

*As You Wait*  
*1 Corinthians 1:4-9*  
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*Introduction*

This morning we are going to be looking at 1 Corinthians 1:4-9 again. However, this week we will be focusing our attention primarily on vss. 5-7. Before moving along I want to remind you of what was emphasized last week. Last week we saw that Paul thanked God for the Corinthians for three precise reasons. Each of these reasons pointed to the activity of God's grace to the Corinthians in spite of their great waywardness. *First, Paul thanked God for the Corinthians "because of God's grace given to you in Christ"* (vs. 4). Notice that Paul does not thank God for the Corinthians because of their superior spirituality. This is quite the statement. He is saying, 'I thank God for you because He has not dealt with you according to your sins.' That is, after all, what grace is; it is when God gives us what we don't deserve. Or to put it another way, Paul was saying, "I thank God for you because you evidence forth to the world how His grace is more than abundant to save and transform even the worst of sinners."

*Second, Paul thanked God for the Corinthians because of the evidences of His present working in their midst* (vss. 5-7). See the divine activity in vs. 5; "by Him you were made rich in everything." Their giftedness did not point to their own great imitable godliness, but rather to the bountiful grace of God. These gifts that God bestowed on the Corinthians evidenced His present working of grace in their midst. *Third, Paul thanked God for the Corinthians because of his faithfulness to keep the Corinthians until the day of our Lord Jesus Christ* (vss. 8-9). Once again, notice the divine activity. The Corinthian's final perseverance in the faith is a work of God's faithful grace. Paul does not express confidence in the Corinthians' ability to keep themselves in the faith, but rather attributes their perseverance in the faith ultimately to the faithfulness of God. Last week we saw that Paul thanked God for the Corinthians because he was confident that God's grace was more than abundant to get them in the door, make them thrive while they were in the door, and keep them in the door until the day of Jesus Christ.

*Getting the Flow of 1:5-7*

This morning we are going to be focusing our attention on 1:5-7. Before diving in I want you to get a sense of the flow of Paul's argument in vss. 5-7. Notice three things. *First, observe the word 'that' in vs. 5.* The word 'that' suggests that Paul speaks of God's making them rich in regard to the grace gifts as an evidence of His grace to them in Christ. The word 'that' (*hoti*) intimately ties vs. 5 with vs. 4. By leaving *hoti* out of their translation, the NLT has lost the intimate connection between God's bountiful giving (of the grace-gifts) to the Corinthians and God's grace given to them in Christ Jesus. The word 'that', however, points to the fact that Paul saw the Corinthian's giftedness as an expression of God's grace given to them in Christ. *Second, notice that Paul, in the second half of vs. 5, extrapolates what he means when he says that God made them rich 'in everything'.* What does Paul mean when he says that God made them rich 'in everything'? Does this mean that God made them monetarily rich or land rich? Of course not! Paul explains exactly what he means when he says that God made them rich 'in everything' in the second half of vs. 5. As an explanation he says, "in all speaking and all knowledge." God has made them rich in everything, **that is** "in all speaking and all knowledge." 'Speaking' is most probably a reference to the gift of tongues/languages that God had given them, as evidenced in chapters 12-14. It most likely also refers to their ability to communicate the truths of God's word

through preaching and teaching. They had been given various sorts of speaking gifts from the Lord. ‘Knowledge’ most likely refers to both theological knowledge (see Chapter 8) and spiritual knowledge given through the Spirit for the building up of the body (see Chapters 12-14).

*Third, notice that the presence of these gifts were given by God to confirm the progress of the Gospel in their midst (vs. 6-7).* Paul clearly associates the presence of these divinely bestowed gifts as God’s way of confirming the truth and reality of the Gospel to them, and of its effectiveness in their midst. Their richness in the gifts points to the fact that God was alive and well in their midst—it was God’s way of evidencing His possession of them in Christ (and, yes, the gifts still work to this end). As I stated last week, the translation ‘spiritual gift’ is rather unfortunate. The word translated as ‘spiritual gift’ is *charisma*. This word is related to the word translated as ‘grace’ in vs. 3 and vs. 4, *charis*. This is why the majority of commentators prefer ‘grace gift’ (or something similar) as a translation of *charisma* over against ‘spiritual gift.’ Paul will employ a word for ‘spiritual gift’ in chapters 12-14 (*pneumatikos*), but in this context (that is, in 1 Corinthians 1:4-9) Paul is clearly communicating the fact that their giftedness is owing wholly to God’s grace given to them. These gifts that God has bestowed upon them are ‘grace-gifts’ first of all because they did not earn them and second of all because they are tools that God uses to administer His grace in its various forms.<sup>1</sup>

