

# Resurrection in 1 Corinthians 15 (3) - The Grace of God

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Preacher: Rev James Maciver

[ 0 : 00 ] Can I ask you now please to turn with me to 1 Corinthians chapter 15, just continuing through from where we finished last time.

1 Corinthians chapter 15, and we're looking at verses 9 to 11, but we can read from verse 3. For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received, that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the Scriptures, that He was buried, that He was raised on the third day in accordance with the Scriptures, and that He appeared to Cephas, then to the twelve.

Then He appeared to more than five hundred brothers at one time, most of whom are still alive, though some have fallen asleep. Then He appeared to James, then to all the apostles.

Last of all, as to one untimely born, He appeared also to me. For I am the least of the apostles, unworthy to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God.

But by the grace of God I am what I am, and His grace towards me was not in vain. On the contrary, I worked harder than any of them, though it was not I but the grace of God that is with me.

[ 1 : 18 ] Whether then it was I or they, so we preach, and so you believed. Now, the early part of the chapter, you may recall that we looked at verses one and two, which we entitled to the gospel.

That's really what he's dealing with there. And then verses three to eight, the core of the gospel, where we find these four points that we mentioned last time and took us our headings from verse three to eight, that this gospel, the core of it being, as mentioned there, Christ dying for our sins. Then he was buried. Thirdly, he was raised on the third day, and then he appeared after his resurrection to those folks that are mentioned there. And tonight we're looking at essentially what he says in verse 10, the grace of God.

The grace of God is the main theme of what we're going to look at from these verses. And God's grace, as you know, is so frequently mentioned by the Apostle Paul in his letters.

In fact, if you look through his letters, you'll find the word grace appearing over 80 times in the letters of Paul. Grace of God to him was central not only to his own experience, because this really is his own experience that he's dealing with here.

[ 2 : 36 ] It's his personal testimony. He's talking here in personal terms and setting out the grace of God from his own experience. But that grace of God, by which he came to be an apostle, by which he came to be a Christian, first of all, is that which now is fundamental to the message of the gospel that he preaches.

God took him from being a persecutor, an opponent of the gospel, as he mentions here, to being turned right around to be a proclaimer of the gospel and an apostle of Jesus Christ.

Now, we can say that grace essentially means, if we want to really define it in just a few words, which is difficult, but grace, the grace that Paul speaks of, the grace the Bible teaches is the grace of God, we could say is God's undeserved favor to us.

God's undeserved favor, his goodwill, his favor, undeserved on our part, and nevertheless bestowed by him to the extent that his people especially come to be saved by the grace of God. That really, the question then arises, well, what is meant by the grace of God? How can you see the grace of God at work? Where can you detect the grace of God or see the meaning of grace in the lives of his people, other than just what you read about on the pages of Scripture, which, of course, is our starting point, as it always must be?

[ 4 : 10 ] There's God's undeserved favor. Well, you can see it in two things especially that I'm going to mention tonight. First of all, it's grace to the unworthy. It's grace to the unworthy.

It's God's undeserved favor to unworthy sinners. And Paul mentions himself here as unworthy of the grace of God because he especially mentions that he was, in fact, not just an opponent, but a persecutor of the church of God.

Not worthy to be called an apostle. Not worthy of the grace of God that made me an apostle because I persecuted the church of God. And that, in principle, applies to everyone who comes to know the grace of God savingly.

We come in response to that, in the knowledge that God gives us from that, to say, as Paul did here, I was utterly unworthy of this grace that I received.

And as you look at it as grace to the unworthy, you begin then to see something of the nature and the wonder and the luster of that grace. And then you can follow that through in so many of the passages of Paul's writings especially.

[ 5 : 23 ] We're going to mention a couple of them later in Ephesians, especially Ephesians 1, Ephesians 2. But it's grace to the unworthy. And secondly, the second main point we're going to raise and try and open up is that grace is... The grace that brings salvation or has brought salvation.

And I'm using that as a definition from 1 Timothy... From Titus, rather, chapter 2 and verse 11, which is how Paul describes this grace of God there.

The grace that brings salvation. Chapter 2, verse 11 of Titus. Where you find him saying there... Sorry, chapter 2, verses 8 to 9.

