

## "Foundations of Spiritual Maturity" 1 Corinthians 1:4-9, Part 2

### Introduction

- I want to begin this morning with a popular Christian writer's story of God's grace. Listen. "Seems a fellow is doing some shopping at the commissary on a military base. Doesn't need much, just some coffee and a loaf of bread. He is standing in line at the checkout stand. Behind him is a woman with a full cart. Her basket overflows with groceries, clothing, and a [DVD player]. At his turn he steps up to the register. The clerk invites him to draw a piece of paper out of a fishbowl.
- 'If you pull out the correct slip, then all your groceries are free,' the clerk explains. 'How many correct slips are there?' asks the buyer. 'Only one.' The bowl is full, so the chances are slim. But the fellow tries anyway, and wouldn't you know it, he gets the winning ticket! What a surprise.
- But then he realizes he is only buying coffee and bread. What a waste. But this fellow is quick. He turns to the lady behind him—the one with the mountain of stuff—and proclaims, 'Well, what do you know, Honey? We won! We don't have to pay a penny.' She stares at him. He winks at her. And somehow she has the wherewithal to play along. She steps up beside him. Puts her arm in his and smiles. And for a moment they stand side-by-side, wedded by good fortune. In the parking lot she consummates the temporary union with a kiss and a hug and goes on her way with a grand story to tell her friends."
- This writer goes on to say, "I know, I know. What they did was a bit shady. He shouldn't have lied, and she shouldn't have pretended. But that taken into account, it's still a nice story. A story not too distant from our own. We, too, have been graced with a surprise. Even more than that of the lady. For though her debt was high, she could pay it. We can't begin to pay ours. We, like the woman, have been given a gift. Not just at the checkout stand, but at the judgment seat."<sup>1</sup>
- I read this story and I just sat at my desk dumbfounded. This description of grace deeply saddened me because I know what the grace of God has meant in my own life. Far too many Christians think the grace of God is free groceries. It's a one-time transaction, a lucky strike. A get out of jail free card. It's something that happened in the past and made for a good day and a good memory. It's a superficial scratch and sniff patch for what is otherwise a generally miserable existence. We pull out grace—scratch it, sniff it, get our fix and move on.
- We've so trivialized the grace of God, so marginalized it, we've lost the magnitude of the grace of God, a grace that is so large and so consuming that when rightly comprehended and experienced it changes your life forever. God's grace is not free groceries for a day. It's the whole grocery store, the warehouse, the distributors and supply chain, everything, for life. You never get out of, away from or want to leave the grace of God when it's touched your life.

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<sup>1</sup> Max Lucado, *When God Whispers Your Name*, p. 69-70.

- Last week we started our study of Paul's opening prayer in this letter to the Corinthians. It's about grace. One thing that's very apparent when you read 1 Corinthians from start to finish is that the Corinthian church was sick. It's an ill, unhealthy church. And the cause of their illness was spiritual immaturity, the likes of which was causing all kinds of all kinds of severe dysfunctionality. And Paul's cure for their immaturity is grace.

### Proposition

- **The maturity of the church depends upon the grace of Jesus Christ**

### Transition

I want to continue that theme this morning.

- More than anything, I want all of us to mature in the grace of Christ. Your individual maturity is dependent upon your understanding and reliance upon the grace of God. The same is true for churches. The more we as a church view our corporate life together under the parameters of grace; the more we operate in a grace-giving way, the more mature we become.
- Unfortunately, most churches don't operate out of grace. Few and far between are the ministries where grace seasons all aspects of church life. [J.I. Packers'](#) analysis is right on. "It is commonplace in all the churches to call Christianity a religion of grace...It is repeatedly pointed out in sermons and books...It is staple diet in the Sunday School that grace is *God's Riches At Christ's Expense*. And yet, despite these facts, there do not seem to be many in our churches who actually believe in grace. To be sure, there have always been some who have found the thought of grace so overwhelmingly wonderful that they could never get over it. Grace has become the constant theme of their talk and prayers...But many church people are not like this. They may pay lip service to the idea of grace, but there they stop. Their conception of grace is not so much debased as nonexistent. The thought means nothing to them; it does not touch their experience at all. Talk to them about the church's heating, or last year's accounts, and they are with you at once; but speak to them about the realities to which the word *grace* points, and their attitude is one of deferential blankness. They do not accuse you of talking nonsense; they do not doubt that your words have meaning; but they feel that, whatever it is that you are talking about, it is beyond them and the longer they have lived without it the surer they are that at their stage of life they do not really need it."<sup>2</sup>
- The passage we are in right now is so important for the simple reason that it speaks to the realities to which the word *grace* points, it deepens our understanding of the grace of God, and inches us toward maturity in Christ. And more than that. You need grace. If you want to be a mature Christian then you've got to understand and make sense and assimilate, you've got to get into your spirit the results of God's grace that 1 Corinthians 1:4-9 talks about.

