

I THANK MY GOD ALWAYS FOR YOU

1 Paul, called to be an apostle of Jesus Christ by the will of God, and Sosthenes our brother, 2to the church of God that is in Corinth—to those who are sanctified in Christ Jesus and called to be saints [together] with all those everywhere who call upon the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, ([he is both] their [Lord] and ours.) 3Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. 4I always thank my God for you, because of the grace of God that was given to you in Christ Jesus; 5so that in everything you were enriched in him—with all speech and all knowledge—6just as our testimony about Christ was confirmed in you. 7Therefore you do not lack any [spiritual] gift, as you wait for the revelation of our Lord Jesus Christ. 8[God] will also confirm you to the end, so that you may be blameless on the day of our Lord Jesus Christ. 9God is faithful, by whom you were called into the fellowship of his Son Jesus Christ our Lord. (1 Cor. 1:1-9)

A note on the Scripture text that accompanies each individual message: The *American Standard Version* and the *New International Version*, along with the original Greek and Hebrew, have been used in an effort to achieve the greatest degree of accuracy and clarity. Where words or phrases have been added to the original text in an effort to better express its meaning, those words or phrases have usually been indicated by means of [brackets].

Introduction

It happens in every war; in the fierce confusion of combat an ally is mistaken for an enemy and a weapon is used against him by a comrade. The military has a term for this tragic phenomenon, a chilling term known as “friendly fire.” According to a Pentagon report, 27 of the 35 American tanks and armored vehicles lost during the 1991 Gulf War were damaged or destroyed by “friendly fire.” Nearly one fourth of the American casualties came from missiles, tank rounds, or bullets fired in error by our own forces. Of the spiritual casualties suffered in the “army” of Jesus Christ, how many must be attributed to “friendly fire?” (*POWER*, 9/13/92, p. 8.)

What becomes the topic of conversation after the Monday night business meeting or the Wednesday night prayer meeting? How many brothers and sisters in Christ become the targets of not-so-friendly fire? Many times we tend to concentrate on one another’s shortcomings, and fail to appreciate God’s work of grace in each other’s lives.

The Apostle Paul could easily have focused on the glaring shortcomings that were very evident in the lives of the Corinthian Christians. But consider the words with which he opens this epistle to the Corinthian church: *“I always thank my God for you.”* Although he must address the church’s shortcomings and sins as part of his pastoral duty as an apostle, he nevertheless begins by expressing his gratitude to God for these fellow believers.

Let us follow the Apostle Paul's example in our relationship with one another: Because of His work of grace in our hearts, let us give thanks to God for one another.

I. Be Thankful for Fellow Believers, Despite Their Present Sins and Shortcomings (1:4a)

There were factions within the church at Corinth:

Now I urge you, brothers, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that all of you be in agreement and that there be no divisions among you; but, rather, that you be bound together by the same attitude and by the same purpose. ¹¹[I say this,] my brothers, because I have been informed by those [who belong to the household] of Chloe, that there are quarrels among you. ¹²Now this [is what] I mean, each one of you is saying, I belong to Paul; or, I belong to Apollos; or, I belong to Cephas; or, I belong to Christ. (1 Cor. 1:10-12)

But nevertheless, the Apostle Paul begins by writing, *"I always thank my God for you."*

We may have different views on music, on how to observe the Lord's Day, on how to handle the various situations that arise within the life of the church; but first and foremost, and above all else, we must follow the example of the Apostle Paul in being thankful to God for fellow believers.

A number of these Christian people were spiritually immature:

Brothers, I was not able to address you as spiritual [men]; [I had to address you] as worldly [men], as infants in Christ. ²I fed you with milk, not with solid food; for you were not yet able to receive it. Indeed, you are still not able [to receive it]; ³for you are still worldly. Since there is jealousy and quarreling among you, are you not worldly and are you not [living] like men? (1 Cor. 3:1-3)

Being characterized by jealousy and quarreling, the Corinthian Christians were living like the unbelieving people of the world—such was their state of spiritual immaturity. According to the Apostle Paul's evaluation of the state of the Corinthian church, the evidence of spiritual immaturity is not a lack of biblical knowledge, but the presence of such sinful attributes as jealousy and quarreling. But nevertheless, he begins by writing, *"I always thank my God for you."*

A number of these Corinthian Christians were judgmental:

But to me it is a very insignificant matter that I should be judged by you ... ⁴I know of no charge against myself; but this does not justify me. The one who judges me is the Lord. ⁵Therefore, judge nothing before the [appointed] time,

wait until the Lord comes. He will bring to light the things hidden in darkness and will reveal the intentions of the hearts. (1 Cor. 4:3a, 4-5a)

Do we harbor a judgmental spirit? Do we judge by human standards instead of using the Bible as the standard? Do we judge by appearance? Is our judgment tempered by grace and designed for spiritual growth, or is it malicious and intended only for the ridicule and condemnation of a Christian brother? A sinful, judgmental spirit prevailed within the Corinthian church, but, nevertheless, the Apostle Paul begins by writing, *"I always thank my God for you."*

