

1 Corinthians 1:4-9

Sermon originally preached by Justin Dean, January 12, 2014.

Good morning and welcome to Sacred City Church. If you are new this morning, or have just recently joined us, we want you to know that we are really glad that you are with us this morning.

What we are going to do now is jump into a study in the book of 1 Corinthians. We started this study last week, so if you missed it, you can find our podcasts online. We are going to be going verse by verse through this book of the New Testament for the better part of 2014.

So, open up your Bibles to 1 Corinthians, or open up your apps, or if you don't have a Bible, we would like to give you one. You can grab it on the step in the back.

This morning, you might be a little shocked. I'm just going to warn you, that your modern western sensibilities will probably be tweaked. If you've grown up in the church, and you think you've got a pretty good handle on things, you might even be disturbed a little bit this morning. See, many people think that being a Christian is all about a personal decision. It's a person, making up their mind to follow Jesus Christ. And hear me this morning, every Christian does make a choice to follow Jesus but there is something deeper than that.

If my choice to follow Jesus was the reason that I am here today, then I'd really have something to be proud of, right? It's like the guy at the office who chose the correct players for fantasy football. How does he react? He brags, right? He tells everyone how smart he is, and how well versed in football statistics he is. All the credit for the victory goes right back to him and his choices.

Unfortunately, this is how many people who call themselves Christians live their life. They are smug and look down on those who haven't chosen to follow Jesus like they have. They look down on others and think, "What is wrong with this guy? Why doesn't he just get saved?"

Now they don't often say that, but you can tell that's what they think. Those people may indeed be Christians, but one thing that you can be sure of is that they do not get the gospel. They miss its depth. Much of the gospel's beauty is lost on them. They might be saved by grace but they don't understand much about the grace that saved them. They don't understand what was under their choice, what caused it, what brought it about. Therefore, much of the joy of their salvation actually goes to themselves, instead of where it belongs solely in the grace of God.

So, we might all get a little shocked this morning. But I pray its for our good and Gods glory. Lets jump back into our study of 1 Corinthians.

The Apostle Paul planted this church in the large and wealthy city of Corinth. We saw last week that Corinth was like our modern day New York, LA, and Las Vegas. It was hot, sexy, full of vices, and streaming with money. And God called Paul to plant a church right in the middle of that mess. The city had such a reputation that Paul was actually scared to go into Corinth with the gospel but in Acts 18:9 God spoke to him in a dream and told him "Do no be afraid, but go on speaking and do not be silent. For I am with you, and no one will attack you to harm you, for I have many in this city who are my people." This is interesting because nobody had yet brought the gospel to Corinth.

This is what I am talking about. Paul is in a tough city, preaching a foolish gospel of a crucified savior to people who are self sufficient, sex obsessed, and drunk on their own importance. What confidence can Paul have that anyone will actually believe the message of the gospel?

But here we have in Acts 18:9-10 God letting Paul know that He had people here who he had elected to hear the gospel and respond. Paul needed to stay and preach, and God would call those who he had predestined to come. The expression is reminiscent of the Good Shepherd's statement that he had 'other sheep ... not of this sheep pen' (Israel), i.e. Gentiles. They had not yet believed in him, but they would do so, because already according to his purpose they belonged to him. This conviction is the greatest of all encouragements to an evangelist.

Strengthened by it, Paul stayed and witnessed God do great things amongst the people of Corinth in the year and a half that he stayed with them. While in Corinth Paul also wrote 1 & 2 Thessalonians. But Paul was an Apostle, meaning he was a man who had been called by God, and had met the resurrected Jesus, and had been sent on a mission to plant churches in unreached people groups, so Paul left Corinth and went to Ephesus.

It was while he was in Ephesus that two concerning things were brought to Paul's attention. First, he received a letter from the Corinthians with some serious theological and moral questions, and at the same time he was getting some verbal reports from Chloe's people of some great abuses taking place within the assembly.

