

Called, Sanctified, and Thankful – 1 Corinthians 1:1-9

Introduction – Corinth is the poster-child church for why we don't want to be a "first-century" church. They were a mess in many ways. And yet we will find that so many of those messes befuddling Corinth culturally, religiously, socially, philosophically, and civilly, are strikingly similar to the issues the modern American church is facing today. Paul writes this letter around 53-55AD, three to five years after having spent 18 months establishing the new church. He is responding to a letter with many questions from them as well as reports that he has received about them. It is helpful to read Acts 18:1-17 to get some of the context. The church was begun with a fight between Jews and God-fearers who responded to Paul's gospel as opposed to those who stuck to the synagogue and old covenant ways, resisting Jesus as Messiah.

Overview of the Text – Paul addresses himself as "called" to be an apostle, mentions Sosthenes is writing with him, and is sending the letter to the church of God at Corinth who are also "called" but to be saints along with all who in every place call upon Jesus (vv1-2). A benediction is pronounced upon them from the Father and the Son, the Spirit implied in the grace and peace (v3). Paul always thanks God for the grace given to them (v4) which he then notes was extensive in speech and knowledge (v5) confirming their testimony in Christ (v6). Their spiritual giftedness was second to none and they exercised those gifts waiting for the revelation of the Lord (v7). He promises that God will confirm them as blameless in the day of the Lord Jesus Christ (v8), and their faithfulness will be the result of God's faithfulness (v9).

Called and Sanctified – Paul was called to be an apostle of Jesus Christ. An apostle was a man authorized by Jesus personally and sent with signs and wonders (2 Cor 12:12, Rom 15:18f) to proclaim the gospel during the period leading up to the end of the old age as they poured the foundation of the new age (Eph 2:20). Just as Paul was called by God, so too are Christians called to be *hagioi*, saints. Long ago, Israel as a whole had been called to be *hagioi* (Lev 19:1-2).

We are saints because we have been sanctified in Christ Jesus (v2), not referring to the process of increasing holiness, but to the status of being "set apart for holy service" much as Israel was sanctified a priestly kingdom and a holy nation (Deut 7:6, 26:19). Thanks to Christ's work on the cross, believers are now sanctified and made acceptable to God (Rom 15:16), and as a community, are able to enter into and enjoy His presence (thus "grace and peace" is ours – v3). This work of the Spirit, a unity of the Spirit, is not something we grow up into; it is something that we must endeavor to keep (Eph 4:1-3). This foundational grace and peace is how all Christians, even in their differences, even in their difficulties with one another, begin and continue in relationship with God and one another. You are to believe and reckon yourselves a sanctified people, not of the world, but citizens of Christ's kingdom. We are to now be living and proclaiming the dynamic transfer of this world to the Lord Jesus Christ.

Thanksgiving Rooted in God and His Grace – Paul is writing to a church that he will say is acting as though they are worldly, carnal, "*mere men*." (1 Cor 3:1-3). He is writing to a church that is a big problem for him and who are not appreciating him. And he begins this letter by giving thanks for them (v4). He gives thanks for the grace of God given to them. He gives thanks for the gifts which God has enriched them with – even though these gifts are the source of all kinds of problems in their misuse. Paul will not downplay the problems in the chapters ahead. But neither will he downplay the thankfulness he has because he knows the God who called them and who is at work in them. For anyone in any place of responsible leadership (pastors, husbands, parents, teachers), this is a critical lesson to learn and practice.

Thanksgiving Rooted in God's Promised Future – The Corinthians (and that generation) were “eagerly waiting for the revelation of our Lord Jesus Christ” (v7) so that they would be “blameless in the day of our Lord Jesus Christ” (v8). Most modern commentators now consider this language as referring to the final judgment when Jesus returns at the end of this age. And that may be, but I think the context begs something more. This church had separated itself (or been separated from) the old covenant building (synagogue) and its faith-practice (Jerusalem-temple-worship) because they worshipped the One that Jerusalem had rejected. It was the Jews who were attacking them primarily in Corinth (and throughout this first generation) and they were awaiting their promised vindication.

Both the “day of the Lord” and “the revelation” of Jesus are mentioned in another passage: Luke 17:22-36, which is a parallel passage to Matthew 24, the great discourse on the destruction of Jerusalem and the temple for rejecting Jesus as Messiah, promised to take place in their generation (Matt 24:34). God was moving out of the temple-synagogue-old-covenant and into every place where they called on the name of Jesus (v2 again). This is what was promised in Mal 1:11. These new saints of the Most High would receive the kingdom forever and ever (Dan 7:18).

When those things happened, the ones who had left the synagogue would be blameless for having done so, for it would be shown that they were the true worshippers of God. Understanding this context will, I believe, shed interpretive light on many difficult passages in Corinthians.

Thanksgiving Rooted in God's Gift of the Fellowship in His Son – Once again Paul says that they are “called” (v9). In these 9 verses “Lord” has been used 5 times, “Jesus” has been used 8 times, and “Christ” (Messiah) has been used 9 times. The church, and therefore you if you are a believer, has been called “into the fellowship of His Son, Jesus Christ our Lord.” *Koinonia*, fellowship, is far more than snacks in the fellowship hall after the service. This is our joint partnership, participation, communion in the body of Christ and His mission to the world. We are called into a relationship with Him and into a close sacrificial relationship with one another. It is a fellowship of grace, by grace and through grace. It is not a natural association that we can decide to join or not to join. If you have called upon the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, that is a confirmation that you have been called to be saints and into this fellowship of grace under the Lord of the universe. And so, grace to you and peace – and all that means for us in Christ.

Dave Hatcher – April 12, 2018

Notes for Little Saints

Did you know that you are a saint? All who are in the church are “called to be saints with all who in every place call on the name of Jesus Christ our Lord” – 1 Cor 1:2

If you are a saint, it means you have called on the name of Jesus. He is your Lord and Savior and you are His called one.

What does He give you (v3)?

What have you been called into (v9)?

You may be a child, but you must know that you are noticed and called by God here and now to be in Christ and to be a part of this fellowship. This is your church and these are your people.