

CCLEB SERMON NOTES



SUNDAY MAY 12, 2024
1 CORINTHIANS 1:1-9

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INTRODUCTION & WHY 1 CORINTHIANS?



Today we are going to look at Paul's letter to the Corinthians first from a broad narrative perspective of the bible, to see where it fits into the narrative of biblical story, then look at the letter more narrowly - pointing out important, or maybe just interesting things specific to Corinth, and then lastly spend the remaining time in the text itself.

We just finished the gospel of John which is John's account of the life of Jesus. That was John's "gospel". John's gospel was written to persuade you and I that "Jesus is the Messiah the Son of God and that by believing in him we can have life by the power of His name. **John 20:31**



A tie between the Gospel of John and 1 Corinthians, is the phrase "Jesus Christ" meaning "Jesus the Messiah", and appears eight times in 1 Corinthians 1:1-9

The word "gospel" in secular contemporary Greek literature was a - "celebratory public proclamation of a new King and Kingdom.

THE GREEK WORD

“EUANGELION”

IS OUR WORD

“GOSPEL” OR “GOOD NEWS”

IT IS WHERE WE GET OUR
CHRISTIAN WORDS

“EVANGELISTS” & “EVANGELICAL”

The Greek word “euangelion” is where we get our Christian word “evangelists”. This word “euangelion” was used in the ancient world when a new king and thus new kingdom started, by takeover or succession. “Evangelists” were sent thru out the kingdom and the known world publicly proclaiming the new King and Kingdom. With the new King and Kingdom often came new edicts, new laws, new societal rules, new ways of thinking and even news ways of interacting. In essence then a new king and kingdom shaped a “new community” for the inhabitants. Hold onto to that idea of “new community”. If the new king and kingdom was “relief” from crippling oppression and harshness and evil and the inadequacy of the previous regime, the public proclamation was “Good News” - which is the literal translation of the word “euangelion” - Good News.

Are you starting to see the framework by which the biblical use of the word “gospel” would have been understood in the first century? A proclamation of a new King and Kingdom - thus “Good News”. Our NLT translates the word Greek word “euangelion” as “good news” rather than “gospel”.

One of the common things that happened in a new King’s reign, one of the early acts of the new king, was to release some prisoners or captives of the previous defeated kingdom. A conquering King would often take captives to work in their kingdom. Think Daniel, Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego carried off to Babylon. Biblical support for the releasing of prisoners or captives by a new king or kingdom can be seen in Ezra 1:1 in the account of King Cyrus of Persia, who in 538 BC after defeating Babylon, released the Jewish exiled captives to return to Jerusalem to rebuild the temple.

In light of that history and understanding of the word “gospel”, listen to Jesus quoting the prophet Isaiah in **Luke 4:18-19**. And also **Matthew 4:23** ... “good news of the Kingdom”. **Col 1:13**

When captives are set free they need to be taught about their new king that they will be subject to which includes learning the new ways of the new kingdom. How to live, how to apply the kings changes, ways of thinking, ways of interacting to their lives, to life circumstances. Who better to be able to reach those that need to be freed and to teach freed captives about the new King and Kingdom than one who was also freed from captivity, one who was taught directly by the new king, and “sent out” by the king with the king’s message?

Paul, in **1 Cor 1:1** is one such person, “chosen by the will of God to be an apostle of Christ Jesus”. Paul was freed from the captivity of the kingdom of Satan, the “prince of this world”, as Jesus called him, Paul was indwelled by Jesus’ Spirit, Paul was taught by Jesus how to live according to Jesus’ teachings, and Paul was “sent out” as an apostle to take Jesus’ messages, teachings, to the world. He was sent out to preach the gospel, announce the gospel, Paul was sent out to teach other freed captives how to apply Jesus teachings to their lives, in essence how to live effectively in a new community of believers as part of Jesus’ kingdom while living on earth where Satan rules.

Now we have begun to answer the question “Who is “letter- writing-Paul”? from a broad narrative perspective – let’s narrow in to see what else we know about Paul that will help us understand our other question, “why is Paul writing a letter to the Church in Corinth?”

