

1 Corinthians 1:1-9 (PM)

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[0 : 0 0] today we begin a brand new series and we're looking at the new testament book called first corinthians and we'll go really big picture just for a moment here so about 2 000 years ago there's this guy called paul and i've heard of this guy saint paul the apostle paul he spent about 18 months in this place called corinth which is in modern day greece he went there on a mission so he went there and he was uh he was telling people about jesus and people some people were into it and they started a church they started like a little christian community there and he stayed there for about a year and a half and then he left corinth to go other places to start other churches so he's gone for about four years and that's all good but then he begins to hear reports that this church in corinth was a bit uh a bit wobbly and here here are a few examples of that wobbliness um and we'll read about all of this wobbliness as we go through the book over the next year so first one wobble was that there were these factions in the community so uh these factions were forming around particular christian leaders and these leaders would have these these kind of like like groupies and these groupies would bow mouth bad mouth the other leaders so obviously in a community that's supposed to be you know loving and unified this is a problem this is a problem um there was there was not so great sexual stuff going on christians were going to pagan temples where the practice was that you could sleep with temple prostitutes there was a guy in the church who had shacked up with his mother-in-law and paul tells us later on that he goes not even the non-christian people in corinth and dodgy old corinth even they thought that was a bit weird and the church's attitude was like oh look it's not a problem this is not a problem because we're free in christ we can do whatever we want there's sort of weird thinking was the body doesn't matter only the spirit matters so do whatever you want with your body it's okay now folks i'm sure you realize this is this is not great theology a couple more examples what else was going on in this church people were using the church services as a time to show off so they're using the gifts that god had given them to serve in the church as opportunities to bring attention to themselves and they would brag about their particular gifts another example they were weird about the doctrine of the future resurrection they didn't really think that this was important the problem was is they're all about living for the now life is about now now now only now matters so any future stuff we don't need to hear about that it doesn't really matter so yeah so there were factions there's the mother-in-law thing there's the terrible theology the church was the church was in really bad shape and the question we ask ourselves is what was behind all this drama like what was behind this mess probably helpful to know a little bit about the city well the city it was it was um you describe it as like a boom town had a great economy it was a port city had two ports either end it was like an isthmus yeah and you know money was flowing in people in general were um uh egocentric individualistic uh it was sort of a me me me place a lot of army vets a lot of freed slaves so the whole freedom thing was big in their mind they were central they were competitive um there wasn't like old money or like a class system connected to family heritage there like you might have in like

the uk for example social status was all about money and recognition and applause and if you get that you're kind of winning so corinth would have loved the idea of social media they would have loved the idea of gaining likes and followers etc i think this is helpful to know because it seems what what happened in this church the church in corinth was more corinthian than they were christian so people were coming to faith in christ but they didn't shake off like the worst aspects of culture they didn't see a problem with acting in ways which were reflected more the culture than their faith when they liked christianity and they enjoyed the benefits of it it's a great story we've got community but it seems in many ways they were an untransformed people so this church in corinth it was it was a mess it was a mess ethically it was a mess theologically one of the scholars described it as a complete dumpster fire which is which is great it's a great term to describe this church so anyway so

