

“CALLED TO BE SAINTS”

1 COR 1:1-9

4.18.21

A pilot was flying over the South Pacific when he noticed smoke coming from one of the deserted islands below. The pilot flew closer and, sure enough, there was a man there with a great huge beard and tattered clothes sending the smoke signals. He looked like he had been on the island for years so the pilot made an emergency landing. When the pilot landed, the man was overjoyed.

“I’ve been on this island all alone for eleven years and I was beginning to lose hope! So many times I’ve seen planes fly by without noticing the smoke signals and here you are!”

“So happy I could help,” the pilot said, “Why don’t we gather your belongings and get you out of here.”

So the pilot followed the man into the leafy jungle and then to a clearing. In the clearing there were three huts. The man went into one of the huts and came out with a modest armful of belongings and announced that he was ready to return to civilization.

“Did you say you’ve been alone for eleven years?”, asked the pilot.

“Yes,” the man replied, “I’ve not seen another soul for eleven years!”

“Then, if you don’t mind my asking, why do you have three huts?”

The man smiled. “It’s simple really... the hut I just came from is my home. This one next to it is my church. I go there every seventh day to worship God.”

“That’s very touching,” said the pilot, “How about that third hut?”

Suddenly the man’s facial expression got very serious and in a quiet voice he said, “That’s where I used to go to church...”

It’s pretty funny to imagine someone not getting along with himself that he had to build a different church.

There are no perfect churches. There are no perfect churches because they are comprised of imperfect people. And yet people are surprised when they experience problems in the church. They become disheartened and some walk away from not just the church where they experienced problems but from the Church as a whole.

To walk away from the Church is to walk away from the very institution that Christ is purifying. To walk away from the Church is to walk away from the bride of Christ. To walk away from the Church is detrimental to your spiritual and relational health.

A biblical church will have healthy and sick people just like a hospital. Healthy people are helping those who are sick. And after the sick are healed they become helpers too.

Because there are healthy and sick in the same church, there will be issues to work through. That is why there is so much biblical teaching on how to relate to your brothers and sisters in Christ.

Apostle Paul planted many churches. Not one of them was perfect. They all had problems to work through. But Paul never called the church to give up and cease to be. Rather, he called them to work through the issues.

We begin a series from 1 Corinthians. We are going to see a dynamic and yet problematic church. They were great in some areas but struggled in others. The letter was to teach and remind the Corinthian brothers and sisters how to live out the Christian life within the church and outside in a very ungodly society. I believe that makes this book very practical for us as well.

We are going to study the first 9 verses. 1 Corinthians 1:1–9 (ESV), “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.”

The background of 1 Corinthians.

When we write letters we often begin them with Dear and the name of the recipient. And then at the end of the letter we place our name. When we read a letter, we look at the bottom first to see who wrote it. In Paul’s letters, he begins them with letting them know who wrote it. “Paul” and then the intro.

Paul wrote 1 Corinthians to the church in Corinth.

[Show Map 1] In Paul’s day, Corinth was probably the wealthiest city in Greece and a major, multicultural urban center. Corinth was a very popular stop for sailors because of the city’s vice as well as location near an isthmus. **[Show Map 2]** Isthmus means “neck.”

Here it references a narrow section of land that separates two oceans. The Corinthians created a paved trackway with stones that enabled ships to be dragged on logs over this section of land. The section of land was 4 miles long. But that 4 miles would cut out about 200 miles of treacherous seas in order to get to Athens.

This feature made Corinth an important city to Sailors seeking a safer voyage and time and money savings.

Several leaders over the years tried making a water canal instead of the land trackway. But ultimately, they either failed or quit because of the cost. But after 11 years of work,

the Corinth Canal was completed in 1893. **[Show picture]** The canal is 3.9 miles long, 82 feet wide, 26 feet deep.

On a massive hill overlooking the city was a large temple to Aphrodite, goddess of love. It was said to house up to one thousand cult prostitutes. Lots of Sailors and other visitors with money came to Corinth to enjoy themselves.

Commentator Gordon Fee called Corinth “at once the New York, Los Angeles, and Las Vegas of the ancient world!”

