

A Word of Encouragement to a Church in Trouble

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[0 : 00] Today we start the book of 1 Corinthians, so let us turn to chapter 1, verse 1 to 9. You may read up on the screen or follow up on your bulletin. And today we will read about Paul's warm and encouraging letter to the church.

So starting in verse 1, we read, Paul, called by the will of God to be an apostle of Christ Jesus and our brother Sosthenes, to the church of God that is in Corinth, to those sanctified in Christ Jesus, called to be saints together with all those who in every place call upon the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, both their Lord and ours.

Grace to you and peace from our God, our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. I give thanks to my God always for you because of the grace of God that was given you in Christ Jesus, that in every way you were enriched in him in all speech and all knowledge, even as the testimony about Christ was confirmed among you, so that you are not lacking in any gift as you wait for the revealing of our Lord Jesus Christ, who will sustain you to the end, guiltless in the day of our Lord Jesus Christ. God is faithful, by whom you were called into the fellowship of his Son, Jesus Christ our Lord. This is the word of God. Great, thanks, CK.

Good morning, can you hear me? Okay, good morning everybody. Great to see you again. If you're new, my name is Kevin, and great to have you with us. I think this is on. I'm on.

[1 : 46] I'm sure those guys will work out. Okay, I'm going to speak loudly, and we'll make it work. Let's pray together, and then we're going to look at the scripture.

So, Heavenly Father, as we come to your word, God, we want you to speak to us. We want to know your heart. We want to know you, the living God. We are not just interested in practical faith, although we know that our faith does work itself out in practical ways.

More than anything, God, we want to know you, the living God. We want to know your heart. We want to know what you think and what you feel. We want to know your will for us. God, come and speak to us from your word, I pray, in your good and gracious name.

Amen. Amen. Okay, let me start with a question. Here's the question. How many of us have been disappointed by the church?

How many of us have been disappointed by Christians? Friends, how many of us have ever thought about the idea of giving up on the church?

[2 : 48] Maybe you are new here this morning. Maybe you're a guest, and somebody has invited you, and you've come along because they invited you, and you felt like you had to. But maybe you like the idea of Christian community, but you're a little bit wary, a little bit unsure, because you've heard too many scandals, you've read too many headlines, you've watched too much drama, and you're a little bit careful and cautious about the church.

Maybe you're a long-time Christian who's been involved in many churches over the years. You've seen some good things, but if you're honest, you've also seen some not so good things. Friends, how do you feel about the church?

And maybe even more importantly, how do you feel when the church is less than its best? This morning, we are starting to work our way through the New Testament book of 1 Corinthians. I'm really excited about that. For much of this year, we've been doing these standalone sermons as we've been trying to do the storyline of the Bible, and we're going to get back to expositional series. And so from now until the end of June, Diego, you want me to use that? Let's try this. Okay, there we go. From now until the end of June, we're going to do the first four chapters of 1 Corinthians, and we'll take a break, and we'll pick up again in September on chapter 12.

[4 : 08] Okay, so that's the next couple of months where we're going to be going. And so today, we're going to look at just the first nine verses. And so once you grab your Bible, we're going to look

at it together.

But maybe actually, before we look at the Scripture, let me explain the background and the context of what's going on in the city of Corinth. So there's four things I want us to get from today. Okay? The first one is this. Corinth is a city that is pretty unhealthy. A city that is sick. Okay? So, the letter of 1 Corinthians is written by the Apostle Paul, written around 53 AD, to a small church, maybe 30, 40 people, that gathers in the ancient city of Corinth.

Okay? Paul started this church about three years before. As he traveled through Corinth, preached the gospel, people became believers, and he founds the church. And he now writes them three years later.

Now, the city of Corinth was an important city in ancient Greece, during the Greek Empire, 500 years before. Very important city. It's a leading city of Greek culture and philosophy.

[5 : 17] It's only 80 kilometers away from Athens. So it's a very important city. Then, about 150 AD, the Roman Empire kind of, there's a big battle. One of the Roman governors sacks the city of Corinth, destroys it, burns it to the ground, and essentially, the ancient city of Corinth, lies dormant for 100 years.

