

Thanks for Grace, Rich in Christ

1 Corinthians 1:1–9

Turn to 1 Corinthians 1 please. I plan to go through 1 Corinthians this fall. As far as the early church fathers were concerned, 1 Corinthians was their favorite New Testament Letter. Why? Because 1 Corinthians talked about all the problems the early church had to deal with all the time. So let's understand this letter a little better.

If you were going to thank God for the ways He had shown grace to our church, for what would you thank Him? What has He given our church, or done for our church, that makes you thankful?

If you were going to thank God for ways your brothers and sisters here have responded to God, for what would you thank Him? What do you see in each other's faithfulness for which you could thank God? The Scriptures today will help you answer those questions.

Most of Paul's letters have a paragraph of thanks to God right near the beginning of his letter. 1 Corinthians has this, and we will go through it today. Other New Testament writers do not begin this way. It is Paul's own style.

And usually he thanks God for these two things: **for how God has been generous** to that church, and he thanks God **for their godly response**, for how their faith changed how they live. But in 1 Corinthians he does *not* thank God for their response, and not in 2 Corinthians either, only for how God was good to them. Because they had not responded very well.

1 Paul's Opening – 1:1–3

The thanksgiving paragraph does not begin until verse 4, but we'll look verses 1–3 as well.

Paul, called to be an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God, and our brother Sosthenes, to the church of God in Corinth, to those sanctified in Christ Jesus and called to be his holy people, together with all those everywhere who call on the name of our Lord Jesus Christ—their Lord and ours:

What is a church? Paul writes to the church of God in Corinth, and then he adds two phrases to explain what it means to be the church of God. *To those sanctified in Christ Jesus, and called to be his holy people.* That's what it means to be the church.

“Sanctified” means we *consecrated* to God, *set apart* for God. It means we belong to God, we are his, bought with a price. God consecrated us for his use. This happens to everyone who calls on the name of the Lord Jesus. We are set apart in Christ Jesus, by being joined to Christ. We are set apart by our union with Christ. When we call on the name of the Lord, God joins us to Christ and in that way sets us apart. We become a very different class of people. God's people. God takes us for himself. It is a wonderful thing. Sanctified in Christ, consecrated in Christ.

To those sanctified in Christ Jesus, and called to be his holy people. That is, called to be saints. “Sanctified” and “called holy ones” are two different ways of saying the same thing. Being *sanctified* makes us *saints*, makes us *holy people*. God separates his people from other people, he sets us apart from the rest, and then he makes us his own, we belong to him, we become his possession. This is what “*called to be his holy people*” means.

“*Called to be his holy people*” might sound like a goal the Corinthian believers should reach, but that’s not what Paul means. The Corinthian believers are already saints, already holy people, in the same way that Paul was already an apostle.

Paul was called to be an apostle, but it was not a goal he had to achieve, he just received it. In the same way, believers do not achieve being God’s holy people, we just receive it. We should act like it, but that’s not how we get it. In this sense, all believers are equally and completely sanctified, equally holy people, equally saints.

The Corinthian church was not a model church. It was a worldly church, an example of what not to be in quite a few ways. But they were still *sanctified* people, people that God through Jesus had *set apart* for himself, had *made sacred* and *made his own*. And they were *called holy ones*, *chosen saints*, *chosen sacred ones*, *bought with a price*, God’s own possession.

And people, if it was true of that church, it is true of our church. And for that we thank God.

Verse 3 says, *Grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ*. How Paul begins his letters is generally how everyone wrote letters in those days: “Paul the apostle to the church of God in Corinth.” That’s a normal beginning. And right after that he should write “greetings:” “Paul to the church in Corinth; greetings.”

But instead of saying “I send you my greetings” he says “God the Father sends you his greetings, and Jesus Christ our Lord sends you his greetings.” When we write to someone, or when we speak to someone on the phone, we sometimes pass on a message from someone else.

That’s what Paul does here, and in all his letters. “God the Father sends you grace and peace. Jesus Christ the Son sends you grace and peace, too.” God the Father and Jesus the Son want this message passed on to every church.

1 Corinthians is not written only to Corinth. Paul says this letter is *to all those everywhere who call on the Lord Jesus Christ*. We here, now, this morning, need to hear this from God. “God the Father sends us all his grace and peace. Jesus the Lord also sends us his grace and peace.” If we heard this every morning, first thing after we woke up, it would be no more than the truth.