During Apostle Paul’s second missionary journey he came to Corinth and planted a church. Acts 18:1–11 (NLT), "Then Paul left Athens and went to Corinth. ² There he became acquainted with a Jew named Aquila, born in Pontus, who had recently arrived from Italy with his wife, Priscilla. They had left Italy when Claudius Caesar deported all Jews from Rome. ³ Paul lived and worked with them, for they were tentmakers just as he was. ⁴ Each Sabbath found Paul at the synagogue, trying to convince the Jews and Greeks alike. ⁵ And after Silas and Timothy came down from Macedonia, Paul spent all his time preaching the word. He testified to the Jews that Jesus was the Messiah. ⁶ But when they opposed and insulted him, Paul shook the dust from his clothes and said, “Your blood is upon your own heads—I am innocent. From now on I will go preach to the Gentiles.” ⁷ Then he left and went to the home of Titius Justus, a Gentile who worshiped God and lived next door to the synagogue. ⁸ Crispus, the leader of the synagogue, and everyone in his household believed in the Lord. Many others in Corinth also heard Paul, became believers, and were baptized. ⁹ One night the Lord spoke to Paul in a vision and told him, “Don’t be afraid! Speak out! Don’t be silent! ¹⁰ For I am with you, and no one will attack and harm you, for many people in this city belong to me.” ¹¹ So Paul stayed there for the next year and a half, teaching the word of God.”

After spending 18 months in Corinth building up the church Paul moved on. In chapter 1:11, we see that Paul was given a report on the situation in Corinth. 1 Corinthians

1:11 (NLT), “For some members of Chloe’s household have told me about your quarrels, my dear brothers and sisters.”

This bad report was the reason for this letter-which in fact was his second letter to the Corinthians. The first letter dealt with their sexual immorality. No copies exist of this letter which means it wasn’t meant to be in the Bible. 1 Corinthians 5:9–10 (ESV), “I wrote to you in my letter not to associate with sexually immoral people— ¹⁰ not at all meaning the sexually immoral of this world, or the greedy and swindlers, or idolaters, since then you would need to go out of the world.”

The Corinthian church had many problems. Here is a short list:

- They created divisions around which leader to follow.
- Instead of dealing with their brothers and sisters by the Golden Rule, they were taking each other to court.
- There was disunity around the exercise of Spiritual gifts.
- Some were getting drunk during the Lord’s Supper.
- There was sexual immorality in the church and instead of dealing with it they were proud of it.
- There was spiritual pride.
- And there were people inside the church that didn’t believe in the resurrection of the dead- something we dealt with the last two weeks in 1 Corinthians.

Paul wrote this letter with the help of Sosthenes. Sosthenes was a convert from Corinth. Most likely Paul dictated the letter while Sosthenes wrote it down.

This introduction of the letter has some encouraging news for the Corinthians and for us to interact with.

Paul was called by the will of God to be an apostle of Jesus.

The word “called” is used 3x in these first 9 verses. This word is only used 10x in the New Testament so it is an important word here.

“Called” is defined as: “God’s summoning of individuals and people to himself, so that they will belong to him and serve him in his world. The calling of a believer may involve a specific place, task or vocation in life.”

Paul chose to be a persecutor of the Church. But God had other plans for Paul’s life. God’s plans were to make Paul an apostle. And that is what Paul became.

An apostle is commissioned directly by Jesus and given authority to speak on His behalf. He is sent with a message. In Paul’s case, the message was the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

In chapters 4 & 9, we read that some in the church of Corinth questioned Paul’s apostolic authority. If he was not an apostle then they didn’t need to listen to him because he would not have authority over them.

But Christ called Paul to be an apostle and had thus given him apostolic authority. Therefore, the Corinthian Christians must listen to him because what he said came from God.

Paul was called to be an apostle. **How has God called you?** Remember the definition, “The calling of a believer may involve a specific place, task or vocation in life.”

- Some have been called to full-time ministry.
- Some have been called to overseas ministry.
- Some have been called to move across the country.
- Some have been called to do a specific ministry often shaped by their own life experiences.
- You do not need to be in full-time ministry to be called. God calls people into the secular workplace. What has God called you to be for Christ?

