

## ONE: Welcome to Corinth

February 1, 2015

**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. 4 I give thanks to my God always for you because of the grace of God that was given you in Christ Jesus, 5 that in every way you were enriched in him in all speech and all knowledge-- 6 even as the testimony about Christ was confirmed among you-- 7 so that you are not lacking in any spiritual gift, as you wait for the revealing of our Lord Jesus Christ, 8 who will sustain you to the end, guiltless in the day of our Lord Jesus Christ. 9 God is faithful, by whom you were called into the fellowship of his Son, Jesus Christ our Lord. (1 Corinthians 1:1-9)**

### Background and summary

#### **Paul's visit to Corinth**

Paul preached the gospel in Corinth in the early 50s AD during his second missionary journey (Acts 18:1-18). When opposition grew fierce there, the Lord Jesus spoke to him in a vision assuring him that he had 'many people' in the city (Acts 18:10). With this encouragement, Paul stayed on for eighteen months, 'teaching them the word of God' (Acts 18:11). God used Paul's ministry to bring about the birth and establishment of the church in Corinth.

#### **Paul's continuing relationship to the church at Corinth**

After Paul moved on from Corinth he kept in touch with the church, greatly valuing his connections with it.

1 Corinthians 5:9 indicates that Paul wrote an earlier letter to the Corinthians which no longer exists. People like Chloe (1:11) kept in touch with him, and the church sent him a letter requesting guidance about problems that had arisen (e.g. 7:1). Stephanas, Fortunatus and Achaicus probably delivered the letter to him (16:17). Paul later sent Timothy to visit them (4:17; 16:10f).

## 1 Corinthians has a number of distinctive features

- **IT IS ONE OF THE EARLIEST NEW TESTAMENT BOOKS** to be written, most likely in the mid 50s AD.
- **IT GIVES A COMPREHENSIVE INSIGHT** into the problems faced by a church in pagan society.
- **IT LAYS DOWN PRINCIPLES** for church order and discipline not found elsewhere in the New Testament (chapters 5 and 6).
- **IT PROVIDES IMPORTANT INSTRUCTION** regarding divorce and remarriage.
- **IT GIVES THE NEW TESTAMENT'S** most detailed discussion of spiritual gifts (chapters 12–14).
- **IT SUPPLIES THE MOST SYSTEMATIC EXPOSITION** of the Christian hope of physical resurrection (chapter 15).

## 1 Corinthians is unique in the New Testament in showing the wide spectrum of problems that an early church encountered

We may identify nine major difficulties, all of which have lessons to teach us. They are:

- **DIVISIONS** (1:10–17; 3:1–23),
- **SEXUAL IMMORALITY** (5:1–13; 6:12–20),
- **LAWSUITS** among Christians (6:1–11),
- **MARRIAGE** and divorce (7:1–17),
- **FOOD** sacrificed to idols (8:1–13),
- **ACCEPTABLE BEHAVIOUR** in church services (11:2–16),
- **DISORDER** at the Lord's Supper (11:17–34),
- **THE RIGHT USE** of spiritual gifts (12:1–14:40),
- **UNCERTAINTY** about basic Christian truth—especially the resurrection of the dead (15:1–58).

## 1 Corinthians also illustrates the kind of questions that early Christians addressed to Paul

Seven questions the Corinthians asked were about:

- **MARRIAGE** (7:1–40),
- **FOOD** sacrificed to idols (8:1–13),
- **CHURCH SERVICES** (11:2–16),
- **THE LORD'S SUPPER** (11:17–34),
- **SPIRITUAL GIFTS** (12:1–14:40),
- **THE RESURRECTION** of the dead (15:1–58),

- **THE COLLECTION** for God's people (16:1–4).

