

Remembering Who We Are

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[0 : 00] Our gracious Father, we do thank you for your word, the Bible, and we thank you that you continue to speak to us through it. And so please help us, we pray, to put away distractions and to focus on your word, that we might hear what it is you are saying to us as your people.

For we ask it in Jesus' name. Amen. Well, some years ago I was playing the Nintendo Wii with my son Tim, and we were playing that game of baseball.

Now for those, I think most of you are familiar with the Nintendo system, although I've got a picture on the next slide to kind of show you. So you've got those, remember those controllers that you're holding in your hand, and as you swing, your character on the screen swings.

And so I was standing next to Tim like those two people down the bottom, and the problem was that Tim was beating me, which was a bit humiliating. But instead of remembering who I was, a responsible adult who graciously accepts defeat, I was determined to win.

And so with Tim standing beside me, he threw the ball, and I gave an almighty swing and whack in the back of Tim's head. Blood started to pour out.

[1 : 13] And I felt at that point sick in my stomach, and in my head I heard my mother's voice, Andrew, act your age. Well, I'm glad to report that Tim forgave me, and I now always remember who I am playing the Nintendo Wii with him.

But today we're starting a new series in 1 Corinthians, which is all about a church who needs to remember who they are, so that they might act their age, so to speak. It seems that this church has a messed up view of spirituality, which has led to all sorts of problems and them behaving like kids. Now, we're not looking at this letter because I think we're a particularly messed up church and behave like kids, but we are looking at it because we can still learn from their mistakes for our church life.

And particularly since we are hoping to plant some new congregations at St. John's Blackburn who are voting today, actually, on it. And if not there, then somewhere else.

But Paul begins this letter with a very carefully written introduction. And he firstly reminds them about who God has already made them, so that they might live like it.

[2 : 23] So at point 1 in your outline and verse 1 in your Bibles, it says, Now, there's quite a bit in this little introduction.

In verse 1, Paul reminds them that he is an apostle called by God. That is, he has God-given authority over them so that they ought to listen to him. And then in verse 2, he moves from reminding them about who he is to reminding them about who they are.

They are firstly the church of God. The word church just means gathering, but they're not any old gathering. They are God's gathering. And this means they are precious to God.

After all, it costs God his only son to make us his church. That's how precious we are. And so Paul will write on the next slide in chapter 3, verse 17, he will say, If anyone destroys God's temple or God's church, same thing, then God will destroy that person.

It's pretty serious language, isn't it? But you see, the church matters to God. Now, in the eyes of the world, the church is becoming less relevant and less important.

[3 : 50] And even as we look around at ourselves here this morning, we're a pretty average-looking bunch of people, aren't we? I'll speak for myself. But in the world's eyes, there's nothing all that special about us, really.

But there is in God's eyes. We are his church. We really matter to him, which means we ought to matter to each other. Now, the Corinthians needed to remember this because they were fighting with each other over leaders, as we'll see in a moment.

They were suing each other in court, chapter 6. They were being unloving to the weaker Christians amongst them by eating food sacrificed to idols in front of them in chapters 8 and 9. They were neglecting each other at the Lord's Supper in chapter 11. And they were pursuing impressive-sounding gifts like tongues while looking down on others in the body of Christ who didn't have them, chapters 12 to 14.

You see, they didn't really matter to each other. Instead, they were trying to be spiritually superior at the expense of one another. And so they needed to remember that they are God's church.

[4 : 58] They matter to God, and therefore they ought to matter to one another. But can I say for us, I am encouraged to see people here at this congregation caring for each other, whether it's providing meals or calling people up or phoning or asking after or praying for one another.

And that's terrific because it shows that we matter to one another. And we need to because we matter to God. We are his precious church.

Well, not only are the Corinthians God's church, they are secondly God's holy people. So verse 2 says, they have been sanctified or made holy in Christ Jesus. The word holy has two meanings. Firstly, it means to be morally good or blameless. That's often how we think of it. But secondly, it means to be set apart for a particular person or purpose. And in Christ Jesus, that is by his death, the Corinthians have been made both.

They've been made holy in God's sight, clothed with Christ's righteousness, and they've been set apart for God's glory, to live for God above all others.

[6 : 06] This is who they are, holy. And in case they don't quite hear it, Paul says the same thing in the very next phrase. You see there? He not only says they've been sanctified or made holy in Christ Jesus, but he also says, and called to be his holy people.

Now the words to be are not in the original. So Paul is not saying they've been called to become holy people. Rather, he's saying they already are.

