

Lake Cities Community Church  
Pastor Craig Schill  
Series: 1 Corinthians  
September 26, 2010

**“One Thing Makes All the Difference”**  
1 Cor 1:1-9

---

Good news!! “The Recession is Over!” Perhaps you remember exactly where you were this past Tuesday Sept 21<sup>st</sup> when this proclamation of economic well-being was made by the National Bureau of Economic Research, and as it was replayed over and over again on TV, Internet and radio.

Or maybe you recall how *you felt* when you heard it – *“The recession is over? Really? Seriously?”* Thousands of people this week have been blogging, calling and writing in their disagreement - arguing the announcement was premature. What should have been a great moment for President Obama become quickly an awkward moment. He sought to temper the news by saying: “The hole was so deep that a lot of people out there are still hurting, and still having a tough time.” He was making the point that while technically the economic indicators might show the recession to be over it had not yet made practical application into most people’s lives.

Many people are still hurting in this economy. And over the past three years of this recession people have been turning to one particular industry for help. It is an industry that thrives in times of recession. Bad times for you are good times for them. It is not the government. Not education. Not religion. I am talking about the self-help industry.

While much of the economy has stalled, Americans have been investing 19 billion dollars a year into self-help books, seminars and products from such gurus as the late Dale Carnegie and Napoleon Hill. From the current King of self-help: Tony Robbins – or from old faithfuls like Zig Ziglar and Steven Covey. And recently even Donald Trump and Rudy Giuliani have gotten in the self-help game.

In fact Rudy Giuliani will be at the AAC on October 19<sup>th</sup> with a host of other famous positive personalities to improve your life. According to the website, this seminar will give you the latest in the areas of time management, leadership, goal achievement, sales training, negotiation, finances, investing, relationships, health, spiritual success, business strategies, motivation, communication skills and dog obedience training... Ok, not dog obedience training, I made that up – but *everything else in your life will be improved by attending this seminar.*

The self-help industry is doing great - because we all need help and they promise answers! And so the question I want us to consider this morning is: *where do you turn to for help?* Where do you turn when you find yourself in need? When you realize you have to change. When you hit rock bottom and are looking up. It is one of the most fundamental questions we could ever ask ourselves. How we answer this question sets the tone for how we live our lives.

Turn with me to the book of 1 Corinthians, chapter one. As you find your way to the text, let me remind all of us that the Corinthian church *was in need of great help.* They were at the end their own three-year recession a spiritual recession, where they were not

growing spiritually. And the good news of the gospel message, that promised transformation, had not made its way to practical application in their lives.

The Corinthian church you will recall from last week was materially prosperous, attitudinally proud, philosophically sophisticated and sexually promiscuous. This morning we look at the introduction to this letter found in the first nine verses. And we move through the text, think about that question – where do we turn for help?

### **Greeting (1-3)**

First century letters had a conventional structure – normally beginning with a greeting and a statement of thanksgiving. Paul follows this custom. The greeting occurs in verses 1-3 and the thanksgiving in verses 4-9.

1Cor. 1:1 Paul, called *as an apostle of Jesus Christ by the will of God*, and Subthemes *our brother*. Notice first how Paul describes himself - he *is an apostle* – which means a sent one. Sent from whom? He is *representing Jesus Christ* by the *will of God*. This introduction of Paul as “an apostle of Jesus by God’s will” is a common beginning - found also in his letters to the Galatians, Colossian and Ephesians. And Paul’s point in *all these* is that he comes to the church, not on his own authority, but as one sent by Jesus Christ Himself by the very will of God.

We will see later in the letter that the Corinthians had dismissed Paul and his authority. Paul had been gone for three years, and they had moved on to other things. Listening to other people. Paul starts his letter by reasserting himself into their lives.

At the self-help seminar in October you might listen to Donald Trump because he has a billion dollars. You might listen to Troy Aikman because he has three Super bowl rings. You might listen to Rudy Giuliani because was the mayor of New York City. Paul says, “The reason you should listen to me is because Jesus Christ sent me here with a message for you. God has sent me to help you.”

