

# THE CHURCH THAT HAD EVERYTHING

## 1 Corinthians 1:1-9

**Have you ever tried to buy a present for someone who has everything?**

The Corinthian church was that kind of church.

It would be difficult to pastor such a church because they have it all!

The best teachers visit there!

They've heard all there is to hear from the best teachers of their day.

That list includes Paul himself! As well as Peter and Apollos!

***How do you follow that act?***

***Every preacher is compared to Paul, or Apollos, [or Chuck Swindoll]!***

***Nevertheless, things are not well at Corinth.***

**Corinth**—commercial center of  $\frac{3}{4}$  million people—on major Mediterranean trade route

Wealthy, highly educated, and highly cultured—lots of wealthy, elite professionals.

Reputation for immoral conduct—*“Corinthian”* [like “Sodomite”]

Associated with pagan religious worship

Mother-child cult Temple to Aphrodite—1000 female “slaves of Venus” (prostitutes)

Known for biennial Isthmian games (second only to Olympic games)

**Athens worshipped the mind**

**Corinth worshipped the body.**

When Paul first goes to Corinth, he settles there for a year and a half.

Later, he sends letter condemning fornicators and announcing plans to visit them.

Then he receives news about divisions and doctrinal differences. Finally, he receives a letter telling him about some problems and asking questions.

### **Purpose and theme**

Content is shaped by the reports received and his desire to answer their questions.

Because of the problem-centered structure, it appears to lack unity of theme.

Paul applies basic principles of Christian living to each issue; some people just label its theme: ***practical sanctification***.

*That's too broad!*

Same major problem underlies every issue discussed.

**One major problem:** *lack of love for one another.*

Bottom line in this letter:

*Having everything except love isn't enough.*

**A church can survive many missing pieces, *if it has love.***

***Unless it has love, all the pieces won't do any good—it's just noise makers!***

### **GREETING 1:1-3**

–3 normal parts give clues about his main idea.

**Practical basis of his appeal:**

**[Author] 1:1 He's speaking as God's representative**

He's called to be an "*apostle*"—one sent by Christ—His official emissary.

He's called *by* God to speak *for* God! Issues he's about to deal with are serious.

This isn't just his *human* perspective.

This is God's work—life's thorny issues must be dealt with *God's way!*

**[Recipients] 1:2** He speaks to us as "*set apart people*"—called to be *holy*.

*The Corinthian lifestyle* has penetrated the church:

Moral pollution & vice      Pride

Philosophical discussions      Great teachers competing for prominence

Pop-mixture of liberty, pleasure and religion, all rolled into one.

Paul is writing to *the church*—NOT society at large!

We're *set apart* from this by Christ => called "*set apart ones*"  
– "saints" – "holy".

They *shared* that calling with *ALL* who've called on Jesus' name.

– All who trust him become "*set apart ones*."

**We stand out as *different from the crowd*—because *we're set apart*.**

**[Greeting] 1:3** He wants us to experience God's *grace and peace*

What they're living in daily experience is NOT an outworking of God's grace and peace.

Imitating Corinthian lifestyle is *far* from a demonstration of God's grace

There's little evidence that God's grace has transformed their lives.

Their quarrels and problems are *far* from a demonstration of peace

God wants us to show the world what God's grace, and the peace He gives, are like. *But they aren't doing that!*

### **Doctrinal basis of his appeal:**

He appeals to us to show genuine love for one another on the basis of **WHO WE ARE!**

**The church belongs to God**—we're among those “called out” by God Himself! **1:2a**

**All we have is because we're in Christ** **1:2b, 4, 9**

We didn't receive it because *WE* deserve it!

No basis for pride about what we've received—we've received it because we're *in HIM!*

**The church is made up of ALL who call on His name** **1:2c**

We're one with *ALL* who call on Him, wherever they may be. All of these things are true. They form the basis for Paul's appeal.

It's possible for all this to be true of us—and still come up short because we lack love for one another!

### **PRAYER OF THANKSGIVING 1:4-9**

Our negative impression about Corinthian church;

we miss something significant: This was a GREAT church!

If you were a newcomer to town, you'd be delighted to find such a church.

It's great! It has everything!

You'd come to town; look around; and go back ready to move saying, "and there's a GREAT church!"

**Their privileges:** Paul is grateful because they have received EVERYTHING. 1:4-5

**They are enriched in Christ**

Paul thanks God for them because of what GOD has done in their lives

*In spite of everything going on, He never questions their profession.*

Everything we have is the result of what *God's grace* has produced. 1:4

**They have received everything—at least in their heads! 1:5**

They say the right things! They know the truth! *They know their doctrine!*

They've been taught by the best teachers of their day.

**They show evidence that they are authentic Christians 1:6**

Their public *testimony* is well-known

Witness concerning Christ is *confirmed* in them. Their life affirms it.

I believe this indicates they're active in evangelism.

**They have all the spiritual gifts 1:7a**

**Their eschatology is correct 1:7b-8**

They have the right hope.

They probably even had an annual prophecy conference!

They understand the truth that Christ will present them blameless—irreproachable.

