

# FAITH & GENEROSITY REFLECTION

CALLED

Year A - Epiphany 2 - 1 Corinthians 1:1-9

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## **1 Corinthians 1:1-9**

*'1 Paul, called to be an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God, and our brother Sosthenes,*

*2 To the church of God that is in Corinth, to those who are sanctified in Christ Jesus, called to be saints, together with all those who in every place call on the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, both their Lord and ours:*

*3 Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.*

*4 I give thanks to my God always for you because of the grace of God that has been given you in Christ Jesus, 5 for in every way you have been enriched in him, in speech and knowledge of every kind - 6 just as the testimony of Christ has been strengthened among you - 7 so that you are not lacking in any spiritual gift as you wait for the revealing of our Lord Jesus Christ. 8 He will also strengthen you to the end, so that you may be blameless on the day of our Lord Jesus Christ. 9 God is faithful; by him you were called into the fellowship of his Son, Jesus Christ our Lord'.*

## **Rowan Williams – Christianity<sup>1</sup>**

*'Central to that relationship is knowing we can trust God. Saint Paul says at the end of the eighth chapter of his letter to the Church in Rome, 'if God is for us, who can be against us?' And this is the heart of faith.*

*How do we know that 'God is for us'? Because Jesus Christ, the one human being who is completely in tune with God - with what God wants and what God is doing - has carried the burden of our human betrayals of God and running away from goodness. He has let himself be betrayed and rejected, executed in a humiliating and agonising way, and yet has not turned his back on us. Death did not succeed in silencing him or removing him from the world. He is alive; and that means that his love is alive, having survived the worst we can do.*

*Nothing – says St Paul in the same passage – can separate us from this love. But this isn't an excuse for doing what we like, knowing we can get away with it. Once we know that God is 'for us', we open up to the gift that God wants to give us – which is a share in his own love*

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<sup>1</sup> This text was sourced from [rowanwilliams.archbishopofcanterbury.org](http://rowanwilliams.archbishopofcanterbury.org) some months ago. Unfortunately, the site is no longer accessible.

*and freedom and mercy. We breathe with his breath – that's part of what it means to say that we receive God's 'Spirit', which makes us live like Jesus 'in tune' with God.*

*If we have really taken the message in, we shall live lives of selfless generosity, always asking how the gifts given us – material or imaginative or spiritual or whatever – can be shared in a way that brings other people more fully alive. And we shall be able to trust the generosity of others and be free to receive what they have to give us.*

*Generosity, gratitude, confidence that when we fail we are still loved – all of this focused on Jesus' life and death and resurrection. That's where we start in the lifelong job of being a Christian'.*

### **A short reflection on 1 Corinthians 1:1-9, and Rowan Williams on Romans 8**

Paul's opening words of thanksgiving (1:4-5) might seem surprising given the challenging context. The letter addresses one of the most divided and confused communities represented in Pauline writings. Yet, instead of starting with criticism, Paul begins with words of affirmation. He speaks to the Corinthians as those already '*sanctified in Christ Jesus*' (1:2), who have received every spiritual gift (1:7), and are well on their way to being kept blameless until the end (1:8).

Of course, this greeting is not merely a gentle opening; it sets the stage for understanding the later rebukes, framing them within a profound theological perspective. At the heart of this perspective is Paul's clear and reassuring declaration: "*God is faithful; by him you were called into the fellowship (koinōnia) of his Son, Jesus Christ our Lord.*" (1 Cor. 1:9)

#### **Divine Initiative**

Our text focuses on God's divine initiative. The Corinthians are called (κλητοί), made holy, blessed, and strengthened. God's action has already taken place and shapes their identity from the start. The Corinthians' shortcomings do not exclude them from receiving grace. Grace is not just generous; it is freely given, without dependence on moral or social standing.

