

“WHO COULD ASK FOR ANYTHING MORE?”

1 Corinthians 1:4-9

THEME: Confidence in Christ is essential for church health.

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Practically everyone has heard Polly’s song, *I Got Rhythm* in the Gershwin musical comedy, “Crazy for You”: ‘*I got rhythm, I got music, I got my man—who could ask for anything more?*’

If you believe you have everything you really need, then you think you can deal with anything that might come your way. That’s confidence!

So Polly could go on to sing, *Old man trouble, I don’t mind him. You won’t find him ’round my door.*’

I maintain that Christians should be the most confident people on planet earth.

- I’d like you to take a good look at how the Apostle Paul explains the basis of our confidence as Christians in his first letter to the Corinthians.

⁴*I always thank God for you because of his grace given you in Christ Jesus.*

⁵*For in him you have been enriched in every way-- in all your speaking and in all your knowledge--*

⁶*because our testimony about Christ was confirmed in you.*

⁷*Therefore you do not lack any spiritual gift as you eagerly wait for our Lord Jesus Christ to be revealed.*

⁸*He will keep you strong to the end, so that you will be blameless on the day of our Lord Jesus Christ.*

⁹*God, who has called you into fellowship with his Son Jesus Christ our Lord, is faithful.*

This is part of a very stern letter. At one point Paul writes that their church meetings did more harm than good (11:17)

Trouble wasn’t at the door of the Corinthian church. Trouble had already set up housekeeping.

- There were a lot of confused, bitter, and spiritually immature people in the church. Their spiritual insecurity made them vulnerable to monstrous problems of disunity, heresy, and immorality. That’s why the Apostle Paul wrote this letter to them.

He called their attention to this vital issue of Christian confidence before he zeroed in on their serious troubles as a church.

That’s what we have in these six verses that I just read to you. These are the basis of the confidence without which we cannot function as a true church of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

- A church is a community of God’s people in the middle of hostile enemy territory. The world around is in the grip of evil. It’s a spiritual battlefield, not a playground for us.

Paul warned the churches in the New Testament to be alert to the enemy infiltrating through false teaching, strife and disunity, moral compromise, and more.

- It’s not unusual over time for a church to slip and fall. Instead of standing firm and confident in Christ, it becomes a breeding ground for disunity and bitterness.

That’s what had happened in the church at Corinth.

- The truly remarkable thing about this hard letter is that Paul began it with wonderful encouragement to them. In spite of all their troubles, they still had everything they needed to be healthy as a church.

A spectator arrived late at a little league baseball game and asked the right fielder how his team was doing and what the score was. The kid answered that his team was doing quite well and that they were trailing 16-0. He asked how the boy could be so positive since they were losing so badly. The kid answered, “We’re not beat. We haven’t been up to bat yet.”

The opposition, Satan, had hit the Corinthian church hard. The situation seemed to be hopeless. Paul started his letter to them by saying, “You’re not beat! Don’t give up. You can win!”

The words of the Apostle Paul in 1 Corinthians 1:4-9 give us a couple of **compelling reasons** why we should have the confidence that we can be a healthy and faithful church.

I. CHRIST HAS MADE US RICH IN EVERY WAY (1:4-7a)

If you have truly placed your trust in Jesus Christ as your Savior and you acknowledge him as your Lord and Master, you are a very rich person.

Your riches are not measured in the stuff of this world that rusts and decays and becomes worthless.

When he wrote to the Ephesian Christians the Apostle Paul explained that *‘In him (Christ) we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, in accordance with the riches of God’s grace that he lavished on us with all wisdom and understanding.’* (Ephesians 1:7-8)

When God’s word speaks of us being rich, it means that we are complete. Nothing we need is missing. We have all we need from God.

The Apostle Peter said just about the same thing: *His divine power has given us everything we need for life and godliness through our knowledge of him who called us by his own glory and goodness. Through these he has given us his very great and precious promises, so that through them you may participate in the divine nature and escape the corruption in the world caused by evil desires.* (2 Peter 1:3-4)

- Let me take you back to our Bible text for today:

⁴ *I always thank God for you because of his grace given you in Christ Jesus.*

⁵ *For in him you have been enriched in every way-- in all your speaking and in all your knowledge--*

We are not spiritually impoverished. In Christ we are rich.

Perhaps you’re thinking, *‘Yeah, sure. That’s just Christian gobbledegook. The riches I want from God are things that I can see and count and use to have a good life here.’*

Here’s something you ought to take very seriously. If God calls something rich, it’s not good to call it cheap.

Don’t push aside God’s values to embrace the world’s values. That’s very dangerous.

Do what Paul told the Corinthians to do in his second letter to them: *Examine yourselves to see whether you are in the faith; test yourselves. Do you not realize that Christ Jesus is in you-- unless, of course, you fail the test?* (2 Corinthians 13:5)

- Paul said he knew that they had received God’s grace in Christ and had been enriched in every way (5).

He made a special point of mentioning that their spiritual riches were evident in their speaking and their knowledge (5)

The spiritual gifts of tongues and prophecy were prominent in the church. But that turned out to be one of their main problems. They took pride in what God had given them, and ignored the greater responsibility of loving one another (Chapter 13).

But Paul knew them. He had been there. He could testify that they had received from Christ everything they needed as a church.

⁶ *because our testimony about Christ was confirmed in you.*

⁷ *Therefore you do not lack any spiritual gift*

In verse 5 he said *‘You have been enriched in every way.’* Then in verse 7 he said *‘You’re not lacking any spiritual gift.’*

- What does this mean for us today? It means God has not withheld anything we need to be his people and to live the way his people are supposed to live in a corrupt world.

We have been enriched by God in every way. Who could ask for anything more?

