

We are beginning a new series in the letters to the Corinthians. It was a church founded by the Apostle Paul, so he is writing as a father to his wayward children. Charles Hodges introduces the letter by saying, *The letters to the Corinthian ... reveal to us more of the personal character of the apostle than any of his other letters. They show him to us as a man, as a pastor, as a counsellor, as in conflict not only with heretics but with personal enemies. They reveal his wisdom, his zeal, his forbearance, his liberality of principle and practice in all matters not affecting salvation, his strictness in all matters of right and wrong, his humility, and perhaps above all his unwearied activity and wonderful endurance.*<sup>i</sup> It is a letter consisting mostly of correction to this fledgling church, steering them away from the culture and toward Christian principles. This letter is the most informative account in the New Testament as to how the early church functioned. Today we will take an in depth look at Paul's greeting to the Corinthians.

<sup>1</sup> *Paul, called by the will of God to be an apostle of Christ Jesus, and our brother Sosthenes,* 1 Corinthians 1:1 Paul was originally called Saul of Tarsus. Tarsus was a town of major universities. He studied under a leading rabbi of his day, Gamaliel (Acts 22:3<sup>ii</sup>). He thought the Jesus' sect, called The Way, was perverting Judaism (Acts 9:2<sup>iii</sup>). He became a lead persecutor of this new faction. He was converted by a divine encounter with the resurrected Jesus on the road to Damascus (Acts 9:3-6<sup>iv</sup>). After his conversion, the zeal he had against the followers of Jesus became a zeal to prove to people that Jesus is the Messiah (Acts 22:3<sup>v</sup>; Titus 2:14<sup>vi</sup>).

On his first missionary journey he led a Roman Governor named Paul to Christ (Acts 13:7<sup>vii</sup>). Most of the apostle's converts were Roman or Greek and they could better relate to a name they were familiar with (1 Corinthians 9:22<sup>viii</sup>). It was common at the time for Jews in the Greek world to adopt a Greek name while using their Hebrew name when among fellow Jews. We can't be sure if Saul used the name Paul before meeting the governor, but the Bible only uses the name Paul for Saul after his encounter with him. Paul seems to never revert to using his Hebrew name, Saul. Perhaps that is because he was called as a missionary to the Gentiles (Acts 9:15<sup>ix</sup>). Some of the most famous missionaries like Hudson Taylor adopted the same strategy of identifying with the culture they ministered to as much as possible without compromising the message. Another possible reason Paul never reverted to using the name Saul is that he identified that name with his old life, the zealous Hebrew persecutor of Christians. Many Christians around the world today change their names when they become a follower of Jesus. One local pastor quickly corrects me if I call him Jim because that is what he was called before he came to Christ. Now he is James, a new creation, "and don't you forget it!" We should all have that conviction that we are no longer the person we once were whether we change our name or not.

In this first verse he alludes to that conversion experience by saying he was called by the will of God. It certainly wasn't his own will for he was on his way to arrest Christians (Acts 22:5<sup>x</sup>). The calling was to be an apostle, which means an official representative of Jesus who testifies to the resurrection of Jesus and His teachings. He is not bringing the Corinthians his opinions or scholarship. He is representing the One who sent Him, the Lord Jesus. He is not superior to other Christians, but God's calling on his life is to be respected. The role of apostle was the most important calling in the early

church for through them the record of Jesus teaching and the principle doctrines of the church were established and should be unchanged to this day (Ephesians 4:11<sup>xi</sup>). If there was an issue where other teachers differed from the Apostles, the Apostles teaching was the final word.

Paul tells us that Sosthenes is a co-author. The Greek name was common at the time and literally means "the brother". He may be referring to someone sent from Corinth to assist Paul. There is another by that name in Acts 18:17<sup>xii</sup>. He was the ruler of a synagogue. It is possible that he was converted and was assisting Paul.