It's just a pile of ruins. But then things turn around. And it becomes a thriving city again. And so, in about 44 BC, Julius Caesar decides, Caesar, the Roman emperor, decides to repopulate, the ancient city of Corinth.

And he does this because the city of Rome, is becoming overpopulated. And so he sends a whole lot of former slaves and people to repopulate the city of Corinth. And so, that happens about 44 BC. The letter is written in 50 AD. And so, over the next 100 years, the city of Corinth becomes this thriving city again. And for two main reasons. One is, it becomes an important city in the Roman Empire.

It's the third leading city, after Rome and Alexandria itself. So it's an important city in the Roman Empire. It's repopulated with people, new people are flowing in, new immigrants, new money is flowing there.

[6 : 32] But the second reason why the city of Corinth becomes a thriving city, is because of its strategic location. Corinth is situated on this tiny strip of land, called an isthmus, okay, which joins the main peninsula of Greece, like where Athens is, and this, sorry, the main land of Greece, and this big peninsula, called the Penopolis.

Okay? And these two masses of land, the main land and the peninsula, are joined by this tiny strip of land, in the middle, called this isthmus.

And Corinth is situated, right in the middle of that isthmus. Which means, Corinth is extremely, strategically located, both militarily, because they control that whole peninsula below, but also commercially, economically.

Because now, if anyone wants to trade with Athens, rather than sailing the whole way around, which is a very dangerous shipping route, now, you just sail to Corinth, and either, they would haul these ships over the land, put them on big wooden blocks, and slaves would pull the ships over the land, or they could unload the cargo, carry it on, you know, ox carts, or horseback, across the little strip of land, load it onto new ships, and send it onto Athens.

And that would cut your shipping time, by maybe a month, or so. And so, Corinth is strategically located, in this area, and they control, all the military, all the shipping, all the trade, that goes through that area.

[8 : 03] And so, it's a very, very important city. And so, these two factors, the new city, rebuilt, repopulated by the Roman Empire, along with its location, meant that prosperity, returned, to the city of Corinth, almost overnight.

It became super prosperous, and abundant, almost immediately. New money, attracts new people, the city grew quickly, new cultures, new ideas, new people, new populations, flooded into the city. So, it was a thriving city. But at the same time, there's also, new people, and new money, creates new problems. Like any city, that suddenly, booms overnight, it also attracts, the wrong kind of people.

And it attracts, all sorts of vices. Okay? And so, being a new city, with new money, meant there was no, landed kind of, aristocracy. I think that's the right way, of saying it.

There's no traditions, and cultures, that's part of the city, customs that everybody, has to adhere to, or obey. It's kind of, everybody's arrived, from different places, with their own customs, their own

traditions, their own values.

[9 : 08] Every man's in it, for themselves. And so, ancient Corinth, was known as the sexual, capital, of the world. There was an ancient philosopher, who said, to be Corinthian, was like a derogatory term.

If you want to insult somebody, you just call them a Corinthian. And essentially, what that meant was, they were very sexually loose. Okay? And, and so, this new city, with all these new people, and new money, influx of new cultures, it was an extremely, seedy, and sleazy city.

Okay? So just think of like, even in modern times, when there's a gold rush, suddenly all these people flood to, let's say, California, or whatever it is. What also floods there? Boons, bars, saloons, prostitution.

That's what made up the city. And so, one scholar, likens Corinthians, like the modern day, Las Vegas, right? It is the sin city capital, of the world.

And so, like any modern city, Hong Kong included, the city of Corinth, was a city of both opportunity, entrepreneurship, ideas, prosperity, new people, but it was also a city of pain.

[10 : 16] It was a city of heartache. It was a city of brokenness. It was a city where people were commoditized, and exploited, and where people used one another, for their own advancement.

Okay? So that's the city. Now, the question is, so here's this new church, that is founded in the city. What is the church like? Well, as you read the book of 1 Corinthians, you don't need to read very far, to find out, that the church, is not too dissimilar, to the city.

The church actually looks, very similar to the city. Now, on one hand, it's not a bad thing, for a church to look like the city, and the culture in which it finds itself. You don't want to, walk into a church, and it feels like you're walking, into a time warp.

