

## Study 1. 1Cor 1:1-9

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**Big idea: the church is both ugly and beautiful all at once – it is beautiful in Christ, and that makes it possible for it to become beautiful, too.**

How would you like to be described by those who know you?

Paul's letter to the church in Corinth is a mash-up of genres. For the first 3 verses it follows the standard Graeco-Roman model: from (v.1), to (v.2) and greetings (v.3). In vv.4-9, though, it becomes very Hebrew, full of thanksgiving for and reflection upon the work of God. Let's start at the beginning.

### Observation and interpretation

The author of this letter is Paul (v.1). What do you know about him?

Have a look at the following passages to fill this out:

Acts 7:54-8:1; 9:1-31; 11:25-30; 16:37-38; 22:3

Phil 3:1-6

2 Cor 11:21-12:10

Paul describes himself as an 'apostle', which literally means 'one sent out', and implies a special commission and message. Who made Paul an apostle?

Read the following and note down what else the New Testament says about the role of apostle.

1 Cor 4:9

1 Cor 12:28

2 Cor 12:12

1 Thess 2:6

1 Tim 2:7

What is the difference between a local church pastor and an apostle?

Read Acts 18:1-18. What is the connection between Paul and the church in Corinth?

Notice that the name 'Sosthenes' appears in both Acts 18:17 and 1 Cor 1:2. It is quite likely that they refer to the same person: Paul usually only mentions names in his letters if they are familiar to the recipients. Sosthenes may have been converted during Paul's ministry in Corinth, and then accompanied him onwards as a secretary or scribe.

In v.4, Paul begins by thanking God for the Corinthian church. This can be a little surprising, once you've gone on to read their problems as a church. Have a quick look over the following passages and see what they are:

1 Cor 1:10-11

1 Cor 3:1-4

1 Cor 4:8-14

1 Cor 4:18-21

1 Cor 5:1-2

1 Cor 6:1-8

1 Cor 6:15-18

1 Cor 7:1-2

1 Cor 8:1

1 Cor 8:7-13

1 Cor 10:14-15

1 Cor 11:17-22

1 Cor 14:20-23

1 Cor 15:12

1 Cor 15:33-34

The city of Corinth was wealthy, proud, sophisticated, international and sexually promiscuous. A lot like Sydney, really. How do you think the problems above are connected with being a church in a big city?

## **Application / Implications**

Let's come back, then, to v.2.

It is almost certain that there were a number of house churches in Corinth. In light of what you have read, why do you think that Paul calls them 'church', in the singular?

Paul also reminds the Corinthians that there are many others who call who call on the name of Jesus. What does it mean to be part of a bigger family? What are the consequences for us of forgetting this? How do you think we might learn from our brothers and sisters around the world?

Paul describes the Corinthian church as both 'sanctified in Christ Jesus' and 'called to be his holy people'. Even though they are very different words in English, they share the same root in Greek. You might like to read 'sanctified' as "holified". The word holy means 'set apart for God's special purpose and use.' So Paul first describes the Corinthian church as already having been made holy (even though they don't look very holy at all!), and then secondly, called to become holy.

How do you think both can be true at the same time (see also Heb 10:10,14)?

If you had to choose, would you be more likely to describe yourself as 'holy' or 'becoming holy'? What difference do you think that this makes for how you think about yourself? What difference does it make in how you live? How do you think that holding the two together would change you?

Unless you come to believe that Christ has made you holy, special to God, you will never begin to become holy. Instead, you will live in fear and anxiety. It is love that produces change. So a change to more holy living is always built on a growing confidence in Christ as our holy standing. Or, in other words, our sanctification always rests on our trust in justification by faith. Here is what the Belgic Confession (1561) says: 'We believe that this true faith being wrought in man by the hearing of the Word of God, and the operation of

the Holy Ghost, does regenerate and make him a new man, causing him to live a new life, and freeing him from the bondage of sin. Therefore it is so far from being true, that this justifying faith makes men remiss in a pious and holy life, that on the contrary without it they would never do anything out of love to God, but only out of self-love or fear of damnation.'

### **Prayer ideas**

Pray that your group will come to see themselves as those truly holy before God.

Pray that each member of your group will strive to become more holy. Perhaps share an area where you need help to change.