

A Godward Thanksgiving
1 Corinthians 1:3-9
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Introduction

This morning we are going to be moving on in 1 Corinthians. It is my goal to skim over the surface of 1:3 and then get an overarching understanding of 1:4-9. Before moving on, however, we must remember that Paul is writing to a messed up church. The Gospel in the church of Corinth had been removed from the center of the Christian community. Serious moral, relational, and doctrinal errors were threatening the life and vitality of the church. To give you a reminder of just how warped the church in Corinth had become consider the following list of sins which Paul called them to repent of:

1. in Chapters 1-4 he rebukes the church for dividing over leadership; 2. In Chapter 5 he rebukes the church for tolerating incest in the church; 3. in 6:1-11 he rebukes certain members of the church for suing each other; 4. in 6:12-20 he rebukes certain members of the church for engaging in prostitution; 5. in Chapters 8-10 he rebukes the theologically mature in the church for not giving up their rights for the sake of their fellow struggling brethren; 6. in Chapter 11:17-34 he rebukes the rich in the church for hoarding all the food for themselves while the poor go hungry; 7. in Chapters 12-14 he rebukes the church for misusing the gifts as a tool for self-promotion and for thinking themselves more superior based on their use of the gifts; 8. in Chapter 15 he sternly warns the church to straighten out their heretical view of the resurrection of the dead.

As we have discussed before, the common denominator of their many moral, relational, and doctrinal errors was their devaluing of the Gospel. Paul thus wrote with the purpose of exposing their many failures with the hopes of reestablishing the Gospel as the foundation of their life in the community of Christ. He knew that their primary problems were theological. He knew that if he could reestablish the biblical Gospel as the foundation of their church, the rest of their relational, moral, and doctrinal errors would be dealt with. The Gospel, after all, is the foundation of the church's life.

1 Corinthians 1:3

We will not be spending much time on vs. 3. Verse 3 is a standard Greco-Roman Christianized greeting.¹ There is much theology compacted into this one little verse, without a doubt. However, it will be profitable for us to consider it briefly and then move along into the next section of the letter.

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

¹ Gordon D. Fee explains how Paul 'Christianized' the standard Greco-Roman letter greeting. "The traditional greeting in the Hellenistic world was *charein*—the infinitive of the verb 'to rejoice,' but in salutations meaning simply 'Greetings!' (see Acts 15:23; Jas. 1:1). In Paul's hands this now becomes *charis* (grace), to which is added the traditional Jewish greeting *shalom* ('peace'). Thus, instead of 'greetings,' it is 'grace to you—and peace.'" Gordon D. Fee, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*; The New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1987), 34.

In this greeting Paul establishes the core components of the Gospel as a sort of prayer on their behalf. I want you to notice three things about this greeting. 1. Consider the significance of the word ‘grace’. ‘Grace’ is a reference to unmerited favor. When a sinner prays for ‘grace’ he is asking that God not deal with him according to his sins—that God not deal with him as he deserves to be dealt with.² Grace cuts at the heart of human achievement and acknowledges our status as dependent creatures. Grace and pride cannot exist in the same sentence; grace precludes (or eliminates) any grounds for boasting. It causes one to say, “I am what I am only because of what God has done for me in Jesus Christ.” The Gospel of God’s grace confirms the fact that our only hope is that God give us what we do not deserve. For Paul to greet the Corinthians by appealing to the grace that comes from God and Christ is for Paul to reestablish their commonality as undeserving sinners. Paul, then, is praying that God’s grace may meet them where they are at.

2. Paul greets them not only by appealing to the grace of God, but also by appealing to ‘peace’. In this context, peace has less to do with an inner disposition of the soul (in other words, it has nothing to do with feelings of peace or rest)³ and more to do with an objective relational peace that God has won through Christ. It is closely paralleled with the idea of reconciliation as communicated in texts like Romans 5:8-11 and 2 Corinthians 5:18-21. This peace that God has effected is entirely relational; it has to do with the fact that God has removed the hostility between himself and sinners by removing the catalyst for such hostility, sin. And the effects of this peace peek out from our restored relationship with God to our relationships with each other in the body of Christ. This, of course, will have massive implications in 1 Corinthians. David Garland helpfully explains that “‘grace’ is the source of Christian life, and ‘peace’ is its consummation.”⁴ In other words, it is God’s grace to us in Christ (through His death in our place for the remission of sin) that creates peace between us and God.

