

1 Corinthians 1:1-9 – the Faithfulness of God

With our introduction last week we saw how the city of Corinth was a happening place. Shipping from all over the world came to Corinth and brought with them people of every nation and language. They also brought with them their evil practices which contributed to the already evil practices of this region.

You'll remember that even the ancient Roman and Greek writers referred to the people of Corinth as (korinthia-zesthai) which literally means "to live a Corinthian life". And the life they had in mind was a life of immorality. With the temple of Aphrodite and others and their temple prostitutes, depravity was placed on a religious level and therefore justified as good.

Corinth was a hub of commerce and trade and entertainment and it was recognized throughout the world. And this is one reason Paul came to this city. Because not only would it be a place from which goods would be transported to the world, it would be a place where the gospel of Jesus Christ would be transported as well.

But Corinth's reputation would not go unnoticed by Paul and as he writes this letter to the Church in Corinth we see that his concerns were not unfounded as some of the Christians in this area had not let go of the life and sin from which they had been delivered in Christ.

Even today, when Christians study this letter it's usually in the light of the divisive nature of the problems Paul was addressing and so there's the tendency to only go to this letter if there's a problem in the Church. But, that's not why we're studying it. In fact, the reason we're studying it is to help keep from going down that path.

The Church in Corinth at this particular time in history is a model church of how it's not to be done. And sometimes that's the best example for a church which seems to be doing it right, because if taught properly, it can be a deterrent and an encouragement to humble ourselves before the Lord, knowing that none of us are above being tempted to act like the Corinthians.

And so, as we start our study this morning we need to keep in mind that this letter was inspired by the Holy Spirit for not only this specific church, but ultimately for all churches in all times to be an example and an comfort, realizing that God's grace is what

brought us to Himself in the first place and God's grace will keep us and enable us to faithfully represent Him despite temptations we all face to go our own way.

1CO 1:1-3 "Paul, called to be an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God, and our brother Sosthenes, To the church of God in Corinth, to those sanctified in Christ Jesus and called to be holy, together with all those everywhere who call on the name of our Lord Jesus Christ - their Lord and ours: Grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ."

As Paul does with most of his letters he begins with a salutation and a greeting. And it's usually very friendly and uplifting in nature. And this letter is no exception. But he begins by identifying himself as a special agent for God.

"Paul, called as an apostle of Jesus Christ by the will of God." This opening statement not only identifies the one writing this letter but it also puts into perspective the position Paul enjoys as one who is given a great deal of responsibility by God to represent Him in this world.

The word apostle comes from the Greek word apostolos, and it means a messenger, one sent forth with orders. In this case it means that Paul has been personally chosen by Christ to be His messenger with the gospel.

Now, obviously all of us are called by Christ to be His messenger with the gospel, but in Paul's case to be an apostle also carried with it the responsibility to reveal God's word to the Church together with nurturing and shepherding the Church-at-large in his day.

It was a unique position which has been abrogated, or done away with, by the very nature of the office, and the very nature of the way an apostle was called. An apostle was to have personally seen the risen Christ, which Paul had as the Lord appeared to him on the road to Damascus which is where Paul was saved.

An apostle was given authority to fully explain the O.T. and reveal the New Testament, which is what this Corinthian letter is, the very word of God. An apostle apparently was given every spiritual gift by the Holy Spirit including all of the miraculous gifts.

And an apostle was given authority from God to rule and guide the Church, as one's who were to be listened to in matters relating to the functioning of the Church, as though Jesus Christ Himself were

there leading and guiding. This didn't make them an equal with Jesus, it simply enabled them to represent the Lord who is the only Head of the Church.

Again, that special authority died out with the last apostle, John, even though the Roman Catholic Church would try to claim that special authority through the Papacy throughout history. There is no one ruler or head of the Church then or today, other than Christ Jesus.

EPH 1:22 "And God placed all things under his feet and appointed him to be head over everything for the church,²³ which is his body, the fullness of him who fills everything in every way."

Paul realized his special position and yet never usurped the authority of Christ because he still understood himself to be a servant of the Most High God. In fact, he realized that the office of apostle which he possessed was the result of Christ calling him to that office.

Paul was not looking for a job with the title of apostle when he received it. At the time our Lord appeared to him Paul was on a mission to destroy the Church. His name at that time was Saul, the same name as the first king of Israel.

But our Lord Jesus came to Paul when Paul wasn't looking for Him and gave Paul a gift which he didn't deserve. Our Lord called Paul and brought him to Himself and commissioned him to be the apostle to the Gentiles. And he fully realized this as he points this out when writing to the Romans.

ROM 11:13 "I am talking to you Gentiles. Inasmuch as I am the apostle to the Gentiles, ..."