Okay? You walk into a church, and suddenly feels like, I'm back in 1910, 1940. It's a good thing, for a church to somewhat, look like the city, and the culture in which it lives. Okay? So we, for instance, we're in Hong Kong, we don't want Watermark, to look like, a church in New York, or Texas, or Australia, or somewhere else.

We want to, hopefully feel, and look a little bit, like we're in Hong Kong. But at the same time, you don't want a church, to be so like the city, that the values, and the culture, and the priorities, of the city, are the values, and the culture, and the priorities, of the church.

[11 : 37] The church is men, who look different. It's meant to be distinctive. It's meant to be a light on the hill. It's meant to be a prophetic voice. The church is, in some ways, meant to stand out, differently, from the culture, of the city.

But what's happening, in the city of Corinth, and the church of Corinth, is that the church, is exactly like, the city. And so, the values, and the priorities, of the cities, using and abusing people, division, socioeconomic division, the rich over there, the poor over there, the rich look down, on the poor, using and abusing people, exploitation, the sexual ethic, of the city, is exactly the same, as what's in the church.

And so, as we read, the letter of 1 Corinthians, that's what we're going to see. It's fraught with division, and discord, and fighting, and there's this group, against this group, the sexual culture, of the city, is mirrored in the church.

One guy is going to be, sleeping with his step mom, and nobody thinks, there's anything wrong with that. Half the church, go and visit the temple, prostitutes, just before CG, and then come to CG, and everyone thinks, that's cool.

Okay. There are people, that are suing one another, taking each other to court. There are, there's conflict over food. This group is looking down, on this group, because they eat meat, and this group thinks, these guys are idiots, because they don't eat meat, and they're fighting about it.

[12 : 53] They're fighting about communion, and the Lord's Supper. There's one group, that thinks, the resurrection, who cares whether it's real, maybe it's just a metaphor, for how Jesus rises in our hearts. There's another group, that says, no the resurrection, has already happened, and all you losers, got left behind.

So there's conflict, about the resurrection, and the gospel, and Jesus. There's competition, over spiritual gifts. These guys, overlook, look down on these guys, because they don't have, the same spiritual gifts, and they all think, this spiritual gift, is a status, about who's better, and more godly, and more spiritual, and then when they come to church, there's a competition, about who can use, their spiritual gifts the most.

And so the church is, it's pretty, it's pretty messy. It's pretty unhealthy. It's pretty sick. Just like, the city.

And so, this is the kind of church, that you probably wouldn't recommend, to somebody. You know, when people leave Hong Kong, and move to another city, they often come to, maybe one of the leaders, and say, hey, I'm moving to, to New York, or to Sydney, or to Tokyo, can you recommend a church?

And this is one of those churches, that we say, don't, don't go near there. Okay, stay away, from Corinth, from the Corinthian church. So that's what we've got so far. Okay, a city that is sick, and unhealthy, a church, which is much the same.

[14:16] Now, here's my question for us, okay? Let's say, you found the church, in Corinth. You're one of the founding leaders. And three years later, you've got a letter from them, and the letter's not that encouraging.

And you've heard some reports, from other people in the church. And now, you're going to sit down, and write an email, to the church. And you want to try, and encourage them, and correct them.

What are you going to say, in the email?

Okay, here's my email to them. From Kevin, founding pastor of the church, and great apostle, listen up, to the Corinthian church, peace. I hear some pretty shocking things.

I can't believe what I'm hearing. What the heck happened to you guys? Have you lost your minds? Stop it, right now. Next time I come, we're going to have a serious talk.

Kind regards, Kevin. That's my email, to the Corinthian church, okay? Stop it, sort it out. This is not what I taught you guys.

[15:20] But what does Paul write? This morning, we're going to look, just very briefly, at Paul's introduction, to the church, in Corinth. This church that he's had conflict with, that they don't like him, they don't want him, to be their leader.

And what is Paul, going to write to them? The astounding thing is, Paul starts off his letter, to this very unhealthy church, with an astonishing, astounding, word of encouragement, and grace.

