

What is the Church of God?

1 Corinthians 1:2

by Dr. Wayne Barber

If somebody stopped you on the street and said, “What is the church?” what would you say to them? Everybody has an opinion, but look at 1 Corinthians 1:2. We are going to find from the text what the church of God really is. He says, “To the church of God which is at Corinth, to those who have been sanctified in Christ Jesus, saints by calling, with all who in every place call upon the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, their Lord and ours.”

Now just what is the church of Christ? Well, that little phrase “to the church which is at Corinth” dispels two myths that the people seemed to believe. Immediately Paul erases them. The reason I am dealing with them now is because when I get to that phrase a little later on, I want to treat it in a little different way. But first of all, there are some people who say that the local church is not important at all. Have you known people like that? They say, “I don’t need to go to a church. I don’t need to belong to a church. Man, I am a part of the body of Christ, and it is worldwide. I can worship in my house just like I can worship at home.” Most people who think this, by the way, have had some bad experience somewhere along the way. And they don’t feel like they have any God-given reason to be in a local church. Well, I hate to tell you, it is the church of God which is at Corinth. That is a local church. As a matter of fact, Paul didn’t address the whole church all the time. As an apostle he did, certainly, because it is in the New Testament. But he wrote a letter **to** the Ephesians; he wrote a letter **to** Corinth; he wrote a letter **to** Thessalonica; he wrote a letter **to** Philippi. Each of these were local church situations. And so therefore, people who say that the local church is not necessary are people who just don’t understand the Word of God and most likely are still bitter over some bad experience they have had somewhere along the way.

Now, denominations are not that bad of a thing. Some people say, “I wish we didn’t have denominations anymore.” Well, you know, denominations can help at times. They give doctrinal clarity at points to know what some people believe. Now, I know there is a downside to that. But there are a lot of people who just seem to think that the whole matter of the local church and denominations, etc., is all wrong. I hate to disagree with you, but the Apostle Paul is writing to a local church. That dispels that to start with. You know, a believer who is not a part of a local church is like a soldier who never puts on his uniform or never goes to battle or like a student who never goes to class and never takes a test or a citizen who never pays taxes and never obeys the law. It doesn’t make any sense. Hebrews says, “Forsake not the assembling of yourselves together.”

There is just something about being a part of the family that you want to be with. It is the church of God which is at Corinth and that is very important to understand. That is a local church situation and people were a part of that church.

The second myth that Paul dispels by that one phrase is the fact that the church ought to be the perfect place to go, the ideal place. Now, I don't know how many of you have been caught in the trap of looking for the perfect church. We are always looking for the perfect church, aren't we? The ideal church!

There was a lady one time who was tough. I mean, she just did not like me at all. I started calling her Super Kay. That is not nice and that is not right, but I did. Every time I would see her I would say, "Here comes Super Kay" and would go the other way. Well, my son was little at that time, very impressionable at his age. We were in a grocery store one day and he came running to me. I thought somebody had stolen my car or something. He said, "Dad, Dad, Dad." I said, "What is it, Stephen? Is something wrong?" He said, "There's Super Kay!" Well, when I heard it from him, I had to ask God to forgive me because I knew that it had gone too far.

But I thought when I moved from that church that Super Kay would stay there. Do you know what? She moved with me. The funny thing is, they disguise themselves. She didn't call herself Super Kay anymore, she just changed disguises, you know, looked differently, changed her name and snuck up on me. It is amazing. Everywhere you go, you are going to have people. That is the problem.

I know you don't like to hear me say, "When you come to this church you are going to be offended." I know that. I have even had people say, "Don't say that to people." Well, you are going to be. And the reason is because people are going to be here. You are not going to find the ideal church. By the way, if you do, don't join it because you are going to mess the thing up!

