

The Doctrine of Grace (1 Corinthians 1:1–9)

By Pastor Jeff Alexander (11/15//2020)

Introduction

Paul gave unqualified thanks to God for the saints in Corinth despite their many problems. His confidence in them lay in the grace of God and nothing in them. This thankfulness also rested on his confidence that the issues he needed to confront would be resolved and that *Christ* would “*sustain [them] unto the end, guiltless in the day of Christ [the final judgment]*” (v. 8).

Nevertheless, there was nothing in Paul’s joy that would give the Corinthians occasion to feel boastful. The grace of God was their only hope, and Paul’s joy was rooted in the *fruit* he witnessed due to that grace in them.

There is no inherent goodness in the fallen descendants of Adam. Death, the wages of sin, is the only option for Adam’s descendants (Rom. 5:12; 1 Cor. 15:22). God called these people to Himself, enlightening their blind eyes and endowing them with true gospel faith in the Christ who gave Himself for them (1 Cor. 1:30, 31).

The glorious hope that drives all believers patiently to persevere in their faith is that, in the end, the church shall be presented to Christ “*in splendor, without spot or wrinkle . . . holy and without blemish*” (Eph. 5:27), or, as Paul writes to the Corinthians, “*guiltless in the day of our Lord Jesus Christ*” (v. 8).

The purpose for Paul’s introductory celebration was to encourage these saints and to prepare them for his correction.

I. The Encouragement of Grace

1. “*God is faithful,*” meaning that He has sovereignly determined to prosecute His purpose to its successful end.

This truth carries over from the OT and His covenantal purposes with Israel. The church was successfully replacing Judaism in her advance among the Gentile nations. The Jews continued to resist the gospel and persecute its messengers.

That national Israel failed to embrace God’s kingdom does not mean that He failed or that Israel somehow frustrated the goal. It means only that national Israel was not to be the actual means to that end. However, One from the nation, the True Israel, would (Isa. 49:7; Deut. 7:9; 2 Cor. 1:18–20). That One is Christ. Thus, Paul informs these Gentile believers who were formerly excluded from the privileges of the covenant (Eph. 2:11, 12) that now they share those rights because they “*were called into the fellowship [koinonia, or participation] of his [covenant] Son*” (v. 9).

2. “*The grace of God*” is the practical means by which God purposes to gather this covenant fellowship in His Son (v. 4).

Here Paul’s reference to *grace* must be understood, not as the favor of God, but as a *metonymy* (a figure of speech in which one term is put for another), the *gift* for the gifting.

A very large wealth gap existed in Corinth, and Paul emphasized that true riches were found in a life of following Christ. Christ’s grace/gifts were what really mattered since most of the saints in Corinth were slaves or from the poorer classes (vv. 26–29; 11:20–22).

II. The Gift of Grace

1. This grace/gifting was *thorough*—“*in every way.*” There is no area in a believer’s life that God has not made more than adequate provision. Believers live in spiritual poverty when they fail to appropriate His grace (Heb. 12:12–15).
2. *Faith* is the means God has granted for His people to appropriate grace (Rom. 5:2). Faith is not mystical or static. Hebrews, again, speaks of faith as *substance* (*hupostasis*, something put under, a substructure, or foundation). Faith is also a gift of God (Eph. 2:8, 9).
3. Faith is given via *hearing* the Word of God (Rom. 10:17). In the text before us, Paul uses terms that were familiar to citizens of Corinth—“*in all speech and all knowledge.*”
4. God’s people are *enriched* in every way when they receive the revealed Word of God and the Holy Spirit grants them understanding of the Word. To illustrate by contrast, Paul addressed the natural man (2:14–16). This is confirmed in 2 Cor. 8:7).

III. The Confirmation of Grace

1. Paul was assured of their faith because he witnessed the fruit of it (v. 6). The word translated *testimony* (*marturion*, *witness*) is the act of providing direct knowledge about a person or event. The fruit of faith is a changed life lived out to the glory of God.
2. This changed life gave Paul confidence to assure them that it would sustain them to the end. While the Greek term used here is *charisma*, it does not refer to miraculous gifts but to spiritual enablement.
3. The last evidence of Paul’s conviction of the Corinthians’ genuine conversion to Christ was *perseverance* in their faith (v. 8). The great assurance of the people of grace is that their salvation is secure because it does not rest in their obedience but the Lord’s preservation (1 Peter 1:3–7). The proof of genuine faith is perseverance to the end. “*But the one who endures to the end will be saved*” (Matt. 24:13).

What We Can Take Away

1. Can those around us, like Paul, raise thanks to God for the clear evidence of God’s grace in us?
2. Can you give testimony of the power of the Word of God to establish your doctrine of life and practice in holiness and truth? Do you walk in the light and truth as He is in the light?
3. Are you waiting with patience for the appearing of Christ and the promise of your immediate change into His likeness?
4. Despite trials, difficulties, and tribulations in this life, and the constant fight against indwelling sin, are you joyfully pursuing holiness and persevering in your faith, confident in God’s purpose to present you to Christ without spot or wrinkle at His appearing?