



# Potomac Hills

## Presbyterian Church, PCA

By Grace Alone ~ Through Faith Alone ~ In Christ Alone

The Reverend Dr. David V. Silvernail, Jr.  
1 Corinthians 1:1-9

September 3, 2017  
English Standard Version

---

### *“Cross Words: Called”*

The 1<sup>st</sup> Sermon in a series on The Book of **1st Corinthians**

#### **1 Corinthians 1:1-9**

*“Paul, **called** by the will of God to be an apostle of Christ Jesus, and our brother Sosthenes, <sup>2</sup> To the church of God that is in Corinth, to those sanctified in Christ Jesus, **called** to be saints together with all those who in every place **call** upon the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, both their Lord and ours: <sup>3</sup> Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.*

*<sup>4</sup> I give thanks to my God always for you because of the grace of God that was given you in Christ Jesus, <sup>5</sup> that in every way you were enriched in Him in all speech and all knowledge — <sup>6</sup> even as the testimony about Christ was confirmed among you — <sup>7</sup> so that you are not lacking in any gift, as you wait for the revealing of our Lord Jesus Christ, <sup>8</sup> who will sustain you to the end, guiltless in the day of our Lord Jesus Christ. <sup>9</sup> God is faithful, by whom you were **called** into the fellowship of His Son, Jesus Christ our Lord.”*

*Heavenly Father, this is Your Word and we need it. We need to be reminded of what makes the greatness of the Gospel, the Power of the Cross, and the Glory of Christ! We need to know the sufficiency of Your Word for all the problems of our lives. We need to know that whatever we struggle with as individuals – loneliness, idolatry, immorality, doubt, and so much more – that the answer to those issues are found in Christ. We need to know that whatever we struggle with as a church – division, gossip, grumbling, false teaching, lack of commitment, fear of others, confusion, and so much more – that the answer to those issues are found in Christ as well. Thank You that **1st Corinthians** is a love letter to unlovely people, pointing them, and us, to our Redeemer. We need the redemption He offers. Bring us to the Cross, Bring us the grace of*

*repentance, Soften our hard hearts, Have mercy upon us. And so we pray, by the power of the Holy Spirit, help us see Jesus, in His name we pray, amen.*

### **INTRODUCTION: “Church as a Contact Sport”**

Now, the title of my introduction today is a little unusual – “**Church as a Contact Sport**” – maybe it’s even a little unfair. But think for a moment about that name – Contact Sports. What does that mean? Most people immediately think of College or Pro Football, where the contact can actually be a devastating physical blow by a giant person, celebrated by many as a ... “good hit.” Of course, with all the concern developing around the long-term impact of repetitive concussions, we have to wonder about the “good hit.” Perhaps that kind of blow leaves an impact not just on our bodies, but on our minds, our wills, and our emotions as well. Of course, we could be talking about baseball, basketball, hockey, or soccer which are also contact sports, and which also cause injuries which can be more than physical.

Now let’s move from the world of contact sports to the world of contact church. Now, no one’s ever tackled me after a bad sermon, but I have been **verbally** laid out. We have very few people that suffer from repetitive concussions received **at church**, but we have had people suffer from repetitive **judgments** or serial **condemnation**. And while the blows received at church tend not to be physical and leave few broken bones, the blows **we do receive** leave an impact, perhaps not on our bodies, but **most definitely** on our minds, our wills, and our emotions. There’s more than one book, article, blog, or sermon entitled “*Why do Christians shoot their own wounded?*” It happens so often it seems that part of our sinful nature entails not getting along with each other. Every church, and every church member, has to be **diligent** about facing **discord**, **division**, and **disunity**.

Imagine a church wracked by **divisions**. Powerful leaders promote themselves against each other, each with his own band of loyal followers. One of them is having an affair with his stepmother, and, instead of disciplining him, some in the church boast of his freedom in Christ. Believers sue each other in secular courts; some like to visit prostitutes, of course, for evangelistic purposes only. As a backlash against this rampant immorality, another faction in the church is promoting celibacy — complete abstinence for all believers, even those who are married — as the Christian ideal. Still other debates rage about how decisively new Christians should break from their pagan past. Disagreements abound about men's and women's roles in the church. As if all of this weren’t enough, alleged prophecies and speaking in tongues occur regularly, but not always in constructive ways. And if that’s not confusing enough, it appears that a number of these immature Christians don’t believe in the bodily resurrection of Christ!

