

June 28th, 2020

# The Members, Marks, and Message of the Church of God

1 Corinthians 1:2-3

## The Church vs. the state

Last week we looked at the little phrase “...the Church of God that is in Corinth” and we examined the vital difference between the Church and the state.<sup>1</sup> If you missed that message, I would encourage you to go back and listen to it. Everything that Paul is saying in the beginning of this letter is vital to be able to understand the rest.

## The Church proper

This week we are looking at the identity of the Church *herself*. Who belongs to the Church? What is the mark or marks of a true Church? And why is the message of the Church the most unique, most exhilarating, most exclusive message in the world? In short, we are looking at *the doctrine* of the Church.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> These are the only two public authorities that God ordained in the whole world, and God gave them to us for our good. God ordained the state for the outward good of man, and God ordained the Church for the inward good of man. Christians, by necessity, are citizens of both, and we have duties that we owe both. We saw that it is sinful for us to disobey the state. But we also saw that the state doesn't possess *absolute* authority. The state oversteps its God-given role in three ways: **1)** When it presumes to dictate to the Church the doctrine that she can or cannot teach. **2)** When it unduly interferes with the Church's obligation to worship in the gathered assembly in Word and Sacrament. **3)** When it imposes its own ideas of membership—of inclusion or exclusion—upon the Church. That's where we were last week.

<sup>2</sup> As we pointed out last time, here in **v.2**, Paul gives us the most “elaborate description of the Church...than in any of his other letters” [Ciampa & Rosner, pg. 55] Why? Why is it so important to the Apostle that we understand who the doctrine of the Church? Because if we don't understand *who we are*—which is doctrine; then we will be walking around in the darkness—which is life. Doctrine and life necessarily go together. The Christian who says ‘I don't have time for doctrine, I just need the practical stuff’ doesn't realize he is reducing himself to a beast—“don't tell me how to think, just tell me what to do.” There is no single attitude that the NT condemns more than the attitude of anti-doctrinalism. [D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones, *Romans: An Exposition of Chapter 1: The Gospel of God*, (Carlisle, PA.: The Banner of Truth Trust, Reprint 2018), pg. 169]

## The ultimacy of the Church in this age

And this doctrine of the Church is especially vital. It wasn't only the doctrine of justification by faith alone and sola scriptura that the Reformers of the 16th century and the Puritans of the 17th century were willing to suffer for, it was also this doctrine of the Church. It was not a matter of indifference to them. They shed their blood over it. And neither should it be a matter of indifference to us. Paul said in **Ephesians 3:10** that it is "...through the Church [that] the manifold wisdom of God *might now be made known* to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly places." Did you hear that? The whole host of Heaven—all the angels—can see the glory of God's wisdom better *only* through the Church. The Church displays God's wisdom like no other thing. So you see beloved, it is vital for us to understand who are the members of the Church, what is the mark or marks of a true Church, and what is the message of the Church.

### *The Big Idea...*

In the Church of God we discover who we are, why we exist, and what God has given to us

- ☆ The Members of the Church
- ☆ The Marks of the Church
- ☆ The Message of the Church

## I. The Members of the Church

### The local Church

Consider the three distinct ways that Paul speaks about the Church. **First**, Paul describes the *local Church*. In the beginning of **v.2**, Paul says "To the Church of God that is *in Corinth...*" By the word *Church*, Bible often means the

local Church, meaning a “body of believers in any particular place [in this case, Corinth] associated together in the worship of God.”<sup>3</sup> Paul speaks of other local churches throughout this letter. In **16:1** he says “Now concerning the collection for the saints: as I directed the *churches* of Galatia, so you also are to do.” There were local churches (plural) in Galatia. Again in **16:19** “The *churches* of Asia send you greetings. Aquila and Prisca, together with the *Church* in their house.”...” So Paul first is describing the local Church here in **v.2**, that is a body of believers in a particular place that gathers together for the sake of worship.

### The invisible Church

**Secondly**, Paul describes the *invisible Church*. Halfway through **v.2**, he says “...to those *sanctified in Christ Jesus*, called to be saints...” Now this description includes more than just the believers at Corinth. It includes all that belong to Christ. This is the invisible Church. Listen to the Larger Catechism here.

**Q. 64** What is the invisible Church?

**A.** The invisible Church is the whole number of the elect, that have been, are, or shall be gathered into one under Christ the head.