So on the next slide, just to clarify, it's more literally to those who have been made holy in Christ Jesus and called holy people. In other words, Paul is calling them holy twice.

Why? Well, so they might remember who they are and act like it. It's like me saying to one of my kids, having a tantrum, hypothetically, of course, hypothetically, when I say to them, you're 10 years old now, 10 years old.

And I say that twice, that I remind them twice that they're a 10 year old. Why? Well, so that they might start acting like it. That's what Paul seems to be doing here by calling them holy twice.

[7 : 16] And again, the Corinthians needed to hear this because they weren't acting like God's holy people. Their faulty view of spirituality meant they thought they were spiritual and their bodies didn't matter anymore.

That the bodies wouldn't even be resurrected. That's what they say in chapter 15. And so they could do whatever they wanted with their bodies. In fact, they were even doing some things that the world wouldn't do.

In chapter 5, we'll hear how they are proud of a guy in their congregation who is sleeping with his mother-in-law. And Paul says that not even the world does that. In chapter 6, they're sleeping with prostitutes and so on.

They seem to think they are so spiritual that sinning with their bodies doesn't matter anymore. But Paul reminds them about who they are. They are God's holy people so that they might live like it. Now again, I don't think we have the same issues that the Corinthians had. At least I hope not. But do we live out who we are as God's holy people? Do we use our bodies, our minds and mouths in a holy way?

[8 : 26] Do we live lives that are set apart for God? So much so that he dictates our priorities, the way we live and act and think? Do people look at us and see that we are people set apart for God?

You see, in Christ, we too are God's holy people and so we too are to live like it. Well, not only are the Corinthians God's church and God's holy people, they are also, thirdly, united under the same Lord Jesus.

Verse 2 again, he goes to great lengths to say that they are holy people together with all those everywhere who call on the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, their Lord and ours.

Now, why does Paul need to remind them that we all have the same Lord Jesus, their Lord and ours? Well, because as we'll see later, there was fighting and factions amongst them based on which leader they followed and so he wants to remind them that they are actually united under the

same leader, the Lord Jesus.

You see, Paul's introduction here is very deliberately written. He is reminding them who God has already made them in Christ so that they might start acting like it.

[9 : 49] But he also then reminds them what God has already given them in Christ. I point to verse 4. I always thank my God for you because of his grace given you in Christ Jesus.

For in Christ you have been enriched in every way with all kinds of speech and with all knowledge. God thus confirming our testimony about Christ among you. In verse 4, Paul thanks God for his grace or generosity shown to the Corinthians.

How has God been generous? Well, verse 5 starts with the word for or because God has enriched them in every way including all speech and all knowledge.

Now, Paul picks on those two things speech and knowledge because those two things were the things that Corinthians were arguing over and fighting for. You know, who spoke the best and who knew the most.

But Paul says when you became Christians, when God confirmed our testimony about Christ among you, you know, you heard the gospel, believed it, became Christian, then God gave you all speech and all knowledge.

[11 : 03] You don't need to keep fighting for it. Now, this doesn't mean each one of them suddenly knew everything there was to know and became the best public speakers in the world. Rather, it means that they as a church, a collective, knew all they needed to know to live as God's people.

They as a church could speak all they needed to speak using the different gifts amongst them to live as God's holy people. In other words, they didn't need to keep fighting over who spoke good and who knew the most because together as a church, they already had all speech and knowledge they needed.

And so Paul says in verse 7, therefore, as a church, you do not lack any spiritual gift as you eagerly wait for our Lord Jesus Christ to be revealed.

You see, as a church, they lacked no gift they needed to live as God's people. One of the problems we face when we read the Bible is that we often think in individualistic terms, don't we?

And that's what the Corinthians seem to be doing. Trying to be more spiritual than each other individually. And as individuals, you know, we don't have all the gifts, do we?

[12 : 18] We do lack some gifts. And my children tell me that I lack the gifts of singing and dancing. I'm actually okay with not being able to dance. I'm not exactly sure how that would help the church anyway.

But Paul is not talking about us as individuals. He's talking about them as the church. For God does not save us, then leave us on our own, but he saves us and gathers us to a body.

our mission statement to gather and grow in Christ. And so it's as a body of Christ together that we lack no gift we need to live as God's church until Christ's return.

But this means then that we need to keep gathering together as God's church so that we can exercise our different gifts together and help each other keep living as God's people.

See, God has a very high view of church. It's where he has gathered us in Christ and it's one of the ways he encourages us in Christ.

[13 : 21] I was visiting someone recently who had been in hospital for I think it was five or six weeks at a rehab centre and they told me they couldn't wait to get back home.

