

# Spiritual Amnesia

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by S. Michael Durham  
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## I Corinthians 1:1-9

*Paul, called to be an apostle of Jesus Christ through the will of God, and Sosthenes our brother, 2 Unto the church of God which is at Corinth, to them that are sanctified in Christ Jesus, called to be saints, with all that in every place call upon the name of Jesus Christ our Lord, both theirs and ours: 3 Grace be unto you, and peace, from God our Father, and from the Lord Jesus Christ. 4 I thank my God always on your behalf, for the grace of God which is given you by Jesus Christ; 5 That in every thing ye are enriched by him, in all utterance, and in all knowledge; 6 Even as the testimony of Christ was confirmed in you; 7 So that ye come behind in no gift; waiting for the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ: 8 Who shall also confirm you unto the end, that ye may be blameless in the day of our Lord Jesus Christ. 9 God is faithful, by whom ye were called unto the fellowship of his Son Jesus Christ our Lord.*

If someone you know received a blow to the head which rendered his memory incapable of functioning, the condition called amnesia, what would you do to help restore that person's memory? I hope you would not believe the movies and give him another whack on the head. You would probably use less drastic methods of jogging his memory. Perhaps you would begin by telling him some things about himself to stir the mind. First, you might tell him about who he was and some things about his past. You could remind him of his name, where he came from, what city he grew up in, whose son he is. Then you might proceed to talk about his present -- whom he is married to, the names of his children, where he works, where he lives. And if that didn't work, you might even try to help him identify with his hopes for the future. You would perhaps describe to him something he was working toward, some future goal. You would remind him of his future.

As we read this text today, I Corinthians 1:1-9, I sense that Paul was trying to jog the memories of the Corinthians from a spiritual amnesia that had settled upon this metropolitan church. From an examination of their behavior it is apparent they had forgotten who they were in Christ Jesus. They had forgotten who they were. Is that possible for a Christian to do? They had forgotten where they came from and where they were going, so Paul begins this epistle by reminding them of these things. He tells them who they are by reminding them of who they were.

How easy it is to forget these things ourselves. I wonder how many of you in this past week really thought about who you are in Christ, and if you did, did you claim it and drink from it as your spiritual beverage? Did you make it the means to be energized in Christ? There are a large number of things today that we try to find energy from, but there is one and only one that will supply the energy you need to live the Christian life. To claim this energy we must remember the

truth of God as recorded in His Word. It is your spiritual energy. Sometimes we make a choice, I think, not to remember. It is not a problem of forgetting -- it is the case that we choose not to remember. We can suffer from self-imposed spiritual amnesia.

As we go through this text, I want you to see, first of all, how Paul reminds the Corinthians of their past. As the apostle reminds them of their past in a few succinct words, may God help us to remember ours. We each need to remember what we were like before we were saved, because the truth is we are exactly the same now – apart from grace. We have not changed any as far as the natural man is concerned. We are still the same old persons, and though we can thank God that those persons we were are dead, we do not need to kill the memory of them.

Paul in verses 1 through 4 reminds the Corinthians of who they were.

First of all though, he reminds them of his apostleship, in verse 1:

*Paul, called to be an apostle of Jesus Christ through the will of God, and Sosthenes our brother.*

Although Paul always began his letters in this way (a common form of identification and greeting at the time), he had an additional reason other than common greeting. His own apostleship had come under disrepute. There were some in the church at Corinth, which Paul had established, who were no longer recognizing Paul's apostleship. A coup was forming against this apostle's leadership. They had come to know far wiser and more eloquent men, those that the Corinthians thought were more qualified to lead them, so they rejected the leadership of the Apostle Paul.

So Paul reminds them that he is an apostle of the Lord, and throughout the letter reiterates that what he has done has been by the power of the Holy Spirit. In the second chapter Paul specifically states that he had come to them not with the enticing words of men's wisdom, but in demonstration and the power of the Holy Spirit. Paul says "I labored among you, and this church was established not by my own means or effort, but by the power of the Holy Spirit of God. I am the man that God has called, and I am the apostle to you." In fact, later Paul says to them "you are my epistles, not written in stone but written in the heart." He claims them as his own, claims the right to lead them, claims the right to be their apostle. Spiritual leadership is very important to the church, so Paul says to these Corinthians "I want you to remember who established you in Jesus Christ. I birthed you. You're mine, and I love you."

