

24ID3713

1 Corinthians 1:1-9
An Optimistic Outlook

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May 15, 2024

All right. If you've got a Bible – hope you do, it's church time - let's open it to 1 Corinthians 1:1. We're going to do the first nine verses this evening, and we'll get to it in twenty minutes or so.

I'd like to give you a little background for this church so that you have a good basis for your study. The book of Acts gives to us roughly the first thirty years of the church's early development. In those thirty years Paul, as a missionary, made three long trips, three missionary journeys; started in about 46 or so A.D., would travel for about the next twelve years or so; traveling – if you just measure out where you went to the book of Acts – well over 6,500 miles. He took his first trip early on – 46-47 A.D. – to just the Galatia region. It was then that he had taken Barnabas with him, you might remember; traveled only about 1,200 miles, saw several churches established. He then came home and really, for the next four years, did not go back out. But in 50 A.D. he felt the calling of the Lord to take a second missionary journey. It would be his longest. He would be out until near the end of 55 A.D. He would take a larger team; Silas would go with him. He would travel almost 2,800 miles. And then his last trip almost followed on the heels of the second. You'd think after five or six years he'd stay home for a little while; he wasn't home six months. But he had just stopped by Ephesus and saw that the Lord was doing a work, and he really wanted to get back there. And so in 55 (towards the end of the year) he took off again, and he spent most of the time in Ephesus but traveled about 2,500 miles or so in those last 3+ years as he wound his way back around to Jerusalem.

Paul came to this city that we're studying (the letter that he wrote to them) on his second missionary journey. He and Silas and Timothy had passed through all of the Galatian churches that he had planted on his first trip, and then they didn't really know where to go. And as you read the accounts in the book of Acts, he sought to go into Asia without any success. Every place he turned to go, the Lord blocked him or forbid him (we're not told how), but it was just a frustrating several months of just, "Lord, where do You want us to be?" And all the time they were moving in one direction. Finally they ran out of road, if you will; they ran out of territory. They ended up in a place called Troas on the water's edge. And there, in Acts 16, we're told that Paul went to sleep and that he had a vision from the Lord – of a man in Macedonia standing up and pleading with him to, "Come and help us." And he woke up, and he believed that the Lord had called him to go preach the gospel. It was a relief, really, after months of searching. And they got on a ship, and they traveled to Macedonia.

And there we are told there were three really significant conversions that took place in their arrival for the first time into Europe. There was the conversion, if you will, of Lydia, a businesswoman who was very successful; had an office or a factory or something

there in town. Eventually she and her family came to know the Lord. There was a possessed woman that began to follow Paul and the boys around and screaming at the top of her lungs, "These men are the anointed ones of God." And it took Paul several days to kind of go, "Man, I don't think this is normal," and he realized this was a demon, and he turned and, in the name of the Lord, he rebuked this demon, and this woman was delivered from her possession; gave her life to Christ. But, as a result, her owners – who made a lot of money from her in the culture – went to complain, and Paul and Silas got arrested, beaten and thrown into prison. Paul was a Roman citizen; that was illegal, but they did it anyway. But at midnight Paul began to worship the Lord in the midst of his circumstance, and then the Lord began to work. A Philippian jailer would come to know the Lord that night. He would take the boys home, patch up their wounds. His family would come around to believe in Christ as well. They brought them back to prison before the morning came. And, as a result, the governor of the area (the mayor, if you will) said, "You need to leave town." And Paul said, "You beat me, and I'm a Roman citizen. We're not leavin'. At least not on your terms." But he left willingly, eventually, because he wanted to buy some time, and I think provide some cover, for this young new church that had been born. In fact Timothy would stay there to kind of nurture this young church as it begins to grow. And so Paul left.

