

<b>Topic</b>	<b>The Gospel Call: From Chaos To Community</b>
<b>Reference</b>	1 Corinthians 1:1-17
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1 Corinthians 1:1 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, ...

If we know something about the city of Corinth that will help us to understand this letter a little bit better. What was significant about this city? What was life like in this city? How difficult would it have been for the gospel to take root and to spread and to build community in this city? One of the most things about Corinth was its very strategic location, pretty much right in the middle of the Eastern Mediterranean Sea. It was halfway between the Capital of Roman Empire and then everything of the Roman Empire to the east. So being a major center like it was, it was a center of trade and all of the major trade routes would have gone through Corinth. Corinth was always hustling and bustling, right in the middle of the East West trade routes, connecting the Roman Empire. Also, the North-South trade routes going right through Corinth. Because of this trade, Corinth became a very wealthy city that became the capital of the province of Achaia.

The city of Corinth was filled with temples, filled with public buildings, market places. Corinth became this very powerful city that became an economic powerhouse, full of merchants and craftsman and artisans. It was also filled with common laborers and slaves. So, it is very diverse, extreme socioeconomic levels, from poverty stricken and slaves up to the extreme wealthy profitable businessman and politicians. It was also very diverse ethnically. There were two reasons for this diversity ethnically.

1. The city had been destroyed by the Romans about 146 years before the birth of Christ. It laid empty for over 100 years and then Julius Caesar ordered the city to be rebuilt and he populated it on purpose with people from all over the Roman Empire. So, there wasn't just one ethnic group there, but people from all over had come plus with the prosperity of Corinth people from all over the world wanted to move there to try to get a piece of the trade.
2. Corinth was also very religiously diverse. Every religion or cult in the Mediterranean world would have been represented there in Corinth. There were temples and statues to just about every god or goddess in that

part of the world that you can imagine. There was also a sizeable Jewish population in this city.

So, there was much diversity in this city of Corinth. Corinthians were very immoral people. They had the reputation of being the most immoral city in the entire Roman Empire. Now some of the immorality in this city could probably be connected to the worship of some of the gods there. It makes a difference who you worship because frequently become like the one that you worship. People use to worship Apollo and in his worship sometime homosexual behavior among man was promoted. There was the temple of Aphrodite, the erotic goddess of love, sometimes known by the name of Venus.

With this type of a culture in Corinth, you can understand why an entire chapter of the book of 1-corinthians is devoted to love, true love, a love from God. Strabo was a Greek geographer who was writing about the time of the birth of Christ. Strabo wrote about the geography and he pointed out that there were these two harbors on either side of Corinth and through the trading commerce the city had become very rich. Strabo also wrote that in connection with the worship of Aphrodite that there were 1000 temple prostitutes that were available to help the people worship. So ship captain, sailors, merchants, businessman, soldiers even sex tourists flocked the Corinth, they were involved in sexual immorality there and Strabo also wrote that in his opinion that it was partly because of the prostitution that Corinth had become so wealthy.

A city that is so full of evil and immorality and a city that has so many divisions and diverse types of people that it would be quite a challenging place to go to try to share the gospel. Especially, if you are the very first one to go there, to try to share the gospel and it is amazing to me that in a place like Corinth that there actually was a church of God.

So how could a community of faith take root in a town like that? How could a community of faith exist where there is so much immorality and so many divisions? Only through the grace of God and through the power of the gospel. Here is how it happened

1 Corinthians 1:1 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, ...

Paul went on missionary journeys to share the gospel around the Roman Empire. On his second missionary journey, he left Antioch and he travelled to the city of Troas in the Northwest of province of Asia, which is now Turkey. From there he went onto the city of Philippi which is the first time the gospel came to what is

now European shores. From Philippi he went onto Thessalonica and then to Berea and all of this time Paul was with other Christians who were helping and then travelling by himself he went on down to Athens and in Athens he encountered quite a challenge to the gospel. A big city, a city full of education, culture, philosophy as well as a lot of idolatry, but people did come to faith and then we don't know why but Paul felt called by God to go onto Corinth, so we see him going that short distance then on down to Corinth. This was really going to be a challenge, because Corinth was a bigger city at that time than Athens. It was the largest city Paul had yet gone to. It was the most corrupt and the most immoral city Paul had yet visited.