3. The Father and the Son are the source of grace (unmerited favor) and peace (right relationship), which is made clear from the second half of the verse. The grace and peace are ‘from’ the Father and the Son. Here Paul makes a clear distinction between the Father and the Son, but as is seen all throughout, for example, the Gospel of John, they are One. Jesus came to do what the Father sent Him to do. Nothing more, nothing less. Jesus perfectly reveals the character, the heart of the Father. The Father and the Son work in sync, as it were. There is no conflict between them at all. Fee explains the interworking’s of the Father and the Son; “grace and peace from God the Father are effected through *our Lord Jesus Christ*.”⁵ Theologically speaking, it is accurate to say that each of the three persons in the Trinity have their own distinctive role to play in salvation: the Father predestines, the Son purchases, and the Spirit applies. The Father chooses who He is going to save, the Son dies and in so doing purchases those whom the Father chooses, and then the Spirit dispenses the gifts of salvation on those for whom Jesus died. In this specific passage we see that grace and peace are given by the Father and the Son as they work in sync on behalf of sinners.

² C.K. Barrett helpfully identifies grace as “God’s love active in Christ.” See C. K. Barrett, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*; Black’s New Testament Commentary (Peabody, Hendrickson Publishers, 1968, 2006), 38.

³ This certainly is a biblical theme (for example, see Philippians 4:6-7), this is just not what Paul is talking about in this specific verse.

⁴ David E. Garland, *1 Corinthians*; Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2003), 30.

⁵ Fee, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, 35.

Paul's Godward Thanksgiving (1:4-9)

We have come to my favorite parts of 1 Corinthians. Without vs. 4-9, 1 Corinthians would be one of the darkest books in the New Testament. Imagine if 1 Corinthians did not contain 1:4-9. From 1:10 all the way to the end of the letter Paul lambastes the Corinthians for their worldliness. These verses have become so dear to me because they confirm to me that no Christian is beyond hope. No church, no matter how far they have fallen, is beyond grace. Notice that Paul's emphasis in the first nine verses of 1 Corinthians—his emphasis is clear; the infinite grace of God dispensed through the Son of God, Jesus, as the foundation of our hope. Paul begins his rebuke by reminding them of the grace of God which is found in Christ; he begins by reminding them of the Gospel. Why do you suppose he did so? I have thought of three main reasons why Paul decided to begin such a hard hitting letter on such an uplifting note.

First, so that they might not take credit for reforming their own lives. Salvation is all of grace. The church is not a 12 step, self-help program. The church centers its message and life on the grace of God given in Christ Jesus. It is interesting today that when someone receives Jesus as their Lord and Savior everyone rally's around the person with accolades. "Congraduations! I am so happy for you. It is so cool that you made the decision to give your life to Christ." No, the Congratulations! should be directed to God, not to the individual. God should be the one being praised. Salvation is not just a time when an individual turns a new leaf. It is a time when God brings breathes new life into dead, dry bones; it is where He gives sight to the blind. Baptism is a cause for celebration for the gift of new life; a celebration of the salvation that God has won; a celebration of the fact that His grace has conquered and cleansed yet another sinner. Paul knew that the power for transformation lay not in the ability of men to reform themselves, but rather in the power of God's grace to transform, cleanse, and forgive. Paul removes any grounds for their potential boasting in effecting change in their own lives by pointing to the fact that their relationship with God is built entirely upon His gracious dealings with them. Interesting enough, the Corinthian church responded in an at least partially favorable way to some of Paul's rebukes in 1 Corinthians. For example, we know from 2 Corinthians 2 and 7 that they took seriously his admonition to discipline the incestuous man out of the church. For this they can take no credit. Their repentance in this area is merely another indication of the grace of God at work in their midst.

