

You're A Saint

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[0 : 00] Well, good morning. My name is Ray Sweet from First Christian Church in Greensburg, Indiana. You can check us out at our website, FCCGreensburg.com or FCC Greensburg Facebook page.

But thank you so much for tuning in today to this audio broadcast. And we just pray that God will take his word and use it in our lives as he molds and shapes us more and more into the image of Christ every day.

Now, won't you join me as we just pray and ask God to bless the preaching of his word today? Heavenly Father, I just pray that as your word is spoken, that you will speak right into our hearts. We give you permission right now to have your way, to speak into our hearts and to draw us closer to you. Thank you for these words of encouragement that we need, these words of conviction that we need.

And this training that you are doing right now in each of our hearts. And we pray all of this in the precious name of Jesus Christ. Amen. Fighting, sexual immorality, drunkenness, anger, power struggles, grumbling, selfishness, adultery, neglect, excuses for all of it.

[1 : 22] You might think I'm describing a new movie that just came out or a thrilling mystery novel, even just the world around us. But sadly, I'm not. Those are all the words that accurately describe a church that the Apostle Paul wrote to in the city of Corinth.

Now, I want to welcome you here to this brand new series starting today called The Power of Unity. We'll be in 1 Corinthians for the next three months, all the way up until our Christmas series.

So you can go ahead and start to turn towards 1 Corinthians. And throughout this series, we're going to hit key passages in this book that will show us the power of unity in Christ's church as we walk in wisdom and holiness, as we seek to look different than the world around us.

Now, speaking of disappointing behavior in the church, I can't help but to go back several years to a sanctuary where I experienced something that literally made my heart ache.

As you know, different churches do things differently. This particular church had an annual meeting where members gathered and discussed the last year. And while that's not a bad idea in theory, there's a human component there that you have to consider.

[2 : 35] And I'll never forget the complaining, the verbal fights that included yelling, and just the spirit of disunity that filled that church.

I was way too green to know in the moment how to lead well through that kind of conflict. But I do remember the ripple effect that that meeting caused. Mind you, this wasn't a stagnant church.

In fact, the church had tripled in size with more people than it had ever had in its 180-year history. People were coming to know Christ and being baptized. The Lord was working in incredible ways. And yet, Satan didn't like it. And he was coming like that roaring lion looking to steal, kill, and destroy the bride of Christ. And sadly, people who love the church, people who are covered by the grace of God, allowed themselves to get caught up in it, including myself.

I once heard our former pastor here at FCC, Danny Wolford, say the church would be a great place to work if it weren't for people. Of course, Danny was joking.

[3 : 41] If you know his heart for people, it was tremendous. But some of the best jokes I've ever heard have a tinge of truth to them. And the reality is that we're human. And if we don't stay close to Christ through his word, through prayer, through seeking his heart, through accountability with other believers, that's when that stubborn flesh likes to pay a visit.

And there's not one of us who can't look a lot like this Corinthian church that we're going to spend some time talking about. So here's the heart behind this series.

Our leadership's deepest desire is to see the Lord have his will and his way done with this body of believers. We love the growth that we've been experiencing.

But if it's not enveloped by being biblically healthy, then it's counterfeit. If we're not mission-driven to love God, love people, and make disciples, then we've missed the boat.

And if we, like the Corinthian church, are constantly fighting and grumbling against one another, then the world will see that and not want a whole lot to do with this Jesus stuff.

[4 : 48] Now, this is the perfect time to say how proud I am of First Christian Church of Greensburg. Yeah, we're not perfect by any means, starting with me, the lead pastor.

But I'm thankful for the spirit of unity that we have here when we gather. I'm thankful for the excitement I see in our church family when lives are being changed for Christ. And I experienced that a couple weeks ago when Bethany and I baptized our oldest and how our church showed up to support him in that time.

So this series is not your pastors trying to say, hey, we are missing the boat. This is your leadership saying how proud we are of our church's unity and heart for unity.

And yet we know Satan is always trying to get a foot in the door of the church. So we're going to talk about what a healthy, God-honoring church with a heart of unity really looks like.