This was revealed early on to Paul, even right after his conversion, when a man by the name of Ananias was given instructions by the Lord to go to Paul with this news.

ACT 9:15 "But the Lord said to Ananias, "Go! This man is my chosen instrument to carry my name before the Gentiles and their kings and before the people of Israel."

It's in this verse where we see that Paul's primary responsibility was to the Gentiles, but it didn't exclude the Jews. And being a Jew himself he always took advantage of being able to go into the Synagogues and expound the Scriptures as one who was a former Pharisee.

But Paul always realized that when Christ called him he was not worthy in and of himself to be an apostle, let alone a Christian. He knew that it was totally because of the will of God to work in his life that he had been given such a privilege.

EPH 3:8 “Although I am less than the least of all God's people, this grace was given me: to preach to the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ,…”

God's will, according to verse one, is what brought Paul to Christ and it would be God's will which would accomplish the work to reach out to a lost and dying Gentile world with the gospel of Jesus Christ. You and I are the fruit of Paul's ministry. Most of us, who are not Jews, would fall into that category of Gentiles.

As the gospel spread from Turkey and Greece into Europe it finally found its way to the shores of the United States as Christians from Europe brought it with them. We are the fruit of Paul's ministry and yet as with all fruit we are to reproduce that fruit in our own lives as we in turn give it away.

Paul was not looking to be an apostle for Jesus Christ, but once he had been called and he responded to that call by faith, he faithfully carried out his duties in the power of the Spirit to the glory of God and so should we, because just like Paul, everyone of us has been personally called by Christ to faithfully represent Him with the truth found in our lives and in our message of hope to the world.

ROM 1:5-6 “Through him and for his name's sake, we received grace and apostleship to call people from among all the Gentiles to the obedience that comes from faith. And you also are among those who are called to belong to Jesus Christ.”

We'll talk more of this in a moment, but let's get through the rest of verse one. Paul mentions a man by the name of Sosthenes as being with him as he writes this letter and includes Sosthenes in sending out a greeting along with Paul.

It would be like me writing a letter to my family and saying that my brother is also here with me and he say's, hey. Sosthenes, in all likelihood, was once part of that church family in Corinth. In fact, the way Paul mentions his name it is assumed that everyone in Corinth would have recognized exactly who Paul was talking about.

Well, how would they have known Sosthenes? We touched on this last week when we looked at an incident in Corinth where the Jews

were trying to get Paul and the Christians kicked out of Corinth using the legal system there in Corinth.

ACT 18:14-17 “Just as Paul was about to speak, Gallio said to the Jews, “If you Jews were making a complaint about some misdemeanor or serious crime, it would be reasonable for me to listen to you. But since it involves questions about words and names and your own law -settle the matter yourselves. I will not be a judge of such things.” So he had them ejected from the court. Then they all turned on Sosthenes the synagogue ruler and beat him in front of the court. But Gallio showed no concern whatever.”

Sosthenes was just minding his own business, and they now turn on him, possibly for being somewhat sympathetic to the Christians, or possibly because, as the leader of the Synagogue, he didn't help to make the case strong enough to get rid of the Christians.

Whatever the reason he's receiving a beating from his own people. And it may be for this very reason that Sosthenes begins to wonder if these “Christians”, who appear to love each other, don't have something to offer.

By the way, there's the tendency for even Christians to beat up on each other through being legalistic and often times taking a holier-than-thou attitude among themselves. And for many in the Church they find this hard to deal with and possibly, because of a weak faith, they leave the church thinking that there are no churches that promote the truth of Christ and the peace and love that should accompany that truth.

And so they flounder for years and don't grow in the faith because they've detached themselves from Christ's church which should be a place of refuge and a place to grow. And so, we must always promote the peace and unity of the Body of Christ without sacrificing those in the Body on the altar of our own agenda, which is part of the problem with the church in Corinth.

This by the way, is not an excuse for those weak in the faith to detach themselves from the Body of Christ, but should be an encouragement for the Church to be there for them and encourage them to be attached, if they're willing to be attached. We are called to encourage each other to love and good deeds, but it's always in the context of the local body doing that among themselves.

And so, at some point Sosthenes, like Crispus, the former Synagogue ruler, came to Christ and is now serving with Paul in Ephesus where this letter to the Corinthians is being written. And he sends his greetings with Paul to the brethren. But notice how Paul addresses this group in Corinth in verse two.

1CO 1:2 “To the church of God in Corinth, to those sanctified in Christ Jesus and called to be holy, together with all those everywhere who call on the name of our Lord Jesus Christ - their Lord and ours: ...”