After clarifying Paul's calling, he proclaimed

The Church is sanctified and called to be saints.

Verse 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."

Paul writes that these Corinthian Christians "are sanctified" which means "set apart" or "holy." They have been set apart by God.

- God takes something that is not fit for service and sanctifies it.
- God sanctified the temple and set it apart making it holy.
- God sanctified the tables, the utensils and bowls to be set apart and holy and useful in the Temple.
- God sanctified- set apart the Levites as Priests to be useful in the temple.

God sanctified the Corinthian believers. 1 Corinthians 6:9–11 (ESV), "Or do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived: neither the sexually immoral, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor men who practice homosexuality, ¹⁰ nor thieves, nor the greedy, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor swindlers will inherit the kingdom of God. ¹¹ And such were some of you. But you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God." He set them apart and made them holy for His use.

All who call Christ their Lord are sanctified. All Christians are set apart and holy to be useful in God's kingdom. Sanctification also speaks to the calling that we mentioned earlier. **You were saved and sanctified for service.**

Before Paul dealt with the Corinthian church's sins he reminded them that they had been sanctified.

Sanctified and "**called to be saints.**"

Paul reminds the Corinthian Christians that they have been “called to be saints.” Here is the second time the word “called” is used. God made them saints. The word “saint” in Greek means “holy one.”

But it wasn't just the Corinthian Christians that were saints. Notice verse 2 again, “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.”

Paul is describing how God sees the believer. How can all believers be called saints? When you trusted in Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins, Christ exchanged his righteousness, His holiness, His sinlessness for your unrighteousness, your unholiness, your sinfulness. **So when God see you He sees Christ.** He doesn't see your sins. They are completely gone. From God's vantage point you are saints- holy ones.

Do you realize that is how God sees you? I used to see myself as a sinner who never measured up. But in college, I came to understand how God saw me. He saw me as perfect and my sin could not change that fact. So I believed Him and that enabled me to keep from having shame parties and instead seek forgiveness and move forward with Him.

You are a saint not because you try to be good. You are a saint because of what Jesus Christ has done for you.

Though we are saints from God's perspective, we are not yet like Jesus. As saints, we are called to live according to our status. We are saints vertically. But there is also a horizontal aspect. We are on the horizontal sanctification road to Christlikeness. This is a lifetime walk down that road with falls, failures and successes.

Billy Graham wrote, “I will never forget when (my wife Ruth) announced what she wanted engraved on her gravestone...at the Billy Graham Library. Long before she became bedridden, she was driving along a highway through a construction site.

Carefully following the detours and mile-by-mile cautionary signs, she came to the last one that said, “End of Construction. Thank you for your patience.” She arrived home, chuckling and telling the family about the posting. “When I die,” she said, “I want that engraved on my stone.” Every human being is under construction from conception to death. Each life is made up of mistakes and learning, waiting and growing, practicing patience and being persistent. At the end of construction—death—we have completed the process.”

We are a continual work in progress- which will end in becoming like Jesus.

Though the church in Corinth was not perfect there was confirmation of God’s transformational work.

Verse 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 saw evidence of God’s transformational work first in their trusting in Christ and then the gifting that the Holy Spirit gave to them at conversion.

Verse 5 reads “you were enriched.” The word enriched means “to become very wealthy in resources literally or figuratively.” God abundantly blessed the Corinthian church with many spiritual gifts- especially the gifts considered more supernatural in nature.

Paul describes some of these gifts in chapter 12. “To one person the Spirit gives the ability to give wise advice; to another the same Spirit gives a message of special knowledge. ⁹ The same Spirit gives great faith to another, and to someone else the one Spirit gives the gift of healing. ¹⁰ He gives one person the power to perform miracles, and another the ability to prophesy. He gives someone else the ability to discern

whether a message is from the Spirit of God or from another spirit. Still another person is given the ability to speak in unknown languages, while another is given the ability to interpret what is being said.” 1 Corinthians 12:8–10 (NLT)

This enrichment brought a testimony to the reality of Christ. People saw the manifestation of these gifts and came to believe in Jesus and were added to the church.