And what Paul does, as we're going to see, is he sees, he looks very intently, as small as it is, he looks for evidence, where God is at work, in this twisted, knotted, unhealthy church.

And he zeroes in, on that work. And then he begins this letter, reminding them, that as unhealthy as they are, God is at work in them. He knows there's some difficult things, they need to say, and we're going to get to that, next week.

But the first thing he does, is he reminds them, God is at work in your midst. And God has not given up on you. And there's two things, in particular that he says. The first thing is, he reminds them, how God has been at work, historically.

[16:31] And then secondly, he says, God is still at work in you, and he's the one, who's going to carry you, all the way home. It's an amazing letter of grace. So, open your Bibles, and let's look at it together.

Now, just by the way, I don't have the scripture, up on the screen. That's very intentional, because, I really want to encourage us, to grab a Bible, or grab a bulletin. Bring your Bibles to church, of the coming weeks.

And I want you to follow along with me. Look at it, down on your lap, as we read this together.

Okay? So, verse 1, Paul essentially says, I'm Paul, and Sosthenes, we write this together.

Verse 2, to the church of God, that is in Corinth, to those sanctified, in Christ Jesus, called to be saints, together with all those, who in every place, call upon the name, of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Okay? So, to be called by God, what does that mean? It means that God, is the one who came, and chose you. He elected you. He chose you. He's called you, what Claire said earlier, about Hannah and Jeremy.

[17:38] He has called these Christians, in Corinth, to be followers of Jesus. And to be sanctified, means, not necessarily, to be morally perfect. It means to be set apart, for God.

To be his special, and treasured possession. So, here Paul says, when you guys, were lost, and ignorant, without God, without hope, bumbling along, doing what Corinthians do, God chose you, he came towards you, and then, he set you apart, by his grace, to be his treasured possession.

And then, he says, that, these Corinthians, their identity, and status before God, their identity, that they are in Christ, is the same, or equal, to what all, other Christians, have in the, in the ancient world.

So, he says, what is true of you, is also true of all Christians, in every other place. So, these Corinthians, they've probably got a bad reputation, and they might think, oh, we're the Corinthian church, no one really likes us.

But the Romans, they're great, or the Philippians, what a great church, or the Thessalonians, those guys really love God. And Paul says, you are as sanctified, as chosen, as called by God, and loved by God, as every other Christian, in every other place.

[18 : 58] Chosen by him. And then he says, look at verse four. He says, I thank my God always. That means, I always pray for you, because of the grace of God, that was given you, in Christ.

Now, just remember, this church, is in deep conflict, with Paul. They're writing letters to Paul, saying, Paul, who do you think you are? We're not so sure, we want to associate with you anymore. You're so unimpressive. You're so simple. We want another apostle. And Paul writes back, and he says, every time I think of you, I thank my God for you. Man, that's amazing grace, right?

That's not what I would say. And look, he gets even more specific. Look what he says in verse five. He says, I always thank my God for you. Verse five, why? Because in every way, you were enriched, enriched in him, in all speech, in all knowledge, even as the testimony about Christ, was confirmed amongst you.

Okay, so, what's he saying? He's saying, hey, when you guys became followers of Jesus, God, by his spirit, gave you, gifts of grace.

[20 : 03] That's what he means, when he says, you were enriched in God. God gave you, gifts of grace. So, let's say, let's say, I give you a gift. Okay, I say, here, Chris is a check.

He has \$100,000. Okay, I give you a gift of grace. You are now enriched. Or, I say to someone, hey, here's a scholarship to go study, do an MBA at Harvard or something.

Okay, I give you a gift of grace. You are now enriched. So, he says, you have been enriched by Christ. God gave you, gifts of grace. And, in this case, he's saying, gifts that pertain to speech or knowledge.

So, he's probably referring to spiritual, gifts of prophecy or words of knowledge. Okay, so, when you became Christians, God gave you these miraculous spiritual gifts. Now, that's not only true of miraculous gifts, of all gifts that God gives.

Gifts of leadership, gifts of hospitality, gifts of generosity, the spiritual fruit that God the Holy Spirit does in our heart. These are gifts of grace. And, Paul's point here, as he says, when you became Christians, God, by his Spirit, worked amongst you and gave you gifts of grace.

