

# CRUX

## Week 11: Christ Our Riches

### 1 Corinthians 1:1-9

#### GOAL:

To discover the riches we have in Christ when our identity is rooted in him.

#### CHECKLIST

- Prepare for your group meeting by praying for yourself and your group (feel free to use the prayer below) and reading through this Leader's Guide.
- Encourage your group members to finish the semester strong by continuing to spend time with God each day using our VRBC Growth Guide. Remind your group that we will give them an opportunity to share each week in Grow Group about what they learned from these readings and times of prayer.
- Take attendance in Planning Center, including guests/new members. Help new members register for your group using the QR code in your room or at [vrbc.net/grow](http://vrbc.net/grow).
- Remind your group about the Christmas Store Auction & Bingo Night on April 18. Invite your group to attend and participate together!

#### PREPARING THROUGH PRAYER:

*Lord Jesus, help me to remember that you are the crux of my life. May all that I am and all that I do revolve around you. I confess that sometimes have relied on my own wisdom, strength, or abilities, failing to recognize the poverty of them in comparison to the riches that you offer to me. Thank you for your grace and your faithfulness. Continue to lead me into ever-deepening fellowship with you. Help me to ground my identity in you and to live someone who is called, sanctified, and made holy by you. Thank you for enriching me and the body of Christ in every way, so that we may live lives that are pleasing to you and fruitful in your Kingdom. May our lives be a testimony of your transforming power and grace. In Jesus' name, Amen.*

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*And let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds, not giving up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but encouraging one another—and all the more as you see the Day approaching. Hebrews 10:24-25*

## CONNECT, COORDINATE & PRAY

- Use this time to connect with your group relationally - both formally and informally.
- Spend a few minutes covering any details the group needs to know, including an invitation to come to the Christmas Store Auction & Bingo night on April 18:
- Invite your group to share one way that they have seen God at work in the past week, and one way they're praying for God to move in the week to come.
- Spend time praying for your group members and for your time together today, including any praises or prayer requests from your previous conversation.

## DISCUSS

- What stood out to you this week from the Growth Guide readings about the riches we have in Christ??

### **Read 1 Corinthians 1:1-9.**

- What adjectives and phrases does Paul use to describe their identity? How does Paul's description compare and contrast with the way we usually think about the church and the way the world tends to describe the church?

**Leaders:** *As Pastor Amy pointed out in the sermon on Sunday, Paul mentions the name Jesus Christ, Christ Jesus, or Christ nine times in this short passage! He is certainly making the point that their identity revolves around Christ. Here are some other words and phrases Paul uses to describe their identity in Christ::*

- Church of God
- Sanctified in Christ Jesus
- Called to be his holy people
- Recipients of grace
- Enriched in every way
- Kept to the end
- Blameless
- Called into fellowship

*Oftentimes, when we think about the church, we might think of it has a place to have our needs met, an opportunity for self-improvement or even a form of therapy, or a place to find friends. While all of these things are possible and even likely at church, that is not primarily who or what the church is called to be. Similarly, we might place our identity as Christians in how good we are, or in our "right-ness." This is a far cry from what the apostle Paul has described. We are on the receiving end of each of the descriptors Paul uses. It is not about who we are or what we have done, but about Christ living in and through us.*

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*If we think about what the world says about the church, we get a much more grim picture than how we likely see ourselves. It is not uncommon for others to stereotype Christians and the church as hypocrites, self-absorbed, or self-righteous. While these descriptors are also possibly true of us (we are a hospital for sinners, after all!), it is sad to think that this is how the world identifies us as followers of Jesus.*

*If we hope to reconcile these descriptions—to see ourselves and have others see us through Christ’s work in us and through us—we don’t get there by trying harder. The beautiful picture that Paul paints for the Corinthians becomes possible only as we ground our identity—the very crux of who we are—in Christ Jesus and the cross. As we seek to live into this identity as followers of Jesus, we become more and more like him (and like what Paul has described here).*

- How does Paul describe the church in verse 2? How does that contrast with the rest of his letter to the church (addressing all kinds of problems)? How do we understand and live into that tension?

**Leaders:** *Paul says that the church is ‘sanctified’ and ‘called.’ It almost sounds as if Paul is painting a utopian picture of the early church, but then the rest of 1 Corinthians talks about problems such as incest, divisions, and greed. That gives us a clue that Paul is not talking about how great the Corinthian believers are but how great Jesus is – the greatness of Jesus in them and through them. He’s naming their identity even though they’re not living into that right now.*

*This is true of our lives as Christians too. Although we are made righteous in Christ, our sanctification is a lifelong process. As Paul said in Philippians 3, “Not that I have already obtained all this, or have already arrived at my goal, but I press on to take hold of that for which Christ Jesus took hold of me.”*

