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 January 28, 2007

GENUINE SPIRITUALITY: A STUDY OF 1 CORINTHIANS

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**I THANK MY GOD ALWAYS CONCERNING YOU
 1 CORINTHIANS 1:4-9**

INTRODUCTION

Last week we were introduced to the Corinthians. In Acts 18, we saw God at work calling out His own chosen people to form the church in Corinth. God encouraged Paul to go on preaching in spite of persecution with these words, *I have many people in this city (Acts 18:10)*. God enabled those people to believe the gospel and God gathered them into a community of His own people called the church in Corinth. By the time Paul writes this letter, the church was comprised of somewhere between 50 and 100 people. As we learned last week, the church was riddled with problems. For example, they were seriously questioning Paul's authority to tell them how to live and this led to some internal divisions as each member tried to decide which leader best suited him. Furthermore, the church was infested with immorality and lawsuits. In addition, some in the church had decided that everyone would be better off single, rather than married. Some of the church's members were still frequenting the pagan temple's idolatrous feasts. Within the Corinthian church, the women began to usurp the men's authority in the worship gatherings. They even managed to misuse the spiritual gifts that the Spirit imparted to them as they competed with one another attempting to dominate the public gatherings of the church. These same worship gatherings had become chaotic and dishonoring to the Lord as the wealthy members of the church neglected the poor when they gathered for the Lord's Supper. Here they were eating gluttonously and getting drunk. The most serious problem in this church was their growing misunderstanding of the gospel as evidenced by some of the members denying the resurrection. As you can see, Paul had much to write about in 1 Corinthians. With these facts in mind, 1 Corinthians 1:4-9 seems a bit out of place as Paul thanks God for the very people who were breaking his heart and questioning his authority.

1. IN SPITE OF THEIR PRESENT SIN, PAUL THANKS GOD FOR HIS GRACE IN THE CORINTHIAN CHURCH (1:4-7a)

Paul's theology causes him to thank God for converted persons even though they are presently experiencing a profound struggle against sin. Paul obviously believes that God is at work in believers even while they repeatedly fail to live holy lives. Paul never minimizes the Corinthians' sins, but neither does he ignore the grace of God in their lives (v4). To more fully comprehend the extent of God's grace, look at the terminology early in this letter used to describe what God had done for the Corinthians.

First of all, Paul explicitly says that the Corinthians were recipients of God's grace as it comes through Jesus Christ to believing sinners. That is to say, they were justified people who God had declared righteous. Secondly, God's grace was demonstrated by the giving of spiritual gifts. Paul is thankful because the Corinthians were *enriched in Him, in all speech and all knowledge (v5)*. God not only justified these individuals, He gifted them as well. Two examples are given here: speech and knowledge. In their knowledge, wisdom, prophecies and tongues, the Corinthians

experienced the enriching grace of God. They certainly neglected and abused these gifts, but their sin did not negate God's kindness toward them. God confirmed Paul's message to the Corinthians by granting them spiritual gifts (v6). Again, Paul reassures his readers that the Corinthians were true believers and they evidenced this through spiritual gifts. In fact, the Corinthians were not lacking any gift necessary for the life and health of their local congregation (v7).

2. PAUL CAN THANK GOD BECAUSE HE UNDERSTANDS THAT GRACE WILL ULTIMATELY CONQUER OUR SIN (1:7b-8)

The church in Corinth was called and gifted, but they were not yet perfected. Perhaps their rich giftedness caused to them to forget that God's grace was the source of their gifts and perhaps, their knowledge, wisdom, prophecies and tongues made them think they had no further need of sanctification. Like all believers, the Corinthians should have been *awaiting eagerly the revelation of our Lord Jesus Christ*. They were justified, but not yet glorified. Therefore, they were to anxiously await the second coming of Christ for their completed sanctification.

In Paul's understanding of salvation, God first sets us apart for salvation and then graciously calls us in such a way that we respond by calling on Jesus in faith (v2, 9). This faith which God's call produces in us leads to our justification, or our positional righteousness [*saints by calling* (v2)]. The Holy Spirit indwells and gifts us for ministry while we are actually increasing in practical holiness (vv5-7a). Finally, our salvation is complete when Jesus grants us a glorified body like His own (v7b). This helps us understand how Paul can be brokenhearted over the Corinthians present sin and thankful for God's triumphant grace that will finally take away all remnants of sin (v8). Justifying grace will always result in blamelessness before Jesus at the final judgment.

3. PAUL'S ASSURANCE OF GOD'S CONQUERING GRACE RESTS IN GOD'S FAITHFULNESS AND GOD'S EFFECTUAL CALL (1:9)

Paul's confidence never rests in the Corinthians, but in God. This is why he thanks God in verse 4 and not the Corinthians. Paul also reminds the church that God is the source of their gifts so that they will not use them in a prideful manner. In fact, Paul mentions Jesus 9 times in the first 9 verses of his letter. He knows that the church had lost its hold on the true gospel and so Christ is made prominent early and often.

Paul's assurance that the Corinthians will be confirmed until the end and presented blameless at the final judgment rests in God's faithfulness and God's effectual call. First of all, God's faithfulness is promised to the weakest believer. God will sustain that Christian's faith until the end. Deeply rooted in Paul's theology is this certainty that God will perfect all believers in the end, even those as misguided as the Corinthians. Secondly, Paul understands God's faithfulness as intimately linked to God's call (v9).

The call of God does not invite us to come to Christ; it is a powerful call that awakens spiritual life within us and compels us to come. As a result of this powerful call, we now see the truth and desire Jesus. This leads to lifelong repentance and faith. The call of God takes away our pride and rebellion and makes Christ irresistibly attractive so that we willingly repent and believe all of our lives. When God calls, He enables us to respond to the call by giving us new hearts [new desires and new ability to carry out those desires]. Our hearts of stone are replaced with hearts of flesh and now we desire to obey God. God is faithful to His promise that we will never again return to unbelief.

CONCLUSION

We must not forget that God has called us to holiness. Because of justification, God has declared us to be holy. Now we must pursue holiness in the most mundane details of life. In addition, we must learn to give thanks for others who are justified and yet, struggling with sin. We must not declare any believer to be hopeless because God's grace will triumph in their lives. Paul's thankfulness for the Corinthians should set an example for us so that we may be grateful for God's grace in the lives of other believers at Green Run Baptist Church.