It was clear that this church was jacked up. The culture of Corinth was still their dominant reality in how they lived their life. They still had a Corinthian worldview, so they related to each other like Corinthians and not like Christians. We will see

later in this book that they were divided by socio-economic status, they were sexually promiscuous, they were selfish, and they were using the spiritual gifts God had given them to show off instead of for the good of others. In short, they were jacked up.

Now let me put this into perspective for you. Paul is the Corinthian's spiritual father. He feels responsible for them and he receives these awful reports of their behavior. So what does he do?

Parents what do you do? Your son or daughter goes off to college and all of a sudden you start seeing the Facebook posts filled with drunken parties, half naked women, and a complete disregard for any type of morality. How do you feel? Grieved? Angry maybe? Ashamed possibly?

And how do you respond? 1st Corinthians is Paul's response. He writes a letter. No phones, no emails, no face time, so Paul does the next best thing to traveling to Corinth in person. He writes a letter, and that's what this is, it's a letter of correction to his spiritual children.

Last week we saw that the first thing Paul did in this letter was to remind the Corinthians of their God given identity. Paul started his whole correction not by addressing their behaviors but by addressing their Identity. He very purposefully called them Sanctified saints. He reminded them how they became sanctified saints, God had effectually called them and they had responded by calling upon the name of Jesus and submitting to Jesus as the master of their lives. Paul shows us a great lesson here. Any time we are addressing another Christian's rebellion or sin, we should start by reminding them of who they are in Christ, because the reason they are living the way they are is because they have forgotten their God given identity. You're saints!

So In verses 1-3 Paul starts off by addressing the Christians in Corinth and now Paul is going to make a slight turn. His eyes are going to turn upward as he begins to address them.

Look now at verse 4. This gives us a strikingly clear glimpse into Paul's theology, if last week wasn't enough this should shock us. Verse 4: "I give thanks to my God always for you because of the grace of God that was given you in Christ Jesus"... What?!

Parents, you just laid your eyes upon another digital picture of your precious child passed out on the couch with empty beer cans flanking him like little soldiers fallen in battle. You see him lying in the lap of a clearly intoxicated barely dressed female. Can I ask you? What in this situation do you have to be thankful for? There are a couple ways most parents respond to this.

1. They call them and shame them. They ask them how their night was, and then at some point in the conversation they let them know they've seen the picture, they know about the recklessness and rebellion and they remind them that they raised them better than that! Don't you know Grandma has a Facebook and sees this stuff? Don't you know how stupid this makes you look? I can't believe you would do this, you know better than that, etc., etc.

This is really an appeal to their child's pride and is meant to shame the child into doing better.

2. They ignore it. These parents have usually already tried response #1 and it did not go well so they take the "avoidance and let Jesus deal with it response." They might pray about it, talk to their MC about it, but they just try to avoid addressing it with their child because of how difficult it is. It's a minefield, right?

Both of these approaches fail because they don't get to the heart, they just don't go deep enough. Jesus tells us that all of our sin comes from our hearts. So our sin is ultimately a heart problem. If you don't address the heart, you can't change a person all the way down. You actually just make them a smarter sinner.

If your kid stops drinking, because "he's better than that" you just succeeded in making him more proud, and ultimately a better sinner. You might have made him look more moral but in God's eyes he's actually worse off than before, because now he thinks he's pretty good. See that's why the Bible says that everything that doesn't come from faith is sin.

I see these same two responses in marriages. #1. They are quick to point out each other's faults and that usually doesn't go very well. #2. They call a truce, and just try to avoid dealing with each other's sins. It's kind of a, "You don't call me out, and I won't call you out," kind of a deal. That type of relationship completely misses the point of marriage. Marriage is meant to make us holy. It's meant to be the chief relationship where sanctification takes place but you completely short circuit it if you never confront your spouse on their sin.

But here in 1st Corinthians, we see Paul display for us a different way. It's a third way. He doesn't put them on blast right away. He doesn't shame them, but neither does he avoid the issue.

