



God's Church (Week 1/18: To the Church in Corinth)

Small Group Discussion Questions

Connect *What is one way this week that you can demonstrate that Jesus has sent you?*

Warm-Up

1. Can you remember a funny example of a time when you made a bit of a mess of things?
2. How had the church in Corinth made a mess of things? Yet, how does Paul speak of it?

Read 1 Corinthians 1:1-4 - Called by God

3. What was the city of Corinth like? What was the history of Paul's connection with Corinth?
4. Whose church was it? Whose church is St Bart's? Why is it so important to recognise this?
5. For what reason does Paul give thanks for the church? Does this surprise you at all?
6. How can you give thanks for the same in our life together at St Bart's? Can you think of examples?
7. How is being called by God to be his church fundamental to our ultimate identity?

Read 1 Corinthians 1:5-7 - Supplied with Gifts

8. In what way does Paul say that the Corinthian church (and us!) have been enriched?
9. What were some of the issues for the Corinthian church when it came to gifts? Can we be similar?
10. When it comes to God's gifts, do you usually have a view of scarcity or abundance? Why or why not?
11. How do you see God's gifts at work in our life together at St Bart's? Is there anyone you could encourage or enable to use their gifts in the life of God's church at St Bart's?
12. For what reasons should our gifts never be a source of boasting?

Read 1 Corinthians 1:8-9 - Kept Blameless

13. What does it mean for God to keep us firm? In what way will we be blameless? On what basis?
14. Does this guarantee give us freedom to obey rather than freedom to rebel?
15. How does belonging to Jesus shape your identity on one of your frontlines?

Apply *How would others recognise that your identity is shaped by your relationship with Jesus?*

Pray *Gracious Father, thank you for the grace, gifts, and guarantee of a secure future that we have in Jesus. Please shape the identity of our lives and church on the basis of who you are and what you have done in the Lord Jesus. Amen.*



God's Church (Week 1/18: "To the Church in Corinth") Going Deeper Resources

On Your Front Line this Week

Amongst holidays, what new opportunities do you have to visit, love, or listen to someone?

For Families

Download some of the family resources to use at home: stbartskids.org

Listen, Watch, and Read

- *Summoned by Grace* by Andrew Each: <https://www.st-helens.org.uk/resources/talk/51866/>
- *1 Corinthians 1:1-9* by Andy Gemmill <https://www.st-helens.org.uk/resources/talk/51692/audio/>
- *Our Confidence* by Grahame Johnson <https://www.st-helens.org.uk/resources/talk/2760/>
- *1 Corinthians 1* by Peter Adam <https://resources.thegospelcoalition.org/library/weak-and-foolish-strong-and-wise>
- *1 Corinthians 1:1-9* by John Stott https://www.allsouls.org/Media/Player.aspx?show_popout=true&show_media=50182&show_file=53500

Series Resources:

Some helpful resources for this series:

- Website: "First Corinthians" by the Bible Project: <https://bibleproject.com/learn/1-corinthians/>
- Course: "1 Corinthians" as part of the Ridley Certificate (6-week online course): stbarts.com.au/ridley

Week 01/18 (GOD'S CHURCH): 25/04/21
"To the Church in Corinth" by the Rev'd Adam Lowe

Bible Passage: 1 Corinthians 1:1-9

When my brother and I were kids, we loved to build model cars. It was old school, before Minecraft and 3D printing, we'd meticulously cut out the pieces of plastic, paint them carefully, and piece them together. It was a good thing, but because it involved knives, paint, and glue, there were a few rules involved. One day, in a relentless pursuit of efficiency, I decided to disband the use of the cutting matt, only to discover that in my haste, I had carved out a number of large, deep cuts straight into the wooden dining table. I had already broken one rule, but instead of fessing up, I decided that I could simply infill the cuts with super glue, and then perform a light sand of the wooden table. Needless to say, it didn't work, and what started as an accident, turned into mess upon mess.

Today as we begin *our* new series in Paul's *first* letter to the Corinthians, it doesn't take long to realise that the Church of Corinth is in a bit of a mess.

