

The Blessedness Of Those Who Have Joined An Orthodox Congregation.

Text: 1 Cor 1:4-9

Suggested Hymns:

181, 340, 256, 437, 265

1) To whom the members owe their blessedness

2) What their blessedness is

3) What enhances their blessedness

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit, be with you all. Amen.

The text for our sermon today is 1 Corinthians 1:4-9, *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.* (NKJV)

Lord God, heavenly Father, sanctify us through Your truth. Your Word is truth. Amen.

Dear friends in Christ,

Today our text tells us of the blessedness of belonging to an orthodox Christian Congregation. Orthodox means right-believing.

When it comes to belonging to a church there are three groups of people. Those who belong to an orthodox church, those who belong to a heterodox church and those who don't belong to any church at all.

It is important that we all know the difference between what is orthodox and what is heterodox.

The following extract is from an excellent devotion book called "Crumbs." It has been reprinted by Pastor Vernon Grieger. It states,¹ *The denomination which has, teaches, and confesses all the doctrines of God's Word in unalloyed purity, is called an **orthodox** church. To this we must adhere, and contribute toward its maintenance and propagation according to our ability.*

*Any denomination, on the other hand, that does not have, teach, and confess all the doctrines of the Word of God as we find them in the Bible, is called **heterodox**. Such denominations cause divisions and offences among Christ's people by departing from the doctrine which we learn from the Word of God.*

*These the disciples of Jesus must avoid because the Holy Spirit teaches us to do so. Listen, Christian, how this is! You must curse false doctrine. This we are told very clearly in Galatians 1:8-9, ⁸ **But even if we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel to you than what we have preached to you, let him be accursed.** ⁹ **As we have said before, so now I say again, if anyone preaches any other gospel to you than what you have received, let him be accursed.***

This points out to us the importance of belonging to a church that teaches everything according to God's Word.

The third group consists of those people who say that they believe in the Bible and in the Christian religion, but they refuse to join a Christian congregation. They come up with many excuses.

Some say, *"I will not join the church because if I do I will have to pay regularly for the support of the ministry, for synodical purposes, for mission work, and so many other things that pertain to the church. I will keep my money in my pocket."*

Another says, *"If I join the church as a member, I will have to be regular in my attendance, and if I do not come, the Pastor and the members will worry the life out of me. Why should I bind myself? I prefer to be my own master, so that I can go to church or stay at home just as I please."*

Still another says, *"The eyes of a whole congregation will be fixed on me if I join the church, and I will have to be very careful not to give offence to any one. If I do anything wrong, they will jump on me. Why should I be ruled by others? I prefer to stay away, and then nobody will have to censure me."*

These are some of the most common reasons which keep people from joining a Christian congregation but there is also another reason. Sometimes people refuse to join because things are not as they should be in a congregation, even though it is orthodox. They see that there is strife and discord among the members, and that great sins are committed, and offence is given, and hence they will have nothing to do with such a church.

Now, note that the words of our text are addressed to the members of a Christian congregation, to the Church of God at Corinth. This congregation was far from being an ideal church. It was in a sad condition. There was no harmony among the members, and great offence was given. But what advice does St. Paul give the Christians in Corinth? Does he warn them and say that they should not join such a church?

No, because the congregation was orthodox, because the Word of God was taught in its truth and purity, and the Sacraments were administered according to Christ's institution in that church he sets forth the blessedness of its members.

It is this point to which our text draws our attention. Let us therefore consider with the help of the Holy Spirit the blessedness of those who have joined an orthodox Christian congregation. May the Lord bless our meditation.

1. To Whom The Members Owe Their Blessedness

To those who had joined the Christian congregation at Corinth St. Paul in the beginning of our text tells them to whom they owe their blessedness. He says, ***4 I thank my God always concerning you for the grace of God which was given to you by Christ Jesus.*** To whom, then, do those who have joined an orthodox Christian congregation and have become true and faithful members, owe their blessedness? To God alone, namely, to the grace of God and to the merits of Christ.