That’s how **Ephesians 5:25** uses the word Church: “Husbands, love your wives, as Christ loved *the Church* and gave himself up for *her*.” What Church is he speaking about? All those who will ever be saved, that is, the invisible Church.

### The visible Church

**Thirdly**, Paul describes the *visible Church*. In **v.2** after he says “called to be saints” he says “...together with *all those who in every place* call upon the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, both their Lord and ours.” Now this description isn’t of any particular local Church, nor a description of all that will be saved—the

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<sup>3</sup> James Bannerman, *The Church of Christ: A Treatise on the Nature, Powers, Ordinances, Discipline, and Government of the Christian Church*, (Carlisle, PA.: The Banner of Truth Trust, Reprint 2016), pg. 11

invisible Church. Rather Paul is describing *the visible Church*. The visible Church is “the whole body throughout the world of those who outwardly profess the faith of Christ.”<sup>4</sup> What the difference between the visible and invisible Church? One important difference is that a person can belong to the visible Church, that is they profess faith in Jesus Christ, but they don’t belong to the invisible Church, that is, they don’t actually have a living faith, they have not been in truly united to Him.<sup>5</sup> So it’s clear that Paul has three distinct ideas of the Church: there is a local Church, an invisible Church, and a visible Church.

### 1st Maxim: No lone-ranger Christians

Let’s draw three maxims from this three-fold definition of the Church. The **first maxim** is this: the idea of a lone ranger Christian is heresy. T.C. Edwards says here “Living and working for Christ apart from the main body would... assume the character of [abnormality], impracticality and even heresy.”<sup>6</sup> Just look at the text. There is not idea here or anywhere in the N.T. of Christians trying to live their Christian experience apart from the local and visible Church. The language of the N.T. no where allows a Christian the liberty to simply remain alone. It’s not a matter of personal choice. Now let me just qualify, there are precious saints who are not able to be with the whole body. Think of this COVID season, those who are at greater risk, or think of people in our own body who are chronically suffering or handicap, or in other countries those who have been arrested for their faith. These people are not sinning by not participating in the body. In fact, we owe them a debt of love, and we ought to do whatever we can to care for them. Aside from those type of qualifications

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<sup>4</sup> Bannerman, pg. 9. James Bannerman (a 19th century Scottish Presbyterian) is not denying the fact that the Larger Catechism also includes the children of believers in the visible Church. (LCQ 62). He addresses it at a different place, and didn’t feel the need to include that here.

<sup>5</sup> The parables of Jesus should be sufficient to prove this point: there are the wise and the foolish virgins (**Matthew 25:1-13**); there are the different types of soil, (**Mark 4:1-20**); or the parable of the good and bad fish (**Matthew 13:47-50**).

<sup>6</sup> Thomas Charles Edwards, *A Commentary on the First Epistle to the Corinthians*, (Published by Forgotten Books 2012, Originally Published 1885), pg. 4

however, the Bible leaves no room for lone-ranger Christians. That is a Christian heresy.

### **2nd Maxim: No ethnic/racial distinctions**

The **second maxim** we can draw from this three-fold definition of the Church is that “differences in nationality...and racial distinctions are immaterial and should never be mentioned in connection with the Church.”<sup>7</sup> One of the dangers of the ideology behind the Black Lives Matter movement seeping into the Church, is that it necessarily makes divisions between white and black. Paul has no such division here. He simply includes all who have been born again, all who call upon the name of the Lord regardless of ethnicity or skin color. In fact the only time Paul brings up ethnicity or race is to show that the Church knows of no such division. **Colossians 3:11** “Here there is not Greek and Jew, circumcised and uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave, free; but Christ is all, and in all.” It is also a heresy to divide up the Church according to ethnicity or race. We must never tear asunder what Christ has brought together.

### **3rd Maxim: These distinctions make healthy Christians**

The **third maxim** simply this, that we must recognize all three distinctions—the local, invisible, and visible Church—if we are going to be healthy Christians. Dear congregation, if all our emphasis is on *the local Church* and we ignore the greater visible Church, then we will become an island to ourselves at best, but sectarian and divisive at worse. Conversely, if all your emphasis is on the visible Church, and you ignore the local Church, then you become one of those Latitudinarians that we spoke of last week. You will come to believe that the obligations that Christ laid on every Christian to belong to a local Church can simply be dismissed and you can do Church however you want. Or lastly if all our emphasis is on the visible Church—what we can see in the world today—and not on what God is doing secretly among His elect—the invisible Church—

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<sup>7</sup> Martyn Lloyd-Jones, *Great Doctrines of the Bible: Three Volumes in One: God the Father, God the Son; God the Holy Spirit; The Church and the Last Things*, (Wheaton, IL.: Crossway, 2003), pg. 13 in vol. 3

then we will become exceedingly discouraged because of the apostasy that we see. If we are going to be healthy Christians we must recognize the importance of the local Church, the invisible Church and the visible Church.

