

Second Sunday after Epiphany
January 15, 2023
“Confirmed blameless in Christ to the end!”
(1 Corinthians 1:4-7)

By Rev. Ed Weber

Grace to you and peace from God the Father and our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, Amen.

Dear brothers and sisters in Christ, our text for this 2nd Sunday after Epiphany is from our Epistle reading 1 Corinthians 1:4-7

“4 I thank my God always concerning you for the grace of God which was given to you by Christ Jesus, 5 that you were enriched in everything by Him in all utterance and all knowledge, 6 even as the testimony of Christ was confirmed in you, 7 so that you come short in no gift, eagerly waiting for the revelation of our Lord Jesus Christ, 8 who will also confirm you to the end, that you may be blameless in the day of our Lord Jesus Christ. 9 God is faithful, by whom you were called into the fellowship of His Son, Jesus Christ our Lord.”

Here ends our text.

Who is Paul speaking to? It sounds like he’s talking to some super Christians. For Paul thanks God for them. They were enriched in everything by God, in all utterance, all knowledge, not coming up short in any gift, totally in tune with God waiting for the revelation of our Lord Jesus Christ. And here is the word that really stands out - “blameless”!

How could you or I ever measure up to them?

Is Paul looking through rose-colored glasses or are these real people? Yes, these are normal real people – people from Corinth. Now Corinth was a commercial center in Greece but also a hot bed of corruption.

Paul was writing to the Christian congregation at Corinth, to whom he had come on his second missionary journey, (Acts 18, 1,) about 50 or 51 A. D., Corinth was "the heiress of a glorious history, whose monuments in metal and marble glorified the gods of Greece. It was known for its open consecration of shameless impurity in its temple service of Venus.

And yet the Lord, through the work of Paul's preaching, had established a Christian congregation in this city. His converts were mainly Gentiles, who, for the most part, belonged to the poorer classes of society. The members of the Corinthian congregation, due, in part, to their environment, were somewhat subject to arrogance and self-conceit, (chap. 1, 17; 8, 1,) and had not yet fully thrown off the dominance of sins of unchastity, (chap. 5, 1—11; 6, 15—18; 11,21.)

In fact, immediately right after our text, Paul speaks of divisions in the Corinthian church:

10 Now I plead with you, brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you all speak the same thing, and that there be no divisions among you, but that you be perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment.

Was it a perfect church? No, there was humanistic favoritism - elevating the man above the message.

“For it has been declared to me concerning you, my brethren, by those of Chloe’s household, that there are contentions among you. 12 Now I say this, that each of you says, “I am of Paul,” or “I am of Apollos,” or “I am of Cephas,” or “I am of Christ.” 13 Is Christ divided? Was Paul crucified for you? Or were you baptized in the name of Paul?”

Yes, and Paul speaks to them very directly in chapter 5 about some 6th commandment problems.

“It is actually reported that there is sexual immorality among you, and such sexual immorality as is not even named among the Gentiles—that a man has his father’s wife! 2 And you are puffed up, and have not rather mourned, that he who has done this deed might be taken away from among you.”

Yes, there was plenty of blame to go around. Paul had his hands full gently reproving them to repentance. God has His hands full with us too, doesn't He? There's plenty of blame to go around in our self-centeredness, arrogance, failures of in thought, word and deed, - not just of the 6th commandment, but the all the rest. We're certainly not super Christians.

And when we realize this, our first defense is to place the blame on someone else. You know like Eve – “The snake made me do it”. Or like Adam – “The woman you gave me caused me to eat of what I knew I shouldn’t have eaten.”

It’s so easy to learn from a fallen world on how to deflect your own sins on someone else. You’re so irresponsible for not safeguarding classified documents says one to the other, only to find out that this one is doing the same thing. Oh, and then we get into the minutia of who is more to blame, and we appoint counsels to try to arrive at the truth. And the truth is always – we’re all guilty. God’s Word says that there is no one good except God.

And yet, Paul describes these believers in Corinth with such beauty. In fact, he really does describe them as blameless even in their present state. For God has taken away their blame. And God has taken away our blame through Jesus!

Our text says:

“who will also confirm you to the end, *that you may be* blameless in the day of our Lord Jesus Christ.”

That “you may be”

When you see words in italics in Scripture, that means that these are extra words, words that are supplied to possibly help give understanding to the text. But in this case should have left them out. For it gives the impression that only on the last day are you blameless. The NAS, New American Standard, translation leaves these words out.