Let’s sum up where we have come. We have seen that God’s bounty to the Corinthians in regard to the ‘grace gifts’ is an expression of His grace to them in Christ, and work to establish the truth and reality of the Gospel in their midst—these gifts validate the success of the Gospel among them.

### *As You Wait*

I want you to notice how Paul speaks of their existence as gifted believers in vs. 7. What is the direction of their lives? Look at this verse 7 with me.

so that you do not lack any spiritual gift as you eagerly wait for the revelation of our Lord Jesus Christ.

God has made them rich in everything so that they will not lack any spiritual gift *as they eagerly wait for the revelation of our Lord Jesus Christ*. Notice the forward looking nature of the Christian life. Paul reminds the Corinthians that these grace gifts have been given to them for a season. These grace gifts that God has so richly bestowed on the Corinthians have been given during a time of waiting. Christianity is by nature a forward looking religion. The Corinthians were not given these gifts as permanent structures. The gifts are given to God’s people while we eagerly wait for His second coming. There is so much here that is worthy of application-based reflection. However, before getting there it will be profitable to look at 1 Corinthians 13 to solidify the fact that the gifts are temporary fixtures of the Christian life. Turn with me to 1 Corinthians 13:8-13. Keep in mind before we read this portion of 1 Corinthians that Paul is here, in chapters 12-14, rebuking the Corinthians for their misuse and abuse of the spiritual gifts/grace gifts. They were using the gifts as a way of building themselves up instead of using them as a way of lovingly and selflessly building up each other. They were using the gifts as the supreme standard for judging spirituality. Paul suggests that love is the true test of Spirituality and that

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<sup>1</sup> See D.A. Carson, *Showing the Spirit: A Theological Exposition of 1 Corinthians 12-14* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1987), 20. For a fuller discussion on this topic see last week’s sermon; <http://www.biblecreed.com/media/1%20Corinthians%201v3-9.pdf>

even the greatest use of the gifts apart from love are useless in the sight of God (see vss. 1-3). With this in mind let's take a look at our passage.

8 Love never ends. But as for prophecies, they will come to an end; as for languages, they will cease; as for knowledge, it will come to an end. 9 For we know in part, and we prophesy in part. 10 But when the perfect comes, the partial will come to an end. 11 When I was a child, I spoke like a child, I thought like a child, I reasoned like a child. When I became a man, I put aside childish things. 12 For now we see indistinctly, as in a mirror, but then face to face. Now in part, but then I will know fully, as I am fully known. 13 Now these three remain: faith, hope, and love. But the greatest of these is love.

There is so much going on in this section. Notice, however, the temporary nature of the spiritual gifts: prophecies, languages (tongues), and knowledge will all come to an end, but love never will. Prophecies, languages, and knowledge are all a reference to the different spiritual gifts mentioned in chapter 12:27-30 and 13:1-2. He says in vs. 10 that “when the perfect comes, the partial will come to an end.” He is here saying that when Jesus comes back and we are all brought to glory we will no longer be in need of the Spiritual gifts. Many have tried to suggest that ‘the perfect’ has already come. Those who take such a position posit that ‘the perfect’ is a reference to the closing of the New Testament canon (that is, they suggest that ‘the perfect’ is a reference to the time in church history when the New Testament in its entirety was recognized and thus established by the early church councils). This position, though, is quite unlikely. It certainly is possible, but it is an embarrassingly large stretch. It is my contention that one could only arrive at such a position if he/she has a prior held theological system that is being forced down the throat of this passage. “The perfect” rather is a reference to the “day of our Lord Jesus Christ” (1 Corinthians 1:8). In fact, 1 Corinthians 13:8-13 and 1 Corinthians 1:5-8 are clearly speaking to the same issue—the temporary nature of the grace gifts/spiritual gifts.

