Fellowship with Jesus Christ

1 Corinthians 1:1-17

Key Verse: 1:9 “God is faithful, who has called you into fellowship with his Son, Jesus Christ our Lord.”

Happy New Year! We thank God that last week he gave us a spiritual direction for the new year, which is to glorify God with one mind and one voice. (Ro 15:6) Even though we are all different in many ways, having different voices and different minds, we deny ourselves to make one voice and one mind for the glory of God. For the year 2023 we will study 1 Corinthians to practice this new year's direction. In fact, there were some problems in the church of Corinth like we have now. When we study 1 Corinthians prayerfully, we will have answers and learn how to glorify God with one voice and one mind.

1 Corinthians was one of the earliest letters written by Apostle Paul, while he was in Ephesus during his third missionary journey. According to Acts 18, the church of Corinth was established by Paul, who vigorously preached the gospel for one and half years until he left for Syria. (Ac 18:18) In Corinth Paul met Priscilla and Aquila, devoted Jewish Christians, who brought Apollos to the church. (Ac 18:24-26) Paul wrote this letter with a shepherd’s heart for his sheep in the church that was struggling with many problems among the members such as: division, lawsuits among the believers, sexual immorality, marital unfaithfulness, the misuse of spiritual gifts, and so on. The members of the church were not easy to keep their faith in the ungodly and secular atmosphere in the city of Corinth. The city of Corinth was located 45 miles southwest away from Athens in Greece and known as the center of commerce and trade in those days. Like any large commercial city, Corinth was prevailing with immorality and pagan worship. The people of those days said ‘*Corinthianize*’ which means “practice sexual immorality.” In fact, the city people worshiped Aphrodite, the goddess of love, and there were 1,000 priestesses in the temple who practiced prostitution in the name of their religion. It is amazing that Apostle Paul overcame all these unfavorable atmospheres and preached the gospel and built a church in the city of Corinth.

Still, Corinth Church was immature and weak in many ways. There were no formal instructions or regulations for the church like today. Most of them were house churches like our church. From chapter 1 to 16 Paul pointed out their problems one by one and counseled them on how to solve their problems and grow as a mature church.

First, fellowship with Christ (1-9) In verse 1 Paul introduced himself as an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God. Mentioning his name and the title at the beginning of the letter was common. Paul called himself an apostle of Christ Jesus even though he was not one of the Twelve disciples of Jesus. Paul received the apostleship directly from Jesus on the way to Damascus as is written in Acts 9. Paul’s apostleship was the will of God for the world mission. I believe that all who attend this service are sent here by the will of God. Jesus said, “*You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you...*” (Jn 15:16)

Look at verse 2. “***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***.” In this short verse we learn the definition of the word ‘church’. A church is the assembly of those sanctified in Christ Jesus. Being sanctified means ‘being cleansed and forgiven by the blood of Jesus.’ A church is the gathering of those who were cleansed by the blood of Jesus and forgiven through faith in Jesus Christ. A church is also the assembly of those who call on the name of the Lord Jesus Christ. Anyone who receives Jesus Christ as their Lord and Savior can be a member of the church. Those who call on the name of the Lord Jesus are brothers and sisters in Christ. The word ‘church’ in Greek is *ecclesia*, which means ‘those who are called out’. A church is the congregation of those who are called out to worship God and have fellowship with Christ and in Christ as brothers and sisters.

What was Paul’s thankful topic when he thought about Corinth Church? Look at verses 4-5. “***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--***” Paul was thankful for God’s grace upon the church. God’s grace was revealed in them with many kinds of spiritual gifts. Look at verses 6-7. “***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***.” Paul urged them not to lack any spiritual gifts. According to chapter 12:1-11 the church received spiritual gifts from the Lord such as the gift of healing, of speaking in tongues, of interpreting different languages, of prophesying, and so on. Paul said all these gifts came from the same Spirit and the one Lord. (1Co 12:4,11,20) These spiritual gifts are all given from the Lord by his grace. All these spiritual gifts were given to them to build up the church, not to tear down others. Is there anyone amongst us who received special spiritual gifts from the Lord? Remember that the Lord gave them to you to build up the church, the body of Christ, not to tear down others. We have many different parts, but we share one body, who is Jesus Christ. We should be united with Christ and in Christ for one purpose which is to build up the body of Christ, the church. (12:20) All gifts and blessings which we received from the Lord are only by God’s grace. We are saved by his grace, and we are called by his grace, and we are working by his grace. Paul said later, “*By the grace of God I am what I am.*” (15:10)