Second, Paul trusted in the power of the Gospel for transformation. When someone is struggling with sin, although there may be a time to deal with sin with a swift word of warning, we often times over look the power of the grace of God in bringing about transformation and repentance. The grace and unconditional love of God are the world's greatest motivators to godliness. This does not mean that Paul does not exhort them strongly to deal with their sin (just read the rest of the letter), but it is interesting that Paul begins by reminding them of the grace that they have been given in Christ. Paul does this because He is confident in the power of the Gospel of God's grace to transform.

Third, and I think most importantly, he began 1 Corinthians with an emphasis on the grace of God because he wanted to build a foundation for them that they might not despair as they continue to read the letter. Paul knew that he was writing a disturbingly strong-toned letter. He knew that there was going to be great potential for the genuine believers in Corinth to fall to a place of despair as they considered the enormity of their worldliness. Paul did not want them to despair as if they had somehow fallen beyond the reaches of the grace of God. Paul wanted to build them up in the grace of God before exposing their great sinfulness so that they might know that their need for repentance in no way means that they have somehow fallen from grace. In

other words, he did not want them to lose confidence in the grace of God given to them in Christ, knowing that he was about to expose how spiritually sick they had become.

Before actually digging into the details of this thanksgiving I want you to notice the Godward nature of this thanksgiving. In other words, although Paul thanks God for the Corinthians, his thanksgiving for the Corinthians centers on God's acts of grace on their behalf. He thanks God for them precisely because they evidence forth the infinite grace and love of God. I also want you to notice that all of God's gracious activity on behalf of the Corinthians is mediated through His Son, Jesus.

Let us briefly consider the main parts of this section. **Paul thanks God for the Corinthians for three precise reasons: 1. because of His grace given to them in Christ (1:4); 2. because of the evidence of His present working of grace in their midst (1:5-7), and 3. because of His faithfulness to keep the Corinthians until the day of the Lord Jesus Christ (1:8-9).** Or to put it another way; in 1:4 Paul speaks of God's past acts of grace to the Corinthians, in 1:5-7 he points to evidences of God's present acts of grace among the Corinthians, and in 1:8-9 he speaks of God's future acts of grace for the Corinthians.

First, Paul thanks God for the Corinthians because of His grace given to them in Christ. Imagine if I were to come up to you and say, "I thank God for you because if it weren't for you I would have never gotten to know your neighbors." That probably wouldn't be the most flattering thing anyone has said to you. You would probably respond, "Thanks! So you are thankful for me only because of who I am associated with? Why can't you be thankful for me because of some quality that you see in me?" And yet this is the sort of thanksgiving that Paul issues to God in regard to the Corinthians. He says,

I always thank my God for you **because of God's grace given to you in Christ Jesus.**

In other words, Paul does not thank God for the Corinthians because they are a superb bunch of folks; he doesn't thank God for them because of their great level of maturity. Just read the rest of the letter! Paul does not here thank God for the Corinthians because of their superior spirituality or because of their imitable love for God and His people. Rather, he thanks God for the Corinthians because they are trophies of His grace. Paul makes much of the Corinthians because they evidence forth the infinite grace of God—that God's grace can cleanse, heal, and save even the worst of sinners. Paul thanks God for the Corinthians precisely because they are living representations that God does not deal with His people according to their sins—that God does not give us what we deserve.

Second, Paul thanks God for the Corinthians because of the evidence of His present working in their midst. Paul certainly does thank God for the Corinthian's giftedness, yet communicates at the same time that the areas in which the Corinthians are thriving gives evidence not of their great spirituality but rather of God's goodness to them. After all, he attributes their giftedness to God's bountiful giving in 1:6-7.

"that **by Him you were made rich** in everything—in all speaking and all knowledge—as the testimony about Christ was confirmed among you, so that you do not lack any spiritual gift as you eagerly wait for the revelation of our Lord Jesus."