But not only Paul - the letter also comes also from “**Sosthenes our brother.**” It is again not unusual for Paul to include other people in his greeting. Eight times in other letters Paul’s adds additional names. So, while we don’t want to make too much of this – we should recall from last week that Sosthenes was a temple leader, who was beat up for the sake of Christ in Acts chapter 18. Paul may be adding Sosthenes name as additional weight to the contents of the letter. As Paul begins to assert himself, which will lead to some uncomfortable rebukes - it was important for Paul to let the church know he also had Sosthenes endorsement and perspective on the issues.

And so even in the first verse we have some spiritual meat and potatoes to think about. Verse one teaches us that God sends us people that we must listen to. Are we ready to learn and be confronted by Paul over the next several months? How open are you to receiving spiritual input into your life? God’s plans for spiritual growth always involves mentoring and discipleship. Do you have someone like Paul who cares enough for you to speak into your life? What a great start to this letter!

Verse two – continuing with the greeting; Paul is writing: **1Cor. 1:2 To the church of God which is at Corinth, to those who have been sanctified in Christ Jesus, saints by calling, with all who in every place call on the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, their *Lord* and ours:**

Let's break this down. Paul writes this letter to the **Church of God**. The Greek word for church is *ekklesia*, which means simply a gathering of people. In Corinth there were many *ekklesias* – various government groups or business clubs. We know this through inscriptions found in ancient Corinth inscriptions found at archeological digs. This *ekklesia* is different – this *ekklesia* belongs to God. It is not Paul's church, even though he founded it. It is not Peter's church or Apollos' church. It is a statement of ownership. In the great Toy Story movie trilogy, Woody's character is constrained in every movie by the statement: "I belong to Andy." He says, "No, I won't go there – I belong to Andy." He argues, "Hey, don't worry! Andy will take care of us." Andy's name written on the bottom of his boot and his belief that he belongs to Andy is seminal for him. Paul teaches here that the church belongs to God, and should be constrained by that theological reality. Don't go there – you are God's Church. That attitude must change if God owns you. Look on your spiritual cowboy boot and God's name is written there. This is God's church and no one else's.

And who are in the church? **"Those who have been sanctified in Christ Jesus, saints by calling."** Sanctified means to be set apart for God's use, to be holy. Paul is making it clear to us that he is writing to saved people. And this is helpful, because once we see how they were behaving, if this wasn't affirmed for us we would debate their salvation. We will see that they were acting just like the world around them – and in some cases worse!!

And isn't that just like Christians today? We hear all the time that Christians live in much the same way as the surrounding culture. The Christian Pollster George Barna recently wrote: "Although most Americans consider themselves to be Christian and say they know the content of the Bible, less than one out of ten Americans demonstrate such

knowledge through their actions.” And while not everyone who calls themselves a Christian is one, the Corinthians are - and we are reminded that our salvation is not by works, but by faith in Jesus by GRACE!

One more thing to know about the Corinthian Church from this verse is that they join, “with all who in every place call on the name of our Lord Jesus Christ – their Lord and ours.” If Christianity were music it would be a chord and not a single note. If Christianity were a song it would be sung by a choir and not a solo. Christianity is lived in community. The *ekklesia* of God in Corinth is not the only game in town. Paul reminds them they are but one of many who make up the body of Christ. As Paul rebukes them on their lack of unity and division.

Paul ends the greeting section by pronouncing a blessing upon them. [1Cor. 1:3](#) Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Grace was the traditional Greek greeting and Peace was the traditional Jewish greeting Paul combines them and this very could sum up all of Paul’s theology. I like the way Gordon Fee states it in his commentary: “The sum total of all God’s activity toward his human creatures is found in the word ‘grace.’ Nothing is deserved; nothing can be achieved. And the sum total of those benefits is found in the word ‘peace.’ The one flows out of the other (peace from grace), and both flow together from God our Father.” (Fee, 34-35).

### **Thanksgiving (4-9)**

In verse four we start the next section of thanksgiving. Verses 4-8 in the Greek are one sentence. [1Cor. 1:4](#) I thank my God always concerning you for the grace of God which was given you in Christ Jesus, It may seem odd to us that Paul would thank God for this

church that is such a source of frustration to him, but that is the heart of a Pastor. He knows they have received God's grace in Christ and knows his job is to help them. He says God's grace is so abundant --

1Cor. 1:5 that in everything you were enriched in Him, in all speech and all knowledge, 1Cor. 1:6 even as the testimony concerning Christ was confirmed in you, Paul is thankful here for their spiritual gifts – particularly gifts of speech and knowledge. Even though we will see later that they have abused both of these gifts (and they will need help to sort that out), the gifts themselves are good and from God.