Where you find the very same thing spoken of here as the grace that brings salvation. Chapter 11... Sorry, Titus chapter 1, verse 11.

The grace that brings salvation has appeared to all people. And then he goes on to speak about that grace. It's training us to renounce ungodliness and worldly passions and so on.

[ 6 : 32 ] But it's the grace that has appeared bringing salvation. It's a grace that has carried salvation with its working, if you like, so that it comes to actually result in the conversion and salvation of those whom God has taken into the benefits of His grace.

Oh, it's grace to the unworthy. Now, you notice how Paul here speaks of himself. He's mentioned the apostles there. And then he speaks of himself as an apostle born in one untimely born.

Jesus also appeared to me. Apostles, of course, were originally the twelve apostles. And to be an apostle, one of the requirements of an apostle was that he was appointed.

They were appointed by Jesus. But they were also eyewitnesses of the risen Jesus. They needed to be eyewitnesses of Christ risen from the dead. And that's why he mentions, one of the reasons he mentions in these verses, that these people actually came to meet with Jesus or he met with them.

He mentions there Cephas, five hundred all at once, James, and then he mentions himself. So, the requirement was you needed to see or be witness to the risen Christ and have met the risen Christ or seen him for yourself.

[ 7 : 53 ] And Paul is saying, I was actually after the rest. I didn't belong to that initial wave of apostles or disciples. I came later. I was, as he puts it here, as one who was untimely born.

It really means one who came into apostleships well after the rest. They had already become apostles. They had gone out with the gospel. And he's saying, I was opposed to that gospel.

I was a persecutor of the church in which they were apostles by Christ's appointment. Apostles by being witnesses of Christ's resurrection. He had met with them, as it says there. But I did too.

And he wants to demonstrate that strongly in his letter to the Corinthians and indeed somewhere in other parts of his letters as well. Because for one thing, in Corinth, his credentials as an apostle were challenged.

There was a group of people in Corinth or surrounding areas there that did not accept his apostleship. Did not accept his apostolic authority.

[ 9 : 00 ] Questioned his apostleship. And therefore questioned his right to teach as the other apostles taught. And that's why in 2 Corinthians chapters 10 and 11 are pretty much taken up with Paul's defense of his apostleship.

And in chapter 9 of 1 Corinthians, you'll find him doing similarly as well. So he needed to defend his apostleship, defend the fact that he had indeed come to be appointed an apostle by Christ, by meeting with the living Christ.

And of course, you know that he met with the living Christ on the way to Damascus. On the way to, as he had it in mind, create further havoc in the church. But then Jesus met him.

Jesus took hold of his life. Jesus took him, as he says in Philippians, into his custody. And having taken hold of him, having apprehended him, having taken him into his custody, having arrested him, if you like, to use the same terminology, then Paul's life took an entirely different and new direction. He became an apostle, a witness, a preacher of the gospel that he once despised. And so that's what he's now setting out as the background to his apostleship as he comes to speak of it to the Corinthians.

[ 10 : 25 ] But then he says, I was unworthy to be called an apostle because I persecuted the church of God. And although this is specific to him as an apostle, there is nobody in here tonight who has come to know the Lord that will actually quibble with this in principle that you are unworthy of it.

If you've come to know yourself as a lost sinner, and you've come to know the Lord as your Savior, the one thing you will be persuaded of is that you are entirely unworthy of the grace that he showed to you.

Entirely unworthy of his salvation, of his taking hold of your life, of changing you, however you want to look at it, this is what it amounts to. I am unworthy to be called a Christian, unworthy to be taken into salvation by this Jesus.

Because I too despised him. I rejected his teaching. I didn't want to actually have him reign over my life. I didn't want to yield my life, my heart to him.

And not only must we confess that we are undeserving of his grace, you have to go further than that. Because the Bible takes us further than that.

[ 11 : 39 ] Not just to say, I'm unworthy of the least of your mercies, Lord. You have to go and say, I am actually worthy of being cast away from you forever. If you've come to know yourself as a sinner, and know something of the nature of sin, the nature of your heart, what is actually in your heart, what is true of you as a sinner, even if it's just to a little extent, you can see in that the evil of sin, the horrible thing that sin is, the antagonism that there is in sin to God.

