

1 Corinthians #1
The Beginning of Our Walk
1 Corinthians 1: 1-9

I have found that there is a "high road" and a "low road" in our "walk" with God, as seen in Colossians 1:10, where we have been told, "That you might walk worthy of the Lord unto all pleasing, being fruitful in every good work; and increasing in the knowledge of God." **This truth is very vividly brought to light in the life of the young church at Corinth.** There is, of course, only one starting point in the Christian life: Calvary, where the sinner meets his Savior and is ransomed, healed, restored, and forgiven. But beyond that starting point we are faced with many deviations from the plan of God; in this letter the Apostle Paul warns us of some of them.

It is possible for a Christian to live on a carnal level instead of on a spiritual level. It is possible to walk after the flesh even though we are converted to walk in the Spirit. It is possible to be saved, but to be saved as by fire: one day to stand before the Judgment Seat of Christ stripped of everything but our soul's salvation. **On the other hand, there is a royal route to heaven, and the word "royal" implies sovereignty.** In the Christian life, it means placing the crown where it rightly belongs: on the Savior's head. That is the main message of this study.

I am not interested in getting to heaven by the skin of my teeth. My one desire is to get there by the grace of God, after a useful life in which the purpose of the Lord in saving my soul has been fulfilled. This Corinthian letter exposes the tragedy of low-level Christian living, and reveals the glory of a walk made under the sovereignty of Jesus Christ.

The city of Corinth was a Roman colony on Grecian soil, the seat of Roman government for the sea, and a center of Greek commerce. A proud and wealthy city, it has been called the "Vanity Fair" of the Roman Empire. Indeed, the word "Corinthian" came to be a synonym for loose living. **These Greeks were notorious for their shallowness.** They loved to argue for the sake of argument; they were very proud of their knowledge - in fact, they thought they knew everything.

In such a place Paul had planted the seed of the Gospel. Arriving there after a shattering experience at Athens, he later declared in 1 Corinthians 2:2, "I determined not to know any thing among you, save Jesus Christ, and him crucified." Acts 18:1-18 tells us that he stayed in Corinth 18 months preaching the gospel, and Acts 20:2-3 tells us that he visited there again on his third missionary journey. At that time he became deeply burdened for these converts, and subsequent letters brought his distressing news of sin in the Corinthian church.

Now here is a pivotal point of religion: in spite of all the destructive sin in their midst, these people had the audacity to write Paul concerning theological questions. In Other words, instead of wanting to deal with the real problem, they wanted to become involved in some theological discussion.

Therefore Paul did not hurry to answer their questions. It was not until chapter 7 did he say, “Now concerning the matters about which you wrote.” In the first 6 chapters he deals with the situation that existed in Corinth. He goes right to the root of the trouble first, before he answers their theological questions.

To analyze this letter briefly, we find that the first 11 chapters deal with carnality. He exposes the tragedy of their living in sin and worldliness, and applies the positive remedy of the cross of Jesus Christ. Then, as if he has had enough of it, he says in 12:1, “Now, touching spiritual things,” and he lifts up to the tremendous heights of the gospel of resurrection and life. The last five chapters of this epistle deal with spirituality, and are constructive. For every aspect of carnality, Paul prescribes the dynamic remedy of the full message of the gospel.

There is a great deal of preaching today that does not follow Paul’s example here: preaching the gospel of forgiveness of sins which is not accompanied by preaching on deliverance from sin. That was the whole trouble with the church at Corinth: they knew all about the forgiveness of sins; there was nothing wrong with their theology, but a great deal wrong with their practice. They did not understand the gospel of deliverance from sin, and that is the thrust of Paul's letter to them.

After this brief glimpse of the background, we are ready to have a more detailed study of the book. We watch how this great missionary preacher approached a church that is living on such a low level. He might have been angry; he might have lashed out at them, but we find he doesn’t do that. Paul adopts the tactics of the Master Himself; tactics which I am sure the Lord would have us all practice in such a situation. He lifts up the believers by reminding them of the glory of their salvation and of the great privileges that are theirs in Christ.

As we come to grips with this epistle, we will notice how Paul reminds these Christians of their relationship to God. Then he reviews their equipment and resources for their Christian journey. He begins by emphasizing his right to write this letter, as seen in verse 1, “Paul, called to be an apostle of Jesus Christ through the will of God.” Although they might not have recognized who Paul really was (remember he was formally Saul of Tarsus), he reminds them that he is speaking as an apostle, a “sent one,” doing the will of God.

Then in verse 2 he addresses them as "the church of God which is at Corinth." The Greek word translated "church" is the word "ecclesia" which means "called ones," and they were the "called-out of God" in Corinth. As the "called" of God, they were not to cringe in fear before ungodly people, but to live as those called into the only position of authority any Christians can have in a pagan world: a position of dignity and power in Jesus Christ. Because Christ Himself said in Matthew 16:19, "I will give unto thee the keys of the kingdom of heaven: and whatsoever thou shalt bind on earth shall be bound in heaven: and whatsoever thou shalt loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven."

Paul continues with the words, "...to them that are sanctified in Christ Jesus, called saints," not "called to be saints," as we have the verb inserted in the King James Version. This is what they are in the sight of God, His separated ones, "called saints." In the remaining portion of verse 2 he opens it up to include every one of us: "with all that in every place call upon the name of Jesus Christ our Lord, both theirs and ours."

