

1 Corinthians 1:4-9 Enriched in Every Way Falls Ch. PM 12/31/2023

Patrick Henry was one of the Founding Fathers of our country. He lived from 1736 to 1799. He was governor of Virginia. He is famous for the statement, "Give me liberty or Give me death." But that is not the quote we consider tonight. Rather, it is his quote about spiritual riches, on the day that he signed his last will and testament, "I have now disposed of all my property to my family.

There is one thing more I wish I could give them  
and that is faith in Jesus Christ.

If they had that and I had not given them a single shilling,  
they would have been rich;  
and if they had not that,  
and I had given them all the world,  
they would be poor indeed."

We share this perspective as Christians about how rich we are in Christ!

**We are all blessed to be called by Christ, and we praise God for each other's rich and various gifts.**

### **1. Praise God for the gifts given to the church. (v.4-5)**

For the form of writing this letter of 1 Corinthians, Paul followed the standard form of letters in his day. Specifically, at the start of the letter, he followed the customary form in 4 ways, by writing down these 4 things: 1) Who is writing the letter 2) the person or persons to whom the letter is addressed 3) A greeting 4) a statement of thanks, usually given to a false Greek god. In the first three verses, Paul gave the first three – 1) he gave his own name as the author, 2) the group to whom the letter was addressed was the church in Corinth, 3) his greeting was grace to you and peace. Now when we get to verse 4, Paul followed the fourth customary form of official correspondence by giving a statement of thanks. However, rather than thank a false Greek god, Paul took this opportunity to testify of His belief in the one true and living God, when Paul wrote, "*I give thanks to MY GOD...*" Other letter-writers may have written about their false Greek gods out of empty formality, but for Paul, the giving of thanks was heartfelt – Paul really did give thanks to His God.

Paul gave thanks to His God for what? "*For you*" that is, for the believers in the church in Corinth! Why? Because of the grace of God that was given to them in Christ.

Wait. Was Paul truly thankful for the church in Corinth? Please remember that this was not a letter from Paul to the wonderfully unified and joyful church over in the city of Philippi. Corinth was a troubled church, thus the need for the letter. Yet Paul was thankful for the church in Corinth. How can that be? This is a crucial

passage for our understanding of the letter of 1 Corinthians. We have to start with this. We have to remember this. Thankful for the grace of God in one another.

SI – In July 1961, Vince Lombardi kicked off the first day of training camp for the 38 players on his Green Bay Packers football team. The prior season had ended in a heartbreaking loss to the Philadelphia Eagles after the Packers blew a lead in the 4th quarter of the NFL Championship Game.

When the Packer players came in to start training camp, they expected Coach Lombardi to immediately begin where they left off, expecting them to remember their plays, and be ready to work on ways to advance their game. Perhaps the coach would teach them fancy new ways to win the championship in the new season. However, when the team sat down and began, Coach Lombardi held up a football and said, “Gentlemen, this is a football!”

The saying has become famous because the coach was saying in order for us to re-build a football team, we have to start with the basics.

Coach started on page one, of their playbooks. They re-learned the fundamentals – blocking, tackling, throwing, catching. That was clearly not what they expected as experienced players, who were at the top of their game.

This hyper-focus on fundamentals allowed the Packers to win the 1962 NFL Championship 37-0 against the New York Giants. Vince Lombardi went on to win five NFL Championships in 7 years. He never coached a team with a losing season after that and he never lost a playoff game again.

Paul is seeing the grace of God in the church in Corinth. The city was filled with the sexually immoral, the idolaters, those who practice homosexuality, thieves, greedy, drunkards, revilers, and swindlers which was scammers. But from that city, Paul noticed what God did and celebrated it. Paul spelled it out in chapter 6:11, “...such were some of you. But you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God.”

And then Paul left and the church forgot those fundamentals.

In this letter, right after the opening greeting, Paul wrote to them the equivalent of the speech “Gentlemen, this is a football...” Verse 4, “I give thanks to my God always for you because of the grace of God that was given you in Christ...?”

