

I thank my God always on your behalf

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- [0 : 00] I thank my God always on your behalf for the grace of God which is given you by Christ Jesus. And everything ye are enriched by him in all utterance and in all knowledge.
- The Trinity of Christ was confirmed in you so that you can be high in no gift waiting for the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. I thank my God always on your behalf.
- Well it's a great joy to be with you this morning and to thank you for all your kindness during recent months.
- And I want to focus this morning, God willing, on this issue of thanksgiving. When we look at Paul's epistles we find that at first glance there's nothing out of the ordinary about them.
- Paul didn't invent letter writing and when he wrote letters he didn't invent any special new Christian form.
- [1 : 19] He simply used the old way of writing letters and used it for Christian purposes. You'll find therefore that his epistles are in their arrangement just like any other letters.
- He begins by telling them who's writing, he says this is Paul, and then the addresses, the Church of God at Corinth, and then the greetings, grace to you and so on.
- And in the ancient world that's how everyone wrote letters. They said this is so and so, writing to so and so, greetings.
- But then of course, Paul breathes a whole new content, a whole new life, a whole new glory into this ancient and standard form.
- And although at one level everything is the same, yet at another level nothing is the same. Because everything, even in the salutation, is Christian.
- [2 : 38] It's not simply Paul who is writing, but it is Paul a called apostle of Jesus Christ. And he addresses, not simply some Corinthians, but the Church of God, which is at Corinth.
- The saints in Christ Jesus, called in Christ Jesus. And then of course, the greetings to our Christian. Grace and peace from God our Father and from the Lord Jesus Christ.
- Now, I'm not going to pause over this, but it is interesting how we have a lesson here, that we can take something completely ordinary, like a letter, and breathe new Christian life into it.
- We can't retain even standard forms and still breathe new life into it. And I'm asking the question, are there areas in our own life and culture in which without inventing new forms, we can't nevertheless baptize them into the Lord Jesus Christ?
- It may be a school classroom. It may be a medical practice. It may be a factory shop floor. It may be a newspaper column.
- [4 : 25] But somehow, while abiding by the ordinary structures, we are able to bring new Christian content and life into those existing forms.
- And then Paul goes on, as in all his letters, to say thanks. He begins by expressing gratitude.

And I want to look at this thankfulness for a moment. I thank my God always. I thank my God always.

Always there's room for gratitude. And that's true. And that's true. It's a great challenge to us as well. All of us can rise to gratitude sometimes.

We're all thankful some of the time. But here's somebody who was thankful all of the time. There was always melody in his heart.

[5 : 43] He was thankful always and in all things. But look more specifically. What is Paul thankful for? He's thankful, first of all, for these people themselves.

I thank my God always on your behalf. Or as it should perhaps better be rendered, I thank my God always for you.

I thank my God always on your account. I thank my God always that he's given me you. I thank my God that you're there.

He is thankful for these Corinthians. He is thankful for the church of God. The one that is at Corinth.

The one that is in Christ Jesus. Now you know, the great thing is this. But Paul isn't thanking them for some ideal church.

[6 : 52] Or for some doctrine of the church. But he's thanking God for the real church of Corinth. For the church of Corinth.

For the church of Corinth as he knew it. For what I might call the phenomenal church of Corinth. The church as it simply stood there. As it made and gathered.

The church as it was. As it really was. I thank my God for you. The church at Corinth. I thank my God for the saints at Corinth.

I thank my God for all at Corinth. Who call on the name of the Lord Jesus. Now what is so important is that.

Paul is going to go on to say very harsh things. To the church at Corinth. He will start. But in fact very, very quickly.

[7 : 50] In verse 10. Now I plead with you, he says brethren. That there be no divisions among you. And it's going to speak of the way that they rely on the world's wisdom.

It's going to speak of the way that there is indiscipline and immorality among them. It's going to speak of the way that women behave. In an unseemly way.

In the church gatherings. Of abuse at the Lord's table. Of heresy with regard to the Lord's supper. It's going to speak of the way they abuse. Spiritual gifts.

And of the unseemliness. In many of their assemblies. In other words. In other words. He's not addressing a perfect church. And yet he's thanking God for them.