Does this sound like anything you’ve ever heard of? Probably no contemporary church faces **this exact cluster** of issues all at once. But all of the issues **remain remarkably current**. The description, of course, is not of any contemporary church but of the first-century church in Corinth. Yet if we can understand the nature of these problems and the nature of Paul's divinely inspired instruction in response to them, then we’ll be able to gain great insights into numerous debates that threaten to **divide** today's church and keep it from having the life-changing impact God intends it to have.

I have to be honest, I’ve had a fear-attraction regard for the **Book of 1st Corinthians**, having the **desire** to preach the book and also a **reluctance**, both for the same reasons. **1st Corinthians**, more than any other New Testament **Epistle** (which is just a Bible word for a New

Testament Letter) addresses how a church is to function and behave. It is the most practical of the **epistles**, tackling not only matters of **belief**, but of **practice**. How should a church worship? What may women do in worship? How should we approach the Lord's Supper? What are the spiritual gifts in the church and how should they be used? There are other issues: church discipline, divorce and remarriage, sexual practices, handling disputes, and still others. For those of you who want more **application** in our sermons, this is the book for you. **Application** is what this book is all about.

That's why I want to preach **1st Corinthians**. It will take us through church life. But that's also why I hesitate to preach **1st Corinthians**. **Application** is what **divided** the Corinthian church. The Corinthian believers approached church from different perspectives. I know that as we approach the various issues in this book, we too will address them from different, and sometimes conflicting, viewpoints. To preach **1st Corinthians** in our church is to **invite debate**. But more daunting than debate is the command of Scripture ... **to be obedient to Scripture**. I'm unnerved by the thought that I have to bend my presuppositions about church life, family life, personal life ... to what a careful study of the Scriptures will reveal. I have my ideas what **1st Corinthians** teaches about the church, but I'm in the same position as you of having to place those ideas under the careful study of what Scripture actually teaches.

You know by now that I don't count speed as a virtue in preaching through a book of the Bible, nor will we be skipping any verses. I'll let you speculate how long it will take us to get to the end of the book, but you can safely plan on ending around Easter next year. And so we start by discovering that this is ...

### **BACKGROUND: A Church in Need of Grace**

Now Paul had visited the city of Corinth and planted a church there around AD 49. It was a **strategically** located city. It's positioned on a narrow four-mile isthmus that separates northern and southern Greece. It had been destroyed by Rome in 146 BC only to be rebuilt a hundred years later by Julius Caesar as a Roman colony and it became the capital of the province of Achaia. Because of its location, it rapidly became a major trade center and a wealthy city. And as always happens when communities are located where economic opportunity abounds, it attracted people **from all over the world**. It was a vast **melting pot** of cultures, all of which, of course, made it a place of stark, social contrasts. Sound familiar?

Writing sometime after Paul's stay in this city, one ancient visitor to Corinth said that "the sordidness of the rich and the misery of the poor were extraordinary." He said it was a place, "abounding in luxuries but inhabited by **an ungracious people**." It was a city noted for **immorality** and **debauchery**. The great temple of Aphrodite was located on the top of a hill overlooking the city where thousands of temple prostitutes worked there as priestesses and below it, there was the temple of Apollo which celebrated homosexuality. In time, to "**Corinthianize**" became a synonym for adultery and perversity of every kind. It was a giant red-light district, but it was here, into this dark, cosmopolitan city, that the Apostle Paul resolved to plant a church, which he did, **Acts 18** tells us, with the help of Priscilla and Aquila.

Now when Paul left the city about a year and a half later, he spent the next three years ministering in the city of Ephesus, and while he was in Ephesus he began to hear that all was not well back in Corinth. The allure of the surrounding culture continued to pull at these young believers. Sharp **divisions** began to emerge. Sexual **sin** continued to be a struggle and the oddities of pagan **philosophy** and the mystery **cults** (the forerunners of Gnosticism) began to

creep into the teaching of some people in the churches. And so Paul's letter to them is designed to directly address each of those issues.

And it also doesn't take much imagination to see why **1st Corinthians** might have something relevant to say to **our context**, and to **our culture**, and to **our community**, does it? Many of the issues facing the believers in Corinth characterize **the struggles facing Christians today** as we wrestle with **The Call** of Jesus Christ to be holy while the old life pulls at us and draws us back into the sinful patterns of the world.

