

## **Grace to You :: *Unleashing God's Truth, One Verse at a Time***

### **Called to be Saints**

Scripture: 1 Corinthians 1:1-3

Code: 1810

We're studying I Corinthians beginning this morning and it's certainly going to be an exciting book. One of the things you have to do at the beginning of every book is to set a foundation upon which to understand the book. And so we'll be looking at I Corinthians just in the beginning sense the first three verses this morning.

I've entitled this whole portion *The Benefits of Being a Saint* because I think that's really what he's saying. I suppose that when we hear the word saint, or when we even use the word saint, we think of a catholic image or a catholic medal because maybe that's the dominance significance of the word, at least in our culture, but that is never the biblical meaning of the word. The word scripturally clearly does not refer to a special people who have been canonized by a church council, special people who are venerated by the masses bowing, kissing, and burning candles to their images. The term saint in the word of God is simply defined right here in I Corinthians 1:2. If you'll look at it we'll just begin by examining that term.

"Under the church of God, which is at Corinth, to them that are sanctified in Christ Jesus, called saints with all that in every place call upon the name of Jesus Christ our Lord, both theirs and ours." Now there you have the term saint used to define those who are sanctified in Christ who call upon the name of Jesus Christ our Lord. Anyone made holy in Christ, anyone calling upon His name, that is any believer, any true Christian is a saint.

You have the right to that title. In fact, the next time you introduce yourself you can simply say it's nice to meet you, I'm Saint John and that ought to start a good conversation. I have been made righteous. I have been made holy. I have been declared just by God Himself, through the sacrifice of Jesus Christ. That's a saint.

Now Paul begins in this particular portion, just to give you an overview of the first nine verses, by declaring these Corinthians to be saints, which as we will see is quite a declaration when you start looking at the things that characterize their living. But He declares that they are saints and then proceeds immediately to discuss the benefits of sainthood from verses 4 to 9. And we're going to get into those benefits in detail next Lord's Day.

But the beginning then of His approach to them is you are saints and here is what it is to be a saint. Now I think there is a great purpose intended in the mind of the apostle in so doing this. He starts out

by stating their identity as saints. The word saint is *hagios* in the Greek. It means holy one. They are holy. What is so amazing about this is that the fact is that I Corinthians from really the first chapter in verse 10 clear on out until it's finished deals with wrong doctrine and wrong behavior. If you could imagine a doctrinal error or a behavioral moral error in the church, Corinth had it. They did everything evil conceivably that a church could do, and yet he begins by saying to them, "you are saints."

Now clearly we must remember something that we've distinguished in the past and that is there is a very clear difference between your position before God and your practice, between your standing and your state, as they used to call it in the past, and your actual behavior. I am a Christian. I am a saint. I am one who has been made holy before God. I am in the eyes of God as righteous as Jesus Christ; however, I do not always act like it. My standing is defined as holiness, my behavior is defined as unholiness.

So if you don't understand that distinction you'll really never be able to interpret the New Testament because you'll get everything confused. The Corinthians were holy, holy before God because they believed in the Lord Jesus Christ, not holy in the way they lived. They had not yet made their life match their position. They had not yet lived up to who they were.

I always go back to the illustration of the time that I was put in jail, when I was a child. I was about eleven or twelve and I got put in jail for robbing Sears and I mean no Woolworth's or something, going for the big job. Anyway I stole some things from Sears. In fact I stole a bunch of cigars and cigar lighters because that's the only thing that was available when somebody wasn't looking, not that I smoked. But anyway, it was lark and I remember I wound up in the Glendale City Jail. And the comments that were made to me were things like, "Don't you know who your father is? How could you do that?" My father had been playing golf with the deacons at the time. They contacted him at the golf course and he brought the deacons along because he thought it was a mistake and they were in the car when he picked me up at the jail. And of course it was a terrible thing for the local pastor having a son bailed out when he was only eleven years old for robbing Sears.

But the thing I got in response to that was, "Don't you know who your father is? Don't you know who you are? Why don't you live up to the thing that is supposed to be characteristic of you?" And in a sense that's really how a Christian is approached. Don't you know who you are in Christ? Act like it! But sometimes our behavior doesn't always match our position, does it? Sometimes kings don't act like kings, and presidents don't act like presidents, and leaders don't act like leaders, and teachers don't act like teachers, and so forth and so forth. Preachers don't act like preachers. And sometimes Christians don't act like \_\_\_\_\_, but the Corinthians were holy. They just didn't act like it. Positionally before God they were in absolute righteousness because of Christ.

And so when Paul begins the letter to them he takes the first nine verses to tell them they're saints and tell them all that means. Why you marvelous saints, you've got everything past, present, future

that a saint would ever have.

Now he begins in verse 10 of 1 by saying act like it. "Now I beseech you," do you see it there? First four words! On the basis of who I just said you are, "Now I beseech you brethren." And he starts in on all of their sins. And so the apostle Paul then is going to state the identity of these people and he does so by giving them the benefits of being a saint. And we'll get into that in real detail next Lord's Day.

