

# Life Together

*Do you not know that you are God's temple and that God's Spirit dwells in you?  
If anyone destroys God's temple, God will destroy him.  
For God's temple is holy, and you are that temple.  
(1 Corinthians 3:16-17. ESV)*

*And we all, with unveiled face, beholding the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same  
image from one degree of glory to another. For this comes from the Lord who is the Spirit.  
(2 Corinthians 3:18. ESV)*

## **All The Promises Of God**

**November 29<sup>th</sup>, 2015**

**2 Corinthians 1:19-20**

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### **Introduction:**

Good morning! Open your Bibles to 2 Corinthians 1:19. For the last couple of weeks we've been looking at the section of the letter that runs from 1:12-2:17. We've spent some time at forest level, last week we spent some time at tree level and this week we are dropping down to leaf level. This week we are looking at the theological centre of this entire passage. Paul connects all of what he is saying in this passage to this one massively weighty truth that all of the promises of God are YES in Jesus Christ. That's the BIG TRUTH that holds this whole section together and so we'll look at it and we'll spend some time making sure that we understand what Paul is actually saying and then we'll spend some time responding as I think he would want us to do.

Hear now the word of the Lord, beginning at verse 19:

<sup>19</sup> For the Son of God, Jesus Christ, whom we proclaimed among you, Silvanus and Timothy and I, was not Yes and No, but in him it is always Yes. <sup>20</sup> For all the promises of God find their Yes in him. That is why it is through him that we utter our Amen to God for his glory. (2 Corinthians 1:19-20 ESV)

This is the Word of the Lord, thanks be to God.

### **Understanding The Text:**

Paul gets to his point by way of responding to one of the accusations that has been made against

him by the false apostles who have infiltrated the church in Corinth. They have said that Paul is a vacillator. He is not consistent. He seems to talk one way in his letters and another way in person. He is hot and cold. He is law and grace, he is strong and weak – he is all over the map and he is therefore not a reliable guide to God. Paul addressed that back in verses 12-14. He said that our message was not mixed, our motives were pure, our message was consistent and simple. The issue is that you have only begun to understand it. You are still very worldly. You are the ones who are mixed. You've got a little bit of Gospel and a whole lot of world in your minds and that's why our message seems confusing to you. But it isn't. If we get the sin out of you and if we get the CORINTH out of you, I am confident you will understand this fully, even as you understood it partially when we are with you.

Paul is trying to help these people transition to a whole new way of thinking. You have to remember that the way of the cross was a very foreign concept to these Corinthians. Paul has been trying to help them understand this since way back in 1 Corinthians 1. He said:

<sup>18</sup> For the word of the cross is folly 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, and the discernment of the discerning I will thwart." (1 Corinthians 1:18–19 ESV)

The cross looks like foolishness. It looks like a dead end. How can the message about a man who was CRUCIFIED be the message of eternal life? He's dead! He died! How can a dead man show us how to live? The cross looks like a giant NO.

He acknowledges that it looks like NO to both Jews and Gentiles but he encourages them to stick with it because it is the power of God for salvation to all who believe. He goes on to say in 1 Corinthians:

<sup>22</sup> For Jews demand signs and Greeks seek wisdom,<sup>23</sup> but we preach Christ crucified, a stumbling block to Jews and folly to Gentiles,<sup>24</sup> but to those who are 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 men, and the weakness of God is stronger than men. (1 Corinthians 1:22–25 ESV)

Stick with it, Paul says. I know the cross looks like a NO, I know that you are hard wired to think that the YES can be found in human wisdom, but that road leads only to death and folly. Trust me on this, God's YES is only found in Christ.

That is the argument Paul is coming back to in 2 Corinthians. NT scholar Mark Seifrid puts it this way, commenting on the passage we are looking at this morning in 2 Corinthians; he says:

“God hides his Yes in a No, drawing the Corinthians away from themselves and their own wisdom to his wisdom in Christ.... The crucified and risen Christ, in whom God’s Yes has come to reality among the Corinthians, is the one “place” on earth in which all God’s promises have come to fulfillment.”<sup>1</sup>

Let me bring this down to street level. There are basically three ways of seeking salvation. There is the Jewish way, there is the Greek way and there is the Jesus way. There are three ways of seeking everything human beings are hard-wired to desire. The Jews are working the religious way<sup>2</sup>. They believe this world is fallen and so the good life has to be sought in the world to come. They are building a stairway to heaven. That’s one way.

The Greek way is the way of wisdom – the Greek word Paul uses in 1 Corinthians 1:22 is ‘*sophia*’ which means wisdom or knowledge or science. So the Greek way is less about the life to come and more about the life we have now and salvation is less about getting to heaven and more about making a perfect world here on earth.

