

## “Thank God!” (1 Corinthians 1:1-9)

How do you feel about your church? When you think of your church, do you get excited or depressed? Do you think of strengths or weaknesses? Do you think of what is happening or what is not happening? How do you feel about your church? How do you view those who are a part of your church?

Imagine with me a church wracked with divisions and factions. There are preaching cults where church members favor one particular preacher over another. Imagine a church filled with sexual immorality. Some of the members are visiting prostitutes. One church member is having an affair with his stepmother. Imagine a church where believers don't work out their problems. Instead, they sue each other in secular courts. Imagine a church where debates rage on topics like Christian liberty, men's and women's roles, prophecies, and speaking in tongues. And to top it off, imagine a church where the Lord's Supper is abused and a significant number do not even believe in the bodily resurrection of Christ!

The church I just described is the first-century church of Corinth...a church that the apostle Paul founded!<sup>1</sup> Now how do you feel about your church? Do you feel any differently? Perhaps you are slightly encouraged that things in your own church aren't nearly as bad as you thought. Regardless, the question that begs to be answered is: How did Paul respond to this unlovable church that only a controversial talk show host could love? Paul surprises us and responds with optimistic thanksgiving. Why is Paul thankful for the Corinthian church? Because God gives His church every gracious gift and keeps His church secure in His faithfulness. We could say it like this: “*God gives and God keeps.*” In 1 Cor 1:1-9, Paul pens a greeting and thanksgiving to the church at Corinth. In these nine verses, Paul will answer the inevitable question: Why should we give thanks to God for our church? Paul gives two reasons: (1) God gives His church every gracious gift, and (2) God keeps His church secure in His faithfulness.

**1. God gives us every gracious gift (1:1-7).** Paul begins the book of 1 Corinthians by penning these words: “**Paul, called as an apostle<sup>2</sup> of Jesus Christ by the will of God**” (1:1). One of Paul's primary themes in chapter one is what it means to be “called.” Here in 1:1, Paul describes himself as one whom God has “called” to be an apostle of Jesus Christ.<sup>3</sup> In 1:2, Paul informs the Corinthians that they are saints by “calling.” In 1:9, Paul closes our section by referring to those whom God “called” into fellowship. In 1:24, Paul speaks of Jews and Gentiles who “are called.” In 1:26, he speaks of the Corinthians call to salvation. The idea of God's calling is everywhere in this chapter! For Paul, God's call to salvation and apostleship was essential to life and ministry. It reminded him that his true allegiance was to God, not man. Paul goes on to state that he was called “by the will of God.”<sup>4</sup> This gave him an even greater sense of confidence and perseverance.

On Saturday evening, August 12<sup>th</sup>, 1989, God called me into a ministry of preaching and teaching. It is the closest I have ever come to God's audible voice. God was gracious to grant me a dramatic call because I had vowed I would never preach. That call has sustained my ministry. Even though I have wanted to quit many times, I have fallen back on my call. Now I am not suggesting that everyone must have the same type of experience that I did. Nevertheless, I would suggest that if you are considering ministry as a vocation, you ask God to confirm His call upon your life. Without a sense of calling you will not last in full-time ministry. You will give up. But if you regularly reflect on your call, God will be gracious to sustain you.

Have you ever considered your calling? Could it be that you are “called” to be a small business owner, a teacher, or a homemaker? I would argue that God has a calling for each one of our lives. This “call” will keep us persevering in our vocation. Let's face it, owning your own business is stressful, and so is being a teacher or a homemaker. But when we understand that we have a calling from God, we can persevere when things are discouraging and difficult.

Before moving on to 1:2, Paul tacks on the phrase, **“and Sosthenes our brother”** (1:1). Who is Sosthenes and why does Paul bother mentioning him? Most likely, Sosthenes was the ruler of the synagogue in Corinth (Acts 18:17).<sup>5</sup> He was with Paul in Ephesus, when Paul penned this epistle. He was serving as Paul’s right-hand man.<sup>6</sup> In ministry, we all need support and encouragement. If you are looking and praying for such a person(s), God will provide you support and encouragement as you serve Him. He loves to give us every gracious gift.

