



PRODIGAL

CHURCH

SERIES: PRODIGAL CHURCH

SERMON TITLE: "DEAR SAINTS" 1 CORINTHIANS 1:1-9

DATE: SUNDAY, JUNE 21ST 2020

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As we begin this journey through Paul's letter to the Corinthians, we need to understand the setting into which Paul has written this pastoral letter.

Corinth was a place of trade due to its geographic location. It was a place of religious fervor due to the number of Greek and Roman temples that filled the city. In particular the largest temple was dedicated to the cult of Aphrodite, the goddess of love and sex. The sporting highlight was the Isthmus games that happened every 2 years. Corinth was a very lively and populated destination, a melting pot of people, cultures and religions to converge upon.

Q. Name a 21st century city that might compare with 1st century Corinth.

Q. Why do you think it is important to know some of the background of a city like Corinth?

THE BOOK OF CORINTHIANS OPENS WITH THIS GREETING:

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

Paul/Saul was a persecutor of the Church who later became its greatest teacher. Paul's conversion story in Acts 9 tells us how Paul was pursuing Christians to arrest them when Jesus appeared to him. This tells us that God is no respecter of people's reputations or previous misdeeds. He will take us and use us to change the world.

Q. Why do you think that we can tend to have a mindset that believes God will only use other people? What holds us back from believing that anyone of us can be used by God to change our world?

In the verses we are about to read below it seems that the Corinthian church has lost its identity of what it means to be a follower of Jesus.

Q. Have you ever had an “identity crisis”? What brought you to that place? What helped you rediscover your identity?

Q. What identity traits should be similar among all believers in Christ? What identity traits would Jesus use when defining one of his followers?

READ 1 CORINTHIANS 1:2:

²To the church of God in Corinth, to those sanctified in Christ Jesus and called to be his holy people, together with all those everywhere who call on the name of our Lord Jesus Christ—their Lord and ours:

Paul is very clear about the identity of the Church. The Church are “those sanctified in Christ Jesus and called to be his holy people”.

Sanctified means: Set apart by way of the ongoing regenerative work of the Holy Spirit actively creating Christ-like character into our lives.

To be holy means: To be entirely devoted to the glory of God. To be set apart for God’s purpose.

So, as you can see these two words - “sanctification” and “holy” are very similar. One describes the process of reaching the other. Sanctification leads to holiness with both of these being the gift of God for us. Our sanctification goal is to become more like Jesus.

Q. Do you regularly pause to measure whether your life is on track towards holiness?

Q. Is holiness something you desire?

Q. How can you determine whether sanctification is occurring within your life?

In the verses below note how Paul greeted the church in Corinth by giving thanks to God for the grace they received through Christ. Then reminding them that they were part of a larger church movement. The fact that Paul highlights God’s goodness rather than his readers goodness is very telling.

READ 1 CORINTHIANS 1:3-4.

³ *Grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.*

⁴ *I always thank my God for you because of his grace given you in Christ Jesus. 5 For in him you have been enriched in every way—with all kinds of speech and with all knowledge*

Q. Why does Paul not offer some form of compliment towards the Corinthian church itself?

4 I always thank my God for you because of his grace given you in Christ Jesus. 5 For in him you have been enriched in every way—with all kinds of speech and with all knowledge

In these same verses Paul gently raises and celebrates two of the gifts of the Holy Spirit that the church appears to be strong in. Namely the gifts of “all kinds of speech and with all knowledge.” Paul is highlighting these gifts early in his letter because later he will rebuke the Corinthians for their undisciplined use of these same gifts. Therefore, what looks like a simple greeting is actually being loaded up with anticipation for what was to come later in the letter.

Q. Paul is offering us a master class in how to raise concerns in a loving but deliberate way. What can we learn from the way Paul approaches, in what we'll soon find out, are significant problems within this church community?

Yet, immediately after signaling his intentions to raise his concerns with the church, Paul reminds the Corinthians that he is also happy to speak to other communities about how God is working amongst them.

⁶ *God thus confirming our testimony about Christ among you.*

It's here that we see Paul's pastoral brilliance at work. Knowing that the Corinthian church had its troubles didn't stop Paul from testifying about what God was doing among them.

Q. Given that Paul is about to challenge the Corinthians about their scandalous behaviours and attitudes do you find Paul's willingness to testify to others about God being at work in Corinth troublesome? How so?

Finally, in this greeting Paul reminds the church that they have everything they need to complete their journey. Whatever the end may be; Jesus' return or they die to be with him.

READ 1 CORINTHIANS 1:7-9.

⁷ *Therefore you do not lack any spiritual gift as you eagerly wait for our Lord Jesus Christ to be revealed. ⁸ He will also keep you firm to the end, so that you will be blameless on the day of our Lord Jesus Christ. ⁹ God is faithful, who has called you into fellowship with his Son, Jesus Christ our Lord.*

When you consider your future life do you know that within God's provision, we also have everything we need to live a spiritually growing and influential life? What I find is that there are times when I have to discover afresh or maybe for the first time that God has all eventualities in my life covered.

Q. Faith, for being able to go the distance, is very reassuring. Discuss what it means to you when we read that “He will also keep you firm to the end.”

Q. There’s a strong sense here that God wants to take responsibility for your faith life. How does this happen on a week by week basis in your life?

I’m really looking forward to this journey through 1 Corinthians. This book is well placed to speak accurately into our times. Let’s be praying that God’s speaks through his word to our church community and to us personally as we explore this letter together.

END YOUR GROUP TIME TOGETHER WITH PRAYING FOR ONE ANOTHER.