

Life Together

*Do you not know that you are God's temple and that God's Spirit dwells in you?
If anyone destroys God's temple, God will destroy him.
For God's temple is holy, and you are that temple.
(1 Corinthians 3:16-17. ESV)*

*And we all, with unveiled face, beholding the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same
image from one degree of glory to another. For this comes from the Lord who is the Spirit.
(2 Corinthians 3:18. ESV)*

To The Church Of God That Is In Corinth

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1 Corinthians 1:1-9

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Introduction:

Good morning! Open your Bibles to 1 Corinthians 1:1. We are starting a new series this morning after 16 weeks in the Book of Genesis. In this series that we begin today, we flip to the other end of the preaching spectrum in many respects. Preaching from the Old Testament is about anticipation of the Gospel; preaching from the New Testament letters is about application of the Gospel. That is the focus of the Apostle Paul's letter to the Corinthians. Paul preached the Gospel in Corinth for 18 months. They received it with joy and thanksgiving – we know that from Acts 18. Then Paul moved on and preached the Gospel in other cities and while he was preaching in Ephesus he received word that the church in Corinth was going sideways. He wrote them 4 letters – we have number 2 and number 4 in our Bibles; we've lost number 1 and 3. These two letters are incredibly helpful, largely because the Corinthians were incredibly dysfunctional and they were dysfunctional in a way that is particularly relevant to us as North American Evangelicals. Let me read to you a very useful summary of the problem in Corinth as presented by New Testament scholar Lyle Vander Broek; he says:

“Each of the community problems Paul needed to address grew out of the Corinthians' inability to let the gospel message fully reshape their gentile, Greco-Roman lives. . . . The Corinthians were simply trying to be Christians with a minimal amount of social and theological disturbance.”¹

¹Roy E. Ciampa and Brian S. Rosner, *The First Letter to the Corinthians*, Pillar New Testament Commentary. Accordance electronic ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2010), 5.

Just for fun, read that last line again but substitute the word “Canadians” for “Corinthians”. The Canadians were simply trying to be Christians with a minimal amount of social and theological disturbance. I think that works just as well and it explains very neatly the enduring value of these letters. These folks were excited about Jesus, they were excited about grace, they were happy to be going to heaven, but they were struggling to live like sons and daughters of God while still here on the earth. Can anyone identify with that problem here today? Yeah, all of us. It is hard, sometimes, to live like we believe.

There is a lot that we can learn from how Paul addresses this pastoral challenge. As he usually does, Paul begins with indicative teaching – meaning he tells them the truth. The entire New Testament seems to operate on the assumption that clarified indicatives will lead to adopted imperatives. That sounds way more complicated than it is. To clarify an indicative is just to help people understand better the truths that they have believed. To clarify indicatives is to help people better understand the truth about who God is, who we are, what God has done in Christ to secure our salvation, what the appropriate response to that is and where this is all going for God’s glory and our good. The Bible operates under the assumption that if you clarify those truths then truly saved people are going to want to move into alignment with those truths. The Bible seems to think that if those Gospel truths from Scripture wash over your hearts and minds then the Holy Spirit within you will reach out for those truths and press you forward into them and in between those two forces – the Word of God coming at you and the Holy Spirit pressing within you – in between those two forces, saved people change. They want to change and they do change. Clarified indicatives lead to adopted imperatives. If you tell saved people the truth then they’re going to want to obey. Paul organizes his letters around that assumption. In Ephesians for example, he spends 3 chapters clarifying the Gospel and then 3 chapters saying – now live like you believe. That is the exact structure of 1 Thessalonians – 3 chapters of clarified indicatives followed by 3 chapters of imperatives to be adopted. Here in 1 Corinthians we see a very similar pattern. We have an indicative heavy introduction, followed by several chapters worth of imperatives rooted back in these indicatives. Paul is a thorough and patient pastor here; he’s telling them who they are and what they have been called to and then he’s showing them step by step, how to live accordingly and how to bring God glory and we’re going to benefit from that thoroughness and patience as we work through these letters together. Here now the Word of the Lord:

1 Corinthians 1:1-9 (ESV)

- ¹ Paul, called by the will of God to be an apostle of Christ Jesus, and our brother Sosthenes,
² To the church of God that is in Corinth, to those sanctified in Christ Jesus, called to be saints together with all those who in every place call upon the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, both their Lord and ours:
³ Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.
⁴ I give thanks to my God always for you because of the grace of God that was given you in Christ Jesus,
⁵ that in every way you were enriched in him in all speech and all knowledge—
⁶ even as the testimony about Christ was confirmed among you—
⁷ so that you are not lacking in any gift, as you wait for the revealing of our Lord Jesus Christ,
⁸ who will sustain you to the end, guiltless in the day of our Lord Jesus Christ.
⁹ God is faithful, by whom you were called into the fellowship of his Son, Jesus Christ our Lord.