But what we're going to see as the Apostle Paul addresses them over and over again, is that he doesn't respond to the Corinthians with angry rebuke, or with a series of "how-to" instructions for living your best life now. Instead, **1st Corinthians** points these relatively new Christians back to **fundamental truths** about God and the **Gospel** of His Son, the Lord Jesus Christ. And I think that's amazing! As you read through **1st Corinthians**, notice that no matter **how complex** or **how difficult** the problem, again and again, Paul's answer is essentially very basic. It's **knowing God revealed** in Jesus Christ, **crucified** on the Cross, **risen** from the dead, by the enabling **power** of the Holy Spirit. That's it – grasping and learning how to apply, with ever increasing clarity and courage, **the Gospel of God's Grace** for sinners in all the details of our lives. That's his response **to every problem the Corinthians are dealing with**.

Paul's agenda in this letter, in other words — and if we'll allow God's Word to do its work in our lives, God's agenda for us as we read **1st Corinthians** together in the weeks ahead — is to strip out all the old, tangled, confused wiring of the world and to re-wire our spiritual systems entirely with this simple, clear truth of **the Good News about Jesus Christ**.

And so **1st Corinthians** is **immensely exciting**, and **personally intimidating**, because it's dealing with the real issues with which we all struggle ... **even now**. What work of grace might the Lord intend in our lives ... and in our life together as a church ... as we come under the teaching of this book? I want you, over these coming weeks, to begin to **pray** with me that God would take hold of our hearts and our minds and our lives by His Word in this Book of **1st Corinthians** and do that re-wiring work among us.

So, let's get started. And this Book begins with words about ...

### **v. 1-3: CALL AND CALLING**<sup>1</sup>

*"Paul, called by the will of God to be an apostle of Christ Jesus, and our brother Sosthenes,<sup>2</sup> To the church of God that is in Corinth, to those sanctified in Christ Jesus, called to be saints together with all those who in every place call upon the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, both their Lord and ours:<sup>3</sup> Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ."*

This is an interesting couple of verses. And we're actually going to spend most of our time this morning right here, as I think these verses are foundational, not just for understanding

---

**1 The Introduction, Background, and Exposition of the text is adapted from the books, Preaching the Word: 1 Corinthians by Dr. Stephen Um, preached at CityLife Presbyterian Church (PCA), Boston, MA, pages 15-21; The NIV Application Commentary: 1 Corinthians by Dr. Craig Blomberg, pages 16-39; and The Lectio Continua Expository Commentary on the New Testament: First Corinthians by Dr. Kim Riddlebarger, pages xv-18. **And the sermons, "The Callings"** 1/8/17 and **"God is Faithful"** 1/15/17, both by Dr. David Strain, First Presbyterian Church, Jackson, MS, [www.fpcjackson.org](http://www.fpcjackson.org); **"The Preacher and the Church"** by Dr. Marian Clark, Lake Oconee Presbyterian Church (PCA), Eatonton, GA, 9/1/02, [www.dmcresources.com](http://www.dmcresources.com); **"The Freedom of Purity"** 6/12/94 by Dr. Timothy Keller, Redeemer Presbyterian Church, New York, NY, The Tim Keller Sermon Archive, Logos Bible Software 7.8**

**1st Corinthians**, but for understanding how to live the Christian life. We see the word “*call*” used **three times** in **three different ways** in these verses. The first time “*call*” is used is in **verse 1**. And here we find the issue of **authority**. Right off the bat, Paul addresses the issue of **authority**, verse 1, “*Paul, called by the will of God to be an apostle of Christ Jesus, and our brother Sosthenes, ...*” Now at first glance, Paul is simply following the conventional letter-writing style of the ancient Greco-Roman world. You begin with the author and then you mention the addressee and then you offer a word of greeting. And that’s largely Paul’s pattern.