Scholars believe that this is one of Paul's earliest letters written around AD 53-57 while Paul was in Ephesus. It gives us insight into the earliest practices, beliefs, and struggles of the early church. It also proves that the teaching of Jesus' death as atonement for our sins and the fact of the resurrection was widespread within twenty years after the crucifixion. That is well within the lifespan of people who witnessed the events. If eyewitnesses denied what was written, the Gospel would have had a tough time taking hold. Quotes in the letter come from even earlier sources.

*<sup>2</sup> To the church of God that is in Corinth, to those sanctified in Christ Jesus, called to be saints together with all those who in every place call upon the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, both their Lord and ours:* 1 Corinthians 1:2 The Greek word for church means an assembly. There were other public assemblies in Corinth. This letter is to the assembly (or church) of God, which consists of many assemblies now and throughout time (Deuteronomy 31:30<sup>xiii</sup>; 1 Corinthians 15:9<sup>xiv</sup>).

The church of God does not belong to any man. When a church belongs to an individual, it is no longer the church of God. No matter how influential or anointed the leader, we should be wary of calling the church by a man's name. It is the church of God which He has purchased with the blood of Jesus (Acts 20:28<sup>xv</sup>). It saddens me when Christian ministries are named after the founder. I cringe when people say, "Paul's church" or "How is *your* church doing?" This is God's church and any ministries that come out of it are His!

The church consists of those who are sanctified in Christ Jesus, the body of Christ, which consists of all who have called on the name of the Lord Jesus (Romans 10:13<sup>xvi</sup>) and received Him as Lord over their lives. We are God's called out ones in the particular city in which we gather. We are one with the church through the ages. We are to be holy in this fallen world in which we live (2 Corinthians 6:17,18<sup>xvii</sup>, 1 Peter 1:14,15<sup>xviii</sup>). All the glory for what is done through us belongs to God who called us out of darkness and into His wonderful light (1 Peter 2:9<sup>xix</sup>).

Just as Paul was called to be an apostle, **we are called to be saints. That simply means we have received forgiveness through the cross.** Christians are sanctified because Jesus has given us His righteousness (2 Corinthians 5:21<sup>xx</sup>). We are being sanctified daily through our trials and the pruning by God's Word (John 15:3<sup>xxi</sup>; Romans 12:2<sup>xxii</sup>). God sees Jesus' sacrifice for us which took all our sins, even the future ones, and sees our completion when we see Jesus' face to face (1 John 3:2<sup>xxiii</sup>). Only then will be as outwardly as God presently sees us. We are clothed in Jesus now (Romans 13:14<sup>xxiv</sup>). We will be inwardly and outwardly like Him then. That is why Paul calls those who are in Christ "sanctified," but also called to be saints, meaning to live holy lives. Do you see how the right now but not yet expressed here? We are sanctified in God's eyes because of the work of Jesus paying our sin debt, but we are called to live it out in our daily lives.

The Greek word translated "called" is more than our word invited. It is to be called with a power that transforms. All are invited to receive the forgiveness that Jesus has purchased for us, but only those who respond to the invitation are called. They are called to be saints, which is to be set apart for God's use. The instruments in the temple were called holy for they were used to follow God's instructions in serving and worshiping Him. We should be God's instruments in the world today, worshiping in spirit and in truth (John 4:23<sup>xxv</sup>).

This is true of all who are calling on the name, crying out for His salvation by grace as justice for our sins is met on the cross. To call (*It*) indicates a continual earnest appeal and dependence on Christ, who alone can save.<sup>xxvi</sup> To call on His name is to continually ask for and depend on His steadfast love and all that He is. The letter is to the Corinthians but also to all those in every place who call on Jesus and have accepted Him as Lord. That includes you who have come here this morning. It is to those who have accepted God's invitation and thereby received the calling to follow Jesus. If you haven't cast yourself on His mercy and prayed for the forgiveness of your sins, you can do that this morning! God is inviting you to call on Him. Then you too will be sanctified and called to be a saint with those everywhere who call on His name and know Him as Lord (Romans 13:10<sup>xxvii</sup>). That makes us all equal, for each of us receives the righteousness of Jesus. Together with the help of the Holy Spirit we are living out that call to be holy.

