

What We Are and What We Have

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[0 : 00] Turn with me to 1 Corinthians chapter 1, page 1146.

Paul's first letter to the Corinthians. We've read already about how Paul stayed in Corinth for over a year and a half as a tentmaker and as a preacher, and how the church in Corinth was started on that occasion.

And now he's writing a few years later to the same church which has grown but has fallen into hard times.

Perhaps I should say that they were experiencing all kinds of perplexing problems. And here is how he starts his letter to them.

Paul called by the will of God to be an apostle of Christ Jesus and our brother Sosthenes. 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.

[1 : 15] Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Now here's the passage I'd like us to look at this evening from verse 4 to verse 9. I give thanks to my God always for you because of the grace of God that was given you in Christ Jesus, that in every way you were enriched in him in all speech and knowledge, even as the testimony about Christ was confirmed among you, so that you are not lacking in any spiritual gift, as you wait for the revealing of our Lord Jesus Christ, 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.

Today was communion in our congregation. communion. And we have a particular tradition of communion. In the old days, if I can use that term, communion was a long process of meetings starting the week before.

And each service that took place on these days would have a particular theme. I don't have time to go into that, but on the Sunday itself, after communion, on the Sunday night, the theme on the Sunday night would usually, typically be evangelistic, in which the message would be given to those who weren't at the table.

And particularly to those who haven't yet come to know Christ as their Savior. But they tell me that it was more specific than that.

[3 : 18] Apparently, you can correct me if I'm wrong, but apparently, the theme on a Sunday night traditionally, would focus on the second coming. For two reasons.

First of all, to remind everyone that Christ is coming again, and we all must be ready for that day. But secondly, so that God's people will be encouraged to wait for him, and look forward to him, in connection with the Lord's Supper.

We mentioned it this morning. That, therefore, we say that, that, we eat this bread, and drink this, the cup, until he comes.

We remember his death, until he comes. So there's an element, in the communion service itself, which looks forward to the coming of Jesus. And so, it's perhaps not surprising, that the theme would very often be taken traditionally, on a Sunday night, of the second coming, to give us that encouragement, to look forward to that day.

But on the Monday night, there would be a Thanksgiving service, and what happened there was, the whole process of services would be wrapped up, and they would be encapsulated, and there was, and God would be approached, as a service of, of Thanksgiving, in which God's people, they look back on everything that they've enjoyed, and the encouragement that they've received, over the course of the last few days, and particularly over the, the communion time itself.

[4 : 54] But it wasn't just looking back, once again, it was looking forward, because Thanksgiving in the Bible, is a rededication of ourselves to God. Communion is that occasion, when we not just, don't just look back, at what Christ has done for us, but that we, that we, in, that we look at ourselves, and how we can, determine afresh, to live as God wants us to live, because Thanksgiving in the Bible, is not just what we say, it's, a commitment, to the Lord, a recommitment, to the Lord.

I would love to think tonight, that we were able to, to do these, three things, that we were able to, that we were able to give thanks to God.

That's what Paul says, that's what this passage is all about, in verse four, I give thanks to God, always for you. But I would like to think also, that tonight, we were able to focus, on the future coming, of Jesus Christ.

Again, Paul tells us, that we are waiting for him, in the day of the Lord, as you wait, for him.

And then I'd like thirdly, to think that, it is also, determination on our part, to live, as God wants us to live, and the kind of lives, that are lovingly, obedient, and submissive, to him.

[6 : 24] Is that not, the way, in which, we rightly, close, a communion weekend, by determining, in our heart, the way, in which, we are going to, live, for him.

We're going to, recommit, our lives to him. Well, how do you do that? How do we, re-dedicate, our lives to him? Well, I believe, that the starting point, is knowing, what God has done, for us, and what we, are entitled to, from his word.

That's where, we are, this evening. And, Paul, Paul encapsulates, everything, that God has done, for us, in this word, this mighty word.

Kenny, I mentioned it, this morning, and it's a word, that describes, the whole, of the gospel. The word, grace. You think, of what Jesus, what God has done, for us, in sending, the second person, of the glorious, Trinity himself.

His birth, at Bethlehem, his upbringing, and his ministry, and his suffering, his being a man, of sorrows, and acquainted, with grief. His coming, into the world, to seek, and to save, those who were lost, his death, on the cross, and all that suffering, that that involved, his resurrection, and his ascension, and then, how the gospel spread, across the world, all over the world, until it got to, the United Kingdom, and through the church, where we are, we somehow, heard the message, of the gospel, and we came, to a living, saving knowledge, of Jesus Christ, the whole thing, is encapsulated, in this one word, the grace, of God.

