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Book	1-Corinthians
Topic	Nature and Calling of The Church
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INTRODUCTION:

It is an exciting book to go through because it is a letter to a church that is full of problems. They have got really wild stuff going in there, but even through the wild stuff that was going in there we can learn many things. This epistle has got many controversial things, which we are going to go through in this study. Some of the controversial issues like

- What does it mean to speak in tongues?
- How do you actually prophesize?

Paul in his second journey landed up in Corinth and that is where they started the church in Corinth. It was a fairly big church. Corinth is a very strategic place. It is a fantastic port. There was also temple prostitution in Corinth. When you go to the temples and you have a meal there which is the food offered to idols you also participate of the priestess who offer sexual services. So this is a situation which is a very different situation from what we experience. So there was a lot of room for cultural compromise as well.

According to that time letter was written about AD 55. It is very modern it has got all sorts of amenities. They have got the market place called the Agora where you actually exchange news and gossip. They have got a theater and everybody sits there and they watch games. They have got many temples.

The Corinthian church were a very difficult lot. They are beset with huge problems. They have disunity, church splits, pride, immorality, lawsuits, compromise, asceticism, reject apostolic authority, they even question the resurrection which is the hallmark of the faith. They came to a stage where they do not believe in miracles in terms of resurrection. So this is a very difficult church and at the bottom of all that stuff they actually have pride.

THE LAYOUT OF LETTER

In the first four chapters Paul uses the gospel to negate the issue of pride. Gospel is about grace. Grace negates all traces of pride. So in the first four chapters he knocks their pride down because pride is the underlying basis of all their contention to each other. Then the rest of the chapters from 5 onwards it will deal with all the issues; church discipline, immorality and all that.

FORM OF THE LETTER

Name of the Writer:

Paul, called by the will of God to be an apostle of Christ Jesus, and our brother Sosthenes,

Addressee:

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:

Greeting:

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

Paul writes that he is an apostle, the word is apostolos. The semantic range for the word apostle is a little bit wide. It could mean a few things. It could mean the original apostles with the authority to speak and write the word of God. It could mean a church planter or missionary or it could mean just a messenger. Apostolos is a general word for a messenger; someone commissioned with a message. The term in terms of applying for Paul has different meanings.

APOSTLES CRITERIA

So the apostolic criteria of the people who can write scripture are basically the twelve including Matthias, Paul, James and Barnabas. The criteria is:

(1) having seen Jesus after his resurrection with one's own eyes (thus, being an "eyewitness of the resurrection"),

(2) having been specifically commissioned by Christ as his apostle.

We are going to look at:

1. The nature and calling of the church
2. The blessings of the church
3. The unity of the church

THE NATURE OF THE CHURCH

The word church is word that comes from two words, **Ek** which means out and **Klesia** which is call. So the church is actually a people who are called out. The church is not a building. A lot of people think church is a build and you congregate in a building, but the church is a movement. So we are a movement and implication to that is very important because if we continue to think ourselves institutionalized, the church only exist in the building with the particular hierarchy then we become imprisoned. When the church becomes a movement for freedom, for equality, for righteousness, for liberation, it becomes an unbeatable force. So in the New Testament time when we look at 1 Acts chapter 2 three thousand people became Christian. They are not going to fit in one church, so it is

like a movement every day. So the church is an exciting revolution because its values are different from society's values. So when you think of yourself as a church you are a called-out people, you are basically an assembly.

NOTICEABLE SUBTLE DIFFERENCE

To the church of God that is in Corinth

(ESV) To the church of the Thessalonians in God 1 and 2 Thess

(ESV) To the churches of Galatia:

(ESV) To the saints who are in Ephesus

(ESV) To all the saints in Christ Jesus who are at Philippi,

(ESV) To the saints and faithful brothers in Christ at Colossae

Paul purposely writes them church of God because he writes 1 Corinthians 1:11-12 (ESV) *For it has been reported to me by Chloe's people that there is quarreling among you, my brothers. 12 What I mean is that each one of you says, "I follow Paul," or "I follow Apollos," or "I follow Cephas," or "I follow Christ."*

The whole church being torn apart to various denominations as it were and based on various leaderships. So when Paul writes he straightaway put, this is the church of God, not of Paul, not of Cephas, not of anybody else. So he calls them back to the singular reason they are there. They are called-out people by God that belong to God not to factions.