### “to those sanctified in Christ Jesus”

Alright then, so let’s look carefully at how Paul, in particular, defines the invisible Church—those who truly belong to the Lord Jesus Christ. Look at this phrase in v.2 “...to those sanctified in Christ Jesus.” Isn’t it just fascinating that Paul starts *here*? The Church in Corinth had a multitude of problems. Yet he doesn’t start with their problems, he starts with reminding them who they are. This is the apostolic method.<sup>8</sup> He starts with the indicative before he goes to the imperative. Meaning, he tells them what’s true about them first, *before* he tells them how they must live. What is the first thing that is true? All true Christians are those that are *sanctified in Christ Jesus*.<sup>9</sup> Sanctify means to be made holy or pure. The Christian is one who is made holy or pure in Christ Jesus. But what is thrilling here is that this word *sanctified* is a perfect passive participle. Perfect *meaning* it is an action that is already completed, never to be repeated again. When Jesus said “It is finished”<sup>10</sup> it was in perfect tense. Just as Christ’s work is reckoned complete, so the believer is already reckoned holy and pure. But additionally it is in the passive voice, meaning the subject of the sentence—here the believer—is the recipient of the action, not the doer of the action. We

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<sup>8</sup> “Paul designedly looks rather to the grace of God in them than to their own defects...” John Calvin, *Calvin’s Commentaries Vol. XX*, (Grand Rapids, MI.,: BakerBooks 2009), pg. 53

<sup>9</sup> “Why is it that Paul emphasizes sanctification and the fact that believers in this Church are called unto holiness, rather than emphasize justification as in his epistles to the churches of Galatia or Rome?” Kim Riddlebarger, *The Lectio Continua: Expository Commentary on the New Testament: First Corinthians*, (Powder Springs, GA.,: Tolle Lege Press, 2013), pg. 4. Riddlebarger’s question demonstrates Paul’s exquisite logic. “Every believer is already reckoned as sanctified, even though many of those in this Church were still engaging in sinful and unacceptable behavior typical of paganism.” *ibid*

<sup>10</sup> John 19:30

were “sanctified” by Another, not by our own actions. “Holy living does not make us holy.”<sup>11</sup> Someone else makes us holy. But there is more.

### The effectual call

Paul continues, he says in v.2 “...to those...called to be saints...” A Christian is one who is *called*. There are two types of calls in Scripture. There is a general call. That is a call for all men and women and children everywhere to repent and believe the gospel (Acts 17:30). But not everyone who hears this general call becomes a Christian. But there is a second type of call, the effectual call.<sup>12</sup> Notice how Paul talks about this calling in v.26 “For consider *your calling*, brothers...” Notice that in Paul’s mind that not everyone received this type of call—“consider *your calling*, brothers...” meaning those on the outside did not receive this type of call. Dr. Martyn Lloyd-Jones provides this illustration:

“Imagine two men seated in the same pew, listening to the same sermon, the same preaching of the gospel. One believes it and the other does not; one becomes a Christian and the other does not. What is the difference? Well, in the case of the one who believes, there is an effectual call. The call has gone out to the two, yes, but in the one it is effectual, it has drawn him forward, it has led him to submit and to believe and to surrender and join himself to the Christian people.”<sup>13</sup>

That is how called is used here. Christian are those who are not merely invited to believe, but are irresistibly summoned to believe.

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<sup>11</sup> John MacArthur, *The MacArthur New Testament Commentary: 1 Corinthians*, (Chicago, IL.: Moody Publishers, 1984), pg. 5

<sup>12</sup> Shorter Catechism Q. 31. What is effectual calling? A. Effectual calling is the work of God's Spirit, whereby, convincing us of our sin and misery, enlightening our minds in the knowledge of Christ, and renewing our wills, he doth persuade and enable us to embrace Jesus Christ, freely offered to us in the gospel.

