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# Gratitude for Evidences of Grace

## 1 Corinthians 1:4-9

Please take your Bible and open to 1 Corinthians 1. I hope that this class is an encouragement to you as we consider the kinds of things the apostle Paul prayed for. I hope as we go through these prayers that you will be challenged to make some of the things Paul prays for a part of your prayer life. I also hope as we go through these prayers we see our own reflection - that the kinds of things Paul asked God for and thanked God for are the kinds of things we see the Lord doing in our lives and in our church.

Alistair Begg, "One of the great privileges of reading the letters of Paul - the first-century apostle, evangelist, church planter and theologian - is that we are allowed to hear the prayers of Paul. We are able to gain a window into the very center of his being, to see what was on his heart. We are able to look in on him not as he is up on his feet, going about the activities of his day, but as he is down on his knees, coming to God in prayer...Paul was a great pray-er. He was confident, he was committed, and he was humble and bold and compassionate. He clearly enjoyed prayer and was excited about it. He expected his Father in heaven to hear what he said and act in other people's lives accordingly. He prayed and then was "watchful in it with thanksgiving" (Colossians 4:2), ready to see how God would be pleased to answer his prayers."

Some verses in 1 John 5:14-15 remind us that God not only hears our prayers, he answers them according to His will, "And this is the confidence that we have toward him, that if we ask anything according to his will he hears us. And if we

know that he hears us in whatever we ask, we know that we have the requests that we have asked of him.” That’s quite the promise.

**Tonight we have the privilege of considering a prayer of thanksgiving.** The prayer we will consider tonight is not going to be a prayer for God to do something. We’ve already considered several of those prayers in Ephesians.

**Tonight’s prayer is a prayer of thanking to God for something He has already done.** The title for this lesson is gratitude for grace.

What makes this prayer of thanksgiving so amazing is the spiritual condition when Paul wrote this letter. When we think about 1 Corinthians, what comes to mind? If you have studied this letter before, when you think about the spiritual condition of the Corinthians when people wrote this letter, was this a healthy church or an unhealthy church? Was it a church with some choppy waters or was it a smooth sailing church? When Paul wrote 1 Corinthians the waters were very choppy.

If Corinth was south of the Mason Dixon you’d describe this group of believers living in this city as a piece of work. There are two things you don’t want said about you if you live in the south - **Bless your heart and piece of work.** Basically, if either of those statements are made in your general direction it means there is no hope for you apart from the grace of God.

Let me remind you of some of the areas where this church was a piece of work and needed work to change. Here are some of the areas Paul corrects beginning in 1 Corinthians 1:10. When Paul wrote 1 Corinthians:

- They were drifting from the centrality of the cross.
- There was major division in the church
- There was gross sexual immorality in the church that wasn't being disciplined

- They were a lawsuit happy church taking one another to court to settle their differences instead of getting the help they needed from the church
- They were using their bodies for sexual sin instead of glorifying God.
- They were using their liberty in Christ to lead people into sin.
- They misunderstood the roles of men and women in the church.
- Some were getting drunk at the Lord's supper
- Their spiritual gifts were annoying instead of helping people because they were not being used in love
- Some were denying the gospel by telling other people in the church that there is no resurrection from the dead.

Where would you begin in a letter to a church with all of those problems?

Honestly, I don't think anyone here tonight would begin where Paul begins. If we heard about all of the problems in this church verse 1 would probably be, "What in the world are you guys doing? Get your act together. Stop sinning. Knock it off you spiritual knuckleheads!" We would be tempted to start with truth. Paul does get to the truth in 1 Corinthians 1:10 all the way through chapter 16, **but Paul starts with grace.**

**Paul begins 1 Corinthians redirecting the focus of the church away from their sin back to their Savior.** Paul wants the church to see themselves the way God sees them in Christ. Perspective matters. How we think about the church matters. Do we see the local church the way God sees the church? Do we see ourselves in Christ positionally?

