

FIRST CORINTHIANS

Our Possessions In Christ I Corinthians 1:4-9

Suppose someone were to deposit five million dollars to your bank account, but for some reason you refused to draw upon the money which was legally yours. You would be wealthy and yet live like a pauper. There might be several reasons why you would not draw out your money. First, you might refuse to believe you actually had five million in the bank or that someone had dealt with you so graciously. Second, you might be ignorant of it, for you might not know the money was actually deposited to your account. Third, you might be indifferent to it and not really care that you had that kind of money in the bank. Whatever your reasons for not using the money, the fact is you would be rich and still live like a pauper.

All Christians have been given infinite possessions in Christ. They are spiritual millionaires (billionaires, trillionaires), but many do not draw upon their spiritual wealth in Christ. They are either ignorant of it, refuse to believe they have it, or are indifferent to it. All Christians are spiritual millionaires in Christ, but many live like spiritual paupers.

After his salutation to the Corinthians in which he reminded them they had been sovereignly called to salvation through Christ and set apart for worship, godliness and service, the Apostle Paul, in the remainder of this introduction, gives a thanksgiving for the depths of spiritual wealth in the church of Corinth. In 1:1-3, Paul dealt their position in Christ. They were saints, holy ones, called by God and set apart for sacred purposes. In 1:4-9, Paul deals with their possessions in Christ, stressing their spiritual blessings in Christ or what they possess because of their new position in Christ.

POSSESSORS OF GOD'S GRACE 1:4

I always thank God for you. Paul loved these Corinthians even though they were immature in their faith and were acting in a carnal, worldly, fleshly manner. He found, however, much reason for thanksgiving because the vast majority of the Corinthians were truly saved. The Apostle was a positive thinker and could always find good in what seemed to be a bad situation. Paul did not thank God for their lives because their Christian experience was atrocious, but he thanked God for who and what they were in Christ. He thanked God for what God had done for them and for all of their possessions and spiritual wealth in Christ.

Because of his grace given you in Christ Jesus. Paul thanked God the Corinthian Christians had become recipients of God's grace. Salvation had made them receivers and possessors of the grace of God. It was God's grace; the unmerited favor of a sovereign God, that had saved these wicked folks at Corinth. "For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God not by works, so that no one can boast" (Eph. 2:8-9). They had been heathen idol worshipers but now they were born again because of God's grace and mercy which they in no way deserved. It is the pure grace of God which gives the Christian his position and possessions in Christ. What are some of these possessions? Because of God's grace, we Christians are

elected, called, redeemed, justified, reconciled, forgiven, recipients of eternal life,
adopted into God's family, seated in the heavenlies and blessed with all spiritual blessing
all this and more because we are in Christ.

It appears the Apostle Paul assumed these Corinthian Christians clearly understood the grace of God, but this was also one of their problems. They were not caught up in legalism as were the Galatians, or ritual, as were the Colossians, but in Corinth they had the problem of license. They accepted the grace of God to such a degree they did not think it made any difference how they behaved. They were libertines, abusing the grace of God and using it as an excuse for immoral living. They reasoned that since they were saved, God would always deal with them in grace, no matter how sinful their lives might be. They wrongly reasoned that grace set them free to sin. They, as many Christians do today, said, "We are so free in Christ, we are free to sin!" How ridiculous to reason like this. They were always free to sin even before they were Christians. What they failed to see was that grace set them free to serve, to worship, to live for Christ!

POSSESSORS OF SPIRITUAL WEALTH 1:5

For in him you have been enriched in every way. God's grace enriched or made wealthy these Corinthian Christians. The word "enriched" is the Greek word from which we get the word "plutocrat" in the English which means "one who is very wealthy." These Corinthian Christians were spiritual plutocrats, blessed beyond measure. They were spiritually wealthy in everything but especially in the area of spiritual gifts.

In all your speaking and in all your knowledge. The Corinthians were enriched with speaking (word) and knowledge. This may mean they were very knowledgeable and loved to speak out their theological and philosophical convictions. The Greeks liked nothing better than to study and then sit around discussing philosophy and theology.

However, the terms "word" and "knowledge" most likely refer to spiritual gifts. The Corinthians not only possessed Christ but they possessed spiritual gifts in abundance. Paul picks out the gifts concerning "word" and "knowledge" because these were two gift areas the Corinthians were abusing in their church. The term "word" (logos) probably refers to any spiritual gift relating to a "spiritual utterance" knowledge, wisdom, teaching, tongues, etc. The term "knowledge" (gnosis) probably refers to spiritual gifts relating to knowledge such as the gift of prophecy.

It is remarkable that Paul thanks God for things in the church that, because of abuses, are also causing him grief. The problem in Corinth was not in their gifts but in their attitudes towards the gifts. They thought because they spoke in tongues and prophesied they were more spiritual, more mature, than most Christians, being able to understand great mysteries. Their negative attitudes led to pride and arrogance. The reason Paul could give thanks is that these gifts mentioned came from God. It was not God's fault they were being terribly abused. These gifts were good things gone sour.

