

# 1 CORINTHIANS: MOVING FROM THE CARNAL TO THE SPIRITUAL STATE

## **Part I: Focusing On Our Encouraging Positional Spiritual Foundation**

### **(1 Corinthians 1:1-3)**

#### **I. Introduction**

- A. Functioning by means of the sin nature, what we term "carnality," is an ongoing challenge in today's churches.
- B. Paul's 1 Corinthians epistle was directed to carnal believers (cf. 1 Corinthians 3:1-3), but his introductory section in 1 Corinthians 1:1-3 offers encouragement for us by focusing on our spiritual foundation in the Lord:

#### **II. Focusing On Our Encouraging Positional Spiritual Foundation, 1 Corinthians 1:1-3.**

- A. The author of this epistle, Paul himself, was a great example of God's mercy in overcoming sin, 1 Cor. 1:1a:
  - 1. Paul had initially persecuted Christians for their faith, blaspheming the name of Jesus and violently persecuting believers (1 Timothy 1:13 NIV) so that even when he was converted to Christ, Christians were initially afraid to associate with him due to his violent past actions against them, Acts 9:1-2, 21, 26.
  - 2. However, he obtained God's "exceeding abundant" grace as God saved him and made him an apostle who in turn would himself suffer persecution for the faith (1 Timothy 1:14 with Acts 9:10-16) so that Paul became an example of God's great patience in disciplining sinners unto Himself, 1 Timothy 1:15-16.
- B. Sosthenes who was with Paul when he wrote the epistle was also the likely Sosthenes of Acts 18:17 whose record like Paul's made him once a sinful persecutor of the Church now victorious over sin, 1 Cor. 1:1b:
  - 1. It is likely that the Sosthenes of 1 Corinthians 1:1b is the same Sosthenes of Acts 18:17, the ruler of the synagogue who then had brought Paul before the proconsul of Achaia with the charge that he taught people to worship God contrary to the Law, effectively then persecuting Paul for his faith, Acts 18:12-13!
  - 2. Sosthenes had then been beaten either by the Greeks in an anti-Semitic demonstration or by fellow Jews who were upset at his failure as their spokesman, Acts 18:17; Zon. Pict. Ency. Bib., v. Five, p. 495-496.
  - 3. This beating perhaps persuaded him to be a Christian! (Ryrie Study Bible, KJV, 1978, fn. to Acts 18:17)
- C. The Church at Corinth was itself a miracle of God's grace given the city's renowned wickedness, 1 Cor. 1:2a:
  - 1. Corinth "had a reputation for vulgar materialism . . . and immorality, . . . Aristophanes coined the verb *korinthiazomai* to refer to fornication (*Fragment 354*)," and Corinth's wealth and vice "centered around the temple of Aphrodite and its thousand temple prostitutes," and Bible Know. Com., N. T., p. 505.
  - 2. In fact, the Lord even had to give the former strict Pharisee Paul a vision encouraging him to continue his initial ministry in wicked Corinth since He had many people there who would believe, Acts 18:9-10.
  - 3. Thus, the presence of a Church in Corinth in Paul's day was a testimonial to the great grace of God.
- D. However, the believers in the Corinthian Church were still practicing heinous sins, 1 Cor. 5:1-2; 11:29-30:
  - 1. 1 Corinthians 5:1-2 reveals that one of the professing believers had had an affair with his stepmother, what wasn't even practiced among the other Corinthian Gentiles in that dreadfully immoral city, and instead of mourning over this wickedness, the rest of the Church had proudly refused to counter it!
  - 2. 1 Corinthians 11:29-30 reports that abuses of the Lord's table had led to some in the congregation suffering physical weaknesses and illness, and some had even died due to divine punishment!
- E. Nevertheless, Paul and Sosthenes of all men were writing unto the Church of believers at Corinth of all places to announce that they were sanctified in Christ Jesus and called of God to be "saints" along with all other believers elsewhere who called upon the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, 1 Corinthian 1:2b:
  - 1. The Greek term for the KJV verb "sanctified" here is *hagiazō*, "purify, sanctify" (U. B. S. Grk. N. T., 1966, p. 578; The Analyt. Grk. Lex. (Zon.), 1972, p. 3, 185), and "saints" here is the noun, *hagios* (saint, Ibid., U. B. S. Grk. N. T.; The Analyt. Grk. Lex., p. 3), the verb *hagiazō* having been derived from the noun *hagios* and meaning that these Corinthian believers were positionally **already saints** in Christ Jesus!
  - 2. [This claim counters Roman Catholic teaching since the immorality and church-wide pride of these Corinthians in 1 Corinthians 5:1-2 are mortal sins (Lorraine Boettner, Rom. Catholicism, 1978, p. 200)!]
  - 3. Nevertheless, their position in Christ set Paul's very carnal readers up for ultimate sanctification as saints at the rapture of the Church, and gave hope of their experiential growth in holiness out of their carnality!
- F. Accordingly, Paul and Sosthenes opened the epistle by announcing that God's grace and resulting peace might be with the Corinthian believers from God their Father and from the Lord Jesus Christ, 1 Corinthians 1:3!

**Lesson: 1 Corinthians 1:1-3 focuses on the hope the believer's position in Christ offers for victory over carnality.**

**Application: May we focus on God's positional sanctification of us in Christ as hope for victory over carnality!**