

The Church Belongs to God

2Corinthians 1:1-2

As we go through life most of us go through a number of events by which we can mark the stages of life that we have been through.

Very few of us can recall the major milestones that we go through early in life.

I doubt anyone remembers the day they were born, or the first time they recognized their mom and dad, the first bite of solid food, the first time they crawled, or saying their first words.

We know we learned it, but we don't usually remember when we learned it.

As life goes on we start to remember more.

The first day of school, graduating grade school, our first job, getting a driver's license, graduating high school, going off to college or university, starting a career, for some getting married, having children, buying a car, buying a house, celebrating milestone birthdays, and alike.

While there are some things we share in common and others that we don't, we all have things by which we can mark the seasons of our lives.

We all grow up and mature in one way or another because that is the nature of life.

The exact same thing is true in our lives as Christians spiritually speaking.

We can look back on our walk with Jesus and see how God has worked in our lives to bring us up from being a spiritual baby into spiritual maturity.

The Bible makes it clear that this process never stops.

God uses all kinds of events and circumstances that cause this maturing process to take place, some stand out in our minds more than others but whether big or small the LORD is at work in His people.

As I have reflected on the book of 2Corinthians the theme of growing up in Christ has stood out to me.

If you are familiar with 1Corinthians you will know that this church faced a number of problems particularly with spiritual immaturity and immorality.

As this was a church planted through the ministry of the apostle Paul he felt the need to write to them to address these problems.

One of those letters is 1Corinthians which we worked through a few years ago.

Most scholars think he wrote at least two other letters to the church which the Holy Spirit did not include in the New Testament.

While we don't have them, enough is said in 2Corinthians for us to know that the content was difficult.

Paul confronted them about their immaturity and sin.

He does it out of a deep and abiding love for them wanting what is best for believers.

He does it even though he knows he is risking his relationship with them.

He does it because he wants them to grow up in the LORD.

[2 Corinthians shows us that his sharp rebuke has made a positive impact on the church. It would seem that the church is turning from their sin and maturing in their faith. Paul writes this letter to keep encouraging them in that direction. No matter where we may find ourselves in our Christian journey, whether we got saved this morning or have been a Christian for many years, we need this encouragement to keep growing up in Christ both as individuals and as a local church. As the apostle begins this letter with that aim he reminds us of some important lessons regarding the church. If we are to grow in our maturity as a gathered group of believers then we need to keep these things in mind. First we need to keep in mind that...]

Point #1 – The people of God are called to live under the authority of Christ. (Verse 1a)

The Lord has made it perfectly clear who we should listen to and He expects us to listen.

Like most of the letters we have in the New Testament this one begins with a greeting.

At first it may seem like a simple greeting common to most letters of that time period, but we would be wise to keep in mind the fact that the Holy Spirit often uses common things to teach us very important lessons.

If we look carefully we can certainly see that here in the first half of verse one.

In a few words we learn who this letter is from. (**Verse 1a**)

Let's focus in a few words here.

Let's look at the word apostle for a moment.

The basic meaning of the word 'apostle' is a messenger.

It is someone who is sent under the authority of another to deliver a message with the authority of the one who did the sending.

The idea is when we hear the words of an apostle we are supposed to hear them as the words of the one who sent the apostle.

[Most of us have had some experience with this. If you have a brother or sister you may have had an experience or two similar to this. Imagine your brother wakes you up and says, "It's time to get up!" If you are like me you might feel the freedom to completely ignore that. On the other hand if your brother wakes you up and says, "Dad says it is time to get up!" That changes the whole situation because now your brother is speaking on behalf of your father.]

By using the word apostle, Paul is claiming to be speaking with the authority of someone else.

He tells us who in this verse. Look he says that he is an **"apostle of Christ Jesus."**

If that is a true statement, and it is, then when we listen to what Paul says to the church we are bringing ourselves under the authority of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

Notice he also says that he is an 'apostle of Christ Jesus *by* the will of God.'

That is true of all the apostles but Paul's story is a bit different than the others.

Paul wasn't with the others from the beginning. In fact he was passionately opposed to Jesus and His followers in the early days after Jesus was raised from the dead and ascended into heaven.

