

Session Two: God, The Master Builder (Corinthians 1:1-9)

Last week, we discussed the introduction to 1 Corinthians, including an overview of the chapters, the historical background of the city of Corinth, and the church.

The apostle Paul planted the church in Corinth during his second missionary journey. He is writing this letter to address the challenges that have arisen in the church. Paul cares deeply about the Corinthian church, but it is struggling with division, cult personalities, sexual immorality, believers suing each other in civil court, confusion about marriage and singleness, Christian liberty, attire of worship, the Lord's Supper, spiritual gifts, and the doctrine of resurrection. The church is a mess theologically, practically, and morally.

Our study focus for this week

“1 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 his holy people, 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.

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— 6 God thus confirming our testimony about Christ among you. 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.”

(1 Corinthians 1:1-9)

Introduction

The main message we could see in this passage is that the people of God are those whom God has graciously called to be saints, who continually profess faith in Christ, and who humbly use their gifts for God's glory as they wait for Christ to return and fulfil his promises.

In this passage we could see apostle Paul remained hopeful despite of the severe challenges in Corinth. His hope for the church is not rooted on the Corinthians but God who gave it birth. Therefore, Paul opens his letter by describing the many ways God works in his church.

God who builds His Church

No matter what is happening in the life of a faithful New Testament church, we must never forget that the church is God's church. Where the Word of God is preached, the ordinances of baptism and the Lord's Supper administered, regenerate church membership is honored, church discipline is practiced, and the Great Commandments and Great Commission are pursued, there exists the Lord's church regardless of what may be going wrong otherwise. God is still building faithful churches, imperfections and all, among the nations. And he builds them in two primary ways.

God calls out leaders to serve the church

Paul was a devout Jew, Pharisee, and persecutor of the church (Acts 7:58–8:3; 9:1-2; Phil 3:4-6). The Lord Jesus, however, called him to be an apostle, specifically but not exclusively, to the Gentiles (Acts 9:15-17; Gal 1:16).

In 1 Corinthians 1, Paul immediately calls attention to three things concerning himself: he is "an apostle of Christ Jesus," he was "called" to this divine assignment, and his calling was "God's will." An apostle is sent on behalf of another, and Paul was endowed with divine, apostolic authority as an emissary of the Lord Jesus Christ. His ministry as an apostle had a divine origin. He was supernaturally called by the sovereign will of God. Paul also notes that "Sosthenes our brother" is with him. It is likely that this is the same Sosthenes of Acts 18:17, "the leader of the synagogue" who was seized by the Jews and beaten during Paul's mission in Corinth.

God called out sinners to be saints

Paul writes "to the church of God at Corinth" (v. 2). Corinth, a strategically located city (see Introduction), was the geographical location of this particular church. But the congregation also had a spiritual location. It was "the church of God." This church, like every other, is his church, his possession.

The church is comprised of "those sanctified in Christ Jesus." The word sanctification or sanctified appears several times (vv. 1,2,3,4,6,7,8,9). Normally when we see the word, we think of God's work in us to make us holy and to conform us more and more into the image of his Son, the Lord Jesus Christ. And it is certainly used like this in the New Testament (see 1 Thess 4:3). Here, however, Paul is not talking about "experiential sanctification" but "positional sanctification," which is not something believers are pursuing but something we already have from the moment of conversion.

Second, all true believers within a congregation are "called as saints." Just as God had sovereignly called Paul to be an apostle, he had sovereignly, effectually called believers at Corinth to be saints (holy ones). Third, saints have one Lord, but they are not limited to one locale; rather, each is part of the larger church scattered among the nations. Fourth, believers comprising the church are sovereignly called by God to salvation, but they must also be those "who call on the name of Jesus Christ." Fourth, believers comprising the church are sovereignly called by God to salvation, but they must also be those "who call on the name of Jesus Christ."

God gives gifts to His church, with nothing missing.