But let's look back at verse 1 and let's see how he begins his letter to them. The first word is what? Paul. I memorized the first word of every one of Paul's letters. You know what it is? Paul! Wasn't too tough. All thirteen of his letters begin that way, and you know that's the way the Greeks wrote a letter. They started the letter with the name of the author, which seems a lot more reasonable than putting it at the end because the first thing you do when you get a letter that you can't recognize the writing in you turn to the end to find out who wrote you the letter so you can believe or not believe what is being said as you read it. I mean you have to be able to evaluate it, right? Well, the Greeks wrote the letter, by first of all, this is me talking to you. We do that. We don't have a phone conversation at the end say, "Signed John." No, you first of all say who you are so there can be some conversation.

So the usual form of a Greek letter begins with the name of the author and then the identification of the reader, such as in verse 2, "The church of God which is at Corinth," then the greeting, such as verse 3, "Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ." This is a very typical format for the apostle Paul. He establishes his identity and then immediately, look at verse 1, he establishes his authority as an apostle. Now this is something that Paul repeatedly did and there were many reasons why he did this. You do not find the other writers of the New Testament doing this in the way Paul does. Of course, not all of the apostles wrote in the New Testament, but nevertheless, Paul is the one who is continually identifying himself as an apostle. And I think there are some very specific reasons why he does this.

He says, "Paul an apostle of Jesus Christ through the will of God." He identifies his calling to be in identification with Christ and by God's expressed will. Now I want you to get this in the very beginning. Paul is not doing this in order to gain self-glory. I often think to myself that when you go someplace and they introduce you and they always like to introduce you with a whole lot of titles, you know. Everybody wants to introduce you as Dr. so and so, and people always introduce me as Dr. so and so, and I'm not a doctor. I'm not even a nurse, I'm just plain John, but that's great. But people always want a title. They always want some kind of point of identification, and you know you hear people give introductions and he did this and he did this and he went here and he went there and he has this degree and so forth and so forth and so on. And I wonder sometimes what the purpose of it is, and I suppose the purpose doesn't have to glory, doesn't have to be vainglory; it actually could be establishing some authority. I mean here's a guy who's this and this and this and this; therefore, what he says you ought to listen to because he's got a background.

Well if we can translate that into Corinthians 1 and elevate it to its highest concept, that's exactly what Paul is doing. He is not saying, I am apostle, clap for me. He is saying, I am an apostle; listen to me. I have authority and I speak with authority. What I am about to say to you comes from Jesus Christ at the will of God, for therein lies my calling.

So it has nothing to do with vanity; it has nothing to do with self-glory, he absolutely and totally disdains self-glory and personal merit. Later on in I Corinthians he says I am the least of the apostles, I don't deserve any of this, I am what I am by the grace of God.

And so it is not for that reason he calls himself an apostle, a sent one, an ambassador, an envoy, and a messenger of Jesus Christ. You say then, what is the reason? Well I sat down and maybe for the first time really tried to think through categorically why Paul does this in almost every single letter. The only times he doesn't do it is where he includes another name where he says Paul and Silvanus unto such and such a group. Wherever there is only his name identified initially he does call himself an apostle. And I came up with what I think are five reasons that he does this, and I'm just giving them to you for your future reference, as well as now.

He does this first of all because of his relation to the twelve. Now there were originally twelve disciples. One of them was disqualified. His name was Judas. His place was taken, according to Acts 1, by a man named Matthias, and the ranks of the twelve were then completed, filled up. They became the foundation for the early church; they became the authoritarian group as you come into Acts Chapter 6, it is the apostles that are really running the church. Even in Acts Chapter 2 the people were studying the apostles doctrine, that is the apostles teaching. The apostles laid the foundation for the church and the twelve were known by the church as the authoritative voice of Christ.

Now on top of this here comes a sort of a Johnny-come-lately by the name of Paul, one who at first introduction to the church was breathing out threatening and slaughter, and killing Christians and maiming them and throwing them in to prison and doing all kinds of things against the church. He had not lived and walked with Jesus Christ in his pre-death years. He had not seen the resurrected Christ before He ascended into heaven. And the qualifications for an apostle according to the Scripture, Acts 1, were that they know Christ in His post-resurrection reality, and that they be specifically and personally and directly chosen by Christ. They had to have seen the resurrected Christ and been called specifically by Him into the apostolate. That's the reason we can't have any apostles today. That's the reason there couldn't be any past the biblical ones because no one since then has seen the living resurrected Christ and been specifically commissioned by Him. He has ascended into heaven where He is until He comes again.

So the apostolate has ceased. It was foundational according to Ephesians 2: 20. But here came Paul and he came along a little bit late and so people were saying, "Yeah Paul, un huh, we hear what

you're saying but you're not one of the twelve. You're not one with authority." So he continually establishes that he has authority, and that he was, in fact, one who saw Christ.

I Corinthians 15, he hallucinates. He says, "Christ, having been raised from the dead was seen of Peter then of the twelve," now watch, verse 8, "And last of all He was seen of me also, as of one born out of due time." And when and where did Paul see Him? On the Damascus Road at his conversion he saw Him in blazing glory and was blinded by Him. And then you remember then further than that the Lord appeared to him on other occasions, once in Jerusalem and then again when he was a prisoner later in Jerusalem, appearing to him to tell him he would go to Rome.

So he saw the resurrected Christ. He was specially called on the Damascus Road to be the apostle to the Gentiles. And I believe that he states this because of his relation to the twelve that he might establish the fact that he is in equality with them as a foundational teacher of revelatory truth.