Three criteria of church

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:

- to those sanctified in Christ Jesus,
- called to be saints
- all those who in every place call upon the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, both their Lord and ours:

The word sanctified and saints the basic Greek word behind this is called holy (Hagios). The criteria for church is that church is a bunch of people who are called out by God who are actually cleansed by Jesus, made Holy and then they are called holy ones.

The whole idea is to talk about holiness. What the Corinthian church has lost is that they started fighting with each other. They are fighting over each other about how many gifts they have, who is right, who is wrong, who has got authority. They are so disunited that they actually lost the reason

why they are in church in the first place. The reason why they are in the church in the first place is that being cleansed from their sin.

HOLINESS

God's holiness means that he is separated from sin and devoted to seeking his own honor.
(Grudem's Systematic Theology)

There are two aspects to that and the idea of holiness is given to us in a pictorial form. In the Old Testament they have got a tabernacle. The people of Israel can come to the tabernacle, they have to offer sacrifices and only the priest can enter into the holy of holies. Once a year the chief priest will go in after one week of cleansing and offer sacrifices of blood on the altar on behalf of the people.

If you simply go in and you didn't complete your ritual cleansing, you will be struck dead by God straightaway. God uses that picture to show you that he is different from you. He is set apart from you. He is separate from you. So this idea of the tabernacle gives you this idea of God's separateness. He is separate from human beings who have sinned and this is dedicated to the glory of God. The other issue is if we look at the burning bush. Moses in the middle of the desert encounters a bush which is flaming in fire he cannot go near, it is very hot and yet the bush is not burnt. The idea of God's holiness is also exemplified by the flames, it is like coming near to the sun, the sun is full of energy and power and might and majesty, you cannot approach it and yet it is glorious. That is the picture of God's holiness but the difference here is even though you got the holiness the bush was not consumed miraculously.

So there is a way which God's holiness and glory is compatible with your presence in there and you don't get burnt up. If you put anything in the fire it will get burnt up but in this particular scene the bush does not get burnt up and the bush is a picture of all of us and we approach the glory of God and the only difference between the chief priest and us is that he prepared and then he goes in once in a whole year, he does not get burnt up.

In Isaiah chapter 6 he had a vision of God being seated on a high with all the seraphim and cherubim singing and the moment he sees the holiness of God the brightness and the brilliance of the flames he says, die, but the angel took a burning coal and put on his lips and that protected him. He wasn't burnt up and that is the same picture of Christians. We are separated, we have the glory of God in terms of we are set apart with the holy, we are not burnt up. That is actually our destination. The problem is that Corinthians have mistaken the whole idea. They thought there were other things in life which they were sidetracked with. So here is this idea of being set apart and basically separate.

When a king says you are royal that means you have to live up to the majesty of the king. Holiness is like that, we have the holiness of God who is separate and perfect and then we are called to be like him and he puts a stamp on us that we are the royal ones. We are the holy ones and that is the biggest honor we have as Christians, not the fact that you have the gift of tongues or you have a gift of miracles, that is not the point, the point is the calling of us as a set aside people, we are actually

specially chosen out of the whole world that we would bear the image, reflect totally the ethical image of God that is our vision.

The prime directive in our life should drive how we live, the choices we make and outcomes in our life. Who we are determine what we do. Identity and our calling determine the choices that we make and outcomes in our lives. So the prime directive in our life is actually that are to be like God that is what is supposed to be.

The misconceptions of holiness are different in different congregations. In Catholics, you have to become a monk, no sex, no food, stay out there in the cold place, no air con. It is really bad and so therefore most Christians would never think of holiness in a positive light. They always think it is sacrifice. Christianity is a religion of the 'No', no smoking, no sex, no fun, no TV, no movies, no, no, no. So that is our idea of holiness. So if we ask an average Christian today, when you wake up in the morning do you actually feel that you want to be holy, do you want to be like God.

Our idea of holiness is boring, it is horrible. We tolerate holiness because we want to go to heaven. So God becomes a mean to an end that is the problem with a wrong conception of holiness.

Thomas Brooks wrote in 1662 the Crown and Glory of Christianity. He says *"Holiness is happiness in the bud, and happiness is holiness at the full. Happiness is nothing but the quintessence of holiness."*

He is telling us that the whole world is searching for happiness but you don't realize that the only source and essence of full happiness is actually holiness. The extent of which you are holy is the extent of which you actually are happy. The secret to happiness is actually holiness. Matthew chapter 5 Jesus said, happy are those who are spiritually poor, happy are those who are persecuted for righteousness sake. There is a whole paradigm shift. The whole idea of holiness that the bible is trying to tell is that holiness is happiness.

