

## “Introductions and Identity”

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1Corinthians 1:1-3

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1Cor 1:1-9 ...An Introduction that helps with Identification and Identity

### A Contradicting Introduction

...If we gather together the rest of the book and the issues that are needing to be dealt with—one will find this opening to feel a bit like a ‘CONTRADICTION’

*“...the many issues we confront in the book of 1 Corinthians make us rightly question how this is all going to turn out for good. It would seem that the objective reality by which Paul encourages and commends them is being called into question by the subjective experience of the church. How is it possible that people who have received the grace of God and who will be preserved to the end could live this way?”* **Stephen Um**, “1Corinthians”, PTWC

### Introducing the Characters

- The Writer is the APOSTLE Paul ...v. 1

*This calling was not of Paul’s own choosing, as his Damascus road experience makes plain, but was due entirely to “the will of God.”* **Craig Blomberg**, “1Corinthians”, NIVAC

—‘What is the will of God for my life?’ ...

- **A man serving the church in an office that is based in the Call of God**  
...i.e. there will be people who play a role of interaction with local churches and the individuals in those settings, who have an ordained role and right to lead, comment, correct, care, encourage, and direct things.

*"...he affirms that he himself is called to be an apostle ...Paul's reason for the insertion lies elsewhere. The Corinthians are a church at odds with their founder: they are judging him (4:1-5) and examining his as to his apostleship (9:1-23)." Gordon Fee, "The 1<sup>st</sup> Epistle to the Corinthians", p. 28, NICNT*

- **The PEOPLE ...**They are 1<sup>st</sup> Century Corinthians ...

*"As a Roman colony subject to Roman law, Corinth had a government similar to that of the imperial city. The official language was Latin, even though Greek remained the language of the common people. ...Roman military and civil officials resided in Corinth together with a multitude of settlers who were ex-soldiers and freedmen (former slaves) from Rome. There were also merchants, craftsmen, artists, philosophers, teachers, and laborers from many countries bordering the Mediterranean Sea. The city's population included a number of Jews from Israel and elsewhere, native Greeks, displaced persons, and slaves. All these people lived and worked in Corinth or its two harbor cities. They increased the population of Corinth, added to its diversity, and strengthened its economy. The countryside contributed to Corinth's agricultural base, the city itself was a manufacturing center, and the two harbors made Corinth a hub of world trade. In short, Corinth enjoyed international recognition." Hendrickson & Kendrick, NTC (from introduction)*

*In Paul's day, it was probably the wealthiest city in Greece and a major, multicultural urban center. Every two years Corinth played host in its massive stadium to the Isthmian games, competition which was second only to the Olympics in prominence. A large theater seating eighteen thousand and a concert hall which could hold three thousand regularly brought drama and musical entertainment of many forms. Nearby farmers could find a large market for their produce in town, and the city in turn could provide necessary services for the countryside." Craig Blomberg, 1Corinthians, NIV Application Commentary*

### **Corinth ...map**

**TIMELINE:** 50-52 AD ...Paul is in Corinth (Acts 18); 54-55 AD ...Paul writes 1Cor. from Ephesus;

*“If we are to characterize 1Corinthians as either a problem-oriented letter or a progress-oriented letter, then it must surely be placed in the former category. Paul is still having to sort out a multitude of basics for the Corinthian Church... As we turn to detailed analysis of the letter we pick things up midstream. Paul is in the midst of trying to create community and dissipate conflict in the Corinthian Christian community. But it is clear from 2Corinthians that things did not get better after 1Corinthians arrived. Indeed, they got worse.” Ben Witherington, “Conflict and Community in Corinth”, p.73*

<Transition> We will spend more time interacting with their particular dysfunction... but the first 9 verses are uniquely important and worthy of us spend some extra time noticing what the Spirit inspires Paul to say to THESE SORTS of PEOPLE!!

- ***These People are God's People ... Acts 18:9-11 ... “And the Lord said to Paul one night in a vision, ‘Do not be afraid, but go on speaking and do not be silent,<sup>10</sup> for I am with you, and no one will attack you to harm you, for I have many in this city who are my people.”***
- ***These people are part of God's family & body ...1Cor 1:2 ...1Cor 12***
  - ***...Which is not true of all of humanity***

**The Bible Highlights God's Choosing ... “to those sanctified in Christ, called to be saints” ...see v. 9 ‘God is faithful, by whom you were called into the fellowship of His Son’; 1Cor 1:31 on this ‘sanctification’**

**Rom 8:28-30** And we know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose.<sup>29</sup> For those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, in order that he might be the firstborn among many brothers.<sup>30</sup> And those whom he predestined he also called, and those whom he called he also justified, and those whom he justified he also glorified.