Secondly, I believe that he gives himself this title in the Scripture because of his relation to false teachers. He was continually being harassed by false teachers. Teachers would come in and they would say to the people whom Paul had just taught, "He has no credibility, he has no authority. He is not one of the apostles. The Judaizers particularly did this. And Paul was constantly being knocked. He was constantly being persecuted. He was constantly being buffeted around even by people who claimed to be his friends, at least they were Jews and he was a Jew. And he answer this, I think, in I Corinthians 4:9. He says, "I think that God has set forth us, the apostles last, as if it were appointed to death. We are made a spectacle to the world, and angels, and men.

He says in verse 11, "Unto this present hour we hunger, we thirst, we are naked, buffeted, have no certain dwelling place, labor working with our own hands." You remember he did that. "Being reviled we bless, being persecuted we endure, being defamed we entreat. We are made as the filth of the world and the offscouring of all things unto this day." And here he simply says I am constantly being battered. I am constantly being defamed and dishonored. I am constantly being persecuted and reviled. This goes on all the time. I am considered filth, I am considered offscouring, something you scrub off and throw away. False teachers are constantly doing this to the apostle and I believe that one of the reasons that he establishes his apostle is because he defends himself against those who would discredit him.

Thirdly, I feel that Paul gives himself this title because of his relation to Christ. This has not to do with the false teachers as much as it has to do with the Christian. The Christians in Jerusalem, at least, were not really sure about Paul and maybe in many other areas initially they weren't too sure about him either, about whether he had credibility, whether he had legitimate apostolate. And one of the reasons I believe he repeats his apostolate statement again and again is in order to insure the readers that he is equal to the rest of the apostles, because you see they weren't too sure about it. False teachers had infected them and given them bad information.

Remember when Paul came back to Jerusalem after his third missionary journey he had to take his life in his hands because even the Christians were after him. They had heard all kinds of terrible things about him. Equally had the Galatian Christians been sold a bill of goods about the apostle and he wants them to know that he is an apostle of Jesus Christ and he is in every sense commissioned by Christ. I am related to Christ just like the rest. He said, I never speak anything that was not given to me of Jesus Christ. "I am determined to know nothing," he says in 2:2, "among you except Christ and him crucified."

So because of his relationship to Christ he says this. I want you to know that I'm sent by Christ, that I have every bit as much authority as anyone else, that I am possessed by Christ. I am not my own. I am His and He it is that speaks through me.

Fourthly I think he uses this title to express his relationship to the readers themselves. He wants them to know that he has been sent to them, that he is not just an apostle, but he is an apostle, verse 2, unto the church of God, which is at Corinth. His calling was to them. He had been called of God to go to them with the message. In I Corinthians 9 he defends this again. He says, "Am I not an apostle? Am I not free? Have I not seen Jesus Christ our Lord? Are not you my work in the Lord? If I be not an apostle unto others, yea doubtless I am to you, for the seal of my apostleship are ye in the Lord." Your very church, the fact that it exists after my 18 months of effort proves that I was sent by God to you. So he states his title again in order to express that he is related to them as a special messenger from God.

Then to lastly fifth, I think that he expresses his title to show his relation to God. So his relation to the twelve, to false teachers, to Christ, to the readers, and lastly to God. When he says, "I am an apostle by the will of God, he in effect is saying what I say to you comes as a delegation from God. God has delegated to me this information to give to you. Now they understood this. They understood the word apostleship. There was a Jewish Supreme Court. Do you remember their name? Sanhedrin. They were made up of seventy of the wisest elders of Israel and they made the decisions regarding every Jew in the world, religious decisions, moral decisions, and when anyone had a problem in any place they would send that to the highest court and it would go to the Sanhedrin if it couldn't be settled at the council of their own synagogue and the Sanhedrin would make a judgment and a verdict on this decision and then they would dispatch a man to take the verdict back to the community of Jews that had asked for it. That man was called Apostelas. He was called an apostle, a sent one, a messenger, an envoy, an ambassador, an agent and he would be sent back and he would say to that group, "I speak with the authority of the Sanhedrin. Here is their verdict," and he would give them the verdict. Paul is saying I am not an independent operator. I come as an envoy from the throne of God and what I give you are God's judgments. You see?

So he's establishing his authority every way possible. From the viewpoint of his relation to the other apostles, the viewpoint of his relation to the readers, the viewpoint to the relation of the false teacher who were knocking him, his relation to Christ and his relation to God. In every way he has authority and he verifies it. He came in the power of God, not in men's power, not in his own authority.

At the end of verse 24 of Chapter 1, he came in the power of God and the wisdom of God. Chapter 2:4, it says, "He came in the demonstration of the Spirit and of power." And so he came with all authority and he establishes his authority at the very beginning that the people might listen to what he has to say.

Now he's not gloating. He's not boasting. Chapter 15 he says, "I'm the least of the apostles. I'm not even fit to be called one because I was a persecutor, but I am what I am and I am that by the grace of God." What he means is I am an apostle by His grace and you're to listen.

Now you say what is an apostle, what do that do? Well for you that might not have known this, and you might want to reread the book, or if you haven't read it get it, The Church the Body of Christ, because we deal with all these things. In fact we deal with much of what we'll be dealing with in I Corinthians. You can read it again, or get it if you haven't read it. But the apostles were especially selected as the foundation of the church. You say well what were they supposed to do? I'm going to give you their duties, as they're indicated in Scripture.

