

The letter of Paul to the Corinthians speaks to “a world like ours.” In the introduction to the letter we glimpse some of the issues which Paul will address. The introduction follows a customary form for ancient letters. Paul modifies the form to make it distinctly Christian and includes hints concerning the interests of his heart and the state of the church to which he is writing.

I. Signature

1. *Paul* and his calling: “called (an) apostle”

An apostle is someone who is authorized to act on behalf of another, such as a messenger who is sent or someone with power of attorney. Paul was authorized by Jesus Christ to act on His behalf and was one of a limited number of apostles in this sense. He defends his authority 2 Corinthians but explains in this letter the nature of his commission as a stewardship (ch. 4) and his discharge of that stewardship (ch. 9). The reminder of the authority with which he writes means that they should listen to what he says.

2. *Sosthenes*: he may be the one acting as Paul’s secretary but is probably more. He is included at least as one known to the church and perhaps the same person as in Acts 18:17.

II. Addressee

1. *the way Paul identifies the church*: “the church of God in Corinth”

Their very existence as a church, their very purpose for being, could be found in God. Factions and abuse of each other denied in practice being the church of God. Cf 3:16-17.

2. *the calling which Paul attributes to the church*: “sanctified in Christ Jesus and called to be holy”

Sanctified means to be set apart, in this case it is set apart for God from the world. This is the position which the Corinthians and all the saved have before God. The Corinthians did not live like they were set apart and holy. The immorality of the city had entered the church (ch. 5) as had participation in idolatrous feasts in the pagan temples (ch. 10).

3. *the broader association which Paul gives the church*: “together will all those everywhere who call on the name of our Lord Jesus Christ”

Jesus Christ is Lord. The Corinthian pursuit of personal rights (ch. 8-10), their factions (ch 1-4), their need to be reminded of the headship of Christ (ch. 11) are all evidences of a failure to remember in practice that Jesus was also to be Lord in their lives. They had been saved by calling on the name of the Lord (cf. 1:26) and shared this common bond with all believers. They apparently were not living this out locally or on a broader scale (cf. chs. 12-14, 16).

III. Salutation

1. “Grace” was similar to the normal greeting and is the first hint of a reminder they needed.

2. “Peace” translates Paul’s Greek equivalent of the typical Hebrew greeting, Shalom. Divisions (ch 1-4) and lawsuits (ch 6) showed a lack of peace.

IV. Thanksgiving

1. Paul’s thankfulness for the grace they received in Christ (v 4)

The Corinthians’ pride evidence itself in their factions, their attitude toward Paul, and in their abuse of spiritual gifts. Paul gently reminds them that what they have is a gift given to them from God because of that which Christ Jesus did for them.

2. Paul’s understanding of the gracious enriching of the Corinthians (vv 5-7a)

The Corinthians viewed themselves as rich (4:8) and acted arrogantly in the exercise of spiritual gifts. “Speaking” (lit. “word”) emphasizes content rather than rhetoric and probably refers to gifts involving communication, e.g., tongues, prophecy, encouragement, etc. Knowledge (cf 12:8; 13:2) may be the comprehension and application of truth. Although these gifts were abused and the source of pride, they also served to demonstrate that the Gospel had been received and had effect in their lives. Such richness came from God in or through Christ.

3. Paul’s confidence for their future (vv 7b-8)

The Corinthians were early awaiting the revelation of Jesus Christ or His appearance when Jesus will come back and people will see Him in His glory. Paul defends the resurrection of the believer in ch. 15. Whether living or dead the appearing of Christ will be a positive event. Until then God will work in His children to make them establish them in their faith. When Christ does appear and their relation to God is checked, God will assure that no charges can be placed against them. The Corinthians could be encouraged about the work of God but warned of discipline and the need to stand firm in the faith.

4. Paul’s basis for thankfulness and confidence (v 9)

The basis for Paul’s thankfulness and confidence is the faithfulness of God and not any supposed faithfulness of the Corinthians or their own abilities. Fellowship with their Lord, however, is inconsistent with carnal conflict with other members of His body.

Despite problems in the church, Paul found things for which to be thankful in what God and done and was doing. Our own thankfulness in all things can be similarly based.

Paul did not draw back from confronting problems even when he can be thankful about things. Neither did he minimize these matters for the sake of fellowship. Neither should we ignore or minimize such matters.

Paul challenges the Corinthians and us to put into practice the reality of what they were and were called to be: sanctified, holy, in fellowship with Christ Jesus their Lord.