

Remembering Who We Are

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[0 : 00] Well, some years ago, I was playing our Nintendo Wii with my son, Tim, and we're playing this game of baseball. Now, for those who don't know what that means, I've got a picture on the next slide.

Here are some kids, and what happens is the black circled things. It's hard to see, but there are some white controllers and these just little plastic things. And as you move the controller with your hand, your character on the screen moves.

So on the next slide, this is the game we're playing, baseball. So as you swing your arm, you either throw the ball or it swings the bat on the screen. Now, Tim was beating me, which was slightly embarrassing.

And instead of remembering who I was, a responsible adult who accepts defeat graciously, I resolved to beat him. And so with Tim standing beside me, he threw the ball, and then I gave an almighty swing and whack, hit him in the back of the head.

And blood started coming out. And at that point, I felt sick in my stomach, and I heard in my head my mother's voice saying, Act your age, Andrew.

[1 : 12] Well, I'm glad to report that Tim has forgiven me, and I always remember who I am when playing the Nintendo with him. Well, as Ned said, we're starting a new series in 1 Corinthians this morning, and it's all about a church who needs to remember who they are, so that they might act their age, so to speak.

It seems this church has a messed up view of spirituality, which has led to all sorts of problems, and them behaving like children. Now, we're not looking at this letter because I think we at HTD are a messed up church and behave like children, but we can still learn from their mistakes when it comes to our church life.

And especially since we are hoping to plant some new church congregations down at St. John's, who are voting today, actually, and if not there, somewhere else.

But Paul begins this letter with a very carefully written introduction, and he firstly reminds them about who God has already made them in Christ.

So point one in your outline and verse one in your Bibles. He says, Now, there's quite a bit in this little introduction.

[2 : 45] In verse one, Paul introduces himself as an apostle called by God. In other words, the Corinthians ought to listen to what he has to say. And then in verse two, Paul moves from reminding them about who he is to who they are.

Notice they are firstly the church of God. The word church just means gathering, but they're not any old gathering. They are God's gathering.

And this means they are precious to God. After all, it costs God his only son to make us his church. That's how precious we are to him.

And so Paul will write in chapter three, verse 17 on the next slide. Paul will write, If anyone destroys God's temple or church, he's talking about the Corinthians, then God will destroy that person.

Pretty strong words, isn't it? But that's how much the church matters to God. Now, in the world's eyes, the church is becoming less relevant and less important.

[3 : 51] And even as we look around at each other here this morning, we're, you know, we're a pretty average looking lot. I mean, I speak for myself, I suppose. But in the world's eyes, there's nothing special about us.

And yet in God's eyes, there absolutely is. We are his church. We really matter to him, which means we ought to matter to one another.

And the Corinthians needed to remember who they are as God's church because they were fighting with one another. And we'll see this later in our chapter. They were suing each other in court, chapter six.

They were being unloving to the weaker Christians by eating food sacrificed to idols in chapters eight and nine. They were neglecting one another at the Lord's Supper in chapter 11. They were pursuing impressive sounding gifts like tongues and looking down on others who didn't have them in chapters 12 to 14.

You see, they didn't matter to each other. And so they were mistreating one another. They were trying to be spiritually superior at the expense of one another. And so Paul reminds them that they are precious to God.

[4 : 57] They mattered to God. And so they ought to matter to one another. But for us, can I say I'm encouraged because I do see you caring for one another. I see you calling up one another, asking how each other's going, offering to pray for one another.

And that tells me that you matter to each other. That's terrific. For we matter to one another because we matter to God. We are his precious church. We're not only are the Corinthians God's church.

They are secondly God's holy people. So verse 2 says they have been sanctified or made holy in Christ Jesus. The word holy has two meanings.

One, it means to be morally good or blameless. And second, it means to be set apart for a particular purpose or person. And in Christ Jesus, that is by his death for us, the Corinthians have been made both.

They've been made holy in God's sight. You know, sins forgiven, washed clean. And they've been set apart for God's glory to live for him. This is who they are, holy.

[6 : 02] And in case they don't quite get the message, Paul says the same thing in the very next phrase. He says, sanctified or made holy in Christ Jesus and called to be his holy people.

The words to be are not in the original. So Paul is not saying they have to become God's holy people. Rather, he is saying they already are his holy people.

So on the next slide, just to try and clarify for you, it's literally to those who have been made holy in Christ Jesus and called holy people. In other words, Paul calls them holy twice.

Why? Or so that they might remember and act like it. It's like one of my children having a tantrum. Hypothetically, of course, just hypothetically.