Here is where Paul begins and why Paul continually thanks God for them. Paul doesn't start with their practice, he starts with their position in Christ. That's why he can thank God for people in such need of change. **Before Paul corrects the church in Corinth Paul starts with a correct view of the church in Corinth.**

I want to begin reading 1 Corinthians 1:1-9 and then we will spend the majority of our time considering what Paul thanks God for in 1 Corinthians 1:4-9:

Notice how Paul starts this letter:

1 Corinthians 1:1-9:

- 1 Co 1:1 Paul, called by the will of God to be an apostle of Christ Jesus, and our brother Sosthenes,
- 2 To the church of God that is in Corinth, to those sanctified in Christ Jesus, called to be saints together with all those who in every place call upon the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, both their Lord and ours:
- 3 Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.
- 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—
- 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,
- 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.

Tonight I want you to see four ways Paul gives thanks for the church in Corinth as a model for our own gratitude in prayer. After Paul greets the church in the first three verses he gives thanks to God for them in verses 4-9. Greeting and then thanksgiving is how Paul starts this letter.

1 Corinthians 1:4-9 shows us four ways to improve the gratitude part of our prayer life:

1. Paul gives thanks for saving grace - 1 Corinthians 1:4
2. Paul gives thanks for serving grace - 1 Corinthians 1:5-7

3. Paul gives thanks for sustaining grace - 1 Corinthians 1:8
4. Paul gives grace for satisfying grace - 1 Corinthians 1:9

Look with me again at 1 Corinthians 1:4:

### 1. Paul gives thanks for saving grace - 1 Corinthians 1:4

Paul starts his prayer of thanksgiving with what is foundational to the Christian life. This is first base in the life of the believer. Paul reminds them what happened when they heard the gospel and turned from sin and trusted in Christ alone to save them. Remember we have said that Paul never skipped the basics in his prayers for believers. 1 Corinthians 1:4, “I give thanks to my God always for you because of the grace of God that was given you in Christ Jesus.”

When Paul wrote 1 Corinthians he was in Ephesus. It had been a few years since Paul was actually in Corinth with these people. He was gone physically but he still cared for these people. He tells them that he always prays for them. This church consistently showed up in his prayer list. Where does Paul begin in his prayers for this church? Gratitude. For what? The grace that God gave them. Where is that grace found? In one place. The grace of God is only found in Christ.

I sometimes think we are so used to the concept of grace that we forget how amazing grace really is. How often do we thank God for our salvation? How often do we thank God for someone else’s salvation? Paul never moved on from grace. Grace wasn’t something Paul ever got over. **He stayed amazed by grace in his own life.** He reminded Timothy in 1 Timothy 1:15 years after his conversion, “The saying is trustworthy and deserving of full acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am the foremost.”

Paul always included himself when he reminded churches about their spiritual condition before God saved them. He reminds Titus in Titus 3:3-5, “For we ourselves were once foolish, disobedient, led astray, slaves to various passions and pleasures, passing our days in malice and envy, hated by others and hating one another. But when the goodness and loving kindness of God our Savior appeared, he saved us.” Paul never got over the grace of the gospel and he never stopped thanking God for evidences of grace in his life or in the people he served.

I have found that the most mature saints are people who are astonished by God’s grace every day. They don’t move on from the gospel in their attempts to obey all that Christ commands. They know they do not deserve to be saved. They are a part of something they can’t earn and don’t deserve.

I said in one of these classes how thankful I am for God always putting more mature believers in my life to model faithfulness to Christ. I got to meet with an elder in a previous church for many years and I never met with him without him saying, “Blake, it’s good to be saved.” He kept telling me that over and over again.

He was a man who studied the deeper things of God routinely. He talked a lot about the sovereignty of God and the doctrine of election and predestination. He wasn’t afraid of wading out into deeper theological waters. But he always seemed to keep one foot in the shallow end of the pool of salvation. He never outgrew amazement over what He deserved from God and what God did for him in Christ as he attempted to wade out into deep doctrine.

What’s the point? If we struggle to be thankful in prayer, we can always start with salvation. Paul did. *Start with salvation and you can always be thankful.* Paul not only gave thanks for these people he told them he thanked God for them and why he gave thanks for them.

What else does Paul spend time thanking God for these people?

The next thing we see in 1 Corinthians 1:5-7 is:

## 2. Paul thanks God for Serving Grace - 1 Corinthians 1:5-7

### 1 Corinthians 1:5-7

- 5 that in every way you were enriched in him in all speech and all knowledge—
- 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,

You in all of these verses is talking about the entire church of God in Corinth. Paul's goal is to remind them that when God saved them He gave them everything they needed to know God and to please God. They were set up for spiritual success.