What We Know About Paul

1. We know that Paul, also known as “Saul”, was present and in support of the stoning of the Jesus disciple, Stephen, by the members of the “Sanhedrin” – Jewish high court. (Act 6:12 - 8:1)
2. We know that Paul was from Tarsus, the capital of the Roman province of Cilicia in southern Turkey. So his bloodline and heritage is Jewish, but from a Roman province and Greek culture.
3. We know that Paul was trained and educated in Jerusalem “at the feet of Gamaliel” a leading Rabbi in the Sanhedrin, to be a zealous Pharisee. (Acts 22:3)
4. We know that zealous Saul “was going everywhere to destroy Jesus’ church, house to house, dragging out both men and women to throw them in prison.” (Acts 8:3)

5. We know that Saul received a letter of support from the High Priest and Sanhedrin to go to foreign cities and arrest followers of Jesus. (Acts 9:1)

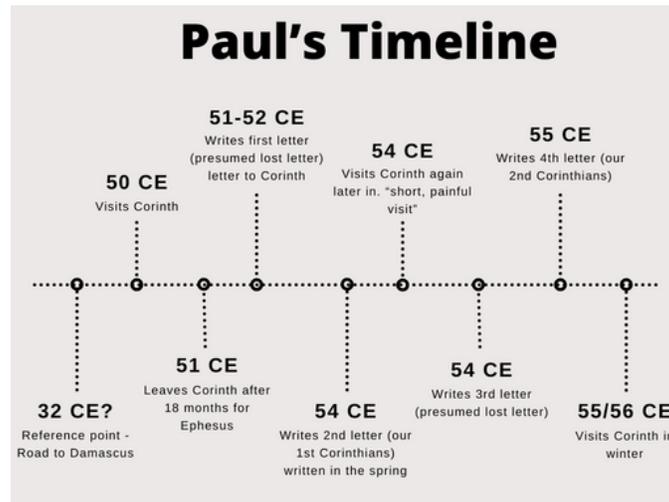
6. We know that on one such trip, on route to Damascus, Jesus himself confronted Saul. This was Jesus’ “rescue operation” to free Saul from the captivity of the kingdom of Satan. (Acts 9:3-9)

7. We know Saul then became Jesus’ “chosen instrument to take my message to the Gentiles, Kings, as well as to people of Israel”. (Acts 9:15) This verse defends Paul being an “apostle” of Jesus that is mentioned in I Cor 1:1. “Apostle” simply meaning “one who is sent”.

8. We know that Saul then started preaching in synagogues outside of Israel that “Jesus is the Messiah the Son of God.” (Act 9:20, 22)

One such place that “Saul”, now called by his Greek name “Paul”, went to during his second missionary journey was to the southern Greek city of “Corinth” in the province of Roman Acacia.

Here’s what Paul’s relationship with Corinth may have looked like on a timeline. This is a historical “reconstruction”... meaning a timeline deduced by man from biblical texts and extra biblical sources - so these dates are “close” but not “certain” .



Acts 18 gives us background of what Paul’s experience in Corinth was like, and it fills in some back ground for understanding our study in 1 Corinthians, I would encourage you to read that. A couple things that we learn from that passage that are significant is that Paul is in Corinth 18 months.. a year and a half. That’s enough time to form some good solid relationships – you will see a few of those relationships mentioned in 1 Corinthians, “Chloe” is one such person.

Also we learn from **Acts 18:6** that up till Corinth, Paul had been going to the Jews in the synagogues first with the “gospel”. But in Corinth that changed –where Paul, in response to Corinthian Jews unbelief – started preaching the gospel to the Gentiles. This is significant because it indicates the makeup of the Corinthian church would likely have been predominantly Greek speaking gentiles that were relatively new converts. When Paul writes the letter, 1 Corinthians, to the church in Corinth they are only a few years in their life with Christ.

The tendency may be to read 1 Cor and judge their spiritual immaturity. Rather I encourage you to see them in the context that they are relatively new believers in need of mature believers to come along side them and teach them, disciple them, how to apply the gospel to every area of their life. That was Paul's calling then, and that is our calling now. In contrast, you and I don't want to be the prideful ones that in judgement "shoot the wounded in the spiritual battlefield that we are all in."

Communicating distances in the ancient world was done by messengers or letters, or a combination of both. Paul is in Ephesus when he writes this letter, 300 miles across the gulf from Corinth.