Look at what Paul calls this group. “The Church of God in Corinth.” Keep in mind that as Paul writes this letter he is fully aware of some horrific problems among these people. And yet he doesn’t disassociate them from being part of the true Church which happens to belong to God.

Calvary Chapel Port Charlotte, for example, doesn’t belong to me, it doesn’t belong to you. It doesn’t even belong to Pastor Chuck Smith who was the first Calvary Chapel started back in the mid-60’s. It is the Church which belongs to God. It just happens to be in Port Charlotte, Fl. where He is also doing a work.

This is why I’m always amused and yet often frustrated when people make the comment, ‘well, how long have you been here?’ - which often means why are you guys still relatively small?

The answer is that God has not chosen at this time to burst us at the seams. Now, if a church is not teaching the truth of God’s word, and it is not demonstrating the love of Christ, and it is not being faithful to the great commission of Christ to take the gospel to the world and make disciples, then one might wonder.

But to make a judgment before finding out these things is a bit presumptive. But, most of you can testify that we have been faithful in all of these areas and yet still we are not a huge mega-church, as though that somehow gives credibility to the validity of ministry.

My point is that it is God’s church. If it were my church I would be hiring the Good Year blimp and parking it a few hundred feet over this school while dropping free tickets to Disney World for the fine folks of Port Charlotte to scoop up. But because it’s God’s Church we must be faithful to carry on with the way He wants us to minister in truth, and trust that God knows what He’s doing with His church.

We don't need to feel compelled to manipulate an environment which will artificially motivate everyone to come, we need only feel compelled to love each other and the world with the truth of God's word and minister to all in the name of Christ. This doesn't mean we don't get personally involved in ministry or in the lives of the brethren, it only means that the results are ultimately up to God, because it's God's church.

And the church of God which was at Corinth also needed to realize that they didn't belong to themselves. They were serving the King of kings and the Lord of lords, and as such they needed to realize, even as we should, that if we are Christ's representatives in this world we should act like it.

This is one reason that Paul is opening this letter the way he does. He is laying out for these Corinthian believers what their position in Christ really is, so that when he begins to address some of their fleshly behavior they will understand that they are not acting in accord with what they have become, new creatures in Christ by faith in Him alone.

Notice that Paul speaks in the present tense in verse two when he brings up the point of them who have been sanctified in Christ Jesus, saints by calling, with all who in every place call on the name of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Despite their carnality, they presently are sanctified. Despite their carnality, they presently are saints. Why? Because they have called on the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, which means they have truly called out to God to save them from the penalty of their sins through His Son and His shed blood on the cross for the remission of their sins.

Let's take a look at this because this is wonderful news concerning the security of our salvation which is in Christ Jesus. "Those who have been sanctified in Christ Jesus." The word sanctified or sanctification is often associated with the process of our salvation where we are being conformed into the image of Christ on a daily basis.

And though Paul would not teach against this, this is not what the word primarily alludes to here in our text. The word sanctified in our text is the Greek word, *hagiazō*, and it means to set apart. In what sense are these Corinthians set apart? They are set apart by God to be a part of His kingdom and share in His fellowship forever.

But it goes beyond that. To be set apart also designates a separating from this world to where you no longer belong to the kingdom of darkness, you are now legally associated with the Kingdom of light in Christ, never to be detached from it.

It is as though God has come to you personally and called you out and then placed you in His loving care, never to let you go. But Paul doesn't stop there. He tells us that we have been sanctified or called out in Christ Jesus.

What does that mean? It simply means that the reason we can know that we have been set apart unto the Kingdom of God, never to fear losing that status, is because of the One who purchased us and has legally claimed us to be His forever.

'In Christ Jesus', means that we are saved in the person and the work He accomplished on our behalf. To be in Christ is to be in the safety of His love and forgiveness. Keep in mind that the opposite of that would be not to be in Christ, but to be in the world and still in our sin.

Since all people everywhere are going to be held accountable to a holy God for their sin, they must be punished for their sin. This was the legal arrangement that God made with Adam when He told him that in the day he eats of the forbidden fruit he would die. That's a legal binding judgment to violating a legal binding rule from God Himself.

That judgment was passed on to all mankind. We're stuck with it. And we will pay the penalty of our own sin which was passed upon Adam and Eve. That penalty is death, total separation from God forever.

But what if someone who was a sinless representative could take our place and die for that penalty instead of us? Wouldn't that be great? Well, someone did. In fact, someone had to if we would ever be legally reunited to our God. God can't wink at sin and just waive the penalty. Someone has to pay that debt. And that's why Christ came into this world.

He is our perfect substitute. He is the One who met the demands of God's law perfectly where we couldn't. He is the One who then paid our debt of death by dying on the cross in our place. But He is also the One who defeated death and gave us the victory over the grave by raising from the dead three days later.