[21 : 12] He enriched you. And, then he says, and his point is this, these didn't come from yourself. Before you became Christians, you didn't have these gifts. Before you believed Jesus, you were just ordinary Corinthians.

but now, since God the Holy Spirit lives inside of you, he is strengthening you, encouraging you, and giving you these gifts of grace. They only began when you believed in him, so they can't have come from you.

They come from God, which means, God is at work in your church. Now, in the later chapters, Paul is going to correct them on the way that they use their spiritual gifts, because they're using them pretty badly.

Right? One guy says, oh, I prophesy. And the other guy says, oh, you only prophesy, I speak in tongues. And someone else says, oh, you only speak in tongues. Well, I have a word of knowledge. And they're all competing, and there's a status, and it's really bad.

They're using them badly. But Paul's laying the foundation here to correct them, and his point is this. These gifts don't come from you. They come from God's grace, which means God is at work in this church.

[22 : 25] As messy, and as much as it's in the process of sanctification, God is at work. And look at what God is doing amongst you. Look at the testimonies that God is doing.

Look at how God is changing people. God is at work amongst you. Friends, I hope you see how counterintuitive this is. These guys are in deep conflict, not only with one another, but with Paul. They're questioning his authority. They're questioning his gospel. They're in open rebellion against him. They're kind of saying, maybe this Jesus guy isn't so impressive after all. And Paul comes with a completely different spirit, an opposite spirit.

And he says, I see God's at work in you, and I thank God for that. Now, this is not the main point of this passage, but I want, here's a very important lesson for us, okay?

Sidebar here. What is, what Paul does here, is one of the very best ways, to handle conflict, when we encounter conflict. Which is to come, with the opposite spirit.

[23 : 26] Right? So somebody, doesn't like you at work, and they want to take your head off, and every time they interact with you, they're challenging you, and they're accusing you. What do you do? You come towards them with grace, and humility, and gentleness.

And someone comes, and they accuse you, and they want to show you, everything you've done wrong, and how bad you are, and how guilty you are, and what a terrible employee you are. And you come to the conversation, willing to own that stuff, and admit it, and say, yeah, you're right, I'm not the best.

In other words, one of the very best ways, to handle conflict, the natural human heart, is to want to get defensive, and proud, and combative, and to throw it right back at them. And Paul shows us, there's another way.

Because the way of the gospel, is the way it comes with humility, and gentleness, and kindness, and grace, in the midst of opposition. And Paul shows us, that when you do that, and when you even see good, in your opponents, you may not only win the argument, but you may actually win the person.

And that's really what Christians, are interested in, right? Not just the argument, but the person. And so look at, again, what Paul says here, verse four. He says, I give thanks to my God, always for you.

[24 : 41] I pray for you often, because of the grace of God, that has been given to you, in Christ Jesus. Isn't that amazing? That is amazing. Now, look what else Paul does here.

He doesn't only show them, where God has been at work in them, he also tells them, of his confidence, that God will still be at work in them, all the way to the end. Look at, verse seven to nine.

He says, indeed, you are not lacking in any gift, as you wait for the revealing, of the Lord Jesus Christ, who will sustain you to the end, guiltless in the day, of our Lord Jesus Christ.

God is faithful, by whom you are called, into the fellowship of his son. So now Paul says, not only has God given you gifts, when you believed in him, he's continuing to give your church gifts, to enrich you, and strengthen you, and he will sustain you, all the way to the end.

So what's Paul's confidence, that this church is going to survive? It's not how brilliant they are, it's the fact that God, is giving them gifts of grace, that's going to carry them. And in verse eight, he says, God will sustain you to the end, look at what he says here, presenting you guiltless, on the day of Christ.

[25 : 51] What does that mean? It means one day, friends, every one of us, is going to stand, before God the Father, the righteous judge. Every human being, is going to stand before God.

And for those who are in Christ, those who are Christians, God will look at us, and say, not guilty, blameless, righteous.

He will present us, guiltless, before God, on the day of Christ. Now why would, why would God do that? I mean, let's just look at ourselves, right? That's not us.