2 Other Thanksgivings in Paul: 1 Thessalonians, 2 Thessalonians, Philippians

Now we get to Paul’s thanksgiving paragraph. In 1st and 2nd Corinthians, Paul does not thank God for how the Corinthians respond to God, only for what God has done for the Corinthians.

In most of his letters to other churches he **does** thank God for how they've lived out their faith, but in Corinth there was unfortunately not enough of that. I looked at how he thanks God for other churches, so I could show you how 1 Corinthians was different.

He thanks God for the Thessalonian believers, because of *their work of faith, their labour of love, and their endurance of hope* (1 Thessalonians 1:3). Their work that comes from their faith, their labour that comes from their love, and their endurance that comes from their hope.

Work, labour, endurance. That was a hard working church. They had faith and love and hope, and so they worked and laboured and had endurance. That fits our church really well. Many of you in this church have demanding lives, just carrying on day by day, and yet you still serve the church and the people. You do this because you have faith in Christ, and you have given yourself to love him and love people.

And you certainly have endurance in this. If Paul was writing this church he would thank God for your work from faith, your labour from love, and your endurance from hope.

Here's another: In 2 Thessalonians he says this: *we boast about you to the churches of God about your endurance and faith in your persecutions and in the troubles you carry* (2 Thessalonians 1:4). *Your endurance and faith in your persecutions and in the troubles you carry.*

We do not have persecutions, not like they did. But I do recall a conversation with a student from Hong Kong. He described what it was like to talk about Christ in high school there, and there was no prejudice there against the gospel at all. It sounded very different than Canada, much kinder. But still, we do not have aggressive persecution, which many places have.

But we have troubles. *We boast about your endurance and faith in the troubles you carry.* That is certainly true of this church. You here have troubles that don't go away. We are disappointed that God does not take them away.

Paul boasted about the Thessalonians because they showed endurance and faith in the troubles that they carried. And if he knew about your lives, he would boast about you as well.

None of these churches were perfect. The rest of those letters shows that those churches needed instruction and correction in one thing or another. But the thanks is no less real for that.

One more. Paul says to the Philippians, *I give thanks with joy because of your partnership in the gospel from the first day until now. Your partnership in the gospel.* Later, in Philippians 4, he reminds them that they had sent money to him at least two different times, and that they were the only church that sent money for his ministry. That's called *partnership in the gospel*.

Over the years, a lot of money has gone out of this church to different groups and people that serve the Lord. Money goes out every year to individuals in need. Several households in this church give generously with money that never goes through our offering and KCC account. You respond on your own to needs out there.

This is very good. Paul would commend our church for this. In different ways, what God has given us goes out. That's just as it should be. And this church keeps being generous with me and my family as well. I thank you for this, and I thank God for you. You are generous with us.

3 The Corinthian Thanksgiving – 1 Corinthians 1:4-7a

I always thank my God for you because of his grace given you in Christ Jesus. For in him you have been enriched in every way.

“Grace” here is not just God forgiving our sins. Grace is all of God’s kindness to his people. Because of God’s kind generosity, his grace, we are rich in every way. And twice in this short section he says “in Christ Jesus,” “in him (you’ve been enriched).” BECAUSE we have Christ, and BECAUSE Christ has us, God has made us rich in every way. He’s reminding us!

The Scripture says to worldly Corinthian believers, *you have been made rich in every way*. If it was true for them, it is true for us. Because of Christ, the best thing that could happen to anyone has happened to us. This Scripture wants us to enjoy being rich.

They were rich in spiritual gifts – *You have been made rich with all kinds of speech and with all knowledge— God thus confirming our testimony about Christ among you. Therefore you do not lack any spiritual gift*. For now I will stop right there, in the middle of verse 7.

Paul will pick up spiritual gifts later in the letter; the Corinthians were lopsided in how they used their spiritual gifts. But they did have many of them.

God thus confirming our testimony about Christ among you. Other places in the New Testament teach the same thing (Acts 14:3; Hebrews 2:4), that spiritual gifts and miracles are God’s way of telling us that the story we have believed about Jesus is true.

Spiritual gifts in a church are how God says: “the message that you heard about Christ Jesus was from *me*, and putting your trust in Christ was believing *me*. I’m showing it by giving your church spiritual gifts.”

