

Release the Treasure

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All Scripture quotations, unless otherwise noted, are from the King James Version. Italics for emphasis are ours.

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INTRODUCTION

Jesus said in John 6:29 that the work of God is to believe on Him. Ironically, many believers who are living in this dispensation of grace struggle continuously in their sincere efforts to “live the Christian life” (Ephesians 3:2). Yet, God never intended for us to live in a system of works; He intended that *Christ* would work His life in us.

Out of Christ’s fullness we have received a great treasure: It is the positional truth of who we are in Christ and of all He has deposited on our account, grace upon grace. But this treasure was not given so we could keep it for ourselves alone; it was given so we would spend it.

Remember, God is not looking for a balanced account, but that we would be enriched in all things and keep drawing from the abundance of grace that produces a spirit of thanksgiving. This booklet examines the apostle Paul’s approach to the carnal church at Corinth. By mag-

nifying their treasure, Paul prepared a way for the Holy Spirit to convict them of their bankruptcy and restore the wealth of doctrine to their souls.

Chapter One

AN ETERNAL DEPOSIT: POSITIONAL TRUTH

When Paul wrote his first letter to the Corinthians, there were serious problems in the church. First, there was the problem of their preferences toward certain leaders; some preferred Peter, others preferred Paul, and others Apollos. (There was even a group who preferred Christ—they wanted no pastor at all!) Then, though the Corinthians possessed legitimate gifts from the Holy Spirit, they used the gifts out of order, which caused confusion in the church services. Also, because the canon of Scripture was not yet completed, they did not have the final authority of the written Word to settle disputes.

So the church of Corinth, once wonderfully active in soul winning, had declined in their faithfulness, and the divisions were intensifying.

Pastors who want to learn how to approach

serious problems in their churches should study the first chapter of Paul's letter to the Corinthians. In Paul's wisdom, he did not begin by rebuking them. Instead, he initiated the truth of their position according to grace—something they did not deserve. Though he would define the problems later on, Paul was the master of grace-initiation.

A Brief Church History

The first pastor of the Corinthian church was Apollos, one of the three greatest orators in the world at that time. There was just one problem: Apollos lacked proper knowledge of doctrine. Though he became more thoroughly trained after he met Aquilla and Priscilla (see Acts 18:24-26), when the divisions in Corinth began to intensify, he quit.

Timothy became the next pastor in Corinth. Raised by his grandmother Lois and his mother, Eunice (2 Timothy 1:5), Timothy lacked the investment of a father in his life. Consequently, the problems with disorder in the church took Timothy out of the race. Though he was a good communicator of the Word of God, emotionally he couldn't stand the division. It took its toll on him, causing stomach problems and other ail-

ments. Eventually, *he* quit the pastorate at Corinth.

Then came Titus, who, next to Paul, was one of the greatest Christian leaders in the ancient world. With great boldness and the wisdom and encouragement he received from his pastor-teacher, Titus was able to straighten out many of the problems in Corinth.

Though Corinth was a multinational center for trade, the church was overwhelmingly Greek. Culturally, the Greeks esteemed three things as essential: intellectual ability, oratory skills, and body building for strength in athletic contests. Notice how Paul, as a leader, approached this congregation, considered to be the worst in the history of the early Church. There were divisions, women running the church, and nobody doing anything about it until Titus came along.

Sanctified in Christ Jesus

“Paul, called to be an apostle of *Jesus Christ* through the will of God” (1 Corinthians 1:1). There is a reason for each form the Holy Spirit uses to refer to the names of God. The Holy Spirit inspired Paul to write “Jesus Christ” in this verse, referring to the humanity of God before His deity. Paul was saying, “I have been

called by the One who died on the Cross in His humanity though He also was Deity.”

