

Maintenance Required
Lesson One - Forgetfulness
1 Corinthians 1:1-9

Intro:

Have you ever had someone say something to the effect of, “I love Jesus, but not the church”? Often, this sentiment is paired with a bad experience in a church or with other Christians who have failed to mirror the heart of our Savior.

While we are by no means dismissing the value of the local assembly and our commitment to it, it is important to recognize that sometimes churches can fail to uphold the values that they claim to represent. In doing so, we push people away rather than pulling them in.

As Mark Dever expresses in his book *12 Challenges Churches Face*, “Churches say they have the best and most important news in the world — they have the answer to our problems, they are God's embassies on earth — yet churches are made up of people like you and me, people who are grumpy, irritable, unfaithful, and selfish. We become too possessive of small things and too casual about great ones. We become too defensive for ourselves and ignore God. We talk of love, but we too often give ourselves over to hate — even in church.”¹

The reasons this can happen in our lives are wide and varied, but undoubtedly every church (and its members) will have challenges that it must face and overcome — challenges that seek to disrupt what God desires to do through His church. Throughout our summer series, we will be looking at 12 challenges that churches face by taking a journey through the book of 1 Corinthians.

Why are we doing this series? Is it because we have massive problems that are destroying our church? I hope not! Is it to allow us to call out specific people? Absolutely not! Is it to critique other churches in the area and make ourselves feel as if we are the only ones doing it right? I hope we are not so easily moved to pride and arrogance, though I know that we often are.

The reason we want to go through this series is to take time for self-reflection as a church. How are we doing in the 12 areas that we will highlight as individuals within the body, and then collectively as a whole?

¹ Dever, Mark. *12 Challenges Churches Face* (9Marks) (p. 12). Crossway. Kindle Edition.

The maintenance required when the “check engine” light comes on is never exciting. It is not cause for celebration, but rather an exasperated, “How much money is this going to cost me?” as you begin corrective maintenance. This is why regular preventative maintenance is so invaluable — it helps address problems before the light comes on, though it is not an assurance that there will never be problems. We hope our series is both preventative (how to keep from being derailed by challenges in the future) and corrective (what changes do I need to make now to stop being derailed).

So, let’s pop the hood and perform some maintenance.

Forgetfulness

In his first letter to the Corinthians, Paul has a lot to address. The city of Corinth was rebuilt during the Roman Empire after it was destroyed and quickly became a prominent trading center between the northern and southern regions of Greece.

During Paul’s second missionary journey, he spent time in this city preaching and teaching, which led to the establishment of this church congregation, and Paul is now writing back to them. And boy, does he have a lot to address. In addition to all the problems they are facing, they have also sent a list of questions they want him to weigh in on.

If you are familiar with the problems that this church is dealing with and the tone of 1 Corinthians, you might think that Paul is going to start off scorched earth from the first paragraph... but he doesn’t. Instead, Paul starts off with his usual greeting, followed by reminding them of who they are in Christ and the immense blessings that come from being His children. Let’s read the passage.

If you know me at all, I am perhaps the best person to do this lesson. Spend any length of time around me and you will quickly learn that either I just got done looking for my keys, am currently in the midst of a search, or have not yet recognized that my keys are in need of being found. Maybe you can empathize with me. My wife often threatens to make me put my keys on a retractable key chain.

While my forgetfulness threatens to derail my prompt arrival home for dinner, our spiritual forgetfulness has far more substantial impacts. Spiritual forgetfulness allows our views to shift from what we know is true to unhelpful thinking and living. Forgetfulness allows our hearts and minds to be filled with discontentment, bitterness, and resentment about the way our lives are going.

Forgetfulness is so dangerous because we often forget the truth of Scripture that Jesus promised is what will set us free in John 8: free from the control of insecurities, free from the control of worry, free from the control of doubt.

Perhaps the scariest element of forgetfulness is that we rarely recognize that it is happening. It usually takes a crisis, an issue, or a painful situation that shakes us out of our way of living and reminds us of the truth.

Throughout this first passage in 1 Corinthians, let's consider four questions that will help us not fall prey to spiritual forgetfulness.

Question 1: Have You Forgotten Your Blessings?²

I know this question seems pretty obvious, but it is an important one to ask ourselves. Do I regularly reflect on the blessings that I have received from God in my life? Is my regular disposition one of complaint and criticism rather than thankfulness and appreciation?

Do you take time for intentional reflection on how God is working in your life? Practical tip: It is really hard to forget something that you are always talking about and always thinking about.

This cuts both ways — we forget what God has done for us because we fail to reflect on our blessings, but we become overwhelmed with negativity because we over-reflect on the challenges that we face.

