

“What is a Church?”

1 Corinthians 1:1-9

Hopefully, we said goodbye to snow the other day and now we're looking at spring arriving. Which means it's time to get the snow tires off. Which is good timing because you've noticed a strange rattling sound the last few weeks from your vehicle and there's some shaking. So, you take your car to the mechanic for the snow tires and maybe an oil change too and mention an unusual sound coming from the rear driver's side and that there seems to be some shaking. 'Okay, he says, 'I'll look into it'.

The next day you pick your car up. Snow tires are off, fresh oil change, usual car stuff. And then you remember the noise. 'Did you check out the rattling in the back?' *“Oh yeah, that? Every car does that. That's just normal. You're fine.”* How would you respond? You would get a second opinion and have someone else look at it to get it fixed. Just because it's normal doesn't make it right.

Now imagine talking to a Christian friend who attends a different church than yours and you say, 'How's things in your church?' And they say, 'Not too bad. Attendance is pretty good. We did have someone leave the church because of immorality. And there's always those people who argue about hymns vs. choruses and the Facebook arguments about amillennialism and pre-millennialism and the gossipers who always keep us on our toes and there's the people who complain every time there's a spelling mistake on PowerPoint! You know, usual church stuff.”

If we wouldn't put up with someone telling us our car was fine when it obviously had problems, why do we get complacent about unhealthy church family issues? Welcome to the church of Corinth.

Paul wrote his first letter to the Corinthians to give them a spiritual realignment. As we read the letter we discover they were complacent about an immoral situation in the church, inconsiderate towards the poorer members in the church, taking believers to court, rudely interrupting each other during the service, arguing about whether meat sacrificed to idols was okay to eat or not and they had divided into divisions based on who their favourite bible teacher was.

This greatly saddened Paul who, we know from Acts 18, planted the church and spent 18 months teaching alongside Priscilla and Aquilla, grounding them in the gospel and how it impacts every area of your life. The grace of God through the good news of Jesus is poured into your life and as a result should pour out of your life. Should. But it doesn't always because we get can lose focus on what matters. We start running our life by how we feel not by what God says in His Word. So we need a spiritual realignment.

When Paul left Corinth in Acts 18:18, he sailed eastward heading back to Antioch finishing his second missionary trip. Shortly after that he would start another trip, heading back to Ephesians and Greece and Corinth again. At some point he hears a report from some of Chloe's household (1:11) as well as a report from 3 men mentioned in 16:17, that problems had arisen in the Corinthian church. And Paul now addresses these issues in this letter.

The letter could be divided into 3 large units. Unit 1 from Ch. 1-6 is Paul directly dealing with the main issues that needed correction, always pointing them to the gospel of grace and God's desire for His people. In Ch. 7-14, the Corinthians had some questions of their own that they wanted answers to, as we see Paul saying a few times, 'Now concerning _____'.

And in Ch. 15 Paul concludes with the hope of the resurrection and how that hope should impact us individually and corporately.

This morning we will look at the opening 9 verses that are not simply Paul's introduction and greeting, but Paul carefully crafts his words of greeting to remind them of what a local church should look like. He uses his greeting to hint at some of the issues they need to work toward resolving. What does a church look like? How should we live and serve God together here as a church in the Westport area? We're going to use these 9 verses and come up with a description of what a healthy [not perfect] church should look like and strive toward.

Paul, called to be an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God, and our brother Sosthenes, 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: ³ Grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

So what is a God-glorifying, Christ-centered church?

A Localized Body of Believers in Jesus Christ **(1:1-3)**

This specific church was in the city of ancient Corinth. One of the biggest cities of the ancient world and an important busy trade center [slides]. Corinth was in southern Greece, on an isthmus separating two parts of the Mediterranean Sea. Ships would come into Corinth and drag their boats across the short stretch of land to avoid the long and dangerous trek to the south around the Peloponnesian Islands. Today there is a canal that boats can go through where they once were dragged across the land.