Both the problems of the Corinthians and the questions they asked provide a helpful key to getting a grip on the content of 1 Corinthians. *The thing for which to watch is the way in which Paul consistently relates every subject and problem to the centrality of the Person and work of our Lord Jesus Christ.* Most of the problems and difficulties of the Corinthian church arose from their losing sight of him and his Headship. The enemy of our souls encourages that same peril today.<sup>1</sup>

## **I. Introduction. 1:1-9.**

### A. The Salutation. 1:1-3.

The introduction, made up of salutation and thanksgiving, prepares the way for the discussion to follow and, in true Pauline fashion, contains important hints with reference to the burden of the letter.

1. **Called to be an apostle** (Gr., *an apostle by calling*, the force of the verbal adjective) stresses the divine initiative in Paul's summons to office. This phrase, together with the strengthening, **the will of God**, is a designed reference to those in Corinth who may have questioned his right to speak authoritatively (cf. 9:1). **Sosthenes our brother** (lit., *the brother*) may designate the ruler of the synagogue mentioned in Acts 18:17, but this cannot be proved. The definite article may mean nothing more than that he was a well-known Christian. If, however, this is the Corinthian Sosthenes of Luke's account, then the beating he received from the Greeks was a blessing; he became a Christian!

2. The church is **the church of God**, not of Cephas, or Apollos, or even Paul (cf. 1:12). **Sanctified in Christ Jesus** introduces an important doctrine, yet one very much misunderstood. The Greek word *hagiazō* means "to sanctify," not in the sense of "to make holy," but in the sense of "to set apart" for God's possession and use (cf. Jn 17:19). Christians are not sinless, although they should sin less. Biblical sanctification is fourfold: (1) primary, equivalent to the 'efficacious grace' of systematic theology (cf. II Thess 2:13; I Pet 1:2); (2) positional, a perfect standing in holiness, true of all believers from the moment of conversion (cf. Acts 20:32; 26:18); (3) progressive, equivalent to daily growth in grace (Cf. Jn 17:17; Eph 5:26; II Cor 7:1); (4) prospective, or ultimate likeness to Christ positionally and practically (Cf. I Thess 5:23). The use of the perfect participle here refers to positional sanctification. Christians are saints now, not by human canonization, but by divine operation. Paul's aim in the letter was to bring the Corinthians' practical life into more definite conformity to their position in Christ. **With all that in every place call upon**

---

<sup>1</sup> Prime, D. (2005). *Opening up 1 Corinthians*. Opening Up Commentary (10–16). Leominster: Day One Publications.

**the name of Jesus Christ our Lord, both theirs and ours** does not extend the address to all Christians, but guards against the tendency to confine the teaching to Corinth only (cf. I Cor 4:17; 7:17; 11:16; 14:33, 36), a further confirmation of the oneness of the body.

3. The familiar **grace** and **peace** refer to grace and peace **in** the Christian life. They do not refer to the grace that brings a man *into* that life and the peace that follows thereupon (cf. Jn 1:16; 14:27).

#### B. The Thanksgiving. 1:4-9.

The thanksgiving is not ironical, nor is it addressed only to a certain part of the assembly. Still less is it simply a courteous attempt “to win friends and influence people,” although it is true that “blames comes best on the back of praise” (MNT, p. 7). It is, rather, a truthful estimate of the position of the Corinthians in Christ and forms the basis of Paul’s appeal for practical conformity to this. The apostle singles out their gifts of utterance and knowledge for special emphasis.

4. **Grace of God.** That which is responsible for the spiritual gifts mentioned later. 5. **Utterance** probably includes more than the gift of tongues (cf. 12:8-10, 28-30). The Corinthians had a wide assortment of utterance gifts (see 14:26). 7. The result of their enrichment is that they **come behind in no gift**. While the word *charisma*, translated **gift**, has a wide variety of meanings, it probably here refers to spiritual gifts in the technical sense (cf. 12:1–14:40). **Waiting**, a strong double compound word, meaning *to await ardently or eagerly* (Arndt, p. 82), expresses the believers’ attitude as they use the gifts in God’s service.

