

I believe we have only a miniscule view of the greatness of God's grace. That is because we tend to think the best of ourselves. I have been communicating with a Buddhist who is telling me we can completely purify our thought life if we really try. Really? I can't say I wish him the best at that effort because the Bible tells us that without Jesus that is just self-deceit. God told Jeremiah the heart is deceitful and desperately wicked (Jeremiah 17:9ⁱ). The more we see the depravity of our own hearts, the more we can appreciate the grace of God and recognize our need for a Savior. I have said this before, but it bears repeating to get the point across. Imagine saying out loud in front of your church family every thought that runs through your head. Or what if everyone could psychically perceive your every thought? How many times would you get yelled at or maybe punched in the face? God does hear our every thought and the words we mutter under our breath (Psalm 94:11ⁱⁱ). Our sins are not just against others but also against our Creator. This idea just touches the surface of our sinfulness. What about the thoughts we harbor of unforgiveness and the anger we don't voice or our lack of gratitude? What about the passive aggressive actions we take?

I'm intentionally making us feel uncomfortable about the condition of our souls so we can delight in the grace of God we see in the opening of this letter. If we don't see the depths of our depravity, we can't fully grasp the wonder of the riches of God's grace.

The letter has started off with a greeting that told the Corinthians that they are God's called out ones, meaning the church of God, and that they are sanctified in Christ Jesus! That means they are set apart from the world for God's holy purposes. It goes on to say they are called to be saints, which means holy ones. The problem is that the rest of the letter from verse ten onward addresses one problem after another about their behavior. So, as we go over these opening words of gratitude, I would like us to hear them as if they were written to us. We know we all have problems and weaknesses, and that we are not yet the people we want to be in Christ. We know we fall so short of His perfection just as these Corinthians did, and yet, hear these gracious words from the Apostle Paul to them and to us.

⁴ I give thanks to my God always for you because of the grace of God that was given you in Christ Jesus, ⁵ that in every way you were enriched in him in all speech and all knowledge— 1 Corinthians 1:4,5 After the greeting, Paul begins his letter telling them that he is always thanking God for who these believers are in Christ and for all the grace that they have received. It applies to all believers. He is declaring what Christ has done for us at the beginning of the letter to tell them in the rest of the letter to live up to that holy calling.

My mother would tell me, "You are twelve years old now, so act like it!" This letter is from their spiritual father in the faith telling them they are sanctified and called to be saints, so act according to the grace that has been given them. They represent Christ in the world, but as we will see, they were representing Him poorly.

Every godly shepherd is thankful for God's grace manifest in the flock. The grace I see in your growth in Christ and your desire to read and take hold of the Word of God encourages my faith and fills my heart with gratitude to God. The grace Paul saw was manifested in their speech and knowledge. Speech had changed from worldliness to godliness. Our conversations expose what is in our hearts. Their conversations had

changed from worldly topics to godly ones. We can tell where our hearts are by what comes out our mouths. Are we constantly talking about the world or about the goodness and grace of God? When a Bible study is over do you think over and discuss what God was showing you or what you want for lunch?

I think we need to consider that if we spend more time thinking and talking about politics than we do the Word of God and our relationship with Jesus, something is wrong in our hearts. If my conversations constantly turn to complaints about traffic, I must not be spending time meditating on God's goodness toward me. Our speech reveals where our hearts are. I suggest that we carefully consider what our speech is saying about the focus of our hearts and minds (Luke 6:45ⁱⁱⁱ).

The enrichment in all speech must not only mean the topic, but also the way to express the spiritual truths they were speaking about. We should not only want to be focused on eternal things, but carefully consider how to express those truths in a clear and considerate way so that others will be able to hear and comprehend. If we come across as "better than thou," who will hear us? **But if we communicate with love and grace as recipients of grace, people can sense we care about them.**

I think an effective method in our divided society is to ask questions. "What do you think of Jesus? Have you read what His disciple John wrote? Would Jesus have had the discernment to choose the right men to convey His message? What do you think Jesus meant when He is recorded as saying (insert Scripture quote). Let them come to their own conclusions and resist the impulse to correct them, but rather, use questions or have them read a verse and tell you what they think it means.

The culture of the Corinthians was one that highly valued the ability to communicate skillfully with logic within their set concepts of nature. Paul was encouraging them by saying that the grace of God was helping them communicate in a way that the citizens of Corinth would respect. That would have been encouraging as the Corinthian culture equated eloquent speech with knowledge. Effectively conversing is becoming increasingly difficult in our divided culture of Twitter users, which implies we desperately need this gift of grace to help us effectively communicate. But I wonder how many of them heard this praise and thought, "I don't think Paul has heard *me* speak lately." Surely, they weren't perfect in every area of speech, but Paul saw the improvement. God sees the improvement in the maturing child of God and rejoices.

