



I mentioned this a while ago, and I'm sure many of you have heard this before, but do you embrace "cat theology" or "dog theology?" "Dog theology" says, "You feed me. You groom me. You pet me. You must be 'God.'" "Cat theology" says, "You feed me. You groom me. You pet me. I must be 'God.'" I've been thinking about this a little more this past week – especially when I was listening to the Christian music radio. Many, or maybe even most, of the songs seem to rejoice because of all he does for me. And, while many of these realities are true, I wonder if many of us have forgotten about how simply glorious God is in himself. I don't hear as many songs that focus on God's nature and rejoicing in him as God, and it makes me wonder. Have many of us resorted back to self-love? Like, God's greatest glory is that he makes much me of me?

I wonder how many of us, myself included, have taken the idol of ourselves, and make *us* the center of our Christianity. And, if we've done that, we need to repent. But, oh how easy this can be. Those of us who are Christians here admit that we were born living for ourselves and our ways, and then when we turned to Jesus as the Lord and Master. His grace reached us in reconciling us to God and we loved him. But that gnawing sinfulness that remains with us can blind us to slowly make Christianity about ourselves. God only becomes exciting to us if he gives us something. God is only good when I can receive something from his storehouse that I want. I know that I've been like this. I've behaved like a self-centered, spoiled child. Have you? And yet, sometimes I haven't even seen it.

What's the solution to this kind of self-centered deception? The only solution to this is to be re-centered on God and his grace in Jesus. This, I believe, is a huge part of the purpose of the verses we'll be studying this morning from 1 Corinthians 1:4-9. And, if you haven't turned there yet, please do so. I'm going to pray for us and then I will read verses 4-9 for us [Lorraine Palmer, Harbor Church, MacPhail-Faussey]:

⁴ I give thanks to my God always for you because of the grace of God that was given you in Christ Jesus, ⁵ that in every way you were enriched in him in all speech and all knowledge— ⁶ even as the testimony about Christ was confirmed among you— ⁷ so that you are not lacking in any gift, as you wait for the revealing of our Lord Jesus Christ, ⁸ who will sustain you to the end, guiltless in the day of our Lord Jesus Christ. ⁹ God is faithful, by whom you were called into the fellowship of his Son, Jesus Christ our Lord.¹

As I read through these words this past week, I couldn't help but think about the issues Paul was going to address in this letter. When I opened my study books (i.e. – commentaries), the authors stated the same thing. **Corinth will be addressed on issues of divisiveness, superiority in spirituality, doubts over Paul's calling as an apostle, and even in chapter 15, there are doubts about the resurrection.** These are only a few

¹ [The Holy Bible: English Standard Version](#) (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2016), 1 Co 1:4–9.

issues that will be addressed. And all of these issues are in some way addressed in this gratitude section that opens Paul's letter to the church in Corinth. So, as we go through this sermon, note these issues and see how they relate to the rest of the letter.

Having said this, before Paul addresses these issues, he starts off by getting everyone's focus on God. If you were here last week, I took time to define the word "calling" that was mentioned in verses 1 and 2. Paul starts off the letter by placing himself on an equal plane with the church by essentially saying, "I'm called by God and you're called by God." Being called refers to your identity and also how you are to live. So, in Ephesians, Paul tells the church there to "walk in a manner worthy of the calling" (see Eph. 4:1ff). Live out who you are. Is Paul living his calling faithfully? Is the Corinthian church? This letter will reveal Paul's thoughts. But Paul isn't coming in with guns blazing with a superiority complex. We see that in verses 1-3, but we also see this in verse 4: I give thanks to my God always for you. . . . If we're going to evaluate whether or not we're living out our calling, then our gaze must be on God.

