

First Sunday in Advent – Epistle

THE FELLOWSHIP OF THE SON

1 Corinthians 1:3-9

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1 Corinthians 1: 3 Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

4 I give thanks to my God always for you because of the grace of God that has been given you in Christ Jesus, 5 for in every way you have been enriched in him, in speech and knowledge of every kind – 6 just as the testimony of Christ has been strengthened among you – 7 so that you are not lacking in any spiritual gift as you wait for the revealing of our Lord Jesus Christ. 8 He will also strengthen you to the end, so that you may be blameless on the day of our Lord Jesus Christ. 9 God is faithful; by him you were called into the fellowship of his Son, Jesus Christ our Lord.

DIAGNOSIS: We Are Weak

Step 1: Initial Diagnosis (External Problem) – *Strong...Willed*

Paul's apparently confident words about the Corinthians and their strength is actually faint praise. The only strength the Corinthians seem able to demonstrate is strength of will. In fact, they are so strong-willed that they are now arguing about who has the best celebrity baptism (1:14-17)-hardly an exercise in Christian grace or fellowship (v. 9). But not unlike many of

our modern, petty Christian squabbles designed to demonstrate self-will (think memorial plaques, hymn selection, flags in the sanctuary).

Step 2: Advanced Diagnosis (Internal Problem) – *Weakness In Strength*

The Corinthians (and we) are more intent on exercising personal pride than spiritual gifts. But their vain efforts expose their weakness: They are not strong in themselves at all. Instead, their contest of wills reveals a deeper malady: not only can they not trust themselves, they cannot trust God. And this business of “waiting for the revealing of our Lord Jesus Christ” (v. 7), well that is for weak-minded simpletons who need religion as a crutch. Such waiting-even if spiritual gifts are part of the package (v. 7)-is sheer folly for those who desire to be self-determined.

Step 3: Final Diagnosis (Eternal Problem) – *Blameworthy (v. 8)*

Problem is, it's not the self that determines one's ultimate worth. No. That is up to God who judges us “on the day of our Lord Jesus Christ” (v. 8). So imagine God's horror to find out that not only did we fail to anticipate that day, but we don't even know this Jesus whom the day is named for. But ignorance is no defense-especially when we have had sound gospel preachers like Paul around. Instead, by our own admitted ignorance we are judged not blameless but blameworthy. (That means a guilty verdict from the judge.)

PROGNOSIS: But He Is Strong

Step 4: Initial Prognosis (Eternal Solution) – *Blameless*

So what's a poor sap to do in the face of God's judgment. Well, the best answer is “nothing.” We can't do anything to remove the blame from ourselves. Only God can fix that problem And that's exactly what God does in Jesus Christ-lifts the blame right off us and puts it on Christ. The praiseworthy Son takes the blame

right in his hands, side and feet; takes our blame to his dying breath. It is an act that should render us speechless and mystified (counter v. 5): The blameless One takes the blame. That is how God proves that he is faithful (v. 9)

Step 5: Advanced Prognosis (Internal Solution) – Strength in Weakness

This same blameless One has called us into fellowship with him (v. 9)-not because we've impressed him with our associations or our personal mastery. He has called us into fellowship out of sheer love and grace. This is what Paul offers thanks for in verse 4; he gives thanks for Christ having come into the lives of the Corinthians. Why? Because, in Christ they will stand blameless before God. Faith acknowledges this truth: We are weak but he is strong. And if Christ doesn't do the talking for us (give us our defense), we don't have a spiritual gift to stand on. But because Christ has spoken up for us, we have everything we need to direct our days until that last day. The kind of spiritual gifts we are blessed with is beside the point. The point is faith, and the gifts simply are put to use in the meantime to benefit others. Real strength, then, comes not in the spiritual gifts themselves but from the Giver; and the Giver will get us through until that last day (v. 8).

Step 6: Final Prognosis (External Solution) – Spiritually Gifted

The gifts are put to use in the meantime to benefit others, and there are plenty to go around (v. 7). And they make the waiting-time pass with purpose and in good company. Good company because when you belong to the fellowship of God's Son you don't wait alone. Instead, you wait in the company of others who have surrendered their strong wills, preferring the strength of One who is more dependable than they-especially on that last day.