**The Bible Highlights Man's Responding ... “together with all those who in every place call upon the name of the Lord Jesus Christ”**

...their is no recognized relationship with the Creator apart from His Calling and Our Responding

- **...Which entails the necessity of a covenant relationship**
- **...Which requires a Spiritual Birth and new Spiritual Identity**

1Cor 6:11 And such were some of you. But you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God.

1Cor 6:19 Or do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you, whom you have from God? You are not your own,

### **Facing The GREAT CHRISTIAN CONTRADICTION!**

...Paul's Lofty Description and Introduction seems to fall FAR SHORT of Their Experience and the Atmosphere of Their Church!!

*"they are 'sanctified in Christ Jesus' ...the emphasis lies on their becoming God's people as the result of divine activity. What God has done 'in Christ Jesus' makes them his new people. ...However, the choice of this particular metaphor is hardly accidental. Believers are set apart for God, just as were the utensils in the Temple. But precisely because they are 'set apart' for God, they must also bear the character of the God who has thus set them apart. Thus holiness forms part of God's intention in saving his people. Paul's concept of holiness regularly entails observable behavior." Gordon Fee, "The 1<sup>st</sup> Epistle to the Corinthians", p. 32, NICNT*

**...This book has an awful lot to say about how we should live! ...It is going to frame various sorts of EXPECTATIONS for these people!**

**—WARNING: Where there are expectations there will be falling short and FAILURE!**

*"In the sense of being set apart, it has rightly been said, 'Holiness is received, not achieved'. Paul does not imply that Christians are already morally perfect. Another writer well expresses the point that 'the church is a school for sinners, not a museum for saints.' Nevertheless, Christian discipleship involves striving to become that which in terms of status God has already given. Practical holiness entails being transformed in Christ-likeness and goodness day by day." Anthony Thiselton, "1Corinthians", p. 31*

- *Striving is a Biblical concept that we must be aware of...*
- *We also must not attempt to live a Christian life that is High on Striving and Low on the doctrine of Justification, imputed Righteousness, and the Belonging to God that IS OURS Before, During, and After we make attempts to Strive!*

**Heb 10:9-14** ...”for by a single offering he has perfected for all time those who are being sanctified.”

- 1Corinthians is a bit of a “Sanctification Manual”—it is correcting and steering these people toward the right things to strive for... but they are NOT striving to be accepted or to achieve right standing—that must be given to them freely from the start!

*“He wants the troubled church that he is addressing to know this: God’s objective reality overrides their subjective experience. Christ’s work on their behalf is more foundational to their identity than their ability to sully it with their failings. He is essentially saying, “Look, Corinthian church, you may be falling apart at the seams, but the God who called you has secured your past, present, and future. He is holding you together.” ...What does this mean for us? It means that our status as “sanctified” and “saints” is not based upon our work but upon the work of another. Our identity is sure because it was given to us by someone else. Our gifts are sure and sufficient because they were given to us by the gift-maker. And our future is secure because it has been prepared for us by the one who holds the future in his hands. ...Because we live in a meritocracy, this sounds alien. The gospel is an anomaly in a culture that runs on self-definition, self-help, and self-realization. But for those who have reached the bitter end of identity building, competency maintenance, and future building, it is the greatest news imaginable. In the gospel, God declares us presentable before he ever even looks at our record. The gospel says, “Stop striving to build an identity; you have been given one free of charge because of the striving of another in your place! You no longer have to live in order to build an identity, but you can live into the identity that has been given to you.” **Stephen Um**, “1Corinthians”, PTWC*

*“...just as Paul is an apostle by divine calling, so the Corinthian believers are God’s new people by divine calling, who as such are to reflect God’s character. One might note in passing that this is NOT their strong suit; in too*

*many ways they look far more LIKE Corinth than they do God's holy people IN Corinth." Gordon Fee, "The 1st Epistle to the Corinthians", p. 33, NICNT*

**Observations & Implications to bear in mind**—as We Try to Learn Valuable Insights from these Corinthians:

- ***The Bible Teaches 'Separation' but Not Isolation nor Disassociation from the Sick, the Struggling, and the Immature; the fact that Corinthians is a manual on how to make adjustments and keep going—rather than a manual on how to dismantle a messed up church—is informative***  
*...To be part of the gatherings of the Corinthian Church was to be exposed to a lot of unideal elements of people who claim to be Christians!*