When the perfect comes there will be no need for the gifts because we will all be rid of sin, we will all have glorified bodies, and we will see Him as He is! We will not need our Bibles because we will be face-to-face with the glorified Word-made-flesh. All that will remain is faith, hope, and love. Paul is communicating the same idea here in 1:7; he is communicating the fact that the spiritual gifts are temporary fixtures in the larger picture of redemptive history.

He speaks of the Christian life as a life of “waiting”—a life of eager waiting. Really, waiting is the posture of biblical Christianity. But it is not the sort of waiting that you may be thinking. There really are two types of waiting. Consider the difference between the two following types of waiting. 1. A man sits in his terminal at the airport snoring as he sleepily waits for the flight attendant to call all the passengers to board the plane. 2. A college freshman diligently studies and prepares for weekly exams as he eagerly waits for graduation day. The Christian form of waiting is the second sort of waiting. The one waiting results in the twiddling of thumbs while the other results in active anticipation.

Paul's words suggest that the Christian life reflects this second type of waiting. Do you remember what he said? He thanks God for the Corinthians because of God's grace given to them in Christ. He communicates the idea that this grace expresses itself to the Corinthians through God's making them rich in regard to all speaking and knowledge so that they might not lack any spiritual gift *as they wait* for the revelation of our Lord Jesus Christ. By His grace He bestows grace-gifts so that we might be busy as we eagerly await the coming of Jesus.

In other words, God gives us the grace gifts/spiritual gifts so that we might be empowered and equipped to busy ourselves with the ministry of kingdom expansion and body building as we wait for His return. This is the whole purpose of the giving of the gifts—to empower us so that we might minister to one another as we wait. Just as a college student eagerly waits for the day of graduation with intensity, hitting the books, so we eagerly wait the return of Christ with intensity, ministering to one another with the gifts given us by God.

One commentator suggested that our lives as Christians ought to resemble that of an athlete. Just as a runner in the 200 meter dash leans forward to go faster and be the first across the finish line, so we ought to be leaning forward, anticipating, eagerly waiting, for the revelation of our Lord Jesus Christ.<sup>2</sup> The whole Christian life is characterized as a life of waiting. This is not the only passage that communicates this idea. Look at some other passages from the New Testament with me.

Romans 8:18-25: 18 For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory that is going to be revealed to us. 19 For the creation eagerly waits with anticipation for God's sons to be revealed. 20 For the creation was subjected to futility—not willingly, but because of Him who subjected it—in the hope 21 that the creation itself will also be set free from the bondage of corruption into the glorious freedom of God's children. 22 For we know that the whole creation has been groaning together with labor pains until now. 23 And not only that, but we ourselves who have the Spirit as the firstfruits—we also groan within ourselves, eagerly waiting for adoption, the redemption of our bodies. 24 Now in this hope we were saved, yet hope that is seen is not hope, because who hopes for what he sees? 25 But if we hope for what we do not see, we eagerly wait for it with patience.

Philippians 3:19-21: 19 They are focused on earthly things, 20 but our citizenship is in heaven, from which we also eagerly wait for a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ. 21 He will transform the body of our humble condition into the likeness of His glorious body, by the power that enables Him to subject everything to Himself.

1 Thessalonians 1:9-10: 9 For they themselves report about us what kind of reception we had from you: how you turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God, 10 and to wait for His Son from heaven, whom He raised from the dead—Jesus, who rescues us from the coming wrath.

There are other passages which we could look to,<sup>3</sup> but this at least provides a basis for understanding that Paul's emphasis here in 1 Corinthians 1:7 is not just a passing, thoughtless comment. This for Paul is at the very heart of the Christian faith. The Christian faith is correctly referred to as an eschatological faith. In other words, the Christian faith is a faith which is forward looking. While our hope finds basis in the finished work of Jesus Christ, the object of our hope involves the final appearing and full salvation brought to us at the second coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. God purchased our salvation through the death of His Son on the cross,

<sup>2</sup> N.T. Wright, *Paul For Everyone: 1 Corinthians* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2004), 4.

