

"To The Church Of God..."

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[0:00] Good morning, Holy Trinity. We are starting a new series, a sermon series today, which will carry us considerably through this year and into next year.

! We will take breaks along the way during Christmas and Easter and some important church year events.

But the book we are taking up, that we will be taking up, is Paul's first letter to the church in Corinth. I wonder if you might all take up the challenge of reading through this book of the Bible as we go along in our series.

At least read it once. I encourage you to read it more than once, but at least try to read through 1 Corinthians once as we go. So your mind and heart may be fertile and ready soil for the work of the Holy Spirit during the preaching of God's Word.

I invite you now to open your Bible to 1 Corinthians chapter 1. It's on page 1213 in the Pew Bible.

[1:20] And before we begin, let us go to God in prayer. O Lord our God, whose dominion is incomparable and glory incomprehensible, whose mercy is immeasurable and love for mankind ineffable, look upon us and upon this Holy Church in your loving kindness and grant to us your abundant mercy and compassion.

Be with us to enlighten our minds by the Holy Spirit and by your mighty power bring us into the way of your truth. Comfort us, correct and strengthen us and mold us into Christlikeness through the study of this book.

Lord, use the preaching of your Word and our faithful hearing of it to build us into a church we fully trust in and is shaped and shapes our lives by the Gospel concerning Christ and Him crucified.

We ask, Lord, that you would destroy and bring to nothing the schemes of Satan in our midst. All this we ask in the name and for the sake of Jesus Christ our Lord.

Amen. Let's look with me in Paul's epistle to the Corinthians.

[3:04] Paul begins the letter with the customary greeting of his day. When one writes a letter in the time of Paul it starts with the name of the writer the person or the people the letter is addressed to and a greeting followed by thanksgiving or praiseworthy note about the people that you're writing to.

But for Paul even the customary is bathed in the Gospel a Gospel a Gospel that is focused on Christian truth.

So Paul begins Paul called by the will of God to be an apostle of Christ Jesus and our brother Sustenys. Paul is an apostle of Christ Jesus not by ambition or popularity or human appointment or human appointment but by God's will.

Paul here is setting the marker from his first words to the church in Corinth about his authority as an apostle. And he's saying to them that the authority is not derived from any human counsel but from God.

He is also being an example to them that despite his position in the church it is by God's gracious calling and by God's gracious will not by any special attribute that he possesses.

[4:46] He will later tell the Corinthians that it is that same divine will that has called them the Corinthian church to be an ecclesia to be a gathering an assembly of God's chosen people.

So he says Paul called by the will of God to be an apostle of Christ Jesus to the church of God that is in Corinth. To the church of God that is in Corinth.

That statement to the church of God that is in Corinth that there should be that there should be a church at all in a place like Corinth.

That the gospel should make inroads in a place like Corinth is a miracle in and of itself. I want to quickly just pause here and say perhaps you have given up hope that gospel ministry can prosper

in Syracuse, New York.

I want to tell you that if the church of God can exist in a city like Corinth there's hope for Syracuse, New York. It might help us to understand this, in understanding this letter better if we first pause and take a few moments to examine this first century city.

[6:10] to understand its setting and its culture and I think if we do so it will give us a better context for understanding this epistle and the church that resides in the city.

Corinth was a burgeoning city. It was a commercial powerhouse due to its prime location at the center of Mediterranean trade.

the city was located on an isthmus. If you remember your geography an isthmus is a narrow strip of land with sea on either side of it which links to larger areas of land and divides to bodies of water.

If you just for a moment observe the bulletin cover you'll see a helpful picture of the city and why it's a prime commercial real estate in the world of sea and land trades.

Corinth links northern Greece Ikaia with southern Greece the Peloponnese and in that time trade ships will land in that little isthmus where Corinth is located which has two bustling ports and the ships will be rolled on rollers across it's only about four miles across so the ships will be rolled on those rollers from one sea to another from the Gulf of surrounding Gulf to the Gulf of Corinth or vice versa two-way traffic the ships will be rolled and it's done this way because it was safer to do this than to take your ship around the treacherous Cape of Malia where ships often will be shipwrecked and the seas are often turbulent!

[8:12] So Corinth is a prime location for trade and apart from the sea trade that it enjoys the city was also blessed with natural resources natural resources that made it a manufacturing hub it has limitless fresh water supply from the Pyrene fountains it had quarries of limestones for construction of buildings and roads the city hosted the famous Isthmian games these games were second only in fame and importance to the ancient Olympic games and I think they hosted it every three years so you can imagine it's already a busy and bustling city but at the times of the Isthmian games it will even be more crowded as people come to compete and to do trade with the crowds that come to observe the games so a city like this is the prime place to go if you want opportunity and upward mobility

Corinth was a relatively new city it was replanted in 44 BC by Caesar Julius Caesar after it had lied in ashes for a hundred years before that it was destroyed in 144 145 BC a hundred years earlier because they stood against the Roman power so this is a young city by the time Paul comes between 51 and 53 AD the city was only a little over a hundred years old this is a young city in comparison to ancient cities like Athens where Paul is just coming from as he arrived in Corinth so being a young city it had no old aristocracy if you have the money and the power you can have a place in a place like Corinth you can make a name for yourself in a place like