But in the light of the rest of **1st Corinthians**, it’s clear there’s a lot more going on here. In chapters 3 and 4 in particular, Paul will have to defend himself and his ministry from those who were challenging his **authority**. “*Why should Paul tell us what to believe or how to behave? Why listen to Paul?*” That’s their question ... and their challenge. And so Paul is reminding the Corinthians, right off the bat, of his **apostolic credentials** ... “*called by the will of God to be an apostle of Christ Jesus.*” The will of God **called** him and the will of God **made** him **an apostle**. His is no derived **authority**. He didn’t receive it from men. He wasn’t made an apostle by the Church. He was **called** by the will of God which invests him with an **authority** that doesn’t belong to other Christians.

For example, notice the contrast between Paul and Sosthenes [sos-the-neeze). Paul is “*called by the will of God to be an apostle.*” But Sosthenes is “*our brother.*” Now if Sosthenes is the same man mentioned in **Acts 18**, and I think he is, this is a **wonderful title** for him. Because Luke told us, **Acts 18:17**, “*And they all seized Sosthenes, the ruler of the synagogue, and beat him in front of the tribunal. But Gallio paid no attention to any of this.*” At this point in **Acts 18**, there’s no indication at all that he’s a Christian. In fact, he has ample reason to **reject** Paul’s message. When the Jews in Corinth brought charges against Paul before Gallio the proconsul – because Paul was making converts from among the members of the synagogue, and from among the Gentiles in the city – Gallio dismissed their charges out of hand. And in their frustration and rage, the mob turns on poor Sosthenes. And they **beat him** because he’s the ruler of the synagogue and this was happening on his watch. He’s being made the target of the mob’s **rage** because of Paul’s ministry. This is Paul’s fault.

Now that’s incentive enough, isn’t it, to hate Paul and to hate his message? But here’s **the great power of the Gospel** to change even the hardest heart. Paul tells the Corinthians that Sosthenes is now “*our brother!*” Praise God ... those of you who are witnessing to and praying for family members and loved ones and friends, some of you for years, and you see no signs of change. God can take the least likely people, those with every reason to **reject** the Gospel and make of them brothers and sisters in Christ. That’s exactly what He has done in the life of Sosthenes. But understand that for all the glory of that, Sosthenes is still “*our brother,*” whereas Paul is “*called by the will of God to be an apostle.*” He is the spokesman of Christ by divine appointment. When Sosthenes speaks the Christians might listen or not. He might speak wisely or he might be spouting foolishness. Their consciences, you see, were free when Sosthenes spoke. But **when Paul speaks ... that’s an entirely different matter.**

I think this is important for us to grasp today, especially in our postmodern context where **authority** is virtually a dirty word. Maybe you feel that Paul’s words to us in this letter don’t come with the same weight and **authority** as an email from a friend might come to you. Maybe you think that Paul’s message doesn’t come with the comparative urgency of a three paragraph Facebook rant we might find mildly informative. No, **Paul...** Paul is **the mouthpiece of Jesus**

**Christ by the will of God** so that when **1st Corinthians** speaks to us, we should be glued to **every word** because **every word** originates ultimately not with Paul, but with Jesus Christ of whose message Paul is the inspired herald. And so the first thing Paul highlights is this issue of **authority**.

The second time “**call**” is used is in **verse 2**. Now, Paul addresses the issue of **identity**. First **authority**, then **identity**. Look carefully at **verse 2**, “*To the church of God that is in Corinth, to those sanctified in Christ Jesus, called to be saints...*” He doesn’t write to the church in Corinth, does he? To whom does he write? He writes to “**the church of God that is in Corinth.**” The word translated “**church**” is “**ecclesia**,” which simply means “**assembly**,” of which there were a variety of assemblies, a variety of community groups, a variety of affinity groups, whatever you want to **call** them, there were all kinds of groups meeting in Corinth. But **this ecclesia, this assembly**, has the distinction of being **the ecclesia of God, the church of God**. It’s not the church of Paul or the church of the Corinthian leadership or the membership or even of the culture. And in the same way, the church in Leesburg, Virginia is not the creation of our denomination, it’s not defined by its pastors or its leaders or by the culture of its members. It doesn’t belong to us! We are the church **OF GOD**. **We are His**.