And therefore, how worthy it would be of him to condemn you and I forever. But that's not what happened. I'm not worthy to be called an apostle.

I'm not worthy of salvation. I'm not worthy to be taken into discipleship of Christ, to be a follower of Christ. In fact, I'm not just undeserving, but I'm ill-deserving.

Deserving of the opposite of what grace has brought into my life. You see, if we think for a moment that there's something in our lives that has earned the grace of God, that has deserved the grace of God, then we've really redefined grace.

Because grace is only grace because it's grace to the unworthy. It's grace to those who are unworthy of the least of it and worthy of all its opposite in God's condemnation.

[ 13 : 14 ] And that's why Paul so frequently in his teaching emphasizes for these Christians, these churches that he went to teach, that he went from place to place to actually bring the gospel to them and then teach them in the gospel like the Corinthians.

That's why you so often find him putting together side by side, as contrast, grace and works. The grace of God, the free grace of God, and the works that we ourselves can do, the works of the law, the works of the flesh, whatever way you tend to call it, it's our own work, it's our own DIY form of salvation.

Paul is saying, that's impossible. That's what attracts God's condemnation because we are not able to match or to meet the demands or the standard of God.

It's all of grace. And the one thing that's sure about grace, the grace which saves, the grace which comes from God to the unworthy, is that it makes you humble.

If we know that people, as we pray and hope, are saved through our preaching, if we know that God's people are to some extent at least built up in their faith, in their following of Christ, through our preaching of the gospel, does that make us proud?

[ 14 : 45 ] Does that make us feel proud? Does that make us want to boast? Well, it might within ourselves, but that's not how it should be, of course. That doesn't make us feel proud.

If I've got any sense of grace at all, and I see that that's what God uses me for, there is nothing more humbling than knowing that God uses such a person as an unworthy sinner to bring benefit to other people.

Grace humbles. Grace humbles you in the presence of God because through grace you come to realize you're not worthy of the grace you receive, that you're unworthy of anything that grace carries into your experience.

So grace is grace to the unworthy. But secondly, it's grace bringing salvation, as we quoted from Titus 2, verse 11. And there are three things in terms of grace bringing salvation.

Just use that as our summary point, if you like, but follow through in what Paul is saying here about himself. By the grace of God, I am what I am.

[15:59] By the grace of God, I am what I am. I'm no longer what I was as a persecutor, as an unworthy sinner before God. I received grace. And what I am now, I have been made so.

I am so by His grace, by what His grace has wrought. So what's the nature of this grace? If it's grace to the unworthy, if it's grace bringing salvation, what does this grace actually look like?

What does it contain? What is it about? Let's see three things about it. It's first of all, God's love in Christ. This undeserved favor of God is God's love in Christ for His people, toward His people.

That's fundamental to the meaning of God's grace, that it is God's love in action, that it is God's love in Christ. It's foundational to our redemption.

It's God's love to the unlovely, to the undeserving, and the unlovely as well. Now let me just point you to Ephesians for a moment. If you turn with me, we're going to look at a couple of passages here for our next few minutes.

[17:08] Ephesians chapter 2 and verses 4 to 8. We'll come back to the early part of chapter 2 in a minute.

But in verses 4 to 8 of Ephesians 2, look at what he's saying here. But God being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which He loved us, even when we were dead in our trespasses, He made us alive, or He quickened us.

He brought us to life together in union with Christ. By grace you have been saved. You see what that is saying? The grace that you see, the grace that has saved the apostle and saves God's people, the grace by which we have been quickened and saved, is a grace that's emanated from the love of God.

It's God's love in Christ to His people. And then Ephesians chapter 1, look at verses 3 to 6. That great statement, Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in Christ, you see, in Christ, with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places, even as He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before Him.

In love He predestined us for adoption through Jesus Christ, according to the purpose of His will, to the praise of His glorious grace, with which He has blessed us in the Beloved.

[18:42] What a combination of terms. He's saying it's the love of God that has come to provide salvation for us. It's the love of God, the grace of God, that has come to embrace us, and indeed not only embrace us, but in Christ has loved us from all eternity, he's saying about God's people.