The Corinthians seem to have embraced "cat theology." Some thought they were better because of wealth or spiritual gifts or their choice of preacher even. Instead of viewing these things as gifts from God, they allowed these gifts to puff them up and think more highly of themselves. Paul reorients them. Look to God. But again notice how Paul reorients them. He calls them to gratitude, and he calls them to God. If you have turned to "cat theology" then, I think these verses are for you. The main idea of these verses can be boiled down to: **Our gratitude must focus on God and his grace in Christ.**

Every day, we must live with a focus on God and his grace – and *being thankful* for him and his grace. Gratitude ought to be the outflow of the Christian. A Christian who isn't grateful for God must wonder if he's even a Christian. But even in being grateful for God, you have to ask, "Are you grateful for God as *God* or are you simply grateful he gives you what you want?" Maybe today's message will be a call to you personally to turn from your selfish tendencies that you've embraced. Maybe today's message will be used by God to fill you with love once again for God himself. And, as a result, maybe these verses will awaken within you a new appreciation for God's grace gifts in your life. So, let's pursue what these verses are saying.

1. Our gratitude must focus on God (vv. 4, 9).

Verse 4 says, "I give thanks to my God always for you because of the grace of God that was given you in Christ Jesus."² Then, verse 9 states, "⁹ God is faithful, by whom you were called"³ This paragraph has God the Father at the beginning and at the end.

Paul doesn't simply say, "I am thankful for you." That could potentially puff up their already puffed up ego. Instead, Paul says, "I give thank to my God. . .for you." Ultimately, our gratitude should always go upward to the Giver of all gifts. If I gave a present to my child and they loved the gift, but they completely ignored me, what does that potentially communicate about our relationship? There might be a problem. If we love the things in our lives, but we don't express to God our gratitude, we miss the privilege of our relationship.

So, Paul's focus is on God, but in no way is Paul downplaying the Corinthians or trying to make them feel ashamed. What's phenomenal to me is that Paul says that he thanks God *always* for them.

² [The Holy Bible: English Standard Version](#) (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2016), 1 Co 1:4.

³ [The Holy Bible: English Standard Version](#) (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2016), 1 Co 1:9.

Wait a second. There is either a powerful minority or a large group of Corinthian Christians who are rejecting Paul – that’s one of the reasons for this letter. In just a few chapters, Paul’s going to speak of being judged by them. I don’t know about you, but when I feel people are judging me and questioning me, I don’t run to gratitude for those people, do you? Why is that? Because I’m not focusing on God. I’m focusing on myself.

Paul reveals that he can be grateful for them *always* (meaning, consistently and whenever they’re on his mind). He has gratitude to God for them. If his gratitude for them was on the basis of himself, he wouldn’t be grateful for them in the writing of this letter. But, because his gratitude is centered on God, he can be grateful. So, let me take a sidestep for a moment. Are there professing Christians in your life that you are not grateful for? Was there a name that just popped into your head? Why? You could say, “Well, they did this or that thing.” Did they hurt your reputation? Did they speak against you publicly? Did they ignore your advice and counsel? All of these things, the Corinthian church did to Paul. Yet, he’s grateful! How? Verse 4 goes on to say, “because of the grace of God that was given you in Christ Jesus.”⁴ The answer is God and his grace.

You know, we can love the word “grace,” but what does it really mean? Grace means that we are gifted apart from earning anything. In fact, God’s grace is given, in spite of the fact that humans have de-merited God’s kindnesses! We’ve worked against him, and yet he gives grace. If we understand grace, I believe we would be more grateful for all believers. Think of it a little more with me. When was the last time you pondered your own sinfulness and what you deserve from God? David, in Psalm 130 says, “If you, O Lord, should mark iniquities, O Lord, who could stand?”⁵ If God pinpointed every moment you acted sinfully, thought sinful thoughts, spoke words out of turn, you would not be able to stand before him. The idea of not standing means you’d be condemned. If you’re anything like me, though, I can be a master-justifier. I can say, “Well, I know I don’t deserve anything from God, *but*. . .,” and then I’ll say that I’m not as bad as so-and-so or at least I didn’t do this-or-that thing. You know what I’m doing in those moments? I’m minimizing God’s grace. I’m saying that I’m not as needy for God’s grace as someone else is. I’m a little more superior and therefore, because I’m superior, I can stand in some sort of judgment. But is that true? No! My whole life is grace. If there’s any godliness that flows out of me, it’s because of God’s grace. If I’m not doing worse things, it’s because of God and his grace! I have not earned *anything* that I have. And therefore, neither has anyone else. Since that’s the case, I can be grateful to God always for every Christian. We all come on the same footing: grace. And I ought to treat them that way.