In 146BC the Romans destroyed Corinth, 100 years later Julia Caesar made it a Roman colony, by 50AD, Corinth had become the capital of Achaia - modern-day Greece.

- *It was a cultural melting-pot of Greeks, Syrians, Jews, and resettled Roman veterans. It was known for its wealth but also that there were many who were utterly impoverished. They had many gods, dozens of pagan temples, and probably over 1000 temple prostitutes.*
- *And it's into this context and time, that we read in Acts 18, that Paul spends 18 months. teaching in the synagogue to persuade Jews and Greeks that Jesus was the Messiah, only later - in light of opposition and abuse - to focus his Gospel efforts with the Gentiles.*

- Paul was a serial church planter, typically going from place-to-place, spending only a few weeks or months, raising up local leadership and moving on.
- But he had pastored the Church in Corinth, it was very close to his heart, *and there had been incredible Gospel fruit in this burgeoning church, as we read in Acts 18...*

Then Paul left the synagogue and went next door to the house of Titius Justus, a worshiper of God.

Crispus, the synagogue leader, **and his entire household believed in the Lord; and many of the Corinthians who heard Paul believed and were baptised.** (Acts 18:7)

- *It's a Good News story of the Good News being grasped! But fast-forward a few years, Paul's left Corinth, now in Ephesus, and he gets word that the Church of Corinth is in a mess.*
- In fact, as you scan through the letter it reads as a comprehensive litany of issues as the Church in Corinth, goes from bad to worse, seemingly perverted every aspect of their working and worshipping lives! *This is the church unfiltered!*
- **issues in leadership; division between believers; competitiveness about gifts; unchecked sexual immorality; drunkenness at the Lord's Supper; and confusion about the resurrection of the dead.** [IMAGINE]

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- It could be hard to know where to begin with such a disparate set of issues!
- But not for Paul - because he sees clearly, that all of these issues are not a random unrelated hodgepodge of problems, *but he quickly diagnoses that the mess and messes that they're making even of good things, are all interconnected! There's common thread.*
- He doesn't run from the hills and reject the Gospel, but he says clearly: that they've forgotten who God has made them to be! that instead of living lives transformed by the Gospel, they're instead living lives that are being conformed to the world!
- Paul longs not for individualistic worldliness, but unity and holiness!
- We'll see that as Paul unpicks issue-by-issue, pointing each time back to the Gospel!
- For Paul, it's all about Jesus! Paul mentions Jesus *eight* times in just *nine* verses! The reason they're confused liturgically, ethically, sexually, pastorally, theologically, is because they've dropped Jesus when it is actually all about him. //
- Big picture, the letter is split into two halves:
Chapters 1-6 Paul address a stack of rumours and reports that he's received, Chapter 7 onwards he responds to a letter from them with a range of questions.
- But Paul begins, not by flying off, saying, what are you guys doing, **but by reminding them of who they are.**
- they are **called by God; supplied with gifts; and will be kept blameless.**

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PAST: CALLED BY GOD | 1 CORINTHIANS 1:1-4

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So first, the Corinthians have been **called by God**. Up front and centre, before Paul goes about surgically dissecting all of their issues, he's reminding the Corinthians of their **identity**. **Underscored first by Paul's identity**.

Paul, called to be an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God, and our brother Sosthenes, (v.1)

- *(We're not really sure who Sosthenes is, he might be synagogue leader mentioned in Acts 18, likely he's now writing down Paul's letter whilst he is dictating it out loud.)*
- But regardless, when Paul says that he's an 'apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God', this is not Paul grandstanding and puffing himself up, in order to assert his greatness, *but he's underscoring that everything that he has to say, is not on the platform of his own authority or by his own will, but on the platform of God's authority and God's will! Paul is God's messenger.*
- This is critical, because as we see later on in chapter 1, the Church in Corinth, have been running a bit of a popularity contest about who is the greatest leader.

