

**THE NOW...AND THE NOT YET  
1 Corinthians 1:1-9**

**I. INTRO**

- A. Anyone here ever heard of or watched a TV show called *The Gong Show*? It was a kind of early version of *American Idol*, where amateur performers could get a shot at fame. But there was a panel of celebrities who judged them—with a huge gong. If someone hit the gong, it was a signal that things weren't going well!

Carol Burnett once did a sketch where she bragged *endlessly* to her family about how she was going on The Gong Show—that *they'd* all see how talented she was. And when she made it big they'd all come crawling to her. Her moment came—and she sang the song *Feelings*. As she wailed, *Feee-e-elings! Wo...wo...wo—Fe-e-lings!* The judges were making faces and holding their ears. Finally one of them hit the gong. When they did—Carol had this shocked look on her face—and then got smaller and smaller and smaller until there was a blip—and she disappeared. Ever felt like that?

- B Confidence is a *good* thing. But *over*-confidence? Not so good. What happens when a sports team gets *over-confident*? What happens when a teenage driver who's just gotten his driver's license gets *over-confident*? It's pretty dangerous for everybody!
1. The spiritual arena is without a doubt one of the the most *dangerous* areas to get over-confident and arrogant. But it happens. And that was the problem with the church we're studying for this next year—the church in Corinth. In fact, their arrogance is an issue that will come up again and again.
  2. You need to understand. Paul was not at *all* squeamish about being in your face--telling you where the bear did it in the buckwheat—if he knew your soul—and the church was at risk. And that's what he does here.
  3. More than anything, today, I want you to have the confidence you need to have in God and what He's up to—and also have an appropriate assessment of who *you* are because of what Jesus has done for you. Not *under*-confident—and not *over*-confident. Is that fair? We're going to be studying some fairly complicated things—and I need you to let me know if I'm not explaining things well. Will you do that for me? Thanks!

**II. ARE WE THERE YET?**

- A. One of my favorite movie scenes comes from *Shrek 2* when they're traveling to the land of *Far, Far Away*. Donkey's in the back seat of the buggy, "Are we there yet?" No. *Are we there yet? No! Are we there yet? Are we there yet? No! No! Are we there... NO!* Then he starts making this funny noise with his lips—it's hilarious! Gives you some idea of my artistic IQ. But, if you've ever had kids—it is *so* typical!
- Actually, we go through life like that. When we're traveling—we want to be *there!* We're *always* waiting for something; for summer; to be 16; to be 21 and *in* a relationship; to get a *real* job. We fantasize about what it will be like to *arrive*. There's the *now* we have to live in—you know, when we're not old enough
- When we don't have enough education, enough money, enough experience—and the *not yet*—when we arrive. When the kids are at a good place, when the job is working, when... Do you understand what I mean by the *now...and the not yet?*

-Anyone here who's ever met someone who **thinks** they've arrived—but hasn't?

**Arrogance** is a word that comes to mind.

1. Let me give my best shot in explaining how this **now and not-yet** thing and why it helps us see why this church was having so many problems. Just about every culture and religion has some kind of understanding of the where civilization is going—how the world will end. There's a fancy name for that: **Eschatology**. For example, the leader of Iran, a Muslim, believes that there is a **Hidden Imam** who will be revealed in the last days—and Jesus Christ will appear and tell everyone to follow him. That's **eschatology**.

-The Bible is full of teaching about how things will end. Ever since the fall of man, prophets have said, "It will not always be like this. One day all this sorrow and sadness and death will end—and a new age of peace will be ushered in. Prophecy also made it clear that the Christ, the Messiah, would be the one to usher in this New Kingdom.

-When Jesus came, teaching, "The Kingdom is here!"—and telling people that he was the Son of God and that they needed to listen to Him—you can imagine how that hit people. They believed that the Messiah would bring a catastrophic end to the world as they knew it. The evil and oppressive present would end, and the Messiah, the Christ would bring in a New Age of **shalom**, peace, hope, joy. The Messiah would rule over this established Kingdom and evil, pain, and injustice would be gone forever.

