

1Corinthians 1:3-4 “Amazing Grace”

1 Corinthians 1:3-4 Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. I thank my God always concerning you for the grace of God which was given you in Christ Jesus,

This morning we'll be picking up in verse three of chapter one in our study of 1Corinthians. As we saw last week Paul introduces himself and opens with a greeting as well as a statement of the position these Corinthian Christians share before God as those who are sanctified in Christ Jesus and saints by calling.

1 Corinthians 1:2 To the church of God which is at Corinth, to those who have been sanctified in Christ Jesus, saints by calling, with all who in every place call on the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, their *Lord* and ours:

This statement is made by the apostle Paul in light of the fact that there are some real problems in this church where it would appear that a number of these people were anything but sanctified or saints from an outward perspective.

But when Paul uses these two terms in this context he's not describing their character, rather he's describing their standing before a holy God. Their standing before a holy God is one which sees them as not guilty because of the shed blood of Christ placed to their account by faith.

And this is the point Paul is trying to make. He's showing them that they stand before God as not guilty only because of the shed blood of Christ on their behalf. Someone else has paid their debt. Someone else took the penalty of death which was promised by God to all of His people.

To be sanctified is to be set apart by God and unto God for a holy purpose. To be sanctified is also to be viewed by God as being in Christ, which means that when we stand before God He sees His Son's righteousness and perfection, as well as the debt being paid in full, as we place our faith in Christ.

As I mentioned last week, part of our salvation has to do with a judicial matter of standing before a holy judge who must punish sin. Someone will have to pay that debt. Either, you and I will pay

that debt, separated from God forever in hell, or God Himself will pay that debt for us in Jesus Christ.

But, we will only be relieved from that debt in Christ as we call upon Him, asking for forgiveness. This is what Paul was saying in verse 2 when he said, "To the church of God in Corinth, to those sanctified in Christ Jesus and called to be holy, together with all those everywhere who call on the name of our Lord Jesus Christ - their Lord and ours:"

By the way, that expression, "who call on the name of our Lord", is used exclusively of God alone. We find it in places like Genesis when Abraham sought after God.

GEN 12:7-8 "The LORD appeared to Abram and said, "To your offspring I will give this land." So he built an altar there to the LORD, who had appeared to him. From there he went on toward the hills east of Bethel and pitched his tent, with Bethel on the west and Ai on the east. There he built an altar to the LORD and called on the name of the LORD."

When referring to the remnant of Israel and God being there for them we read in ZEC 13:9 "... I will refine them like silver and test them like gold. They will call on my name and I will answer them; I will say, 'They are my people,' and they will say, 'The LORD is our God.'"

To call on the name of the Lord is to call on Jehovah. In fact, in both of these O.T. passages that is the name which is used in the Hebrew. The word Lord is always a designation of the name Jehovah in the O.T. Scriptures.

And Paul purposely uses this expression in the Greek in this passage in 1Corinthians when he says, "everywhere who call[s] on the name of our Lord Jesus Christ - their Lord and ours:..."

In the context here the word for Lord in the Greek is kurios which means supremacy and is the exact equivalency to the name Jehovah. In fact, if you were to go to the Septuagint, which is the Greek translation of the Hebrew Scriptures, the same word Kurios would be translated for Jehovah or Lord in the O.T. passages we just saw.

What Paul is clearly saying is that the same God and Lord who is declared Jehovah in the O.T. is the same God and Lord being declared here in 1Corinthians. And then Paul identifies who this

Lord is; Jesus Christ who sets us free from the penalty of sin as we call on His name.

ACT 4:12 "Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to men by which we must be saved."

And so, back in our text, Paul is driving home the point that if we have been set free from the penalty of our sin through Christ's atonement on our behalf, then how should we be living unto His glory out of thanks for so great a salvation? When writing to the Romans Paul makes the same point.

ROM 6:17-18;22-23 "But thanks be to God that, though you used to be slaves to sin, you wholeheartedly obeyed the form of teaching to which you were entrusted. You have been set free from sin and have become slaves to righteousness. But now that you have been set free from sin and have become slaves to God, the benefit you reap leads to holiness, and the result is eternal life. For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord."

