

1 Cor 1:4-9
Deuteronomy 7
Psalm 44

“Called into Communal Participation”

February 2, 2014

Deuteronomy 7 explains what it means for Israel to be a “people holy to the LORD.”
It offends our “modern sensibilities”
when we hear that Israel was called to destroy the 7 nations of Canaan.

This is *genocide!*
“you must devote them to complete destruction.”
Why does God tell them to do this?

Certainly, Deuteronomy 7 points to the central concern about worship:
if they remain in the land, they will lead Israel astray –
and Israel will wind up worshiping others gods,
turning away from the LORD,
and so Israel will be destroyed.
(Incidentally, that’s exactly what happens.
Israel *fails* to wipe out the Canaanites,
and so the Canaanites wind up leading Israel astray,
and eventually, God brings judgment against Israel!)

But there is a bigger picture of what is going on.
Israel is called to be the Son of God.
And as the Son of God – Israel is called to bring judgment on the earth.
Judgment means one of two things:
1) salvation and blessing for those who repent;
2) destruction and death for those who rebel against God and mistreat his people.

God is using Israel to show forth a picture of what is coming at the end of history.
At the end of history, God will judge the nations (cf. Revelation 18-20).
And so at the beginning of Israel’s history,
God shows us, in a picture, what that will look like.
He started with Egypt as God brought Israel out of Egypt with mighty deeds.
But then, Joshua led Israel into the land, and Israel dispossessed the nations.

But things didn’t go the way Deuteronomy 7 said.
Yes, it’s true that Israel failed to drive out the nations entirely.
But something else was at work – and not just Israel’s sin.

After all, God was going to turn the world on its head in the cross of Jesus.
And he began to show that in the OT.

We sing about that in Psalm 44.
Psalm 44 is a lament.
But it is not a confession of sin.

Psalm 44 says that Israel has been faithful to God's covenant.
We have not worshiped other gods.
We have not turned aside from the Law of the LORD.
And yet, our enemies are winning.

Why?

Psalm 44 is a song for the persecuted church –
it's the Psalm that Paul quotes in Romans 8:36,
when he asks “who shall separate us from the love of Christ?”
“for your sake we are killed all the day long;
we are regarded as sheep to be slaughtered” –
and Paul concludes (v37-39),
“No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us.
For I am sure that neither death nor life, nor angels nor rulers,
nor things present nor things to come, nor powers,
nor height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation,
will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.”

So let us sing Psalm 44.

Sing Psalm 44
Read 1 Corinthians 1

“Called to fellowship”

Wow – there's a sermon that nearly preaches itself!
We live in such a disconnected age.
And yet, we are more “connected” than ever.
We have non-stop connection to entertainment, food, transportation,
goods and services.

And yet there is such a longing for ‘real,’ human connection.
Singles want to get married – and are surrounded by other singles –
but can't seem to find a connection.
We hear reports that people are so busy texting and keeping up with social media
that they don't have face time with other people –
except when they're on Facetime!

Certainly, the Christians in Corinth understood our dilemma.
Corinth was a post-modern city in pre-modern Greece!

Corinth is full of self-made millionaires who had risen from nothing –
and so naturally were prone to fall back into nothing,
when their fortunes changed.
It was the dot.com city, where people rose and fell overnight.

And so that's what makes Paul's statement in verse 9 so fascinating.

Paul will have a lot to say in 1 Corinthians about relationships and "fellowship" – in that sense of the word.

But that's not what he's talking about in verse 9.

When we hear the word "fellowship,"
we usually think of hanging out with friends –
playing games – good food – good times...

But here, Paul says,

"God is faithful, by whom you were called into the fellowship of his Son,
Jesus Christ our Lord."

Christian fellowship is not just 'having good friends who are Christians.'
Christian fellowship is a communal participation in the sonship of Jesus Christ.

This is at the heart of 1 Corinthians.

It's why I couldn't preach only one sermon on the first 9 verses of chapter 1.

The word "koinonia" only appears in one other place in 1 Corinthians.

That's in 1 Cor 10:16-17, where Paul says,

"the cup of blessing that we bless, is it not a *participation* in the blood of Christ;
the bread that we break, is it not a *participation* in the body of Christ."