<sup>13</sup> Lloyd-Jones (Romans 1), pg. 163

### All Christians *just are* saints

But Paul goes further. He says “called to be *saints*...” This word has been ruined by the Roman Catholic Church. According to their false teaching, only *some* Christians are saints. Recently the BBC reported on how one becomes a saint according to Catholicism.<sup>14</sup> Five easy steps. **Step 1:** First you generally have to wait five years after death. **Step 2:** An investigation has to be opened in order to determine if you had sufficient personal holiness. **Step 3:** Your life must be an example of ‘heroic virtue.’ **Step 4:** A verified miracle(s) must be attributed to your prayers. **Step 5:** There must be an official ceremony of canonization. Now the first question we must ask here is this: where is any of this found in Scripture? Nowhere. It is a fabrication. There is no process to become a saint in the Bible.

So then what is a saint? The Greek word ἅγιος *hagios* means a *holy one*, or more precisely *one that is separated from the world unto God*. Think about how this works in the OT. Moses had to take off his sandals because he was on *holy* ground—that is ground set apart for God (**Exodus 3:5**). The Sabbath was called *holy* because it was a day set apart from all the other days for God (**Exodus 20:8**). “The temple, the altar, the priests, the prophets, and [all Israel] is called holy.”<sup>15</sup> Being holy in the OT had nothing to do with the intrinsic value of the thing, but rather a thing was holy if it was set apart for God’s praise and God’s service.

The same is true here, a saint—a holy one—is one who is set apart for God. It has nothing to do with any intrinsic purity or holiness found in the person. A Christian does not make himself a saint by how he/she lives. God calls a person to be a saint. A man may be a very moral man—if you only look on the outside—but that doesn’t make him a saint. Conversely, a Christian may at times lead “an unworthy life, he may fall into sin, he may be an ‘infant in Christ’,

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<sup>14</sup> Source: <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-27140646> Accessed June 27, 2020

<sup>15</sup> Charles Hodge, *A Commentary on 1 & 2 Corinthians*, (Carlisle, PA.: The Banner of Truth Trust, Reprint 2018), pg. 3

he may be very ignorant, nevertheless he is a saint.”<sup>16</sup> Which means this beloved, you don’t have to wait until the end of your life to see if you will be judged a saint or not. If you are a Christian, then you *just are* a saint. A Christian is made a saint at the beginning not at the end. Why? Because the Christian is the man whom God *sets apart* for His praise and His service. You are just as much of a saint as the apostle Paul himself. There is no difference.

### **Our position vs. our condition**

You see Paul is laying out the difference between a Christian’s position and a Christian’s condition. Those are very different things. Imagine a 10 year old little girl. What is her **position** in relation to her dad? She is a most beloved daughter. She is his special little girl. He loves her, he would do anything for her, because she is in the very unique position of being his daughter. She didn’t make herself a daughter, she was made a daughter.

Oh, but what is her **condition**? She has cancer. She’s sick, she’s in the ICU at the hospital, she might not make it. Does her condition of being sick change her status as her father’s daughter? No. In fact, because she is so sick, the bowels of his love are more drawn out to her. Her condition makes him heartsick all the more for her.

### **Who are you?**

Beloved, these Corinthians were sick, they were really sick. They were in the spiritual ICU. But before Paul ever deals with their **condition**, he reminds them of their **position**. And this is how God deals with each of us. Are you spiritually sick? Are you backsliding? Have you lost the fire you had at the beginning? What ails you? Whatever it is, Paul is saying to you this morning—remember who you are! You did not make yourself a Christian, God made you a Christian. It doesn’t matter *what* your condition is, it does not change the fact that you are still a son or daughter of the King! “Presidents do not always act presidentially” but the President is still the President. Likewise “Christians do

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<sup>16</sup> Lloyd-Jones (Romans 1), pg. 164

not always act like Christians, but they are still Christians.”<sup>17</sup> Don’t you realize that most of your problems would cease if you only realized your **position** in the universe. Put aside for a moment your condition. Put aside the sins you are struggling with. Put aside what happened this last week, and what you think will happen next week. Meditate on this: The Most High God made you His own. He didn’t do that to everyone. But He made *you* His own. The Most High God sanctified you in Christ Jesus. *Perfectly* for all time, it never needs to be repeated. You received this *passively*—it is something that happened to you, you didn’t earn it. The Most High God summoned you to Himself, and He set you apart for His praise and service. And all of that had nothing to do with you! It’s astonishing. You are **member** of God’s invisible Church, and you never applied for this membership. In fact you did everything to be disqualified from this membership. And you still do things that would require your removal if your membership depended on you. But it doesn’t. You are a saint not by birth, not by merit, not by keeping yourself unstained from the world. No you are a saint by the blood-bought grace of Jesus Christ. That’s our **first point**.

