

“To Grace a Debtor”

1 Corinthians 15:8-10

INTRO:

We need to ask God to teach us daily how great a debtor we are to His grace. My heart has been captive lately to the stanza in “Come Thou Fount of Every Blessing” It 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. In fact, our debt to God’s grace is so much bigger than this.

Today we will look at Paul’s statement in **1 Corinthians 15:8-10**. In this text, we find Paul’s testimony of the importance of God’s grace in his life and the debt 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)

A. In the context of **1 Corinthians 15**, the Apostle Paul wrote about the resurrection. In his proof of the resurrection of Jesus Christ Paul lists several witnesses who had seen the risen Christ.

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

2. Last in line, the Apostle Paul saw Christ.

v.8 *“Then last of all He was seen by me also, as by one born out of due time.”*

B. Having thought of this moment in his life, the first thought that floods his mind is the wonder of the grace of God given to him. He is a debtor to that grace because first 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 that God established. Paul persecuted the very people of God. Luke vividly described Paul 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.”*

Here Paul breathing out smoke and fire because he hated the church of the living God. What happened to make Saul the persecutor, Paul the preacher who wrote **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

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 Church, into the Paul who laid down his life for that same Lord Jesus Christ.

C. Not only did grace transform him. It also defined Paul.

II. Defining Grace (v. 10a)

A. This statement thrills my heart every time I read it. Paul wrote:

v.10 *“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 are true, but they are true because of the activity of Grace in Paul's life.

2. But 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 me, it is all of Grace.

B. Paul's call was by grace. In **Galatians 1:15-17** we read:

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

C. God also taught him through grace.

Titus 2:11-14 ***“For the grace of God that brings salvation has appeared to all men, teaching us that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly in the present age, looking for the blessed hope and glorious appearing of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ, who gave Himself for us, that He might redeem us from every lawless deed and purify for Himself His own special people, zealous for good works.”***

Paul was the man of character that he was because he had spent time in the school room of grace. He learned to live righteously and godly. His vision was 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. God molded the Apostle Paul through the fires of adversity. The Grace of God brought him through and changed him.

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 which brings us through and transforms us into the people God wants us to be.

E. Grace transformed him. Grace defined him. Finally, grace enabled him to accomplish God’s work!

III. Empowering Grace (v. 10b)

A. *“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.” (v.10)*

It is by the grace of God that Paul did what he did. I love the ***“yet not I”*** statements that Paul makes. 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. But 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 works earlier in **1 Corinthians 3:5-7** *"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 3:7-9** another Pauline glimpse at his own ministry. *"Of which [the Gospel] 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."*

Paul said, 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 also should 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 how great a debtor we are to grace.

Hymn #202 *Amazing Grace*