The Acts account, as you read through this trip, was filled with trouble. Everywhere Paul....you know, sometimes when you do something you think the Lord is into it and things go bad, you start to second guess, "Well, maybe this isn't the Lord, maybe I heard it wrong." Well then Paul heard it wrong a lot because he kept running into trouble every place that he went. He traveled thirty miles to a place called Amphipolis, traveled thirty-five more miles (when he wasn't welcomed there) to a place called Apollonia, got on the road and went forty more miles to Thessalonica where he found some favor. And so he began to preach there, but he only last for three weeks before the troublemakers in town made sure that he got out. Interestingly enough, if you read the book of Thessalonians, that was a church planted in three weeks. Thrived. Did great. But Paul doesn't know that. He just knows he's been there for three weeks, and they're chasing him out of town at the end of a stick again. And off he goes.

More opposition came, and he traveled sixty more miles down the road to a place called Berea. Then he would be sent off alone just because the boys were worried about him. He was like a lightning rod everywhere he went. And so off he was sent by himself three hundred miles away to Athens, set sail, and then, when that didn't work out there very well and there was very little fruit, he would eventually travel the last fifty miles or so from Athens to Corinth.

Like I said, Luke had stayed behind in the Philippi area to pastor the young church there. He would eventually join Paul again on his third missionary journey. So if you lose track of Luke, you'll find him there for several years, really, ministering in the church there.

Paul had been sent to Athens from Berea for his own safety. Silas and Timothy said, "We'll catch up with you." But that's a long way to go, and Paul kind of arrived in Athens

just beat up, if you will, and he had a lot of trouble. He got to Mars Hill. You might remember the discussion there (Acts 17) with the philosophers of his day, and he tried to mix his message with the tales of the culture. He quoted their gods, the poets to try to convince them, “I saw that tomb of the unknown god.” And yet it went very poorly. I mean the responses were meager at best, and Paul, in his frame of mind, if you read, was very discouraged. I mean, he was by himself. He literally had been chased out of a half dozen towns. I’m sure he still had welts on his back from the beating he took there in Philippi. He didn’t have a friend to talk to, and the culture just continued to get worse. And rather than waiting for the group there in Athens, he went off to Corinth alone.

And so he arrives in Corinth, but from what we read just in the book – very discouraged, very kind of gun shy, extremely defeated. He had faced terrific problems. It was fine in Galatia, but the minute they got on the new road, man, things had gone just really, really difficult. And now he arrives in maybe one of the most perverse cities on the planet. He was all by himself. He was fearful, he was trembling (if you read the first five verses of chapter 2 of this book, you’ll hear Paul describe the way he showed up). He came here at the end of his rope; he was on edge, he was alone, he was afraid. Discouraged. The road had been rough. The stays had been short. The response had been uneven, at best, and the loneliness was pervasive. It just didn’t let up. As a tentmaker, Paul went to make tents. That’s what he did as a job. He ran into a couple that he met there – named Aquila and Priscilla – and Paul began to go to the synagogue with them on the Sabbath and just try to share with the folks. But I think the description that you’ll find of Paul is he did it on the sly and didn’t want to cause any waves, and he shared with people that would listen, but he didn’t need to stir up the next city that he was in. And he found himself to be fairly timid and kind of withdrawn, if you will.

We don’t know how long he waited for Silas and Timothy to show up; could have been months. But when they did (as you read there in Acts 18), Paul began to find some boldness. He had some friends now to stand with him. And he began to preach a little bit more succinctly and loudly and targeted his comments about Christ, and it wasn’t long before the pushback came as it always had. And, again, Paul finds himself in this dilemma, you know, “I want to share the gospel of Christ, but, man, how hard is this! I don’t know what to do.” Fearing he’d be chased out of another town, Jesus appeared to him in a vision, and He told him he could preach without fear of reprisal, that there were many in the city that He wanted to reach. In fact, the Lord said to Paul in that dream that He was with him to protect him, that he shouldn’t be afraid, and he shouldn’t be silent. He said, “You speak. I have a lot of souls here. No one will lay a hand upon you.” I think that’s exactly what Paul needed to hear. God was going to go before him and, for a time, make it easy. Now it wasn’t always going to be easy, but it was – at least for the next eighteen months – about as good as it could be. God was just faithful.

