

Church is

a series in 1 Corinthians

Church is His (1 Corinthians 1:1-17)

Credit – Mark Driscoll

INTRODUCTION (CHURCH IS)

So today we are starting a new series called “Church is!” In this series we are going to be going through the book of 1 Corinthians. As a church we really esteem the Word of God, and one of the ways we work this out practically is by preaching through various books of the bible. 1 Corinthians is one that we have not done for a very long time – and we felt led to tackle it!

So when it comes to the book of 1 Corinthians, let me state the obvious... this is a book written to a local church. A mistake that we can make when going through the bible is to just ask “How does this relate to me?” Yes, that is a great question to ask yourself, because it is meant to relate to you, but the bigger question is, “How does it relate to us?” Because it’s a book written to a church.

And so as we go through this book, I want to encourage you to learn as much as you can about how this relates to us as a local church here at King of Kings. Before we get into the text, it’s also good to have an accurate understanding of the context. We know what it’s like to be a Capetonian. But we need to have a understanding what it was like then to be a Corinthian. So let’s quickly look at this city...

The City of Corinth

The City of Corinth was an imposing busy city when Paul reached it. It was a city in a strategic position, which made it an important trading centre.

As the map here shows – it was in the country of Greece. Those of you who have been on Operation Joshua Missions Trips have probably been around there.

Way back then - It had a bad reputation though – the slang word back in the day for being debauched was to be Korinthiazein! For good reason, as a Temple dominated the hill overlooking the city – the Temple to Aphrodite, the goddess of love, which had 1000 priestesses who basically were prostitutes.

It also had at the bottom of a hill a place to worship Melicertes, the god of navigation, and also a Temple to Appollo – the god of music, song and male beauty.

Corinth became a Roman colony as well, so it was a melting pot of religion, language and cultures.

David Prior says; “it was rough and tough.”

It was not a neat & tidy, prim & proper city. It was messy, and full of people with messy lives, and as such, it was also a messy church!

Yet, Paul ended up staying 18 months there – you can read about it in Acts Chapter 18. He initially worked as a tentmaker, and later received a love gift from the churches in Macedonia and Philippi which meant he could focus on teaching. It was in Corinth that he met his good partners in the gospel – Pricilla & Aquilla, also tentmakers, who took him in, and later continued to travel with him.

So Paul established a church in Corinth, and the church was maybe about 50 or 60 people. And they got together, probably in a big home, and they got up to all kinds of nonsense. You will hear more about it as we go along in the series...

Now for some of you this might take the wind out of your sails, because sometimes I hear people say; “If only we could get back to what it was like in the early church!” Well. If only you knew. Sorry to burst your bubble. But there is not much new under the sun. Not everything was hunky dory in the early church! This church in Corinth was a bit of a mess! As you will see, they were getting drunk on the communion wine, suing each other, having sex outside of marriage, and believing all kinds of crazy ideas. Makes me feel a lot better about us! Maybe we are just like the early church!

And so Paul is write letters to them to clean up all these messes. I believe he actually wrote four letters; we only have two. So as we get into it today, I need you to look with Paul's heart, look with Paul's mind; look with Paul's love of the church, but also great concern.

And so he starts off his letter –

1 Corinthians 1:1

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

Right in the beginning of this letter, Paul is making a big point. He is an apostle of Christ Jesus, and he has been called by God!

Driscoll says this about the opening verse of this letter; *“the first thing that Paul says is that there must be spiritual leadership in the church, because people disagree on everything and they fight over everything. And somebody's got to be the umpire that calls balls and strikes and brings some order into the church.”*

What I want you to see today King of Kings, is that God appoints spiritual leadership to lead the church. Spiritual Leadership is incredibly important. Remember that although in our church, we take nominations, and we do a vote, biblical spiritual leadership is not meant to work like the polling station in the room next door. We believe leadership is more than just a nomination or a vote. It has to be somebody who knows there are called by God. Amen?!

I remember when I first realized that God was calling me into ministry... It was the most exciting yet most terrifying time of my life. But I became convinced of this – God was calling me to serve as a pastor. It was not because I could not cut it as a graphic designer. It was not because I thought it would be a good career choice for me. It was not because I heard the salary was good and the package benefits were wise. God was calling me to serve as a pastor. So let me ask you...

What is God calling you to do?

Perhaps you know what that is – have you obeyed God? Perhaps you're still working that out.

