

What It Is To Be A Christian And What it Is To Be A Church

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[0 : 00] Well, this morning we are going to be in 1 Corinthians.

If you have a Bible, just turn to chapter 1. And next week is Palm Sunday, and we'll be going into an Easter series in Palm Sunday called Behold Your King.

And so that'll all tie in together. But this morning, it offered an opportunity to just delve into some things that are worth refreshing, some things that are worth looking at.

You'll have heard some version of a story before of the children and the royal family perhaps being told to act a certain way and being reminded, remember royal children, royal manners.

And just that reminder of who you are, we need reminded of who we are at times. Life is a struggle. And so this morning, I thought it'd be a good opportunity to look at a passage where Paul is trying to remind some people who they are.

[1 : 40] And so we're going to be looking at a facet. Not everything that can be said, not every angle, not every detail. We couldn't possibly do that.

But we're going to look at a facet of what it is to be a Christian. We're going to look at a facet of what it is to be a church. And so those two things, Paul is reminding people in Corinth.

And he does so right at the very beginning. And then there are some parts later on where we'll begin to see why he needs to remind them who they are. Because of the things that they're distracted by, the things that they're doing, the temptations we face, the weaknesses we have.

And so we're going to be looking just at one verse, chapter 1, verse 2. And we're going to be cross-referencing with other verses throughout, but really that is the one verse to anchor in.

Have your thumb in 1 Corinthians 1, verse 2. And it's really the writing on the front of the envelope. That's all it is. But it's important.

[3 : 00] It's important to know who it is addressed to. And it's important for the people receiving this to remember, this is us. This is not for my neighbor. This is not for the person next door.

I'm not taking in a delivery for someone down the street. DPD haven't delivered it to the wrong door. If it was DPD delivering this letter, they would have probably delivered it to the wrong door.

just with the track record. But yeah, right on the front of the letter, Paul is reminding these people who they are.

And so here is what he writes, right at the outset of this letter, that this is 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.

Heavenly Father, please would you, by your Spirit and by your Word, remind us of who we are.

[4 : 17] Cause us to consider in our hearts who we are, where we are, what we believe, who we belong to. Please would you teach us through your Word, we pray in Jesus' name.

Well, this is to the church of God that is in Corinth. Isn't that an interesting way to talk about the church?

When was the last time that you spoke about or even thought about a particular local church being the church of God? Think about that.

When was the last time that you ever thought about a local church and thought, that's the church of God? Now, Paul isn't talking about the universal church here. He's talking about this messy bunch of people living in Corinth who've been joined together by their common faith in Jesus.

You just need to read the next couple of paragraphs to learn that this is a messy group of people with a lot of things, a lot of imperfections, but yet, this bunch of people Paul calls the church of God.

[5 : 30] Those who are sanctified in Christ Jesus. Those who are called to be saints, they're called to be saints.

Whatever struggles they have, whatever weaknesses, whatever imperfections, nevertheless, they're called to be saints. And this word saint is referring to the bit before, sanctified, which means really set apart.

They're called to be set apart together, not on their own. You notice that? Called to be saints together. And with all those who in every place call upon the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, both their Lord and ours.

Now, we don't often realize, I think, how individualistic individualistic your society is. It's so ingrained in us who live in Britain.

So ingrained in us, and it has been for centuries. You can search the internet about individualism, and you'll see that it came from Britain, really, and that Britain is so, so attached to its individualistic philosophy.

[6 : 43] It's ingrained in us from birth. It's the air that we breathe. We breathe the air of individualism without even realizing it.

And because of that, it seeps into how our version of Christianity is. It seeps into every area of our lives. And so, even in our Christianity, we think of our faith in a very individualistic way, that our faith is purely our own.

But that's not the picture that we see in the Bible. And it's not been the experience or expression across church history, or even in many places in the world today.

That's not the case in many places in the world today. Or you think about the situation that's going on in Israel. And if you are Jewish, you're not just on your own.

You're part of a people. There's a collective that you feel very part of. And so, as such, we tend to see this collective expression of Christianity in Britain, we tend to see the collective expression as less important than our individual expression of faith.

