, when received, it brings peace. There is no peace with God until grace is present.

Conclusion

That is the salutation of 1 Corinthians. As we study this great letter, may God help us to learn well from its great truths. Amen.

¹² Charles Hodge, *An Exposition of the First Epistle to the Corinthians*. (Bellingham, WA: Logos Research Systems, Inc., 2009), 5.

Mission Statement

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*To bring people to Jesus Christ
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equip them for their **ministry** in the church
and life **mission** in the world,
in order to **magnify** God's name.*

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PRAAYER:

O Lord Our God, I thank you for *The First Letter of Paul to the Corinthians*. For at least the next year we will study *Challenges Christians Face*. Help us to learn from these challenges and begin to apply them to our lives on a daily basis.

Thank you also for “The Salutation of 1 Corinthians.” Thank you that we are saints from the moment of conversion. We do not have to become saints, but you have set us apart for yourself in your Son, Jesus Christ.

And for this we give you thanks in Jesus’ name. Amen.

BENEDICTION:

May the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all, now and always. Amen.

CHARGE:

Now, brothers and sisters, go and live as those who are called “saints” by God!