**Pastor Tim’s Message Notes 1-1-2023  
Who are the Corinthians?**

Friends, on this New Year’s Day, we are reminded how God makes things new. Jesus in Revelation states “Behold, I make all things new.” 2022 has transformed into 2023. Yes, we are still the same people, but something has changed. Namely, the month and the year. Time has transformed them into something new.

Yes, it may take us a bit to get adjusted to the new thing. If you are like me, you may have dated things in the wrong year a time or two before it become natural to write the correct year on a check or some other form.

But eventually, we all get used to this transformation.

And this reality should remind us that God is in the business of transformation. While God’s character is constant and unchanging, when people respond to His work on their lives, godly change will result. In fact, it is expected.

We are told in Paul’s letter to the Romans **“to not be conformed to the pattern of this world, but to be transformed by the renewing of your mind.”**

Again, the LORD transforms hearts and minds as people respond to His gracious actions towards us. This has been true throughout the history of humanity. But this is most clearly demonstrated in the Person of work of Jesus Christ. As people respond to the good news that Jesus took our place and died on our behalf, and rose from death, God’s Spirit comes to dwell within believers. And He gives believers a new heart – a heart that deep down does want to please and honor God.

And the Holy Spirit of God begins to transform us into living holy lives for God.

Today, on this New Year’s Day, we will begin to explore a powerful example of transformation as seen in the Christians of the city of Corinth.

Now sometimes it is tempting to look back on the days of the early church with rose colored glasses and just assume that back then all the Christians were nearly perfect.

But the simple truth is that people are people. And just as the church today is far from perfect, so was the church in its early days. Christians living in the 1st century were as human as we are today.

But the title of this sermon series we are beginning today, “Church Gone Wild,” should remind us this view of perfecting in the early church is not a very accurate one.

**A more accurate view would be that from the very earliest days of the church, God was transforming people.** The Corinthians were a work in a progress. And I hope we can all relate to that.

\*Before we turn to our first Scripture from Paul’s correspondence with the Christians of Corinth, I thought it would be helpful to share a bit of the backstory to how this relationship between Paul and these Christians came to be.

Paul arrived in Corinth in the year AD 50. And this was on his second missionary journey. You can read about this amazing mission journey of Paul in Corinth in the Book of Acts chapter 18.

And Paul, as was his custom, went first to share the good news of Jesus in the Jewish synagogue. There was a Jewish presence in this city as there was in many, many cities within the Roman Empire.

But sadly, besides the synagogue leader and his family, the Jews of Corinth were largely very hostile to Paul. In fact, Luke writes in the book of Acts that they were beginning to become abusive to Paul.

But then we are told that Jesus came and spoke to Paul in a vision one night and told him **“Do not be afraid; keep on speaking, do not be silent. For I am with you, and no one is going to attack and harm you, because I have many people in this city.”**

And because of this, Paul decides to stay much longer in Corinth. He is actually there for 18 months. A whole year and a half in this city and this was only one of many stops on his second missionary journey. Pretty amazing.

And even though many of the Jews continued to fiercely be opposed to Paul, the good news of Jesus began to be received by more and more people. The words that Jesus gave to Paul were coming to pass.

But before we discuss this church any further, it is helpful to take a moment to ask who these Corinthians are. And what was this city like?

Corinth was a city in Greece, but it was destroyed by the Romans in 146 B.C. And it was founded again as a Roman colony in 44 BC.

In the hundred years or so between then and when Paul arrives in AD 50, the city had grown greatly. Corinth was located in isthmus, which means that it had water on both sides and it served as a port city. And it had a very temperate climate, making it a place where lots of people wanted to live.

With these factors, it became a rather influential city with some wealthy and powerful people. But as is often the case, while some were quite wealthy, the majority of the people in the city were rather poor.

Corinth also held the Isthmian Games every other year. This would have been the second biggest athletic event to the Olympic Games in Athans. These games were dedicated to the pagan god Pisidian.

Corinth was also a very pagan town. There were many gods that people worshipped and idolatry was rampant.

Corinth was also a center for prostitution and sexual deviancy. It had a reputation for these things. In perhaps a similar way that Las Vegas has a reputation for similar things.

But just as God has His people in Las Vegas today, the Lord was bringing about a faithful community of the people in Corinth.

In summary, and we will get into more of this in upcoming weeks, Corinth was a city where status and power and sexual immorality and idolatry were the norm.

But in the midst of this cesspool of paganism, Jesus told Paul that He “**has many people in this city**.”

This shows that Jesus offers His grace to everyone. And Jesus knows who hearts are poised to receive Him. And so, Paul stays for these 18 months and the church is established there.

