

## 1 CORINTHIANS 1:4-9

### INTRODUCTION

In the opening words of this letter (v 2) Paul assured the believers in Corinth that they were sanctified and made holy by God. The implication of this fact is that the Corinthian believers must begin to live holy lives, they are holy therefore the outcome ought to be holy living. The main thrust of this letter is to exhort the believers in Corinth to live pure and holy lives.

In the first nine verses of this opening chapter Paul shows the Corinthians who they are in Christ. The rest of the letter is built on this wonderful foundation, you are holy therefore act holy, live a life consistent with who you are in Christ. Now in verses 4-9 Paul summarises the benefits of believing in Christ, of being made holy. The benefits have three dimensions.

Some are in the past given to us the moment we trusted Christ. Others are in the present worked out in us as we live our lives in Him. Still others are in the future to be experienced only when we go to be with him in heaven. In the past there is grace, in the present there are gifts and for the future there are guarantees. All of these benefits can be summed up in one word the word 'grace.' What we received when we trusted in Christ we receive in grace. What we receive in the present is received in grace and what we will receive in the future is received in grace.

### 1. PAST BENEFITS OF GRACE (vs. 4, 6)

The first benefit of being made holy through Christ is the grace of salvation. The words 'given' and 'confirmed' in the Greek are in the past tense, it indicates an action completed at a particular definite point of time. In the past every true believer received God's grace when he received Jesus Christ. Paul is thankful to God that these Corinthian believers have received Christ and therefore have received God's grace.

Paul's passion was to see people saved and his greatest joy was expressed to God for his salvation to sinners. The word 'grace' means undeserved favour or kindness. This grace is given freely to all that receive Christ, it is unmerited and is a gift from God to sinners and it comes to us through Christ. It cannot be repaid and we should never try to do so.

But in order to understand the grace of God further I want us to understand that grace cannot co-exist with certain things for the moment we try, it ceases to be grace.

For example the grace of God cannot coexist with guilt. Grace provides for the abatement of guilt. Therefore Christ's work on the cross means that he became guilty by taking our sin upon himself, he paid the price for our sin. Our sin has been dealt with in Christ and once God acts sovereignty to forgive us our sin through Christ then we are totally and forever free from guilt. We stand in grace; all guilt is removed and we can never return to that state of guilt and condemnation.

Grace is God's gift and completely deals with our guilt before God. If you are a Christian and still living with guilt then you must simply accept the reality of your forgiveness in Christ. There is a huge difference between feeling guilty and being guilty. Christ came to die for the guilty and God's grace in Christ removes guilt from his believing people.

We may feel guilty because of our sin and God might even discipline us because of it but we will never be guilty in the sense of being condemned for our sin. The feelings of guilt that sin leaves is not a mark of condemnation or rejection by God but it is a reminder to us, that we have sinned and it should also be a deterrent to further sin.

But God's grace cannot coexist with human obligation either. We can so easy feel that because God has been so good to us and has forgiven us that somehow or other we must try and pay him

back for his kindness. But God's grace is a free gift not a loan. Grace makes us totally indebted to God but because the cost is so great we cannot repay it and because his grace is so great we need not repay it.

In other words we are completely indebted to God but we have no debt. We cannot pay for our salvation before or after we are saved. Just think about it for a moment what have we got to pay Him with anyway? To offer God our love and devotion and obedience and service could not start paying the debt that we owe him for his gracious salvation.

What makes the message of salvation such good news is that we cannot pay for our salvation and we should not feel obliged to do so. Salvation comes to us by grace and it is God's grace that makes payment unnecessary. Of course we do owe God our love, devotion and service but when we understand grace these are expressions of our gratitude to God because all we have as Christians belongs to Him.

We do love him but we are only able to love him because he first loved us and sent his Son to die for us (1John 4:10). Therefore we owe him everything out of gratitude but we owe him nothing out of obligation.

Perhaps for some of us our service to Christ is done out of a sense of obligation out of a sense that we owe God so much and want to try and repay at least some of it. If that is why we serve Christ then our service is not acceptable. We have failed to understand the grace of God in our salvation.