The Corinthians have no grounds for boasting in their own spirituality. Notice that they did not make themselves rich. No, they were made rich by Him! They were made rich

specifically in regard to the ‘spiritual gifts’ or more appropriately, the ‘grace gifts’⁶ of ‘speaking and knowledge.’⁷ These two areas of gifting are clearly spoken of by Paul in 1 Corinthians 8 and 12-14. The Corinthians are what they are only because of the richness of God’s grace. They do

⁶ BDAG defines *charisma* as “that which is freely and graciously given.” Walter Bauer, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*. Edited by Frederick William Denker, 3^d Ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2001), 1081. Almost every commentator suggests that it is a mistake to translate this word (*charisma*) as “spiritual gifts”, preferring instead the translation “grace gifts” (or something similar). See Barrett, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, 38; Anthony C. Thiselton, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians: A Commentary on the Greek Text*; The New International Greek Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2000), 97-98; Garland, *1 Corinthians*, 31-32, 34. See especially D.A. Carson, *Showing the Spirit: A Theological Exposition of 1 Corinthians 12-14* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1987), 19-24. Carson defines the ‘grace gifts’ as “gifts of God’s grace”. Ibid., 22. Fee sees a clear connection between the “grace” (*charis*) of 1:4 and the “grace gifts” (*charisma*) here in 1:7. “... for Paul *charis* (“grace”) very often is closely associated with *charisma/charismata* (‘gift/gifts’) and in such instances refers to concrete expressions of God’s gracious activity in his people.” Fee, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, 37.

In another place Fee suggests “gracious endowment” as the best possible translation for the word *charisma* in 1:7. He explains; “The first occurrence of the word *charisma* in the Pauline corpus (v. 7) is especially instructive, since it demonstrates that the first emphasis in the word is on its root *charis* (‘grace’), not on either the Spirit or the gifting per se. Thus, even though Paul has concrete expressions of ‘grace’ in view (in this case ‘speech’ and ‘knowledge’), and even though in ch. 12 these concrete expressions are understood as the direct result of the Spirit’s activity, there seems to be no real justification for the translation ‘spiritual gift’ for this word. Rather, they are ‘gracious endowments’ (where the emphasis lies on the grace involved in their being so gifted), which at times, as in this letter, are seen also as the gracious activity of the Spirit in their midst.” Gordon D. Fee, *God’s Empowering Presence: The Holy Spirit in the Letters of Paul* (Peabody: Hendrickson Publishers, 1994), 86.

⁷As one would expect, there are a plethora of different ideas as to what “speaking and knowledge” might refer to. Most commentators posit that these two gifts are represented in 1 Corinthians 8:1-13 and 1 Corinthians 12-14. In that camp would be Fee, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, 39—see also Fee, *God’s Empowering Presence*, 87-88; Thiselton, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, 91-92 (although he is quick to not associate his view too closely with the super-spiritual view that Fee takes, he nonetheless points to the same groups of passages as viable cross references to what ‘speaking and knowledge’ might refer to); Gary S. Shogren, *1 Corintios*. Comentario Bíblico Iberoamericano (Buenos Aires: Ediciones Kairos, forthcoming), 47; Charles Hodge, *A Commentary on 1 and 2 Corinthians*; Geneva Series of Commentaries (Carlisle: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1857, 2000), 6-7; Garland, *1 Corinthians*, 33-34; Barrett, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, 36-37. Ben Witherington postulates that the ‘speaking and knowledge’ refer not just to the realities of 1 Corinthians 8 and 12-14, but also to the ‘speaking and knowledge’ of 1 Corinthians 1-4. Ben Witherington III, *Conflict and Community in Corinth: A Socio Rhetorical Commentary on 1 and 2 Corinthians* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1995), 87-89. Shogren offers a clear reason for rejecting Witherington’s position. He says, “Paul is in no way thankful for that pseudo-intellectual speech and knowledge. Rather Paul is thinking ahead to the *charismata* in chap. 12-14, true workings of God that the Corinthians have abused.” Shogren, *1 Corintios*, 47.