For the church as it is. I thank my God for you. And Paul was completely sincere when he said this. They were there.

[8 : 56] They were the church of God. It's always important to remember that. They belong to God.

That meant that Paul was grateful to God for them. He didn't mean that Paul wouldn't exalt them.

Or admonish them. Or warn them. Or even speak to them sometimes in church and extreme sarcasm. But he was always thankful.

Thankful for them. He saw them as the church of God. He saw them as saints. As consecrated, dedicated, separated people. As people who were in Christ Jesus.

I think it's hugely important for ourselves to try. To take aboard this mindset that Paul. is showing to us here.

[9 : 56] I thank my God always for you. You have to thank God for those around us. For the people.

The men, the women, the boys, the girls. The phenomenal, real, solid people. That are there. We have to be grateful for all the encouragement.

And all the love. And all the support. And all the advice. And all the criticism. We've got to learn to say thanks to God. For these things.

It doesn't mean that we're not going to speak the truth. But sometimes speak very severe truth. But here he starts. Before there is a word about the abuses.

There is this great note of thankfulness. I thank my God for you. And I've been very conscious this last week in particular.

[11 : 01] of all the goodness that still lives in the church of God. I'm not going to narrow to denominational boundaries.

But it is striking. How much compassion. How much compassion. And how much strength. And how much caring.

And how much God-centeredness. And how much other worldliness there is. The church is not its structures.

The church is not its ministers. It's not its church courts. It's not its professors. It's not its clergy. The church is its people.

I thank God for you. I thank God for you. Paul says. I thank God for you people. I thank God for you as people. For what you are as saints in Christ Jesus.

[11 : 59] I thank God. And today I remind myself of. All the dedicated work and workers in the church of God.

I remind myself of. Those sacrifice holidays. To go to the youth camps. Of those who serve God overseas.

Of those who immerse themselves. In essential. And sometimes demanding and discouraging. Local ministries.

I thank God for those who pray. For those who serve. For those who bring all their gifts. For those who are in the churches their life. I thank God. Paul says. For you. Of course.

In the background of his mind. There were all the problems. And he would address them. But he had to start by saying. I thank God for you.

[13 : 00] And in my mind's eye this morning. I see. All over the church. People to whom I owe so much. And I see. This.

The church itself. As somebody which I owe so much. And I want to say. And I want to try to move into this mindset. And I thank God. I thank my God always for you.

For the church of God. In this city. And I mean all over the city. Corinth. Edinburgh. Paul. And to the church of God.

Which is in Edinburgh. I thank my God always for you. That you are there. And that you are what you are. And that you give all the dedication you give.

To the gospel of Jesus Christ. I thank my God always for you. It does us enormous harm. That we think of the church.

[13 : 58] Simply as some kind of ideal. The church I say again. Is its people. It's not its doctrine. It's not its clergy.

It is its people. I thank my God for you. And one of the great sadnesses of recent times. Has been. That there has been such tremendous emphasis.

And all the deficiencies of some aspects of the church. And not enough emphasis on the glory of the people of God. And the goodness and decency and dedication of the people of God.

And it's time perhaps. To sound this note. I thank my God always for you. And then he says this.

I thank my God. For the grace given to you. The grace of God. Which is given you. By Christ Jesus. He thanks them first of all.

[15 : 02] For themselves. For being what they are. And then he thanks God. For the grace that God has given to them. That means he thanks them.

For the redeeming mercy that God has shown to them. For the grace that saved them. For God's mercy towards them.

As undeserving sinners. The grace that God has given to them. The grace that God has given to them. As perhaps nowhere else. In the whole of the New Testament.

That God had dealt here with. People who were so utterly and so totally undeserving. Corinth.

Corinth was above every other church. A trophy of grace. Paul tells us of someone. Elsewhere of the kind of people they had been.

[16 : 01] They had been immersed in all kinds of sin. We have all heard that. To be a Corinthian. Was to be. At the very margins. Of civilized and decent society.

They were notorious. For their immorality. And for their barbarism. And so on. And. That wasn't through simply the city. It was through.