It is good for churches to understand that God has established certain offices to give oversight to the people of God. Today we call them pastors, but what about the apostles? Do we still have apostles today? There are people who act very much in apostolic ways. Missionaries are no doubt "sent ones" (the definition of "apostle"), and they do establish churches in many places where there has never been named the name of Christ. There are many men whose ministries are very apostolic, but to say that we have apostles alive and functioning today is incorrect. We do not need apostles today, because we still have the ministry of the apostles with us through the written Word of God. Their ministry is still functioning.

There was also another problem involved in the issue of Paul's apostleship. Some had rejected it, while others had idolized it. There is such a thing as idolizing preachers, too, and it is as wrong as rejecting the leadership of a godly shepherd. There are some who go far beyond the limits of proper respect for their pastor or spiritual leader and idolize him. Paul, in I Corinthians 1:12, recognizes that there is a group within this church which has placed him on a pedestal that he neither deserves nor wants.

He says some claim to be of Paul, some of Apollos, others of Cephas and some of Christ. Paul says these kinds of divisions ought not to be happening among them. He reminds them "I am just a man, a man called by God. What I did among you was by the power of the Holy Spirit. The gospel is not mine by my own invention. It is the gospel of Christ."

It is important that you do respect the leadership that God has given you. It is immaterial that I am the spiritual leader that God has given you. I am not asking for respect for myself, but for the office I hold, which God has established. In Hebrews 13:7 it is very clear, "Obey those who have the rule over you." But let me warn us of an equal danger – to idolize spiritual leadership. Brothers and sisters, I am not the Lord God. I am not the one who gives the direction for the church. There is only one head for any New Testament church. This is not a two-headed monster. The Lord Jesus Christ is the only head. He is the one who establishes the way in which a church is to go, and that church follows Him, not a man.

You do not need my supervision. You do not need my permission to do what God has told you to do. The day you think you need my approval to do what God has already told you to do, you are guilty of the same idolization that took place in the Corinthian church with the Apostle Paul. Let me tell you, the Spirit of the Lord is much more than I – much more talented, much more wise, much more powerful.

God has so designed the local church that every member in that church is God-called, God-filled, and to be God-empowered, not just the mouth of the church. Anybody can be a mouth. The mouth is what gets you in trouble according to James. It is a little thing. Just because I am the one who gets to speak a lot, and I am the mouthpiece of the church does not mean that I am all that critical. Why if something happened to me today, in a few months you would have someone else up here talking.

What is important is that the Spirit of God is allowed to work in you, and that you function in accordance with the equipping and the gifting and the power of that same Holy Spirit who now dwells in you. Then, and not until then, do we become a church. I have labored and grieved for a long time about how to say this to us. I have labored and grieved this week over the truth that we are not doing church the way God wants us to do church.

Somebody reminded me a few weeks ago that you can't "do" church, with a little advertisement from a newspaper in which a church was touting how they did church. I understand that you cannot "do" church, you have got to be the church. However, I fear we have substituted what

we do for being the church. Dear saints of God, what God wants to do in you personally and through you collectively does not really depend on one man. It depends upon the Holy Spirit of God.

Therefore, Paul reminds the Corinthians of their spiritual origins. He jogs their memories. Paul reminds them of their sainthood. He says in verse 2:

*2 Unto the church of God which is at Corinth, to them that are sanctified in Christ Jesus, called to be saints, with all that in every place call upon the name of Jesus Christ our Lord, both theirs and ours:*

I like this term for Christians. I wish we would use it today. I wish it had not bogged down in the medieval days when the Roman Catholic Church began to appoint saints posthumously based upon some unusual and extraordinary work in their lifetime. That is not Scriptural sainthood. Paul says these Corinthians were saints, and they were very much alive.