Paul continues his introductory remarks in 1:2, where he writes: **“To the church of God which is at Corinth, to those who have been sanctified in Christ Jesus, saints by calling, with all who in every place call on the name of our Lord Jesus Christ<sup>7</sup>, their Lord and ours.”** Paul wants us to understand several important truths about the church.

- **God gives us a new leader.** Paul writes, “To the church of God.” How often we hear churches identified in terms of who the pastor is. That is \_\_\_\_\_’s church, and we fill in the blank with the pastor’s name. When we do so we are not in line with Paul, who believed that the church belongs to God. God is the One who brought the church into existence through the shed blood of His Son, Jesus Christ. God is the One who sustains His church. It is God’s church.<sup>8</sup> Since the church belongs to God, we need to ask: “What does God want us to accomplish at our church?” “Who does God want us to reach?” “How will God be glorified in our gatherings?” The church belongs to God so it should be about Him. He alone is our leader.
- **God gives us a new family.** Paul writes that the church of God includes “all who in every place call on the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.” When God thinks of the church, He thinks of the “city church” (i.e., the group of all believers in a particular city,<sup>9</sup> or the church *at* a particular city<sup>10</sup>). The church of God extends beyond a particular local church. In fact, every local church, regardless of size, is like a pebble on a beach. Yet, it can be easy to think that we are the only pebble on the beach. Here, Paul lays waste to this mentality. He wants us to know that we’re a part of something bigger than ourselves. We’re all little pebbles on God’s endless kingdom beach.<sup>11</sup> Our theology must be “one church; many congregations.” With this in mind, how are you encouraging other Christians in various churches in our county? Are you speaking well of other churches? Do you desire their success? This is God’s heart.
- **God gives us a new identity.** In this context, the word “sanctified” is a metaphor for conversion (cf. 1:30; 6:11).<sup>12</sup> The Corinthians were saints by divine calling, not by their conduct. A “saint” is not a dead person who has been honored by men because of his or her holy life. No, Paul wrote to *living* saints, people who, through faith in Jesus Christ, had been set apart for God’s special enjoyment and use. In other words, every true believer is a saint because every true believer has been set apart by God and for God.<sup>13</sup> What an encouragement! Regardless of our behavior and in the midst of some of our most difficult times, God continues to see us as His people. Like Paul, we must establish our identity first. Who we are in Christ is the foundation that cultivates us to become fruitful in Christ.

In 1:3, Paul greets the church at Corinth: **“Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.”**<sup>14</sup> This greeting sums up Paul’s whole theological outlook.<sup>15</sup> “Grace” (*charis*) speaks of God’s free gift to us in Christ. Grace not only forgives us when we sin, it empowers us so that we will not sin. Grace helps us to say “no” to sin and “yes” to Christ. Grace shows up beforehand so that we don’t have to blow it. “Peace” (*shalom*) means more than “peace” does in English. It means not the absence of strife, but the presence of positive blessings. It is the prosperity of the whole person, especially his spiritual prosperity.<sup>16</sup> God gives us every gracious gift.

Like in his other epistles, Paul follows his greeting with an expression of thanksgiving for the church at Corinth.<sup>17</sup> Why does Paul give thanks? Paul does not give thanks for the sins and failures of these saints. Paul gives thanks to God for what He has done and for what He will ultimately do for His children. Paul's introduction is distinct from introductions to his other epistles in that he fails to commend these believers. Instead, he elaborates on their position and blessings in Christ<sup>18</sup> and His faithfulness to confirm them to the end. What an important lesson for us! May we always remember what God has done and ultimately will do. If Paul could be thankful for the church at Corinth, we can be thankful for our church and the church in Thurston County. Instead of complaining about petty things, why not focus on the blessings of our church?

