

## **Northwest Community Evangelical Free Church**

October 26, 2025

Dave Smith

Sermon manuscript

### **Sermon Series: The Church - a Work in Progress**

(Studies in 1 Corinthians)

#### **A Corinthian's Story**

(1 Corinthians)

Study #23

#### **Setting:**

Speaker (Lycos) is a long-time member of the church in Corinth.

Time stamps:

2<sup>nd</sup> Missionary Journey 49-52

time in Corinth near the end (51-52)

1 Corinthians written around 55 AD.

Talk three dated at three years after Paul's death (~70AD)

20<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the church in Corinth.

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#### **Greetings**

*Χαρις και ειρηνη!*

**Bienvenidos!**

**Shalom!**

**Greetings!**

Welcome on this first day of the week to a time of worship, here in Corinth.

I am Lycos, and I have lived my whole life here in Corinth.

Today, as you know, is a very special day for our church.

It was at this season of the year that our brother, Paul, first came to Corinth and brought to us the message of Jesus.

So, each year, at about this time of year we celebrate one more year of the joy of knowing Jesus and of serving Jesus, together.

Today we are marking the 20<sup>th</sup> year since Paul came to us, we believed, and our church started.

(applause)

Yes, we re grateful to God for His amazing grace to us over these many years.

Speaking of Paul, yes, we all miss Paul dearly. I miss that brother so much.

As we all know, he is no longer with us. Emperor Nero put him to death three years ago in Rome.

So, we won't see Paul again - UNTIL WE SEE HIM AGAIN!

As the Elders were planning for this day of worship and celebrating, they approached me with a request.

They knew about my close ties to Paul and asked if I would tell the story of our church AND my own story, as a way to honor Paul.

I quickly said, "Yes!"

I am only too happy today to bring you the testimony of our church and my own testimony to the amazing grace of God.

#### **Meet Lycos**

I work at the Corinthian shipyards. I am in charge of some of the crews that load and unload cargo from the ships at the docks.

Like many Corinthians, I've always made my living from the sea.

I've worked on fishing boats and I've sailed on merchant vessels. I've built and repaired ships.

These days, I supervise the younger guys who do the heavy lifting.

I am grateful to God for my work.

But mostly, I am grateful to God for having lavished me with His grace for many years.

So, welcome to worship, Corinthians.

And welcome, too, to those I've just met who are guests to our time in worship this morning.

### **THE FOUNDING OF THE CHURCH BY PAUL**

*Lycos believed in Jesus early on*

I've been a part of this church from the very beginning.

I met Paul, twenty years ago, when he first brought the good news of Jesus to Corinth.

He told us that God poured out His grace on the world when He sent His Son, Jesus, to live, to die, and rise again - for us.

Jesus graced me with the gift of eternal life when I believed His promise.

I'll never forget that day, or the day soon after when Paul baptized me along with others who formed the nucleus of our church.

But I'm getting ahead of myself...

*Paul's journeys and arrival in Corinth*

Paul had been traveling with his friends, Silas and Timothy, sharing the good news about Jesus. They went to Philippi, Thessalonica, and Berea.

Paul then went to Athens, alone. And after that, he came, alone, here to Corinth.

I was on the loading docks the day that Paul's ship pulled in. I watched him.

*Paul's arrival in Corinth; the city's character*

He saw the natural beauty of the harbor that everyone sees who sails into Corinth.

This is a beautiful place. And with our access to the Aegean and the Ionian Seas, our location gives us great commercial clout.

And, as Corinth is the capitol for the whole region of Achaia, we've got political clout, too.

As he looked around, Paul could easily see the grandeur of Corinth - its wealth, its architecture, its rich culture.

But I saw that he saw more.

He saw the statues and the temples of the gods and goddesses. He saw violence.

He saw the vices associated with harbor cities.

*Planting the gospel in Corinth*

Within days of arriving, Paul made his way to the Jewish synagogue. He told the Jews about Jesus.

But, as most of them weren't interested, he turned to us, who aren't Jews.

(Jews call us "Gentiles." I still don't know if that is a compliment...)

Paul went everywhere to talk about Jesus - to the temples of the gods, to street corners, to meeting halls, and to homes.

He even went to the shipyards. That was how I met Paul and learned about Jesus.

He told me and my friends that by Jesus' death on a Roman cross, He became "***the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world.***"

And by His resurrection from the dead, He defeated death.

I understood and soon saw that when this Jesus offered me eternal life, I could believe Him!

I believed, was saved, baptized and became a part of the church.

### **Paul's departure from Corinth**

While Paul was with us, he taught us about Jesus and His ways. He helped us grow as disciples of Jesus.

He always marveled at Jesus' grace. He never stopped reminding us about how gracious God had been to him.

You should know that before he became a Christian, Paul had been a violent persecutor of Christians.

He used to travel far and wide to find and arrest Christians.

He put them in jail and even killed some of them...until the resurrected Jesus confronted him on the road to Damascus!  
That meeting with Jesus changed everything about Paul.

The persecutor became the preacher - and he travelled far and wide to proclaim Jesus!