[8 : 01] Do we not? Obviously, the collective wouldn't exist without the individual. But certainly, in our culture, many people think that the individual faith can happily exist separately from the collective.

Or at least, there are many people in Britain who prefer to keep the collective expression of their faith at arm's length.

Corinth. Now, if ever there was a church in the New Testament to keep at arm's length, it was Corinth. You only need to read through the New Testament to think, if I was going to pick a church in the New Testament, I'd probably swerve away from Corinth.

If ever there was a church to keep at arm's length, it was probably Corinth. But, Paul, who had the responsibility to tell them some very hard things, that's not the way that he thinks about them.

He calls them the church of God. He says they're called to be saints together. And so, when Paul is saying that, that they are the church of God, he isn't simply saying that this people who he is writing to, this church, he's not simply saying that they are the Kirk.

[9 : 19] He's not saying they are just Corinth Baptist Church or the church of Corinth. He isn't talking about some building somewhere.

The group of people who assemble locally, he calls the church of God that happens to be in Corinth. Now, I wonder if you have ever thought about the church like that.

I wonder if any of us have ever thought about this church as the church of God that is in Bells Hill or any church that we've been in.

Have we ever thought about any church we've been in as the church of God in that place? It's difficult. Challenges the way we see things and the world will make us see things in certain ways and we need reminded, we need our eyes lifted to something greater, a different reality.

And so, have you ever thought about this church or any church as the church of God? What about a church? Think of a church that has caused you harm.

[10 : 36] Think of a church that has had many divisions. Think of a church of many hypocrites. Think of a church perhaps where the people are suing one another.

Think of a church full of scandalous sins. Think of a church where people are treating each other like they don't belong. Welcome to Corinth.

The church of God that is in Corinth. Isn't that interesting? All these things, you know. If you've ever read Paul's letter, you'll know he has a lot of things to say about that.

He doesn't just say, it's okay. It's okay to be like that. He doesn't say that at all. But he needs to remind them who they are. I think that's why right at the beginning he reminds them who they are. Because the way they're acting is not who they are.

They are supposed to be sanctified in Christ Jesus. They are called to be saints together. And with all those who in every place call upon the name of the Lord Jesus Christ.

[11 : 40] They're Lord and ours. Together, they are the church of God in that place. So, if we were to ask what church is, would we see it as all these people set apart in Christ who together call upon the name of the Lord Jesus?

Well, who is that? Who fits that description in this very building today? Who here would be considered those who are called to be saints with all those in every place who call upon the name of the Lord Jesus?

Sanctified in Christ. Who is that? Whoever that is, together we are the church of God in this place. Now, I'm trying to help us to see, and myself, to be reminded of what church really is.

It's not a building. It's not an organization. It's not a denomination. All of these things might help us in some ways, but that's not really what the church is. And so, we could do a simple illustration.

We could say, how many people here today actually come from the tradition to which this church belongs? And I would probably guess that not very many.

[13 : 02] This place is full of people from very different backgrounds. How many people here come here because of this?

Probably not very many. We come from different backgrounds, and we come for different reasons. And actually, I would encourage you at the end of today, it might be a good idea to ask one another why you come here.

I think you would be surprised. I think it would be interesting to hear the different answers. I think it would be challenging to hear the different answers. And I think it would be very encouraging to hear the different answers.

Another example would be that while we are part of a union of churches like this, we're also part of the West of Scotland Gospel Partnership, and so we have strong connections with churches from different denominations and different traditions because of our shared convictions on the primary things.

things. You see, sometimes we make it all about the secondary things and we lose sight of the primary things. And so I wonder again, if we made it all about the secondary things, I wonder how many people who are here today would still be here in a couple of years' time.

[14 : 27] And I'm not saying particular parts of that, particular aspects, are unimportant. I'm not saying that, but we mustn't put the cart before the horse. We must keep the primary things primary and the secondary things secondary.

And that's why we are part of a West of Scotland Gospel Partnership, because we want to get together with churches who are keeping the primary things primary. Gospel churches preaching the gospel.