In 1:4-7, Paul writes, **“I thank my God always<sup>19</sup> concerning you for the grace of God which was given you in Christ Jesus,<sup>20</sup> that in everything you were enriched in Him, in all speech and all knowledge, even as the testimony concerning Christ was confirmed in you, so that you are not lacking in any gift,<sup>21</sup> awaiting eagerly the revelation of our Lord Jesus Christ.”** Paul expresses thanksgiving for the grace of God. He acknowledges that in “everything” God has “enriched” the church at Corinth. Particularly, they have been blessed in “all speech and all knowledge.” By “speech” (*logos*) the apostle means speaking the Word through tongues and prophecy. “Knowledge” (*gnosis*) refers to their spiritual insight.<sup>22</sup> We can sum up “speech” and “knowledge” as “the telling forth of truth and the grasp of truth.” These are certainly important gifts, but we will find out in chapters 12-14 that they were abusing these very gifts. That is why Paul thanks God for their giftedness, not so much their use of their gifts.<sup>23</sup>

We can learn a great deal about spiritual gifts from these four verses. Consider these three truths:

- ***God gives us the necessary spiritual gifts.*** The church at Corinth possessed every spiritual gift...and they were not a very spiritual bunch! This should serve to remind us that *every* Christian, regardless of his or her spiritual maturity, has been given at least one spiritual gift. This means every Christian is immediately useful to Christ and His church with a unique opportunity for ministry. God has given our body every spiritual gift necessary to accomplish our purpose.
- ***God empowers us through the use of spiritual gifts.*** The church will never be all that she could be unless all God's people are using their spiritual gifts. Regardless of how big or small you think your gift is, God wants you to use it.

Yesterday afternoon, I got involved in a melee with my two boys (Joshua, 10 and Justin, 8). I made the awful mistake of getting involved in their pillow fighting match. Let me tell you, they beat me down with a holy vengeance. I've never seen two boys that bloodthirsty in my life. Honestly, they hurt me! I know it sounds funny, but bear with me. When I went into this pillow fight, I got down on my knees and thought to myself, there's no way that these two boys are going to hurt me. I can take them with one arm tied behind my back. Boy, was I wrong! They had the perfect game plan. Justin is our wrestler so he kept diving into me with head butts and body slams. Since I was on my knees for the fight, I couldn't shake Justin. He was all over me like “white on rice.” And then Joshua just kept raining down pillow bombs that crashed against my head with unusual authority. Whenever there was an opening, he had no mercy. Both boys behaved like trained assassins. It was brutal and downright sickening. Afterward, I told Lori that my back was bruised and scratched and I had strained my ribcage to protect myself. My boys were fine, mind you. As I reflected on this incident, I realized that my boys were able to use the gifts that they had to accomplish a great goal—beating down Dad. If either of them tried to take me on alone, they would have been crushed, but together they were a formidable foe. God uses seemingly unimpressive gifts to accomplish His purposes.

- ***God wants us to be faithful in the use of spiritual gifts.*** We do not need to seek additional gifts or experiences, as many do today, though we may need training in the use of the gifts we already have. And God may graciously choose to grant us additional ones as we grow. But our primary task is to act in faithful obedience to God and service to his people with what we have already been given.<sup>24</sup> Gifts are not necessarily mature at the time of discovery...they are developed through practice.

I probably don't need to tell anyone here that today is Super Bowl Sunday. Many of us will watch the big game between the Bears and the Colts. My question is: Will any of you go out during halftime and throw the football around? Probably not, right? You'll be feeding your face! Yet, in the past men and women would exercise and play sports together. But now we tend to just watch other people play. We are "armchair athletes." I'm afraid that there are many "armchair athletes" or "pew potatoes" in our church. This violates the Scriptures and the entire thrust of Christianity. God expects each one of us to find our niche in ministry. As our heavenly coach, God has expectations of us. Will we follow His game plan and serve the body of Christ? We are not lacking gifted people; we are lacking faithful people. What has God called you to do? How will you contribute? May we not complain; may we contribute. May we not sin; may we serve.

[Why should we give thanks to God for our church? Because God gives our church every gracious gift. But not only does God give our church every gracious gift, we will also see that...]