Notice the two words in verse 5 - In him. That Him is Christ. The One that we are saved by, the one in whom God's grace was given to us, is the One who gives the local church everything we need to serve Him. **All speech and all knowledge summarize gifts of grace.** Whatever we need to speak for Christ and whatever we need to know Christ is what God gives us through the gospel.

David Prior reminds us, "In giving us his Son Jesus, God has given us all he has; he can give us no more; we have everything in him."

John MacArthur reminds us, "In the present, the believer has everything the Lord has to give and therefore everything he needs. God provides believers with all the knowledge they need in order to speak effectively for Him."

**Verses 5-7 remind us that we are all saved to serve.** There are no benchwarmers in the body of Christ. We all have the same jersey, the

righteousness of Christ. We all have the same jersey, but we have different roles to play.

Here is something I have seen over the years - Churches that are amazed by the grace of the gospel and happily play the role the Lord has given them to play are a joy to be a part of. It is when we lose sight of the gospel and we are not content with our role in the body of Christ that the joy evaporates. We need to all be happy in Christ and content to serve in the role He has for us, even if it is not the one we want.

When I was young I played on a basketball team with my best friend at the time, Matt Moore. We were put on a team that was a little older than us. We played half court on 8 foot goals. Matt and I went through the entire season without scoring one basket. We never lost a game. We won the championship but when you make zero contribution it's kind of hard to celebrate.

We know this - We make zero contribution to our justification. Our right standing with God is entirely a result of God's grace through what Christ already did for us. Dr. Bookman likes to say that our salvation is rooted in actual historical events. Jesus has already lived for us and died for us and rose again for our salvation. We are saved because of what Jesus already did for us and not what we do for Him.

And yet, all who believe are to be zealous for good works (Titus 3:8). Paul reminds us in these verses that every believer and every church has been endowed with spiritual gifts to know Christ and to make Him known. 1 Peter 4:10-11, "10 As each has received a gift, use it to serve one another, as good stewards of God's varied grace: whoever speaks, as one who speaks oracles of God; whoever serves, as one who serves by the strength that God supplies—in order that in everything God may be glorified through Jesus Christ. To him belong glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen."



We are not all gifted to serve Christ the same way, but we are all gifted to serve Christ some way. There are speaking gifts and there are serving gifts. Both need to be used the way God tells us to use them for His glory.

Here is one thing you might find interesting - **Paul actually thanks God for gifting these believers with spiritual gifts that they weren't using the right way.** Paul thanks God for gifting people who were using their gifts for their own self promotion instead of the glory of Christ. The fact they had all the gifts was reason for thanksgiving and confirmed their salvation was real. Paul actually tells them he thanks God for giving them all the gifts they needed to serve him and then he circles back to this issue of spiritual gifts later in the letter in 1 Corinthians 12-14 and shows them how to actually use them the right way.

David Prior, "The church is thus fully endowed with all the gifts of God's grace. These need to be discovered, explained and appropriated."

What do we do when we see people in the body of Christ using their gifts to serve Christ? Thank God for them and tell them you are thankful for them. Don't wait to tell people you are thankful for them. Tell them now. Write them a letter. Send them an email. Stop them in the hall and thank them for how God is using them in your life. **We are told in Romans 12:10 to outdo one another in showing honor.**

I love to be a part of a local church where people identify evidences of grace in other people and then point it out. I agree with one pastor who wrote, "We will motivate others by grace when we perceive where and how He is at work in their lives and humbly let them know. They need to know because so often they're unaware. Too many Christians are more readily aware of the absence of God than they are of the presence of God, and they are more aware of sin than they are of grace. God is at work. We motivate others by grace when we help them to

see this, and one of the greatest joys we can experience is when we watch them come to that awareness.”

This is an area where we can all probably do a little better in our prayers. Spend time thanking God for how he is using other people in the church in your life to help you know Christ better. Thank God and then honor them by telling them how God is using them and how thankful you are for them. Then pray they will not become arrogant. Ha!

So far Paul has given thanks for what God had done in the past and what God was doing in the present. In verse 8, Paul looks ahead to an important future day. What he calls the day of our Lord Jesus Christ. Paul was confident that these believers who were saved and spiritually gifted would also be sustained by Christ.