A number of these Christians were conducting themselves in a proud and arrogant manner:

Paul must exhort them *"not to go beyond the things that are written; so that none of you may become arrogant on behalf of one and against another. ⁷What makes you superior? And what do you have that you did not receive? But if you received it, why do you boast as if it had not been given to you?"* (1 Cor. 4:6b-7)

One expression of their pride was the fact that they were not abiding by the written Word of God, which they had received; rather, they were relying upon their own wisdom and going beyond the Scriptures. Furthermore, with regard to spiritual gifts, they proudly acted as though the gifts originated from themselves, rather than humbly acknowledging them to be gifts of the Holy Spirit to be used for the good of the whole body of Christ. Do we become self-inflated because of the spiritual gifts or natural God-given talents we possess? Has our progress in the Christian life caused us to become conceited, do we entertain and exhibit an "I have arrived at spiritual maturity" attitude? Do we look down upon those brothers who are less sanctified? Such was the case with a number of members of the Corinthian congregation, but nevertheless, the Apostle Paul begins by writing, *"I always thank my God for you."*

Here were Christian people who were tolerating gross immorality in their midst:

It is actually reported that there is fornication among you, and the kind of fornication that does not even exist among the Gentiles, [namely,] that someone has his father's wife. ²And you are arrogant! Should you not rather be grieved, so that he who has done this thing might be removed from your fellowship? (1 Cor. 5:1-2)

Being influenced by our immoral society, have we developed an attitude that is "easy on sin," accepting it, tolerating it, excusing it? The Word of God informs us that as Christians we may never condone sin or tolerate its undisputed presence in our own lives or in the life of Christ's church; when blatant sin is practiced, it must be rebuked and action must be taken against it. Contrary to the counsel of God found in Scripture, the Corinthian church was allowing itself to be influenced

by its immoral society and condoning blatant acts of sin in its midst, but nevertheless, the Apostle Paul begins by writing, *"I always thank my God for you."*

Some of these Christians were actually bringing lawsuits against one another:

If any of you has a dispute with his neighbor, does he dare to bring the matter before the unrighteous for settlement, and not before the saints? ... ⁶but one brother goes to court against another brother—and this before unbelievers! ⁷Actually, the fact that you have lawsuits against one another is already a defeat for you. Why not rather suffer wrong? Why not rather be cheated? ⁸On the contrary, you yourselves are doing wrong and cheating, and you are doing these things to your brothers. (1 Cor. 6:1, 6-8)

Paul is rebuking the Corinthians for bringing their grievances to the secular law courts instead of settling their disputes among themselves as Christian brothers with the help of the church. Do we presently find ourselves at enmity with a Christian brother or sister? Has that enmity arisen because we have put more value on some earthly possession than on the unity of Christ's body and the importance of imitating our Savior's self-giving love? Have we become a cause of enmity by wronging a brother or taking unfair advantage of him? Such was the situation with the Corinthian church, but nevertheless, the Apostle Paul begins by writing, *"I always thank my God for you."*

Many of these Christians were thoughtlessly participating in pagan religious practices:

But [what I am saying] is that the sacrifices of the Gentiles are being offered to demons, not to God; and I do not want you to have communion with demons. ²¹You cannot drink the cup of the Lord and [also] the cup of demons; you cannot partake of the table of the Lord, and [also] of the table of demons. ²²Or are we trying to provoke the Lord to jealousy? Are we stronger than he? (1 Cor. 10:20-22)

Are we thoughtlessly and recklessly engaging in such pagan practices as astrology or New Age exercises in an effort to enhance our effectiveness or personal well-being? Are we lightly dismissing the pagan spiritual element in yoga? Some of the Corinthian Christians were dangerously exposing themselves to demonic influence and carelessly indulging in pagan practices, but nevertheless, the Apostle Paul begins by writing, *"I always thank my God for you."*

Many of these Christians were grossly abusing the sacrament of the Lord's Supper:

Therefore, when you are assembled together it is not possible to eat the Lord's Supper; ²¹for each one goes ahead and eats his own meal. Consequently, one remains hungry, while another gets drunk. ²²What, do you not have homes in

which to eat and drink? Or do you despise the church of God and seek to humiliate those who have nothing? What shall I say to you? Shall I praise you? I cannot praise you for this ... ²⁷Therefore, whoever shall eat the bread or drink the cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner shall be guilty of [sinning against] the body and the blood of the Lord ... ²⁹for anyone who eats and drinks without recognizing the body [of the Lord], is eating and drinking judgment upon himself. (1 Cor. 11:20-22, 27, 29)