For Paul, he begins this letter to the Corinthian Church by stating that God has called him, and he's working with spiritual authority. But he is not just some dangerous loose cannon! He says, “I'm with Sosthenes.” Who is this guy? Well, we don't know much about him. The name is only mentioned two times in the bible – based on these verses, some believe he used to be a synagogue leader before Paul led him to faith in Christ, and he was now a

significant leader who spent time ministering with Paul, and clearly someone who was a co-worker with Paul. Because that's how Paul operated. Always as a team. Always in accountability. Let me ask you this...

Are you accountable to others?

Paul always works in a team. Here he is with Sosthenes. In Acts 18 he's with Priscilla & Aquila, and later he's with Timothy. He continually works in team. He always has good Godly people around him to keep him accountable; to keep an eye on him. The church could've asked, "*Paul, who are you to tell us what to do? Who's keeping an eye on you? Who's looking at your life? Who knows that you're not sinning all the time?*" Paul says, "*Well, Sosthenes, that great Godly brother. He's my right-hand man here. He's traveling with me and strategizing with me, and we're accountable to each other.*"

It's important to have leadership, but leadership that is accountable and submissive to other leaders. That's how we do it here. I am accountable to the Overseers. We should all be accountable to someone!

So one of the first things we see coming out in the book of 1 Corinthians about what the church is meant to have – is leadership that is called by God, and leadership that is accountable.

And let me say this. One of the things we have not been really good at as Baptists over the years is understanding the spiritual gift of leadership. Because some people get really afraid of strong leaders. Some people just don't like spiritual authority. May I suggest that is not a healthy, not a biblical position. So..

Do you respect spiritual leadership?

This is something the Church in Corinth was now having to work through, and I want to encourage you to work through it as well. Because healthy churches have healthy strong spiritual leadership. You might not like that. But put yourself in my shoes. Put yourself in our leadership's shoes. According to that verse, I need to give an account for all of you before Jesus at the end of time. How would you like that job?

So, having established his leadership calling and authority, Paul now proceeds;

1 Cor 1:2-3

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.

First thing he says is, ***“To the church of God”*** – Which establishes another very important truth about the Church in this series. Question time King of Kings...

Who does the church belong to?

Church is His.

God! Right. Now this seems obvious, but in Corinth they were fighting about this.

The single people said, *“It’s our church.”* The married people said, *“It’s our church.”* The rich people said, *“It’s our church.”* The poor people said, *“It’s our church.”* The charismatic people said, *“It’s our church.”* The more reformed people said, *“No, it’s our church!”* And they were all fighting over everything and everybody’s got their thing. What about the women’s ministry? What about the children’s ministry? What about this? What about that?

And what Paul is saying is that the church doesn’t belong to any of us; the church belongs to God! And because of that we all need to lay down our agendas, we all need to lay down our personal interests, we all need to lay down our flags and say, *“God, what do you want for your church?”* Because the death of every church is when people show up with their agenda saying, “You do this... or we’re going to fight, you do this... or I’m going to leave.”

Rather, everybody needs to walk in and say, *“God, this is your church; what do you have for us?”* Some of you God has called here because there are things that we are not doing or not doing well. Praise God – welcome! We need you!

But you also need to accept the fact that the church belongs to God, and it doesn’t belong to us. It doesn’t belong to me. It doesn’t belong to the leaders. Churches do not belong to the denomination. We don’t belong to the Baptist Denomination. But also, Churches don’t belong to the people. Ultimately, churches belong to God – they do. It’s God’s church.

Jesus went to the cross, He died for the sins of his people. He rose to forgive us. He has saved us. He has made us Christians. He’s brought us together as a church. This is his church – it has to be.

This is why it can be so hard as a pastor when people complaining about the church. People moaning about this and that. Look, I get it. I understand that the church is not perfect!

Me and my OCD see every problem in this church. Trust me. I know. I'm doing my best. But do you love the Bride of Christ enough to serve her? or are you just standing back and complaining?

That's the church – filled with sin and sinners and problems and mistakes and errors and flaws. So please don't stand back and say, "It's a mess, and it's not good enough for me." Rather say, "How can I help". The staff here at King of Kings have been working on that. "How can I help?" How can we help?

Just like if my mom was in trouble. I wouldn't stand back and criticize – I would help her. If you believe that the church of Jesus Christ in general or this church in particular is in trouble, acknowledge that it belongs to God and God is at work on it. And God is calling us to be at work on and in the church – that we are the church.

That's why Paul says the church are - **all those everywhere who call on the name of our Lord Jesus Christ—their Lord and ours:**

Paul is teaching the church in Corinth that it has a universal nature – **“all those...who call on the name of the Lord Jesus Christ”** – and a local expression – **“the church of God in Corinth.”** We are part of the church of Jesus Christ. All nations, races; all times and places; everybody who belongs to Jesus – that's the big C, the Church.