paul hears about all this because they write him a letter saying you know some of the good guys write him a letter so here's what's going on so he writes a letter to them and the letter he writes to them in response to what he hears is going on is called first corinthians in terms of the book as an overall structure um there are five major sections and in each section what paul does is he kind of clearly articulates where the church is in area so five sections focusing on particular particular issues um division all the sex stuff the bad theology around the resurrection etc etc five sections in each section what he does is he articulates the problem he says where here's where you're in error and then he shows them the beauty of the gospel and how it relates to the issue that's going on so in each section he says here's how you think here's why this is a problem here's what jesus says isn't that awesome doesn't that make sense here's what you think it's not that great what jesus says is much better it's a much better story it's a much better way of thinking about this so that's what he does so that um i mean what it what he's trying to do is he's trying to get these folks to think through all the areas of their life through the lens of the gospel through the filter of the gospel and i think this is going to be great book for us it's going to be very helpful to us because as one of my friends said to me just before corinth is very similar to vancouver and we'll talk about that over the following weeks so i think it's going to be great for us because we do we want transformed lives don't we we want to be transformed in our faith but we don't want to be just moralists we don't want to be just people kind of robotically trying to be nice and do the right things um we want the holy spirit to show us how precious the gospel is because that's this is paul's strategy we want the holy spirit to show us how precious the gospel is the beauty of jesus and be transformed out of that and this is this is what paul does now for you guys here that are youth and when you think about it like this it's like playing soccer or something or whatever sport you might play at school it's you can get better at soccer in a couple of different ways you can have just people shout to you from the sidelines just shouting at you angrily you know and that will do some good probably a little bit you know but it'll be much better if you just loved the game if you just really loved the game and wanted to do well at it and i think this is what paul is trying to do he wants his church to be more christian and less corinthian by showing them how awesome jesus is and what a fantastic story the gospel is right so that's some background and i'll touch back on on these ideas a little more over the next few weeks but now let's jump in to these first nine verses which was our reading today if you have a bible that'd be great to open that or an app that's probably helpful for you so these first nine verses are an introduction to the whole book so what is paul doing here if you read it quickly it does sound like a lot of the introductions to other new testament books right it's kind of like paul introduces himself and then he says who he's writing to i'm paul i'm writing to you guys in this particular place and then he says what he's grateful for that's a pretty standard format for one of these kind of super old school letters but if we dive into the details which is what we'll do you'll see he's doing he's doing something else there in fact he's doing a couple of things in this introduction first first thing is he's redirecting them away from themselves to god the second thing he's doing is he's trying to help them understand that they haven't arrived spiritually so again he's redirecting them away from themselves to god and secondly he's helping them understand that they haven't arrived spiritually so that's going to be the structure for these next sort of eight minutes here so those are the two points first he redirects them away from themselves so remember the church it was egocentric because the the culture they swam in was completely egocentric and we'll see in the um some later chapters the spiritual gifts went functioning as they should and what i mean by that is so this is chapters like 11 to 14 ish instead of these spiritual gifts being used to edify the church and encourage the church etc there were opportunities for people to show off people use them as a chance to kind of prove themselves you know more spiritual than others also culturally they lived in a time where if you wanted to be good at something the thing you wanted to be good at was speaking it's oratory you know philosophers were big they'd come into town they'd do these big really interesting dynamic talks and they'd gain followers and they'd gain fame and they'd gain money and they'd gain gravitas this is what people wanted so these guys in this church who were swimming in this were using christianity as a me me me thing like look at me i've got this gift you don't have this gift i'm a great preacher i've got this great spiritual gift you don't have this gift and again we'll get into more detail later in the book but paul is kind of like hinting at it here and i'll show you where he hints at it verses four and five really simply paul just says this he says all those spiritual gifts that you have they are all from god and that's why he says i really want to thank god for these particular things remember they're using them to elevate themselves and paul is trying to redirect them away from themselves to god if you look at verse five it's interesting um he says he

says guys i'm just so thankful for these gifts in your life the gifts of speech and knowledge and what's interesting is because these are the things which are causing major problems in the church and he's like i'm so thankful for that for those gifts and this is quite different to other introductory letters because in other introductory letters if you compare when paul does his like thanking part he always like i'm thankful for your love i'm thankful for your generosity doesn't say that because they don't have any of that so he picks this particular speaking gift which is the thing they're showing off about which is a big problem for them because i'm so thankful for that gift and he's very clever because he says i'm so thankful that god gave you that he's undercutting their pride in their so-called spiritual achievements their egoism which is causing comparisons and divisions and they're thinking they're really special he undercuts it and he's saying you know those gifts which you use to elevate yourselves they're from jesus you can't take credit for that remember the culture was all about applause and recognition and paul says that recognition that belongs to jesus not you so very cleverly just sort of undercuts that it's not yours that is god's gift he's given you don't misuse it that's kind of the subtext of the i'm so thankful for these gifts paul unpacks that a lot more sort of in later chapters 12 to 14 but he's kind of signaling it here now saint john's our church let me say this quite plainly when people come to this church and they're looking for a new church and they say tell me about the church i give them a very honest opinion of saint john's i say here's the stuff we're good at here's the stuff we're not good at and um on the positive side i'll say things what people usually say about us is that we're good at the speaking things good at discipleship good at the speaking stuff and um like corinth this is there is a danger here for us there's a danger that we are filled with pride this becomes a source of pride for us that we think we are better than other churches that we think we are personally better but god in his word to us today says this he says whatever your church is good at this church other churches it's all grace we're just recipients god in his goodness and his wisdom has equipped us in particular ways and it's all gift and we have nothing to boast about apart from the fact that isn't god good so if god has given you particular ways to serve in his church in the world in the marketplace in your jobs it's a gift from from him but those gifts can become liabilities when we say man we are just so good aren't we i am so good becomes a liability when we use it thanklessly when we use these things that god has given us to draw attention to ourselves so that's why in the short introduction paul keeps redirecting their attention away from the gifts to the giver of the gifts and if you read the passage really clearly you'll see that everything he thanks god for everything he mentions it connects to jesus like every verse bar one says jesus christ in it he's continually redirecting them away from themselves away from the things that are sources of ego and pride to jesus so that's point one redirecting them away from themselves to the giver of gifts to sort of he's trying to take an axe to their arrogance and their me me meness so point one point one point two the other thing paul is doing is he's helping them understand they have not arrived spiritually again this is an idea he's kind of just introducing here but he's going to flesh out a lot more later um if you look at verses seven and eight you'll see um just the end there you are not lacking in any gift as you wait for the revealing of our lord jesus christ who will sustain you to the end guiltless in the day of our lord jesus christ see what he's doing there he's pointing them to the future to christ's return and why is he doing that because we'll hear in chapter four later on and again

