

Sermon: Welcome To Corinth

Text: 1 Corinthians 1:1-9

Introduction:

1st & 2nd Corinthians have become two of my very favorite books in the New Testament. I suspect the reason is that, as a pastor, I have a deep appreciation for how difficult it can be to shepherd a church. Things rarely if ever go as we want them to. Problems arise. Things go sideways. BUT...it's not that we can just turn off our emotions when these things happen. We can't stop caring. These struggles can cause a lot of stress and deep emotional pain. This is precisely why I so appreciate these two letters that Paul wrote to the church in Corinth. In a word, they are REAL. They are gut-wrenchingly honest. Paul absolutely loves the church that he planted in the ancient Greek city of Corinth—better said, he loves the PEOPLE in the church.

Within a couple years of Paul's having moved on from Corinth to plant another church in Ephesus—which is about 200 miles due east of Corinth across the Aegean Sea—Paul begins to hear reports that things are NOT GOING WELL with the church. Paul had sent his co-worker and fellow church planter, Apollos, to Corinth to see how things were going. The reports were not good. Paul responded with a letter (that has been lost to history) that apparently gave a strong warning against associating with immoral people (this lost letter is referred to in 1 Cor. 5:9-11). Then, either by letter or personal visits, Paul received news from "Chloe's household" about outright divisions in the church (1 Cor. 1:11), as well as questions that had been relayed to him by three men whose names were Stephanas, Fortuntus & Achaicus (1 Cor. 16:17). The letter we now call 1st Corinthians (his second letter that we know of) was Paul's response to these questions and discouraging reports. Soon after this—Paul actually boarded a boat to make a return visit to Corinth. This visit didn't go well at all. In fact, Paul refers to this trip as a "painful visit" (2 Corinthians 2:1-2).

Following the "painful visit", Paul wrote a third letter (which has also been lost to history)—a letter of "many tears" in which Paul pleaded with the Corinthian believers to get their act together (2 Cor. 2:3-9; 7:6-15). We're not crystal clear what happened next, but I believe Paul's deep discouragement over the events in Corinth caused him to wrap up his ministry in Ephesus after about 3 years and head towards Corinth. Instead of traveling by ship across the Aegean, Paul knew that his co-worker Titus had spent time with the Corinthians—and was traveling by land to report back to Paul in Ephesus. Paul couldn't wait for the news, so he headed off to meet Titus somewhere along the way. He first visited Troas (where he had met Dr. Luke several years prior), but decided to keep going in hopes of meeting up with Titus—which is precisely what happened. Paul reunited with Titus in Macedonia (I'm guessing the city of Philippi), and learned first-hand that the situation in Corinth had made a significant turn for the better! Instead of continuing to question Paul's authority, the leaders of the church were far more accepting of Paul's leadership and rebukes.

It is out of this spirit of joy and relief that Paul writes the letter we now call 2nd Corinthians.

Examination:

- **Read 1 Corinthians 1:1-9**
 - What two things does Paul cite in verse 1 that substantiate his credentials?
 - What two things does Paul indicate in verse 2 as being true about the church in Corinth?
 - What does it really mean to be “sanctified” and “his holy people”? Is this something we have to achieve on our own—or is this something that Christ has already done for us?
 - Why do you think Paul refers to “those everywhere who call on the name of Jesus”? How important is it for each local church—and each person within each local church—to see themselves as part of the worldwide church that Jesus is calling and forming? Is this something you ever think about?
 - I know that Paul often uses the words “grace” and “peace” in his opening comments as he writes to various churches—but take a minute to think about them. What do they mean? Why do you think Paul uses these two words? Are you experiencing grace? Are you enjoying peace? Why or why not?
 - What is Paul remembering when he prays for the church in Corinth? (v. 4)
 - What does Paul say is TRUE about the church in Corinth? (v. 5)
 - What do you think it means that the church has been “enriched” by “all kinds of speech and with all knowledge”? What is this speech? What is this knowledge?
 - What is this bestowal of speech and knowledge a confirmation (or evidence) of? (v. 6)
 - Paul goes further in verse 7 to describe this “enriching” as actual gifts that God has given to the church. What do you think of when you consider what these gifts might be? Does God continue to give these gifts to churches?
 - What is our ultimate hope as we employ these gifts? (v. 8)
 - What do you think it means that “God is faithful”? Do you believe that this is true? What is God faithful to do? What difference does this make to us?

Application:

What stands out to you in this introduction? How hopeful and positive is Paul as he begins this letter? Do you believe that God has given YOU spiritual gifts. What are they?