

And You Thought We Had Problems

1 Corinthians 1:1-9

⁴I give thanks to my God always for you because of the grace of God that was given you in Christ Jesus, ⁵that in every way you were enriched in him in all speech and all knowledge— ⁶even as the testimony about Christ was confirmed among you— ⁷so that you are not lacking in any gift, as you wait for the revealing of our Lord Jesus Christ, ⁸who will sustain you to the end, guiltless in the day of our Lord Jesus Christ.⁹ God is faithful, by whom you were called into the fellowship of his Son, Jesus Christ our Lord.

Someone once said: “The church is like Noah’s Ark: If it were not for the storm on the outside, no one could stand the stench on the inside.” The Church at Corinth fit that description: it was a mess --full of problems: divisions, immorality, pride, selfishness, pettiness, and much more. If you think the current state of the morality displayed in the headlines these days stinks, you should have seen what was going on in Corinth.

Reports of these problems greatly distressed the apostle Paul. In fact, he mentions in this letter that he had already sent one letter before this one concerning the problems at Corinth.

Acts chapter 18 describes the founding of the church at Corinth. Corinth was a crossroads of commercial trade and pagan worship. Situated in Corinth was the temple of Artemis, hosting more than 1,000 temple prostitutes.

Paul spent somewhere between 18 months to 3 years getting this congregation started and on the right foundation. But the influence of the world was more attractive than the influence of the Holy Spirit to many who called themselves Christians.

The apostle Paul is harsh in his letter. His harshness, however, is based on his love and concern for their spiritual well-being. Paul’s quarrel with the church at Corinth was a lover’s quarrel. He loved them despite their problems. He was disappointed that they had failed to become everything that God had intended and designed them to be.

Paul understood that unless he loved the church, even a problem church like Corinth, he could never help her overcome her problems.

Maybe you’ve heard the old adage: “If you

ever find a perfect church, don’t join it. If you join it, you will spoil it for sure!” Of course, we know there is no such thing as a perfect church. All churches have problems of some sort because churches are made up of imperfect, sinful people.

The problems described in Paul’s communication to the Corinthians occur at some time and in some way in every congregation. It makes this letter a very helpful study for any congregation. As problems and difficulties arise, there are things that need to be set straight.

Paul is not just writing as a fellow Christian, a friend to those in Corinth, or even as founding missionary pastor of the church in Corinth. He writes as someone who is “called” or “commissioned” to do the job set before him. Paul’s authority and leadership came from something outside of himself. It wasn’t something he decided but rather God decided and God called him to it.

To what was he called? He was called to be an apostle – a leader, a building block for the church. An apostle was one who was “sent on a mission with authority and power to accomplish God’s mission”

Paul’s calling gave him spiritual authority over those placed under his care. The people understood that, and they knew he was speaking for God in the same way as the Old Testament prophets had spoken to the people for God.

One of the major problems that Paul dealt with in this letter is that there were those in the Corinthian church who either looked to themselves as the source of authority or they looked to sources outside the church for authority.

Paul is reminding them of the “chain of command” in any congregation. Christ is the head. Christ then calls men to serve as pastors and spiritual leaders.

The authority comes from Christ, and it rests in Christ. The under-shepherds answer to the Head Shepherd, Jesus Christ – in all matters.

Heb. 13:17 says: “Obey your leaders and submit to their authority. They keep watch over you as men who must give an account. Obey them so that their work will be a joy, not a burden for that would be of no advantage to you.”

A church is also in spiritual trouble when its leadership fails to lead in the proper manner. Sometimes they don’t lead at all or they lead in the

wrong direction.

We note that the church in our text does not belong to the people, or to the pastor: it belongs to God. It is the

“church of God.” It was bought and paid for with the blood of the Son of God. It is “Sanctified” – it has been cleansed. The old stuff is washed away.

Corinth was a lot like a gross mud puddle. Why would anyone bother to be cleansed in the middle of a mud puddle? The people were cleansed, but ready to roll in the same mud again. It was hard to understand, and it was frustrating, but it wasn’t all that uncommon.

The people of God are “Called to be holy” and “set apart for service.” They are reserved for use by Christ Jesus.

As Paul was called for a purpose, so the people of God there were also called to serve the Lord Jesus with their particular gifts and talents.

They were the people of God in their local congregation, but they were also part of something bigger. They were part of the Holy Christian Church. What one local congregation does reflects on the church universal.

While they had enormous responsibilities, they were also blessed with everything they needed to succeed. v. 5 tells us that they had been made rich in spiritual blessings. vs. 7 says that they “lacked no spiritual gift.”

At times a congregation looks at itself and remembers a glorious past. It looks at its current state and says, “We don’t have what we used to have, or even more than that, it looks at other congregations and says, “We don’t have what they have.”

But we don’t lack the resources to accomplish what God wants us to do. He provides what we need. He is not stingy and withholding. Paul later will write: “And my God will meet all your needs according to his glorious riches in Christ Jesus.”

That Jesus Christ is Lord. He is “their Lord and ours...” He’s in charge. He’s head over all things. And He is coming again.

“Therefore you do not lack any spiritual gift as you eagerly wait for our Lord Jesus Christ to be revealed. He will keep you strong to the end, so that you will be blameless on the day of our Lord Jesus Christ.”

Paul reminds us that things need to be straight because the church belongs to Christ, and He’s coming back.

The night of April 14, 1912 began as any other night for the many laughing passengers aboard the huge ocean liner. The waters of the North Atlantic were cold but the skies were clear. Music and dancing continued well into the night. The captain and most of the crew had already retired to their bunks, when, without warning, a huge iceberg ripped a gaping hole in the side of the Titanic. The press had declared her unsinkable but the Titanic went down like any other ship. All it took was some water inside its hull

This was the same problem in the Corinthian church. The church was in the world, just as Christ intended it to be. The congregation was formed in the perfect place to reach out to sinners who needed to meet Jesus.

But unfortunately, the world was also in the church.

The world’s philosophies, the world’s morals, and the world’s priorities had entered the hull of this ship, and it was taking water.

Does your life seem like the Titanic? You thought you were going somewhere but something entered your life and kept you from making progress, and reaching your goal? Can you identify with the congregation at Corinth? A lot of promise, but easily distracted?

The one who loves the Holy Christian Church as his beloved bride, the one who loves every single member, big and small, young and old is coming. We prepare to celebrate his coming at Christmas. We prepare to meet him on the last day, when we will receive our inheritance as believers.

In the mean time, we will be a part of an imperfect congregation, just like Corinth. We will seek to strengthen our faith and our witness to Him who loved us so much that he was ready to come into our imperfect world and redeem us from sin and death. He is the one who is the Lord of an imperfect church like ours, and He is ready to provide everything essential. Our trust in this new church year is in Him alone.

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