Look at verses 8-9. “***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***.” In these short verses Paul mentioned the purpose and the meaning of the church again. Paul said that God called them into fellowship with his Son Jesus Christ. Here the word ‘fellowship’ in Greek is *koinonia*. In the Bible the word ‘church’ contains two main definitions, “*ecclesia*” and “*koinonia*”. The word *koinonia* means ‘fellowship’, ‘having personal relationship with Christ and with others in Christ.” Why is koinonia’ fellowship with Christ’ important? Fellowship with Christ is the most essential and crucial task for Christians. I asked their new year resolution from several Christian friends. One answered that he wants to spend more time praying and memorizing Bible verses than last year. Others said that they want to pray and read the Bible every day before going to bed. I answered that I want to walk with the Lord faithfully and daily. All our answers are the same, which is to have fellowship with Christ Jesus. Jesus said in John 15:5, “*I am the vine; you are the branches. If you remain in me and I in you, you will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing.*” Having koinonia with Christ means ‘remaining in Jesus with a vine and branch relationship’. A branch cannot survive by itself. It should stick to the vine, which can provide necessary water and nutrition.

We have many ways to have fellowship with Christ. As I mentioned before, we can have fellowship with Christ by reading and memorizing his words. We can meet Jesus in our prayer and in our praise. We also meet Jesus in serving the Lord in the church or helping other people in need. Some have fellowship with Jesus in their suffering and hardship. They share Christ’s pain and sorrow while they are going through difficult times. Having fellowship with Christ has many different cases, but one is to ‘be united with Christ’. We become one with Christ and in Christ. Paul explains the meaning of being united with Christ in the book of Romans. He said, ‘*For if we have been united with him in a death like his, we will certainly also be united with him in a resurrection like his...Now if we died with Christ, we believe that we will also live with him.*” (Ro 6:5,8) We have koinonia with Christ until we become united with Christ in his death and in his resurrection. Our God is faithful. He called us here to have fellowship with his Son, Jesus Christ our Lord through the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit enables us to be united with Christ. The Holy Spirit is the Spirit of Christ. The Holy Spirit enables us to deepen our relationship with Jesus and to enrich the grace and knowledge of Christ. As Christ made us be one with God the Father, so the Holy Spirit makes us be one with Christ. Amen! I pray that we all may have deep koinonia with Christ Jesus' new year so that we may be united with him in his suffering and in his glory. Amen!

Second, division (10-17). All problems in churches arise when they fail to have fellowship with Christ Jesus. There was a division in Corinth Church. Look at verses 10-12. “***I appeal to you, brothers and sisters, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that all of you agree with one another in what you say and that there be no divisions among you, but that you be perfectly united in mind and thought. My brothers and sisters, some from Chloe’s household have informed me that there are quarrels among you. What I mean is this: One of you says, “I follow Paul”; another, “I follow Apollos”; another, “I follow Cephas”; still another, “I follow Christ.***” (10-12) Church members followed several different leaders. Some followed Paul, who was the founder of the church. Others followed Apollos, who was the current leader and excellent teacher. Some Jewish believers claimed that Cephas, Simon Peter, the top disciple of Jesus, should be their leader. Those who did not agree with all of these said that they follow Christ Jesus as their leader. Paul was speechless about their ignorance and foolishness and said in verse 13. “***Is Christ divided? Was Paul crucified for you? Were you baptized in the name of Paul?***” Paul rebuked their division and encouraged them to be perfectly united in mind and thought. (10) The word ‘conflict’ comes from the word ‘difference’. We have conflicts because we are all different. Conflict and division come from difference. When we admit differences and respect other’s ideas and suggestions, we can avoid conflict. How then can we become perfectly united in mind and thought as Paul appealed in verse 10? Literally it is impossible. But Paul believed that it is possible when we all have fellowship with Christ Jesus. This is possible when we are united with Christ Jesus. When we die to our sins and become a new creation in Christ, we become one. In Ephesians 2:14-16 Paul said that Christ Jesus destroyed the dividing wall of hostility and created in himself one new humanity out of the two. In short, in Jesus all become one.

The new year has already started. I believe that you all have new year resolutions. I pray that all may focus on the fellowship with Christ Jesus. I believe that all good things, and even miracles will come to you and your family through your fellowship with Christ. May God richly bless you and your relationship, your koinonia with Christ Jesus the year of 2023. Amen!