Duty number one of an apostle is in the first chapter of I Corinthians, right where we are, verse 17. "For Christ sent me not to baptize, but to preach the gospel." The first thing an apostle was to do was to preach the gospel. What was the gospel? The good news that Jesus died and rose again. Salvation was by faith in Him. The apostles then were to preach the gospel. That was the beginning of their task. And later on I Corinthians 9, he repeats basically the same thing that the apostles were to preach the gospel and also to live of the gospel, which means they were to gain a livelihood from that preaching.

Acts 6:4, gives us further instruction as to what the apostles were to do. It says that, "The apostles said we will give ourselves," Acts 6:4, "continually to prayer." All right, the second thing the apostles were to do was to give themselves continually to prayer, third, and to the ministry of the word. In fact in Ephesians 4:11, it says, "And he gave some apostles for the perfecting of the saints." They were then to evangelize, to pray, and to teach the church that it might grow. And the last thing that they were to do was to perform miracles. II Corinthians 12:12, "Truly the signs of an apostle were wrought among you in all patience, in signs, and wonders, and miracles, mighty deeds."

So the apostles preached the gospel, prayed, taught the word to the church and did miracles to confirm the preaching. Now that's the work of the apostle. They were sent by God, they were empowered by God, they were selected for a period of time in the church history, which was done

when they were done. When they died it was over. Paul identifies himself in order to give authority to what he says.

Now listen to me, people, when you read a truth in the book of I Corinthians, that is not Paul's opinion; that is God's message through His messenger. Now people get into the book of I Corinthians and they like to play around with some of it and they say, "Well Paul speaks in I Corinthians 7 and he says, 'I speak this not of commandment but by permission,' and they say, 'See that's just Paul's opinion.'" Nowhere in the book of I Corinthians does Paul offer his opinion. This is God's word, and that's true of all the Bible.

Sometimes I on occasion come home from the Lord's Day at night and I get on the radio that terrible program Religion on the Line, which confusion on the line to put it mildly. And they have a protestant on there and that's all he is, not a Christian just a protestant, and they get people calling in. This lady calls in and she says such and such about a question she wanted to know about heaven and hell. "Is it true there is a heaven and a hell?" And so they felt that since the Rabbi on there didn't believe that and apparently whoever else was on they directed it to the protestant and he says well, "Personally," he says, "I don't feel that there is." Now he says, "Of course we know that many things in the Bible are a matter of opinion." Well that gets to me. Right about then I want to put my foot through the radio. I don't know why they don't ever let me on those programs. I mean we could really have dialogue.

But the Bible is not a matter of opinion and I want to get that at the beginning because people want to take parts of I Corinthians and explain them away. They get to the part about where a Christian is not to go to law with another Christian and they want to do something with that and make that a matter of opinion. That is not a matter of opinion. That's the word of God. This is authoritative and we treat it as such. And we'll explain as we go the various passages in this particular and marvelous book.

And may I hasten to add that everything in here is authoritative and I believe it like the little ol' lady from cover to cover. And I didn't have to sacrifice my brain to do that. I don't have enough of it to make much of a sacrifice. I've kept all that I have.

All right so Paul introduces himself then by establishing the fact that this is authoritative. But he is God's man speaking to them. Now from there he goes on and he adds another very interesting note at the end of verse 1. "And Sosthenes and you see the word brother, so he probably would put it and brother Sosthenes. This is terrific. I mean you could read right by that and never understand what that meant. That is absolutely fantastic. Brother Sosthenes! You say what's he doing in there? Did he write this too? No. Paul usually used an amanuensis. Manuences is the name for a secretary, but since he's a man we'll call him amaneunsis. It's better than calling him a secretary. He might not like it. Amanuensis like just a penman. Paul would dictate it and he would write it and very often Paul in his letters would sign with his own signature. Maybe sometime he wrote the letter himself, but usually



he dictated it to an amanuensis.

So here's this guy Sosthenes, but he never bothers to put the name of the secretary or the amanuensis in the front unless there's a very very good reason and it is this: Sosthenes isn't just writing this he's agreeing with it. You see, do you get the point? Paul and Sosthenes to the church. Hey he's in agreement. You say, "So what?" I mean what credibility does that add? Well I'll tell you what credibility it adds. Sosthenes new the Corinthian situation. You say how do you know? Go back to Acts 18 and see one of the most interesting things that happened in Corinth.

Acts 18 records the founding of the church at Corinth by Paul and we'll meet Sosthenes. Oh incidentally Paul didn't really get a great reception when he came to Corinth. As was typical the Jews threw him out. But what was really typical after the Jews threw him out the revival began and the chief ruler of the synagogue got saved. Verse 8, "'Crispus, the chief ruler of the synagogue, believed on the Lord with his whole house; many Corinthians hearing believed and were baptized.'" Well since the chief ruler of the synagogue was saved they had to get a new one. So you know who the new ruler was? Sosthenes! He was the new guy leading the mob against Paul. He was anti-Paul.