This is the Word of the Lord, thanks be to God.

Paul is a wonderful letter writer and around the standard features of an introduction – who he is, who the letter is to etc, he always manages to insert almost a table of contents that tells us what to expect in the rest of the letter. Here he lays out the primary indicatives that will govern the chapters full of imperatives that follow. Let me bring those to the surface for you. He tells them who they are in Christ and then he tells them what God is doing in them for his glory and for their good. Let's start with what a Christian is.

The first thing he says is that a Christian is:

What A Christian Is:

1. Sanctified

Look at verse 2:

² To the church of God that is in Corinth, to those **sanctified** in Christ Jesus

Here Paul tells them who they are in Christ – sanctified – holy people – God's people – set apart and acceptable for service. Now he uses an unusual word in an unusual form. We tend to think of the word "sanctification" as meaning progressive, bit by bit, one degree of glory to the next type of change and the word is often used that way in the Bible – but not here. Here Paul doesn't say: "To the church of God in Corinth that is being sanctified or that will be sanctified" he doesn't say that, he says to those SANCTIFIED. He uses a perfect participle which indicates

their PRESENT IDENTITY. He is saying “right now, in Christ, you are holy, you are acceptable to God and you are fit for service”. When theologians talk about sanctification they tend to say that there are two types of sanctification; positional and progressive. Progressive is that little by little one and positional is this one here. Paul is saying that at the very moment you become a Christian your status before God is changed immediately. Whatever you were is gone, it doesn’t matter and you have a brand new identity – you are a child of God, you are holy and acceptable, you are SANCTIFIED and ready to serve. The Apostle John taught his people that too. In 1 John 3:2 he says:

² Beloved, we are God’s children now (ESV)

This is a good truth and I don’t want you to forget it so let’s do a thing. If you are a Christian – if you are born again, trusting in Christ, hating your sin and filled with the Spirit – then let’s do this. Say right now, out loud: “I am a Christian.” Now say: “I am a child of God NOW”. Say: “I am acceptable to God NOW because of Christ.” Say “I am filled with the Spirit NOW”. Say “I am fit for service NOW”. Amen! Amen. This is a great truth! This is one of the truths that has such an impact on people from India for example. In India the two dominant religions in the north are Hinduism and Sikhism which is sort of monotheistic version of Hinduism and both of those religions teach a progressive salvation. You work hard, do the best you can, die and are born back into this world a little higher, you work hard again, do good, placate the god or gods and hope for the best next time around. Of course you might go down a few rungs too, you can’t know for certain until you die – it’s a giant game of snakes and ladders! In Christianity, as soon you come to Christ you go right to the end of the board – YOU ARE HOLY AND FIT FOR GOD’S PRESENCE NOW! Hallalujah! That’s a good truth. Its done. You can’t add to it, you can’t take away from it. Its done. You are sanctified, free from death and fit to serve both now and in eternity. That’s a good truth and Paul is going to build off that in the chapters and verses to come.

Secondly, he says that every Christian, every person in Christ is also:

2. Called

Look at the end of verse 2:

² To the church of God that is in Corinth, to those sanctified in Christ Jesus, **called to be saints** together with all those who in every place call upon the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, both their Lord and ours:

Scholars generally agree that Paul is applying here to Christians the designation originally given to the children of Israel back in Exodus 19:

⁵ Now therefore, if you will indeed obey my voice and keep my covenant, you shall be my treasured possession among all peoples, for all the earth is mine; ⁶ and you shall be to me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation. (ESV)

If you are a Christian, whether you are Jew or Gentile now, God has chosen you, he has saved you, he has brought you near to himself in Christ FOR A REASON: To be a kingdom of priests and a holy nation. With the identity comes a calling. Your calling as a Christian is to manifest the holiness of God before the nations and to bring the cause of the nations before God in prayer – that’s what priests do. They speak to men on behalf of God and to God on behalf of men. God saved you to do that. You are sanctified in order to serve. You are sanctified people with a calling to serve God as priests. Luther called that the priesthood of believers. IF you are in Christ, you are a priest – welcome to the ministry.

