

I Corinthians 1:4-9

The first step in ministering to worldly Christians.

- The presence of the world's values and patterns in the church is not new to us and remains a serious challenge to every congregation.
- Most attempts to handle "carnal" (fleshly or worldly) saints have been less than fully successful. "Strict rules" tends to send sinners underground and create witch-hunts, hypocrisy, and pride. "Exclusive membership" tends to exclude many who need help. "Looking the other way" tends to encourage undisciplined behavior.
- We can learn a great deal by observing Paul's ministry to the Corinthian church. It was full of worldliness.

A. Paul did not deny the reality of sinning saints. He faced these problems and others like them wherever he traveled.

1. The first lesson that we must learn from Paul is that the idea of an ideal First Century Church is largely a myth.
 - a. Most of the churches mentioned in the NT had problems. Racism in Ephesus, Legalism in Galatia, etc.
 - b. The epistles of the NT were written to address sinning Christians and churches that were "off base" morally or doctrinally.
2. Paul's theology of the Christian life included the "carnal" Christian.
 - a. His doctrine of our position in Christ satisfied the requirements of a holy God for eternal fellowship.
 - b. While "good works" were to be the natural and expected fruit of a regenerate believer, they were not automatic nor were they always visible to other people.
 - c. We can assume that there also were people in the early church who were not truly "born again" in that their faith was not sincere.
 - d. For more information on this subject look at apptoteach.org theology file #710, 711, 713

B. How might some Christians today suggest that we address the problem of the sinning Christian?

1. Deal with the sin up front.
2. Remind them of the moral law of God and its warnings.
3. Warn them of the discipline of a holy God against sinners.
4. Point out the importance of being faithful to their covenant in Christ to confirm their faith as genuine.
5. Things to avoid. (What would many Christians tell us that we should not do.)

- a. Talking too much about grace.
- b. Talking too much about God's work for them.
- c. Offering them hope without a call to repentance.
- d. Leaving them feeling that they are secured without getting their lives under proper management.

C. Paul seems to take a very different approach.

“⁴ I thank my God always concerning you, for the grace of God which was given you in Christ Jesus, ⁵ that in everything you were enriched in Him, in all speech and all knowledge, ⁶ even as the testimony concerning Christ was confirmed in you, ⁷ so that you are not lacking in any gift, awaiting eagerly the revelation of our Lord Jesus Christ, ⁸ who shall also confirm you to the end, blameless in the day of our Lord Jesus Christ. ⁹ God is faithful, through whom you were called into fellowship with His Son, Jesus Christ our Lord.”

D. First, he recognizes God's work in them.

“⁴ I thank my God always concerning you, for the grace of God which was given you in Christ Jesus,”

1. We are to see other the way God sees them.
2. Our connection with God's grace is through our position “in Christ.”
3. Grace is not earned it is “given” as a gift.

E. Second, he recognizes God's favor toward them.

“⁵ that in everything you were enriched in Him, in all speech and all knowledge, ⁶ even as the testimony concerning Christ was confirmed in you, ⁷ so that you are not lacking in any gift,”

1. Being rich in speech and knowledge does not automatically lead to right living.
2. A full complement of gifts is present in the church but not in any one individual.
3. The confirmation of true faith may not involve moral virtue.

F. Third, he recognizes God's hope for them.

“⁷ . . . awaiting eagerly the revelation of our Lord Jesus Christ,”

1. We are to find our hope not in this life but in the life to come.
2. Before Jesus comes life will include struggle, suffering, and trials.
3. the revelation of Jesus = His 2nd coming.

G. Fourth, he recognizes God's faithfulness to them.

“⁸ who shall also confirm you to the end, blameless in the day of our Lord Jesus Christ. ⁹ God is faithful, through whom you were called into fellowship with His Son, Jesus Christ our Lord.”

1. Paul was confident of God's confirmation in spite of the present carnality.
2. God called us while sinners, He will be faithful to confirm us by grace.

H. The Gospel is first of all about God's work in Christ.

1. Grace is the motivation and power of the Gospel story.
2. Grace is at the center of the big picture of our sin issues.
3. The path to holy living starts with God's work not ours.
4. Before we address the work of God **through** us we must be assured of God's work **for** us.

I. Love starts by:

Listening to the concerns of others.

Overlooking the faults of others

Valuing the strengths of others

Empathizing with the pain of others.

NOTE: We all want to be loved but find it a challenge to love others. The best way to get the love we desire from others is to start giving it to them.

Love does not end with these four postures. It may often include confrontation, correction, and discipline as we will see in the rest of I Corinthians.