

# Church Live Re-Visited: Session Two - Part 1

by Ron Bailey

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*The sermon explores the authentic spiritual beginnings of the Corinthian church while addressing the issues of division and self-centeredness among its members.*

**Duration:** 23:06

**Scripture:** 1 Corinthians 1:4

**Topics:** "Spiritual Growth", "Godly Living"

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## Description

This sermon focuses on the importance of understanding the genuine beginning in the Spirit that believers have, emphasizing the need to live in alignment with God's intended way of life. It highlights the Corinthian church's authentic encounter with God but their struggle with individualism and self-centeredness, urging personal responsibility and a shift towards living for God's purposes.

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## Transcript

Would you just have a word of prayer, and then I'll explain what I'm doing. Father, we come the same old way, Lord, through shed blood and torn red, and we thank you for this access that we have into your presence, and we thank you that you have given to us your Spirit, and we might know the things that are freely given to us of God. And we pray for our time together, Lord, that you'll help us to hear in our hearts what you're saying, and to understand what we need to understand.

We pray, Lord, that you say that this book, Lord, and our givenness to it will make us thoroughly equipped for every good work. We pray, Lord, that you'll use this time that we spend together tonight in equipping us, not for academic excellence, but for every good work. We do ask these things, Lord, for the glory of your Son, our Lord Jesus.

Amen. Okay, quick reminder then of the pattern. I'm going to do three sections tonight of about 15 or 20 minutes, and then there'll be a gap after each one, so if, as I'm saying things, things come to mind, if you've got a notebook, please just kind of jot down your questions or tie a knot in your handkerchief or something like that, and then we'll try and spend a little time looking at some of those questions.

So there's three sections, hopefully, of about 15 or 20 minutes. All right, and this is number two. Last time, which was over a month ago now, when we were together, I tried to give you something of the background of Corinthians, just to show that this letter didn't just kind of drop out of heaven and we just happened to find it.

It was a specific letter sent by Paul to a specific group of people, and we read in the Acts of the Apostles that the way in which the church at Corinth came into existence, and we saw some of the key characters in the church, and there's a person who is mentioned here in 1 Corinthians that I'll just mention again now, because I think this will help us to get a kind of a feel for the sort of situation that Paul is writing to when he writes this letter to the Corinthians. If you look at chapter 1 of 1 Corinthians, and I'm reading from the New King James Version, this is 1 Corinthians chapter 1, and in verse 13 and 14, I'll read verse 15 as well, just so that you can see the context. Verse 13, Is Christ divided? Was Paul crucified for you? Or were you baptized in the name of Paul? I thank God that I baptized none of you except Crispus and Gaius, lest anyone should say that I had baptized in my own name.

Now if you look in the previous chapter, that's to say the last chapter of Romans, Romans chapter 16 and verse 22, you'll see that there's someone here, a man named Tertius, who was the actual scribe, or the amanuensis, who wrote Romans at Paul's instruction, and he says this in verse 22, I, Tertius, who wrote this epistle, greet you in the Lord. And then he says this, Gaius, my host and of the whole church, greets you. Erastus, the treasurer of the city, greets you.

And Quartus, a brother. You can see that in verse 23, there's a reference to Gaius. And the letter to the Romans was written from Corinth.

And it seems as though Gaius was, he was the host for the church. So we're not thinking of a mega church, such as you might see in the United States. We're not thinking of a church which has two congregations of a thousand on a Sunday morning.

This is a house church. This is a church, I presume this man has some wealth, and it may be a fairly large room. There may be a room for a hundred or more in it, but not a lot more than that.

This isn't a big group of people. So that's the kind of context. In other words, the letter to the Corinthians is written to a church much more like our own sort of signs than a really big kind of mega church.

I just thought that might kind of help. That makes a little bit of sense, I think. Later on, when we come to some of the Paul, the text of Paul, and he begins to speak about the gift of the Spirit.

One of the things he says is that if someone is in the middle of a prophecy, and that person notices that someone else has had a revelation, the man in the midst of his prophecy is to sit down and give space for the person who just received a revelation. Now, if you think about that, that could only happen in a fairly intimate company of people. That could not happen in a mega church.