And the fruit, as Paul went out to share, began to come in bunches. First, a fellow named Crispus, who was the head of the synagogue there in the town, was converted along with his family. His replacement was a fellow named Sosthenes who, angry with Paul at having led this Jewish Crispus to the Lord, went before Gallio (the Roman

proconsul there in the area) and accused Paul of sedition and all. But interestingly enough, the Roman proconsul didn't want to hear the case. He said, "Just take it to the street," and so God gave Paul grace. He didn't even need to open his mouth to defend himself. God had done that for him. And the crowd turned on this fellow, Sosthenes (the head of the synagogue), and beat him up because he had failed in court. We'll see in a minute (verse 1); if that's the same guy (in verse 1), it seems to have done the trick; maybe he came around as well. This wasn't exactly a common name, so we assume (and it's just an assumption) that this might very well be the second leader of the synagogue that came to Christ as Paul began to minister.

Paul stayed in this town for eighteen months. He raised up, as the Lord used him, a new body. He moved to a house next door to the synagogue, owned by a fellow named Justus, who was a believer. And there, next door to the synagogue, he began to preach fulltime and meet everyone who wanted to hear. Eventually, after eighteen months, Paul would leave; not under any pressure but just as a leading of God, the Holy Spirit. They would bring a fellow named Apollos in. Apollos is a man who had been schooled by Aquila and Priscilla back in Ephesus, and he would take Paul's place as the pastor of the church for a time. While he was here, Paul would write the book of Romans. He would write the books of 1 and 2 Thessalonians. He would write the book of Hebrews as well. So if you ever want to know how Paul felt about what he was seeing, just read the first few chapters of the book of Romans because it was written from the streets of, and in the midst of, the perversion of Corinth.

Today Corinth is a very small town. We have gone there on our "Footsteps of Paul." It is, to me, the most moving place because you can certainly relate to what Paul must have seen. The streets of Corinth still have the little cubicles down the center street of where the dealers would sit with their wares. It could be one of those was Paul's tent making xxxxx.....I don't know. There's the judgment seat there as well. But in Paul's day, it wasn't a small little town. It was politically active, it was thriving, it was a very prosperous town. If you've been to Corinth at all or know about it, it's situated on a four-mile isthmus that attaches the Gulf of Corinth and the city that's on that side with the Saronic Gulf on the other side where there's another city; and both of those cities were very much on trade routes. You go to Corinth today, you can walk across the Corinth Canal which divides this isthmus in two. It was a major trade port, if you will. Corinth had been destroyed in 146 B.C., but Julius Caesar 100 years later – 46 B.C. – rebuilt it. And his plan for how to run it.....he took retired Roman soldiers and gave them the oversight of the town in exchange for no taxation, free housing. They really ran the town; it was a Roman town. But it had lots of Greek influence, and like most Greek cities, it had an acropolis, a high part, if you will. It was called the Acro or the Acrocorinth, and there stood the Temple of Venus. In Greek it would be Aphrodite which she, if you don't know.....well, Greek, who cares about mythology but she was the goddess of sexuality. And so there up on the hill above the city there stood a place where 1,000 temple prostitutes lived so that those from the city could go up to worship that god. It was a perverse town....as they entertained the sailors and the traders in the name of their religion.

It was the capital of what was then called the province of Achaia (you've read that, I'm sure, in your Bible), and most of the Greeks – 750,000 people – lived in and around this place. But it was a filthy hole. It was debauchery in every place. In fact, imagine a cosmopolitan sailors' port where they worship the goddess of sexuality, and maybe you can get a little feel. It was a morally-bankrupt place. In fact, if you look at the language of the 1st century, the phrase "to Corinthianize" meant literally you act some shamelessly perverse and immoral individual; whatever that was, you were acting like a Corinthian. What happened in Corinth.....well, you get the idea.....it stays in Corinth.