[8 : 13] But that same word, although it describes, what God has done, it describes, also, what God, has made us, and what he continues, to do in us, and that is, what Paul, is describing here.

Now, the amazing thing, about this passage here, is that, you would, you would almost think, that this church, were without any problem, at all. The way Paul, begins this letter, you would never think, there was anything wrong, with the church.

But there were, massive problems, in the church. Let me just, give you some of them, let me just remind you, of some of them. They were seriously, falling out, with one another. Chapters one, and chapter three.

In chapter five, there is gross, immorality. There's a man, who's living, with his father's wife. In chapter six, there's some Christians, taking others, to court.

Suing them. There were all kinds, of moral problems, in the church. In chapter seven, there were questions, about the kind of society, in which they lived, the kind of food, that was offered, to idols.

[9 : 22] And how could they, negotiate their way, within society, and maintain a witness, and protect, the conscience, of one another. These questions, were massively complicated.

There was drunkenness, at their communion. Chapter 11. There were arguments, about gifts, of the spirit. And some were even, beginning to doubt, the reality, of the resurrection.

Well, where do you begin, when you're writing, to a church, with these kind of problems? We're not, they're not talking, about the kind of trivial problems, that we sometimes, fall out over. We're talking about, major issues, which called, into question, whether there were, a church in the first place.

At least, that's what we would, think of them. You go through the, letter to Corinthians, and you wonder, well, what kind of Christians, are they? It's astonishing. And yet, Paul, has to begin, at the beginning, which is this, he is never, going to resolve, the issues, and the problems, that are arisen, in the church, in Corinth, without this, as a starting point, the grace, that God, has given you.

I thank God, because whatever, the problems, there are, within you, as a fellowship, God, can resolve them.

[10 : 41] And we're looking, to God, to resolve them, and he will resolve them, because, he has given you, his grace. What a way, to be able, to face, some of the issues, in your own life, and in my life.

That has to be, the starting point. What God has done, for us, that can't change, and what God, has made us, that cannot change.

You have received, he says, verse four, you have received, the grace, of God, and what they now, need to do, is to live up, to that grace.

And that's, where we are, this evening. We now, need to live up, to that grace of God, the marvelous grace of God, that has reached down, into this lost, and broken world, and rescued us, for himself.

And yet, even having rescued us, we're not perfect. There are many, obstacles, and challenges, that you and I, must face, this evening, even this week, as we think about, what God has done, for us.

[11 : 46] Perhaps, you're beginning, to despair. Many Christians, they, go through times, in their lives, when they despair, and they say, I see so many, shortcomings, and every communion, is a reminder, to me, of my shortcomings.

And I don't seem, to me, make any progress, in this life. Well, that's a good place, to start. That concern, that longing, that we have, is a good place, to start.

And yet, we know also, don't we, that many of the, that whereas, every Christian, struggles, I don't believe, there's a single man, or woman, of God, who doesn't struggle.

And yet, many of these struggles, are of our own making. And many of these, choices, that we make, they're because, as we take our eyes, away from, the word of God, that is given there, to remind us, of who we are, in Christ Jesus.

So that's our starting point, this evening. We're coming back, to the Bible. We're asking God, who are we? What have you done, for us? The Bible tells us, we have been born again.

[13 : 07] We are a new creation. Of any man be in Christ, he is a new creation, says the apostle. The old influences, they should have passed away, by now. And our motivation, and our direction, in life is new.

We live for the glory, of God. It tells us, that we are God's children. Behold, says John, what manner of love, the Father has bestowed, upon us, that we should be called, children of God.

That is what we are. Do we remember it? Do we lose sight of it? In the busyness of life, we are justified, like Kenny I was telling us, this morning.

We are justified, which means, that as God looks upon us, today, we are righteous. He declares us, to be righteous, with the righteousness, of Christ. It doesn't get better, than that.

And then, Paul goes on to say, that we have been, enriched in him. And am I not right, in saying, this evening, that, that, we sometimes, choose, a second rate, Christian life, because we don't, remember, the privileges, that God, has declared, that belong to us, in, Jesus Christ.

[14 : 25] Am I not right, in saying that? And that we make life, hugely, hugely, confused, and complicated. I'm not saying, that there is an easy way, to live the Christian life, there isn't.

