

**I Corinthians: Becoming a family after God's Heart
The Pathological Church
7/31/2016**

Up here on the wall we find our slogan for the year-

Becoming a family after God's own heart.

1. Not becoming individuals after God's own heart.

2. Not being a family after God's own heart,

like we have arrived,

and can now rest on our accomplishments.

Nope- it's about being family

on a journey in pursuit of the heart of God.

Sometimes we do good. Sometimes we do NOT so good.

So I thought, is there a church

1. that we could observe, that we could learn from,

2. that was on the same journey we are,

3. maybe taking some different turns in the road,

4. not a perfect church-

the hypothetical "New Testament church"

that only existed as a composite of the best of

real churches that didn't measure up.

Is there a church that Paul wrote to, warts and all,

that we could read their mail,

and maybe get Paul's advice to them,

and figure out how that advice might fit our situation?

Well, that's kind of what Chris and I set out to do,

to identify the church that maybe had the furthest to go,

you know, the MOST pathological church.

Well, if you put a whole bunch
of Bible scholars in the same room, and said,
“Pick the most pathological church in the NT,”
or you took a bunch of regular Christian folk,
and told them to pick out the most pathological church,
you would probably get the same answer-
The craziest, most messed up church,
riddled with problems of every description,
would be... Corinth.

1. Seacoast port,
filled with sailors from all over the Roman world,
2. World famous temple there dedicated to Aphroditus,
goddess of beauty, love and sex.
3. All the forms of sexual and moral perversions
so pervasive in the Greek world,
you could find them ALL in Corinth.
4. A severely socially stratified society-
clear lines between the “haves” and “have-nots”...
that’s Corinth.

On and on I could go.

A messed up church in a messed up town.

Sure, why not? Lots of room to grow here.

What can WE learn about

becoming a family after God’s own heart,

from the “dysfunctional church in Corinth?”

Quite a lot, actually. Shouldn’t that be good news for us?

They were on a journey,

Today, WE as a church, are on a journey.

Our destinations are the same,

- 1. to be more like Christ,**
- 2. to reflect the love of Christ,**
- 3. to become a family after God's own heart.**

Everybody on board? So here we go...

If you were Paul, knowing all the terrible things

you are going to have to deal with-

- 1. Incest**
- 2. Lawsuits against each other,**
- 3. Consorting with prostitutes**
- 4. Abuse of the Lord's Supper,**
- 5. Fighting over, of all things, spiritual gifts...**

**(And that's only a "Whitman's Sampler"
of the problems in the book...)**

What would YOU write?

How would YOU start the letter?

This is hugely important,

because Paul doesn't start where too often,

WE want to start.

- 1. You just wait until I get home,
or until your father gets home...**
- 2. Heads will roll...**
- 3. Go pick out a switch, or as in Nancy's case, a 2x4...**
- 4. You are in trouble NOW...**

(Just makes you feel all warm and fuzzy, right?

Can't wait.)

- 5. You are such a failure, a disappointment...**

I Corinthians 1:1-9

Paul, called to be an apostle of Christ Jesus

by the will of God, and our brother Sosthenes,

² To the church of God in Corinth,

to those sanctified in Christ Jesus and called to be holy,

together with all those everywhere who call on

the name of our Lord Jesus Christ—

their Lord and ours:

³ Grace and peace to you

from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

⁴ I always thank God for you

because of his grace given you in Christ Jesus.

⁵ For in him you have been enriched in every way—

in all your speaking and in all your knowledge—

⁶ because our testimony about Christ was confirmed in you.

⁷ Therefore you do not lack any spiritual gift

as you eagerly wait for our Lord Jesus Christ

to be revealed.

⁸ He will keep you strong to the end, so that you will be

blameless on the day of our Lord Jesus Christ.

⁹ God, who has called you into fellowship

with his Son Jesus Christ our Lord, is faithful.