Sin is a joy which is poison. If you are searching and if you go through the Book of Ecclesiastes and you will learn that everything you can look for happiness in your job, in your family, in your money, in your enjoyment but after a while this is all meaningless. The true happiness is actually found in the person who is the most happiest being in the entire universe and he is God. He has got everything, all powerful, all omniscient and totally happy with himself, which means if we want to be happy like God, the true happiness that really last is being like God. The picture of God is someone who is laughing and joyful, not a monk.

Psalms 19:7-8 (ESV) *The law of the LORD is perfect, reviving the soul; the testimony of the LORD is sure, making wise the simple;8 the precepts of the LORD are right, rejoicing the heart;*

When you study the word of God and it goes into your heart and it brings joy and that is the joy that will stay.

Psalms 33:1 (ESV) *Shout for joy in the LORD, O you righteous! Praise befits the upright.*

John Piper writes, *“If you tried to describe for me what it means to be a holy person, leaving out happiness in God, you can’t do it. There is no such thing as holiness minus happiness in God. Happiness in God is — I will risk it — the essence of holiness.”*

We come here to understand who God is and when you understand him you will factually find perfect happiness.

SURROGATES FOR HOLINESS:

- If I serve God well it means I must be holy. If I have good theology, only my theology is correct and all the rest are wrong then I will be holy.
- If I have miraculous gifts then I must be holy, but Matthew 7 says, in the last days many people will come to me and say, Lord, Lord and then God says depart from me I never knew you.
- If I cast out demons then I must be holy man. The Bible contradicts that.
- Position, leader of church.

All these things actually happen in church. Church is the worst place to get holiness because they produce all these surrogates for holiness and you think you are holy, actually you are quite far from God.

Why do we lack this practice of holiness?

The problem today is the degree of the admiration. The degree we desire to be like someone is the degree of which we hold someone in great regard. We have trouble with personal holiness because our lack of appreciation of God’s holiness. God is like our buddy, God is always there like our mother and father. Because we struggle with the picture of what God is and many of the churches now we no longer preach about the majesty of God, the power of God, the justice of God, the holiness of God. We are all talking about Jesus on the cross. Therefore, we have deleted the picture of God and now people don’t want to be like God anyway. God is not a good destination. So that is the key to our problem. Coming to a Bible study allows you to dig into the word and see the beauty of how God has put the world together and that will speak to your heart.

PROCESS OF HOLINESS

We are people who are sanctified. This is a perfect tense which means it has happened and it is basically has ongoing effects and we are also called to be saints. 1-Corinthian chapter 8 verse 8 says

1 Corinthians 1:8 (ESV) [who will sustain you to the end, guiltless in the day of our Lord Jesus Christ.](#)

This means that we have been cleansed and in the end will be perfectly cleansed. There is a dimension here. We are already righteous because of what Christ has done for us. This is our positional righteousness that we are regarded as such. One day we will be completely righteous. We are called to be processed, which means there is a process but in the end we will be perfect. So therefore it is called our calling to be righteous.

We are the kingdom of God which is started, there is a kingdom of God which is consummated which will come one day. The problem with the Corinthian church they have got this idea of over-realised eschatology which is basically the kingdom of God is here now complete 100%.

We will see through the pages of 1-Corinthians there is a bunch of people that people we have the kingdom now and that has effected some of the churches today. Some of the churches think that we will have our healing now. That means if you ask for any healing 100% because of what Christ has done they will be healed, but the fact is you won't be healed. Only a minority of people will be healed because the kingdom of God has come, it is on the way but it is going to be fully here with us. There is a tension and the same thing with our call of the righteousness.

Together with all those who in every place call upon the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, both their Lord and ours:

There is a general call of God to everybody to come to be saved but there is also an effectual call. The effectual call is that the only way you are going to call God is when God call you first. So everywhere we have a situation where God calls you and when he calls you, you call him back and that is an effectual call.

John 6:44 (ESV) No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him. And I will raise him up on the last day.

Acts 16:14 (ESV) One who heard us was a woman named Lydia, from the city of Thyatira, a seller of purple goods, who was a worshiper of God. The Lord opened her heart to pay attention to what was said by Paul.

It means that God opens up her heart, it is always an effectual call when God calls you.

What About My Gifts?