Then, Paul goes on to say, “Unto the church of God which is at Corinth, to them that are sanctified *in Christ Jesus...*” (1 Corinthians 1:2a). This time, the Holy Spirit prompted him to write “Christ Jesus,” referring first to His deity that became humanity. Only Deity has the ability to sanctify sinful men positionally by placing them in union with Jesus the Savior the moment they become saved. Plus, the fact that we are *in Christ* is the premise for all positional truth (see 1 Corinthians 12:12-13).

So, Paul’s first approach to this rebellious church was, “to *you who are sanctified in Christ Jesus.*” “Sanctified” is a perfect passive participle in the Greek text. In essence Paul was saying that he wasn’t going to talk about the Corinthians’ sins or problems right now. Using this form of the verb, he implied, “You were sanctified at the point of salvation, and you are continuing to be sanctified now (*perfect tense*). You have already received the action of being sanctified forever in your union with Christ (*passive voice*), and Christ Jesus is the One who did it (*causative participle*).”

That is how Paul handled the division, vin-

dictiveness, implacability, resentment, hatred, gossip, and criticism by a church that was as carnal as it could be!

Paul completes the thought by saying that the Corinthians were “...called to be saints, with all that in every place call upon the name of *Jesus Christ* our Lord, both theirs and ours” (1 Corinthians 1:2*b*). With the emphasis again on the humanity of the Savior who died on the Cross in our place, this verse shows that everyone who calls upon Jesus Christ is sanctified.

Thanking God for Grace

“Grace be unto you, and peace, from God our Father, and from the Lord Jesus Christ. *I thank my God always on your behalf, for the grace of God which is given you by Jesus Christ*” (1 Corinthians 1:3-4).

Notice that Paul did *not* say, “I thank God for you Corinthians.” Instead, he thanked God for the *grace* that was given to them by Jesus Christ. On the other hand, when he wrote to the Philippian church, he thanked God for them (Philippians 1:3), but he did not thank God for the church at Corinth. It is vital that we understand this. Paul was addressing this church in reference to their *positional sanctification*, without

regard for anything in their experience.

The grace we have received is a provision of divine reality. It was given when we met the Lord at Calvary by faith, for salvation. We received this grace “by Jesus Christ”—by virtue of His death on the Cross in His humanity and because of His Deity which gives Him the right to give us this grace.

My orientation to grace is measured by my thanksgiving. The measure that I have received and understood God’s grace will be the measure that I will thank God for everything that happens in my life. Likewise, the measure of my thanksgiving is the manifestation of how well I understand grace.

When Paul spoke of the grace that was “given” to the Corinthians, he used an aorist passive participle (1 Corinthians 1:4). The aorist participle precedes the action of the main verb, which is “thank.” This means that receiving the grace that God gives precedes the action of thanking God. Can you see how amazing Paul’s response was? The Corinthians had received grace; but because of their rebellion, they had no capacity for thanksgiving. So the wise master-builder said, “I thank God, *on your behalf*, for this grace which is given you.”

Because God placed sixty-five points of positional truth on our account the moment we were saved in addition to the benefits He loads us with daily, we can never stop thanking Him. In fact, throughout eternity we will be thanking God with singing, shouting, and thunderous praise for all that He is and all He has done (Revelation 7:11-12).

Enriched in All Things

“That in every thing you are enriched by him, in all utterance, and in all knowledge” (1 Corinthians 1:5). This verse begins with a purpose clause, which shows the result of the Corinthians’ receiving grace. Paul said, “I thank God, on your behalf, that you are *sanctified* forever, you are *in Christ Jesus*, and you have been given *grace*—three beautiful things—because you met Jesus Christ at the Cross.” What was the result of receiving this grace? They were enriched in *all* things.

Think of it. Here is a carnal church, backslidden and fighting among themselves; but now they have been enriched in everything because of positional truth, because of grace.