8. **Confirm** was used in Koine Greek as a technical legal term referring to a properly guaranteed security (ibid., p. 138). They have God’s guarantee that they shall be in his presence at Christ’s return. **Blameless.** Literally, *chargeless*, or “unimpeachable” (Leon Morris, *The First Epistle of Paul to the Corinthians*, p. 37). “It implies not merely acquittal, but the absence of even a charge or accusation against a person” (W. E. Vine, *Expository Dictionary of New Testament Words*, I, 131; cf. Rom 8:33). 9. Everything is grounded on the fact that **God is faithful. Fellowship** has as its primary thrust the concept of having a share in, then a common share. Thus, all believers have a share in Christ and, consequently, a share in one another. This is the hinge upon which Paul attacks the party spirit, the climax of the attack being reached in 3:21-23.<sup>2</sup>

---

<sup>2</sup> *The Wycliffe Bible Commentary: New Testament*. 1962 (C. F. Pfeiffer & E. F. Harrison, Ed.) (1 Co 1:1–8). Chicago: Moody Press.

# 1 CORINTHIANS

## Introduction

**Authorship.** All scholars accept 1 Corinthians as Pauline.

**Corinth.** Corinth was one of the major urban centers of the ancient Mediterranean and one of the most culturally diverse cities in the empire. A Greek city by location, the capital of Achaea (which made up most of ancient Greece), Corinth had been a Roman colony for about a century, resettled by Romans after its destruction, and Greek and Latin cultures coexisted and sometimes clashed here. Its location on the isthmus of Corinth, a short land route across Greece that spared seafarers the more treacherous voyage around the south of Greece, made it a prosperous mercantile community. Its mercantile character contributed to the presence of foreign religions and may have accelerated the level of sexual promiscuity, although promiscuity was characteristic of Greek male culture in general. Corinth was known for its prosperity, and the proverbial sexual looseness of ancient Greek Corinth seems to have continued in Roman Corinth as well.

**Language.** Although Latin was used for official business, most people spoke Greek, especially most of the people who made up the Corinthian church.

**Situation.** Roles were determined by social status in antiquity, and those with wealth and power preferred religious, philosophical and political ideologies that supported their base of power. A simple reading of 1 Corinthians in terms of a conflict of status ideals cuts through much of the speculation of older commentaries; although theological errors were involved, the biggest issue was that people were not getting along. The Corinthian Christians were basically like most Christians today. They had their own social interests, which seemed natural from their own perspective, but Paul summoned them to think instead as servants.

Thus higher-status members of the community seem to have preferred a more rhetorically skilled speaker like Apollos; and, sharing the values of their peers they hoped to reach with the gospel, they rejected manual labor as a suitable occupation for a moral teacher. Manual laborers in the church, however, appreciated a voluntarily lower-status, working teacher like Paul, even if his personal delivery in speeches left something to be desired (chaps. 1–4). Philosophical ideals held by some higher-status members may have justified sexual offenses (chaps. 5–7); conflicts also arose over higher- and lower-status views of meat and communal meals (chaps. 8–11), high- and low-status views of head coverings (11:2–16), and possibly higher-status susceptibility to philosophical mystical currents (chaps. 12–14) and views of the body and immortality (chap. 15). In other words,

the conflicting values of diverse groups in the broader society had been carried over into the church as divisive issues.

**Commentaries.** The best commentary is Gordon D. Fee, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, NICNT (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1987); C. K. Barrett, *A Commentary on the First Epistle to the Corinthians*, HNTC (New York: Harper & Row, 1968), is also helpful. More focused works on specific texts or themes, such as Gerd Theissen, *The Social Setting of Pauline Christianity* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1982), or Dale B. Martin, *Slavery as Salvation: The Metaphor of Slavery in Pauline Christianity* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1990), are useful for specific studies on social relations at Corinth. Also helpful are general works on social relations in antiquity, such as Ramsay MacMullen, *Roman Social Relations* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1974); for such relations in the New Testament, see Wayne E. Meeks, *The First Urban Christians: The Social World of the Apostle Paul* (New Haven, Conn. Yale University Press, 1983); Abraham J. Malherbe, *Social Aspects of Early Christianity*, 2nd ed. (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1983); and other works in the LEC series cited in the bibliography in the introduction to this volume. On 1 Corinthians 7, see chapters five and six in my earlier book ... *And Marries Another: Divorce and Remarriage in the Teaching of the New Testament* (Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson, 1991); for 1 Corinthians 11:2–16 and 14:34–36 see my *Paul, Women and Wives* (Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson, 1992), pp. 19–100; for 1 Corinthians 8 and 10, see Wendell L. Willis, *Idol Meat in Corinth: The Pauline Argument in 1 Corinthians 8 and 10*, SBLDS 68 (Chico, Calif.: Scholars, 1985); for parts of 1 Corinthians 2–3 and 15, cf. Birger A. Pearson, *The “Pneumatikos-Psychikos” Terminology in 1 Corinthians: A Study in the Theology of the Corinthian Opponents of Paul and Its Relation to Gnosticism*, SBLDS 12 (Missoula, Mont.: Scholars, 1973).