By the way, have you noticed that not much has changed in 2000 years? Everybody still wants the same stuff and everyone is still looking in the same two places. We’ve got religious folks blowing themselves up in concert halls – why? Because in the religion of Islam the only way you can be SURE of going to heaven is by becoming a martyr. Everyone else dies not knowing whether their staircase reaches all the way to heaven – but the martyr can be sure. Let’s be honest, there are still a lot of people who believe that salvation is in the world to come and who are doing everything they can – even killing themselves and others – to get there.

And we’ve got people putting an awful lot of faith in modern science. In Canada we have more of the latter than the former. Our native religion is science – it is what scholars call “secular materialism”. We think that we can have heaven on earth and we believe that science will deliver

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<sup>1</sup> Mark Seifrid, *The Second Letter to the Corinthians*, Pillar New Testament Commentary. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2014), 58 and 62.

<sup>2</sup> Throughout the rest of the message I am using the word “religious” or “the religious way” as synonymous with “the Jewish way” of 1 Corinthians 1 and Romans 2-3. I am using it to mean relying on “works of the law” in order to possess the promises of God. I know that we Evangelicals use the word in a variety of ways and I have previously spoken against the false contrast of “religion” and “relationship” as if one has to choose between intimacy with God and living in a godly way. Christianity is both religion and relationship. It is “good religion” if we can be so crass and the Apostle is here denouncing “bad religion”. Hope that helps.

that promise to us. In this worldview, the future is heaven and science is the Messiah. Larry King and Britney Spears believe in this way. I'm sure you've heard the news that Larry King has invested heavily in a science, or a pseudo-science called cryonics. He plans to have himself frozen when he gets near to death so that in the future ONCE SCIENCE has solved all the worlds problems and discovered a cure for death and aging, he can be reawakened so as to enjoy the heaven he believes will then exist. In an article in The Telegraph he explains why he is doing this. He says:

“I don't think I'm going anywhere,” he said. “I don't have a belief.”<sup>3</sup>

According to Larry King, there is no heaven – “I don't think I'm going anywhere” – and there is no God who can take you there – “I don't have a belief”. Therefore salvation has to be sought here on earth, and in King's mind, cryonics is his best opportunity to experience it.

Nothing has changed in 2000 years. Paul is saying to the Corinthians – “You have two things, two options out there that look like YES. You have the religion of the Jews and you have science. Both look like potential candidates for the life we all desire. But look a little closer, he says. Consider the story of the Jews. Does it really convince you that religion is a way to enjoy the promises of God? Aren't these the folks who had their temple destroyed and who went into exile TWICE? Aren't these the folks who are right now living under the boot of Roman oppression? These people do not look extraordinarily favoured by God! It hasn't worked!”

Paul will make that argument to the Romans from Corinth very shortly. He will pick up this theme of the religious way and he will concede that no one is more religious than the Jews. They are quite simply better at it than anyone else on all the planet. They are zealous and God has given them several advantages. They have the law. They have circumcision. They have the prophets. Yet where did that get them? He says:

For it is not the hearers of the law who are righteous before God, but the doers of the law who will be justified.  
(Romans 2:13 ESV)

The Jews aren't going to go to heaven because they heard the law – if you want to go down that

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<sup>3</sup> <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/celebritynews/8947779/Cryonics-do-you-really-want-to-wake-up-next-to-a-1000-year-old-Britney-Spears.html>

road you actually have to KEEP THE LAW and the Jews never did. Their failure to do so has been quite catastrophic he says:

For, as it is written, “The name of God is blasphemed among the Gentiles because of you.” (Romans 2:24 ESV)

Your failure has become an international talking point Paul says – interesting, in chapter 3, he says that this was the whole point. In Romans 3 he says that God gave the Jews these advantages, knowing that they would go down this road and FAIL MISERABLY for a specific reason – he says in 3:19:

so that every mouth may be stopped, and the whole world may be held accountable to God. (Romans 3:19 ESV)

No one will be able to say when they stand before God, having tried to earn their own salvation by means of good works and religion: “I didn’t know that this road was a dead end – you didn’t mark it as such, you didn’t warn me away!” I did warn you away, God says. I gave you the example of the Jews! Nobody was ever better at this than them and still they couldn’t do it. They got closer to the finish line than anyone in history and still they ended up in exile, ruin and despair – if they couldn’t do it, what makes you think that you can do it? Their story should have convinced you that religion will not prepare you to stand before God.