I have a friend who has always wanted to start a church. Now some starting churches is good because church planting is something that is necessary in many of the localities of the world. But I want to tell you something, folks, a lot of people, particularly younger folks want to start churches so **they** can have the **ideal** church. I want to tell you something, it has never been done yet. Don't think more highly of yourself than you ought to think, if that is what you are thinking. Because the first thing you are going to do is become the denomination of a non-denominational. That is the first thing you are going to do. "Well, we are not going to be denominational." Ah, baloney! As soon as you get a group of people you are a denomination. Can't we understand that? And then what is going to happen is you are going to get people who are coming out of other churches and they are going to have baggage you didn't know about and they won't tell you. Then one day you are going to wake up and say, "Well, look here. We have the same problems we had before." And God is going to say back to you, "Where did you find in scripture that you are going to find the perfect church?" You will never find the perfect church.

What does this have to do with Corinthians? A whole lot. If you were in Corinth would you want to join the First Baptist Church of Corinth, if that is what it was? Maybe it was the First Presbyterian Church. Let's just call it the Corinth Community Church. Would you like to join it? I mean, it is a perfect church, ideal setting, people just love each other. Man, if you think that, you haven't gotten far enough into 1 Corinthians.

Beginning in 1 Corinthians 1:10 you are going to find out what kind of church this is. They were men followers. In fact, let me just remind you of the verses. In 1 Corinthians 1 beginning in verse 10 he talks about the fact that they followed men. Therefore, there were divisions among them. They had quarrels and divisions. In 3:1-2 he said they have an adult nursery, they are

spiritual infants. That is what he said. You know, sometimes in many churches you just want to put a sign up that says “Adult Nursery I, Adult Nursery 2, Adult Nursery 3. If you want to whine and complain, come in here and this will be your place for the morning.” That is what was going on in Corinth.

As a matter of fact, in 4:3-5, they even criticized the Apostle Paul. Can you imagine this? They were judgmental of him. In 5:1-3 he talked about the gross immorality that was going on there. As a matter of fact he said they were even worse than the Gentiles in that area, and they weren't doing anything to discipline them. Then in 6:7 they were suing each other in courts of law. Great church, huh! I know a real good church over in Corinth! Let's join that one.

I tell you what we will do. We will make it the ideal church. Listen, there are no ideal, perfect churches, folks. There are churches that teach the Word and that ought to be the criteria. But that one phrase dismisses the idea that the local church is not necessary. It also dismisses the idea that there is a perfect church because he is addressing the church of God which is at Corinth.

Let me just give you a suggestion here. If you want to find a perfect church, stop looking for perfect Christians and become the ideal Christian yourself. My Mama always told me when I found the right person, she said, “You will just know.” I said, “Mama, how will I know?” She said, “You will just know because you know.” I didn't know what she was talking about. So everybody I dated I just kind of made myself feel like I knew. I don't know how many people I thought I was going to marry. Thank God, He had grace on me and spared me! A friend of mine said, “Do you know what your problem is, Wayne?” I said, “What?” He said, “Why don't you quit looking for the right person. Just stop. Just stop looking for the right person and start becoming the right person for somebody else.”

Do you want the perfect church? Then shape up your own life and start living like you ought to. Then one by one we will have the ideal situation right in your own church. But quit looking at other Christians and telling them that you can't find the ideal church. Man, that is crazy. They are going to have all kinds of levels of maturity in every church.

I think John pegged it. Look over in 1 John 2:12-13. He picks up on four levels of maturity. These are in every single church and you have got to understand this. This is what is going on with Corinth. They may have had more of the infants than others had, but you have them all in every church. You are never going to find the perfect church. You are never going to find the ideal place. 1 John 2:12 he says, “I am writing to you, little children, because your sins are forgiven you for His name's sake.” Those who are fresh in the kingdom need to know that their sins are forgiven.

How many people do you know who later on in life have difficulty with their past life because they don't understand that their sins have been forgiven? So he tells them that straight out.

