

The Grace of Godliness - Part 1

THE CONFESSION OF GRACE 1Corinthians 15:1-11

STIMULATE

** As we begin a new series, the Lord has impressed upon my heart the matter of His Grace toward those of us who have called on His Name for our salvation. When we walk in obedience to His Word, how did that happen? When we decide to forsake a sinful thought or attitude, who is to get the glory? Even when we labor on behalf of our Lord and His kingdom, what is the resource behind it all?

MOTIVATE

**Today we begin a four part series entitled "The Grace of Godliness" and it is my prayer that we will learn some profound truths about our God given abilities to serve Him and to bring Him the glory He so richly deserves. Each part will be sub-titled based upon the truth it will be teaching us and how that truth reflects upon our godly behavior. The four parts are:

- 1) **The Confession of Grace**
- 2) **The Gift of Grace**
- 3) **The Glory of Grace**
- 4) **The Humility of Grace**

** For now, please join me in Paul's first letter to the Corinthians, chapter 15, verses 1-11 as we begin part one of "The Grace of Godliness".

Read Passage (V.1-2) (V.3-5) (V.6-8) (V.9-11)

Opening Prayer

The Confession of Grace

INVESTIGATE

** The apostle Paul has written to his beloved church in Corinth in an effort to correct the sweeping damage caused by the influence of the sinful world around them and by false teachers, who's design was to bring discredit to Paul's reputation and replace his inspired teaching with their own, self-serving doctrines. The result was these two letters that we have today known as first and second Corinthians.

Here in chapter 15 of 1Corinthians, Paul addresses the most poignant of all the problems of the church in Corinth. That is, the truth about the resurrection of Jesus Christ. It is the resurrection of Christ that makes Christianity different from the religions and philosophies of the world. As we drop in on his discussion of this very important topic, we are going to hear Paul's "**Confession of Grace**".

V. 1 ** What is it that Paul wanted to make clear in the minds of the Corinthian believers?

"...the gospel..."

** How did the Corinthians hear this gospel?

Paul had "preached" it to them for a year and a half (cf. Acts 18:11).

**** What was their two-fold response?**

They "received" it and they were taking their spiritual "stand" upon it. The changed lives of the Corinthian Believers was the first witness Paul calls upon to verify the Resurrection.

V. 2 ** What was the outcome of Paul's preaching and the Corinthians believing the gospel?

"...by which also you are saved..."

**** Did you notice a qualifier to Paul's statement about how they were saved?**

"...if you hold fast the word which I preached..."

**** Are there individuals who hear the gospel, respond for a while in a "Christian-like" manner and then let go or walk away from the truth of the Word, having "believed in vain"?**

Yes! Our Lord repeatedly spoke of those who had a useless, non-saving faith. For example, just in Matthew's gospel alone He spoke of:

Matthew 7:13-14 - gates and paths that seem right

Matthew 7:24-27 - houses without foundations

Matthew 13:18-23 - gospel seed falling on poor soil

Matthew 13:24-30 - tares that look like wheat

Matthew 13:47-50 - good and bad fish in the same net

Matthew 25:1-13 - virgins without lamp oil

Matthew 25:14-30 - servants who wasted their Talents

In all of these examples, the individual's faith was useless because they did not hold fast to the Word of God, they were never saved! In our passage this today, Paul is pointing out that some of those in Corinth had possibly done the same thing.

V. 3 - 4

**** What three things did Paul report to the Corinthians about our Lord Jesus Christ?**

1) That He died for our sins 2) He was buried 3) He was raised on the third day (and all according to Scriptures).

**** Did Paul just make all that up, was he the originator of some wildly concocted story?**

No! He "delivered" only what he had "received"...it was the Truth, inspired by God Himself!

**** What Scriptures might Paul be referring to for proof of the Messiah's death, burial, and resurrection? Let's look together to see what Paul is talking about.**

Psalms 22:11-18 - The Messiah's Death

Isaiah 53:7-9 - The Messiah's Burial

Psalms 16:8-11 - The Messiah's Resurrection

The Old Testament directly or indirectly, literally or in figures of speech, foretold of Jesus' death, burial and resurrection.

