



gracefellowship

Series: Crossroads: Between Kingdom and Culture
Date: February 11, 2024

Title: Focused on Jesus
Passage: 1 Corinthians 1:1-9

Scripture Reading: 1 Corinthians 1:1-9

When we become Christians we have dual citizenship. We are both citizens of this world and citizens of heaven. One of the great works of the Holy Spirit in the life of a believer over time is to help us embrace the Kingdom of God and the rule of Jesus in our lives while letting go more and more of the kingdom of this world.

One of the most difficult things we face in this life is being so comfortable in this world that it feels more like home to us than heaven does. We want the future promise of heaven and the purification of our sins, but we don't want to change now. And because we are so comfortable here we end up bringing the sinful things of the world into the Church. Then we see things that don't look natural:

- The Church is just as power hungry as government.
- The Church is just as corrupt as the culture.
- The Church is greedy and self-focused rather than servants who are others-focused.
- The Church celebrates things the Bible clearly calls sin.

These are the kinds of things Paul is going to have to address in his letter to the Church at Corinth. And they are things that we still need to be confronted with today as we strive to live for Jesus in a culture that celebrates and promotes sinful indulgences.

As we jump into the text today we are going to see Paul do something wise at the beginning of the letter. He doesn't just jump right in and bash the Corinthian church over the head. Paul begins with some encouragement before he moves to critique and rebuke.

:: 1 Corinthians 1:1-9

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

² 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:

³ Grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

⁴ I always thank my God for you because of his grace given you in Christ Jesus.

⁵ For in him you have been enriched in every way—with all kinds of speech and with all knowledge—

⁶ God thus confirming our testimony about Christ among you.

⁷ Therefore you do not lack any spiritual gift as you eagerly wait for our Lord Jesus Christ to be revealed.

⁸ He will also keep you firm to the end, so that you will be blameless on the day of our Lord Jesus Christ.

⁹ God is faithful, who has called you into fellowship with his Son, Jesus Christ our Lord.

When we look at verses 6-9 we are going to find the encouragement Paul uses with the church.

Paul's Encouragement:

1. You love Jesus (vs 6)

They accepted the testimony about Jesus and God had confirmed that through their faith.

2. Spiritual Gifts were present (vs 7)

They had the Spirit of God living in them and it was evident based on the gifts of the Spirit they demonstrated.

3. They eagerly awaited the return of Jesus (vs 7)

One of the key attributes of Christian faith is a longing to be united with the One who saved us. We are continually instructed to wait and even long for His appearing.

That's not bad! If Paul were to write Grace Fellowship Church a letter I could only hope he would say, "I see your love for Jesus. You're full of the Spirit and using the gifts He has given you in a positive way. I'm thankful that you are continually looking forward to the return of Jesus." That's the positive message before the rebuke comes! The church in Corinth was a mess, but they had some positive things going for them. We may not the same issues that Corinth had, but I wonder if we have the same positives? As we stand at the crossroads of the Kingdom of God and the culture I wonder about these things:

1. How strong is our love for God verses our love for the things of this world?

2. Do we exhibit a dependence on God's Spirit and rely on His power at work in our lives or do we attempt to follow Jesus in our own power?

3. Are we expectant about the return of Jesus and praying for that daily, or are we so at home here that we don't really care if He returns or not?

Jesus takes the same approach of encouragement before rebuke in Revelation when He gives John letters to write to the 7 churches in Asia Minor. He will start off with something that He sees that is positive and then challenge them in an area of concern that needs to be addressed so they remain vibrant and firm in Him. The only church Jesus doesn't begin with something positive is Laodicea- they were a mess and needed to get their act together!

This week someone told me about a Pastor who gave a general outline of how Paul wrote his letters and it looked like this:

General Pauline Letter Outline:

Grace.

I thank God for you.

Hold fast to the gospel.

For the love of everything holy, stop being stupid!

My friends all say hello.

As we study this book together there is something important we need to know, and it's not only for this book, but for all of the Bible:

As Westerners we have been taught to live and think in very individualistic ways. But Eastern cultures are more likely to have a collective mentality.

- When we read the Bible you may have been taught to ask, "What does this mean to me?" or "What am I supposed to do about this?"
- Easterners would ask, "What does this mean to us?" or "What are we supposed to do about this?"

In fact, we see how this plays out here at the beginning of the book. Some of you will read verses 4-9 as if Paul were thinking of you personally when he wrote this and it's supposed to first apply to your personal life.

⁴ I always thank my God for you (Joel) because of his grace given you (Joel) in Christ Jesus.