Historians and archeologist have collected about 14,000 letters believed to have been written between 200 BC and 150 CE. Letters were often written in their final form by professional writers from writers guilds who could writes neatly, accurately, and more importantly, write very small as the cost of writing materials, ink and papyrus were exorbitant. The cost of sending letters distances was also incredibly high, as the sender was responsible for the cost of travel, lodging, and the salary for the carrier. So if a trip took a month to deliver a letter, await a reply and return, imagine that cost. In many cases carriers were expected to read the letter to the recipient, explain it, and answer questions, and bring questions back to the sender also in the form of a letter.

In conjunction with that **1 Cor 1:1** also mentions a person named "Sosthenes". It is possible that "Sosthenes" in v1 was either the same "Sosthenes", now converted, that was the leader of the Jewish Synagogue in Corinth **Act 18:17** that was beaten in the governors court; or "Sosthenes" was Paul's "amanuensis".

" Amanuensis "

In letter writing, or any formal writing, Greek "**amanuenses**" were often employed as translators or transcribers who brought correctness and "**literary polish**" to a writing.



In letter writing, or any formal writing, Greek amanuenses were often employed as translators or transcribers who brought correctness and “literary polish” to a writing. These often were also from professional writers guilds. As a teenager growing up in Brazil, I wanted to translate an American worship song to Portuguese – so I did. And when I presented my translation to a bilingual Brazilian friend he said to me, “Your translation is good, let’s make it prettier”. And so he did. In Paul’s case, even though Paul was quite literate in Greek, he used an “amanuensis” to make his writing better. It is likely, but not certain, that Sosthenes was such a person, and thus listed in the formal introduction of the letter where amanuenses were often listed. If that raises questions for you about inspiration see Pastor Dan.

So Where is this “Corinth” that Paul lived in for 18 months and then later wrote letters to? You can see the Isthmus of Corinth on the maps.



Ancient ruins in Corinth include the temple of Apollo



amongst many others, which gives us some understanding spiritually of where they were – deep in polytheism.



Corinth is believed to have been inhabited as early as 5000 BC - that's several thousand years before Abraham. The Temple of Apollo was built around 550 BC at the same site of a previous temple, about 12 years before King Cyrus released the Jewish captives in Babylon to return home to rebuild the Jewish temple in Jerusalem. Other temples in Corinth included the temple of Athena, Poseidon, Hermes, Isis, Serapis, and Asclepius. The most prominent worship was at one of three temples Aphrodite, the protector of Corinth, and who was known to have more than 1,000 prostitutes and priestesses in her service.



Corinth has been destroyed many times by war and by earthquakes. Rome destroyed Corinth in 146 BCE then rebuilt Corinth in 44 BCE, making it the capitol of the Roman province. Corinth was very wealthy, very educated, and very powerful - she had "plenty". Some historians have described Corinth as one of the most important cities in the ancient world.

Of significance, Corinth at the time of Paul, had a road across the Isthmus called the "Diolkos" where small ships or cargo were rolled onto portage devices and hauled across land about four miles to another gulf to avoid the dangerous sailing waters to the south that were a graveyard for many ships, sailors, and cargo.



The "Diolkos" was also used to improve the speed of naval operations. [One such military operation in the 5th century BC hauled 260 Roman naval vessels on the Diolkos.] Using a combination of slaves, soldiers and animals to pull the vessels, it is estimated that it would only have taken 3-4 hours to cross the four-mile Isthmus.

Culturally many historians and commentators have described Corinth. Leon Morris described Corinth as being "Intellectually alert, materially progressive, and morally corrupt". Some have described Corinth as the "Sin City" of the Roman empire. Corinth was known to have socially open licenses on sexual practices.

There was a word used in the Roman Empire - "Korinthiazomai" which means "to live like a Corinthian" - referencing one being sexually out of control and intoxicated. Historically most of the comments describing Corinth's sexual practices were from the city's early days prior to the common era. Currently many historians state that by the time of Paul most other Roman cities had risen to the level of moral corruption as Corinth.

Materially, Corinth was known for its artistic pottery, and polished brass, which is alluded to in chapter 13.

One last comment on "Corinth". The names "Corinth" and the name "Cornelius" from Acts chapter 10, share the same Greek root word that means "of a horn" which is believed to be like a "horn of plenty" in reference to the wealth of material resources and consequently power. From that then the name "Corinth" means "satiated" as in able to satisfy fully or satisfy to excess."



