

Parson to Person

1 Corinthians 1 (Part 3) — Sosthenes our Brother

(Repeated from last week)

“Sosthenes our brother” (1 Corinthians 1:1b NKJV).

Paul the Apostle

We have discovered that Paul the Apostle was a devout Jew who (in an effort to please the Lord) persecuted Jesus and His Church. However, on his way to Damascus, the Lord interrupted his journey, revealed Himself to him, and thus inspired repentance and saving faith—salvation.

We also discovered that Paul was specifically called by the Lord to be an apostle—a sent one, commissioned to the proclamation of the Gospel. His call was to the Jew first, as always, but with primary focus toward the Gentiles.

Finally, we learned that Paul’s transition from the Old Covenant to the Church Age did not and does not suggest he ceased being a Jew. Every Jew who has come to know Jesus as Messiah will readily confess that he or she is a Jew and yet Christian—a believer. Moreover, those who have come to faith in Jesus (most often) also understand that they are no longer under the Law but are in Christ—by grace. As Paul wrote, *“if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under the law”* (Galatians 5:18).

Don’t Miss This

We recognize that through the finished work of Jesus there has been a clear dispensational change—from the Old Covenant and its Laws to the Church Age. Herein we recognize deliverance from the tutorial nature of the Mosaic Law—the tasking/condemning

master is no longer required as the result of the present work of the Holy Spirit (see John 16:7–16, Galatians 3:24–25, and 2 Corinthians 3:7–18).

Sosthenes

As Paul introduced himself as author of the Corinthian letter (as a customary method of introduction), he also introduced Sosthenes, a brother in the family of God, as a participant in the communique.

Sosthenes was apparently a resident of Corinth who served in the local synagogue. Although little is known about him, we do have some pertinent information.

1. Sosthenes was a Jew. Like Paul, he bore the testimony of service before the Lord. His activities as a ruler in the synagogue documented this fact. “...*Sosthenes, the ruler of the synagogue...*” (Acts 18:17).
2. Sosthenes became a believer in Jesus (likely sometime after a beating at the bema of Corinth). Paul’s reference to “*Sosthenes our brother*” (1 Corinthians 1:1) supports this fact. Herein, we also point out that Sosthenes, a Jew, was also required to trust in Jesus in order to experience regeneration. Clearly Sosthenes recognized this fact and the dispensational change, and therefore acted upon it. The Jews must trust Jesus for salvation in order to be saved! Of note is also the fact that Crispus (the earlier ruler of the synagogue) also came to know the Lord—most likely through the ministry of Paul, Silas, Timothy, Aquila and/or Priscilla (see Acts 18:8 and 1 Corinthians 1:14).
3. Sosthenes apparently became a servant/secretary and companion to Paul for the purposes of ministry in the Gospel.

It would be natural for him to continue service. Although he would no longer serve as a “*ruler of the synagogue,*” he was apparently ready to continue serving by joining Paul. It is common for many to take their pre-Christian talents and gifts with them into service for the Lord.

4. The experiences of Sosthenes becomes a very distinct example of how God can use odd and/or difficult circumstances in order to make Himself know. As mentioned above, Sosthenes, a ruler of the synagogue, was beaten at the bema in Corinth. This experience must have played a role in his pre and post faith in Jesus.

In Acts 18 Dr. Luke recorded this account:

“After these things Paul departed from Athens and went to Corinth. And he found a certain Jew named Aquila, born in Pontus, who had recently come from Italy with his wife Priscilla (because Claudius had commanded all the Jews to depart from Rome); and he came to them. So, because he was of the same trade, he stayed with them and worked; for by occupation they were tentmakers. And he reasoned in the synagogue every Sabbath, and persuaded both Jews and Greeks.

When Silas and Timothy had come from Macedonia, Paul was compelled by the Spirit, and testified to the Jews that Jesus is the Christ. But when they opposed him and blasphemed, he shook his garments and said to them, ‘Your blood be upon your own heads; I am clean. From now on I will go to the Gentiles.’ And he departed from there and entered the house of a certain man named Justus, one who worshiped God, whose house was next door to the synagogue. Then Crispus, the ruler of the synagogue, believed on

the Lord with all his household. And many of the Corinthians, hearing, believed and were baptized.

Now the Lord spoke to Paul in the night by a vision, ‘Do not be afraid, but speak, and do not keep silent; for I am with you, and no one will attack you to hurt you; for I have many people in this city.’ And he continued there a year and six months, teaching the word of God among them.

When Gallio was proconsul of Achaia, the Jews with one accord rose up against Paul and brought him to the judgment seat, saying, ‘This fellow persuades men to worship God contrary to the law.’ And when Paul was about to open his mouth, Gallio said to the Jews, ‘If it were a matter of wrongdoing or wicked crimes, O Jews, there would be reason why I should bear with you. But if it is a question of words and names and your own law, look to it yourselves; for I do not want to be a judge of such matters.’ And he drove them from the judgment seat. Then all the Greeks took Sosthenes, the ruler of the synagogue, and beat him before the judgment seat. But Gallio took no notice of these things” (Acts 18:1–17).

At The Bema

I like to point out that this passage is one of several supporting my view on the Judgment Seat. Many dispensational thinkers view the bema (Judgment Seat) as a place of rewards—without any mention of punitive or disciplinary evaluation/punishment. Simply stated, Sosthenes’ beating at the Corinthian bema would poke holes in that position. That said, I will point out that however one views the bema, this was recorded in the Scriptures with purpose—not just as a historical note.

It is clear that there will be no future condemnatory/disciplinary judgment for the believer in Jesus. Jesus took all of our punishments and washed away all of our sins. Therefore, the common dispensational view must be corrected. There is no doubt that believers will receive reward—sometime in the future. But internal evidences clearly show that the bema should not be categorically seen exclusively as a place of rewards.

Methods of Evangelism

There is no question about the fact that Paul and his companions went into the synagogue proclaiming the Gospel. It seems he may have started by building a case from the Old Testament Scriptures—the only Scriptures then in existence. Then, when his ministry companions arrived, (with their support) he went to his closing arguments and presented Jesus as Messiah. The response they received from the unbelieving was “the left foot of disfellowship.” Thereafter, they “*departed from there and entered the house of a certain man named Justus, one who worshiped God, whose house was next door to the synagogue.*” (I must note that this was not the first time Paul—or other true servants of God—have experienced rejection. This kind of rejection has occurred throughout the centuries.)

We might consider that upon hearing the gospel presented, experiencing a beating from the Gentiles—and the likely nursing care Sosthenes may have received from observing Christians—coupled together through divine revelation brought about what was needed to secure Sosthenes in the faith. Moreover, with this in mind, may I suggest that Sosthenes’ experience at the bema in Corinth may have reminded him that all men, everywhere, will

someday stand before the Lord. Rejecting Jesus would certainly provide a future condemnatory/disciplinary judgment. Responding to the Gospel Paul proclaimed would indeed rescue the believer from an undesirable future. I have chosen to stand before Him now—before the cross—in order to escape future condemnation and punishment! How about you?

Brother—In the Family

Paul called Sosthenes a “*brother.*” This could easily be attributed to the fact that he was a Jew. However, it is best to recognize this as an attribution of his faith in Jesus. Either way, he is part of the Christian family—this we know.

We praise the Lord for the fact that Jesus is building His Church—the family of God.

“But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, to those who believe in His name” (John 1:12).

I love you all,
Pastor Paul