And it's not only in Christ, but He calls Him in the Beloved. You know, as a Christian tonight, if you're a Christian, if you're in Christ, if you know the Lord, if He's your Savior, here's a most wonderful and beautiful emphasis.

He has loved you in the Beloved. He has loved you in the Son of His love. He has loved you not for what you were, not for what He saw you, not for what He saw you would come to be, but for His sake.

He has loved you by His grace, in His grace. He has loved you freely. He has loved you as one who is undeserving of it. He has loved you in the Beloved.

And because He is the Beloved, it has pleased God the Father to love His people in Him, to elect them in Him, to choose them in Him, to place them in Him, and from all eternity to make them candidates of redemption in His own love, by His grace.

[20:12] And you see, that's why we can say that God's... Somebody actually once asked, I think it was J.G. Voss, one of the American theologians, can you assure me that God's love for His people will never end?

And the response of the theologian was, yes, I can. I can assure you that God's love will never end because it never began. God's people were loved from all eternity in the Beloved.

And because they were placed in the Beloved from all eternity, as the Beloved came into the world and took their nature and died for them and rose again from the dead, so they continue in the Beloved to be regarded by God as His people, not without them having come by faith to trust in

Him, but this goes to the root of the matter.

He has blessed us in the Beloved. It's God's love in Christ. That's the grace of God, the undeserved favor of God, the love of God for His people.

Secondly, the grace that brings salvation is God's power in action. God's love in Christ, God's power in action.

[ 21 : 42 ] Now, of course, you have to join all of these together because they're inseparably connected. I'm just looking at them in terms of distinct points, but they really belong to the same outworking of God's love.

The grace of God is God's power in action. Back again to Ephesians chapter 2. Look at what he says in verse 1. You were dead in the trespasses and sins in which you once walked.

You were dead, spiritually dead, in the trespasses and sins in which you once walked. And then skip ahead to chapter 2, verse 5. Even when we were dead in our trespasses, God made us alive together with Christ.

Christ. You see, it's God's power in action. It's God's power coming to the dead. It's God's coming to those dead in trespasses and sins.

We stand so often, sadly, at a graveside or even to see a coffin as we've been all too familiar with, particularly in the last two to three weeks here.

[ 22 : 56 ] And as you see that coffin, as you look into the grave and the coffin is lowered into the grave, one thought that should absolutely be certain in our minds is this.

That body of itself can never live again. The dead cannot themselves come to life.

That body will live again by the power of Christ in His resurrection, in the resurrection from the grave when it comes. But in itself, as you look at what is dead, it cannot come to life.

And that's the wonder of God's grace. It is the power of God coming to that which is dead and actually saying, live. And that which is dead comes to life.

Even when we were dead in trespasses, He quickened us. He brought us to life in union with Christ. The grace of God is God's power.

[ 24 : 00 ] And in that same chapter in Ephesians, it's the power that from the love of God works through in the power of His grace. The power of the Holy Spirit to bring His people to life.

And of course, that's such an important emphasis and link with the main theme of 1 Corinthians 15 because it's a chapter dealing with the resurrection. The resurrection of Jesus, the resurrection of His people in union with Him to counteract those who are saying in Corinth and trying to lead people astray to say there is no such thing as resurrection.

And Paul is saying as he leads towards that, he's saying, well, this is true of my own life. I know there's a resurrection because I was brought to life spiritually. And to the Ephesians, you were dead in trespasses and sins, but God brought you to life spiritually through the power of His grace.

By grace, you are saved. that not of yourselves as the gift of God. You know, we can yearn for certain things to happen.

We can deeply desire certain things for certain people. And as you see, people sometimes in desperate need, your heart goes out to them.

[ 25 : 22 ] You wish you had the resources to help them. And if you had the resources to help them, you would certainly do that, whether it would be financial or practical or whatever. You can see them suffering in different parts of the world or even in their own nation in difficult times.

You'd really want to have the means and the resources and the wherewithal to help them, and you don't have them. And it hurts you that you can't and you wish you had. But that's the great thing about God's grace.

It isn't just that God, as it were, yearns towards the salvation of His people. He has the resources. Grace has the power.

Grace has the enabling by which He brings us spiritually to life. Anything that God intends by His grace, His grace will certainly accomplish.