The reason Christians have eternal life is not because of living holy lives to gain that life. It is the result of being declared holy because of Christ living a holy and perfect life and then giving us His righteousness.

But this doesn't mean that once we've received forgiveness from Christ that we can go off and do our own thing and live any way we want. We have been purchased by His death and resurrection and we belong to God who is a caring and loving Father. But we must always realize that it is the grace of God which is extended to sinful man for this gift of eternal life. But grace must never be used as an excuse to sin.

ROM 6:1-2 "What shall we say, then? Shall we go on sinning so that grace may increase? By no means! We died to sin; how can we live in it any longer?"

And so we come to our text this morning.

1CO 1:3 "Grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ."

This is one of Paul's favorite expressions because in it capsulizes the truth of where our salvation comes from. It comes from God our Father and the Lord (Kurios, supreme in authority) Jesus Christ. But this is all grace.

It's interesting that nowhere in the word of God do we find those two words, grace and peace, being reversed. And the reason for that is because there is no peace unless we first receive grace.

The word grace comes from the Greek word charis which implies a gift extended. You don't pay for a gift, it's free and undeserved. And grace is the same thing. It's a gift from God, not because we were worthy of such a gift, but only because it pleases God to give it.

And so, what Paul is saying here in verse three is that grace and peace will always go together. When God gives us this free gift of forgiveness in Christ we then immediately enter into a peace relationship with God because the barrier of sin which separated us from Him has been taken down.

When our debt was paid in full on the cross God provided the way of escape from being totally lost forever. In Christ we find this grace. Paul points this out when writing to the Romans.

ROM 5:1-2 "Therefore, since we have been justified through faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have gained access by faith into this grace in which we now stand. And we rejoice in the hope of the glory of God."

But this legal standing with God which is peace, should then lead us to live at peace with God and one another.

COL 3:15 "Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, since as members of one body you were called to peace. And be thankful."

Paul was a thankful man for the grace and peace which God extended to him and which he received by faith in Christ. And he was thankful for this same grace and peace which was extended to everyone else because, like himself, he knew no one deserved it.

1CO 1:4 "I always thank God for you because of his grace given you in Christ Jesus."

Paul was just as amazed that God would grant these Corinthians the free gift of eternal life because there was certainly nothing in them which attracted them to God. Remember, a couple of weeks ago we saw how the entire region around Corinth was one of the most vile places in the entire world.

Everyone outside of this area knew this to be the case. Immorality of every kind was running rampant with prostitution not only being legal, but actually being elevated to a religion. And it was in this

city where God graciously brought His gospel through Paul and offered this free gift of eternal life.

I suppose in Paul's greeting of "I always thank God for you because of his grace given you in Christ Jesus", we might put his words another way. 'I'm thankful for God's grace given you because from a human stand-point I can't believe God would ever want to give you guys salvation, knowing what kind of place you live in and knowing the kind of sinful life you're involved in.'

In many ways, it could probably being compared with Sodom and Gomorrah. And yet, even in Sodom and Gomorrah God's grace was extended to them. He was long-suffering and patient with the inhabitants in Sodom and Gomorrah before He ultimately destroyed them. And this is why Paul rejoices with the Corinthians.

Grace is an amazing thing when you consider that what we really deserve from God is His wrath and condemnation. The wages of sin is death and unless Christ left His throne in glory to come into this world to die for our penalty we would still be in our sin and found guilty as charged.

But, let's talk about grace. With the help of John MacArthur from his commentary on 1 Corinthians I would like us to consider what grace is and how it works in our lives.

One of the things we should understand is that grace can't be repaid. If it could be it would cease to be grace. The very nature of grace is that it is free and undeserved favor from God and so to think that we could ever repay it is simply out of the question.

But, John brings up a very interesting point about grace and he states it this way. "In order to understand the true meaning and significance of God's grace we need to understand three things that cannot coexist with grace: guilt, human obligation and human merit."

Let's start with the first. Grace cannot exist with guilt. "Grace provides for the alleviation of guilt. God cannot say, "I am gracious and I give you salvation, but one false move and I'll take it away." That would not be a gracious gift, but a qualified, legal gift that could be taken away whenever we fell short of God's requirements.....

