

“The **Gift** of Fellowship”—1 Corinthians 1:9

The text for this sermon, the theme of which is, “The **Gift** of Fellowship”, is 1 Corinthians 1:9 → *God is faithful, by Whom you were called into the fellowship of His Son, Jesus Christ our Lord.* This is the text.

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ Jesus:

Do you consider your congregation to be a gift from God? Many people consider a “gift” to be something which acts as a blessing in their life in some manner. Such a definition of “gift” is very fitting for our congregation in many ways. The relationships we share as we worship, work and play together can be considered a gift of God in the midst of a “Christian family.” Being divinely served with God’s forgiveness of sins through His means of grace in congregational worship in baptism, the Lord’s Supper, Absolution and the Gospel is God’s gift given in our midst. Members praying for one another and reaching out to one another in times of crisis and tragedy with support is a gift from God in our congregation.

How many times has this “gift” of “the communion of saints” become a burden in the expressions of sin by self-righteous judgments, slander, selfish manipulation, divisiveness, contentions and so forth? Such sin is also

expressed by those who choose to cling to their own ideas of God's will in opposition to His Word with a refusal to submit to His written Word. When such sin is experienced we certainly are not acting like a "communion of saints"—those made holy by the Holy Spirit working through the Gospel of Jesus Christ! These actions challenge our sharing of the **gift** of fellowship.

As Paul began his first letter to the church in Corinth, Greece, he recognized them as *those sanctified in Christ Jesus*. In other words, because of the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ they were made holy and declared righteous as they placed their faith in Him for the forgiveness of their sins. They were *called* in this fellowship with Jesus *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*. (cf. 1 Corinthians 1:2)

When Scripture uses the word "saints" it refers to all living believers in Jesus Christ alone. Since believers in Christ are declared righteous and holy in God's sight they are the "holy ones" set apart by God to express His will in a sinful world. This is why people look for the church to be different and act differently than the world around them. This is also why it becomes a stumbling block to repenting and believing in Jesus Christ when the church is like and Christians act like the sinful world. Even Jesus stressed the importance of how we act in this fellowship as a "mark" of belonging to Him in

John 13:35 → *By this all people will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another.*

As Paul thanked God for the gracious gift of forgiveness given the Corinthian Christians in Jesus he confessed the focus of this fellowship in our text: **God is faithful, by Whom you were called into the fellowship of His Son, Jesus Christ our Lord.** As with the Corinthian Christians the reason for your presence in this fellowship of believers at Grace Lutheran Church is the gift of God's **Son, Jesus Christ our Lord.** It is expressed in Jesus' words which we strive to teach our children from infancy: *For God so loved the world, that He gave His only Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have eternal life.* (cf. John 3:16) God has called us into this fellowship by giving us His love as displayed in the Person & Work of Jesus, His Son!

So why may we find ourselves complaining about this gift of fellowship? Why might it feel more like a burden rather than a blessing? Why do so many who were *called into the fellowship of . . . Jesus Christ our Lord* remove themselves from the expression of this fellowship in worship? Because the focus of this fellowship—*Jesus Christ our Lord*—becomes blurred in the midst of the functioning of this fellowship.

Paul had to deal with such mis-focus throughout this letter to these Christians in Corinth. They created factions and divisions by pitting servants

of Jesus against each other. (cf. 1 Corinthians 1:11-13; 3) Is this practiced today when various leaders in the church are thought to be better than others? They allowed sexual immorality to be practiced among them as if it were not sin. (cf. 1 Corinthians 5) Is this practiced today by Christians in the midst of living as a married couples without a marriage license, affairs, homosexuality and so forth? They were trying to “resolve” their conflicts by law suits in the courts of unbelievers. (cf. 1 Corinthians 6:1-8) Are Christians suing Christians today in civil courts? Paul spoke directly to their broken fellowship as he dealt with sexual immorality in light of marriage as ordained by God (cf. 1 Corinthians 6:9-7:5), idolatrous selfishness in the midst of taking the Lord’s Supper together (cf. 1 Corinthians 10-11), sinful pride in the use of spiritual gifts (cf. 1 Corinthians 12-14) and much more.

The unity and fellowship that believers have is founded in **Christ alone**. When you lose sight of the Lordship of Jesus Christ you lose sight of the gift. Then the fellowship becomes a fertile environment for the breeding of division and problems in sin. It will become a fellowship filled with criticizing and tearing each other down, filled with self-righteous judgments and negativity at every turn. Sin is the very thing which broke fellowship with God and others in the Garden of Eden and continues to produce broken fellowship to this day.

However, our text says that ***God is faithful, by Whom you were called into***

*the fellowship of His Son, Jesus Christ our Lord. 2 Timothy 2:11-13 says: The saying is trustworthy, for: If we have died with Him, we will also live with Him; if we endure, we will also reign with Him; if we deny Him, He also will deny us; if we are faithless, **He remains faithful—for He cannot deny Himself.** God's faithfulness is constantly calling us sinners into fellowship with Himself in the very gift which His fellowship is called to dispense and deliver—the forgiveness of sins. This gift is received only by humbly acknowledging your sin and submitting to *Jesus Christ our Lord* in repentance and faith as you receive His forgiveness through His means of grace.*

As Christ displays His undeserved love (i.e. grace) toward us sinners we live in this fellowship by undeserved love (i.e. grace) for each other, not sinful pride and self-righteousness. This is why Paul stressed so strongly that **God's love** working through us is all-important in our functioning together as Christ's body. After talking about the worthlessness of "spiritual" characteristics being displayed without God's love, he says in 1 Corinthians 13:4-8 → *Love is patient and kind; love does not envy or boast; it is not arrogant or rude. It does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable or resentful; it does not rejoice at wrongdoing, but rejoices with the truth. Love bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things. Love never ends. **This love is embodied in the Person & Work of His Son, Jesus Christ our Lord!***

We live this fellowship **as a gift** by keeping Jesus *our Lord* in clear focus and building it upon His Word and Will, not acting as if it is a creation of our own making. The gift of eternal life we receive from Christ puts us in a special relationship with each other called *fellowship*. It is rooted in relationship with Jesus Christ as *our Lord*. While relationships and interactions with others are important in this fellowship we must keep the fellowship focused on Christ, not simply on the relationships themselves. Then we will experience the Spirit's gifting us together in this fellowship to continue receiving and dispensing the gifts of grace through this fellowship. We will desire to bring the focus of this fellowship in line with Jesus and God's written Word! We will rejoice in it as a **gift of God** and give thanks to God for each other, building each other up in the fellowship we share together! Think about it this way:

I think that I shall never see,  
A church that's all it ought to be—  
A church whose members never stray,  
Beyond the straight and narrow way.  
Whose pastor never has the blues.  
A church whose deacons always "deac",  
And none are proud and all are meek.  
Where gossips never peddle lies,  
Or make complaints or criticize.  
Where all are always sweet and kind,

And all to other's faults are blind,  
Such perfect churches there may be,  
But none of them is known to me.  
But still I'll work and pray, pay and plan  
To make our own the best we can.

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