Then he says in verse 13, “I am writing to you, fathers [Now why would he call them fathers?], because you know Him who has been from the beginning.” Then he says, “I am writing to you, young men [those in that time of life when God can tremendously use you], because you have overcome the evil one.” And you know how to overcome him. In 1 John, it is by obedience to Christ. As we obey Christ we overcome the evil one. Then it says, “I have written to you, children, because you know the Father.” These are the older children who are ready now to be disciplined in the faith.

There are four levels of maturity there. They were in John's epistle, and they are in all of the churches Paul addresses. So I just want to say that one more time, that there is no such thing as the ideal church. Praise God for the churches that have more of the fathers than they do the infants, but at the same time you are going to have those different levels of maturity. So be the right person for someone else and therefore the church can be what it needs to be.

The Church of God Is Made Up of "The Called Ones"

Well, what is the church of God? Just what is it? First of all, the church of God is made up of those who are the called ones. You don't have a church without believers. I don't care what denomination you are a part of. I don't care what church it is. You don't have a church until you have believers. That is the key.

He says in the phrase, "to the church of God which is at Corinth." Now the word "church" is the special word that helps us with our meaning. It is the word *ekklesia*. Let me explain that to you. The word *ek* is a preposition, and it means motion out of. Suppose I have a pen in my pocket, and I take this pen "out of" my pocket. Now this pocket that this pen used to be in no longer has this pen in it. Something has been taken out of it. It is very important to remember that. Not away from it, where something is alongside it that is taken away from it; that is different from something that is in it that is taken out of it. Do you understand the difference there in the two prepositions?

Now the word *klesia* is the word that comes from *kaleo*, which means to call. So what is the church? It is those who have been called out of something and into something and unto something. That is very important to understand. If you are going to call yourself a believer then you have been called. And it is not you calling, it is God calling you. You have been called out of the world and into Christ and unto Christ.

Let me give you an example of that. A boat in water is by design. Did you know that? A boat is designed to be in the water. How can we still live in a world and not be of the world? You can. Oh, it is very simple. You are called out of the way it thinks and looks. That is what Paul said in Romans 12:2, "Be not conformed to this world but be transformed." You have to live in it but you can't be of it. You have been called out of it, you see, into Christ. So a boat in the water is by design. But water in the boat is disaster.

So the first thing you find out then of the church is that they are the called ones. They have been called out of the world. They are still in it as far as having to exist every day. And they are called into Christ and unto Christ.

He says "to the church of God" by the way, not the church of man. There are a lot of organizations man can build, folks, and they really look good in today's economy of the way people think. But this is not a church that is called by man. This is a church that is called by and unto God. And it is so different because you have to take your hands off of it then. It is His, not yours. Somebody said one time, "The way you build a church is by doing this and this and this." That's funny. Jesus said, "No man can build the church. I will build My own church." It is His church and we are called unto Him.

Now when you think of being called out of something that is a lifestyle of evil and called into a totally different world in the sense that we are in Christ with a brand new lifestyle, think of the church of Corinth and think of the picture that Paul is drawing for them. Look what they came

out of. Remember how lewd the city was? Man, there was an expression in the Greek of that day whether you lived in Corinth or not, if you were acting immorally or you were acting sinfully, then they would say, "You are acting like a Corinthian." That was their phrase! The place was known for the debauchery. But right in the middle of it, God had put His church and called them out of all that kind of lifestyle and yet they still lived in Corinth. He called them into a different kind of lifestyle in and unto Christ.

Look over in 1 Corinthians 6 and you will see what I am talking about. Look at what they are called out of and how they are now different and you will get an idea of what it means to be a believer. Verse 9 says, "Or do you not know that the unrighteous shall not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived." Now by the way, I didn't write this. This is God's Word. "Do not be deceived; neither fornicators, nor idolaters [and this means habitual], nor adulterers, nor effeminate, nor homosexuals, nor thieves, nor the covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor swindlers, shall inherit the kingdom of God." Look at verse 11: "And such were some of you;" but you have been called out of that. Look what happened. He says, "but you were washed, but you were sanctified, but you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, and in the Spirit of our God."