*Christ has called us out of the world and into a life centered around him. This is such good news for us! It means that we don’t have to live in shame and fear of our shortcomings. It means that we don’t have an uncertain hope in our standing with God. It means that we don’t have to search for identity and meaning in things that won’t last. Because we have the riches of Christ available to us! That is our primary identity. And we aren’t called to live ‘up’ to it; we’re called to live ‘into’ it.*

*In Colossians 3:12, Paul says, “Therefore, as God’s chosen people, holy and dearly loved, clothe yourselves with...” What he is saying is that our identity comes first, and then Christlikeness can follow. Paul proclaims their identity in Christ even though they are not living into that right now.*

*The word ‘called’ means a summons or an invitation. So when Paul says that we are “called to be holy,” it’s an invitation to live into and reorient our lives around our identity in Christ, around the things that Jesus said and did.*

- Read Ephesians 1:3 and reread 1 Corinthians 1:4-5. What are the ways in which followers of Jesus are enriched in him? What are some of the ways you’ve experienced this?

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**Leaders:** Take some time to chew on Paul's phrase, "because of his grace given you." Paul is not thankful for the believers at Corinth in and of themselves, but because of the grace of Christ in them. In fact, we might look at their problems in the rest of the letter and be surprised that Paul can find anything for which to be thankful. But Paul grounds his thanks in the grace of Christ given to them.

It's important to understand that all of our spiritual riches are a gift of grace—not earned, not deserved. It is simply a result of being "chosen and dearly loved" (as we saw in the last question from Col 3:12). As Amy pointed out in her sermon, there is a reason why Paul put verse 4 before verse 5: Paul wants us to be sure that we focus on the giver before we focus on the gift.

All of our spiritual blessings stem from the grace of God we experience in the person and work of Jesus Christ. As your group brainstorms ways that followers of Jesus have been enriched in him, this is a chance for your group to share personal testimony and give Christ praise. It is also an opportunity for your group to affirm one another by naming the spiritual blessings you see in one another's lives. Our spiritual blessings include things like the fruits of the spirit and spiritual gifts (plus lots more your group will think of!). Prompt your group to think about how these gifts might be given for their own edification and also for the benefit of others.

- What does Paul mean about God confirming their testimony about Christ in the lives of the Corinthians. In what ways do we see that confirmation in our groups and in our church?

**Leaders:** Paul has given his life to follow God's call as an apostle. He has been preaching the gospel—his testimony about Christ—to the Corinthians for many years already and has a deep relationship with them. He lived among them for a year and a half of fruitful ministry. During this time, some Jews and many Gentiles believed in the gospel message he had preached, and the church grew significantly in numbers. Paul attributes this fruit to God's action, not his own. It is a confirmation of the power of the gospel.

In fact, when Paul mentions Sosthenes in verse 1 as a co-author of his letter to the Corinthians, it is likely that this is one very specific instance of God confirming their testimony in the lives of the believers at Corinth. In Acts 18, we learn that Crispus, the leader of the Jewish synagogue, converted to Christianity. Following his conversion, Sosthenes assumed leadership of the synagogue. Subsequently, Sosthenes and other Jews brought accusations against Paul, alleging that he was advocating unlawful worship practices. They brought Paul before Gallio, the regional leader, but Gallio perceived the matter as an internal Jewish dispute and dismissed the charges. However, the situation took a violent turn as the crowd, whether Jews upset at Paul being set free or Greeks disturbed by the commotion, turned against Sosthenes. In front of Gallio, who remained passive, they subjected Sosthenes to a beating. It is likely that this is the same Sosthenes that Paul mentions here in 1 Corinthians 1:1. If so, this means that after persecuting Paul, Sosthenes became convinced at the truth of the gospel and became a Christian, one that was well known to the rest of the church at Corinth!

Paul also sees the evidence of God working in the lives of the believers at Corinth as validation of the power of the gospel he has preached. The confirmation he is referring to could be the Corinthians

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*experiencing the transformative power of the Gospel in their lives, the growth of their faith, the demonstration of spiritual gifts among them, and the fruits of the Spirit becoming evident in their community. Essentially, Paul sees the Corinthians' response to his message as evidence of God's active presence and confirmation of the truth of what he has shared about Christ.*

*Take some time to share stories and celebrate the evidence you and your Grow Group members have seen of God at work in the lives of people in your group and at VRBC. If you're willing and able, please take notes of these stories and share them with Amy after your group meeting. Just as Paul rejoices in the confirmation of the gospel he preached to the Corinthians, it is a great encouragement to our pastoral staff to hear about what God is doing in the lives of people in our congregation!*

- Read 2 Peter 1:3 and reread 1 Corinthians 1:7. What do these verses tell us about God equipping the church for the ministry to which he has called us? How is this true in the context of the local church and in the context of the universal Church?