## II. The Marks of the Church

### What do we mean by the marks of the Church?

Perhaps this idea of the *marks* of the Church is completely foreign to you. What do we mean by the *marks* of the Church? In this context, a mark is anything that makes something distinct from other things. Ask yourself, how many individuals and societies today claim to be Christian yet have vastly different belief systems and theologies? The Mormon Church claims to be Christian. Liberal Churches who embrace ungodly and gross doctrines claim to be Christian. Is there a criteria by which we can test whether they are truly Christian or not? “What does she do when she shows that she is the Church?”

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<sup>17</sup> MacArthur, pg. 6

<sup>18</sup>Is there a visible mark by which its presence would indicate a true Church, and its absence would indicate a false Church? Yes. There is.

### The three marks

Traditionally, the Reformed Church has recognized three such marks: “the faithful preaching of the Word, the faithful administration of the sacraments, and the faithful exercise of discipline.”<sup>19</sup> However we must make a careful distinction between these three marks. We need to make a distinction between *why* God created the Church, and what things God created for the health of Church. In other words, we are asking two questions: 1) Why does the Church exist? 2) What makes a particular Church healthy?

#### 1. Why does the Church *exist*?

How would you answer that question? **1 Timothy 3:15** tells us that the Christian Church is the “pillar and buttress of the truth.” Jesus said in **John 18:37** “For this purpose...I have come into the world—to bear witness to the truth.” He told His disciples in **Acts 1:8** “..you will be my witnesses...to the end of the earth.” Those three statements tell us why the Church exists. James Bannerman puts it like this:

“the Church of Christ was established on the earth to declare and uphold the truth...the truth which exhibits at once the glory of God, and...the salvation of the sinner.”<sup>20</sup>

That’s why the Church exists. Therefore to profess and preach the true faith—Christ and Him crucified—is the only true mark of the Church because this is the one thing for why Christ built His Church. This is why Paul says what he

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<sup>18</sup> Lloyd-Jones (Great Doctrines of the Bible), pg. 13

<sup>19</sup> Source: <https://www.ligonier.org/learn/articles/the-marks-of-the-church/> Accessed June 27, 2020

<sup>20</sup> Bannerman, pg. 63

says in v.2. Please look with me at the end of the verse. Paul is *only* writing to the true Church, that is only to those “who in every place *call upon the name of our Lord Jesus Christ...*” This phrase is another way of referring to the true Church. It’s found elsewhere in Scripture. Before Paul was converted, he had “... authority from the chief priests to bind all *who call on your name*” (Acts 9:14). To call upon the name of the Lord Jesus Christ is not merely a one time event at the beginning of salvation. It describes the whole Christian experience. It means at least three things. To call upon the name of our Lord Jesus Christ means 1) to call upon Christ for salvation<sup>21</sup>; 2) to call upon Christ in prayer and worship<sup>22</sup> and 3) to call upon Christ in the ordinary function of preaching.<sup>23</sup> It is *only* through this three-fold call that Christ’s purposes in establishing His church are met. He is called on in salvation, He is called on in prayer and worship, and He is called on in preaching. And in this way, the Church is a witness to Christ on the earth. The world cannot see or witness the *invisible Church*. The elect don’t have a mark on their heads. They are known only by the secret counsel of God. But the world can see the *visible Church*. And how is it seen it *mainly*? She is seen as she calls upon the name of the Lord Jesus Christ. Therefore this mark is the one indispensable mark of a true Church. 1 Peter 2:9 “But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession, *that you may proclaim the excellencies of him* who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light.”

## 2. What makes a particular Church *healthy*?

So then what about these other two marks of the Church: the faithful administration of the sacraments, and the faithful exercise of discipline? Aren’t these necessary marks of the Church? Yes and no. No they are not necessary for *the existence* of the true Church. This is clear from the case of the Corinthian Church itself. They were not faithful in administration of the sacraments.