They gained knowledge which probably refers to an understanding of the Scriptures and of Jesus and His love. Paul may be referring to the gift of knowledge which would be expressed through the prophets and teachers (1 Corinthians 12:8^{iv}). While they weren't living it out, just as we often fail to live it out, Paul still saw the improvement. I like the bumper sticker, Not Perfect but a Work in Progress. Improvement is encouraging because we know God is at work in us. Grace acknowledged the improvement, even though so many other areas fell short.

⁶ even as the testimony about Christ was confirmed among you— ⁷ so that you are not lacking in any gift, as you wait for the revealing of our Lord Jesus Christ, 1 Corinthians 1:6,7 The testimony of Christ is the gospel. He died that we might truly live. Christ's testimony is seen in transformed lives, lives that express His resurrection power expressed in the fruits and gifts of the Spirit. These believers' lives had been transformed, and they were exercising the gifts of the Spirit as they waited expectantly for Jesus to return. In the words of Jesus, their lamps were lit, and they were dressed and waiting for

their Master's knock on the door (Matthew 25:2-4^v, 7^{vi}). *This reference to the future, to Christ's appearing, reminds them that even with all their gifts they are not yet complete. What they have is only good enough for the interim.*^{vii} Is the testimony of Christ's ability to transform a life being seen in us?

As we saw in verse 5, their speech was different. Their spiritual knowledge was such that they lived with a new focus in life. While most Corinthians were living to advance themselves in this world, the Corinthian church had their eyes on the real prize, the return of Christ and eternity in His presence.

We'll see later that in some ways they were caught up in the temporary, but again **Grace sees and acknowledges the progress despite our shortcomings!** In chapter 14 we will read that the gifts were in need of some boundaries, but the point here is that they had all the spiritual gifts the church needed to help them endure until the return of Jesus. Paul was thankful for that grace given to them.

A side note here is that the gifts of the Spirit are a blessing and help sustain us. At the same time, those gifts do not mean we are without our problems. Some Charismatics in our day speak as if those without their particular gifts are inferior. The gifts didn't keep the Corinthian church from sin in many areas of their lives. Without the fruits of the Spirit the gifts just become toys used to offend rather than upbuild (Romans 14:19^{viii}).

⁸ who will sustain you to the end, guiltless in the day of our Lord Jesus Christ.

⁹ God is faithful, by whom you were called into the fellowship of his Son, Jesus Christ our Lord. 1 Corinthians 1:8 One of the great qualities of God is His faithfulness (2 Timothy 2:13^{ix}). He calls us into the fellowship of Jesus Christ our Lord, and He keeps us in Christ. It is all His doing. We experience that fellowship when worship together, when we pray, and when we see His hand in our lives. We should be experiencing that fellowship throughout our day as we constantly talk with Him in prayer (1 Thessalonians 5:17^x). The implication of what Paul is saying in verse 9 is that **because God who called us is a faithful God, He will keep you and give you all you need to continue in that fellowship with the Son.**

In countries where persecution is common, I would think the pressure would cause believers to crumble. Instead, I hear testimonies of amazing growth and perseverance. That is because God who called them is faithful to keep them in fellowship with the Son. It seems the more intensely difficult the situation, the greater the fellowship. Perhaps that is because that is when we most earnestly seek Him.

In these first nine verses Paul has given them one reason upon another to be encouraged, and it is all based on who they are in Christ Jesus. The rest of the letter will deal with their many problems, but first he wanted them to know that their value and potential is wrapped up in Jesus and all He has done for them. Even though we have problems like the Corinthians, we too should be encouraged with the work of Jesus in our lives. Many of these encouraging words apply to us as well. We too are God's sanctified saints who are recipients of His grace. That grace has enriched our lives. We may not all have been graced with speech and knowledge but certainly many of you have. And others have been graced with other gifts such as hospitality, helps, kindness, music, and I could go on and on (1 Corinthians 12:7^{xi}). The point is that Jesus' presence in us has given us new qualities that God values and uses for His glory.

Jesus' testimony is confirmed in you as it was in them. You no longer have the same goals as the culture. You live to serve and to glorify your Savior. You desire to be

more like Him. That is evident in your speech and actions, caring for one another, daily spending time in God's Word, and attending Bible study groups. You, too, are waiting for the return of Jesus. He will sustain *you* to the end guiltless at His return. You, too, have been called into fellowship with the Son. Experience it. Revel in it!