### Transition

Last week we looked at the first of three results of the grace of Jesus Christ coming from verses 4-9.

### Organizational Sentence

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<sup>2</sup> J.I. Packer, *Knowing God*, p. 128-9.

- **This morning we are going to look at the second and third results of God's grace that Paul talks about in this passage**

### Background

- For those of you who weren't here last week let me remind you of the flow of this passage. In verse 4, Paul gives thanks for the grace that is given to the Corinthians through Christ. And then he follows his thanksgiving with three clauses that describe how that grace manifests itself in the form of spiritual gifts. Look at verse 5. *For*. Look at verse 6. *Because*. And verse 7. *Therefore*. Three clauses that explain how God's grace tangibly comes to you and me in the form of spiritual gifts. That's what we talked about last week. The enriching of spiritual gifts that result from the grace of God.

### Transition

Now for the second result. Look at verse 8.

### Main Points

- *He will keep you strong to the end, so that you will be blameless on the day of our Lord Jesus Christ.* What's the second result of God's grace? It preserves and perfects whatever it touches. That's the **second result**. **God's grace preserves and protects**. God's grace through Jesus Christ isn't some past event that has little or no repercussions for the present and no bearing on the future. God's grace is like dropping a rock in the perfectly calm water pool of your life. The ripples of his grace extend to the farthest reaches of a person's life. Paul says just this later on in 1 Corinthians about his own life when he says that God's grace to him was not without effect.<sup>3</sup>
- I see in this verse one of the clear instances in scripture of the teaching called the perseverance of the saints. In other words, "all those who are truly born again will be kept by God's power and will persevere as Christians until the end of their lives, and that only those who persevere until the end have been truly born again."<sup>4</sup> In my mind this verse sounds an awful lot like Philippians 1:6 *he who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus*. Or 1 Peter 1:5. I realize that a number of you will disagree with me on this and that's okay. We're Free Church people. As long as your belief is formed by scripture there's latitude here.
- However, let me see if I can build a case for this encouraging teaching from this verse. What's most significant about this verse is Paul's repetition of a key word. He first used the word in verse 6 where it's translated *confirmed*. Now look at verse 8. The *he will keep you strong* of verse 8—that's the same word as the word confirmed in verse 6. Those two are the same words. The King James and the New American Standard capture this idea by translating those words the same.
- Now think about this. When God's grace through Jesus changes your life you're given spiritual gifts, right? The gifts confirm the grace that's there. Can you have a Christian without spiritual gifts? No. The gifts confirm or guarantee that grace is working, operating underneath. That's what verses 4-7 talk about. What Paul seems to be saying in verse 8 is that in the same way God confirmed or guaranteed the results of his grace through the giving

<sup>3</sup> 1 Corinthians 15:10

<sup>4</sup> Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, p. 788.

of gifts, that same grace confirms or guarantees the blamelessness of the believer on the day Jesus Christ returns for his saints. In other words, can you have a Christian that doesn't persevere and make it to the end? No. The preserving-perfecting work of grace of Christ is guaranteed to do its work.

