

# Morning Worship Services

Sunday, February 3, 2008

**“Abiding in Christ: God, Himself, has United You to Jesus”**

1 Corinthians 1:30

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It is because of him that you are in Christ Jesus, who has become for us wisdom from God—that is, our righteousness, holiness and redemption. *1 Corinthians 1:30 NIV*

The Apostle Paul *really* liked to write letters. Do you write letters? I mean, do you sit down at a desk or table, take your favorite pen in hand, and actually write a letter?

Most of us have abandoned letters in favor of some electronic means of communication. For some, it's e-mail. It seems like you can far more easily sit down at a computer and dash off an e-mail than you can write a letter.

Or, maybe you have really advanced and you “text” your thoughts to others via your cell phone or your Personal Digital Assistant, your PDA.

Can you imagine how one of the great writers of the 1800's would react if he or she observed the way we write today?

“What is that young person doing over there?” the writer might ask.

“She's texting.”

“She's what-s-ing?”

“She's texting. She's sending a message to one of her friends via her cellular telephone. (Blank look) Ah, her cell phone is that small device in her hand. (Blank look) It's like a two-way radio. (Blank look with a scowl) Ah, it uses ultra high frequency electrical impulses to transmit messages. (Blank look, scowl, head shake from side-to-side) Ah, it's like little tiny bolts of lightning snapping from one device to another over great distances.”

“May I see the message,” the writer asks politely.

“Hey, Julie, may we see your cell? Thanks. See that little screen. If you look closely you can read the message Julie was sending.”

“Gd 4 U. Gd 4 U? That's a message?”

“Well, its like shorthand. It stands for ‘good for you.’”

You see the difficulty we would have trying to explain our modern ways to someone from, say, 1898? We can hardly do it.

The Apostle Paul *really* liked to write letters. In an age when written communication was largely reserved for matters of commerce, Paul took the God-given gift of education and put it to very good use.

Part of the reason he did this—wrote letters—was because of the enormous responsibility he felt for the people in the churches where he had ministered. Having introduced them to faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, Paul felt he had to help preserve the Truth of God's Good News.

As much as Paul liked to write letters, and, believe me, he *really* liked to write letters, I imagine that when Paul sat down to dictate to a scribe this particular letter to the Corinthians, he did so with some reluctance.

I have no doubt that Paul really, really loved the people in the church at Corinth. He cared about them with a particular intensity. I also feel quite confident that Paul felt a deep pain in his heart at what he had heard about the goings-on in the Corinthian church.

To understand what was happening at Corinth, you need to understand a bit about that great ancient city.

I do not have a polite way of adequately expressing to you the nature and character of most Corinthians. So, I'm just going to tell you about them. They were arrogant. They were proud. They were, well, pompous. They actually believed, with all their hearts, that they were better, no, that they were *far* better than virtually everyone else on the planet.

In some ways, they had good reasons for these feelings. The city of Corinth was a transitional city. Located on the narrow stretch of land that joins the Peloponnesus to the mainland of Greece, Corinth had developed a great sense of superiority throughout the Grecian Golden Age.

By the time of the Apostle Paul, the city of Corinth has been reborn following the destruction by Lucius Mummius in 146 BC. Mummius killed all the men, captured and enslaved all the women and children, and burned the city to the ground.

Rome then began a process of repopulating the city with freedmen from Rome. But, the culture of the city of Corinth did not die in the burning. The superiority in artistic fervor and intellectual strength prevailed. By Paul's time, the city and its people had regained a pomposity and arrogance that had made them both laughed at and feared throughout the then-known world.

Into this amazing hotbed of a cultural cesspool, Paul brought the Good News of the Gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ. As the Holy Spirit convicted a goodly number of the Corinthians of their sins, they responded, confessed their sins, repented of those sins, and acknowledged God's call on their lives.

Once Paul had departed, the church at Corinth fell prey to the culture of the city. Soon, little cliques had formed within the church: the Paul Group, the Apollos Group, the Peter Group, each feeling superior to the others and each unwilling to cooperate in getting down to the reality of Kingdom business.

In the midst of this log jam of ideas, sin crept in and began to destroy the church. So, Paul begins to dictate a letter to the Corinthian Christians that he hopes will set them back on track.