Paul makes spiritual reference to having "plenty" or "having it all" in vs 5 and 7 and throughout the letter. And when one has it all, what sin might that lead to? Pride. This is what Paul is up against, spiritually young Christians who have it all physically and spiritually, that are high on pride and low on love and consequently then every little thing divides them. Sounds like the church in the US doesn't it? You'll hear that word "division" throughout our teachings in this book.

Now let's return to Paul's letter to the Church in Corinth that we call 1 Corinthians.

As I stated in the timeline, it appears that Paul wrote four letters to the Church in Corinth, not two because of references to communications Paul mentions that we do not have. We will point out the support for that as we work thru the text. The letters that we have are probably the "second and fourth" letters. If this is true, then the first and third letters are "lost". That is why you heard me today say "1 (One) Corinthians", not "1st Corinthians", because our 1st Cor is actually the 2nd letter and our 2nd Cor is actually the 4th letter. Even though 1 Cor and 2 Cor is more accurate, I will use our common designations of 1st and 2nd Corinthians.

Now regarding the lost Corinthian letters. To me this means two things. From a worldview that is shaped by a belief in a sovereign God who has miraculously preserved His word over thousands of years, and it is truly miraculous preservation, for the other two letters to have been lost, [SN and have been lost so early on], leads me to think that they were not meant for divine preservation. You do your own research on that one.

The second thing it means to me is that the letters encourage me to approach interpretation and application with even more humility. If someone forwards you an email or text thread where two parties are interacting, if you had some background of who the parties are, you would probably have a good shot at figuring out what they are talking about.

If someone forwarded you only their responses and not the other persons, it would be more challenging to follow the narrative.

If someone forwarded you only half of their responses, let's say "two out of four", and none of the other persons responses, it would be even more challenging to follow the narrative. In a reductionistic way, that's what we have with Paul's letters with the Corinthian church. However, Yes we have the history of the book of Acts that provides commentary and information, Yes we have an understanding of who some of the characters are from other biblical writings; Yes we have the gospels which are the foundation for all of the truth in the letters, yes we have other letters that help us understand the use of words and phrases and parallel teachings, and which also provide some information, and yes we have the whole bible that is the best commentary. Collectively though they are not enough for us to understand the letters completely. We need to do our due diligence with all those to help us understand the letters, of course, but recognize collectively that they are not enough. And in that recognition, comes humility, and humility creates space for God.



When humility creates space for God , then God can give us his understanding and application. What we do have is a sovereign God, who knows us and loves us infinitely, who knows what truth we need, he knows what "daily bread" we need, and has made it available to us through His inspired word. And with humility that creates space for God, His Spirit will teach and make application in our lives. Jesus said that in **John 14:26**. God will connect His words to our minds and hearts - and give the daily bread that we need. Amen?

So let's look at His words in 1 Cor and ask that He connects them to our minds and hearts.

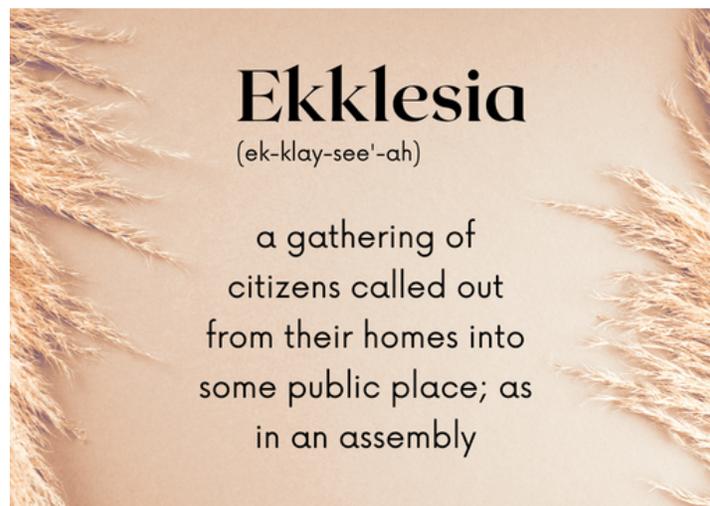
In verse two, before we define what "church" means please note that Paul is clear that it is "God's church".



