

1 Corinthians 15:5–10

⁵ And that He was seen by Cephas, then by the twelve.

⁶ After that He was seen by over five hundred brethren at once, of whom the greater part remain to the present, but some have fallen asleep.

⁷ After that He was seen by James, then by all the apostles. ⁸Then last of all He was seen by me also, as by one born out of due time.

⁹ For I am the least of the apostles, who am not worthy to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God.

¹⁰ But by the grace of God I am what I am, and His grace toward me was not in vain; but I labored more abundantly than they all, yet not I, but the grace of God which was with me.

“To Grace a Debtor” ***1 Corinthians 15:8-10***

INTRO:

Have you thought about goals you would like to set for yourself in the New Year? We usually call these New Year’s resolutions. Our experience with these resolutions is usually poor. We commonly fail in keeping them beyond the first week of the New Year. How do we respond to this phenomenon? Some refuse to set any goals at all. As one person told me, “My resolution is to make no resolutions.” While this may work, it doesn’t help us grow in grace and in the knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

I have found it is best to set simple goals and to not give up on those goals the first time we fail. My goal in this year is to ask God to teach me daily how great a debtor I am to His grace. My heart has been taken captive lately to the verse in *“Come Thou Fount of Every Blessing”* which says, *“O to grace how great a debtor/ daily I’m constrained to be.”* The hymn writer’s thought is how God by His grace preserves us even though we are determined to wander from Him. Our debt to God’s grace is so much bigger than this.

We will look at Paul’s statement in **1 Corinthians 15:8-10**. In this text, we find a statement of the importance of God’s grace in Paul’s life and something of the debt that he felt to the grace of God. He was indebted to God’s grace because **(1)** it transformed Him; **(2)** it defined him, and finally **(3)** it empowered him.

I. Transforming Grace (v. 8-9)

II. Defining Grace (v. 10a)

III. Empowering Grace (v. 10b)

I. Transforming Grace (v. 8-9)

“And that He was seen by Cephas, then by the twelve. After that He was seen by over five hundred brethren at once, of whom the greater part remain to the present, but

some have fallen asleep. After that He was seen by James, then by all the apostles. Then last of all He was seen by me also, as by one born out of due time. For I am the least of the apostles, who am not worthy to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God.” 1 Corinthians 15:5-9

A. **1 Corinthians 15** discusses the importance of the resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ. Paul’s chain of the post resurrection appearances is in chronological order.

1. First, the Lord Jesus was seen by the Apostle Peter and then the rest of the twelve. Next, He was seen by more than five hundred people at one time, most of whom were still alive when Paul wrote. Then, His half-brother James saw Him and the other apostles.

2. Finally, last in line, the Apostle Paul, himself saw the resurrected Lord.

1 Corinthians 15:8

“Then last of all He was seen by me also, as by one born out of due time.”

B. Paul thought first about the wonder of the grace of God given to him. He was a debtor to that grace because it transformed him. Listen to how Paul describes himself before the grace of God transformed him (v. 9).

“I am the least of the apostles, who am not worthy to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God.”

1. Paul was against God and the plan of God. Sure, he thought he was advancing God’s cause, but in reality, he was actively seeking to destroy the very work God did in Christ. He sought to persecute the very people of God. We see Paul vividly described by Luke in **Acts 9:1-2**.

“Then Saul, still breathing threats and murder against the disciples of the Lord, went to the high priest and asked letters from him to the synagogues of Damascus, so that if he found any who were of the Way, whether men or women, he might bring them bound to Jerusalem.”

We see Paul with smoke and fire coming out of his nostrils in his great hatred of the church of the living God. What happened to transform Saul the persecutor into Paul the preacher who was writing **1 Corinthians 15**?

2. Grace did it all. God in His great grace interrupted Paul’s life with a word from the Creator. We begin to understand Paul’s heart when we read his words in **1 Timothy 1:12-15**.

“And I thank Christ Jesus our Lord who has enabled me, because He counted me faithful, putting me into the ministry, although I was formerly a blasphemer, a persecutor, and an insolent man; but I obtained mercy because I did it ignorantly in unbelief. And the grace of our Lord was exceedingly abundant, with faith and love which are in Christ Jesus. This is a faithful saying and worthy of all acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am chief.”

Grace through faith transformed the Saul, who breathed out threats and murder against the Christ of the Gospel and His people, into the Paul who laid down his life that the Lord Jesus Christ might be proclaimed to the world and His church built.