I would agree with Shogren on this. After all, Paul slams the Corinthian’s ‘pseudo-knowledge’ by drawing a sharp contrast between it and the true knowledge of God in chapters 1-4. Paul gives no indication that the ‘speaking and knowledge’ of 1 Corinthians 8 is inherently wrong (and 8:4-7 would indicate that the knowledge possessed by the Corinthian believers in chapter 8 was in every way accurate and good) with the knowledge they possessed. The problem lay, rather, in their wrongheaded claim to what they knew (accurately, I must add) to be their own Gospel given rights even when their claim on such theologically correct knowledge (of their rights) led to the real spiritual destruction of their less theologically astute brethren. There was also nothing inherently wrong with the ‘speech and knowledge’ discussed in 1 Corinthians 12-14. The problem addressed in chapters 12-14 lay not in the unbiblical nature of their use of the gifts, but rather in their self-centered, self-gratifying use of the gifts. However, the ‘speaking and knowledge’ in 1 Corinthians 1-4 was contested by Paul on every front and was even spoken of by Paul as contrary to the wisdom and power of God (see especially 1 Corinthians 1:18-2:16 and 4:19-20). I would posit that the ‘speaking and knowledge’ in vs. 5 includes theological knowledge, preaching gifts, spiritual knowledge, and spiritual utterance.

not own their spiritual gifts—the gifts are not theirs’ to do what they want with. Paul communicates this very idea to the Corinthians in 4:6-7.

The purpose is that none of you will be inflated with pride in favor of one person over another. For who makes you so superior? What do you have that you did not receive? If, in fact, you did not receive it, why do you boast as if you hadn’t received it?

In attributing their spiritual bounty to the graciousness and bountiful giving of God, he precludes or eliminates any ground for boasting. The Corinthian’s were misusing the gifts that God had given them; using them as grounds for establishing superiority over each other instead of using them as a tool for building up the brethren in love (read 1 Corinthians 12-14 as one context). Even though they were misusing the gifts, the presence of the gifts, nonetheless, evidenced the fact that God was in their midst. Thus, Paul thanks God for the Corinthians because they have the fingerprints of God’s present activity in their midst all over them. The Corinthian’s giftedness was not indicative of themselves. The fact that the Corinthian’s were endowed with such a remarkable degree of gifting says much more about God, the giver of the gifts, than it does about the Corinthians themselves. All their gifting reveals is that God has been extraordinarily good to them in spite of themselves.

When I was in college I had a good friend who was a joke stealer. We would be sitting together in the cafeteria and I would tell him a joke or make up some sort of a funny or witty line. He would laugh and laugh and laugh. But almost immediately after I would tell the joke or say the witty line, he would turn around to the table behind us and blurt out what he just heard as if he were the one who had made it up. I would (pridefully, I must admit) wait for him to give credit where credit was due. But he was a joke stealer. Everyone at the table would be laughing their heads off and he would sit there all proud as if he were the one who had made it up. In my mind I would be thinking, “Hold on a second. He stole my joke!” All the people at the table thought he was so funny, and only he and I knew where the joke originated. This is exactly what the Corinthian’s were doing. They were using these gifts that God had given them to build up their own egos as if their giftedness pointed to their great godliness as opposed to the great grace and bounty of God.

