

# *Iglesia de Carne*

Studies in First Corinthians

Text

First Corinthians 1:1-9

Topic

Paul begins his letter to the Corinthians by taking them back to their experience of the grace of God

Title

*“The First Time Ever I Saw Your Grace”*

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A rare Bible went on display for several months starting in April of this year. Only three copies are known to exist. It's called the Slave Bible. The 200+ year-old book was used to justify slavery in the British West Indies during the 19th century.

How so? Most of the Bible is missing in the Slave Bible. The editors removed 90% of the Old Testament and half of the New Testament.

References to freedom and escape from slavery are missing, while passages encouraging obedience and submission to masters are emphasized. "They removed portions that could inspire hope for liberation," said museum director Seth Pollinger.

It was originally published in London in 1807 and (get this) distributed by a missionary group, the Society for the Conversion of Negro Slaves. Or should I say, the Society for Deceiving Negroes into Remaining Slaves.

Something was **missing** in the church at Corinth. Missing was the grace of God.

That's not entirely true; at least, it isn't the whole story. God's grace *was* abundant; it *was* being showered upon the believers - so much that Paul could say that they were "enriched in everything."

But we will see that God's abundant, enriching grace was not being displayed in their personal walk or their corporate worship.

They had experienced God's grace, but they were not expressing it.

If there is one takeaway from being with a believer, or being in a gathering of believers, it ought to be the grace of God. He has declared it; we ought to display it.

I'll organize my comments around those two points: #1 God's Declares His Grace Wooing You, and #2 You Display Gods Grace Worshipping Him.

## #1 God Declares His Grace Wooing You

(v1-3)

I'm still convinced that the most significant reason people immediately reject God is the problem of evil in the world. If He is God, why doesn't He do something about it?

He has. Jesus said, "Now is the judgment of this world; now the ruler of this world will be cast out. And I, if I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all

*peoples* to Myself." This He said, signifying by what death He would die" (John 12:31-33).

Jesus was talking about being "lifted up from the earth" on the Cross. It accomplished two things:

1. The "ruler of this world," Satan, would be "cast out." We can see what Jesus meant in the Book of the Revelation. All evil will end, for eternity.
2. Second - The Cross made it possible for God to justify sinners - to save for eternity anyone who calls upon Jesus.

The problem of evil is on **us**, *not* God. Even our Sovereign, omnipotent God cannot create beings in His image without giving them genuine free will to reject His goodness and blessings. We're the sinners; He's the Savior. We're at fault; He is faithful.

With so much evil in the world, the more significant question is, "Why don't you get saved?"

His longsuffering waits for people to hear the Gospel and be saved. God has an endgame, and it's a good one - laid out logically and chronologically for us in the Bible's final chapters.

The Cross was the ultimate sacrifice. It proves God so loved the world; and by it, Jesus has sent His Spirit into this world to woo sinners to salvation. He wooed them in evil Corinth:

1Co 1:1 Paul, called *to be* an apostle of Jesus Christ through the will of God, and Sosthenes *our* brother,

The apostle Paul had founded the church in Corinth. He spent eighteen months there - the longest he was anywhere except for three years in Ephesus. It's interesting to note that even with Paul as their teacher for an extended time, it didn't take the believers long to revert back to carnality.

As we get deeper into this letter, we're going to find that many of the believers were doubting Paul's authority as an apostle.

He starts out reminding them he was “called” by God. It wasn’t a ministry he was appointed to by men. It wasn’t his will; it was God’s will. He was struck down by Jesus, overcome by His glory, on the way to murder believers in Damascus.

“Sosthenes” is most likely the same guy mentioned in the Book of Acts who was ruler of the Jewish synagogue in Corinth. If so, he got saved through Paul’s preaching of the Gospel.

Stop for a moment, and put on your grace-glasses. Jesus Christ confronted Paul (Saul at the time) on the road to Damascus, saving him. Not only did Jesus save Paul; He called him to be His apostle. Some twenty years later, Paul was directed divinely by the Holy Spirit to go to Corinth. He preached a simple Gospel message in the most vile city in the Empire. The Corinthians were “unrighteous... fornicators, idolaters, adulterers, homosexuals, sodomites, thieves, covetous, drunkards, revilers, extortioners...” (First Corinthians 6:9-10). God freed their will to receive Jesus and some did.

It's almost impossible for us to realize the amazing grace of God in saving them then sending Paul, then establishing a church. It was all part of the plan we have in the Bible - starting in Eden, ending in eternity.

It was a stunning display of grace. Instead of dispatching an angel to Corinth à la Sodom and Gomorrah, God sent an apostle to plead with them.