C. Not only did grace transform him, it also defined him!

II. Defining Grace (v. 10a)

A. This statement thrills my heart every time I read it. Paul said, ***“But by the grace of God I am what I am.”***

1. We love to pile the accolades upon the Apostle Paul. “Paul was the greatest missionary who ever lived.” “Paul was an unqualified genius.” “Paul was the spiritual father to almost all first century Christianity.” These and many other items of praise we could cite to show how great Paul was.

2. However, Paul would respond, “Don’t praise me. Praise God who made me what I am, and who I am.” ***“By the grace of God, I am what I am!”*** It is none of Paul, it is all of grace.

B. Paul wrote how his call was by grace. In **Galatians 1:11-17** we read:

“But I make known to you, brethren, that the gospel which was preached by me is not according to man. For I neither received it from man, nor was I taught it, but it came through the revelation of Jesus Christ. For you have heard of my former conduct in Judaism, how I persecuted the church of God beyond measure and tried to destroy it. And I advanced in Judaism beyond many of my contemporaries in my own nation, being more exceedingly zealous for the traditions of my fathers. But when it pleased God, who separated me from my mother’s womb and called me through His grace, to reveal His Son in me, that I might preach Him among the Gentiles, I did not immediately confer with flesh and blood, nor did I go up to Jerusalem to those who were apostles before me; but I went to Arabia, and returned again to Damascus.”

After he was converted by faith, he looked back and recognized that God had a plan for his life from before he was born. God called him to serve the Lord Jesus Christ by His grace, not because Paul merited it at all.

C. God also taught him through grace. He spent time in the school room of grace. He learned to live righteously and godly. His vision focused upon the coming of our Savior and he desired to be zealous to do the work of God. Grace taught him those things. Have we spent time in the school room of grace?

D. As God sought to mold the Apostle Paul through the trials He brought into Paul’s life, it was the grace of God that brought him through and changed him in the fires of adversity.

We get a glimpse of this in **2 Corinthians 12:7-9**,

“And lest I should be exalted above measure by the abundance of the revelations, a thorn in the flesh was given to me, a messenger of Satan to buffet me, lest I be exalted above measure. Concerning this thing I pleaded with the Lord three times that it might depart from me. And He said to me, ‘My grace is sufficient for you, for My strength is made perfect in weakness.’”

While tribulation works patience, and patience experience, and experience hope, it is the grace of God that brings us through and transforms us into the people that God wants us to be.

E. So, Paul would say to us that it is not that I am something; it is that God made me what I am. Don’t give me credit; give the credit and all the praise to God! ***“By the grace of God, I am what I am.”***

F. So, grace transformed him. Grace defined him. And finally, grace enabled him to accomplish God's work!

III. Empowering Grace (v. 10b)

“But by the grace of God I am what I am, and His grace toward me was not in vain; but I labored more abundantly than they all, yet not I, but the grace of God which was with me.” 1 Corinthians 15:10

A. It is by the grace of God that Paul did what he did. I love the **“yet not I”** statements that Paul made. He wants his readers to understand that the grace that God gave to him produced results. He worked in that grace and with that grace. Ultimately it was not Paul who deserved the credit, it was God who empowered him to do what he did.

B. We catch a glimpse of Paul's understanding of how this worked earlier in **1 Corinthians 3**. ***“Who then is Paul, and who is Apollos, but ministers through whom you believed, as the Lord gave to each one? I planted, Apollos watered, but God gave the increase. So then neither he who plants is anything, nor he who waters, but God who gives the increase.”***

We work, but except God works through us, nothing happens. So, the one who should be honored is God, not us!

C. Again we read in **Ephesians 3:4-9** another Pauline view at his own ministry. ***“By which, when you read, you may understand my knowledge in the mystery of Christ), which in other ages was not made known to the sons of men, as it has now been revealed by the Spirit to His holy apostles and prophets: that the Gentiles should be fellow heirs, of the same body, and partakers of His promise in Christ through the gospel, of which I became a minister according to the gift of the grace of God given to me by the effective working of His power. To me, who am less than the least of all the saints, this grace was given, that I should preach among the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ.”***

What I do, I only do through the grace of God.

How about you and me?

Do we recognize as Paul did how great a debtor we are to grace? Grace transforms us. It saves us from sin and makes us children of God.

Grace should also define us. Do we consciously recognize that we are what we are by the grace of God?

Finally, do we recognize that any and all ministry that we do for God is simply done by the grace of God?

May we all recognize anew this new year how great a debtor we are to grace.

Hymn# 2 Come Thou Fount of Every Blessing