The word “saint” simply means “holy one,” “called one,” “set apart one,” and Paul reminds them that they are saints. Focus on this term right here, that you are a saint in Christ Jesus. Paul specifies saint purposely. Number one, it reaffirms their position. It reminds them of who they are, not in and of themselves, but who they are in Christ. And, friends, it does not matter what you are in and of yourselves. It does not matter that you did not finish high school. It does not matter that you did not come from an elite family. It does not matter that you do not have much in your bank account. It does not matter that you do not have a fabulous job. It does not matter that people do not come to you for wisdom and advice. These things do not matter. What matters today is who you are in Christ Jesus. That is the key.

Why, if you could quit looking at yourself and see Jesus, you would see a dramatic turnaround in your life. And so this is the reason why Paul reminds the Corinthians who they are in Christ. Christians are saints, which means they are holy people and ought to live holy lives. You are to be holy, not in name only, but in practice. In fact, it is a contradiction – an unholy Christian. But Paul’s point is that the Christian is first holy because of being “in Christ.” It is his new position, his new realm or sphere of living. We are holy because of who we are in Christ Jesus; therefore, we are already holy. We are saints of God.

Paul, in this one small word “saint,” is reminding the Corinthians of who they are in Christ; and, it is a reminder of how they are to behave – holy as saints. It is Christ’s work alone that makes us holy, but it is the Spirit of God working in us now that we might live holy. Paul calls the Corinthians saints so that, later in the letter, he can charge them with not behaving according to their name. In chapter three, he says

*And I, brethren, could not speak unto you as unto spiritual, but as unto carnal, even as unto babes in Christ. (3:3)*

As Paul proceeds through the epistle to the Corinthians, he begins to correct different errors in their doctrine and in their lifestyle. By the time he gets to the fifth chapter, he has to scold them because they had elevated a concept of grace that is not grace and were even gloating that they could allow a perverted man to continue to operate and function within the church with full membership – because of “grace.” Paul tells them, “You are puffed up. You are not holy acting. You are puffed up that you would allow sin to have free rein in your midst and not do anything about it according to the law of Christ.” He reminds them of their sainthood, so that he might show them how they are not living up to it.

You are a saint in the Lord Jesus Christ. Tomorrow morning when you walk into your place of employment or assume your place as a member of the student body, you go in as a saint of Jesus Christ. You ought to remember that. You need to remember that you are there as a representative of the Lord Jesus Christ, and that through Jesus Christ you have been made holy by the blood of the Lamb. You are a royal creature. You are somebody, not because you did anything, but because Jesus did it all. He is the somebody, and you are His representative. Now it is the design of God to work in our lives so that we live up to this name that He has already given us and this position of holiness that He has already given us. That is why I say to us so frequently that it is not only unscriptural, but also it is not even possible for one who professes faith in Christ to continue to live an unholy lifestyle. It is impossible.

Jesus not only saves and sets you apart as holy in Him, transferring to your account His perfect righteousness and obedience, but He has also given you the Holy Spirit, God in you, working night and day, tirelessly, without ceasing, to make you like Jesus. Now, dear Sir, are you going to tell me that God the Holy Spirit is unable to make you conform to the image of Jesus Christ? That is exactly what all those who say you can be saved and still live like the world are saying.

Paul reminds the Corinthians of the benefits of being saints, in verses 3 and 4:

*3 Grace be unto you, and peace, from God our Father, and from the Lord Jesus Christ. 4 I thank my God always on your behalf, for the grace of God Which is given you by Jesus Christ;*

What are the benefits of sainthood? Number one, it is grace. Grace provides the removal of our guilt. Before you were saved you were guilty before God. This week the shoe bomber was convicted to life without parole by a federal judge for his crime of trying to blow up an American Airlines plane. He was guilty and he was found guilty. The payment of that guilt is in a federal penitentiary.

Dear friend, I say to you, not to be melodramatic but to convey to you the absolute truth so you will sense and know it, you are more guilty of treason than that man. You committed an act of treason against an authority higher than some federal judge or even the United States government. Your attempt to overthrow the powers that be were not aimed at some national sovereign, not some government, not some president or prime minister, you literally lived your life to overthrow the authority of the Sovereign God of all creation. That places you under eternal guilt, but thank God for the word “grace.”