For once we come to a clear understanding of God's grace then our hearts response will be one of love, devotion and service. But we will do so not because we feel obliged too but simply because we are grateful and thankful to God for all that he has done for us and given to us in Christ.

I trust that God will bring us to a clear understanding of the grace of God and as a result we will love and serve him with committed hearts because of our gratitude for all that he has done for us and in us through Christ.

## 2. PRESENT BENEFITS OF GRACE (vs. 5-7)

The first benefits of grace are received in the past when we receive God's salvation in Christ. However there are benefits that are also present a continual treasury of riches granted to us throughout our life on earth. In Christ we are continually enriched in every way (v 5). The key words in verse 5 are the words 'in Him' for these words qualify what is meant by 'in every way.' In other words we as a church are enriched in every way through the gracious giving of Christ.

He gives us everything that we need although often not everything we want.

He grants to his church all that we need to live life for him in our world, there is nothing that we are lacking to live godly and holy lives. Paul lists two things that the Corinthians received from Christ to show how they have been enriched. They have been enriched in all their speaking and in all their knowledge. God grants to his people all speech and all knowledge that is necessary to accomplish all that God wants his people to do.

The particular speech that Paul has in mind here is that of telling God's truth to the world. God gives to every believer the ability to speak for him. We may not have an impressive vocabulary or even a captivating personality but we all have the necessary God given ability to speak for him in the way that he wants us too. The church has no excuse for failing to witness about their Lord. Some might argue that they don't know what to say or how to say it or some may argue that they just can't do it but Paul assures them and us that we are enriched in every way necessary so that

we can speak for our Lord. In other words if we fail to witness about our Lord then we are failing to make use of the riches that we possess in Christ.

We are granted the riches by God's grace to speak for him but there are far too many Christians who fail to take advantage of these riches in Christ. If we are failing to witness about our Lord then the fault always lies on our side for God in Christ grants us all that we need to witness but the problem is often our lack of willingness to witness. We far too easily talk ourselves out of witnessing.

Sometimes such people allow fear to grip them and paralyse them but every one of us needs to realise that we have the riches needed to witness for our Lord whether it is out on the doors or in our homes or places of work. Some Christians can be very surprised to find out that they actually can witness of Christ yet none of us should be surprised for we have all the riches that we need to be able to speak clearly for our Lord.

But not only does the Lord provide us with the riches to speak for him but he also provides the riches to know all that is necessary. God does not expect us to witness of him in a vacuum he provides all the knowledge that is necessary to make our witness more effective. Now God does not give us the ability to know everything but Paul's point is that we are given all that we need to know to live effective Christian lives and to witness effectively for him.

God has granted to us his word and His Holy Spirit to interpret his word. We cannot know spiritual truth by natural abilities it takes God's gift of the Holy Spirit to open our eyes and to give us understand so that we can believe God's truth (1 Corinthians 2:14). But again our problem is our willingness to appropriate God's gifts to ourselves. We are more willing to do something else than spend time in His word and in prayer asking God to grant us understanding of his word.

It takes effort to be in attendance when God's word is expounded and it takes effort to concentrate and seek to understand and apply God's word when it is preached to us. Attending this service is no guarantee that your knowledge of Christ will increase, it needs you to be thinking about what you hear and it needs you to be applying it in your life with the aid of the Holy Spirit.

It is possible to attend this church and yet not even hear what is being said because we are allowing our minds to drift and our thoughts to run riot. It takes hard work to hear God's word. It takes a willing heart but none of us have any excuse for our lack of knowledge for God enriches us in Christ with all the knowledge that we need to know to live and witness for Him.

Paul now moves (v 7) from two specific rich gifts to gifts in general and he tells the church that they do not lack any gift that they need to live a full and faithful life for Christ. The words 'do not lack' is in the present tense therefore Paul is saying to the church at Corinth that you are not lacking any gifts now, God's grace to the church provides them with all the gifts they need to live as Christians in Corinth.

