

## TAKING LIFE BACK ... INTELLIGENTLY

... clear thinking in an emotionally charged environment  
**1 Corinthians Series**

Thousands of ideas bombard us every single day. Straining each one of them through a “Christ-grid” can get a bit tiresome.

Think of the hot buttons out there right now ...

- pornography
- women’s rights
- sexual freedom
- homosexuality
- abortion
- “professional” ethics
- divorce
- lawsuits
- political correctness
- environment

In the center of this emotionally charged environment is God’s Church. ... walking in an area littered with controversial social and moral landmines. Just mention them, and people tense up ... afraid to say anything may be politically incorrect.

**1 Corinthians** takes us through the landmines ... helping us determine whether the church is archaic and out of touch with the research of the social sciences, homosexuality, divorce, lawsuits.

If you are 50 years of age or older, then you would be one of those who has experienced it; if younger, you are getting it mid-stream.

In the 1960’s and 70’s God’s church drastically changed.

Things that were once considered wrong, what we today would call petty matters ... and some of them were ... drinking, dancing, cards, attendance at theatre’s ... which were considered wrong ... faced a strong reaction from many of God’s people.

Those activities, once shunned, became acceptable. ... and we even today chuckle at our past immaturity and hypocrisy.

What happened and why can be debated, ... so let me give you “the truth on the matter” ... at best, partially.

Fifty years ago there was a sexual revolution ... that led to sexual “freedom”. Society stopped blushing. Sexual freedom was “in”.

One of the reasons for this landslide of behavioral change was the introduction of “the pill”.

For the first time in history we could act as we wished sexually and not have to face the consequences.

We had outmaneuvered God. We could do as we pleased and not have to pay the bills.

The effects of that cascaded into other areas. The word IN THE CHURCH became that we had been liberated from “legalism” ... and to a degree that was true.

Now, 50 years later we can evaluate:

There may be nothing biblically wrong with drinking alcohol in moderation, nor may there be anything wrong in going to a theatre ... but something happened for which we were not prepared.

I do NOT have statistics to prove each statement, though there is documentation for some. Here is what we find WITHIN GOD'S CHURCH ... among us.

- the percentage of people who lose their sexual purity in the Church is rather high
- divorce at essentially the same rate as society, some would say that it is higher in the Church
- alcoholism is more prevalent ...particularly among young people
- an epidemic of pornography among God's men

We got rid of "legalism" and didn't know how to handle our freedom ... and it got away on us.

We have statistically become worse.

### **What went wrong?**

- **we threw out the "bad activities" ... and with it we threw out the principles.**

We strained at a gnat – that speck of a bug; but we have ended up swallowing the proverbial camel.

We took new roads, but forget where we were headed - our destination.

We got rid of specific behaviors; but never replaced that with development of character.

We need to TAKE LIFE BACK ... INTELLIGENTLY. We need clear thinking in an emotionally charged environment.

**1 Corinthians** walks us through the process of regaining the right balance. It deals with the "bugs in the system", but it also brings us to the principle.

God is intelligent ... smart ... wise. If we will take the time to let His stuff sink into our minds, we will find that not only does it work extremely well for everyday, but it is true because it fits with reality in all aspects.

As we jump into the New Testament book we are looking for biblically reasoned thought that knows what to do with our

- damaged lives ... and how they need to be healed;
- strained or destroyed relationships
- inflated egos

Before we get into the specifics, this letter starts off with a few brief introductory comments.

### **1 Corinthians 1**

**Paul, called to be an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God, and our brother Sosthenes,**

**To the church of God in Corinth, to those sanctified in Christ Jesus and called to be holy, together with all those everywhere who call on the name of our Lord Jesus Christ— their Lord and ours:**

**Grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.**

It's only the INTRODUCTION, but we can't ignore it.

It's stuff that we have heard repeatedly ... we sing about this all the time ...

This morning, let it sink in.

Key Thought:

**The only way we can see eye-to-eye with one another is by adopting new eyes ... Christ's ... not our own.**

This is the only foundation.

This is the absolute minimum.

There is no other starting point.

Drop down to **1 Corinthians 1:10**

That's it ... this is where we should be ... **all of you agree with one another so that there may be no divisions among you and that you may be perfectly united in mind and thought.**

Here is the approach that God takes.

We need to see ...

### **1. We are not like everyone else**

**To the church of God in Corinth, to those sanctified in Christ Jesus and called to be holy, together with all those everywhere who call on the name of our Lord Jesus Christ— their Lord and ours:**

For us to take life back ... intelligently requires that we make the same positive identification that God makes of us.