And with this being week one, I want to make sure we understand some context to this letter. So I wish, with this being an audio broadcast, I wish I could show you the map that we will show in church.

[5 : 57] But if you look at Paul's second missionary journey, this is when he planted the church in Corinth. And that city is actually in what is present-day Greece.

And while Corinth is still there, it is a very small town with very little influence now. But it used to be a bustling city of influence in the first century.

It was also the home of the famous temple devoted to Aphrodite, the false goddess of love, or more accurately, the goddess of sex. Their religion was basically an excuse for all kinds of sexual immorality, which included prostitution.

Now that's a pretty good description of the city of Corinth. In fact, there was a saying to describe behavior like moral corruption, gross immorality, drunken debauchery.

You would say you're behaving like a Corinthian. And in different plays that were done in that era, those from Corinth were almost always portrayed as the drunkards.

[7 : 01] And if we look at Acts chapters 16 through 18, we see that Paul spends a year and a half alongside Aquila and Priscilla, getting this church off the ground, even in the face of opposition.

He eventually left to continue his work elsewhere. Apollos then came in to minister as their pastor. And now Paul is hearing some not-so-good stuff that is coming back to him about the church.

And he loves her enough to speak truth into the lies. So, if you're not already there, go ahead and turn to 1 Corinthians. If you're kind of new to flipping open your Bible, it's okay.

You've got to start somewhere. So if you go about two-thirds of the way through your Bible, you'll come to the New Testament. That's Jesus' life through the early church. And the first four books, Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John are the Gospels.

Then you come to Acts. Then Romans. And then you find 1 and 2 Corinthians. So, seventh book of the New Testament, 1 Corinthians. And I've got to tell you that I'm amazed at the wisdom from God that Paul shows here, as he knows he's taken this church to the woodshed, okay?

[8 : 13] He knows he's got to bring up some hard truths amidst their moral failures. See, one of the hardest things about being a leader in a church is not getting up to speak.

It's not necessarily being on call 24-7. The hardest thing for most leaders is when you have a tough conversation to make sure you're keeping the church healthy.

That's the hardest thing to do. And yet, Paul starts this letter to a church that is an absolute train wreck, awful example to the world. And he still shows them a tremendous amount of grace, reminding them of who they are in Christ.

And so, let's start here in 1 Corinthians 1 and verse 1. It says, Paul called to be an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God and our brother Sosthenes to the church of God in Corinth.

Now, let me stop right there for a second. So, in our culture, when we write a letter, we put who it's from at the bottom. I've always thought that was backwards. And so, actually, in the first century, they did the opposite.

[9 : 19] And so, Paul starts off introducing himself, who he is as an apostle, his authority in Christ. Even introduces a brother named Sosthenes who most likely dictated this letter because we know Paul had some sight issues, okay?

And so, he's either dictating this letter or just a brother in Christ there with Paul. And he's writing to the church of God in Corinth. And here's what he says, 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.

Grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Now, some of us are very quick to jump over these greetings at the start of letters as just kind of standard procedure. But make sure you don't do that. There's some meat here that we need to talk about as Paul shares some reminders with us today. And so, if you have the YouVersion, Y-O-U version Bible app on your phone, on your tablet, you can always go to the menu, go to events, go to First Christian Church of Greensburg, and you can see our outline that way.

But I want to share some reminders with you today from the Lord. And here's the first one. Remember, you're a saint. Remember, you're a saint.

[10 : 42] Now, right now, some of you might be like, Ray, what have you been drinking, man? We're just normal people. I ain't no saint. Ask my wife. She'll tell you. But that's the thing. I know here in southeastern Indiana, we're immersed in a culture that is very Catholic.

And while I'm not here to bash on Catholics, I think it's fair to say that our understanding of the word saint is often understood from a Catholic perspective. And we think of the Apostle Paul, or we think of Mary, the mother of Jesus, who both have received their sainthood in the Catholic Church.