What Paul is trying to teach his people – that they are the church; that the church is them. That they can't fight over the church, because the church belongs to God and they belong to God.

That's why he tells them that positionally they are sanctified, made holy, **called to be his holy people!**

What is holy?

Holy means you live like Jesus and you stop sinning and you start obeying. See, some of us want holiness, but not obedience or discipline. The Bible says elsewhere, without holiness no one will see the Lord. Let me ask you this: **How is your holiness going? Are you growing in holiness?**

Are you hating sin, loving Jesus, loving your church? Are you seeing holiness grow in you? Not a self-righteousness, but do you hate sin and do you see changes in your life, to where you don't want to do what you used to do, and you don't do it anymore?

Sadly, the truth is, some people don't want to be holy. The Corinthians didn't want to be holy. They didn't want to listen... But Paul says that if you are truly a child of God, then you must be a person who altogether desires to be holy; to live a life that is pleasing in God's sight and gets rid of those things that are displeasing in God's sight.

Let's read on, verse 4,

1 Corinthians 1.4-8

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.

Now at first glance this sounds like a pretty little prayer. But it's actually not so great. It's rather rebuking. Paul is not giving them a compliment here. He is saying; "Wow, God is seriously having to put up a lot of grace for you lot!" ***I always thank my God for you because of his grace given you in Christ Jesus*** – that's not a compliment! This is a very gentle, fatherly-type rebuke. In other words, God could've given up on these people a long time ago but he's hung in there with them, he has chosen to bless them despite their sin, enrich them. God is so good. Let's read on...

1 Corinthians 1:7-9

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.

Paul says that God has blessed the Church in Corinth, and they do not lack any spiritual gifts. What he is saying here is basically this, I praise God that he's been so good to you. I praise God that he's given you all these gifts and abilities and talents. I praise God that you lack nothing and you have everything you need from God to do what he has called you to do.

Spiritual Gifts! The book of 1 Corinthians is going to teach us about them. And we are trusting that the Lord is going to reveal to you what your spiritual gifts are – and that you are going to begin to serve the body with those if you are not doing so already!

Paul also says here in verse 8 that God ***will also keep you firm to the end, so that you will be blameless on the day of our Lord Jesus Christ.***

King of Kings... Maybe this is less for you who are here today, and more for others, but maybe you can spread the word...

Don't write off the church because people mess up

Paul knew very well the problems that they church had – but he did not write them off. Yes, later on he will get down to the nitty gritty of sorting out the mess - but he did not abandon them because of it. Instead he called them to live up to their calling for God.

I know some people leave a church or condemn it because the people mess up – friends you are not going to find a perfect church anywhere because the people there are not perfect. Yet we are reminded this morning of the potential of this church, King of Kings also. Yes we will mess up, yes we are not perfect but church, today God loves us and wants to help us.

We do not lack what we need to follow Jesus and live up to our calling – God has given us grace, He has enriched us in every way. But am I maturing?

Am I maturing?

Am I repenting of sin? Am I reading Scripture? Am I praying? Am I using the abilities and gifts and talents and skills that God has given me to bless the church? Let me ask you this really simple, but I think important question:

What has God brought you here to contribute?

See, Paul says, *“God called me to be an apostle, but he’s called all Christians to be holy; to obey God and live the life that he intends for them.”* What is the life that God intends for you? What’s your part?

See, the big problem in a big church... is that everybody thinks that everybody else has got it covered. Everybody thinks that. What’s your part? What’s your portion, what’s your contribution?

And none of you would go home to your family and say, *“All right – I need to be served now, and it better be good!”* Would that go down well? No! In a family, everybody’s got a chore. Everybody’s got a part. Somebody takes out the rubbish. Somebody cooks the dinner. Somebody picks up the dishes. We’re the family of God. God is our Father. We’re brothers and sisters. Everybody has a chore. Otherwise we’re not a family; we’re a business. And King of Kings is not a business; we’re a church, we are a family. We’re a family on a mission to increase the name of the Father in the city, to find the other children that belong to the family of God. That’s why we’re here. We are a family community committed to reaching the world.

But Paul goes on to highlight some of the problems now;

1 Corinthians 1:10

I appeal to you, brothers and sisters, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that all of you agree with one another in what you say and that there be no divisions among you, but that you be perfectly united in mind and thought.

