

CALLED OUT ONES**1 Corinthians 1:1-9**

INTRO: I participated in two surveys in the past week. The first was from the Barna Group and came via our denominational leadership in PA. It had to do with the hot-button issues of the past month – namely racial issues and attitudes and how we are addressing them as pastors and churches. The second was online and it concerned my health and if I'd had or been in contact with COVID-19 and I cannot remember the source. I took both of them because they promised to take less than 5 minutes to complete.

It was interesting that both asked me about my mental state – specifically if I was depressed or hopeless. Apparently depression is growing, and it's understandable. One doesn't have to go very far to understand why, just when you think your incredulity cannot be stretched anymore, a new level of craziness is passed. So, it's not a stretch to think that without Jesus and my hope in him, I could slip into despair. But I don't. I don't because God is greater than this mess and I choose to look to him rather than get caught up in it.

BUT – we can't hide from the mess and we cannot ignore it either. If we do we are renegeing on the call to carry out the Great Commission. People need to know the truth in the midst of a fog of Orwellian confusion. Lost souls who do not have the hope of Christ are on the edge of hysteria, and some people who do know Christ aren't too far from it either. This is the time for the CHURCH to step up.

As I've pointed out numerous times, the very definition of Church is "God's Called Out Ones". It is not a building and that's why ABC and many other congregations around the world have thrived through the quarantine. We don't need a building to be the Body of Christ. The fact that we are worshipping on Zoom and in this room as one group is further evidence. These are challenging times, and God's called out ones need to step into the gap and address the confusion.

All this brings us to an introduction of Paul's first letter to the Corinthians and the beginning of a sermon series that cover the next several months. Paul wrote at least three letters to the church in Corinth, and what we have here in the New Testament is what we still have of them.

Paul's correspondence with his friends in Corinth was that of a father-figure to people he knew since he had founded the church in about 50 AD. He knew their struggles because he knew the city and the region. So he is addressing specific issues that have raised their ugly head.

The helpful thing for us and what makes this study timely is how similar Corinth is to 21st century life. The things that bring frequent face palms to us in our present situation prove that Solomon was exactly right in his assertion in Ecclesiastes, "*there is nothing new under the sun.*" For that reason, 1 Corinthians has lots to say to us about being God's called our ones in these challenging times.

With that intro out of the way, I'll read just the first nine verses of the first chapter, which is Paul's opening to the letter and pull some learnings from it.

Read 1 Corinthians 1:1-9

Paul's intro and greeting are typical correspondence for his day and, truthfully, not very different from a formal business letter from the present. I love how our brothers and sisters in Christ from around the world, and certainly from Africa, begin their emails to me in a very similar way. They utilize a courtesy and tradition that is common to their culture and sadly missing from ours.

The way of my friends in Kenya, Zambia, Zimbabwe, and Tanzania, always begins with a greeting and an inquiry after my family. This is what our friends Ilam and Wilson from Kenya and Gerald from Tanzania do. They know my family and spent time in our home so it's not unusual that they check on how Kathy and the kids are doing and they ask about ABC. But my friend Osward, who is a BIC pastor and music minister in Zambia has never met me in person and has never become acquainted with my family to this date – and yet he almost always greets me, asks me if I am well, and if my family and church are well too. It is the first thing, because it shows the importance to them of what is important to me. It is important because it is important indeed.

Americans often launch into conversation with little regard for what might be going on with us. I'm not putting us down for it – in many ways it's cultural, but I think the Bantu way of doing it is more than just endearing – there's a lot more to it than that.

Paul begins similarly and he first gives his credentials. He is...

Called by God and has authority from God

- The disciples became the first apostles when the Holy Spirit fell at Pentecost. They had been commissioned by Jesus when he returned to the Father and they were on mission for him. They had a special connection and anointing that came from the fact that they had spent three years in training with Jesus. They had heard his teaching and they had observed him at work. They had a jump start on other disciples and because of that they were the first leaders of the church. They had been called out ones from the first time Jesus had said to them “Come follow me!” and they had left their fishing nets and tax collector booths and revolutionary meetings, and whatever they were before he came along and had become his disciples.
- Paul wasn’t one of that original group. In fact, when the church was launched in Jerusalem in the months after Jesus’s ascension, Paul had been one of the Young Turk religious leaders who seethed with indignation at the audacity of the young church. He wanted Christ Followers dead and he did all he could to make that happen. Until (and this is the subject of most of Acts chapter 9) Paul met Jesus up close and personal on the road to Damascus. You’ll read in Acts how Paul became a called out one from that moment on. Not only that, he was called to be God’s personally chosen representative and a special messenger, as the Amplified Bible puts it. For that reason he had gone out on the missionary trail and on his second missionary journey he had started a church in the bustling secular and at the same time pagan city of Corinth.
- A quick aside, he also mentions that Sosthenes is also with him and collaborating with him, but other than that we know almost nothing of him.
- Paul goes on to point out . . .

