

The church is formed to own and expose the grace and peace of Christ.

Last week we had our annual celebration service, and oh what a sweet time it was. We sing and then open the mic to anyone who wants to share how God has been faithful over the last year. It is a marker of reminder of the goodness of Christ toward us.

The service did not disappoint. What struck me the most was how God's faithfulness was expressed through the care and ministry of the church. This rag-tag group of believers hungry for the presence of Jesus and looking out for each other. Fuels us for what lies ahead, for the flourishing of the church and expansion of Christ's kingdom in our neighborhoods.

As we begin a new study and think of how we will endeavor to "Build Together" in 2020 it is to our rootedness and purpose we want to look. And we dare to find it in two simple verses of introduction.

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2 Corinthians 1:1–2 "Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God, and Timothy our brother, To the church of God that is at Corinth, with all the saints who are in the whole of Achaia: [2] Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ." (ESV)

New book of the Bible, an epistle - a letter to the church from their spiritual father, their founding pastor. It is not the first one Paul has sent but like the others it is a call back to what is vitally important and what actually builds and drives the church.

Paul during an early missionary journey came to Corinth, a bustling Roman city connecting the whole of Greece. Estimates vary but we can imagine the city had close to 100,000 people, many Freeman (former Roman soldiers grant citizenship) that were building their lives in a pluralistic hub. There was great diversity in skin tone, heritage, economics, and religion. And among the crowds of a synagogue Paul preaches the gospel and the church is born.

The city was not without its distractions and problems. Sexual immorality, idolatry, obsession with riches... Ray Stedman used to call Paul's Corinthians letters "First and Second Californians"! So we should be able to relate!

Paul would remain there for about a year laying the foundation of the church then would continue on his missionary journeys always though sending representatives to care for them and correspondence to correct them.

The people of the church in Corinth had a penchant for missing the point and Paul would, often with very direct language, invite them to return to the cross as their anchor.

What necessitates this letter was to prepare them for another visit by Paul and quiet a rising challenge to his authority and ministry. Traveling preachers looking for followers would stir up controversy, saying Paul wasn't fruitful enough in ministry. His preaching was too boring. Maybe his crowds weren't big enough. The church under his care wasn't influential enough. All questions we are very familiar with even in our day.

To those questions Paul roots his credentials and arguably the church's, in the strength of Christ; God's will, His light, his truth, His appeal.

This book is about the nature of the gospel and authentic ministry. Weakness is the source of strength and suffering is the vehicle for God's power and glory.

"God's way of measuring success and significance is entirely different than the world's way."

There is then great hope for the church there and everywhere because in places of adversity the Spirit is alive and well and the gospel is advancing.

We too want the same theme to be written in and through our lives and ministry here. And it begins with our formation.

1) The Church Formed

There are a couple of truths we can pull for verse one that give us a view of the formation and elevation of the church.

a) Rooted and Tied

“Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus...and Timothy our brother.” More than merely authors of the letter, but those responsible for the care of the church. As the “sent One” of Jesus Paul’s relationship to the church roots them in the global church. They are part of something more than merely a local gathering. They are tied to the kingdom movement of Christ to the ends of the earth, they are part of the founding of the church in Jerusalem.

Timothy and Titus have both, with Paul and without, visited and ministered to them. Apollos and others have been through to spur them on and proclaim the gospel among them.

We can have a harder time with this reality because we are so business-like when it comes to the church... founding pastors that are no longer in town have little to no interaction with a body of believers. A congregation might pay lip-service to being part of the global church when they don’t actually know anyone in the global church! And when it comes authority! The North American priority is the “autonomy of the local church...”

But the biblical model calls the church to deeper roots and ties. This is what Paul’s letter will again establish for them and for us. The church is not an island to itself, in fact prideful independence can be dangerous in the church.

As Reservoir we have recognized this and we increasingly endeavor to partner with the global church... Part of Advance, a church planting and strengthening movement, we are linking arms with the church in Asia, Africa, Europe and North America (longing to partner in South America.) Expanding our missions support ties us to those bringing the gospel to frontier regions. Spreading seeds of special needs ministry to other churches links us as we serve the least. Partnering with local churches to minister and encourage pastors... all of it keeps us tied to the kingdom, not just concerned with our own.

Like Paul desires for Corinth we are committed to being rooted in what the Spirit is doing in Christ’s church.

The second truth is just as grand, those who were not a people are now a people...

b) Made The Church

“To the church of God that is at Corinth, with all the saints who are in the whole of Achaia.”

God places his church in a specific context. Here it is Corinth and Greece... “This is God’s word for the church of God that has its being where we are planted.” Hughes

More than individuals, the ekklesia, the assembly, the collection of believers are formed into a body with a unified identity and purpose. The ‘church of God’ reveals the elevated status of the local church.

“In addressing them as ‘the church of God’ Paul meant the Corinthian believers to understand that in their gathering together they were all that the gathered tribes of Israel had been - the church of God, no less. If to us church means a religious building or institution and to the Corinthians it simply meant an assembly of any kind, to Paul it meant specifically ‘an assembly’ of God’s people in God’s presence to hear God’s word.” Paul Barnett

For us this reveals the importance of the family that is the church. Being known, part of something bigger than self, on mission together. Waging war together for our lives and the lives of others.

