

The Church of God
II Corinthians 1:1

INTRODUCTION

II Corinthians is a church letter. Even though it bears the name of the ancient city of Corinth, it was actually addressed to only a small portion of the citizenry of that city.

Paul, the writer of this letter, along with his missionary companion Timothy, was probably in Macedonia when he wrote the letter. It was written as a follow-up to his previous letter to this church and to confront some new problems that had arisen in the life of the church. None of Paul's letters more fully expose the heart of this great Christian Apostle. Some of the most personal things in his life are put into writings for the sake of this church.

Since this letter is addressed to the church of God at Corinth, this raises a question. Who actually received this letter? Or maybe, who is this church of God? We call ourselves a church. What do we have in common with this assembly so addressed in Corinth. This question needs to be raised because of all the confusion about the church in our day. Because we began some years ago to call our meeting house, "churches," most people think of a building when you use the word church. Others think of a denomination. From this simple address to this church in Corinth, we can learn two vital things that are true of every true church of Jesus Christ. Consider them with me.

I. THE CHURCH IS OWNED BY GOD

The word translated in our New Testament, "church" has an interesting history. The word was used of the assembly of the citizens in a community across the Greek-speaking world. They would be called together to carry on the business of the community. The translators of the Old Testament into Greek chose this word to refer to the congregation in the Old Testament. Whenever the tribes of Israel came together as the congregation of the Lord, they were called the "church." Jesus only used the word twice in His recorded teachings, but it became the word by which the people committed to Jesus were described.

So the church of God in the city of Corinth was the assembly of the people who had committed their lives to Jesus Christ. They made up the people of God in that community. Their common relationship to him bound them together as the people of God. Paul's favorite way of referring to them was as "the church of God." "Of God" indicates that they are the church which belongs to God. It is a possessive genitive construction. What is the significance and basis of this divine ownership of the church?

The divine ownership of the church is based upon redemption. Paul declared this plainly to the elders from the church at Ephesus in their famous meeting at

Miletus. in admonishing them he said, "Take heed, therefore unto yourselves, and to all the flock, over the which the Holy Ghost hath made you overseers, to feed the church of God, which he hath purchased with his own blood." (Acts 20:28) Paul connects the divine ownership of the church with the divine redemption of the church. He purchased the church, acquired the church, through the transaction of the Cross. In the Old Testament, Israel's being the congregation of God had begun with the shedding of blood. The same is true of the New Testament people of God. The primary difference is that the blood of God's own through His Son in the case of the church. This gives us some indication of how much value the Lord God must place upon the church. It is His because of His redemption rights.

Every once in a while we have someone who forgets about the divine ownership of the church and tries to use the church for some selfish objective. Often they will claim the right to so use the church on the basis of how much money they have given to the must not forget that the church was not purchased by gold and silver, but by the precious blood of the Son of God upon a cruel Cross.

The divine ownership of the Church is based upon creation. The church is the creation of Jesus Christ. He declared, "I will build my church." Beginning then, and continuing through the ages, He has been doing just that. We must not relegate that statement of our Lord to the church universal for He is the builder of each local expression of the church. The church at Corinth is the creation of Jesus Christ. He used the gospel preaching of Paul and others, but He did the building. The same is true of the First Baptist Church, Lubbock. Our history is filled with the names of some noble men that Jesus Christ has used, both pastors and laymen, but this church is His creation. If you are truly a part of this church, It is because He added you to the church. It is a marvel to behold! I never cease to be amazed at how the Lord continues to build and sustain His church. This surely gives to Him the rights of ownership.

The rights of ownership provide the background for this letter. What right does a man like Paul have to write such a letter to a church? Why is his word considered to be so Authoritative? He is an Apostle of Jesus Christ. He is speaking to the church what the owner of the church wants the church to know and to do. This is an important truth for us to keep in mind. The only one who has the right to impose his will upon this church is the owner, God. Every star member, including the pastor, must keep this in mind. We are dealing with God's property. Every deacon must keep this in mind. When the deacons meet, their will is not important, but His will is. Every committee must keep this in mind. Every action we take must be a reflection of our awareness of the divine ownership of the church. You are a member, but He is the owner. The members have only the right to reflect their sense of His will for the church.

II. THE CHURCH IS LOCATED IN THE EARTH

What a contrast! "The church of God at Corinth." Corinth was the most wicked city of the ancient world. When a Corinthian was portrayed in a drama, he would almost always be a drunk or be involved in some immoral behavior. It was a moral cesspool. Yet right there in the mist of that darkness there was a light shining. It was the church of the living God. God has left His church right in the midst of the darkness of this present age.

The location of the church is purposeful. As you read the letters of the New Testament, the purpose becomes clear. The church is left on the earth, in the cities like Corinth, for the sake of the citizens of earth. The passage that most dramatically demonstrates this is found in the opening of the Revelation. In his first vision, John was seven golden lampstands. We are told that these seven golden lampstands are the seven local churches of God located in the seven strategic cities of Asia Minor. Their being golden reminds us that they are the prized possession of God. Their being lampstands reminds us of their purpose. What is the work of a lampstand? Obviously its sole work is that of holding forth the light of the darkness. Jesus was indicating that the situation in which His church works is one of great spiritual darkness. The work of that church in the midst of that darkness is to be the holder of the light, even the word of life. The church is in Lubbock for the sake of Lubbock. The darker the times, the more the church is needed. She is the only source of light.

It is of interest that Paul did not address the letter to "the church of God at the corner of Broadway and Avenue V in Corinth." While it is true that there was probably some place along Broadway in Corinth where the church assembled regularly to worship the living Christ, it never entered their mind that they would cease to be the church when they scattered to their homes and to their works. They were still the church when they worked on the docks the next day, or met at the school, or worked in the shops of the city. Indeed, the church cannot do the work of the church in a building. Not really! We do the work of the church best when we are out in the city. It is out there that the light is needed and that light must shine.

Several years ago, police found a foreign student who had been hiding in the attic of the First Methodist Church of Ann Arbor, Michigan for four years! His hair was shoulder length, his skin the color of a dead man's. He had been failing his courses at the university and was afraid to face the consequences. So he fled from the world to a church's attic. Is this not a parable to our actions at times? We retreat into the church to hide from the darkness of the world rather than go out into the world of darkness to be the church of God, the light of the world.

It must have been quite a challenge to be the church of God in the city of Corinth. There were many pressures to become a part of the world. These pressures would be felt from so many different quarters. It is still a challenge.

The only thing that makes such a challenge possible is the knowledge that we are the "church of God ." In being the church of God, there is the commitment of the resources of God to meet the challenge of our modern Corinth. We do not need a better community in which to be the church of God, but rather, we will have a better community when we are the church of God in reality in this community.

CONCLUSION

Are you ready to reaffirm that we are the church of God? It would involve a reaffirmation of the divine ownership of the church. There is a need for us to gratefully, joyfully declare before all that this is the church of Jesus Christ, the church of the living God, that we are a people under the control of His mind and will!

This reaffirmation also involved our making a recommitment to the mission that He has assigned to us. We will not be able to be everything others want us to be, but we must be what He wants us to be. We must be the lampstand in this dark age. We must go out into this community to shed abroad the light of God. Are you ready?