The church at Corinth was certainly lacking in moral purity and in spiritual maturity but it was not lacking in any spiritual gift. God has provided them with the same resources, as every other Christian church the problem was that the church at Corinth did not always seek to use God's grace gifts. But the church did not need to look for any thing further to enhance their Christian life and witness for God had provided every gift necessary and needed to live for him.

The church at Corinth needed to discover all that God in Christ has given to them and begin using those gifts in their own lives and in the life of the church. God's grace gifts to the church are adequate to enable the church to reach out to the world and to enable the church to be built up in their faith.

In later chapters Paul is going to deal with God's grace gifts more specifically but for now he wants the Corinthians to understand that they have all that they need to live as holy and pure Christians in the wicked and perverse city of Corinth.

Perhaps we think that the situation where God has placed us is a difficult one. It is not easy to be an effective witness and church in the Dales. Well we must remember that God has provided His church with every gift necessary to live for Him in whatever situation he has placed us in. We have no excuse for failing to live as we should in our situation, there is no excuse for apathy or ungodliness or for our failure to witness; God has provided all that we need in Christ to live for him in our community.

As a church we have every gift that we need to have in order to make progress as a church.

That does not mean that we all have the same gifts, we all have at least one gift and we all probably have many more than that. When every member of God's church uses his gifts within the church then the church will be built up and will grow and develop. However the problem comes when some in God's church fail to recognise their gift or fail to use it for the benefit of the church and for the glory of God then the church does not mature and grow, as it should.

So we all need to make sure we know our gifts and are using them in the church. Your gifts and my gifts are not for our own benefit but for the benefit of the church therefore make sure you are using your gifts within the church otherwise the church is being robbed of God given gifts and will be less effective than it should be. None of us have all the gifts necessary but collectively as a body of Christ we have all the gifts that we need to see God glorified through His church here in the Dales. We all have a responsibility to God and to His church to be actively involved in using the grace gifts that God has given to us. Our failure to do so makes the church less effective than it ought to be.

### 3. FUTURE BENEFITS OF GRACE (vs. 7-9)

Now I don't have time to explore this but God's grace not only provides past and present benefits but also future benefits. God has saved us by his grace; he presently empowers us with grace gifts and he guarantees the final fulfilment of his grace. For the Christian the best is yet to come. The Christian cannot help but look forward to the future.

We are grateful to God for his salvation and we seek under God to live holy lives using all the gifts God has granted to us but our greatest joy is looking forward to future grace. We should be waiting longing and hoping for the return of our Lord. God grants to his church the gifts that we need to live for him here on earth but as we use those gifts and seek to live a God honouring life our eyes should always be looking to the future (v 7).

We feel the pull of the world to come and we wait eagerly for our Lord Jesus to be revealed in all his glory. The Greek word translated 'eagerly wait' means to wait with eager anticipation and also with activity. This is not a passive waiting but it involves working while we wait it involves giving our all for God and his work while we wait for Jesus Christ to be revealed. As a church we have all the gifts that we need to live for Him while we wait for his return.

But the question is will we make it? Will we get to our heavenly home in the end? Well God's grace is such that not only do we need grace to save us and grace to help us live in the present but also we will have grace for the future. God in his grace will keep his church strong to the end. On that day when the Lord returns we will be blameless. It's not that we are blameless in Christ now and then just before the Lord returns something will be found against us.

No we are in Christ therefore we possess his righteousness and we always will be found blameless. Therefore we have no need to worry about our future if we belong to Christ. God's grace is adequate for saving us and keeping us and taking us to our heavenly home. The reason why we can be sure of our future is because it does not depend on us but on our faithful God (v 9).

The emphasis on the final verse is on the word faithfulness. It literally reads "Faithful is God." He has called us into union with Christ into fellowship with his Son and he is faithful in keeping us in that union and bringing the full benefits of that union to us in the future.

So we need God's grace for every aspect of our Christian life. We can be sure that if he has saved us by his grace he will keep us and empower us by that same grace. That same grace will take us to heaven and will grant to us all the blessings and privileges that await us.