**2. God keeps us secure in His faithfulness (1:8-9).** In 1:8, Paul promises his readers that it is God<sup>25</sup> **"who will also confirm you [plural]<sup>26</sup> to the end, blameless in the day of our Lord Jesus Christ."** The word for "confirm" (*bebaioo*)<sup>27</sup> suggests that Paul is using a legal metaphor, illustrating that God has completed a contract with the church at Corinth.<sup>28</sup> This indicates that believers have God's guarantee that they shall be in His presence at Christ's return.<sup>29</sup> They will be "blameless" (lit., "chargeless" or "unimpeachable").<sup>30</sup> The word implies not merely acquittal, but the absence of even a charge or accusation against us.<sup>31</sup> It means every Christian will stand before the Lord guiltless, because God has imputed the guilt of our sins to Jesus Christ (cf. Rom 5:1; 8:1).<sup>32</sup> We have the witness of the Spirit within us and the witness of the Word before us, guaranteeing that God will keep His "contract" with us and save us to the very end.<sup>33</sup> This guarantee is certainly not an excuse for sin! Rather, it is the basis for a growing relationship of love, trust, and obedience.

I need to ask you a bizarre question. Are you a "cat" Christian or a "monkey" Christian? There is a big difference. Notice how a mother cat carries her kittens—she grasps them by the neck with her teeth. On what does the kitten's security depend? The mother. By contrast, the baby monkey grasps its mother with its tiny paws and hangs on for dear life. On whom does the baby monkey's security depend? Itself! Does your security in salvation rest upon your ability "to hang onto God," or does it depend on God's ability to keep you?<sup>34</sup>

Our passage closes in 1:9 with another great promise: **"God is faithful, through whom you were called into fellowship<sup>35</sup> with His Son, Jesus Christ our Lord."**<sup>36</sup> How could Paul be so confident that the Corinthians would be "blameless in the day of our Lord Jesus Christ?" Because his confidence was not in the Corinthians themselves, but in God. The question is not, "Can I keep going as a believer?" Rather, the question should be, "Can I rely on God?"<sup>37</sup> Paul states that everything is grounded in the fact that God is faithful.<sup>38</sup> Our preservation is a sure thing!<sup>39</sup> God is faithful to us even though we are often unfaithful to Him (2 Tim 2:13). Paul's confidence in 1:9 is based upon his certainty in 1:2—God's call. Paul's confidence that his readers would one day stand without guilt before the Lord did not rest on the Corinthians' ability to persevere faithfully to the end. It rested on God's ability and promises to preserve them. Since we too are "saints by calling," God will ensure our salvation.

It is worth noting that most of the verbs in 1:2-9 are passive—God is the One that is acting upon the Christians! It is God who sanctifies (1:2), who gives (1:4), who makes rich (1:5), who confirms (1:6), and who calls (1:9).<sup>40</sup> Furthermore, the last words of our passage are “Jesus Christ our Lord.” It is in Jesus Christ our Lord that we must daily depend upon. Nine times in nine verses, Paul focuses us on Jesus Christ.<sup>41</sup> If this was Paul’s focus, this must be ours as well. Salvation and assurance is all about God’s promise to keep us, through the Lord Jesus.

A common hindrance to discipleship maturity is a lack of assurance. The disciple that lacks assurance will lack confidence, love, joy, peace, and comfort in the Lord (Jas 3:13-17). Such a one may also lose a good conscience and confidence in prayer (1 John 3:20-23). Furthermore, the disciple that lacks assurance will be distracted from making other disciples (Matt 28:19-20). Yet, these consequences do not have to belong to any disciple.<sup>42</sup> This is why Paul begins his letter by affirming that we have been positionally sanctified in Christ (1:2).<sup>43</sup> He then explains that God has given us gracious gifts (1:4-7). This *past* action is linked with a *future* promise: God will confirm us to the end, blameless in the day of our Lord Jesus Christ (1:8). This act of confirmation suggests that on account of simple faith in Christ, every believer will be legally blameless before the justice bar of God.

In 1937, the great Golden Gate Bridge was completed. It cost \$77 million. The bridge was built in two stages: the first slowly and the second rapidly. In the first stage, no safety devices were used. As a result, 23 men fell to their deaths. However, for the final part of the project a large net was used as a safety precaution. At least ten men fell into it and were saved from certain death. Yet, even more interesting is the fact that 25% more work was accomplished after the net was installed. Why? Because the men had the assurance of their safety and they were free to wholeheartedly serve the project. Likewise, those who have been saved by God’s grace have been given a safety net. His name is Jesus Christ. On account of His person and work, we can have complete confidence in our relationship with God.

