



Paul's letter to the church of Jesus Christ at Oklahoma City The Greeting

When the church was birthed at Pentecost, the apostles were the authority on the doctrines of Jesus for the church.

The New Testament in your bible is composed by the apostles or close associates of the apostles.

As the gospel was preached in various cities and new churches were planted, the apostles would give them their instructions by visiting them, by sending a representative, or by writing them letters.

A large section of the New Testament in your bible contains 13 letters written by the apostle Paul. He wrote letters to both individuals and churches in various cities and regions. These letters are extremely personal in their content. They address specific issues that were problems or potential problems in the churches or in the lives of individuals. These letters were inspired by the Holy Spirit. They are letters from God.

Elders were appointed in the church in each city and they were entrusted with the responsibility of following the instructions of the apostles and applying the content of the letters to their own lives and to the church they were appointed to lead.

If the apostle Paul was alive today and he wrote a letter to the church of Jesus Christ at Oklahoma City, what do you think he would say?

(I want us to also specifically look at the issues and challenges that we at Western Hills are facing and consider what Paul might say to us.)

(I want you to feel free to send me a passage of scripture from Paul's epistles that you believe is relevant to us as a church. But I will not consider using it unless you tell me why you believe is relevant.)

Today, I want us to consider what Paul would say in His greeting to the church in OKC.

Paul began all of his 13 letters with a greeting. There are some similar features and there are some unique features.

1. Romans 1:1

1 Paul, a bondservant of Jesus Christ, called to be an apostle, separated to the gospel of God...

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2. 1 Corinthians 1:1

1 Paul, called to be an apostle of Jesus Christ through the will of God, and Sosthenes our brother...

3. 2 Corinthians 1:1

1 Paul, an apostle of Jesus Christ by the will of God, and Timothy our brother....

NKJV

4. Galatians 1:1

1 Paul, an apostle (not from men nor through man, but through Jesus Christ and God the Father who raised Him from the dead)...

NKJV

5. Ephesians 1:1

1 Paul, an apostle of Jesus Christ by the will of God,
To the saints who are in Ephesus, and faithful in Christ Jesus:

NKJV

6. Philippians 1:1

1 Paul and Timothy, bondservants of Jesus Christ,
To all the saints in Christ Jesus who are in Philippi, with the bishops and deacons:

NKJV

7. Colossians 1:1-2

1 Paul, an apostle of Jesus Christ by the will of God, and Timothy our brother,

NKJV

8. 1 Thessalonians 1:1

1 Paul, Silvanus, and Timothy,
To the church of the Thessalonians in God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ:

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

NKJV

9. 2 Thessalonians 1:1-2

1 Paul, Silvanus, and Timothy,
To the church of the Thessalonians in God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ:

2 Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

NKJV

10. 1 Timothy 1:1-2

1 Paul, an apostle of Jesus Christ, by the commandment of God our Savior and the Lord Jesus Christ, our hope,
NKJV

11. 2 Timothy 1:1-2

1 Paul, an apostle of Jesus Christ by the will of God, according to the promise of life which is in Christ Jesus...
NKJV

12. Titus 1:1-4

1 Paul, a bondservant of God and an apostle of Jesus Christ, according to the faith of God's elect and the acknowledgment of the truth which accords with godliness,
NKJV

13. Philemon 1

1 Paul, a prisoner of Christ Jesus, and Timothy our brother,
To Philemon our beloved friend and fellow laborer...
NKJV

- In 9 of his 13 letters, in his greeting, Paul identified himself as an apostle.
- In Romans and I Corinthians he adds, "called to be an apostle."
- In Galatians he adds "not from men nor through man, but through Jesus Christ and God the Father who raised Him from the dead."
- In Ephesians, Colossians, and 2 Timothy, he adds, "by the will of God."
- In 1 Timothy he adds, "by the commandment of God our savior."

If Paul was writing a letter to the church in Oklahoma City would he find it necessary to identify himself as an apostle with a special emphasis on the fact that his selection to this office in the church was the will of God?

Would he say something like this...?