That is a beautiful passage. That is the best illustration I can come up with as to what it means to be the called ones. Man, called out of and into and unto what God wants in your life. You know, a lot of people say, "Well, brother, I have been a Baptist since I was born." Well, bless your heart. I mean, I feel sorry for you. But did you get saved and were you called out of that lifestyle you used to live and were you called into the lifestyle? Jesus didn't say, "I am the life alone." He said, "I am the way, I am the truth, and I am the life." You come out of one way of life and you come into another way of life and that is what the church of God is. And it doesn't matter what tag you want to put on it. You might disagree on eschatology, you may disagree on a lot of things, but I want to tell you, the church of God are those who have been called out of one lifestyle, called into another, called into Christ and unto Christ. And if you are not a believer, you are not a part of the church of God. That is what Paul said to the Corinthian church.

Actually it is a subtle rebuke because from verse 10 on he is going to start showing them how they are certainly not living like who and whose they are. So the church of God then is made up first of all of the called ones, those who have been called out of and into and unto.

Before I finish with that one, let me just share this with you. In verse 2 it says "which is at Corinth." Now I know I mentioned a while ago a little bit about that phrase, but I also told you I am going to go a different way when I get to it and I am going to do it right now. Do you realize what he just said? He said "the church of God which is at Corinth." He didn't say "part of the church of God which is at Corinth because the other part is at Ephesus and the other part is at Philippi and the other part is at Thessalonica." That is not what he said. He said, "the church of God which is at Corinth." Now folks, I am going to get a little emotional on this but this thing knocked my socks off.

I was studying this and I had never seen it before in my life. What he is saying is, "If there were no other church in Greece, if there were no other church on the face of this earth, that bunch of immature babies was the church of God at Corinth." Man, he is trying to wake them up. They have every bit of God they could ever have or ever ask for. They have Him all and that is the church of God that is at Corinth. The church of God at Corinth. Oh, man, just think about it, the

potential that is there. What is Paul doing in Corinthians? I tell you what he is doing. He is subtly moving in to remind these people of who they are.

I want to show you something. The way you behave, now listen to me, does not change who you are. Are you with me? Think about it again. The way you behave doesn't change who you are. You are who you are because of Christ, the called ones. Now it may not make you look like who you are supposed to be and it may not make you exemplify whose you are supposed to be, but it does not change who you are. So the church of God which was at Corinth are those Christians who were there, who Paul is writing this epistle to, are the called ones, called out of the world into Christ and unto Christ.

The Church of God Is Made Up of Those Who Are “The Sanctified Ones”

Well, the second thing really helps understand the first one. The church of God is made up of those who are the sanctified ones. Not only the called ones, but the sanctified ones. Now do we know what it means to be sanctified? It says in Verse 2, “To the church of God which is at Corinth, to those who have been sanctified in Christ Jesus, saints by calling.” Now the word “sanctified” just draws a picture for you and you can't miss it. It is the word *hagiazō*, which means to be separated. It means to be set apart. Another word that comes from this word is *hagios*, and we get the word “saint” from that. It is the word “holy,” the holy ones. As matter of fact, we call God the Holy God. Why do you call Him Holy God? Because He is in a class all by Himself. There is no other god like Him, totally by Himself. He is God. He is pure. He is righteous, but He is in a class all by Himself. That word *hagios* means He is separated from anything else you could put in your mind when it comes to understanding who God is.

The term here, “those that are sanctified”, is the plural term. It is the separated ones. I love this. So Paul is addressing the church not as a building, he is addressing the church as the people who make it up. What is that little thing we did when we were in kindergarten? “Here is the church, here is the steeple, open it up and there are the people.” That is simple. It is the people. Paul is addressing the sanctified ones. God could care less about buildings. I hate to tell you. They are necessary and you have to have them, but as far as eternity goes there are not going to be any buildings made by man's hands. Thank God, they will be made by God's hands and the great architect Himself. But he is talking about the people who make up the church, people who are holy and separated unto God for His purposes.