Of the members of the church of Corinth. They had come from that kind of background. Backgrounds of. All the. Outward and inward sins imaginable.

And yet. God had shown them grace. God had forgiven their sins. God had justified them. God had adopted them. God made them his own son.

And his own daughter. If you had said. That of all the cities in the world. The gospel would triumph. At Corinth. Then. People would have dismissed you.

[17 : 01] As being of quite unsound mind. That's what had happened. The gospel had come. And the gospel had triumphed. And of course.

All of us know. That for ourselves. That to oneself. One is the chief of sinners. And the grace that matters. The trophy of grace.

The proof. The proof. Demonstration of grace. It's that God forgave my sins. God made me his son. God made you his daughter. It is at that personal level.

That this grace. Is so powerful. And so potent. And we bow to be so thankful for it. I thank God. For the grace shown to you. The fact that he's shown towards you.

Who are so undeserving. And the fact. That he has shown it. In such tremendous. And extravagant measure. Because grace.

[18 : 00] You see. Is never restrained. Unmeasured. But grace. Always overflows. And grace. As Paul says here. Enriches. It is so lavish.

And when Paul. Thanks God. For these people. He is. Thanking God above all. For the lavishness of the grace. That forgave so many sins.

That conferred such a glorious status. On such people. With them his sons and daughters. And that gave them such a glorious. Glorious hope.

That they would share. In the glory of his own son. I thank my God. For the redeeming grace. That God has conferred upon you.

That's what he says. But it goes beyond that too. To this. He is thanking God. For his generosity. Towards these people. They come behind.

[18 : 59] In no gift. This is a very gifted church. Compared to any other church. This. He says. Is a superbly gifted church.

This is a church. Which lives up fully. To expectations. It has been filled with the spirit. And it has rich in the gifts of the spirit.

And so is thanking God for it. Now if you ask me. What are those gifts that God has lavished upon this church.

Has been so generous. And bestowed upon this church at Corinth. Well Paul mentions two great things. They have. They are there in verse 5. They are enriched by him in everything.

But particularly. In utterance and in knowledge. They have been enriched. It is worth.

[19 : 59] Pausing to ask ourselves. Are we sufficiently conscious of the enrichment. That the grace of God has brought to us. And brought to this particular congregation. Are you rich?

I thank my God that you are so rich. You are so rich in gifts. Of course they are so rich in two things.

They are rich particularly. In knowledge. And they are rich in utterance. They have insight. They know the truth.

They have the doctrine. They have the message. They have the perception. They have been enriched by God. In all knowledge. These people really know the Christian faith.

They know the mind of God. And the will of God. And that is a gift. God has enriched them by giving them this gift. But more than that. They have utterance.

[21 : 00] In this church. There are those able to articulate this knowledge. Able to put this knowledge into words. And Paul says.

Well doesn't he. Well that's not very important. Or that's commonplace. Or that's not worth noticing. No he says. This is tremendous. I thank God for your gnosis.

For your knowledge. And I thank God for your word. For your utterance. That you can speak the truth. This is just so important he says. You are rich.

You are rich in knowledge. And you are rich in utterance. And he thanks God for that. Now it seems to me that.

These words apply with very great force. To the historical church of God in Scotland. God has enriched us.

[21 : 57] And he has enriched us particularly in those two areas. In knowledge. And in utterance. We have come behind no church.

In those respects. There may be churches which have been more. Better adored in some areas of Christian wealth.

But none are more endowed in terms of knowledge and utterance. Than the church in Scotland. And I might even narrow it down.

And say that we. In our own particular future tradition. That this too has been an area. We are bound to be thankful to God. Because he has enriched us in knowledge.

We have a theological heritage. Which is the inferior of none. And we have a tradition of utterance.

[22 : 54] Which again. Can't stand comparison with any. In the whole range of the Christian church. And I want you to be thankful to God for that.

But I want the young folk to know. That they are indeed heirs. Of a most honourable intellectual Christian tradition. And I want them to know.

That intellect. That knowledge. That utterance. The two words here. Gnosis and logos. Very much the words of intellect. And I know how much intellect is despised.

In the present day. How much more people want experience. And they want excitement. And they want care. And compassion. And of course all those things.