But this point about our communal identity in Christ –

and our communal sharing in the divine life of Christ *with* one another –
is the central message of the epistle.

This is what Paul will keep coming back to over and over.

"Is Christ divided?" [note – not is "the church" divided – but is *Christ* divided!]

"we have received not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God" (2:12)

"for when one says, 'I follow Paul,' and another, 'I follow Apollos,'
are you not being merely human?" (3:4)

[you are not supposed to be "merely human"!]]

"So let no one boast in men...for you are Christ's, and Christ is God's" (3:23)

"your bodies are members of Christ" (6:15)

"your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you, whom you have from God" (6:19)

"Now you are the body of Christ and individually members of it" (12:27)

Paul is saying that God has called you into the fellowship of his Son –

and this fellowship is a communal participation in the resurrection life of Jesus.

It's not just a "me and Jesus" sort of fellowship –

but neither is it just a "one another" sort of fellowship.

Rather, we have been baptized by one Spirit into one body,

so that we might be members of Christ – and members of one another.

Insofar as we are connected to *him*, we are therefore connected to one another,

and we participate in this new community – in this new humanity –
through our common participation in one Spirit.

When the church forgets this,
then fellowship degenerates into a social club –
where we “hang out” with nice people,
and do nice things for people – because we like them,
and we want them to like us!

Paul objects to this way of “doing church” –
and insists that the church is “*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.” (v2)

Last time we looked at the theme of “calling” in Paul’s greeting to the Corinthians.
Paul says that he is *called* by the will of God to be an apostle,
and that the church in Corinth is *called* to be saints –
together with all those who in every place *call* upon the name of the Lord.
Jesus has only one church –
and so *everyone* who belongs to Jesus is connected to each other *through him*.

Today we see the same word appear again in verse 9 –
“God is faithful, by whom you were *called* into the fellowship of his Son.”

The way that you become a Christian is by God *calling* you.
God calls.
And when God calls, we respond by calling on the name of the Lord.
Think of Paul – or Saul of Tarsus, as he was known then!
Jesus called him – and Saul replied by calling Jesus Lord!
Or as we saw in Acts 18:10 last week,
Jesus told Paul to stay in Corinth and preach,
“for I have many in this city who are my people.”
This gave Paul great confidence in his preaching –
and it gives us confidence as well –
because we know that Jesus’ people will hear his voice!
As I always tell my seminarians when I teach at Mid-America –
when you speak with the voice of the Good Shepherd,
his sheep hear his voice,
and they respond with faith, hope, and love!

Today, we are looking at verses 4-9 of 1 Corinthians 1.
Here, Paul gives thanks for the Corinthian church.
People sometimes wonder how Paul could give thanks for such a messed up church.
And it’s true.
The Corinthian church was messed up –

but even so, if Paul really believes what he just said in v2 about the church in Corinth – namely, that they are sanctified in Christ Jesus,
and called to be saints together with all those who in every place
call upon the name of the Lord Jesus Christ –
then everything that he says in verses 4-9 must follow!

And, given how messed up we are!, I find this thanksgiving very encouraging!
Paul gives thanks for the church – no matter what!
There is only one epistle where Paul does *not* give thanks –
and that is the epistle to the Galatians.
When he hears that the Galatians have abandoned the gospel,
then (and only then) does he omit his thanksgiving.
(After all, one cannot give thanks for the destruction of the gospel!)

But Paul does not hesitate to give thanks for a messed up church – and neither should we!
Paul’s point is that *God* has called you (together) into fellowship with himself.
You are *sanctified* in Christ Jesus.
God *loves* you.

Paul’s thanksgiving in verses 4-9 summarizes the whole epistle.
Paul will start in chapters 1-4, by talking about the question of wisdom and speaking,
and then in chapters 5-11, he will apply these principles
to a series of questions that the Corinthians asked.
Then in chapters 12-14, he will deal with the question of gifts,
and in chapter 15 he will cover the resurrection – the “revealing of Christ.”

