

Intro:

We're starting a new series today, one that will take us through March. It's called "Church: are you serious?" Its an important series, because the spiritual journey Jesus calls us to involves interaction and identification with others who are on the journey together. The Bible calls this group the church. Now, the reality is that each of us today probably has a different reaction to the idea of church.

Disgust: you gotta be kidding me, church and Jesus are like this?

Distance: you want me to get involved? I just don't have the time or interest.

Discovery: wow, I didn't know church and Jesus were like this!

Dedication: I want to give myself to Jesus and His Church more.

My hope is that, throughout the series, we'll be able to the move toward discovery and dedication.

Now, our series will take us through a letter written to a very unique community of Jesus followers, a church that you might look upon with disgust.

A few things to note about this church.

First, it was located at Corinth. This was a unique city because of:

- Its location: Nestled in the middle of two bodies of water and two land masses, it was a central point for trade and commerce. (see map)

- Its people: it was a Roman colony as of 44BC. Rome, the capital of the Roman empire, in order to deal with overpopulation in its capital and also a desire to properly control the rest of the empire, would establish cities throughout their empire by exporting citizens, often potentially troubling citizens to the capital's population, to these cities. And so people were sent to Corinth for this endeavor, many of who were called freedmen- people who had recently acquired their Roman citizenship but had low social status, status just above slave. These included urban traders, military veterans.

- The result of the location and demographic of people: a city known for its opportunity for advancement. One historian writes "perhaps no city in the Empire offered so congenial an atmosphere for individual and corporate advancement." And so historians note that Corinth became a city of go-getters, competitive people seeking social status, trying to get one-up on the next person with how much they had, flouting their status when they could. One scholar notes that it was like LA, Las Vegas, New York, all rolled into one.

Now, as a result of this, the church located here struggled with this people they came from this background. We see this throughout this letter to Corinth. For example, there was: (these are on slides)

Infighting among members:

You are still worldly. For since there is jealousy and quarreling among you, are you not worldly? Are you not acting like mere men? - 3:3

Sexual deviance:

It is actually reported that there is sexual immorality among you, and of a kind that does not occur even among pagans: A man has his father's wife. And you are proud! - 5:1-2

Sue/Cheat each other:

One brother goes to law against another... you yourselves cheat and do wrong, and you do this to your brothers.- 6:6, 8

Division and discrimination:

In the following directives I have no praise for you, for your meetings do more harm than good. In the first place, I hear that when you come together as a church, there are divisions among you... when you come together, it is not the Lord's Supper you eat, for as you eat, each of you goes ahead without waiting for anybody else. One remains hungry, another gets drunk. Don't you have homes to eat and drink in? Or do you despise the church of God and humiliate those who have nothing? What shall I say to you? Shall I praise you for this? Certainly not!- 11:17-18, 20-22

Disgusting! And yet... Paul begins his letter to the church laying out a shocking reality: God's goodness was still present with this church, even despite their failure in the spiritual journey. And I think this is the appropriate thought for us to begin this series with as well. God's goodness to us is the basis, the foundation, of our life as individuals and as a community. His God's goodness to us is still present and strong even as we fail in the journey of faith.

Let's read this passage, and then I want to note three ways his goodness is given to us.

Read text: 1 Corinthians 1:1-9

Three ways God's goodness to us is shown:

He makes us holy, blameless, free of sin. (v.2, 8)

This is important because God is Holy, and if we are to relate to him the issue of our evil, sin, unholiness has to be dealt with. A few things to clarify:

1. This might seem really contradictory, especially in light of what the rest of the letter will point out in terms of their spiritual and moral failure. But it points to a crucial and central reality of being a Jesus follower: our holiness is given to us by Jesus, not by ourselves. When we decide to follow Jesus, there's a great transfer: he gets our sin, we get his holiness. This is a holiness of status we have before God. Often times the Bible uses language from the imagery of a legal court system, that, like a person declared to be free by a judge, we are declared as holy (some of the terms here are from that imagery). We are called to live out that holy status, to have a lifestyle of holiness as a result. This is how the Bible wants us to understand our obligation to live out a holy life- it's a response to a status we are given by God.

2. The importance of holiness is simply huge, because our holiness is what enables us to have a right relationship with God. This is a true statement, but often we don't feel it to be true. Some of us, especially those of us who are simply exploring who Jesus is, may think "well, I can relate to Jesus as I am. I don't need to get hung up with this issue of holiness. Why do Christians get all hung up with sin anyway? It seems like they just have a negative self-image that needs some help." But then there comes that moment where you get a sense of God and his holiness, and all of a sudden your unholiness gets exposed. At that time, holiness matters. It makes me think of Tiger Woods and how his life of sleeping with a bunch of women has recently been exposed. Now, I don't know him, and I don't know exactly what goes on in his mind. But, if he's like the many others who have lived a double life, I'm sure there was a length of time where what he was doing didn't strike him as all that bad- it was normal to him. But then all of a sudden, because of the car accident and people coming out and bringing exposure, a sense of shame and unholiness was perhaps birthed. So with us. We can go on thinking all is fine, but then we begin to encounter God and Jesus, and we begin to sense the unholiness. And, at this juncture, the reality that God is the one who declares us holy is crucial. We don't make ourselves holy- we can't! It is given, and we live it out. It requires us to acknowledge our need, and embrace the gift of Jesus by giving our lives to him. If you're still trying to figure Jesus out, this is simply crucial.

3. The third and final clarification is that there is great freedom in living this truth. Because if and when we don't- and many of you know this- a life of distance and fear with God and others, a life of self-imposed hate, can develop.