Why should we give thanks to God for our church? Because God gives us every gracious gift and keeps us secure in His faithfulness. Don’t ever forget, “*God gives and God keeps.*”

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## **“Thank God!” (1 Corinthians 1:1-9)**

**Topic:** Thankfulness

**Exegetical Idea:**

*Subject:* Why was Paul thankful for the Corinthian church?

*Complement:* Because God gave them every gracious gift and promised to keep them secure in His faithfulness.

**Homiletical Idea:**

*Subject:* Why should we be thankful for our church?

*Complement:* Because God gives us every gracious gift and keeps us secure in His faithfulness.

**Preaching Idea:** *“God gives and God keeps.”*

**Exegetical Outline:**

- I. God gave the church at Corinth every gracious gift (1:1-7).
  - A. God gave the church at Corinth the gifts and calling of the apostle Paul (1:1).
  - B. God gave the church at Corinth an accurate view of the church (1:2).
  - C. God gave the church at Corinth grace and peace (1:3).
  - D. God gave the church at Corinth every spiritual gift (1:4-7).
  
- II. God promised to keep the church at Corinth secure in Christ (1:8-9).
  - A. God will confirm the church at Corinth blameless at Jesus’ return (1:8).
  - B. God will preserve the church at Corinth because He is faithful (1:9).

**Homiletical Outline:**

- I. God gives us every gracious gift (1:1-7).
  - A. God gives us a unique calling (1:1).
  - B. God gives us an accurate view of the church (1:2).
  - C. God gives us grace and peace (1:3).
  - D. God gives us every spiritual gift (1:4-7).
  
- II. God keeps us secure in His faithfulness (1:8-9).
  - A. God will confirm us blameless at Jesus’ return (1:8).
  - B. God will preserve us because He is faithful (1:9).

**Scripture Reference**

1 Corinthians 1:1-9  
1 Corinthians 16:13-20  
Acts 18  
Acts 19  
Romans 1:1-7  
Romans 5:1; 8:1  
Ephesians 1:3-1:4

**Study Questions**

1. Do I believe I am called by God to serve Him in my vocation? Why or why not? What would it take for me to sense God's call upon my life? Does God have a specific will for my life? Why or why not? If so, what will I do to ensure that I know what I have been called to do?
2. What is my view of the church as a corporate entity? How do I speak of my local church? How broad is my perspective of the church, local and universal? Am I aware of church "happenings" locally, nationally, and internationally? If not, why not? What can I do to ensure that I am considered by God and others a lover of God's bride (i.e., a "churchman" or "churchwoman")?
3. How does it make me feel to know that God does not base His love and acceptance of me upon my performance? Should this have any bearing on how I love and accept my spouse, children, friends, and fellow church members? How can I balance unconditional love and biblical accountability with others in my life?
4. Do I know what my spiritual gift(s) is? If so, how did I discover my gift(s)? Have others confirmed this? How am I currently using this gift for the building up of the church? If I am not serving in at least one capacity in the church or in the community, when will I begin to do so?
5. Do I believe that I am eternally secure in Christ, no matter what I do or don't do? How do I defend this view biblically and logically? If I am secure in Christ's unconditional love, how will I behave? Will I live a sinful life for myself or will I live a godly life of gratitude for Christ?

## Notes

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<sup>1</sup> The letter of 1 Corinthians focuses on basic social, moral, and spiritual issues. Among all of Paul's epistles there is none that covers such a wide variety of subjects and problems.

<sup>2</sup> Thiselton argues that apostleship entails witness to Christ in both an "objective" and "subjective" sense. Apostleship involved witnessing to the events of Christ's death and resurrection, but also entailed "a practical experience of sharing in the weakness of the cross of Christ and in the transforming power of Christ's resurrection... Apostleship thereby entails "the establishment of the kerygma (1 Cor 1:21) and indeed the proclamation of the kerygma," in both word and lifestyle. Anthony C. Thiselton, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians: A Commentary on the Greek Text* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000), 66-68.

