

1 CORINTHIANS 1:4-9 CHRIST ALONE, GRACE ALONE

I wonder, as I'm looking and studying this book of 1 Corinthians during the week, if the unconverted - if you like, the great unwashed and unchurched around us - were to get saved and were to come to faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, could we really handle it? Could we handle the dilemmas, the knots that seem to be untieable of immorality, personal problems? I think we would be faced with real dilemmas and real headaches. There are problems coming from that type of background, there's no doubt about it. These Corinthians came to Christ, and many of them brought those problems with them - although they were immoral, they were fornicators, they were effeminate, and Paul said 'such were some of you', some of them found it very difficult letting go of the baggage that they had before they were regenerated by the Spirit of God.

Paul gave a greeting to the Corinthians, which is what we looked at last week. He then says a prayer for them. That is what we will look at this morning. Paul frequently interceded for the saints, especially that they would know the hope of their calling. As in the greeting that mentioned grace, he stays with that thought of grace as he thanks God for the grace that was given to them. It is grace, and grace alone, that brought them into the church. God gets all the glory from Paul as he writes to this church. But the people are actually commended here, and that would seem surprising because most of this letter is a rebuke and exhortation for the many sins of the Corinthian church.

Paul is very generous in starting this epistle out, as he knew the worst about these people, yet he writes the best about them. He is being honest and not using flattery. They had many sins but there were many things that they deserved to be commended for. True believers, no matter the shortcomings, have the work of God in them. They have been referred to as saints. They had been sanctified by Christ because of their trust in Him. They are holy, but of course they are to act holy also.

The same truth holds for us. As Christians we are not condemned but are declared holy. Our sins are forgiven, never to be held against us. Since our new nature is holy, we are to live our lives as holy. This is the foundation of Christian living. The Corinthians needed to know who they were, saints, sanctified ones. The first nine verses are dedicated to bringing that truth to them. The rest of the letter is built on this foundation.

This section is totally saturated with a Christ centered message. Paul is consumed with who Christ is and what He does. He is at the heart of the message, as He always should be. As Paul gets them ready for his message to them, He emphasizes the supremacy of Christ and at the same time defines the benefits of being believers in Jesus Christ.

1. SUFFICIENCY OF CHRIST 1:4-5,7

Christ gives His people every thing they need.

A. PAST BENEFIT OF GRACE 4

Paul starts by giving thanks, and this is to God.

Paul remembered how God's grace had transformed them. This is about salvation and he knew how these people came into the kingdom

of God. He could not help but think of God's grace to them. He thanked God for them and the work He had done there in Corinth through them. He first sees the people in Christ. Paul could have started out by criticizing them but instead He thanks God for His favor upon them. He gave God thanksgiving and praise. We need to think of this the next time we are filled with anger toward another believer and recognize what God's grace has done for them. Paul's spirit made it more easier for the people to accept this letter than if he would have started off by dogging them.

With the past of great sin that these Corinthians had there was, I believe, a greater capacity for them to grasp the great grace of God that is greater than all our sin. That's how Paul, believe it or not, reacts to this very sinful immoral church. He reacts in grace! I want you to grasp this this morning. You heard last week of the type of city that these people were living in, you heard about the type of sins that the church of Jesus Christ was imbibing and was filtering into their everyday practice, and even their sacraments - as they broke bread they were getting drunk! They made holy things unholy, yet as Paul comes to write to them in a letter of instruction, what is the first thing that he brings to them? Grace!

How would you react if you were asked to address these problems? I know how I would react! I would get pen to paper very quickly and say: 'Dear Corinthians, are any of you saved at all? Corinthians, you call yourselves Christians? You can't be Christians unless you behave like Christians!'. But what does Paul say? As he writes to them in the first nine verses he's basically saying: 'Look, look at what you are! Look at what you have in the Lord Jesus Christ!' - and it's only when he tells them what they have in the wonderful riches of the grace of God that he then moves on to exhort them and to encourage them and to rebuke them in the ways that they should be going. This is grace.

There are three reasons for God's grace.

1. To glorify God

Above all things, grace was given that they would be able to do the most important thing, giving God the glory.

Eph 1:6,12, 3:21, Mt 5:16, John 12:28, 17:1,4-5

2. To produce good works

Grace is also given so that the saints can do the good works, to bear fruit. God saved us to do good works because they benefit men. God wants us to touch the world with goodness that is made possible only through Christ.

Eph 2:10, Titus 2:14

3. To bring blessings to believers

Eph 2:4-7

He will pour out His great blessings on us forever.

B. ENRICHED IN EVERYTHING 5, 7

Because of Christ, we have all we need. He is sufficient for us.

We have everything pertaining to life and godliness.

2 Pet 1:3, Col 2:10, 1 Cor 3:21

1. Speech

All Christians have the ability to use their mouths to tell the Gospel. We may all not be eloquent in speech or impressive with a glib tongue, but we can speak for Him the way He wants us to speak. Witnessing is not an option for Christians. We are commanded to do that. We need to do that as the early church did. When we get the opportunity to share Christ, He will give us what we need to say. Of course we need to be prepared by studying the Word, and in prayer.