- Every couple of months a bonehead athlete guarantees a victory in some athletic competition. Sometimes those guarantees come true. Most of the time the fools end up eating crow. Verse 8 is the Paul's Joe Namath-like guarantee of victory before the 1969 Super Bowl. Just think about for a second how remarkable the words here really are. *He will keep you strong to the end, so that you will be blameless on the day of our Lord Jesus Christ.* Think about how messed up the Corinthian church is. Think about how messed up our lives are because of our sin and then think about the grace of God. Now think about the promise. *He will keep you strong to the end, so that you will be blameless on the day of our Lord Jesus Christ.* God's grace is not without effect. He who began a good work will complete it. He will keep you strong to the end and yet the Corinthians aren't strong. They're weak. Their unspiritual. They are acting like babies with the spiritual truths they have. And yet Paul is supremely confident, not in their own moral ability, but in God's preserving-perfecting power. He is supremely confident in grace; in the strengthening, sustaining, preserving, perfecting power of God's grace so that when that grace takes root in a person's life it will produce blamelessness. I like how [Eugene Peterson](#) captures this idea of God's preserving-perfecting grace. He translates verse 8, "*And not only that, but God himself is right alongside to keep you steady and on track until things are all wrapped up by Jesus.*"
- Let me ask you. Do you have a present trust in Christ for salvation? Is there evidence of a regenerating work of the Holy Spirit in your heart? Do you see a long-term pattern of growth in your Christian life? If yes, then why do you not have the same confident assurance of salvation that God so freely offers through his words here? Which should you place more trust in, the sin that condemns your heart or the grace that is able to swallow up all your sins? *There is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.*<sup>5</sup> I guarantee you; the grace of God is bigger than whatever you've done this week, provided you keep on believing that his grace is for you. As one theologian has put it, "it is difficult if not impossible to see any end to God's guarding activity."<sup>6</sup> Your salvation is assured provided God's power is working through you by faith. You've got to trust. You've got to believe. Do you want to know whether God is guarding you? If you continue to trust God through Christ, then God is working and guarding you, and he deserves your gratitude. This is one of the riches of his grace. Don't take it for granted.

### Transition

How do I know God will do this? Why do I believe this with all my heart? Verse 9. Look at verse 9. *God, who has called you into fellowship with his Son Jesus Christ our Lord, is faithful.* God is faithful. He's faithful. And that brings us to the [third result](#) of grace this passage talks about. What is it? It's [fellowship with Christ](#).

- The God who is faithful to guard us and preserve us and perfect us calls us by his grace into fellowship with Christ the Son. One of the sweetest deals about being a Christian is this thing called fellowship with Christ. "Believers are not only *in* Christ, and as such freed from

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<sup>5</sup> Romans 8:1

<sup>6</sup> Grudem, p. 792.

the guilt of their sins, but are also *in fellowship with* Christ, and as such are privileged to commune with him through the [Holy Spirit]."<sup>7</sup>

- So what does it mean to be in fellowship with Christ? It means seeing all of life, whatever you do as doing it with Jesus. Christians don't do things for Jesus necessarily. They do things with Jesus. Do you watch movies with Christ? Do you go to school with Christ? Do you punch the time clock with Christ? Do you cook your meals with Christ?
- In John's gospel it means abiding—remaining in Christ. In Acts it's the courage of unschooled ordinary men who brought on astonished looks because they had been with Jesus.<sup>8</sup> In the words of [Brother Lawrence](#). "To be with Him, we must cultivate the holy habit of thinking of Him often. In order to know God, we must think about him often. And once we get to know Him, we will think about Him even more often, because where our treasure is, there is our heart! Do not forget him! Think of him often; adore him ceaselessly; live and die with him. That is the real business of a Christian; in a word it is our profession."<sup>9</sup> Or as Paul says in verse 9, it's your calling.
- [Leighton Ford](#) says it like this. It means "at bedtime be at peace with Christ. During sleep rest in Christ. When sleepless, commune with Christ. In the morning ask of Christ. During the day, talk to Christ. On the Sabbath, remember Christ. In time of trouble wait for Christ. At all times praise Christ. Always and forever, be at home with Christ."<sup>10</sup> You have one calling as Christians. You are called to be with Jesus.
- Your vocation as talked about in verse 9 here begs one question and one question alone. Is this you? Does this characterize your life right now? This is one of the riches of his grace. What are you resisting? What are you afraid of? That he won't accept you? What is this passage about? Grace. He will.

### Conclusion

- Growing up, Valentine's Day was always a big deal at our house. And Miriam and I have carried on the tradition. I received a very special card from Miriam that I will always cherish. This passage, verses 4-9, which lists all the riches of God's grace that comes to us through Christ is God's valentines to us. He showers us with spiritual gifts. He tells us that he will always be faithful to us. He calls us into fellowship with him. This is God's way of saying to you and to me, "BE MINE!" through Jesus Christ. Pray with me.

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<sup>7</sup> Gordon Fee, p. 45.

<sup>8</sup> Acts 4:13

<sup>9</sup> Brother Lawrence, *The Practice of the Presence of God*, p. 90.

<sup>10</sup> Leighton Ford, *Nine Ways to Build Intimacy with Christ*.