So into this mess God brings a very discouraged disciple who has been as faithful as he could be but really needed a visit from the Lord to continue on. And then He places him into a town where it is so far fallen, and yet God wants to do a work. He wants to get glory. But the challenges - to not only the leadership but to the saints who will come into the church - are extremely steep. What a place to come out from.

We learn from Paul's two letters that in many ways these saints, after 18 months with Paul, had not very many fully detached themselves from the world and from the city in which they had been living. The influence around them was still a mark upon their lives. They needed to be de-Corinthianized, and yet they had a ways to go. It's nothing new, but we know that that's certainly one of the lessons of the book.

In the New Testament, in the way that we have received it, this book is between Romans and Galatians, the two doctrinal books, really, of the New Testament; at least the ones that stand out as far as doctrinal practices. And in the middle, God places this book to say, "Look, My people need to live for the Lord in a fallen world."

We've entitled the name of this series "Living A Pure Life In An Impure World" because that really is the focus. How do you separate yourself from all that's going on around you as it is falling and falling faster and maintain both your witness and your walk?

The Corinthian church, by just solely reading the Bible, was one of the most carnal fellowships in the New Testament. There were factions and divided loyalties. There was a constant bickering and division. Sin was out for all to see. There was pride about gifts. There was liberality about policy and about sin. There were folks in the church that wanted all of the blessings of knowing Christ and none of the responsibility. "Bless me, Lord, but I don't want to walk with You." They want to hold on to their sensual pleasures and yet see from Jesus not only the promise of a future but His blessings in this life. And Paul will say to them, beginning in chapter 6 especially, "You can't have it both ways. It just won't work."

As such, because of the nature of the church, most of these chapters are corrective; meaning Paul says, "Here's what you're doing. That's what you shouldn't be doing. Here's what you should be doing." So it's easy to follow. It's not theological in the sense of you're struggling with great theological concepts as you might be with Romans or with Hebrews or with the book Galatians. It is more about correction. In fact after chapter 4, where Paul kind of finishes this whole division thing, every chapter is devoted

to another problem that they were dealing with that they hadn't dealt with, and it goes on for several chapters. "Let's pick this topic, let's pick that topic. Come on, guys. We gotta do better than this." Paul will talk to them about what has gone desperately wrong in a church that he's planted; was there for 18 months and saw God's grace at work. He will write to them about unity. He will talk to them about being servants. He will obviously bring up the issue of morality and the sanctity of marriage and our liberty and how we should use it and what the role of a man versus a woman is in the church. He will talk about the Lord's supper and spiritual gifts and the doctrine of the resurrection and the responsibility that we have to take everything God's given us and return it to Him with fruit. It's a good book. He has a lot to say. I think it's a good book for our generation – we who know the Lord – because we've been saved by His grace, and now we have to face a world that is, quite frankly, not interested in God and really doesn't want anything to do with Him. And yet we're the ones that are supposed to take the gospel to them. It's a great book to give you confidence in God's grace – that He will finish in you the work that He's begun. And if you fall on your face from time to time – I see some flat faces out there - I think we all understand that God's grace is sufficient to get you up and get you started again; that there is a second chance, and an eighteenth chance, and a hundredth chance with Him. On the one hand God demands holiness, that we live separate lives in a fallen world. On the other hand God offers us grace that allows us to fall and stand up time and again. God certainly does that with His church.

After leaving Corinth, Paul headed for Syria with Aquila and Priscilla in tow. They got to Ephesus. They stayed there for a little time. Paul began to minister and, like in Corinth, things were going well. It seemed like there was a real appetite for the things of God, and they said to Paul, "Can you stay longer?" And Paul said, "Well, I'd like to, but I've got to get back to Jerusalem for the Feast. But, look, Lord be willing, I'll come back." And he did. He got to the Feast. You would think after five or six years he'd take a vacation. No. He turned right around and came back to Ephesus, where he would spend the better part of three years planting the church there.