But when I say you're 10 years old now, 10 years old, I'm repeating who they are, a 10 year old twice. Why? Or so they might get the message and act like it.

[7 : 00] That's what Paul seems to be doing here. And the Corinthians, again, need to hear this. They need to remember who they are because they weren't acting like God's holy people. And their faulty view of spirituality meant they thought their physical bodies didn't matter.

They could sin and do whatever they liked with their bodies. They wouldn't even be resurrected, they say. So they could do all sorts of things with their bodies. In fact, they were even doing things the world wouldn't do.

So in chapter 5, we'll hear about how they are proud of one man in their church who is sleeping with his mother-in-law. And Paul says not even the world does that. And in chapter 6, they're sleeping with prostitutes and so on.

They seem to think they are so spiritual that sinning with their bodies doesn't matter anymore. But Paul here reminds them you are God's holy people twice. So that they might live like it.

Now again, I don't think we have the same issues the Corinthians have. At least I hope not. But we are to live out who we are as God's holy people, are we not? So do we use our bodies, our minds, our mouths in a holy way?

[8 : 05] In a blameless way, in a way that is set apart to honour and glorify God? Or do we use them to honour and glorify us? Do we live our lives in a way that is set apart to bring God honour?

Because in Christ, we are holy, you see. And so we are to live like it. Well, not only are the Corinthians God's church, and then secondly, God's holy people, they are also thirdly united under the one Lord Jesus.

See verse 2 again. Notice how Paul goes to great lengths to talk about all Christians everywhere who call on the same name of the Lord Jesus, their Lord and ours.

Why does he remind them that we are united under the same Lord? Well, because as we'll see later today, they were fighting with one another based on which leader they followed.

And there were divisions amongst one another. And so he wants to remind them that they are actually united under the same leader, Christ, their Lord and ours.

[9 : 09] And so act like it, he's saying. See, Paul's introduction here is very deliberate. He is reminding them who God has already made them in Christ so that they might start acting like it, living like it.

But he also reminds them what God has already given them in Christ. So we're at point two in your outlines now and verse four in your Bibles. He says, I always thank my God for you because of his grace given you in Christ Jesus.

For in him, in Christ, you have been enriched in every way with all kinds of speech and with all knowledge. God thus confirming our testimony about Christ among you.

In verse four, Paul thanks God for his grace or generosity that he has shown the Corinthians. How has God been gracious or generous? Well, verse five, for or because God has enriched them in every way, including all speech and all knowledge.

And now Paul picks those two things in particular, speech and knowledge, because the Corinthians were arguing over and fighting for who spoke the best and who knew the most.

[10 : 19] But Paul says, when you became Christians, that is, when God confirmed our testimony of the gospel among you, God gave you everything anyway.

God gave you all speech and all knowledge. So you don't need to keep fighting for it. Now, this doesn't mean each one of them suddenly knew everything there was to know and became the best public speakers in the world.

Rather, it means that they as a body, they as a church, knew all they needed to know to live as God's people. It means they as a church, as a body, could speak all they needed to speak to live as God's holy people.

In other words, they didn't need to keep fighting over who spoke good and who knew the most, because together as a church, they could work and use each other's gifts. And amongst them, they had all knowledge and all speech.

And so Paul says in verse 7, Therefore, you do not lack any spiritual gift as you eagerly wait for our Lord Jesus Christ to be revealed. So as a church, collectively, they lacked no gift they needed to live as God's people until Christ's return.

[11 : 33] And one of the problems we face here in the Western world is that when we read the Bible, we often think in individualistic terms, don't we? And that's what the Corinthians seem to be doing. At trying to be more spiritual than one another by themselves.

And as individuals, we do lack gifts. We don't have every gift there is to have as individuals. My children tell me that I lack the gifts of singing and dancing. I'm actually okay with that.

I'm not sure what dancing would do to help the church anyway. But Paul's not talking about us as individuals, but as a church, a body. For God does not save us and then leave us on our own.

He saves us and gathers us. That's why our mission statement, to gather and grow in Christ. He gathered us together as a family, a church. And so it's as a body of Christ together that we lack no gift we need to live as God's people until Christ's return.

But this does mean that we need to keep gathering together as God's church so that we can exercise our different gifts and help and encourage one another to live as God's people.

[12 : 42] You see, God has a very high view of church. It's where he has gathered us in Christ. And it's one of the means by which he encourages us in Christ.

I remember visiting someone recently who'd been in rehab hospital for several weeks. And they told me they couldn't wait to get home. And you know the second thing they couldn't wait to do?