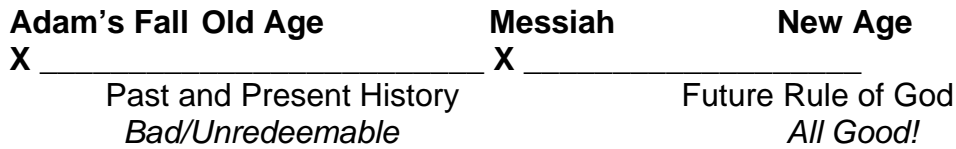
-You can imagine why the Jewish people were totally baffled when Jesus ended up like all the others who had said they were the Messiah—on a Roman cross. Dying in a way their Bible said was cursed.

2. And **that's** where God surprised everyone. When Jesus walked out of that grave alive and His Followers realized that God **had** shown up, they were confused. They quickly realized that Jesus **had** in fact defeated Satan and brought the Kingdom—but **not** as people expected. He didn't annihilate the opposition. In fact, he made a way for everyone—even enemies, Romans, Gentiles—to be forgiven and transformed and be a **part** of this Kingdom.

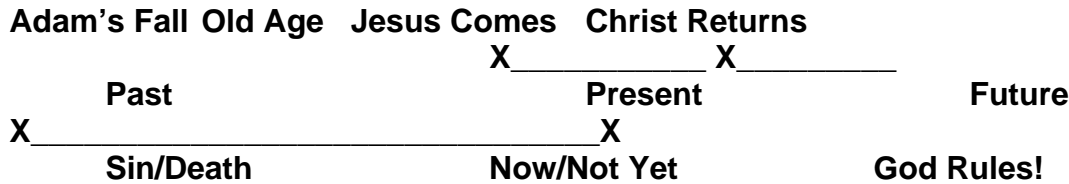
-When anyone believes that Jesus is the Messiah and puts their faith in Him, the Spirit comes to dwell in them and use them to bring God's Kingdom, God's leadership, to this planet, person by person. This is maybe the hardest part to understand: Satan is defeated, God's Kingdom is here, along with the power and blessings of the new age—but not in the fullest sense of that. We are **already** saved from our sin and its effects on us—but **not yet fully**. We have healing now, and joy now—but **not yet fully**.

-It's only at Jesus' **second** coming that all the beauty and power and life and goodness of God will be ours—and Satan and his messengers and all the sorrow and death he's caused will be gone. You've always wanted a perfect body—cancer free, cellulite free—with free-flowing hair? **That's** when it will happen. Now. I know this is a little hard to grasp—so look at these two diagrams—and you'll see the comparison.

## COMMON JEWISH VIEW OF END-TIMES



## THE N.T. VIEW OF END-TIMES



2. So. ***Are we there yet?*** Some people have pretty much hung on to the old view—the view of end times before Jesus arrived. People who are stuck there basically have this pessimistic view of the world. “Well, it’s awful here! Satan runs the show. So, let’s just circle the wagons, sing hymns, and wait for Jesus to show up.” To ***believe*** this way is to totally under-estimate how Jesus, through his death, ***thoroughly*** defeated Satan. To believe this way is to not ***under-estimate*** what God is doing and using ***us***, His people—to do—and ***over-estimate*** the power and authority of Satan.
3. But that wasn’t the Corinthian’s problem. They still were on the old diagram—but ***they*** believed that this new promised age had ***fully*** come. And because of that, they ***already*** had all the blessings and privileges and knowledge and wisdom and authority of that new age. They had ***arrived!*** They were like the ***angels!*** They had ***super***-knowledge and ***super***-powers! Given this perspective, you can ***imagine*** their egos.

-Anyone here ever seen someone who has totally over-estimated themselves? If you’ve ever watched ***American Idol***, you’ve probably seen this. Someone gets up and ***wails away***, and you can see Simon Cowell—licking his lips in anticipation of the kill.