Well they decided they were going to attack Paul, so they got him and dragged him to the judgment seat. Incidentally this summer when we were in Corinth we were there at that judgment seat. What an exciting thing to realize what went on there where they still have the rocks that are there and the whole thing, you know. But anyway, they got Paul over to that, that judgment seat, and they said, "This guy is persuading men to worship God contrary to the law." They didn't say what law, Jewish law, Roman law, whatever, they were trying to get an indictment against him and get rid of him. Gallio was smart and he just threw the whole thing out of court, just threw them all out.

Verse 16, "He drove them from the judgment seat." Clear the court. Then what happened in verse 17, some manuscripts say the Greeks beat him and some manuscripts say the Jews beat him. And who did they beat, Sosthenes, the chief ruler of the synagogue. Why would the Greeks beat him? Well they would have beaten him for taking up Gallio's time. Get out of here! They didn't like the Jews anyway. You say why would the Jews beat him? The Jews would have beat him because he did such a lousy job of presenting their case that it got thrown out of court and his own people beat him up. Whoever beat him he got beaten. What is interesting about this is here is the leader of the anti-Paul being beaten up and 18:17, by the time Paul writes I Corinthians he says, brother Sosthenes. Fantastic. I mean I'm sure Paul just zeroed in on that guy. What an amazing and marvelous story of conversion, and Sosthenes having been in on it in Corinth would have known the situation. So when he adds Sosthenes' name all of a sudden the people in Corinth say, "Uh oh, he knows us. He lived here. Paul was here a year and a half. This guy's from this place." So it just added some potency to his introduction.

All right now let's go to verse 2. The letter is being written to the church of God, which is at Corinth. Keep in mind that the church is not the church of the Corinthians; it's the church of whom, of God. This is God's church. This is not John MacArthur's church. This is not your church; this is God's church. And one of the perspectives, I think, that a believer always must have is that the church is a body of people, not a building, and that that body of people belongs to God, not to an organization, not to a denomination, not to any person or persons, but to God. And this kind of perspective, I think, is the steward's perspective. In other words, I look at this church not as my church, but as God's church and He's given me the responsibility of caring for it for Him. That's a heavy responsibility. If I was just taking care of the church for my self my standards would be too low. Do you understand? But caring for it for God gives me a tremendously high standard I have to reach. And that's the perspective of a steward and that's the way you have to look at your life. Your responsibility is to minister to the church just as well, to minister to other believers and they are God's possession. So minister knowing that they are God's. In fact, Paul when he writes to the Ephesian elders or when he speaks to them says, "Remember the church of God was purchased with His own blood." So remember the price that it cost Him and care for the church with that in mind.

All right so it's the church of God and it's at Corinth. Now Corinth is a fascinating place. I suppose in all the places I've been in the world it has to be one of the most fascinating because of all of the history that is there. Any glance at Corinth on the map would give you the idea that it was strategic, and indeed it was. Today there's nothing there but a little town. But in ancient times it was a tremendously strategic place and I want to show you why.

Greece is divided into two parts, the north and the south. And the south is the large part called the Peloponnese. Now in the middle of Greece there are two giant indentations, the Saronic Gulf on the West and the Corinthian Gulf on the East. It's almost as if the southern Peloponnese is just attached barely. That whole area there, that isthmus is four miles wide. So Greece is large at the top, it indents a four-mile area and then there's a large southern part of Greece. That indentation is four miles from the Saronic to the Corinthian Gulf, two seaports on each side in ancient time. Right in the middle of that isthmus is Corinth. All north and south trade and traffic went right through the middle of Corinth. It had to, nowhere else to go.

So everything coming to and from Athens came right through Corinth, strategic location, vital location. It became, consequently, a great trade center, in fact, one of the greatest trade centers in the world. Not only did north south traffic through there, but something very fascinating, east west traffic did too.

There were ships, for example, that were on the west coast of Greece. They wanted to go to the east coast and then down east in the Mediterranean. If that was what they needed to do, they would supposedly need to go all the way around the Peloponnese, at least two hundred and fifty additional miles, all the way around. And the area at the south end of Greece is know as the Cape of Malea, M-a-l-e-a. It was so treacherous that sailors of old used to say, "A sailor never takes a journey around

Malea until he first writes his will, very treacherous. Those small vessels just did not venture that way very frequently.

And so what they used to do, and this is most interesting, was that they would simply go in at the Saronic Gulf, they would take their ship up on land, put it on rollers, roll it across the four miles and dump it back in at the Corinthian Gulf and then proceed east. They would do the same thing the other way and avoid going around it. It was easier to go four miles on land than two hundred and fifty miles around the cape. In fact, the isthmus became known in the Greek language as *delcas*, which means the place of dragging across because ships were always being dragged across.

Today, right now if you go there you will see a four-mile canal called the Corinthian canal that is deep, and I mean it is deep, deep, and it runs right through. You can stand at one end, right on the seacoast of the Corinthian Gulf and look right down the canal. It's an absolute straight line and see the west Saronic Gulf. The gulf is now attached by that canal that took hundreds and hundreds of years to build. I believe it was started by the Caesars.