In order for them to re-build a church, they had to start with this.

Here is the lesson for Christians in every age. No matter how much we disagree or are inconvenienced by or disappointed by Christians with poor attitudes, bad actions, and irresponsible errors, we still genuinely give thanks for their true faith in Jesus Christ.

How long did Coach Lombardi use the fundamentals? Always. How long did Paul give thanks? Was it for a few weeks? A few months? Verse four says always. I give thanks to my God always for you. Why? Verse 4, Because of the grace of God that was given you in Christ Jesus. Why always? Because God's grace was a permanent gift of grace. When do we stop being thankful for changed lives? Those lives are still changed. God's grace is still evident in those hearts and lives. The people who used to be stuck in destructive ways leading to death are now embedded in constructive ways leading to life. We keep giving God thanks for that! When is it appropriate to stop giving thanks to God for changed lives? They had come from the wicked life to the good life, and from worshipping false Gods to worshipping the true God.

How could we tell? It was seen in the life of the church in Corinth. Look at the evidences of the grace of God listed out in verse 5. "...*that in every way you were enriched in [Christ Jesus] in all speech and in all knowledge...*"

This did not mean that they had become perfect people. What it meant was that in comparison to the wicked ways of speaking that were happening across the rest of the city of Corinth, these believers in the church were enriched in their speaking. In contrast to the spiritual knowledge of the others in their neighborhood, the Christians in Corinth had true spiritual knowledge of the one true God.

Better than that – they themselves knew God. They can speak about God to others as people who knew God! They testify about God to others, they teach about God to others. God is their Father, as Paul wrote in verse 3. Christ Jesus is their Lord, as Paul wrote in verse 3. They were confessing Christ to pagans in Corinth. The light of God was shining through them! Praise God for the gifts given to the church. That brings us to our 2nd point.

## **2. Praise God that the church does not lack any gift. (v.6-7)**

The same gospel of grace that Paul had preached when Paul was in the city of Corinth, was now spreading around the city through the believers living in Corinth. God had placed the believers on a firm foundation of Christ. Verse 6 explained how they were enriched, "*even as the testimony about Christ was confirmed among you...*"

Paul had known Christ ever since Paul's own personal conversion. The same was true for believers in Corinth. They were not just speaking things that Paul had coached them to speak. They were speaking what they themselves had come to know about Jesus, and therefore they were sharing what they believed with first-hand knowledge! They were themselves confirming in Corinth, what Paul had previously preached about Christ in Corinth. After Paul had left, the testimony of Jesus had not

stopped. Instead, the testimony of Jesus had continued, as the enriched Corinthian believers were now expressing in Corinth what they themselves knew and believed about Jesus. The light had shone in their hearts, and now they had themselves become lights shining within sin city! Paul was genuinely thankful and actually rejoicing because of the grace of God seen in their lives.

Moving on to verse 7, Paul observed that the church in sin city did not fall behind other churches such as the church in Galatia or the church in Thessalonica. No. The church in Corinth was equally equipped to testify as the churches elsewhere were equipped to testify. Here is how Paul started in verse 5, “*that in every way you were enriched in [Christ]...*” and here is how Paul continued that statement in verse 7, “*...so that you are not lacking in any gift, as you wait for the revealing of our Lord Jesus Christ.*” Enriched. In every way. In all speech. In all knowledge. Not lacking. Nothing missing in their abilities, their knowledge, their faith, and their speaking gifts in the church in Corinth. They had the same spiritual gear and spiritual equipment with which God had furnished the other churches. They had it all. In fact, Paul seemed to be suggesting through a simple understatement here that the church in Corinth had an abundance of speaking gifts. Paul was making a simple point. Regarding speaking gifts – Corinth lacked none. Regarding any sort of spiritual gifts for ministry – Corinth lacked none. They had every spiritual tool needed for testifying. Paul meant it, and Paul was thankful for it.