## 1:1–9

### Opening Greetings

These verses follow a standard ancient way to open letters; see the introduction to New Testament letters and comment on Romans 1:1, 7.

**1:1.** Letters in antiquity were not usually coauthored; thus Paul may have authored the letter and Sosthenes served as scribe, writing it down (cf. 16:21); or Sosthenes may have contributed to the letter’s contents or (more likely) merely concurred with Paul’s message.

**1:2.** “Saints” means “set-apart ones,” and “sanctified” means “set apart,” “holy or separated for God.” This language was applied to Israel in the Old Testament; it meant that God had set apart Israel to himself when he redeemed them, and they were therefore to live for God, not like the nations around them.

**1:3.** “Grace” adapts a standard Greek greeting, and “peace” a Jewish one. By pairing Jesus with the Father as the source of grace and peace in a wish-prayer (wish-prayers for the

hearers were common in letter openings), Paul declares Jesus' divinity.

**1:4.** Thanksgivings were common in letters. As in speeches, letters might open with a proem praising the reader, which was designed to secure the reader's favor for the rest of the letter. Moralists who gave rebuking speeches or wrote rebuking letters also mixed in praise to make their advice easier to accept.

**1:5.** Opening sections of letters commonly introduced some of the themes that would recur throughout the letter. "Speech" and "knowledge" were important to the Corinthians. In fact, the nearby Isthmian Games (see comment on 9:24–25) included speech contests, and knowledge was associated with philosophical wisdom or the ability to speak extemporaneously on any topic (a skill in which rhetoricians, or public speakers, were trained). Here Paul means spiritual, not merely natural, gifts, but the Corinthians had come to excel in these particular gifts precisely because these mattered most to them in their culture.

**1:6–8.** "The day of our Lord Jesus Christ" here fulfills the role assigned to "the day of God" in standard Jewish tradition. Some elements of Judaism, especially in the Diaspora, played down the future aspects of biblical hope; Paul wants to reverse this tendency among the Corinthian Christians.

**1:9.** Ancient philosophers often spoke of human "fellowship" or "communion" with other people. Although Paul could mean fellowship with others in Christ, he probably means something far more unusual in antiquity: intimacy with the Lord himself. Greco-Roman religion tended to stress ritual (or, in some cults, nonrelational ecstasy). Judaism viewed God as intimate with his people, but it did not claim to experience him as indwelling and speaking to the believer by the Spirit, as Paul does elsewhere.<sup>3</sup>

## I. Introduction (1:1–9)

The introductions to Paul's letters are frequently seedbeds for issues expanded on later; his prefatory words in 1 Corinthians are no exception. He touched on his calling to be an apostle, the Corinthians' calling to be saints, and the unity which is theirs in Christ.

### A. *Salutation and description of the writer and readers (1:1–3).*

1:1. The legitimacy of Paul's apostleship and its denial by some is hinted at in this letter (chap. 9), but receives explicit defense in 2 Corinthians. In the first words in 1 Corinthians **Paul** affirmed his appointment to this position **by the will of God** to represent not his own interests but those **of Christ**.