Indispensably important. And they want you to know. And they want you to know. And they want you to know. That those areas in which you are strong. Are areas for which Paul gave thanks to God.

[23 : 57] It was a great thing to be rich in knowledge. And a great thing to be rich in utterance. And I wouldn't have said any of that.

If the impact were to make you leave this building proud and conceited. Because of course Paul is introducing here.

In the very open sentence of his letter. A point to which he is going to return. A point which is in fact pivotal.

To his whole epistle. And that is that these very gifts. Became a stumbling block to the church at Corinth.

But before he says anything about that. He wants to thank God for them. They would abuse those gifts. And they would divide the church over those gifts.

[25 : 04] And they become so arrogant because of those gifts. And they would overemphasize. Prophesying and tongue speaking. And the word of wisdom. The word of knowledge.

And all those things. They would abuse them. And you may abuse them too. But maybe we have abused them. And yet.

They are things he thanks God for. They are things that come from God. Things that no man can give you.

They are not simply human endowments. They are great gifts from God himself. And furthermore. They come to us in or through the Lord Jesus Christ.

I am saying at one level. Let's be thankful for these gifts. I am saying at another level.

[26 : 04] They come to us from God. They come to us through Jesus Christ. I am saying that they are hugely precious. But I am also saying.

That the fact that they come from God. Doesn't mean. That they cannot be abused. But I am also saying. That the fact that they can be abused.

Does not mean that they don't come from God. And I want to put it to you as a matter. Of personal aspiration and ambition. That you might hear Paul's word of thanksgiving.

And that you might ask for yourself. That you too be enbridged. And come behind in no gift. I am asking that this whole church.

Especially at this time in its history. Go on its knees before God. And say to God. Lord. Every good and perfect gift comes from you. You can give us leadership.

[27 : 09] And evangelists. And carers. And people who pray. And intercede. And people who love. And people who are wise. And folk who are compassionate. You can give us all of these gifts.

And you can give us knowledge. And you can give us utterance. Let us be that kind of church. Let us be that kind of Christian.

Because God is the bestower. I think that gives us such enormous hope. Listen not. You see we are not talking here about.

Congenital limitations. We are not talking about. Natural heredity. We are talking about. The gifts of God.

These Corinthians. Not very wise. Not very mighty. Not very noble. Not very strong. Not at all. They were very ordinary people.

[28 : 08] But God you see. Made them rich. God enriched them. With every gift. With the gift of knowledge. The gift of utterance. We must get an only reason.

As God. To give us those gifts. That we need. And then you know Paul. Does something else. That's quite marvelous here. He. Takes it down to verse 7.

You see. I thank God for you people. I thank God for the gifts. That God has given to you. That which you have an exercise. And he puts it this way.

You come behind in no gift. Waiting for the coming of our Lord Jesus. You see. The point that is emerging here is this.

They had so many gifts. If we would die. Have been in the church at Corinth. We'd have thought. What a wonderful experience it was.

[29 : 07] We'd have said to ourselves. Let's build three tabernacles here. Let's stay here. We just love this. We never want to leave it. This is. This is absolute bliss.

This is an absolute perfection. This church is so rich. And this church is so gifted. And this church is so effective.

And this church has such wonderful knowledge. And such wonderful utterance. And such wonderful leaders. You know. We've had Paul here. We've had a policy. We've had Peter here. We've had everybody.

Anybody that's been here. This is just absolute perfection. But Paul says. This is a waiting church.

Waiting for something better. All those gifts were important. And yet those gifts did not mean.

[30 : 07] That they had reached perfection. Amed all the gifts. And all the endowments. And all the wealth. That God had conferred upon.

They were still waiting. They were waiting for the revelation. The apocalypse. The revelation. Of our Lord Jesus Christ.

And I think that what I want to do with you. At this moment is this. To put you up against those two great interfaces. Which challenge us.

Because we are challenged first of all. By the fact. That this was a charismatic church. And I'll come back to that word in a moment.

But also. It was an eschatological church. And I'm going to ask you. Whether it's not possible.

[31 : 08] That we are deficient in both of those areas. I say it was. A church which was self-consciously charismatic.

