

1 Corinthians 1:1-9

Paul, called to be an apostle of Jesus Christ by the will of God, and our brother Sosthenes,

²To the church of God in Corinth—those who have been sanctified in Christ Jesus, who are called as saints—along with all in every place who call on the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, their Lord and ours:

³Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ!

⁴I always thank my God for you because of the grace of God given to you in Christ Jesus.

⁵You were enriched in him in every way, in all your speaking and all your knowledge, ⁶because the testimony about Christ was established in you. ⁷As a result you do not lack any gift as you eagerly wait for the revelation of our Lord Jesus Christ. ⁸He will also keep you strong until the end, so that you will be blameless on the day of our Lord Jesus Christ. ⁹God is faithful, who called you into fellowship with his Son, Jesus Christ, our Lord.

Called by God

I.

Some cities are university cities. They just seem to draw their whole identity from the fact that academia is there; that *their* fair city is a center of learning and intellect. College towns, some call them. Everything revolves around the students who traipse into town to begin the new term every year. When the students leave at the end of the marking period, the hectic pace slows to a crawl. The shops and the restaurants echo with lofty speech—various philosophical ideas are bandied about and endlessly debated. Which system of philosophy is superior? Which batch of academicians is to be mocked and ridiculed? Often such cities are not huge metropolitan areas. Much of the activity centers on keeping the students, and even more importantly, the faculty, happy with the goods and services available for their enjoyment.

The city in question was not like that. The university did not dominate the landscape. It was not a place known for philosophy or deep intellectual thought. There was a practicality about the place—a sense of pragmatism. This particular place was, in many ways, all about making money. This was a city of commerce.

When you read about cities in the Bible, often they were not really very large by modern standards—usually just a few thousand people. Even many of the larger cities had only tens of thousands of people.

This particular city was huge by the standards of that time—there were more than 1/2 million residents. The city was located at a critical juncture of trade. Racism was not really a huge problem; people from many different races lived side-by-side. Class-ism, however, *was* a problem. Only about 200,000 of the residents were free, another 500,000 residents were slaves—slaves from every one of the races of free people.

Corinth was a cosmopolitan sort of place. There were wealthy people who wanted a dose of culture, but there were also places that catered to the baser side of humanity. There was a large temple to the goddess Aphrodite with 1,000 priestesses, who were really temple prostitutes.

Corinth had a well-deserved reputation for living it up, for idolatrous and loose living. Perhaps even more than non-Christian paganism, the culture was dominated by secularism—a pragmatic approach to good things and wealth.

II.

Christians who live in such a culture begin to acclimate to the culture. Corinth, perhaps, wasn't so different from modern culture. Secularism dominates. Pragmatism reigns.

The people I am speaking to right now are people who carve out some time from the

secular culture to listen to the Word of God. But does the hustle and bustle of modern life push Christianity aside, even for you? Does a devotional life play a part in your daily routine? Sadly, for many Christians, time spent with God takes a back seat. Young people are convinced that they will have more time when they are older; older people decide that they have to cram in all the things from their bucket list that remain undone. The sanctified life of faith too often gets neglected throughout the years.

III.

But, you see, the thing is—you are here. Today. Right now.

“To the church of God in Corinth—those who have been sanctified in Christ Jesus, who are called as saints—along with all in every place who call on the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, their Lord and ours” (1 Corinthians 1:2, EHV).

“Saint” is a word that jumps off the page when you read what Paul wrote. These days, if someone is long-suffering in dealing with a problem in life—whether it be some physical ailment or financial challenges or a spouse or significant other who is difficult to deal with—we dub them a saint. Paul called the believers in the Christian congregation at Corinth “saints.” They must have been doing a bang-up job of living among all the debauchery of their cosmopolitan city, right?

I wonder if the Corinthians would have blushed when they read the address of Paul’s letter to their congregation. This congregation the Apostle Paul had founded was in turmoil. They were plagued by divisions and factions; by jealousy and strife. They were taking one another to court. They were indulging in the sexual immorality that so predominated the landscape of Corinth. Even their worship services had degenerated into displays of selfishness and sinning against Christ’s body and blood. How could they be called “saints”?

Perhaps people dubbed “saint” today would have a similar twinge of conscience. Inside, the one we call “saint” might be seething with rage, barely holding together an outward appearance of calm. Sometimes those looking from the outside in don’t see the turmoil of life and the upheaval of soul and psyche.

Paul’s use of the word “saint” brings up a question: What is a saint? A saint is not some super-Christian who has a firmer grasp on Christianity than others in the congregation of believers or who, perhaps, has managed to do something people choose to describe as a miracle. Saint is another word for believer.