Thirdly, Paul says that if you are a Christian you are:

3. Equipped

God never calls anybody without equipping them for that calling. We see that in verses 4-7:

⁴ I give thanks to my God always for you because of **the grace** of God that was given you in Christ Jesus,

⁵ that **in every way you were enriched in him in all speech and all knowledge**—

⁶ even as the testimony about Christ was confirmed among you—

⁷ so that **you are not lacking in any gift**, as you wait for the revealing of our Lord Jesus Christ

Paul spends a little more time on this one because this was a major problem in Corinth. How many of you know that spiritual gifts can cause problems in a church? They can, it was true in Paul’s day and it is still true in our day. But its interesting that he thanks God for those gifts, even though they are causing a great deal of trouble – that is a bit of a rebuke to the more conservative wing of the Evangelical church isn’t it? We handle this difficulty, often times, by pretending that God hasn’t given the gifts. We act like if we deny them, they’ll go away and take

the crazy with them – by the way, how is that working out? Not too good. You can't get rid of what God wants to give – cessationism is an exercise in futility. These things exist! Now – let's just try and understand them better and use them more appropriately. Paul tells us later on what these gifts are for; he says in chapter 12:

To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for **the common good**. (1 Corinthians 12:7. ESV)

The problem in Corinth is that spiritual gifts had become a source of pride and division. People started saying goofy and ignorant things like: “If you speak in tongues you are super spiritual and if you don't speak in tongues, you might not even be saved.” Its hard to believe that anyone would say something that goofy, but that was 2000 years ago, no one would say anything like that today, I'm sure. But when things like that were being said, church services got all kinds of crazy as everyone was trying to show how loudly and how fantastically they could speak in tongues. Nobody was being served by that, no one was being edified by that and so Paul reminds them that gifts are given not to glorify the individual but to serve the common good. In that sense, the measure of a gift is not how good it makes you look, but rather how well it serves the church. Listen, if you are a Christian then you are gifted right now, from your conversion, by God in order to serve the common good – you are a GOD GIFTED PRIEST AND SERVANT, Paul says. You have what you need, right now, to start serving the common good. No saved person is without a spiritual gift. You have something right now that we need. Start serving the common good.

Fourthly, Paul says, all Christians are:

4. Incorporated

Now I don't mean that in a business or legal sense I mean that in a literal sense. The word incorporated means “in a body”. All Christians are in a body – they are part of a church. Paul says that pretty clearly, look at verse 2 again:

² To the **church** of God that is in Corinth, to those sanctified in Christ Jesus, **called to be saints together**

If you are a Christian then you are not an individual anymore! You are part of a church – a gathered body of local believers and you are part of the THE CHURCH – all those who worship Christ in every place. The Corinthians tended to think of their salvation in overly personalized terms – again – substitute the word Canadian here and you do just fine – these folks struggled to think in corporate terms and so Paul is telling them that the old “every man for himself”, “take care of number 1” days are gone. If you are a Christian you are part of a group. You are part of a local tribe of believers and part of the world wide clan of Christ followers. That’s the way it is now. He says in chapter 12:

For just as the body is one and has many members, and all the members of the body, though many, are one body, so it is with Christ. ¹³ For in one Spirit we were all baptized into one body— Jews or Greeks, slaves or free—and all were made to drink of one Spirit. (1 Corinthians 12:12-13. ESV)

As soon as you become a Christian you become part of the One Body and you are filled with the One Spirit. That’s who you are, right now and that has implications, obviously for how we live as saved people and Paul is going to spend a lot of time talking about those implications. I listed this one last because it is this topic which Paul picks up immediately in the next paragraph. This indicative receives the first set of imperatives. It was important to Paul that they understand that who they are now as members of the Body of Christ - as members of the church - must have an impact on how they live as saints TOGETHER.

I want to linger here just a bit. I want you to hear what Paul is saying because I think as Canadians we’re inclined not to hear it. We like hearing about our status before God, we like hearing about our great calling, we like hearing about our spiritual gifts, but I’m not sure we like hearing about our corporate identity so let me pause and make sure you’ve heard it. Let me clarify the indicative so that you can embrace the imperative. The Gospel destroys all human division. It destroys economic division because we are all beggars before God’s mercy and we are all rich in Christ. It destroys all ethnic division because we are all made in the image of God and we all share in the sonship that is ours in Christ. The Gospel – if you have truly apprehended it, should destroy your individualism and help you to live in community. It should. It will. One of the marks of the true believer is that they WANT to live in community. They love the church. They’re not blind to its faults – of course the church has faults, we keep recruiting crazy people! We’re crazy, wacko sinners in here, in process, growing daily into the image of Christ but still struggling with the flesh. Of course the church has warts. But real Christians love her and want

to be with her. You need to hear that. I'm trusting that hearing that as a real believer, the Holy Spirit is pushing you forward into it. He's whispering in your ear: "Its time to get over your church problem. Its time to get merciful, get humble and get on with it." Are you hearing that? Lean into that. That's God talking.