And then Paul focuses the camera lens so that we can see more. What is the church of God? What does it really look like? How do you distinguish it from other assemblies? What is it that makes Potomac Hills distinct from the Rotary Club or the Urban League? Look at the text. The church of God, Paul says, is made up of “**those sanctified in Christ Jesus, called to be saints...**”

Now you may know the word “**sanctified**” and the word “**saint**” share the same Greek root word. A **saint** is a **sanctified** one. And the word simply means “to have been **set apart**; to have been **consecrated**” like the vessels and the furniture and the garments and the priests themselves in the Old Testament Temple. They were **set aside** and **consecrated** and **devoted** to a sacred purpose, **dedicated** to God. And like the priests in the Temple in Jerusalem, we have been **consecrated** and **dedicated** to a sacred purpose. That is our **fundamental identity** now. We have been **designated** and **reserved FOR GOD**.

And Paul tells us where and how that happens. Where it happens – look at **verse 2**? We are sanctified where? “**In Christ Jesus.**” God unites us to Christ through faith. We are planted into Him. He is the Holy One and in Him, we are consecrated and set apart as holy too. And then he tells us how it happens. He says we are “**called to be saints.**” The sovereign, effective, irresistible **call** of God **in the preaching of the Gospel**, in the power of the Holy Spirit, **makes us saints**. God, **in the preaching of the Gospel**, applied by the Spirit of God, **makes us saints**, as He **calls** us into union with Jesus Christ.

Now just think for a moment about the Corinthians. They were fighting, squabbling among themselves, holding grudges, acting superior, suing one another, sleeping around, participating in pagan rituals, getting drunk at the Lord’s Table, and so much more. **They were a mess!** **And yet ...** the Apostle Paul **calls** them “**saints.**” He **calls** them “**sanctified in Christ Jesus, called to be saints...**”

You get up in the morning and you look in the mirror and you see a wicked, sinful, compromising screw-up full of lust and pride and anger and laziness and unbelief and judgmentalism and a thousand other things besides. Me too! But that’s **Not Our Identity**. That may be **what we do, how we act**, but as we cling to Jesus — sometimes desperately, sometimes

brokenhearted — as we cling to Jesus Paul says **that's not who we are**. No, we are *sanctified in union with Christ Jesus* by the powerful **call** of the Spirit of God. You are a *saint*. You are His! Dedicated for His use and His glory. Consecrated to Him. **That is who you are**.

So now Paul is saying to the Corinthians and will go on to say in more detail as we'll see in moving through this letter, it's time to **be who you really are**, to live out your **identity** before the world and the eyes and gaze of a holy God. Stop living the old life. **That's not who you are, not anymore**. Stop telling yourself otherwise. You are *sanctified*, so be holy. You are a *saint*, in union with Christ, it's time to start living like it! The issue of **authority**. The issue of **identity**.

And the third time "**call**" is used is at the end of verse 2. Here Paul addresses the twin issues of **activity** and **unity**. The first has to do with our new **activity** as Christians. **Authority, identity, activity**. Here's what the church does. Look at verse 2 again. We are **called** to be saints, "... together with all those who in every place **call** upon the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, both their Lord and ours: ..." Paul doesn't simply mean to say that the church is marked by this stance that we occasionally pray. More than that, he's saying **the whole life of a Christian** can be summed up under this heading. This is **the distinctive characteristic feature**. They're always **calling**, they live **calling**, clinging to, dependent on the name of the Lord Jesus Christ.

The great Presbyterian Theologian Charles Hodge puts it this way in his commentary on this phrase, Paul's phrase, he says, "expresses not so much an individual act of prayer, as [it does] **a habitual state of mind** and its appropriate expression." That's what Paul's saying. It's **a habitual state of mind** in the church to **call** on the name of the Lord Jesus Christ. They're constantly **calling**. It's how they live; their stance, their leaning on, resting on, **calling** on the name of the Lord Jesus Christ in every circumstance, at every juncture. But you have to wonder — can that be said of us? That our most notable feature, our great characteristic is that we are habitually and instinctively **calling** on the name of the Lord Jesus? What happens when fear strikes? Is it your instinct and habit to run to Jesus or is He fifth, sixth, seventh down the list of reactions that pass through your mind and occupy your hands? Is He always on our lips, on our hearts? Are we longing for more of Him? All our hope for the future, for our growth, for our ministry, for our faithfulness and our fruitfulness **rests on Him**.

