

“The Church of God”

1 Corinthians 1:1-3

As was pointed out in the last message on this text, these three verses act as an introduction to the book we call “First Corinthians” (or, “One Corinthians,” as some say). It was the first of two letters recorded in Scripture from the Apostle Paul to the saints in the city of Corinth.

The point of these three verses – “the church of God which is at Corinth” – is found in the answer to the question: What can we learn from this text that will help us as followers of Christ be better at serving Him? The answer to that question is the whole purpose of the letter written to the saints at Corinth.

What about the church? As has been said many times, the church is not the building, the church is not a place – it is a people. The term “church” is not to be considered a noun – it is a verb. It’s a group of believers “doing” something, not “being” somewhere.

“Where is the church at 11:25 on Monday morning?” The church then is in the dentist’s office, in the automobile sales room and repair shop, and out in the truck. It is in the hospital, in the classroom, and in the home. It is in the offices, insurance, law, real estate, whatever it is. That is where the church is, wherever God’s people are. They are doing what they ought to be doing. They are honoring God, not just while they worship in a building but out there.

Arthur H. DeKruyter (1926-)

I. IS CALLED OUT OF THE WORLD – “THE CHURCH OF GOD WHICH IS AT CORINTH”

A. The word for "church" here (and in more than 100 other places in the New Testament) is the Greek word "ecclesia"

1. The word "ecclesia" means called out assembly – it comes from two Greek words
 - a) The first one means "out of" ("ek")
 - b) The other is a verb that means "to call"
 - c) So, literally, "the called out" – as already stated, the church is not a noun but a verb, and the very definition of the word translated "church" in many English versions of the Bible bears that out
 - d) Of note, here, is the definition of the word "church" in our English Bibles – it is a word that is most commonly referred to as "the house of the Lord" (tracing back to the Greek word "kuriakon" – the word for building, and the word "kurios" for Lord). The original Greek word for "church" had nothing to do with a building – it referred to the believers themselves.

2. The usage of the word in Bible times was not initially a spiritual one – it was used for "an assembly of the people convened at the public place of council for the purpose of deliberating" (Thayer)

Acts 19:39

(39) But if ye enquire any thing concerning other matters, it shall be determined in a lawful assembly.

 - a) "It originally meant an assembly called out by the magistrate, or by legitimate authority" (Smith and Hackett – as found at <https://www.studylight.org/language-studies/greek-thoughts.html?article=4>)

b) "Every citizen of Corinth knew about the ecclesia of Corinth. In every Greek city the ecclesia was – to use modern term which will help us – the town council. It was the governing body in the affairs of every Greek city, consisting of a company of men called out to take oversight of the city." (G. Campbell Morgan)

3. Considering the brief etymology of the word, it can be seen that "church" in the New Testament was an assembly (a congregation) of those that had been "called out" of the world unto the Lord (where the word "church" comes in) for a purpose

a) In its broadest sense, it is all those that are believers in Christ, the family of God, the church of God (universal)

1 Corinthians 12:13

(13) For by one Spirit are we all baptized into one body, whether *we be* Jews or Gentiles, whether *we be* bond or free; and have been all made to drink into one Spirit.

Ephesians 4:4

(4) *There is* one body, and one Spirit, even as ye are called in one hope of your calling;

b) In its practical application, it is a group of believers assembled together in a local place for the purpose of worship and service to the Lord – such as we find in this verse – "Which is at Corinth"

It matters not how spiritual a church may profess to be, if souls are not saved, something is radically wrong, and the professed spirituality

is simply a false experience, a delusion of the devil. People who are satisfied to meet together simply to have a good time among themselves are far away from God. Real spirituality always has an outcome.

Oswald J. Smith (B. 1889)

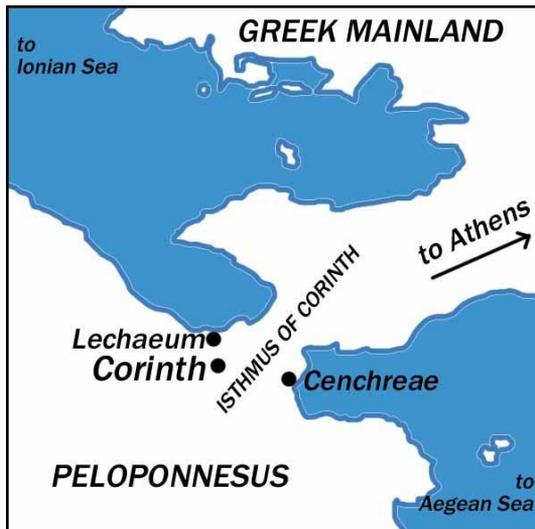
B. It is the church "of God"

1. The meaning here is belonging to God – “not to any individual or faction” (Robertson)
2. “The church is called ‘the church of God,’ because it has been founded by His agency, and was devoted to his service. It is worthy of remark, that although great disorders had been introduced into that church; though there were separations and erroneous doctrines; though there were some who gave evidence that they were not sincere Christians, yet the apostle had no hesitation in applying to them the name of a ‘church of God.’” (Barnes)
3. The point here is that no church, no congregation, no assembly, gathered in the name of the One who established them, is perfect, nor will it be perfect on this earth because it is made up of imperfect people, yet it is still “the church of God”

C. "Which is at [or, in] Corinth"

1. The city of Corinth – located in southern Greece, about 50 miles from Athens, and

about two miles south of the narrow isthmus that forms a land bridge between the main landmass of Greece and the Peloponnesus



2. Determining the population of Corinth in Bible times is difficult – some put it at 100,000 people in it's rebuilt Roman status, with others having it as high as 600,000