Oklahoma City 1:1-3

1 Paul, called to be an apostle of Jesus Christ through the will of God,
2 To the church of God which is at Oklahoma City, to those who are sanctified in Christ Jesus, called to be saints, with all who in every place call on the name of Jesus Christ our Lord, both theirs and ours:
3 Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. NKJV

I believe that he would identify himself as an apostle for the same reasons that he used this introduction in his epistles.

Why did Paul introduce himself as an apostle in his letters?

- To help validate who was the author of the letter.

Paul's mission trips were extensive. He took the gospel to more people in more cities and planted more churches in those cities than all the other apostles. His letters would have a broader distribution to more people. There were false apostles that were writing letters to the churches. He did not want to leave any question in his readers that they were hearing directly from the apostle that brought them the gospel, helped them believe upon Jesus, and helped them begin their church. Paul identified himself as an apostle to validate who was the author of the letter.

- To help disciples know how to relate to His authority.

To be an apostle meant you were appointed by God to a position of authority in the church. From the time that Paul planted the church to the time that they received his letter, there would be new converts that had never met Paul and that did not know what it meant to be an apostle. Paul identified himself as an apostle to help disciples understand his authority and how to relate to him.

- To help disciples accept his role of authority in the church as being from God.

Paul's authority to be an apostle was questioned more than all the other apostles. Paul was the only apostle that saw Jesus after the resurrection that did not walk with Jesus or the other apostles. It is interesting that the apostle John did not introduce any of his letters by introducing himself as an apostle. Paul identified himself as an apostle with a special emphasis on "by the will of God" to help disciples accept his role of authority in the church.

- To help disciples and elders in the church challenge elders in the church that rejected his authority.

There were then as there are now elders in the church that rejected the authority of the apostle Paul and all the apostles. They established their own authority.

- There were some that rejected the authority of scripture.
- There were some that rejected the humanity of Jesus.
- There were some that rejected the doctrines of grace.
- There were some that rejected the doctrines of morality.
- There were some that rejected the doctrines of the second coming of Christ.

Paul identified himself as an apostle to help disciples challenge elders in the church who were in error that rejected his authority.

The early church was devoted to the apostles doctrines. The rejection of false teachers that rejected sound doctrine from the apostles was critical to the future integrity of the church. Paul identified himself as an apostle in his letters to give disciples a voice of authority when they raised objections to false teaching and false teachers.

Paul identified as an apostle himself to call the disciples to adhere to his instruction and reject those who do not.

- To help disciples follow his example as a disciple of Jesus

To be an apostle, was to be the ultimate example to the church of what it meant to be a disciple of Jesus.

Therefore, Paul said...

1 Corinthians 4:16-17

16 Therefore I urge you, imitate me.

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1 Corinthians 11:1

Be ye followers of me, even as I also am of Christ.

KJV

Phil 3:17

17 Brethren, join in following my example, and note those who so walk, as you have us for a pattern.

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Phil 4:9

9 The things which you learned and received and heard and saw in me, these do, and the God of peace will be with you.

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How did Paul want the church to follow his example?

- Paul wanted the church to follow his example in what he believed.
Paul believed that...

- I. Jesus is Lord, the savior of the world. (1 Cor. 8:6)
- II. Salvation is available to both Jews and Gentiles. (Romans 9:22-24)
- III. To be saved, we must confess with our mouth Jesus is Lord and believe in our hearts that God raised him from the dead. (Romans 10:9)
- IV. When we believe upon Jesus we are...
 1. Justified by the blood of Jesus (Romans 5:1)
 2. Crucified with Jesus (Romans 6:1-7)
 3. A new creation in Jesus (2 Cor. 5:17)
 4. A member of Jesus's body the church (1 Cor. 12:12-14)
 5. Called to be a disciple of Jesus (2 Timothy 2:2)

- Paul wanted the church to follow His example in the way he lived.

I. Paul followed Jesus (1 Cor. 11:1)

Paul submitted himself to the authority of Jesus. Paul had a personal relationship with Jesus. Paul learned the commands of Jesus and learned how to apply them to his life.

II. Paul loved the church of Jesus (2 Cor. 2:4)

Paul did not see the church as a service he attended or a building where the service was held. He saw the church as His family. He embraced the church of Jesus as his family. Wherever Paul lived, he was closer to members of the church than he was to his physical relatives.