<sup>3</sup> For example; 2 Corinthians 4:7-5:9; Galatians 5:5; 2 Peter 3:11-14; Hebrews 9:27-28 just to name a few others. We could also look at the many parables told by Jesus which point to the forward looking nature of Christianity (e.g., Matthew 13:44, 45-46, 47-50; 25:1-13, 14-30, 31-46; Luke 12:35-40; 14:15-24; 18:1-8).

but our salvation will not be finally complete until the ‘day of the Lord Jesus Christ’. Thus, the cross is the basis, the surety of our hope, but Jesus Himself, His return, is the object of our hope.

This is so very clearly seen in so many passages (not to mention one of the passages we have already looked at). Christian salvation in many ways has a three stage aspect to it: I was saved when I first repented of my sins and believed on the Lord Jesus Christ, I am being saved in the present as Jesus continues to forgive my many continued sins, and Jesus will bring final salvation on the day of His return.<sup>4</sup> It is interesting how many passages speak of salvation as a future event. Look at 1 Peter 1:3-9, 13 with me.

3 Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. According to His great mercy, He has given us a new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, 4 and into an inheritance that is imperishable, uncorrupted, and unfading, kept in heaven for you, 5 who are being protected by God's power through faith for a salvation that is ready to be revealed in the last time. 6 You rejoice in this, though now for a short time you have had to be distressed by various trials 7 so that the genuineness of your faith—more valuable than gold, which perishes though refined by fire—may result in praise, glory, and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ. 8 You love Him, though you have not seen Him. And though not seeing Him now, you believe in Him and rejoice with inexpressible and glorious joy, 9 because you are receiving the goal of your faith, the salvation of your souls... 13 Therefore, get your minds ready for action, being self-disciplined, and set your hope completely on the grace to be brought to you at the revelation of Jesus Christ.

Salvation is something to be hoped for. Our final salvation is sure—it was bought with the blood of Jesus—but its complete and final stage is still yet in the future. This is why Paul can say, “If we have placed our hope in Christ for this life only, we should be pitied more than anyone.” (1 Corinthians 15:19). The Christian life is a life of hope. Pay close attention again to what Paul says in Romans 8:24-25.

24 Now in this hope we were saved, yet hope that is seen is not hope, because who hopes for what he sees? 25 But if we hope for what we do not see, we eagerly wait for it with patience.

You cannot hope for something that you already have or it wouldn't be hope. Suppose I were to come up to you with a hot dog in my hand. Suppose I take a bite out of it and then say, while chewing, “Boy I hope I get to eat a hot dog today.” Would that not be ridiculous? How can you hope for a hot dog that you are already eating? The Christian faith is a faith that both looks backward and forward. We look backwards at what secures our future hope, the cross, and this gives us reason to both rest in the present and anticipate the future.

Thus it is can be said that we are to ‘live in the moment but not for the moment.’ This is exactly what Paul communicates in 1 Corinthians 1:7. We are to live every moment for the glory of God. We are to make the most of every opportunity (Colossians 4:5). We are to put all of our energy into both advancing the Gospel and into building up the body of Christ. We are to live in the moment as those who have been made rich by God in everything. However, we are not to

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<sup>4</sup> Wright explains this way; “God called them in the past, God equips them in the present, and God will complete the whole process in the future.” Ibid.

live for the moment. We minister ‘as we wait’ for Jesus’ return. We are to live for the Kingdom to come. We are to store up our treasures there. Every activity is to be done “as we wait for the revelation of our Lord Jesus Christ.”

