

## **I CORINTHIANS: HANDLING BELIEVERS' PRACTICAL PROBLEMS**

### **I. God's Optimistic View Of Us In Light Of Our Destiny**

**(1 Corinthians 1:1-9)**

#### **I. Introduction**

- A. The people Paul discipled in Corinth lived in a city that was famous for its immorality, alcoholism and worldly pursuits (Ryrie Study Bible, KJV, 1978, "Introduction to the First Letter of Paul to the Corinthians: The City of Corinth," p. 1619), so the formidable influence of the city's culture on the Corinthian believers left Paul addressing "(a)berrant beliefs and practices of an astonishing variety" in his letters to them, *Ibid.*
- B. However, in a vision Paul received from God as he ministered at Corinth in Acts 18:10b NIV, God told him, "I have many people in this city," so Paul was to keep on ministering regardless of the trials he faced there.
- C. This epistle is thus timely for us who face our own decadent culture today, so we view the introduction to the epistle in 1 Corinthians 1:1-9 that offers God's encouragement for us today (as follows):

#### **II. God's Optimistic View Of Us In Light Of Our Destiny, 1 Corinthians 1:1-9.**

- A. In 1 Corinthians 1:1 where Paul introduced himself as an apostle of Jesus Christ through the will of God, he also mentioned that Sosthenes, the spiritual brother of Paul and his readers, also addressed Paul's readers. This may mean that Sosthenes was Paul's amanuensis who was writing the epistle at Paul's dictation, the same Sosthenes who once was the synagogue ruler whom the Gentiles had beaten in anti-Semitic rage before the judgment seat of the proconsul Gallio in Acts 18:17. (Bible Know. Com., N. T., p. 407) If so, Sosthenes had since that beating converted to Christ following his initial opposition Paul's ministry (Acts 18:4-8, 17)!
- B. This focus on God's unmerited favor toward Paul's coworker Sosthenes and toward Paul's believing readers is emphasized in the rest of the introduction of 1 Corinthians 1:2-9 in light of the whole context of the epistle:
  - 1. Paul's readers at Corinth were said by him to be "sanctified" in Christ Jesus, 1 Corinthians 1:2a. This term in this context meant to be "set apart by God as His possession," *Ibid.*, p. 507.
  - 2. The readers were also "called to be saints" with all who in every place call on the name of the Lord Jesus, both their Lord, and Paul's, and Sosthenes' Lord, 1 Corinthians 1:2b. It is amazing that these readers are called to be "saints" when Paul later dealt with their sins of division in the Church (1:11), immorality (5; 6:9-20) and errant marital, food, worship and resurrection beliefs and practices, *Ibid.*, Ryrie.
  - 3. Nevertheless, Paul gave his usual epistolary opening greeting of wishing God's grace to them and peace from God their heavenly Father and the Lord Jesus Christ, 1 Corinthians 1:3.
  - 4. Paul then expressed his thanksgiving to God on behalf of his readers for the unmerited favor of God that had been given to them in that they lacked no spiritual gift for Christian ministry, be it in the realm of speaking or knowledge, 1 Corinthians 1:4-7a. The Corinthian believers were thus gifted and using their gifts while waiting for the coming of their Lord Jesus Christ in the rapture, 1 Corinthians 1:7b. This is a very gracious thanksgiving for Paul to state, for in 1 Corinthians 12:1-14:40, two whole chapters of the epistle, Paul later wrote to correct abuses of these same gifts in the Church meetings at Corinth!
  - 5. Nevertheless, Paul announced that the Lord Jesus Christ would confirm them unto the end that they might stand before Him "free from accusation" (*anenkletous*) at Christ's return, 1 Corinthians 1:8; *Ibid.*, Bible Know. Com., N. T., p. 508. This freedom from accusation was possible only by way of the Judgment Seat of Christ that Paul would mention in 1 Corinthians 3:10-15, an event where the godless works of his readers would be burned up so that sinning believers would become blameless before God in the end!
  - 6. In summary, Paul acknowledged the fact that God was faithful, and that He had called the Corinthian believers unto the fellowship of His Son Jesus Christ, the Lord of all believers, 1 Corinthians 1:9!
- C. Accordingly, "on this note" of optimism about the destiny of his readers in eternity, "Paul made his transition from what God had done in the past" in His unmerited favor "and will do in the future" for them "to what the Corinthians needed to do in the present" (*Ibid.*) as Paul began his corrective instruction at 1 Corinthians 1:10!

***Lesson:*** Amid the many great spiritual problems affecting Paul's Corinthian believing readers due to the negative spiritual baggage they had brought with them into the Christian faith as citizens of a decadent city, Paul still anticipated how God in grace would perfect them at Christ's coming so as to be thankful to the Lord for what they possessed in Christ, and how God had so bountifully gifted them for Christian ministries.

***Application:*** May we focus on the finished product that God will produce in every believer in eternity for encouragement today to keep on addressing the current spiritual imperfections we see in us and in other believers.