

Title: SUSTAINED BY GOD, 1 CORINTHIANS 1:3-9
(Chatham, NJ; 11/30/14, AM) [Pd – Topical, Inductive]

Theme: No matter what the surrounding circumstances and the behavior of others, our spiritual life and our hope are sustained by God alone.

Purpose: To help us focus on the power of God to sustain us and to renew our hope that because of the incarnation we will be redeemed from this disordered and sinful world.

Introduction:

1. Paul's introductory remarks to the Corinthians seem to me a little disjointed from the rest of the letter.
2. Had I first heard only this part of the letter, I might have expected more complimentary things to follow.
3. Instead, after he assures them here, he chastises them for a lot of things.
4. He jumps immediately to the reports that he has heard: there are quarrels among them.
5. Think less about the particulars of the quarrel (factions) and more about the quarrelsome spirit that is displayed; quarreling indicates strife and worldliness, 3:3
6. 2 Timothy 2:23-26, Paul advocates gentle correction without deterioration into quarreling; God's servant must not be quarrelsome.
7. Other issues: problems with spiritual gifts, lawsuits among believers, sexual immorality, denial of the resurrection, and more.
8. Good things about the church because of what God has done can still be true even where imperfections are readily apparent: might this be Paul's inherent message?

I. Paul Sees God's Activity among Them

- A. Grace given to you, 4
 1. Grace infuses everything we are and do
 2. We are saved by it
 3. And where good works are on display, it is because we are responding to that
- B. Enriched in speech and knowledge, 5; also they don't lack spiritual gifts, 7
 1. Gifts of prophecy and tongues were on display
 2. Some thought certain gifts were better than others
 3. He spends a great deal of time explaining that all gifts are important, chap. 12
 4. The presence of the gifts is an obvious indication of the presence of God, so he can rejoice in it
- C. Christ's testimony has been confirmed among them, 6
 1. In Acts 18 Paul was told to stay there because God had many people in the town of Corinth
 2. His "such were some of you" statement in 6:11 reinforces that testimony
 3. God had changed them
- D. In the meantime, they wait, 7
 1. The waiting period can cause many problems: boredom, anxiety, etc.
 2. Those times must not deteriorate into worthless activity

II. Sustained, Guiltless, God's Faithfulness, 8-9 (Paul is calling them back to the fountain from which all power and hope come.)

- A. Sustained, 8
 1. Turning their thoughts first to God's power may be Paul's way of distracting them from the problems the church is having
 2. Christ will keep them – the power comes from him

3. Ephesians 3:16 testifies to the power at work within the Christian
4. Ephesians 3:20 reminds Christians that God's power transcends any amount of power we can imagine
5. We live by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God
6. It is this very power that sustains them

B. Guiltless

1. Some early commentators suggest this may be a backhanded reproof
2. Perhaps he insinuates better things from them
3. In any case, it is the grace of Christ that declares us guiltless
4. This is the power at work in the Corinthian church as well as ours
5. They were guiltless because of God, not because of anything they did

C. God is faithful

1. 2 Timothy 2:13, "if we are faithless, he remains faithful"
2. Maybe this is what is particularly important in his address to them

III. Our Hope and Faith in God

A. Israel's urgent pleas

1. They cried out to God before the Exodus
2. Isaiah 64:1-9
 - 1, rend the heavens and come down
 - 9, do not remain angry and come to us
3. Psalm 80
 - 3, 7, 19 – restore us
 - 14, turn again and look down
 - 17, the man at your right hand
4. The desperate plea of the righteous is to seek the power and deliverance that only God can provide

B. These were regular reminders of God's salvation

1. Yearly celebration of the incarnation reminds us that God has heard these pleas
2. It is also a fulfillment of hope as well as a longing for the next great salvation event

Conclusion:

1. In all of these things, God is the mover and shaker.
2. His power brings about salvation where we are incapable.
3. We rely on his grace to accomplish in and among us what we cannot do for ourselves.
4. We are thankful for his power to overcome evil.