So, after Paul had been pouring Jesus and grace into us for a year and a half, he told us that it was time for him to go.

There were other people in other places who needed to hear about Jesus - so he sailed away.

And, for a while after Paul left, our church continued to do well. More people were saved. Believers grew in grace.

But it wasn't long before problems developed. Big problems.

Let me tell you about a few of these problems.

### **TELL HOW PROBLEMS STARTED IN A NUMBER OF AREAS**

*The diverse church at Corinth became divided (1:10-17)*

From the beginning, our church was extremely diverse.

The men and women who made up our church were Jews and Greeks, slaves and free, rich and poor, tradesmen, dock-workers, and politicians.

And in the early days we enjoyed great fellowship - koinonia - despite our differences. Jesus was at the center of everything. He united us.

But not long after Paul left, things started to change.

We started forming into cliques. There was the Paul faction (that was me) and the Apollos gang and the Simon Peter group.

Dividing into camps killed our unity. And THAT led to a host of other problems.

*Church members turning to immorality (5:1-5)*

Sin of a sexual nature spread in our church.

This all happened many years ago, so you who are newer might not have ever heard about this. But it happened. The stories were all true.

Many in our church simply reverted to old "corinthian" ways.

*Christians taking each other to court (6:1-11)*

We made news in the city in another very bad way.

Christians were taking each other before the Roman Proconsul, Gallio, and suing each other.

NOT a great look for a church. We should have been known for love.

*Marriages in crisis (7:1-7)*

With all the bickering going on in the church, it wasn't surprising that bickering trickled down to homes and families.

Love grew cold and marriages fell apart.

That hurt everybody - children, men and women, the community, and the church's witness.

Overall, we were just a mess.

*Issues with issues of conscience (8:1--11:1)*

The Jews started judging us non-Jews for some of our habits. And we weren't all that sensitive to Jewish sensitivities, either.

We offended each other, judged each other, held each other in contempt.

*Problems during worship (11:2-34)*

And what had always been one of the highlights of our week when Paul was with us - our times of worship - became ugly and disorderly and chaotic.

So much self-promotion, so much focus on the sensational.

Very little service, very little encouragement, very little giving to meet needs in Jesus' Name.

And the time of taking the Lord's Supper became a farce.

At the beginning, taking the bread and the cup was such a powerful reminder of what Jesus did for us.

And it was a time to draw close to each other.

Not during that dark season.

Rich people would gorge themselves on fine food they had brought from home. They got drunk.

And the poor, who had to rush for worship from their jobs and had no food, sat and watched while the rich refused to share.

**THESE PROBLEMS DAMAGED THE CHURCH**

Like I said, things started to fall apart shortly after Paul left. Within a couple of years, our church was only a shell of its former self.

There was...

...no initiative for ministry.

...very energy for prayer.

...no heart to reach out to the lost or to help young Christians grow.

We had lost our fire for Jesus.

Then, out of desperation, our sister, Chloe, sat down, and wrote Paul a letter. She told him what was going on here in the church.

And to that letter Paul sent a letter back. And THAT was some letter.

It was a very strong letter that honestly addressed the problems here. It definitely was that.

But his letter was really all about Jesus and all about grace.

THAT was what we had forgotten and THAT was what Paul's letter forced us to remember.

When we remembered Jesus and His grace, we were stunned at how quickly God restored us and put us on the road to recovery.

Some of you remember how it was.

## PROBLEMS RESOLVED BY HEEDING PAUL'S LETTER

### *Resolving the divisions problem*

Paul reminded us that we will never find unity in anything or anyone other than Jesus.

Remembering that, we put away divisions.

### *Resolving the lawsuit problems*

He helped us see that suing each other wasn't wrong because it violated some rule of order. It was wrong because it violated love.

Remembering that reminded us of the better way.

Work things out. Talk things out.

If necessary, agree to be wronged. That's better than doing harm to a brother or a sister in Jesus.

### *Resolving marriage problems*

The same awakening mended broken marriages.

Not always overnight, but the changes came. Many broken marriages were restored.

Husband and wives remembered Christ's love for them - and that changed the way they saw each other.

### *Resolving worship woes*

Our Sunday times together again became healing times, times to connect.

Once again, taking the Lord's Supper became a time for worship.

That was lots of sharing of food and drink and love: true koinonia!

### *Removing stumbling-blocks*

And we began again to be careful about how we dealt with those who were different from us.

I watched as this hit home to one of our church leaders, Stephanus.

Now, Stephanus was a good man.

But, during that dark season, Stephanus went back to eating meat that had been sacrificed to idols. He didn't care that this practice deeply offended the Jews in our church.

Then we got Paul's letter. Stephanus remembered Jesus' love - and stopped. He refused to be a stumbling-block - to a friend in Jesus.

And the Jews stopped making such a big deal out of their kosher laws and their special holidays.

They stopped trying to make us Greeks observe them and loved us, just as we were.

So much of his letter - and so much of his life - was about love.

