

To Exalt Christ

To Equip, Encourage, Exhort and Edify God's Elect

The Church Called – 1 Corinthians 1:1-9

The Call – 1 Corinthians 1:1

This morning, I wish to start a 5-part series based on 1 Corinthians 1 and 2. We will look at the church as it began, its fundamental foundations and what has happened through the centuries since the church was called into being. We begin with a major event in the history of Presbyterianism in Canada.

In 1875 various forms of Scottish Presbyterianism came together to form the Presbyterian Church of Canada. It survived until June 10, 1925 when church union almost ended it. Congregationalists, Methodists and Presbyterians decided to form the United Church. But some Presbyterian delegates to what was to be its final General Assembly, opposed church union. They elected Rev. Dr. McQueen moderator. He declared the court in session at midnight, & so was born, the Presbyterian Church in Canada. This June marks our 99th anniversary.

Our Presbyterian roots go back to the Reformers, to John Calvin in Geneva and to John Knox in Scotland both in the 16th c. John Knox, in exile in Geneva, studied reformed theology under Calvin. So, the Reformed faith travelled from Geneva to Glasgow, from Switzerland to Scotland via John Knox and that is why we are denominationally Presbyterian today.

The apostolic church which began in the first century AD was century by century falling apart theologically, doctrinally morally and spiritually. It needed to be reformed. Men such as John Calvin and John Knox led the 16th c Reformation charge for change that was so desperately needed.

The church has always faced challenges since its birth in the early AD 30s following the death, resurrection and ascension of Christ. It began in Jerusalem at Pentecost with the promised coming of the Holy Spirit as recorded in Acts 1 & 2. The church was called into being as 3000 came to faith in Jesus Christ in the first preaching of the gospel by Peter. Jesus had called him to be his disciple, then his apostle and then his preacher. That was the start of the church as the gospel spread from Jerusalem to Judea and Samaria and to the ends of the earth as Jesus had mandated in Acts 1 by those he had called to be fishers of men.

But the early church was opposed by those who opposed the gospel. In our Wednesday evening Bible study of the gospel of John, we have seen how Jesus was constantly opposed and his life threatened. He was always defending his identity. His death and resurrection would become the gospel, the good news to be preached. It was the gospel of repentance and baptism for the forgiveness of sins and receiving the gift of the Holy Spirit. The purpose of the cross was the forgiveness of sin. Our sin was imputed to Christ; his righteousness imputed to us.

Paul was one who opposed it. But that all changed. In 1 Corinthians 1:1 we read – *“Paul, called to be an apostle of Jesus Christ by the will of God and our brother Sosthenes.”*

Paul is the writer as he is for 12 other letters that make up most of the NT. He was called of Christ miraculously and dramatically on the Road to Damascus. He would be converted and become an apostle, an ambassador of the gospel, a commissioner of Christ. It was a high calling to a position of service, suffering and sacrifice, but it was as Paul said, *“by the will of God.”* IOW this was not what Paul would have voluntarily signed up for. But it was an irresistible call that saw his life, its direction, its purpose changed forever.

We owe our faith, our conviction, our salvation to that same will of God for our life. Do we ever think of what our life might have been had God not called and willed us come to him?

Think of the influence of Paul as an apostle of Christ. He wrote 13 of the 27 NT books. John wrote 5 and the rest by another 7 for a total of 9 writers. Think of their impact on the world since then. On August 20, 1940, Winston Churchill said – *“Never in the field of human conflict was so much been owed by so many to so few.”* He was speaking of the fighter pilots who defended Britain in those dark days. The same can be said of the NT writers - We the many, owe much to the few.

They were used of God to transmit and defend his gospel, the good news of Jesus Christ to a world under attack by Satan. Paul carried out the call God placed upon his life. He wrote, preached and taught. We are the benefactors as we read and study his word which in truth is God's word to us.

But as an ambassador and commissioner of Christ he was also called to be a church planter. God would use him through Christ to call churches into being as he called people to faith.

There are two types of call. There is the outward call which is the general proclamation of the gospel. People hear it, but not all respond. The second is the inward call by which the Holy Spirit takes the preached gospel and applies it convincingly to the heart, mind & soul of an individual. They are regenerated, brought to life spiritually and then to faith in Christ. They form the church. That brings us to the characteristics of the church.

The Characteristics – 1 Corinthians 1:2-3

The church at Corinth is one of seven churches Paul wrote to. Paul wrote this letter from Ephesus in the spring of AD53, 54 or 55. He had previously spent a year and a half there. Corinth was a city of 500,000 people. It was described as being the wealthiest but also the most immoral city in its the time. This was where Paul had brought the gospel and established a church.