And what those that are part of God's "church" are "called" to is to be "his own holy people". Note the strong ownership there by God using the words of "his own". That goes along with the word "holy" which means to be "separate from", in this case "set apart for God". And this "holiness" or being set apart for God, as God's church, is achieved by "the means of Christ Jesus". So to be part of the "church" happens thru "Christ Jesus". Also Note "Christ Jesus". "Christ" being the Greek word for the Hebrew word "messiah" the anointed one, which ties us back to John's gospel **John 20:31**

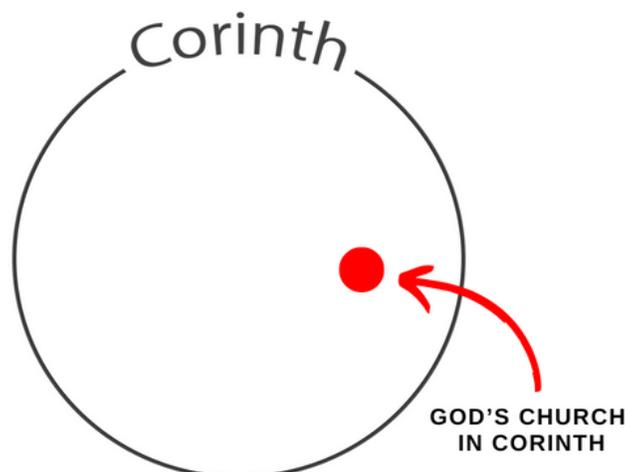
The last line of v2, "...just as he did... This tells us that this "church" in Corinth is part of a much larger body of believers globally. Paul says "all people everywhere who call on the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, their Lord and ours." That's one Lord, one savior, one name to call on "Jesus", one church. Now that is clearly different than our western understanding of "church".

So what does this word "church" mean? In contemporary greek culture according BLB: the Greek word "ekklesia" (ek-klay-see-ah) means a gathering of citizens called out from their homes into some public place; as in an assembly



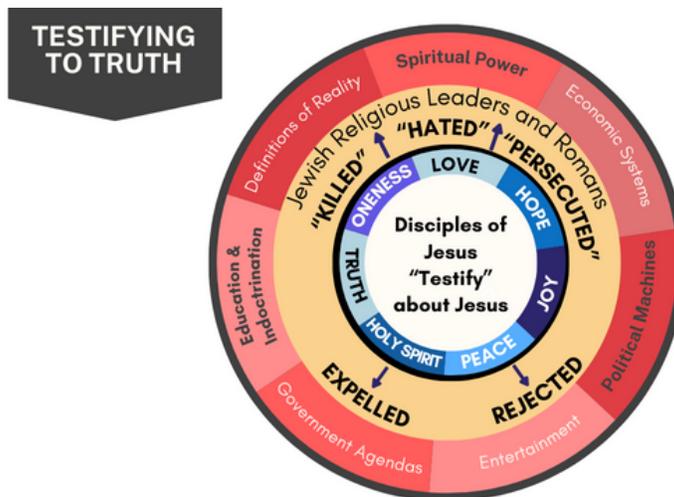
So this "church" are people called to be part of a "gathering", set apart for God to be his "own holy people", distinguished from the rest of the people of Corinth by their identification with Christ Jesus. Hmmm.

So in a diagram in may look like this.