And then Paul emphasizes **unity**. **Authority, identity, activity, unity**. It's the other great fruit of the **call** of God that **sets us apart** in Christ as holy. We are first Jesus' people. We **call** on the name of the Lord Jesus. And then we're **united** people. We're **called** saints, verse 2, "... together with all those who in every place **call** upon the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, both their Lord and ours: ..." You see the emphasis on **unity**. Paul wants us to understand that to be **sanctified** in Christ and to be **called** a saint has vertical implications — we **call** on Jesus — and horizontal implications — we do it together. We are united. And those two implications — vertical and horizontal — always go together. The prideful party spirit that riddled the Corinthian church, Paul is saying, is incompatible with that posture and habit of **calling** on the name of Jesus.

So that's the opening — **Biblical authority, Gospel identity, prayerful activity, spiritual unity**. But remember, this church is still a mess. They're not doing any of that stuff — at least, not very much, or not very well. So, what comes next? You would think the rebukes,

challenges, exhortations would now be delivered with both barrels. I mean, after all, they deserve it. But no ... Paul doesn't go there ... at least not yet. Rather, he starts talking about ...

#### **v. 4-9: GIFTS AND GIVING**

*"I give thanks to my God always for you because of the grace of God that was given you in Christ Jesus, <sup>5</sup> that in every way you were enriched in Him in all speech and all knowledge — <sup>6</sup> even as the testimony about Christ was confirmed among you — <sup>7</sup> so that you are not lacking in any gift, as you wait for the revealing of our Lord Jesus Christ, <sup>8</sup> who will sustain you to the end, guiltless in the day of our Lord Jesus Christ. <sup>9</sup> God is faithful, by whom you were **called** into the fellowship of His Son, Jesus Christ our Lord."*

And while Paul clearly had a lot to challenge the Corinthians about, I think it's fascinating that he doesn't begin there at all. Not with a rebuke, but rather by **thanking** God for them. I suppose even the Corinthian leadership were bracing themselves for some harsh words. And how disarming it must have been to hear Paul begin, not with devastating critique, but instead this thoughtful word of **thanksgiving** to God, which betrays Paul's deep love for the Corinthians, despite all their mess. He's not playing games with them either. He's not just trying to be nice. This is not the Pauline equivalent of the Southern phrase, "Bless your heart," which really means, "We love you, but you're an idiot!" He means every word. He feels deep, lasting gratitude to God for these believers among whom he has invested a year and a half of his life and ministry.

I mean, critique is easy, isn't it? Criticism comes easy. But cultivating a **thankful** heart for the people of God sitting around you, in this church ... that's the heart-searching example that the Apostle Paul sets before us. I wonder if that's how you think of Potomac Hills; if those are **the first thoughts** when you think about our church, if those are **the first words** when you speak about our church. **Are you thankful?** Or do you display a critical spirit that makes you more like the Corinthians than the Apostle Paul?

The Apostle Paul begins by **giving thanks** for the evident work of grace he sees in their lives, and as he does so in this great prayer, he tells us of what grace did in their lives and through them in the lives of others. It encourages me about what God might yet do in my life and through me and in your life and through you. And I think that's what Paul intends to happen as we hear him pray about the Corinthians. He wants to show us what grace did in their lives that we might be encouraged with the hope of what grace might yet do in our own life.

The most noticeable thing here is that the Christian life is fundamentally and supremely a **Christ-centered life**. As we went through these verses, you heard, again and again, in every verse, the name of **Christ** mentioned. It's everywhere.

**Verse 4**, the grace of God is given to the Corinthians "*in Christ Jesus.*"

**Verse 5**, they are enriched in every way "*in Him.*"

**Verse 6**, the testimony confirmed among them is "*about Christ.*"

**Verse 7**, they live waiting for the revealing of "*our Lord Jesus Christ.*"

**Verse 8**, and they will be sustained to the day of "*our Lord Jesus Christ.*"

**Verse 9**, and our faithful God is the one who has **called** us into the fellowship of His Son, "*Jesus Christ our Lord.*"

This prayer is saturated with Jesus and it's a **Christ-centered** prayer because as Paul **thanks** God for the Corinthians he's praying for them to live a **Christ-centered** life. Because everything in the Christian life is centered on and is in some way or another an aspect or a

celebration of our **union with Christ**. So the grace we receive at the beginning and the grace we continue to receive every step of the way, we receive **in Christ**. The Word of God, the testimony that is confirmed among us that sustains and strengthens and nourishes us is a testimony **about Christ**. And that for which we look and long at the consummation of all things, our final destiny, is the revealing of **Jesus Christ**. In a therapeutic age like ours, that always strives to turn our attention inward, it's immensely helpful to be reminded that the Christian life is centered elsewhere, not on the self, but **on the Savior**. Paul directs our gaze up and away **to Jesus**. We are **in Him**. The testimony is all **about Him**. We wait **for Him**.