The church in Corinth is set apart for God

- They are, literally, God’s called out ones. In verse 2, Paul sets the Corinthians straight, right from the start, as to what they are, they are God’s holy and sanctified people. Truthfully using holy and sanctified together is redundant – they mean the same thing – but it’s a good thing to remind us what we are As God’s people we are holy and sanctified. The words holy and sanctified mean, literally, we have been set aside for God. We have been reserved for his pleasure. God’s people are his. They are not to be shared. God’s called out ones are set apart for his ministry and for his mission.
- In the second half of verse 2, Paul points something out we cannot miss. Its this...

His message is for us in 2020 just as it was in 52 AD

- Specifically he says, *together with all those everywhere who call on the name of our Lord Jesus Christ—their Lord and ours.* . . . 1 Corinthians 1:2b. This message is for God’s called out ones, around the world in the early 50s AD or in 2020. What does that mean? Well, we’re holy and sanctified – set apart for God’s ministry and mission too. We are his ministry team, ABC! Christ Followers in every church and denomination and nation and tribe are his ministers. Anyone who calls on the name of the Lord Jesus Christ is called.
- Are you up for it? Are you worthy of it? I’ll address that in a bit. First this...

Paul offers grace and shalom to his readers

- Now this is a common greeting from Christians in their correspondence in Paul’s day. It’s a formality of sorts. But also implies something else: The Corinthians were in need of grace and peace. We will see that as we go through our study over the next weeks, and they also probably had received a pretty hard-hitting letter from Paul previous to this one that may have had them smarting. They needed a blessing and Paul was making sure he did.
- Also, grace and peace are two things that characterize Christ Followers. Because we are recipients of God’s grace and the all-pervading peace (the very essence of the meaning of Shalom), we experience far less despair in the face of the craziness we have in this world.
- And then...

Paul expresses thanks

- He may be discouraged with the reports he has heard from Corinth (something we will look at next week), but he still is very aware of how far these people have come from what they once were. John Newton wrote “*I once was lost, but now I’m found, was blind, but now I see.*” Paul knew that to be true for the Corinthians. They were the citizens of a port city that had harbors on both the east and west. Shipping arrived and

departed from Gulf on Corinth on the west and the Saronic Gulf on the east. It was a port city full of sailors and sin. There were many temptations and distractions for someone trying to walk with God. Paul makes sure the Corinthian Church knows he knows what they deal with.

- In fact he goes on, both here, and throughout the letter, and especially the latter part of it, to point out how...

The Corinthians have been gifted to serve

- And right from the start let me point out to us, we have been too. Each of us has been gifted to serve. This gifting is evidence of God's work among us. If we are not utilizing what God has gifted us with, we are cheating the kingdom out of our anointing. Being called out ones means suing the gifts we've been given. We will talk about this more, especially as we look at chapter 12.
- One of the things that can be a deterrent to utilizing gifts is the fact that we are not all God intends us to be. Certainly the people to whom Paul is writing felt that and I know we do too. That is why he points out to his readers...

They were not perfect but they were blameless because of his work in their life

- These people were ANYTHING but blameless. They were squabbling and sinning. They were not reflecting well on Jesus Christ. Does that sound familiar? It's funny how 2000 years has made little difference – Christians still squabble and Christians still stumble. We are certainly not perfect. We are still mortal and susceptible to sin. God's grace taken away the power of sin and the work of the Holy Spirit in our lives has given us the convicting protection to shed the light on sin and temptation. But we still stumble and fall. But the blood of Christ makes us new creations. This, Paul points out, is the saving grace we have, because...

God is faithful and can be depended upon

- Paul had already written to his friends in the church in Thessalonica and he had written something very similar to what we find here in verses 8-9 of our text. It'll sound familiar to you since I often use this as a benediction: *May God himself, the God of peace, sanctify you through and through. May your whole spirit, soul and body be kept blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. The one who calls you is faithful, and he will do it.* 1 Thessalonians 5:23-24.
- God is faithful. What he says he will do. I know it's what Paul was implying to the Corinthians and I know it's what he's saying to us – let's emulate God here. Can we just be so faithful? Can we just at least attempt to be so reliable?
- After all...

It is through Christ they were called

- Christ has invited us to ministry with him. He has made us his called out ones, ready for service. He knows who we are. He knows our faults. He still loves us and invites us to ministry in his kingdom.
- That's all for today – I've already gone too long, especially considering this was merely Paul's intro to him long correspondence to his dear friends in Corinth. We will pick up next week. Until then, as you always should between Sundays, be God's called out ones. Be Jesus to a despairing world. Amen.