Question: what does every church need to be doing with its full range of spiritual gifts in a needy world? Answer: the church needs to be engaging those spiritual gifts in testifying to the world, and actively waiting for Jesus to return. We can thank God for every gospel church on the mission field, and every gospel church in our country. Faithful ministry of God’s Word will sustain us and faithful witnessing will draw unbelievers in, as we wait for Jesus to come. Once Paul mentioned in verse 7 the future return of Christ, he was prompted to write yet more to reassure the church about their future. That brings us to our 3rd point, and verse 8.

### **3. Praise God for future blessings, all the way to the end. (v.8-9)**

In verse 8, Paul wrote another fundamental and bedrock truth that it was Jesus who sustained them. It was Christ who upheld them to the end. Only because of their Lord did they anticipate being found guiltless on the final day – the day of judgment – the end of the world, the day when Jesus returns, or as Paul wrote it in verse 8, “*...the day of our Lord Jesus Christ.*” On the day of Christ, they will be guiltless in Christ, by virtue of the death and resurrection of Christ. It was Christ who would vindicate them on that day, despite their many sins – because of the gospel of Christ.

We need to make sure we are clear on this – we are studying a blessing that is in the future, yet a blessing that enriches us now while we wait for it. We know how the whole world all ends. We know the last chapter of world history! We live in hard times in a broken world, and yet we remain hopeful people as we look to the future. Verse 8 does not only reference the future. Verse 8 also references today. Today Christ will sustain us. The word *sustain* has the literal meaning of laying a foundation underneath us. Verse 8 means that we are being actively and presently upheld today. Verse 8 also means that we are confident of our being actively upheld tomorrow. Christ and His foundation underneath us, will sustain us both today and tomorrow and all the days in the future. Verse 8, Paul says something so powerful, so encompassing, that it describes a very enriched life indeed. We have the true outlook that we will certainly be sustained by Christ Jesus to the end of our lives, or to the end of the world.

We join Paul in giving thanks to God for that truth and outlook for all other believers. We can thank God that all of His people are standing in rich blessings!

There are many temptations surrounding us in a sinful society. There are numerous ways to fall away from our walk with God. Walking through this world is like walking through a spiritual mine field full of explosions and traps. Christians get caught up in the behaviors of the world. We are called to holiness, and so any sinful behavior becomes a problem. If we find sin in ourselves or in others, what to do? We keep coming back to grace. We remind every believer in sinful society, that there is a gospel of grace and a gift of forgiveness and eternal life found only in Jesus Christ. We are Christians, and we have fallen into sin? Of what would Paul write a letter to remind us? Paul would remind us of the cross. On the cross, our Lord Jesus Christ paid for our sins fully with His own life as the sacrifice, and He rose again. The result is that God's forgiveness and love is ours now, and always will be ours. More than a few Corinthians, thinking about how they had sinned, and thinking of their past guilt, might be wondering as they read these words – Paul, are you sure? Yes. And so Paul, teach us how we can become sure? On what basis can we take this announcement about guiltlessness in the day of our Lord, and be consoled by it? How can we have certainty? So, Paul wrote verse 9 to reinforce the good news to sinners who were struggling to actually believe that God's gifts are so rich that believers who fell back to sinning can get forgiveness again. Believers who have succumbed to temptation need to hear again the same gospel, and the basis of the gospel, for our own souls. So, Paul in verse 9 ended this paragraph by providing a solid basis, "*God is faithful, by whom you were called into the fellowship of His Son, Jesus Christ our Lord.*"

Here is another fundamental needed to straighten out any church that is forgetful. God is faithful! Is your forgiveness based on your own faithfulness? No. that would be works, not grace.

Grace says that your forgiveness is based not on you being faithful enough, but rather your forgiveness is based on God being faithful. Paul wrote, *God is faithful!*

We were unfaithful? Yes, but that is not the defining truth about us. The defining truth about us is that God is faithful to us. He will not let us go.

We failed God? Yes, but we must not let that fact be the one fact that controls us. Instead, we must let this fact be the one fact that controls us and encourages us: God is faithful, which means that God will never fail us, even though we have failed Him.