There is a lot of overlap here with the series that we just finished, Winning the War in Your Mind. We need to guard what is happening in our thinking. We need to replace the lies with the truth. In doing so, we refocus our attention on the blessings that provide encouragement, support, and motivation in our Christian life.

We reflect to remember.

² Dever, Mark. 12 Challenges Churches Face (9Marks) (p. 13). Crossway. Kindle Edition.

Notice how Paul does this in this opening text. Pause this video, take a minute, and walk through the passage and highlight blessings that he is reminding the church of Corinth about. How many did you come up with?

In his book, Mark Dever highlights several areas of specific blessing that the Corinthian church had received, but what is really exciting is that we, as His followers, have those exact same blessings available to us today.

V. 2, Church of God — We are not just a random group of people coming together; we are His people. We are a part of His church and receive His active care in our lives.³

V. 2, Sanctified in Christ — We have been separated from the world through the righteousness and actions of Christ! We are no longer under condemnation but under life-changing grace! “Christians are sanctified in Christ Jesus, and in Him they are being changed in their attitudes and actions, their loves and longings, to be more like Him.”⁴

V. 2, Called to Be Holy — At first blush, this may not seem like a blessing. It feels more like just another thing I need to accomplish: “Be ye holy, for I am holy.”

But when we actually dig into that command, we recognize that its true purpose is to remind us that we are not enslaved to sin any longer. It reminds us that we have the Spirit at work in our lives producing good fruit. It displays God’s providential care in our lives.⁵

V. 3, Grace and Peace — Through the meritorious work of Christ, you and I have been given the extraordinary grace of God and a peace that passes all understanding, as Paul would write to the Philippians. We have received God’s grace. Ponder that sincerely for a moment. No matter what else we may receive on this earth, grace alone outweighs everything else.

Puritan pastor William Gouge remarked as he neared the end of life, filled with crippling physical pain: “Well, yet in all these there is nothing of hell, or of God's wrath.”

³ Ibid. (p. 14)

⁴ Ibid. (p. 14)

⁵ Ibid. (p. 14)

V. 5, Enriched in Christ in Every Way — As followers of Christ, our lives have been radically changed because of the work of Christ. The old man has been destroyed, and we have been given the new man, to borrow the Apostle Paul's phrasing. Every part of our lives has been directly impacted, and always for our betterment. Paul lists two specific ways we are enriched by Christ, though the list could be endless. Paul highlights our utterances (speech) and our knowledge.

It is through the work of Christ and His Word that we have the ability and enablement to have our speech changed. We are now able to speak boldly and confidently about the merits and glory of Christ, building each other up in Him.

But notice how these are tied together: He increases our knowledge, which increases our ability to speak. In Christ, we as believers are able to properly understand our purpose and are enabled to live it out. Consider for a minute how great a blessing it is to have the God of the universe give us the knowledge of Scripture to guide us and answer our questions.

Words of the Psalmist: "Thy Word is a lamp unto my feet and a light unto my path."

"What better knowledge is there? Whatever these Christians may have been struggling with, whatever questions they had outstanding, whatever uncertainties or errors, they had been enriched in Christ in every way by the gospel in all their speaking and knowledge."⁶

V. 7, So That Ye Come Behind in No Gift — If you were still on the fence about the blessings that you have received, Paul makes it really broad and simple for us to understand: We don't lack anything from God.

"They lacked nothing that God could give them. We have all that we need for what God has called us to. As Christians, we lack nothing we need to be built up in the Lord that He has not and will not supply."⁷

Whoa... even the richest parents fail to always meet that threshold with their children, but in God we have everything that we can and will ever need!

V. 8, Who Shall Also Confirm You Unto the End — The certainty of our future in heaven is blessing enough to ease the weight of the burdens of this earthly life and bring it all into the proper perspective.

⁶ Dever, Mark. 12 Challenges Churches Face (9Marks) (p. 16). Crossway. Kindle Edition.

⁷ Dever, Mark. 12 Challenges Churches Face (9Marks) (p. 17). Crossway. Kindle Edition.

Have we been blessed? The answer is a resounding and emphatic yes — 100%, absolutely! The question, though, is whether we have been living in a way that communicates that we have forgotten these blessings.

Question 2: Who Has Blessed You?⁸

While we have highlighted this truth a few times already while discussing the blessings that Paul reminded the Corinthian church about — and likewise us — we will never be in danger of making too big a deal of the One who bestows these blessings upon us.

I think if we observed our lives, we would find that we are often far too quick to attribute the bad and difficult parts of life to God and far too slow in attributing the good.