i'm sorry i'm doing lots of bouncing around here but um in chapter four we'll hear that the church in corinth basically thinks they're pretty perfect and that the church is the only show in town and so why why would they need to think about the future this idea that christ will return one day we'll be resurrected he will make all things new i mean they don't need this doctrine because they they think we are just killing it right now god will make all things right one day come on what's to make right look around all right we're doing so well that's what was what was going on in this church in fact the whole book of first corinthians lands at the resurrection right at the end the last thing that paul talks about is the resurrection of all christians that's free lands but the corinthian church doesn't want to doesn't want to think about it for for them that's a weird doctrine to go on about because now is all that matters they think now we're doing really well that's what they think now sort of as a side note when when paul talks about the christian life in this book he's pretty unromantic about it he talks about how his body's kind of letting him down how he still struggles struggles with sin it's very real it's very real about his his life and for the for the corinthians christianity just meant triumph it just meant winning all the time and lots of the lots of the church in corinth we discover actually think paul was a bit of a loser because he talks about his struggles and physical struggles and spiritual struggles this corinthian church it's just about winning man they just want to win they think they're

going to win christ returning making things right everything's so good now what a loser the great question to ask ourselves is how much do we actually think about the return of christ how much do we think about christ returning and the new creation as many of you know and you prayed for me like a couple of months ago i had this operation right in my guts where they just kind of you know that's pretty much it it's a bit more technical than that my ab modeling days are over by the way um and you know so i had this where they had to remove a piece of my guts and uh i have this chronic illness and um folks part of the gift part of the gift of having physical struggles in life part of the gift is that is that um the bodily resurrection that the bible promises that will be made new new creation it does become something you think about a lot i do i can't wait like it's on my radar a lot like not to have not to have pain not to have constant nausea not to have these things in your life like come jesus come let's let's get this happening this struggle in life can actually be very helpful to us it can lift our eyes beyond what's happening immediately in life to the great horizon to the great promises of the bible that christ will return we will be made new all evil will be destroyed it's wonderful so the flip side of this is an easy life an easy life can do the opposite an easy life can make us think that life is all about maximizing our joy right now and we can take our eyes off the goal posts that christ will return and make things new this is part of what paul is doing in this introduction as well he's he's lifting their eyes to the great theological horizon because right now they're just kind of they're kind of just looking at their feet living for now thinking they're winning let's uh finish up here

[20 : 10] god is good god is very good through christ god provides for his church you're gifting people in specific ways and paul is very grateful for that but he makes it clear then he makes a couple of key points which he unpacks through the rest of the book he says look these gifts that god gives they can become liabilities when they become sources of pride and at one point he actually says having your church services is making you worse like it's making you worse it'd be better if you just didn't do it you know because there's so self-focus secondly in the introduction paul introduces this idea again of christ's return he says don't make your life so much about now that you forget the great hope you have and behind all these issues it's the same issue the church in corinth were more corinthian than they were christian and it's it's a theme we'll be returning to uh a lot their great treasure was applause it was status it was prestige not so much jesus which is why why jesus is mentioned in almost every verse of this introduction folks for your homework if you like that kind of thing perhaps it would be helpful to you spiritually helpful for you to begin to pray the holy spirit reveals in your hearts where are you more vancouverite than you are christian and that is that is a tricky thing because we are swimming we are swimming in this culture where are you more vancouverite than christian and ask the holy spirit to show you that the great treasure in your life is not so much these temporary accolades which we might accrue in our lives a great treasure is that we get to be friends with jesus and we'll be with him for eternity amen you you you you you you you