And that's a wonderfully comforting thing for you tonight. That as a Christian, as somebody who has begun to follow Christ or maybe been following for many years, and let's face it, it's not just those who are younger in the faith that have doubts at times or questions at times.

[ 26 : 34 ] It comes to us all, whatever stage we're at. And maybe sometimes in the later stages of our Christian experience and walk, maybe it's then more doubts come in and more feelings of weakness, if you like, come in and more fears than we had earlier on in our Christian experience.

Well, God is saying, if I've got you in the custody of my grace, if I've got you in the safety of my grace in Christ, if you are indeed, as you're saying, under the power of my grace, what's going to stop that?

What's going to cause the further advance of your Christian walk and experience when the grace of God, as Paul is saying, by the grace of God, I am what I am?

You can really say that included in that, you might say, is Paul's conviction by the grace of God, I will be what I will be. I will be what God intends me to be.

I will be everything He has promised me to be. By the grace of God, by the grace that is His love in Christ, that is His power in action.

[ 27 : 50 ] And that's why he goes on there to say in verse 10 that the grace of God, which was not in vain towards me, because he says, on the contrary, I worked harder than any of them, though it was not I, but the grace of God that is with me.

And commentators really generally take it that he means all the other apostles put together, I worked harder than them all put together.

Now, is Paul boasting there? Is he saying, look at me, I worked harder than all of them put together? Of course, he's not saying that. What he's doing is saying, it is not I, but the grace of God that is with me.

In other words, the more he sees of what God has enabled him to do, and even if he is convinced that he has worked harder than all of them put together, he's not saying, praise to me.

He's saying, praise to grace. Praise to the God of grace. Because Paul, as a humble Christian, is always concerned to bring the glory and the praise to God.

[ 29 : 10 ] He's not exalting himself, he's exalting his grace. And you know, the way we often use this kind of illustration, if you have a diamond ring, and that diamond ring, you want to see it in all its brilliance, what sort of background do you put it against?

Not a background, not a background that's very sparkly and shiny, but a black background, a black velvet cloth on which you place, or a box with a black velvet lining in which you place this wonderful diamond ring.

And it's the blackness, the darkness of the background that makes the luster of the diamond shine all the more brightly. Well, that's what Paul is doing. I am undeserving and worthy to be called an apostle because I persecuted the church of God.

There's the dark background, there's the black velvet background of his life, but by the grace of God I am what I am. The grace of God shines in my life, not because of me, not because of my achievements, not because of what I now am, but because of who God is, and because what His grace is like, and what His grace has achieved.

It's grace bringing salvation, grace to the unworthy. It's God's love in Christ. It's God's power in action. And thirdly, finally, it is God's kindness in gifting, gifting salvation to us.

[ 30 : 50 ] Again, you find that emphasized the passages we read from in Ephesians, in Ephesians 2, verse 8 especially. This is what He says, He has raised us up with Him when we were dead in trespasses and sins.

And then He goes on to say, For by grace you have been saved through faith, and this is not your own doing, it is the gift of God.

Grace is always gifting. The gift of God is the gift of grace. The grace of God is the gifting grace. The salvation that we have in Christ is a gift of God.

We haven't earned it. We haven't deserved it. We haven't worked for it. We can say we didn't want it until God showed us our need of it. It is His gift to us, a gift to the unworthy.

I happened to give my wife a present at Christmas. Not going to tell you what it was, but hope she liked it. But I gave her that gift because in my estimation she was worthy of it.

[ 32 : 01 ] After all, she has to look after me day after day. She was worthy of it. I thought, well, she deserves this, so this is my gift to her.

But it's the very opposite with God. I can never come before God and say, just like the apostles is emphasizing for us, we can't come before God and say, your gift to me is immeasurable, but I deserved some of it.

I deserved in a measure something or what I have of your salvation. No, we come to God and say, I am unworthy of it. I am not in the least but deserving of it. It is entirely your gift to me.

Your free gift. Your undeserved gift. But Lord, I am glad to receive it and make it my own. The fact that it is free only makes it all the more wonderful.

If we had anything to do with it, it would just spoil it. If we in any way measured at all deserved it, it just would not be the same thing, would it? It wouldn't be a gift really then at all.