Corinth you can become influential and powerful in a place like Corinth it was a city of self made men it is a city of young or new money as we will say today and all sorts of trade and other activities were on offer in Corinth here was a pluralistic society if there was any temples to Roman gods and Greek gods were all over the city also temples to Egyptian and Parthian eastern gods were around every corner of the city in fact on a hill called the Acro Corinth right outside of the city was a hill called the Acro Corinth about 2,200 meters high on the top of that hill was the temple to Aphrodite of Venus the goddess of love and this temple had its many priestesses who serves as prostitutes so imagine a city like

Corinth powerful where money power and sex were worshipped and the many temples to pagan gods were vehicles towards filling all your carnal needs and desires think San Francisco or Amsterdam with its sexual perversity think Hong Kong in its commercial influence and location think Washington D.C.

in its political influence now combine all these cities and their influences all rolled into one would describe Corinth and what of the church in this city now if you know anything at all about the New Testament if you read through it you know that the church in Corinth was a troubled church she had allowed the values of its wider culture the values of its city to infect her she was preoccupied with competitiveness self promotion self importance and arrogance the church in Corinth thought of herself as self sufficient divisions sexual immorality lack of discipline snobbery all these and more were plaguing the church in

[13:18] Corinth it was a church marked by dysfunction rather than the truth and power of the gospel people and in their arrogance the Corinthian church challenged the authority of God's word

in their rejection of apostle Paul's authority and in their rejection of apostle Paul's teaching so the dysfunction within the church even spilled out to the unbelieving community around them because members of the church were taking each other to court suing each other even within the church in Corinth they gave allowance to a scandalous sin a kind of sin that would have made even the unbelieving people in Corinth bashful they were more concerned with being gifted and showy than in displaying the fruit of the spirit that springs from love for

God and for one another Corinth at least the church there and the city and the church sounds like a 21st century church doesn't it as we look at Corinth we can observe that these problems are not unique to Corinth these problems have been plaguing the churches of Christ since the first century for Paul knowing all these things about the Corinthian church writes to them and begins the letter in the way he does does it puzzle you that Paul will address them these people with all their dysfunction as the church of God as to those sanctified and called to be saints is

Paul lying is this empty flattery from the apostle I don't think so although Paul will later go on to address all the problems amongst them yet he starts his letter with these words I think Paul even in his greetings to them wants to set before them the gospel gospel tones that he hopes will refocus their crooked visions he writes the church of God in Corinth now Paul founded this church if you go to act 18 which I encourage you to do when you get home you will read the account of Paul's ministry in Corinth Paul founded this church in Corinth but he dared not say to my church that I founded in Corinth no he didn't say that it's the church of

God in Corinth he dared not say because he says to the church of God in Corinth with Sustainis our brother Sustainis was an influential member of this church at its founding but Paul didn't write to our church a Sustainis church he dare not say that because Paul knew the church belongs to God and he wants the Corinthians to know that at the outset in order to correct any false pride in them he goes on to call them sanctified in Christ he called them saints that is they are made holy these people these saints these Christians they are made holy in Christ Jesus saints a people set apart for

God's use and God's glory that's who they are Paul isn't by any means saying they're perfect and without sin he knows so well the dysfunction in their midst yet Paul wants to bring their attention to who they've been made into who they've been made to be in Christ he points them to Jesus the one who has accomplished the work of making them holy that's why Paul keeps mentioning in these nine verses Jesus or in Christ Paul mentions Jesus name nine times in these nine verses and all that he says of the Corinthians that is praiseworthy Paul wants them to know all of it is theirs in and because of Jesus Christ!

[18:28] And lest they think they're special or unique in this he quickly added you are saints together with all others who call upon the name of Christ as Lord he is both their Lord and ours now there is nothing you have Paul is telling them there's nothing you have Corinthians that is of your own doing it is God it is God who has called you through the proclamation of the gospel concerning Jesus Christ he called you to himself and that calling was effectual because of Jesus perfect life and atoning death and you Corinthians are not alone in this you are not special you are part of a universal church that spans space and time you are part of a people who belong to the risen Lord and will longingly await his return

Paul ends his salutation with these words of grace to you and peace from God our father and the Lord Jesus Christ Christ now this is a conventional greeting in Paul's day but Paul has Christianized it says grace grace which is God's gift is theirs grace to you as one theologian puts it the sum total of all of God's activity towards human creatures is found in the word grace grace freely given unearned unmerited and it's by this grace they have come to enjoy peace with God the peace here is from the Hebrew word shalom which doesn't just mean absence of conflict but a holy well being and allness and

Paul tells them you are graced by God himself and you have peace you are no longer under its wrath and condemnation grace and peace to you it is from God our Father through our Lord Jesus Christ and Paul is saying to them only those who call on the name of the Lord Jesus Christ by faith can be recipients of this peace with God that comes by grace through Christ this is not a greeting that you can give to anyone but only were named in Christ so Paul identifies even in these at the outset of his letter you are the church of God you are sanctified saints belonging to God and Paul continues in his thanksgiving to them or thanksgiving rather to