This has to be a situation where, they're not sitting in rows either. This has to be a situation where pretty much you can see one another's faces, and it really is a much more kind of intimate pattern of things. So when we read about Corinthians, remember that we're talking about that kind of church.

OK, that's just a little kind of incidental thing. I want to do these three sections. The first one is going to be two key facts.

And then the second section is going to be two sources of wisdom. And then the third section is going to be three functional states. I'm not quite sure what to call those.

Three ways of living on the earth. So the first one is two key facts. The second one is two sources of wisdom.

And the third one is three ways of behaving, or three functional states. These are the two key facts. And I'm calling them key facts because I think it's really important when we read the letters of the Corinthians that we keep these two things in mind.

And here's the first one. The first one is that they had had a very genuine, authentic beginning that was in the Spirit. Paul never questioned that.

In fact, on the contrary. If you look at what you've got in the first chapter, you'll see he says very strong statements, things he says about them. Things like this, for example, in verse 4, he says, I thank my God always concerning you for the grace of God which was given you by Christ Jesus.

So he knows these people have received grace. In verse 5 he says that you were enriched in everything by him, in all utterance and all knowledge, even as the testimony of Christ was confirmed in you, so that you come short in no gift, eagerly waiting for the revelation of our Lord Jesus Christ. So this was a group of people who had had a real encounter with God.

They'd had a real encounter with the Spirit. And this is not superficial Christianity. This isn't sort of having made decisions in the front of meetings or put your hand up or sign cards.

This is people who've had a real encounter with Jesus Christ. And Paul does not doubt it. It's really important to remember that.

That Paul never questions the authenticity of their Christianity. They've received gifts, they've received grace. In fact, if you look at 1 Corinthians chapter 2 and verse 12, you'll see this statement.

1 Corinthians chapter 2 verse 12, Now we, says Paul, Now we have received not the Spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God, that we might know the things that have been freely given to us by God. And you can see in that verse that Paul uses the pronouns we and us, as to say he puts himself on exactly the same basis as these Corinthians. As far as he is concerned, their experience of God is common.

There's nothing second-hand, there's nothing substandard about what happened to them right at the very beginning. It's really important to remember that. Otherwise, some people get farther on into Corinthians and they say, These people couldn't have been Christians to have been behaving like this.

That's not the way Paul addresses them. He definitely regards these people as Christians and have a very genuine experience of God. Okay, so Paul does not say that they are people who need to be born again.

I'm not going to go into this in detail, but the letter to the Colossians is really a very, very valuable letter for us, if you're trying to define what normal Christianity is. And the reason is that because Paul wrote Colossians, not Corinthians now, he wrote Colossians to people that he had never met. But he had heard about them from a man named Epaphras.

And the things that he had heard about them gave him enough evidence to know what had happened to them, and from that basis he is then able to make other statements. In other words, he knows their subjective experience. He knows what they've gone through because of what Epaphras has said to them.

And then later on he begins to open up revelation to them that he knows is true for them, because he knows the foundations are right. In other words, if A is true, Paul is saying, then B is true. Let me give you a little list of these kind of things.

This is what Paul says in Colossians. These references will be on the website ultimately. In Colossians 1 and verse 14 he says that these people have genuine faith.

This is the information that Epaphras gave to them. In verse 4 he says they've got genuine love for the saints. In verse 5 he says they've heard the gospel in truth, that's to say in reality, nothing superficial, but they've heard the genuine article.

In verse 6 he says that they're bearing fruit. In verse 7 he says that they have heard and known the grace of God in reality. In verse 8 he says that they have love in the spirit.

Later on in the second chapter he speaks about them being steadfast in Christ. So those Colossian people, because Paul knew these facts about them, he knew that they were genuinely born again, and because of that he can reveal other things that are true of them. Why am I saying all this? Well, I'm saying this because I really have a very strong feeling, I've had it for a long, long time, that many people who think they're born again in fact are not.

Many people have gone through an evangelical counselling process. They've been counselled, they've prayed a sinner's prayer, they've invited Jesus into their heart, and because of that they're convinced that they're born again. Of course there's nothing like that in the New Testament.