But, many of our choices, are the wrong ones. And, when we choose, to disregard, or when we choose, to neglect, what the Bible, tells us, about ourselves.

I was in, Edinburgh on Wednesday, I was coming back, through the airport, in this mile long, security queue. It was unbelievable. And, especially the way, they twist them, all around this way, and that way, and this way.

You don't know, how many times, how long you're going to, have to wait there. And, I'm standing in this queue, and I'm seeing that, there's another line, and there are these people, who are just, running through.

This is the fast track lane. And, I'm getting a bit annoyed, and I'm saying, well, who do these people, think they are? What, who, what, how, what makes them different, from the rest of us, the hundreds of people, who are in this queue?

[15 : 31] And, so, eventually, after about half an hour, you get through, I sat down, and I looked, at my ticket. And, I discovered, that I could have been there. I could have been, in the fast track.

Why? Because, my ticket, told me, what I was entitled to. Now, there's no way, of fast tracking, through the Christian life.

That's not what I'm saying. But, I'm saying, that for many of us, we choose, the wrong way. We choose, the way, of confusion.

All, because, we don't, look at our ticket. And, we don't realize, the marvelous, entitlement, that God has given to us, in Jesus Christ.

Well, that's where we start. And, Paul describes, what God, has done for us, as him, having given us riches. He says this, in verse 4, he says, that you were, in that, in every way, you were enriched, in him, in all speech, and knowledge.

[16 : 37] Now, I don't know, whether you think of yourselves, tonight, as a rich person, or a poor person. Here, is an absolutely, clear declaration. Verse 4, you were enriched, enriched, in him.

So, that means, that, whatever your bank balance is, as far as God is concerned, if you're a follower, of Jesus Christ, you are rich. What does he say, in 2 Corinthians, chapter 8, that God, herein is the grace of God, that though he was rich, in all his glory, and majesty, he became poor, so that we, through his poverty, might be made rich.

So, in real terms, it has nothing to do, with how many thousands, or hundreds, or whatever, whether your bank balance, is in the red, or in the black, if you're following Christ, we are rich, we have nothing, we have, God, God, we lack nothing, in the Lord, Jesus Christ.

The Bible goes on, to tell us, that we're heirs, of his glory, that God has, withheld no good thing, to, from us, we have everything, that we have.

It goes on specifically, to tell us, that, that, we were enriched in him, in all speech, and knowledge. I think, I believe that Paul, was referring to, one or two of the problems, that were arising, in the church, at that time, where, where some people, were claiming, to have special qualities.

[18 : 11] Paul was saying, that, whatever, whatever people teach, whatever arguments, that you're having, God, has not deprived you, of anything, and when you think about it, speech, and knowledge, are, are what we need, to know God, more and more, to discover, more and more, about him.

That's the kind of knowledge, that Paul is talking about here, the knowledge of God. You can be a, you can have five PhDs, and still be lost. You can still be as ignorant, of the one important, area in life, which is, your relationship, to God.

And speech, is the way, in which we, we come and express, and worship, and to tell others, of the grace of God, in Jesus Christ.

But then, the second area, is not just, we've talked about, a little bit about, where we are, and what God has done for us, our entitlement, in Jesus. But he tells us, even as the testimony, of Christ was confirmed, among you, so that you're not lacking, in any spiritual gift, as you wait, for the revealing, of the Lord Jesus Christ.

You remember, when I said, at the very beginning, that on a Sunday night, that we typically, focused on, the second coming, of the Lord Jesus Christ.

[19 : 38] But, the Bible tells us, not only that, Christ is coming, but that we must, live, in the knowledge, of Christ is coming.

The New Testament, was very clear, that, in the promise, that one day, Jesus will come again. Not in the way, he came at first, not in the humiliation, of the, the stable, and the manger, but in his glory, as he ascended, to heaven.

That's the way, in which, he will come. Tells us, that his angels, will be with him. It tells us, that on the day he comes, he will judge, the whole world. Tells us, that he will utter, the command, and the graves, every grave, will open.

Every person, who has died, however they have died, they will come, to life again, and they will go, to be judged, by God, in Jesus Christ. The one thing, it doesn't tell us, is when, that will be.

And that means, we don't know, when it will be. Many a Christian, has tried to work out, from the book of Revelation, and the Thessalonians, and Daniel, and they've tried to, sit down, for hours and hours, and they've tried to work out, the times, and seasons, and what the signs are, and all the rest of it.