And so that was what made Corinth a very populace trade center. It had great success as a center of entertainment as well. There were two great games in those days in that part of the world: the Olympic games and the isthmian games and the isthmian games took place in the isthmus where Corinth was, so it was famous. It had a mongrel population originally populated, I should say not originally but it was destroyed in 146 B.C. and then it was rebuilt a hundred years later by Caesar and Caesar populated it with free men from Rome. It was originally populated with Romans, then slaves came, and then there were Greeks there who came, and then Jews came as a trade business boomed people came from Phoenicia and Phrygia and so it became a mongrel population as any trade center would become.

It also became a place of evil. There is a verb in the Greek language and that verb is *corintheodzize*. It means to corinthianize. You know what that means? It means drunken debauchery and immorality. The name of that city became synonymous with evil and so the word dropped its capital letter and became a verb for evil. It was a vile city.

Every town, every major city usually had what was called an acropolis. Have you ever heard of The Acropolis in Athens? It's a mount with building on it. You've seen pictures of it? Well that is really not a proper name. Acropolis just means it's a Greek word for the high place, and every town had a high place, somewhere to go when a battle came. And there is an acrocorinthus, there is a high place just south of Corinth and there's this huge 2,000-foot thing juts up like a great big granite block in the middle of the skyline and it was fortified on the top and on a clear day they could stand on the top and see Athens 45 miles away and it's usually clear over there, at least at that time of the world it was. A beautiful area, and so it was a very important area for strategy, for securing the city. The people could be moved up there in case of a battle from the city, which was below and all the farm lands that were

below.

But also on the acrocorinthus was the temple of Aphrodite and Aphrodite was the goddess of love and their love wasn't very ethereal and it wasn't very emotional. It was mostly just rotten and vile. Their interpretation of Aphrodite went like this: the temple of Aphrodite had a thousand priestesses who were prostitutes and every night they came down the hill and plied their trade in the town.

Well that was the worship of the Corinthians. They were a vile evil people. They had too much money, too much luxury, and too much indulgence. In fact, in I Corinthians 6, you get a little idea of what they did. I Corinthians 6:9, Paul describes Corinth. He says, "Don't you know that the unrighteous shall not inherit the kingdom of God? Be not deceived," and here he really describes their life, "neither fornicators," that's the word *porneia* from which we get the word pornography, pornographers, people who are involved in sexual sin of any kind, "idolaters, adulterers," sex outside of marriage, "effeminate," that's interesting, we have people like that who wear clothes, men who wear women's clothes, "abusers of themselves with mankind," masochisms, sexual masochism, maybe even homosexuality in mind there, "thieves, covetous, drunkards, revilers," that is orgies, "extortioners," they're not going to inherit the kingdom of God, "and such were," what, "some of you." You see that was what they lived in. That was their town. Those words could all be combined and they would give you a composite definition of the verb to corinthianize.

And so that city is the city to which the letter is written. And I'm telling you that church was so messed up by what was going on in that city that when Paul wrote this letter they had actually surpassed the city. They were doing some things that even the people weren't doing who weren't even in the church. That's shocking.

You say well what about the church at Corinth? Well Paul founded it on his second missionary journey and let's turn to Acts 18, and see how he started it. We have to see this or we won't understand really all the letter has to say. As I said, this is really just an introduction this morning, but it's God's truth and that makes it exciting to us. Acts 18, let me give you a little background just so you can get a setting, give you some background to the background to the background that we're going to have in I Corinthians.

Paul arrives in Corinth in Acts 18, but he's a discouraged man when he gets there. And apparently he was all alone. He had arrived initially in Greece, Macedonia, as it was then known, at the town of Philippi. Remember Philippi? It was great. He went out by the river and found a group of Jewish women and he presented Christ to them and they were saved and he had a little nucleus of a church. And then there was a demon-possessed girl and her, some men were using her to make money. She was telling fortunes and people were paying and they were making a fortune off of it. And so the apostle Paul cast a demon out of her and messed up their business and they got upset and dragged Paul downtown and threw him in jail, remember, and locked him in the stocks with Silas? They were

singing in there and the Lord brought a localized earthquake and broke the jail all up and on the way out Paul led the jailer and his whole family to the Lord and the church grew, unusual way but it did. Demon-possessed girl, a jailer and his family, and a bunch of women by a river and that was the nucleus. But it got hot in Philippi and Paul had to leave and they chased him out of town.

He came to Thessalonica and there he ministered and the church began and he was chased out of that town and he found his way to Berea and remember he met those dear souls at Berea who searched the Scripture diligently, but the Thessalonians kept chasing him and they finally caught him there and he had to run?

And he finally had to take a little detour, a tricky little deal, and wound up in Athens and he was tired, he was out of gas, he was discouraged, he decided to rest until he saw the city given over to idolatry, his spirit was stirred within him and he started preaching all over again all by himself in this huge city of Athens. He started in the *agora*, the marketplace. He wound up on Mars Hill preaching to the philosophers, but there wasn't much result in Athens so he left there and he came a very broken and discouraged man to Corinth, and that's where we begin in Chapter 18, verse 1.