In **verse 2** Paul addressed them – *“To the church of God in Corinth, to those sanctified in Christ Jesus and called to be holy, together with all those everywhere who call on the name of our Lord Jesus Christ – their Lord and ours.”*

This church, this group of people was first characterized as *“the church of God.”* They were not the church of Paul or Sosthenes or any other apostle. They were those who belong body & soul to God, to Christ, to the Holy Spirit purchased with the sacrifice of Christ on the cross. It is God’s church. They are God’s elect, his chosen and called people

Second characteristic of the church is – *“those sanctified in Christ Jesus.”* Sanctification is God by his Holy Spirit making one progressively more holy until the believer’s glorification.

The third characteristic of God’s church Paul says is – *“called to be holy.”* When we are justified, we are declared holy and righteous in the sight of God. We are then **called to be** what God **declared** us to be – holy. God sets us apart as holy, as his own. We can only be his by being what he called us to be which is, holy and righteous. It is what he is. God is intrinsically, inherently, naturally holy/righteous. We however must have it imputed to us, i.e., ascribed to us, given to us by God through faith in Christ. We do not earn it. It is granted to us by God in his *Irresistible Grace*, the fourth Doctrine of Grace.

The fourth characteristic of the church in Corinth, is what happens to *“all those everywhere who call on the name of our Lord Jesus Christ – their Lord and*

ours.” It is that commonality of faith in Christ by which the church world-wide calls on the name of Christ for one’s salvation that unites *“all everywhere.”*

The fifth characteristic is in **verse 3** – *“Grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.”* This is like a benediction, a blessing that Paul pronounces at the beginning rather than at the end. They know the grace and peace of God that follows from being at one with God and Christ through the Holy Spirit’s inner working. We know the grace of God through his work of saving us in Christ. As a result, we know his peace, which means in the Greek language of Paul’s time - *“quietness, rest, set at one again.”*

To set at one again is to unify what has been apart. Sin keeps us apart from God, from the holiness and righteousness he wants for us. Faith in Christ, which God initiates, allows us to be *“set at one again”* with our heavenly Father, reconciled through the cross of Christ and his resurrection. That leads to –

The Confirmation – 1 Corinthians 1:4-7

Here Paul speaks of that which confirms their call and ours to faith and to be God’s people, his church. In **verse 4** Paul states – *“I always thank God for you because of his grace given you in Christ Jesus.”* Paul confirms that they have received the grace of God. By grace they have been saved through faith. That is a one-time gift from God. But what Paul speaks of here is the on-going grace or blessings they receive each day from God.

Another confirmation is in **verses 5-6** – *“For in him you have been enriched in every way – in all your speaking and in all your knowledge – because our testimony about Christ was confirmed in you.”* Their testimony of Christ is the gospel. Paul would tell these same Corinthians in 15:2 – *“By this gospel you are saved, if you hold firmly to the word I preached to you. Otherwise you have believed in vain.”*

So when Paul says they have been *“enriched in every way”*, it is in their speaking and knowledge. IOW, they have a firm grasp in their minds and consequently in their heart and soul of the gospel preached by Paul. They are also able to articulate it, to speak to that knowledge of the gospel with understanding.

That knowledge is vital as Paul says because by it they are saved. There is no other way to be saved except by faith in the gospel, which is faith in Jesus Christ in his finished work of the cross, its efficacy sealed by his resurrection. Are we able to articulate, to explain the gospel with knowledge/understanding?

In **verse 7** Paul continued the confirmation of their call to be his church – *“Therefore you do not lack any spiritual gift as you eagerly await for our Lord Jesus Christ to be revealed.”*

The spiritual gift Paul refers to is their ability to speak of the gospel and to know it. Matthew Henry, 1662-1714, a great Puritan preacher and writer, wrote – *“Where God has given these two gifts, he has given great capacity for usefulness.”*

God will use these two gifts, speaking and knowledge, in the context of the second coming of Christ. Paul always had the broad perspective of the gospel – the life, death, resurrection, ascension and the return of Christ, what I call the *Five Points of the Gospel*. They have all they need until Christ returns. When Christ returns faith will be confirmed by sight.

The Conclusions – 1 Corinthians 1:8-9

In **verses 8 and 9** Paul gives the Corinthians three conclusions or summations that further confirm God’s new covenant in Christ by which his church was called into being and will be sustained. Paul wrote – *“He will keep you strong to the end, so that you will be blameless on the day of our Lord Jesus Christ. God, who has called you into fellowship with his Son Jesus Christ our Lord, is faithful.”*

Conclusion one – He will keep you strong. He will keep you in the faith he has given you. One will never lose their salvation. It is the *Perseverance of the Saints*, the fifth Doctrine of Grace. Conclusion two - That you will be blameless on the day Christ comes. God’s justification by faith and sanctification will accomplish that. You will have no fear of the judgment because you will be without sin that would condemn you. Conclusion three – The Lord is faithful. He will be what he is. Paul also reconfirms that God has called them into fellowship with Christ, to be his church and consequently his people.

We can take this entire passage and apply it to ourselves as those God has called into fellowship with his Son Jesus Christ, our Lord and a member in his church. Amen.

Soli Deo Gloria.