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<sup>21</sup> Romans 10:13

<sup>22</sup> 2 Timothy 2:22

<sup>23</sup> 1 Peter 2:9; Psalm 22:30-31

Regarding baptism, they were fighting about the superiority of one baptism over another depending on *who* baptized them. Paul says in v.14-15 “I thank God that I baptized none of you except Crispus and Gaius, *so that no one may say that you were baptized in my name.*” Regarding the Lord’s Supper, Paul said their practice was so corrupt, that they weren’t actually even really taking the Lord’s Supper. In 11:20 Paul says “When you come together, *it is not the Lord’s supper that you eat.*” Neither were they faithful in the exercise of discipline. Paul rebukes them in chapter 5 for refusing to remove the man who was sleeping with his mother. On top of that they had members taking other members to court and members visiting brothels in chapter 6. They had no Church discipline. *Yet* Paul still called them the “Church of God.”<sup>24</sup> Why? For this simple reason, the Church doesn’t exist to administer the sacraments or practice Church discipline.

Does that mean these things aren’t important? Of course not. The whole reason Paul wrote this letter was because the Church was out of order in these two main areas. So although the sacraments and discipline aren’t necessary for *the existence* of the Church, they are necessary for *the health* of the Church.

### **A crucial test for us**

But it’s precisely at this point where the Apostle’s doctrine is a test for us. If this church (the Corinthian Church) was in Boise, how many of us would be ashamed to recognize it as a true Church?<sup>25</sup> Would we bad mouth them, gossip about them, treat them with contempt? Would we disown them? That’s not Paul’s method. Paul calls them the “Church of God.” Dear congregation, do you see how careful God is which His Church? What does that mean for us? That we must be equally as careful. These are not simply people that we can throw away, or slander or gossip about. God didn’t do that with this local Church. And I can testify that we have had major problems here, problems that

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<sup>24</sup> "Notwithstanding of this [i.e. all their errors], however, inasmuch as they retained fundamental doctrine: as the one God was adored among the, and was invoked in the name of Christ: as they placed their dependence for salvation upon Christ, and, had a ministry not altogether corrupted: there was, on these accounts, a Church still existing among them." Calvin, pg. 51

<sup>25</sup> cf. WCF 25.4-5

I am so embarrassed and ashamed about if I were to think of them. But God has preserved us, and continued to nurture us, and abide with us even when we get things wrong. And thank God because we will still get things wrong. The Westminster Confession of Faith says in 25.4 that “the purest churches under heaven are subject both to mixture and error.” The problem with any particular Church, including this one, is that it is full of people. People who are selfish, and self-centered, and self-absorbed. People like you and me. Why doesn’t God just get rid of us? Because we call upon the name of the Lord Jesus Christ. And all who call on Him will never be put to shame. That is the one true mark of the Church and may we love all those who call on the name of the Lord in spirit and truth.

**“...both their Lord and ours:”**

Paul gives us one more incentive to make sure the divisions in Corinth aren’t happening with us. He says at the end of v.2 “...together with all those who in every place call upon the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, *both their Lord and ours:*” Now why would have to Paul add that—*both their Lord and ours?* Because of the divisions in the Corinthian Church.”<sup>26</sup> Some were claiming a peculiar relationship to Christ, because of what teacher they belonged to. Paul is heading that off at the pass. No the Lord belongs to all who call upon Him. Christ Jesus is their Lord and our Lord. We have one Master, and we are united under Him. This is one of the most wonderful truths about the true Church God. Especially in the hour that we are currently in. Beloved we are not alone. Christ’s Church is not limited to our own congregation or any one particular domination. We have precious brothers and sisters around the world in the Church in China, and Australia, and South America, and Africa, and

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<sup>26</sup> Roy E. Ciampa & Brian S. Rosner, *The Pillar New Testament Commentary: The First Letter to the Corinthians*, (Grand Rapids, MI.: Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2010), pg. 58; also see Hodge, pg. 5

Russia, who join us in spirit<sup>27</sup> “on the Lord’s day in calling upon our Lord.”<sup>28</sup> We are not alone. Christ Jesus, by His own blood, has “ransomed people for God from every tribe and language and people and nation”<sup>29</sup>—He is both their Lord and ours. That’s our **second point**. The one sure and infallible mark of the Church of Christ is that she calls upon the name of the Lord.