While there are overseers of the church which the Bible refers to as elders, none of us are superior to others. We are all sinners saved by grace. We are all works in progress. Elders do not lord it over the flock, rather they serve the flock in love (Hebrews 13:17<sup>xxviii</sup>; 1 Peter 5:2,3<sup>xxix</sup>). The elders lead the church through prayer and the Word, not personal opinion. They must all agree together in the Spirit on God's leading before they direct the congregation or discipline the wayward. We all are waiting for Jesus to finish the work in us. We should all remember that God resists the proud but exalts the humble (Romans 14:11<sup>xxx</sup>).

To better understand the letter to the Corinthians, we need to know a little about the city of Corinth. It was very much like our world. Rome had conquered this Greek city that controlled two ports and rebuilt it in the mode of the best Roman cities. Slaves hauled ships across the isthmus which helped them avoid treacherous waters around the peninsula. Trade came from all over the known world. Corinth boasted the best of everything. It was a place where people made a name for themselves, gained wealth, and attempted to be the best in their field, whether that was religious, manufacturing, athletics, religion, or lust, and there were plenty of opportunities to pursue lust.

Amid this metropolitan city of wealth, idolatry, and hedonism, was a struggling church that proclaimed another Lord, a crucified Lord. Paul started the church and he longed to see it survive and prosper, for its central location would influence the world. Church means assembly but also implies they are "the called out ones". They were called out of the culture of Corinth and the world into the kingdom of God. They were citizens of heaven (Philippians 3:20<sup>xxxi</sup>), and so they were to live lives that were noticeably different from the average Corinthian.

Corinth and Roman culture were very similar to our current culture. (Show picture of ruins.) This picture is the remains of the temple of Apollo. There were other temples, the most prominent being the temple of Aphrodite with its thousand temple prostitutes.

To be called a Corinthian was an accusation of being morally debased. As we go through the letter remember that the members of this church came out of that culture.

Christian values have remained the same, but cultural values always decline in every society unless there is revival. Making a name for oneself, seeking to be the most affluent, and pleasure seeking are all areas in which our modern culture mirrors that of Corinth. As believers, we should stand out. People should see where we will not compromise to fit in, but they should also see our love and joy. If they only see our resistance to the culture's decline without witnessing our love and joy, they just assume we are stuck in the past, intolerant killjoys, who don't like change. The fruits of the Spirit manifest in our lives declare that there is substance behind our valid objections to the dark side of every culture. That is how we make a difference in one life at a time. We share the hope we have in Jesus and disciple those who are receptive (Matthew 28:19,20<sup>xxxii</sup>; Colossians 4:6<sup>xxxiii</sup>).

<sup>3</sup> *Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.* 1 Corinthians 1:3 This was a typical greeting of the day. He uses the exact same greeting in five other letters. Paul took it from the culture and applied it with the much deeper implications derived from the gospel. **Grace is God's favor which is out of the goodness of His heart and not earned in any way by us. The result or receiving that grace is peace in our hearts.** The source of grace and peace is only found in Jesus and our restored relationship with God.

The world can only offer shadows of the real thing, and those are fleeting at best. We who have received grace and peace from Jesus should overlook sins against us, as we reflect God's grace extended to us who once were sinning against Him. John the Beloved wrote that we who are in Jesus have received out of His fulness and grace upon grace (John 1:16<sup>xxxiv</sup>). That is like saying **we have been given grace piled upon grace.**

Much of the time we are unaware of our sins that are so offensive to God. We neglect to do the good He sets before us and go on our way with an excuse that we don't have time. We give our conscience an excuse and take the grace of God for granted. Then He gives us more grace for taking His grace so lightly.

It isn't that He is just a kind old gentleman who is not easily offended, but rather that He is deeply offended at sin, but the cross paid our debt so He can justly forgive us. He knows how weak we are and how prone to sin our old nature is (Psalm 103:14<sup>xxxv</sup>). That is why He sent Jesus to make a way out of our condition. That is why He sent the Holy Spirit, to empower us to recognize the sin we so easily overlook. And even then, we take His grace for granted. What mercy is expressed to us when we excuse sin in our lives! Then the goodness of God leads us to repentance (Romans 2:4<sup>xxxvi</sup>). We can and should therefore extend grace to others, for God has paid such a high price through the cross that we might receive grace upon grace.