In the meantime let us continue to use the grace gifts that he has given to us to live for him as we await with eager expectation the revelation of the Lord Jesus Christ God's Son and our Saviour.

Amen



## 1 CORINTHIANS 1:1-3

### INTRODUCTION

Today Corinth is a relatively small town with little significance other than historical but in the New Testament times during the times of the Apostles it was a thriving prosperous and key city. Greece is divided geographically into two small parts. The southern part is attached to the northern part by a very narrow four-mile wide piece of land. On the western side was the Gulf of Corinth and on the eastern side was the Saronic Gulf.

In the middle of the piece of land to the south is the city of Corinth. In bible times all northern and southern overland traffic including that to and from Athens had to pass through Corinth. Corinth also became a major port and therefore economically Corinth was a thriving city.

Corinth was also a very immoral city so much so that there was a saying in Greek that if you lived an immoral life you behaved 'like a Corinthian.' The name of the city became synonymous with moral depravity just like the name Soho today. In this letter to the church at Corinth Paul lists some of the city's characteristic sins – fornication, idolatry adultery, homosexuality, stealing, covetousness, drunkenness, abusive language and swindling (6:9-10). Some of the Corinthian believers had been guilty of practising those sins before they were converted to Christ (6:11). Others in the church however were still living immorally, some were involved in sins worse than those already mentioned, sins that even pagan Gentiles did not commit such as incest (5:1).

### 1. THE FOUNDING OF THE CHURCH AT CORINTH

Paul first came to Corinth on his second missionary journey. He had been preaching and working in Greek cities for some time. He had been to Philippi, Thessalonica, Berea, Athens and now Corinth (Acts 16:11-18:1) Upon arriving at Corinth he met Aquila and Priscilla, Jews who had been driven out of Rome and who were like himself tentmakers.

He stayed with them for a while and began to preach regularly in the synagogue every Sabbath and when Silas and Timothy joined him from Macedonia his preaching intensified. He faced much opposition to the gospel but he also saw many Corinthians including a number of Jews come to faith in Christ. Even Crispus the leader of the synagogue along with his household trusted in the Lord Jesus (Acts 18:18). Paul continued to minister in Corinth for a year and a half (Acts 18:11), Jewish opposition became so strong that he was brought before a Roman tribunal. Since the charges were purely religious Gallio the proconsul refused to hear the case. After staying a little longer Paul left Corinth with Priscilla and Aquila and went to Ephesus (Acts 18:12-22).

As I said the church at Corinth was full of problems many of a serious nature. Their main problem however was their inability to detach themselves from the wicked and evil ways of the society in which they lived. They did not understand and probably did not want to understand the principle 'not to love the world nor the things in the world' (1 John 2:15).

Paul had written to the church before, a letter that we do not possess but in it he had warned them not to associate with immoral people (5:9). Some of the Christians thought that Paul meant not to associate with the unbelieving immoral people but actually he was talking about those who professed faith who refused to give up or perhaps had fallen back into the debased lifestyle of Corinth (5:9-11).

Like believers in every generation, the Corinthian Christians had great trouble in not copying the unbelieving and corrupt society around them. It seems that many of the Christians at Corinth wanted to be in the church but in the world at the same time, they wanted the blessing of being in

Christ and the pleasures of being in the world. They wanted what they thought was the best of both worlds but Paul clearly writes this letter to warn them that this is impossible.

You are either in Christ and in the church or in the world you cannot have both and both don't mix. Yet the amazing thing about this book is that God had planted his church in such a hostile, pagan and immoral place. He had granted them all the spiritual resources necessary (1:5-7) to live holy and godly lives in such a city. Paul knew this church had great potential to make a real impact in such an immoral city.

He had every confidence in the gospel and Paul longed that the church might start to fulfil its potential and use its spiritual resources to make an impact for God in this wicked city. It is for this reason that Paul writes to the church to try and resolve the many difficulties and problems that were making the church ineffective.

