

**MINISTRY BY MAIL**  
**Lutheran Conference of Confessional Fellowship**  
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**Eighth Sunday After Trinity, August 2, 2020**

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(Hymns found in The Lutheran Hymnal, CPH, 1941)

Hymns: 26 (246:1) 24, 392, 391

Lessons: Ezekiel 3:17-21; 2 Thessalonians 3:1-5; Matthew 5:1-12

Text: 1 Corinthians 1:4-9,

Sermon by Pastor M. H. Eibs

Fellow Redeemed in Christ,

Our text is what Paul wrote to the believers in Christ at Corinth in his first Epistle. It is an amazing thing that Paul could write to them as he did, taking into consideration what kind of a city Corinth was. It was the capital city and commercial center of that part of Greece called Achaia. It was a worldly city in every respect with idolatry, luxury, and wickedness. But here lived some believers in Christ since Paul's second missionary journey. When Paul came to Corinth, we are told, "***Paul devoted himself exclusively to preaching, testifying to the Jews that Jesus was the Christ,***" Acts 18:5b. As a result of the Holy Spirit's work in their hearts, many of the people who heard Paul became believers in Christ.

When Paul wrote to the believers at Corinth in his first Epistle, he addressed them as "***those sanctified in Christ Jesus and called to be holy,***" 1 Corinthians 1:2. As in all his epistles, Paul wrote to the saints, those made holy through faith in Christ Jesus. In other words, he wrote to believers in Christ. So we as believers may apply Paul's words in our text to ourselves as we consider:

**GOD'S GIFTS OF GRACE IN CHRIST**

- 1. Thanking God for all the spiritual gifts believers have received; and,**
- 2. Expressing the confidence that God will keep them strong in the faith to the end.**

Paul wrote: "***I always thank God for you because of his grace given you in Christ Jesus.***" The Apostle Paul was speaking not just with his mouth, but from the heart. The almighty and gracious God, who had called Paul to be an apostle to the Gentiles, had graciously bestowed many gifts of his grace on the believers at Corinth through Paul's ministry. Paul was deeply and continually thankful for these blessings from God. This is something Paul always did when he wrote his epistles. To the believers at Philippi he wrote, "***I thank my God every time I remember you,***" Philippians 1:3. To the believers at Colosse he wrote, "***We always thank God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, when we pray for you,***" Colossians 1:3. To the Thessalonian believers he wrote, "***We always thank God for all of you, mentioning you in our prayers,***" 1 Thessalonians 1:2. This is a reminder to us that we should always thank the Lord for his blessings, especially for the blessings that have to do with our salvation in Christ.

These blessings are due to God's grace in Christ. Let us remember the definition of that word "**grace**". It is **God's undeserved love and mercy given to us for Jesus' sake**. Sinners (and we are all sinners) never deserve anything but God's wrath and punishment. Only Jesus Christ, God's Son, could earn God's grace for sinners. This he did by perfectly keeping the commandments of God, doing what sinners cannot do. "***When the time had fully come, God sent his Son, born of a woman, born under law, to redeem those under law, that we might receive the full rights of sons,***" Galatians 4:4-5. "***He humbled himself and became obedient to death – even death on a cross!***" Philippians 2:8. Jesus also earned God's grace for us by his suffering, shedding of blood, and death on the cross. Jesus Christ, "***the Righteous One...is the atoning sacrifice for our sins, and not only for ours but also for the sins of the whole world,***" 1 John 2:1b-2.

What gifts of God's grace in Christ the Corinthians received is told us in our text. ***"In him you have been enriched in every way – in all your speaking and in all your knowledge - because our testimony about Christ was confirmed in you."*** Paul says that the believers at Corinth were **enriched** in every way. He isn't talking about material things or earthly matters, but about spiritual gifts. The gifts of God's grace in Christ are spiritual gifts, and they are the only gifts of real importance and consequence. We all too often think of and seek only earthly gifts, material things, and forget about or disregard the more important spiritual gifts. This is because we live in a sinful world where material things are emphasized and spiritual things are ignored.

Specifically, the believers at Corinth were enriched in their ***"speaking"*** and in their ***"knowledge."*** The word ***"speaking"*** does not refer to some specific type of speaking, but every form of expressing the saving truth in Christ Jesus. This could include instruction and admonition, public preaching and teaching. Paul had preached to them the full truth of God's Word. So the believers at Corinth did not have just a smattering of truth, superficial or piecemeal. They had the whole truth, for Paul could say, ***"I have not hesitated to proclaim to you the whole will of God,"*** Acts 20:27, as he told the elders at Ephesus. They were well instructed, for Paul was not some self-appointed preacher, speaking whatever he decided. He was chosen by God to speak the full truth of God to the Gentiles. The Lord told Ananias when Paul was converted, ***"This man is my chosen instrument to carry my name before the Gentiles, and their kings and before the people of Israel,"*** Acts 9:15. He preached ***"that Jesus is the Son of God,"*** and he ***"baffled the Jews living in Damascus by proving that Jesus is the Christ,"*** Acts 9:20.22. As a consequence, the believers at Corinth were enriched in their ***"knowledge."*** They had learned from God's Word why they were living here on earth, the reason for their existence, and they had full knowledge of the way to eternal life in heaven. They knew how to apply God's Word to their everyday life and needs. So they were ***"enriched in every way."*** They had received unspeakably great blessings because of God's grace in Christ. What earthly blessing can be compared with that?