Paul knew the reputation that Corinth had, he knew what a chaotic ungodly place it was and he knew it would be difficult to share the gospel there among that many different kinds of people with such diverse backgrounds. It would be like if God were calling us to go into the Klang Valley and share the gospel. It was challenging and not easy for Paul, but he wrote

**1 Corinthians 2:3 It was in weakness, fear, and great trembling that I came to you.**

Paul was a human being like us and yet God called him to go share the gospel. He had also been beaten several times. He had been put in jail. He had been stoned and left for dead. Paul going to a city like Corinth, he had fear and trembling but still he went in obedience to God, trusting God, going in the power and strength of the Holy Spirit and proclaiming the powerful message of the gospel through Jesus Christ.

Acts 18 tells us the story of Paul taking the gospel to Corinth. To begin with, he goes regularly to the Jewish synagogue, there he talks to both Jews and Greeks and he shows them that Jesus is indeed the promised Messiah, the one that the entire Jewish scriptures were pointing to. The prophets had foretold about him. God had promised that one would come and Jesus is that person. We also know that Paul preached and proclaimed regularly this message because he says later in his letter

**1 Corinthians 15:3 For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received: that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the Scriptures, 4 that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the Scriptures, 5 and that he appeared to Cephas, then to the twelve. 6 Then he appeared to more than five hundred brothers ...**

We also in Paul's missionary work that he proclaimed,

Act 20:21 I testified to both Jews and Greeks about repentance to God and faith in our Lord Jesus.

So this is the heart of the message that Paul was preaching. Many of the Corinthians did believe the message, many of them were baptized including the Jewish leader of the synagogue and his entire family. There were Jewish people who rejected the gospel, they did not want to hear that Jesus was the Messiah, so they kicked Paul out of the synagogue, became very abusive to him but no problem that did not stop his message. He just moved right next door and there was a gentile person who lived right next door and he continued his preaching and teaching there. After a period of time in Acts 18 it tells us that Paul was thinking about leaving the city of Corinth, but we don't know why, possibly he was discouraged or afraid. Right before he left God told him in a dream

Acts 18:9 And the Lord said to Paul one night in a vision, "**Do not be afraid, but go on speaking and do not be silent, for I am with you, and no one will attack you to harm you, for I have many in this city who are my people.**"

I think God is telling each one of us that same message today. The key was, because God was with him. It is just like Jesus promised at the end of Matthew's gospel, go make disciples of all people behold I am with you. God promised that he would take care of Paul and he also said there are many more people in this city who are my people. So then we see in Acts 18 that Paul stayed for about a year and half in the city of Corinth. During the time he was there, there was a new Roman proconsul who was appointed at the office. His name was Gallio. Because of this man's name written in the Bible, we can date pretty precisely Paul's time in the city of Corinth because archaeologists have uncovered an inscription in stone that was commissioned by the Roman emperor of the time, Emperor Claudius and in this inscription the emperor is describing Gallio as his friend and he mentions that Gallio is now the proconsul of that part of the world Achaia. So it was during that time that Gallio was now the proconsul that the Jews did attack Paul for his proclaiming the gospel and they took him before the proconsul and took him to court. When Gallio heard the case, he just threw it out and he also threw the Jewish leaders out of the court and they got so angry that they then beat up their own leader of the synagogue. After about a year and a half of ministry then Paul did leave Corinth and he moved on to another city to share the gospel.

Paul with the help of Sosthenes then wrote the letter that we know now is 1 Corinthians. He wrote it to address the problems that the church in Corinth was facing, needing to deal with. Paul had heard from a lady named Chloe that there was quarrelling within the church. Now later chapters of the book, we will see

that this was not the only problem they had, they had many problems. Despite the problems that Corinth had, there were some good things going on. Today, we are going to look at some of the positive things that are mentioned in the first chapter about this church as well as then begin to look at the problems and when we examine this text there will be some things that we can see that will apply to our lives, both individually and also corporately as a community of faith.

1. What are foundations for Christian community?
2. What are dangers for Christian community?
3. What is the hope for Christian community?

### 1. What are foundations for Christian community?

We see that beginning back in verse 2,

1 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:

Here we see that God provides the initiative. God works in our lives to change us, God calls us to him, God calls us to each other. So, we see that God himself provides the foundation for Christian community, because he calls us to be his church. We are the church of God. We are those people who have been called out by God, those who have been set apart to have a special relationship with God, those who are set apart to serve God. They have a distinct identity as being the people of God, not because they are special, not because they are perfect, but because they have been sanctified in Christ Jesus. Sanctification is a lifelong process that begins at the moment we accept Christ and doesn't end until the day we die or until Jesus comes again, whichever might be first.