They owe it solely to the grace of God. Nobody is inclined by nature to search for the true religion and to connect himself with the true Church of God. By nature nobody cares for God and for His Church. By nature we are all unbelievers and atheists, as David says in Psalm 14:2-3, ***2 The LORD looks down from heaven upon the children of men, To see if there are any who understand, who seek God. 3 They have all turned aside, They have together become corrupt; There is none who does good, No, not one.***

If any desire is awakened in a person's heart to find out which is the true religion and to connect himself with God's Church, it is God's doing and not his own. Most of us assembled here have been born into the true Christian Church and have been connected with it since the days of our infancy. Why were we not born heathen, or why were we not raised and brought up in infidelity or in some false church?

Others may have been brought up without the knowledge of the true God, and yet, while thousands remain in their natural unbelieving state, they were led by God in life so that they came to the knowledge of the true God and have connected themselves with His Church. To whom, then, do they owe their blessedness as members of His Church? To God alone, to the grace of God, who sought them out of the great mass of mankind and made them His own.

Let us always bear in mind that it is not of our own deserving if either by birth or in some other way we have come into the true Christian Church, but that we owe it solely to the grace of God.

But the grace of God is given to us by Jesus Christ, says the Apostle. Your blessedness as a true member of the Christian congregation you owe, at the same time, to the merits of Christ. Had the eternal Son of God not come into this world to live and to die for fallen mankind, had the Lord Jesus Christ not worked out for us all a spotless righteousness by His perfect fulfilment of the Law in our stead, and had He not suffered and died on the cross to make atonement for our sins, we would know nothing of the grace of God.

There would be no grace for us. We would be and remain under God's wrath forever. We must ascribe it to the great work of our blessed Redeemer that God is gracious and merciful to us damnable sinners. But since God has been so gracious to us as to lead us into a Christian congregation, let us be thankful to our merciful Saviour Jesus Christ whose merits have secured for us the grace of God.

2. What Their Blessedness Is

What is the blessedness of those who have joined a Christian congregation and have become true, faithful members? The Apostle says, ⁵ *that you were enriched in everything by Him.*

If you join an orthodox congregation, that is, a Christian church which is in possession of the correct doctrine, and prove yourself a faithful member, you are enriched in everything, in all those gifts which pertain to the Christian life.

The Apostle mentions a few of these gifts. He says, *in all utterance*. If you are an active member of the church, surely you are kept under the influence of the divine Word more effectively than if you are an occasional visitor. By being a member who regularly attends church and having the Word of God proclaimed

to you in its truth and purity Sunday by Sunday will surely have the effect of encouraging you to search the Scriptures for yourselves.

This is exactly what the people of Berea² did. We read in Acts 17:10-12, ***¹⁰ Then the brethren immediately sent Paul and Silas away by night to Berea. When they arrived, they went into the synagogue of the Jews. ¹¹ These were more fair-minded than those in Thessalonica, in that they received the word with all readiness, and searched the Scriptures daily to find out whether these things were so. ¹² Therefore many of them believed.*** You see, they checked up on what the Pastor said by searching the Scriptures. They did not follow blindly but tested everything according to Scripture.

This will also lead you to speak the Word of God in your own home, to those of your household, to read the Bible to them, to pray with them and for them, to bring up your children in the nurture and admonition of the Lord. It will encourage you to keep the divine command as we read in Colossians 3:16, ***¹⁶ Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom, teaching and admonishing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with grace in your hearts to the Lord.***

We are enriched, then, in the spoken Word, in having the Word of God proclaimed to us richly and in giving utterance to the Word of God in our own homes. Is not this a blessed thing? Is it not worth more than all the money in the world? Did Jesus not say in Luke 11:28, ***“blessed are those who hear the word of God and keep it!”***?

Another gift with which those who have joined an orthodox Christian congregation is, that they are enriched in knowledge, as the Apostle says, ***and all knowledge, ⁶ even as the testimony of Christ was confirmed in you.*** How are people to grow in Christian knowledge if they are not members of the church? Experience teaches us that those who do not connect themselves with a Christian congregation soon lose all interest in divine things and are lost to the world.

However, if you are a faithful member, you will learn more and more as to your soul's salvation, you will understand the Law and the Gospel better, the more you deal with these two chief doctrines of the Bible; you will increase in all Christian knowledge. Is this not a blessed thing ?

It is important to have a thorough knowledge of the Christian religion so that you are not wandering around in uncertainty and doubt. If you are embedded in the truth, God's infallible Word, you will find comfort in affliction, and your faith will rest on a firm and solid foundation that cannot be shaken because the foundation rests outside of you, namely on Jesus Christ.

