

Well, 2009 is here. And of course with the New Year comes the “New Years Resolutions”. Now these resolutions are meant for us to have a new start, to do what we have not done before, or maybe correct bad habits we may have in our life. And to accomplish them you have to have certain things in place or they are not going to work. For instance, let’s say your goal is to lose 20- 50 lbs. Now, I know there are a million diet plans out there...but here it is this is what you need to do in order to lose that weight. By the way this is a bonus... no charge for this. Alright, First, you eat healthy foods – a balanced diet of healthy foods, 2<sup>nd</sup> – you have a plan for how much you will eat (in other words, don’t fill up your plate and eat till your “full.” Go w/ set amount and if you eat slower you will find that your full earlier anyway. And finally, set yourself up with a good exercise program that involves some strength training and cardio. Simple, that’s it. To lose weight and get in shape you have to have a plan. A good plan, otherwise it’s not going to happen. You have to have a plan and prepare for what is to come.

Well, what I want to focus on this morning from the book of 1 Corinthians is similar to that. You see, God did not set it up for us to become believers without a plan for us to know Him and to grow in Him. As believers, God has equipped us with everything we need to live productive, fruit filled lives that bring Him glory. This is because of God’s grace and the awesome love He has for us, wanting us to experience the best we can in knowing Him during our time on the earth. In 1 Corinthians chapter 1, Paul describes many of the benefits of being a believer. So, if you would turn with me to 1 Corinthians, chapter 1, verses 4 – 9, we will read that together.

### **READ 1 Corinthians 1:4-9**

**Paul begins giving thanks for the believers in Corinth, but not specifically because of them, but because of the grace given them. God’s grace is the focus of the thanks. This awesome grace comes from God and is given in Jesus Christ. Grace that is given in the form of Christ.**

Romans 3:22-24 describes this grace that has been given. It says: *“This righteousness (which means to be pure, holy before God) comes through faith in Jesus Christ, to all who believe. There is no difference, for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, and are justified freely by His grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus”*. So this amazing gift (we did not deserve it...it’s a gift...but He gave it out of His perfect grace) this gift that God has given us is His Son Jesus Christ, the justification, the redemption that we receive by having faith in Christ Jesus.

Paul is thanking God for what the Christians in Corinth have become in and through Christ. **Believers have forgiveness of sin, salvation and freedom because of God’s grace. We are what we are because of Him.** We have been and are being transformed to be like Christ and the result of this is being shown in our lives now. And please recognize the importance of that word “in” that you see in verse 4. This grace did not come from just hearing about Christ, or believing that He exists, or from saying a prayer. It comes from knowing Christ personally, intimately following and walking with Him. **John MacArthur** puts it like this: **“Being in Christ is an appropriation of committing myself to Him in total unity by faith. And once I am in Christ then the grace of God is mine.”** We have to be “in” Christ to experience God’s grace.

**Now, before we look at the benefits of being a believer and how the Christians in Corinth were blessed, let’s deal with something you may be wondering about.**

**Since these Christians in Corinth have experienced God's grace and been blessed in such amazing ways, does it mean that the believers there were more spiritual and did things better than everyone else? Had they received a special blessing that others had not? No. Absolutely not. In fact they had a lot of struggles which Paul had to address later in this book.**

If you look on into 1 Corinthians you see that they dealt with divisions within the church, sexual immorality, idolatry, worshiping inappropriately, abusing the Lord's Supper, and not Loving as they should. These were believers just like you and I that struggled in their walk with God. However, Paul makes it clear by his thankfulness that these believers had been given by grace what they needed to grow in God. And believers today, Christians today, have been given those same things! So let's look at them more closely.

Look at verse 5...(READ Verse 5)

**Now, Enriched in every way does not mean we have anything we want, but instead we are enriched in every way to be exactly what God intended us to be as believers.** We can easily fall into that trap. That if everything does not go as planned, if we don't have what we want, if 2009 isn't what it is "supposed to be" that God's not blessing us, or God is not in control or there is no God. When God, who created us, knows exactly what we need. He knows what is best for us whenever our desires and wants do not fulfill and do not satisfy the way we had hoped.

In verse 5 **Paul gives two ways in which believers are enriched: in all their speaking and in all their knowledge. This focuses on the knowledge one has of the gospel, the Word of God and the ability to communicate it to others.**

Everything we learn, know or say about God and our relationship with Christ as believers has been enriched and given by Him. This is really a wonderful thing when you think about it. Are you one who is often overwhelmed by Biblical knowledge and theology? Is it hard for you to understand what scripture passages mean? Does hearing Greek this or Hebrew that confuse you? Or do you not know what to say to someone who is not a believer if you have an opportunity to share your faith? Are you afraid of not having the words to say or that you will get confused?

Well, take hope. Be reassured. As a believer and one who is **In Christ**, you have been enriched in every way regarding Christ. The things you need to say and know will come. Now this does not mean they automatically are there when we become believers. No, otherwise we would not be told to study God's Word, to pray to meditate on scriptures and memorize them. But we are assured that as we study, meditate, memorize and seek Christ that all of this will come alive and be enriched within us. Words will flow as the Holy Spirit brings together what we have studied and know. Witnessing to others regarding Christ and what He has done in our lives will flow from us as we trust Him. And all of us, that are believers, have been blessed in this way.