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- Paul wants their identity not to bound up in him, or another leader, or the culture, *he doesn't want their identity to be bound up in their job, wealth, status, reputation, but he wants their identity to be totally grounded in who God has called them to be!*
- Good warning to both:
Christian leaders: *that their identity ought not to be bound up in people following them, and*
Followers of Jesus: *that our identity must not be bound up in a Christian leader...*
- For not only will those people imperfect and are bound to disappoint us in some way, but the truth of who we are is much more stable and thrilling: we're God's church.

To the church of God in Corinth, to those sanctified in Christ Jesus and called to be his holy people, together with all those everywhere who call on the name of our Lord Jesus Christ—their Lord and ours: Grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. I always thank my God for you because of his grace given you in Christ Jesus. (vv.2-4)

Look at the dimensions of who we are:

- **Not Paul's Church but God's Church.**
- *Sanctified in Christ* - which means they *and we* - have been set apart by Jesus.
Called to be his holy people - which means *we are to bear Jesus' likeness for we belong to him. Together with all those everywhere who call on the name on the Lord,*
which means that belonging to God's church doesn't just connect them to one another, but it connects them to the entire church that spans time and space.

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- St Bart's is not my church, or your church, we're God's church. The church is not a pile of bricks or tilted-up concrete slabs, but a living body belonging and bought by God.
- That's why when Paul says that he gives thanks for the Church in Corinth, *it's not because of how amazing they are, but because of the amazing grace given to them in Jesus.*
- And that's already happened! It's something they can look back to, be sure of. //

The people of Corinth had a reputation from jumping from *fad-to-fad*.

- We live in culture in which we're obsessed with finding our identity in ourselves, but Paul, and the Gospel saying that our true identity, *one that is unshakeable and sure*, comes from outside ourselves, it comes from who we are in Jesus.
- And if you're a follower of Jesus, it's who are: you are part of God's church.
- *Which means when we choose to act in a way that is incongruent with what God wants, we're not just rejecting what God longs for us to do; but:*
we're also forgetting who God has *called us out* to be. [picked from a team]
- It's like Paul saying to the Church in Corinth, don't you remember who you are? It's like me rocking up to a Year 1 class and sitting down to be a student again!
Surely someone what say, Adam why are you doing this? You're no longer a student. Don't you remember who are you?
- You're the church of God, sanctified in Christ, called to be his holy people. //

7

PRESENT: SUPPLIED WITH GIFTS | 1 CORINTHIANS 1:5-7

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Second, Paul reminds the Church in Corinth that they have been **supplied with gifts**.

For in him 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. Therefore you do not lack any spiritual gift as you eagerly wait for our Lord Jesus Christ to be revealed. (vv.5-7)

In face of their challenges, and living distinctively as called out by God, *to live the Christian life, to witness for Jesus, and stand against paganism and immorality*, Paul is reminding them that they already - in the present - have every gift needed!

- And note, that Paul's reference point is not in the individual, but as a church!
- So exciting to think that all that we need, *to do what God is calling us to do* and *be who God is calling us to be*, if we just look around, has already been supplied to us.
- That means that not only do we all have a part to play, but every part that we play is important. //
- It's affirming and corrective. That:
If we're not using our gifts, the whole body is missing out.
If we are using our gifts, then the whole body is at work.

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- *I'm constantly amazed how enriched we are as a church through God's provision of gifts.*
- When Paul says we have been enriched one very way, there's a sense that God has lavishly entrusted and endowed these gifts to us.
- *It's a bit like when we think of some of the massive universities around the world, that have gigantic endowment funds that can basically keep them rolling on in perpetuity.*
- Well, God, has entrusted us all with something worth much more: his gifts. //
- As we've been working to start implementing VISION 2025 there are some new areas. There are some really challenging things that we believe God is leading us to.
- But even as we begin, as we've asked and prayed for people to be involved, *I've been astounded at the people who God has gifted and raised up to take part.*
- Every time I think: *wow, I'm not sure where we will find someone with that experience, or that skill, or that particular passion, right before my eyes, they've been raised up.*
- As Paul goes on to challenge the Corinthians on a whole number of fronts, they could have been so tempted to say, well we can't address that yet, or we can't possibly live that distinctively until... but Paul is saying:
you have every good gift needed amongst you, right now!
- *That's not to say that should stop praying that God would send more workers for the harvest, or that we don't need to be patient sometimes and wait for God's provision, but it does mean that as we pray, we should expect God to bring those gifts, into faithful mature expression for the purposes he has for us right now.*