And the second thing they couldn't wait to do, come back to church. You see, they had noticed and missed the encouragement they received from being together, sitting under God's word and encouraging one another.

And I wonder, do we have the same high view of church as this person did, as God does? If we do, then we'll do our very best to come every week, won't we?

And to do a third or fourth or fifth lap around the car park until those jolly nine o'clock people free up a space. Well, God has not only given them as a church everything they need to live as his people, he's also given them a great promise to encourage them to live as his people.

See verse eight? He will also keep you firm to the end so that you will be blameless on the day of our Lord Jesus Christ. God is faithful who has called you into fellowship with his son, Jesus Christ, our Lord.

[14 : 36] That promise in verse eight, it's a great promise of assurance, isn't it? That God will keep us firm to the end, to the time we see Christ face to face.

either at our death or his return. After all, we are precious to him. As we heard in our first reading, he will be with us through the water and the rivers and the flames.

For the Corinthians, this meant that they didn't need to pursue spiritual superiority at the expense of each other because God would keep them to the end. And for us, it means we're not alone in this life, that God will help us and keep us firm to the end.

And we need to hear this because life in this broken world is sometimes hard. And we're sometimes tempted to stop trusting in Christ, especially when we suffer, whether it's from health issues or loneliness or unemployment or grief, especially when our prayers aren't answered the way we want or God doesn't seem to work the way we expect and we kind of wonder what on earth he's doing. Last Friday, I conducted the funeral for Faye Chu, a member of our church. I mentioned her last Sunday. As I mentioned, she suffered for some time with a couple of different diseases and we prayed regularly for her.

[16:03] But our prayers weren't answered the way we wanted and certainly not the way Faye wanted. And yet, while her health did get her down from time to time, she continued to trust in Jesus.

In fact, by her bedside was a plaque. With permission, I took a photo of it and I showed the people at the funeral last Friday. It's on the next slide. It's a bit hard to see, so let me read it to you.

It's entitled What God Hath Promised. And it says, God has not promised sun without rain, joy without sorrow, peace without pain.

But, God has promised strength for the day, rest for the labourer, light on the way, grace for the trials, help from above, unfailing sympathy, and undying love.

You see, part of our pain, I think, comes from us having wrong expectations of God. But, Faye knew God has not promised, did not promise her an easy and healthy life.

[17:12] And although she wanted her prayers to be answered yes in terms of her health, she could accept that they were answered no. But, Faye also knew that God has promised her strength to keep trusting in him each day of her life.

Or in the words of Paul, he has promised to keep her firm to the end. And God kept that promise. Faye trusted in Christ until her dying breath.

So, do remember what God has and has not promised us. And do come to him for strength. For he has promised to keep us firm in our faith to the end. And he will keep that promise, just as he did for Faye.

For verse 9 says, our God is faithful. Well, Paul's introduction firstly reminded the Corinthians who God has already made them in Christ.

God has made them his church, his holy people, united under the same Lord Jesus. And then secondly, Paul reminded them of what God has already given them in Christ.

[18:14] Every gift they needed and the promise of assurance to get there in the end. And so, if they have all this, if this is who they are, then there's nothing more to fight for and to quarrel over and to be divided about.

And that brings us to point 3 and verse 10. Paul writes, I appeal to you then, 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.

Here Paul starts by appealing to them in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ. Did you notice? It's exactly the same phrase he used back in verse 2. And so again, he's subtly saying, remember who you are.

You are united in the same Lord Jesus Christ. So act your age. Live out who you are as a united people and don't be divided. Now there may be good reasons, I need to say, to divide with some people who call themselves Christians, like false teaching.

That's a reason to kind of break fellowship. But that's not what's on view here. Rather, it's ungodly fighting over leaders that is dividing them.

[19:31] Have a look at verse 11. He says, My brothers and sisters, some from Chloe's household have informed me that there are quarrels among you. What I mean is this, one of you says, I follow Paul, another, I follow Apollos, another, I follow Cephas or Peter, and still another, I follow Christ.

You see, it seems in their desire to be super spiritual, they were using different leaders to claim spiritual superiority. I think Paul summarises the situation well in chapter 4, so just turn over one page in your Bibles to chapter 4, verse 6.

Just one page in your Bibles, chapter 4, verse 6. He's been talking about leaders again, and he says in verse 6 that he's applied what he's been talking about to Apollos and himself for their benefit, so that you may learn from us the meaning of the saying, do not go beyond what is written. And here's the summary part, I think. Then you will not be puffed up in being a follower of one of us leaders over against another.