This way of thinking aligns closely with Rowan Williams' reflection on Romans 8, in which reassurance depends not on human achievement but on Christ's steadfast faithfulness amid human betrayal. Williams asks: "*How do we know that 'God is for us'? Because Jesus Christ, the one human being who is completely in tune with God ... has carried the burden of our human betrayals of God and our running away from goodness ... and yet has not turned his back on us.*"

What Paul presupposes in 1 Corinthians, Williams makes explicit: the trustworthiness of God is revealed not abstractly, but through Christ. Assurance isn't just a feeling, but a heartfelt theological conclusion drawn from the resurrection of Christ.

The theological tone of Romans 8 is evident throughout 1 Corinthians 1:1-9. Paul's reassurance that God will "*strengthen you to the end*" (1:8) mirrors the promise that nothing

can separate believers from God's love in Christ Jesus (Rom 8:39). The pattern is consistent: divine action, Christ-centred foundation, and confidence in the future.

This is not mere optimism but confidence in God's completed and ongoing action in Christ. Paul does not deny the seriousness of the Corinthians' failures; rather, he refuses to grant them any interpretive authority.

Williams' reading of Romans 8:31, *'If God is for us, who can be against us?'*, echoes Paul's message. The claim is not that opposition, failure, or judgment are unreal, but that they are not definitive. The final word belongs to God, who has already acted decisively in Christ.

A common concern is whether such a high level of confidence could lead to moral complacency. Williams directly tackles this issue:

*"This isn't an excuse for doing what we like, knowing we can get away with it."*

Paul's subsequent arguments in 1 Corinthians suggest he shared precisely this concern. Yet Paul's strategy is not to strengthen moral exhortation at the expense of assurance. Rather, he insists that only assurance can generate a genuinely transformed moral life. Paul reminds them of their calling and gifts, not to flatter them, but to help them see the true meaning of their new life in Christ (1:9)

Williams' description of being 'in tune' with God emphasises that receiving the Spirit is about reshaping what we truly desire. This idea echoes Paul's reminder that gifts mean little without love (1 Cor 13) and that freedom without consideration of the good of others can be harmful (1 Cor 8-10).

### **Koinōnia**

Paul describes the Christian vocation as a calling into *koinōnia* with Christ (1:9), sharing in Christ's life.

Williams extends this participatory vision ethically and ecclesially:

*'Once we know that God is 'for us', we open up to the gift that God wants to give us - which is a share in his own love and freedom and mercy.'*

Here we have a social ethic characterised by generosity, gratitude, and openness. Williams highlights not only the freedom to give but also the freedom to accept, a point that directly addresses Corinthian concerns about competitiveness and anxiety about status. Many conflicts in the letter can be interpreted as struggles with receptivity - the challenge of relying on grace rather than achievement.

### **Eschatology**

Paul situates the present life of the Corinthian church within an eschatological horizon: *"as you wait for the revealing of our Lord Jesus Christ"* (1:7). Waiting must be neither passive

nor despairing but sustained by patient confidence in God's fidelity, not by performance as a church. The church's failures are real and damaging, yet they do not exhaust the meaning of its existence. Williams' assertion that Christ's love has '*survived the worst we can do*' truly resonates here.

This perspective reminds us that the life of the Church is not about being perfect or failing. It is about being a community sustained by God's unwavering faithfulness, gradually learning - more often than not through challenges - to embrace a reality that is already present.

### **In Conclusion...**

1 Corinthians 1:1-9 affirms that Christian life starts with assurance and gift, not anxiety or demands. Paul's declaration that '*God is faithful*' is not a sentimental reassurance but a robust theological claim grounded in Christ's death and resurrection. Rowan Williams' meditation on Romans 8 articulates the same conviction in contemporary idiom: the love of Christ is alive, resilient, and unexhausted by human failure.

Read in this light, Paul's opening thanksgiving is a theological foundation. It sets out the conditions under which repentance, growth, correction, and reconciliation can occur. Paul does not evade the hard questions of Corinth - nor can we evade those of the contemporary Church - but we can situate them within the truth of God's unrelenting generosity and faithfulness.