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I Corinthians 1:4-9:

**“It’s Always a Matter of What We Do
with What We’ve Been Given”**

- I. Enriched in Him.
- II. Enriched.
- III. God’s Faithfulness

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I Corinthians 1:4-9

Dear Friends in Christ,

I don't think many of you would be surprised at the numerous insights and statistics the pastors have received over the past years regarding the condition and decline of the church in America. I cannot sufficiently express my surprise at the innumerable times I have recalled to myself the story about the first grade girl who was invited to have dinner at her friend's home. The vegetable of the day was buttered broccoli. The mother asked the girl if she liked broccoli. She replied, "Oh, yes, I love it." But when the broccoli was passed she declined to take any. The mother said, "Oh, I thought you said you love broccoli." The girl sweetly replied, "Yes, ma'am, I do, but not enough to eat it."

There are still a lot of people who genuinely love Jesus; a declining number, but they're still there and will be to the end. And there are those who love Jesus but not enough to do anything serious with Him. I mean, let's face it, to get serious about Jesus means you'll have to deal with, "Anyone who loves his father or mother more than me is not worthy of me; anyone who loves his son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me... (and so on)." (Matt. 10:37) Have you ever heard the theology of "I know my church doesn't teach certain parts of the Word of God, but that's where my family and friends go and that's where I feel comfortable..." - or something along that line? What was it Jesus said? "If you love...(whom?)...more than me."

And if you get real serious about Jesus, you'll have to deal with, "and anyone who does not take his cross and follow me is not worthy of me." (Matt. 10:38) That isn't inviting. That will never draw those chasing this world's promises. You see . . .

IT'S ALWAYS A MATTER OF WHAT WE DO WITH WHAT WE'VE BEEN GIVEN

I. Enriched in Him.

I give thanks to my God always for you because of the grace of God that was given you in Christ Jesus, that in every way you were enriched in him in all speech and all knowledge...(vv. 4-5)

Grace. Love we don't deserve. Love that was beaten, whipped, nailed to a Cross, watched His Father turn away, died. And, all too often - way too often - we try to justify what we know cannot be justified and we mimic the filthy, death encompassing question Satan asked our first parents: "Did God really say...?" "Does the Bible really mean that??"

Martin Luther said, "The worst enemies we have are lodged in our own heart and in our very flesh and blood. They wake, sleep, and live with us, as an evil guest whom we invited into our house and now cannot get rid of." (Ewald M. Plass, *What Luther Says*, CPH, St. Louis, Mo., 1959, p. 1295) What are the worst enemies? The countless sins that dog our lives. Paul expresses it this way: "For I do not understand my own actions. For I do not do what I want, but I do the very thing I hate." (Rom 7:15)

And Luther made this statement: "We sin and err without ceasing." (Ibid., p. 1307) On and on it goes! And above Luther's statement is this word of God from the Apostle Paul: "For I do not do the good I want, but the evil I do not want is what I keep on doing." (Rom 7:19) *I keep on doing.* These statements were never intended to excuse us. They state fact. Sin is always there - rips into life and relationships, damages and destroys and, above all, separates us from God forever!

And so, in our text Paul writes, "I give thanks to my God always for you because of the grace of God that was given you in Christ Jesus...". The Grace of God that forgives and forgets - sin after sin after sin. Where have we been? Where are we - right now!? What have we done? What are we doing? What cries of "guilty!" plague the conscience and dog our lives? The grace of God - the love of God for the unlovable - says: "As far as the east is from the west, so far does he remove our transgressions from us." (Ps. 103:12) How far is that? Forever far! Eternally removed.

II. Enriched.

Thus, Paul writes, "...in every way you were enriched in him in all speech and all knowledge..." Enriched. Life changed. If God loved this unlovable person could I do less with others? What am I doing with what has been given? What are you doing?

