

January 28, 2018

I Corinthians 1:4-9

“The Body of Christ (2): The Faithfulness of God”

We are living in an age of *unprecedented change*. Last weekend Miriam and I had dinner with my brother and his wife Rachele. And Rachele was telling us about her favorite new TV show. It's called *Undercover High*. The premise is that they take these twenty-something young adults, who could kinda pass for highschoolers, and see how they do in highschool *now*. So Miriam and I took it in. And we kinda chuckled to ourselves, for it to really go over, the “plants” would *have* to be just in their twenties, or else they just wouldn't be able to pull it off. Like, can you imagine, if they casted *me* for that show? I'd be all like, *whatup dog? What's brackin'?* And the real highschoolers would be like, *Are you SURE you're supposed to be here?* And I'd be like, *yeah, cuz, I just got my G licence... man, grownups are just SO OUT OF IT!* ... It wouldn't work.

But here's the deal ... these twenty-somethings, just young adults who are 21, 22, maybe 25 at the very most ... are all marveling at how much *things have changed!* We're just talking a difference of about four, five, maybe eight or nine years at the very most! And yet these twenty-somethings are all like, *This isn't what it was like when I was in highschool at all!* We are seeing tectonic change in technology, in politics, in lifestyles, in ethics, in morals, even in beliefs. Where's it all going to end? And is there an anchor? Is there a refuge? Is there a Rock to which we can all cling in the midst of all of this change?

... I submit to you this morning that here in God's Word we can find that anchor, that refuge, that rock. And it is found in none other than the rock-solid *faithfulness of God*. Here in I Corinthians 1:4-9 we see God's faithfulness rooted in at least four realities: **The grace of Jesus, The Riches we have in Jesus, The Source of our Strength, and finally, a Faithful, Faithful Friend.**

The first Foundation Stone of the Faithfulness of God is **the grace of Jesus**. Inspired by the Holy Spirit, Paul writes, **“I always thank God for you because of the grace given you in Christ Jesus.”** My friends, the faithfulness of God always, *always* is based on the *grace* of God given to us in Christ Jesus. As we're going to find out in our series on I Corinthians, the church in Corinth was a messed up church. They weren't some Hollywood, perfect church. They were a church plagued by all sorts of problems—ethical problems, divisions, sex scandals, doctrinal problems, spiritual pride problems—this was a messed up church. *But Paul could always thank God for the grace that's been given to them in Christ Jesus.*

You and I, we may not have our ducks in a row either. You may have come to church thinking to yourself, *You know, when I really think about it, I'm pretty messed up myself.* Trust me, I know the feeling. I've had that thought cross my mind all too often. But here's the deal: *We can never be too messed up for the grace of Jesus.* Grace isn't about earning brownie points with God. He's so high, He's so holy, we could never really earn enough brownie points anyways. But grace isn't about what we do for God either. Grace is all about what *God has done and continues to do FOR US through His Son the Lord Jesus Christ.*

Grace is a free gift. It's funny, everybody loves to get free stuff... except when it comes to God. With God, we feel we have to *earn it.* But we could never earn it with God. And neither do we have to. He's done it all through His Son, Jesus. Jesus died and rose again so that we could be made right with God—totally forgiven, completely let off the hook, absolutely justified before an all-holy, all-righteous God—not through anything we could ever do on our own, but by simply trusting that His grace is enough. His grace is all we need. Nothing that we could ever do could suffice. He's done it all—through Jesus—on the Cross.

I did a study on all of Paul's "Thanksgiving sections" in his letters in the New Testament. And all throughout the New Testament Paul thanks different churches and individuals for all that they're doing for God, and all that God is doing through them. But here in I Corinthians, he couldn't say much, because, frankly, they were so messed up they weren't up to much. But he could thank God for His grace that is so actively working in them in and through Jesus Christ. Isn't that instructive? *Don't give up. Don't give up because God's grace in Christ is the foundation stone of His faithfulness. Don't give up on yourself ... don't give up on the church ... but be grateful for God's grace in Christ Jesus FOR YOU and FOR THE CHURCH!*

And then notice *another* foundation stone of the faithfulness of God: ***The awesome riches we have in Christ Jesus.*** Look with me at vs.5-7: ***"For in Him* (that is, of course, in Christ, in Jesus) ***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. Therefore you do not lack any spiritual gift as you eagerly wait for our Lord Jesus Christ to be revealed.*"****

Isn't that amazing? But how could Paul describe messed up people in such lofty, elevated terms? "Enriched in every way". "In all your speaking and in all knowledge". "Not lacking any spiritual gift". Is he just fronting? Is this all just hype?