Now. Imagine Paul’s problem in bringing these people back down to earth—when they’re ***totally*** convinced they’ve left him in the dust. “Oh, Paul! You’re ***so*** last year!”

4. The hard thing for me to understand is how they could think this when their church was in such a mess. Division, immorality, people showing off with spiritual gifts, humiliation of the poor—what was happening was ***scandalous!***

-Want to know how they pulled this off philosophically? It’s with the philosophy of ***dualism***. What this basically teaches is that the soul/spirit and body—which make up every human—are disconnected--in ***opposition*** to—at war with each other and on two separate tracks. Just so we’re clear, that’s ***not*** what we believe. We

believe that body and soul are interconnected and integrated—and that both need redeemed.

-According to dualism, the reason the body and soul are on separate tracks is because the body is corrupt, evil and irredeemable—and the soul/spirit is good and holy—but held down, held back by this anchor; the body. The soul, the mind is fed and built up with secret knowledge and wisdom. You deal with the body by either denying it pleasure of any kind—called **asceticism**, or giving it everything it craves—which is called **hedonism**.

-That may give you some idea why Paul is dealing with so much junk in this church—and yet them thinking that they've arrived, spiritually. That they're extremely wise, spiritual people—and have even passed Paul with their secret knowledge and insights.

**That's** why you hear Paul emphasizing that the **cross** and **Christ crucified** are the wisdom of God, even though people of their culture see that message as foolishness.

-At the very core of his letter in dealing with their arrogance and superiority, Paul makes it clear that our spiritual growth becomes obvious, not by how much we know, but by whether or not we **love**. **Love wins!** **Love** is what ultimately matters. Love is on the final exam.

- B. Now, here's the deal. We as Jesus' followers find ourselves caught in the quandary of the **now** and the **not yet**. Listen to how Paul puts it:  
**To the church of God in Corinth, to those sanctified in Christ Jesus and called to be his holy people, together with all those everywhere who call on the name of our Lord Jesus Christ—their Lord and ours (1 Corinthians 1:2 TNIV).**

1. Look at the first part. **To the church of God in Corinth, to those sanctified in Christ Jesus.** When Paul says, **to those sanctified**, know what he's calling them? **Saints!** When I think of a **saint**, I don't usually think of someone who's selfish, divisive, arrogant—and morally loose, do you?
  - a. There's this story about two incredibly wicked brothers who were both known to be involved in organized crime and all kinds of sleazy stuff. Well, one died—so the remaining brother went to a local minister and told him that he wanted him to do the funeral—and to tell the people that his brother was a saint.
 

-The minister said, "I couldn't do that! It would be lying!" The brother said, "I know you're in the middle of raising money for your new building. I'll give \$100,000 for your building if you'll do this." The minister said, "I'll pray about." He called the brother back a little while later and told him he'd do it. At the funeral, the minister got up and said, "The man in this casket was a liar, an adulterer, a murderer and a cheat—but compared to his brother, he was a **saint**."
  - b. Why does Paul call these people **saints**? Well, he's not comparing them to their evil twin. He calls them that because that's who they are **now**—but **only** because of Jesus. And that's true of you. Jesus lived a perfect life—the only one who ever has. When he died on that cross on Passover, 30 AD, he died for **my** sins. Paid for them all—and then rose from the dead.

-Because of that—I have been forgiven completely for everything. When God looks at my life, He doesn't see my messy record; He sees Jesus perfect life. That's **now!** And that's true for you, too. That's what makes faith in Jesus so opposite from religion. [ Religion = **DO.**] You just keep working and working—and maybe, **maybe** God will accept you. Faith in Jesus = **DONE [on screen]**. Because of Jesus, we're already accepted. We're saints. Holy ones

- c. If you've put your faith in Jesus and what he's done, the truth about you **right now** is amazing! You're a saint. You are **redeemed**. You are **accepted—adopted** by God as **His Child**.