Now, I mentioned off the top that we were going to see 4 things about who we are and a couple things about what God is doing in us for his glory and our good. Let's end by bringing those things to the surface.

What God Is Doing (For His Glory And Our Good)

1. He is multiplying grace as you apprehend the Gospel

Look carefully at verses 4-7:

I give thanks to my God always for you because of the grace of God that was given you in Christ Jesus,⁵ that in every way you were enriched in him in all speech and all knowledge—⁶ even as the testimony about Christ was confirmed among you—⁷ so that you are not lacking in any gift

The key phrase for understanding Paul's argument is translated in the English as "even as" – you see it at the start of verse 6. The Greek word behind that is *kathos*. Paul is saying that this happens as that happens. What happens while what happens? Read carefully. Grace is given and multiplied as the testimony about Christ – that's the Gospel – as the Gospel is confirmed among you. The Greek word translated as "confirmed" can also mean "established" – it's the same Greek word translated in verse 8 as "sustain". Let me bring this down to street level for you. Paul is saying that as you go deeper in the Gospel – as you see it better and grab hold of it more firmly and sustain it by faith in your heart – as you do that, God gives you more grace. God helps you. God helps you and blesses you with additional grace and additional gifts, the deeper you go into the Gospel. What does that sound like to you? It sounds like Jesus, Jesus said that kind of stuff all the time:

And he answered them, "To you it has been given to know the secrets of the kingdom of heaven, but to them it has not been given.¹² For to the one who has, more will be given, and he will have an abundance, but from the one who has not, even what he has will be taken away. (Matthew 13:11-12. ESV)

Every step of your Christian life is a gift from God that you need to lean into. Jesus said: “To you it has been GIVEN to know the secrets of the kingdom of heaven” – your faith is a gift! You didn’t figure it out, God showed it to you! It was a gift! You know it was! Even if your momma taught you the Gospel when you were 5 years old – it was a gift from God. Who gave you to that woman? Why did God give you to her and not some other woman? Because he wanted you to see! And you leaned into that. When your eyes are open to the truth of God – of course you lean into that. Don’t break your arm patting yourself on the back because you leaned into that – everyone who is given the gift of faith leans into that! Boast in the Lord who opened your eyes, for crying out loud. And now, Paul says, understand this. The same God who opened your eyes and gave you grace to get you started, keeps feeding you grace the more you lean into the Gospel. He is leading you on, step by step, by grace. Every step of your Christian journey is a gift. As you lean in God feeds you and you get stronger. That’s how you grow. It’s a God thing from start to finish.

The second thing we see God doing for his glory and our good shows up in verses 8-9:

2. He is keeping us in fellowship with Christ to the end

Speaking with God as subject still back from verse 4 Paul says that God:

⁸ who will sustain you to the end, guiltless in the day of our Lord Jesus Christ. ⁹ God is faithful, by whom you were called into the fellowship of his Son, Jesus Christ our Lord.

Let me ask you a question. How do you know that you will wake up tomorrow still believing in the Gospel, still holding to Jesus Christ as your Lord and Saviour? How do you know that you won’t be finally seduced by the lies and temptations of the world, the flesh and the devil? How do you know for sure? It can’t be that you are just stronger and smarter and wiser than many others who have fallen away. It can’t be that. It can’t be. So how do you know? The only hope we have according to the Bible is that the same God who chose us in the first place is faithful and he will not let us fall. Listen to me friends, you cannot separate the doctrines of grace one from another based on those that you like and those that you don’t like – they all go together! So many of you LOVE the doctrine of the perseverance of the saints. You love it, you cherish it and yet you don’t love the doctrine of election. Do you not see that you cannot have the one unless you have the other. No one perseveres unless God is Sovereign over them from start to finish. The only reason we believe that we will persevere is because we believe that God is faithful. If he

called us he will never forsake us. If he DID IT then it will stay done. I don't believe that I could never fall away. I know myself too well. Prone to wander GOD I FEEL IT, prone to leave the one I love. O God! Here's my heart Lord, take and seal it! Seal it for thy courts above. I know that I will still be standing in faith, in Christ at the end, not because I'm a good man, but because God is a faithful God. There's a lot of changing I need yet to do, but like the Corinthians, I need to see these things first. These are the truths I need to see and you need to see if we are to be changed by one degree of glory to the next. This is the truth, Paul says, about who you are and who God is for his glory and for our good. And this is the Word of the Lord, thanks be to God.