

# 1 CORINTHIANS 1:3-9

First Sunday in Advent, December 2-4, 2023

Smith

## You Do Not Lack Any Gift

**3 Grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. 4 I always thank my God for you because of his grace given you in Christ Jesus. 5 For in him you have been enriched in every way—with all kinds of speech and with all knowledge— 6 God thus confirming our testimony about Christ among you. 7 Therefore you do not lack any spiritual gift as you eagerly wait for our Lord Jesus Christ to be revealed. 8 He will also keep you firm to the end, so that you will be blameless on the day of our Lord Jesus Christ. 9 God is faithful, who has called you into fellowship with his Son, Jesus Christ our Lord.**

You and I, formerly sinful, sin-soaked, sin-riddled, wild, untamed and untrained creatures subservient only to Satan, but now called by Christ Jesus himself.

I think the Peter and Paul start all their letters with “grace” because in Greek it’s so very much like their usual word “Greetings.”<sup>a</sup> Grace is God’s favor, his disposition toward us; it’s the love he has for us, love we don’t deserve. “Peace” was the usual way to say greetings in Hebrew, such as in the letters of Ezra in the Old Testament.<sup>b</sup>

Think about what it means to greet someone who a prayer for them: a prayer for God’s grace, and God’s peace. When we do this, we are not trying to manipulate God, but we are showing that we expect only good things from him, and we pray that he will do precisely what he promises to do for us all through the work of the Holy Spirit and for the sake of Jesus our Savior.

Paul is writing to some of his most troubled and troublesome readers (Christians who did not always think so very highly of Paul, but who he loved dearly)-- he shows them that they have been enriched in all their speaking and knowledge.

To enrich someone in their speaking goes beyond a good speaking voice, good grammar, proper vocabulary, or a persuasive way of speaking. None of those things would matter at all if they weren’t backed up by faith in Christ. How often do the Gospels and the other Epistles show us that a man with little or no real education, with the coarsest way of speaking, who couldn’t tell an infinitive from an imperative, but who has faith, is all the Holy Spirit needs

<sup>a</sup> *Charis* “grace” and *Cheirein* “greetings.” 2 John also begins this way (2 John 1:3).

<sup>b</sup> “Greetings” (Ezra 4:17; 5:17) is the translation of the Aramaic form of *shalom*, “peace.”

to convey the Gospel of Jesus to human hearts. Faith gives us all the riches of God, and all his blessings are channeled through it to one another through faith in Jesus.

“We all,” Paul admits, “are waiting for our Lord Jesus to be revealed.” Now that Jesus Christ has come into the world-- which was also the case when Paul wrote these words-- this sentence has two meanings. For most, it is the about the second coming of Jesus into the world, when he will come again to judge the living and the dead. This is something we confess week by week in the Creed. It is also grossly misunderstood by many Christians around the world, throughout our country, and even here in our community.

The true focus of the creed and of all of the Scriptures is this: That Jesus Christ came into the world to save sinners. The chronology of the final days of the universe and of the final hours of the very last day, do not need to be a concern to anyone who knows Christ, and for those who do not, it will be too late. But this focus on the coming of Jesus is of course why this passage is part of our Advent worship. Advent meaning “coming,” and in Advent we remember Jesus’ first coming, and we anticipate his second.

But let’s ponder for a moment the value of the creed. And since the creed we are using this weekend is the Nicene, let’s look briefly at its language. **“For us, and for our salvation, he came down... became truly human... for our sake was crucified, suffered death, and rose again.”** And as for the second coming? **“He will come again in glory to judge the living and the dead. And his kingdom? Will it be for a thousand chronological years here on earth? No? His kingdom will have no end.**

The creeds have the value of instructing us with what is key and vital for our faith. The creeds do not use language that isn’t found in the Scriptures. The value of the creeds is that they remind us that they were written against dramatic error in the past, errors that will resurface again and again, and that the Church came together to agree that these brief points are crucial to our faith, our teaching, and our life.

Now, Paul says to you: “You do not lack any gift.” And we expect that the gifts God gives to us are always and only for our good. Even when trouble comes, it is for our benefit, often to turn us more squarely to Christ. God does not give us a “side hug.” He does not concern himself that any of us might be too obscene, or too obese, or too obnoxious, or too overly sinful, to touch. He brings it on with open arms and his wide smile with even his eyes smiling, because he loves us. He is gracious to us. He brings peace to us.

And that means that we lack nothing. Paul even dares to say that we are blameless. Moses says in Deuteronomy 18:13, **“You must be blameless before the Lord your God.”** In the

beginning, Adam and Eve were indeed blameless. But God gave them a single law-- the law about which tree not to eat from. He gave that law for at least three reasons: **(1) For this own glory.** Man serves and obeys God as God's servant and creature. **(2) God gave the first law for man's free service.** God did not create human beings as brutes that needed to evolve, but before the fall, with perfect powers of reason. And **(3) as a schoolhouse.** If man had continued to obey and learned the delight of pleasing God in all things without sin, at a later time Adam and Eve would surely have been transferred from their earthly paradise to the heavenly one without pain or death, and they would have been confirmed in their goodness.<sup>a</sup>

But of course, they did fall, and we are born fallen creatures who need our Savior, because left to ourselves, we are not blameless. We cannot by our own reason or strength or thinking or choosing, believe in Jesus Christ or come to him.

Consider nothing less than the very first commandment: "Do not have any other gods." A god is the one we look to, for all good, and a god is one we find refuge in, during every time of need. To have a god is nothing else than to trust in him and to believe in him with our whole heart.

Maybe for some, money is a rival to God. Or power. Or authority. But more and more it is the lonely island fortress of one's own opinion. My desires, my cravings, my judgment, reigns supreme even over God Almighty-- that is too often the sad truth and the sad, selfish, sinful idolatry of our time.

Now in Paul's time, the Jews had a temple where they could obey Moses and make sacrifices for their sins. But many of the Corinthians were not Jews. They were Gentiles, as most of us are. And since just after Paul's death the Temple was destroyed by the Romans, there has not been an altar for any sacrifice. But there doesn't need to be. Christ, the Bible tells us, gave his own body as the one sacrifice for all.

And he calls us, forgiven, covered, and free of guilt, into his fellowship. To be in his fellowship is to have a close, mutual relationship with him. We are able to participate in him, sharing in his gifts so freely and joyfully given. Fellowship with God is not a mere acquaintance, but a family, an intimate family relationship, that Paul describes in Romans as branches grafted into the vine. We have been cultivated by Christ. You and I, formerly sinful, sin-soaked, sin-riddled, wild, untamed and untrained creatures subservient only to Satan, but now called and forgiven by Christ Jesus himself. You lack nothing.

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<sup>a</sup> Gerhard, *On Sin* §5.