"And he went to the synagogue surely, and the Jews in those days when they went to synagogue usually sat together with people of a like trade, and so he sat down with people who did the leather work, people who made tents. The word tentmaker is really the Greek word for leathermaking, leatherworking. So he sat down and he met a couple of other leatherworkers by the name of Aquila and Priscilla and he moved in with them and he began to preach in verse 4, every Sabbath in the synagogue persuading Jews and Greeks and finally his friends arrive, but they didn't get a good reception. You know in verse 6, Paul finally got thrown out. They just didn't want him. They opposed him, they blasphemed so he shook his clothes off, as if to say I'm shaking the dust off, your blood is on your heads, I'm clean, I'm going to the Gentiles. He said goodbye to you Jews I'm leaving, I'm going to the Gentiles and he marched right out and went next door. I like that, I like that. He never lost his heart for Israel. He only went to the next door. That's really kind of funny. I'm leaving, walks out goes right in next door. Spent a year and a half next door. Do you think that had an effect on the Jewish synagogue? The chief ruler of the synagogue got saved, in verse 8, his whole house and a bunch of other Corinthians and the church was begun. Verse 11, says he stayed a year and a half preaching the word. Listen, he gave himself to that outfit for a year and a half. That's how the church began. It was made up of Jews and Gentiles. Finally he had to leave, verse 18, he leaves but you know who their second pastor was? Had a good man.

Second pastor of the Corinthian church is named for us in verse 24, "A certain Jew named Apollos." Boy he was a good man. Born in Alexandria, eloquent, mighty in the Scriptures. Paul met him in Ephesus. He was instructed in the way of the Lord, fervent in spirit, spoke and taught diligently the things of Jesus. He knew only the baptism of John, so Aquila and Priscilla those two other tentmakers or leatherworkers in verse 26, got a hold of him and told him the way more perfectly, and finally he

wound up in Corinth.

Verse 1 of 19, "it came to pass while Apollos was at Corinth, Paul was coming to Ephesus." Now you see the apostle Paul's work is continued by a man named Apollos. You remember in I Corinthians 1, that becomes a cause for faction in the Corinthian church. Some of you are of Paul, some of you are of Apollos. Apollos was the second pastor. Well that's the church, a brilliant work done by Paul. Then another brilliant man comes and God blesses his work. But you know something there was some problems in Corinth and the major problem was they couldn't detach themselves from the morality of their world. Does that sound common? They could not get de-corinthianized. They couldn't understand the principle of I John, "Love not the world neither the things that are in the world." They could not detach. They were holy positionally, but they could not clean up practically. They just were sucked into the vortex of their own world. They were in to that Corinthian kind of living and they just couldn't seem to get out of it. So Paul, sometime after he left, wrote him a letter. We don't know what he said in that letter in detail 'cause that letter is lost. I Corinthians is the second letter Paul wrote to the Corinthians, not the first, the second. The first one we call the lost letter for obvious reasons. It's lost. You say, "Well how do you know that there was a first letter if it was lost?" Good question and it deserves an answer.

I Corinthians 5:9, is the answer. He says to the Corinthians, "I wrote unto you in a letter not to company with fornicators." Here he is writing I Corinthians saying I wrote unto you in a letter. He had written them a previous letter and what did he say? Don't company with fornicators. Don't hang around with sexually sinful people. You see what the problem was in Corinth then basically? It was the inability of the Corinthian believer to detach themselves from the morality of the system in which they lived. And people that is exactly what we face in our world today. The morality of the Christian church has gone down at a rate that is measured by the rate of the decline of the morality of the system in which it exists. Now I don't think we're going down at the same pace. I think we're going down in some sort of a relative way, though. There are things that Christians allow today for themselves that they would never dream of allowing years ago. And in a relative way they are still about the same distance from the world, but the manifestation of the world's evil has gone so far they found themselves going in the same way. That was the Corinthian problem. They never knew how to cut off from the world. That's what we're trying to say in I John. Same thing. John's pouring his heart out on it. The church always has the inability or the problem of being in the world and not being able to cut off from the world. So that is where they were hurting.

Well he writes to them, "I told you once before not to company with fornicators." But you know they misunderstood what he meant. And he says that in verse 10. "Yet not altogether with the fornicators of this world." I didn't mean the unsaved ones. I didn't mean don't ever go near the unsaved. Apparently what they did was they just stopped talking to the unsaved people. No, and the covetous and extortioners and idolaters. If you do that you might as well go out of the world. You might as well die, right? You're no good to anybody if you don't mix along with the unbelievers. I didn't mean them.

Verse 11, "But I have now written to you," to clear that up, "not to keep company with any man that is called" a what, "a brother, be a fornicator, covetous, idolater, railer, drunkard or extortioner. No eat with those kind. He's not talking about unbelievers; he's talking about what, believers. What is the church's obligation to continual sinning of a brother? You don't have anything to do with them. You put them out. Why, because then he has to count the cost of his sin. You see, then you purify the church. Paul is saying, "Get that thing pure." You misunderstood. I didn't mean stay away from the ungodly. I mean stay away from those who are God's children who are living in sin. Make them pay the price of loneliness. Make them pay the price of dis-fellowship. Make sure your ranks are pure. Keep the sins of the world out. Anybody who does them put them out. Purify! And that's what he is saying in this letter. Their problem was they couldn't disconnect from the world.

So he wrote them the first letter, and then he writes in I Corinthians, which comes later. Now after that first lost letter Paul got some bad reports. I guess they didn't do what he said. That's the indication of what I just read to you in I Corinthians 5. And he got more word. Look at verse 11 of Chapter 1, he started hearing things about the Corinthian church that bugged him. "It's been declared to me my brethren by them who are of the house of Chloe, that there are contentions among you." You're fighting. He heard that from Chloe.

