

Confirming the Testimony of Christ

By Linda Rex

December 3, 2023, 1st Sunday in Advent—I was reminded this morning of the blessing and gift we have been given of fellowship in our Lord Jesus Christ. Last Tuesday when I woke up, I was greatly challenged with being able to write and post this blog and to provide Sunday's sermon on video, because I was very sick and my head was filled more with congestion than with any coherent thought.

I put out a prayer request for those who participate with me in Our Life in the Trinity, and was so blessed to have the Lord's mercies in clearing up by noon almost completely the congestion and fuzziness of brain I had been experiencing. I was able to post both the blog and the video by Wednesday morning, and I can give no credit anywhere but to the Lord Jesus Christ, and my gratitude to the believers for their faithful prayers on my behalf.

I believe this is what the apostle Paul was describing in his passage for this week, 1 Corinthians 1:3–9. I do give thanks to God concerning every one of you who support me in this ministry, for the grace of God has not been without effect, and the testimony of Jesus has been confirmed over and over in all of you. As Paul reminds us, this is the work of our God, who is faithful, and who has called us together into fellowship with his Son Jesus Christ.

Paul was wise enough to realize that whatever gifts he had been given of speech and knowledge were gifts of the Spirit from our Lord Jesus Christ. He knew that the believers in Corinth valued skills of human rhetoric or speech and knowledge, but what Paul focused on in his letter was fellowship with our Lord. The Spirit generously showers spiritual gifts upon us, but it is Jesus who confirms in us the grace of God by his Spirit, making us blameless. Our identity is in Jesus Christ and as we trust in him, dying in his death and rising in his resurrection and ascension, we participate in his own face-to-face intimate fellowship with his Father in the Spirit.

This is meant to be most evident within the context of spiritual community, where those who trust in Christ are joined together in the fellowship of the Spirit, sharing in their common faith in our Lord Jesus. The gifts of the Spirit showered upon the Body of Christ are not meant for personal glory or aggrandizement, but for the equipping of the saints, to aid in our growing up into the fulness of Christ. Together, we live as those who trust in Christ, reflecting the divine *perichoresis* or *koinonia* in our relationships with one another. This is evident testimony to the reality of our living Lord Jesus Christ by his Spirit at work in and through us.

As the psalmist says, apart from what God has done, is doing, and will do through our Lord Jesus Christ and by his Spirit, we are at the mercy of our sins and brokenness (Psalm 80:1–7, 17–19). The prophet Isaiah reminds us that apart from the mercy and compassionate intervention of God, we are not able to live out the covenant life God has called us into (Isaiah 64:1–9). But God is, by nature, merciful and compassionate, so he did not leave any of us in the state of bondage to evil, sin, and death. No, in Christ, he has set us free, and invites us to participate in that freedom by faith in Jesus.

The good news is that, as God in human flesh, Jesus lives in face-to-face relationship with our Father in the Spirit, and he enables us to share in this union and communion by faith in Christ. It's not all up to us, thankfully, but all up to him, even though he honors our personhood and allows us to say 'No' to his 'Yes' in Christ. Our Triune God's 'Yes' to us stands in spite of our 'No', but if we insist, in spite of and in the face of the consuming fire of his love, we will experience the results of that resistance to God's love. It is hard for me to imagine someone so forcibly resisting God's love, but we are persons who at times can be quite stubborn in our resistance against what is beautiful, loving and good. I am grateful, as ever, that it's not up to me

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to decide any of this, but up to our loving, gracious Lord Jesus, who is both the judged and the Judge. May his Name be praised evermore!

Our loving, heavenly Father, thank you for your faithfulness by which we are saved and brought, in your Son, into face-to-face fellowship with you in the Spirit. Grant us the grace to allow you to finish what you have begun in us, by fully participating in your saving work, through Jesus our Lord. Amen.

“Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. I thank my God always concerning you for the grace of God which was given you in Christ Jesus, that in everything you were enriched in Him, in all speech and all knowledge, even as the testimony concerning Christ was confirmed in you, so that you are not lacking in any gift, awaiting eagerly the revelation of our Lord Jesus Christ, who will also confirm you to the end, blameless in the day of our Lord Jesus Christ. God is faithful, through whom you were called into fellowship with His Son, Jesus Christ our Lord.” 1 Corinthians 1:3–9 NASB