Heaven will not need grace, though all who are there will have been recipients of grace. All who are there will have been perfected by completion of the work of God's grace. That results in peace which will be the very atmosphere of heaven. Peace will permeate all that as is done, peace with God and with one another. We taste a little heaven on earth when as brothers and sisters in Christ we extend grace to one another and make that effort to be at peace (Psalm 133:1<sup>xxxvii</sup>). But sadly, too often we fail to be gracious and forgiving which results in the lack of peace.

I would suggest that real peace is unknowable without Jesus as Lord of one's life. That is because the only way to have peace with God is through Jesus. Paul wrote in Romans 5:1 *"Therefore, since we have been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ."* We were once enemies of God and actively resisting the Spirit of grace that drew us to Jesus. But when the grace of God convicted us of our sins and prompted us to believe, we found that peace we had been longing for. No longer did we need to carry the guilt and fear of the judgment we deserve. The war against God was over. We switched to the winning side. Oh, there is still a war being waged against us by our old nature (Galatians 5:17<sup>xxxviii</sup>), but we know Jesus as the victory. He is our peace.

In John 14:27 Jesus said, *"Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you. Not as the world gives do I give to you. Let not your hearts be troubled, neither let them be afraid."* He gives us His very own peace. Think about this ultimate peace that Jesus has. He knows the future. It can't be altered. He has all power given to Him from the Father. He knows everything. Satan has tried his best to stop Jesus, and, in the process, Jesus brought salvation to all who would receive Him. Knowing that God's plan to make us into Jesus' likeness is certain to be fulfilled, that evil will end, and righteousness will prevail forever brings an amazing kind of peace.

Jesus said He gives His peace to us. He doesn't give the world's kind of peace. The world's peace is a temporary lack of conflict. It doesn't even consider the need for peace with God or provide any kind of assurance for the future. In fact, it anticipates future conflict. His peace is very different from anything we experienced before we knew Him. His deep and sure peace that He shares with us is the reason He can say, *"Let not your hearts be troubled, neither let them be afraid."* Don't allow your hearts to be anxious about anything. You are loved by Almighty God. You are the bride of Christ. He will see you through whatever He allows to come your way (1 Corinthians 10:13<sup>xxxix</sup>). That is the peace that passes understanding (Philippians 4:7<sup>xl</sup>)! And what a testimony it is to those who don't know this peace.

Do you have His peace? If you are in Jesus His grace freely offers it to you, but you have to embrace it. You must accept Jesus to have His peace. You must believe that He holds the future and holds you too. You must know He has made you His own, that you are His beloved and that He is yours (Song of Songs 6:3a<sup>xli</sup>).

There was a dear lady who was a longtime attendee of Wayside. She told me she just couldn't seem to shake her anxiety over her future. She explained it as a disposition of her personality. I tried to explain to her that she needed to really trust that she was in God's hands, but it seemed too big a stretch for her. The time came in her life when her mind was unable to handle the necessary tasks of living alone. A relative stepped up and took her into his home and cared for her. We all want our mind to be clear to the day we die, but do we trust that even if we don't, God will care for us? Do we have that unflappable peace that Almighty God loves and cares for us, and that He will see us through whatever He allows? That brings a wonderful sense of peace.

We've just gone over three short verses of Paul's greeting to the Corinthian church. As it is the Word of God, it has a lot to say to us. We see Paul's calling to be an apostle. We see our calling to be saints. And we have contemplated just the surface of the riches of grace and peace that are ours in Jesus. We live in a world of competing philosophies, many of which telling us we can attain what we seek in our own power. Jesus simply invites us to realize we are carrying a heavy burden and invites us to come

to Him and find rest. He does have a burden for us to carry, but it is light (Matthew 11:28-30<sup>xliii</sup>).