⁵ For in him you (Joel) have been enriched in every way—with all kinds of speech and with all knowledge—

⁶ God thus confirming our testimony about Christ among you (Joel).

⁷ Therefore you (Joel) do not lack any spiritual gift as you (Joel) eagerly wait for our Lord Jesus Christ to be revealed.

⁸ He will also keep you (Joel) firm to the end, so that you (Joel) will be blameless on the day of our Lord Jesus Christ.

⁹ God is faithful, who has called you (Joel) into fellowship with his Son, Jesus Christ our Lord.

But if you go back up and look at verses 2-3 you're going to find a clue to help us know how to read the book.

:: 1 Corinthians 1:2-3

²To 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:

³Grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

Now we need to go back and read verse 4-9 again with a collective approach rather than an individualistic approach. This is East Tennessee, so let me help this make sense to you. When we read the word “you,” think “all y’all!”

⁴I always thank my God for you because of his grace given you in Christ Jesus.

⁵For in him you have been enriched in every way—with all kinds of speech and with all knowledge—

⁶God thus confirming our testimony about Christ among you.

⁷Therefore you do not lack any spiritual gift as you eagerly wait for our Lord Jesus Christ to be revealed.

⁸He will also keep you firm to the end, so that you will be blameless on the day of our Lord Jesus Christ.

⁹God is faithful, who has called you into fellowship with his Son, Jesus Christ our Lord.

- God has blessed His Church with all the gifts of the Spirit. He has not blessed individual believers with all the gifts of the Spirit.
- God has promised that His Church will endure and survive to the end. Jesus told His disciples that He would build His Church and the gates of Hell would not prevail against it.

Now, why am I pointing all this out to you and spending an entire Sunday looking at 6 verses? Because I think Paul is intentionally setting the stage with this discussion for the very first problem he wants to address with the people in the church of Corinth. Next week we are going to look at a major problem facing the church: disunity. Paul is laying all this out in order to say, you all need one another. God has created us for relationship and the new family He has built is the Church.

In our culture faith is typically very personal and individualized. But in reality we are meant to live out our faith in community.

In Roman culture family ties were vitally important. Being family gave you belonging, but it also gave you obligations. You didn't just abandon your family or embrace another family. So when Jesus and Paul started talking about Kingdom

relationships as the believer's primary family it was radical talk- not cultural convention.

Do you remember the story of Jesus being visited by His mom and brothers because they didn't understand what He was doing as His ministry took off?

:: Mark 3:31-35

³¹ Then Jesus' mother and brothers arrived. Standing outside, they sent someone in to call him.

³² A crowd was sitting around him, and they told him, "Your mother and brothers are outside looking for you."

³³ "Who are my mother and my brothers?" he asked.

³⁴ Then he looked at those seated in a circle around him and said, "Here are my mother and my brothers!

³⁵ Whoever does God's will is my brother and sister and mother."

I think Jesus would always tell us to love our families well, but I also think we are meant to see our true family as the brothers and sisters we have in Christ. And Christ is head of the family. We are meant to come under His divine authority and live in obedience to Him, even when that looks crazy to our culture.

In fact, that brings us to the final thing I want to see in the text this morning. If we want to stand firm in Jesus and endure to the end- either the end of our life or until He returns- then we have to keep our focus and gaze fixed on Jesus.

Life in the Kingdom requires a constant focus on Jesus.

Let's go back one more time and read the passage together, this time we are going to see something interesting: in these 9 verses Paul references Jesus 10 times!

:: 1 Corinthians 1:1-9

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

2 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:

3 Grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

4 I always thank my God for you because of his grace given you in Christ Jesus.

5 For in him you have been enriched in every way—with all kinds of speech and with all knowledge—

6 God thus confirming our testimony about Christ among you.

7 Therefore you do not lack any spiritual gift as you eagerly wait for our Lord Jesus Christ to be revealed.

⁸ He will also keep you firm to the end, so that you will be blameless on the day of our Lord Jesus Christ.

⁹ God is faithful, who has called you into fellowship with his Son, Jesus Christ our Lord.

What is the cure for the problems facing the church in Corinth? Focus on Jesus!
What is the solution for the issues facing the church in America? Focus on Jesus!
What is the cure for the sin that exists in the church called Grace Fellowship?
Focus on Jesus!

Individually, yes, you should keep your focus on Jesus. But collectively we need to encourage and challenge and even rebuke one another when necessary to keep our focus on Jesus. We will all be better off for it. Let's follow Jesus together!