Here Paul is making a very passionate plea with his people for unity. I appeal to you! Brothers and sisters! ***in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ*** – That all of you agree with one another! So that there may be no divisions among you.

Paul appeals for Church Unity.

Some of you may have lived through church fights, church splits - where people don't love each other, don't like each other; they're on multiple teams. That was starting to happen in this church. And so Paul makes a plea to the whole church, for the cause of unity.

No please don't misunderstand. When Paul speaks about unity, and agreeing with one another. He does not mean tolerance of all kinds of ideas and people. Also, unity does not uniformity. It doesn't mean we all need to be the same. But there are some important things that we do have to agree on and be the same on.

Firstly, unity around the main theological issues, like the authority of the Bible, the person and work of Jesus Christ, salvation through Jesus alone, forgiveness of sin at the cross alone, salvation by faith through grace because of Jesus Christ alone. We believe in Heaven. We believe in hell. We believe God made us male and female. We believe in marriage. These things are big.

Some people come and say, "Well, are you open to new views?" Well, not on these things. Not on these things, but we also realize there are other theological issues where Christians have a variety of reasonable opinions. It's okay for us to differ about those. Primary things we unify on. Secondary matters we are happy to discuss, and differ on, but never divide over.

The Jesus of the Bible is really what we're about. And if we had to summarize what we're about in one word, that word should be, must be Jesus.

So Paul's first appeal is for unity. His second appeal is for maturity, so if you'll read with me in verses 11-12 he says this:

1 Cor 1:11

My brothers and sisters, some from Chloe's household have informed me that there are quarrels among you.

We don't know much about Chloe, but she was obviously a good, generous, Godly woman who opened her home to the church. And some from her household tell Paul that everybody is fighting! Paul describes the issue more and says in verse 12;

1 Cor 1:12

What I mean is this: One of you says, "I follow Paul"; another, "I follow Apollos"; another, "I follow Cephas "; still another, "I follow Christ."

Let me explain here. What happened in that culture, was they had communicators and philosophers who would speak publicly, and they were highly regarded. They were like their version of celebrities today.

And so these people have different fans. They've got groupies in the church. And they are very loyal to one another. And because of that, the teams fight; they don't like each other, right?

And we know this is how it is – these leaders represent teams, different perspectives. And so everybody had their team.

I remember in boarding school – my boarding school house was called "Merriway" because of two famous Grey High Rectors – Mr Merridith, and Mr Way. And so all the boarding school boys at Grey were part of the Merriway House. The not boarders, or day boys as they were known, were a part of other houses. Not nearly as awesome, and sporty, and amazing as Merryway. We had our unique colours. We were proud of who we were and who we represented. And there were a lot of fights with other houses because of it!

And in Corinth they carried this sort of cultural arrogance into the church. And they said, "Well, Paul's my guy", or "Peter's my guy, Cephas." Or "No, Apollos is my guy." And they broke off into teams in the church. And the whole church was divided and fighting, *but it did not have to be like that!*

They did not need not be the team of Paul, or the team of Apollos, or the team of Peter. You know why? Because Paul and Peter and Apollos all love Jesus, all said the same thing. They all serve the same God. Apollos was a great preacher. Peter was the leader of the disciples. And also Paul was the one who had founded the church. There were good reasons to respect each of these men. And what happened was that the church had an elevated sense of human leadership, and they adored, appreciated, admired and almost worshiped their leaders too much. This still happens in Christianity, right? Some people have their preachers they love. Their worship leaders they adore. Some of you love whomever it might be.

And some of you have teams that you consider yourself to be on, theologically or philosophically and how you think church should be done. And to a degree it can be okay, but it can also become very unhealthy.

There were also some in Corinth said, “Oh, you like Apollos, you like Peter, you like Paul? “I follow Christ!” These were like the super spiritual bunch. You ask them, so have you ever gone to church? Nope. I don’t need to go to church. Me and Jesus – we’re tight! We hang out all the time.” “So who do you listen to?” “I listen to Jesus.” “Well, do you have anybody who speaks into your life?” “Don’t need to – Jesus talks to me!

Some of you will find mentors and friends that you really love and respect. Some of you will be working in various departments with various elders and deacons that are leading, and you will love them, be close to them. You will know them and you will be loyal to them, and we say, “That is wonderful, glorious and good.” Have preferences, just don’t let them become prejudices. Have differences, just don’t let it become divisions. And you could say, “**Well, I love Pastor So-and-so.**” **Great, great – just don’t split the whole church over it, because all your pastors – like Cephas, Peter, or Apollos or Paul – all are working together, all serving the same Jesus!**

Verse 13 – Paul asks a series of rhetorical questions.