As a benefit of becoming a saint in Jesus Christ, that grace removes the guilt from you, so that God does not find it on your record anymore – no record of your rebellion against God. Now, grace and guilt cannot coexist. Grace and guilt cannot be friends. They cannot live together. Grace removes guilt. If you are still guilty, it means you have not yet accepted the grace of God. But if by faith in the Lord Jesus Christ God has forgiven you, then listen to me, you need not spend your days, weeks, months, years, your life in remorse, grieving, mourning what you did in your past. It is removed, cleansed, gone. Grace and guilt cannot coexist.

I do not understand Christians who are under a spirit of condemnation all the time. Constantly you have to counsel them to remember what Jesus did on the cross, because they live under such feelings of incrimination, guilt, and condemnation. They always feel that they are not pleasing to God, that there is some barrier between them and God. I pray you to tell me what did Jesus' blood not accomplish on that cross? What part of your sin did He not cleanse? What part of your evil did He not remove? Our Lord said it, "It is finished" – your guilt is finished. It is gone. It is over. It has met its match and it lost. Grace defeats guilt. They cannot coexist.

Now, grace is not a result of works. It is not about you changing your life. Being a saint in the Lord Jesus Christ is not about you becoming good and performing good acts. You see, this is the problem with the word "saint." When you think of the word "saint" you think about somebody who lived an extraordinary life, did some miracle, and was almost sinless. Holiness by grace is not a result of works. Our Lord does not say "I will forgive you, but you had better not step out of line again." That is not grace. That is works. God's forgiveness is not dependent on how you behave, because if it were it would not be grace. That is self-righteousness, a self-righteous religion that will damn you, not save you. Grace can really only work where there is sin – "where sin did abound." The Bible says in Romans 5:20:

*Moreover the law entered, that the offence might abound. But where sin abounded, grace did much more abound:*

Grace can only work where there is sin. So if you say today, "I am not ready to come to Jesus Christ as my Lord and Savior because I am not good enough yet. I have not earned it enough. I need to do more works. I need to change my lifestyle," then, dear friend, the grace of God cannot work in your life. Grace can only work when you recognize your sinfulness, and you recognize that there is nothing that you can do to change it either. Then grace can flood your heart and soul and take with it and carry with it everything about you that now is hurting your heart and troubling your conscience.

Paul clearly demonstrates in the words, "I thank my God always on your behalf, for the grace of God which is given you by Jesus Christ," that the Corinthians are recipients of divine mercy. They were wicked and the very enemies of God when the Lord saved them. He reminds them from what they have come.

That was the past. Secondly, Paul reminds the Corinthians of the present. Look at verse 5:

*That in every thing ye are enriched by him, in all utterance, and in all knowledge.*

Look also at just the first part of verse 7 – “So that ye come behind in no gift.” God had so blessed these Corinthians that they were behind in no gift. Now did He treat them better than He did any other church? No.

This is the way God treats all His churches, all His people. He gives them everything they need. In fact, Paul says it, and Peter reaffirms it, that everything we need to live godly in Christ Jesus has already been given to us. All present needs are provided for. He says three things in particular here though. Number one, speech. Did you know you are lying when you say you cannot speak for God? The last time you said to somebody, “You know, I am scared of witnessing because I just do not talk very good,” you just lied. You just slandered God’s promise and provision. Look at the verse “He has enriched you in all utterance.” In other words, God has given you exactly what you need to say when you need to say it to whom you need to say it. A very well-known character named Moses did the same thing, did he not? When God called Moses, what was one of his excuses? “Lord, I am slow of speech.” I remind you today what God said to him.

*...Who hath made man’s mouth? Or who maketh the dumb, or deaf, or the seeing, or the blind? have not I the LORD? Now therefore go, and I will be with thy mouth, and teach thee What thou shalt say. (Exodus 4:11–12)*

That is the promise. You know why you have never experienced this promise in its fulfillment is because you have never in faith taken God at His word and stepped out and opened your mouth to a sinner and let God fill it. You have withheld one of the glorious joys of present grace in your life because you do not believe God to give you full utterance. So what if it does not sound as polished as someone else. Maybe it is not a fine exposition of some passage of Scripture. But, friend, if it is full of demonstration and power of the Holy Spirit, it is enough! It is enough. Paul again says in the next chapter, “I did not come with eloquence. I did not come with enticing words of man’s wisdom. I just came in the power of the Holy Spirit.”