Ok, then, what makes a person a believer, a Christian? Is it a decision you made at some point in your past? While some might think so, and some Christian leaders today might claim that is the case, Paul disputes it. What makes you a Christian is what God has done. Believers are “those who have been sanctified in Christ Jesus.” Believers are those “who are called as saints.”

“Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ!” (1 Corinthians 1:3, EHV). There were certain things Paul would have to address with this congregation of believers. He would have things he would want to address with *any* group of believers—every believer has sin he or she still fights against. “Simul justus et peccator” was a phrase Martin Luther came up with to describe the condition of a believer. It means, “At the same time, both a sinner and a saint.”

You are a saint, not because of anything you have done or because you are such a wonderful, sparkling example of a human being. You are a saint because you believe in the Lord Jesus. You believe because the Holy Spirit has *given* you the very faith you have. That’s grace. God’s grace makes you a child of God. Grace comes first in Paul’s description of what you have in Christ Jesus.

Then—after grace which gives you the faith that makes the forgiveness Jesus won for all people your own—*then* comes peace. Real peace is the peace that passes all human understanding. Peace is the peace you have with God—the peace of conscience, the peace

of your soul—peace which knows there is no more hostility between God and yourself. Peace is the result of the salvation God has given you.

“I always thank my God for you because of the grace of God given to you in Christ Jesus” (1 Corinthians 1:4, EHV). Sometimes people think Paul was just being diplomatic in the early stages of his letter to the Corinthian congregation. After all, he would have some scathing words for them later. Are these words just an empty compliment to get the people to relax so that he can later lay into them? “I always thank my *God*.” *God* is the One who deserves all credit for the faith of the Corinthians, in spite of their often straying ways. *God* is the One who deserves all credit for the faith of *any and every* Christian. The fact that *God* is the source of faith is a comfort to the Christian. We know that the faith we have in the Lord Jesus is genuine, because we didn’t invent it ourselves or cause it to spring up inside us; God did that.

“I always thank my God for you.” Every pastor needs to remember to thank the Lord for faithful Christians who sit in the pews and do the work of the Lord in the congregation. It would be easy to despair over those who lapse in the exercise of their faith to the exclusion of giving thanks for those who are here and who work to grow in their faith. I thank my God for *you*.

IV.

“You were enriched in him in every way, in all your speaking and all your knowledge, ⁶because the testimony about Christ was established in you. ⁷As a result you do not lack any gift” (1 Corinthians 1:5-6, EHV). Though sinners can always find ways to abuse the gifts God gives, there is no problem with the gifts or the Giver. God’s gifts to the Corinthians were an indication that Christ was still present in the midst of sinners.

The same is true for Holy Trinity. You do not lack any gift. Have you noticed the abundance of gifts God has given to his people in this place? Have you noticed how his people have been using those gifts to give testimony about Christ? Offerings have increased since the 10 for 10 Stewardship program to support the ministry at Holy Trinity.

“You were enriched in him in every way, in all your speaking and all your knowledge.” The “speaking” Paul is talking about is proclaiming the great things God has done. “Knowledge” is the wisdom God’s people have of spiritual things. “Speaking and knowledge” have been displayed in, among other things, the musical talents God’s people have been using to praise his Name in worship. You—the saints of God at this place in this time—do not lack any gift.

The blessings God gives to his people do not come because of our faithful use of those gifts, but since every gift given has come from God, we *are* to be faithful in our *use* of those gifts. Where his gifts are, there his kingdom is.

“You eagerly wait for the revelation of our Lord Jesus Christ. ⁸He will also keep you strong until the end, so that you will be blameless on the day of our Lord Jesus Christ. ⁹God is faithful, who called you into fellowship with his Son, Jesus Christ, our Lord” (1 Corinthians 1:7-9, EHV).

Not only do you enjoy God’s abundant blessings in your lives today with all the gifts he has given, you also look forward confidently to the future. Christians “eagerly wait” for the time the Lord Jesus will return to take us home to the eternal home he has been preparing for us. Look to him to keep you strong in your faith until that day. God has the power to do it. You will be blameless when the Lord Jesus returns for you—not because of anything you have done, but because you stand prepared to meet God in the righteousness the Lord Jesus has purchased and won for you.

Be confident in your life of faith. Live as one who is prepared, despite the culture that surrounds you. Live as one who is *in* the world, but has not become *of* the world in your attitudes and actions. Live as the saint—the believer—God has called you to be. Amen.