“Ye are enriched” is an aorist passive indicative. This aorist is unique because it refers to a

point in time, that continues outside of time into infinity. In other words, the Corinthians were being enriched in all things, in time, beginning at the point of salvation. Because of grace, this enrichment would continue throughout all eternity. This aorist can be pictured as a dot, a space, a dot, a space, and so on (. . .), instead of a continuous straight line (———). The spaces represent the times when we stop receiving grace in our experience. This is important because God, who knows everything, knew that men would fail. This aorist expresses the character of One who continues to give us opportunities for rebound, though we fall seven or seventy times in a day.

Remember, so far Paul has not rebuked the Corinthians. Imagine having to deal with all of these problems yet coming on like this, with positional truth, declaring their sanctification in Christ and their spiritual enrichment in all things. Oh, if pastors would only learn that *this* is how to deal with problems in their churches.

Chapter Two

THE WAY TO LIFE: GLAD SURRENDER AT THE CROSS

There were four things the Christians in Corinth needed to learn: No one can live the Christian life in the flesh; everyone will experience failure; trying to repress weaknesses is legalistic Christianity that does not work; and, a believer will never grow or be changed in any area of his life until he stops trying to get better.

Paul came to a painful understanding of this when he cried out in Romans 7:24, “O wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me from the body of this death?” Then the Word of God resonates with its powerful provision: “I thank God through Jesus Christ our Lord....There is therefore now no condemnation”!

The Battle is the Lord's

There are many hypocritical, deceived people in churches today—sincere people who do

not understand that though they may repress their weakness, it will pop up again. The struggle goes on (Psalm 18:43). There needs to be a death.

In Psalm 83:11, the writer asks God to make his enemies as Zebah, and as Zalmunna, referring to the Midianite kings and their host of fifteen thousand who were overthrown by Gideon's army of three hundred faithful men (Judges 8). They were taken at a time when Israel's small but mighty band, exhausted from the battles, were "faint, yet pursuing."

A careful study reveals that the name "Zebah" comes from the Hebrew word that means "to become the victim of a sacrifice." This Midianite king did not merely die in battle. He was taken captive, delivered up, and slain before the people (Judges 8:18). In practical application, Zebah represents our number-one enemy—*self*—who becomes the victim at last through crucifixion.

When we live in the strife of self-effort, we offend God and we offend the Cross. We fall, then pull ourselves up by our bootstraps and try all over again; but that is not at all what God intended for us, as Paul learned by the thorn in his flesh.

A Divine Provision

“And lest I should be exalted above measure through the abundance of the revelations, there was given to me a thorn in the flesh, the messenger of Satan to buffet me, lest I should be exalted above measure. For this thing I besought the Lord thrice, that it might depart from me” (2 Corinthians 12:7-8). The thorn in Paul’s flesh was a demon—a messenger of Satan—sent by God to pierce and buffet his body. Paul had to live with a demon on his case day and night!

As he cried out to God for deliverance, the answer came: “My grace is sufficient for thee:” God said, “for my strength is made perfect in weakness.” And Paul responded, “Most gladly therefore will I rather glory in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me. Therefore I take pleasure in infirmities, in reproaches, in necessities, in persecutions, in distresses for Christ’s sake: for when I am weak, then am I strong” (2 Corinthians 12:9-10).

These verses bring out what is known in the Greek as an *elative conclusion*. This simply means that Paul had a choice between a divine provision—God’s grace—and a human provision, which in this case would have been deliverance

from the thorn. Paul chose God's provision.

The apostle learned a great secret: Apart from a divine provision, he could not live the life. He needed to be enriched by God's grace, or he could forget everything. He learned that when he was weak, he was strong through God's grace.

More pastors have tried to repress their weakness, and many become a reproach to Christ, all because they do not understand how to deal with weaknesses. When we finally say to God, "I quit!" then we quit trying to live the Christian life. A man can't even surrender to God apart from grace. We could go down the aisle and surrender to God at every service, but that is only flesh surrendering to *try* to do better. It won't work. This is the mystery of iniquity that has embattled sincere Christians everywhere who love God and whom God loves very deeply.