[20 : 52] And they've all failed. Because the Bible tells us, that no one knows, the day, or the hour. It will come as a thief, in the night. And even although, we think, that we've worked it out, we're not quite sure, when we may be, entirely wrong.

God tells us, that it will be, a surprise. But what he tells us, is this, be ready. Be ready. And the only way, to be ready, is to live, as he, requires us to live, which means, that we put our trust, in Jesus.

That we come, come to, to faith, in Jesus. We ask him, to be our savior, and to change, our lives. And then, the person, who's following Jesus, is the person, who's living, every day, in the light, of his coming.

We started off, by saying, we live, every day, in the light, of what he has done. Our entitlement, in Jesus, our place, our position, as his sons, and daughters, in Christ.

But now, we're asked to live, in the light, of his coming. Those who are waiting, there are various ways, in which we can, wait, aren't there? If you go to the doctor, you wait to be called, you're waiting, in the waiting room.

[22 : 06] If you're waiting, for a bus, you're waiting, at the bus stop, and you're not, not really doing, anything else. But God, in the New Testament, he expects us, not to be doing nothing, just waiting.

When he says here, that we're waiting for him, doesn't mean, that we're sitting back, just believing, that one day, he's coming, so I'm not going, to do anything else. No, that's not the way, to wait. That's not faith, at all. That's laziness.

But we are to wait, actively, as servants, praying, that God, will find us, doing his will, living for him, and his glory.

Are you determined, tonight, in the light, of what we have done, today, in remembering, the Lord's death, to live for his glory, to live expectantly, believing, that one day, he will come.

And it takes, great faith, to believe that. Because, we've nothing to go on, except his promise, alone. Just like Abraham, in the past, when he, up sticks, and when he heard, the call of God, when he lived, in Ur of the Chaldees, and God, told him that, I want you to leave, your home, and your, everything that you're, accustomed to, and I want you to go, hundreds of miles, into a land, that I will show you.

[23 : 28] All he had, to go on, was the bare, word of God, alone. And that's, what faith is. That's why we, tonight, we, have celebrated, the Lord's death.

Because we believe, by his word, that his death, is our forgiveness, and our cleansing. And his death, is, the mark, is the pointer, that one day, that he will come, again, at a time, when we do not know, and at a time, when we perhaps, don't expect, because we should be, expecting him every day.

We should be living, in that light, so that we're not ashamed, when he, he comes. Here's another thing, that Paul says, as he goes on, to say that, he will sustain you, in the end, to the end, guiltless, in the day.

And now, we're coming on, to the third element, that I started off, by saying, we spoke about, what we are, and what God has done, for us, and what God has made us. We're, trying to, emphasize the importance, of living, in the light, of his coming.

But now, we are, in the present. We are trusting, in his, help, and his leading, and his guiding.

[24 : 50] When you, think about it, and you think about, how God wants us, to live as Christians, it doesn't take long, before you realize, that you can't do it, by yourself. Well, that's not a problem, to God.

Once again, the grace of God, that God showed us, at Calvary, is the grace, that didn't stop, when we were converted, that, but that continues, with us, from day, to day, to day.

God's grace, doesn't come to an end, when you come to faith, in Christ, or when you become, a member. God's grace, continues, and will continue, to the end, all the way, through your life, and will not, let you go.

It's the grace, that sustains. It also, is the, quality, that we must have, towards others.

It was the quality, that Paul had, towards the Corinthians. He was just about, to have to say, some very blunt, things to them. He was going to have, to rebuke them, in the strongest, possible terms, for what they, were doing wrong.

[26 : 00] And I guess, that made him feel awkward, just as it would make, you and I feel awkward, if we ever had to do, that kind of thing. And yet, he started, by remembering, that he was not, he didn't deserve, God's grace.

He had lived, for years and years, as, as a proud Pharisee, believing that he, could work his way, into the kingdom, of heaven, until, he met with Jesus, on the road, to Damascus.

So, he knew in himself, his own corruption, and his own sinfulness. And we must, never forget, where we have started, and God's grace, to us.

And it will sustain us, from day to day, like a mother, who's, doesn't cease, to be a mother, the day that her child, is born.

A mother doesn't, doesn't, imagine, imagine if you had a mother, who was, who was just about, to give birth, who went to the hospital, she gave birth, she had the baby, and then she said, well that's my bit over. I've done my bit, someone else, can take over now.