One thing that has to happen if we are going to agree with one another is this: **We who make up the Church are not like everyone else.**

We are different.

We - as God's church –

- **have been sanctified**
- **are called to be holy**

Heard this before? ... yes ... but hold on for a second. Keep tuned in.

HOLINESS and SANCTIFICATION are not the most exciting words.

It isn't the "in thing"; it's not the rage. Holiness doesn't grab us. It's not "awesome".

We don't have people running around saying, "Let's become 'holy'!"

HOLINESS makes us uneasy. It alarms us ... It brings up pictures of being straight-laced, stern, strict, no fun, ... and that is not where we want to be.

But there has to be something to HOLINESS because God is all enthused and thrilled with it.

Here is what we find about HOLINESS in God's Word -

- holy NATION
- holy DAYS
- holy MEETINGS
- holy PLACE
- holy CLOTHES
- holy OINTMENT
- holy OIL
- holy FRUIT
- holy NAME
- holy LAMBS
- holy "COW"
- holy HILL
- holy TEMPLE
- holy MOUNTAIN
- holy HIGHWAY
- holy PROMISE
- holy WAGES
- holy PROFIT
- holy BODIES

- holy SACRIFICES

- holy CITY

**Holiness is concrete.**

You can put your hands on clothes, money, city, hill, lamb ...

Holiness is not a feeling. It is that which we can see, hold, hear ...

Holiness is hands-on ... It is to be experienced.

It is not a concept.

Holiness is never abstract.

There are nations, days, meetings, places, clothes, ointment, oil, fruit, names, lambs, cows, hills, temples, mountains, highways, promises, wages, profit, bodies, sacrifices, cities ... **that are ordinary ... just like any other nation, day, meeting, ... etc.**

What **holiness** does is that it **takes the ordinary and re-designates and re-defines the reason for one's existence.**

Holiness is not just being different, removed from the ordinary.

Holiness **takes the ordinary and re-designates and re-defines the reason for one's existence ... by tying it all to God.**

We get the right drift if we went through the list saying ...

The HOLY place really means **GOD'S** place

HOLY clothes really means **GOD'S** clothes

**GOD'S** ointment

**GOD'S** wages

**GOD'S** city

To be **SANCTIFIED** here indicates that an **official change has taken place so that we are no longer who we once were. Jesus Christ has made forever made us different. We are never just "ordinary" again.**

It's like we have been issued a government document, ... like our driver's license ... and it says right on that driver's license – RON KOLEBA ... **SANCTIFIED IN CHRIST JESUS.**

You might think that the writer didn't know what to say so he repeated himself when in the next phrase we have ... **CALLED TO BE HOLY ...**

A point is being made.

It is one thing to carry the official document. It is another to act in accordance with that document.

You have a driver's license ... and that means that you should follow the laws of the province of Manitoba, the traffic laws ...

Do we speed? ... Do we roll through the stop signs? ... go through red lights when no one is present?

**"... CALLED TO BE HOLY"**

**... moving past being a card-carrying Christ-follower, to living out visible holiness.**

We don't just HAVE a license, we DO what that license represents.

We LIVE OUT THE TRUTH CONTAINED IN THE WORDING OF THE LICENSE AS WE DRIVE DAILY IN AND OUT OF TRAFFIC.

**... together with all those everywhere who call on the name of our Lord Jesus Christ ...**

We are not free to create our own identity.

This isn't just for the Christ-followers in Corinth. It isn't just unique to them.

Our identity has been carved out for us by God and Jesus Christ.

**This is one of the GLOBAL IDENTIFYING TRAITS of God's Church.**

**It is non-negotiable.**

We cannot come into God's family and see things through our own eyes.

We cannot make our own calls.

We cannot run our own show.

... because now we are **SANCTIFIED ... we are CALLED TO BE HOLY.**

We, the Church, are **NOT LIKE EVERYONE ELSE.**

We **ARE DIFFERENT.**

We ARE HOLY ... we have the official document and now need to live out that document.

If we want to be ourselves and yet be part of God's Church, this will be one unhappy gathering for us.

If we want to keep on seeing things through our own eyes – Church, the people in it - will make us go cross-eyed.

If we want to do your own thing, run our own schedule, keep our own time, then God's people are going to make life miserable for us.

We are different.

We are holy.

We are holy because of God.

We need to constantly keep this in front of our eyes.

We need to look at life not through our own eyes, but Christ's.

That's how things come together.

*Transition:*

If our minds are half thinking about this, we know that we are finished.

This is more than we can handle, bigger than we bargained for, and frankly, a tad big depressing because any sane person realizes that we are in over our heads.

... so let's just pack up and go home ...