It was in Ephesus during that third missionary journey – during those three years – that Paul began to get the first unfavorable reports because, look, there's no TV; there's people that travel and people that talk. And they came from Corinth, and they told Paul some of the things that were going on, and Paul wrote a letter to them that we don't have. He mentions it in 1 Corinthians 5, that he had written to them previously. No idea what's in the book other than those two or three verses in 1 Corinthians 5:9-11, I think, that talk about separating from those who call themselves brothers but were living drunken, immoral lives. He said, "I'm not telling you to get out of the world. Just get away from those people who claim to be God's people and living like that." But he mentioned he had written a letter. We don't have it. But it had prompted him to certainly write, and he did.

Later on, while he was still in Ephesus (again, according to this book – I'm only quoting to you things that are written here, and I'd be happy to give you references; you can just wait, we'll get to them).....later on in Ephesus, there were some folks who came from a

home fellowship in Corinth hosted by a lady named Chloe. And Chloe came to Ephesus and began to tell Paul...as well as some of her family with her...how much the church was divided, how they were taking sides, how there was some gross immorality that had just been allowed to fester in the church, and no one had raised a finger to deal with it. You can read about that in chapter 5, I think. She went on, and she said, "Christians are going to court in front of the Roman magistrates to sue each other," chapter 6. "We're gathering for the Lord's supper, but rather than honoring the Lord, we're just there to feed our own flesh and get in line first and load up our plates," chapter 11. The misuse of the gifts in chapters 12, 13 and 14. The error about the resurrection in chapter 15. So Chloe came with some folks from her home fellowship. Again, every church in the New Testament didn't have a building. They met in homes. In fact, they met in homes until about 300 A.D. when Constantine came and nationalized and institutionalized Christianity. Nothing could have been wronger, but that's what he did.

A little later, a three-man delegation – Stephanas, Fortunatus and a fellow named Achaicus – came from Corinth (you can read about it in chapter 16 of this book) and they brought to Paul a letter with further questions from the church about divorce, marrying unbelievers, eating food that was offered to idols, spiritual gifts, how do we take offerings, what do we do with them, how should we be behaving as a church. Really good questions. And as a response, Paul wrote this letter in 1 Corinthians to them and then the 2 Corinthians letter as well.

Because Paul spent so much time in Corinth – because we have two long letters that he wrote to them and we also have Luke's account of the planting of this church - we know more about this fellowship than almost any other in the New Testament. We have more information to go on and to understand how God works and what His Word has to say to us as a church. And so to arouse an apostle like Paul could mean trouble, and Paul was a powerful guy. I mean, God was with Paul. There was a fellow there tried to defy him one time in sharing, and God struck the man blind at Paul's request. You don't want to mess with Paul. So I suspect that when this letter from Paul arrived, there was a lot of gathering together in one place in fear. "What is he going to say to us? What is our expectation?" This was the founding church father, if you will. But it is this letter to them that we are committed to for the next several months here on Wednesday nights.

If you were going to write a letter to a church that you know a little bit about now, what would you say? And I suspect – if you read the history first – that you expected the letter to start off with, "You idiots" or "You goofballs" or somethin' to that effect. But you don't read that at all. Paul begins these first nine verses that we'll look at tonight- before we finish – on a very upbeat and very (what's the word I'm looking for?) optimistic heart. And here's why: Paul knew the Lord had begun a work there, knew that God had poured out His Spirit. It had been the city where God had visited him and said, "You go for it, buddy. I've got a lot of people here. No one's going to hurt you." And no one had. And so Paul was very optimistic in his outlook, and even though the reports were not good – and they certainly were not – Paul's hope in the grace of God was that whether it is good or not as a report, God will finish the work that He's begun, and God will see this through.

