

## Enriched in Him

### 1 Corinthians 1:1-9

At my forward congregation, I served for a period as the chairperson of Christian education. This included supervision of Sunday School and the Children's Church program. We had a young student name David, a likeable elementary student, who often gave the teachers and the children's church volunteers the "blues." We instructed the teachers and volunteers to look for positive behaviors at the beginning of a class or church activity worthy of praise – rather than waiting for him and others to begin to participate in inappropriate behaviors that would need to be corrected. We even gave the volunteers a list of words to use to praise the positive behavior. These included:

You're doing a good job!

That's the way!

You're doing fine.

Now you have it!

That's Great!

You did it that time!

Way to Go!

You're doing much better today.

Find!

That's It!

These were all aimed at positive behavior. Sometimes when we look for good behavior we find it. What we were asking the volunteers to do was to bring out the good behaviors by expecting them, and helping David see himself in a different light, because a crucial dynamic in human relationships is the perception that people have of themselves and of others. If a person perceives herself as articulate and competent, she will interact with others in a way of which she would not be capable if she saw herself as fumbling and inept. If a person perceives others as informed and able, he will deal with them in ways that he would not if he saw them as incompetent and ill informed. Furthermore, the way people respond to him will be strongly influenced by

the perception that he has of them. People sense how they are viewed by others and respond accordingly. If people discern that another has high regard for them, they often live up to that expectation. Conversely, if they discern that the other has a low opinion of them, their attitude and behavior often reflect that assessment.

As Paul begins his letter to the church at Corinth, he expressed both his perception of himself and his perception of the congregation to which he was writing. Both those perceptions made a strong impact on what Paul wrote and how he dealt with the people.

First, how did Paul see himself? He wrote with confidence, clearly indicating that he had something to communicate that would be important to them. He wrote with such confidence not simply because he thought that he had some good ideas or because he believed the Corinthians were obligated to pay attention to him. He perceived himself as one who had been "called to be an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God" (v. 1). Paul had been given a mission and a message as an apostle. All of this had come about because God had willed it. Because this was Paul's perception of himself, he wrote with neither arrogance nor apology.

Second, how did Paul see the people of Corinth? They were "sanctified in Christ"; they were "called to be saints;" they were part of a broader community of those "who call on the name of our Lord Jesus Christ" (v. 2). Paul had no illusions about the Corinthians. He has heard about their quarrels and divisions. He said that they were "people of the flesh," "infants in Christ" (3:1). He had heard "that there *was* sexual immorality among *them*" (5:1). Nevertheless, Paul began his letter by affirming his understanding of who they were and reminding them of who they were: they were of people who had been set apart and sanctified in Christ; those called to be saints (v. 2). They were the church called to be what God intended it to be...people with an understanding of who they were in Christ and the fact that their baptism has brought

them into the beloved community. They were at the people of God. **Harry B.**

### **Adams**

Paul said they were enriched in Christ. So what are those riches?

1. They were enriched because they had Christian faith and were called by God to be followers of Jesus Christ. While we are individually called, as God addresses each of us, we are not called individually into faith. To enter into faith is to be in union with Christ—in other words, to be sanctified, to be saints—is to be set aside together as a new people or new society made up of those in every place who call Jesus Lord.

2. They were enriched because they had the peace of God, wholeness and reconciliation, given as a gift that is a matter of grace, not of birth or status, not defined by ancestry but by discipleship.

3. They were enriched because they had togetherness. Among contemporaries, this claim that life is given as a people is expressed by Desmond Tutu in the African word *ubuntu*, which connotes that a person is a person only through other persons. To be is to be "we" and not "I." The other is gift to us. Together in Christ gathered as the church, the community of faith lacks nothing that is needed as we wait upon God. It is in this sense that Paul gave thanks to God for the gift of each member of the church (vv. 4-9). Thanksgiving, grounded in the fact of *ubuntu* is grace given in Christ (v. 4) for the sake of being called together in community (*koinōnia*) (v. 9). **Timothy F.**

### **Sedgwick**

4. They were enriched because they had grace, strength, blamelessness, and fellowship with Christ: all these come from outside. The source of life is from without. The Corinthians were what they had *received*, and they have received much.

5. They were enriched because they had spiritual gifts: God's gifts of "speech and knowledge" are genuine gifts, for the sake of the Corinthians, and the whole church

for ministry to the community, to be witnesses of Christ's work in the world. **Alan Gregory**

6. They were enriched because "God is faithful" (v. 9), Paul was confident that the Corinthians would grow to maturity. What God had done in the past by calling the Corinthians into the fellowship of the Son assured the community of God's faithfulness in the future. To be in fellowship (*koinonia*) with Christ, as Paul explained later (10:16-17; 12:13) is to be in fellowship with others in a corporate journey in a community that includes rich and poor, Jew and Greek (12:13). **James W. Thompson**

As we look at the church in our own time, the weaknesses and failures are often all too evident, but Paul can teaches us to be grateful for the gifts that God has given to the church even with its frailties—gifts of understanding, gifts of caring, gifts of words that help and heal, gifts of faithfulness to Jesus Christ, gifts of shared community. The church is rich in blessings, not because of the accomplishments of the people within the fellowship, but because of the grace of God that has enriched and sustained us.

One final perspective that Paul had on the church was that Paul was quite aware that the church is not fulfilled in the present, but that the church waits for "the revealing of our Lord Jesus Christ" (v. 7). The church seeks to minister in this day and to be faithful in this day, but the church is a community that waits in hope for a future day. The church can live in hope because Jesus is our strength to the end and because God is faithful. **Harry B. Adams**

Like my student Dave, we need to know we have good news and that we are blessed. We are truly enriched and beloved in the Lord.