This verse is speaking of sanctification as something that has happened, a onetime act in the past and yes it is possible for one word to have more than one meaning. So when Paul is talking about being sanctified as something in the past, he is talking about something that caused a decisive break with the way our life had been. Later in the book of 1-Cor chapter 6 Paul says that do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God and then he list many different types of unrighteousness including idolatry, adultery, homosexual behavior, thieves, being greedy, drunkards, swindlers, etc., but then he says, but you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, showing again sanctification as something happening in the past.

There was something decisive that has happened in the past in the life of these Corinthian Christians. There had been a decisive break. There has been a break with the old lifestyle because we have been set apart for God. So sanctification means both this lifelong process that we often times think of, but it also means this decisive break with the old life as we accept Jesus to come into our life.

Our text continues and talks about the fact that we are called to be saints. Now when we hear that word saints, sometimes we think that people who are highly spiritual, we could never be like them. Some churches have statues that they have labels of saints attached to them. This is not correct. We are called to be God's holy people. We are not saints by the definition that maybe the catholic church would use, we are saints by the definition the Bible uses, which is anybody who believes in Jesus is in God's eye a saint, because he has called us to be holy.

Holy is also a word that is sometimes misunderstood. If a person is holy then we think they are perfect, never do anything wrong, nobody will fit that category on this side of heaven. Holy means we have been set apart by God, set apart to belong to him, set apart to become more and more like him, set apart to let him rule our life and to change our life. So all people who believe in Jesus Christ are saints, not because of their achievement but because of what God has done for them. In God's eyes, those who believe in him are considered to be saints. Our text continues

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

Grace is God's love and favor that He shows to us, even though we do not deserve it, even though we cannot earn it, God gives His grace to us because of who He is, not because of who we are. God's grace is what makes it possible for us to then experience the peace that comes from God our father and from the Lord Jesus Christ. This peace that we receive is peace first of all with him because earlier we were alienated from God, we were enemies of God. It was like we were at war with God, rebelling against Him but through the cross of Christ, through God's grace we have now been reconciled to God. We have received forgiveness. We are now at peace with God. This peace is an inner peace and inner harmony because now we are in a harmonious relationship with our creator. This peace is lacking in the lives of so many people.

A lot of people feel that void inside them and they try to fill it with different social works. Doing good and ignoring the relationship with God, you are still going to have that inner void and that inner emptiness because that will be filled by the relationship with God that comes from God's grace, the inner peace that we can get from him. So back to the first question?

What are foundations of Christian community?

God's grace. God takes the initiative, God calls and God works in our lives. The clearest way that we see the grace of God is through the crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus Christ. So this is a basic foundation for the Christian community, the gospel message of what Jesus has done for us.

1Corinthians 15:3 For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received: that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the Scriptures, 4 that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the Scriptures, 5 and that he appeared to Cephas, then to the twelve. 6 Then he appeared to more than five hundred brothers ...

So the gospel message is crucial for Christian community, because without the gospel there is no community. With the gospel we see we have so much in common. We recognize that we all sin. We all need a savior, none of us can make ourselves right with God, we need somebody to help us because we all need God's grace and the only way we can be reconciled to God and brought into fellowship with Him and other believers is when we respond in repentance and faith, confessing our sin and letting God change our heart, letting God change our mind, letting God take control of our lives and trusting our lives to Him.

So God has given us a decisive call to come to him to be holy, but then we make a decisive response to God by calling on him in faith, acknowledging Jesus Christ as Lord. So our response to God is that of breaking allegiances to old masters, to old things that use to control and lead our life and to now begin to call on Jesus for help, for guidance. That's what it means to call on the name of the Lord in faith. God calls us out of darkness, he calls us out of chaos, he calls us out of emptiness and in response to His call we decisively turn from what we use to trust in and from that moment on we call on Jesus, asking him to take control of our lives and to direct our paths. These two together; God's call to us and then our call in faith to God, that's what it means to become a Christian. So the gospel message is crucial to establish Christian community. Without the gospel message and our response to the gospel we cannot be part of Christian community.