When I’m grateful for them, I not only admit that I’m graced and they are graced, I admit that God is at work in all of us. See, this is why Paul can be grateful to God. He’s not grateful for the Corinthians simply because they’re a group of people meeting in Corinth. He’s grateful to God for them always because, as verse 9 says, “God is faithful.” Praise the Lord that he doesn’t give up on any of his children. This faithfulness mentioned is that God always keeps, preserves and cares for his children! While Paul is going through difficulties with the Corinthians, he knows his God. God is faithful to fulfill his plan for the Corinthian church – and what is the plan? Well, verse 9 tells us: by whom you were called into the fellowship of his Son, Jesus Christ our Lord.⁶

⁴ [The Holy Bible: English Standard Version](#) (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2016), 1 Co 1:4.

⁵ [The Holy Bible: English Standard Version](#) (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2016), Ps 130:3.

⁶ [The Holy Bible: English Standard Version](#) (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2016), 1 Co 1:9.

Notice the word “called” again. Paul is highlighting this word, especially in this first chapter which starts the letter. God has called the Corinthian Christians into the fellowship with his Son, Jesus. That means that this is our identity and it’s also what we are to live out.

What does it mean to be “into the fellowship?” I think of the book series *The Lord of the Rings*. The one book is entitled “The Fellowship of the Ring.” As you read the story, it’s not talking about everyone having fellowship with only the ring. But instead, it’s talking about many people who were united around a specific goal regarding the Ring. This is part of what Paul means when he uses this phrase “the fellowship.” One man named David Garland explains his understanding of this. He translates this as the “common-union” of his Son. It’s not only that Paul is saying that God called us into fellowship *with* Jesus, but that God calls us into the common-union *of* Jesus. What does this emphasize then? This means that the Christians in Corinth were *united* as one in Jesus and around Jesus. Unlike a Ring, which is impersonal; Jesus is personal. So, we have fellowship with Jesus – and our fellowship with Jesus means that *we together* have fellowship (common-union) in and around Jesus.

So, Garland goes on to say that this phrase “highlights many of the issues Paul addresses in the letter. Paul has in mind their sharing in Christ. . . , which means far more than merely being together as a fellowship of friendly faces: it signifies sharing ‘the status of being-in-Christ and of being shareholders in a sonship derived from the sonship of Christ’ (Thiselton 2000: 104). **Common-union with Christ creates common-union with other Christians. . .**” (Garland, pp. 35-6).

God has called the Corinthians to *the fellowship*. Sure, they’re a mess. Paul’s a mess, too. Have you read Romans 7? Yet, Paul and the Corinthians, in being part of *the fellowship* of Christ, means that God has promised to faithfully grow them. The Corinthian church is united under God’s call. This is who they are and they are to live out this unity.

I love Paul’s wording here because he so helpfully reveals how the Corinthians should be relating to each other. If you have time, take note of even Paul’s usage of personal pronouns, referring to him and the church. You see “I” and you see “you.” But every time Paul references the Lord, he says “our.” Jesus is “our” Lord. This emphasizes our unity in *the fellowship*. God’s faithfulness is revealed in uniting us in the fellowship of his Son! This is an exciting journey – one of which Paul is grateful to God for. And Paul is grateful for the Corinthians because he knows that as God has taught him, he will grow and teach the Corinthians.

Again, this should affect our gratitude for one another. Don’t let your gratitude be focused on you or merely on people themselves. If you do this, your gratitude will go up and down. If your gratitude is focused on God, then your gratitude can remain steadfast. Practically speaking, when other brothers or sisters within Ventura hurt you in some way or another, you can still be grateful because you know God is not finished and God is *faithful!* You can be hopeful for their growth – and your growth in godliness as well. We, together, are part of *the fellowship* of the Son!

But how can you be sure God is faithful? That takes us to the next point.