What you have in the New Testament is people who've had a genuine experience, a genuine encounter with God. Now, when Paul wrote to the Colossians, he knew these people had had a genuine encounter with God. He knew that they had a life that was in the spirit, he knew that they were bearing fruit, he knew that they were going on, he knew that they had a genuine love for the brethren, and because of that he can say other things.

If A is true, then B is true. The important thing is, if A is not true, then B is not true. So if someone comes along and just happens to find Colossians chapter 1, or later on Colossians says, oh look it says this is true of me, this is true of me, well it isn't true of you unless A is true of you.

You follow what I'm saying? You're actually reading someone else's mail. Unless the first part of this is your own experience. So Colossians really is a very, very valuable letter because you can see what evidence Paul needed to be assured that people were genuinely regenerate.

And on the basis of that he can make all kinds of other statements about having been crucified with Christ, having been circumcised with Christ, circumcision, having been bedded with Christ, having been raised with Christ, having been ascended. All these things are true if A is true. If A is not true, these things are not true because B is only true for people who have A is true.

Are you understanding that? Okay. I feel strongly about that. But what I'm really saying is that Paul would have said exactly the same thing about the Corinthians.

He would have said, because A is true, then I know that this must be true. These are subjective facts that you have experienced that you can tell me about and I can see, but that are objective facts, that are spiritual realities that you can't actually see with your eyes, but are equally true. It is equally true that you are now dead with Christ, that you're raised with him, that you're ascended into the heavenly places, that you sit together with Christ in the heavenly places.

These are equally true because A is true. Okay? It's a bit laboured, but what I'm saying is these people were genuinely Christians. So, the letter is intended for people who have genuinely received the Spirit, but people who are living for themselves, and this is the second of our keys, they're behaving wrongly.

That's to say, their birth was right, but their walk is wrong. Their beginning was fine, it was authentic, but something has gone wrong. And in 1 Corinthians 12, this is how he introduces this thing.

He says in verse 11, It has been declared to me concerning you, my brethren, by them, sorry, by those of Chloe's household, that there are contentions among you. Now, contentions is kind of strife, it's animosities, and what it is really, it's party spirit. It's people who are taking sides, and who are rallying to something that they have a kind of a, their own affinity to.

Maybe they like this person, they like the way he does it, they like the way he dresses, they maybe like his wife, all kinds of reasons people have for kind of joining themselves. But what has happened is that contentions have arisen. And what you've got in Corinthians is Paul expressing it like this, he says in verse 12, Now this I say that each one of you says, I am of Paul, or I am of Apollos, or I am of Cephas, or I am of Christ, is Christ divided.

So these people were behaving in a particular way, which was wrong. And what they were doing was that they were behaving in a way which was intensely individualistic. As to say, they were looking at everything from their own unique perspective.

So, although they've had genuine experiences of God, they've had a genuine baptism of the Spirit, they were genuinely born again, in fact now what's happening is that they're not living in the way that God intended them to live. And that is the explanation of 1 Corinthians. 1 Corinthians is not written to non-Christians.

It's written to Christians who are not living the way they ought to live. And these keys are kind of very important. I emphasised as I read this thing in verse 12, now I say this, that each one of you says, I. I think I've sort of tried to explain this at different times in the past, that the Greek language and the Hebrew language, like a few kind of European languages, you don't really need to use the pronoun.

Now I'm hopeless at languages, but I know, say for example, in Spanish, to say I have, you say tengo. Now yo is I, and tengo is have, but you don't need the yo, you can just simply say tengo, which means I have. But if you want to emphasise the I and draw attention to the I, then you put the personal pronoun and you say yo tengo.

So this is a way really of saying I, you're drawing attention to yourself. In fact Jesus did this, when he said I, I am the way, the truth and the life. That's really an emphatic way of speaking, you're drawing your attention to him.

And what's happening here is that these people, each one of them saying, well I, I'm for Paul, I'm for Apollos, I'm, so you've got people, they're breaking off into these different sections, these sectarian party groups, on the basis of I have a right to my opinion, this is what I think and this is my choice, and this is what I'm doing. And this is what's going wrong with this church. Every single one of these people is, this is Oswald Chambers' language, each one of them is claiming his right to himself.