Chapter Three

THE TREASURE MEN SEEK IS IN YOU

“But we have this treasure in earthen vessels, that the excellency of the power may be of God, and not of us” (2 Corinthians 4:7).

We have a treasure inside of us. *People are looking for that treasure.* If an anointed believer were to talk to one hundred people personally, fifteen or sixteen would recognize the treasure and take hold of it. They can see it in our eyes. Their response reveals a hunger for what we have. In this cold dark world, we have a life that shines, reflecting the treasure.

Consider 2 Corinthians 4:6, “For God, who commanded the light to shine out of darkness, hath shined in our hearts, to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.”

The treasure has value in itself; but to enrich another soul, it needs to be exposed. How does

God get our treasure to come out? It's very simple. *The only way the treasure will come out is when God breaks us.* So, He sends trouble on every side.

“...We are perplexed, but not in despair; persecuted, but not forsaken; cast down, but not destroyed; Always bearing about in the body the dying of the Lord Jesus...” (2 Corinthians 4:8-10a). Why? “...that the life also of Jesus might be made manifest in our body.” The treasure comes through our mortal bodies, revealing and dealing with any death in our lives, so new life can flow through us to others. “So then death worketh in us, but life in you” (see 2 Corinthians 4:10b-12).

The Christian life is simply accepting that the work has been done *for me* and acknowledging that the work has been done *in me* (Romans 8:4). Then, while I live in the process of growing in grace, I reveal that God is for me.

True Wealth

People do not like to face bankruptcy, and they hate to admit when they are bankrupt. But Matthew 5:3 says, “Blessed are the [bankrupt] in spirit: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.” The King James says “*poor* in spirit,” but “bankrupt” is a good application in this case. The next verse

says, “Blessed are they that mourn: for they shall be comforted.” Because of our sins, we are so spiritually bankrupt that we begin to mourn. We are fed up with sinning. But God meets us where we are and comforts us through the Holy Spirit.

The transaction out of bankruptcy is made when we finally go through the Cross, and we begin to live a derived life through the transcendent power of the resurrection and ascension of Christ. No longer do we have to repress our weaknesses; *they will not go away*. But when we honestly and fervently believe that the work has been done for us and in us and that God is for us, then we suddenly discover a new kind of experiential power in our lives. No longer do we have to secretly strive, trying to make it happen. We are truly wealthy!

God describes this wealth in 1 Corinthians 1:5: “That in every thing you are *enriched* by him, *in all utterance*, and *in all knowledge*.” Utterance means communication, and knowledge speaks of categorical doctrine. In principle, as we receive the truth, it is restored in our soul, line upon line, and we are enriched. Now, because we have been enriched by God, we are constrained by love to “spend” the wealth. It causes

us to give utterance, we communicate the truth to others, and, ultimately, Christ is formed in our heart.

Remember, at the time Paul wrote this letter, the Corinthians were not fellowshiping with God. Still, Paul had not brought up their wickedness one time! Though they were wicked people, they were still saved, and Paul's communication remained positive: "You have been enriched in all things and in all knowledge. Doctrine has been restored in your soul, and I thank God, on your behalf, that it is so. Now spend what you have by communicating the treasure!"

Drawn to the Treasure Within

"Even as the testimony of Christ was confirmed in you" (1 Corinthians 1:6). At one time, the Corinthians had been great witnesses for Christ. So, rather than magnifying the fact of their poor witness now, Paul reminded them of the time when they were faithful witnesses. "You witnessed by your lives and by your confession (2 Corinthians 3:3; 5:14-21). Instead of rebuking them by comparing their present situation with what they used to be, Paul was able to minister truth without indicting them. He said, "The testimony of Christ was con-

firmed in you”—and it was confirmed through that treasure.

It is so important for us to realize that even if the people we witness to seem indifferent, complacent, or passive toward our testimony, *oh how they want to see the treasure that is inside of us!* They don't even know what they are hunting for, but they see something in us that draws them.

I spoke to a man once who told me, “I'm an agnostic, but I don't want to be. And I don't want to be that *other thing*.”