And listen, I admire and I look up to the Apostle Paul to marry the mother of Jesus, who in God's word both were ordinary people just like us that God called to an extraordinary faith in him. And he actually used their obedience in wonderful ways to shine Christ into this world. And I want to learn everything I can from their examples. But I also can't forget that it was all God working through broken vessels who needed his grace and his power just as badly as we do.

But that view of saint that we often have in our minds that is not what we see in Scripture. That view of a superhero of the faith that we feel we could never attain is not how the New Testament Greek word for saint, which is hagios, that's not how it's defined.

[12 : 04] It literally means one who is set apart or one who is holy. And the reason I'm talking about this is because Paul uses this word in verse 2, where the NIV just kind of defines the word and says called to be his holy people.

Some other great translations use the word saint, where the NIV just kind of defines it. Okay, so Paul comes to this church that is really jacked up.

And my story that I started off with earlier about a dysfunctional meeting doesn't begin to compare to the church in Corinth. But Paul could have started with, okay, this is who I am.

This is the authority given me by Christ. And this is what you're doing. You're acting like Corinthians. So knock it off, you knuckleheads. But listen, that's not what the Holy Spirit inspired Paul to do, okay?

Instead, he starts off with a warm greeting, a gentle reminder of who he is as their overseer. And then he reminds them of who they are in Christ.

[13 : 06] He says to them and to us, if you're a believer, you are a saint. You are called to be holy. You are called to be set apart from the world because you have Christ in you, the Holy Spirit living in you.

Because you have been set free from your sins by the blood of Jesus Christ and now have the promise of eternal life in him, which is greater than we can imagine.

He even goes on to say his normal greeting, grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. In other words, yes, you're not perfect and you have your struggles, but you are a saint covered by the grace of God through your faith in him.

And when you choose to walk in that grace, peace always follows. So hear me. You're not that mistake you once made if you're in Christ.

You're not that adultery or that divorce or that sexual promiscuity. You're not that anger or rage you feel. You're not that alcoholic or drug addict. You're not that gossip or complainer.

[14 : 13] You're not that critical spirit or that absent parent. But you are more than conquerors through Christ. Yeah, that stuff's got to die. But you are more than conquerors.

If you belong to Jesus, he tells us you are loved, forgiven, adopted, made new, blessed and victorious. And I don't know about you, but the Lord has given me some amazing mentors in my life who didn't come in to hit me over the head with a hammer.

My dear friend, Steve Abernathy, who now has gone to be with Jesus. When he met, when we met, he had been a minister for 30 plus years in his 60s.

And he was talking to me in my mid to late 20s about the intricacies of ministry and how to just honor God. And I'm sure he could have seen all the immaturities in my ways of thinking.

I'm sure he could see that that fire in my belly often got me into trouble. And I'm sure he could see that I had a ton to learn. But he never raked me over the coals.

[15 : 15] He simply spoke gently and reminded me often of who I was in Christ. Reminded me often of all that God could do through me if I was sold out.

And that's what Paul does here. He hears what's being said about this church. And he's not going to sweep it under the rug or avoid confrontation. But he is going to show grace and love and remind them of who they are in Christ.

Because that kind of gentleness has a way of waking us up to our pride, our arrogance, our selfishness, and our spiritual laziness that are often behind disunity and ungodly behavior.

And I love how Galatians 2.20 speaks truth into our hearts when it says, I have been crucified with Christ. And I no longer live, but Christ lives in me.

And Paul's heart in reminding them of who they are in Christ is allowing the Holy Spirit to convict their hearts to grace, which should be all the motivation that we need to live like Christ.

[16 : 20] Knowing that we are bound for hell apart from the saving grace of Jesus should change us and call us to be that saint, to be holy as he is holy.

Now, remember, you're a saint. And Paul starts off with this with their position in Christ, which should always call us, because of God's amazing grace over our lives, should always call us to seek holiness in him.

And then here's your second reminder. Remember, you have a purpose in Christ. Now, later in the book, there are actually three chapters devoted to correcting some of their improper uses of spiritual gifts.