It was a rich city, a metropolitan city, an immoral city and a center for Aphrodite worship. And yet, Paul thought a great place to plant a church. When we read Acts 18:1-17, we find that when Paul arrived there he met a couple named Priscilla and Aquilla, Jewish believers who had been kicked out of Italy by Emperor Claudius. Both Paul and Aquila were tentmakers and believers and hit it off right away. They first went to the synagogues on the Sabbath where they taught the gospel. Numerous people were saved which upset the Jewish leaders so they went next door to a believer named Titius Justus along with Crispus the synagogue ruler and his family who all get saved!

Of course this started a potential riot and the Jews took Paul to court and the Proconsul Gallio heard their case and said it didn't merit a legal proceeding and told them to go home. To which the Jews went and beat up the new synagogue ruler because he also became a believer and his name was Sosthenes, the same Sosthenes no doubt mentioned by Paul as part of his introduction.

Paul very smartly includes Sosthenes as a connecting point with the Corinthians to remind them of how they even became a church, through Paul. A church is a localized body of believers

Whose foundation is the teachings of Jesus (v.1)

Paul was called by God to be an apostle of Jesus Christ. Sosthenes came to believe in Jesus Christ. He writes to everyone there who called upon the Name of the Lord Jesus Christ – our Lord Jesus Christ. Paul was an apostle because he saw the risen Christ and staked his life on what he witnessed and so everything Paul taught was grounded in Jesus Christ.

A biblical local church is one that is founded and grounded in the Bible. The Word of God contains the teachings of Jesus (who taught people with the Old Testament) and the apostles who shared the teachings of Jesus. There are thousands of churches in the world but a true biblical church is one that remains committed to the teachings of Jesus Christ.

Paul uses the word 'call' for himself and the church, pointing out that biblical churches are not only grounded in the teachings of Jesus but

Share God's calling to Christlikeness (v.2)

Paul was called to be an apostle by God and the church was called to be holy together with all those everywhere who call on the Name of the Lord Jesus Christ. The idea of being called is to be 'set apart' by God to those "who have been sanctified" in Christ. Paul is using Greek language carefully to say that 1) God did this to you and for you; you didn't do this yourself; 2) God sanctified you positionally at salvation and continues to make you holy/set you apart as a follower of Christ because he is committed to making all of us perfectly holy like Jesus one day.

There was a lot of selfishness in this church and Paul is setting the tone here that none of you are here because you figured this out on your own. God called you like He called me. God set you apart for Christ and God will continue to set you apart for Christ. Thank God He's working in your life. Without Him you could do nothing. And there's all kinds of others 'everywhere' whom God has also called.

And then he says, '*Grace and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.*' This is more than a greeting. Paul has taken a typical Gentile greeting word 'grace' and combined it with the Jewish greeting word 'peace' and I believe is using it as a prayer/blessing over the people reminding them that a biblical church grounded in the truth of Christ, mutually called to Christlikeness should be constantly

Praying for each other's spiritual wholeness (v.3)

'Grace to you' is Paul's way of saying may God's grace be poured out on you but also may you pour grace into other's lives so that 'peace', God's wholeness, would happen for all. 'Shalom' meant you want everything in your life to be at rest. That you were at peace with God, peace with your neighbour and were at peace about your life's circumstances or peace in life's circumstances. The Corinthian church was severely lacking in being gracious and wanting shalom for each other.

Like most of his letters, Paul begins first with thanksgiving. It's a great reminder that we are all recipients of God's grace and to remember that Jesus dwells in each one of us by His Spirit. So for these people who were not getting along well, Paul indirectly reminds them and us that a biblical church is a localized body of believers in Jesus Christ

Graciously Gifted by God's Spirit **(1:4-6)**

⁴ I always thank God for you because of his grace given you in Christ Jesus. ⁵ For in him you have been enriched in every way—in all your speaking and in all your knowledge— ⁶ because our testimony about Christ was confirmed in you.

Vv.4-8 is one long sentence in the Greek. Most of our English translations break it up into 4 or 5 separate sentences which can break up the flow of Paul's thoughts and change participles

(supporting verbs) into main verbs which sometimes can even change the meaning. The more sentences we have, the less accurate the text may get. Paul's main thought here is I thank my God always for you and then he gives reasons why. Paul reminds believers in a church that all of you are gifted by God's Spirit to serve together for God's glory.