So, if you're struggling with that, let me ask you, as an illustration again, if you knew that the Church of Scotland, who have many churches in many places, if you knew that currently they are consolidating and merging congregations, did any of you at any point, if you knew that, did any of you at any point wonder if some of those folks would come here or go to a different kind of church?

And if that's true, why shouldn't they stay within their Presbyterian convictions? Why shouldn't they stay within their convictions?

Do we really think that we are the only true church of God, that we are the only right way to do things? My guess is not. If it was only you and another person in any given place, a friend asked me, and you had very different views, but you were the only Christians in that place, would you not be together?

[16 : 06] And so I think very few people are that dogmatic about it. We need to remember, so what is the church of God in any given place? Well, I'm reminded of a chap in East Coast Bride, a chap that I used to know.

He's a funny and peculiar brother in the Lord. And he would sometimes ask sincerely, I'd bump into him, and he would ask this sincerely, and it was a searching question.

It wasn't that he was asking rhetorically as if it was a critique. He was genuinely asking the question. But sometimes I would bump into him and he would say, where are the Christians at?

And it was because he was wanting to know where his people were at. He's like, where's my family? Help me find my family. Where are the Christians at? And so he was looking for his people.

He was looking for his family in that given place. Sometimes it's hard to tell. Sometimes we just see messy lives. Sometimes we are just wounded people wounding other people.

[17 : 17] Sometimes, again, with our individualistic faith, we see the speck in the eye of the church before seeing the log in our own eye.

And if there is a log in the eye of the church, it is made up of the speck in each one of us, is it not? Now, none of us are perfect. Paul said to the Christians and Philipians, he who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ.

What a wonderful promise. But what he is in effect saying is, you are incomplete. Christians, whatever they are, are incomplete. Paul also said in Philipians 2, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling.

And then he goes on to say, for it is God who works in you, both to will and to work for his good pleasure. And so, like my peculiar friend said, where are the Christians at? Because if you find them, you will find the church of God in that place.

Where are the Christians at in Bells Hill? If you find them, you find the church of God in that place. So, what is a Christian?

[18 : 34] Who are we really? Who are we called to be? Let us be reminded of who we are. So, Paul said, again, we are only going to have the opportunity to explore just a small facet of this, but Paul said, Christians are those sanctified in Christ Jesus, called to be saints together with all of those who in every place call upon the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Who call upon the name of the Lord Jesus Christ together. This is similar to Romans 10, verse 9. If you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord, and you believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved.

That's a Christian. Someone who believes in their heart, not just with their words. One who joins the family that comes under the rule of Christ as Lord.

You see, that little verse in Romans, you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart. There must be an agreement between your heart and your mouth.

It can't just be nominal. We can't just say that we are one thing when our heart is not in agreement. If you are saying that you believe in Jesus, if you are saying that he is Lord, it must be coming from your heart.

[19 : 56] Many people acknowledge Christ, seen this. Many people acknowledge Christ to be part of Christianity. I'm not saying that in a bad way. But it's almost like when you tick that box, when you're trying to get onto some sort of program or website or download something, and you tick that box, you see before you can move on, it says agree to terms and conditions, and you just tick it, yeah, I just want the thing.

Or accept cookies, yeah, just do that and get it out of the way. Some people acknowledge Christ in order to be part of Christianity. Many folks enjoy the benefits that come from Christianity without their hearts really believing in Christ.

Christ. You see, you can actually like Jesus without loving Jesus. And so a Christian is one whose heart and mouth agrees that Jesus is Lord.

But what does it mean? What does that mean, Jesus is Lord? What do you actually believe about Jesus matters? And so when Paul said that in Romans, he's alluding to Joel 2.32, the prophet Joel, who said, for everyone who calls upon the name of the Lord will be saved.

Paul quotes Joel. That's Joel 2.32. Paul is saying that Jesus is the Lord that we must call upon to be saved.

[21 : 28] Now, what does it mean that Jesus is Lord? In Joel 2, in the prophet Joel, when he says everyone who calls upon the name of the Lord, he's talking about this.

He's talking about the name Yahweh. He's talking about the God of the Old Testament. He's talking about the God that brought Israel through the wilderness, through the waters, through the Red Sea, the God who rescued Israel out of Egypt.

