



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

Paul wrote 13 letters. 4 of the letters are to individuals. 9 of the letters are to churches in cities or regions.

After his greeting, in 6 of his 9 letters to churches, Paul gave a commendation for something positive that the church was doing well. He was celebrating what they were doing well. He was like a father bragging about his children.

Romans 1:8

8 First, I thank my God through Jesus Christ for you all, that your faith is spoken of throughout the whole world.

NKJV

Ephesians 1:15-17

15 Therefore I also, after I heard of your faith in the Lord Jesus and your love for all the saints, 16 do not cease to give thanks for you, making mention of you in my prayers:

NKJV

Philippians 1:3-6

3 I thank my God upon every remembrance of you, 4 always in every prayer of mine making request for you all with joy, 5 for your fellowship in the gospel from the first day until now,

NKJV

Colossians 1:3-4

3 We give thanks to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, praying always for you, 4 since we heard of your faith in Christ Jesus and of your love for all the saints; NKJV

1 Thessalonians 1:2-10

2 We give thanks to God always for you all, making mention of you in our prayers, 3 remembering without ceasing your work of faith, labor of love, and patience of hope in our Lord Jesus Christ in the sight of our God and Father, 4 knowing, beloved brethren, your election by God. 5 For our gospel did not come to you in word only, but also in power, and in the Holy Spirit and in much assurance, as you know what kind of men we were among you for your sake.

6 And you became followers of us and of the Lord, having received the word in much affliction, with joy of the Holy Spirit, 7 so that you became examples to all in Macedonia and

Achaia who believe. 8 For from you the word of the Lord has sounded forth, not only in Macedonia and Achaia, but also in every place. Your faith toward God has gone out, so that we do not need to say anything. 9 For they themselves declare concerning us what manner of entry we had to you, and how you turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God, 10 and to wait for His Son from heaven, whom He raised from the dead, even Jesus who delivers us from the wrath to come.
NKJV

2 Thessalonians 1:3-5

3 We are bound to thank God always for you, brethren, as it is fitting, because your faith grows exceedingly, and the love of every one of you all abounds toward each other, 4 so that we ourselves boast of you among the churches of God for your patience and faith in all your persecutions and tribulations that you endure, NKJV

In 3 of the letters to churches, Paul did not give them a commendation.
1 Corinthians, 2 Corinthians, and Galatians.

Instead after he completed his greeting, he immediately addressed serious issues in the church.

The Corinthian church was divided.

Instead of a commendation, he wrote...

1 Corinthians 1:10-11

10 Now I plead with you, brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you all speak the same thing, and that there be no divisions among you, but that you be perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment. 11 For it has been declared to me concerning you, my brethren, by those of Chloe's household, that there are contentions among you.
NKJV

The word divisions is the Greek word schisma from which we get our word schisms. It means divided or split. And as a result, there were contentions which means quarrels. There were serious debates that were not pleasant disagreements.

There were many issues that were dividing them.

- They were split over leadership
- They were split over church discipline
- They were split over civil matters
- They were split over marriage and divorce
- They were split over food
- They were split over communion
- They were split over spiritual gifts
- They were split over liturgy
- They were split over the resurrection of the dead

The problems were so serious that Paul wrote at least two letters to this church and scholars later divided those two letters into 29 chapters.

The problems were so serious that Paul informed them that he was sending Timothy to deal with the division. He told them that he would also be visiting them soon. He urged them to repent before he arrived so that he would not have to chasten them.

The Galatian church had embraced a different gospel that Paul said was no gospel at all. So instead of a commendation, Paul writes...

[Galatians 1:6-9](#)

[6 I marvel that you are turning away so soon from Him who called you in the grace of Christ, to a different gospel, 7 which is not another; but there are some who trouble you and want to pervert the gospel of Christ. 8 But even if we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel to you than what we have preached to you, let him be accursed. 9 As we have said before, so now I say again, if anyone preaches any other gospel to you than what you have received, let him be accursed.](#)

[NKJV](#)

The church had accepted false teachers that taught that in addition to professing their faith in Jesus through baptism, to be saved, they also needed to be circumcised and commit themselves to maintain certain holy days in the Jewish law.

I do not believe that Paul avoided giving these churches a commendation because there was nothing to commend.

[I believe Paul did not give a commendation to these churches because he did not want to undermine the weight of his concerns!](#)

Since Paul was writing these letters for God, we must accept that this was not a human error. There are times when it is not wise to commend someone.

If Paul wrote a letter to the church in OKC, would our letter include a commendation?

I do not think Paul would brag about the church in OKC. There are many positive things he could point out but I think that there are so many serious concerns to address that he would not want any commendation to undermine his concerns.