<sup>3</sup> Many important Greek manuscripts have a reversed order of these words and read "Jesus Christ" rather than "Christ Jesus." The meaning is not affected in either case, but the reading "Christ Jesus" is preferred both because it has somewhat better attestation and because it is slightly more difficult and thus more likely the original (a scribe who found it would be prone to change it to the more common expression). At the same time, Paul is fond of the order "Christ Jesus." As well, the later Pauline letters almost uniformly use this order in the salutations. Thus, on both external and internal grounds, "Christ Jesus" is the preferred reading here. See NET Study Notes.

<sup>4</sup> Cf. Rom 1:1; 2 Cor 1:1; Eph 1:1; Col 1:1; 2 Tim 1:1.

<sup>5</sup> Though Luke did not record his conversion in the book of Acts, Sosthenes quite clearly became a believer—assuming this was the same man. It is likely he was the same man, and Paul referred to him because the Corinthians knew him well.

<sup>6</sup> With the exception of Romans, Paul always mentions co-senders in his salutation. Thiselton writes, "Paul does not perceive himself as commissioned to lead or to minister as an isolated individual, without collaboration with co-workers." Thiselton, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, 69.

<sup>7</sup> In the OT, people call on the name of Yahweh (Joel 2:32, etc.), so that in using the expression Paul is assigning the highest possible place to Christ. Leon Morris, *The First Epistle of Paul to the Corinthians*: Tyndale New Testament Commentaries (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, [1958] 1990), 36.

<sup>8</sup> Bob Deffinbaugh, "Introduction and Background to 1 Corinthians": [http://www.bible.org/page.php?page\\_id=780](http://www.bible.org/page.php?page_id=780).

<sup>9</sup> See Revelation 2 and 3.

<sup>10</sup> See Acts 11:22; 13:1; 18:22; Rom 16:1.

<sup>11</sup> The map of global Christianity that our grandparents knew has been turned upside down. At the start of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, only ten percent of the world's Christians lived in the continents of the south and east. Ninety percent lived in North America and Europe, along with Australia and New Zealand. But at the start of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, at least 70 percent of the world's Christians live in the non-Western world—more appropriately called the majority world. More Christians worship in Anglican churches in Nigeria each week than in all the Episcopal and Anglican churches of Britain, Europe, and North America combined. There are more Baptists in Congo than in Britain. More people in church every Sunday in communist China than in all of Western Europe. Ten times more Assemblies of God members in Latin America than in the U.S. Preaching Today Citation: Christopher J.H. Wright, "An Upside-Down World," *Christianity Today* (1/2007).

<sup>12</sup> See Robert L. Saucy, "'Sinners' Who Are Forgiven or 'Saints' Who Sin?" *Bibliotheca Sacra* 152:608 (October-December 1995): 400-12, for discussion of the Christian's essential identity. He concluded that we are primarily saints who sin.

<sup>13</sup> Warren W. Wiersbe, *1 Corinthians* (Wheaton, IL: Victor, 1989), Electronic Ed.

<sup>14</sup> Not only are these two qualities mentioned, but God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ are linked as joint-authors. No higher place could be given to Christ. Morris, *The First Epistle of Paul to the Corinthians*, 36.

<sup>15</sup> Cf. Rom 1:7; 2 Cor 1:2; Gal 1:3; Phil 1:2; 1 Thess 1:1.

<sup>16</sup> "Peace" appears in all the greetings of the letters attributed to Paul (Rom 1:7; 2 Cor 1:2; Gal 1:3; Eph 1:2; Phil 1:2; Col 1:2; 1 Thess 1:1; 2 Thess 1:2; 1 Tim 1:2; 2 Tim 1:2; Titus 1:4; Phlm 4) and in many of the closing benedictions (Rom 16:20; 2 Cor 13:11; Gal 6:16; Eph 6:23; 2 Thess 3:16; cf. Phil 4:9). David E. Garland, *1 Corinthians*: Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2003), 30.

<sup>17</sup> One might compare Paul's thankfulness for the Roman and Ephesian Christians' faith (Rom 1:8; Eph 1:1) and the Philippians' participation in the gospel (Phil 1:5). Only the epistle to the Galatians starts off with less warmth than this one. (That may be because the issue in Galatians is justification by faith and their very salvation was threatened.)

<sup>18</sup> What is remarkable here is the apostle's ability to thank God for the very things in the church that, because of the abuses, are also causing him grief. Fee, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, 17-18.

