

1 Corinthians 1:1-9

Some churches can cause their pastors great pain. Corinth was such a church for the apostle Paul. Founding the church in the Vanity Fair of Europe was hard enough. He was so violently opposed that the Lord Jesus visited him in a vision to assure him that no one would attack him to harm him. The Jews had even dragged him before the Governor in their hostility (Acts 18:1-17). But the pain wasn't just at the founding!

A few years later while he was serving in Ephesus, he was brought news of some disturbing trends in the life of the Corinthian church. There were party divisions along leadership lines. Some members were taking other members to court. Some members were unhelpfully visiting the idol temples and participating in their immoral feasts. Others were acting in selfish ways at the Lord's Supper, while others were speaking in tongues and prophesying in a disorderly manner in the worship services. Some were heretically preaching that the general resurrection had already occurred. There was also sexual immorality in the congregation, and immorality at its worst. One fellow was living with his mother in law as husband and wife. What was even worse was that Paul had written to the church to correct some of these sins and his ministry had not been accepted.

From Ephesus he now wrote to this unhappy situation in what we know as 1 Corinthians. Today we shall concentrate on the first nine verses.

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We note the writers v1

Despite these major problems in the church, Paul was not abandoning it. Founding the church at Corinth was not ultimately his plan. He had founded the church because it was God's will and God's Christ, Jesus, had sent him. When Jesus met him on the road to Damascus he was told that he was God's chosen instrument and that he would have to suffer many things for Christ's sake. The Lord Jesus had given him this commission in an amazing act of mercy. He had been an enemy of Christ and now he was a chosen ambassador. It was by God's grace he had been given the mission and by God's grace he was now determined to fulfil that mission. Moreover during those tough early days of founding the church the Lord told him in a vision, "Speak and do not be silent" for the Lord had many people in the city. With such commands from the Lord Jesus he could do no other. He wrote to them as an apostle of Jesus Christ called by the will of God. No wonder he persisted in his ministry to them despite their unholy behaviour. He was about God's business and this determined people's eternity.

But it is not just Paul who was writing. Paul deliberately associated Sosthenes with his authorship. We might well ask, "Who was this Sosthenes?" We cannot be absolutely sure because there were probably a few around in Ephesus at the time. However given the circumstances surrounding this letter, it is reasonable to assume that this was the same Sosthenes who had been the ruler of the synagogue when Paul began preaching in Corinth. It was this Sosthenes that the Jews appointed to run the case against Paul before the Governor in Corinth. He did not prosecute his case well and was not only thrown out of Gallio's court but also beaten by his fellow Jews. One of the reasons he was unsuccessful

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in having Paul jailed was probably that he was being persuaded by Paul's preaching. Whatever the situation Paul thought it would be very helpful to the Corinthian Christians to assure them that as he attempted to correct their church corporate life, one of their significant members, formerly the ruler of their synagogue, was in agreement with his instructions to the church.

We note Paul's preamble to his letter.

Paul was not happy with many aspects of the life of the church at Corinth and he would address those in due course and at length but he would not allow those things to rob him of his gratitude to Almighty God for his great saving work of the church in general or of this work in Corinth in particular. As one experienced pastor used to say, "We should never be surprised at the sins people can and will commit but always be surprised and thankful at the grace God shows toward us".

Paul prayed God's grace and peace upon them. V2-3

Paul addressed the church for what they were. They were not just like any of the other communities that made up the city of Corinth. They were a community that belonged to God. They were a holy people. They received their holiness because they were united with Christ and their calling was to live as holy ones. Moreover they belonged to a network of holy communities throughout the Roman Empire. They, like the Corinthian church, called upon Jesus Christ to be their Lord and Saviour. They were under God's favour and as such enjoyed God's eternal peace. They may have had their problems but they were God's people. Paul's plea to God and the Lord Jesus was that they might enjoy more the favour God shows them and the resultant richer experience of that peace.

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He thanked God for the grace they had received. V4-9

Paul never ceased to wonder at the kindness God showed toward people in Jesus Christ. He himself had had the richness of this experience. He had been a murderous enemy of Christ and now he enjoyed the high privilege of being his ambassador.

The special blessing the Corinthian church experienced was knowledge and the ability to articulate that knowledge. This led to other gifts. In fact Paul would say they lacked no spiritual gift to sustain their community life in Christ until the coming of Christ. On that day they would be found holy and blameless even if now they had some major issues.

And the reason? God is faithful. He would sustain them to the end. They certainly had their problems but the basic one had been solved when Jesus died. This removed guilt from believers and brought them into a living and eternal fellowship with the Son of God.

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Conclusion:

Every church will have problems and every diligent pastor will feel the weight of those problems. Pastors may feel so burdened that they are tempted to abandon God's flock. Paul did not do that. He understood God's mercy from his own experience and spent much prayer, time and energy to convey God's grace and peace to God's people. He knew God had sent his Son into the world to remove their guilt by his death and to give them life by a living union with his resurrected Son. He thanked God for his faithfulness and continued to serve by instructing the church with the knowledge of God.