**Sosthenes** was probably Paul's amenuensis and may have been the synagogue ruler

---

<sup>3</sup> Keener, C. S. (1993). *The IVP Bible background commentary: New Testament (1 Co)*. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press.

publicly thrashed by the Jews (Acts 18:17). If so, he illustrates how God can turn the worst circumstances to a believer's ultimate advantage.

1:2. **The church** belongs to **God**, not man. Had the Corinthians recognized this, their problem of division might not have existed. Those who compose the church have been **sanctified**, set apart by God as His possession. The burden of Paul's letter was that the Corinthians' practice might more nearly approximate their position. **Christ Jesus** as **Lord** was to be obeyed. Herein was unity for Christians not only in Corinth but **everywhere**.

1:3. **Grace** was what brought them together and what they needed to display mutually so that relational **peace** would be maintained. These qualities, especially needed in the Corinthian church, were produced by **God** in those dependent on Him.

*B. Thanksgiving for the effects of God's grace (1:4–9)*

Thanksgiving for a church so rife with problems may seem a bit strange. If Paul's only resources had been his own, the prospects of reforming a group like the Corinthians would have been dim indeed. But God was at work and that, for Paul, was a matter of thanksgiving.

1:4. However prone the Corinthians may have been to self-exaltation, it was because of God's **grace** alone that they were members of the body which existed in **Christ Jesus**.

1:5. It was only because they were a part of His body that they had been so **enriched** with the **speaking** and **knowledge** gifts such as tongues, prophecy, discernment of spirits, and/or interpretation (12:4–11). These gifts were not given to be abused as the Corinthians had done, but to be used for the good of all the church.

1:6. The presence of these gifts also bore **testimony** to the effectiveness of Paul's message **about Christ**. Though it might have been feebly delivered (2:1–5), God securely implanted His Word.

1:7–8. Because it was God's work, Paul had no question about the outcome. Because the Corinthian believers were justified by God's grace, they would stand before Him **blameless** (*anenklētous*, "free from accusation"; cf. Col. 1:22) when **Christ** returns. Thus they could **eagerly wait** (*apekdechomenous*; used seven times in the NT of the return of Christ: Rom. 8:19, 23, 25; 1 Cor. 1:7; Gal. 5:5; Phil. 3:20; Heb. 9:28) for Him.

1:9. This was so because **God ... is faithful** and He had **called** the Corinthians **into fellowship with His Son Jesus Christ**. But one cannot enjoy fellowship with Christ while being at odds with other members of His body (Matt. 5:23–24). So it is on this note that Paul made his transition from what God had done in the past and will do in the future to what the Corinthians needed to do in the present, namely, mend their divisions.<sup>4</sup>

---

<sup>4</sup> Lowery, D. K. (1985). 1 Corinthians. In J. F. Walvoord & R. B. Zuck (Eds.), *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures* (J. F. Walvoord & R. B. Zuck, Ed.) (1 Co 1:1–9). Wheaton, IL: Victor Books.

# 1 CORINTHIANS

## Introduction

### Background

By the time Paul reached Corinth, in the autumn of AD 50, it had been a Roman colony for over a century. It had formerly been a Greek city with a proud history but had been destroyed by Mummius in 146 BC after conflict with Rome, and lay in ruins for 100 years. Its town plan was laid on the traditional Roman grid pattern in 44 BC after the decision of Julius Caesar to make it a Roman colony. It became the seat of the Roman governor of the province of Achaëa and soon had a population larger than that of Athens. Although founded as a 'soldier settlement', supplemented with some freedmen coming from Italy, it quickly established itself as an important centre of culture and trade. Some of the wealthy families of Greece had been attracted to Corinth and settled in the desirable residential suburb on the slopes of the enormous 1,800 foot (545 m.) outcrop known as Acrocorinth. They were among its leading civic benefactors. Inscriptions give evidence of many among the class of the wise, the well-born, and the powerful. By the beginning of the Christian era the Isthmian games had resumed under its auspices. The ports which served the colony were Lechaion and Cenchrae. The archaeological remains of the latter indicate its prosperity not only as a port but also as a satellite city, and at the time when Paul wrote his letter to the Roman Christians there was a church in existence (Rom. 16:1).