[27 : 06] No, a mother, is not just the physical act, of giving birth. The motherhood, is, everything that she does, from that moment, till, for year after year, changing nappies, teaching, feeding, loving, caring, everything that a mother does, until that moment, that the child reaches the point, where he or she, leaves home.

But that point, never comes with a Christian. God continues, to care for us, and to lead us, and to guide us, to nourish us, to feed us, to encourage us, sometimes to walk, to warn us, to send his spirit, into us, to show us, the truth of his word, and to assure us, that we are forgiven, and to lead us, and to guide us, in every step, of the way.

Is there anybody here tonight, that is not struggling, with temptation? We all struggle, with temptation, sometimes more, sometimes less, but everyone here tonight, struggles with temptation, and sometimes, we are tempted, to despair, when we meet, the power, of temptation, and perhaps tonight, you, are, despairing, wondering, whether you are a Christian, in the first place, because, you fall so often, and you fail so often, and you, you have to, you have to, rediscover, the horror, of your own weakness, God, sustains, his people, by his spirit, the first thing, he tells us, is that we are forgiven, that, that if we confess, our sins, he is faithful, and just, and will cleanse us, from all, unrighteousness, so, if you are a Christian, do not despair, come to the Lord, confess, your sin, and he will, forgive you, but he will, do more than that, he will, strengthen you, through, every kind, of experience, now, thus says the Lord,

Isaiah 43, he who created you, O Jacob, he who formed you, O Israel, fear not, for I, have, redeemed you, I, have, called you, by name, you are mine, when you pass, through the waters, I will be with you, and through the rivers, they shall not, overwhelm you, when you walk, through fire, you shall not, be burned, and the flame, shall not, consume you, Psalm 23, even though I walk, through the valley, of the shadow, of death, I will fear, no evil, for you are with me, and your rod, and your staff, they comfort, me, God promises, to present us, guiltless, on the day, that's what he goes on, to say, verse 8, he will sustain you, to the end, guiltless, in the day, of our Lord, Jesus Christ, God's assurance tonight, and we've heard it already, we've been assured, by the death, of Jesus, that our sin, has been, completely, cleansed, past, present, and future, and future, but here's a promise, that looks, to the future, and says, that on the day, of judgment, you are guaranteed, in the same Lord,

Jesus, that God, will find you, guiltless, that's the day, when he'll say, welcome, to my kingdom, come you, blessed of my father, into, everlasting joy, enter, into the joy, of the Lord, I want to ask you tonight, do you have, that assurance, because there's only, one place, where you can get it, and that is, in Jesus Christ, you can pretend, that you're not, that bad, you can pretend, that you can work, your way into heaven, through your own efforts, it won't work, there's only one way, in which you're able, to find, that assurance, and that is, from the word of God, as you trust, in what Jesus Christ, has done for you, on the cross, God says to us, in him, and in him alone, your sin, and your iniquity, I will remember, no more, and so tonight, as we remember, what Christ has done for us, we look back, to what we've already enjoyed, and as we reflect on it, may we reflect on it, long, for a long, long time, and may it be, the empowerment, the determination, when you think, of what our sin, cost, the Lord Jesus Christ, how can we not be, all the more determined, to war, against temptation, to trust, in Jesus, all the more, to grow, in our knowledge, of him, and our love for him, to be more, prayerful people, how can, his death, on the cross, not, take hold, of us, as the very, center, of our being, for what we are, in ourselves, and what we are, to others, this is my commandment, said Jesus, that you love, one another, as I, as,

[32 : 35] I have, loved you, the death of Christ, is our, inspiration, tonight, so, inspiration, in living, for him, it is our, inspiration, in taking up, our cross, daily, and following him, our, inspiration, to say, to the evil one, to get behind me, I'm going to live, for Jesus, to avoid, every occasion, where we might be, drawn into temptation, and into sin, and to fill our hearts, and our minds, with what, God has done, for us, and to wait, for his coming, to live in the light, of his coming, and to take such, a delight, in that prospect, that we say, even so, come, Lord Jesus, let's pray.

Amen. Our Father in heaven, we ask now, that you will bless, our time together, we thank you, for your word to us, we thank you, for everything, that we have enjoyed, this weekend, pray that it will, not only be, be a reminder to us, of what Jesus, did for us, but that it will be, the strength, by which we live, putting God first, glorifying you, obeying you, and in surrendering, everything to you, in Jesus name, Amen.

Amen. Amen. Thank you.