**Furthermore, Paul is sure that *in spite of present indications, . . .***

**In the end, God will finish the job because He is faithful. 1:8-9**

They will be unprovable in the day of judgment because God is faithful,  
--NOT because of *themselves*.

God did it—from beginning to end, it's God's work!

*He called them He is faithful He will finish what He started*

**They are:**

\* **Rich in every way!**

**Great speakers! Great teaching!**

**Good understanding of God's Word!**

\* **Solid testimony for Christ**

\* **All spiritual gifts evident**

\* **Eagerly awaiting the Lord's return**

***What more could you ask for?!!***

They have **EVERYTHING!** But something is missing!

*Can you tell what it is?*

Paul identifies it in 1:10

**They had everything except love for one another**  
(and it wasn't pretty!)

**You can have all of these things and still be carnal!**

**They're lacking love and unity.**

All the problems in the book arise because of one lack:  
they don't have genuine love for each other.

That's why Paul's final appeal is significant: **12:31;**  
**13:1; 13:13-14:1**

### **WHAT HAPPENS TO A CHURCH WHEN LOVE IS MISSING?**

[Sample: ] Divisions/personality cults 1-4 Fights over rights 8-10

Indifference to sin in their midst 5 Women's lib 11

Legal feuds among brethren 6 Hoarding food at potlucks 11

Cheating one another 6 Pride concerning spiritual gifts 12-14

Legalistic attitudes about marriage 7 Inability to correct doctrinal confusion 15

Little interest in giving 16

**If we have everything they have, but no love—we're just making noise (1 Cor. 13)!**

**It's WORTHLESS!!!** Love has to come first.

Jesus said people will be able to identify HIS disciples by our love for one another.

They didn't start out real well. At first it was every man for himself.

But they became known for their love.

***How are WE doing?***

**Are we known for our love for one another?**

Article in Discipleship Journal talked about how "The Issue" is splitting the church.

He chose to label it that way because it doesn't really matter what "The Issue" is!

And it really doesn't matter what side of "The Issue" you're on.

We can have the best program in the world!

But if we don't have love, we're just a bunch of noise makers.

## ***WE MUST GET BACK TO LOVING ONE ANOTHER!***

God won't bless His church, unless we get that priority straight, and love one another! —whether we happen to agree on “The Issue” or not!

God loves us! He wants His children, *US*, to love one another! If I could take you to Corinth, and introduce you to the real people who live there, you'd discover something interesting about them: their alliances change from one issue to the next!

Those who agree on the issue of the preachers, don't always agree on discipline.

Those who agree on the issue of doubtful things—what we're allowed to do—don't always agree on the women in ministry issue, or on worship styles.

“The issue” in each of these cases is only *a symptom* of the real problem.

“The issue” isn't the issue at all.

The real issue is *lack of love* for one another!

God reminds me of **two incidents** I witnessed that I shall never forget!

The first I witnessed in church years ago.

The pastor stood one Sunday morning to speak:

“I stand before you this morning as **a pastor with a broken heart.**”

I feel like the apostle Paul must have felt when he wrote to the Corinthian church.”

They lost their love for one another.

After dealing with “the issue” in that church, next Sunday 1/3 of the people were gone.

Within a month, they were replaced by others, the congregation began to grow, as people began to love each other

That’s why Paul wrote the letter to the Corinthian church.

2nd incident I will never forget happened years ago also.

Helen and I attended the **national conference** of a major denomination.

Group of young people did a modern dance about how the fall has affected modern society.

They pointed out numerous ways fallen man has corrupted our environment, and how the lack of love has corrupted society.

At the close there was opportunity for dialogue between delegates and the young people.

After numerous questions, an older gentleman went to the microphone and asked: “I heard a great deal in your program about what’s wrong with our society, and our lack of love, but I didn’t hear anything about forgiveness.

*Where does forgiveness fit into what you’ve been trying to tell us?*

I’ll never forget the response. Young man takes a microphone, with a glare in his eye: *“We will forgive, and start to show love to you, when you start demonstrating love to us!”*

They rightly observed that lack of love was the problem;

but they failed to realize that the solution for lack of love has to start with *US!*

***THOSE “YOUNG PEOPLE” ARE NOW IN THEIR FORTIES!***

Many of them are still angry, and STILL haven't learned LOVE  
MUST START WITH US!

**I'm convinced there are some hurting people in OUR congregation this morning.**

There are *numerous* issues involved,  
but I can assure you that the same thing is true in Warsaw that  
was true in Corinth! :

"The issue," however significant it may seem for you, isn't the  
real issue!

*The problem with treating symptoms is that you fix  
a symptom, but the real sickness just pops out  
again somewhere else.*

We have to deal with the real issue! We must love each other.  
That has to start with US, NOT the other guy!

**God only blesses His church when we love each other! 1:10; 13:1; 14:1**

During next few weeks, we're going to look at specific **ways lack of love shows up in church, and what God wants US to do about it.**

I'm praying that God will speak to ALL of US about how we ought to show love for one another.

**God wants us to love one another!**

Will that demonstration of love start with us?