1 Cor 1:13-16

Is Christ divided? Was Paul crucified for you? Were you baptized in the name of Paul? ¹⁴ I thank God that I did not baptize any of you except Crispus and Gaius, ¹⁵ so no one can say that you were baptized in my name. ¹⁶

(Yes, I also baptized the household of Stephanas; beyond that, I don’t remember if I baptized anyone else.)

Paul says in verse 13:

Is Christ divided?

Does Jesus only love some people? You know what – Jesus loves Anglicans, Baptists, AOG’s, NG’s, Methodists! Does Jesus only love a few kids in the family of God?” No. Jesus loves the whole church. Right? What we learned earlier in verses 1-9, all who call on the name of the Lord Jesus Christ are the church.

So everybody that worships Jesus is the church, and Jesus loves the whole church. What happens is sometimes you would think that some churches own

Jesus. They lost sight of the fact that they're owned by Jesus; that all churches are owned by Jesus.

Second thing he asked,

Was Paul crucified for you?

This is the issue of salvation. Paul says, "I don't remember dying on a cross for your sins, so don't write any songs to me and sing them in church." Right? "Don't put my name over the church and have me be the focus of attention."

In the center of the church up front here, we have a cross, and you know what we don't have, we don't have a big picture of me. Praise God for that! Because a good pastor's sole job is to point to Jesus.

And that what Paul's saying to this church. "I don't remember atoning for the sins of the world!" **Was I crucified for you?** No!" And his third question:

Were you baptized in the name of Paul?

Is your ultimate allegiance to me, or Jesus? This is so important. I obviously want you guys to respect the pastors and the leaders in this church. But never forget where your ultimate allegiance lies.

He goes on then to explain this in verse 14. **"I am thankful,"** he says, **"that I did not baptize any of you"** – and he has a little senior moment here – **"except Crispus and Gaius, so that no one can say they were baptized in my name."** What's happening here is people are saying, "Paul baptized me. Who did you get baptized by? Oh, Deacon Dan? Whoopee. Paul wrote a bunch of books of the Bible. Paul's a big deal. I got baptized by Paul!" It's very immature.

He goes on to say – **"I also baptized the household of Stephanas; beyond that, I don't remember if I baptized anybody else."** What Paul says is this: it's not about who your pastor is. It's not about who serves you communion. It's not about who teaches your Bible study. It's not about who baptizes you. It's about whether or not you love Jesus! If you have a passionate heart of devotion to Jesus, Paul says that's what matters. And people get so side-tracked on everything.

Please can the worship team come up as I draw to a close...

Paul then ends this chapter in verse 17 with his great closing...

1 Cor 1:17

For Christ did not send me to baptize, but to preach the gospel—not with wisdom and eloquence, lest the cross of Christ be emptied of its power.

When God calls you into ministry he tells you what to do. I remember what he said to me when I felt his call on my life to become a pastor. And when Jesus tells you to do something, there's a confidence that comes with you.

And everybody in the church is just saying, "Paul, we think you should do this, and we think you should do that, and we want this, and we want that." And Paul says, "Sorry guys, that's not what God has called me to." ***"Christ did not send me to baptize"*** I don't need any more baptism notches in my belt. Not that I'm against baptism, but that's not my main priority. My main priority is this: ***"to preach the Gospel."***

And that's really what the church it is all about guys. The good news of Jesus – that he is God become a human being to save lost and broken human beings. Through his death on the cross, his resurrection; the grace that he provides, the faith that he gives, so that we can trust in him.

Unity is around Jesus. It's not around the church. It's not around morality or politics or a mission or a cause. Unity is around Jesus. If Jesus is the center of the church, people come together around Jesus.

"Christ did not send me to baptize, but to preach the Gospel" – the good news about Jesus. ***"Lest the cross be emptied of its power."***

Amen.

How do you need to respond to the Word of God today? What has the Holy Spirit been saying to your heart? Sometimes it can be overwhelming to follow Jesus when we keep messing up. Maybe we are not as spectacular at messing up as the Corinthian church was, but we do keep messing up.

Yet God looks at us and says we are His church. He has given us everything we need. He has equipped us with every gift we need to be His holy people. Yes, we are not perfect, but if we let Jesus lead He will help us. Will you respect spiritual authority? Will you hate sin? Will you love the church? Will you do your part? Will we be faithful in response to God? Will you put aside your favourites and focus on following Jesus first before any other? Will you protect the unity of this family?

Let's pray...