This thing about seeing things through Jesus' eyes sounds good until we try doing it.

If internally your mind is shutting down and you are saying, "Now I know why it hasn't worked and never will work ..." - don't just close your Bible.

The writer knows that he has sunk us before we have even set sail, but he's not done.

That is why we have **1 Corinthians 1:4-9**.

**I always thank God for you because of his grace given you in Christ Jesus. For in him you have been enriched in every way— in all your speaking and in all your knowledge - because our testimony about Christ was confirmed in you.**

**Therefore you do not lack any spiritual gift as you eagerly wait for our Lord Jesus Christ to be revealed.**

**He will keep you strong to the end, so that you will be blameless on the day of our Lord Jesus Christ.**

**God, who has called you into fellowship with his Son Jesus Christ our Lord, is faithful.**

**This matter of being HOLY is an enormous nonnegotiable, but it is not beyond us.**

Here is why ...

Key Thought:

**The only way we can see eye-to-eye with one another is by adopting new eyes ... Christ's ... not our own.**

This is what we need to see ... yes ...

**2. God asks big things of us ( ... matters that are difficult, tough and beyond us), BUT He comes loaded with unlimited resources (GRACE)**

**I always thank God for you because of his grace given you in Christ Jesus.**

I don't like marking up my Bible, but maybe we should. That line should be unforgettable for us.

... just how much "grace" have we been given?

If we interpret life on the basis of our generosity, normally we aren't all that generous.

So, God, how generous is He in giving us His "grace"?

**For in him you have been enriched in every way— in all your speaking and in all your knowledge - because our testimony about Christ was confirmed in you.**

**Therefore you do not lack any spiritual gift as you eagerly wait for our Lord Jesus Christ to be revealed.**

This whole thing is possible only because God is backing it.

God had it all together – God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit. But He decided to pass on the dividends of that

relationship ... and His dividends to His Church are issued under the label - GRACE.

For no investment on our part, God gives us dividends?! ... that's GRACE.

God is no tight-wad holding on to His good things. He is ready to release it to us even before we have proved ourselves.

When we are told – He SANCTIFIED us – whether we have just gotten our "spiritual driver's license" or whether we have been with Jesus for over 143 years ... we could not be MORE SANCTIFIED.

God does that for us ... completely.

Now we are learning to LIVE DIFFERENTLY – CALLED TO BE HOLY ... and He is there making sure that it happens.

GRACE is not God merely throwing good things into our lives. Each of His "dividends" are always attached to Jesus Christ.

... remember ... we are different.

**Grace is only distributed with Jesus ... never by itself as just GRACE.**

Here is what God has GRACED us with in Christ Jesus ...

Get the right picture of GRACE.

It is ...

- what we don't have, but need if life is going to work
- seldom served in a prim and proper setting. Rather, GRACE is what is delivered when life is a mess.

- untangles the mangled loose ends of hatred
- straightens out deceptive statements
- works through inconsistencies
- walks through the mud and muck in which we get stuck and gets us cleaned up
- is what seems to be like limitless patience in putting together the broken and shattered pieces of what was once our life

You can't buy GRACE in the bulk aisle, nor in nicely wrapped packages in a specialty shop.

**GRACE is not for sale.**

**God throws it in ... for free ... when we find Jesus.**

A strong young man at a construction site was bragging that he could outdo anyone in a feat of strength. He made a special case of making fun of one of the older workmen.

After several minutes, the older worker had had enough.

"Why don't you put your money where your mouth is?" he said. "I'll bet a week's wages that I can haul something in a wheelbarrow over to that building that you won't be able to wheel back."

"You're on, old man," the young worker replied.

The old man reached out and grabbed the wheelbarrow by the handles. Then he turned to the young man and said, "All right. Get in."

GRACE is not payment for our performance.

It is God throwing in "not just the extras", but "the essentials".

This matter of GRACE can be a bit confusing.

We receive GRACE ... **because Someone willingly choose to be HOLY, not just a bit HOLY, but to be TOTALLY HOLY.**

Jesus Christ choose to HOLY, He made a decision to be DIFFERENT FOR HIS FATHER'S SAKE.

**When it would have been, oh, so convenient to be just like everyone else, to forget about His assignment, His official "driver's license" that indicated that He was the Holy Son of God, ... and that He fully lived out what His "license" stated**

**... because He literally hung in there on the Cross, doing what was so different for a person who was innocent would normally do ... this Jesus became authorized to be the Giver of Grace.**

**On a non-descript cross, the kind used for Roman criminals, at the most inopportune time, in the worst of circumstances, GRACE reached its peak in the Person of Jesus Christ.**

There is something that happens to us when we've been GRACED ... it helps us want to see life through eyes other than our own.