There is another word for “sanctified” or “holy”, and you must realize the difference because there are some people who teach sinless perfection and they come right out of this kind of teaching right here. Since we are sanctified, then we are now sinless. No, no, no. There is another word that would mean that and it is the word *hieros*. It is translated holy but in a different sense than *hagios*. It is a different sense and you must understand it. This is the word that is translated “sacred” in English.

Look at 2 Timothy 3:15: “And that from childhood [talking to Timothy here] you have known the sacred writings.” That is that word right there, *hieros*.

Now, look at 1 Corinthians 9:13. It is used again. I am going to explain to you the difference in the two words and it is going to light your fire. Verse 13 says, “Do you not know that those who perform sacred services eat the food of the temple, and those who attend regularly to the altar have their share with the altar?” So you have two words there translated “sacred” but it is this

little word.

What does it mean? Well, in the New Testament when they used this word it meant something that is absolutely spotless, something that has no blemish on it at all. Aren't you glad that is not the word used for sanctified, because every one of us know the blemish that is already on our life, the sin that is in our life. You see, you are not sanctified on the basis of the fact that you are spotless. The church of Corinth, if anything, was not spotless in their behavior. Their history was horrible. Yet now they are sanctified. What in the world? Well, it has nothing to do with man's ability or inability. It has everything to do with God's sinlessness. It was Jesus who came as the God-man and what He did for us on the cross, the sinless lamb of God took sin upon Him. Sin was never in Him. There was nothing in Him that Satan could draw out of Him. He died on the cross for us. He arose from the dead, ascended, was glorified. Now we can be sanctified. We can be made holy, not based on our sinlessness but based on His sinlessness.

Hagiazō means something that has been taken and presented to God regardless of its nature or its past. If you had the other word it would have to be spotless. The only way we are made spotless is to be washed in the blood of the Lamb. Perfection is never resting upon our ability. It is always resting in Him who lives in us, the perfect One who lives in us. He has taken us and has set us apart. That is the difference in the two words. Thank God for that.

I think of a friend of mine. He told me, "Wayne, if you just knew where I had come from." He told me some of his past and it made me blush. I am thinking, "Good grief, I thought mine was bad." But isn't it wonderful when we stand together we are sanctified, set apart. We are holy unto God. Not because of anything we have done but because of what He has done for us. Their sanctification was due to God snatching them from sin and purifying them by His blood and by coming to live in their lives. In Hebrews 10:10 it says, "By this will we have been sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all." And again, it was His sinlessness that enabled us to be sanctified. It had nothing to do with our being spotless in our behavior or their being spotless in their behavior.

Now the term "sanctified" here is in the perfect tense. You have to remember the perfect tense. Perfect tense is not static. It means something happened back here, yes, in a static sense it happened back here. When I put my faith into Jesus Christ as these Corinthians believers, God set me apart, called me out of the world, called me into Himself. He separated me unto Himself and made me holy by putting His presence within me and washing me of my sin. But the perfect tense means something happened back here that is having a result way over here. It is still going on in my life. That doesn't mean that I can't sin because that is not even the meaning of being set apart and sanctified, but it does mean that the Holy Spirit of God lives in me as a divine referee to make sure I do know when I have sinned. Therefore, I am a changed person because I am not like I used to be. I have His life within me now and it has a present result.

I hear people all the time saying, "Well, I got saved 30 years ago." You did? That is great. What is God doing in your life now? "I got saved 30 years ago." That is wonderful. What is God doing in your life now? "I got saved 30 years ago." You can just forget people like that, folks, because you see, sanctified perfect tense means it happened back here but it is still having a present result on you right now.