- This means that if there are problems in a church—and there were serious problems in the church at Corinth—it’s not God’s fault!

The Corinthian church was neglecting or abusing what Christ has given them for life and godliness as a church.

For us this means that nothing is too tough or too complex or too delicate for us to deal with and resolve properly.

- Here at First Free Church Christ has made us rich in every way. Who could ask for anything more?

[2nd compelling reason why we can have confidence that is essential to our church’s health]

II. CHRIST WILL KEEP US STRONG TO THE END (1:7-9)

Christ can make us finish well as a church.

The challenge for us is the same challenge the church at Ephesus had to deal with. After 40 years of existence the church at Ephesus was still very active, still holding to doctrinal purity. But it had lost the love it had at the start, 40 years earlier. It had fallen from its high position, and as a congregation it needed to repent. Christ himself said so in Revelation 2:1-7.

Our church is 123 years old—3 times as old as the Ephesian church of which we read in Revelation 2.

According to Paul, we have everything we need in Christ to remain strong to the end—until Christ our Lord returns.

He will keep us strong.

⁷ *Therefore you do not lack any spiritual gift as you eagerly wait for our Lord Jesus Christ to be revealed.*

What exactly is Christ’s church doing in the world? We’re waiting.

We are in a waiting period. It's the time between Christ's first and second comings. In the Bible it is sometimes called the 'last days.'

Some theologians call it the 'Church age.' We can also call it the 'gospel era.' In verse 8 Paul says we're waiting for 'the day of our Lord Jesus Christ.'

- I really don't enjoy waiting, do you?

It makes me think of the Post Office.

Waiting can be boring. I used to think you don't need any special gifts or skills to wait.

My wife Liz changed my mind about that. But I still don't like to wait.

She doesn't mind. In fact she really likes it.

If she has to wait in a long, slow-moving line, by the time she gets to the front she has made several friends. Some people who were grumpy are now happy. People who were struggling have been introduced to Christ very winsomely, and they know that Liz is going to pray for them

That is a gift—a major gift. And after all these years together, it's still amazing to see that gift at work.

- Isn't this what Paul is talking about?

God has given us all kinds of gifts, everything we need, for this waiting period, so that we can touch people with Christ's love and truth.

It's the time when the church of our Lord Jesus Christ holds out the good news of forgiveness and life in Jesus Christ to people of all nations.

- When the disciples asked Jesus, '*what will be the sign of your coming and the end of the age?*' (Matthew 24:3), Jesus spoke of events that would occur between his two comings. He said false Christs would appear, there would be lots of wars, famines, earthquakes, persecution, apostasy, false prophets performing deceptive signs and wonders, lawlessness, and spiritual coldness among believers. All of these phenomena will take place throughout the entire waiting period, right until its very end. In fact it will all escalate as the end draws near.

The Apostle Paul picked up the theme in his letter to the Roman Christians: '*we ourselves, who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for our adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies.*' (Romans 8:23)

- How can we have confidence that we won't fail as a church?

When you read through Paul's Corinthian letters you're appalled. The church seemed to be abysmally messed up—relationally, morally, and spiritually.

Paul knew all about their problems, but he held out hope to them:

⁸*He will keep you strong (lit. 'confirm you') to the end, so that you will be blameless on the day of our Lord Jesus Christ.*

⁹*God, who has called you into fellowship with his Son Jesus Christ our Lord, is faithful.*

By his grace in Christ, God had given the Corinthian church everything it needed.

But they either ignored it or abused it.

- Let's not consider ourselves better than them. We have no right to be proud.

They were in a spiritual war, and so are we.

The secular world that is under the control of the evil one is not kind to the people of Jesus Christ—and we should not expect it to be!

Expecting the world to treat us kindly because we are good Christians is a bit like expecting a crazed bull not to attack you because you are a vegetarian.

- It's amazing that Paul could give such assurance to a community of Christians whose conduct was so horrible. How could he?

The answer is in verse 9, '*God, who has called you into fellowship with his Son Jesus Christ our Lord, is faithful.*'

- This little portion of God's word is an encouragement to us as a church.

We don't have to be weakened or paralyzed by disunity, fault-finding, or discouragement. He will keep us strong to the end.

- It will take every one of us to stand up and to declare before God that with Christ's strength we will not let the enemy gain even a foothold in this church of our Savior and Lord Jesus Christ.

Our enemy wants to immobilize us while we're waiting. He wants us to get us fussing over minor issues so that we won't be any threat to his dark domain in which he holds the souls of people captive.

- What Paul wrote is strikingly similar to Jude's superb doxology in his letter in the New Testament: '*To him who is able to keep you from falling and to present you before his glorious presence without fault and with*

great joy--to the only God our Savior be glory, majesty, power and authority, through Jesus Christ our Lord, before all ages, now and forevermore! Amen.’ (Jude 1:24-25)

Christ will keep us strong to the end, if we’ll let him.

Christ has made us rich in every way. We’re not lacking anything we need from God as a church.

Christ will keep us strong until the end—throughout this whole period of waiting for Christ to return. It’s the gospel age.

First Free Church has been waiting and reaching out to people with the good news of forgiveness and new life in Christ for close to 124 years.

Let’s not become weak now when the world needs proof that the good news of Christ is real by the way we love each other.

- Christ has made us rich, and Christ will keep us strong, if we are willing.

Who could ask for anything more?

- What can you do about this?

Will you pray every day for yourself as a part of this church—that Christ’s riches and his strength will begin to be expressed through you in the life of this church?

I don’t know what that will mean for you. It may take a lot of courage to lovingly broach a concern you have with some people. It may take the humility to ask forgiveness. It may mean taking the initiative to encourage someone who is struggling with discouragement.