That's who Joel is talking about. And Paul quotes Joel and says, that Lord is Jesus. That's quite a thing to say that.

Paul is saying in some way, Joel is actually talking about Jesus. And it's not some different person to Yahweh, but in some way, it's Jesus. You see, these three words in that little statement, Jesus is Lord, these three words can be understood in this way, and this is a great way that Andy Bannister from Solas explains it.

So firstly, if we take the first word, Jesus, it's not about belief in some abstract, distant God. It's not about some belief in some life force underpinning the universe.

[22 : 44] But the claim of the New Testament is that if you want to know what God is like, look at the historical man, Jesus. If you want to know who God is, look at Jesus.

If you want to find God, look at Jesus, because the testimony of those who actually saw and heard and touched Jesus was that the God of their history that they had heard and read about was now suddenly present in their midst, wrapped in flesh and bones with a name Jesus.

This God, Yahweh, who they'd heard about, who'd led their nation out of slavery, was suddenly in their midst. not some abstract God, not some distant God, not some energy or life force, but a person, and a person who revealed himself in very clear ways.

Jesus. That's the claim. Jesus is Lord Jesus. It's not about something that you can't put your hands on. It's about a person who existed in real history, made an impact like no other human being has ever made.

Suddenly, Jesus truly was God with us. And so Paul says in Romans chapter 1 that he was descended from David according to the flesh and was declared to be the Son of God in power according to the Spirit of holiness by his resurrection from the dead, Jesus Christ, our Lord.

[24 : 16] And he says in Romans chapter 4, Jesus, our Lord, was delivered up for our trespasses, and he was raised for our justification. Now who else has done that?

No one else in history has, will, or ever could do that. There is only one way, there is only one person, there is no other name but the name of Jesus, our Lord.

So that is the first part, Jesus. The second word is, and I've got to give credit to Andy Bannister for pulling this out because you might think, what can you bring out of just a two-letter word?

Well, it really matters because at the heart of Christianity and the heart of every true Christian is not that Jesus once was Lord 2,000 years ago in Israel, that Jesus sometime in the long history was important at some point, that he was Lord doing miracles and making an impact and speaking with power in Israel.

that was a long time ago and now the world is messed up. Jesus was that. That's not the heart of Christianity. It's not the heart of a true Christian. It's not that he was something.

[25 : 32] Neither is it that he will be something. That, oh, the world is in a dark and messed up place but one day in the future Jesus will be Lord.

That's not the claim of Christianity. It's not at the heart of what it means to be a Christian. What it means is that Jesus is today, this moment, not just in this place, not just in our hearts but in every corner of the entire universe.

The God of all creation, the Lord of some men, of every man, whether they acknowledge it or not, the Lord of every man, currently presently today, Jesus is.

Also, Romans 10, believing in your heart that God raised him from the dead, Jesus isn't a person who was. Jesus is a person who is.

He's not in the grave. He's not someone from a long time ago who now was. He is. He is alive. He is raised from the dead.

[26 : 46] And he is Lord. Finally, that Jesus is Lord. Some people believe that Jesus was a good teacher. I think he was a good teacher.

But I think he's more than that. Some people believe he was a prophet. Some people believe he was a wise, radical rabbi. Some people believe that Christianity is just a set of morals, philosophical ideas.

But at the heart of Christianity is that Jesus is Lord. Contrary to appearances at time on the ground, it is Jesus who rules.

And that will soon be evident for all to see. Just as it was for the Christians in the Roman Empire when they were faced with death if they didn't claim that Caesar was Lord, to them they said, no, Jesus is Lord.

You think Caesar is reigning? He only has power because it's granted to him from heaven. Is that not what Jesus said to Pilate? But yet, who is the one who is on the throne?

[27 : 56] Who else has ascended to the right hand of God? Peter says this in Acts chapter 2 when he's speaking to the matter of where Jesus is. He says that unlike King David, whose tomb was still occupied with David's bones and was there for people to see, he says Jesus is no longer in the tomb, but he ascended to the right hand of God.