Well the reason is, because Jesus, on the cross, took our guilt, and our sin, and our shame, for those who trust in him, and in his place, he gave us his righteousness, as an exchange.

So, Jesus takes our guilt, and he gives us his perfect track record, of righteousness, in his place. And so now, if you are in Christ, one day you stand before God the Father, and the Father looks at you, and says, not guilty, blameless, righteous, because Jesus' righteousness, is credited to us.

[27 : 00] Paul writes to this messy church, whose sins, though they are many, and he reminds them, God's mercy, is more. Thank you Chris, for reminding us, of that this morning.

Listen to how Andrew Wilson, puts it. He says, the basis for Paul's confidence, in the Corinthian church, is not how moral, not the moral performance, of the church on earth, but the absolute faithfulness, of God in heaven.

God's commitment, to his people, is the guarantee, that the Corinthians, will make it home, in spite of all the sin, that characterizes them, at the moment, and all the warnings, Paul will issue, later on. Friends, isn't that amazing? Paul writes, and he says, this church, I have absolute confidence in it, not because you are great, but because there's one in heaven, and he is great, and he is going to sustain you, and carry you, all the way home.

And on that day, you'll stand before him, as imperfect as you are, and God will say, blameless, amazing grace. Friends, Paul sees this church, which is, which most of us, wouldn't go anywhere near, and what he sees, is a church, which is a work in progress, and generally speaking, he can, and not just generally, but specifically, he looks at people in church, and he says, I can see evidence, of God in you, I can see God in you, I can see God's grace in you, I can see how God is changing you, I can see that spiritual gift, that God has given you, be encouraged, God the Holy Spirit, is at work in you.

[28 : 30] My friends, what's the application for us? What do we do with this? Friends, when you look at the church, let me just put this up here, as imperfect, as frail, as prone to wonder, as we are, maybe full of disagreements, maybe relational tension, maybe even difficult, and immature people in the church, what do you see?

What do you see? Friends, do you see a bunch of hypocrites, that really should get their act together? Do you see a bunch of misfits, who really need to get a life?

Friends, do we see a bunch of losers, that need somebody, to slap them into place, and sort themselves out? Well friends, do we see the grace of God, despite the imperfections, and the problems?

Friends, do we see evidence, small as it may be, that God is at work, in these people? And friends, do we thank God, for the miraculous signs of grace, even in this imperfect body of people, called the church?

Do we thank God, that by his grace alone, God is using people, even in ways, that we're uncomfortable with? Hey, can I be honest with you? One of the things, that Corinthians challenges me, I know this is going to upset some of you, but it's okay.

[29 : 50] Corinthians talks a lot, about spiritual gifts. I'm a charismatic, I believe in spiritual gifts, but I get very uncomfortable, with a lot of what I see in the church, around spiritual gifts.

It just makes me uncomfortable. Maybe it's my personality, maybe it's my theology, maybe it's my immaturity. Sometimes the stuff I see, I'm uncomfortable with it. When I see churches like that, do I get on my high horse, and judge them?

Well you guys, you shouldn't do that. Or can I like Paul, see the grace of God, in people that even I'm not so sure, I agree with.

And see God is at work there. And I wouldn't do it like that, but God the Holy Spirit is, and he's choosing to do it, and who am I to criticize? Friends, do I shake my head in disdain, or do I thank God for his church?

That's the question. And Paul shows us here, how to view the church, even when it's messy, and immature, and difficult, and full of difficult people. And here's why, because the fourth thing, and the final thing is this, because here is a church, which is secure, and which is deeply loved.

[31 : 00] I want you to see, if you've got a bulletin, or actually I'll put it on the screen, I want you to see, how many times, the name, Jesus Christ, the Lord Jesus Christ, is in this passage. Okay, I'll give the answer, it's nine times, it mentions Jesus Christ, ten if you count the word him, in verse five.

Look at what he says, everything about this church, is saturated with Jesus. Their identity, and calling, is not self-generated, it's from Christ Jesus. They are sanctified, in Christ Jesus.

They're given a new identity, and security, being God's saints, not because they are saintly people, in and of themselves, they're not, but because of the Lord Jesus Christ. God's peace, and mercy, come not from mindfulness, or yoga, or spiritual, mental health seminars, but from, the Lord Jesus Christ.