..... Grace would not be grace if God said, "I will save you if you don't sin." If we could keep from sinning we would not need

grace, because we would merit salvation, we would deserve it. If grace were given and then later withheld in the least degree because of sin, it would not be the grace taught in Scripture.....

..... Grace involves unmerited, undeserved and permanent forgiveness. Grace can operate only where there is sin. Without need of forgiveness there is no need of grace.” (John MacArthur, N.T. commentary, 1Cor.)

And so, to suggest that we can receive grace, a free gift from God, and then also to suggest that we can be legally guilty of sin at the same time, once we placed our total dependence on the One who came to take away our sin, is to make God a liar.

If we've received this free gift from God then we have been declared by God as not guilty and that status cannot be changed.

ROM 8:1-3 “Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus, because through Christ Jesus the law of the Spirit of life set me free from the law of sin and death. For what the law was powerless to do in that it was weakened by the sinful nature, God did by sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful man to be a sin offering. And so he condemned sin in sinful man,...”

The condemnation for our sin fell on Christ. 2CO 5:21 “God made him who had no sin to be sin (Or be a sin offering) for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.”

This is exactly what the prophet Isaiah tells us.

ISA 53:6 “We all, like sheep, have gone astray, each of us has turned to his own way; and the LORD has laid on him the iniquity of us all.”

Our iniquity, or our perversity and evil, which is what that Hebrew word iniquity means, was put on the One who had no iniquity, who had no sin. And by taking our place and paying the debt for our iniquity we have been given the righteousness of God, which is the righteousness of Christ, who is God.

PHI 3:8-9 “What is more, I consider everything a loss compared to the surpassing greatness of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whose sake I have lost all things. I consider them rubbish, that I may gain Christ and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which is through faith in Christ - the righteousness that comes from God and is by faith.”

If Christ has removed our guilt before God, then that guilt cannot be held against us. There is no double-jeopardy with God. Once we have been forgiven we are forgiven forever. “Grace is God’s gift that completely and permanently overrules guilt.” (MacArthur)

But the second point MacArthur makes is that “Grace cannot coexist with human obligation”. What that means is that now that I’ve received this grace from God there is nothing I could do to pay Him back.

I like the way MacArthur puts it. “Grace is a free gift, not a loan. In other words, we are completely indebted, but we have no debt.”

It’s impossible to consider our being able to pay for our salvation in any way shape of form and still call it grace. That’s the point Paul was making when he wrote to the church in Rome.

ROM 4:4-5 “Now when a man works, his wages are not credited to him as a gift, but as an obligation. However, to the man who does not work but trusts God who justifies the wicked, his faith is credited as righteousness.”

It would like your employer handing you your check at the end of the pay period and telling you that this is a gift from the company. And while many employers may give you that impression, it simply isn’t the case.

The only reason an employer gives you a paycheck is because you put the time in to work for him. An exchange is being made; time and work for money. You earned it. It cannot be considered a gift.

And so, for anyone to think that they can earn salvation by something they do for God is to take grace and throw it out the door and approach God as though He were your employer and demand that since we have given so much work He is obligated to give us our wages for that work in the form of eternal life.

Again, the question needs to be asked if we are going to take that approach to God. How much does eternal life cost? What are the wages? The wages of sin is death. In other words, what God owes us for our attempts to earn salvation, as noble as they may be, is death, separation from God forever.

As hard as we may try we still come up short and we must now receive our just wage. That’s exactly what James tells us in his epistle.

JAM 2:10 “For whoever keeps the whole law and yet stumbles at just one point is guilty of breaking all of it.”

Paul also points this out in GAL 3:10 “All who rely on observing the law are under a curse, for it is written: “Cursed is everyone who does not continue to do everything written in the Book of the Law.” (Deut. 27:26)

There’s only one person who ever kept the whole law perfectly and that was Jesus Christ. And it is precisely because of His perfection and righteousness that He could go to the cross and take our wage which is death and nail it there and then give us that free gift as we embrace Him alone which brings us back to a peace relationship with God.

The third point MacArthur makes concerning this grace of God is that “grace cannot coexist with human effort.” In other words, grace is not offered simply to good people.”