**Leaders:** *Paul tells the Corinthians, "you do not lack any spiritual gift." And 2 Peter 1 says, "His divine power has given us everything we need for a godly life." In other words, we're not waiting on anything else. You have everything you need. The ingredients are all out on the counter, so to speak. Therefore, live accordingly!*

*It is important to note that both Scriptures use the second person plural form. "You (all together as a church) do not lack any spiritual gift." God has not gifted each individual person with every spiritual gift for a complete life in Christ. No, God never intended for us to be spiritual islands, living the Christian life on our own, apart from the body of Christ in community. In fact, God never intended for us to be archipelagos (a group of islands), living the Christian life independently but in proximity with one another. Instead, we were created to live the Christian life dependent on Christ and also on one another. We are meant to be involved in one another's lives, living as brothers and sisters, learning from one another, admonishing and encouraging one another. We need one another! We need the gifts of each person working together to grow and love and serve in the ways God has intended for us as a church. So take some time to consider as a group together, how can I/we live into this identity and calling together as a community of faith at VRBC?*

*In 1 Corinthians 1:2, Paul is speaking "to the church of God in Corinth, to those sanctified in Christ Jesus and called to be his holy people, together with all those everywhere who call on the name of our Lord Jesus Christ." This means that our local body of Christ is linked with the universal Church, with "all those everywhere" who follow Jesus. Part of what this means is that we are not in competition with other churches but rather celebrate the work that God is doing in them and through them. It also means that we should be praying for and sharing our gifts and resources with churches and Christian leaders and missionaries who are laboring for Christ in difficult places.*

- Why does Paul's focus shift in verse 8 from the present to the future? How does an assurance of God's faithfulness and Christ's fellowship (verse 9) shape our identity and purpose as followers of Christ?

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**Leaders:** *The assurance of God's faithfulness to confirm believers to the end provides us with a profound sense of security and confidence in our faith journey. It reminds us that our salvation and perseverance in the Christian walk are not dependent on our own strength or efforts alone but on the unwavering faithfulness of God. It is not just the spiritual high achievers—all of us will be presented blameless on the day of the Lord Jesus Christ.*

*Especially in light of where the rest of Paul's letter goes, this is good news. Paul is basically saying, "All this stuff I'm yelling at you about, it's going to be completed. You're going to grow, because God is faithful, and this is part of the process." This assurance of God's faithful and persistent work in us encourages us to trust in God's promises and rely on his grace, even in the face of challenges or trials. It reminds us to continue to abide in Christ and ask him to transform our lives. Hebrews 4 tells us that our thoughts and attitudes are laid bare before God, to whom we must give an account, but it is very encouraging to hear Paul say "you will be blameless." It instills within us a sense of hope and peace, knowing that God is faithful to complete the work he has begun in us (Philippians 1:6).*

*Verse 9 is a great reminder that God's priority is not "behavior management" but a deep and lasting relationship. He doesn't say, "he...who has given you a long list of rules to obey," or "he...who has said 'you better shape up!'" Instead, it's all about an intimate relationship. The fellowship believers have with Jesus Christ is foundational to our identity and purpose as Christians. As we abide in Christ, our identity becomes rooted in him. We are no longer defined solely by our past, our accomplishments, or our circumstances, but by our union with Christ. This identity empowers us to live out our purpose as ambassadors of Christ (2 Corinthians 5:20), reflecting Christ's love, grace, and truth to the world. Furthermore, this fellowship with Christ empowers and equips us for service, enabling us to bear fruit that glorifies God and fulfills his Kingdom purposes (John 15:5).*

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## PRAY

**Leaders:** *As we close today, ask for four volunteers who would be willing to lead the group in prayer around the following four topics. Consider printing extra copies of this page so that they can have the prayer prompts available as they lead.*

### **Prayer of Thanksgiving**

Leader: We want to take time as a group to offer prayers of thanksgiving for God's grace, peace, and faithfulness in our lives. I invite you each pray out loud as you feel led, offering specific thanks for blessings you have received and for the fellowship we experience with Christ and one another.

[Leader allows time for group members to pray, then closes this section with a prayer.]

### **Prayer for One Another**

Leader: Now I invite you to lift up prayers for one another, asking God to encourage and strengthen each of us in our faith journeys. As you pray, feel free to lift up any specific needs, challenges, or areas where you desire God's grace and guidance.

[Leader allows time for group members to pray, then closes this section with a prayer.]

### **Prayer for VRBC**

Leader: Now as you think about all that we have read and discussed today, how does that prompt you to pray for us as a church? Let's take a moment to pray that we would keep Christ at the center of all that we are and all that we do. Let's pray for unity and fellowship within VRBC and the body of Christ around the world. Pray for deeper bonds of love, understanding, and support among believers.

[Leader allows time for group members to pray, then closes this section with a prayer.]

### **Benediction**

Leader: We will close today with a benediction from Paul's second letter to the Corinthians church. 2 Corinthians 13:14 says, "May the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all."