

Problems and growth in an apostolic church

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Date: 11 September 2016

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[0 : 00] from the Acts of the Apostles, chapter 18, reading there from verse 1. After this, Paul left Athens and went to Corinth.

And he found a Jew named Aquila, a native of Pontus, who was lately come from Italy with his wife Priscilla, because Claudius had commanded all the Jews to leave Rome, and he went to see them. And because he was of the same trade, he stayed with them, and they worked. For by trade, they were tent makers. And he argued in the synagogue every Sabbath, and persuaded Jews and Greeks.

When Silas and Timothy arrived from Macedonia, Paul was occupied with preaching, testifying to the Jews that the Christ was Jesus.

And when they opposed and reviled him, he shook his garments and said to them, Your blood be upon your heads. I am innocent. From now I will go to the Gentiles.

[1 : 21] And he left there and went to the house of a man named Titius Justus, a worshiper of God. His house was next door to the synagogue.

Crispus, the ruler of the synagogue, believed in the law together with all his household. And many of the Corinthians hearing Paul, believed and were baptized.

The Lord said to Paul one night in a vision, Do not be afraid, but speak, and do not be silent. For I am with you, and no man shall attack you to harm you.

For I have many people in this city. And he stayed a year and six months, teaching the word of God among them. Now, first chapter of 1 Corinthians, reading there from verse 1 to verse 9.

1 Corinthians chapter 1, verse 1. Paul called by the will of God to be an apostle of Christ Jesus and our brother Sosthenes.

[2 : 36] To the church of God, which is at Corinth, to those sanctified in Christ Jesus, called to be saints together with all those who in every place call on the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, both their Lord and ours, grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

I give thanks to God always for you because of the grace of God which was given you in Christ Jesus, that in every way you were enriched in him with all speech and all knowledge, even as the testament of Christ was confirmed among you, so that you are not lacking in any spiritual gift as you wait for the revealing of our Lord Jesus Christ, who will sustain you to the end, guiltless in the day of our Lord Jesus Christ.

God is faithful, by whom you are called into the village of his Son, Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

May the Lord bless you as he readings, and to his praise and to his glory. When we think of the epistles of Paul, what we have to do is to realize that there are actually four groups.

The earliest two are 1st and 2nd Thessalonians, and they can be dated to 52-53 AD.

[4 : 18] The second group are often called the salvation epistles because they deal with the teaching about salvation. These are Romans 1 and 2 Corinthians and Galatians.

They are dated 55-57 AD. Then you have the third group, the prison epistles, written when Paul was in prison in Rome, Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, and Philemon, somewhere about 61-63.

And the final group, 1 and 2 Timothy Titus, written before Paul's death, is martyrdom in AD 67. So when we come to 1 Corinthians, we've got to try and find out what the theme is.

And I believe this, that in every book of the Bible, you will find one text that explodes the whole meaning. And that text is to be found in 1 Corinthians chapter 14, verse 40, where he says, let all things be done decently and in order.

Now he's talking in the context there of the gift of prophecy. But it actually applies to the whole letter. Because what Paul is concerned about is that the Corinthians will start to live as they should

live and have a credible witness in the way that they should have before God.

[6 : 00] And when you read the letter, you find that there are two sources as to why this letter was written at all. The first source is mentioned in chapter 1 and verse 11, where it talks about, it has been declared to me by those of Chloe's household.

Now it's the only time that she's mentioned, but the thought is that Chloe lived in Ephesus. And she had Christian slaves. And it is they who visited Corinth and they who made this report to Paul.

It comes up again in chapter 11. I hear there are dissensions among you. In chapter 15, how do some among you say that there is no resurrection of the dead?

So that a lot of this letter is around the report that's given by the slaves of Chloe's household. But the second part of the letter also has to deal with a letter that the Corinthians had written to him.

And so chapter 7 starts off by saying, now concerning the matters you wrote to me. And these are to be found in chapter 7 right on to the end of the letter.

[7 : 33] But here we're looking just at the first three verses of 1 Corinthians chapter 1. The problem of dissension had entered the church.

And it entered the church around the personalities of the preachers, the ministers of the word. You see, some people said, we like Paul.

We like his dogmatic statements about the faith. Others said, no. We like Peter, his simple approach, his dynamic preaching.

Others said, no, we like Apollos. He's a man of words. He's eloquent. Others said, we're not of any of these parties. We're of Christ. So there is this problem of dissension.

And we're going to find out in the first three chapters how Paul deals with this. Now, bear with me, if you will, if you look at verse 1. The address to the Corinthians.

[8 : 37] Paul called by the will of God to be an apostle of Christ Jesus and our brother Sosthenes. This is the way the apostle starts his letter.