Acts 4:29, Eph 6:19, 1 Pet 3:15, 2 Tim 2:24-25

2. Knowledge

Knowledge was not left to the Greek civilization. It belonged to the Church. This true philosophy was not borrowed from the world. It came from God. God gives everything we need to know to be effective in speaking the truth. We have His Word and His Spirit to interpret it. We must use the knowledge God gives us to be effective in witnessing.

2 Cor 4:6, Col 1:9-10—We are to be filled with the knowledge of His will. We must appropriate this knowledge that God has fully given us.

3. Gifts

This church did not lack any gifts. It may have lacked in maturity and purity, but certainly not in gifts. The problem was that they did not use these provisions correctly as they were unfaithful and perverse in using the gifts. In chapter 14, we see that they sought gifts they didn't have. You don't have to go looking for gifts because God has already provided every spiritual gift that is needed.

Charisma is the Greek word for gift as it relates to charis, or grace. These gifts are intended to edify other believers. They are meant for others in the body of Christ. The general blessings of speech and knowledge would be used for those outside the body of Christ as we share the Gospel and reason with them. God grants to all believers, spiritual gifts. Each have their own special blend of uniqueness to bless the rest of the church. Sometimes it can take years to recognize what our special gift is and even more years to develop them. We must try to understand what they are and minister them. We must commit to use our divine resources for the good of others.

So, the Corinthian church had everything they needed. Christ was more than sufficient for them.

2. TESTIMONY CONCERNING CHRIST 1:6

A. PRESENT BENEFIT OF GRACE

This is about Christ in us now.

They were graced and could use their blessings at the present time. We receive God's grace when the testimony of Christ is confirmed, settled in us.

He continues to pour out the superabundance of His blessings and riches. God's grace that we have now extends all the way through eternity.

B. TESTIMONY (Marturion) Witness We get the English term martyr from Marturion. Christ's witness is settled in us when we trust in Him.

These people were witnesses. Their responsibility was to give the testimony of Christ. The witness is that God has given us eternal life, and this life is in His Son. The greatest testimony is the message of salvation.

Acts 1:8, 20:21

C. THE GOSPEL

2 Tim 1:8, 1 John 5:11

3. RETURN OF CHRIST

1:7

A. FUTURE BENEFIT OF GRACE

We are thankful for past benefits of grace, we want to be responsible in using the present grace of the witness of Christ, but our greatest joy is future grace. The best is yet to come. It is good to serve the Lord now, but it will be much better to be right in God's presence, because Christ will be coming back for us.

B. AWAITING EAGERLY

Apekdechomenous-----Rom 8:23 This means to wait with eager anticipation We work now as we wait, watch, and hope. We have great hope for we know that Christ will return but the world is hopeless.

C. REVELATION OF CHRIST

This is His unveiling of Himself. It is His manifestation in blazing glory at His second coming.

1.Exaltation-----Rev 4:11, 5:12 He will come in His full glory and splendor.

When He came the first time, He was humiliated, despised, and rejected, but when he returns every knee will bow and tongue confess Jesus Christ as Lord.

2.Judgment----2 Thess 1:7-9

The Lord will come to judge those who hated and rejected Him. To believers, it is a blessed hope when He returns, but to all those who reject Him, the stakes are high, for eternal punishment looms over the horizon. Those people renounce the testimony of the believers.

4. CONFIRMATION BY CHRIST

1:8

A. CONFIRM

Here we discover that confirmation is not an act but an effect.

It is not a ritual performed by men, but a result which proceeded from our faith in Christ. To confirm means to make sure. It is established by grace. The specific effect of this confirming was their security. They were confirmed to the end.

B. BLAMELESS CHRISTIANS

When Christ comes back, He will confirm us before His Father.

We will not have our sins flash before us for everyone else to see.

Christ will affirm before the throne of God that we are blameless because we are in Him. We will be in the very image of Christ, with no stains of sin. We will stand there perfectly holy, without sin.

Eph 1:4, Col 1:22

Eph 5:26-27, 2 Cor 11:2

5. FELLOWSHIP OF CHRIST

1:9

A. FAITHFULNESS OF GOD

Man is not faithful as we are convinced of that, but God is faithful.

The Corinthians were full of corruption, but that did not mean that God is not faithful. Here is our hope. We have a perfectly faithful God. God is faithful to His sovereign will. He cannot lie. What He says he will do, He will do.

B. CALLING OF GOD

When God calls one to salvation, He is faithful to that call. This is called effectual call. It is effective because all those He calls, will

come. Effectual call produces salvation.

Rom 8:30

We are saved because God wanted us saved, and we stay saved because God does not change His mind about His desire. We had no part in God's original desire to call us and we can do nothing to change it. He called when we were wretches and He will not stop being faithful to those He calls.

C. FELLOWSHIP

Koinonia—partnership, oneness We are secured to glory by being one with Christ. We were saved by grace and will be kept by grace.

We are united to Him through Christ by the union of fellowship.

This is a partnership. It is a vital union of life, a mystical union of faith. It is through this fellowship that we prove His faithfulness.

Christ is at the center of each one of these verses. He is what the church is all about. It revolves around Him. Without His grace; speech, knowledge, gifts and all the blessings we have been given are nothing. The supremacy of Christ was put on display in this section we have looked at today. His supremacy should reign always.