1. Called by Grace – Given You in Christ (v4)

⁴ *I give thanks to my God always for you because of the grace of God that was given you in Christ Jesus,*

Paul’s thanksgiving has very little to do with anything the Corinthians themselves have done!
I give thanks to my God always for you

because of the grace of God that was given you in Christ Jesus.

Paul will often open his epistles by praising the church –
like with 1 Thessalonians 1:2-3:

“We give thanks to God always for all of you,
constantly mentioning you in our prayers,
remembering before our God and Father
your work of faith and labor of love
and steadfastness of hope in our Lord Jesus Christ,”

and then he goes on for 7 verses, praising them for their labors in the gospel!

Paul doesn’t have much good to say about the Corinthians.

But I *always* have something for which I can give thanks –
because God has given you grace in Christ Jesus.

Grace is not a substance that gets poured into you.

Grace is an event – it is something that happened (in the death and resurrection of Jesus).

God has been gracious to us – he has shown us kindness and mercy in Jesus,
even when we were hostile toward him.

You are called *by grace* – there was nothing that you *did* to deserve it.

And this grace is demonstrated in this [verse 5]:

2. Called to Be Enriched in Him in All Speech and Knowledge (v5-6)

⁵ *that in every way you were enriched in him in all speech and all knowledge—* ⁶ *even as the testimony about Christ was confirmed among you—*

Knowledge is really important to Paul.

Knowledge is not the goal for Paul.

You can see that in the structure of his sentence.

Verses 5-6 are the middle of the sentence –

speech and knowledge – the testimony about Christ –

is a means toward an end – and the *end* is found later in the sentence!

But knowledge is very important.

Paul came to Corinth as a *preacher* who was communicating a *message*,
namely, the *testimony about Christ*.

He came to bear witness about Jesus Christ and his cross and resurrection.

Paul doesn't use rhetorical flourishes and enticing words.

He has a message that doesn't need marketing –

because the Holy Spirit is the one who enriches you in Christ

“in all speech and all knowledge.”

Notice the way that speech works for Paul.

You were enriched *in him* in all speech and knowledge – again, Christ is the center.

But notice *how* you were enriched:

“even as the testimony about Christ was confirmed among you.”

Your knowledge and your words are changed by the gospel.

When you are *called* by God,

you pass out of darkness into light –

out of the ignorance of God into the knowledge of God.

Sometimes you hear people say that what's important is not knowledge *about* God,

but really *knowing* God.

Paul would look at you funny and say, ‘how do you do that?’

Because Paul is talking about the *content* of the testimony *about* Christ!

This is a message whose factual content has earth-shaking power!

When you know that Jesus is the Son of God who came in the flesh –

when you know that in his death and resurrection
he has passed through the final judgment *for us!* –
that changes the way that you speak and know about everything else!

Some of you have now heard this every Sunday for 8, 12, 17 years.
You're thinking – yeah, sure, I know all that.
So what?

Paul answers that so what in verses 7-8

Because the purpose of your speaking and knowing –
indeed, the purpose of your calling is:

3. Called to Be Gifted and Guiltless in the Day of Christ (v7-8)

⁷ *so that you are not lacking in any gift, as you wait for the revealing of our Lord Jesus Christ,*
⁸ *who will sustain you to the end, guiltless in the day of our Lord Jesus Christ.*

The testimony about Christ is not just some interesting information!

The testimony about Christ is a world-changing message.
Because what Paul proclaimed about Jesus
is that God's last-days final judgment has happened *to* Jesus.
Jesus has passed through the final judgment –
and he is now risen from the dead and seated at the right hand of God.

Paul will talk a lot about spiritual gifts in chapters 12-14.

In Christ, you lack no gift.
Now, remember that the “you” is plural here.
You (singular) are lacking all sorts of gifts!
You and I are incomplete by ourselves.
That's why Paul emphasizes the importance of the church –
the assembly (those who are called together).
And you – as a church – lack no gift –
when you are connected with Christ and with one another.

And since you have been called into fellowship with Jesus and with one another,
therefore our Lord Jesus will sustain you to the end –
“guiltless in the day of our Lord Jesus Christ.”

It's easy to look around and say,
“the church is messed up!”
We say we believe this, but we don't act like it!