Those encouragements don't just come from me, they come from the Holy Spirit who inspired Paul's writings. If an employer was to start a letter with so much encouragement, we would file it away to use in a future resume. But this encouragement comes from our Lord and Savior. It touches on His promises to complete His work in us. Be encouraged, for it is your heavenly Father's good pleasure to give you the Kingdom (Luke 12:32^{xii}). Yes, there are problems to address, but **He wants you to first know that He is your new identity.** While the Corinthian citizens strove to make a name for themselves, the church was given the greatest identity in belonging to Jesus. It wasn't by their striving, but rather by simply calling on the name of the Lord and receiving His gracious gift of salvation (Romans 10:13^{xiii}). While the culture saw this identity as ridiculous or even dangerous, the church of Corinth knew it was better than anything the world offered. Our culture is increasingly seeing followers of Jesus as backward bumpkins and even as dangerous. But like the Corinthians, we know how blessed we are.

Look back over the nine verses that start this letter. There is a constant drumbeat that shows us what Paul is trying to communicate to this church filled with problems. v.1 The apostle of Christ Jesus tells them v2 they are sanctified in Christ Jesus because they called on His name. v3 They have grace and peace from Christ our Lord. v4 He is thankful for the grace given them in Christ Jesus. v5 They were enriched in Jesus in every way, in all speech and knowledge. v6 The testimony of Christ was confirmed among them. v7 They await the revealing of the Lord Jesus Christ v8 who sustains us guiltless until the day of the Lord Jesus Christ v9 for they were called into the fellowship of Jesus Christ our Lord.

Did you notice Jesus is in every verse? Paul is about to tell them of all their problems, but before he does, **he wants them to know Jesus is their everything.** They are secure in Him. He will see them through to perfection. They are sanctified saints because of what He has done, not because they are already perfect or have been given spiritual gifts. The author and perfecter of our faith is Jesus (Hebrews 12:2^{xiv})!

Are we any different? Every one of those wonderful truths of being in Christ and all that meant for them is true of us too. Like the Corinthians, we fall way short of what we should be (Romans 3:23^{xv}), but our identity is in Jesus. He has made us worthy. Our future is in His omnipotent hands, and He has promised to perfect that which concerns us (Philippians 1:6^{xvi}).

This concept of dependence upon God is rare in the American "do it yourself" culture. But for every person who has tried and tried to be the perfect Christian and realized that we constantly fall short, this is great news. It means the work was done by another (1 Thessalonians 5:10^{xvii}). It means we simply let go and let Him lead, and His life in us will make us overcomers (Romans 8:37^{xviii}). Yes, we are all works in progress, but the Master Craftsman isn't done with us. And the grace we have received along with all the promises tell us the final product is certain to be Christ likeness (1 John 3:2^{xix})!

All praise to God for what He is faithfully doing! The Lord Jesus Christ will preserve us to that glorious day (1Thessalonians 5:23-24^{xx}). We don't keep ourselves. He keeps us from falling (Jude 1:24^{xxi}). We sin, but He is the One who has removed our sins,

and so we are positionally guiltless in God's sight. We should be sinless as we walk in the Spirit, but John wrote that if we sin, we have an advocate with the Father and when we confess those sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us and cleanse us from all unrighteousness (1 John 1:9^{xxii}; 2:1^{xxiii}). Jesus is sustaining us in the faith and He will do so to the end when He will present us guiltless to the Father. Now that is the best news ever. Don't get used to it. Be overwhelmed with gratitude again and again. It is the goodness of God that causes us to strive to walk in holiness and let Jesus have His way in us. His goodness and grace motivate us to love Him and desire His will.

Listen to Pastor Steven Um's summation of these first nine verses as God's encouragement to us today. *The Christian's identity is not self-made or self-maintained. It is the result of an outside action of God on our behalf. We are sanctified not in ourselves but "in Christ Jesus" (v. 2). We are "called to be saints" not because we are inherently saintly but simply because we "call upon the name of our Lord Jesus Christ" (v.2). The grace and peace we experience is delivered to us "from God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ" (v.3). The grace we experience was not earned but was a gift given to us "in Christ Jesus" (v. 4). Our speech and knowledge are "enriched in him" (v.5). We are confident in our faith because God confirmed the "testimony about Christ" among us (v.6). Our future hope is not in our manifold gifts or in the potential of our achievements but in "the revealing of our Lord Jesus Christ" (v.7). In Christ, God sustains us to the end. He has promised to make us—the guilty—"guiltless in the day of our Lord Jesus Christ" (v.8). And we are absolutely certain of this because "God is faithful," and he has called us into "the fellowship of his Son, Jesus Christ our Lord" (v.9).*^{xxiv}

The Scriptures are filled with encouragement to those who would seek God's will for their lives. Let me remind you of just one more from Jeremiah. ^{3b} *I have loved you with an everlasting love; therefore I have continued my faithfulness to you.* Jeremiah 31:3b These truths prepare the readers for the discipline and instruction that lies ahead. And since these are general truths of all who are in Jesus, we too should be ready for whatever correction our Lord communicates to us. May the grace of God help us receive these wonderful truths as well as correction we need that we might glorify God with our lives and offer hope to those in our own culture who are searching for answers.