But there's no question that this church has been given spiritual gifts to be used for the Lord. He has a great purpose for them to shine Jesus into a place of incredible darkness.

And while I don't think the U.S. is as dark as Corinth was yet, we are trying to give them a run for their money. So let's head back here to 1 Corinthians 1, verse 4.

[17 : 29] And let's read a few verses here. Paul says, He says, So Paul starts off reminding them that they're saints set apart for the Lord.

Now, he reminds them now that their spiritual gifts they've been given through the Holy Spirit, just how important that is. In other words, we have a purpose in this life that is so much bigger than just running the rat race, Monday through Friday, before enjoying the short weekend, before enjoying the short weekend, and then doing it all over again.

There's more to life than that. We get to partner with the King of Kings for the greatest purpose on this earth, as we follow His leading, using our gifts to tell others about the amazing love of God.

You know, the gifted author Max Lucado put it like this. He said, He said, In other words, Now, I'll never forget a conversation with our youth minister that we had when we were in Tennessee.

He was a pretty dynamic personality with an amazing testimony of what God had done in his life. He had more talent in his pinky finger than I did in my whole body. In fact, he's now a minister on staff at the fifth largest church in America called Christ Church of the Valley in Phoenix, about 35,000 people over 17 campuses.

[19 : 48] And he's serving the Lord faithfully on that staff. And while he was just a few years younger than me, I had a decade of ministry experience and he was new to ministry.

And one day he was a little bummed that he wasn't connecting well with a certain couple in the church. My family happened to be very close with this godly couple. And I remember saying to him, Listen, I know we want to connect with everyone and that's a wonderful heart to have.

But the reality is that you might connect with a couple that I don't connect with and vice versa. We're just all wired differently. And I reminded him while I was close with this one couple, he was close to another couple in the church that I had a harder time relating to.

And that's just the cool thing about the church. We aren't meant to be a one-man show where everyone brings their popcorn to watch the pastor do his thing. That's a very American idea. That is a very American and false mentality, okay?

We are a team with every one of us using our gifts for the glory of God, filling in where others may lack. And you know what? When it comes to our staff, I actually rejoice when our church family connects with Pastor Steve or Tyler or Mitch.

[21 : 02] Or when you have a great relationship with Lynn or Amy or Jude. Because it takes all of us using our gifts, realizing we have a purpose in the church.

And what an incredible reminder from Paul. Could you imagine being a church member in Corinth who's guilty of some things that Paul is about ready to expose in this letter? Could you imagine the shame and embarrassment Satan had probably already poured onto them?

Maybe they kept Apollos, their pastor, at arm's length. Maybe they only came a few times a year and got out quickly before any deeper conversations happened.

And here you are in your guilt when the Apostle Paul writes you a letter. And instead of an instant butt-whooping, he starts off by reminding you of your amazing position in Christ and even your purpose in the church.

Wow. That may just wake you up because here comes the boom. And let me just say, while no one enjoys having tough conversations, every healthy, God-honoring church I've ever seen deals with conflicts so the church can be biblical and healthy.

[22 : 12] Here's the last reminder here. Remember, you need to choose unity. You need to choose unity. I'll never forget back in probably 2014, 2015-ish, our oldest was a toddler.

And Bethany had gone from a third-grade teacher to a stay-at-home mom. The only problem was we lost her income. So we needed a little bit of income just to survive. So she started babysitting for two little girls who went to our church.

Parents were friends of ours. And I don't remember all the details now, but we kind of had a policy that said if you cancel the kids coming without a certain amount of notice, you still had to pay your daily rate.

That's, you know, pretty common among babysitters. That's how they pay their bills. So for whatever reason, the girls didn't come one day. And when we got our weekly check, they didn't pay for that day.

And we thought they probably should have. And Bethany and I were sitting in Joes' room while he's playing. And I'm not proud of this, but I'm just ranting. I mean, it's just Bethany and I and baby Joes.

[23 : 17] And I'm just ranting to Bethany, making it probably a bigger deal than it needed to be. And guess what? We look over, and Joes has one of our phones.