Get back to church. You see, they had noticed and missed the encouragement from meeting together as God's people. And sitting under God's word. And I wonder, do we have the same high view of church that this person did?

Or that God does? Well, God has not only given them as a church everything they need to live as his people. He's also given them a great promise of assurance to make it to the end.

Have a look at verse 8. He says, He will also keep you firm to the end so that you will be blameless on the day of our Lord Jesus Christ. God is faithful.

[13 : 45] Who has called you into fellowship with his son, Jesus Christ, our Lord. Now, this is a great promise of assurance, isn't it? That God will keep us trusting in Christ until we see him face to face.

Either at our death or his return. After all, we are precious to him. As we heard in our first reading. And so he'll be with us through the waters and the rivers and the fires.

Enabling us to keep trusting in Christ. For the Corinthians, this meant they didn't need to pursue spiritual superiority at the expense of others. Since God is going to keep them anyway.

And for us, it means we're not alone when we face hardships in this world. So this promise is a great promise because life in this broken world is sometimes hard.

I'm pretty sure every person in this room knows that. And sometimes we're even tempted to stop trusting in Christ. Especially when we suffer. Whether from health issues or loneliness or unemployment or grief.

[14 : 49] Especially when our prayers aren't answered the way we want. Or God doesn't work the way we expect. And we're left wondering what on earth he's doing. Last Friday, I conducted the funeral service for Faye Chu.

Who used to be a member of this congregation. I mentioned her to you last Sunday. She suffered for some time with a couple of different diseases. And we prayed for her regularly. Her name was on the back of our pew sheet.

But our prayers weren't answered the way we wanted. And certainly not the way Faye wanted. And yet while her health did get her down from time to time. She continued to trust in Christ.

In fact, beside her bed was a plaque. Which I showed people at the funeral last Friday. It's on the next slide. It's a bit hard to read. So let me read it to you. It's entitled, What God Hath Promised.

And it says, God hath not promised sun without rain. Joy without sorrow. Peace without pain. But God hath promised strength for the day.

[15 : 56] Rest for the laborer. Light on the way. Grace for the trials. Help from above. Unfailing sympathy. And undying love. You see, part of our pain, I think, comes from having the wrong expectations of God.

But Faye knew that God has not promised or did not promise her an easy and healthy life. But she did know God has promised her strength to keep trusting in him each day of her life.

Or in the words of Paul here in 1 Corinthians, to keep her firm to the end. And God kept that promise. For Faye trusted in Christ until her dying breath.

So do remember what God has and has not promised. And do come to him for strength. For his promise to keep us firm to the end. And he will keep that promise.

For our God is faithful. Verse 9. Well, Paul's introduction firstly reminded the Corinthians who God has already made them in Christ. God has made them his precious church.

[17 : 04] His holy people. And united under the same Lord Jesus. And so they had to act like it. And then secondly, Paul reminds them of what God has already given them in Christ.

Every spiritual gift they need. And the promise of assurance. And so they don't need to keep climbing over each other to get ahead. So if they have all these things, there is nothing more to fight for.

No reason to have divisions in the church, says Paul. Which brings us to point 3 and verse 10. He says, I appeal to you now, 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 the mind and thought, he says. Paul starts by appealing to them in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ.

It's exactly the same phrase he used back in verse 2, did you realize? And so he's subtly saying, remember who you are. You are united in the same Lord Jesus Christ.

[18 : 11] So act your age. Live out who you are. Be united, not divided. Now I need to say there might be good reasons to divide with some Christians.

Like if they're teaching things that are false and not according to the Bible. But that's not on view here. Rather, it's ungodly fighting over leaders that is dividing them.

Do you see verse 11? He says, my brothers and sisters, some from Chloe's household have informed me that there are quarrels among you. And what I mean is this. One of you says, I follow Paul.

And another, I follow Apollos. And another, I follow Cephas or Peter. And still another, I follow Christ. You see, it seems in their desire to be super spiritual, they were using different leaders to claim spiritual superiority.

I think Paul summarizes this well in chapter 4. So in your Bible, just flick over one page to chapter 4, verse 6. And we'll see it there for a moment. Just one page over, chapter 4, verse 6.

[19 : 10] He says, now, brothers and sisters, I have applied these things to myself and Apollos for your benefit, so that you may learn from us the meaning of the saying, do not go beyond what is written.

Then notice this is the summary. Then you will not be puffed up, you know, claiming spiritual superiority, in being a follower of one of us leaders over against the other.