He was happy when Christian preachers died and personally oversaw the imprisonment of believers.

It was on a mission to put people in jail where Jesus personally appeared to him and changed his life forever.

Through in person encounters with Christ, Paul went from wanting the destruction of the church to someone who wanted to build it up.

God affirmed his apostolic call through the other apostles who accepted him as being appointed by Jesus.

Down through the centuries and into our own time people have made the claim to be apostles of Jesus, but their claims should always be rejected because they cannot meet the criteria we find in the Scriptures for holding that office.

To be an apostle you had to have been there to see the Risen Lord.

To talk with Him, to eat with Him, and to learn from Him directly.

Paul had those experiences later than the others that is true, but the others accepted him.

Here is the problem with so called modern day apostles. There are no original apostles left to affirm their claim.

They have all died and not one of them gave any indication that the kind of authority granted to them should be extended to others.

According to Ephesians 2:20 the apostles are the foundation of the church.

Buildings only have one foundation and it has been left to us in the written word of God.

Timothy is also mentioned here. He is one of Paul's closest friends and faithful students.

He was sent by Paul to Corinth to minister on his behalf.

Now Timothy teaches under the apostolic authority of Paul.

That is to say Timothy taught what Paul taught under the authority of Jesus.

That can still happen today. No one can write Scripture today.

This book is finished and should not be added to or subtracted from.

If, however, this book is taught correctly then that teaching is based on the authority of Jesus and ought to be listened to by the church.

This is why we want you to bring your bibles to church.

This is why we want you to look at the words for yourself.

We want you to see the authority of what is written here, rather than the authority of the preacher standing up here.

[If we don't have that as believers we will never grow up in Christ. If we don't have that we will be easily pulled this way or that. We will easily fall for the lies of self-serving sinful people. God wants something better for us. He has gone to great lengths to give us what is written here so that we might live under the authority of Jesus. That is one of the important characteristics of being the people of God. Here is a second...]

Point #2 – The people of God are a set apart people. (Verse 1b)

Believers both as individuals and as a group have been called out of the world and into the kingdom of heaven to the glory of the LORD forever.

Having told us who the letter is from, Paul then tells us who the letter is to. Verse 1b.

Let's focus in for a moment on that phrase 'the Church of God'.

That is a possessive phrase meaning that the church belongs to God.

It's His, He owns it, He decides what it is going to be, what it is going to do, and what it is going to look like.

That is what ownership entails right.

[How many people here this morning own a house? If you own a house that means you get to decide what colour to paint your walls. You get to decide what kind of flooring, furniture, and appliances go in your home. Take that a step further and say you are building your home. That means you decide much more. Why do you get to decide all those things? Because you own it.]

That is how it is with the Church. God owns it.

He intends His ownership of the church to be seen.

That is clear in the meaning of the word church.

The word church translates the Greek word 'ecclesia'.

My Greek dictionary tells me that it is related to two words one meaning ‘out of’ the other meaning called.

Commentator Mark Seifrid points out that the word was used in secular Greek literature to describe the ‘assembly of citizens of a city’.

That is what the church is. It is a gathering of citizens, not citizens of an earthly city or country but a gathering of those that have their citizenship in heaven.

Listen carefully, if the church looks like the world then it’s not the church.

That is why Paul is willing to say really hard things to these people who are gathering in the name of Jesus in a place called Corinth, because he knows that the gathering of believers needs to look different than a gathering of unbelievers.

He is also writing to more than just the church at Corinth.

He says he is writing to ‘all the saints who are in the whole of Achaia’.

This letter is for more than one church it is for all the churches.

He expects the Corinthians to give this letter to all the churches in the surrounding area.

It’s for ‘all the saints’ he says.

When we think of the word ‘saint’ we might be thinking of particularly good Christians, but when the bible uses the word it refers to all believers.

The word ‘saint’ is closely related to the word ‘holy’ and the word holy means to be set apart by God for God.

Everyone who genuinely believes on the person and work of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of their sins is set apart by God.

We have been bought by the precious blood of God the Son to belong to Him forever for the eternal praise of His name.