And he starts it by saying that he is an apostle. One who is sent forth by God. Now, why does he want to stamp his authority on this letter to the church at Corinth?

The best way of understanding this is to see how he addresses other letters, other churches. I've said already that the first two, the earliest letters that he wrote were to those in Thessalonica.

And these letters begin like this. Paul, Silvanus, and Timothy to the church of the Thessalonians in God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ, grace to you and peace.

That example comes from 1 Thessalonians chapter 1, verse 1. But if you look at 2 Thessalonians chapter 1, verse 1, you'll find the opening address is identical.

[9 : 57] There's no mention here of what he considers his role in the kingdom of God to be. It's simply a friendly and pastoral greeting from Paul, Silvanus, and Timothy.

If you turn to the epistle to the Philippians and to the Philemon, the idea and the title, Apostle is missing there too. And the reason probably is that he felt a very close relationship to Philemon and to the church in Philippi.

When we come to Romans, he says this, Romans 1, verse 1. Paul, a servant of Jesus Christ, called to be an apostle, set apart for the gospel of God.

Now, it's a very humbling statement that he makes here. He says he's a servant. In Greek, it's the noun *doulos*, which means a slave.

That's what he's saying he is. He's giving a humble estimation of himself, not saying he's received this revelation or that, or I founded this church, that church, or the other church.

[11 : 24] I'm a slave of Jesus Christ. When we turn to Philippians 1, in verse 1, we read, Paul and Timothy, servants of Christ Jesus, to all the saints in Christ Jesus who are in Philippi with the bishops or the elders and deacons.

So, Paul and Timothy again described as slaves or servants and eager to do the will of God, whatever that might be. The letter of Paul to Titus opens, Paul, a servant of God and an apostle of Christ Jesus to further the faith of God's elect and the knowledge of truth which accords with godliness.

once again, the idea of Paul occupying a humble position, a slave. He writes to Philemon, Paul, a prisoner of Christ Jesus and Timothy, our brother, to Philemon, our beloved fellow worker, written at the time when he was in prison in Rome and he considered that this was all part of his ministry.

So, there's nothing particularly dogmatic or bombastic about that title. So, we come back to 1 Corinthians 1 and 1.

Paul called by the will of God to be an apostle of Christ Jesus and our brother Sosthenes. So, why is he saying here that he's an apostle, not a servant or a slave?

[13 : 17] He wants to say this in the first place because he wants to reinforce the idea that he's not doing this because he thinks it's a good idea.

he's exerting this call or fulfilling it because he's been called to it by the direct will of God.

And the reason for that is because this is a church on which he must stamp his authority so that it will have a credible witness in this town of Corinth.

Not something he's taken upon himself, but something that God has called him to. And later on in the Acts of the Apostles when he's called before the Sadducees and the Sadducees to state why he's doing this that or the other he states his call comes from God.

Let's move on. the status of the Corinthians to the church of God which is at Corinth to those sanctified in Christ Jesus called to be saints together with all those who in every place call on the name of the Lord Jesus Christ both their Lord and ours.

[14 : 53] So he's moved on from saying who he believes himself to be to now saying what he believes the Corinthians are.

This is not what he hopes they will become. This is what they are now. And in that second verse he says four things about them.

they are the church of God in Corinth. They are sanctified in Christ Jesus.

They are called to be saints. They are exercising a prayer ministry.

This is a very profound statement that the apostle is making here because he's telling them in the grace of God this is what you are.

[15 : 59] This despite all your divisions your dissensions your lack of belief this is what you are.

Now that statement is very similar to another statement that you find in 1 Peter 2 verse 9.

He says this writing to the people who had been scattered through persecution you are a chosen race a royal priesthood a holy nation God's own people that you may declare the wonderful deeds of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light.

It's the same idea. He wants the believers to see despite their problems despite their persecution what they are.

people they are going to say perhaps some of you have heard of Martin Lloyd Jones the one time minister of Westminster Chapel. You may not know his predecessor was a man called Campbell Morgan and Campbell Morgan was preparing to preach in Westminster Chapel.

He had the sermon all made out and in his devotional reading he came to 1 Peter 2 verse 9 and when he read it you are a chosen race.

[17 : 46] This somehow filled his soul with such an authority he discarded the sermon he was going to preach and preached on these two words you are.

As far as the Corinthians are concerned this is a very appropriate thing to do because it stresses what they are in spite of all their problems and divisions.

The church of God which is at Corinth. The Greek term used here ecclesia from which we get the word ecclesiastic means church congregation assembly gathering of religious political or unofficial groups.

That noun comes from a verb that's not used in the New Testament but that means that verb means to call out to oneself.

So the idea that Paul is putting across in this particular statement you are the church of God in Corinth is that it is they who have been called out of the world to form a new society the body of Christ.