Remember what God says in the very first Psalm. We read in Psalm 1:1-2 *¹ Blessed is the man Who walks not in the counsel of the ungodly, Nor stands in the path of sinners, Nor sits in the seat of the scornful; ² But his delight is in the law of the LORD, And in His law he meditates day and night.* Realising the importance of having the right foundation we will not want to compromise it. Rather we will want to build upon it. This text truly encourages us to meditate on the Word of God and have family devotions at home.

One more gift with which those who have joined a Christian congregation as faithful members the Apostle mentions in the words *⁷ so that you come short in no gift, eagerly waiting for the revelation of our Lord Jesus Christ.* Here he is telling us what a blessed state it is to be that you are found as the faithful members of a orthodox Christian congregation! You lack no gift. God has enriched you in everything that pertains to your salvation.

You have the Word of God, which is able to save your souls. You have the holy Sacraments, which seal unto you the forgiveness of your sins. You have the Holy Spirit, whom God has given into your hearts. What more do you need to make your salvation sure?

All that you wait for now is the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. Your desire is to depart and to be with Christ, to be translated from the church militant to the church triumphant, to be received from this vale of tears into the realms of glory. Then your happiness shall be complete.

O the blessedness of those who join and become faithful members of an orthodox congregation! When these blessing are realised we can see how foolish it is when people refuse to join for money's sake, or because they don't wish to bind themselves, or because they just want to be free and do as they please.

3. What Enhances The Blessedness Of Those Who Have Joined An Orthodox Christian Congregation

If you join an orthodox Christian congregation and become a faithful member, your blessedness will even be enhanced or made greater the longer you are a faithful member. The Apostle says ⁸ *who will also confirm you to the end, that you may be blameless in the day of our Lord Jesus Christ.* If you are a faithful member of a Christian congregation, your blessedness is enhanced by the firm hope that you will not drop off, but endure to the end.

True Christians should not live in constant dread and fear lest they might not reach heaven after all. They should not feel like the escaped convict who is free, but doesn't feel safe anywhere and continually has to fear that he might be caught and executed. True Christians should be sure of heaven, and they can be made sure if they are faithful members of an orthodox Christian congregation.

How is this so? We read in Romans 10:17, ¹⁷ *So then faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God.* It is faith that saves. Membership in a church does not save. But by belonging to a church that teaches God's Word in its truth and purity your faith will be strengthened and certainty of your salvation will result through the operation of the Holy Spirit through the Word.

On the other hand if you belong to a church that mixes error with truth, God's Word is therefore adulterated and this may cause your faith to weaken or you may lose it altogether. Surely, your salvation is too important to be compromised.

As long as you are in faithful connection with an orthodox Church, and your faith is grounded in the Word of God you are in God's hands who is not willing that any should perish. This means that the promise of our text is yours, ⁸ *who [meaning God] will also confirm you to the end, that you may be blameless in the day of our Lord Jesus Christ.*

True, if a faithful member of a Christian congregation considers his sinfulness, his weakness, his inability, he will have to fear for his salvation and admit that he may lose the faith, as thousands did, and finally be lost.

But a true Christian will not trust in himself for his endurance to the end, but in God alone of whom the Apostle says at the end of our text, 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.* If God Himself tells you that He will confirm you

unto the end, that He will keep you in the faith, in the fellowship of His dear Son, in His grace and mercy, until you breathe your last, can you doubt it?

If anybody will keep his promise, will not God do so? And as long as you are a faithful member of a Christian congregation, God is with you, and leads you, and works out for you your salvation. Are you not in a truly blessed state, then, as a member of the church?

We can say with confidence, *If God is for us, who can be against us?*³ We can be sure of eternal life, and exclaim with St. Paul in Romans 8:38-39, ³⁸ *For I am persuaded that neither death nor life, nor angels nor principalities nor powers, nor things present nor things to come,* ³⁹ *nor height nor depth, nor any other created thing, shall be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.*

Praise be to God, therefore, who has led us into a true Christian congregation in which we enjoy the blessedness of His children. To Him be honour and glory forever and ever! Amen.

The peace of God, which passes all understanding, will keep our hearts and minds, in Christ Jesus. Amen.

¹ C. M. Zorn, Crumbs, Concordia Publishing House, St. Louis, 1914, Saturday, Week of the Seventh Sunday after Trinity, p298

² Acts 17

³ Romans 8:31