[ 33 : 05 ] It would be something that we merited, something God owed to us. That's not how grace is. And what a gift He's given us.

A free gift. Salvation in Christ. What a gift. He gave us His Son. He gave us His Son as a Savior. He gave us exactly what we required, even if for most of our life it wasn't what we thought we needed. Though it is what we need. And what we need is a Savior that exactly matches our condition as sinners.

That exactly matches what we are under God's condemnation. Someone who will rescue us.

Someone who will place us in a favored relationship with God.

He gave us Jesus. He gave us a Savior. He gave us this free gift. What a gift. What kindness.

[ 34 : 15 ] What love. What amazing grace. How sweet it's sound. And that John Newton who wrote that hymn, Amazing Grace, near the end of his life, well, he took these words of Paul from our text tonight in 1 Corinthians 15.

And this is what he said in his confession. I am not what I ought to be. That's what you're saying tonight, I hope.

And I hope I'm saying it as well. I am not what I ought to be. I should be better than I am. I should be a better Christian than I am.

I should be more faithful to God than I am. I should be more zealous to God. I should be more holy than I am. That was his testimony. I am not what I ought to be.

I am not what I want to be. He wanted to be better than he saw himself at the time. And that's how you are surely too. Because however good you are tonight, however far advanced you are on the Christian way, however much you've learned of Christ, however much you value him, however much you love him and worship him, you still hope to be more than you are tonight.

[ 35 : 36 ] You're not what you want to be, or what you hope to be, yet when it comes to your ultimate salvation. But, he said, I'm not what I ought to be.

I'm not what I want to be. I'm not what I hope to be. But still, I am not what I used to be. See, there is grace, amazing grace.

I'm not what I used to be, he said. And by the grace of God, I am what I am. And that's the same John Newton, who in that amazing hymn, in that hymn, Amazing Grace, wrote these words as one of the verses.

Through many dangers, toils, and snares, I have already come. 'Tis grace has brought me safe thus far, and grace will bring me home, will lead me home.

The grace of God, the love of God in Christ, God's power in action, God's kindness in gifting us salvation in Christ.

[ 36 : 53 ] Grace to the unworthy. Let's pray. Lord, our God, we thank you for the grace that enables us to confess our unworthiness, the grace that has brought us to see ourselves as we truly are.

O Lord, our God, we pray that by your grace we may continue to grow in the grace and in the knowledge of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ.

And we pray tonight, O Lord, that our desire may be intensified to be more like himself. And we pray that as we pray these things, we may be conscious too of how to be like him means that we will take to ourselves whenever your will decides that we will need to face challenges, suffering, loss, deprivation, pain, perhaps even persecution.

But Lord, we give thanks that your whole package of experience for your people is but the outworking of your grace for them. And within your own great program of salvation and sanctification, O grant us grace, we pray, to be willing to leave our life in your hands and to be willing to accept you as our Lord and Savior each and every day.

Receive our thanks for your grace, for Jesus' sake. Amen. Let's conclude our worship tonight, singing Psalm 63. Psalm number 63, that's on page 295.

[ 38 : 30 ] verses 1 to 5, Psalm 63. Lord thee, my God, I'll early seek, my soul doth thirst for thee, my flesh longs in a dry, parched land wherein no waters be, that I thy power may behold and brightness of thy face, as I have seen thee heretofore within thy holy place.

Since better is thy love than life, my lips thee praise shall give. I in thy name will lift my hands and bless thee while I live. Even as with marrow and with fat my soul shall filled be, then shall my mouth with joyful lips sing praises unto thee.

These verses in conclusion. Amen. For thee, my God, I will be to see, my soul doth thirst for thee, my flesh longs in a dry, parched land wherein no waters be, that I thy power may behold and brightness of thy face, as I have seen thee here to fall within thy holy place.

hallsequently While thou play hah ■eby committing■ onto thy glory open and■■■ In a swift marrow and with heart, my soul shall thrill it be.

Then shall my mouth with joyfulness sing praises unto thee.

[ 41 : 24 ] I'll go to the main door now after the benediction. Now may the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God the Father, and the communion of the Holy Spirit be with you now and always. Amen.

Amen.