It was a city of rich culture and its citizens, as in Athens, worshipped many gods. Among them, Aphrodite is the best known. When Corinth was a Greek city this goddess was associated with love and especially temple prostitution. She had been thoroughly rehabilitated in the Roman period. She was claimed to be the mother of the imperial family; hence her presence in Roman Corinth as a venerated figure associated, as she was elsewhere, with the imperial cult. It is a gross exaggeration to say that the Corinthians' leanings towards immorality were a result of her patronage, and wrong to imply that the sexual sins of the Corinthian Christians could be explained because of her. Immorality, whether fornication, adultery or incest, was not confined to Corinth.

Paul founded the church circa AD 50, after his visit to Athens (Acts 18:1-7). It had its origins in the sermons Paul preached in the Jewish synagogue whose leader was among the early converts (Acts 18:8). Inevitably the church and synagogue clashed. The Jews attempted to institute criminal proceedings against the Christians. This failed when Gallio ruled that Christianity sat under the umbrella of Judaism (Acts 18:12-17), giving Christians the same favoured status as Jews. This was a decision with far-reaching consequences,

especially for Christians who were Roman citizens with obligations to the imperial cult.

Paul underwent a period of discouragement in ministry which required the direct intervention of the Lord (Acts 18:9–11). After 18 months' work—his second longest stay in any city—he left Corinth. The work was continued by Apollos (1 Cor. 3:6), an able Jewish orator from Alexandria and more recently from Ephesus where his ministry had been greatly enhanced by Aquila and Priscilla (Acts 18:24–28). They had been with Paul in Corinth from the founding of the church and followed the same profession as tent-makers (Acts 18:2–3). It would seem that Peter was also in Corinth (1 Cor. 1:12).

Before writing 1 Corinthians Paul appears to have written a letter about associating with immoral people which was misunderstood by the Corinthians (1 Cor. 5:9). He himself had by this time moved to Ephesus when some from the household of Chloe brought reports of dissention in the church (1 Cor. 1:11). Others also came, Stephanas, Fortunatus, and Achaicus (1 Cor. 16:17), bearing a letter which the Corinthians had written seeking Paul's ruling on a number of complex pastoral matters affecting the church—marriage, food offered to idols, spiritual gifts, the collection for the Jewish Christians in Jerusalem, and the request for the return of Apollos (1 Cor. 7:1, 25; 8:1; 12:1; 16:1, 12).

Verbal reports also disclosed problems of divisiveness, incest, civil litigation, immorality, women prophesying unveiled in church, abuse of the Lord's supper, and the denial of the resurrection of the body (Chs. 1–4; 5; 6; 12; 15).

For a more detailed discussion of the Corinthian correspondence and a reconstruction of Paul's several visits see the Introduction to 2 Corinthians. See also Reading the letters.

1 Corinthians is the longest pastoral document in the NT and gives important clues as to how difficult pastoral issues should be handled. It also provides crucial answers to critical problems which one way or another still haunt the church today.

## Further reading

- D. Prior, *The Message of 1 Corinthians*, BST (IVP, 1985).
- D. A. Carson, *Showing the Spirit: A Theological Exposition of 1 Corinthians 12–14* (Baker Book House, 1987).
- D. A. Carson, *The Cross and Christian Ministry: An Exposition of Passages from 1 Corinthians* (IVP/UK/Baker Book House, 1993).
- L. Morris, *The First Epistle of Paul to the Corinthians*, TNTC (IVP/UK/Eerdmans, 1985).
- G. D. Fee, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, NICNT (Eerdmans, 1987)

## Outline of contents

### Commentary

#### **1:1–3 Authors and recipients**

Letter-writers in Paul's day began by mentioning first the author and then those to whom they were writing. Paul refers to himself and his qualifications for writing—he is not a self-styled teacher nor self-appointed Christian worker, but one who has been commissioned for God's purposes to be Christ's missionary and mouthpiece. The letter is 'co-authored' by Sosthenes (1) who is described as 'our brother'. The inclusion of Sosthenes demonstrates Paul's concept of joint partnership in apostolic ministry. Paul was no 'prima donna' and never calls those who share in his work 'followers' or 'disciples' but rather colleagues—'fellow workers'. Nor is the church 'his' although he was the founding apostle—it is God's gathering, it belongs to him (2).

