

## OUR POSITION IN CHRIST (I Cor. 1)

Twenty-three years ago today is a special date in my calendar for that is when I was inducted to the pastorate here. We have been through many experiences, and I'm grateful to the Lord for His keeping and sustaining power. Over these years, the world is moving at quite a pace away from God, as is reflected in our laws and attitudes. Even within the churches throughout Scotland and the United Kingdom, while some of the changes have been helpful, there have also been some which make us cringe with despair.

I remember one of the comments some of you regularly made at the beginning was you didn't always understand my accent ... I wonder if it has changed any 😊 ... It is usually the case your first impressions of someone are the most important. How they dress, how they speak, how they stand, how they sit, facial expressions, etc. It is how we form our opinions.

Paul wasn't a particularly outstanding personality, or so it seemed to some of the Christians in Corinth, <sup>1</sup> I Cor. 2:1 And I, brethren, when I came to you, came not with excellency of speech or of wisdom, declaring unto you the testimony of God. <sup>2</sup> For I determined not to know anything among you, save Jesus Christ, and him crucified. <sup>3</sup> And I was with you in weakness, and in fear, and in much trembling. <sup>4</sup> And my speech and my preaching was not with enticing words of man's wisdom ... He was under no illusion as to his lack of glamour, but then ... it was not his purpose to be glamorous. He was not there to present himself, but to present Christ, the Saviour Who died on a cross to save sinners.

It's amazing how some people waste time looking at the messenger, instead of looking past the messenger to the message. Early in his Gospel, John wrote how his message was not about himself, but about his Saviour, <sup>Jn. 3:30</sup> He must increase, but I must decrease. Writing to the Corinthians, Paul had the same sentiment, <sup>1</sup> Cor. 2:2 I determined not to know anything among you, save Jesus Christ, and him crucified.

However, some of the church members were besotted with finding faults in Paul. They took great pleasure in pointing out what they considered to be his weaknesses. ... They considered him foolish (<sup>II Cor. 11:1</sup> Would to God ye could bear with me a little in my folly: and indeed bear with me *Imake an effort!*), a lesser apostle (<sup>5</sup> For I suppose I was not a whit behind the very chiefest apostles), <sup>6</sup> rude *[unskilled]* in speech, burdensome to the point of being lazy (v.9), a boaster (v.10) ... and adding all things together, he was seen by some as a bit of a 'trumped-up' fool, even an embarrassment (<sup>16</sup> I say again, Let no man think me a fool; if otherwise, yet

as a fool receive me, that I may boast myself a little)! ... They spent their time refusing the messenger, so how could they then receive his message?!

Here is how the church in Corinth began, - it began through Paul's efforts ... He had travelled over eight hundred miles from distant Jerusalem, to Antioch, to Tarsus and north-west through Asia Minor to Troas on the coast, then across to the little island of Samothrace, and to the European mainland, docking in the harbour of Neapolis, walking to Philippi, and then to Thessalonica, southwards to Berea ... and on down the coast to Athens, and eventually to the busy metropolis of Corinth. He travelled all that distance preaching the Gospel. Some people were saved, but many were offended. The Jews, particularly, chased him from city to city. He was whipped, stoned, brought before ungodly authorities, falsely accused, and jailed, and on at least one occasion left for dead. ... And yet, he was in all those places because the Lord had led him.

And when he arrived in Corinth. ... The Jews did not want him there either. They made it abundantly plain. It wasn't any easier evangelising the Gentiles either, and he wanted to go somewhere else. He was not keen on staying, in fact, he prayed for the Lord to get him out, When Silas and Timotheus were come from Macedonia, Paul was pressed in the spirit (Acts 18:5) ... It was affecting him! Nevertheless, the Lord insisted he remain, and he witnessed a church being established there, drawing from all areas of society, - wealthy and poor, slaves and slave-masters, educated and non-educated. ... Gradually though, some of them became embroiled in issues and practices unbecoming of God's people for the church was contaminated by professing Christians who spent their time confronting and disagreeing with each other. However, when Paul's correspondence arrived, they all joined together against him.

He was not interested in their games though, but he *was* concerned about their conduct and how it was being perceived in the city, - some of the professing Christians were not much better than the pagans! Nevertheless, they fired their pernicious comments at Paul, and how much better they were compared to him. ... They couldn't recognise their faith was not about them ... and when Paul reminded them, I have nothing to glory of: for necessity is laid upon me; yea, woe is unto me, if I preach not the gospel (I Cor. 9:16), they did not understand. They were happier identifying with *men*, rather than identifying with the *message* of the Lord Jesus Christ ... I am of Paul; and I of Apollos; and I of Cephas (I Cor. 1:12).

It is not the messenger we need to be concerned about, but it is the message. It is not about David Greenaway, or Pathhead Baptist ... it is about Christ and the

debt we are privileged to owe Him for our salvation. As Paul reminds us, we are **CALLED** to salvation, <sup>1</sup> *Cor. 1:1* Paul, *called* to be an apostle of Jesus Christ through the will of God, and Sosthenes our brother, <sup>2</sup> *Unto the church of God which is at Corinth, to them that are sanctified in Christ Jesus, called to be saints ...* <sup>9</sup> *God is faithful, by whom ye were called unto the fellowship of his Son Jesus Christ our Lord.*

He has made us into what we do not deserve to be, and He has given us what we do not deserve to have. Every born-again believer, He hath made ... kings and priests unto God and his Father (*Rev. 1:6*). ... Prince William turned forty during the week, and all the royal commentators speak about him becoming king one day. We hope and trust he will, however, his reign will be restricted to years, whereas we have the *eternal* guarantee of kingship for we are children of the Heavenly King, and heirs of salvation (*Heb. 1:14*). It means we are looking forward to our Lord Jesus receiving us, when there will be the great shout [*from Heaven*], with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God (*I Thess. 4:16*) ... and the Church will rise to meet Him, and He will present us to His Father, so that he [*the Bridegroom*] might present [*His Bride*] to himself a glorious church, not having spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing; but that it should be holy and without blemish (*Eph. 5:27*). ... He will bring us into the home He has especially prepared for us (*Jn. 14:1-3*), He will bring us into the banqueting house (*Songs 2:4*) and set us down at the marriage supper of the Lamb (*Rev. 19:9*), and forever we shall be with Him, with the Lord (*I Thess. 4:17*).

