

ACCORDING TO HIS GRACE

Scripture Reading: II Timothy 1:8, 9

Regardless of our degree of understanding of God's working, we can in no way diminish or deny His absolute sovereignty. Whatever He wills to do, He does. How it affects our individual lives is governed solely by the fabric of His master plan and program. As believers, we perform within the strength He gives us by His Holy Spirit. Paul emphasizes this, saying, "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*" (II Corinthians 12:10). He leaves no doubt as to the Source of his strength as he declares, "I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me" (Philippians 4:13).

Not only what we perform, but what we endure is by the enablement of His grace. "Be thou partaker of the afflictions of the gospel *according to the power of God, Who hath saved us, and called us with an holy calling, not according to our works, but according to His own purpose and GRACE, which was given us in Christ Jesus before the world began.*"

What a program, what a purpose, what a statement of God's sovereignty! "According as He hath chosen us in Him BEFORE THE FOUNDATION OF THE WORLD, that we should be holy and without blame before Him in love" (Ephesians 1:4). Thus He formed the Church which is His Body. "...Christ also loved the Church, and gave Himself for it...that He might present it to Himself a glorious Church, not having spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing; but that it should be holy and without blemish" (Ephesians 5:25b, 27). All this, *according to His grace!*

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Notes:

THE GOSPEL OF GOD'S GRACE

Scripture Reading: Acts 20:24

Nearly all sincere believers will readily acknowledge the grace of God. It is spoken of throughout all of Scripture and relative to all dispensations. Without God's grace there would have been no possibility of His plan and purpose ever coming to fulfillment. God's grace tolerated the unfaithfulness and disobedience of not only His chosen people but all nations in all ages. His grace brought blessing and peace to many, even when condemnation and punishment were deserved—even when His law and commandments were in full force.

But there is a vast difference between the grace of God and the *dispensation* of the grace of God. Simply put, God's grace dealing with man was carried out under the principle of salvation by grace through faith *plus works*. Whereas presently, under the current dispensation of the grace of God, salvation is bestowed as a free gift acquired upon simple acceptance of salvation by grace through faith *without works*.

We learn of this marvelous truth through one channel only—the letters of the apostle Paul to whom it was exclusively revealed by the risen, heavenly-seated Savior the Lord Jesus Christ. The apostle claims it as "*my gospel*, and the preaching of Jesus Christ, according to *the revelation of the mystery, which was kept secret since the world began*" (Romans 16:25). Paul defined his message as "the ministry which I have received of the Lord Jesus, to testify THE GOSPEL OF GOD'S GRACE" (Acts 20:24). "For I neither received of man, neither was I taught it, but by the revelation of Jesus Christ" (Galatians 1:12).

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Notes:

THE DISPENSATION OF GRACE

Scripture Reading: Ephesians 3:2

Having explained to his Gentile hearers the privileges and blessings purchased for them by Christ at Calvary, the apostle Paul writes, "For this cause I Paul, the prisoner of Jesus Christ for you Gentiles, if ye have heard of THE DISPENSATION OF THE GRACE OF GOD which is given me to you-ward: how that by revelation He made known unto me the mystery [the secret]...which in other ages was not made known unto the sons of men...that the Gentiles should be fellow-heirs, and of the same body and partakers of His promise in Christ by the gospel..." (Ephesians 3:1-6). Instructing his young son Timothy in the faith, Paul wrote, "I am appointed a preacher, and an apostle, and a teacher of the Gentiles....Hold fast the form of sound words, *which thou hast heard of me*, in faith and love which is in Christ Jesus" (II Timothy 1:11-13).

The dispensation of the grace of God was revealed and committed to Paul by the Lord Jesus Christ from Heaven after He had struck down and saved Saul (His chief persecutor), later giving him a new name *Paul*. Christ, speaking from Heaven, declared, "He [Paul] is a chosen vessel unto me, to bear my name before the Gentiles, and kings, and the children of Israel: for I will shew him how great things he must suffer for my name's sake" (Acts 9:15, 16).

And suffer he did! In his own words: "Thrice was I beaten with rods, once was I stoned, thrice I suffered shipwreck, a night and a day have I been in the deep" (II Corinthians 11:25). Yet in his faithfulness he declared, "I take pleasure in necessities, in persecutions...for Christ's sake" (II Corinthians 12:10).

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Notes:

EXCEEDING GRACE

Scripture Reading: II Corinthians 9:14

The Corinthian saints had expressed and demonstrated their generosity in contributing to the laborers in Christ their faithfulness and love. In view of this proof of their sincerity, Paul appealed to them in behalf of the poor saints, that they were with them their material substance as a collection was to be made for delivery by Paul's laborers. Paul expresses his confidence in their certain participation on the basis of the EXCEEDING GRACE OF GOD in them. He feels assured of their "liberal distribution unto them [the needy saints]" (verse 1).

The degree of grace that is exercised by us (who are saved) is according to our own discretion because we are blessed with unlimited grace by our Lord Jesus Christ. "Being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ: by whom also we have access by faith into this grace wherein we stand, and rejoice in hope of the glory of God" (Romans 5:1 & 2).

The gift of grace that the believer receives provides strength to endure, power to perform and patience to sustain. In his first letter addressed to the Corinthian saints, the apostle writes: "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" (I Corinthians 1:3 & 4). Grace is dispensed by the Lord Jesus Christ in such volume that we are hard put to fully take its measure. "But He giveth more grace. Wherefore he saith God resisteth the proud, but giveth grace unto the humble" (James 4:6). "Unto every one of us is given grace according to the measure of the gift of Christ" (Ephesians 4:7).

