

1 Corinthians 1:4-9

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[0 : 0 0] We're going to be looking at 1 Corinthians 1, 4-9, that reading. And with verses 4-9, we have arrived at a prayer.

As Dave mentioned last week, Paul's letters follow first century convention in writing. So after the prescript would typically come a prayer to the gods wishing health upon the recipient of the letter.

And with Paul's letters, and we can actually see this by looking across the letters, we get a prayer. But it's a prayer of thanksgiving to God for the church.

And I think it's a way for Paul to establish that his relationship with that recipient is actually connected to his and to their relationship with God.

So this prayer here at the beginning is no mere formality. It's actually quite important. And as with most of the letters, it also begins to foreshadow a lot of what Paul knows he must argue in the rest of the letter.

[1 : 0 4] So I want to make a couple of observations here about this prayer. I want to look particularly first at Paul's gratefulness.

Notice in verse 4 how he actually starts. I give thanks to my God always for you. I think this is actually encouraging because Paul actually knows them.

I mean, you remember a couple weeks ago we were looking at Acts 18, the sort of history and where it begins with Corinth. Paul left Athens sometime in late 50 AD, walks the 50 miles to Corinth and sets up shop.

It's a labor of love, I think. Full days of tent making with a robust preaching ministry. He's a good friend. You know, many converts. Many people presumably disciplined by Paul personally.

He spends time with his closest friends and allies in the gospel, Priscilla and Aquila. And he ends up at the end spending a year and a half there. It's the second longest he spends anywhere.

[2 : 1 5] And so he knows them. He's spent time with them. He's eaten in their homes. He's, you know, had all those little awkward moments and all of those little frustrations that come with being that intimate with a group of people.

And yet, he's still thankful for them. This isn't like the Thessalonian correspondence where he only spent a couple weeks with them or the Roman correspondence where he actually didn't plant the church and, as far as we can tell, never really visited them until he was going to jail.

This is a group of people he knows and that know him. And he's still thankful for them. But let's go a step further. Because he left there after a year and a half, so a few years have also passed.

What do we know about their relationship in between? Well, we learn later in 1 Corinthians, in chapter 5, that he's actually already written a letter to them. A letter in which he corrects some of their behaviors.

What else? What else do they know when they receive this letter? Well, they actually know what things are going like in Corinth because they're there. They're receiving this letter.

[3 : 26] So they know three things when they receive this letter. First, Paul knows them. Second, Paul's already written to them. And three, things are going well.

No, things aren't going that well here. So that's what they know when they receive this letter. They open it up. They take the envelope. They pop it open. They pull out the parchment. And they start reading. And I think there's a note of encouragement here.

I think they must have been a little bit surprised even. In fact, I think they might have been a little relieved. Because there's this sense of, whew, at least he's still grateful for us.

But it's not just gratefulness. And I think that's what really brings us to the heart of this prayer. It's not just gratefulness. It's confidence. He's confident.

Look at it there, how he keeps going. I give thanks to my God always for you because of the grace of God that was given you in Christ Jesus.

[4 : 29] That in every way you are enriched in him in all speech and knowledge. Even as the testimony about God, excuse me, about Christ was confirmed among you. So that you are not lacking in any spiritual gift.

I think there's a subtle nuance here that's quite important. It's not like when he writes to the Colossians or the Romans and he's thankful for their faith. Or when he writes to the Philippians and he's thankful for their partnership.

He's thankful to God for the Corinthian church. Not because of something the Corinthian church has done or said. And I think this is important because it establishes a little bit of a tension that we're going to get to in a moment.

But it's not just confident in God's grace to them. It's very specific, isn't it? He's grateful for their giftedness.

And he actually mentions two specific gifts. Speech and knowledge. Logos and gnosis. Two very important concepts. If you have a church in the middle of a pagan world that values highly Greek philosophical concepts.

[5 : 40] They also lack no gift. So it's not just those two gifts. They actually have all the gifts they need. And they already have them.

I think that's really probably the important thing here. They already have them. They're not waiting for them to show up still. But is it giftedness that they need? And this is where we get to the tension.

Because there's still something of an open promise here, isn't there? Look at verses 8 and 9. So wait for the revealing of our Lord Jesus Christ in verse 7.

Who will sustain you to the end, guiltless in the day of our Lord Jesus Christ. God is faithful by whom you were called into the fellowship of his son, Jesus Christ our Lord. Do you see the tension there?

They've got all giftedness. And if the prayer had ended at that moment, it would leave this kind of impression that, hey, they've arrived. They're at maturity even. They've got everything they need.

[6 : 41] But Paul goes on. They actually still lack something, don't they? Despite having all kinds of giftedness, they have not arrived at full maturity.

It's not additional knowledge or speech or gifts that they need. But they do need something. What is it? Well, it's that they will endure.

That's where his confidence is. And I don't think it's any accident that Jesus Christ is mentioned nine times in these first nine verses of the letter. It's endurance that's found in Jesus Christ as the gift of God.

It's endurance to the end that they might still be found guiltless. Which, despite all their giftedness, is something of a question at this point.

Will they be found guiltless? But Paul's confident they will. God is faithful by whom you were called into the fellowship of his son, Jesus Christ our Lord. That's verse nine.

[7 : 43] As they were called to be saints back in verse two. Here they are now, called into partnership in Christ Jesus. So let me conclude here with a couple of applications for us.

Ours is a culture that values gifts. Especially here in Hyde Park, right? We spend our whole lives working toward that next promotion. That next A.

That next award. That next fellowship. That next thing that brings us some recognition. We get into a mindset where it's our talent that actually pushes us forward.

It's our talent that actually gives us value in this world. And we begin to confuse giftedness with what we're actually called to. Partnership in Christ Jesus.

Giftedness does not equal calling. It does not equal being found guiltless in the day of our Lord Jesus Christ. That's not to say we shouldn't cherish our gifts.

[8 : 48] And recognize them as gifts. I mean, how does Paul start? He's thankful for their giftedness. And as we're learning in Ephesians, we absolutely should be using every ounce of giftedness to build up this church.

But giftedness is actually not the thing we're called to. It's the thing given to us by God. But it's not the thing we're called to. He's called us to be saints together.

A grateful, loving people in community with one another. It's not our talent, but Christ. That's the object of our calling.

Secondly, I think Paul here is something of a model for us. I'm still stuck on he knows them.

They know him. And yet he's still grateful. So if we are, despite all our giftedness, if we recognize we are still growing, if we recognize we still haven't arrived, if we're on a trajectory toward full Christian maturity to be found guiltless in the day of our Lord, then it affects how we treat one another.

[10 : 04] It's so easy when you know somebody well to get stuck on their flaws, to get aggravated by them, to get frustrated with them.

Life together is hard. And yet Paul, I think, does something for us. He shows us something, something we ought to do. Begin with gratefulness.

See the person how God sees them, the recipient of grace, who will be found guiltless in the day of our Lord. It's so easy to lose patience and to lose sight.

But may we be more like Paul and our brothers and sisters in Christ and see them as fellow heirs of grace. Let me pray. Heavenly Father, we are so grateful to you for the grace you've given us.

that you sent your son down to us, that he lived with us, and yet he sees beyond all our giftedness, and he sees beyond all our flaws, and loves us.

[11 : 13] Loves us so much that he would give his life for us. And we thank you that he rose again. Because of that, we have a hope of being found guiltless in the day when he returns.

We pray these things in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Amen. Amen.