

*1 Corinthians 1:4-6***PREFACE**

As he does so often, after Paul's formal salutation he includes a slightly more personal expression of thanksgiving for the Corinthians—sort of.

In v3 he expresses his desire for them to have and experience “grace...and peace”; in vv4-7 Paul gives thanks that they indeed *have* grace—and more. Verses 4-9 can and should be interpreted in two ways. First, in a positive, affirming sense Paul is describing who and what the Corinthians are, what they have in Christ, and how regularly they are in his prayers. But second, in a not necessarily negative but artful way of setting them up for the argument that follows, Paul establishes how well equipped they are, in Christ Jesus, for a holy, righteous life. That's the good news. The bad news is: *So why aren't you living that way?*

This section in Paul's letters, typically just after the greeting, is not boilerplate: These words expressed by a politician (or maybe even one of us) might be empty twaddle; expressed by Paul they are another window onto the state of this church. For a comparison, let's read the corresponding section in the First Thessalonians letter.

Read 1 Thessalonians 1:2-3.

Now let's read the next paragraph in our Corinthian passage.

Read 1 Corinthians 1:4-9.**Question: What is missing?**

Answer: any mention of their good works, love for each other, generosity toward the saints, etc. The entire section speaks of what *God* has done and will do for them in Christ Jesus—not about what they are doing with His gifts to them. This reveals, as well, the difference between the two churches.

v4

I thank my God always concerning you

The recipient of Paul's thanksgiving he refers to as “my God” (NIV follows two earlier MSS that do not include “my”). Something he said to his worried shipmates in Acts gives us an idea of what he means by saying “my God.”

“For this very night an angel of the God to whom I belong and whom I serve stood before me...” (Acts 27:23)

The God to whom Paul belongs, and the God he serves, is the One to whom he offers thanksgiving. He does this “always”—i.e., “every when,” at all times, at every opportunity. Regarding the Corinthians, for what does he give thanks?

for the grace of God which was given you in Christ Jesus

With an understanding of the many problems in the Corinthian church, some read sarcasm here. Not at all; there is nothing false or cynical said here. Paul *will* employ sarcasm elsewhere in this letter (e.g., 4:8-10), but here he is honestly giving thanks to God for what He has given them: grace, Christ Jesus, knowledge, multiple and varied gifts, and, not least, fellowship with “Jesus Christ our Lord.” His approach is, *I thank God for all He has given you. Now why aren't you doing more with it?*

Note: Paul's emphasis is not contingent on the church's laxity. Even if its members were a laudable, supreme example of service, love, generosity, piety, Paul *must* (and would) give thanks to God *first*, for the Lord is the source and giver of it all. For example, even to his beloved Philippians he begins, “I thank my God in all my remembrance of you...”

The word “grace” (Greek *charis*, *khar'-ece*) is a flexible word that can refer to all sorts of things, so we must do our best to understand what Paul means by its use here. Is he saying that the members of the church deport themselves with grace? Are they a gracious bunch? Is he thanking God for *saving them* by His grace?

A strong case can be made by the context of this paragraph (vv4-9) that what Paul has in mind here are the spiritual graces, or gifts, bestowed by God. The best evidence for this is v7.

so that you are not lacking in any gift, awaiting eagerly the revelation of our Lord Jesus Christ,

gift = *charisma* = from <G5483> (charizomai); **a (divine) gratuity**, i.e. deliverance (from danger or passion); (special) **a (spiritual) endowment**, i.e. (subject) religious qualification, or (objective) **miraculous faculty** :- (free) gift.

The NIV explicitly inserts the adjective “spiritual” before “gift”—although, in a sense, that is redundant, since *all* gifts are theirs from God (who is, after all, spirit) in Christ Jesus. For the Christian, *all* gifts are spiritual, as James tells us.

Read James 1:16-17.

Later in this letter Paul will devote considerable time and ink (Chapters Twelve to Fourteen) to the church's proper use of these gifts. Here he gives thanks to God for them.

Just a Thought: Perhaps the Lord was especially generous to the Corinthians in supernatural gifts, knowing they would need them more than others, living in the corruption and license of Corinth.