[What would be Paul's concerns with the church in OKC?](#)

- [Paul never wrote to a church in a city or a region that had so many congregations and groups that were so divided over so many doctrinal and liturgical issues.](#)

Regarding doctrine, there are so many different responses to the gospel being taught in OKC. To name a few; Catholics, Episcopalians, Presbyterians, Methodists, Pentecostals, Assembly of God, Church of God, Church of Christ, and Baptists do not agree on what is the necessary response to the gospel to be saved.

With regards to liturgy, baptism, and communion, each group has its own practices that they believe is holy.

- Paul never wrote to a church in which the members viewed church as a building or a worship service.
- Paul never wrote to a church in a city or region that had so many celebrity Pastors that various congregations were following.
- Paul never wrote to a church in which the members of a congregation believed that their only responsibilities as a church member were participating in worship services, paying the organization's bills, volunteering to serve the organization once a week, and occasionally inviting someone to a church event.
- Paul never wrote to a church in which the members of congregation did not understand that they were a family and that their primary responsibility to one another was to love one another like a family.
He never wrote to a church in which the members were so disconnected relationally. He never wrote to a church in which the members were intentionally isolating themselves from one another. (The members at Corinth were not following Christ in the way they related to one another but they were not disconnected.)
- Paul never wrote to a church that did not understand that discipleship was the main mission of the church.
This is a very serious issue. With regards to division in the church, someone is wrong in what they believe and practice. This means that someone is deceived.

Why are so many disciples of Jesus deceived?

Every one of us is on a mission whether we know it or not. Our mission is a powerful motivation in our hearts that is the lens through which we view life. Our mission determines the decisions we make.

Throughout world history, powerful leaders have understood that before a person will follow them, they must first change their mission. Therefore, Jesus called his disciples to be fishers of men before they understood His mission. (Matthew 4:19)

If we have the wrong mission, we become subject to the wrong leaders. This will cause us to embrace error in our beliefs and practices. This will cause us to tolerate error and faults in a leader.

(Examples: Politics-Hitler, Business-the leaders of Enron, and Religion-Joseph Smith and Jim Jones)

Our mission, whatever it is, will even determine how we interpret the bible. Nearly all powerful leaders use the bible to support their mission.

If we embrace the wrong the mission we will be subject to leaders that misinterpret the bible to serve their own purposes.

So many very sincere people in the church in OKC are currently deceived because they have the wrong mission. They tend to take one aspect of Christian living and make it their mission.

Evangelism

Worship

Care for the poor

Strengthen the family

Counseling

Prayer

You can be engaged in one or all of these without being Jesus's church!

So many others have a mission that much less noble than these.

For the church to become what Jesus and Paul envisioned it to be, we must first change our mission to fit theirs.

- Paul never wrote to a church in which the pastors and few other people were the only ones engaged in discipleship daily.
- Paul never wrote to a church that had a pastor that believed that the most effective way to disciple the church was from a pulpit.
- Paul never wrote to a church that did not understand that the most effective way to disciple was in community with others.
- Paul never wrote to a church in which the members were constantly migrating from one congregation to another.
- Paul never wrote to a church where the members decided to join a congregation based on whether that congregation had a preacher that was a gifted communicator, a cool band, or great children's ministry.
- Paul never wrote to a church in which members were so self focused on their own families that they did not have time to connect with lost people.
- Paul never wrote to a church that had drifted so far from God's original blueprint for the church that can be found in the teachings of Jesus, Acts, and the Epistles.

With all our issues, we would make the church at Corinth and the church at Galatia look good to Paul. I think he would say I only thought they had problems until I discovered what was going on in OKC.

Because of serious nature of these problems, I do not believe that Paul would commend the church in OKC. We have too much to learn. I do not think Paul would write the church in OKC a letter, I think he would write us a book!

If Paul was writing a letter to the church in OKC or if Paul came to OKC and called a meeting for all the Pastors and elders in OKC, I think the first thing he would say is...

“What happened to Jesus’s church?”

“How did you get here?”

“How is it working for you?”

I think the next thing that he would ask would be...

“Will you lay aside all of what you think you know about following Jesus, church, and discipleship and listen to me?”

Are we willing to do that? Are we willing to lay aside all of what we think we know and just listen and learn from the Word of God? Are we willing to humble ourselves? Are we willing to be teachable? Are we willing to reconsider the context of the way we look at the teachings of Jesus, the church, and discipleship so that we can correctly interpret and apply what Paul says?

God loves us more than we can comprehend. He will empower us to do whatever He calls us to do.

Humbling ourselves before God is always the starting place for repentance and lasting change.

Will you join me in humbling ourselves?

Lest we all be deceived, will you accept as your mission Jesus’s mission for His church?