It is about 3 years after Paul had left Corinth that he is led by God to begin to instruct them through letters. What we have in our Bible is at least some of this correspondence.

There were lots of questions that they had for Paul and Paul seeks to help this young and rather immature church become all that Christ desires for it to be.

In the weeks to come we will explore various questions and concerns in this church gone wild, but today I would like us to remember a very important truth that Paul reveals at the very beginning verses of 1 Corinthians.

Let’s now turn to 1 Cor. 1:1-9

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

**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.**

**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.**

I just love this beginning of Paul’s letter. It is a powerful reminder to these young and rather immature Christians that through their genuine faith in Jesus Christ, they have been made holy by God.

The following truth I am about to share is so important to remember. It is that the Christian life is so different from the religions of the world. And this is because in some ways we begin at the finish line. And it is because of God’s grace towards us in Jesus Christ.

This is what Paul is seeking to remind them of at the beginning of 1 Corinthians.

These Christians in Corinth truly believed in Jesus and Paul tells them that they have been enriched by Jesus in every way. God’s grace and mercy has been abundantly poured out over these women and men and children of Corinth who said yes to God by calling on the Name of Jesus. And God sees each of them in Christ as His redeemed children. They are forgiven of their sins and they are born again.

Now, does it mean that they are getting everything right and that they are fully mature? No. There are lots of growth areas in their lives.

But Paul makes it abundantly clear from these verses that Christians do not need to become mature before being made blameless before God.

What does this mean? It means that the scandal of Christianity is that in an instant God’s grace covers and cleanses people from all their sins. The scandal is that instantaneously people are transformed into saints and made holy before God.

Christians begin at the end. Think of the repentant thief on the cross who believes. Right there, on his cross, he was transformed and became a saint, a child of God, blessed with every spiritual blessing.

Friends, in the weeks to come we will explore many ways that the Lord is seeking maturity in His church, but today, this opening passage of 1 Corinthians reminds us of one big thing – when someone truly believes in Jesus, with their heart and mind and they confess Jesus openly with their mouth, God saves them.

While the Lord does expect Christians to be mature in the faith, He does not expect us to mature immediately. Maturity takes times and effort and yieldedness to the Holy Spirit.

There are different kinds of transformation. There is instant transformation and gradual transformation. Today we are celebrating the instant transformation that happens when we say yes to Jesus. Transformations like being born again spiritually and being forgiven of all our sins and being brought into the family of God and destined for heaven.

Remember, in the natural, when people are born, they are not born fully mature. And in the same way, when we are spiritually born again through faith in Jesus Christ, we are not born spiritually mature. It takes time and learning and growing and yielding to instruction.

So what is the big takeaway from today’s text?

It is to remember as we begin 2023, that if you truly put your trust in Jesus Christ as your Lord and Savior and truly believe with your heart and He was raised from the dead as the Scriptures clearly testify, then we are spiritually blessed with every spiritual blessing. It is by His grace that we have been made holy and pure in God’s sight. We are forgiven and we have eternal life by God’s grace. We are part of the New Covenant by the sacrifice of Jesus Christ.

We have a new heart and from the deepest parts of our being we now want to please God.

Friends, this is a fundamental truth that we all must be grounded in – the truth that we are saved by God’s grace through faith alone. And there is nothing we can ever do to add to our salvation. We know and understand who we are in Christ by God’s sheer grace.

Yes, we can and should grow in this faith. And Yes, God expects all of us to be transformed to think and act more like Jesus each day, but God’s amazing grace reminds us as it reminded our sisters and brothers of Corinth that we truly begin at the end. We start at the finish line. God has transformed us while He continues to transform us.

As we conclude this time, I invite you to join me in reaffirming our faith in our great savior with me through our joint confession of the ancient apostle’s creed.

Let us proclaim with our mouths what we believe in our hearts and recognize as the truth.

I believe in God, the Father Almighty,  
maker of heaven and earth;

And in Jesus Christ his only Son, our Lord;  
who was conceived by the Holy Spirit,  
born of the Virgin Mary,  
suffered under Pontius Pilate,  
was crucified, dead, and buried;\*  
the third day he rose from the dead;  
he ascended into heaven,  
and sitteth at the right hand of God the Father Almighty;  
from thence he shall come to judge the quick and the dead.

I believe in the Holy Spirit,  
the holy catholic\*\* church,  
the communion of saints,  
the forgiveness of sins,  
the resurrection of the body,  
and the life everlasting. Amen.

Resources:

# <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UV5OUGG3Bwo> 1 and 2 Corinthians Historical Background - Part 1

[www.BibleGateway.com](http://www.BibleGateway.com)

Lecture 4: The Corinthians Correspondence – Letters to a Troubled Church From a Troubled Apostle – by Dr. Doug Buckwalter