Now Paul goes on in verse 6 to explain how this was able to take place. We know from verse 4 that it was God's grace that accomplished all of this in us. However, here Paul says that the Christians in Corinth were enriched in speaking and knowledge because of their (Paul's and those with him) testimony being confirmed in them. The testimony he is referring to is the Gospel of Jesus Christ. This is Paul's witness that you see in Acts chapters 13, 17, 22, 24, 26. Paul presented the gospel through the Holy Spirit, which all of us who are believers are able to do, and then those in Corinth who Paul is

writing to, were called by God and became believers. **This was confirmed in them (which means it was established or made stable)** when they believed **IN** Christ, not just of Christ, they took ownership and became followers (which shows action) they became followers of Christ. This was real; a personal relationship that was not just a part of them, **but who they were.**

This is the same way it is with us as believers. We have an active relationship with Christ as we are in Him, believe in Him through faith and have a personal relationship with Him.

Now in verse 7 Paul tells them another result or benefit of being a believer. Due to God's grace that was given in Jesus Christ, we are not only enriched in speaking and knowledge, but we do not lack any spiritual gift. The believers in Corinth and believers today have been given everything they need as far spiritual gifts to accomplish God's purposes in our lives, in and outside of the church. And once again, everything does not mean the every believer has been gifted with every gift there is, but that each believer has been gifted in the way needed to accomplish the tasks that God has specifically given.

So that whatever role God has for you, whatever purpose or calling He has on your life as a believer, you are gifted with the spiritual gifts needed for that calling. We know that in anything we do, in order to succeed, we have to be prepared. God has seen to it that we are prepared.

And this may be an area where you have talent and maybe not. It may be a case of Moses, where God called him to confront Pharaoh with releasing the Israelites from slavery. Moses felt he was not a good speaker and could not accomplish the task given, however, God still used him and also sent Moses brother Aaron along to assist. Or it could be like the disciples of Jesus who were uneducated fisherman who turned the world upside down by spreading the Gospel of Jesus Christ. Those who God calls, He prepares and gifts for ministry. You are gifted for what God has called you to do.

Then, in the second part of verse seven, we get a picture of where, as believers our focus is to be. Although we are serving God here on this earth, our eyes are to be consistently looking forward to Jesus' return. **As believers serve God in the present, their eyes are on the future.** We have been made new in Christ, we are being transformed to be like Him, and we are looking forward to the day of His return. And I like the adverb Paul uses in saying the believers are "eagerly" waiting. This, present earth is not what is important. We are strangers in a foreign land. This is not our home. And this affects how we look at and relate to what is around us. Let me illustrate. I heard a story a couple of weeks ago about a missionary, H.C. Morrison and his wife who had served overseas for 46 years and then returned home from Africa. Upon their arrival by ship, they noticed a welcoming party, and for a moment thought the excitement was for them. They were disappointed to find out the welcome was for President Teddy Roosevelt who was returning from an African safari. Upon experiencing this, Mr. Morrison felt pity and frustration that Roosevelt had gotten all this recognition from returning from an African safari, and he had given his life to serving God in Africa and got nothing. It was then that he realized that "He was not home yet." His reward would not come until he gets home.

And as we look forward to that of Christ's return, Paul once again reminds us of the hope we have in the grace that God has shown us. He tells the believers in verse 8 that God will keep them strong to the end, so that we will be blameless on the day of our Lord Jesus Christ. The "day of our Lord Jesus Christ" refers to the end times, when Christ will come and judge all men. It refers to a time of judgment. Now, **The same One who is given thanks for His grace in verse four will not falter in keeping us blameless at the time of judgment He calls the believer and He is faithful in keeping believers in Him.** What peace we have in that. We are assured that God will sustain us.

We also see this in various passages. **Read:**

1 Thessalonians 5:23-24 states: **23May God himself, the God of peace, sanctify you through and through. May your whole spirit, soul and body be kept blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. 24The one who calls you is faithful and he will do it.**

And 2 Thessalonians 3:3 states: **3But the Lord is faithful, and he will strengthen and protect you from the evil one.**

Ephesians 5:25-27 **just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her 26to make her holy, cleansing<sup>[b]</sup> her by the washing with water through the word, 27and to present her to himself as a radiant church, without stain or wrinkle or any other blemish, but holy and blameless.**

God will find his people, those who have received His grace and are IN Christ and walking in faith with Him as Lord and savior, God will find them blameless on that day of judgment because of Christ.

And so in verse 9, Paul sums up this section keeping things in perspective. He started verse 4 focusing on God, saying that he always thanks Him for the Corinthians because of God's grace that was given them. Now he says that God, who is the one who called you into this fellowship with His son Jesus Christ in the first place, is faithful.

Which is emphasizing that everything mentioned in the previous verses, God's grace and everything that that Christians have received through it – God is faithful to do it all. Be of strong in hope. Be encouraged. God is on the throne, all things are in His hands, By His grace He has equipped us for His work, He will keep us strong and blameless, and He is faithful. Amen.