In 1 Corinthians 1:8:

3. Paul gives thanks for sustaining grace - 1 Corinthians 1:8

1 Corinthians 1:8

**8** (Our Lord Jesus Christ from the end of verse 7) who will sustain you to the end, guiltless in the day of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Where is Paul's confidence for the future of the local church? His confidence was found in the chief shepherd. Christ in these people and Christ for these people was Paul's confidence they would make it all the way through until Christ returns. Richard Pratt writes, "Paul did not place his confidence in the church as the Corinthians did, but in the church's God."

Paul was confident Christ would sustain these people until He returns. Guiltless. Wow! How could Paul write this without a lie detector going off? Remember all of the things Paul is about to correct. How was Paul so confident Christ will sustain them to the end, guiltless?

Whose perspective is Paul using in the first 9 verses? Paul is seeing the church with what kind of glasses? Gospel glasses. He is looking at them through grace lenses. He is seeing this church in Christ from a divine perspective. This is God's perspective of the church. This is how God sees everyone united to Christ.

I know long quotes are hard to remember - especially after a long day. If you're interested in any of these lessons my notes will be on the church website under the prayers of Paul tab if you want to find them:

David Prior, "God's faithfulness extends to that day (the day of our Lord Jesus Christ), and beyond it into the fullness of eternity. He will keep his people guiltless in that day: i.e. when the secrets of men's hearts are disclosed and we might have had legitimate fear of being finally found guilty before him. God will ensure that absolutely no charge or accusation is laid against his people, whether by human beings or by Satan, the great 'accuser of the brethren'. On that day it will be plain to all that it is God who justifies, and that those whom he has justified he has also, in the selfsame act, glorified. It is Jesus who matters on that day; it is his day; he calls the tune; he determines the issues."

This is another thing we could spend time thanking God for. How Christ preserves His people. We can spend time thanking God for how Christ does this for us and how Christ does this for one another. We could read 1 Corinthians 1:8 again and make it our own in prayer. God, I can look back on my life since the time you saved me. I can see how you sustain me. Thank you Lord.

Jesus you say in John 10:27-30:

- 27 My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me.
- 28 I give them eternal life, and they will never perish, and no one will snatch them out of my hand.
- 29 My Father, who has given them to me, is greater than all, and no one is able to snatch them out of the Father's hand.
- 30 I and the Father are one."

Lord, thank you for allowing me to hear your voice calling out to me through Scripture summoning me to salvation. You have held me fast and you will hold me fast. Thank you Lord.

In 1 Corinthians 1:4 Paul gives thanks for saving grace

In 1 Corinthians 1:5-7 Paul gives thanks for serving grace

In 1 Corinthians 1:8 Paul gives thanks for sustaining grace

Finally, in 1 Corinthians 1:9:

4. Paul gives thanks for satisfying grace - 1 Corinthians 1:9

Where is true satisfaction found in the Christian life? What does God give us to enjoy between here and heaven? Between here and heaven God gives us the best gift of all to enjoy - **God gives us His promises and God makes us one with His Son.**

1 Corinthians 1:9 is an awesome verse.

God is faithful, by whom you were called into the fellowship of his Son, Jesus Christ our Lord.

This is still part of Paul's gratitude for grace. He's not done telling the church what he is thankful for. Paul ends the section with a reminder that he is thankful because their salvation is entirely dependent on the faithfulness of God. God is faithful means that God always keeps His Word. God cannot lie. God's faithfulness is the reason we are united to Christ. Paul circles back to this reminder again at the end of chapter 1. Look down at 1 Corinthians 1:30-31:

1 Corinthians 1:30-31

- 30 And because of him you are in Christ Jesus, who became to us wisdom  
from God, righteousness and sanctification and redemption,  
31 so that, as it is written, "Let the one who boasts, boast in the Lord."

What's the reason we are in Christ Jesus? Because of Him. David Prior reminds us, "If we have been called, on the initiative of God himself, to share in his Son, Jesus Christ, then God will not abandon us or go back on his promises. We can totally depend on God: he is not a man, he cannot deny himself, he will keep his word. **The church is his responsibility: he is committed to 'the perfecting of the saints.'**"

God's faithfulness is the reason we have fellowship with Christ. Union leading to communion with Christ. Derek Prime, "Behind God's calling of Christians is the glorious truth of his faithfulness (v. 9). It guarantees that what he has begun in our lives he will carry through to completion (Phil. 1:6; 1 Thes. 5:24). His faithfulness is a wonderful rock upon which to build and under which to shelter!"