The promotion at work had nothing to do with God blessing me; it was all about my hard work. The fruit that I have seen in my witnessing to friends is not primarily due to the working of God in their hearts, but the new witnessing tactics that I have gleaned from the Sunday and Wednesday series with Pastor Josh. The obedience and attitude of my children are not due to the work of the Spirit, but the 85-step plan highlighting how amazing a parent I am.

My goal is not to make you feel as if your hard work is not meaningful; however, we must recognize who makes it possible. Think of the context of our church... when we are encouraged, taught, exhorted, helped, and ministered to by the other members of our congregation, yes, they are acting in obedience to the Word, but it is also the provision of God in our lives.

Forgetfulness about the blessings we have received robs God of the glory and praise He deserves, but it also robs us of the opportunity to grow and be ministered to when we pour out our thanksgiving and praise.

When we lose sight of Christ, we lose sight of our eternal standing. Forgetfulness will always derail our spiritual progress.

⁸ Dever, Mark. 12 Challenges Churches Face (9Marks) (p. 18). Crossway. Kindle Edition.

Question 3: How Has God Blessed You?⁹

It is time to make this lesson personal. How has God blessed you? We experience a multitude of blessings every single day, but we often fail to recognize them and allow them to slip into areas that we take for granted.

Consider the general blessings that we all experience. Each day we step out into God's gift of creation. What a blessing that is. Each day, God allows us to have another day of life here in His creation. He has provided His salvation to all who freely come to Him. He hears our prayers when we call out to Him. He provides the weather that is needed for our continued flourishing on this planet.

If you are like me, I tend to dismiss these types of blessings when I am having a pity party over how "hard" my life is, when in reality they are a testimony of God's continued faithfulness and provision in my life every single day. He has not and will never forget about us!

But beyond the general blessings, consider the specific blessings that you have experienced. God has saved you. That's personal; that's substantial. He has given you the hope of an eternity with Him that can never be taken away and provides comfort through all of life's challenges. I can know with certainty where I am going.

Reflect on the prayer requests that you have seen Him answer in your life. Perhaps it was a prayer request that you shared with the church or a group of friends in the church, and you saw God move in a miraculous way in answering your prayers.

Perhaps it was a prayer you whispered in heartbreak that no one heard except God. Remember the feeling of care and love that you experienced in that moment. That is the same care and love that we receive from Him every single day, but we forget. We become disenchanted when things don't go the way we think they should, and so in forgetfulness we minimize how much God truly has done for us.

I am reminded of the song What Is Our Hope in Life and Death: "Christ alone, Christ alone." "What is our only confidence? That our souls to Him belong." Even if we received nothing else from Him, this would be enough to demand my love and my obedience... but guess what? He continues giving every single day!

⁹ Dever, Mark. 12 Challenges Churches Face (9Marks) (p. 20). Crossway. Kindle Edition.

Question 4: Have Christians Around You Forgotten Their Blessings?¹⁰

When forgetfulness begins to breed within a church and the congregation begins to lose sight of what God has done, the effects can be devastating. Instead of a place of hope, it becomes a place of despair. Instead of a place of service, it becomes a place of selfishness. Instead of a place of joy, it becomes a place of bitterness. Instead of a place of life, it becomes a church destined for death.

Why? Because when we believe (falsely) that God has stopped working, we lose our spiritual fervor. Sadly, I think many of us have probably experienced a church like that. No one greets each other, no one asks how the others are doing, no one invites others to hear the Gospel — this place is dead.

We don't want that in our lives or our church. We want to have a healthy body, and one of the ways that we can avoid that is by reminding each other of the blessings of God. This is why times of testimony and thanksgiving are so helpful in the life of a church. It is why this is a part of our regular members' meeting gathering. We want everyone to be reminded that yes, God is still working. It reminds us that it is true of our brothers and sisters, but it is also true for ourselves.

How have you engaged those around you in the church in this area? Who was the last person you asked, "Tell me something that God is doing in your life. What is a blessing that you have experienced?" I found some conviction here myself. I do not do this nearly as often as I should.

Parents, how are you helping your young people see and express gratitude for the blessings in their lives? Are we raising victims — always being hurt, always being treated poorly, always needing things done their way — or are we raising content, generous, grateful followers of Christ?

All of us have a tendency to become forgetful. We cannot become forgetful of the truth or the blessings of God if we desire to be people who are used by God, gathered in a local church that is used by God. Let's take some time and walk through the discussion questions for this lesson together and find encouragement about who God is, what He has done, and what He is continuing to do for us!

¹⁰ Ibid. (p. 22). Crossway. Kindle Edition.