Are you experiencing Jesus' peace? His grace is holding it to you as a gift. Will you receive His forgiveness, embrace His grace, and know His peace? You are called to be a saint. Will you call on Jesus' name to do that work in you?

Questions:

- 1 Why do some people change their name upon conversion?
- 2 Why did Paul remind them that he was called by the will of God?
- 3 Why shouldn't we name a church after a person?
- 4 What does "called to be saints" mean?
- 5 What was Corinth like?
- 6 How is our culture similar?
- 7 How can we make a difference?
- 8 What does John 1:16 tell us about the grace we have received?
- 9 What kind of peace do believers in Jesus have?
- 10 Do you have that kind of peace? Why or why not?

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<sup>i</sup> C. Hodges, A Commentary on the First Epistle to the Corinthians.

<sup>ii</sup> **Acts 22:3** <sup>3</sup> “I am a Jew, born in Tarsus in Cilicia, but brought up in this city, educated at the feet of Gamaliel according to the strict manner of the law of our fathers, being zealous for God as all of you are this day.

<sup>iii</sup> **Acts 9:2** <sup>2</sup> and asked him for letters to the synagogues at Damascus, so that if he found any belonging to the Way, men or women, he might bring them bound to Jerusalem.

<sup>iv</sup> **Acts 9:3-6** <sup>3</sup> Now as he went on his way, he approached Damascus, and suddenly a light from heaven shone around him. <sup>4</sup> And falling to the ground he heard a voice saying to him, “Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me?” <sup>5</sup> And he said, “Who are you, Lord?” And he said, “I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting. <sup>6</sup> But rise and enter the city, and you will be told what you are to do.”

<sup>v</sup> **Acts 22:3 (ESV)**

<sup>3</sup> “I am a Jew, born in Tarsus in Cilicia, but brought up in this city, educated at the feet of Gamaliel according to the strict manner of the law of our fathers, being zealous for God as all of you are this day.

<sup>vi</sup> **Titus 2:14** <sup>14</sup> who gave himself for us to redeem us from all lawlessness and to purify for himself a people for his own possession who are zealous for good works.

<sup>vii</sup> **Acts 13:7** <sup>7</sup> He was with the proconsul, Sergius Paulus, a man of intelligence, who summoned Barnabas and Saul and sought to hear the word of God.

<sup>viii</sup> **1 Corinthians 9:22** <sup>22</sup> To the weak I became weak, that I might win the weak. I have become all things to all people, that by all means I might save some.

<sup>ix</sup> **Acts 9:15** <sup>15</sup> But the Lord said to him, “Go, for he is a chosen instrument of mine to carry my name before the Gentiles and kings and the children of Israel.

<sup>x</sup> **Acts 22:5** <sup>5</sup> as the high priest and the whole council of elders can bear me witness. From them I received letters to the brothers, and I journeyed toward Damascus to take those also who were there and bring them in bonds to Jerusalem to be punished.

<sup>xi</sup> **Ephesians 4:11 (ESV)**

<sup>11</sup> And he gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the shepherds and teachers,

<sup>xii</sup> **Acts 18:17 (ESV)**

<sup>17</sup> And they all seized Sosthenes, the ruler of the synagogue, and beat him in front of the tribunal. But Gallio paid no attention to any of this.

<sup>xiii</sup> **Deuteronomy 31:30** <sup>30</sup> Then Moses spoke the words of this song until they were finished, in the ears of all the assembly of Israel:

<sup>xiv</sup> **1 Corinthians 15:9** <sup>9</sup> For I am the least of the apostles, unworthy to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God.

<sup>xv</sup> **Acts 20:28** <sup>28</sup> Pay careful attention to yourselves and to all the flock, in which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to care for the church of God, which he obtained with his own blood.

<sup>xvi</sup> **Romans 10:13** <sup>13</sup>For “everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.

<sup>xvii</sup> **2 Corinthians 6:17,18** <sup>17</sup>Therefore go out from their midst, and be separate from them, says the Lord, and touch no unclean thing; then I will welcome you, <sup>18</sup> and I will be a father to you, and you shall be sons and daughters to me, says the Lord Almighty.”