Benediction: ²⁴ *Now to him who is able to keep you from stumbling and to present you blameless before the presence of his glory with great joy,* ²⁵ *to the only God, our Savior, through Jesus Christ our Lord, be glory, majesty, dominion, and authority, before all time and now and forever. Amen.* Jude 24,25

Questions:

- 1 What was Paul's first word of thanks regarding? Application to us?
- 2 Why would he mention speech when they still needed to improve?
- 3 What do our conversations say about our hearts?
- 4 What kind of knowledge is Paul thankful for?
- 5 How can our lives confirm the testimony of Christ?
- 6 What was their forward focus fixed upon?
- 7 How do we experience fellowship with the Son?
- 8 What is the implication of verse 9?
- 9 What do the first nine verses have in common?
- 10 Why is Paul beginning the letter this way? Relate that to us?

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- ⁱ **Jeremiah 17:9** ⁹ The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately sick; who can understand it?
- ⁱⁱ **Psalms 94:11** ¹¹ the LORD—knows the thoughts of man, that they are but a breath.
- ⁱⁱⁱ **Luke 6:45** ⁴⁵ The good person out of the good treasure of his heart produces good, and the evil person out of his evil treasure produces evil, for out of the abundance of the heart his mouth speaks.
- ^{iv} **1 Corinthians 12:8** ⁸ For to one is given through the Spirit the utterance of wisdom, and to another the utterance of knowledge according to the same Spirit,
- ^v **Matthew 25:2-4** ² Five of them were foolish, and five were wise. ³ For when the foolish took their lamps, they took no oil with them, ⁴ but the wise took flasks of oil with their lamps.
- ^{vi} **Matthew 25:7** ⁷ Then all those virgins rose and trimmed their lamps.
- ^{vii} Witherington, B., III. (1995). *Conflict and Community in Corinth: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary on 1 and 2 Corinthians* (p. 89). Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co.
- ^{viii} **Romans 14:19** ¹⁹ So then let us pursue what makes for peace and for mutual upbuilding.
- ^{ix} **2 Timothy 2:13** ¹³ if we are faithless, he remains faithful— for he cannot deny himself.
- ^x **1 Thessalonians 5:17** ¹⁷ pray without ceasing,
- ^{xi} **1 Corinthians 12:7** ⁷ To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good.
- ^{xii} **Luke 12:32** ³² “Fear not, little flock, for it is your Father’s good pleasure to give you the kingdom.
- ^{xiii} **Romans 10:13** ¹³ For “everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.”
- ^{xiv} **Hebrews 12:2 (NIV)** ² Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy set before him endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.
- ^{xv} **Romans 3:23** ²³ for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God,
- ^{xvi} **Philippians 1:6** ⁶ And I am sure of this, that he who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ.
- ^{xvii} **1 Thessalonians 5:10** ¹⁰ who died for us so that whether we are awake or asleep we might live with him.
- ^{xviii} **Romans 8:37** ³⁷ No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us.
- ^{xix} **1 John 3:2** ² Beloved, we are God’s children now, and what we will be has not yet appeared; but we know that when he appears we shall be like him, because we shall see him as he is.
- ^{xx} **1 Thessalonians 5:23-24** ²³ Now may the God of peace himself sanctify you completely, and may your whole spirit and soul and body be kept blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ.
- ²⁴ He who calls you is faithful; he will surely do it.
- ^{xxi} **Jude 1:24** ²⁴ Now to him who is able to keep you from stumbling and to present you blameless before the presence of his glory with great joy,
- ^{xxii} **1 John 1:9** ⁹ If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.
- ^{xxiii} **1 John 2:1** ¹ My little children, I am writing these things to you so that you may not sin. But if anyone does sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous.
- ^{xxiv} Um, S. T. (2015). *1 Corinthians: The Word of the Cross*. (R. K. Hughes, Ed.) (pp. 21–22). Wheaton, IL: Crossway.