### III. The Message of the Church

#### **The most concise summary of the gospel**

You’ll recognize v.3 as it is the greeting that we begin nearly every Lord’s Day with: “Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.” “Christians have used these words to open worship since the apostolic age.”<sup>30</sup> Now these two words contain everything that this struggling Corinthian Church needs, because in these two words are the most concise summary of the gospel. These two words contain everything we need. “The two together comprehend all the gifts of the Spirit.”<sup>31</sup> This is *the* message to Christ’s Church, and no other people can claim it. Grace and peace is only for Christians.

#### **God *our* Father**

Lets deal with the benefactors first. “Grace to you and peace from *God our Father...*” During the 19th century, a German liberal “defined the essence of the Christian faith as the universal fatherhood of God and the universal brotherhood

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<sup>27</sup> Colossians 2:5 “For though I am absent in body, yet I am with you in spirit, rejoicing to see your good order and the firmness of your faith in Christ.”

<sup>28</sup> Riddlebarger, pg.9

<sup>29</sup> Revelation 5:9

<sup>30</sup> Riddlebarger, pg.8

<sup>31</sup> Edwards, pg. 5

of man.”<sup>32</sup> God is everyone’s father, he believed. Is this true? Paul, quoting a Greek poet in Acts 17:28, says “For we are indeed *his* offspring.” Does Paul mean the same thing as the liberal? No. He’s simply conceding the point that God has created all men, and in that sense we are all his offspring. The rest of his theology is clear. God only becomes our Father through adoption. **Romans 8:15** “...you have received the Spirit of adoption as sons, by whom we cry, “Abba! Father!”” Until that happens, we are “sons of disobedience” (**Ephesians 2:2**) and the devil is our father (**John 8:44**). No God is only Father to the Christian. “He is not Father to anybody else.”<sup>33</sup> And Paul wants us to know this. He could have left it impersonal. He could have just said “Grace to you and peace from *God*...” But instead, he included these most profound words “Grace to you and peace from God *our Father*...” A Christian is a man who has the Almighty, unchangeable, everywhere present, infinitely holy, wise, good, and just God as His Father.

### No one but the Lord Jesus Christ

But then he adds these words: “and the Lord Jesus Christ.” When Lloyd-Jones was preaching these words, he made a big deal out of that word “*and*”—“God the Father *and*...” What’s significant about that word *and*? Well ask yourself: what other person can you put next to God? Could he had said “Grace to you and peace from God our Father *and* Moses?” Or “God our Father and David?” Or “God our Father and Gabriel the Archangel?” No. The only one you can put next to God here is God. Nothing else. And in an instant, Paul affirms not only the full humanity of the Lord Jesus Christ, but His Divinity. Truly God + truly man. Who does this grace and peace come from? Not only God as our Father, but God as our Redeemer, the One who put on flesh to redeem us from our sins.

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<sup>32</sup> Source: <https://www.ligonier.org/learn/devotionals/fatherhood-god/> Accessed June 28, 2020

<sup>33</sup> Lloyd-Jones (Romans 1), pg. 174

## Where is the Holy Spirit?

But ah, where is the Holy Spirit? How come in Paul's thirteen letters in the NT, he never mentions the Holy Spirit in his greetings? It's always grace and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.<sup>34</sup> Where's the Holy Spirit? Beloved, "the Holy Spirit *is* the grace and peace of God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ."<sup>35</sup> Don't you see the blessing is the Spirit Himself. Grace and peace aren't gases that pass through the air from Heaven to us. Grace and peace are embodied *in* the Person of Holy Spirit—the third fully Divine member of the Trinity. Grace and peace are communications from Him *directly*. If we have grace and peace, it is because we are being filled with the Holy Ghost. If you want to read more on that, I would heartily commend to you Jonathan Edwards' Unpublished Essay on the Trinity.

## Grace = undeserved love

Alright then, what is this grace? The best definition of grace that I have found is simply this: grace is undeserved love. But again there is a distinction here we need to make. As I already said, this message is only for the Church. Don't unbelievers experience grace? Yes they do. Unbelievers receive what's called *universal grace*. This is the grace that God pours out on every single creature. He opens His hand and gives all their food in due season (**Psalm 145:15-16**). He causes the sun to rise on the just and the unjust (**Matthew 5:45**). This is universal grace. Though the Christian receives this grace, this is not what he is referring to here.

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<sup>34</sup> Granted, in Colossians 1:2, he only includes "God our Father"; in 1 Thessalonians 1:1 he only says "Grace to you and peace" omitting all three members of the Trinity; in 1 and 2 Timothy he adds the word "mercy" but the larger point still stands.