Its status is determined by the work of Christ who made its members *holy*. As a result they are a particular class of people, 'saints'. The term 'class' is used to describe them. It was also the term used to describe the secular classes in class-conscious Corinth (the verb 'to be' is not in the Greek text). Their status as 'holy ones' or 'saints' is given not because of their holy deeds—in fact, some have engaged in unholy ones (5:1; 6:1, 16; 8:10; 10:8, *etc*). It is acquired solely because of what Christ has done, (*cf* 1:30). Paul does not simply stress their status—secular Corinthians were arrogant and considered themselves superior because they lived in the capital of Achaea—but rather their common spiritual origin with every person in the world who calls upon the name of 'our Lord Jesus' for salvation (Rom. 10:13). Christ is both 'their Lord and ours'. **3** To the normal secular greeting of *peace* or 'health', Paul adds *grace* which is something given as a gift and not earned (Rom. 6:23). These blessings are real indeed, for they proceed from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ (*cf* 8:6).

#### **1:4–4:21 Christian approach to ministry in the church**

##### ***1:4–9 Thanksgiving for Christ's total sufficiency***

In the thanksgiving sections, Paul often signals the issues he needs to deal with later in his letters. He can always give thanks because God's sufficiency is able to resolve all our needs in the person of his Son.

Here he alludes to the problem of inferiority felt in this Roman colony by the non-elite. Many Christians belonged to that group. He mentions specifically the highly-polished art of

speaking, *i.e.* rhetoric (*logos*), and the possession of knowledge. These were the tools used by the educated public speaker and teacher, but were they crucial for bearing Christian witness and for being teachers and preachers in Christian gatherings? The Corinthians' traditional love of oratory ('even amongst women and children', Dio Chrysostom Or. 37) also explains one reason why some in the church had asked for the return of Apollos in preference to Paul. The former clearly used his training in rhetoric for preaching (1 Cor. 16:12; Acts 18:24–28). This is one of the major issues in the letter. In each of these verses Paul mentions Jesus Christ. The people of God are significant because everything they are and will be is a result of what God has done for them in the person of his Son (*cf.* 1:30), and not as a result of secular status, privileges or achievements.

**4** His reason for thanking God constantly is to acknowledge the grace which God has given the Corinthians in Christ Jesus. **5** This has resulted in the enrichment of every aspect of their lives. Paul singles out an area crucial to Christian evangelism, preaching and teaching: *in all your speaking and in all your knowledge*. These were gifts bequeathed to them by Christ. **7** As a result they are not deficient in any of the gifts necessary for the ministry they perform, as they wait, not for the ending of their lives by an inevitable event, but for the revelation of the Lord Jesus Christ. This expectation of the second coming represents a radical change in their world view which previously saw the history of mankind continuing for ever in an indestructible world. **8** In a society where the non-elite were judged to be socially and politically insignificant, Paul gives emphasis to the truth that Christ will keep them strong so that they will be blameless on the day of our Lord—an OT expression referring to the day of judgment. **9** Of themselves this is impossible, but the God who has called them into the *fellowship* of *his Son* is absolutely trustworthy, for he cannot fail to keep his promises. Therefore none of God's children should be paralysed in Christian service because of an inward feeling of inferiority or inadequacy, but should look to Christ who is all-sufficient for their needs.

---

<sup>5</sup> *New Bible commentary: 21st century edition*. 1994 (D. A. Carson, R. T. France, J. A. Motyer & G. J. Wenham, Ed.) (4th ed.) (1161–1164). Leicester, England; Downers Grove, IL: Inter-Varsity Press.