Secondly, God’s enriched you with enough knowledge to do His will. That does not mean you do not have to learn any more. But what you need to know for the present moment, God has promised to give you. He simply says “all gifts” – you are behind in no gift that you need. So how can I reasonably answer to our satisfaction, why it is that some of us, if not all of us including me, live so far beneath this promise? Why is that happening? Why is it that some of us find ourselves anxious at this time in human history with world events? Why is it that speech and knowledge and everything we need to be holy in Christ Jesus seem not to be in practice? Why does it seem that you are not as holy as you know you should be? It is because spiritual amnesia has taken place. You have forgotten that it is the Lord who has promised to live through you and not that you are to live for God.

God has said He would supply all your needs according to His riches in glory. But we do not remember this. It is a nice, neat, little memory verse. It is useful to memorize and quote when somebody needs a few dollars. We think of this verse in light of financial need. He is writing not only about financial needs, rather he is emphasizing spiritual needs. That is really the context. Spiritual amnesia has taken over. Paul says, "I want you to remember what you have, and what you have you ought to be using."

How many of you have ever gone to the garage, guys, and you find a tool that you had forgotten you had, and then you remember that you went out a few weeks ago and bought one just like it because you had forgotten you already had one? I was in a bookstore a few months ago and I was looking at a book. I picked it up, looked at the blurb on the back, and thought, "this sounds like a good book." I debated whether I should buy it and decided not to. When I got back to the office, I was looking for something, and do you know what I found? That very same book. Friends, you have everything you need right now to be what God wants you to be. You have just forgotten it. You have forgotten that God has made that promise yours. Now let me see if we cannot jog your spiritual memory by the future.

Look at the last part of verse seven and verses eight and nine, where Paul reminds the Corinthians of their future. He says in the last part of verse seven, "waiting for the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ who shall also confirm you unto the end that you may be blameless in this day of our Lord Jesus Christ. God is faithful by whom you were called into the fellowship of His Son Jesus Christ our Lord." Ah, the best is yet to come. I find it not surprising that I have aches and pains, I have difficulties, I have hurts. I have troubles. These are promised to us. But, the best is yet to come.

One of the reasons you can be discouraged today is because you expect the best now. No, the best is yet to come. Paul reminds them of the second coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. Notice some words here. The very first word I want you to look at is in the last part of verse seven. It is the word "waiting." He says you are to be waiting for the coming. Now what does he mean by this word "waiting"? He doesn't mean to quit your job and sit in your homes, build your bomb shelters and wait. No, the word "waiting" here is literally meaning "busy while believing the promise." It is a word full of activity, actively waiting for the coming of the Lord. Another way of saying it is "occupy till I come."

Jesus is coming. Oh, glorious news! Jesus is coming. But Jesus is not just our Savior, He is our Lord. Our Master. Our owner. He has saved us, and the act of salvation really could be better compared to hiring you. The moment of salvation is a job. You have been employed by the Master. He bought you. The only difference is it is not a paycheck kind of a deal, it is an ownership deal. He bought you. It is a slave/master relationship. And one day our Master is coming back to see how we have performed in His fields.

Are we busy while we wait for His return? Does the thought of His return activate us, prompt us to busyness, prompt us to do something? It ought to, and that is what Paul is saying. Jesus is coming back. You better be busy until He gets back. Waiting means waiting with activity. But not



only does He promise His coming, but He also promises that God will preserve us until His coming. Look at verse eight, “Who shall also confirm you until the end.” In other words, God is going to keep you and keep you steadfast until the very end.

Paul goes on to say God is going to present us blameless. Again, verse eight, “that you may be blameless in the day of our Lord Jesus Christ.” I am thankful for this little phrase. I used to have an idea about heaven that was probably a lot like yours, that when we get to heaven there is going to be some type of panoramic projection system. And your name will be called before God, and there you go, walking up before the Lord, all by yourself. And up on this big projection screen God is going to replay your entire life and reward you based on what is on the film. But what does this text tell us? He is going to preserve you. How and in what condition will you be preserved? Blameless. Blameless! That means there is no panoramic vision, no movie of all our sins before all to see. Why? Because He paid them all. He paid for them all. There cannot be any panoramic movie of your sins on judgment day. They are all under the blood. Now what are we going to be judged for? Well, that is another sermon for another time. I want you to know today that if your sins are not all paid for, you are in big trouble. But they are all paid for. And not only have you been called a saint, but by the time you get there, you are going to be living up to your name – glorified, spotless, without wrinkle or blemish.

