

1 Corinthians 1:1-2:5

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Preacher: David Helm

- [0 : 00] Good morning. Welcome to the new year and in particular the reconvening of this Holy Communion service.
- We have been off for three weeks and today begin afresh. And we have set ourselves in this year and within this service to study Paul's letter to the church at Corinth.
- And we have worked our way in the fall through a series of five messages that got us to the conclusion of chapter 2 and verse 5.
- Before going on to chapter 2 verse 6 and following, we thought it would be wise to take one week to give ourselves to a review, as it were, to the letter that we would situate ourselves rightly for the year.
- And so the comments today are more inclusive of chapter 1, 1 through 2, 5. And therefore they are to help our understanding of the whole that we might apply it to our hearts in part.
- [1 : 17] And so to that end, we look at the letter this morning. Chapter 1, verse 1 through verse 9, I'd like to simply call Paul's commendation to the church.
- He commends the church. And in a sense, we learn right from the beginning that he has confidence in the church at Corinth.
- This commendation is set forth in three ways. Verse 2, he writes to those who are sanctified in Christ Jesus.
- Something that has already occurred. It carries with it this sense of completed action in the past. We normally think of sanctification as that which we are working out in the present.
- But in Christ, the church at Corinth is called sanctified. Done. Set apart for God. What a wonderful commendation to the church.
- [2 : 26] You could almost think of it as having that force that what Christ has done in the past has completely set them apart in all ways.
- But not only the past, this commendation of the church at Corinth involves the present. Chapter 1 and verse 4, I give thanks to my God always for you because of the grace that God was given you in Christ, that in every way you were enriched in Him in all speech and all knowledge.
- Commendation to the church at Corinth involves all the things they had. God had graced them, gifted them. They were a church loaded with spiritual gifts.
- The commendation also goes to the future. Verse 8, he's confident that God 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. What a great reminder for us. Just as he commends this church that at the time of writing was probably in the neighborhood of four years old.
- [3 : 38] He speaks with this comprehensive trust in the work of God in their midst. Set apart in Christ.
- All things accomplished for you. Enriched in Christ. All spiritual gifts working within you.

And then a promise of being sustained all the way into the end. As we begin a new year, what a wonderful way to think that the Lord Jesus Christ in all of His work will sustain His church.

Guiltless in the day of our Lord Jesus Christ. But here's this church at Corinth about whom Paul was capable of expressing this great confidence. These words of commendation.

He is also able to express to them a concern. Verse 10, really carrying all the way through verse 17.

[4 : 42] 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 of the same judgment.

The commendation gives way to a concern. And in the concern we see the very aim for which this letter was written. Verse 10 summarizes it all.

It is the purpose for which Paul picked up his pen. He wanted agreement. He wanted a lack of division.

He wanted a united mind and a united judgment. This was his concern for the church.

What was it based on? Well, if he's asking them to have a united mind and the same judgment, then the concern was that they were of a differing mind and a differing judgment.

[5 : 48] They were beginning to think and make judgments on values that were laden in the standards of the world rather than the wisdom of God.

The church was returning to the ways of the world, both in what it thought and what it deduced from such thinking.

They had taken on the values of Corinth rather than Christ. This, too, is a concern for the church today and in every day, that we would begin to think and judge according to the standards of the world.

To put it in one simple word, power. A misunderstanding of the ultimate values of the world.

The world has always wanted what God alone truly possesses. All power, all knowledge. Think back to the fall in the garden.

[7 : 02] The temptation to, in a sense, take within themselves all that embodied what would give life. The power of all of that and the knowledge of what would be good and evil.

The very first temptation was to become like God. To possess the power of God and the knowledge of God. And so, too, in Corinth, the concern of Paul is that they had begun to have this way of thinking return into play.

Which leads, then, to his corrective. The corrective of Paul is to put forward a different way of thinking. A different value system in place.

And that he clearly lays out in verses 17 and 18 by way of summary. 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.

For the word of the cross is folly to those who are perishing. But to us who are being saved, it is the power of God. So, Paul puts forward, by way of argument, the way God works in the world.

[8 : 25] Through Christ and the power of the cross. As the corrective to their seeking their own power and their own wisdom.

I can't think of a time in history other than the Roman Empire where those embedded ideals of power and knowledge came to fore.

With its rule over the entire world. And even its senatorial provision for the way in which things would be judged and what was wise or not.

And a way of life. And here is this beginning church entrapped in a world that seeks its own way, its own power, its own influence, its own wisdom.

And he says, look, you're beginning to think exactly like they are. And the corrective, of course, is to remember how God works in the world. His power. His wisdom.

[9 : 27] Which is the cross. Did you notice the emphasis on power in the first couple of chapters? There it is at the end of verse 17. He doesn't want the cross of Christ to be emptied of power.

There it is at the end of verse 18. The cross is actually the power of God. There we find it in the midst of verse 26.

Not many of you were powerful or of noble birth. You find it again at the end of chapter 2, verse 5. So that your faith might rest not in the wisdom of men, but in the power of God.

That's how far we've seen it and it will continue to be seen. He unfolds an argument uplifting God's power in the cross. Which would govern our mind and our values.

And so he lays it out. This commendation to the church. This concern for the church. A corrective to the church.

[10 : 35] And notice the corrective. He indicates in chapter 1, verse 19. That the scriptures themselves predicted God would work in this way. I will destroy the wisdom of the wise.

And the discernment of the discerning I will thwart. He says, look, you should have known this. The scriptures predict this. God does not work the way you work. Not only do the scriptures predict it.

But the fact that you, Corinthians, were converted actually proves it. Look at chapter 1, verse 26. For consider your calling, brothers. Not many of you were wise according to worldly standards.

Not many powerful. Not many of noble birth. But God chose what is foolish in the world to shame the wise. The scriptures predict this is the way God works. Through weakness and through the cross.

Your conversion proves it. So why would you begin to think and judge differently? And my manner of coming provides confirmation of it.

[11 : 37] That's really what the reading was today. Chapter 2, verses 1 to 5. Not only does your conversion prove it. But when I came to you, brothers. I did not come proclaiming to you the testimony of God with lofty speech or wisdom.

For I decided to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ and Him crucified. And I was with you in weakness. My manner of coming provides confirmation of the way God works.

And so as the year begins, for you and for me, do we have the mind of Christ? Or the spirit of the age?

Are our values laden with the Chicago way? Or the power of the cross?

Will we embrace a message of weakness? Or will we want a message that elevates us to a position of strength?

[12 : 42] Our maturity depends on the way in which we work it out. And the table would commend to us the only way forward for the church.

Our Heavenly Father, we thank you for this letter. And we pray that as we come to understand it through this year, you would apply its truths to our life individually and collectively.

That we would not be drawn away to the spirit of the age, but walk forward in weakness, always embracing what you have done.

We pray this in Christ's name. Amen.