Every church is a miracle of God and a mark of God's grace. God establishes his church in cities and towns and villages for a purpose. He equips his people with all the spiritual resources needed to live for him in this wicked and godless world. The church must always use its spiritual resources to resist the temptation to live like the ungodly world in which we are placed and to live holy and godly lives.

We are placed in Leyburn and in the Dales not to be like the people in the Dales but to be unlike them, we are called to be holy and godly and not worldly. Every church and every Christian must battle against the pull of this wicked world. It is attractive, its pull is very strong but God has planted us in the Dales to live for Him to be godly and to be like Christ and he has given us all the resources that we need.

So let's ask God to help us by his Spirit to resist the pull of the world and to grow in grace and in the knowledge of the Lord Jesus Christ. Now let's look at this church at Corinth a little more closely.

## 2. THE CALLING OF THE CHURCH

Paul introduces himself to his readers and lays down his credentials to speak on the various issues that are raised in this letter. He is God's apostle called by God for this task. He has not chosen to be an apostle God has chosen him and he is being obedient to the will of God for his life. He also introduces us to Sosthenes who is probably Paul's scribe who is writing the actual words dictated by Paul. This is probably the same Sosthenes mentioned in Acts 18.

He was a leader of the synagogue at Corinth probably replacing Crispus. On one occasion Sosthenes was beaten probably by the Jews for his unsuccessful involvement in bringing Paul before the civil court at Corinth (Acts 18:12-17). However now Paul calls him "our brother" indicating that some time after this incident in Acts 18 he became a follower of Jesus and companion of Paul's.

After his brief introduction Paul reminds the church of their calling.

**a) Called to be the church of God in a specific place** - If Paul is called to be an apostle the church is called to be the church of God in Corinth. Now the church was first and foremost called by God to be the church of God. The church is not a man made institution but it is a God ordained body of believing people. The church does not belong to any person or group of people but to God alone. Wensleydale Evangelical church is not 'my' church or 'your' church or even 'our' church it is God's church. But God places his church in specific places. He has placed this church we are looking at in Corinth. He has placed us in Wensleydale. The people were to serve God in Corinth and we are to serve God in Wensleydale. This also teaches us that the church is people and not the building.

We so often use the word 'church' to talk about the building "look at that church over there." But the Bible never refers to churches as buildings, in fact the early church met in homes they had no buildings. So we must understand that when we talk about church we are talking about God's saved people who meet in any location.

I sometime wonder if our notice board outside should say 'Wensleydale Evangelical church meets here' in order to show clearly the distinction between the building and the believing people who meet in this building. So we are called to be the church of God and the question it raises is this; do our lives reflect that truth? We are called to be God's church in Wensleydale does our commitment to this area show that fact?

I have met many believing people who have no commitment to any specific place. They float about all over the place attending one church and then another but God calls people to be his church in specific locations. I don't mind Christians going to other churches as long as those same Christians are first and foremost committed to their own local evangelical church. Why is it that we have so many Christian people who are not in membership in any local church?

The key reason I think is that they are not committed to the principle of local churches. They want to be free to float about to go and hear this preacher or that preacher but God calls His people to be His church in a certain locality.

**b) Called to be Holy** - So the church is called to be God's church in Corinth. But the church is called to be sanctified in Christ Jesus and called to be holy. The word holy in Greek means to be 'set apart' so the Corinthian believers were holy 'set apart' in God's eyes regardless of their sinful behaviour and distorted doctrine. They were holy because they had been 'sanctified' the word means 'set apart from sin' they have been made holy.

They are not holy because they are living holy lives sadly the church were living unholy lives but they were Holy because God set them apart in Christ Jesus. Jesus gave himself on the cross for these people and saved them from sin and gave to them His own righteousness. Therefore Jesus Christ set them apart for himself he forgave them their sin and he granted to them his Holy Spirit.

So every one of us if we are believers in the Lord Jesus is holy people, we are as holy as the apostle Paul because you have been sanctified in Christ Jesus. So in the sense that the word Holiness is being used here i.e. as one's position before God every believer is as holy as they can be, holy not because they live holy lives but because they have been made holy and called to be holy in Christ Jesus.