And then he quoted Psalm 110, the Lord says to my Lord, sit at my right hand until I make your enemies your footstool. So, Corinth, despite the imperfections of all these folks in Corinth and despite our own imperfections, the Christians are those who are believing this in their hearts and confessing this with their mouths and that they are not alone but are called to be saints together with all those who everywhere believe and confess these things about Jesus, their Lord.

Peter goes on to say that the way you identify yourself as a Christian is to repent and be baptized. baptized. How should we show that we believe this in our hearts and how should we confess this with our mouths unless we repent and be baptized?

The way that you are welcomed into the family of those who likewise have believed and confessed these things, those who have repented and been baptized.

baptized. And Paul says this as well. In fact, just in, you know, in the start of Corinthians in chapter 1, just a few lines down, Paul begins to say, I'm glad that I didn't baptize most of you.

[29 : 40] I'm glad that you don't think your baptism is something to do with me. Your baptism is baptism into Christ. Christ. And so, Paul goes on to say in Corinthians 12, 1 Corinthians 12, just as the one, the body is one, he's talking about the people, just as the body is one and has many members, all the members of the body, though many are one body, so it is with Christ.

For in one spirit, we were all baptized into one body. Jews or Greeks, slaves or free, whoever you are, wherever you're coming from, whatever your background, we were all baptized into one body and one spirit and all made to drink of one spirit.

That's just another way of Paul saying what he said in chapter 1. We are called to be saints together. And now he says, you are a body. If you want to think about yourself in a particular way, just think of the human body.

The human body is made up of many parts, but it's one body. Christians are as united together, whether you feel it or not.

Christians are as united together as limbs are with the body. And so here's a thought, here's a thought that is quite challenging.

[31 : 07] It is as unnatural and detrimental to a Christian to be separate from the church as it is for a limb to be separate from the body.

Isn't that obvious when we consider what it would be like for a limb if it was cut off? And so as a Christian, it's as unnatural and detrimental to a Christian to be separate from the people that they belong to.

Where are the Christians? Where's my people? Where's my family? It is as unnatural and detrimental to be separate from that as it is for a limb to be separate from the body. Or think of it this way, what would the body feel like without one of its limbs?

What would the limb feel like without the body? So Paul, who uses the body member language in chapter 12, uses it to show what the church of God really is and how it functions together.

There were some people who fit the description of a Christian in Corinth, yet somehow they were made to feel like they didn't belong in the body. How can that be?

[32 : 20] And so Paul says, if the ear should say, because I'm not an eye, I know I'm not an eye. Because I'm not an eye, I don't belong to the body. Paul says that wouldn't actually make it any less a part of the body.

And then he says, well, you know, the eye is good, but if the whole body were an eye, where would be the sense of hearing? And so if you fit that description this morning of believing in your heart and confessing with your mouth, if you fit that description of what it is to confess that Jesus is Lord, if you're a Christian and you're sitting there thinking, I don't know if I belong here, just because you think that doesn't mean you don't.

If you think, I don't know what I've got to offer here, I'm a body part that's insignificant, I feel like an appendix. It doesn't make you any less a part of the body.

Isn't that good news? Isn't that encouraging for those of us who feel weak, who struggle, who maybe don't feel like we have a place, who maybe feel like we don't offer much?

We feel like we could be easily dispensable? This is what Paul has to say, because there were some people who were treating others like they were not needed in the body, and so Paul says, well, the eye cannot say to the hand, I've got no need of you, nor can the head to the feet, I have no need of you.

[33 : 47] On the contrary, the parts of the body that seem to be weaker are indispensable. Now, let me ask you, wherever you are today, in the body, do you feel weak?

Paul says, if you feel like one of the weaker parts, you're actually indispensable. Okay, even if sometimes you're not treated that way, even if sometimes you don't feel that way, you are indispensable.

And then Paul goes on to say, and on those parts of the body that we think less honorable, we actually bestow the greater honor. And our unpresentable parts are treated with greater modesty, which our more presentable parts do not require.

Now, think of that with, like, he's talking about the human body. Now, we've got parts of our human body that are unpresentable, don't we? And yet, on them we bestow the greater modesty.