You may be in sin but I guarantee you the Holy Spirit of God is rocking your boat because you

are not like you used to be and you were called out of that lifestyle. You were called into a different lifestyle and you are not comfortable by what I am saying because the Spirit of God lives in you and that is what we are talking about. It still has a present result in your life. You can't go back and live like you used to live. That is what he is saying. I tell you what, folks, start thinking about that for a while. Then think about the church at Corinth and you see what Paul is driving at.

It is in the passive voice. Passive voice means you didn't set yourself apart. No, sir. You were set apart by God Himself. Religion, you can set yourself apart for that. But only God can set you apart in His Kingdom.

Well, in spite of all the problems in the Corinthian church, Paul reminds them that they are holy and sanctified and they have been called out from this world. Isn't that great! They have been called out.

You say, "Well, Wayne, now that I am sanctified, I know that is positionally. I am in Christ and I am set apart unto Him. But I also know that sanctification is a process. Now, where is the balance in understanding all this?" Don't make the mistake that the Galatian church made. The Galatian church was sanctified by God. God did it. God was the one who came to live in them. It was based on His sinlessness, not their sinlessness. But once they were sanctified and saved and called out, they went back to the law and thought by the efforts of their own flesh that somehow they could now continue to sanctify themselves. The Apostle Paul wrote to them and said, "Oh, foolish Galatians."

Let me say something very simple to you because I have a simple mind. How do you continue the process of sanctification? The same way it got started in your life. When you fall on your face and you cried out to God and said, "God, I am unholy. I am sinful. I am aware of it. I know what You require and I can't meet it. But I thank You that Jesus came to do that for me. And God, I put my faith into Him and I receive what He has done for me and I receive Him into my life. I bow down, lay my sword down. I won't fight Him anymore."

You were saved, folks. But let me tell you something. That same attitude that saved you is the same attitude that sanctifies you. I want to say it one more time. Perfection never rests in human flesh. Perfection rests in the One who is perfect who lives within us. Therefore, day by day I have to continually come before Him and say, "God, I can't. You never said I could. You can and you always said you would. God, I can't produce the righteousness you are demanding out of my life. But God, I know that by my surrendered relationship to you, I can perfect holiness in the sense that I can release your life in me and that is what you are requiring. You are only pleased when you look at me and see yourself." That is sanctification.

Religion. That is what men do for God and justify themselves by it. But sanctification can always rest in Him. That is why when it says you are sanctified you fall on your face and say, "It has nothing to do with me. He is the spotless One. He is the sinless One. He is the perfect One. He has rescued me. And He is the one who has manifesting His life in me. I am decreasing so that He might increase." That is how holiness is perfected in our life.

In 2 Corinthians 7:1 we read, "Therefore having these promises, beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from all defilement of flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God." In Colossians 2:6 it says, "As you therefore have received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk ye in Him." You say, "I

have to go to work tomorrow. How can I be holy before God?" Easy. He has already enabled you by putting His Spirit in your life. Bow down before Him and say, "God, it is not my agenda today, it is Your agenda. I am going to be about Your task. I am going to cleanse myself of all the defilement of my flesh by choosing against it." And at that moment, something takes over in your life that you are not even aware of. And God who lives in you begins to live through you. That is what righteousness is all about. That is perfecting holiness, you see. It is not what man can do. It is what God can do through man.

I don't know really why I stopped and threw that in, but I want to make sure that we understand if we are sanctified, understand all the way through that it is Him from the beginning. It is Him in the middle. And it is Him at the end. Philippians 1:6 says, "I am confident of this very thing, He that began a good work in you will perform it until the day of Christ Jesus." It is not what you can do, it is what He does in you.