Here we have a whole bunch of people who think they have got a lot of gifts. So the next section is Paul telling them

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

Paul says that the gifts you have are actually given by grace. So he gives a whole bunch of thanksgiving and everything points to God

I give thanks to my God always for you because of the grace of God that was given you in Christ Jesus, that in every way you were enriched in him in all speech and all knowledge— even as the testimony about Christ was confirmed among you— so that you are not lacking in any gift, as you wait for the revealing of our Lord Jesus Christ, who will sustain you to the end, guiltless 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.

If you underline Lord and Jesus Christ, the whole paragraph is full of God. There is no room to boast, everything you had you received.

Another blessing is that God will preserve and bring you to the end. So everything that actually have is actually given. So therefore you actually have no room to be very proud.

The Best Way to Boast

1 Corinthians 15:9-10 (ESV) For I am the least of the apostles, unworthy to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God. 10 But by the grace of God I am what I am, and his grace toward me was not in vain. On the contrary, I worked harder than any of them, though it was not I, but the grace of God that is with me.

First of all, he says that I am the least most evil terrible horrible worm because I kill people, on the other hand he says I am the hardest worker, I work harder than everybody else but not me grace, God works in me. The whole thing is full of thanksgiving.

Unity of The Church

The Greek philosopher in those days they don't have movies so they spend their time listening to old man who are talking about all sorts of theories and ideas and so they tend to support Socrates, I support Plato, I support Aristotle and they form all different schools. This has crept into the church as well.

I appeal to you, brothers, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that all of you agree, and that there be no divisions among you, but that you be united in the same mind and the same judgment. vv10

Cause of Disunity

For it has been reported to me by Chloe's people that there is quarreling among you, my brothers. What I mean is that each one of you says, "I follow Paul," or "I follow Apollos," or "I follow Cephas," or "I follow Christ." Is Christ divided? Was Paul crucified for you? Or were you baptized in the name of Paul? I thank God that I baptized none of you except Crispus and Gaius, so that no one may say that you were baptized in my name. (I did baptize also the household of Stephanas. Beyond that, I do not know whether I baptized anyone else.) For Christ did not send me to baptize but to preach the gospel, and not with words of eloquent wisdom, lest the cross of Christ be emptied of its power.

What we actually have is a phenomenon called basking in reflected glory. When Manchester United wins you say our team won. When Manchester United loses we say they lost. This is actually a psychological phenomenon. When Donald Trump wins he says I win. If he loses he say they lost and it is not only him, everybody does that. We bask in reflected glory. When Obama was made president of United States so many children came with Obama. They all will not become president with this name, but everybody wants to bask in reflected glory. The whole idea is that

John 5:44 (ESV) How can you believe, when you receive glory from one another and do not seek the glory that comes from the only God?

The problem is they have a split in the church because they are seeking glory from one another, they are seeking recognition and self-esteem and so therefore if you like Justin Bieber, the reflected glory is that I have the merit or wisdom to have chosen him as the best singer. So therefore some of it reflects back on me. That is called basking in reflected glory. So the fan club will tell each other we are so clever because we chose Justin Bieber together and then the fan club of Justin Bieber will be against the stupid group which is basically the ones who don't like Justin Bieber and then there will be conflict. This is how conflicts happen in church. They have got this idea of social identity which cuts across what you like versus what the other group likes. So this is the idea that is actually splitting the church aside.

1 Corinthians 1:13-17 (ESV) [Is Christ divided? Was Paul crucified for you? Or were you baptized in the name of Paul](#)

The unifying factor should be Jesus Christ, the gospel of the crucified Christ, it is not baptism, it is not clever rhetoric. Whatever our differences are, the most important thing that unifies the entire church is the gospel of Jesus Christ. We live in an era in which there is a lot of ecumenical movements. The Catholics want to join the protestant then we have got this group or that group. The only thing that we need to unify all of us is the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ. If you have a group that do not believe that Jesus is the son of God and Jesus is Lord, then we cannot join with them. The unifying factor is that. So whatever your differences you have with people in this church, the most important thing is the power of Jesus Christ.

So we should actually have singular loyalty, our social identity is to Christ alone. If our loyalty is to Christ it means we are loyal to the truth, Godly behavior, love, forgiveness and righteousness. You cannot be loyal to a particular leader in the church and the Corinthian teaches us and in my personal experience in this church as well I have seen many people they support this leader or that leader. Whatever he does you forgive him, you support him, you die for him. That is wrong. Whatever it is as a church, we must vote based on the truth. We never take sides. It could be our best friend, we don't care. If you are wrong means you are wrong. That is how we show as a church that we are loyal to Jesus Christ. If we are loyal to a particular leader without finding the truth, then we are going to cause splits in them. There are many-many churches split simply because of this.