Therefore holiness is a position from which we ought to live holy lives. God has made us holy in Christ Jesus he has called us to holiness therefore the implication of such a calling is that we ought to live holy lives. We need to emphasise this and make it absolutely clear that living holy lives comes as a result of being made holy in Christ Jesus. Living holy lives does not and cannot make one holy.

So what this means in practise is that as Christians our daily sins do not affect our position in Christ Jesus. We are still holy set apart by Christ Jesus. Let me illustrate it like this. There is nothing that any of our children can do that will change their position in our family. They are our children no matter what happens. However what they do can affect their relationship with us and vice visa. They will always be our children but how they live etc. will affect our relationship with them.

If a child decides to stop speaking to his Father his decision does not affect his position in the family; he is still related to his Father but it obviously affects his relationship. So it is with God. He

sees us as holy because we are called to be holy and sanctified in Christ Jesus. That is a fact and nothing can change that fact. We are brought into a relationship with him as a result so that He is our Father.

But if we constantly continue in sin then although we are holy in Christ Jesus the relationship we have with our Father will be affected. We will not experience all the blessings that being made holy bring to us because we will miss out on real and meaningful communion with a Holy God. We might even experience the disciplining hand of our Father but none of that affects the fact that we are made holy in Christ Jesus but it does affect our relationship with the one who has called us to be holy and has made us holy in Christ Jesus.

Of course this great truth does not give us a license to sin. It ought to be a motivation to live a Holy life. We have a Father who has made us holy. We have a Saviour who has died for us and has borne our sin and dies in our place. We have been granted Christ's righteousness therefore we ought to have a desire within us to live worthy of our calling.

One of the greatest motivations for Christians to live holy lives is to remind ourselves constantly about our position before God. Look at what he has done for us in Christ. That I would suggest to you should be our greatest deterrent to sin. It ought to be our greatest motivation and reason for seeking under God and by his grace to live worthy of our calling.

Finally Paul seeks to increase the Corinthians sense of responsibility by reminding them that they are linked in spiritual life to all other believers. The Corinthians were not the only ones who were called to be holy. Everyone no matter where they live who have called upon the name of the Lord for salvation share the same Saviour that the Corinthians have; they too have been called to be holy and have been sanctified through Jesus Christ. Paul wants the Corinthians to see that they are part and parcel of a larger body of believers. They are not a mere autonomous people who can live without regard to the other members of the body of Christ.

They have a responsibility to live holy lives not just because they are holy but because they belong to a much larger body and what they do and how they live affect God's church elsewhere. Now this is a truth that needs to be rediscovered again in our own individualistic world. How we live as Christian people not only affects this church but also God's church everywhere.

How many times have you heard people say I knew someone who was a Christian and you should have seen how they lived? That person's experience of another Christian affects their perception of you. It can equally be true of churches. We have lots of true Christians who are refusing to be members of a local church because of some previous bad experience.

That by the way is no excuse for their failure to be in membership but it highlights the fact that all Christians are called to be holy and must seek under God to live holy lives because our lives have a much wider effect.

This can also be the case in local churches. We think our behaviour affects no one but ourselves. But our behaviour affects every person in this church. If you are careless about the things of God; this will affect others in the church. If you never or rarely turn up at the key meetings of the church then that will soon be noticed by others and before we know it they too will be missing from those meetings.

You see none of us are an island to ourselves we all belong to one another and our behaviour affects one another not just in this local church but in all the family of God. We are responsible to others and we need to see this for our society tells us we are responsible only to ourselves. That is not true when it comes to the church. We are not at church today I trust simply for ourselves.

We are here I trust because we have a responsibility to be here for the benefit of the wider church. Every time we are missing from those key meetings of the church we are robbing our brothers and sisters of our fellowship. So I trust we can see that we are all responsible to one another, therefore we must seek to live holy lives because we are holy and are united to all others who have been called to be holy in Christ Jesus.

Therefore: "Grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ" (v 3).

Amen