<sup>35</sup> Jonathan Edwards from his Unpublished Essay on the Trinity. He says "I can think of no other good account that can be given of the apostle Paul's wishing grace and peace from God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ in the beginning of his Epistles, without ever mentioning the Holy Ghost, - as we find it thirteen times in his salutations in the beginnings of his Epistles, - but that the Holy Ghost Himself is the grace and peace of God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ...the blessing is from the Father and the Son in the Holy Ghost. But the blessing from the Holy Ghost is Himself, the communication of Himself."

Secondly, unbelievers also receive *common grace*. Common grace includes ingenuity and wisdom, charity and prudence, and we could even include compassion. Hospitals and first responders and politicians all of which have unbelievers working in them are endowed by God with this type of grace that enables them to bless humanity. This is common grace—that is it is common to both the unbeliever and the Christian. But that is not what grace Paul is referring to here.

Paul here is talking about the *special grace* that only the Christian has received. Meaning, not only the grace that we receive at the new birth—free and undeserved love—but the reality for the Christian is that now all of life is grace. There is nothing—nothing—that the Christian can ever experience, that *ultimately* cannot be said to be grace. **Romans 8:28** “And we know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose.” Every single thing you face—every hardship, every abuse, even every sin that you commit—God has promised to work it out for your highest and best good. Do you realize the astoundingly different position that you stand in compared to the unbeliever? No such promise has been given to him. His bad things are not promised to work out for his good, and terrifyingly, even the blessings he receives will be turned into a curse for him in the end. But everything you face is a gift of undeserved love from Father. Find for me one instance in the Bible where a believer didn’t face incredible hardship and it didn’t turn out for his best good. There isn’t any. All is grace for you.

### **Peace = reconciliation with God**

Now we come to our last word. What is the best gift that the grace of God brings us? Peace. One author said grace and peace are the Alpha and Omega of the Christian life. “Grace is the fountain and the source which leads to this ocean of peace.”<sup>36</sup> What then is peace? Again this is not something that the unbeliever experiences. Therefore by “peace” here Paul cannot mean here simply an absence of war. No he means a peace that only a Christian possesses.

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<sup>36</sup> Lloyd-Jones, (Romans 1), pg. 172

He means peace with God. He means a peace that can be experienced even in the midst of war and trial and trouble, a peace that can never be taken away, a peace that passes the understanding.

When peace like a river, attendeth my way,  
 When sorrows like sea billows roll  
 Whatever my lot, thou hast taught me to say  
 It is well, it is well, with my soul

Why can the Christian alone sing that? Because he is no longer at enmity with God. **Romans 5:1** “Therefore, since we have been justified by faith, we have *peace with God* through our Lord Jesus Christ.” Peace with God. Why? Because our sin has decisively been put away in the body and blood of Christ.

My sin, oh, the bliss of this glorious thought  
 My sin, not in part but the whole,  
 Is nailed to the cross, and I bear it no more,  
 Praise the Lord, praise the Lord, o my soul  
 It is well, it is well with my soul

That’s what Paul is saying to every Christian this morning: It is well with your soul. You already have the only peace that matters.

### **To those who have not called upon the name of the Lord**

Now if you are here this morning, and you have not called upon the name of the Lord Jesus Christ to be saved, then I would ask why not? Your conscience tells you that you have sinned. The Bible tells you that you have sinned. Your loved ones have pointed out your sin. What will you do with your sin when God requires an account of your life? Perhaps you think that God couldn’t save someone like you. Consider this: if God, who is the One who has been most offended at your sin acted first in sending you a Savior, then you don’t

need ever call into question His willingness to save you. The Father sent Christ into the world to be crucified for sinners, and this Christ was buried and then He rose again on the third day. And the promise is that everyone who calls on the name of the lord will be saved. But if you don't place your hope in Him, then you live in active contempt of His offer. In fact, by rejecting Christ you are calling God a liar. **1 John 5:10** says "Whoever does not believe God has made him a liar, because he has not believed in the testimony that God has borne concerning his Son." How will stand on the last day, knowing you called God a liar. Repent, turn away from your self-reliance this very morning, and trust in the one who can bury your sins in the sea of forgetfulness. Turn to Him who said "I am the Bread of Life, whoever comes to me shall not hunger, and whoever believes in me shall never thirst."