<sup>xviii</sup> **1 Peter 1:14,15** <sup>14</sup>As obedient children, do not be conformed to the passions of your former ignorance, <sup>15</sup> but as he who called you is holy, you also be holy in all your conduct, <sup>xviii</sup>

<sup>xix</sup> **1 Peter 2:9** <sup>9</sup>But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light.

<sup>xx</sup> **2 Corinthians 5:21** <sup>21</sup>For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.

<sup>xxi</sup> **John 15:3** <sup>3</sup> Already you are clean because of the word that I have spoken to you.

<sup>xxii</sup> **Romans 12:3** <sup>3</sup>Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect. <sup>xxii</sup>

<sup>xxiii</sup> **1 John 3:2** <sup>2</sup>Beloved, we are God’s children now, and what we will be has not yet appeared; but we know that when he appears we shall be like him, because we shall see him as he is. <sup>xxiii</sup>

<sup>xxiv</sup> **Romans 13:14** <sup>14</sup>But put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh, to gratify its desires.

<sup>xxv</sup> **John 4:23** <sup>23</sup> But the hour is coming, and is now here, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for the Father is seeking such people to worship him.

<sup>xxvi</sup> Mare, W. H. (1976). [1 Corinthians](#). In F. E. Gaebelin (Ed.), *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary: Romans through Galatians* (Vol. 10, p. 189). Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House.

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<sup>xxvii</sup> **Romans 13:10** <sup>10</sup>For “everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.”

<sup>xxviii</sup> **Hebrews 13:17** <sup>17</sup>Obey your leaders and submit to them, for they are keeping watch over your souls, as those who will have to give an account. Let them do this with joy and not with groaning, for that would be of no advantage to you.

<sup>xxix</sup> **1 Peter 5:2** <sup>2</sup>shepherd the flock of God that is among you, exercising oversight, not under compulsion, but willingly, as God would have you; not for shameful gain, but eagerly; <sup>3</sup> not domineering over those in your charge, but being examples to the flock.

<sup>xxx</sup> **Romans 14:11** <sup>11</sup>For everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted.”

<sup>xxxi</sup> **Philippians 3:20** <sup>20</sup>But our citizenship is in heaven, and from it we await a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ

<sup>xxxii</sup> **Matthew 28:19-20** <sup>19</sup> Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, <sup>20</sup> teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age.”

<sup>xxxiii</sup> **Colossians 4:6 (NIV)** <sup>6</sup> Let your conversation be always full of grace, seasoned with salt, so that you may know how to answer everyone.

<sup>xxxiv</sup> **John 1:16** <sup>16</sup> For from his fullness we have all received, grace upon grace.

<sup>xxxv</sup> **Psalm 103:14 (ESV)** <sup>14</sup> For he knows our frame; he remembers that we are dust.

<sup>xxxvi</sup> **Romans 2:4** <sup>4</sup> Or do you presume on the riches of his kindness and forbearance and patience, not knowing that God’s kindness is meant to lead you to repentance?

<sup>xxxvii</sup> **Psalm 133:1 (ESV)** <sup>1</sup> Behold, how good and pleasant it is when brothers dwell in unity!

<sup>xxxviii</sup> **Galatians 5:17** <sup>17</sup> For the desires of the flesh are against the Spirit, and the desires of the Spirit are against the flesh, for these are opposed to each other, to keep you from doing the things you want to do.

<sup>xxxix</sup> **1 Corinthians 10:13** <sup>13</sup>No temptation has overtaken you that is not common to man. God is faithful, and he will not let you be tempted beyond your ability, but with the temptation he will also provide the way of escape, that you may be able to endure it.

<sup>xl</sup> **Philippians 4:7** <sup>7</sup> And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.

<sup>xli</sup> **Song of Songs 6:3a** <sup>3</sup> I am my beloved’s and my beloved is mine;

<sup>xlii</sup> **Matthew 11:28-30** <sup>28</sup> Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. <sup>29</sup> Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. <sup>30</sup> For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.”