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<sup>19</sup> In Paul, thanksgiving prayers are offered “always” or “continually” (Rom 1:9; 1 Cor 1:4; Phil 1:4; Col 1:3; 1 Thess 1:2-3; 2:13; 2 Thess 1:3; 2:13; Phlm 4), 105.

<sup>20</sup> Paul usually refers to the Lord as “Christ Jesus” rather than as “Jesus Christ.” This put the emphasis on His divine character as Messiah rather than on His human nature and encouraged his readers to submit to Him as their Lord.

<sup>21</sup> This word is used of salvation (Rom 5:15), of God’s good gifts in general (Rom 11:29), and of special equipment of the Spirit, for example, speaking with tongues (1 Cor 12:4ff). Here the thought is the wide one (ii). God has enriched their lives and they lack no spiritual gift. Morris, *The First Epistle of Paul to the Corinthians*, 37. Mare argues, “This potential lack does not necessarily refer to the lack of special gifts mentioned in 1 Corinthians 12-14, because there Paul indicates that each Christian is not to exercise every gift (1 Cor 12:27-31). Rather, he seems to be referring more generally to God’s grace actively counteracting the sins and faults so prevalent in the Corinthian congregation. Paul expresses confidence that God will keep them strong and will present his people blameless before him at Christ’s return, which they are eagerly waiting for (vv. 7, 8).” Harold W. Mare, *1 Corinthians*. The Expositor’s Bible Commentary (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, [1996] 2001), Electronic Ed.

<sup>22</sup> These appear by their usage in this letter and in 2 Corinthians to have been common buzzwords in Corinth. *Logos* occurs 26 times in 1 and 2 Corinthians compared to 58 times in Paul’s other epistles, and *gnosis* appears 16 times in these two epistles but only seven times in all of Paul’s other writings.

<sup>23</sup> The Corinthians greatest liabilities and greatest strengths lie in their gifts. Yet, Craig Blomberg (a professor at Denver Seminary, a Conservative Baptist seminary) makes a valid point: “...if all the gifts are for the entire Christian age, serious questions must be asked of contemporary congregations that are closed to certain of the so-called sign gifts. It seems likely that they run the serious risk of missing out on blessings the Spirit would want to bring them. Such conclusions will, of course, remain controversial. Perhaps we can more readily agree that, charismatic or not, fellowships that err on the side of overexercise and misuse of their gifts and talents are less displeasing to God than those that err on the side of underuse. Immature but growing children delight their parents far more than those who simply refuse to mature in some area of their lives.” Craig L. Blomberg, *1 Corinthians*: NIV Application Commentary (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1994), 40.

<sup>24</sup> Blomberg, *1 Corinthians*, 40.

<sup>25</sup> The exact antecedent of the relative pronoun *hos* in 1:8 (translated “who” or “he”) is debatable. While the nearest referent is Christ, in light of the flow of the thanksgiving prayer, it seems best to see God the Father as the subject, especially when it is His covenantal faithfulness that is being emphasized (cf. 2 Cor 1:21). Fee provides three arguments for why God the Father should be understood as the subject. See Fee, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, 44.

<sup>26</sup> It is also important to note that Paul speaks to the church collectively. In our day of so many “lone-ranger” Christians, it is important to recall that neither here nor elsewhere does Scripture envisage Christians apart from a local church. So God is also in the process of perfecting his people corporately as well as individually.

<sup>27</sup> The future tense of *bebaioo* (“confirm, establish, strengthen”) appears to be a typical predictive future; however, it could also be a *gnomic* future, expressing not a particular event that will take place, but one that is true of any time (i.e., God is in the business of working to strengthen His people to conform them to the Lord Jesus). If it is a typical predictive future, then Paul is saying, they can know that God will work to fulfill His goals for believers, but, and this is very important, Christians are responsible to respond to the grace provision of God. Either way (gnomic or future), I don’t think this text is saying true saints will be confirmed blameless (perseverance) from the standpoint of sanctification.