2. Our gratitude must focus on God’s grace in Christ (vv. 4-9).

God first and then his grace in Christ. As a church family, we often say that we are a people pursuing Jesus together. Why is Jesus emphasized so greatly here at Ventura? Because without Jesus, there’d be no point. Now, some would argue that. They’d say there is a point for church. Church can be a great

community to support other people, make a difference in the community, do nice things. But we believe that without Jesus, there's no point to those things! And, a Christian church is only a Christian church inasmuch as Christ is the center of our focus.

Look back at verse 9: God is faithful, by whom you were called into the fellowship of his Son, Jesus Christ our Lord.⁷ I think verse 9 is Paul's conclusion of verses 4-8. Paul wants us to walk away realizing our gratitude is because of God and his grace in Jesus. Let's get our eyes off of ourselves and let's focus on God and his grace. But, in focusing on God's grace, we can't simply think "grace" means "things" given to us. Instead, we must remember that God's kindnesses to us are given through a Person – Jesus himself. If you mark in your Bible, underline, circle (or mark in some way) every reference to Jesus. Jesus is explicitly mentioned in every verse. Is Jesus important? Yes.

The Corinthian church will only grow in living out their calling *if* they are focused on God's grace in Jesus. Now, what do I mean by "in Jesus." Paul uses that phrase many times in many letters of his. To be "in Christ" refers to our identity as well. Because Jesus took the punishment for my sins on the cross, and since I turned to Jesus for forgiveness and reconciliation with God, I have been given Jesus' righteousness as a gift. Being in Christ means Jesus defines me, protects me, satisfies me, strengthens me. Without Jesus, I'm lost. With Jesus, I'm found. Without Jesus, I'm broken. With Jesus, I'm whole.

These same realities are true for the church as a whole. And Paul, in each verse, reveals to us the grace given to us in Christ. I want to walk through each of these, but before I do, I want to share one other thing about grace. Sometimes people talk about grace as though it's something in the past: God gave me grace when I was saved. I remember an older, godly man who once told me that he thought grace was something we got when we turned from our sins and turned to Jesus for forgiveness. But he thought that the rest of our lives was not lived in grace. Thankfully, God taught him more. But maybe you're tempted to believe this, too. In these verses, Paul shows us that the whole of the Christian life – from beginning to end – is all of grace. Grace is past, present and future.

The Corinthian church, and Ventura Baptist, must live with grateful focus on God and his grace in Christ. For all he's done in the past, praise him! For all he does in the present, praise him. For all he promises to do in the future, praise him! So, what does he do, in grace? Paul shows us at least **five grace-gifts** God gives to us. These gifts do end up confronting the Corinthian's cat-theology and, hopefully, causes them to rejoice more in God and not simply themselves.

Enrichment in speech and knowledge. Verse 5 says, "⁵that in every way you were enriched in him in all speech and all knowledge. . ."⁸ In Christ, in union with Jesus because when you depended on Jesus alone to rescue you from your sinfulness and make you right with God, God the Father decided to enrich you! Now, when I hear the word "enrich," it sounds a little old-fashioned. I hear the word "enrichment," and it sounds almost too fancy for me. What does it mean to be enriched in Christ?

This past week, I read a humorous statement about Michael Bloomberg's removal from the race. And the statement said that the thing that must take the sting away from him losing is the fact of him still being worth 56 billion dollars. Then the person said, "I know that there were many times when I made a public misstep where having 56 billion dollars would have been some consolation." Having that kind of wealth would be a consolation. I think we can, in some ways, understand this. I bring up this idea of money

⁷ [The Holy Bible: English Standard Version](#) (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2016), 1 Co 1:9.

⁸ [The Holy Bible: English Standard Version](#) (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2016), 1 Co 1:5.

because “enrichment” has the word “rich” in it, and Paul is referring to the idea of wealth. But it’s not wealth that a nation creates. It’s wealth that God gives to us. It’s a wealth that reaches deep into our souls and then manifests itself in our demeanor and actions.

