

Paul's Opening Greeting

1 Corinthians 1:1–9

Paul begins 1 Corinthians by affirming his apostleship, something apparently denied by at least some in the church. He also affirms that the believing Corinthians were saints, something that was not evident by the way they were acting. Paul begins the book of 1 Corinthians by admonishing them for not acting the way a believer should be acting. The second part of the book focuses in on answering some questions they had about basic applications of doctrine and instructions about Christian living.

Paul starts out with a few positive words of encouragement and gives them assurance of their position in Christ before he begins pointing out their faults.

Both theirs and ours (verse 2)

Paul is speaking of two different groups here in verse 2. Both groups are believers, those who call on the name of the Lord. The first group formed would be those saved under the ministry of Jesus and the Disciples sent to Israel. They are called the Little Flock in Luke 12:32.

The other group that Paul is referring to is the Body of Christ. Once Paul was saved, all who followed him in salvation no longer became members of the earthly kingdom, but of the Church, the Body of Christ with a heavenly future. Both groups believed in Jesus Christ, but Paul is preaching the cross, not Jesus as Messiah. Both groups were meeting in the church at Corinth.

Grace and peace (verse 3)

Every book written by the Apostle Paul includes the salutation of grace and peace. Paul uses this phrase in a very special way that needs to be dispensationally understood.

We are currently living in a special period of God's grace, a time when God is lavishing His grace upon us. However, it must be understood that His grace is also evident in all other generations, for without grace, mankind would not be forgiven. Grace is God giving us something that we do not deserve while mercy is the other side of the same coin, not giving us what we do deserve. We deserved death because of sin, but instead God gifted us with life. Praise the Lord that although we were once dead in our sins, that grace abounded much more (Romans 5:20).

On a broader dispensational note, we can see how God's wrath and judgment were delayed so that He could show us His great love and grace in this dispensation of Grace. The world has a future promise of God's wrath according to Psalm 110:1—2. His enemies were scheduled to be subdued and punished. The timing of this was set forth in Daniel's 70th week of prophecy, most often understood to be the Tribulation. This will happen when Jesus Christ arises in His anger and wrath (Psalm 7:6). Notice Stephen's description of Jesus Christ standing in Acts 7:55—56, indicating that the last seven years of Daniel's prophecy is about to begin. However, instead of wrath, God poured out His grace and postponed His prophetic wrath, replacing it with a great outpouring of His grace in this Dispensation of Grace (Ephesians 3:2).

Likewise, His outpouring of grace produced a declaration of peace offered by God to all who come to Him by faith. Dispensationally, this peace is in contrast to God's declaration of war against the unrighteous man during the Tribulation, as can be seen in Revelation 19:11.

And I saw heaven opened, and behold a white horse; and he that sat upon him was called Faithful and True, and in righteousness he doth judge and make war.

An understanding of Paul's declaration of grace and peace should lead one to see that God had changed His dealings with mankind. This change happened after the stoning of Stephen with the raising up of the Apostle Paul. He is the one who was commissioned to carry the Mystery to the Gentiles, something Peter

and the 11 never did, or could do. We are never told to follow Peter, however Paul tells us often that we are to follow him, and that he is our pattern (1 Corinthians 4:16; 11:1; Philippians 3:17; 1 Timothy 1:16).

This declaration of grace and peace is extended to the whole world when we share with unbelievers Paul's gospel in this Dispensation of Grace (1 Corinthians 4:1—4). Specifically, we are ambassadors who are carrying the message of reconciliation to the world. God had reconciled all things unto Himself by sending Jesus Christ to die for man's sins. Our message is that we have been reconciled, and that unbelievers need to accept the offer of reconciliation. Although everyone is reconciled to God (Romans 5:10; 2 Corinthians 5:18; Colossians 1:20—21), the transaction is not complete until individuals accept God's offer of reconciliation. This is why Paul says that we have a message of reconciliation, telling people that they need to be reconciled to God (2 Corinthians 5:19—20).

Following this period of grace and peace will come God's wrath and His war against mankind. As Psalm 2:5 says, "Then shall he speak unto them in his wrath, and vex them in his sore displeasure."

The work of Christ on the believers (verses 4–8)

Although the Corinthians were living like the world, Paul never even hints that they will ever lose their salvation. In fact, he calls them saints (1 Corinthians 1:2), and thanks the Lord for the grace given to them by God. He also assures them that God has set them firm to the end.

Not only has He set them firm, He is also faithful to do what He says He will do. This is called the faith of Christ. Unfortunately, most Bible translations miss the significance of the phrase *faith of Christ* and translate it *faith in Christ*. The faith of Christ focuses on His faithfulness toward us, while faith in Christ is about us putting our faith in Him. One is about His work, the other is about what we do.

The King James Bible effectively makes this distinction, one reason that it outshines other translations. Here is the most common translation with newer Bibles:

Philippians 3:9 and may be found in Him, not having a righteousness of my own derived from *the* Law, but that which is through faith in Christ, the righteousness which *comes* from God on the basis of faith, (NASB)

Notice how it says our righteousness comes by faith IN Christ. However, the verse is actually showing us that this righteousness is of God on the basis of our faith (in Him). In context, since the righteousness comes from God, it is much clearer, and more accurate to say that it came through the faithfulness OF Christ, not our faith in Him. We need to read this verse as being about Christ, not about us. He is the subject of our faith and we are the object.

This difference becomes very evident in Galatians 2:16:

nevertheless knowing that a man is not justified by the works of the Law but through faith in Christ Jesus, even we have believed in Christ Jesus, so that we may be justified by faith in Christ and not by the works of the Law; since by the works of the Law no flesh will be justified. (NASB)

knowing that a man is not justified by the works of the law, but by the faith of Jesus Christ, even we have believed in Jesus Christ, that we might be justified by the faith of Christ, and not by the works of the law: for by the works of the law shall no flesh be justified. (KJV)

Notice how having faith IN Christ repeated twice in this verse does not make sense and actually obscures a deeper meaning. In this typical example, the NASB speaks only of my faith in Christ and completely bypasses Christ's work in my salvation. The KJV acknowledges that it is the faith of Christ that made it possible for me to have faith in Him.

The reason for this discrepancy is that the Greek basically says, "faith Christ." The context would then indicate whether it is the faith of Christ or faith in Christ. The newer translations take the unfortunate path of putting the focus on me instead of Christ.

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