

# Grace & Peace

## 1 Corinthians 1:1-9

First Corinthians is the longest of Paul's epistles, written to a church in the biggest city in Greece. It's full of practical wisdom on many issues that transcend the first century because wisdom always ties back to God and who we are in Him. In this letter we see the gospel thrive in the wildest church in the worst place.

### The City

Corinth is "the master of two harbors", located on an isthmus between mainland Greece and the Peloponnesus. Cenchreae to the east leads to Asia and Lechaeum to the west to Italy, making Corinth a center of international trade and travel. Small ships and cargo would be on a path that allowed travellers to avoid the dangerous sea voyage around the south. The ancient city was destroyed in 146 BC by the Romans and rebuilt in 44 BC by Julius Caesar as a Roman colony for freedmen. This made it a destination for up and coming people with new money. Corinth oversaw the popular biennial Isthmian Games, which brought even more diverse people and investment. The old temple of Aphrodite had been destroyed, but in Paul's day there were at least 26 cities devoted to pagan gods including Egyptian Isis, mystery religions from the east, and the cult of Augustus, plus a Jewish synagogue to boot. It had Greek tradition, Roman culture, and cosmopolitan power and prestige. It was one of the most dazzling and immoral cities of the day.

### The Second Letter

Paul arrives at Corinth during his second missionary journey "in weakness, and in fear, and in much trembling" (1 Cor. 2:3). He had just been beaten in Philippi and chased out of Thessalonica and Berea, and when he gets to Corinth he lodges with Aquila and Priscilla who were also tentmakers (Acts 18:2-3). Though he is not well received by the Jews, the Lord appears to him in a vision at night, saying "Do not be afraid, but speak, and do not keep silent; for I am with you, and no one will attack you to hurt you; for I have many people in this city" (Acts 18:9-10). Paul stays for 18 months planting the church. Gallio is proconsul around 50 AD, and 1 Corinthians is written from Ephesus probably in 54 or 55 AD (1 Cor. 16:8). He had written them another letter, which was misunderstood (1 Cor. 5:9-10), and word from Chloe's people had also gotten back to him about factions and problems (1 Cor. 1:11). He also received a letter from the church with specific questions (1 Cor. 7:1). This letter is like listening to one side of a phone conversation. The topics include what you might expect from new Christians living in a diverse, religious, philosophical and proud Graeco-Roman city: factions (1:10), the foolishness and scandal of the cross (1:18), pride, sexual immorality (5:1), lawsuits (6:1), marriage and singleness (7:1), idols (8:1), ministry (9:1), relationship to the Old Testament (10:1), men and women (11:2), the Lord's Supper (11:17), spiritual gifts (12-14), worship (14:26), and the resurrection (15). Our city has much in common with Corinth, and this letter teaches us how to live together.

NOTES:

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### The Gifts of God

When you consider the breadth and depth of issues in the Corinthian church, Paul's approach is astonishing and inspiring. He is "called to be an apostle of Jesus Christ by the will of God, and Sosthenes our brother" (v1). The people didn't invite him to plant a church there (though his call was externally confirmed), and he won't walk away from the mission when some of them attack him (4:1; 9:1). Sosthenes was most likely the ruler of the synagogue who was beaten and apparently converted when the Jews attacked Paul (Acts 18:17). This church has been made holy in Jesus, called saints with *all the churches in every place* that are calling on Christ (v2). Churches were popping up all over, and Paul wants the Corinthians to know they are not alone in calling on Jesus. The blessing of grace and peace is bestowed on them from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ, and the Holy Spirit is not so much omitted as He is spoken of in terms of His blessing (v3). The Holy Spirit enlivens us, gives us new hearts, opens our eyes; He does will of the Father and the Son, bestowing grace and peace. Grace is God's undeserved forgiveness, favor, and kindness that comes through Jesus' death on the cross for our sin. Peace is the result of receiving that grace. Paul is going to address their problems, but the first thing he does whenever he thinks of them is give thanks for what God has done (v4). The Corinthians are a handful, but God's grace is more! Specifically, he is thankful for their wealth of speaking and knowledge, which demonstrates they received Christ (vv5-6). These gifts result in their lacking no spiritual gift, and the eager anticipation of the revelation of Jesus (v7). Jesus is not done with them but will keep confirming them to the end with the result of their blameless in the day of Christ (v8). "Blameless" does not mean sinless, but innocent of great transgression (Ps. 19:13). God is the faithful one who will free the Corinthians from their high-handed sins (v9). Some have thought Paul is being sarcastic or ironic because these strength and blessings lead them into sin which he will correct later in the letter. But this misses Paul's wisdom and gratitude. He isn't thankful for the abuse of what they've been given, but the abuse doesn't account for everything. They're still Christians, they're still listening, so he is still thankful. When we fail, Jesus doesn't regret loving or dying for us. He doesn't regret all the blessings He gave us just because we sinned. God's message to you is grace and peace.