What is our responsibility? It is just like Corinthians said, we cleanse ourselves of the moral defilements, we choose to obey Him. We choose to get into the Word. Yes, there is responsibility in the Christian's heart. But then He takes over and what you see manifested in your life is the character of Christ. That is sanctification. We are being made more and more conformed unto His image. It is Christ in us and through us. So sanctification is not only a position, but it is a process. "To the church of God which is at Corinth, to those who have been sanctified in Christ Jesus." You know what it means now to be sanctified. It means that He has set you apart unto Himself.

He has another purpose for your life. Then he says "saints by calling." That could be translated "called to be saints." It could be translated "called saints." In the morning when you get up just walk to a mirror and say, "Good morning, Saint Kent." "Good morning, Saint Chuck." "Good morning, Saint Wayne." Just remind yourself of what that means, not sinlessness, not anything like that. But, oh, the message of grace and how God has separated you unto Himself based on what He did to fulfill the law, in your stead, took your punishment on the cross. Now you put your faith in Him and He comes to live in you.

You know, if you start thinking about salvation it just makes you want to shout. We didn't deserve any of it. He came and died for us. He went beyond what was required. Now He puts His life in us and gives us the ability to do all the things He commands us to do. Then one day we get to heaven and get to see Him and He gives us rewards for it! No wonder we are going to turn around and cast those crowns back at His feet and worship Him forever and ever and ever.

Saints by calling. Called saints. You say, "You don't act like a saint sometimes." Well, neither did the church at Corinth. But they were still saints. I want to keep saying it. What you do does not change what you are in Christ Jesus. You may shut the process down a while and you may keep it from being seen but what you do does not change what you.

You know most of us have children who grow up. It is fun to watch them. You warn them and warn them. We were warned and I never paid any attention to my Mother and Daddy either. So there were times when my kids didn't pay any attention to me, and there were consequences that go with that. I remember telling my son, "Stephen, be careful who you run around with. Guilt by association." But Stephen has such a gift of mercy. I mean, he cares. You find somebody who is an underdog and Stephen is drawn right to him. I mean, he has always been that way.

Well, years ago he had gotten his first car, and they were out one night. He had a black Honda. They were out on Brainerd Road and he had his buddy with him. Somebody took a cigarette and just flicked it right on his hood. He had just cleaned the car. You know how you are when you get your first car. You clean it and everything... for about a week anyway. You want to make it look good. It made his friend madder than it did Stephen. Stephen was upset with him, but his friend kind of lost it and a long story. You don't need to know everything that happened, but it wasn't really good. Some things he said and did.

Well, the people who his friend did it to got the tag number of Stephen's car. Now Stephen doesn't own the car. The car was not registered in his name, the car was registered in my name. We got a phone call one day at the church. They called and said, "We can't believe that the pastor's son would talk this way and do some of the things that happened." Well, it wasn't Stephen. Stephen had told me that and I had really trusted him in it, but now he is wondering if I am really going to believe him now that we got a phone call. These people had a friend who was a policeman. I don't know if they are supposed to do this or not, but they tracked it down and called the church. It was a real easy tag number to identify.

The thing that I think I appreciated most about Stephen was he wasn't so upset. He loves his friend and they are still friends and God has done a great work. But the thing that impressed me the most was Stephen was so hurt that he had brought shame upon me. It hit him that he wasn't really getting the blame for it. I was getting the blame for it. Sure enough, they called back and said they were sorry that it wasn't the driver of the car and they cleared him. It was okay. He was honest. He told me exactly right.

I thought about that as I was studying the first ten verses of 1 Corinthians. It is like the Apostle Paul very subtly is writing to them, reminding them of who they are and whose they are. Then in verse 10 on he is going to start showing them what they are doing to disgrace and bring shame, not upon themselves but upon the God who paid the ultimate price to sanctify and to call them. Remember that when you go out this week. When you sin, you are going to pay for with God and consequences, yes. But the one who gets the real shame, it is not even the church sometimes, it is Christ who is the founder of it. It all goes back to Him somehow. Just remember that. Maybe it will be a helpful reminder to each of us.