And he has randomly, we didn't know this until we looked at it, he had randomly called the mom of the girls that we babysat for. And I don't remember if it went to her voicemail or if she answered it and just heard me talking, but she heard me just ranting about them.

And I felt this big, okay? And I'm showing a very small measurement right now. I felt this big. I felt terrible. And it caused some friction in our friendship.

But I'll never forget the awkwardness of when her husband came to get the girls that next day or whatever. And he just looked at me and said, Ray, I love you.

Everything is good. Your friendship is more important than money. Here's the extra money. We're sorry we did that. And he gave me a hug. And it was one of those moments where my heart had been humbled.

[24 : 20] It could have been so much simpler than me just fuming and ranting. And it was just, my heart was so humbled. And it was one of those moments where I'm like, no, I don't want the money anymore.

And he's like, I don't care. You're going to take it. And I'm like, no. And he's like, yeah, you know, it's one of those. But you know what? He showed me a tremendous amount of grace when I didn't deserve it and taught me a big lesson.

Now, look at Paul's words in 1 Corinthians 1, 10 and 11. He says, I appeal to you, brothers and sisters, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that all of you agree with one another in what you say and that there be no divisions among you, but that you be perfectly united in mind and thought.

My brothers and sisters, some from Chloe's household, have informed me that there are quarrels among you. Now, we're going to stop right there because the next part of the passage is covered in

greater detail in chapter 3.

But Paul isn't saying that we choose unity, that we sweep things under the rug, instead of having correct biblical doctrine. That doesn't happen.

[25 : 22] He's simply saying that we should always have hearts that are centered, yes, in the truth of God's word, and that's where we unite as believers. But we must also have that attitude of humility and graciousness towards each other, that heart of servanthood, where I choose to put you above myself and you choose to put me above yourself.

That wisdom from Christ that can recognize what hills are worth dying on and which ones aren't. And I love how simply Psalm 133.1 puts this.

It says, How good and pleasant is it when God's people live together in unity? Key word today, hagios. That means saint. That means set apart ones.

That means holy ones. And that title isn't because of our good deeds, that we somehow have earned it, but simply because of the grace and mercy that Christ has shown us on the cross and by the empty tomb.

And today, Paul pleads with the church in 2023, just the same as he did in his day. He says, Remember, church, you are a saint. You have a purpose in Christ and you need to choose unity.

[26 : 38] Amen? All right, guys, I'm excited about this series. Let's go ahead and pray. Heavenly Father, thank you so much for these words of life that you have spoken over us today.

Thank you for just how you have a way of not sweeping things under the rug, but still dealing with us with grace and compassion.

And Father, I'm so thankful for the grace and compassion that you have shown us on the cross. I'm so thankful for what Jesus did to pay the price that we should have to pay, but he paid the price so that we wouldn't have to pay it in eternal punishment.

Thank you so much for that grace and that mercy that you have shown. And may we be a people who strive to live out of our position in Christ, out of that grace.

May we be a people of compassion, of unity, and a people who live out our faith every day in you. So Father, thank you for these words of life.

[27 : 42] Stir them in our hearts and cause us to look more like Jesus than we did at the beginning of this message. We love you, Christ. We pray all of this in your precious and your holy name.

Amen and Amen. Hey, let me give you just this quick invitation. Once again, my name is Ray Sweet. I'm the lead pastor at First Christian Church of Greensburg, Indiana.

You can always go to FCCGreensburg.com and check us out. Our messages are always on there as well as FCC Greensburg Facebook page. But hey, if you have listened to this today and you just need to talk about your faith, you have questions, you want to talk about giving your heart to the Lord, we would love to just walk you through what God's Word teaches.

It's not about FCC and our opinions. It's all about what does the Word of God teach in context. And so we would love to be that for you so you can reach out to us in a couple different ways.

First Christian Church of Greensburg, you can call 812-663-8488, 663-8488, or you can email me at rayatfccgreensburg.com.

[28 : 49] Hey, we're so thankful that you listened today. Pray that God uses it in your life, and we hope that you have a great week.