[19 : 11] This is what they are. The visible presence of Christ in their own community. he goes on to those who are sanctified in Christ Jesus.

What does that term mean? It comes from the Greek verb hagiazo which means to set apart as sacred to God make holy consecrate regard as sacred purify or cleanse.

When we think of sanctification we tend to think of the process of us being made holy and that's in that verb but it's not the basic meaning.

The basic meaning is to set apart to God as sacred. In the Old Testament there's a different Hebrew word that means that and I want to show you two examples that it means to set apart as sacred.

Second Chronicles 29 verse 19 deals with the revival of religion under Hezekiah against the faithlessness of King Ahaz.

[20 : 43] And this is what the text says. All the utensils which King Ahaz discarded in his reign when he was faithless we have made ready and set apart and behold they are before the altar of the Lord.

So these things which have been discarded have now been set apart as sacred to God. That's an example of it meaning objects.

But it also applies to persons. Jeremiah the prophet he makes this statement in chapter 1 verse 5 Behold before I formed you in the womb I knew you and before you were born I set you apart. I ordained you a prophet to the nations. Jeremiah has been set apart as sacred to God for his use and that is what Paul is saying to the Corinthians.

They have been sanctified or set apart to the Lord by Christ Jesus himself. in spite of all the immorality with which they were surrounded the evil of their society they are set apart to God as sacred.

[22 : 21] He goes on to say that they are called to be saints called to live a holy life and that they are exercising a healthy prayer ministry.

This is all of part of what Corinth is right now. But let's move on and finally consider the blessing. Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. in pronouncing this blessing of peace the apostle does it in a similar way to the high priest did and that's found in Numbers 6 22 to 26.

The Lord said to Moses say to Aaron and his sons thus shall you bless the people of Israel you will say to them the Lord bless you and keep you the Lord make his face shine upon you and be gracious to you the Lord lift up his countenance upon you and give you peace this word peace we know it shalom but that word that's used there in that blessing means more than peace it means healing it means salvation it means blessedness it means spiritual prosperity that is what is being pronounced over the people of

Israel so they shall put my name upon the people of Israel and I will bless them now what that scripture is telling us is this that there is a divine power when the blessing is pronounced and that power is illustrated in the blessing that Isaac placed on his son Jacob when that son had deceived him you find it in Genesis 27 27 to 29 so Jacob came near and kissed him and Isaac smelled the smell of his garments and blessed him and said see the smell of my son is as the smell of a field which the Lord has blessed may

[25 : 12] God give you the dew of heaven and the fatness of the earth and the plenty of grain and wine let people serve you and nations bow down to you be lord over your brothers and may your mother's sons bow down to you cursed be everyone who curses you and blessed be everyone who blesses you now if you read the book of Genesis we find that Jacob had fraudulently obtained this blessing which was destined for his elder brother very soon this deceit was discovered and when it was discovered it was relayed to Isaac his father and he said this I have blessed him yes and he shall be blessed what are these verses teaching us there's power in the prophetic blessing which

Isaac had pronounced upon his son Jacob you read through the history of Jacob as it related in the book of Genesis you will find that the blessing of Isaac was fulfilled in every way so we're coming down from an Old Testament context into the context of Corinth and Paul is saying there is a divine power here which is going to be released on the saints of Corinth but unlike Isaac and Jacob this blessing will only be released in the name of our Savior Jesus Christ this is what he says grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ it will be released in the name of his son the

Lord Jesus Christ what do we know about Jesus in this context John 1 16 17 says and from his fullness have we all received grace upon grace for the law was given through Moses but grace and truth came through Jesus Christ Christ the law was revealed through Moses but not in him whereas grace and truth are revealed through Jesus Christ because they've also been revealed in him what is it that the apostle John says John chapter 1 after saying the word was made flesh he says this we beheld his glory we'd never seen this in any other person thinking of

Jesus the eternal word we saw it for ourselves and because it's in him when the apostle gives this grace to you and peace from God our father and the Lord Jesus Christ he pronounces upon them the blessing of grace and peace why because this blessing will heal all their divisions their doubts their immorality whatever grace to you and peace from God our father and the Lord Jesus Christ

this is not a lesson in ecclesiastical history although it is that this is something that stands for us right now because what it teaches us is what we are in

God we in Westerhills are the church of God serving this great locality for that purpose we have been set apart as holy by God himself we are called to give a credible testimony to the world outside for whom we are also called to exercise a healthy prayer ministry all of these things we are right now and what we need to do is to appropriate the blessing of grace and peace and allow it to flow through us that it might meet the needs of society that we serve amen may

[30 : 57] God bless these remarks for his own praise and his own glory