God’s Sheep Are All Like the Black Sheep of the Family

Intro to 1 Corinthians

I’m sure many of you are familiar with the term “The Black Sheep,” but for those of you who aren’t I would like to begin with an explanation from writingexplained.com.

Writingexplained.com defines the term “Black Sheep,” as:

“…The oddball member of the family who does not fall in line with the others; the worst member of the family.”

They go on to say…

“Also used as the shortened phrase black sheep, the black sheep of the family is someone who makes bad decisions or has a bad reputation within a family unit. While the rest of a family may follow laws, the person who is the black sheep of that family may have been to jail or is simply the “odd man out” when it comes to family relations.

While often used to describe a person with drastically bad behavior, the phrase can also be used to describe somebody who does not fit in with his or her family.”:

Have you ever been called the Black Sheep of the family?

Have you ever felt like you were the Black Sheep of the family?

Have you ever felt like you weren’t loved because you were the black sheep of the fam?

It is thought that this phrase may have originated due to the fact that black sheep were not worth as much as white sheep because their wool was more difficult to dye various colors.

I want to propose that the book of 1 Corinthians was written to black sheep everywhere. And it was written not to shame people who were different or who had made bad choices in life, it was written to help those who were born black sheep, to walk as the white sheep that God had created them to be.

To some degree, I will leave it up to you to decide whether you are one of the black sheep in God’s family or a white sheep. Although, based on the words of the prophet Isaiah it should be obvious who we are…

“5 But he was pierced for our rebellion,

crushed for our sins.

He was beaten so we could be whole.

He was whipped so we could be healed.

6 All of us, like sheep (probably should say like the black sheep), have strayed away.

We have left God’s paths to follow our own.

Yet the Lord laid on him

the sins of us all.”

Isaiah 53:5-6

With that said, let’s take a look at the context of the Book of 1 Corinthians:

First of all Biblical Corinth was located on an isthmus that connects Pelponnesus to the rest of Greece. And the BlueletterBible.org says of it:

“Corinth’s location made east-west trade common because ships that traveled from the Adriatic Sea to the Aegean Sea would cut through this isthmus to save hundreds of miles of sea travel. The method of crossing the isthmus involved putting the ships on rollers and transporting them across the four mile stretch of earth that connected the two land masses.” They go on to say that: “the city was well-trafficked with travelers; and so the population of about 600.00 people was quite diverse. Some of the outcomes of this diversity were the prosperity of religious syncretism and immorality. Corinth had a reputation for its depravity, and the temple prostitutes of Aphrodite did not help in saving the city’s bad name.”

Some would even use the term “Corinthianize,” to describe the practice of fornication.

This city was like a giant shipping hub…Many of the population, by todays equivalence, would be longshoreman, truckers, and sailors on commercial vessels. Now, I don’t have anything against truckers, longshoreman, deckhands, or captains of boats, but they can have quite the reputation for “Black sheep” kind of living.

Corinth was a bit of a wild place.

And guess what? There was a church in Corinth. The apostle Paul had established this church. Paul’s first visit to Corinth is recorded in Acts 18:1-17.

The scriptures say that Paul spent about 18 months in Corinth beginning his ministry in the synagogues with Jews and then moving to the Gentiles.

“4 Each Sabbath found Paul at the synagogue, trying to convince the Jews and Greeks alike. 5 And after Silas and Timothy came down from Macedonia, Paul spent all his time preaching the word. He testified to the Jews that Jesus was the Messiah. 6 But when they opposed and insulted him, Paul shook the dust from his clothes and said, “Your blood is upon your own heads—I am innocent. From now on I will go preach to the Gentiles.”

7 Then he left and went to the home of Titius Justus, a Gentile who worshiped God and lived next door to the synagogue. 8 Crispus, the leader of the synagogue, and everyone in his household believed in the Lord. Many others in Corinth also heard Paul, became believers, and were baptized.

9 One night the Lord spoke to Paul in a vision and told him, “Don’t be afraid! Speak out! Don’t be silent! 10 For I am with you, and no one will attack and harm you, for many people in this city belong to me.” 11 So Paul stayed there for the next year and a half, teaching the word of God.”

Paul loved these people in Corinth and even describes himself like a father figure to them. And father’s love all of their children. Even those who are the “black sheep.”

Many when studying 1 Corinthians act like the church in Corinth was a “Bad church” and that the people were way worse than they are. I am not going to tell you one way or the other. I will let you judge for yourself.

Are you a prodigal son or daughter?

From what I see of Christian’s social media these days, most seem to present themselves as the people who have it all figured out and are pure as the driven snow.

I even read a post lately that said something like, “it is us against them; Good against evil. Following Jesus is all about choosing sides.” You know what, it may be true that following Jesus is about choosing sides, but, as Christians we should never forget that where we came from. Naturally we have more in common with the “other” side than we do with Jesus. Let’s not get all self-righteous, we are in this together…even with the them’s of this world. Remember the scriptures say:

“6 When we were utterly helpless, Christ came at just the right time and died for us sinners. 7 Now, most people would not be willing to die for an upright person, though someone might perhaps be willing to die for a person who is especially good. 8 But God showed his great love for us by sending Christ to die for us while we were still sinners.”

Romans 5:6-8

Do you see yourself as a black sheep or a white sheep or white sheep in God’s family?

Either way, Paul’s reason for writing to the Church in Corinth was because he loved them very much, just as God loved them very much. Parents and Shepherds love even the wayward. And when they correct and discipline it isn’t out of hate or spite, it is because their belief that even those who are born black sheep are meant to be cleansed so that, through God’s eyes, they are as white as snow.