That is. It was very conscious of the gifts of God. Very conscious of its dependence of these gifts. And very anxious to secure these gifts.

The Scottish church you see. Has been built. On the land of herds. On the natural educational abilities.

Of its leaders. Education. Training. Professionals. Skill. Organization. Administration. Well I don't say that any of that is important.

Unimportant. But you see the gifts here. Things that no man could give them. Things that I can't give my students.

[32 : 12] Things I can't plant. That I can't inspire. That none of us can create. This dependence on the gifts. No man can enrich God's church in this way.

It really is so utterly and so entirely supernatural. We need God to enrich us.

We need gifts that come from above. Straight from God himself. The charismata. Where is the knowledge going to come from? Where is the utterance going to come from?

Where is what is perhaps wrongfully called great preaching? Where is that going to come from? It's going to come straight from God himself. Where can we find great pastors?

Great elders? Not that we want accolades. But we want an effective church. Where can we find effective deacons?

[33 : 17] Effective care? Effective compassion? Effective love? Effective prayer? Effective prayer? Gifts, you see. From God through Jesus Christ.

This dependence upon God's own initiative. This was a gift-conscious church. A church that knew it needed what God alone could provide.

But it was also a church which longed for the end. We, I'm suggesting to you, are not gift-centered.

And I'm also saying to you that we are not focused on the second coming of the Lord Jesus. We have pushed the whole idea of the gifts to the margins.

And we have pushed the idea of the second coming of Jesus to the margins. But these people who had the gifts.

[34 : 22] Who were part of a great, vibrant, exciting, effective church. There were people who knew that this wasn't perfection.

That there was something greater, something more glorious. And so they were longing for the revelation of Jesus Christ. And as I close, I just want to mention a third movement in Paul's thought in this thanksgiving.

He has thanked God for them and for the generosity of God towards them. He has highlighted for us the way they were focused on the second coming of Jesus.

And he closes this section of his epistle by affirming his confidence that God would establish them and confirm them and build them up.

God, or the Lord Jesus Christ, we don't quite know to whom Paul refers there. Who shall also confirm you unto the end that you may be blameless in the day of our Lord Jesus.

[35 : 38] God would confirm them. God would make them steadfast. And you know again that shows a remarkable faith.

God, because I guess that the impression made by the Corinthians and all those who read this epistle is that they were very unstable people.

A very un-steadfast people. And you would say, the rot has already set in. And all the signs of future trouble, degeneration, apostasy, they're all there you see. Division, indiscipline, heresy, abuse, it was all there.

And if you were to extrapolate from the actual details, from the characteristics of this particular church, you should have said, well in ten years it'll be nowhere.

Ah, but he said, God shall confirm you to the end. God shall establish you. God shall build you up.

[36 : 53] God shall confirm, as the years, the decades rolled by, God will confirm that the root of the matter was in you.

And that God's truth was among you. And that his gospel was effective among you. He will confirm that my preaching was sound, Paul says. And my gospel was true. That his grace was really incorruptible.

God will confirm that. Now you must forgive me if I don't hasten to apply this denominational legal.

But we have to apply to the Church of God. And the Church of God in this land. And the Church of God in this city. And indeed the Church of God which is elder memorial free church and lethal.

This you, in many ways, are more important than denominations. I thank God for you. I thank God for your generosity that rewards you.

[37 : 59] I would like to be able to thank God for your focusing on the second coming of Jesus. And I am expressing the confidence with regard to you, which Paul expressed with regard to Corinth.

That he will confirm you. And that he will establish you. And that he will make you steadfast. And that he will confirm that his truth, his gospel, his grace, his saving power is here.

Well, I shall leave it there. Let's join in prayer. O Lord, have mercy upon us. Look down upon us in pity.

We thank thee indeed for all thy gifts to mortals, for thy grace and generosity. And for the hope of the return and revelation of our Saviour.

And Lord, remind thee of those great words we have looked at. That thou will confirm us and establish us and make us steadfast.

[39 : 12] And may this Church here, which is your Church here in Leith. May this Church, Lord, by thy grace go from strength to strength. For the sake of your glory in Christ. Amen.