1. How many “text messages” are in this passage,

did you catch that?

2. How many “calls” were made?

3. Who made them? This is important stuff!

(Don't YOU want to know WHO called... and why?)

Not only that, but did you notice who has done

most of the work here? (Re-read the passage slowly)

1. Who called Paul?
2. Who accomplished the sanctifying? Not us... God.
3. Who gave us grace in Christ Jesus?
4. Who enriched the Corinthians
in all speaking and knowledge?

⁷ Therefore you do not lack any spiritual gift
as you eagerly wait for our Lord Jesus Christ
to be revealed.
Where did all those good gifts come from???

⁸ HE will keep you strong to the end,
so that you will be blameless...

⁹ God, who has called you into fellowship
with his Son Jesus Christ our Lord, is faithful.

1. God is faithful.
2. God gives you good gifts.
3. God gives us grace.
4. God gives.
5. God will keep you strong... God.

Starting in v. 10, Paul dives into "messed up church."
But that's NOT how he opens this letter.

You guys can do this, you guys can pull this out,
because... God.

Not because... you. You're a mess.
Lordy, Lordy, you're a mess.

No, because... God.

I love the way Paul makes the same point in Phil. 1:3-6

³ I thank my God every time I remember you.

⁴ In all my prayers for all of you, I always pray with joy
because of your partnership in the gospel
from the first day until now,

⁶ being confident of this,
that he who began a good work in you
will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus.

God began the good work in us,
and HE will see His work through
until the day of Christ Jesus... (Which day is that?)

1. Are we supposed to “invest every effort?” Absolutely.
2. Can we grieve the Holy Spirit, put out the Spirit’s fire?
Sure we can.
3. But the ultimate outcome
of us becoming a family after God’s own heart,
just like for Corinth,
is much more about GOD’S ability than ours.

And if Paul could write with such incredible confidence
for the congregations in Philippi and Corinth,
I believe he would write with the same confidence
about the congregation in Warrenton today,
and for the same reason-
because of who God is-

1. His faithfulness to us,
2. His desire to see us succeed,
3. His incredible invest in Christ, into us,
4. His incredible love for us-

“For God so loved the Warrenton Church of Christ,
made up of HIS children,
that he gave his one and only Son...

Hard words in the chapters to come
for those folks in Corinth,

but Paul has already re-assured them
that God will see them through.

And as we learn from their bad example and their mistakes,
we have the same assurance that despite all that,
the loving God who will see THEM through,
will see us through as well.

So... what? So-

1. Anxiety goes down as our certainty of success goes up.
Psychological principle about stress-
people need information or control-
or, some assurance that based on
a good track record, they can trust the outcome.

2. Do you want success to happen?
Scripture assures us that nothing can thwart
the overall success of God's plan for the universe,
for humanity.

But any one of us can deny it for ourselves.

If we DON'T WANT the gift of God,
He want force it upon us.

I believe, based on Scripture,
that free will is just that important to God.

3. Recognizing that our
"becoming a family after God's own heart"
is God's idea and primarily HIS project,
there can be a change
in how we view the events of life.

a. Either God is sovereign, or He isn't.

b. Caesar is not in charge; Caesar is not Lord.

c. President Obama is not Lord; ISIS is not lord.

d. Neither the Democrats nor the Republicans
are in charge of human history.

e. God is still on His throne,
and he continues to shape human events.

4. In light of all this,
our priorities should end up being re-calibrated.
What matters most... and why.

5. Recognizing that God will see us through
should help us to have hope in an often hopeless world,
and should initiate from us
a response of incredible appreciation.

⁹ God, who has called you into fellowship
with his Son Jesus Christ our Lord, IS faithful.

Whatever comes after this,
whatever challenges Paul lays before the Church in Corinth,
they are based on the assumptions that

1. God is faithful.
2. He who began a good work in you
will bring it to completion
until the day of Christ Jesus... Amen?