Spiritual gifts say *nothing* about the godliness of the gifted person. Whatever the spiritual gift, how impressive to us or not, it does not make the gifted person special in any way. Gifts are God’s way of confirming the basic message of Christ. Humans speak the message of Christ, and God confirms that the message is from him by giving spiritual gifts: *God thus confirming our testimony about Christ among you*. The gift itself is an undeserved grace, as is all grace.

There are spiritual gifts in our church, which means that God is saying this to *our* church: “The message that you heard about Jesus was from *me*, and trusting in Jesus was right, and I’m showing you that it was *my* message by giving your church spiritual gifts.” Paul thanked God for confirming the simple gospel in this way, and we also thank God for that.

Therefore you do not lack any spiritual gift. What do you think about that? Corinth was a worldly church, not heroes of either faithfulness or of faith. But they did not lack any spiritual gift. Every gift they needed, they had. Does any church lack spiritual gifts? No. Thank you God for the gifts in our church; may they all flourish.

4 Present to Future – 1 Corinthians 1:7b

In the middle of verse 7, Paul switches from this present age to the return of Christ: *Therefore you do not lack any spiritual gift as you eagerly wait for our Lord Jesus Christ to be revealed.*

“Revealed” is the word here, not “return.” He’s talking about the Lord’s return, but he’s emphasizing that someday everyone will *see* Christ, he will be *revealed*. On that day, trusting and obeying Christ will clearly be the wisest thing we could have done.

In this line, Paul is preaching to them. He brings up the return of Christ many times in Corinthians, because they were *not* “eagerly waiting for our Lord Jesus Christ to be revealed.” They were not thinking outside this life, and that was a problem.

The Christian life is a life of waiting for the Lord to return. In 1 Thessalonians Paul summarizes our lives this way: serving God and waiting for his Son Jesus. Serving and waiting.

Does that summarize our view of the Christian life? God encourages you and me to use our gifts to serve each other, all the time eagerly waiting for the Lord Jesus to be revealed to us and to the whole world!

5 God Keeps us Firm and Blameless – 1 Corinthians 1:8–9

He will also keep you firm to the end, so that you will be blameless on the day of our Lord Jesus Christ. God is faithful, who has called you into fellowship with his Son, Jesus Christ our Lord.

Here is a huge reason to thank God. If Paul can write this to the Corinthian church, I can say it to you. *God will also keep you in KCC firm to the end, so that you will be blameless on the day of our Lord Jesus Christ. God is faithful, who has called you at KCC into fellowship with his Son, Jesus Christ our Lord.*

What exactly does “blameless” mean here? I do not know. It does not mean sinless. It does not mean just “forgiven,” either. God is determined to bring to that day living faithfully. There are quite a few “blameless” texts like this in the New Testament. God will complete what he has begun.

We will not be blameless on that day *without* our own effort. But we will not be blameless on that day *because of* our own effort, either. It will happen *with* our effort, and *because of* God’s faithfulness and his determination to lead us to himself.

Jude 24 - *To him who is able to keep you at KCC from stumbling, and to present you before his glorious presence without fault and with great joy.*

1 Thess 3:13 - May God strengthen your hearts so that you at KCC will be blameless and holy in the presence of our God and Father when our Lord Jesus comes with all his holy ones.

1 Thess 5:23-24 - May God himself, the God of peace, make you at KCC holy through and through. May your whole spirit, soul and body be kept blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. The one who calls you at KCC is faithful, and he will do it. Amen,

PRAYER: Thank you, God.

Thank you, Father, that you have made us holy. You have set us apart for your own possession.

Thank you, Father and Son, for sending us grace and peace every day.

Thank you that because we are Christ's, and he is ours, you have made us rich in every way.

Thank you for giving many spiritual gifts to our church.

Thank you for telling us that the story about Jesus is true – you told us that it's true by giving this church spiritual gifts.

Thank you that your Son will be revealed to us and to everybody. Thank you for that hope.

Thank you for deciding to keep us firm to the end, so we'll be blameless when our Lord returns.

Thank you that you called us into fellowship with your Son, into partnership with your Son.

Thank you that you are faithful, completely and always reliable. Amen.

BENEDICTION: May God himself, the God of peace, make you holy through and through. May your whole spirit, soul and body be kept blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. The one who calls you is faithful and he will do it. Amen. Go in God's peace to love and serve the Lord.