NAS 1 Corinthians 1:8 who shall also confirm you to the end, blameless in the day of our Lord Jesus Christ. (1 Cor. 1:8 NAS)

And that meaning concurs with other Scripture: In Colossians 1 Paul writes:

“21 And you, who once were alienated and enemies in your mind by wicked works, yet now He has reconciled 22 in the body of His flesh through death, to present you holy, and blameless, and above reproach in His sight— 23 if indeed you continue in the faith, grounded and steadfast, and are not moved away from the hope of the gospel which you heard, which was preached to every creature under heaven, of which I, Paul, became a minister.”
(Colossians 1:21-23)

"But now" is the time since conversion. "Reconciled" speaks of the personal reconciliation of the individual at the time of conversion.

It is truly amazing that Scripture never calls mere man, not even a Christian, "good." Jesus says that only God is good, (Matthew 19:16-22), The works of the Christian are called good. But never is the Christian called good. He is declared holy, blameless, and irreproachable which reminds us constantly of what Christ did for him. And he is such in the very presence of God now already. And you are declared holy, faultless, and blameless.

So complete is the atoning work of Christ for the individual that Christ presents him now already as "holy, faultless and blameless."

Holy in the sense of covered with the righteousness of Christ. Faultless in the sense that the blood of Jesus Christ covers all blemishes. And blameless in the sense that no one, not even Satan, can bring a charge against a believer.

Listen to how Jesus describes His bride the church, you and I:

“Christ also loved the church and gave Himself for her, 26 that He might sanctify and cleanse her with the washing of water by the word, 27 that He might present her to Himself a glorious church, not having spot or wrinkle or any such thing, but that she should be holy and without blemish.” (Ephesians 5:25-27)

Yes, by the grace of God, we are blameless now and in the day of our Lord Jesus Christ” This new life which we possess carries into an eternal life through the resurrection! So that, there is never a moment when the Christian, the baptized Christian doesn’t have life, now or eternally!

What a joyous state of being this is. Last week we heard Paul tell us these beautiful words in Romans 6.

10 For the death that He died, He died to sin once for all; but the life that He lives, He lives to God. 11 Likewise you also, reckon yourselves to be dead indeed to sin, but alive to God in Christ Jesus our Lord.

This week we hear that we are not only dead to sin, but blameless for it. Our past sins are not held against us!

Again, Paul tells these same Corinthians, and all of us also in his second letter to them these most amazing words:

2 Corinthians 5:21

“For He made Him who knew no sin to be sin for us, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him.”

And, yet, there is even more good news in our text. For God will confirm us in this faith in Jesus until the end. He is faithful! We can count on Him to see us through to the end. So Paul says to the Philippians in chapter 1.

“being confident of this very thing, that He who has begun a good work in you will complete it until the day of Jesus Christ;”

These were the words that 15 year old Teresa heard yesterday at the service in Port Isabel, celebrating her Quinceañera. God brought her into the faith through baptism as He has for each of us. And God will continue to keep us in the faith as we go through all the stages of our lives. We can be absolutely confident that God is faithful. What He begins He finishes.

You know last week the House of Representatives elected a new Speaker of the House. It took fifteen ballots but finally there was a majority in favor of Speaker McCarthy. In his acceptance speech he joked: "That was easy, huh?" He continued: "My father always told me, it's not how you start, it's how you finish. Now, the hard work begins."

Indeed it is so important how we finish in the Christian race.

The Formula of Concord, Solid Declaration, Art. XI, Election, Tappert 621,32: In the same vein Holy Scripture also assures us that God who has called us will be so faithful that after 'he has begun the good work in us' he will also continue it to the end and complete it, if we ourselves do not turn away from him but 'hold fast until the end of the substance which has been begun' in us. for such constancy he has promised his grace, 1 Corinthians 1:8; Philippians 1:6ff; 2 Peter 3:9; Hebrews 3:14.

God will never stop giving you His grace and peace in testimony of His love and forgiveness for you in Jesus. He will never stop confirming your faith through the Holy Spirit through His Word and Sacraments. Even as we receive Jesus' body and

blood, God confirms your faith in Him. He confirms you blameless in Christ now and to the end! All glory to God! Amen!

The peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your heart and minds through Christ Jesus.” Amen. (Philippians 4:7)