Did you see what Paul's saying? They're getting puffed up and claiming spiritual superiority because they follow one leader over another. I remember doing this kind of thing one time as a joke because the minister who married Michelle and I had just become a bishop.

[20 : 49] bishop. And so I said to this guy at my old church, well, I was married by a bishop. The only problem was this guy was married by a minister who had just become the archbishop. So he said, well, I was married by the archbishop.

Now we were just mucking around, but it seems these Corinthians were doing it for real. They were holding up different leaders to outdo each other in this kind of bizarre game of spiritual one-upmanship.

And this caused divisions or factions within the church. As some said, we're superior because we follow Paul who planted our church. Others said, no, we're superior because we follow Cephas or Peter who was the leader of the apostles, the archbishop if you like, and so on.

And then I think Paul rather cheekily adds his own at the end of verse 12 saying, and still another, I follow Christ. I don't think there was actually a faction at the church who said that because when Paul lists the factions again in chapter 3, this one's not mentioned.

Rather, I think it's Paul's way of reminding them who they are all supposed to be following, Christ. For Paul then goes on to say in verse 13, chapter 1 verse 13, is Christ divided?

[22 : 02] Was Paul crucified for you? Were you baptized into the name of Paul? In other words, he's saying it's silly to say following Paul makes you spiritually superior.

Because we are all one in Christ. Christ is not divided. And Christ, not Paul, was the one who was crucified for you. And Christ, not Paul, was the one whose name you were baptized into.

In other words, Christ is the leader who matters. Not Paul, not any other. Which is why Paul is glad he didn't baptize many of them, lest they try and use that fact to claim spiritual superiority.

Do you see verse 14? He says, I thank God that I did not baptize any of you except Crispus and Gaius, so that none of you can say you were baptized in my name. Oh, yes, I also baptized the household of Stephanas, but beyond that I don't remember if I baptized anyone else.

For Christ did not send me to baptize, but to preach the gospel, not with wisdom and eloquence, lest the cross of Christ be emptied of its power.

[23 : 07] Paul says that he's glad he didn't baptize many, though he seems to remember a few more as he writes. But he's glad because it means they cannot say I'm superior because I was baptized by Paul in Paul's name.

For him, it's not about him or any other leader, it's about Jesus Christ. After all, it's the gospel about Jesus that saves, not clever words of the leader or the preacher.

Paul will hammer this home next week when he says the gospel message may look foolish to the world, but it is God's wisdom and God's power to save.

But for now, he wants them and us to see that such divisions to claim spiritual superiority based on the leader we follow, it's ridiculous. In fact, on the next slide, Paul will say it towards the end of chapter 3 because this argument goes on for a while.

He says, so then no more boasting about leaders because all things are yours anyway. Why? Because God has already given them every gift they need in Christ.

[24 : 15] God has already made them his precious church and holy people united in Christ. And so Christ is the leader they are to follow, to boast in.

In fact, Paul mentions Christ 15 times in these 17 verses. That's a fair amount, isn't it? Just to make the point. Now, I doubt anyone here at HCD will say our congregation is spiritually superior because we follow Vijay Henderson, our pastor, or Andrew Price, our pastor, or Mark II, or whatever.

After all, everyone knows at HCD that the 1030 congregation is the best. There wasn't enough people laughing at that. I wondered, did you take that seriously? That was a joke and yes, I did change it for every other congregation this morning.

But in a church like ours with different preachers, then we might prefer one preacher over another. At one level, that's okay. But if we do it to the point where we boast about one preacher over

another, when it's not the preacher who matters, but the person they're preaching about, Christ, then it is a problem.

And if St. John's church votes yes today to the parish partnership and we plant some new congregations down there, then we may be tempted to talk about us versus them. I've seen it happen before.

[25 : 35] Instead of remembering that we are actually all united and follow the same Lord Jesus Christ. And so while these warnings here are heaps relevant to us now, they're still warnings worth heeding, aren't they?

And like the Corinthians, we need to remember what God has already given us in Christ. Every gift we need as a church to live as his people. And we need to remember who God has already made us in Christ.

His precious church, his holy people united in him. And so by his grace, may we continue to follow Christ and live out who we are as his people.

Let's pray. Our gracious heavenly father, we do thank you for this reminder this morning about who we are in Christ and what we have in Christ.

Father, help us not fall into the trap that the Corinthians did by following earthly or human leaders over and above Christ, but rather help us to remember who we are and all we've been given in him and help us therefore to live out who we are.

[26 : 46] We ask it in Jesus' name. Amen.