I was reminded of an incident from many years ago when a Pilgrim sister asked me these two questions: First, "Is it wrong to want to go to Heaven right now?" Second, "Is it wrong to want Jesus to return right now?" Let's look at the second question first: "Is it wrong to want Jesus to return right now?"

Verse 7 of our text states, "so that you are not lacking in any gift, as you wait for the revealing of our Lord Jesus Christ...". We're waiting for the revealing; His return. John closes the Book of Revelation with, "He who testifies to these things says, 'Surely I am coming soon.' (That's Jesus.) Amen. Come, Lord Jesus!" (Rev. 21:20) We pray for His return.

The Holy Spirit had Peter write, "...scoffers will come in the last days with scoffing, following their own sinful desires. They will say, 'Where is the promise of his coming?' (2 Pet. 3:3,4a) We're in the last days! We are to understand the horror the Second Coming will bring upon this world. Jesus said, "Then will appear in heaven the sign of the Son of Man, and then all the tribes of the earth will mourn, and they will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of heaven with power and great glory." (Matt. 24:30) *The tribes of earth will mourn.* It's that instant moment of complete understanding! But for Christ's people, the Scriptures say, "(we are to live) lives of holiness and godliness, waiting for and hastening the coming of the day of God... we are waiting for new heavens and a new earth in which righteousness dwells." (2 Pet. 3:11,12a,13b) We're eagerly waiting for and wanting that day - now. "Come, Lord Jesus!"

"Is it wrong to want Jesus to return right now?" Never. In Christ we are truly enriched with the knowledge and the want of His return.

That brings us to the first question the sister asked: "Is it wrong to want to go to heaven right now?" Oh, friends, we must hold to the words God gave Paul: "For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain... My desire is to depart and be with Christ, for that is far better." (Phil. 1:21,23b) That really needs no commentary, does it? What Paul writes is not morbid or suicidal. It's enriched faith that grasps the goal; the everlasting Kingdom won for us in Christ. Remember the words of Jesus: "I will come again and will take you to myself, that where I am you may be also." (Jn. 14:3b)

We are enriched by the promise that our living is not motivated by death, but by life eternal. Our sins have been forever washed away by the Blood of Jesus Christ. So, what are we going to do with this? What? How about moving beyond a casual reading of the Word? How about moving into real study of God's Word? How about Jesus words, "If you abide in me, and my words abide in you (His words, the Scripture), ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you?" (Jn. 15:7) And "it will be done for you" is not about winning the lottery or a world happy life. It's about the promises of His presence, love, forgiveness and Heaven.

What are we going to do with this? How about reach out to others? We know what the Word says: "Let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven." (Matt. 5:16) Our text goes on to say . . .

III. God's Faithfulness.

- even as the testimony about Christ was confirmed among you - so that you are not lacking in any gift, as you wait for the revealing of our Lord Jesus Christ, who will sustain you to the end, guiltless in the day of our Lord Jesus Christ. God is faithful, by whom you were called into the fellowship of his Son, Jesus Christ our Lord. (vv. 6-9)

It's relatively simple: We are enriched by God's faithfulness. There, in Word and Sacrament, He repeatedly, consistently assures us that we are guiltless! It's about His faithfulness to us!

Do you remember this story?

A man called a plumber and asked him to fix a problem he was having with some pipes. "I'm pretty busy," the plumber said. "In fact, it will be exactly two years before I can get there." The man asked, "Will you be here in the morning or afternoon?" "Two years from now what difference will it make?" asked the plumber. "Well," the man said, "The cable man is coming in the morning."

Crazy story, isn't it? But it is a reminder of how crazy things have become. Lots of uncertainty, problems, running around and getting the run-a-round. And, with it, the usual menu of decay, dying and death. But not with Jesus. With Jesus it's about the Good Shepherd enriching us in Word and Sacrament as we "walk through the valley of the shadow of death." It's about letting our light shine. It's about, "(we) shall dwell in the house of the Lord forever."

So, what are we doing with what we have been given? Amen.

Pastor Bill Abbott