And if we have placed our faith in Christ then our status with the Father has changed forever. Our status has gone from being guilty as charged and condemned, to not guilty, and free from that penalty as we now move from being at war with God to now being at peace with God.

Everything Christ accomplished for us was done legally according to a just and holy God and the demands were met legally. When we are declared not guilty, by placing our faith in Christ and what He did for us, we are now in a new relationship with God; justified. But we are only in that relationship because of what Christ did for us.

We have a new standing. And that's what it means to be in Christ. We stand in His righteousness before the Father. We are placed and set apart unto God's Kingdom because we are in Christ's perfect work on the cross. The penalty He suffered for us we can now claim for ourselves. It is as though we met the demands of God's law and have been allowed to come into His presence.

But we must never think that we did anything to earn our salvation.. Though we may say that we have met the demands of God's law it is still met in Christ. But because we have been set apart in Christ our status now moves from enemies of the cross to saints according to verse two.

In fact, this is the premise at the heart of this entire letter. Paul is writing to a group of rebellious, divisive Christians. But before he begins to address all of that he tells them what they really are in Christ, so that when he brings corrective instruction they will understand why they shouldn't be pursuing a carnal path.

Now, you and I might be tempted to tell such people what they really are. Selfish, self-centered, vindictive, greedy, and just all around no good people. And though these may be symptoms of not following after the Lord, that is not what we really are, positionally, if in fact we've trusted Christ as Lord and Savior.

We are, what Paul describes. We are sanctified, or called out by God and set apart for His glory, and we are saints, present tense.

Often times the word saints is associated with the Roman Catholic church who determines after the death of someone, if they were worthy of sainthood. They have a couple of requirements. 1) That they lived exemplary lives and 2) that there was some miracle associated with their lives or ministry.

In other words, you can become a saint if you do something to earn sainthood. The bible clearly teaches that no one can earn sainthood. Remember what Paul told the Ephesians?

EPH 2:8-9 “For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith - and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God - not by works, so that no one can boast.”

But what does it mean to be a saint? Well, just as the word sanctified comes from the Greek word hagiozo, the word for saint is hagios which means most holy thing. To be holy is to be set apart for a special work of God. Therefore, a Christian who is in Christ has been set apart for a special work and is therefore considered a most holy thing, or saint.

Again, as I mentioned earlier, the status we have as saints doesn't come from anything we could do to earn such a position, rather, it is from the work which Christ did on our behalf. Being in Him is being set apart or holy, or a saint.

In fact, this is why many translations uses the phrase “called to be holy” there in verse two instead of “called to be saints.” The result is the same. Because God called us and set us apart for salvation in Christ we are then declared holy or saints which is our new status before the Lord. It does not necessarily mean that we actually are living holy lives at a particular time, but it does mean that now that we are declared holy or saints in Christ, we should begin living in the life we have, which is where Paul is going in this letter.

And then Paul assures these saints in Corinth that they, just like the rest of the world who have called on the name of the Lord, enjoy an everlasting relationship with God that cannot be broken. What this shows us is that there is a real connection with the rest of the body of Christ world-wide.

We are brothers and sisters in Christ with every other true believer, whether they be Presbyterian, Baptist, Charismatic's or any other true Bible believing church. This doesn't mean we have to condone bad doctrine in any one of these or other denominations, but it does mean, at a root level, we belong to each other in Christ and we should love each other in light of that.

Jesus Christ is our Lord, as Paul points out in verse two, and as Lord He is our Master as well as friend. We share a common bond with every true believer, but most importantly, we share a

relationship with Christ with every other believer in this body and that should affect our relationship with each other as well as with the Lord.

This is what Paul would have us realize, that we have a salvation found only in Christ and we share it with each other and that the Son of God has chosen to associate Himself with us to the degree that He became a man specifically so that we might be found holy in His perfect holiness and righteousness.

HEB 2:11 “Both the one who makes men holy and those who are made holy are of the same family. So Jesus is not ashamed to call them brothers.”

But we must never forget how we have come into this family through a righteousness from above.

ROM 3:22 “This righteousness from God comes through faith in Jesus Christ to all who believe.”

May our hearts delight in so great a salvation and may we begin to consider the grace which has been extended to us, which by the way we’ll look at in some detail next week. I’ll leave you with this as Paul describes the work of God through Christ to Timothy.

2TI 1:9-10 [God] “has saved us and called us to a holy life - not because of anything we have done but because of his own purpose and grace. This grace was given us in Christ Jesus before the beginning of time, but it has now been revealed through the appearing of our Savior, Christ Jesus, who has destroyed death and has brought life and immortality to light through the gospel.”