Verse 1, (see, we got here), “Paul, called to be an apostle of Jesus Christ through the will of God, and Sosthenes our brother, to the church of God which is at Corinth, 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: Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.” The greeting is typical. Paul writes his name first. I know we sign letters at the end. This was typical to sign them before. Everyone would have known Paul by this time, at least his reputation both in terms of persecuting the church, his conversion and now his excitement for the Lord. I think he’s kind of a guy you either loved or you hated. Those of you that grew up at Costa Mesa, there’s a guy named Romaine. He was a tough guy. I really liked him, but there were a lot of people who didn’t like him at all. Because he’d tell you right to your face, you know? He never had an office in church. He would sit with you in the.....if you wanted counseling, he’d go sit in the sanctuary with you. And he’d always start with this, “Did you go to church Sunday? Then why are you wasting my time if you don’t even bother to come here to church?” And he’d send them out the door. So counseling, he could do a hundred people an hour. He was great. (Laughing) But you either liked him or you hated him. Well Paul would have, I think, had that reputation as well. I think some of that you would be concerned about. He had a great mind. He was brave as a lion. A letter from him would mean important business. I’m sure there were some people in this church that were not at all eager to hear from him, and there were others who just couldn’t wait to hear what God’s heart was through a man that God used and for a people that He loved.

So he signs his name at the beginning. His name – a signature like this – appears on all thirteen books that he wrote. And then the fourteenth, the book of Hebrews (I believe he wrote that as well), it was hidden with purpose and reason, but we’ll talk about that another night. What a life of teaching and instruction this guy had.

He starts off with authority because this is going to be a corrective letter, and he wants to be sure they understand who he is, where he’s coming from. Notice he’s “an apostle by the will of God.” I want to point out to you in verse 1 and in verse 2 the words “*to be*” (I think in your Bibles) are in italics, are they not? Which meant they were placed there by translators to try to fill in the understanding, if you will. They are not in the original. And I would say to you they’re poorly done because it suggests something less. Paul wasn’t just called to be an apostle; he was an apostle. These folks that he was writing to were not called to be saints; they were saints. And thus the difference. We are saints. So Paul immediately asserts his authority with some in Corinth that had questioned whether he was that or not. He would say, in chapter 15, “Look, I didn’t pick myself to be an apostle. God chose me. You didn’t vote for me. He chose me.” But he was their apostle, and Paul humbly took that place. He wanted to be responsible for the church that he had begun. I love the phrase “by the will of God.” I think I’ve pointed that out to you before. It is always good to know when you’re doing what God wants in your life. It gives you a lot of confidence and I think a lot of encouragement, a lot of hope. You can ask yourself what are you doing today by the will of God; and the will of God could just be you go to work at a job you don’t like, but He wants you to be a

witness, so you be the best that you can. You've just got to know where you're at is the place God has called you or has called you for now. It is awesome when, I think, you're right with God and you know where you're supposed to be.

So Paul the apostle is writing the letter, and with him is Sosthenes, and now he calls him "our brother." If he is the same leader of the synagogue who replaced Crispus and was beaten, pretty cool to see that here's a coup for the church. The first two leaders of the synagogue next door have come to Jesus. That's pretty good. That's pretty exciting. And so God can change the heart. Now the enemy has become his friend. Now the enemy has become his co-laborer. He's now his brother. Isn't it great? God takes the most hated person in your life, makes him your friend and even your brother.