Do you see what they were doing? They were claiming to be followers of one leader in an effort to be puffed up and spiritually superior to each other. I remember doing this one time as a bit of a joke, because the minister who married Michelle and myself had just become a bishop.

And so I said to this guy at my old church, well, I was married by a bishop. The only problem was, this guy was married by a minister who had just become the archbishop. And so he said, well, I was married by the archbishop.

Now, we were just mucking around, but it seems these Corinthians were doing it for real. They were holding up different leaders to outdo each other in a game of spiritual one-upmanship.

[20 : 18] And this caused divisions and factions within the church. Some said, we're superior because we follow Paul who planted our church. Others said, no, we're superior because we follow Cephas or Peter, who was the leader of the apostles, you know, the archbishop of the apostles, and so on.

And then I think Paul rather cheekily adds his own at the end of verse 12, saying, still another, I follow Christ. I don't think there was actually a faction in the church that said, I followed Christ, because that group is not mentioned when the others are later on.

Rather, I think it's Paul's way of reminding them of who they all are supposed to follow. Because Paul then goes on to talk about Christ in verse 13. He says, is Christ divided?

Was Paul crucified for you? Were you baptized in the name of Paul? In other words, it's silly to say following Paul makes you superior because you are united in Christ and he's not divided.

And Christ, not Paul, was the one who was crucified for you. Christ, not Paul, was the one in whose name you were baptized. In other words, Christ is the leader who matters, Corinthians.

[21 : 30] Not Paul, not any other. Which is why Paul is glad he didn't baptize many of them, lest they try and use that fact to claim spiritual superiority.

See verse 14? He says, I thank God that I did not baptize any of you except Crispus and Gaius, so that no one can say they were baptized into my name. Yes, I also baptized the household of Stephanas.

Beyond that, I don't remember if I baptized anyone else. For Christ did not send me to baptize, but to preach the gospel, not with words and eloquence, lest the cross of Christ be emptied of its power.

Here, Paul is glad he didn't baptize many, though he kind of remembers a few more as he writes. But he's glad because it means they cannot say that they were baptized into his name.

They cannot say, I'm superior because Paul baptized me. For it's not about him or any other leader, it's about Christ. After all, it's the gospel message about Christ that saves us.

[22 : 31] And not the clever words of the preacher or the leader. Paul will hammer this home next week when he says, the gospel message may look foolish to the world, but it's actually God's wisdom and power to save.

But for now, he wants them and us to see that such divisions, to claim spiritual superiority based on the leader we follow, well, it's ridiculous. In fact, on the next slide, Paul will say to later on in chapter three, because this argument continues for several chapters, he says, so then no more boasting about leaders, because in the end, all things are yours anyway.

See, remember who you are. God has already given you every spiritual gift you need in Christ. God has already made you his holy church united in Christ.

And so Christ is the leader you are to follow, Corinthians. Christ is the one they are to boast in. Not Paul, Apollos or anyone else. In fact, Paul mentions Christ's name 15 times in 17 verses.

It's quite a lot. Just to make the point. Now, I doubt anyone here at HCD will say, our congregation is spiritually superior than the other congregations, because Andrew is our pastor, or Mark Chu is our pastor, or Vijay is our pastor.

[23 : 56] After all, everyone already knows that the 9am congregation is the best. I'm glad you got that was a joke. And yes, I will change it for the next one.

But in a church like ours with different preachers, then people will prefer one preacher over another. But we must not prefer one preacher over another to the point where we boast about one over the other.

When it's not the preacher who matters, but the person they point to, Christ. And if St. John's Church votes yes today to the parish partnership, and we plant some new congregations down there, then it will be very easy for us to talk about us versus them.

Instead of remembering that we are actually all united in Christ. We have the same Lord, Jesus. And so while these warnings may not be particularly relevant for us right now, they're still worth heeding so we don't fall into those traps.

And like the Corinthians, we have to remember what God has already given us in Christ. Every gift we need as a church to live as God's people. He's also given us the promise that he'll keep us to the end.

[25 : 11] We also have to remember who God has already made us in Christ. We are his precious church, his holy people, united in the Lord Jesus. And so by his grace, may we continue to follow Christ and live out who God has made us to be.

Let's pray. Our gracious Father, we do thank you for this great reminder of who you have made us to be in Christ, that we are your precious church, your holy people, united in Christ with every spiritual gift amongst us to help one another to heaven.

And that you will not let us go. Father, we thank you for all that you've made us and all that you've given us. Please help us, therefore, to live out who we are.

We ask it in Jesus' name. Amen.