And there is that word “in” again. The Corinthians are sanctified in Christ Jesus (v2) and they are given God's grace(s) in Christ Jesus (v4). Paul is already addressing one of their big problems, as he describes later.

Read 1 Corinthians 4:7.

Why do you boast as if these gifts sprang up from within you, by your will, by your inherent superior qualities? They are from God—and only from Him because you are in Christ Jesus.

David Guzik: When Paul looked at the Corinthian church, he could say: “These people proclaim Jesus, they know about Jesus, there are the supernatural gifts of God among them, and they are excited about Jesus’ return.” Whatever problems they had, these are some pretty impressive strong points! Can even this much be said about many churches today? We may pride ourselves on not having the Corinthian’s problems, but do we have their positives? Yet, these positives were no great credit to the Corinthian Christians themselves. They were not the spiritual achievements of the Corinthians, but the work of the grace of God in them.

v5

In v5 Paul gets a little more specific about the content of his thanksgiving. In v4 he writes, “I thank my God always concerning you.” Concerning *what* about them?

that in everything you were enriched in Him

The Greek word translated “enriched” means wealthy. In his second letter to the church in Corinth, Paul uses the word literally, in an oft-quoted passage about giving.

Read 2 Corinthians 9:10-11.

That is, you will be given much so that you will have much to give to others. But here in the first letter Paul uses the term figuratively to refer to the wealth of graces (gifts) they possess because they are in Christ. *They* have been made wealthy because of their relationship with Christ Jesus. And then he proceeds to specify two areas in which they are wealthy.

in all speech and all knowledge

Here are two sometimes-mystical words that require deeper examination. Note the repeated “all.”

speech, utterance = *logos* = from <G3004> (*lego*); **something said** (including the thought); by implication a topic (**subject of discourse**), also reasoning (the mental faculty or motive; by extension a computation; specially (with the art. in John) the Divine Expression (i.e. Christ) :- account, cause, **communication**, × concerning, doctrine, fame, × have to do, intent, matter, mouth, preaching, question, reason, + reckon, remove, say (-ing), shew, × speaker, **speech**, talk, thing, + none of these things move me, tidings, treatise, utterance, word, work.

knowledge = *gnosis* = from <G1097> (*ginosko*); knowing (the act), i.e. (by implication) knowledge :- knowledge, science; understanding.

Fee interprets *logos* (speech) in this context as “in every kind of ‘spiritual utterance’”—i.e., as we will see later in this letter, gifts of utterance such as knowledge, wisdom, tongues, prophecy, etc. By *gnosis* (knowledge) Paul refers to their insight into spiritual things, such as the mysteries of faith (13:2).

Paul is walking a narrow line here, broaching a topic that he will develop more fully later. We are familiar with the rest of his letter so we can imagine what is going through Paul's mind even as he, once again, thanks God for their gifts of speech and knowledge. Later he will show that there is too much of the flesh, too much of *self* in their use of these gifts—that they are worthless if they are not employed in the Spirit, and enveloped in love.

Read 1 Corinthians 13:1-2.

v6

Once again we must bring to a close our study in the middle of another of the apostle's long sentences. We will revisit v6 in our next session as we complete this paragraph. But now let us complete our thoughts with a brief look at this verse.

even as the testimony concerning Christ was confirmed in you,

Nevertheless, even if badly realized, their gifts serve as a confirmation—a “testimony”—implied, “God the Father confirmed Paul's witness to Christ among them by giving them these Spirit giftings” (Fee).

testimony = *martyrion* = neuter of a presumed derivative of <G3144> (martos); something evidential, i.e. (genitive) **evidence given** or (special) the Decalogue (in the sacred Tabernacle) :- to be testified, testimony, **witness**.

We can think of this paragraph as *progressive*—no, not “progressive” as in the new Democrats, but moving from the smaller to the larger or, more precisely here, from the beginning invitation and acceptance (v4: “the grace of God which was given you in Christ Jesus”) to the fruition and filling of that new relationship (v5: “you were enriched in Him...”) to the extent that they “were not lacking in any gift” (v7).

Put succinctly in more modern vernacular,

Paul came.

Paul preached.

The Spirit came.

The Spirit empowered.

Testimony confirmed.

We will begin with v6 in our next session.