1Co 1:2 To the church of God which is at Corinth, to those who are sanctified in Christ Jesus, called *to be* saints, with all who in every place call on the name of Jesus Christ our Lord, both theirs and ours:

The church is believers in Christ. It is His church; He is its foundation and builder. We are living stones set in His building as He sees fit.

“Sanctified” means *set apart* or *saved*. It involves three stages:

1. The moment you receive Jesus, you receive the indwelling Holy Spirit and you are saved.
2. For the rest of your life on the earth, Jesus works to finish the work He has begun in you.
3. At your resurrection or rapture, you will have a glorified body, be eternally free from sin, and enjoy eternity in Heaven with Jesus and all the saints.

The moment you believe, you are a saint. It isn't a title given to certain believers after they die.

Ever been to a meeting of the Lions Club? The members must address each other as Lion So-and-so. If not, they pay a fine. They are all Lions. We are all saints.

“Called to be saints” is better translated “called to be holy.” The emphasis is that God will make you holy; that holiness is possible on account of His grace. Without Him, you’ve got no chance.



The last clause of verse two reminds the believers in Corinth they are part of something much bigger. A geography-defying, centuries-spanning, supernatural building project. Again: Grace is on display as we see the Gospel as the universal solution to mankind's universal problem - Sin.

1Co 1:3 Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

Theologian Karl Barth was once asked if he could summarize what he believed in a sentence. He replied, "Jesus loves me, this I know, for the Bible tells me so."

Ray Ortlund summarizes his theology, "The Lover of our souls won't let the romance die, but is rekindling it forever."

How would you answer? If you ever get asked, and feel stumped, just cite John 3:16.

One of the commentators I read said that Paul's entire theology is summarized by verse three.

By grace, God woos the undeserving, Hell-doomed sinner, seeking to save you. Nothing can be deserved or achieved; it is offered to all as a gift to receive.

Then this commentator wrote: "The sum total of the benefits as they are experienced by the recipients of God's grace is found in the word "peace," meaning "well-being, wholeness, welfare." The one flows out of the other, and both together flow from "God our Father" and were made effective in human history through our "Lord Jesus Christ."

**God's** amazing grace changes everything. It saves; it sanctifies; it glorifies.

## #2 You Display Gods Grace Worshipping Him

(v4-9)

How would you like to earn \$100.00 an hour? That's the going rate for Human Mannequins. You pose in display windows, as if you were a mannequin.

Clowns creep-out some people. Mannequins are a close second. Whenever I see one, I am drawn back to episode 34 of *The Twilight Zone*, "The After Hours." Marsha White is shopping in a department store, but things are not what they seem. Turns out, Marsha White was a store mannequin. Within their society, the mannequins take turns, one at a time, to live among the humans for one month. Marsha had enjoyed her stay among "the outsiders" so much that she had forgotten her identity.

A mannequin is a frame that gets adorned with items to be put on display. Do you realize that when the church returns with Jesus at His Second Coming we will be adorned and put on display?

2 Thessalonians 1:10 when He comes, in that Day, to be glorified in His saints and to be admired among all those who believe, because our testimony among you was believed.

This is not the rapture, when Jesus comes *for* His saints. This is His Second Coming, ending the Great Tribulation, when He comes *with* us.

He will be glorified “in His saints,” in us, because we will be in our glorified, eternal bodies - blameless, without blemish, perfected by Him. The people on the earth, who survive the Tribulation, will marvel at what Jesus has done for us.

We will be on display then... **We are on display now.** Our display isn't so much a list of particular behaviors; it isn't do's&don'ts. It is a display of how grace changes things. It is showing what is so amazing about grace.

1Co 1:4 I thank my God always concerning you for the grace of God which was given to you by Christ Jesus,

1Co 1:5 that you were enriched in everything by Him in all utterance and all knowledge,

In the “grace” “given” to them God “enriched” them “in all utterance and knowledge.” This refers to the gifts of the Holy Spirit.

You might already know that the Corinthians were abusing the gifts of the Spirit. The most obvious example, found in chapter fourteen, is that they were all speaking in tongues, all at once, without any interpretation. Paul will say that, as a result, visitors to their gatherings thought they were crazy. Grace was definitely not being displayed.

The thought here, in our verses, is that the gifts were given to the believers to adorn them in a way that they displayed the grace of the Giver. Someone exposed to a gift being exercised ought to be able to deduce something supernatural and self-less is occurring - not something natural and selfish. Certainly not fear that God drives you mad.

1Co 1:6 even as the testimony of Christ was confirmed in you,

One way God confirmed Paul's "testimony of Christ," the Gospel he preached, among them by giving them these spiritual gifts. (BTW - Those who opposed Paul's apostleship would thus have to wonder if their gifts were false).

1Co 1:7 so that you come short in no gift, eagerly waiting for the revelation of our Lord Jesus Christ,

This may mean that all the spiritual gifts we can find specifically listed in this letter were present in their gatherings. More likely it means they had all the gifts necessary for them.