... Well, it isn't all just hype. It's real. It's true. How so?

For one thing, it's *in Him*, it's *in Jesus* that they've and we can be "enriched in every way". Notice Paul goes on to say "because our testimony about Christ was confirmed in you". What does that mean? Well, we might say, "they bought in". They believed the good news, the gospel of Jesus. However messed up they may be, they nonetheless bought in

to the fact that it's all grace and not works; that it's all God and not them; that it's all about Jesus and what He's done for them, and it's not about them and what they can do for Jesus. And amazing thing happens when you and I "buy in" like that: There gets placed within us, by God Himself, an amazing enrichment. We're not talking about an enrichment of money or intellect or anything like that. But there gets placed within us, by God Himself, because of Jesus, through His Holy Spirit, the mysteriously divine power to *speak better, to do better, to be better*—to be more gracious, and forgiving and kind and loving, perhaps first to ourselves, but then to those around us.

But it all happens *in Him ... in Jesus ... as we buy in ... as we trust in Him*. That's key part of God's great, great faithfulness to us in Jesus Christ. We may not always *feel* as if we're enriched. We may not always *act* as if we're enriched. But we are. We *are* enriched in every way. We are enriched by the Living God through all that Jesus is and does for us.

And then Paul writes, "in all your speaking and in all your knowledge" we've been enriched. But isn't it strange that Paul says "in all your speaking" [first], *and then*, "in all your knowledge" [second]? Shouldn't it be the other way around? Shouldn't we get enriched in all our knowledge *first*? And then *from that knowledge* that'll inform our speech? That really puzzled me. And then I thought of a bit of a crazy thing Paul says in Romans 10:8-10 where he does a bit of a similar thing. There he writes, **“The word is near you: it is in your mouth and in your heart, that is, the word of faith we are proclaiming: That if you confess with your mouth, ‘Jesus is Lord’, and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you will be saved. For it is with your heart that you believe and are justified, and it is with your mouth that you confess and are saved.”** Check it out. Confession. Saying with your mouth, "Jesus is Lord", comes *first*. And then after saying the right words belief in your heart comes and with that heart believing in the fact that God raised Jesus from the dead we are saved. And then, here in I Corinthians 1:5 it says that we're enriched "in all your speaking" [first] and then "in all your knowledge" [second].

What's all that about? Well, I think there is a need for a kind of --what I'm going to call—a kind of "sanctified hypocrisy". Could it be that our *confession*, what we say with our mouths, what we say with our speech—especially if it is the truth!—actually *informs* our knowledge? Could it be that as we *tell ourselves*, and perhaps even *tell one another*, say in small group or in conversations with a close Christian friend, about who we are in Christ—effectively *preaching to ourselves, telling ourselves of who we are in Jesus actually informs our knowledge?* I think so.

I John 3:1 tells us, **“How great is the love the Father has lavished on us, that we should be called the children of God! And that is what we are!”** Think about that. The Living God, the Great, Limitless God of the universe is bonkers over you—He *loves you*. In fact, God loves you so much He *lavishes* that love on you—so much so that you, especially, are His precious, cherished, beloved child. You and I, because of Jesus, are *enriched* in the love of God. Now, what if we told that to ourselves every day? No longer would we need to puff ourselves up. I bet we'd become not so competitive any more. I bet we'd become

kinder ... and more forgiving ... and more gracious ... all because we have been greatly and graciously enriched by the faithful love of God.

So one foundation stone of the faithfulness of God is that He freely gives us the grace of Jesus. Another is that God freely gives us great spiritual riches in Jesus.

A third foundation stone of the faithfulness of God is this: **He gives us the Source of our strength.** Vs.8 says this: **“He will also keep you firm to the end, so that you will be blameless on the day of our Lord Jesus Christ.”** A very similar thought is expressed by Paul in I Thessalonians 5:23 & 24 -- there Paul writes, **“May God Himself, the God of peace, sanctify you (or make you holy) through and through. May your whole spirit, soul and body be kept blameless till the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ.”** And here in I Corinthians 1:8 he says that God will keep us strong to the end, so that we'll be blameless on the day of Christ Jesus, that is, that great and glorious Day when Jesus will come again a second time in great power and great glory at the end of the age. We see the same kind of thing again in Philippians 1:6 where God's Word says, **“... being confident of this, that He who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus.”**

Now it isn't that the Corinthians are “blameless” at this point, any more than we are “blameless” right now. We're all sinners. We all need grace. We all need Jesus. But God's strength is such that, at the end of time, at the judgment, when Jesus comes again, God's power is such that He will *present* us blameless. And that word blameless means unimpeachable, no charge, no blame can be laid against those whom Jesus Himself guarantees. Isn't that good news? God is the One Who strengthens us in Jesus Christ. He is the One Who'll keep us, Who'll keep us strong to the end. He's got us. He won't let us down. He's faithful.