I would add for the sake of this class - His faithfulness is a reason to be thankful. We should spend time in prayer thanking God that our salvation is His work. It was His plan. He has promised to never leave us or forsake us. He united us to Christ. Christ keeps us to the end. The church is God's idea, not ours. The One who drew up the plan executes it with absolute precision.

Let's think of prayer like a pizza - There are different pieces of a pizza and there are different kinds of prayer. Part of our prayers should include slices of thanksgiving. How can this prayer in 1 Corinthians 1:4-9 help us when it comes to doing a little better thanking God in our prayers.

We can spend time thanking God for saving grace

We can spend time thanking God for serving grace

We can spend time thanking God for sustaining grace

We can spend time thanking God for satisfying grace - union and communion with Christ all the way from here to heaven.

How could Paul be so confident that piece of work Bible church in Corinth would ultimately arrive in heaven and be with the Lord forever worshipping Him? Paul's confidence in this church flowed from a divine perspective of the church. When Paul thought about this church he saw the blemishes and he addresses the blemishes starting in 1 Corinthians 1:10. **Paul doesn't start with the blemishes - He starts with the beauty.**

Tonight as I pulled into the church parking lot I saw the beautiful sunset and the beautiful church building and I asked myself, "Blake, how do you see the local church? How do you see Cornerstone Bible Church?" If I see it with gospel glasses, through the lens of the grace of the gospel, I will always have something to thank God for this church. I am convinced that Paul's loyal affection for this church and his constant gratitude for this church years after he was there was motivated and sustained by a divine perspective of the church.

**The church is the beautiful bride of Christ because of who the church belongs to.** Several months ago I read a morning devotion by Charles Spurgeon. It was called a beautiful bride based on Song of Solomon 4:7, "You are altogether beautiful, my love."

Spurgeon writes, "The Lord's admiration for His Church is very wonderful, and His description of her beauty is very glowing. She is not merely beautiful, but "altogether beautiful." He views her in Himself, washed in His sin-atonement blood and clothed in His meritorious righteousness, and He considers her to be full of attraction and beauty. No wonder that this is the case, since it is simply His own perfect excellency that He admires; for the holiness, glory, and perfection of His Church are His own glorious garments worn by His well-beloved spouse.

She is not simply pure or well-proportioned; she is positively lovely and fair! She has actual merit! Her deformities of sin are removed; but more, she has through her Lord obtained a meritorious righteousness by which an actual beauty is conferred upon her. Believers have a positive righteousness given to them when “he chose us in him” (Eph. 1:4). Nor is the church barely lovely—she is superlatively so. She has a real worth and excellence that cannot be rivaled by all the nobility and royalty of the world.

If Jesus could exchange His elect bride for all the queens and empresses of earth, or even for the angels in heaven, He would not, for He puts her first and foremost! Like the moon she far outshines the stars. Nor is this an opinion that He is ashamed of, for He invites all men to hear it. He sets a “behold” before it, a special note of exclamation, inviting and arresting attention. “Behold, you are beautiful, my love, behold, you are beautiful!” (Song of Sol. 4:1). He publishes His opinion widely even now, and one day from the throne of His glory He will declare the truth of it before the assembled universe. “Come, you who are blessed by my Father” (Matt. 25:34) will be His solemn affirmation of the loveliness of His elect."

Here is what I don't believe - I don't believe that Song of Solomon is primarily about Christ and the church. It's about Solomon and the Shulammitte woman. But here is what I do believe and I will finish with this - **Solomon's love for the Shulammitte woman can't hold a candle to the love Jesus has for the church.** Solomon had 700 wives, Jesus has one bride. Solomon was unfaithful. Jesus is always faithful. Solomon's love eventually died out. Jesus' love for the church is from everlasting to everlasting. Jesus will never stop loving His bride so we must never stop loving His bride.

How do we keep loving the local church? Keep seeing her from God's perspective and keep thanking God for His grace. Let's pray.