

Parson to Person

1 Corinthians 1 (Part 4)

The Church in Corinth—And Other Sanctified Saints

“Paul, called to be an apostle of Jesus Christ through the will of God and Sosthenes our brother. To the church of God which is at Corinth, to those who are sanctified in Christ Jesus, called to be saints, with all who in every place call on the name of Jesus Christ our Lord, both theirs and ours: Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ (1 Corinthians 1:1–3 NKJV).

The Church of God at Corinth

A casual bible student may not see the difference between the words “the Church in Corinth” and “the church of the Corinthians.” However, there is a difference! The Church of God which [was] at Corinth was a true church and was indeed the property of the Lord. However, this is not true of every “church.” For example, a case study of the church of the Laodiceans—a church in the city of Laodicea “ruled by the people” will reveal that the group in the city of Laodicea specifically around 94-95 A.D. was not the Church in Laodicea—it was the church of the Laodiceans (see Revelation 3:14–22)—a noted difference.

“And to the angel of the church of the Laodiceans write, ‘These things says the Amen, the Faithful and True Witness, the Beginning of the creation of God: “I know your works, that you are neither cold nor hot. I could wish you were cold or hot. So then, because you are lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will vomit you out of My mouth. Because you say, ‘I am rich, have become wealthy, and have need of nothing’—and do not know that you are wretched, miserable, poor, blind, and naked—I counsel you to buy from Me

gold refined in the fire, that you may be rich; and white garments, that you may be clothed, that the shame of your nakedness may not be revealed; and anoint your eyes with eye salve, that you may see. As many as I love, I rebuke and chasten. Therefore be zealous and repent. Behold, I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears My voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and dine with him, and he with Me. To him who overcomes I will grant to sit with Me on My throne, as I also overcame and sat down with My Father on His throne. “He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches” ’ ” (Revelation 3:14–22 NKJV).

It is apparent that there were no born again believers in Laodicea at the time John penned these words. Not so with the Corinthian Church. They were born again—yet carnal. They were called saints—but saintly they were not! They were sanctified—yet immature and disobedient. They were recipients of grace—but were not experiencing the peace God intends for His own. They (like many Christians today) needed instruction leading to repentance.

Intended for Every Believer—The Circular Nature of this Letter

This letter, written to the Corinthians, was intended for circulation. This is demarcated by Paul’s statement *“with all who in every place call on the name of Jesus Christ our Lord, both theirs and ours.”* Therefore, we can be assured that the material contained will be applicable to all of us. Some for rebuke. Some for instruction. Some as a call to repentance. And, all for encouragement.

The Church—An Assembly of the Forgiven

One might be able to identify a building in town as a church facility but a clear identification of the Church may prove a bit more difficult. Many who look like Christians are not; some who look like the world may indeed be the Church. These facts then require we look at what the Church is.

Broadly speaking, the “Church” is the assembly of the forgiven—those who have trusted the Lord for salvation. However, a carefully defined segregation shows that the Church Paul is addressing is the body of believers specifically “called and assembled” (“ecclesia”) from the populations of the “Church Age”—a specific period of history beginning on the day of Pentecost and ending at the Rapture. I point this out so that we will recognize the distinction between those found in the overarching “ecclesia” (noted throughout history) and those called together from the city of Corinth with *“all who in every place call on the name of Jesus Christ our Lord.”* This group is specific to the Church Age. The material herein then is specific to believers who live in this noted period of history. Here we will note that there are things Paul teaches that will only apply to the Church in the Church Age, for example, 1 Corinthians 5 and 12–14.

Paul, an Apostle to the Gentiles

If we look over the history of the Ecclesia in the Old Testament, we find a few groups of people noted for their specific calling and purpose. We know that God sovereignly created Adam and Eve using them for His purposes. We know that He set apart Noah. He set apart Abraham, his family—the nation and people of Israel, and many for specific uses throughout the Old Covenant Dispensation. Included here would be the disciples.

When God “chose” Israel He did so to make Himself known to her—that He might make Himself known through her—for the benefit of the rest of the world. This act Theologians call “Special Revelation.” (He has made Himself known through all of His creative acts through what we call “General Revelation.”) (See Romans 1.)

In “Special Revelation” God made Himself known to Abraham, et al. as a fundamental work of His grace in the Old Covenant Dispensation. To the Church Age He chose/added Saul/Paul as a specifically “chosen vessel” (see Acts 9:15) to make Himself known to the Gentiles. He made Himself known to Him, that He might make Himself known through Him. This too was a fundamental act of grace. In this we rejoice—for we are the recipients!

God has not forsaken Israel. He uses them to this day. However, by His grace, God chose Saul/Paul (and the other apostles) as the foundation of His “ecclesia” in the Church Age (see Ephesians 2:11–22)— specifically Paul for the Gentiles in the Church Age.

We then, as the Church in the Church Age, are sanctified/set apart for His purposes and pleasure that He might make Himself known to us, and through us, for the benefit of the whole world.

As we study this letter—written to the Church in the Church Age, I trust we will learn, grow, and shine before a very dark and hopeless world.

I love you all,
Pastor Paul