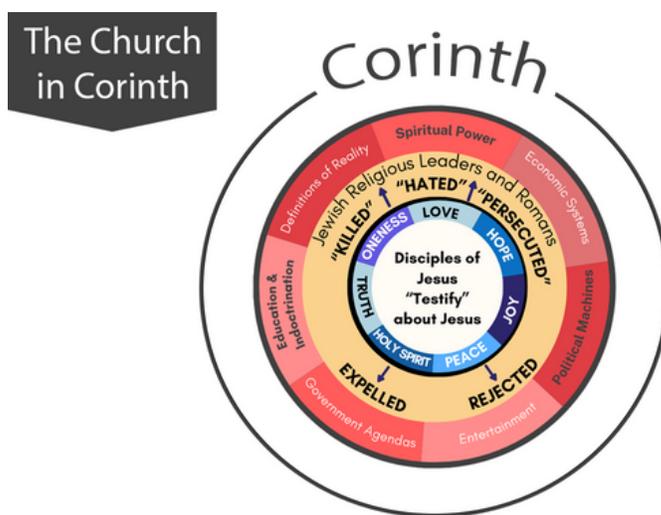


So the large circle is the City of Corinth and all its citizens, part of the kingdom of darkness. The smaller circle is "God's Church" called out from the general population to be set apart for God by Christ Jesus, and set apart for a work of God. This is the Kingdom of Jesus here in earth then. Where the general population is pursuing and worshiping one or many of the local gods, God's church is to pursue and worship him. Where the general population is pursuing what satisfies the flesh and satisfies the eyes and results in pride - power, wealth, status, popularity - all things that leave the soul empty - God's church, as part of the kingdom of Jesus, are to pursue the things of the Spirit so that as they are transformed into the image of Jesus, their King. Where the general population is pursuing self-gain, Gods church is to be collectively pursuing supernatural unity thru humility and sacrificial love, collectively working together to build each other up by their spiritual gifts. And as they collectively are transformed by Jesus words, Spirit, and abiding presence they can be increasingly effective, living out the gospel of Jesus Christ in Corinth unified under the banner of "our Lord Jesus Christ".

Remember this circle?



Now put that circle in the large Corinthian circle..

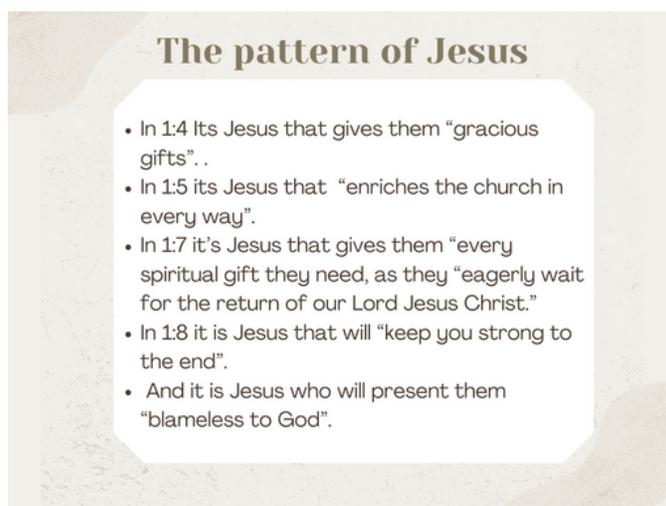


That was God's intent for the Corinthian church. But what happens when the self-sacrificing love of Jesus is eclipsed by just.. "self"? What happens when living by the power of the Spirit becomes living by the power of the flesh? What happens when supernatural oneness in the gathering, in the new community is replaced by "its all about me"? The effectiveness to live out the gospel of Jesus Christ thru transformed lives gives way to division and problems. The effectiveness to teach the gospel thru both words and actions, slowly gives way to fighting, arguing within the new community. The effectiveness of preaching the gospel becomes just hollow words and an empty gong, because there is less love, less oneness, less power of the holy Spirit.

That progression was what was beginning to happen in the Corinthian church and why Paul is writing this letter to them.

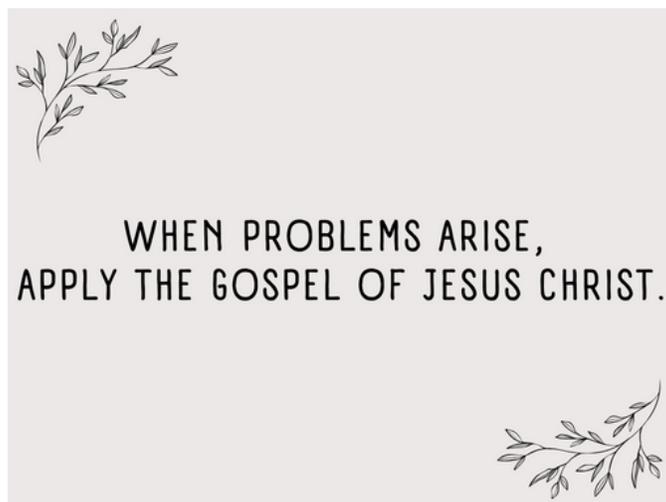
Now, the Corinthian church did have a lot going well for them, and Paul points that out in v4-9. So Paul starts with “thankfulness” for what the Corinthian church did have. Paul when beginning to address problems, first starts with what he is thankful for despite the problems. There is wisdom in that. Paul recognizes that despite the things he needs to address there are so many strengths, that are evidence of Jesus’ presence in Corinth. They have been given the grace of Jesus, they are an “enriched church” – spiritually and physically, they can speak “eloquently and knowledgeably” about Jesus, they have every spiritual gift they need , and they are eagerly waiting on Jesus return. The Corinthian church having all those things is significantly further ahead than many self labeled “evangelical” churches today. And Paul doesn’t want them to lose that, which they are at risk of, but rather to gain.