They're not laying down their rights, they're not submitting themselves to other brothers, they're not understanding the purpose for which God baptised them into one body. Because these things are true

corporately and individually, as to say when God does this work of regeneration, he actually adds you to the church, he makes you part of a new company of people and you then have a responsibility to that family that God has put you into. And what was happening with the Corinthians is that they were living these self-assertive, self-independent, self-conscious, self-stating lives.

And those two keys are really the explanations to what's going wrong in Corinthians. And several times when we work our way through Corinthians, I'll come back to these facts. I'll come back to these facts.

These are people who've had a genuine experience of the Spirit, but they are people who are living from themselves. They're living from the I. Now, sometimes when people kind of talk about this, they use language like this and they say they were self-centred. And I don't suppose there's any other way you can say it, but I'm always cautious about using psychological terms that don't really have a basis in the Bible.

So, really, what we're talking about here is I, that's to say, me. And I don't want you to kind of go ferreting about and say, well, is the I behaving like this or is the I behaving... It's you I'm talking about, it's me I'm talking about. Maybe you know that I have certain views about the will.

That's to say I don't believe we have one. And that will take a bit of explaining. But I don't think anywhere in the New Testament there is an indication that we have the faculty of the soul that's called the will.

What we have is me. What we have is you. And sometimes what happens to people is because they've heard a lot about the will, they get tangled up with all kinds of things and they say, well, I would like to, but I'm having trouble with my will.

Actually, you're having trouble with you. That's what you're having trouble with. And when the Spirit of God comes, he comes to fill you.

Whatever you mean by I, that's what's causing the trouble here. And it isn't a faculty called the self. It isn't a faculty called the will.

It's you, that's what it is. So you can't say, well, it's somebody else in my sport. It's the self that's doing this.

No, it's you that's doing this. It's me. You see what I'm doing? This was a thing he used to say, can I beat about every bush, give them nowhere to hide? So this is what I'm doing.

I don't want you to hide anywhere. We have to face up. This is personal responsibility.

If these things are not working out right, it's because I am not doing something right. Me, me personally. Okay.

Okay. Now let me stop. Before I stop, let me read you something.

I've been reading a biography of a man named Dominus. Some of you will know Dominus because they think he's opposite to Calvin. And it's a fascinating book.

I've really enjoyed reading it. And he comes across really as a very warm kind of a character. And he was always involved in controversy.

And on one occasion, he wrote some remedies down for what he called religious dissensions, ways in which you could avoid religious dissensions. And I'm not going to read all of them. But one of the things he

says is this.

He says that there are certain things that you must keep in mind. And here's number one. He says it's very difficult to discover truth and avoid error.

Remember that. One of the problems is that to discover truth, it often comes as a reaction to somebody as someone else has said. And the problem with that reaction is that you tend to kind of go in the opposite direction.

So you swore to avoid the ditch on the right-hand side and you kind of end up in the ditch on the left-hand side. So what he's saying is that it's very difficult to discover truth and avoid error. Number two.

People who err are more likely to be ignorant than malicious. In other words, Dominus is saying give them the benefit of the doubt. They haven't got a secret agenda.

They're not kind of plotting. Give them the benefit of the doubt. If they're wrong, it's more likely that it's through ignorance than through any malicious intent.

Number three. Those, this is old-fashioned language, those who err may be among the elect. Because it's very easy to say the trouble with him is he's carnal.

He isn't really behaving like a Christian. Well, you'd expect them to believe that because they're not really Christians. And what Dominus is saying is people can be part of the elect.

They can be God's people and yet still go wrong. That's what he's saying. And then this is the fourth one.

I like this. It is possible that we ourselves are an error. I mean, because that's a very, that's almost an outside possibility.

It is just possible. I can imagine him writing that and kind of smiling. It is just possible.

Okay, so there are, when things go wrong in the church, there are ways of dealing with it. But the way of dealing with it is not to start a battle in which there is a loser and a winner. That never resolves anything.

Okay, I'm going to stop.

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