Our God is a good and gracious God. He delights in showering his children with gifts. Psalm 84:11 says it beautifully: “For the Lord God is a sun and shield. The Lord grants favor and honor; he does not withhold the good from those who live with integrity.”

We are rich in God’s grace (v4)

Verse 4 begins a prayer of thanksgiving for God’s grace. God’s gracious activity toward the Corinthians and all believers is supremely revealed in the Lord Jesus Christ. It is a grace given, not earned or merited. It is something the Corinthians certainly did not deserve. Its origin was the Father, and its means was the Son.

We are rich in gifts (v5-7)

One evidence of God’s grace in our lives is his blessing of spiritual gifts (grace gifts), which are listed in four different places in the New Testament (Rom 12:3-8; 1 Cor 12:4-11,28-30; Eph 4:11; 1 Pet 4:10-11). Paul says he is thankful believers are enriched (GNT, “have become rich”) in him. And to what extent did they become rich in Christ? Well, spiritually, “in every way”! Their gracious Father holds nothing back. But Paul draws attention to the gifts of “all speech and all knowledge.”

Paul is convinced the Corinthian church has been enriched in “all speech and all knowledge,” areas highly valued by the Corinthians. However, for all who are in Christ, there is no place for boasting or pride. God did this for those in Christ (v. 5). The believing community does “not lack any spiritual gift” (v. 7). Indeed, in Christ we get all that we will ever need to be pleasing to God and effective for God. Nothing is missing. Nothing lacking. He provides all we need.

God Provides Hope for His Church with Powerful Promises (v7-9)

Paul identifies two particular promises of God that we can trust: the return of the Lord Jesus Christ and the faithfulness of God.

We can expect Jesus to return (v7-8)

Interestingly, Paul connects spiritual gifts and the second coming of Jesus. To exercise your abundance of spiritual gifts effectively and rightly you must “eagerly wait for the revelation of our Lord Jesus Christ” (v. 7). In other words, being heavenly minded will make you of earthly good! Never lose sight of the truth that what you have now is good, but the best is yet to come! Work and wait! Work and watch!

We can expect God to be faithful (v8-9)

Paul says there is both blessing and hope in longing for the coming of “our Lord Jesus Christ” (v. 7). First, believer, “He will also strengthen you to the end” (v. 8). You will persevere because God will preserve you. The one who called you to salvation (v. 2) will keep you in salvation to the end. This is another confirmation of what is called the doctrine of eternal security or perseverance of the saints (cf. John 10:27-29; Rom 8:28-39; Eph 1:13-14; 2 Tim 1:12; Jude 24-25). Christ will faithfully get his people home. Second, we will arrive “blameless in the day of the Lord Jesus Christ.”

Discussion Questions:

1. What does this passage teach you about God’s work in salvation? What does it teach you about the Christian’s identity?
2. In what ways does this passage emphasize God’s role from the beginning to the completion of your salvation? How can this give you hope and rest?
3. Can Christians begin to believe a church is theirs instead of God’s? If so, how? What are the fruits of this belief?
4. How does the church’s identity as God’s possession refocus what a church prioritizes?
5. How does God’s role as the builder of his church shape your role? How does it give both power and freedom to your role?
6. How does being heavenly minded make you of earthly good? How does waiting eagerly for Christ’s return help Christians to use their spiritual gifts properly? In what ways does neglecting to do this cause Christians to abuse their gifts?

Memory verse:

1 Corinthians 1:9 (NIV) – “God is faithful, who has called you into fellowship with his Son, Jesus Christ our Lord.”

References

- Daniel L Akin and James Merritt, *Christ-Centered Exposition: Exalting Jesus in 1 Corinthians* (B & H Publishing Group, Tennessee, 2023)
- Charles R Swindoll, *Swindoll’s Living Insights: New Testament Commentary 1 & 2 Corinthians* (Tyndale House Publishers, Illinois, 2017)