So he addresses the saints and the place, verse 2, where they're planted. Notice "the church of God which is at Corinth." As we started to talk to you tonight, that was one of the problems: the church of God and where it was located, where it found itself. And it's not just this place for, in the latter part of the verse, Paul says, "to all of us who in every place where Jesus is Lord." So, it's something to me that I could say to you tonight you are the church of God in Whittier. Now there may be other churches of God in Whittier. I can't attend those. I'm here. But whoever is naming Jesus. You know, the question becomes not who's affecting you but who are you affecting. Paul was speaking to the Corinthian church, and his hope was that they would influence the Corinth in which they were planted and that they would stop allowing the Corinth in which they were planted to get into the church. They needed to define who they were and what they were there for. For the Corinthians, unfortunately, the church was awash with folks who brought the world in with them, and yet the word "church," "*ecclesia*," means to be called out from one place to another. They were sanctified. The word "*hagios*" is the word for set apart, it's the word for holy, set apart for an exclusive use. His people in that town were supposed to live and be seen in stark contrast to the cesspool in which they were planted. They needed to shine in a place that was very dark. They were in Christ Jesus. And notice from verse 2 that Paul says this truth applies to "every generation who calls upon the name of the Lord Jesus Christ our Lord, both theirs and ours." We, as a church tonight, are called to live in the world as a light and as a witness. Our only common bond can be Jesus. We can come from different backgrounds and experiences and economic statuses. We can come from different educational levels. It doesn't really matter. Our bond is in Christ. And so Paul says to these saints, "Don't take the low road in which you've been called out of. Living as a believer should be the ultimate lifestyle in Corinth. You want to live an alternate lifestyle? Be a Christian in the culture." Allan Redpath – I loved him as a commentator, he was a terrible singer, but he's with the Lord now, so I'm sure he's singing better – wrote in one of his books, "It is possible to be saved and still live a carnal life, still get to heaven, but how much are you going to miss out on the ministry and the fruit and the joy of the Lord on your royal route to heaven?" That was what Paul was interested in these guys. The church was filled with trouble, but there were saints there who loved the Lord, and they were all linked together by one thing – Jesus was the Lord. There would be no "of Paul" or "of Apollos" or "of Cephas." They would try to divide themselves up. No. There was only Jesus.

In verse 3, Paul uses the common greeting. He does it in most of his letters. He mixes the Greek greeting, "*charis*" or grace, with the Jewish welcome of "*shalom*." And he always puts them in that order because if you're going to have the grace of God, you're going to need the grace of God to get the peace with God and then have the peace of God. And so Paul blesses this wayward congregation with that which God the Father has made available to us in Christ. He just gets them on track. "Now let's talk about why we're here." He calls Him "the Lord." "The Lord," by the way, in Greek, is "*kurios*." There's no name there; that's a title. It's a title of authority. It's not His name, it's His title. Jesus is the Greek for the Hebrew Joshua or Jehovah-Shua (God is Salvation), and Christ is the Greek for Mashiach, which means this is His mission, He's the Anointed One, He's the One that is promised to come. Jesus will say, "Some of them will call Me Lord but will never enter the kingdom of heaven" (Matthew 7:21). So is He the Lord? He is if you're under His authority and following His will.

Verse 4 (we're going to get there, just don't worry, we'll get there, all right), "I thank my God always concerning you for the grace of God which was given to you by Christ Jesus, that you were enriched in everything by Him in all utterance and all knowledge, even as the testimony of Christ was confirmed in you, so that you come short in no gift, eagerly waiting for the revelation of our Lord Jesus Christ, who will also confirm you to the end, that you may be blameless in the day of our Lord Jesus Christ. God is faithful, by whom you were called into the fellowship of His Son, Jesus Christ our Lord." Verse 4, "I thank God always." Somehow an expression of thanks to the Lord for this goofed-up church is not what I would expect. "I just thank the Lord always for you false teachers, false practices, carnal, poor witnesses. Oh, thank the Lord." Not exactly what you would expect to hear. Paul doesn't thank the Lord for their failures and for their sins or lack of commitment, but he thanks the Lord – if you read again – for what God had begun in them. They existed because of God's goodness. He thanked God for His grace that had begun this good work and would continue based on His grace down the road. They were still going to fail, they were still going to come up short. But, at the same time, this was the fellowship that God had planted. How easy it is to be thankful when we focus on the Lord and not focus on the failures or the weaknesses of others. That's important. It is so easy to start finding fault that you lose sight of God's grace which has brought you in to begin with. Jesus prayed over – at communion – the cup and the bread, but they represented His death. "Thank You, Father, for these." Paul always prayed, he said, for the Corinthians.