Ventura, do you realize that if you have depended on Jesus alone as your Savior, you are *enriched*. You are wealthy in Christ. What kind of consolation is that? It’s an eternal consolation. Jesus said you can gain the whole world and lose your soul. You can acquire all the material possessions and live apart from God forever in a place called Hell. Yet, if you confess your sinfulness and turn to Jesus alone for forgiveness of your sins, you are not only forgiven, you are given God’s wealth! You are enriched.

This should be a reminder to the Corinthians that nothing they have comes from themselves. In chapter 4, Paul’s going to say that to them. Why do you boast as though you didn’t receive what you have (see 4:7)? The Corinthians, and we, have been enriched. But Paul focuses on a specific aspect of their enrichment. They’ve been enriched in speech and knowledge. This goes to another issue Paul is going to talk on later in this letter. The Corinthians valued those who could speak in tongues – thinking they were more spiritual because of this. They boast in certain knowledge. They were acting like the world around them that valued a certain type of talk and speech. In the Greco-Roman culture of Corinth, people worked hard on how they presented themselves. Corinth was falling into a similar trap. They were more concerned with *how* they were communicating than with *Who* they were communicating.

Yet, Paul still thanks God that they have been enriched in speech and knowledge. Even though they’re sinning with their gifts, they’re still gifts. This is a teachable moment for us. Some of us can reject God’s good gifts because we abuse them. But if they’re God’s gifts, we need to learn how to treat them as such. Gratitude helps to correct our hearts and minds. The problem is not in the gift. The problem is in your attitude surrounding the gift. Did God give you a gift because you are amazing or because God is amazing and gracious? We know the answer! So, let’s rejoice together in God enriching us in various ways! If God has enriched us, and we confess this, then we will grow together in the fellowship of the Son!

Confirmation of the gospel. Look at verse 6: ⁶even as the testimony about Christ was confirmed among you. . . .⁹ This phrase “even as” refers to the idea that when they were gifted, it was a confirmation of the message of Jesus. It’s like when we hear people share stories of how they ended up turning to the Lord, and they’ll say, “Then I wanted the Word,” or, “Then I experienced spiritual warfare,” or, “Then I wanted to gather with other believers.” All of those things would be considered confirmations of the testimony about Christ.

Now, what’s interesting is that Paul is using courtroom terms here. You give a testimony in court. Details are confirmed or denied in court. Paul was the one who shared the story of Christ – the gospel – with the Corinthians. This is the testimony about Christ – that he lived the perfect life humans could never live and died the death we deserved to die, and he rose again and ascended to Heaven – calling people to turn to him and find forgiveness and eternal life in God! Certain Corinthians responded and then after they responded, the testimony of Christ was confirmed in their lives through their lives changing. A changed, and changing life, is a testimony that the gospel has taken root. People who say they’re “saved” or “born again,” but their lives don’t change do not know what being saved means.

God gives grace to rescue us and God gives grace to continue to conform us to Jesus, which means we’ll be changed. And also, God gives us this grace in order to increase our assurance in him and his message.

⁹ [The Holy Bible: English Standard Version](#) (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2016), 1 Co 1:6.

The gifts they received were given in order to confirm the message. The gifts you receive in your life, God gives you to give you greater assurance in the gospel itself so that you can grow in trust in him! How glorious that our God wants us to be assured – and he wants our assurance to rest fully in JESUS! The testimony of Jesus is confirmed. We're not believing lies about him. We believe the truth about Jesus!

By the way, this statement also addresses what Paul will address to the Corinthians later. If they heard the testimony through Paul and their gifts came as a result, then is Paul a false apostle? No. God's gifts confirm the testimony and here, it also confirms the one who shared the testimony of Jesus. Another grace-gift in Christ is:

No lack in any gift. Verse 7 states, "so that you are not lacking in any gift, as you wait for the revealing of our Lord Jesus Christ."¹⁰ I think the "so that" could be understood as "with the result of." God gave them grace in Jesus, enriched them in Jesus, confirmed the testimony of Jesus, with the result that they would not be lacking in any gift. God, in the past graced them so that in the present, they'd be graced with no lack. Keep in mind, this is in the plural form. I believe this is referencing the church at Corinth. They, as a church, are not lacking in any gift. This word for "no lack," in the Greek refers to being destitute or to fail to attain to something needed. Well, that's not the case for the Corinthian church. God has given them all they need.