The following is from Vincent's Word

Studies:

On the restoration of the city by Julius Caesar, both Greek and Jewish merchants settled in Corinth in such numbers as probably to outnumber the Romans. In Paul's time it was distinctively a commercial center, marked by wealth and luxury. "It was the 'Vanity Fair' of the Roman Empire, at once the London and the Paris of the first century after Christ" (Farrar). It was conspicuous for its immorality. To "corinthianize" was the term for reckless debauchery. Juvenal sarcastically alludes to it as "perfumed Corinth;" and Martial pictures an effeminate fellow boasting of being a Corinthian citizen. The temple of Aphrodite (Venus) employed a thousand ministers. Drunkenness rivaled licentiousness, and Corinthians, when introduced on the stage, were commonly represented as drunk. Paul's impression of its profligacy may be seen in his description of heathenism in the first of Romans, and in his stern words concerning sensual sin in the two Corinthian Epistles. "Politically Roman, socially Greek, religiously it was Roman, Greek, Oriental, all in one. When, therefore, the apostle preached to the Corinthians, the Gospel spoke to the whole world and to the living present" (Edwards).

3. What is important here is that, no matter how wicked the city is, we have a responsibility to give them the gospel, and a responsibility to establish churches in those cities – not run from them when they turn wicked
4. Also, of importance is the fact that we are

to maintain our walk with the Lord and our testimony no matter how wicked the world gets (more on that later)

5. Notice, it doesn't say "the church of Corinth" – it wasn't the church found only in Corinth, but rather the church of God that existed in the city of Corinth

II. IS CALLED UNTO CHRIST – "SANCTIFIED"

A. "To them"

1. The church was made up of mostly Greeks, with a mixture of free men and slaves
2. Some give the size of the church as being between 40 and 150 members, but considering the fact that the book of Acts (18:8) says that "many of the Corinthians hearing believed, and were baptized," and the size of the city, it would be reasonable to believe it was larger than that – by the content of the book itself, it would be safe to consider the size in the several hundreds, if not, thousands

B. "That are sanctified"

1. The word "sanctify" means to make clean, render pure – to make one holy
2. It is seen here that the "sanctifying" is done because of the work of Christ ("in" – resting in) – He is the one that made the believer pure and clean through His work on the cross, and this is done through the ministry of the Holy Spirit through the preaching of the Word of God
3. As a doctrinal position, we believe that

sanctification is wholly the work of God by which He sets apart the believer unto Himself (initial sanctification). Once saved, the believer's position as seen by God is holy and blameless in Christ. Then, walking with the Lord, encountering the trials of life and of the flesh, the believer is continuously sanctified unto holy living (progressive sanctification). God completes and makes final the believer's sanctification when Christ takes us to be with Him (final sanctification).

Practically, the individual believer must constantly yield his life, confessing sin and consecrating himself to God as the Holy Spirit uses the Word to convict of areas needing the grace of God in sanctification. The daily living of believers thus yielding to God separates them from entanglement with worldly activities. This testimony to God's work is evident to believers and unbelievers alike.

2 Timothy 2:4

(4) No man that warreth entangleth himself with the affairs of *this* life; that he may please him who hath chosen him to be a soldier.

1 Thessalonians 5:23

(23) And the very God of peace sanctify you wholly; and *I pray God* your whole spirit and soul and body be preserved blameless unto the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ.

1 Thessalonians 4:3

(3) For this is the will of God, *even* your sanctification, that ye should abstain from fornication:

C. "In Christ Jesus" – the name of Christ appears nine times in the first nine verses of the epistle – it is the foundation upon which the church is built, and it is the foundation for the writing of this letter

III. IS CALLED FOR A PURPOSE – "SAINTS"

A. The words "to be" have been supplied by the translators for readability – it simply reads "called saints" in the Greek

B. Similar word as translated "sanctified" – this word is most often translated "holy" (168 times of the 231 times it's used in the New Testament) – means to be set apart for Divine use

C. The believers of the congregation of God in Corinth were called out unto Christ (and by Christ) for a purpose – the purpose is that of demonstrating the holiness of God to the world so that they can see Christ in us and be saved

One of American Christianity's most serious evils may be the sin of sermon listening. We hear, but we do not act. God is not basically interested in our listening to sermons. He wants us to be living sermons. The church is intended to be a vibrant, redeeming community of compassion, service, love, and worship. It is not a fraternity of fans of the faith.

Beam

D. We will not be holy without first responding to the call of God through grace and becoming part of the "Church

(congregation, assembly) of God," and then, as the work of sanctification takes place in our lives we walk closer and closer to Him

Conclusion: Much is done in the name of "the church" today that is not what God had in mind. It may not be wrong, in and of itself, but it is not what the Bible refers to as the "church" – the called-out body of believers in the name of Jesus Christ, for His work and service, with the intent of being holy. If the outcome of the ministry of a church isn't to edify the body of Christ with the ultimate purpose of building the Kingdom of God then, no matter how successful that church may be in the eyes of man, it is not going to be effective in the way God intended.

I was naked, and you questioned my lack of modesty in my appearance. I was imprisoned, and you debated the legal aspects of interference.

I was penniless, and you discussed tax-deductible donations from your wealth. I was sick, and you thanked the Lord for the blessings of your health.

I was hungry, and you formed a club to study malnutrition. I was homeless, and you said God's love was shelter under any condition.

I was lonely, and you left me by myself while you and your friends prayed. You seem so holy and close to God. Yet I'm still sick and alone and afraid!

Ruth M. Walsh

--James S. Hewett, *Illustrations Unlimited* (Wheaton: Tyndale House Publishers, Inc, 1988) p. 95.