God on their behalf and it seems ironic that Paul is thanking God on their behalf for the very things that is causing dysfunction among them if you note that and I hope you will see it as we go further in this first Corinthians Paul begins by thanking God for them I give thanks to my God always for you grace of God that was given to you in Christ Jesus that in every way you were enriched in all speech and knowledge not lacking in any gift that these were the very things the Corinthians church were boasting in they were boasting in their giftedness in prophecy and tongues they were boasting in their self sufficiency yet Paul isn't heaping empty praise on them that's not what he's doing he rather he wants to show them that the one who deserves the praise for all that they have and all the gifts that they enjoy the one who deserves the praise for all of it is

God who has freely bestowed it upon them and so verse 4 he wants to show them that the grounds of their blessedness it's God's grace in Christ Jesus and notice the abundance of God's gifts they're not measly postled out but they're lavishly bestowed in every way you've been enriched in all speech and in all knowledge but the very proof of this grace is through the gospel of Jesus confirmed among you that's what Paul means in verse 6 by testimony the testimony he's referring to is the gospel the testimony Paul means that as he testified to them as he testified to Christ saving work as he preached the message of the cross to them they by

[23:53] God's electing will by God's call and through the power of the Holy Spirit they came to faith and so he's telling them the gifts they now have are not earned because of any inherent worthiness on their part rather they are proof it's I mean the gifts themselves are proof of their faith in Christ Jesus that is when they accepted the testimony about Christ when they believed the gospel when they placed their faith in Christ God poured out his spirit upon them as a guarantee of his blessing the gifts are from God and they are given to them to serve and to edify the church not to pride over the gifts are to be employed to serve one another even as they continue to hope in

Christ and as they continue to eagerly anticipate is coming again the revealing of our Lord Jesus Christ now do you notice Paul's intent here is to ground everything everything about the Christian life in Christ that's his intent he wants to ground their past that is their coming to faith to saving faith in Christ Jesus he wants to ground their present that is their ongoing work the ongoing work of the Holy Spirit among them in apportioning gifts to them and in sustaining them he wants to ground their future that is their hopeful expectation of Jesus Christ glorious return he wants to ground it all in Christ

Jesus in their union with Christ note verse 8 the day of our Lord Jesus Christ that day when the consummation of God's promise to his called ones will be fully ours then on that day we will stand before God as Paul puts it guiltless without shame without condemnation we will stand before the throne of God not because we're innocent but because Christ our Lord has already carried our guilt and condemnation upon himself on the cross and Paul wants us to know he wants the Corinthians also to know that all these is ours in Christ past present and future we have all we need all we need in

Jesus Christ so remember verse 2 when Paul says of the Corinthians when he refers to the Corinthians blessedness what he says of the Corinthians in verse 2 is true of all Christians in every place and every time it is true of all those who call on the name of our Lord Jesus Christ what he says here in all in this greetings and this thanksgiving of the Corinthians is true of every church that calls on the name of Jesus Christ and is found in Christ that means that means this past present and future our blessedness our blessedness here even in the 21st century church in Syracuse New York as the church of the Holy Trinity our blessedness is in Christ and what is true of the first Corinthian church regarding their blessedness is true of us beloved in

Christ we have all we need in Christ none of it has been earned it is the result of God's saving grace and the benefits that flow from that isn't this wonderful think on it you are enriched in Christ you lack nothing in him it is by his grace given to us that it is so and so our thanks is to him the glory is to him the praise is to him consider what difference it will make in our outlook and in our dealings with each other if we remember that all the gifts past present and future that

[29:13] God has given to us is in Christ do you think it will affect our focus and our priority and our interactions and love for one another and for our community out there I think it would if we are to take time to meditate on this truth and I think Paul begins here he begins here in this letter despite all the issues facing the Corinthian church he begins here with them and he wants us to see it as well so that we along with them might be reminded of what is ours in Christ so that we may see that every part of our life together we may see it through gospel lens rather than wordly lens and I want

to invite you as we continue through this book I do hope you will allow

God to minister this gospel truth to you now the danger of this book and I guess it could be of any of the books in the New Testament but perhaps more so of 1st Corinthians or maybe 1st and 2nd Corinthians the danger is to start thinking of those godless others out there who need to hear these things that Paul is saying those liberal churches those godless city dwellers or maybe even that brother or sister in the next pew and in so doing we lose out on what God is saying to us you lose out on what God is saying to you so can I invite you now as we begin here can I invite you to pray not just for them out there but pray for us that we may together sit under God's word now here's the remarkable thing about this letter there are factions and divisions in this church of first Corinth of Corinth there are factions and divisions in this church

Paul knows it full well but Paul doesn't write to the factions he writes to the whole church without spelling out one faction or another he writes the letter to the whole church he writes the letter to the whole body which is the local church and that's also one thing I want us to see as we read this letter this is a letter to a local church and I pray that we as the body of Christ church at Holy Trinity we will together sit under God's word and we will let it shape us to correct us to refine us for Christ's glory and for our joy Amen Amen erfahren