-Whether you know it or not, you are a friend of Christ. You are a member of his Body. You can come into God's presence at any time. You are secure, because he will never disown you. You are free to live like Jesus, to love, to forgive, to live the life Jesus calls you to live. You can engage meaningfully and powerfully in God's plan to bring His Kingdom, His leadership to **every** part of this planet!

-That's what you have **now** because Jesus defeated Satan through his death on a cross—and his resurrection. The **now** part of you and me is absolutely amazing! You and I need to **know** that and **celebrate! Party!**

2. That was true of the Corinthian believes, too...but they had missed the **not yet** part. The **not yet** part of my life is humbling. It's messy; unflattering. That's why I need—and **you** need the Holy Spirit to clean me up, repair the damage, renew my mind, transform my heart. And **that's** why Paul makes this seemingly contradictory statement:

**...To those sanctified in Christ Jesus and called to be his holy people (1 Corinthians 1:2a).** See the contradiction? "You're saints because of Jesus; now you have to grow into your name and **be** his holy people." To actually look like Jesus, live like Jesus, and **love like Jesus!**

- a. Let me use a couple of illustrations that might bring this home for you. A woman goes through public school, high school, university, and medical school—and **finally** gets the coveted M.D. after her name.

-What if she never again read any medical journals, took any classes, connected with colleagues or anything—but just did her quota of patients; then went home and played with her cat. What would you think? Would you want her for a physician after 25 years?

-Another example. A couple figures out the whole reproduction thing—and have children. So, they receive the title of **parent**. But they never adapt their home, their lifestyle or their priorities to that. In fact, they're mainly concerned about **their** careers, **their** nest egg, and **their** inalienable rights to a hassle-free life. sleep, and vacations without ankle-biters!"

- b. Do you see my point? It's one thing to have someone **declare** you to be a doctor or a parent—and even have the diploma or birth certificate to prove it. But it's quite another thing to grow into it—and live it out in a way that is

satisfying, wholesome, and beneficial. People who settle for paperwork get **stuck**.

- c. And when you're stuck, you simply redefine your behavior to make it fit. I went to a seminary that taught something called **entire sanctification**. That's a big word that simply means that it was possible, in this lifetime, to get so thoroughly zapped by the Holy Spirit that you never sin again. So. What happens when you **still sin**? Well, you redefine it. "I wasn't angry when I threw the phone through the wall; I was **righteously indignant!**"
  - d. We see this issue in the health and wealth gospel preached on TV every Sunday. That it's **always** God's will for His people to be healthy, successful and happy and grow great kids. And when that doesn't happen? The **escape** clause is, "Well, you obviously didn't have enough faith, or you have sin in your life."
3. Paul totally affirms the **now** part of who they are because of Jesus: The gathered people of God in Corinth. Redeemed and magnificently gifted and called to make a difference in God's Kingdom.

**I always thank my God for you because of his grace given you in Christ Jesus. For in him you have been enriched in every way—with all kinds of speech and with all knowledge—God thus confirming our testimony about Christ among you. Therefore you do not lack any spiritual gift as you eagerly wait for our Lord Jesus Christ to be revealed (1 Corinthians 1:4-7 TNIV).**

\*Paul tells them that they know what they need to know. They speak well. They aren't lacking in spiritual gifts. God has given them **all they need** because they are His beloved children!

-Paul was saying, "What you have been given by God is a **magnificent thing!** Now; **develop it. Grow. Let Jesus truly be Lord—the One who prevails over your daily life!**

- 4. But **then** Paul makes the **not yet** part clear. **He will also keep you firm to the end, so that you will be blameless on the day of our Lord Jesus Christ. God is faithful, who has called you into fellowship with his Son, Jesus Christ our Lord (1 Corinthians 1:8-9 TNIV).**
  - He says, "You think you've arrived. That you're like the angels. I've got news. **You ain't there yet!** But that's okay. God is a **finisher**. He is faithful even when we aren't. He'll do the work you so desperately need. But if you're going to be the people he's called you to be, you have to get serious about the **not yet!** Part of your life—not make excuses for it. You have to grow into the name God has already given you!