Paul right up front wants the Corinthians to grasp that all their spiritual gifts came from God and there was no room for boasting or feelings of superiority. "For who makes you different from anyone else? What do you have that you did not receive? And if you did receive it, who do you boast as though you did not" (I Cor. 4:7)? God gave these gifts to enhance their witness and testimony, but because of their abuse of them, they actually hindered their witness and testimony.

POSSESSORS OF THE GOSPEL 1:6

Because our testimony about Christ was confirmed in you. The "testimony about Christ" refers to the gospel; they had responded to Christ by grace. It also refers to the bestowal of spiritual gifts upon these Corinthians as evidence that the gospel of Christ had taken root in their lives. These spiritual gifts confirmed, secured, guaranteed or validated the gospel that Paul preached and that they had received by faith. They possessed the gospel and the evidence of that was a manifestation of spiritual gifts.

POSSESSORS OF SPIRITUAL GIFTS 1:7

Therefore you do not lack any spiritual gift. This is an obvious reference to spiritual gifts. They were a blessed church. In fact, one wonders if there was ever a local church blessed with all the spiritual gifts as was the church at Corinth. The New Testament lists at least twenty-one spiritual gifts, and the Corinthian church had them all: tongues, healings, helps, teaching, knowledge, leadership, etc. The Corinthians must have had some fascinating, exciting meetings. No one wanted to miss church at Corinth.

The Corinthians had all the gifts, but the gifts did not make them spiritual. It made them exciting, but not spiritual. They were carnal. One may be very gifted and not necessarily walking with God, not necessarily guided by the Holy Spirit in the use of his gift. Because of their carnality, they abused their spiritual gifts. Since their hearts were not right with Christ, they used their gifts for their own glory rather than for the glory of God.

Did you know each Christian has at least one spiritual gift? Some have two or three. You have been given some gift and God expects you to use it in and through the local church to reach the lost for Christ and to build up the saints. Are you using your spiritual gift or gifts? If not, you are not experiencing the fullness of Christ in your life.

As you eagerly wait for our Lord Jesus Christ to be revealed. The Corinthians as a whole were waiting for the second advent of Christ, and they apparently understood that when He returned to this earth, He would set things right. They were not given to naive and liberal delusions that they would, by their own efforts, handle all the problems of the world and correct all evil in life and that by doing so they would usher in the kingdom. They discarded all human schemes for saving the world and looked to the return of the Lord Jesus Christ as their only hope. Perhaps they had made a determination to use their gifts faithfully until the Lord Jesus returned.

Christ's second coming is called "a revelation" (unveiling). On that day, Christ will be totally unveiled; we will see and know Him as He really is. It will also be a day in which there will be a true unveiling by Christ of the motives in our hearts as to why we served Him.

"Therefore judge nothing before the appointed time; wait till the Lord comes. He will bring to light what is hidden in darkness and will expose the motives of men's hearts" (I Cor. 4:5).

It is possible to have a right eschatology (understanding of last events) and still be carnal in certain areas of life. Looking for the second coming of Christ should cause us to live holy lives, but quite often our head knowledge far exceeds our heart experience.

“Dear friends, now we are children of God, and what we will be has not yet been made known. But we know that when he appears, we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is. Everyone who has this hope in him purifies himself, just as he is pure” (I Jn. 3:2-3).

Verse seven strongly implies that all the spiritual gifts will be in existence to some degree until the second coming of Christ. It also implies that the church in general is not perfect and will not be until Christ returns, and many churches, like Corinth, have a long way yet to go in this old world. Every Christian, however, should be using his or her spiritual gifts until the Lord returns for His church.

POSSESSORS OF ETERNAL SALVATION 1:8

He will keep you strong to the end. The word "strong" was used as a legal guarantee for the deliverance of goods. It means to confirm, to secure or to guarantee. God will secure, confirm, guarantee the Christian to the end. The end refers to the day of the revelation of Jesus Christ at His second coming. God secured our salvation and will take us to heaven. This is not so much the perseverance of the saints as the perseverance of God in keeping each one of His children right to the end. The reason all the elect will persevere to the end is that God guarantees it.

This is surely a great promise for the eternal security of the believer. Someone has said that if God will keep me to the end, that is, the second advent, when I shall receive a new, spiritual, sinless body, then He can let me go because I will be perfect and a perfect person can enter into heaven. "Being confident of this, that he who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus" (Philip. 1:6).