Now, dear friend, let us put this all together. Paul reminds the Corinthians to stir them up to a living hope, to a remembrance that will motivate them to love God all the more and obey Him all the more. Today I want to ask you a question. Is it possible you and I are living without remembering? We are walking around here as Christians in a state of amnesia. The tragic events of yesterday will jog your memory if anything else will not. Karen and I were reminded of a few things with the tragedy of the Columbia space shuttle and her crew. We talked about it, we and our entire family, yesterday at lunch time. Most of us live our lives without any thought of dying. Most of you in this room have not thought about dying this last seven days until yesterday, and some of you did not even think about it then. You are really in deep amnesia.

The coming of the Lord seems so far off that we seem to think that it is not going to happen in our lifetimes. And so we live for the present. Now I want you to listen to me. This is what this message is about – we are living for the present, the here and now occupies most of us. We spend little time thinking about our own death, and we certainly do not reserve time for the thinking of the eternal. That is why so many of us are so discouraged, depressed, and disgusted. The thoughts about the future do not captivate us except predictions about the tribulation, mark of the beast, who the antichrist is. When we think about the future that is what we think about... prophetic stuff. We are all consumed with the prophetic. We have enough books and videos about prophecy to fill graveyards of wrong predictions about our Lord's return. And yet the next book that comes out, many of you will go buy it, and it will make the bestseller list until the time has come and gone and the predictions are proved wrong. You would think we would learn. Yet I am going to go out on a limb this morning and tell you that the Lord is coming soon. In fact, He is coming in my lifetime. If He chooses not to return in my lifetime to take the church, He is going to come and take me personally. You are going to see Jesus sooner than you think you are. Even

if I live to be 120, what in the world is that as a span of time? It will go by so fast. We shall all see the Lord very soon. But sadly, we do not think this way. Why?

Why is it we do not think this way? Because we do not practice the spiritual discipline of remembering and meditation. It is work, because your natural mind does not think that way. You have literally got to train your mind. The natural mind does not think about death. A few years ago I was talking with a dear brother about his conversion. He was an atheist. He told me “When I died I thought I was just going to be like an old stick or rock. There was nothing.” So I asked him, “how did you cope with living then? I mean that must be a terrible thought to live knowing that one day you are going to be like an old stick or rock – nothing.” His answer was, “I didn’t think about it.” You see, the natural mind does not want to think about death, so there is a natural instinct for self-preservation. It is instinctive for us not to think about our untimely demise, and it’s always going to be untimely, whenever it happens. Very few will be looking for it when death comes.

It takes a supernatural mind to think supernaturally. You have got to practice the discipline of remembering and then meditating on what you remember. In order to think differently, to think eternally, you have to have a different fuel, and the fuel for eternal thinking is eternal truth. Oh, how I wish we could live this way and think this way. I would spend most of my time as a pastor trying to rein you in instead of trying to discover how to get you out of the barn. That is how grace works – it is superabundant—I would be trying to figure out how to control you, because you would want to be doing too many things for God. That is just how grace motivates. You would want to give your homes. You would want to give your bank accounts. You would want to give the clothes on your back. You would want to give your time, your effort, if you thought eternally. Brother, I am guaranteeing you that if God would get hold of you and convince you that you are going to see Jesus very soon... why, you would become such a blazing inferno that people would come to watch you burn for Christ.

Is it possible that amnesia plagues you? Not an amnesia that causes you to forget what your name is, but an amnesia of the spirit, that you have forgotten what you are and whose you are? May God this day set it aside and in comparison with yesterday, which seems so tragic, may today be one of the highlights of this church’s life and your life – a day when God renews your mind to begin to remember where you come from, whose you are, and where you are going. Amen.