Now look at Chapter 5:1, just quickly. It is reported commonly to me that there is sexual sin among you and such sexual sin is not so much as named among the pagans that a person should have his father's wife." And you guys are doing things that even the pagans don't talk about. I haven't even heard this of them. Chapter 7:1, something else he heard. Apparently somebody wrote him a letter and told him about this. "Concerning the things about which you wrote unto me, it's good for a man not to touch a woman, nevertheless avoiding fornication or sexual sin, let every man of his own wife and every woman have her own husband." He got a letter from somebody saying they had a problem in this area. Their basic problem is pretty clear isn't it, sex, also divisions, but you go the rest of the book and you'll find they had a problem with everything. They just had no seeming commitment to disconnect from the system. So Paul started getting these reports. He was so upset you know what he did? He sent Timothy to them.

Chapter 4 verse 17 of I Corinthians, Paul says, "This cause have I sent unto to you Timothy whose my beloved son, faithful in the Lord. He shall bring you into remembrance of my ways, which are in Christ." Now he's going to remind you of what you know. And in 16:10, he says, "Now when Timothy gets there you receive him."

So he was so upset he sent Timothy. In addition to that it seems to me most likely while he was at Ephesus for three years after he left Corinth, he made a hurried visit back to Corinth he was so upset. But finally he writes them I Corinthians, but not until he's founded the church, written them a first letter, dispatched Timothy to them, and even made a quick visit himself, finally then he writes I Corinthians and this masterpiece of setting the church right morally and doctrinally. And how he

begins is so beautiful. Look at verse 2.

He says, "You are sanctified in Christ Jesus. You are saints along with everybody else who calls on His name." He drives down the same concept, you are holy, and this becomes the foundation for all of his exhortation.

Now the word saint, *hagios*, the word sanctified, *hagiazō*, same root. You have been made holy and therefore you are called holy ones. This is positional truth, beloved. They are saints. They are holy. You say, how could they be holy with all that mess in their life? Holiness is not a matter of works, is it? Holiness a matter of works? Can a man make himself holy? No. How did they ever get holy? I'll tell you. I'll give you just a quick definition of how to be holy.

Hebrews 2:11 tells us, don't look these up, just listen. Hebrews 2:11 says that, "Christ, by His sufferings has sanctified all who believe. By Christ's death he made men holy. Men can be holy because he paid the price for sin. That's the point. Let me give you another verse: verse 14 of Chapter 10 of Hebrews, it says there simply, "By one offering he has perfected them forever that are sanctified." Again He sanctifies men; that is He cleanses them, He makes them holy, He sets them apart to Himself by His offering, by His suffering, by His death. You say you mean Jesus dies and we're all holy? There's one other step. There's one other step. Acts 26:18, listen to this: "Jesus said, 'I've called you Paul, to open their eyes, turn them from darkness to light, from the power of Satan to God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins, you can be holy, you can receive forgiveness among all those who are made holy,' now listen, "by faith that is in Me." God's part to make men holy was Jesus' death. Man's part to become holy is what, faith. We believe that's it. The Corinthians saw the work of Christ on the cross, they knew that He died, Paul preached that, they knew that He rose from the dead, they said He offered the perfect sacrifice and they believed and that made them holy.

Listen people, if you believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, you've accepted His death and resurrection on your behalf you are a saint. You are holy, and Paul lays it down. He says, "Hey people, by the very definition you have been made holy. You are called holy, and his point is what are you doing acting unholy? You see? I mean it comes on so strong when you understand the background of the book. Just the simple statement of verse 2, "You saints who have been made holy," that alone would have been an indictment, wouldn't it? That alone would have been a piercing sword that could have cut their hearts. You're saints, you're holy. So having identified them he gives them a greeting, just a common Christian greeting. "Grace be unto you, and peace, from God our Father, and the Lord Jesus Christ." That was just a greeting and I love that greeting. Grace is favor and peace is its fruits. Grace is the Greek greeting, peace is the Hebrew, shalom, *arenein* Greek. He says you're saints; therefore you have grace and God's peace.

You know you can't say that to an unsaved person, can you? You can't say grace and peace. These are Christians behaving like this, holy people. And he's going to discuss all that their holiness means



in verses 4 to 9 and then in 10, he going to begin to discuss how it ought to change their behavior.

Well let's pray. Father thank you for this morning's time. Thank you for what we've seen and learned. O God we know that our holiness is because you have made us holy, not because we are ourselves. Our holiness is because of what Jesus did, not because of what we can do. Our holiness is simply by believing not by doing. Thank you Father, that we too are holy, even though we fail, and ever though we sin, and even though like the Corinthians we somehow just can't seem to detach ourselves from the system we're still holy and we're still saints and we're still blessed with all blessings. But O God, teach us how it is to be repaying You with obedience. Teach us how it is to live in a conformity to who we are. May you bring our lives into harmony with what you've made us. Lord, if there's some folks with us this morning who are not holy, who are not saints, who have never yet believed and received the perfect gift of salvation provided on the cross, may they come this morning, may they receive Jesus Christ. May our hearts rejoice with them for the new birth that occurs today. We commit them to you and ourselves as well, in Christ's name. Amen.

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