It's strange ... but so good.

Now that impossible task of living up to what our "driver's license" means becomes a manageable task.

Our lives may have huge gaps, but GRACE can fill them ...with the solid reality of Jesus Christ.

**Since Jesus could be gracious when ...**

- **we were at our worst**
- He was the farthest from our minds
- all of our sin was loaded on to His shoulders and it killed Him and yet never turned Him against us

...then it is a no-brainer, ... that when He brings us into His family, He will not turn off the tap of His GRACE.

**He will keep pouring out His GRACE into us.**

**Jesus Christ has dug in His heels and He will not stop giving His GRACE until the day we actually become PERFECTLY HOLY.**

When we see that ... **God asks big things of us ( ... matters that are difficult, tough and beyond us), BUT He comes loaded with unlimited resources**

... then we are not looking through our own eyes, but Christ's.

Transition:

HOLINESS is a big thing ... humungous. We know that all too well ... and that is what makes us skeptical of this whole process ... even with God's GRACE.

We may be thinking ... even if God's shelves are full and packed with His GRACE ... so that SUPPLY outstrips DEMANDS in our lives ... we are still hesitant to take His offer.

God may be generous and big-hearted, but when does He turn off the tap?

... when does He look at us and say, "I've tried to get you to see for so long ... and you haven't picked up on it. I'm done. No more." ... and He abandons us?

There are days when even we are not happy with what we see in ourselves. What about God?

Nothing every changes! Why try? It is never going to happen, this thing about being holy.

Whoa ... hold on. One more thing ... just one more thing.

We just aren't getting the picture ...

If we look through Jesus' eyes we will recognize that ...

**3. Our pronounced and obvious inconsistency is more than matched by God's dogged persistence**

**God, who has called you into fellowship with his Son Jesus Christ our Lord, is faithful.**

This was obviously written in the day before computers, but on our computer screens is the BOLD B as an icon. That transforms normal print into **BOLD PRINT**.

What the writer could do in the language of the New Testament was rearrange the words in a special order and it would do just a good as bolding it does on a screen.

What had gotten into the author's eyes was this:

## **FAITHFUL is God.**

**God is outstandingly FAITHFUL ... so much so that this is worthy of taking the front page of newspapers.**

*To get us to be HOLY is such a big thing; ... such a long shot for it to happen in us ... TIME and not just RESOURCES are of essence in our minds.*

Who is going to give us another chance after our 954,678th failure?

... once, twice, three times ... we even might give the person another chance.

Who is going to stand around waiting for us to finally get our act together?

Who has the ability to encourage us after we have missed it again, and we deliberately and purpose choose just to be a stinker and not get it ... plain stubborn.

Maybe these are a few other phrases to underline in our Bible.

Get the words:

**GOD - FAITHFUL, ... INCREDIBLY SO; UNIMAGINABLY SO!**

God is reliable, dependable, able to be counted on, trustworthy, never going back on His Word, no matter how the circumstances change ... recession, depression, hot economy, war, peace, sickness, death, good health ...

God is still FAITHFUL.

*RICK DOUGLAS HUSBAND (COLONEL, USAF) NASA ASTRONAUT*

*(Born July 12, 1957, in Amarillo, Texas. Died on February 1, 2003 over the southern United States when Space Shuttle Columbia and the crew perished during entry, 16 minutes prior to scheduled landing. He is survived by his wife and their two children. He enjoyed singing, water and snow skiing, cycling, and spending time with his family.)*

Evelyn Husband lost the love of her life, space shuttle commander Rick Husband, in a national tragedy. A year later, she shared her message about God's healing hand.

It had been nearly a year since Evelyn stood with the other families of the space shuttle Columbia's crew at the landing site in Cape Canaveral, Florida, waiting for her husband to return home. The shuttle was just minutes from landing when NASA's Mission Control lost contact with the shuttle crew. The next few moments were a blur of events: video images of Columbia breaking apart over the Texas skyline, NASA officials scrambling to move the family members away from view of television cameras. Evelyn remembers looking at the faces of her son, Matthew, and daughter, Laura, then 7 and 12.

That was the beginning of Evelyn's efforts to deliver a powerful message: Even in the midst of intense suffering, God is faithful.

**"Deep inside, I knew God was going to walk me through this somehow," she says. "I knew it because he'd walked with me through other crises earlier in my life."**

*Corrie Cutrer, "Finding Purpose in Pain," Today's Christian Woman (Jan/Feb 2004)*

Someone doesn't talk to us ... we bail out.

We feel slighted ... we walk.

Nobody notices us ... we quit.