<sup>28</sup> The word “confirmed” often has a legal sense and when coupled with “blameless” suggests justification, not progressive sanctification is in view. It therefore seems to be a promise that the Corinthians will be legally counted as justified until the time of their perfect sanctification when they are completely without blame at the Second Coming. (It would parallel a common NT theme found in 2 Cor 7:1, 1 Thess 5:23.) These passages speak of the complete sanctification of the believer at Christ’s return. Paul does not say anything about God preserving us in a state of increasing holiness, rather it speaks of his confirming us as completely without blame, justified, until that which has been declared to be true in justification becomes experientially true at the resurrection of the body.

<sup>29</sup> This coming day is referred to as “the day of the Lord Jesus” (1 Cor 5:5; 2 Cor 1:14), “the day of Jesus Christ” (Phil 1:6), and “the day of Christ” (Phil 1:10; 2:16). “The day of Christ” in 2 Thess 2:2 should be rendered “the day of the Lord.” “The day of Christ” in all six references in the NT is described as relating to the reward and blessing of the Church at the rapture and in contrast with the expression “the day of the Lord” (cf. Isa 2:12). The apostles taught the imminent (i.e., any moment) return of Christ for His own (cf. 4:5; 15:51-52; 16:22; Phil 3:20; 4:5; 1 Thess 1:10; 2 Thess 3:10-12; Titus 2:13; Jas 5:7-9; 1 John 2:28; Rev 3:11; 22:7, 12, 17, 20). See Wayne A. Brindle, “Biblical Evidence for the Imminence of the Rapture,” *Bibliotheca Sacra* 158:630 (April-June 2001): 146-148.

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<sup>30</sup> The Greek word translated “blameless” (*anegkletos*) means unprovable or without accusation (cf. Col 1:22; 1 Tim 3:10; Titus 1:6-7).

<sup>31</sup> In 1 Tim 3:10 and Titus 1:6-7, “blameless” (*anegkletos*) is used in an experiential sense.

<sup>32</sup> It is possible that Paul is concerned with their living as Christ-like which is certainly the opposite of the divisiveness going on at Corinth (1 Cor 1:10f.). As you know, being blameless can refer, as it is used in other passages by Paul, to a relative degree in the sense, not of being sinless, but of being without reproach as it is used of elders in 1 Tim 3:10 and Titus 1:6. I think the same thing is true in Col 1:22.

<sup>33</sup> This includes unfaithful Christians who will “suffer loss,” even though they will be saved (3:15) because of their “blameless” status through the grace of God.

<sup>34</sup> Paul Enns, *Approaching God: Daily Readings in Systematic Theology* (Chicago: Moody, 1991), August 15<sup>th</sup>.

<sup>35</sup> Through fellowship with the Savior (i.e., sharing in the life of Christ in salvation and in our daily walk) in the inner man (Eph 3:16f), we can count on His sanctifying grace to establish and change us spiritually, morally, and ethically. Spiritual change is not something we have to do on our own by our own spiritual push-ups. But we do need spiritual discipline to appropriate His grace, and if we fail to do so, we can count on His fatherly discipline (1 Cor 1:28-34; Heb 12:5-11) to stop the downward direction.

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<sup>37</sup> Robin Dowling & Stephen Dray, *1 Corinthians: Free to Grow* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1995), 21.

<sup>38</sup> The word *pistos* (“faithful”) is placed first in 1:9 for emphasis. Paul also stresses God’s faithfulness in 1 Cor 10:13; 2 Cor 1:18; 1 Thess 5:24; 2 Thess 3:3.

<sup>39</sup> It is also possible that Paul’s words in 1:9 refer to a *present* promise: God is faithful to believers day by day.

<sup>40</sup> Nigel Watson, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*: Epworth Commentaries New Edition (London: Epworth [1992] 2005), 6.

<sup>41</sup> See 1 Cor 1:1, 2 [twice], 3, 4, 6, 7, 8, 9. 1:5 is the only verse Christ is not explicitly mentioned.

<sup>42</sup> God intends for every believer to have the assurance of his/her salvation (see John 3:16; 5:24; 6:37, 44; 10:27-29; Rom 8:29-39; Eph 1:4; Col 1:12-14; 2 Tim 1:12; 1 John 5:10-13).

<sup>43</sup> The Corinthians are positionally and judicially righteous, but not experientially (1 Cor 1:10f). The rest of the book is a call to respond to the sanctifying and strengthening grace of God.