### **Our Recognition of Jesus as lord**

There is so much repetition in our text today and the emphasis is on the word Lord. By so much repetition Paul is trying to make a clear point, a Christian

recognizes Jesus as the Lord. If we are in the family of God we have a common Lord, we have the same Lord. Lord not just as a theory, not just as somebody that exist out there, not just as a title of respect but someone who really bows their knee before Jesus and allows Him to rule their life as master and leader. So when someone comes into the community of faith, we have the same lord and that will do a lot to bring about us having similar values. We will have some of the same basic priorities in lives, such as seeking first the kingdom of God. We will have some of the same basic desires in lives, such as we want to glorify God with our life. We have the heart to want to love the Lord our God with all our hearts, soul, strength and mind. We will have the desire to love our neighbor as ourselves and we will have the same goal of making disciples of all people, being Christ witnesses.

So when we have the same Lord we will more likely be able to do what Paul asked us to do in verse 10 when he says,

**10 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**

There are minor points and some minor doctrines amongst us that we disagree on, methodologies we might disagree on. But there will be this unity of purpose, of wanting to honor God and do his will. There will be this unity of heart and there will be unity in the most important crucial areas of doctrine based on holy scripture and rather than being distracted by our own pride and ego and other things in life, we will want to have Christ at the center of our life, so crucial to the foundations for Christian community is our joint and common recognition of Jesus as Lord.

### **Coming to God as father**

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

Why is this important for Christian community?

Well if I come to God as father and you come to God as father that means we have the same father. If we have the same father that means we are family. You can't choose your brothers and sisters whether in physical life or in spiritual life. That's why Paul appeals to them as brothers. The call from God is a call to be reconciled to him and when we are reconciled to God then we become part of God's family. Now some people when they think of responding to the gospel call of responding to God in faith they act as if they are God's only child. God does

not have any only children. When we come to faith in Christ, we are not only coming to God we are coming in to his family and we have brothers and sisters in faith. When we come to God in faith we need to realize that God has these many other brothers and sisters and this family is going to continue to grow. So foundation for our Christian community is coming to God in faith.

What are dangers for the Christian community?

We see one thing in our text today in verses 11 and 12

11 For it has been reported to me by Chloe's people that there is quarrelling 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." 13 Is Christ divided? Was Paul crucified for you? Or were you baptized in the name of Paul?

Now quarrel is not really a strong enough word, it was really some strong arguments strife, a word that Paul uses in a list of sins that we should avoid because these are the works of the flesh. He said people are divided in the groups, personality cults possibly. One is saying, I belong to Paul, another I belong to Apollos, I belong to Cephas, I belong to Christ. We don't know exactly what that means but it is probably a personality cult. In the church of Corinth people were following their leaders.

Paul asks very simple question from them, is Christ divided, was Paul crucified for you.

17 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.

Paul comments on baptism have surprised many people anyway, because didn't Jesus himself commands us to baptize, yes, he did. So, Paul is not saying that baptism is unimportant but what Paul is wanting to emphasize here, the person who baptizes you is not important. What's important is the person into whom you are being baptized because you are being baptized into Jesus and into the body of Christ. Baptism is not essential for salvation, it does not save you, if it did Paul would have been baptising everybody he could have. Baptism is only for those who have responded in repentance and faith to the Lord Jesus Christ. Possibly one of the problems in Corinth was that there might have been people who had been baptized, thinking that baptism was some kind of a magical ritual that would do something, but they had never accepted Christ as their Lord and saviour.

Paul is emphasizing that faith in Christ, responding to God's call in your life in faith and repentance is what is important and then you follow Christ in baptism as an outward symbol of an inner change. It is nothing magical. In this text, I think we are also seeing that Paul is talking about the priority of gospel proclamation. Other things are secondary, even something as important as baptism is secondary to a clear presentation of the gospel message. Because on the basis of the gospel that we build and grow.

Paul said in Romans

**Romans 1:16 For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek.**

So Paul is saying, don't focus on me, focus on Jesus, don't focus on secondary things, focus primarily on the most important thing. So based on what we have seen so far, the danger for Christian community is sin, pride, jealousy, selfishness, lack of love that we saw on these divisions. Also taking our focus off Jesus, taking our focus off his will.

**What is the hope for Christian community?**

**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.**

God provides the foundation. We mess things up and when we do it we have to go back to God. This is our hope. This is God's grace.

Today people are longing for community. Many might have experienced the chaos that was prevalent in Corinth, many might be experiencing an emptiness or a void or a loneliness, God is offering community through faith in our Lord Jesus Christ.