Here they were, God's called-out people in Corinth, and here we are also, given a flaming message to proclaim, the good news of redemption in Christ Jesus. Here is the gospel for a city with all its corruption and licentiousness, vice and ignorance, a gospel that is completely adequate for every situation when it is intelligently preached and intelligently understood. This letter is addressed not just to a few people in Corinth, a city that is now in ruins, but to the church of Jesus Christ in any city of the world in any era of history, even the times in which we live. We are God's separated, called-out ones to a position of authority, that is to say, a position in which we are supposed to know what we believe, to live it and proclaim it. That is the only way through which others can find the living Christ. We may be called; also, as was the church at Corinth, to live in a city notorious for its corruption and licentiousness, but that is a sphere in which the church, by contrast, should shine its brightest.

"Called-out" - that is our relationship to God and His message. To those who are in that wonderful position the Lord gives resources for the Christian journey that are "abundantly above." You find Paul listing them for us, beginning in verse 3, "Grace be unto you, and peace from God our Father, and from the Lord Jesus Christ. I thank my God always on your behalf, for the grace of God which is given you by Jesus Christ." Here the Holy Spirit points out to us that double spiritual power which, if we understand and appropriate it, will be adequate for everything that we can ever encounter in life. What are those resources? "Grace and peace."

If I were to ask you to define the word "grace," perhaps you would say, "It is the undeserved loving kindness of God which has met us in our sin and need." Yes, grace is that, but it is far more than that. It comes, as Paul says here, from

God our Father, through the Lord Jesus Christ: God the Father is the source and Jesus Christ is the channel through whom it flows. Grace, therefore, is His life of purity and holiness; His death that was sufficient to pay the price for our sins; and His present ministry by which He imparts the Holy Spirit today, enabling us to die to sin and to live in His power.

It seems to me that "grace" in the New Testament is that which brings into our lives everything that delights the heart of God. There is grace to make me like the Master, grace to give me victory when otherwise I would fail, grace to make me patient where I would be impatient, grace to enable me to, glorify the Lord Jesus in every situation and circumstance. Are you concerned about pleasing God today? Let me remind you that He has already placed within you that possibility: His life, His character, and His Spirit.

The second word, "peace," does not imply laziness or inactivity. It is movement without friction, creating perfect harmony. It also means balance and unity which result from every part of your life being centered on doing the will of God. God has given us these two inner powers to each one of His children. Therefore, Paul says that as Christians, we have been given some tremendous potential for the journey.

Not only have we been given "grace" and "peace," but other wealth, also, as seen in verse 5, "That in every thing ye are enriched by him, in all utterance and in all knowledge." Here we take a backward look to the moment of our conversion, when we were "enriched." When we came to Jesus Christ, He imparted to our life spiritual wealth that is going to be revealed "in all utterance and in all knowledge." We have a message to proclaim, for God has given us His gospel to preach, His Word to live by, His life to live out. Therefore, our message ought to reveal a message of "wealth." He has also given us the Holy Spirit, the great Discerner of truth, by whose wisdom and strength we can understand and appropriate the grace of God and the riches of our Lord Jesus Christ. Our lives ought to reveal a revelation of "knowledge."

Let me remind you, once again, that the promises are to ALL the church of Jesus Christ. This is the purpose of our salvation; here is the advantage that God freely gave us when He saved us. God's convincing argument to the world is the Christian who is possessed and indwelt by the Spirit of God. It is only through your life and mine that God can do things in our neighborhoods that He could not accomplish otherwise. That is His way of working, the way in which His sovereign purpose is fulfilled - through people to whom He has made Himself known, a people who have enlightenment from the Word of God, a people whose very lives demonstrate that the God in whom they believe is alive because He dwells within them.

That possibility should be a very solemn, challenging thought to our hearts: to know that God has a ministry for each of us, that He intends to do something with our lives that He could not accomplish apart from His Spirit dwelling with each one of us. Therefore, regardless of the amount of theory or intellectual understanding you may be acquiring, the conclusive argument for His gospel of redemption is your life and mine in the place where God has put us. **If God has put you here, it is for a ministry. If God did not put you here, then you need to go somewhere else.**

Notice also the tremendous privilege that is ours as Christians, as seen in verse 9, "God is faithful, by whom ye were called into the fellowship of his Son Jesus Christ our Lord."

In chapter 15:58 of this letter, Paul writes, "Therefore, my beloved brethren, be ye steadfast, unmovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, forasmuch as ye know that your labor is not in vain in the Lord." Apart from greetings, that is the end of this letter, and it seems as if that verse goes back to this one in the first chapter, "God is faithful...therefore be ye steadfast, unmovable." **How can we be steadfast?** Because God is "faithful," and He has "called" us into the "fellowship" of His dear Son. **This is the priceless privilege of the Christian life.**

The Greek word for "fellowship" is "koinonia," which means "having everything in common." **It is the thought of communion together, of mutual understanding.** We who have been enriched, made wealthy by the grace of God, have the great privilege of sharing the Good News of God's love to a lost and dying world.

The idea that Paul brings to focus here is that of the Old Testament concept of a "covenant relationship." In other words, we have a blood covenant with God through our faith in the finished work of Jesus Christ. And because of that, God is interested in every part of our being: your mind and its development, your body and its sanctity, your purity and holiness, your spirit and its graciousness, your tenderness and love.

And because of our covenant relationship with God, our concern should be to bring Him glory, and our life should show forth the wonder of His person, the majesty and greatness of His power. Our constant ambition should be not only to learn about doctrine, but to know Him, His Word, and His will for our lives.

Therefore, as we set out on our journey with Christ, we have the resources of grace and peace; we are enriched in all utterance and in all knowledge; and we are given this great and precious privilege of a covenant relationship with Almighty God.