One of the first things he has to deal with is the matter of their overwhelming arrogance and pride at who they were as a people. And that, dear friends, sets the context for Paul's words in 1 Corinthians 1:18:

<sup>18</sup> For the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God. <sup>19</sup> For it is written:

"I will destroy the wisdom of the wise; the intelligence of the intelligent I will frustrate."

<sup>20</sup> Where is the wise man? Where is the scholar? Where is the philosopher of this age? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of the world? <sup>21</sup> For since in the wisdom of God the world through its wisdom did not know him, God was pleased through the foolishness of what was preached to save those who believe. <sup>22</sup> Jews demand miraculous signs and Greeks look for wisdom, <sup>23</sup> but we preach Christ crucified: a stumbling block to Jews and foolishness to Gentiles, <sup>24</sup> but to those whom God has called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God. <sup>25</sup> For

the foolishness of God is wiser than man's wisdom, and the weakness of God is stronger than man's strength.

<sup>26</sup> Brothers, think of what you were when you were called. Not many of you were wise by human standards; not many were influential; not many were of noble birth. <sup>27</sup> But God chose the foolish things of the world to shame the wise; God chose the weak things of the world to shame the strong. <sup>28</sup> He chose the lowly things of this world and the despised things—and the things that are not—to nullify the things that are, <sup>29</sup> so that no one may boast before him. <sup>30</sup> It is because of him that you are in Christ Jesus, who has become for us wisdom from God—that is, our righteousness, holiness and redemption. <sup>31</sup> Therefore, as it is written: "Let him who boasts boast in the Lord."

Over the course of the last four weeks, we have been talking about where we, who believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, belong. The simple directive comes to us from John Chapter 15. In that passage, Jesus tells his disciples, and us, to "meno" in Him.

"Meno" is a very powerful Greek word. It appears all throughout the New Testament. Contextually, scholars translate the word "abide," "remain," "dwell," "continue," "tarry," "endure," "stand." Now, even those of you who started to nod off when I said, "Greek word," have to admit that all of those translations offer equally and interestingly powerful words: abide, remain, dwell, continue, tarry, endure, stand.

So when Jesus tells us to—meno—to "abide in Him" or "remain in Him," those phrases fairly pop with electricity.

The Apostle Paul agrees. His whole "thing" is to try to help the early Christians fulfill Jesus' instructions. He wants to steer them onto the pathway of obedience. He wants to help them "abide in Christ." That's why he's writing to the Corinthians.

Paul tackles this cultural arrogance of the people at Corinth by urging them to grasp the truth that they now find themselves as citizens of God's eternal kingdom, not by anything that they have accomplished, but solely and completely by means of God's mercy and grace.

<sup>30</sup> It is because of him that you are in Christ Jesus, who has become for us wisdom from God—that is, our righteousness, holiness and redemption. <sup>31</sup> Therefore, as it is written: "Let him who boasts boast in the Lord."

Before the foundation of the earth, God called us to belong to Him. He is the One who has drawn us irresistibly into His mercy and grace. He is the One, who by the power of the Holy Spirit, has wooed us and won us to Himself. He is the One who has redeemed us through the sacrifice of the Lord Jesus Christ on the cruel cross of Calvary. He is the one who has plunged us into the redeeming blood of Jesus. He is the One who has marked us as belonging to Him by filling us with the Holy Spirit. He is the One who not only calls us to live a life of obedience, but empowers us to do so.

Who are you? Who are you? Who, in the world, do you think you are?

This is a question that each one of us has to face every day of our lives. Oh, I'm not so silly as to think that each one of you consciously asks himself or herself this question every day. But, I know for certain, that deep in your subconscious mind, and in the outward working of your inner being, you struggle with this question. "Who am I?"

Every person on the face of this earth answers this question by clinging to someone or something. "Who am I?"

"I am the son or daughter of so-and-so." "I am the father or mother of so-and-so." "I am the such-and-such of this company or that organization." "I graduated summa cum whatever from the prestigious University at Wherever" "I have worked very hard to amass such-and-such an amount of great wealth." "I may not be rich in monetary terms, but I am one who shows love to my children, or my nieces and nephews, or my dogs and cats, or my fish, or my birds, or my..."—well, you name it.