"Thank You, God," verse 5 and 6 and 7, "for saving them by Your grace. Thank You, Lord, for the lives that You touched. I saw Your work in their lives. I saw Your work in their understanding. I saw how You enriched them in their lives. I was there with them for eighteen months. I saw the wealth of information that had filled their hearts. They weren't the same people that I'd met when we started."

In fact, in verse 6, their "testimony." The word "martyr," by the way, comes from this word. But they're living their lives, if you will, for Jesus has been "confirmed" by, in Greek, a word for a commercial title that's guaranteed. So literally it had been confirmed. "I've seen Your work. This isn't they who have been changed. God, You've changed them. Oh, they're struggling. Mightily. They've got a long way to go. But

Your hand is upon them. Your handprint is on them.” And Paul prays with a tremendous hopefulness, and he even says to them, “You’ve given them everything they need, they lack nothing, and You’ve produced in their hearts an eagerness to have You come back, that they’re looking for Your return.” They were saved by God’s grace. It showed in their understanding, their speech, their testimonies, and the gifts that God gave them, their expectant hearts. Yet learn from the fellowship, if nothing else, that with all that God gives you, it is possible to live a sub-par Christian life. You can backslide, allow a lot of things to get in the way, your witness can be overturned, and your daily fellowship with God – that should bring peace – interrupted. And that was certainly the case. That didn’t mean God was done nor that God wasn’t faithful. It is possible to be saved by the fire and then one day have to stand before the Lord, stripped of everything except your soul’s salvation. That’s not what you would prefer. You’d like to show up with fruit that has been put into your account because you were faithful to the Lord. I think in our Christian life we have to put the crown on the right head. It belongs on Jesus’ head, not on yours. And so we want to be sure that we look to the Lord for the fruit that comes, and that really is the main burden of these chapters. This church might have had the right theology, but their practices were not right and needed attention. Paul might have started off with a whip. Knowing Paul you would think that would be the case, but he reminded himself who started this church, who built this church, who planted it, and he comforted himself in knowing that God would continue. Even though this was not all right. And all you have to do is read verse 10 because Paul turns to this first issue of division in them. He says, in verses 8 and 9 (before he gets to it), “I know God’s faithful. I know God is faithful. What He has begun, they might not be faithful, but He always is. They may not stay faithful, but He always does.” And so before he’s discouraged, he’s encouraged. They might not have been faithful, but they had been faithful at one time – their hope as well as his - was in God’s faithfulness. They were a mess, but in Paul’s understanding, they were His mess, and Paul didn’t need to take it personally.

No wonder Paul’s so thankful. He had begun a work, He would finish the work. And so Paul had much to be thankful for as he peers down the hall of this current situation. I love verse 9 because he reminds – or he reminds us, I guess – that we are the called by God into fellowship with His Son. That’s all God wants from you, a fellowship, and Paul emphasized that to them again and again. The problem is when you start to live out in the fringes, your fellowship with God dries up, it’s cut off. Sin separates.

How astounding that God would call us into “*koinonia*,” an intimate relationship with Him. He wants you to be around. He likes it when you pray. He actually likes you, too. Believe it or not. So this was important to Him that He sent His Son to be sure that we could get close to Him. Read about Jesus in the gospels. He laughed and He cried and He hurt and He was refused. He’d been lonely. He’d known applause and rejection and abuse. He suffered in every way like we did. He knew what Paul was going through. We hold with Him all things in common. He shared our humanity, gives us His Spirit so we can share His divinity, His strength, His power. He could have chosen to hang out with angels, but He made us instead.

So Paul has to write a pretty tough letter to this church in turmoil, but he starts off by saying, "Isn't God good with all He's done, how far He's brought us, how much He's begun?" I don't know if, at this point, Paul didn't put his pen down or maybe somebody's amanuensis is writing it down for him, but paused and he said, "Well, that's the easy part. Now to get to the tough part" which begins in verse 10, which we'll start next week.

Submitted by Maureen Dickson
May 22, 2024