To be '**called**' means we have been '**chosen**' ... and that is something God has done in eternity by His electing love ... And the people He **called** and **chose**, He has also **COMMANDED**. Being a Christian is to live by a certain conduct, as presented in the Word of God. It is not according to our rules or regulations, but His because being a Christian is showing obedience to the Lord Jesus, for He has said, *Jn. 14:15* *If ye love me, keep my commandments ...* *15:10* *If ye keep my commandments, ye shall abide in my love ...* *16* *Ye have not chosen me, but I have chosen you, and ordained you, that ye should go and bring forth fruit, and that your fruit should remain ...* *17* *These things I command you, that ye love one another ...* *I Jn. 5:2* *By this we know that we love the children of God, when we love God, and keep his commandments.* <sup>3</sup> *For this is the love of God, that we keep his commandments.*

Loving God is inextricably linked with keeping His commandments, - the two cannot be separated. ... Steadfast and sure, safe and secure, and separated unto His service. It is not something which comes with practice, but it comes with possession for you don't work your way into it. ... It is yours because as a believer, *Rom. 5:8* *God commendeth* his love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us ... God loves you and has called and chosen you to be His child

and servant. ... It is a privilege to be saved and you demonstrate your gratitude to Him through how you serve Him.

We are **called**, we are **chosen**, we are **commanded**, we are **commended** ... and we are also **CLOTHED** for we are instructed to Put on the whole armour of God, that ye may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil (Eph. 6:11). ... The moment we're saved we enter a battlefield. Sometimes we might think we are safe 'in the barracks', behind the fortified walls, however, Paul had to contend with the insurgencies not only outside the church with the unbelievers, but also inside the church, as in Corinth. When we are saved, we are given 'a new wardrobe', **Is. 61:10** for he hath clothed me with the garments of salvation, he hath covered me with the robe of righteousness ... Paul used the same description, in the righteousness of God in *IChrist* (I Cor. 5:21) ... not having mine own righteousness ... but that which is through the faith of Christ, the righteousness which is of God by faith (Phil. 3:9). ... And we could also include how we are **COMPLETE** in Him (Col. 2:10), **Col. 2:12** Buried with him in baptism, wherein also ye are risen with him through the faith of the operation of God, who hath raised him from the dead. **13** And you ... hath he quickened together with him, having forgiven you all trespasses; **14** Blotting out the handwriting of ordinances that was against us ... and took it out of the way, nailing it to his cross ...

**Called, chosen, commanded, commended, clothed, complete, and CONFIDENT** in the Lord Jesus Christ Who died for us on the cross and Who is the very centre of our message and Who holds us in the palm of His hand. ... Confident we shall not pass through the gates of Hell for they will never prevail against us. ... Confident He will call us to Himself when He returns, and we shall be with Him forever. ... Confident the Holy Spirit indwells us, and He is shaping and forming us in accordance with His will, in anticipation of glory. ... Confident He has saved us and secured us in our eternal salvation, and He will keep us. "I will not boast in anything, no gifts, no power, no wisdom, but I will boast in Jesus Christ, His power and resurrection".

We live in morally corrupt and depraved times when many, for example, do not understand it is wrong to murder a defenceless little child in the mother's womb ... when they are not sure what defines a man or a woman ... and when our society has set aside God in all kinds of ways and replaced Him with the wicked things of their imagination. Consequently, evil is no longer recognised as evil, and they glory in what is offensive to God. They do not attribute the wonderful work of creation to Him, but instead they choose to believe senseless tales. There is no fear of God, and no thought of a Godless eternity. The sacrificial death of Christ on the cross is a theme of mockery and disbelief ... and the

opposite of God's righteousness increasingly rules the thoughts and actions of men and women.

But God will not be mocked for whatever we sow, we shall reap (Gal. 6:7). In the Old Testament, Amos warned, **Amos 8:11** Behold, the days come, saith the Lord GOD, that I will send a famine in the land, not a famine of bread, nor a thirst for water, but of hearing the words of the Lord. Similarly, Paul wrote to the Romans when he described the ungodly as having changed the truth of God into a lie, and worshipped and served the creature more than the Creator (Rom. 1:25), and God condemned them by giving them over to a reprobate mind, to do those things which are not convenient (v.28) ... He gave them what they wanted by handing 'them over to a depraved mind, to do those things which are not proper, not natural'.

On the other hand, - in stark contrast, - the people of God are to feed upon the things of God. If we eat the wrong food, physically, we suffer for it. In the spiritual realm, if we eat the wrong food, it will also make us weak and unsteady in our faith. ... We need to constantly feast on the good spiritually nutritious diet God provides in abundance to His people, as described in Acts 2:42, they continued stedfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, and in breaking of bread, and in prayers. It will keep you fit, it will give you all the spiritual nourishment you need, and it will keep you strong ...

***Our position in Christ ... Called, chosen, commanded, commended, clothed, complete, and confident*** ... and Paul concludes this chapter confidently affirming, **I Cor. 1:30** of him are ye in Christ Jesus, who of God is made unto us wisdom, and righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption: <sup>31</sup> That, according as it is written, He that glorieth, let him glory in the Lord.