### III. STRUGGLING WITH THE **NOT YET**

- A. It is **so** important for you and me to know—and see the **now** about our lives as followers of Jesus. Life gets messy, doesn't it? Anyone here ever been so discouraged after a spectacular failure that you've wondered, "Maybe I don't even **know** Jesus!"
  - I often feel weak and small and ineffective and unimportant. I forget who I am because of Jesus. Do you? Let me remind you! Irregardless of how you **feel**, you are God's beloved child. Treasured. You have instant access to Him all the time.

-You are forgiven from every sin, freed from the power of sin and death—and **accepted forever** by the God of this Universe! The Spirit of God lives in you!

And He is **not** a spirit of fear, but of love and power and a sound mind. You have been gifted and called to make a difference in this world. Together, we are the salt of the earth, the light of the world—more than conquerors. Together, we are part of an underground revolution, headed by Jesus Christ, that, as we speak, is moving across this planet and **will** never, **can** never be stopped or even hindered. ***That's who you ARE! Right now!***

1. Now, do you think followers of Jesus will ever be written up in ***Time*** or ***Maclean's***, or ***The Toronto Star*** like that? Of course not. Even what *I* know about Jesus' followers here doesn't seem to match that. But, it doesn't matter—that's ***who*** we are—and also who we're ***called to be!***

-I found myself strangely comforted recently to find out that even someone like Mother Theresa sometimes felt far from God. Did you see the recent press on this? She was a legend in her own lifetime because of how she gave her life for the poor and forgotten. And ***yet***--she struggled. Doubted. Feared. Sometimes felt like a hypocrite. Why? Because, like us, she was caught between the ***now...***and the ***not yet!*** Like us, she was flawed and very real, very human.

2. This ***not-yet*** part of Jesus' people—even Jesus himself--is the part that mystifies the people of our world the most. People say things like, "Well, if there's a God, why doesn't He bring justice to this world? How could He ***ever*** let a Hitler...or a Stalin just butcher people? How could He ***ever*** let cancer and AIDS and poverty stalk so much of the world? And what about tsunamis and hurricanes and earthquakes and mine cave-ins and the wars...the list is endless.

-When you tell them that Jesus, God in flesh showed up here, ate our food, felt our pain and saw our sadness and died at our hands, most people would ask, "***Why didn't He solve the problem of suffering before He went back to the Father?*** Why didn't He just end the whole sorry mess then instead of just healing a few people and leaving a rag-tag group to carry on his mission."

-Jesus could've done that instantly—***no problemo!*** But He's chosen to use us—His followers--to bring His leadership, His compassion, His power to make a make a difference to this world by us submitting to His leadership, His Kingdom. We ***can*** make a difference. And if we just sit around helplessly and wait for Jesus to return, we will have ***missed*** the point of why He has left us here and called us to be His Body and do His work.

-And then there ***IS*** the ***not yet*** part that Jesus' second coming will solve as he puts an end to evil and suffering for all time and eternity. And ***then*** all the little rebel kingdoms of this world that have created such a mess will be God's—and who ***we*** are in that day will totally match our name: ***Saint!*** We will ***finally*** be like Jesus!

-But we know how it ends! What we know ***now, for certain***, is that as aggressive and destructive as hatred is today, ***God's love will win the ultimate victory!*** Unfortunately, ***Time, MacLeans*** and ***The Toronto Star*** will not be around to publish the report. Know this, friends--as much as you and I don't see or understand God's actions now—He is ***actively*** but ***secretly*** working in every congress, ever strategy meeting, every corporate board room—in ***every*** situation

in this world. And He has His people **everywhere**. And one day—**every** Kingdom will be His!

- B. Here's the question for you and me. It's **not**, "Am I living up to my name as a saint." I **know** that's not true. I can't. That's my calling. That's the direction I'm going in. But I'm not there yet—by **any** stretch of the imagination! And I struggle with that.