Look at the text. What does Paul do? He thanks God for the grace that was given to the Corinthians. That's key. Paul does not commend their behavior, because they are screwing things up big time. He doesn't say, "You guys are awesome. I am really proud of you guys." NO! Paul's eyes lock onto the one thing he can be sure of, and that's God's grace.

Watch this. Look at something on the wall across the room. Now look at the back of your hand. Do you know what just happened? Here's what happened, without you even trying, or exerting any effort. The Ciliary muscle in your eye just changed the shape of the lens in your eye. When you were looking at the far wall, the Ciliary muscle stretched your lens and thinned it out so you could focus there. But when you looked at the back of your hand, the Ciliary muscle squeezed your lens, and thickened it so you could focus on something up close. How crazy is this? God actually built you with a lens that can change shape to focus on different things. What I am saying this morning, and what I think Paul is displaying for us, is that God can change your lens. He can totally change the way that you see other Christians, and ultimately see the world.

What we are seeing here is that Paul's theology (Paul's gospel theology) has affected his way of seeing. It's changed the way he sees other Christians, even immature ones.

The gospel has given Paul a whole new way of seeing. In our natural way of seeing, with the eyes of the flesh, we lock onto the Corinthians and all of their bad external behavior. Our eyes like to focus on ourselves or on others. But Paul is redirecting their vision here. He's trying to remind them of the gospel and bring their attention back to the grace of God. With gospel eyes, Paul is able to erupt in thanksgiving to God. How is that possible?

This shows great spiritual maturity on the part of Paul. To be able to delight in God's work in those you have beef with shows your awareness and sensitivity towards God's grace. This is "having gospel eyes." Paul has plenty to be frustrated with, but first and foremost he rejoices in the grace of God in them.

Can you see God's work in others? In those you disagree with? This is a test for you. It's a grace barometer. How often do you thank God for his grace in those you have issues with? If you don't, or if you can't – this shows that your awareness of your own need for grace is slim. You might be more aware of you choosing God, than his choosing of you. You might be forgetting the gospel. So I want you to see the approach Paul is taking here with some wayward, jacked up, Immature Christians who have been caught up in the ways of the world. Paul is looking at them through gospel eyes and thanking God for His grace to them.

But for that to happen, God has to give us a better glimpse into the gospel. So let me show you, as I close, how Paul's gospel lens is able to focus on past, present and future grace. His eyes have been set by the gospel. They have literally been tuned to grace. They been trained, and changed to see grace.

Verse 7: They are not lacking any spiritual gifts. (PAST GRACE) Paul reminds them of what they have been given. Verse 4: grace, Verse 5: enriched, Verse 6: confirmed, Verse 9: you were called.

That's a whole lot of grace that they received in their past, and Paul is reminding them of everything that God has already given them.

Then look at Verse 8. Jesus will sustain them to the end. Here we see Paul remind them of the present and future grace of God. Even though they are not living like it, Jesus has made them blameless, they are guiltless, and he will sustain them until the end.

How do we know this will happen? Verse 9: Because God is faithful, by whom you were called.

God is faithful, and if He has called you, He will sustain you. This is the shocking nature of the grace of God; this is the gospel. God gives what he demands. He calls people and He gives them faith. He does that. Then people respond, we respond. And God stays faithful.

God demands that we be holy and blameless, and then He makes us guiltless. God continually accepts Jesus' perfect life and sacrifice on our behalf. He will never turn away from that sacrifice. Christians are saved because of God. God saves them. God sustains them. God makes them guiltless.

This is why a Christian cannot lose their salvation. It began with God, and it ends with God. God is responsible for our salvation and He will sustain us to the end, guiltless in Jesus.

Paul is addressing his wayward spiritual children and he is trying to shock them out of their immaturity. He's trying to remind them of the shocking and live giving power of the gospel of grace.

I pray that this gospel would shock us this morning and bring to life hearts that have been dead to the grace of God.