He understood from the life of Jesus that the body of believers is supposed to be closer to us than our own families (Matt. 12:46, Luke 14:26). Jesus said that "all people will know you are my disciples, if you have love for one another" (John 13:35). He also prayed that his disciples would be so "perfectly one" that the world may believe that the Father sent Jesus (John 17:20-23).

Paul loved the church of Jesus.

III. Paul suffered to make disciples for Jesus (Philippians 3:7-8)

He suffered the loss of all things.

In 2 Cor. 11:23-28 Paul reluctantly recounts his resume of suffering, which included imprisonments, countless beatings, and near-death experiences:

- whipped with 39 lashes (5 different times)
- beaten with rods (3 different times)
- pummeled with stones (1 time)
- shipwrecked (3 times)
- adrift at sea (one night, one day)
- journeys (frequent)
- danger from rivers
- danger from robbers
- danger from his own people
- danger from Gentiles
- danger in the city
- danger in the wilderness
- danger at sea
- danger from false brothers

- toil and hardship
- sleepless nights (many)
- hungry and thirsty (often)
- cold and exposed
- the pressure of anxiety for all the churches (daily)

And yet given his radically God-centered worldview, Paul calls such suffering “light” and “momentary”!

I think that if he wrote a letter to the church at OKC, he would identify himself as an apostle.

Why is this important to the church in OKC?

- The church in OKC needs to accept Paul’s authority?

Currently, there is a battle for truth going on in the church of Jesus Christ in OKC that is unlike any battle that has ever been fought in the church since the reformation.

In the last days before the coming of Jesus, Paul said that there would be a great apostasy and that many would be deceived.

2 Timothy 4:3-4

3 For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine, but according to their own desires, because they have itching ears, they will heap up for themselves teachers; 4 and they will turn their ears away from the truth, and be turned aside to fables.

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The apostle John says that this apostasy will be motivated by a spirit of the anti-Christ. (1 John 4:3).

The spirit of the anti-Christ inspires a message of unity, acceptance of diversity, and equality. Unity is being sought at the expense of sound doctrine or biblical truth. Those who oppose this spirit are being called bigots and are being accused of hate crimes for discriminating based on God’s standards of morality. Those who oppose this spirit are being accused of inspiring hate crimes. It is happening politically and religiously in our city and our nation. It is the spirit behind globalism.

In the name of unity, the church is feeling the pressure to deny that the gospel as the only way to be saved.

In the name of unity, the church is feeling the pressure to be inclusive of life styles that the apostle Paul says we must call people to leave.

Those ungodly life styles include murder, homosexuality, fornication, adultery, theft, divorce for any reason, and other perversions.

The church in OKC needs to accept Paul's authority as an apostle.

- The church in OKC needs to follow Paul's example in the way that He lived.

I. We need to follow Jesus (1 Cor. 11:1)

We need to submit to the authority of Jesus. We need to have a personal relationship with Jesus. We need to learn the commands of Jesus and learn how to apply them to our life.

II. We need to love the church of Jesus (2 Cor. 2:4)

We need to stop seeing the church as a service that we attend or a building where the service is held. We need to see the church as the family of God. We need to love one another.

Let's be honest—so often we don't even know the people in our churches, much less exhibit this supernatural type of unity and love. And if we're even more honest, we'd admit that it's much easier to try to invite someone to a church service with a cool band, an excellent children's program, an amazing speaker, and a comfortable building than actually loving that person with Christ's love. Being part of our biological family is hard enough, so showing this other-worldly type of love that God demands requires real sacrifice and his Spirit every day.

In a family, no one is left out. Every person's needs should be cared for (Acts 4:32-34), and the family takes it upon itself to care for its members. This is a kind of love that points people to Jesus.

III. We need to suffer to make disciples for Jesus (Philippians 3:7-8)

We need to be willing to suffer the loss of all things to make disciples for Jesus.

At Western Hills...

Will we accept Paul's authority as an apostle?

Will we follow Paul's example in the way that He lived?

We are going to learn a lot more as we consider what Paul might say if he wrote a letter to the church at OKC, but since Paul called himself an apostle, we must first answer these two questions.