The coming Kingdom therefore is the goal, the focal point, of all of our activity on this earth. Consider what John Piper says about the Christian’s relationship with the Jesus’ second coming:

“*loving* the appearing of the Lord is not an optional Christian act that may earn more rewards. It is what true Christian faith does: it loves Christ and longs for the Bridegroom to come. Saving faith says, ‘Thy Kingdom Come! Come back, O precious Bridegroom. Come, reign as King. Come, vindication your people. Come, marry your bride.’”<sup>5</sup>

I do not say this as a rebuke to anyone without adding myself into the equation. But I must ask; why do we not pray for the second coming—for the revealing of our Lord Jesus Christ? Have we created for ourselves mini kingdoms on this earth that have choked out and competed with our passion for the coming Kingdom of Christ? This forward-looking, glory-seeking posture is what made early Christianity what it was. Once again, for Paul the much-anticipated second coming of Jesus was at the very heart of the Gospel he preached.

If someone was to come up to you and ask; “So... you are a Christian. Tell me, what do you do as a Christians?” Would you be able to respond, “I wait.” Does waiting for the revelation of Jesus characterize your life as such? If not, your Christianity is seriously lacking—your Christianity is sickly—your Christianity is biblically misguided. So often our Christianity only focuses on the past (what Jesus did) and the present (how we can live for Jesus) but deemphasizes the future, eschatological fulfillment of Jesus’ righteous rule as Lord. Don’t get me wrong, we need to be grounded in Jesus’ death, burial, resurrection, and ascension and we need to be focused on the tasks given us by God at hand, but we must never lose sight of the fact that the object of our faith was the *future* return of Jesus. If this was not the object of Paul’s faith how could he have said what he said in Philippians 1:21?

21 For me, living is Christ and dying is gain. 22 Now if I live on in the flesh, this means fruitful work for me; and I don’t know which one I should choose. 23 I am pressured by both. I have the desire to depart and be with Christ—which is far better—24 but to remain in the flesh is more necessary for you. 25 Since I am persuaded of this, I know that I will remain and continue with all of you for the advancement and joy in the faith.

How could Paul have felt such a struggle if the object of his hope was not future. Is this not also the whole force of Hebrews 11? The point of Hebrews 11—the chapter known as the ‘Hall of Faith’ is to point to the fact that true faith believes God for things which are not yet at this moment possessed. The author of the Letter to the Hebrews encourages his readers to consider such a great list of Old Testament saints who apprehended by faith the future-oriented promises of God.

Paul emphasizes the past (vs. 4) the present (vss. 5-7a) and the future (vss. 5:7-9) grace of God. The Corinthians have been saved, they are being saved, but they are awaiting their final, completed salvation.

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<sup>5</sup> John Piper, *A Hunger For God: Desiring God Through Fasting and Prayer* (Wheaton: Crossway Books, 1997), 87.

## *Conclusion*

The Christian faith is a faith of hope. But hope that is not grounded in anything is false. Our hope, however, is a hope grounded in the historical death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. The death of Jesus is the surety of our future, eschatological salvation. Although our future salvation is yet to come, it is sure. Our salvation is in the bag. What is our guarantee? The cross and the resurrection! The cross is the basis of our hope; it was by His death on the cross that Jesus purchased our final, eschatological salvation.

Suppose I was to go on vacation to Florida. In planning my trip I take into account the fact that I am going to have to get a hotel for the length of my visit. Before heading to the airport I go online and book a room for myself in a Holiday Inn. I pay for the room ahead of time and print out a receipt. If you were to come up to me and say, “Jimmy, where are you going to stay when you get to Florida?” I would tell you that the Holiday Inn is holding a room for me. If you then asked me how I could be so confident that the Holiday Inn would hold a room for me, I would break out my receipt and thus provide you proof that I had already purchased my room.

Well, this is the same sort of a role that the death, burial, and resurrection accounts in the Gospels play. They are proof that our salvation has been purchased. Our final salvation is sure. Jesus “was delivered up for our trespasses and raised for our justification” (Romans 4:25). While he was on the cross He cried out, “It is finished.” (John 19:30). The Father then raised Him from the grave to provide evidential proof that His Son’s sacrifice was accepted and sufficient to atone for the sins of the world. The death, burial, and resurrection are our receipt, guaranteeing God’s commitment to our final salvation. Thus, we have a faith which is grounded in the past, active in the present, and ‘eagerly waiting’ for the future.