Also we note that God's gifts are the true source of **their riches**. You will recall that Corinth was an extremely wealthy city. Paul is playing on that theme as he will later in the letter by arguing that their true riches are found in Jesus Christ! He continues with the emphasis of their rich blessings -- verse seven:

1Cor. 1:7 so that you are not lacking in any gift, awaiting eagerly the revelation of our Lord Jesus Christ, 1Cor. 1:8 who will also confirm you to the end, blameless in the day of our Lord Jesus Christ.

In terms of help -- God has done His part in imparting to them everything they need to live pleasing to Him – and God has given you and I the same benefit. Those gifts are put into practical use as we wait for the revelation of **Jesus Christ**. The imminent return of Jesus is a major part of Paul's theology as a motivator because Jesus could return at any time, and we don't want to be embarrassed or caught unprepared.

And not only that but, **we will be held blameless when Jesus returns.** Again the assurance of their salvation – possible because of their immaturity and lack of obedience, is highlighted. Paul uses legal language. When you stand before God Almighty, if you trust in Him you will be declared innocent of all charges against you.

In other words, their problems *are not* like those of the leaning Tower of Pisa, which began to lean in 1173 because of a poor foundation. The Tower in Italy has only a 10-foot foundation and all its problems started there. The church at Corinth, however, has a solid deep foundation – their belief in Jesus Christ. Their problem is that they have not built anything good on that foundation yet – but they do not need an expensive foundation repair job, only a remodeling to build a solid structure on that existing foundation. Finally, verse nine:

**1Cor. 1:9** God is faithful, through whom you were called into fellowship with His Son, Jesus Christ our Lord. We often stress that what Christianity is all about is a personal relationship with Jesus Christ. That is Paul's last point - God brought you into fellowship – the Greek word is *koinonia* – with Jesus Christ. Think of it as having joined Jesus' Community Life Group! The church belongs to Jesus and is driven by a personal relationship with Him.

### **Conclusion / Application**

Eight out of ten Americans believes that the phrase, "God helps those who help themselves?" is in the Bible. Is it? Actually it is not. Pastor Erwin Lutzer wrote: "It is first found in the writing of Aesop who said, *"The gods help them that help themselves."* Euripides, a Greek philosopher, said, *"Try first thyself, and after, call on God."* George

Herbert in the 17<sup>th</sup> century wrote, *“Help thyself and God will help thee.”* We received our present version from Benjamin Franklin who wrote, *“God helps those who help themselves.”*

But Paul has been telling us something very, very different this morning hasn't He? Look at our passage one more time and notice that it is all about Jesus Christ. Everything we have been talking about is in, around and through Jesus. These nine verses have 139 words in the Greek, and 32 of them are spent in telling us about Jesus. Paul is consumed with the centrality of Jesus.

Jesus is the one who speak to you through godly counsel. Jesus is the one who unifies the church. Jesus is the one who extends grace and peace. Jesus gives us true riches and makes us Holy. Jesus is the one who gives gifts to the church for godly living. Jesus is the one who is coming back and Jesus is the one will confirm you as blameless. Jesus is the one with whom you have a relationship. *Don't turn to self-help, turn to God's help through His son, our Jesus Christ our Lord!!*

If we are to understand the book of 1 Corinthians, if we are to understand how to bring our behavior in line with our beliefs, we must understand that it is all about having a correct understanding and relationship with Jesus. Jesus is the one thing that makes all the difference.

Theologian Dr. H. Wheeler Robinson at Oxford University said in 1928: “In a deep and real sense, Christ is the one answer to our many questions, and we gain the answer by the experience of Him, not by a number of statements about Him. He becomes the center of life, because our life finds its only satisfaction in Him, and then, we live life from this new perspective.”

Do you know this Jesus? In whom life finds meaning? If you do -will you let Him help you? **He** is the answer to the Corinthians problems and He is the answer to your problems and mine. Let's pray.