Again, the question: how good do you have to be to earn God’s salvation? The answer is perfect. I don’t know any perfect people including myself. But I do know my Lord and my God, Jesus Christ who is perfect in all ways.

There are a lot of “good” people in this world. There are many people who might make some Christians jealous with the way they lead their lives. But, does their goodness give them enough good works to demand from God that He owe them eternal life? I’ll let the word of God speak for itself.

ISA 64:6 “All of us have become like one who is unclean, and all our righteous acts are like filthy rags; we all shrivel up like a leaf, and like the wind our sins sweep us away.”

This is how God views our righteous acts if they are trying to be used to earn salvation. This does not mean that God doesn’t desire for us to walk righteously. But, there is no one who can come to God and say, “I deserve salvation”.

“A person’s goodness, in relation to other people and certainly in relation to God, is not considered in God’s grace. Merit, like guilt and obligation, has no part in grace.” (MacArthur)

Again, there may be people who certainly appear to be better than others in the way they conduct their lives and therefore might be considered “good people”, but we are clearly told that “all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.” (Rom.3:23)

There is only One who can remedy that problem and that is the One offering this free gift, this grace from God, which is found in the redemptive work of Christ.

In fact, this is exactly what Paul says in ROM 3:24 [we] “are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus.”

If it is freely offered, then who are we to turn it into a wage that we somehow earn? But if it is a gift we cannot earn and certainly don't deserve, how should we viewing this grace and peace we have from God which is received when we call on the name of the Lord for forgiveness and eternal life?

Again, that is the question Paul is posing to these Corinthians who seem to have taken this grace and abused it in the name of salvation. There is a real danger in this. Not that we can lose our salvation, but for those who would use grace as an excuse to sin clearly shows that they do not know Christ and the grace He extends.

JUD 1:4 “For certain men whose condemnation was written about long ago have secretly slipped in among you. They are godless men, who change the grace of our God into a license for immorality and deny Jesus Christ our only Sovereign and Lord.”

We must never think we can turn the grace of God into a license to sin. Rather, as we consider this awesome and amazing grace, we should be humbled at such a gift and show our gratitude and thankfulness with lives of love and obedience.

And this is where the righteousness we receive in Christ should show itself with lives of righteousness as we desire to live unto His honor and glory.

EPH 2:10 “For we are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.”

And so good works for the believer are important, but we never get the cart in front of the horse. We are not saved by good works, but we are saved unto good works. And it is God Himself who gives the grace to accomplish these things for Him.

TIT 2:11-14 “For the grace of God that brings salvation has appeared to all men. It teaches us to say "No" to ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright and godly lives in this present age, while we wait for the blessed hope - the

glorious appearing of our great God and Savior, Jesus Christ, who gave himself for us to redeem us from all wickedness and to purify for himself a people that are his very own, eager to do what is good.”

We ought to be eager to do what is good, not only to be a blessing to others, but most importantly to bring glory to the One who has given us this grace and this life and this love from above and will last forever in His presence in His Kingdom.

This was the main motivation of the Son of God, to bring glory to the Father. This kind of glory is reserved only for Jehovah God, maker of heaven and earth, which is precisely why Jesus Himself could expect glory as He brought glory to the Father.

JOH 17:1 “After Jesus said this, he looked toward heaven and prayed: "Father, the time has come. Glorify your Son, that your Son may glorify you.”

Should we as redeemed people do any less? Should we who have been purchased and given eternal life in Christ go on thinking that we have some pass to heaven and that we can opt out of bringing glory to our Lord and Savior who has loved us with an everlasting love?

I hope not. I pray our eyes would be open to this grace in a way that it hasn't before and that our appreciation for so great a gift will motivate us to live to His honor and glory, and may we take this grace and extend it to the world through the gospel of Jesus Christ.

Be a grace extender to the world and never forget the love that God has bestowed on us in His Son who is Lord and Savior. In Christ, we've received a grace that could never be paid back, but it should be a grace that we desire to live in and demonstrate in such a way that we don't take it for granted.

EPH 3:20 “Now to him who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to his power that is at work within us,²¹ to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, for ever and ever! Amen.”