The Holy Spirit gives gifts as He chooses. There's no gift exchange. We can't steal a gift from someone else because it seems better. Neither are we to think we are stuck with a gift. It is from God; it is His perfect choice for you.

Local gatherings of the church are going to have different emphases on the gifts, based on how the Holy Spirit has distributed gifts to the believers.

1Co 1:8 who will also confirm you to the end, *that you may be* blameless in the day of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Ever see a honeycomb dripping with honey? Verses eight and nine are dripping with grace.

Grace is unmerited; it is unearned; it is undeserved. We just saw in verses one, two and three that God takes all the initiative to save you by grace. Now you are promised He will “confirm” you to the very end by grace. The word means, “guarantee.” We are so used to loopholes, and fine print, in guarantees that we don’t take God at His Word.

How would you answer this question: “Is salvation a work of God?” Of course it is; “Yes!”

What we sometimes overlook is that salvation is His work **from start to finish**. He will “confirm you to the end” means if you are in Christ, **you cannot be lost**. He Who began His good work in you *must* complete it. It’s on Him, not you, to complete it.

Is there a passage of Scripture that indicates God starts to save you, but then leaves it up to you to make it to the end? Did Jesus, on the Cross, say, “It has begun?” No, He said, “It is finished!”

What about professing believers who are sinning? I’d recommend you read, or listen to, last week’s study on the Carnal Christian. You’ll see why that initial study was crucial.

These verses mean what they say. Even the carnal, baby believers in Corinth - **they were already confirmed to the end**. I’m not going out on a limb. Gordon Fee writes:



Paul... express[es]... confidence about a community whose current behavior is anything but blameless and whom on several occasions he must exhort with the strongest kinds of warning.

He can express “confidence” because God is the One making these promises. His grace cannot fail.

What “end” is Paul referring to? Their death, or the coming of Jesus for His church.

The words, “*that you may be* blameless in the day of our Lord Jesus Christ,” refer to the rapture.

The Corinthians were far from “blameless.” But so am I. You, too. When we see Jesus, at death or in the rapture, we will be made blameless.

Between now and then, we really ought to cooperate with Him in becoming more like Him every day.

1Co 1:9 God *is* faithful, by whom you were called into the fellowship of His Son, Jesus Christ our Lord.

The God Who “called” them is “faithful” to keep them. This word, “called,” is powerful. Albert Barnes writes:

The word “called” here does not refer merely to “an invitation” or an “offer of life,” but to the **effectual influence** which had been put forth; which had **inclined** them to embrace the Gospel. In this sense the word often occurs in the Scriptures, and is designed to denote a power, or influence that goes forth with the external invitation, and that makes it effectual. **That power is the agency of the Holy Spirit.**

We briefly discussed prevenient grace last study. It is the grace Barnes is writing about. It is the influence of the Spirit to free your will to receive Jesus or to go on rejecting Him.

“Fellowship” with Jesus - that’s what it’s all about. A relationship with the living God.

“I’ll establish the church in Corinth,” God thought.

- A light in the darkness of human depravity.
- Salt to season and preserve.
- Truth to defy error. Power to transform lives from the guttermost.
- A display of longsuffering, not willing any should perish, but rather that they would repent.

That church, like every church, is nothing more than a gathering of believers in Christ. We are the way God has chosen to display His grace.

The mannequin in the *Twilight Zone* got too comfortable out in the hustle and bustle of the store patrons. She forgot what she was created for - to adorn and display. Let’s not make her mistake.

I mentioned the Lions Club. Lions wear vests that are adorned with patches. I read on their website that “There are more than 20 award programs to acknowledge their accomplishments.”

Some of the Lions have many, many such adornments, encouraging the younger Lions to do the same.

In the supremely glorious passage in the Revelation that describes our return with Jesus, we read,

Rev 19:7 Let us be glad and rejoice and give Him glory, for the marriage of the Lamb has come, and His wife has made herself ready."

Rev 19:8 And to her it was granted to be arrayed in fine linen, clean and bright, for the fine linen is the righteous acts of the saints.

Our return is likened to a wedding banquet. The church is the bride. It appears that we are given a "fine linen" garment, like a wedding gown, and that each of us can further adorn our garment by the "righteous acts" we perform for Jesus on earth prior to the resurrection and rapture.

We can have tons of 'patches,' as it were. Not for pride's sake; for the Lord's sake.

Answer me this: Does a bride want to be as beautiful as possible on her wedding day? **So too ought you want to be beautiful for Jesus.**

Jesus makes all things beautiful in His time. But we can further adorn ourselves while we are on display on earth in our own Corinth's.

One final question: Is my display of God's grace missing? Or is it amazing?