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- Paul says: they have been **enriched in every way!**
- **With all the challenges they face, and with all the opportunities they had: the mind boggles at all the possibilities of the depth of what this means!**

One of the big problems that has surfaced in the Church in Corinth was an arrogance about gifts.

- They had become competitive about gifts.
They were weighing some gifts as more super than others. They craved more spiritual gifts in order to be superior.
- People were desiring secret knowledge like that of the gnostics.
Some were ranking gifts like tongues and prophecy as markers of true believers.
- An individualist approach to gifts had led to all sorts of pride and arrogance.
- But Paul won't have any of that. It's likely what he's correcting when he says:
you've been gifted with all speech and knowledge that you need as a body.
- You've already had the testimony, the witness of the Good News among you!
- In speaking, *there are those gifted for teaching, prophecy, evangelism, encouragement. In knowledge, we have God's Word, are empowered by God's Spirit.*
- We don't need a special guru, or a solution to secret riddle, we've got all we need.
- Therefore, as you wait for Jesus to return, what are we waiting for?
- Like J I Packer said, *it's not let go and let God, but trust God and get going!*

10

FUTURE: KEPT BLAMELESS | 1 CORINTHIANS 1:8-9

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Finally, Paul reminds the Church in Corinth that they will be **kept blameless**.

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. (vv.8-9)

Paul is going to get really challenging after his greeting.

- All sorts of sin is going to be exposed. Paul is going to go totally unfiltered.
There will be no closing their eyes to the truth, or sweeping things under the carpet. //
- Sometimes when convicted by sin, or in the face of rebuke, our reaction can be to go on the defence, run away, or just feel hopelessly lost.
- So before he gets to the gritty stuff and tackles the problems, Paul reminds them of the great hope which will enable them to face the truth, and hold fast:
- That on the day of the Lord, that is when Jesus returns to judge the world, and every hidden thing is brought to light,
the same God, has called them into relationship with Jesus, will keep them *blameless* because of what Jesus has done.

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- That on that day, when the dead will be raised to an incorruptible life, *a day which Paul so longs for that the letter concludes with the words, O Come Lord*, we neither fear nor faint of that which will be exposed,
But delight that God has promised that those who trust in him, *will be found guiltless*.

The Corinthians are not going to be kept blameless by their great efforts.

The Corinthians are not going to be kept blameless because of their great gifts.

The Corinthians will be **kept blameless** because of the Lord Jesus. And so can we.

- I mean, can you imagine on that day,
when every bit of sin is brought to light, even the sin that we've been oblivious too, on that day, on what other basis could we appeal?
- To our own merit? To our own goodness?
Confronted by the reality of our sin, could we possibly boast in myself?
Well yes God, that is rather bad, but look at all these degrees!
Well yes God, I had forgotten about that, but look at all the good things I did!
- That would be like claiming I could get to the moon, by jumping off the ground.
- It just won't work.
- The only way we can be kept blameless, because of God's faithfulness, in Jesus.
- The Corinthians, despite all their issues, already have that assurance.

12

- We can have a wonderful certainty that we stand on solid ground.
- *Following Jesus is not like being on a stage, with God waiting to pull the trap door on us.*
- That no matter what our ups-and-downs are, how wobbly things get, that God is the one who will bring us through.
- That doesn't give us freedom to do whatever we want,
But it gives us a freedom to live for God without fear of condemnation.

As Paul lines up what they're doing against the Gospel, things are going to get really unfiltered.

- And the only thing that will give them a confidence, *the only thing that can give us a confidence:*
to face the sharp end of God's Word, is to be reminded:
that they have been called by God, supplied with all
the gifts they need, and that God will keep them
blameless until the end.