

Second Sunday after Epiphany

January 19, 2014

1 Corinthians 1:1-9

God has Enriched You in Every Way in Christ Jesus

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Fellow-Redeemed in Christ Jesus,

The end of a calendar year is the time for statistics. It is the time for “Best of” and “Worst of” lists. People use these statistics and lists for comparison and evaluation. Our Wisconsin Synod asks each of our 1200 congregations to fill out an annual statistical report. You will find a copy of the information on that report along with some comments by me about Bethlehem in 2013 in your mail slots.

What do they all mean and how may we make the best use of them? This reminds me of the quote by a famous football coach. He said that whenever he looked at statistics and averages, he thought about the guy who drowned in a river with an average depth of three feet! In other words, don't put too much stock in statistics. That is not always easy especially when they are very positive.

Apart from all the statistics for Bethlehem, I know that you will rejoice with me over our real blessing last year. Paul writes about it in his first words to the believers in Corinth. **God has Enriched You in Every Way in Christ Jesus. The testimony about Christ was confirmed in you; he will keep you strong so you are blameless on the day of our Lord Jesus Christ.**

God had called Paul to preach to the Corinthians the good news of their Savior, and ours, Jesus Christ. The apostle had been faithful in his calling. The Holy Spirit changed many hearts from unbelief to faith. Paul expressed his gratitude for this positive statistic, “Every day I thank God because of his grace given you in Christ Jesus.” [4]

God has enriched you in every way in Christ Jesus as the testimony of Christ was confirmed in you. Your saving faith in Christ is your confirmation that God not only loves you but also has called you to be his own dear child. The Holy Spirit has done his sanctifying work in your hearts and called you from darkness into light. The Holy Spirit has set you apart, and now you share one holiness and one certain hope in Jesus Christ who is “their Lord and ours.” [3]

I thank God that he has enriched you in every way. Your faith, your holiness in Christ's righteousness, your grace and peace in Christ are

the legal guarantee, or security, of your relationship with God; child and Father. This is according to the will of God. It is a statistic that testifies to God's undeserved love for you in Christ Jesus, not an indication of a will or decision I make.

Corinth was a city that highly valued education and knowledge. In that sense, it was not unlike our area. The Corinthian Christians would not have been any different in those values from the non-Christians. The apostle skillfully draws on that interest in “speaking and knowledge” and tells the believers that they have a more special richness in those areas. “For in him you have been enriched in every way-in all your speaking and in your knowledge-because our testimony about Christ was confirmed in you.” [5]

In the matter of the knowledge of their faith, God had enriched them. In the matter of their speaking in outward expressions of their faith, God had enriched them. The Holy Spirit had endowed them through the gospel, the testimony about Christ, with everything they needed to know their Savior well and speak well about him to others.

I thank God that you lack nothing in those areas through God's Word especially the gospel. For the youngest to the oldest, for men and women, for new Christians to lifelong Christians God has enriched you in every way in Christ Jesus. You lack nothing through his Word to know Jesus well as your Lord and Savior. You lack nothing through his Word to speak well of his saving work in life and death to family, friends and acquaintances.

So, while congregational statistics might be interesting we do not really on them too much as an indication of real blessings in the past or in the future. Rather we look to our God who has enriched us every way in Christ as the testimony of Christ was confirmed in us. In addition, he will keep you strong so you are blameless on the day of our Lord Jesus Christ.

The apostle attributes all of our richness to everything we have in Christ. This is true not only for now but also when Jesus returns. We live our entire lives as Christians in the context of what theologians call eschatology, or the study of our final end and the end of the world as we know it. We notice this context as well when we look more closely at Jesus' discourses during his ministry. The Word of God always points our eyes to the day of the Lord Jesus Christ.

The Holy Spirit who has enriched you in every way in Christ Jesus will keep you strong so you are blameless on that great day. The Spirit