And it all comes to a great conclusion, the fourth foundation stone of His faithfulness in vs.9: **“God is faithful, Who has called you into fellowship with His Son, Jesus Christ our Lord.” That's the fourth foundation stone of God's faithfulness: We have a faithful, faithful Friend in Jesus.** Interestingly, Paul opens his letter to the Corinthians talking about God's calling in vs.1 & 2. And here in vs.9 he returns to that theme: *God is faithful. And He expresses that faithfulness by calling us into fellowship, that is, into relationship, into friendship with His Son, the Lord Jesus Christ.* Folks, it really *is* all about Jesus. Bible scholar Leon Morris noted that in these first nine verses of I Corinthians, nine times Paul mentions the name of Jesus—and he'll mention the Name of Jesus again in vs.10. It's as if Paul is just lingering over that Name— *Jesus, Jesus, Jesus. How sweet the name of Jesus sounds in a believer's ear!*

It soothes our sorrows, heals our wounds, and drives away our fear.

We live in an age of unprecedented change. Your operating system changes every month. Your smart phone is outdated just about the moment you take it out of its box. 22 year olds are going, *whew, kids nowadays.* But do you know what doesn't change? God will

never change. He is faithful. Hebrews 13:8 tells us that Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today and forever. In fact, here in I Corinthians 1:9 that word *faithful* gets all of the emphasis in that sentence—it actually comes *first* in the sentence so that the Greek here literally reads, **“Faithful is God”** But His grace, His riches, His strength comes *through* the Lord Jesus Christ. As one biblical commentator puts it, the Father originates, but it’s the Son Who executes the plan. He is *faithful*. *Even if I’m so messed up?* Even if you’re so messed up. *God is faithful. Stick with Him, even as He’s sticking by you, and you won’t be messed up for long. He is faithful.*

But it all comes through fellowship, through relationship with His Son, Jesus—believing on Him, trusting that He paid the price to pave our way to God and everlasting life with Him, allowing Him to guide us through His Word and by His Spirit, talking to Him in Jesus’ Name.

And most of all—hoping in Him to the very end. Amazingly, in vs.7 & 8 Paul actually emphasizes the reality of the very end of it all, when Jesus will come again in great power and great glory. Scholars say that Paul’s doing that on purpose, anticipating I Corinthians 15 where near the very end of this letter God will inspire him to write some of the greatest truths about all the marvelous, amazing, hope-fulfilling things that will happen when Jesus finally comes again. It is that hope that God’s got the end—not Kim John Un, not a nuclear holocaust, but God Himself, in His faithfulness, has us to the very end. *He will not let us go.*

In his book, *Leading on Empty*, Wayne Cordiero tells his story of healing and coming out of depression and burnout. He writes, “At some point in my healing process, I had to anchor my soul on hope—hope that I would return to wholeness, that my marriage would be wonderful, and that my family would be healthy—even though I couldn’t see it happening at the time. I knew I had to live by hope. There were days when I simply kept motoring forward, even though I had to tow my feelings behind me. I pressed on in the knowledge that God would be faithful.”

Cordiero goes on to write, “Imagine a person running to catch a bus. He knows that the bus arrives at that stop every morning at exactly 8:30. It has been there for the past five years without fail. So being a bit tardy leaving his house, he runs towards the bus stop *knowing* that the bus will arrive at the scheduled time. The bus is still nowhere in sight. It hasn’t rounded the corner on his street. Passers-by may even make comments as to the futility of his actions when there is no visible proof, but he runs *in the hope* that the bus driver will be faithful to his schedule. ... We serve a God who never fails us when we run in the confidence of His trustworthiness.” (W. Cordiero, *Leading on Empty ...* , pg.151)

God is *faithful*. In and through His Son, Jesus, He is faithful in His grace, faithful in His riches, faithful in His strength, faithful in calling us into fellowship with His Son, the Lord Jesus Christ.

A.W. Tozer got it right when he put it like this: “Upon God’s faithfulness rests our whole hope of future blessedness. Only as we have complete assurance that He is faithful may

we live in peace and look forward with assurance to the life to come. ... The tempted, the anxious, the fearful, the discouraged may all find new hope and good cheer in our knowledge that our Heavenly Father is faithful. He will ever be true to His pledged word. The hard-pressed sons of the covenant may be sure that He will never remove His loving-kindness from them nor suffer His faithfulness to fail." (A.W. Tozer, *The Knowledge of the Holy*, pg.81)