I want you to notice as well that Paul was not afraid to praise God for them in this area. The majority of the Corinthian’s problems stemmed from their wrong usage of the gifts and still Paul was not afraid to thank God for His making them rich in the usage of these gifts. I think we can learn a lesson in this way from Paul: we must never 1. excuse the wrong nor 2. ignore the good in others.⁸ We generally have the tendency to do one or the other, do we not? We either overlook the obvious sins of others (and usually resort to gossip instead of going the route of biblically guided, gentle, loving confrontation as laid forth in Galatians 6:1-2) or we so focus on each other’s shortcomings that we completely lose sight of how God’s grace is evident in their lives. And the interesting thing is that our greatest strengths are generally our greatest weaknesses. This was true of the Corinthians as well. As messed up as the Corinthian’s were, God was using them. He was working in their midst in spite of themselves. And Paul was not afraid to praise God for His activity in and among them. We must never discredit the evidence of the present day workings of God in the lives of his people, no matter how badly His people may be misunderstanding, misusing, or misrepresenting such gifts. Thisselton says,

⁸ I am indebted to Gary Shogren for this insight. Shogren, *1 Corintios*. 46.

“What Christians bring from their cultural backgrounds into the church has varying value. Paul respects and appreciates what he can, knowing that the transformative power of the cross transposes indifferent or ambivalent raw material into what becomes part of a genuine gift of God’s grace for good. Paul places *everything* before God in a posture of thankful prayer and address.”⁹

Third, Paul thanks God for the Corinthians because of His faithfulness to keep the Corinthians until the day of the Lord Jesus Christ. The Corinthian’s perseverance in the faith bears evidence to the faithfulness of God in keeping His people. Notice that Paul does not here thank God for the Corinthians because of their great ability to keep themselves in the faith. He thanks God for the Corinthians because they evidence forth the faithfulness of the God of all grace to a people who are utterly faithless. Check out 1:8-9.

He will also confirm you to the end, blameless on the day of our Lord Jesus Christ. God is faithful; by Him you were called into fellowship with His Son, Jesus Christ our Lord.

Notice the divine activity in these two verses. He says absolutely nothing about their own ability to keep themselves. It is all about God’s ability to keep them. If my final salvation were in my own hands; if my being kept was completely dependent upon my ability to keep myself, I would be a goner. The only reason any of us persevere to the end is because God is a promise keeping God. We give Him reason to let go of us every day, and the only reason we are kept anyways is because He has pledged His faithfulness to us in Christ. Paul encourages the Corinthians in the faithfulness of God. Paul affirms them; you will be kept. Their final perseverance once again is not indicative of their great godliness, but rather of God’s great faithfulness to a faithless people. Just read the rest of 1 Corinthians to get an idea of how tall of an order it was for God to keep a people like the Corinthians. They are a testimony to the great faithfulness of God’s keeping grace.

I want to say something about the doctrine of the Perseverance of the Saints. There have been some in church history, John Wesley for example, who have taught that the Bible teaches that a Christian can lose his/her salvation. This, however, is not biblical. There are certainly passages in the bible that can at least cause one to question the validity of Wesley’s position,¹⁰ but the overall biblical teaching is quite clear. Paul communicates that the final perseverance of the Christian is an issue of the faithfulness of God. That is to say, to suggest that a Christian may lose his/her salvation is to put a question mark over the faithfulness of God. After all, in regard to the Corinthian’s final perseverance, Paul says, “He will... confirm you to the end... God is faithful.” Perseverance is a work of God. Man certainly has a part to play (as evidenced in **Philippians 2:12; Jude 21**, etc.). However, God is the engine driving the efforts of men, making their ‘keeping’ efforts effective (as evidenced in **Philippians 2:13 and Jude 1, 24**).

Jesus communicates this very idea, the idea that the final perseverance of the saints is an issue of the faithfulness and power of God, in John 6:37-40.

Everyone the Father gives Me will come to Me, and the one who comes to Me I will **never** cast out. For I have come down from heaven, not to do My will, but the will of

⁹ Thisselton, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, 93.

¹⁰ 1 Corinthians 15:2, Galatians 5:2-4, Colossians 1:22-23, Hebrews 6:1-6, and Hebrews 10:26-31 just to name a few.

Him who sent Me. This is the will of Him who sent Me: that I should lose none of those He has given Me but should raise them up on the last day. For this is the will of My Father: that everyone who sees the Son and believes in Him may have eternal life, and I will raise him up on the last day.