SI - In 1881, President Garfield was shot at a train station in Washington DC. The bullet lodged behind his pancreas, but the doctors could not find it. At the scene, a doctor probed the wound with his unwashed little finger trying to find the bullet. He couldn't find it, so he tried a silver-tipped probe. Still, he couldn't locate the bullet. Next, they transported President Garfield back to The White House. He was growing very weak. Teams of doctors tried to locate the bullet, probing the wound over and over. In desperation they asked Alexander Graham Bell, who was developing a little device later called the telephone, to see if Mr. Bell could locate the metal inside the president's body. He too failed. The president hung on through July, through August, but in September he finally died-not from the bullet wound, but from infection. The repeated probing, which the doctors thought would help the man, eventually, killed him. So it is with people who dwell too long on their sin and refuse to release it to God. It is not the sin itself that brings us down, for that can be forgiven, but rather it is our continual probing at the wounds of the sin that brings us down. Instead, we need to keep applying God's healing grace and gain strength. God will never fail us, even though we have failed Him.

Paul went on to write in verse 9 that it was God our Father who called us into the fellowship of His Son, Jesus. God the Father did not merely give us the richness of forgiveness, and then make us stand in a corner in shame and punishment. God our Father does not shame us, and never tells us – ‘you better not make a sound, just be glad I let you be in here.’ No, that is never the way that we believers are treated by God our Father. Our riches are so much richer than that! Look at the end of verse 9, how it was God our Father who did the opposite of having us stand in a corner in shame, but instead, as it were, motioned to us and called us “...into the fellowship of His Son, Jesus Christ our Lord.” God our Father does not shame us. God the Father does not give us a begrudging forgiveness. God our Father does not allow us to

shame ourselves, and does not allow us to consign ourselves to stand in a corner in an act of self-shaming and residual guilt. God our Father does not allow someone else to shame us and to make us feel less than rich in Christ. God our Father does not allow the devil to keep whispering to us and suggesting to us that we don't deserve the riches of Christ. No way. Because Jesus died and rose again not just to pay our spiritual debts, but also to give us spiritual riches, we will have our spiritual debts paid down, and we will get the full measure of our spiritual riches. God the Father sees to it.

**Conclusion:** We are enriched by the love of God our Father.

When God sees us moving toward the corner, head down, and shame controlling us, the Holy Spirit calls to our hearts. What is that call? It is the call of the fellowship of the gospel. Come out of the corner! Come out of your guilt cloud. Shake off your shame, which is not appropriate. Come right out of the corner into the center of the fellowship of Jesus and the people of Jesus. We hold our heads up high, and we do so not because of our own performance, but rather because of our rich gift of grace, eagerly and lovingly given to us, with the insistence on the part of Father, Son, and Spirit, that we feel spiritually rich. We now wear the righteous robe of Christ's perfect performance. We are rich. We are regal. We are royalty. We belong in the family of God. There are no second-class members of the family of God, says God our Father. We are in the fellowship of Jesus. We belong here in the warm embrace of the people of the Son of God. This is home. This is our home. God is Our Father. Christ is Our Lord and Shepherd. We can echo Paul and say "MY GOD." We can echo Paul and say, I give thanks to My God always....because of the grace of God that was given to me in Christ Jesus. We can echo Paul and say, thank God that in every way we were enriched in Christ. We can together rejoice and be filled with hope, as we wait for the coming of the Lord Jesus Christ from heaven to take us home to heaven. We can relax because it is all by grace, and because Christ will sustain us until that fine day. We are enriched in every way.

Later in our study of 1 Corinthians, when Paul will directly confront our sins, let us never forget this orienting passage, this truth, this love of God.

Verse 3 of our closing hymn speaks of God's love.....

Thou who art love beyond all telling,  
Savior and King, we worship Thee.  
Emmanuel, within us dwelling,  
Make us what Thou wouldst have us be.  
Thou who art love beyond all telling,  
Savior and King, we worship Thee.