[Here is a question that we should think long and hard about? Do we look different? Do we want to? I’m not talking about becoming a group of self-righteous hypocrites. I’m talking about being people who love what is right for the sake of Jesus’ Name. If we are going to grow in our faith as individuals and as a gathered group of believers then we need to remember we are a people set apart for the LORD. Here is a third lesson about who we are as the people of God...]

Point #3 – The people of God depend completely on God. (Verse 2)

This is true of everyone but the believer knows it and that becomes evident in the way we think, feel, and act in this world.

After telling us who the letter is from and who the letter is to, Paul gives a greeting to believers. (Verse 2).

First let's focus on Who the grace and peace is from.

It says here that this grace and peace come 'from God the Father and the LORD Jesus Christ'.

This tells us something very important about Who Jesus is.

We rightly believe that Jesus is genuinely human. That is how He is able to take our place on the cross and pay our penalty.

He is more than human however. There is no way that someone like Paul would write this sentence like this if Jesus were merely human.

Why is that? Because He is putting Jesus on the same level as God the Father.

He is saying that Jesus is responsible for these things in the same way that God is.

To say that about a creature that is less than God is idolatry, but Paul is no idolater which means Jesus must be equal with the Father.

That is what the bible teaches us about God.

He is One Being in which there are distinct Persons. This verse mentions the Father and the Son and we know from other passages that Holy Spirit is also God.

We call this the doctrine of the Trinity. One God in three persons.

The unbeliever might object and say, that's illogical. One plus one plus one is three not one.

That is right, but the math of the Trinity is different. It is infinity plus infinity plus infinity which equals infinity.

This is the glorious incomprehensible true God who has created all things and has resolved to redeem a people for Himself to the praise of His name forever.

From this God Paul says comes "Grace and peace" to the church.

Grace is perhaps the most wonderful word in the Bible in terms of what it means for us.

The simplest way to define grace is to say it is undeserved favour or an undeserved gift.

As it relates to God it means that God shows us kindness even though we don't deserve it at all.

Jesus didn't die for you because you are good or deserve it.

Jesus died for you because God is good and glorious.

Even before we are saved God shows us grace.

We don't earn a single breath of life it is all a gift.

To grace he adds the word 'peace'.

Certainly He means peace with God. Before knowing Jesus we were God's enemies bound for total destruction.

In Christ we go from being enemies to being sons and daughters of God.

Though we hated Him, He loved us and made peace with us through the cross.

As His sons and daughters He is bound by His own promise to take care of us forever.

We can rest in that.

We can have as it says in Philippians a peace that passes understanding because we have put our lives in God's hands.

Do you see? It all depends on God.

That is true of absolutely everything.

Hebrews 1:3 tells us that the entire universe is 'upheld' or 'sustained' by the power of the LORD.

Most people go through life without realizing or caring about that fact.

It's amazing how foolish we can be when God gives us constant reminders that we are dependent creatures.

What would happen if the earth lost its atmosphere and there was no more air to breathe?

What would happen if there was no more food?

What if the Sun stopped giving light and warmth?

We could go on and on.

Why did God make it so we would have to depend on so many things to live?

So we would be constantly reminded of our need of Him.

Every Christian and every Church should know that down to the deepest parts of who we are.

Our hope is NOT in what we have done, what we can do, or what we will do.

Our hope is in what the LORD has done. Jesus died for us to take away our sins, so that we can be forgiven and made right with God by faith.

Jesus rose from the dead to conquer death forever. All of that happens by Grace and believing that gives us peace.

Our hope is in what the LORD is doing.

He is at work every single day sustaining us in our life and faith.

Our hope is in what the LORD will do.

Christ will come again and raise all of His people from the dead.

He will remake this creation to be without sin and every believer across all time will live in the light of His glory forever.

That brothers and sisters is why the hope of the Christian is so wonderful, it's because it all depends of God.

As we continue to grow up in Christ day by day it is important to remember who we are as the Church.

We are the people of God.

Called to live under the authority of Christ.

Called to be set apart.

And called to depend of God.

That is who we are to be in Christ because being in Christ means being a part of the Church and the Church belongs to God.