

The Corinthians had many abilities. They were fully enriched. They had great potential to do great things. Paul didn't overlook these. He didn't want them to be under confident, but he didn't want them to be over confident either. They needed to get the light of Christ out! Under-confident might make these new converts ignorant. Over-confidence might make them arrogant. Either way, as we will see in these opening chapters of 1 Corinthians, God has a cure!

When we talk about potential for the future - the Corinthians had all kinds of it. Paul said that they had been - enriched in every way -- in all your speaking and in all your knowledge. Later in **1 Corinthians 12** Paul will list many of them. Yes the Corinthians had great potential.

The problem was that they were raw. They were undisciplined. They were divided in so many ways. They arrogantly bragged over who had the greater gifts. They had no sense of right and wrong. Sexual immorality ran rampant throughout the congregation.

According to Paul's words in 1 Corinthians 5:9 Paul already wrote them one letter, trying to straighten out their problems. But the people didn't listen. In fact, they challenged Paul's authority. They questioned Paul's "right" to tell them what to do. They thought they could make their own decisions and lead their own lives without his help. Not only was Paul's advice rejected, he was ridiculed by them. How tempting retaliation must have been. And yet what does Paul do? He compliments them, saying, "you don't lack any gifts."

But this compliment was loaded with meaning. Notice that he didn't praise the Corinthians directly. Instead Paul gives credit for all of their gifts to God. I always thank God for you because of his grace given you in Christ Jesus. In this subtle way, Paul wanted the Corinthians to see that their gifts were gifts of God through faith in Jesus. Read his words between the lines. "If you didn't have faith in Christ, you and your gifts would be absolutely worthless.

We would be worthless in God's eyes, if it weren't for Christ. We like to think that God needs our gifts and our abilities - our family needs us because of our great and many gifts – our

church ministries couldn't survive without us. But how much do you think we are worth without Christ? That would be Zero. We are worth nothing without Christ.

There was an article a while back about a guy who bought an old motorcycle. Basically an old piece of junk. Then one day, he opened the gas tank. On the bottom of the cap he read, "to Elvis, from Priscilla." This was the very same motorcycle that Priscilla Presley gave to Elvis. With that one signature, it turned from a piece of junk to a collector's item, worth thousands of dollars.

Same thing with the Corinthians. God turned them from worthless to gifted because the testimony about Christ was confirmed in them. God took the words that Paul spoke and implanted them firmly within them. With this one signature, it made them worth everything in God's sight. Paul wanted the Corinthians to know that their worthiness wasn't found in who they followed or the abilities they had, but only "in Christ."

That's what God has done for us too. "in Christ". Our faith in Christ turns us from worthless to blameless just like that. We turn from a people covered with sin to people who are perfect in God's sight. When God brings us to faith, all of Jesus' good works, all of Jesus' perfections become ours. The signature of "Christ" is placed on you. You became precious property. We didn't earn this. It was given to you without price.

When we accept that we are "nothing" without Christ - it changes our outlook. We then realize that our success in life is not based on our gifts or how hard we work - but on God's grace. It is only by the grace of God that we will be successful. It is only by God's grace that we will grow. When I lived in Ohio, fall and those crisp nights brought with it a task that could bury you. Leaves. Raking leaves. So many leaves. Raking and raking. Pile after pile after pile. A friend invited me to bring my leaf piles to his farm for his cows. My friend told me to just throw the leaves over the fence to the cows. They'd just been fed. I just went in the corner, took a bag, and threw it over the edge. Even though these cows had plenty of room to eat all they wanted in the trough, they all jammed into this corner to eat this one bag of leaves. I got another bag, and put

it about five feet away from the other spot. The cows trampled on the other leaves so they could eat the new leaves. The cows were never happy with what they had, they always wanted something new.

This was the attitude of the Corinthians. They weren't satisfied with the knowledge they had. They weren't confident that Christ and God's Word was enough. They wanted to find higher knowledge and greater gifts. The Corinthians seemed to value eloquence and wisdom above anything else. They were trained to be eloquent and persuasive speakers. They pursued knowledge as the highest good in life; they were proud of their knowledge. They bought into the lie that they would not be complete Christians or ready for Christ until they achieved ultimate knowledge.

But what did Paul tell them? Paul told them they didn't need any more. He told the Corinthians, " 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.

Quite a promise. Paul doesn't say God "might" keep you strong to the end. God WILL keep you strong to the end so that you WILL be blameless on the day of our Lord.

Paul is speaking to the attitude of the Corinthians. So arrogant about their gifts but also so ignorant of them. Paul is telling them, "quit thinking you don't know enough. Your righteousness and holiness is given to you IN CHRIST. It has nothing to do with what languages you can speak. It has nothing to do with how much you know. It has everything to do with how holy and righteous Christ was! The same God who gave you faith and gave you your gifts can and will keep you in the faith! God is more powerful than any enemy you will face! He will keep you in the faith through His Word and sacrament! Stop worrying about how many gifts you have – accept that you are all fully equipped for the job!"

Church family, what advantages do you have that you are ignorant of? When you look at other churches, how often do you think...dang that church has so much going for it." Are you blind to the gifts we have right here at St. Johns. Blindness makes us afraid of our future. That makes us want to wring our hands and wipe our brows. Are you afraid to invite someone to our church service because we have such a (fill in the blank) theology? Are you tentative to share your faith because you'll "probably get laughed at?" How often do we sit behind our labels and cliche's of "at least Pastor Amy preaches the truth," and yet who here is afraid to try anything besides maybe VBS to reach out to our community. Do you smell it? I smell it. It's called a lack of faith.

Here's what we have and it's glorious. We know that we are saved by the grace of God. God will keep us strong to the end. Blameless on the day of our Lord Jesus Christ. But here's what you have to do. Stay connected to God's Word and sacrament - He will be able to keep us in the faith until the end. We have the Gospel. The good news which is fully enriched by the Spirit. Our attitude should be encouraged by these words of Paul. "We are more than conquerors through him who loved us." You are a conqueror and you are a conqueror, and you are a conqueror. Turn to your neighbor and tell them you are a conqueror. You have the most powerful weapon in the world, the Gospel of Christ. A gift that gives you eternal life. A promise from Almighty God that he will never leave you or forsake you - all these things are yours. What a powerful thought as we face our futures. We don't want to be arrogant. But we don't want to be ignorant either. We have many gifted people within our church family. We have talented musicians, talented artists, talented builders, talented teachers, talented businessmen- the list goes on. God wants to use these gifts to help our church reach the lost. God will keep us close to Him. When our life is over, don't we want to be able to say we gave it our best shot? And because we believe we are fully enriched, I'd certainly bet on us being able to say yes.