

1 Corinthians Lesson 3

1 Corinthians 1:1-2

INTRODUCTION

The Apostle Paul wrote 1 Corinthians to the church in the prosperous port city of Corinth. He had founded this church during his second missionary journey (Acts 18) and wrote the letter from Ephesus during his third journey, most likely in 54 or 55 AD. Corinth was a major commercial center known for wealth, trade, Greek philosophy, and open immorality. The Temple of Aphrodite and the surrounding pagan culture exerted strong pressure on new believers. Many in the church had come directly out of this background.

Paul addresses the Corinthians as those who are “sanctified in Christ Jesus” and “called to be saints” (1:2). They are genuinely saved and united to Christ. Yet in chapter 3 he gives a sobering diagnosis of their spiritual condition. He tells them he could not speak to them as to spiritual people but as to “men of flesh” (Greek *sarkinoi*), as “babes in Christ” (3:1). He further states that they are “still fleshly” (*sarkikoi*, 3:3), as shown by the jealousy and strife among them. These terms do not question their salvation. The repeated phrase “in Christ” confirms their secure position. Instead, Paul is exposing their immaturity and the continuing influence of the flesh. They possessed the Holy Spirit but were not consistently walking in accordance with the truth. They had access to the mind of Christ yet were still thinking and acting like natural men.

This carnal behavior produced many practical problems. Paul had received disturbing reports from members of Chloe’s household (1:11) concerning divisions, immorality, lawsuits, and disorder in the assembly. The Corinthians had also written Paul a letter asking specific questions about marriage, food sacrificed to idols, spiritual gifts, and other matters (see the repeated “now concerning” sections beginning in 7:1). Paul responds to both the reports and their questions with apostolic authority, pastoral concern, and deep theological grounding in the gospel of the crucified and risen Christ.

The letter is therefore both corrective and restorative. Paul moves through the problems in a deliberate order, always calling the church back to the centrality of Christ, the power of the cross, and the life of love and holiness that is the marker of true spirituality.

1 CORINTHIANS 1:1-9 OBSERVATIONS:

- Paul begins with a lengthy opening. Verses 1-3 form the salutation, followed by a thanksgiving. This is a normal pattern for Paul’s letters, which is often lengthy (e.g., Romans 1:1-17; 2 Corinthians 1:1-11; Ephesians 1:1-14).
- This is the only mention of Sosthenes in any letter.
- The first identity of the assembly of God in Corinth is sanctified. Also, the next usage is in 6:11. Both are positional (not progressive).

1 Corinthians Lesson 3

1 Corinthians 1:1-2

- The most poignant observation is that God, through Paul by means of the Holy Spirit's inspiration, speaks very favorably about this church, whom he later calls "men of flesh, infants in Christ, walking like mere men." Behavior does not impact identity. They are identified as:
 - Sanctified
 - Saints
 - Enriched in everything, in all speech, in all knowledge
 - Testimony of Christ confirmed in them
 - Not lacking any gift
 - Confirmed to the end
 - Blameless in the day of our Lord Jesus Christ
 - Called by God into fellowship with His Son, Jesus Christ our Lord

1 CORINTHIANS 1:1-9 EXPOSITION:

Verse 1 – Paul identifies himself as the author of the letter.

There is a translational correction right off the bat here. The word called "κλητός klētos" is an adjective, he is *called*. This is attributive, meaning that this part of his identity.

Called is also the identity of believers (Romans 1:6-7 – you are called of Jesus Christ, beloved, called, saints: all adjectives) The word *called* serves as identity. We dealt with this concept back in Ephesians 4. There we saw that the calling of God is the Gospel of Jesus Christ. All who believe the gospel are then called, "the called."

In Paul's usage, *called* is an adjective of his name, Called Paul.

Next, Paul is an apostle. This is a transliteration of "ἀπόστολος apostolos" which is a non-technical word that means "one who is sent." A person can be an apostle of a church (2 Corinthians 8:23), Jesus was "the sent one from God" (Hebrews 3:1). Here, Paul distinguishes himself as an apostle of Jesus Christ by the will of God (Galatians 1:1; 1 Corinthians 9:1-2) and there are signs of him being a true apostle (2 Corinthians 12:12; Hebrews 2:3-4).

Sosthenes was a companion of Paul from Corinth. We do not know much about him except that he was the leader of the synagogue in Corinth (Acts 18:17). Paul had an impact upon that synagogue there as Crispus (Acts 18:8; 1 Corinthians 1:14) and Sosthenes were both leaders of the synagogue in Corinth.

Why was Timothy not mentioned? Was he with Paul at the time of the writing? He was sent to them (1 Corinthians 4:17, 16:10) and maybe the carrier of the letter.

Verse 2 – To the church of God which is in Corinth. The word for *church* is "ἐκκλησία ekklesia." In our study on the church a few years ago, we discovered that there is a universal concept of the

1 Corinthians Lesson 3

1 Corinthians 1:1-2

church (Ephesians 3:10), but most of the time, the word is used as a local assembly of “those who have been called out.”

Now we get into the identity of those addressed in the letter. The term *sanctified* is a perfect passive participle. It does not have an article (anarthrous), but this is an adjectival participle used substantively. It identifies the persons as “ones who have been sanctified.” The perfect tense in the passive voice indicates a completed act with perpetual effects. This use shows that sanctification now forms part of their identity.

The verb “ἁγιάζω *hagiazō*” and the noun “ἅγιος *hagios*” are both used in verse 2. The meaning is simple “set apart.” Being a saint is not based upon behavior and being sanctified is also not based upon behavior or performance. When “ἁγιάζω *hagiazō*” is before God, it is His work alone and is the believers’ identity when they believe in Jesus Christ (Hebrews 2:11, 10:10, 14, 13:12). But there is also a sanctification that believers can do (1 Peter 3:15; 1 Thessalonians 4:3-7; 2 Timothy 2:21). It is an important distinction that, when we set apart ourselves, our body, for honor, this does not make us holy before God.

The next identity is “the ones who call on the name of the Lord.” This is another adjectival participle (this time the article is present). This is not necessarily an activity; here it is an identity. “Calling upon the Lord” is normally used as a plea for help in a time of need. Stephen used it as he was being stoned (Acts 7:59). It is also used in eschatology for the Jews (and Gentiles) to be supernaturally preserved in the Tribulation (Joel 2:32; Romans 10:12-14).

Therefore, believers are sanctified, saints, and are ones who call on the Lord. This is identity and is not based on activity or behavior.