The application for us as Ventura is that we're not lacking in any gift either. Now, this doesn't mean that we have every possible gift here, but that we have all God designs for us. He calls us as saints to live as saints. He's graced us – and he continues to grace us, as a church family, to live as we are called.

Even this should frame the Corinthian's thinking. Jesus is the Lord of the church, and God has graced them in Jesus as a church. He has given the gifts as he sees fit; so, should any of them think that one gift is superior to another or that *all* should have the same gift (like tongues, for example)? Just because some don't have that miraculous gift doesn't mean the church lacks (or that those individuals are lacking). No, God has given as he sees fit! We are *not* lacking!

Instead of taking our gifts and talents and raising them above others and/or looking down on others who aren't like us, let's rejoice that God has given all of us as he sees fit – and that's a good thing! We don't lack. We won't fail to attain.

But what do we mean we won't fail to attain in any gift? Attain what? I think that moves us to the next phrase in verse 7: as you wait for the revealing of our Lord Jesus Christ. This is talking about the time period when Jesus comes back again. We have, as a church family, all we need to grow and attain to the day when Jesus returns! This then moves Paul to verse 8:

Sustaining power. God will never leave us. He will never *not* give us grace. That's why verse 8 goes on to say, "⁸who will sustain you to the end."¹¹ The "who" of that verse could be Jesus or God the Father. I believe it's God the Father, through Jesus. Therefore, his grace will always be sufficient for every moment, every step, until Jesus returns. Praise his name!

We see that God gives past grace, present grace and he gives future grace in Jesus. Be grateful for God and his grace in Christ! Now, Paul gives one more grace-gift at the end of verse 8:

¹⁰ [The Holy Bible: English Standard Version](#) (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2016), 1 Co 1:7.

¹¹ [The Holy Bible: English Standard Version](#) (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2016), 1 Co 1:8.

Acquitting Grace. Have you ever had a dream when you were a guilty person and you felt that guilt? Have you ever had a time when some thought overwhelmed you and you felt powerful shame? Have you ever wondered what it would feel like in the day when Jesus judges every single person. We're told he will judge even the thoughts and intentions of our hearts. He'll judge every idle word. If you haven't turned to God for reconciliation, to say sorry and receive forgiveness, this is fearful – tremendously so. In this day, many will be confused even. Jesus says people will be cast into eternal punishment, but they thought they did all these things for God. None of your works will ever save you. The question is whether you are in Christ.

The end of verse 8 says that God will sustain us and cause us to be “guiltless in the day of our Lord Jesus Christ.”¹² Christian, you can recall all your sins, but none of them will keep you from entering into Heaven. You will be declared guilt-less. That's not simply “Not Guilty.” It's as though no accusations were laid towards you because Jesus took all the accusations on the cross. Guilt-less! I can't wait for that day.

So, with Corinth, they should never have thoughts thinking they're more spiritual, more qualified, more worthy because of their smarts or speech or actions. They should be rejoicing in, grateful to God for God and his grace in Christ Jesus. This is where their boast must remain because in Christ, God gives us past, present and future grace. By the way, the fact that Paul brings a future judgment up also addresses the concern some have raised in Corinth, dying the resurrection. The fact that God gives grace means that he gives you grace every moment: past, present and future! And, this grace of God comes from the God who is glorious over all – through Jesus Christ! Everything is about him – for him, by him and through him! Therefore, the church should always have their eyes focused on God, in Christ. We no longer emphasize us, but instead we emphasize him – and we find our hope and rejoicing come from resting completely in him!

⁹ God is faithful, by whom you were called into the fellowship of his Son, Jesus Christ our Lord.¹³ Therefore, our gratitude (together, as a church family) must be in God and in his grace in Christ.

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¹² [The Holy Bible: English Standard Version](#) (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2016), 1 Co 1:8.

¹³ [The Holy Bible: English Standard Version](#) (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2016), 1 Co 1:9.