Do we appreciate that the sacrament of communion is sacred, representing nothing less than the Savior's atoning sacrifice at Calvary and our interest in that sacrifice as the means of our salvation? Whenever we partake of the sacrament we must be conscious of its significance and conscientious to be in a right relationship with God and with one another. At least some of the Corinthian Christians were abusing the Lord's Supper, by failing to reverence it as a sacred sacrament instituted by Christ for the spiritual welfare of His body, but nevertheless, the Apostle Paul begins by writing, "*I always thank my God for you.*"

Some of these Christians were even denying the future resurrection of the body: (note 1 Corinthians 15:12, 35-38)

Now if it is preached that Christ has been raised from the dead, how can some of you say that there is no resurrection of the dead? ... ³⁵But some one will say, How are the dead raised? And with what kind of body will they come? ³⁶O foolish one, that which you yourself sow does not come to life unless it [first] dies. ³⁷And when you sow, you are not sowing the body that shall appear; but just a seed, perhaps of wheat or some other grain. ³⁸But God gives it a body just as he pleases, and to each [kind of] seed he gives its own body. (1 Cor. 15:12, 35-38)

Do we make the mistake of allowing our own human reason or human ability to dictate what Almighty God Himself can or cannot do? Such a position is more than a mistake, it is the height of arrogance and the depth of foolishness; and such was the perspective entertained by some within the Corinthian church, but nevertheless, the Apostle Paul begins by writing, "*I always thank my God for you.*"

All of these glaring and serious sins and shortcomings were present in the Corinthian church. The Apostle Paul will address each one of them out of faithfulness to Christ and love for the church of Christ. But first he begins by expressing his thankfulness for these fellow Christians.

Following the example of the Apostle Paul, let us be thankful for fellow believers, despite their present sins and shortcomings.

II. Be Thankful for Fellow Believers, Because They, Like You, Partake of Christ's Salvation (1:4b)

In 1 Corinthians 1:4 the Apostle Paul follows up the words, *"I always thank my God for you,"* by supplying the reason for his thanksgiving: *"because of the grace of God that was given to you in Christ Jesus."*

There was still much sin present in the lives of these Christians—sin that would not be tolerated nor excused, but addressed in strong and straightforward terms; note, the apostle's stern words found in this epistle:

Do you not realize that the unrighteous shall not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived. Neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor male prostitutes, nor those who practice homosexuality, ¹⁰nor thieves, nor the greedy, nor drunkards, nor slanderers, nor swindlers, shall inherit the kingdom of God. (1 Cor. 6:9-10)

Note, too, the words he addresses to this church in his other epistle to them: *"I already told you when I was with you the second time. I now repeat it while absent: I warn those who have sinned previously as well as all the rest, when I come again I will not spare"* (2 Cor. 13:2.)

Nevertheless, the Apostle Paul is thankful to God that these people have become fellow partakers of the saving grace of God in Christ Jesus.

They heard the good news of salvation through faith in the Lord Jesus Christ and they put their trust in Him alone, as Paul reminds them:

Now, brothers, I remind you of the gospel that I preached to you, which you also received, on which also you stand, ²and by which you are saved—if you hold firm to the word we preached to you ... ³I delivered to you as of first importance that which I also received, [namely,] that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures; ⁴and that he was buried; and that he has been raised on the third day according to the Scriptures. (1 Cor. 15:1-4)

They have been sanctified in Christ Jesus—that is to say, they have been set apart to be God's holy possession in Christ Jesus. Note that Paul addresses this epistle *"to the church of God that is in Corinth—to those who are sanctified in Christ Jesus and called to be saints"* (1 Cor. 1:2.)

It was God Himself who brought them to Christ and put them into Christ, as Paul asserts: *"Now it is because of him [i.e.; God the Father] that you are in Christ Jesus, who has become for us wisdom from God—righteousness and sanctification and redemption"* (1 Cor. 1:30.) God in His faithfulness will bring to a completion and perfection the work of grace He has begun in these Christian people, as Paul assures the Corinthian believers:

I always thank my God for you, because of the grace of God that was given to you in Christ Jesus ... ⁸[God] will also confirm you to the end, so that you may be blameless on the day of our Lord Jesus Christ. ⁹God is faithful, by whom you were called into the fellowship of his Son Jesus Christ our Lord. (1 Cor. 1:4, 8-9)

All that is described in this epistle concerning the Corinthian Christians is likewise true of each one of us who is a believer in the Lord Jesus Christ—and it is also true of each one of our fellow believers in Jesus Christ.

Let us be thankful for fellow believers, because they, like ourselves, partake of Christ's saving grace. Let us focus on the work of grace in our brothers' and sisters' hearts, thanking God for it and praying for its development and its fruition.

Conclusion

Let us cease from the unholy practice of making one another the target of not-so-friendly fire. Let us imitate the Apostle Paul in giving thanks to God for one another as fellow believers in Christ and pray for the development of that work of saving grace in one another's life.