Grace is not earned, or achieved, where does their grace come from? The Lord Jesus Christ.

These guys, they possess gifts, gifts of grace, how do these gifts, come to them?

Because of the grace, of the Lord Jesus Christ. What is the subject, of Paul's message? Christ, and Christ crucified. Jesus is the reason, for their hope in this world, not their gifts, or abilities.

[32 : 13] Jesus will sustain them, to the end. It's Jesus, who will present them, blameless, guiltless, before the Father, one day. And it's Jesus, who presently invites them, into amazing fellowship.

Friends, what's Paul's point here? The point is that, Jesus has this Corinthian church. He has their past, he has their present, he has their future, and as wayward as they are, and as much as they're, in the middle of their, sanctification process, this church is ultimately, Jesus' church.

And so Paul can write, from a distance and say, I thank God, and I have confidence, that God, what he has begun in you, he will bring to completion, because Jesus, is doing it.

Friends, in this passage, what do the Corinthians do? They do nothing. What does Jesus do? He does everything. Everything good, every sign of life, every source of hope, it's all Jesus.

Jesus loves this church, just like he loves every church, even when we're unlovable. He hasn't given up on her. He doesn't keep his distance. You know, 20 years ago, or thereabout, I was, I think I was a, fresh graduate, or university, somewhere around there, and I was, driving in the car, with my best friend at the time, he was driving, and I was in the passenger seat, I can still remember, exactly where I was, on what street in Cape Town, and I say to my buddy Ian, I say, hey bro, I really love Jesus, I'm not so sure, about the church anymore.

[33 : 53] I mean, I love Jesus, but the church is hard work, people are pretty frustrating, it's not that exciting, it just feels like a slog, to go to church these days. And Ian is quiet, for a few moments, and then he says, no bro, that's impossible, I don't believe you.

He says, it's not possible, to love Jesus, and not love what Jesus loves. And then there's quiet, and then he changes the subject. And I was absolutely stunned.

I didn't know what to say. And so I went on, with the new subject. But that conversation, has never left me. Friends, can we love Jesus, and not love Jesus' church?

I think Paul is going to say, some strong things to this church, and he's going to challenge them, but at his heart, he loves the church, because he knows, this is Jesus' church. Jesus is the one, who saved her.

Jesus is the one, who sanctified her. Jesus is the one, who's called her. Jesus is the one, who's still at work in her. Jesus is the one, who's purifying her, and sustaining her, and working in her.

[35 : 01] And ultimately, Jesus is the one, who's committed to her. And despite all the trouble, Jesus has not, washed his hands of them, or walked away from them. He's still there. And so how do we respond?

Well friends, let's follow Jesus' example. Sorry, let's follow Paul's example. Let's love the church, even when it's difficult to love. Even when it's not, what you'd naturally, choose to love.

And friends, let's love the real church, the real flesh and blood church, the real people in the church. Not an imaginary church, or the church of our dreams, or the church that's online, or the perfect Instagram choreographed church.

Friends, let's love the real flesh and blood church, the people that we rub shoulders with, and interact with. And above all, let's be hopeful, and full of grace, because Christ is at work in this church.

As imperfect as it is, as much as it's in the process, Christ is at work in this church. And so let's be hopeful, and love her too. Let's pray together. Lord Jesus, we have much to confess in this regard, and God, I stand at the front of the queue, which much is confession.

[36 : 07] God, I confess that I get frustrated, I get impatient, I often, God, see things that are not the way that I would choose, and I find it easy to criticize.

But God, I don't often see the grace of God, the gifts of grace, that you have enriched, not only this church, but every church. God, I find it easy to look at the church down the road, and criticize them, to point out all their faults and failures.

But Jesus, you are at work in your church. And so I pray, help us, God, by your spirit. God, won't you give us the gift of grace that loves your church. Help us, God, to love what you love.

And help us, God, to be, won't you, God, sustain us all the way to the end, to take us home, to present us blameless and pure before God the Father, by your grace alone.

We pray this in your wonderful and your gracious name. Amen. Amen.