So Paul says to these Corinthians that you have two apparent YES roads that are actually NO roads. The religion road doesn’t work. It looks like a Yes but it’s a No – if you don’t believe that, look at the Jews. Then you’ve got the wisdom and science road. That looks like a Yes too. But look a little closer. If Paul were writing today he might say: “Look at lesson of the 20<sup>th</sup> century”. In the 19<sup>th</sup> century everybody thought that science would bring us to the Promised Land. We had penicillin, we had railroads, we had advanced industry, we had the scientific method – surely we were standing at the very gates of heaven! We call that era – the Modern Age. Do you know when the historians say that the Modern Age – characterized by its optimistic view of science and human progress – do you know when they say that era died? In August of 1914. In August of 1914 World War I broke out in the middle of the most advanced human civilization the world had ever seen. The smartest and most advanced people starting killing each other on a scale that no one could believe. Do you know how many people died in the in the American Civil War? 620,000. That’s a lot. Do you know how many people died in the First

World War – just 50 years later? 38 million. France lost 27,000 on the first day of World War 1 – in their first CONTACT with enemy forces.

The guns of August 1914 CHANGED how the Western world looked at science. We used to believe that science would save us – now we understood that it only make us better at killing other people.

But still there are people – despite ALL THE EVIDENCE TO THE CONTRARY – who believe that these apparent YESES – religion on the one hand and science on the other – will lead us to the Promised Land. No they won't Paul says. Look at the history! God is mocking those ways and he is MARKING THOSE WAYS as the way of death. Therefore there is no excuse, do not be deceived. There is only one way to the life you were created to live and that way is the way of the cross. It is the way that looks like NO when in fact it is God's ETERNAL YES.

That's what this passage is about; this is the exclamation mark on an argument Paul began with the Corinthians way back in 1 Corinthians chapter 1. The road of religion is arrogance and folly. The road of science is deception, futility and death. Don't go there – you don't have to go there because all the promises of God find their Yes in Jesus Christ.

Paul knows that this truth is MASSIVE – it has consequences, it demands a response – he says as much in the second half of verse 20. He says:

That is why it is through him that we utter our Amen to God for his glory. (2 Corinthians 1:20 ESV)

To say AMEN in response to something is to say: “I agree! So be it! This is it! I receive that!” Paul is saying that when you see this – when God helps you to see this – then you respond. You say the AMEN – you get glad and you start worshipping because you see it! This is it! Praise the Lord!

I want to do two things to help you enter into that space. I want to help you respond in worship to this message. To do that I want to answer two questions that I think will get us there.

## Two Questions On Our Way To Worship:

### 1. What are the promises of God?

If we want to be as excited as the Apostle Paul then we need to take a minute and try to understand what “all the promises of God” meant for the Apostle Paul. Paul is assuming a knowledge of the Bible here. He can do that because he taught the Bible to the Corinthians for 18 months – he knows what they know but some of us may not know what they know so let’s go back and do a quick refresher. To do a good job with this – to provide a decent survey of “all the promises of God” would take a couple of hours. I’m going to do it in 5 minutes so this is summary at best.

We get our first three promises from one passage in the Old Testament. The prophet Ezekiel says:

<sup>25</sup> I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you shall be clean from all your uncleannesses, and from all your idols I will cleanse you. <sup>26</sup> And I will give you a new heart, and a new spirit I will put within you. And I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh. <sup>27</sup> And I will put my Spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes and be careful to obey my rules. (Ezekiel 36:25–27 ESV)

#### i. A clean slate

I will sprinkle clean water on you and you shall be clean. That’s a big promise because sin is a big problem. Sin makes us hide from God and from each other – we learn that in Genesis 3 – sin makes us ashamed, it makes us irrational, it makes us inhuman and it makes us hostile towards God and other people – so we will never live the life we were created to live unless God does something to eradicate all memory and all trace of our sin. God promises to do that. He’s going to wipe it away and remember it no more. Praise the Lord that’s coming, that’s here now for all those who are in Christ.

#### ii. A new heart

We see that one in verse 26 from the same passage. A new heart. You see, a heart ruined by sin bends in the wrong direction. It has contrary desires. It wants things it shouldn’t want. All sinful people struggle with wrong orientation. We’re all pointed in weird ways. We want to do bad

things and because we are weak, we do what we want and that just takes us further and further away from the life we were created to live. We're going to need a new heart and God promises to give it to us.

iii. A new spirit – The Holy Spirit!

We need a new spirit and God says in verse 27 that he will give us HIS SPIRIT! He will put his Spirit in our new hearts and he will be the voice inside us saying “This is the path, walk ye in it!” Hallelujah! Praise the Lord, if that promise doesn't get you going then you are dead!