Paul is writing to *the* most messed up church in history!
He's writing to a church that thinks that it's okay that a man is sleeping with his father's wife.
And yet he says that Christ will you sustain you *guiltless* in his final day.

The word "guiltless" is "anegkletos" -- "one who cannot be accused" -- which is formed by adding two prefixes to the root "kletos" (called) -- first the prefix "en" (egkaleo means "to call someone in [to court]" -- so egkletos would mean "chargeable" or "accusable"), and then the prefix "an" which means "not". So basically the word "anegkletos" means "someone who cannot be called into court." And the verb translated "sustain" is the same verb used earlier -- translated "confirm" -- speaking of how the testimony about Christ was confirmed among you.

So Paul is saying that in the same way that the testimony of Christ was confirmed among you, so also Christ will confirm you until the end as someone who cannot be called into court in the day of our Lord Jesus Christ.

This is the legal language of justification.

Paul doesn't spend much time on justification in 1 Corinthians. But he starts by reminding them that no matter what comes later, the foundation of their acceptance to God is *not* in themselves. In the cross, Jesus has passed through the final judgment. Therefore, those who belong to Jesus -- those who are *in him* -- have passed through the final judgment as well. Justification is where God forgives all your sins, because Jesus has endured the final judgment for you.

And therefore, he will sustain you to the end, guiltless in the day of Christ. Notice that justification has an eschatological focus. It is, after all, the *last days* judgment of God -- the final judgment of God -- that is proclaimed in our justification.

When you are called into fellowship with Christ, it's not that he forgives what you have done *before* -- and then later, at the final judgment, he forgives you for the rest -- rather, justification *is* God's final judgment declared *in advance* to all who believe in the name of Jesus.

This is why Paul says that Christ will sustain you guiltless in the day of the Lord. No one will be able to bring a charge against you, because Jesus has already paid the price for all your sins.

And all of this because [verse 9]:

4. Called into the "Communal Participation" of His Son (v9)

⁹ *God is faithful, by whom you were called into the fellowship of his Son, Jesus Christ our Lord.*

Anthony Thiselton is right that "fellowship" is not a great translation of "koinonia." In evangelical circles, "fellowship" usually refers to a group of like-minded people. We talk about "having fellowship" when we are "hanging out" with friends.

Paul knew all about that sort of “fellowship.”

In Corinth there would have been lots of shrines for communal meals (AT, 7).

That’s not what Paul is talking about.

Thiselton suggests that we translate it,

“by whom you were called into the communal participation
of the sonship of Jesus Christ our Lord.” (104).

The “fellowship of Jesus” is not a group of people that we like to hang out with.

The fellowship of his Son is a participation in his sonship.

But “participation” doesn’t quite capture the whole sense of the word ‘koinonia.’

And especially nowadays, I can “participate” in an “online” event,
and never see another human being.

If all you say is “participation” then you might think that this is a “me and Jesus” thing.

But Paul is using a “you plural” here.

And so I think Thiselton is right to translate this:

“God is faithful, by whom you were called into the communal participation
of the sonship of Jesus Christ our Lord.” (104).

There are overtones of adoption and sonship here.

We are not just made “friends” with Jesus.

We are made partakers of his sonship – we participate in his inheritance –
indeed, in his very life!

And this brings us back to our opening idea of *calling*.

God has called you into communal participation in the sonship of Jesus Christ.

Jesus Christ is the unique Son of God –

but through God’s call, through his *effectual call*,

you now have been made a partaker – together with all the saints –
in the resurrection life of Jesus.

And so as the day of our Lord Jesus Christ approaches,

you have confidence before God, because you have been made a partaker of his Son.

Jesus has passed through the last days’ judgment of God,

so that in the Day of the Lord, you might stand guiltless before him!

This is the reason why our *fellowship* at Michiana Covenant

needs to be *more* than just “hanging out” with people we like.

In fact, it’s entirely possible that you won’t like some of the people here!

But we need to be careful not to let ourselves divide into factions and parties.

If we have been called into the communal participation of the sonship of Jesus,

then we need each other, whether we like each other or not!

Because Jesus didn’t call us into a social club of nifty people –

he called us to be conformed to his own likeness.