You see, we all seek—whether consciously or subconsciously—to acquire a definition that will allow us to answer the question: "Who am I?"

Where do we find an appropriate answer? Where do we come upon an appropriate definition by which we can secure our identity?

I believe it begins when we clearly recognize: all that we are, and all that we have is because of God's mercy and grace. God has chosen us and He, and He alone, has united us with Christ.

In a sentence, what I have been trying to share with you today might go something like this: "As true believers, we define our identity by knowing that God has bonded us inseparably to His Precious Son." Let me say that again, "As true believers, we define our identity by knowing that God has bonded us inseparably to His Precious Son."

"So, what do I do with that?" you may ask. Let me make a suggestion.

Stop trying to live for God without God. Stop trying to live for God without God.

You don't have to *be* a Christian. You don't have to *act* like a Christian. You don't have to *work* like a Christian. You don't have to *think* like a Christian. You don't have to *speak* like a Christian. And yet, you have to do all those things.

In your living, in your being, in your acting, in your working, in your thinking, in your speaking you must exhibit obedience to Christ. You just don't have to do it all by yourself.

At the moment you acknowledged God's claim on your life. At the very moment you recognized and gave your assent to the fact that Christ died to redeem you, to cleanse you from your sins, God placed the Holy Spirit—the Spirit of Christ—within you. He did this to give you the Paraclete, the One to come alongside you, lead you, guide you, strengthen you, help you, protect you. The Holy Spirit will enable your living, your being, your acting, your working, your thinking, your speaking, and everything else in your life.

So, here's your assignment. Every day this week, before you even get out of bed, pray this prayer:

Father, as I begin this day, I dismiss from my mind any notion that I can live the Christ-life strictly through my own efforts. So right now, I state that it's my desire that You have complete freedom to fashion my day as You please.

Help me to be sensitive to Your communing, whether it be through Scripture, my conscience, the words of others, circumstances, interruptions, or whatever. Make me aware of Your priorities.

More than anything else, when I review my day this evening, I want to be able to say, "Yes, I sensed Your Divine Presence," and then I want to be able to illustrate for You specific times when this was true.

Thank you for the way You are going to honor my prayer. And, teach me this day. I pray through the matchless Name of Jesus. Amen.

I know you didn't even try to write that down. But don't worry. You will find this prayer posted on our website. And, if you don't have access to the world wide web, you will find a copy of this prayer waiting for you in the Welcome Center.

Now, you may not think that sermons come with "money back guarantees." And, you would be right, but wouldn't that be something if they did.

Nevertheless, I *can* give you a guarantee: if you sincerely and earnestly pray this prayer every morning during the coming week, you will begin to have a very different experience with God than you have ever had before. I know this because I have prayed this prayer every day since I first received it from my spiritual mentor, Dr. David Mains, in 1978, and it has changed my life.

You see, there is something very special and very powerful about intentionally and persistently giving yourself over to God's power. What you are really doing is acknowledging that you are nothing and that He is everything. What you are doing is answering the question, "Who am I?" by acknowledging that your real identity exists in and is fulfilled in Christ. You can live, and move, and have your being solely by abiding in Jesus, the One to whom you belong.

After all, it's true. You are not who you are because of you. You are who you are because before the foundation of the earth God called you to belong to Himself. God is the One who has united you with His Son, the Lord Jesus Christ. He did it. Not, you. Him.

The only thing He asks of you is obedience. And, you can only find obedience by experiencing the "meno"—the abiding, the remaining—in Him.

Gospel songwriter, Norman J. Clayton, penned these words:

Jesus, my Lord will love me forever,  
From Him no pow'r of evil can sever,  
He gave His life to ransom my soul;  
Now I belong to Him;

Once I was lost in sin's degradation,  
Jesus came down to bring me salvation,  
Lifted me up from sorrow and shame,  
Now I belong to Him;

Joy floods my soul for Jesus has saved me,  
Freed me from sin that long had enslaved me  
His precious blood, He came to redeem,  
Now I belong to Him;

*Chorus*  
Now I belong to Jesus,  
Jesus belongs to me,  
Not for the years of time alone,  
But for eternity.

"As true believers, we define our identity by knowing that God has bonded us inseparably to His Precious Son."

Let us pray.