Then secondly notice the Christian life is a grace-enriched life. Look at the text carefully. Take out the little parenthesis, the little aside Paul makes in verse 6 and read verses 4, 5, and 7 together, "...the grace of God that was given you in Christ Jesus, that in every way you were enriched in Him in all speech and all knowledge," verse 7, "so that you are not lacking in any gift..." The grace of God that was given them **in Christ** has a particular result that Paul wants to emphasize. It has produced in them spiritual gifts, especially in the areas of speech and knowledge. And for now, he simply gives **thanks** that whatever issues there may be in Corinth, nevertheless God was enriching the life of the churches in the city through these gifts of grace. To be a Christian is to live enriched by the grace of God. To be a Christian is to live a **Christ-centered** life, and to pray **Christ-centered** prayers.

Do you see the sweep of Paul's argument? Biblical **authority** produces Gospel **identity**. We are **in Christ**, saints, sanctified, set apart **for Jesus**. And that new Gospel **identity** leads to prayerful **activity** – we cling **to Christ**; we're always **calling** upon **His name**. And that brings about profound spiritual **unity** – we do this all together; together we pray **Christ-centered** prayers, and together we live **Christ-centered** lives.

Maybe you've been coming to church for years and you've missed this. Maybe you've been looking for comfort and healing, for personal wholeness, for relationships. Maybe church for you is really about finding a place, building a community. Fair enough. I'm glad. You can find those things here; I pray that you will. But hear me carefully please, if that's all you're looking for, you're missing something, or more accurately, missing someone. Christians, whatever they find in the church, have found something infinitely more satisfying **in Christ**. A Christian is someone "**in Christ**." So Paul's prayer here directs our attention **to Christ**. He would ask you today the supremely urgent question, "Are you in Christ? Do you have Jesus? Does Jesus have hold of you?" That is the vital question everyone here must answer. The Christian life is oriented **toward Jesus**. It is **in Christ**. We are waiting **for Him** to come. It is a **Christ-centered** life.

Is yours? Think about that ... You need to pray.  
Take a moment to do that, and then I'll close.

*Our Lord and our God, thank You that You have spoken to us by Your Son. Open our eyes that we might see our sin and then see our Savior. God our Father, we bow before You and we confess to You that we often love ourselves in a way that allows us to justify to ourselves our lack of love for one another. And though we claim the name of Jesus, our hearts turn elsewhere when troubles come. It's not our habit and instinct, not as it ought to be, to **call** on the name of the Lord Jesus. And though You have made us saints in union with Jesus, we have continued to tell ourselves and define ourselves by our old life rather than by the new one we have in Him.*

*And all of that is because we have set aside the weight of Biblical **authority**, directing our consciences, and shutting us up to the obedience of faith. So look for us as a church, we pray, in mercy. Forgive us and work in these weeks and months ahead of us through **1st Corinthians** — teach us who we really are in Jesus and to strengthen us as we seek to live it out for your glory and honor and praise. And as we begin to be re-wired by the Gospel, would You make use of us in ways surpassing our expectations in this part of our community, in our workplaces, among our friends and family, and all over the world. Grant that we may live like people **called** to be saints, in the name of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, One God, now and forever. Amen.*

This message has been lightly edited and formatted for the web page. No attempt has been made to alter the basic extemporaneous delivery style, or to produce a grammatically accurate, publication-ready manuscript conforming to an established style template. There may be slight differences with the audio version. Should there be any questions regarding grammar or theological content, the reader should presume any error to be with the original speaker and should contact him directly. For full copyright, reproduction and permissions information, please visit the PHPC Copyright statement at [www.PotomacHills.org](http://www.PotomacHills.org).

**1 Thessalonians 5:23-24    #CrossWords**

*“Now may the God of peace Himself sanctify you completely, and may your whole spirit and soul and body be kept blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. **He who calls you is faithful; He will surely do it.**”*