Given identity in Jesus. Calling them “saints Paul does not imply that they were exceptionally heroic or devout, as we infer from the word, but rather that they were, in God’s eyes, his ‘holy people.’ The Bible speaks of ‘saints’ as quite ordinary people whom God graciously regards as special to him through their faith-commitment to his Son Jesus. Moreover, God not only treats believers as holy, he actively makes them so by the dynamic presence of the Holy Spirit in the inner recesses of their lives, conforming them to the pattern of Christ.” Paul Barnett

There is wonderful truth and experience in the individual’s salvation and transformation in Christ - but it is enriched and put on display - Jesus is glorified through the church. When sinners become saints built together.

1 Peter 2:4–5 “As you come to him, a living stone rejected by men but in the sight of God chosen and precious, [5] you yourselves like living stones are being built up as a spiritual house, to be a holy priesthood, to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.” (ESV)

This spiritual house, the church is no joke. At the confession of Jesus as Messiah, the Son of the living God... **Matthew 16:18–19** Jesus says, “on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it. [19] I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven, and whatever you bind on earth shall be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven.” (ESV)

Just in the church’s formation there is power. Shared identity and shared purpose.

2) Our Purpose

I have suggested it is to own and expose the grace and peace of Christ. Paul writes, “Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.”

While this is a regular and consistent greeting of Paul’s, he has adapted a typical Greek hello into “charis,” grace; I think it also expresses the Apostle’s true prayer for them and us matching Jesus’ prayer for the church.

John 17:20–24 “I do not ask for these only, but also for those who will believe in me through their word, [21] that they may all be one, just as you, Father, are in me, and I in you, that they also may be in us, so that the world may believe that you have sent me. [22] The glory that you have given me I have given to them, that they may be one even as we are one, [23] I in them and you in me, that they may become perfectly one, so that the world may know that you sent me and loved them even as you loved me. [24] Father, I desire that they also, whom you have given me, may be with me where I am, to **see my glory** that you have given me because you loved me before the foundation of the world.” (ESV)

a) Owning

That together we would see the glory of Christ. That which is revealed in the gospel of grace.

Hearing and believing that Jesus in the Son of God who dwelled among humanity living a life of perfect obedience to the Father in our place. That he was crucified as a criminal, bearing the shame that our sin deserves, establishing a new covenant with us for forgiveness by his own blood. And yet he defeated death in his resurrection giving us new life and identity in him.

Paul prays a longer prayer to the same end in Ephesians.

Ephesians 3:14–19 “For this reason I bow my knees before the Father, [15] from whom every family in heaven and on earth is named, [16] that according to the riches of his glory he may grant you to be strengthened with power through his Spirit in your inner being, [17] so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith—that you, being rooted and grounded in love, [18] may have strength to comprehend with all the saints what is the breadth and length and height and depth, [19] and to know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge, that you may be filled with all the fullness of God.” (ESV)

This is what is meant to captivate us and anchor us in life. Grace applied and peace experienced.

This is supposed to be the treasure of the church. Taste and see that the Lord is good... Essentially Paul is praying, and we should join him, that we would have our taste buds renewed to get the full flavor of the grace and peace of Jesus.

Have you ever given someone your favorite meal or ordered them a favorite dish that is bursting with exquisite flavor, just the perfect combination of fat, salt, and heat. But they act like it isn't special. It doesn't change their lives.

Like me and Chicken-fried steak! Our buds are so used to the sweet and sickening sting of lesser meals we need our palates cleansed in order to taste. And when we do... watch out, nothing else will satisfy! And I am talking about the good news of Jesus!

Tough times will come... Paul will talk about it... but it is to this meal we return, this grace and peace from God that carries us, invigorates us.

This is why we don't cook anything else at Reservoir. We desire to know nothing among you but Christ and him crucified. The forgiveness of sin, newness of life, eternity with our king. Living from and for that we are given peace.

Colossians 3:15 “And let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, to which indeed you were called in one body. And be thankful.” (ESV)

“The peace for which Paul prays is that blessed enjoyment of harmonious fellowship with God our Father enjoyed by those who have taken hold of his grace or graciousness shown them in the birth and death of the Lord Jesus Christ.” Paul Barnett

“God’s church, which listens to the word of the apostle of God, can expect two things: grace (the ongoing covenant love of God) and peace (his well-being that always accompanies his grace.)” Hughes

And this can’t be contained... it is meant to spill out of us.

b) Exposing

We live to show this grace and peace to others. Paul will bring the Corinthian church there in chapter 5, making clear our role as agents of reconciliation between God and man, and people to people.

We know our commission to be witnesses empowered by the Spirit of God, that Christ’s glory would fill the earth.

For us as Reservoir this means we will be spent that others would come to faith in Christ. It should shape our budget and calendar, Building Together not for our sake to get a bigger crowd, but building through the proclamation of the gospel for the transformation of our city.

The God of all comfort has called us, made us saints and empowers us to carry his grace and peace wherever we are. And we are just getting started Reservoir Church!

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Be the Church - Know you are formed for this - engage, labor together, take steps toward that ministry the Lord is calling you to. Owning the grace and peace of Christ. Maybe you will own it for the first time today - we would love to pray with you.

Build Together - Exposing our neighbors, inviting them in. Loving the least, giving them a place to belong. All that Christ's glory would be known.

Together we are leaning toward next year's celebration service. When we recount the faithfulness of God and new voices join in the chorus of praise to king Jesus.

To the church of God that is Reservoir... grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

Onward.