In fact, lots of us committed Paul's great song to love to memory:

***[13:1] If I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, but do not have love, I have become a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal.  
[2] And if I have the gift of prophecy, and know all mysteries and all knowledge; and if I have all faith, so as to remove mountains, but do not have love, I am nothing.  
[3] And if I give all my possessions to feed the poor, and if I deliver my body to be burned, but do not have love, it profits me nothing.  
[4] Love is patient, love is kind, and is not jealous; love does not brag and is not arrogant,  
[5] does not act unbecomingly; it does not seek its own, is not provoked, does not take into account a wrong suffered,  
[6] does not rejoice in unrighteousness, but rejoices with the truth;  
[7] bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things.***

**[8] Love never fails...**

**[13] But now abide faith, hope, love, these three; but the greatest of these is love.**

The new wind of love that blew over our church when we received Paul's letter affected every aspect of our church.

That was the impact of our brother, Paul.

And one more thing...

### **Lycos' testimony**

What I have told you so far is not different than my testimony.

But it is not the whole story of my testimony, either.

In his letter, Paul mentioned one other "situation."

There was a man in the church who was involved in a sinful relationship.

That man was active in the church. He had a good reputation in the church.

But he was involved with a woman in a way that was way out of line.

And nobody in the church said a word to him.

Everyone knew what was going on, but nobody confronted or spoke to him about his sin.

So...through his letter, Paul spoke to the man.

Paul might as well have named names. He might as well have written, "*Deal with Lycos!*" - because that man was me.

In the absence of action by the church, Paul, long-distance, took action.

Writing as Jesus' apostle, Paul wrote -

**[5] I have decided to deliver [him] to Satan for the destruction of his flesh, that his spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus.**

When the leaders read the letter out loud to the church on that Sunday morning about so many years ago, honestly, nothing happened.

As you can imagine, it was uncomfortable. For me - and for everyone else. On that Sunday, though, nothing happened.

Nobody said a word to me.

A week later, something happened.

The Elders of the church showed up at my home. They wanted to talk with me. I invited them in.

Each of them confessed their sin of staying silent while knowing of my sin.

I listened. Then, they gave me two options.

- 1 - I could end the sinful relationship and continue with the church.
- 2 - I could continue with the relationship and be banned from the church.

I saw red!

Who did these guys think they were, telling me how to run my life?!

I had been a part of the church longer than some of those Elders!

I told them what I thought of their "options" and told them to get out of my house.

Who needed them? What a bunch of holier than thou, moralistic snobs?!

Who needed that know-it-all Paul and his busybody letter?!

I chose option #1 and left the church.

I separated from all Christian activities and fellowship and worship.

I thought, "*Good riddance!*"

And then...some four months into my self-imposed exile -

yes, it was self-imposed. The Elders gave me a choice; I chose rebellion over repentance -

I began to hunger for things to be the way they used to be.

Not the way they had been near the end, but the way they had been at the beginning.

When I walked with the Lord, when Jesus was central to my life, when I enjoyed time with my brothers and sisters in Jesus.

For a solid month, I wrestled with what I was to do.

I could continue living in the misery of my isolation with my sin.

OR I could forsake my sin, repent, and present myself to the Elders and beg forgiveness.

Eventually, the pain of living separate from community was too great. I chose repentance.

I will never forget the Sunday morning I came back to this church.

I arrived just before the bread was to be passed for the Lord's Supper.

I walked into this room. The door closed behind me - and everyone stared at me as I interrupted the time of worship.

I walked to the front and spoke.

I told the church that I had sinned and that I was sorry. God had dealt with me and it was ready to change.

I said that I wanted to be a part of the church again, if they would have me.

Now, I expected that you would allow me to begin attending again.

But I also expected the leaders and YOU to come down pretty hard on me.

I expected some, "*I told you so's.*" I expected to be placed on probation to test and see if my repentance was genuine.

None of that happened!

Instead, after I finished my speech...

The leader of the service that morning walked over to me, grabbed me, hugged me, and shouted "*Hallelujah!*" (he was Jewish)

My Gentile brothers and sisters shouted, "*Maranatha!*"

Everybody rushed to me to pray for me and to welcome me back...and I was undone.

After what I had done, never, in my wildest dreams did I imagine that I would be received back - and accepted. But I was.

You received me with grace. You invited me to take the bread and the cup - and the bread had never tasted so good and the cup never so sweet.

That Sunday morning restoration time took place over ten years ago. You'll agree that from that day to this, we have been leaning into grace, right?

I have wanted to tell my story this morning to honor the legacy of our brother Paul, my friend, Paul.

God used his loving truth-telling to scrape the calluses off of my heart.

God used Paul's single-minded focus on Jesus' grace to rescue me from myself.

That, Jesus' grace, was exactly what I needed. And it is exactly what I have received from this church.

And that - be grace-givers - is what our church has come to be all about.

We are here to introduce broken people to Jesus.

We are here to be God's tools to restore broken people to wholeness.

We are here to extend grace and forgiveness and fresh starts to people who have lost their way.

All of that is what God did for me.

God lovingly graced me with eternal life when I first believed.

God kindly graced me to repentance after my sin.

God lavishly graced me when you accepted me as He had accepted you.

To God be the glory and praise for ever and ever!.