One of our members has been realizing this for themselves, and I thought it'd be good for them to share. Give a warm welcome to Ida.

(Testimony)

God shows us his goodness by calling us holy. This is true even as we fail.

Two more ways God shows us his goodness, and I'll go through these quickly.

God gives us gifts to be significant contributors in this world. (v. 4-7)

Note how Paul specifically mentions the gifts of speech and knowledge, referring to gifts like teaching and wisdom to help others that the Corinthian church had in a very special and powerful way. It should be noted that these were good, but Corinthians thought of and used these in a twisted way, creating division and elitism with each other through comparing themselves against each other. It was more about themselves than God. Paul, having the ability to see the good in the bad, affirms it. But more than that, he puts the emphasis in the right place: God, not them. In fact, he worships God for it (v.4).

And so it is with us. Many of us are very gifted people here. Do we realize it is because of God? What a wonder! Let's embrace the gifts, get our minds set on Him, and use them as He would desire. God is so good- he calls us holy, he gives us gifts to be significant contributors in this world!

Finally:

God is faithful, and gives us what Jesus has.

It's clear through all these verses, but made explicit in v. 9. He is faithful, which is a word worth pondering over through this week, given we live in a world with so much unfaithfulness, people backing out of commitments, not keeping their word. But what I want to note is this idea of fellowship. The concept in the Bible isn't just about friendship, but it's about having the same things in common, having co-ownership, you could say. The verse says we have fellowship with Jesus- we have what Jesus has. There is so much involved in this- again, I encourage you to think about it this week. But here's the point I want to focus on: Should this not amaze us as to amazing God's goodness is? Should this not move us to worship?

In fact, each of these ways that God shows us his goodness- his granting of holiness, his giving of gifts, his giving of all that Jesus has- it should move us from disgust and distance to discovery and dedication.

Close, Communion:

We are going to take communion today, an act instituted by Jesus where we remember all of who He is and all of what he has done for us on the cross. He is the expression of how God's goodness is shown to us- even in our passage, he is mentioned 10 times in 9 verse.

As we do this, I want to invite you to embrace God's goodness for you- his holiness, his gifts, all of who he is for you. You may, for whatever reason, be distant or disgusted. Today is your day to come back to him, or come for the very first time. You may be overwhelmed with a sense of unholiness or insignificance- you need to embrace his holiness and gifts. His goodness is here, let us come and embrace it. And as you come, if you need some prayer, I'm going to invite some leaders to come here and prepare themselves to pray for you.

Extra Study Notes:

Paul's relationship with the Corinthian Church:

Paul establishes the church somewhere from 49-51 AD. (Acts 18)

A couple years later, Paul writes a letter, one we do not possess. (1 Cor. 5:9)

The Corinthians respond with a letter. (1 Cor. 16:15-17)

In addition, an oral report is given by believers from Corinth. (1 Cor. 1:11)

Paul writes 1 Corinthians.

Paul visits the church (2 Cor. 1:15-16), having changed his previous plan in 1 Cor. 16:5-9.

Paul leaves and writes another letter, one we do not possess (2 Cor. 2:3-4, 7:8, 12)

Paul meets Titus, who gives a report on how the letter was received (2 Cor. 2:12-13, 7:6ff)

Paul writes 2 Corinthians.

See various commentaries for more detail.

Unity of 1 Corinthians

Some Bible scholars think that 1 Corinthians is actually a composition of multiple letter fragments. Various scholars have addressed the details, noting that a genuine coherence nonetheless exists within the letter. For specific resources, see *An Introduction to the New Testament* by Carson, Moo, and Morris; *1 Corinthians* by Anthony Thiselton. You can borrow these from Pastor Yucan.

Letter Writing, Rhetorical Conventions, and Genuine Meaning

Scholars have discussed at length how Paul's argumentative style (rhetoric) and letter writing style (epistolography) are similar and different from the conventions of his day. At times, the debate casts doubt to the truthfulness of Paul's words and intent. It should be noted that, given the need to avoid the pitfalls of manipulative speech and knowledge as noted in 1 Corinthians, it would be strange for Paul to use conventions in an untruthful manner. See *1 Corinthians* by Anthony Thiselton for more.

v. 1. Sosthenes. The only other mention of someone with this name is in Acts 18:17. This may be the person (he became a follower of Jesus), although not enough data is known.

v. 2. Church. The word translated "church" (ekklesia) was used in the Old Testament to refer to God's people (Israel) when gathered (eg- Deut. 4:19), and used in New Testament times by the secular world in reference to political gatherings. The early Christians used it at first as a word primarily to signify their gathering together.

v. 5- Speech, Knowledge. Both these terms are heavily used in 1 Corinthians. They refer to something positive the Corinthians have.

However, the Corinthians misused them and so are also used by Paul in a way that exposes their misuse:

Speech (logos) as the Gospel being preach, in contrast to their negative speech - 1:17, 18; 2:1, 4, 13; 4:19, 15:2, 15:54.

Speech (logos) as a spiritual gift that encourages others: 12:8; 14:9, 19, 36.

Knowledge in a negative light- 1:5; 8:1, 7, 10

Knowledge as a spiritual gift: 12:8; 13:2, 8; 14:6

v. 7-8. Jesus' second coming. Examples from other parts of the Bible: Amos 5:18-20, Joel 2:31, Matthew 24-25. Paul alludes to aspects of the coming day of the Lord in every discussion except the one concerning headdresses (11:2-16). Needless to say, this is an important aspect of Paul's message. (see 2:6-8; 3:10-17; 5:5; 6:2-3, 9-10; 6:14; 7:29-31; 9:25 10:11-13; 11:26, 32; 13:8, 12; 15:1-56).