-But I **am** called to live in God's Kingdom—under His full leadership. I am called to love and forgive—even when I don't feel like it. And I am called, as part of God's Kingdom, to live for His priorities—not mine. I am called and gifted and empowered, even though I live imperfectly, to submit to Him every day—and look for places to bring His love, His compassion, His joy and His peace.

-And as I submit to Him and live in His power—I **can** make the difference of the **not yet** in a very **now** life with all it's mess and imperfection and sadness. I'm on a journey in doing that—and I want to invite you to travel with me. I think if we travel together, that could be powerful—and mutually encouraging!

1. I'm trying to get past the individualism my life is infested with. This letter was not sent to a group of individuals; it was sent to a **community**. People who were interdependent.  
I am **learning** how to live as part of Christ's body—doing his work in redeeming the world. Let's do that together!
2. We live in a world saturated by greed and consumerism—run by the **monster of more**. I don't even have to **try** to constantly think about "bigger" and "more." I don't want to be blinded to need by my own greed. Let's grow in this **together**, okay
3. I'm struggling to move beyond our culture's definition of success. Of what it means to really **be** someone significant—mostly by what you achieve and how many people who know about you. And how many people like and accept your ideas. Anyone else struggle with this?
4. So, why doesn't God zap all the weakness and selfishness and narcissism out of our hearts? Make us perfect. Instantly. Wouldn't that make us more believable? -It's because He **values** the struggle. He **works** through the struggle. I struggle with the temptation to trade in everything I love and value for some thing cheap. I struggle with my ego, my need to be right, to be listened to. I struggle with the temptation to be mean and selfish. It's a **struggle!**

-But there is something that happens in me when I have to face who I am, who I'm destined to be—and the long path inbetween. Somehow being Jesus to the world through a faulty body and faulty life has incredible power to it. God is at work developing perseverance, endurance and faith—as I live, and you live--squished between the **already--the NOW**, and the **not yet**.

-The Good News is that we have God behind us, all Heaven cheering for us—and I have **you**, and you have **me**—and others to live the **now** in a way that is eternally significant!

#### IV. IT'S FRIDAY...BUT *SUNDAY'S* COMIN'!

A. Anyone here know what ***D-Day*** was? It's when the Allied Forces hit the beaches of Normandy and invaded Europe. It was bloody and difficult. But when it was successful, ***everyone***—even the Germans—knew how the war would end. ***VE Day***, which took place several months later, was the actual end of the war.

1. When Jesus gave his life on the cross and defeated Satan—and brought in his Kingdom—that was D-Day. That ***day*** God's victory of Satan, death, poverty and heartache was certain. There's no doubt about the ultimate victory—and how things will turn out. But we're not there yet. ***D-Day*** is the now. ***VE Day*** will happen when Jesus comes back for us!
2. When TV networks celebrated the 50th anniversary of the invasion of Normandy back in 1994, news broadcasters interviewed a lot of aging veterans about their memories of that historic event. One writer says that as he was watching the reports, two contrasting interviews were put back to back.

-The first man was a former marine who had landed on Omaha beach. He described this vicious bloody battle in which most of his unit was wiped out by the Axis powers. As one of the few survivors of this fight, the conclusion he came to was, "We're going to lose."

-In the very next interview, a reconnaissance pilot spoke. His mission was to fly over the entire Normandy area, carefully observe what was happening, and then report on the progress to Eisenhower and the other generals. So, he flew long hours on the first day, then the second and the third--observing everything that was happening. He said, "I came to the conclusion--***we're going to WIN.***"

-The difference? ***Perspective!***

B. In the mud, the blood and the tears of the now, you can lose perspective. You can forget who you are. You can forget what we are called to do—and who we are called to be. So, remember; the outcome of it all is inevitable! Satan has already been defeated—and Jesus has been declared Lord of all! Let's not get ***over-confident*** or ***arrogant***; but let's not forget our calling. Let's ***live*** our destiny as His People!