But let me ask this, when Paul's using this, he's saying, who are the people in the church who are less presentable? Who are the people in the church that we just, if we were doing an open day or if we were doing a photo, that we would think, yeah, we don't want, they're not so presentable.

[35 : 12] We don't want them in the front because it might put people off. Do we treat them with greater modesty and honor? Because Paul is saying, actually, God has so composed the body, giving greater honor to the part that lacked it, so that there may be no divisions in the body.

Isn't that wonderful? That the members may have the same care for one another. That's wonderful. The parts of the body that we hide, people in the church that we would like to hide from the people we evangelize.

Yeah, God has so composed the body, given greater honor to the part that lacked it. I wonder who are the people in the church that we would deem unpresentable. I wonder who are the people in the church that we would deem the weaker parts.

And I wonder how we treat them. Do we treat them with greater honor and greater modesty? Do you feel indispensable?

Do you feel dispensable? Lord, help us to see the church as you see it. Lord, help us to see the way that you see.

[36 : 33] Help us to see others the way that we should see them, the way that you see them. Lord, help us to see those who don't know you, to see you and believe in their hearts that you are Lord.

Lord, help those who do believe. Help us to be saints together with all those who call upon you. Help those who find it hard to be saints together and who hold the church at arm's length.

Lord, help us to be saints together with the rest. And help those who find it hard to accept those who are different. Help us. And so, let me leave you with just a challenge, really.

My challenge is that wherever you are on this, whatever your experience, for the sake of reflecting on these things, let us just try for a moment, and again, I'm not saying these things are unimportant, but let's try to remove things that might cloud how we see things.

Help us to remove the experiences that we've had that might cloud things. Help us to just set aside for a moment certain traditions and certain experiences and certain hurts from the past and certain imperfections in the church.

[37 : 48] Help us to set them aside and just help us to see the picture that the Bible paints. Now, of course, we do this imperfectly. Every church does.

Every human does. But let us try to see the church of God, not the church of our own making. Because we didn't bring this church into existence.

Jesus did. We didn't bring our own faith into existence. How can a dead person make themselves alive? How can a baby make themselves born?

We didn't give ourselves this new life, and we didn't make this church ourselves. This is the doing of Jesus. This is the Lord's doing. It's not our church either.

This church isn't our church. It belongs to Jesus. And if you're part of this church, it is because of Jesus that you are part of it. And you may be part of a church organization without actually being part of the church of God.

[38 : 54] It's something serious and sobering to think about. On the other hand, you may believe that Jesus is Lord, yet not view the church like he does. And so you try to keep at a distance.

Put your call to be saints together. And so my challenge, just as we leave, is to think about where we are on this. And I would like to ask, if you are not a Christian, then why?

What is stopping you? What is stopping you from seeing this? Do you want to read the Bible with someone? What can we do to help? And if you are not baptized, then I'd like to ask, why?

What is preventing you from being baptized? What is preventing you from obeying our Lord Jesus? And if you are baptized, but you hold the church of God at an arm's length, at a distance, then why?

I know we're imperfect. I know we're messy. If you're not committed to being a part of the family in a church of God in any given place, why?

[40 : 02] What is preventing you? Come and talk to us. How can we help? If we cannot be saints together, as Paul says, then we will not function well as the body should.

And I think this is why he started the letter that way, because we need to be reminded of who we are. They were struggling to be what they were called to be, because they were getting distracted by many things, and losing sight of how they were supposed to view one another in Christ, and how we're supposed to view one another collectively as the church of God.

And so let us try to see each other as Jesus does. Amen. Let me pray. Oh, Lord, help us with our many imperfections.

First and foremost, Lord, help us to see who you are. Only by seeing who you are will any of this make sense. Only by seeing who you are will we have any hope in life or death.

And if we see who you are, Lord, help us to see who we are in you. Help us to honour you and praise you, both in how we acknowledge you and how we treat one another.

[41 : 23] Let us serve one another and serve you in a manner worthy of the gospel to which we were called. Help us do that for your glory, for the sake of your name.

Amen. Amen.