We have to start moving quicker now:

iv. The absence of evil

Heaven won't be heaven if there are evil people in it. Therefore one of the great promises of the Old Testament is that God will come and judge the world and destroy evil and banish the evildoer. We have a picture of that in Isaiah. He says:

<sup>15</sup>“For behold, the LORD will come in fire, and his chariots like the whirlwind, to render his anger in fury, and his rebuke with flames of fire. <sup>16</sup>For by fire will the LORD enter into judgment, and by his sword, with all flesh; and those slain by the LORD shall be many. (Isaiah 66:15–16 ESV)

God is going to judge evil and God is going to kill the evil doer – I don't care if that sounds barbaric to you, I don't want to live in heaven with an unrepentant Paul Bernardo. I don't want to live in heaven with unrepentant rapists and murderers and suicide bombers. It won't be heaven if evil people are there and the Bible says that they won't be there if they don't repent of their evil and turn to Christ. Hallelujah.

But the Bible promises even more than the absence of evil, it promises positively all the things we need to be ultimately and finally happy. These last couple of promises speak to that; fifthly the Bible promises:

v. Health, family, prosperity and peace



Isaiah speaks about that too. Looking forward to the new heavens and the new earth he says:

no more shall be heard in it the sound of weeping and the cry of distress. (Isaiah 65:19 ESV)

People are going to be happy – they are going to rejoice. He goes on to tell us why:

They shall build houses and inhabit them; they shall plant vineyards and eat their fruit.  
(Isaiah 65:21 ESV)

More than that he says:

They shall not labor in vain or bear children for calamity, for they shall be the offspring of the blessed of the LORD, and their descendants with them. (Isaiah 65:23 ESV)

We are going to be a family and our families will not be torn apart by death or calamity – we will be TOGETHER and we will be with God. Is there anyone in here who is longing for that day? Me too. I don't know whether that is 1 promise or 4 promises but I know that it sounds really good. It sounds like heaven to me. And it all comes, the prophet says, from the presence of the Lord – that's the last promise, that's the only promise; everything else is derivative.

vi. The presence of the Lord - forever

<sup>22</sup> “For as the new heavens and the new earth that I make shall remain before me, says the LORD, so shall your offspring and your name remain. <sup>23</sup> From new moon to new moon, and from Sabbath to Sabbath, all flesh shall come to worship before me, declares the LORD. (Isaiah 66:22–23 ESV)

That's the promise of God. That's the life you were created to live. You can't get there by works of the law – you can't get there via the traditional religious road and you can't bring that world to the earth via science, wisdom and human achievement. Those roads lead to death. You can only get there – you can only possess these promises, Paul says, in the person of Jesus Christ. All of the promises of God, ultimately, finally and forever find their Yes in Christ alone.

Therefore, our last question on the way to worship is this:

**2. How can I be found in Christ?**

We aren't the first people to ask that question. When the very first Christian sermon was preached with the help of the Holy Spirit on the day of Pentecost people asked that question and this is what Peter said. He said:

<sup>38</sup>“Repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins, and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. <sup>39</sup>For the promise is for you and for your children and for all who are far off, everyone whom the Lord our God calls to himself.” .... <sup>41</sup>So those who received his word were baptized, and there were added that day about three thousand souls. (Acts 2:38–41 ESV)

There are three key words in that paragraph I want you to see.

i. Repent

That just means to turn around. If you are a normal human being then the chances are pretty high that you are well on your way down one of those other roads that lead to hell. You are on the religion way – you are trying to build a stairway to heaven. You're not going to make it. So turn around, come back and come to Christ. Or maybe you are on the science road. You believe in human progress. You believe that with enough time and enough smart people working on it we will have heaven on earth. Its not going to happen. See the Guns of August. See Hiroshima. See Larry King. This road also leads only to death and ruin. Turn around. Give it up and cling to Christ. That's what it means to repent.

ii. Receive

Luke uses that word at the end. He says that people received the word and were baptized so receiving the word comes first. The word they received was Peter's word. They received the Apostolic witness to Jesus Christ. That's exactly what Paul is calling on the Corinthians to do. In 2 Corinthians 1:19 Paul says that the word that they PREACHED established for them a PLACE within this fallen world where God's promises can be found. They preached CHRIST CRUCIFIED. They opened the door to eternal life – its all there for you in the Word! Receive it – BELIEVE IT and you shall have everything you've ever wanted. All the promises of God are YES in Christ presented to you only in the Apostolic Gospel. Receive it – 3000 people RECEIVED it on Pentecost and you can receive it today.

When you receive it, after you receive it you must:

iii. Be baptized

Why baptized? Because you have to DIE to the old ways in order to walk in the new way. That's what baptism is. Its God presenting you with Christ – his death and his resurrection. It is you repenting of your old ways and rising again to walk by faith in the way of Christ. This is not just a new start – IT'S A NEW LIFE. His life – for you and through you.

Repent, receive and be baptized.

That's how you can be found in Christ. It is God who establishes you in Christ and this is how you say the AMEN – to God, among his people, for his glory always. This is the Word of the Lord, thanks be to God. Let's pray together.