Be thankful for one's another's role in the body (v.4)

The Corinthian church argued about their God-given gifts as if 1) they are more valuable because they have a more exciting gift; and 2) they had something to do with the gifts when Paul is emphasizing that none of you would have any gifts were it not for the grace of God. The Corinthians were a gifted church; "enriched in Him" in all speech and knowledge. Most of these believers were Greeks having been raised in a culture that exalted those who had skills of tongue and mind. They had carried their culture into their faith and Paul was showing them, that's not the way it works if you're following Jesus. Be thankful for everyone because they are gifted by God and have a role to play in His body. We are graciously gifted by God to

Serve beside one another with Christ's message (vv.5-6)

They were a very individualistic church, selfishly guarding their gifts or ministries and making it about themselves and not God or Jesus. That's a sad way to do church. So Paul was emphasizing they were all "enriched" by God. Had nothing to do with themselves. And Paul heard the testimony through others of God's evident hand on their life.

Every local body of believers in Christ is 'rich' in God's grace gifts given by His Spirit because prior to salvation we had nothing. You can't earn these gifts. You can't take a course and get the gift – it's a gift. We can exercise our gifts and by trusting God by faith we can grow in faith through using the gifts. We all have different gifts to serve God together for the edification of one another. In Ch. 12 Paul will expand on this to say

1 Cor. 12:7 To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good.

Pet. 4:10 As each has received a gift, use it to serve one another, as good stewards of God's varied grace: ¹¹....by the strength that God supplies—in order that in everything God may be glorified through Jesus Christ. To him belong glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen.

Paul is trying in his introduction to model grace to his fellow believers – who were using God's grace for selfish purposes – to remind them of why they became believers in the first place. Why they are a part of the body of Christ and how we are to work together for God's purposes not our own. He's reminding them what a biblical church is: a localized body of believers in Jesus Christ, graciously gifted by the Holy Spirit

Committed to the Shared Goal of our Transformation **(1:7-9)**

God plants and builds local bodies of believers to assist in His work of conforming us to Christlikeness. That's what God is doing in you and me and that's why you and I were called together here to grow together. In my giftedness God can use me to help you be more like Christ and God is using you to help me be more like Christ. V. 7 introduces the purpose or result of what he just said. Using the ESV here because it does not begin a new sentence *so that you are not lacking in any gift, as you wait for the revealing of our Lord Jesus Christ*

We are to keep serving God and Jesus with our gifts so that we all get what we need from each other, and we keep doing it

Until Jesus returns (v.7)

Because that's when we'll be completely transformed into glory. So if you're still breathing this morning that means we need you and God isn't finished with you. When we choose not to serve each other the author of Hebrews says we are abandoning God's people.

Heb. 10:24 and let's consider how to encourage one another in love and good deeds, ²⁵ not abandoning our own meeting together, as is the habit of some people, but encouraging one another; and all the more as you see the day drawing near.

When we deliberately choose not to encourage others through our giftedness we abandon each other. Abandon means I intentionally withhold from you something I have that you need. And the author of Hebrews also said we do it until Christ returns. So we are to be committed to the shared goal of our glorification in Christ until He returns and our job is done

As God accomplished this in us together (vv.8-9)

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 irony is when we continue to encourage one another and serve each other we grow in Christlikeness but it's still God who is doing this work because He is committed to that. *"He who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus."* (Phil. 1:6).

⁹ God, who has called you into fellowship with his Son Jesus Christ our Lord, is faithful.

If we've all been called into fellowship with his Son we're also called into fellowship with each other. We are "in Christ" together and Christ is in each of us. This is what Paul wants to remind this church who were looking at some people too highly and some too lowly and themselves too muchly, before he addresses the issues directly. Have you forgotten who you are and what God has called you to? Are we so focused on ourselves that we're missing out on God's blessing of each other? God could do so much more through us as a church if we individually would remember, God saved us by His grace; gifted us and others by His Holy Spirit and that we are in Christ but so is the person beside you. Same God. Same Lord Jesus. Same purpose; Christlikeness. For how long? Until He returns or calls us home.

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If you have any questions or comments about this message please
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