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STRONG IN HIS GRACE

Scripture Reading: II Timothy 2:1-3

The apostle Paul offered much counsel and sound advice to his son in the faith Pastor Timothy. One of the strongest examples of his wise guidance is found in our text: "Thou therefore, my son, **BE STRONG IN THE GRACE THAT IS IN CHRIST JESUS**. And *the things that thou hast heard of me* among many witnesses, the same commit thou to faithful men, who shall be able to teach others also. Thou therefore endure hardness, as a good soldier in Christ."

Paul prefaces his instruction with "Be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus." Whatever the believer does or says is done or said by means of exercising God's grace which is instilled in us by the indwelling Christ. The grace that is in us is the grace that is in Christ. The grace of God that saved us, also gives us the ability to walk pleasing to Him. "For the grace of God that bringeth salvation hath appeared to all men, teaching us that denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly, in this present world" (Titus 2:11, 12) – hence, Paul's words of encouragement to Timothy.

The apostle offers his own testimony to the above. In his Philippian letter he declares, "I can do all things through Christ which [who] strengtheneth me" (Philippians 4:13). He exhorts Timothy to call upon the grace that is in Christ to faithfully proclaim and teach the doctrines taught him by Paul, to instruct others who are faithfully committed, and to willingly suffer the inevitable sacrifices and opposition to be encountered in his ministry. May we, as fellow saints, accept the same challenge as ministers of reconciliation!

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Notes:

GOOD HOPE THROUGH GRACE

Scripture Reading: II Thessalonians 2:16, 17

"Amazing grace, how sweet the sound!" The composer of the beloved old hymn expressed it well. The limitlessness of God's grace is beyond our scope of comprehension. The apostle of grace and revelator of the mystery Paul has given us voluminous testimony of the wonders of His grace. He magnifies the solace to be derived from God's boundless grace, that we might find tranquility and assurance as we anticipate the glorious appearing.

Paul writes to the Thessalonian saints, "Now our Lord Jesus Christ Himself, and God, even our Father, which hath loved us, and hath given us everlasting consolation and good hope through grace, Comfort your hearts, and stablish you in every good word and work" *...everlasting consolation and good hope!* What treasure do we possess by God's marvelous grace! The world turns to all manner of human counsel, seeking the very peace that we as believers possess, simply because we have accepted the free gift of salvation by grace through faith.

The plight of the Gentiles in ages past is graphically recounted by the apostle as he writes to the members of the Body of Christ: "Remember, that ye being in time past Gentiles in the flesh, who are called Uncircumcision by that which is called the Circumcision in the flesh made by hands; that at that time *ye were without Christ*, being aliens from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers from the covenants of promise, *having no hope, and without God in the world*" (Ephesians 2:11, 12). But now—"God, even our Father which hath loved us, *...hath given us everlasting consolation and good hope through grace.*"

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Notes:

THE ABUNDANCE OF GRACE

Scripture Reading: Romans 5:19-6:2

"As by one man's [Adam's] disobedience many were made sinners, so by the obedience of one [Jesus Christ] shall many be made righteous." The simple truth is this: "Since by man [Adam] came death, by man [Jesus Christ] came also the resurrection of the dead. For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ shall all [who believe] be made alive" (I Corinthians 15:21, 22). "Death reigned from Adam to Moses, even over them that had not sinned after the similitude of Adam's transgression, who [Adam] is the figure of Him [Christ] that was to come" (Romans 5:14). "As it is written, *there is none righteous, no not one...* for all have sinned and come short of the glory of God" (Romans 3:10, 23).

King David stated concisely the above described condition of unregenerate man: "Behold, I was shapen in iniquity, and in sin did my mother conceive me" (Psalm 51:5). There are absolutely no exceptions. Never has there existed so much as one individual (since Adam) who was righteous in the sight of God without God's own righteousness being imputed by His grace. Even under the dispensation of the law, David declared, "Blessed is he whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered. Blessed is the man unto whom the Lord imputeth not iniquity, and in whose spirit there is no guile" (Psalm 32:1, 2).

The answer to man's dilemma is clearly stated, "Where sin abounded, *grace did much more abound: that as sin hath reigned unto death, even so might grace reign through righteousness unto eternal life by Jesus Christ our Lord.*" But our apostle adds a word of caution: "Shall we continue in sin, that grace may abound? God forbid!" (Romans 6:1 & 2a).

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Notes:

The Saving Gospel

We are all sinners: "...all have sinned and come short of the glory of God" (Romans 3:23). "The wages of sin is death..." but there is good news: "...the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord" (Romans 6:23).

The Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of God came into the world as a man (Galatians 4:4) – He lived a perfectly obedient and perfectly righteous life. And then He took our place, shedding His blood for our sins...He was buried...and He rose again the third day according to the Scriptures" (I Corinthians 15:3,4). "For God hath made Jesus Christ to be sin for us Who knew no sin, that we might be made the righteousness of God in Him" (II Corinthians 5:21).

"For as by one man's (Adam) disobedience many were made sinners, so by the obedience of One (the Lord Jesus Christ) shall many be made righteous" (Romans 5:19). Will you believe the good news—receive eternal life, one hundred percent forgiveness of sin, and become a member of the Body of Christ?