V. 5 - 8

** Having just borne witness to the validity of the resurrection by the means of the changed lives of the Corinthian believers and the testimony of Scripture, what does Paul turn to next for proof?

Eye witness accounts! Individuals that had seen the risen Savior. First hand testimony by those who had actually been there.

** Who saw the resurrected Christ?

First, Cephas (Peter), then the twelve (now minus Judas, but they were known as "the twelve"), then more than five hundred brethren at one time, then James (most likely His brother, the writer of the epistle and head of the Jerusalem church) and then more times to the apostles and finally to Paul himself.

** How many witnesses does it take to confirm a fact in a Jewish court of law?
cf. Matthew 18:16, John 8:17, 2 Corinthians 13:1, 1 Timothy 5:19

Deuteronomy 19:15 "by the mouth of two or three witnesses every fact may be confirmed"

** Given that standard, would you think that there is sufficient evidence to prove that Jesus Christ rose from the dead?

Absolutely! It is only the sinfulness of man that would willingly reject so great a witness.

** In verse eight, what insight do we gain about the apostle Paul's view of himself?

He was a misfit, last of all in importance, but even so, our gracious Lord appeared to Him because of the work that Christ wanted Paul to do.

V. 9 ** How does Paul further describe himself in comparison to the other apostles?

"...the least of the apostles..."

** What reason does he give for having that opinion?

"...because I persecuted the church of God."

The self-appraisal here is in **54 A.D.** some twenty years since his conversion. Let's look at how it progressed...

57 A.D. Romans 7:24 - "Wretched man that I am! Who will set me free from the body of this death?"

65 A.D. 1 Timothy 1:15 - "...Jesus came into the world to save sinners, among whom I am foremost of all.

V.10 ** As Paul grew more humble in the view of himself, did that mean he would not accept the role that Christ had called him to?

No. He simply was willing to "**confess**" how he got there. "**But by the grace of God I am what I am...**"

** How do you view yourself? How do you view your accomplishments? Who gets the credit when someone commends you for anything that you have said or done?

For us, like the apostle Paul, we must acknowledge that we are what God has made us and when we obey Him or act in a manner that draws the approval of others, we should be quick to "**confess**" that is was all by His marvelous grace.

** Since we too can share this wonderful "**confession of grace**", does that mean that we can just sit back and relax because everything that we are and have is by God's grace?

No! The apostle said that God's "grace toward me did not prove vain; but I labored even more than all of them..."

The one who was chosen last of all, the least of the apostles, labored the hardest!

** Well certainly, all that hard labor would be to Paul's credit, right?

Wrong!!! Even when we labor hard for our Lord, it is only because He granted us the grace to do it. Our part is simply to be faithful and "hold fast to the Word" which was preached to us.
cf. verse 2

V.11 ** Having stated that he worked harder than any other of the apostles, was it important to Paul that he be recognized as an effective, soul-winning preacher?

No...he said, "Whether then it was I or they, so we preach and so you believed."

The resurrection was the pivotal message to the proclamation of the gospel, and Paul did not care who preached it, just as long as it was preached. cf. Philippians 1:15-18

EXTRICATE

** What is the wonderful truth that distinguishes Biblical Christianity from the world's religions and philosophies?

The resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ.

DELINEATE

** If we have placed our faith in the Lord Jesus Christ because we believed the gospel (that Jesus died, was buried and rose again according to Scripture), what should be our common confession relative to anything that we are or have achieved?

"By the grace of God I am what I am". . . That it is all by His marvelous grace.

EVALUATE

** Look back with me to verse 10 of today's passage. What three guidelines can be drawn from Paul's example and then applied to our daily walk with the Lord?

- 1) **By God's grace I am what I am.**
- 2) **His grace is not in vain, if I will labor.**
- 3) **When I labor (even harder than others) it is not I, but the grace of God with me.**

ACTIVATE

** As this series continues we are going to be learning much about God's grace and how it produces godliness in us. For today it will be enough if we honestly recognize how gracious God has been toward us in our salvation and go from here a grateful people willing to labor hard for His glory. Let's commit to that!

Closing prayer