Furthermore, Paul told the believers why they were enriched. ***"Our testimony about Christ was confirmed in you. Therefore you do not lack any spiritual gift as you eagerly wait for our Lord Jesus Christ to be revealed."*** When the Gospel was preached to them, the Holy Spirit worked in their hearts so that their faith was made solid and strong. They were made certain in their hearts that they were indeed God's children by faith in Christ and heirs of eternal life in heaven. So Paul could say to them that they were ***"enriched"*** with these spiritual blessings to the extent that they did not lack any spiritual gift. They could serve the Lord here in this life, and they looked forward eagerly, with anticipation, to the day of their final redemption when their Lord and Savior would come and take them home to heaven. What more precious blessing could anyone have than to be sure of eternal salvation in heaven, and not on the basis of any good works performed, but solely and alone because of God's grace in Christ! Surely Paul had abundant reason for thanking God for the believers at Corinth!

We should think now of how we have been enriched with spiritual gifts given to us because of God's grace in Christ. There are not many people who in our day of laxity in doctrine can say that they have the full truth of God's Word in their church. They may have a full range of social activities that they enjoy, but the spiritual gifts are lacking. We in our fellowship, by God's grace alone, can say that we enjoy a full range of spiritual gifts, gifts that have to do with our salvation. We still have pastors who believe and teach that the Bible is **God's Word**, that ***"all Scripture is God-breathed,"*** 2 Timothy 3:16, that there are no errors or contradictions in the Bible. We still have the Gospel of Christ preached and taught to us, so that we have learned to know Jesus as our Savior in whom we can trust and know for a certainty that we will go to heaven. We have learned that our salvation does not in any way depend on our own works and efforts, but alone on God's undeserved love and mercy for Jesus' sake. We have been firmly grounded in our faith by the instruction we received. Is it not a wonderful blessing that we by God's grace can say that we are eagerly waiting for the time when we go to heaven? Paul describes this as ***"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,"*** Titus 2:13-14. And to protect all these precious teachings of

God's Word, we in our fellowship still heed Christ's warning, ***"Watch out for false prophets,"*** Matthew 7:15. We still have the blessing of being instructed that we should not fellowship with those who teach and practice contrary to God's Word. We heed the admonition ***"I urge you, brothers, to watch out for those who cause divisions and put obstacles in your way that are contrary to the teaching you have learned. Keep away from them,"*** Romans 16:17.

We have yet to consider another gift of God's grace in Christ: **the confidence that God will keep the believers strong in the faith to the end.**

2.

Paul told the believers at Corinth, ***"He will keep you strong to the end, so that you will be blameless on the day of our Lord Jesus Christ. God, who has called you into fellowship with his Son Jesus Christ our Lord, is faithful."*** What a precious gift! While we are still here on earth we may be confident that God will keep us strong in the faith to the end. The end may come at any time, either when we die or when the Lord comes on the Last Day. It also may be a long time from now, even though we think it must be coming soon because of the extreme wickedness on the earth. Since we do not know when the Lord will take us from this earth or come on the Last Day, we must heed Jesus' warning, ***"So you also must be ready, because the Son of Man will come at an hour when you do not expect him,"*** Matthew 24:44. We also must be ready for the day of our death and pray as the psalmist wrote, ***"Teach us to number our days aright, that we may gain a heart of wisdom,"*** Psalm 90:12.

Whenever the end comes, we as believers in Christ may have this confidence that we ***"will be blameless on the day of our Lord Jesus Christ."*** Think of it, we who are sinners, who ***"have become like one who is unclean, and all our righteous acts are like filthy rags,"*** (Isaiah 64:6) we will stand blameless before the Lord Jesus when he comes to judge all mankind. How is that possible? John writes, ***"The blood of Jesus, his Son, purifies us from every sin,"*** 1 John 1:7. That's why we can sing, ***"Jesus, Thy blood and righteousness my beauty are, my glorious dress; Midst flaming worlds, in these arrayed, with joy shall I lift up my head,"*** (The Lutheran Hymnal 371:1)

All this is possible because as Paul told the believers at Corinth, ***"God, who has called you into fellowship with his Son Jesus Christ our Lord, is faithful."*** God, who called us to faith in Jesus and made us members of the Holy Christian Church, is faithful. ***"He who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus,"*** Philippians 1:6. God cannot lie. When he makes a promise, it will always be fulfilled. Our assurance of eternal salvation is secure in God's hands.

Surely we, who have this confidence by God's grace, should thank the Lord with all our heart. Surely we should happily serve the Lord in his kingdom as we eagerly await his coming on the Last Day. Lord; grant us this joyous certainty of faith to our end. Amen.