But v4-9 Paul isn’t just identifying the strengths that the Corinthian church has, he also sets up a pattern of how he is going to address the divisions and problems in the Corinthian church. Let me show you.



The common denominator in all those verses is all that the Corinthian church has spiritually, that is freely given to them, is from Jesus. Paul is pointing their eyes that are drifting to self, back to Jesus. The name and title “Jesus Christ” is written 8 times in the first 9 verses to draw the readers attention back to Jesus the Messiah, the Son of God that has life in the power of his name.

So moving forward in the in the letter, as Paul addresses these divisions and problems that the Corinthian church is beginning to experience, Paul’s intervention is to point them back to Jesus. **1 Cor 1:10**. Thus you and I can apply this principle we learn from Paul, “When Problems arise, apply the gospel of Jesus Christ.” And when we apply the gospel of Jesus Christ v9 happens.



SUPPLEMENTAL

NOTES:

- **Approach to reading Corinthians:** We need to be more like Cornelius, whose name means “horn of plenty” .. he was devout, God fearing (Acts 10:1-2) . Was Roman Captain of Italian Regiment, so he had a lot of power and resources. Yet is says he “gave generously to the poor”. Despite the wealth and power he was humble and “Fell on his face (Acts 10:25) even though it was misguided, it was still humility. And we see in (Acts 10:33) he was “waiting before God to hear the message the Lord has given you.” As we read Corinthians we need to be reminded that they are us, we too have resources and power, yet we need to fall humbly on our faces and wait to hear a message from the Lord for us from 1 Corinthians.
- **More on King Cyrus releasing captives.** This fulfilled Jeremiah’s precise prophecy from 150 years earlier.
- **More on Gamaliel and Pharisees.** Gamaliel was a famous rabbi – the president of the Great Sanhedrin. So an education under him would be roughly equivalent to the pride and prestige of our IV League seminaries like Harvard, Princeton, Yale. The Pharisees were a ruling spiritual and political party governing the nation of Israel. The opposing party in government was the Sadducees.
- **The impact of Gamaliel.** Gamaliel was a Pharisee and a grandson of the famous Rabbi Hillel. Like his grandfather, Gamaliel was known for taking a rather lenient view of the Old Testament law in contrast to his contemporary, Rabbi Shammai, who held to a more stringent understanding of Jewish traditions.” <https://www.gotquestions.org/Gamaliel-in-the-Bible.html>

These two rabbis split the Pharisaic tradition, Hillel favoring grace, Shammai favoring law. This may help us understand Gamaliel’s actions of leniency in the Acts 5. Pharisees saw them selves as “separate from” (what Pharisee means) the elite Sadducees and the polluted spiritual and physical bloodline of the Hellenized (Greek speaking) Jews.

1. How do we know 1 Cor was likely written in spring of 54 CE?

<https://bible.org/seriespage/7-1-corinthians-introduction-argument-and-outline>

- **“Saul” vs “Paul”.** Some have mistakenly taught that “Paul” was “Saul’s” Christian name. Paul is simply Saul’s greek name or common name.
- **Also while Paul was in Corinth from Acts 18:** Paul met “Aquila and Priscilla” – fellow Jews, fellow “tentmakers” (Like Paul), that became ministry partners later on. “Tent” is the same root word in Greek as “tabernacle”. Its Hebrew verb equivalent is “dwell” – it’s Greek verb equivalent is “meno” or “abide”. Aquila and Priscilla left Rome when Claudius Caesar deported all the Jews from Rome in 49 CE. – things had been bad for the Jews in Rome since 41 CE when the same Claudius had mandated that the Jews were not allowed to “gather”.

SUPPLEMENTAL

NOTES:

So imagine Jews with no synagogue. This was all just feeding the smoldering fire of Rome's anger with Israel and Israel's anger with Rome.

- **More on “writer guilds”.** Corinthian social structure involved the “guilds” that one's employment was attached to. “Guilds operated collectively, like a union, they had their own designated god and temple to worship, and celebrated their own frequent feasts related to that temple. 1 Corinthians chapter 8 related to meat offered for sacrifice happens in that context.
- **Is there still “inspiration” if there were professional writers and amanuensis involved?** The original writing in its completed form is what is inspired of God. The process by which the inspired writing happened was God in partnership with humans all under God's sovereignty and design.