

In Here Out There
I Corinthians 1:1-9
St Andrews Presbyterian Church Duncan
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INTRO

Life is full of contrasts. For you it is in the wedding of Melanie and Kevin. For us it is a time of changing back to Campus Work. Families change, life changes, even the weather. We moved from the mild west coast climate to Winnipeg's – 30. Every shift is a contrast.

The Apostle Paul is study in contrasts. As a Jew he knew the Jewish laws well and used them to eliminate Christians. Paul's lifestyle was deeply religious yet he was filled with anger.

Then he encountered the living Lord Jesus Christ. His repentance was vivid. Smashed into the dirt on the Damascus Road, blinded and helpless he was abandoned by his escorts and left alone in a house on a street called Street. Paul, once powerful and filled with rage against the Christians, was suddenly humbled and helpless until Ananias came a released him into his mission. Paul went from power to weakness, anger to grace, and hatred to love. Once he made the headlines and now he lives in obscurity.

The City.

Today we meet Paul in the letter to Corinth. His faith in Christ is strong and his life is completely different. Corinth was a city filled with idolatry, immorality, wealth, and the culture and was offensive in almost every way you could imagine. The church had allowed the old ways to seep back into their life, faith, and church and Paul addresses this issue.

The church

The church in Corinth had all the promise that most churches start with. But they had accepted the immoral lifestyle they had left and behind doubted Paul's leadership. Paul corrected them in how they were living. He begins by stating his role, reminding them of how they ought to live, and he gives thanks.

POINT ONE: Called to be an apostle

When we proclaim the Gospel we frequently experience challenges. So here Paul restates his role because the false teachers in the Corinthian Church challenged Paul's role as an apostle.

1. Apostle

Paul begins by stating he was *called to be an apostles of Christ Jesus by the will of God*. The word for apostle means the one who is sent as the representative. Apostles are like missionaries sent to plant and build up the church. This fit Paul in everything we read throughout this letter.

2. Divine call

So Paul clarifies his role as a Divine Call of God. He came as Christ's representative the letter shows how competent he was in this role. He saw the real issue and wrote directly to their need. That is the role of an apostle.

He writes that life in Christ, when lived correctly, draws us deeper and deeper into our relationship with Christ causing us to live with a growing holiness. This is Paul's hope for the Corinthians. In fact it is the Lord's desire for each of us.

POINT TWO: Sanctification

Paul notes that even in their strained condition the same Holy Spirit that sanctifies him in Christ Jesus is the same Holy Spirit that sanctifies them. We relate to their struggle. It is always easier to hold on to the old way resists growth, to put our Bibles on the shelf, or stop praying. But living faithfully is not easy. We are called to be Holy and this means. We take the ride path not the easy road.

Worship, prayer, and serve in here and out there with real faith. We, of course, can fake it in here but others see it out there. But we can never fake it in our hearts. To understand sanctification is comes as we grow in our faith.

1. Called to be holy – saved

So, lets ask: how do we honor and live out the call to be holy – to be saved – in circumstances that confront us our life and culture. We are affected by the temptation to make it easy.

In this capacity, one of my ministry roles this year has been as a volunteer chaplain at the University of Winnipeg. To profile the ministry I wrote articles for the student newspaper titled: What does it means to be a Christian? What does it mean to be a non-Christian? And what does it mean to say I am no longer a Christian? Each article was followed by an invitation to dialogue with me.

The first dialogue went well with about eight Christian students. However the next two were tough. An atheist student group had formed and they decided to show up for the dialogue. They were cynical, aggressive, and anti-religious - specifically against Christians. They argued aggressively for proof that God exists. They cited an obscure study stating prayer does not work, quotes from other atheists, and ridiculous cliché's all to prove they were right and Christian were wrong. At points I was having some fun with

them at other times I was aggressively calling them to defend their point of view. Another Christian worker was at the session and we later concluded the best I could do was bring the debate to a draw. They weren't about to convince me and I wasn't about to be convinced by them.

The point? Atheism as part of a student culture can draw people into that world if they do not stand firm in their faith in Christ they can be swayed away from truth. You are offered less because what is out there is not what Christ gives you in the Church an in your hearts. Paul reminded the Corinthians they had been drawn back into their old godless ways. The call is to be holy. The call is to be steadfast. The call is to follow Christ. The call is to be holy is directed towards all of us.

2. Called to be Holy – together

In here we might struggle but out there we need to know why and what we believe. Often if when one person stumbles into the old ways others follow or worse we think it is OK and the church soon becomes caught up in the ways that undermine the centrality of Christ and corrupts the biblical way we are called to live. Again, if you read through the whole book of Corinthians you see how powerfully yet graciously Paul addresses this problem. And in the end, the old life style is similar to an atheistic viewpoint – it offers nothing. It demands its ways, it asks for proofs on its own terms, it ends, and those trapped in it die and never see God in glory. Atheism like the offerings of culture offers nothing.

POINT THREE: Give thanks

Yet, even with all the problems Paul has a realistic grasp on the situation. He demonstrates this by giving thanks for all the Corinthians. Paul says you are enriched in every way because their testimony about Christ was confirmed in you.

1. You lack no spiritual gift.

Paul makes the statement: “you lack no spiritual gift.” He recognizes the Lord has given this group of churches everything needed for strong and balanced ministry. But again, the culture has affected them and they have incorporated ideas that assume certain gifts that are superior to others. This approach caused divisions - both spiritual and social - within the church. The problem was they thought some to the more sensational gifts - like tongues - as superior to the other gifts. We may not have exactly the same challenge but we do have some parallels. Think for example of all the books that used to be published in leadership.

Nonetheless, Paul says, you have all the gifts but you do not understand how to use them according to the Lord's leading.

2. Keep strong

Paul exhorts them to stay strong knowing, as Matthew 28 states, that Jesus promised to be with them till the end of the age. He wants the people then, as we need to hear now, that the way of Christ – not the ways of Corinth, or Duncan, or Winnipeg - is where we find our direction. Paul redirects them back to Christ where they will find truth and confidence. This teaching permeates Paul's writing. It is ours to take and live by – focus on Christ.

He recognized that even in their divisiveness, imbalance, immaturity, and drifting faith even in all realness in life and faith - there was much to be thankful for. This is our call.

CONCLUSION

Paul, once hated Christian, but now loves and teaches them the ways of Christ – what a contrast. He is an apostle who reminds them to continue to grow and deepen their faith and holiness to be strong. And he reminds us all to give thanks.

We are a people of contrast: Where were we before we met the Lord – out there?
Where are we now - in our church and in our hearts?
Where will be we are in a few months – in our hearts?

When you read Paul you hear him say: *focus on Christ, stay true to Christ, return to Christ for in him you will lack nothing.*

The first letter to the Corinthians is a redirection. Christ is with you, Christ will lead you, follow him before anything else. Because what you do in the church, what you do in your hearts, what you do through the Bible you take with you out there. Let us take these thoughts home with us today and be changed Amen