Hollywood seldom brags about faithfulness.

“Entertainment Today” is always giving prime time to unfaithfulness.

Faithfulness is not very flashy. It is seldom the life of the party. But when the party is over and everyone goes home ... faithfulness doesn't leave. It sticks with us. It's genuine.

Faithfulness ... absolutely “no quit”.

Faithfulness may not always be pretty, ... but it definitely is dependable.

### Now what do we do?

**So when we come to the next time when we say, “We haven't changed very much at all. As a matter of fact, we have gone backwards! God isn't even waiting for us anymore.”**

**... we are seeing things through our own eyes!**

... and we see so poorly.

**Look through Jesus' eyes.**

**We are not like everyone else. We are SANCTIFIED ... CALLED TO BE HOLY.**

What are the chances of it ever happening?

**GOD – FAITHFUL !  
GOD – GRACIOUS !**

HOLINESS is incredible ... it is beautiful, powerful, liberating, filled with incredible joy ... but it is also impossible, straining, tough and requires more than we ourselves possess.

It means things like the Cross – which we will look at next Sunday, Lord willing; denying ourselves; stop looking at life through our own eyes ... and looking through Jesus' eyes.

### **1. Make certain you have a valid “driver's license”.**

Have you accepted Jesus Christ?

We must be mature enough and humble enough whether we are 12, 38 or 77 to deal with our sin.

That comes only by accepting Jesus as our personal Savior.

Take that most important of steps today.

Please, let us notch into our minds this important clarification.

### **2. Being different is not what we are after.**

Differentness becomes another form of personal arrogance unless it is tied to Jesus Christ.

**Our “differentness / holiness” must be tied to Jesus Christ.**

We have too much “differentness”. That neither impresses God nor our community.

What does win the day among God's people and in our circles of influence beyond the Church, is HOLINESS THAT IS SHAPED BY JESUS.

This is going to require humility and that is going to come through the GRACE of God.

### **3. We will never use what we do not think we have.**

If we are ever going to take our lives back ... intelligently ...

If we are going to think clearly in an emotionally charged environment ...

We are going to need to be willing to exert significant effort.

One of the works that we are going to do is THINK, REASON THROUGH SCRIPTURE.

We are going to learn how to see things not through our own eyes, but Christ's.

**Grace is opposed to works (doing things our own way), but it is not opposed to effort.**

We are going to need to use our minds and ask that God would clear them of much information ... some of which is wrong, some of it is prejudice, part of it is plain misinformation.

We are going to need to go through our mental files and think.

In preparation for next Sunday do this:

**4. Study your "divine driver's license" and note that it has the words "SANCTIFIED IN IN CHRIST JESUS" and "CALLED TO BE HOLY" on it.**

Study that.

Review that.

Get a better grasp of that.

... and start to live it in some ways this week.

What you will find out that this will work only as we see thing not through our own eyes, but Christ's.

Remember, what we are being asked to accomplish – this whole matter of BEING SANCTIFIED IN CHRIST JESUS – is impossible ... and that is why we have GOD'S GRACE and GOD'S FAITHFULNESS.

They are available to you this week.

But understand that that is not enough.

**Study is only the precursor to what must come; implementation of knowledge into real, live behavior.**

What happens in Church happens in all other areas of our lives.

Studying is not merely a mental exercise. It is preparation for change.

We are not talking about education, we are talking again, about transformation.

Only if you are going to step out will you be able to take life back ... intelligently.

A [2006] medical study reveals just how difficult change is for people. Roughly 600,000 people have heart bypasses a year in America. These people are told after their bypasses that they must change their lifestyle. The heart bypass is a temporary fix. They must change their diet. They must quit smoking and drinking. They must exercise and reduce stress.

In essence, the doctors say, "Change or die."

You would think that a near-death experience would forever grab the attention of the patients. You would think they would vote for change. You would think the argument for change is so compelling that the patients would make the appropriate lifestyle alterations. Sadly that is not the case.

Ninety percent of the heart patients do not change. They remain the same, living the status quo. Study after study indicates that two years after heart surgery, the patients have not altered their behavior. Instead of making changes for life, they choose death.

Change is that difficult. The majority of the heart patients choose not to change. They act as if they would rather die.

*Thom S. Rainer and Eric Geiger, Simple Church (B & H Publishing Group, 2006), p. 229; submitted by Bill White, Paramount, California*

#### CLOSING INSTRUCTIONS:

In a minute I am going to pray, but after that would you be so kind to take 120 seconds to ponder, pray by yourself or with others ... about seeing things through God's eyes ... and not our own.

Next week ask how things have gone.

#### CLOSING PRAYER