For Jesus to lose any that the Father has given Him is for Jesus to fail to fulfill the will of the Father. If He loses any that come to Him in faith, He has failed to be obedient to the will of the Father. To suggest that one can lose his/her salvation is to imply that Jesus is a disobedient failure. It also seems to put a question mark over God's unconditional love to His people. Furthermore, it seems to turn our grace based salvation into a salvation of works. What do I mean by this? Well, faith may get one in the door, but how does one stay in the door? The true Arminian who believes that a Christian can lose his salvation is forced to resort to the Roman Catholic teaching, which communicates that one must maintain his justification by faith-wrought works in order to keep himself justified. In the final analysis, if salvation were a losable thing, my ultimate hope would be in my ability or performance in keeping myself. Paul, however, makes our final perseverance in the faith an issue of the faithfulness of God. I would not say that the Wesleyan doctrine is a damning doctrine, but I would suggest that it is ultimately dangerous and worthy of contestation. We can hear the sentiment of 1 Corinthians 1:8-9 in Robert Robinson's hymn, *Come Thou Fount of Every Blessing*:

O to grace how great a debtor
Daily I'm constrained to be!
Let Thy goodness, like a fetter,
Bind my wandering heart to Thee.
Prone to wander, Lord, I feel it,
Prone to leave the God I love;
Here's my heart, O take and seal it,
Seal it for Thy courts above.

What was the plea of the hymnist? For God to get involved! He knew that he was completely dependent upon God for his perseverance in the faith. His hope is in the goodness and faithfulness of God. Our best efforts to keep ourselves are worthless apart from Him keeping us. If my perseverance in the faith is dependent upon my ability, my discipline, my power to will, my determination, my love, I will not be kept. But if God keeps me according to the standard of His faithfulness, my final perseverance is sure! *The ground of my hope is not in my own performance to keep myself, but rather in His faithful character, in the unconditional grace and love which He has extended to me in Christ Jesus.*

But the point here in 1 Corinthians is to emphasize the faithfulness of God in keeping those who repent and believe on the Lord Jesus Christ as a reason for Paul to thank God. Paul thanks God for the Corinthians because their continued perseverance in the faith is a testimony to His faithful character. Paul thanks God that His grace has been sufficient to get the Corinthians in the door, is sufficiently bearing fruit in the present, and will be sufficient to keep them 'blameless' until the day of Christ Jesus. The Corinthians, from the top of their heads to the soles of their feet, are walking pictures of sinners saved, used, and kept by the grace of God. What a word of encouragement to the Corinthians! They are about to stare their own ugly sinfulness in the face, but they have the news of God's sufficient, keeping grace to combat any fears of total abandonment or judgment that might come their way. Paul surely wants them to repent of their

many sins, but he also does not want the knowledge of their sin to cause them to either cease resting in the grace of God or rejoicing in the grace of God.

Conclusion

Paul thanks God for the Corinthians, building them up in the grace and love of God, before he mentions even one issue for which they need to repent. This whole thanksgiving is shot through with God's active grace mediated through Christ. Paul's thanksgiving for the Corinthians has everything to do with how their life in Christ redounds to the glory of God's grace (mirroring the emphasis of "to the praise of His glorious grace" in Ephesians 1:3-14). His thanksgiving is a Godward thanksgiving as opposed to a man-centered thanksgiving. He thanks God for the Corinthians precisely "because of God's grace given to you in Christ Jesus." There is hope for the Corinthians because their life in Christ is from beginning to end is a work of God. Paul establishes their confidence in the grace of God before he begins to expose their multi-faceted problems. How badly do we need the Good News of God's grace preached to us again and again and again?! Paul knew that they needed to be reminded of their standing in Christ before they could appropriately handle the strong word of rebuke that he had prepared for them.

Do not despair! Do not take your sins lightly, but do not despair! God has saved you, he is at work among you, and He will keep you to the end. You have nothing to boast in save the cross of Christ, but this cross gives you all that you need for salvation, life, and final perseverance. God has saved you, is saving you, and will keep you saved unto the end!