So that you will be blameless on the day of our Lord Jesus Christ. The word "blameless" should be translated "unaccusable" or "unchargeable." When the Christian goes before the Judgment Seat of Christ at the second advent, he will be so perfect that no charge can be made against him. At that time, the Christian will be judged and rewarded for the good and bad things he did in the body while on earth, but in Christ, he will be found blameless, unchargeable and unaccusable. Men can accuse us now because we have sin still in us. Satan can accuse us because we still do wrong things as Christians; but in that future day, with our new bodies, it will be impossible to be charged.

It is remarkable that Paul could express such confidence about the Corinthian Christians' future destiny when their present behavior was anything but blameless. We see how people are now, but God sees the finished product. The evidence shows that most of the Corinthian Christians did grow up spiritually, but it took time. They had not arrived spiritually, but God sees the final product. He knows how the movie will end.

POSSESSORS OF CHRIST'S FELLOWSHIP 1:9

God...is faithful. This tells us why Christians will be preserved to the end. It is not because men have great, indestructible faith and mechanical determination, but because God is faithful and He will confirm or secure us to the end. The fact that every believer will stand in God's presence does not depend upon man's faith but upon God's faithfulness. Our security is grounded in the character of God.

One may have doubts at times about the reality of eternal security, but God is faithful even over our doubts. Since God has given us this great salvation, we ought to live lives in accordance with our calling, position and future promise that we will be in His presence.

Who has called you into fellowship with his Son Jesus Christ our Lord. This may well be the key verse of First Corinthians. The rest of the letter centers around it. God called these Corinthian Christians into a very important relationship fellowship with Jesus Christ the Lord. Notice that they were called to fellowship with Christ as Lord. The reason for all the problems in the Corinthian church was that they did not understand the implications of their calling and their relationship with Christ, nor were they submitted to the Lordship of Christ in their experience. Beginning in verse ten, the Apostle Paul starts to deal with division, scandals, lawsuits, immorality, drunkenness, quarreling, and other issues which were prevalent in the Corinthian church. It is quite clear that despite the fullness of provision in Christ these Corinthian Christians had received, they were experiencing a great failure in the church. They had all the ability to do mighty things in the Spirit, but not much was happening in the city of Corinth for Christ. Instead of making an impact on Corinth, Corinth was making an impact on the church. All the ugly attitudes and actions and activities that were going on every day and every night in the city were beginning to infiltrate the church. Instead of the church changing the city, the city was changing the church.

God sovereignly called these Corinthians into fellowship or partnership with Christ.

They had lost a sense of Christ's fellowship. His Lordship over their lives was set aside. They no longer lived in the awareness and the excitement that they were partners with Christ in everything they did. This letter, therefore, was written to call the people back into an awareness of what it means to have fellowship with Jesus Christ.

Through fellowship with Christ we get direction and dynamic to live the Christian life in a way that is pleasing to Him.

When any one of us forgets this (Lordship and fellowship), we drift into that terrible syndrome of recognizing the Lord on Sunday, and from Monday through Saturday living our life on our own without any recognition of His presence with us. He is no longer Lord of all our life, but only a part of it. If He is not Lord through our life all day long, then he is Lord only of the margins, only of the leftovers, only of the weekends" (Ray Stedman, First Corinthians).

CONCLUSION

What does God want Christians to learn from this section of scripture? First, we are secure in Christ. He possesses us and we possess Him. Second, we have spiritual gifts that God wants us to use and not abuse to get His work done. Third, fellowship with Jesus Christ and recognition of His Lordship over our lives is the key to keep from becoming a carnal Christian. Fourth, we need to appreciate the fact that we are rich beyond measure with spiritual blessings in Christ. Are we aware of our wealth in Christ? No one has more right to be called a spiritual plutocrat than a Christian. It is when we realize our spiritual wealth in Christ that we will have the basis for godly living as Christians.

Many years ago the U.S. government gave a huge piece of land to a tribe of Indians in Oklahoma. They gave it because they thought it was worthless land. Shortly thereafter, oil was found on the land and this tribe became fabulously wealthy. The land had been divided up among the Indians in individual plots.

Sometime after this an Indian died of starvation. He had a locket around his neck in which a piece of paper was crumpled. He valued that paper because it had come from the Great White Father in Washington, D.C. When the locket was opened and the paper read, it was in fact from the Department of Indian Affairs informing this man he was a possessor of one of the wealthy plots of land in the Indian reservation. Yet he died of starvation because he was illiterate and did not know what was in his locket. He was not aware of his wealth and lived accordingly. How many Christians there are who are wealthy in Christ but live in spiritual poverty!

Would you like to know God has elected and called you to salvation? Would you like to have an awareness of fellowship with the resurrected Christ? Would you like to have the forgiveness of sins and eternal life that can never be taken away from you? If the answer is "yes" then you can. You must receive Jesus Christ as your Savior for your sins and bow to Him as your Lord, giving Him the right to rule in your life. Jesus Christ stands ready to forgive you and make you a child of God the moment you acknowledge Him as your personal Savior and Lord.