This enrichment by God according to verse 7, was such that they did not lack any spiritual gift. The Corinthian church was very dynamic but at the same time flawed.

Paul praised the Corinthian Church even though they were far from perfect.

There are a lot of great things about Cornerstone. Each Sunday the worship team has the privilege of leading worship among people that are eager to worship. Each Sunday the Pastors have the privilege to preach from the Bible to people that strongly believe the Bible and want to grow. Each Sunday the children have the privilege of being taught by teachers that care about them deeply.

Cornerstone ELD and DWT have had years and years of great unity. We have been greatly blessed. We have made many decisions even some major ones with little if any pushback.

Cornerstone is known in ELD and is gaining a reputation in DWT for loving to serve. We are seen as caring for our communities.

Even with these great blessings as a church, Cornerstone is not perfect. We are still a work in progress.

The great news for the Corinthian church as well as for Cornerstone is:

The Church will be sustained and found guiltless. God’s faithfulness will see to it.

Verse 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.”

“Sustain can be translated strengthened or confirmed.” God will keep the Corinthian church strengthened or sustained until the end. Listen 1 Corinthians 1:8 (The Message), “And not only that, but God himself is right alongside to keep you steady and on track until things are all wrapped up by Jesus.”

They will be sustained and guiltless. It is God, not these Corinthians, who will prepare them for the day of Jesus’ coming. It isn’t that they will be guiltless or blameless on that day, but that God will count them as blameless because of their faith in Jesus Christ.

Once we get more into the book of 1 Corinthians you are going to read how sinful they are. And yet they will be guiltless in the day of the Lord’s return thanks to Jesus. Their only hope as well as ours in the faithfulness and grace of God.

God will see to it that His Son has a pure and guiltless bride. One day Eph 5 will be true, “For husbands, this means love your wives, just as Christ loved the church. He gave up his life for her ²⁶ to make her holy and clean, washed by the cleansing of God’s word. ²⁷ He did this to present her to himself as a glorious church without a spot or wrinkle or any other blemish. Instead, she **will be holy and without fault.**” Ephesians 5:25–27 (NLT)

So too will you be. Right now you are sanctified Saints who are becoming more like Christ. Your sin will not intimately win out. It will not deter the Lord from His ultimate goal.

You were called to live out your status as saints and

You were called into the fellowship of Jesus Christ.

Verse 9, “God is faithful, by whom you were called into the fellowship of his Son, Jesus Christ our Lord.”

Here is the third use of “called.” Called into the fellowship of Christ. The Corinthian church was saved, sanctified, sainted and brought into the fellowship of Christ.

The word here is Koinonia- common union or where we get the word communion. It is an intimate connection with Christ.

So too are you saved, sanctified, sainted and brought into the fellowship of Christ.

The way you live will impact the fellowship with Christ. If you are not connecting with Him in prayer and getting to know Him better through Bible reading and connecting with your brothers and sisters for encouragement the fellowship can falter.

If you treat God’s sons and daughters poorly, your fellowship with Christ will suffer. That is where Paul is headed in the letter. He transitions from what God has already done in the past, what He will do in the future to what the Corinthians need to do in the present.

In verse 10, one verse later, Paul challenges the Corinthians because of their disunity. We will study this in more detail next week.

We will close with a few questions.

First: God has a plan for your life. The plan is right now. Kids, Teens, God’s plan is not 20 years in the future. He has a plan for you right now. What has God called you to be and do as students or employees? As you grow up, His plan may change. He may call you into full-time ministry or missions. He may call you into a specific ministry as a result of the experiences you went through. God’s plan stops only at death. Seniors. God’s plan is not over. You have not retired or aged out of His plan for you.

So, what has God sanctified or set you apart for Christ? What has God called you to be for Christ? How does He want to uniquely use you and where for His glory?

Second: How do you see yourself? Do you see in the mirror a sinner that is worthless? If you are a Christian, God sees a saint- a holy person who is becoming more like Christ. "You are totally accepted, fully pleasing, deeply loved and completely forgiven because of the cross and resurrection of Christ." Believe the truth. It will set you free.

Let's pray

o.b.g