I said, “What other thing? An atheist?”

“No.”

Then I asked him what other thing he didn't want to be.

He said, “I don't want to be lost.”

All this man had ever known of Christianity were rules, laws, and standards that the flesh was mandated to perform. After I shared the glorious gospel of the Finished Work with him, he prayed with me and accepted Christ.

Coming to Ourselves

God has given every believer a thorn in the flesh, a weakness that we cannot overcome with natural strength. You may not know what your

thorn is, but you do have one. God gives the thorn to crush us.

You can try to repress your weakness, but that won't work. Hide it and cover it up all you want to, but it won't go away. You must come to a place where you realize you are bankrupt, poor in spirit, then enter into mourning and say by the grace of God, "I can't handle this. I'm all done trying." Remember, when the prodigal son grew weary of his lifestyle in the far country, the Word of God says, "He came to himself" (Luke 15:17).

When we "come to ourselves," then we stop trying, we stop striving, we stop doing, and we stop pretending. Self-righteousness goes. Our religious efforts and relative righteousness, so quick to compare flesh with flesh, are gone. Now we become *real* men and women with God, and He begins to take His rightful place with the treasure in our earthen vessels.

Yes, God will trouble us on every side. Yes, we will be persecuted and cast down. But God does these things for a purpose, so we will never have a proud or critical attitude toward others. We find ourselves instead living by the grace of God and having a thankful spirit, as a representation of the measure of grace we have received.

We truly believe, and we begin to grow in this grace through doctrine. As we are being enriched, we retain doctrine through the Spirit. Then we spend the doctrine—releasing the treasure—by communicating it to others.

Confirmed Investments

In 1 Corinthians 1:7-8, Paul praised God for the Rapture of the Church. “So that ye come behind in no gift; waiting for the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ: Who shall also confirm you unto the end, that ye may be blameless in the day of our Lord Jesus Christ.” He thanked God for the ultimate sanctification that will take place in the Rapture, knowing that God will confirm them—and us—unto that end.

Paul closed his greeting to the Corinthian church by saying, “God is faithful, by whom ye were called unto the fellowship of his Son Jesus Christ our Lord” (1 Corinthians 1:9). He could have said, “You are out of fellowship with God, and you are wicked, evil people!” but he didn’t. He gave them the truth of their position: “*God is faithful.*”

After edifying the church, approaching them on the basis of what had been done for them, Paul said, “Now, I beseech you, brethren, by the

name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that ye all speak the same thing, and that there be no divisions among you; but that ye be perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment” (1 Corinthians 1:10).

Still not outrightly rebuking them, Paul sums it all up. He said, “You are rich! God has supplied all your needs, and you can do all things through Him. Anything you ask in prayer, believing, He will do it.” As we go forward with this treasure, we will very gladly spend and be spent for the sake of the Gospel—for others (2 Corinthians 12:15).

CONCLUSION

The simplicity of the Christian life is summed up in Jesus Christ's words in Matthew 10:8*b*: "Freely ye have received, freely give." Only when we release the treasure can we fully enjoy its enrichment and power in our own lives. David cried out, and God delivered him from the strivings of the people (Psalm 18:43). Likewise we must declare "self" as one of those from whom we seek to be free.

Paul said in Galatians 4:19, "I travail in birth again until Christ be formed in you," that is, until the Word and the Spirit have become an attribute of divine nature indwelling us. In other words, "I want the words to become spirit, and the Spirit to take the words into your mind and form God's nature inside of your soul."

Paul knew the only way these carnal believers could live the Christian life was by having Christ's nature formed in them through the Word and Spirit, *not* by legislating rules to an

already struggling assembly. They would have to learn, as we must, that the secret to living the Christian life is in recognizing the treasure that was given to us. By cultivating positional truth in our souls through the Word and through an intimate fellowship with God, we can release the treasure and give freely to those who are bankrupt in Satan's world system.