Did you know that many sheep are born black and later their wool turns white?

As I just shared with you, Paul had established the church in Corinth, and he was hearing some reports of some serious “Black sheep types of activity.”

Among the things the Apostle addresses in his letter are:

Divisions in the church

Blatant sexual immorality

Christians were suing each other

He addressed some concerns with regard to Marriage

He writes about Christian liberty

He addresses modesty (Apparently some women were flaunting their wealth through the way they dressed).

He shares with them about spiritual gifts and how to use them to build up the family

And he takes some time to share about how important the resurrection is for Christianity.

Remember, though Paul is writing to instruct and correct, it is all in the context of those who are loved as children of God.

I would guess that some of you have struggled to live a sexually pure life? Have been ever hated someone because of differing opinions on issues? Have sued someone or been sued? Have had marriage problems and/or questions about marriage? And maybe you have wondered just how you fit into God’s family?

Hopefully, as we study this letter, each of us can allow God’s power to dye some of our black wool to white. Oh, don’t get me wrong, you and I will probably still have feelings of being like a black sheep. In fact this is absolutely necessary. If you don’t feel a little like a black sheep, than you are self-deceived and too self-righteous. Just know this… God love’s His sheep! God is pleased with His sheep. Even though we, like the Corinthians, are in a process of transformation.

As I have said before, it is the righteousness of Jesus that buys us a safe environment for growth and change. Remember Titus 3 says:

“3 Once we, too, were foolish and disobedient. We were misled and became slaves to many lusts and pleasures. Our lives were full of evil and envy, and we hated each other. 4 But—

When God our Savior revealed his kindness and love, 5 he saved us, not because of the righteous things we had done, but because of his mercy. He washed away our sins, giving us a new birth and new life through the Holy Spirit. 6 He generously poured out the Spirit upon us through Jesus Christ our Savior. 7 Because of his grace he made us right in his sight and gave us confidence that we will inherit eternal life.”

Titus 3:3-7

Let’s begin with the introduction of Paul’s letter to the church at Corinth:

“1 This letter is from Paul, chosen by the will of God to be an apostle of Christ Jesus, and from our brother Sosthenes.

2 I am writing to God’s church in Corinth, to you who have been called by God to be his own holy people. He made you holy by means of Christ Jesus, just as he did for all people everywhere who call on the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, their Lord and ours.

3 May God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ give you grace and peace.

Paul Gives Thanks to God

4 I always thank my God for you and for the gracious gifts he has given you, now that you belong to Christ Jesus. 5 Through him, God has enriched your church in every way—with all of your eloquent words and all of your knowledge. 6 This confirms that what I told you about Christ is true. 7 Now you have every spiritual gift you need as you eagerly wait for the return of our Lord Jesus Christ. 8 He will keep you strong to the end so that you will be free from all blame on the day when our Lord Jesus Christ returns. 9 God will do this, for he is faithful to do what he says, and he has invited you into partnership with his Son, Jesus Christ our Lord.”

1 Corinthians 1:1-9

Does this sound like a man who hates these bad people? Or does it sound like a proud father or a loving shepherd?

After introducing himself and Sosthenes, Paul gives thanks to God for them and the gifts that God had given them. And for the faithfulness of Jesus who, He believed, would present them as blameless.

Please let this be the lens that you look through as we study this 1st century letter. Even though Paul was writing to address “problems,” he was writing as one who deeply loved the problem children.

Don’t be confused, if you have trusted yourself to Jesus, you are loved by God. Problems and all. Don’t think for a second that God doesn’t want you to address your problems, but also, never buy into the lie that God wants you out of the family.

In our study of 1 Corinthians we are going to see how Paul addresses a man who is sleeping with his father’s wife and bragging about it. Paul’s hope was that this man would be rightly restored to healthy fellowship with God’s family.

Just as the Prodigal Son’s Father ran to his son with open arms as he returned home, so the Apostle Paul loved the church at Corinth and was looking forward to their repentance. God’s desire is the same for us. Each of us is on a journey where the Holy Spirit reveals the truth about us…To us.

Remember the Apostle Paul wrote to the church in Philipi:

“12 I don’t mean to say that I have already achieved these things or that I have already reached perfection. But I press on to possess that perfection for which Christ Jesus first possessed me. 13 No, dear brothers and sisters, I have not achieved it, but I focus on this one thing: Forgetting the past and looking forward to what lies ahead, 14 I press on to reach the end of the race and receive the heavenly prize for which God, through Christ Jesus, is calling us.

15 Let all who are spiritually mature agree on these things. If you disagree on some point, I believe God will make it plain to you. 16 But we must hold on to the progress we have already made.

17 Dear brothers and sisters, pattern your lives after mine, and learn from those who follow our example. 18 For I have told you often before, and I say it again with tears in my eyes, that there are many whose conduct shows they are really enemies of the cross of Christ. 19 They are headed for destruction. Their god is their appetite, they brag about shameful things, and they think only about this life here on earth. 20 But we are citizens of heaven, where the Lord Jesus Christ lives. And we are eagerly waiting for him to return as our Savior. 21 He will take our weak mortal bodies and change them into glorious bodies like his own, using the same power with which he will bring everything under his control.”

Philippians 3:12-21

As we take a trip through 1 Corinthians bring your black wool to God and trust Him and rely on His power to present you as white as snow.

If, on the other hand, you’re wool is already white enough, than you can choose to listen along and be disgusted with just how bad this church in Corinth was.