

# A Biblical View of Grace

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Part II

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In Part I of this teaching we looked at both the Old and New Testament concepts of grace, the doctrines of grace and justification, grace versus works, grace and sanctification, and the incredible power of grace in our lives. Now let's continue with grace as the divine enabler.

## Grace and Divine Enablement

For years I have wondered what Paul was experiencing when he wrote these words:

To keep me from becoming conceited because of these surpassingly great revelations, there was given me a thorn in my flesh, a messenger of Satan, to torment me. Three times I pleaded with the Lord to take it away from me. But he said to me, *"My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness."* Therefore I will boast all the more gladly about my weaknesses, so that Christ's power may rest on me. That is why, for Christ's sake, *I delight in weaknesses, in insults, in hardships, in persecutions, in difficulties. For when I am weak, then I am strong.* (2 Cor 12:7-10 NIV, emphasis added.)

The answer to this obviously serious problem in Paul's life is easy to read, "My grace is sufficient for you . . ." but difficult to understand! In reading and meditating on this principle I conclude that there is an element of grace that many of us today never understand or experience. I recall reading some years ago eye witness accounts of Christians who were martyred yet experienced awesome joy as they were dying for their faith. Some of them seemed, as Stephen in the Book of Acts, to be conversing with Jesus as they were dying. The joy they expressed was super human in light of what was happening to their bodies at the hands of their tormentors. Even as I read the stories, Jesus' words to Paul seemed to ring in my ears, "My grace is sufficient for you . . ." If this kind of grace is available to martyrs dying for their faith, then certainly it is available to us for what we experience in our daily lives!

The question then becomes, "What must we do to access this kind of grace?" The answer to this question is encompassed in the following principles.

### 1. All Christians are Called to Ministry

As Paul tells us, all Christians clearly have a call to ministry. In his letters to the churches he used the ana-

logy of the human body in which each member has a part to play.

"The body is a unit, though it is made up of many parts; and though all its parts are many, they form one body. So it is with Christ. . . God has arranged the parts in the body, every one of them, just as he wanted them to be. If they were all one part, where would the body be? As it is, there are many parts, but one body. . . Now you are the body of Christ, and each one of you is a part of it. And in the church God has appointed first of all apostles, second prophets, third teachers, then workers of miracles, also those having gifts of healing, those able to help others, those with gifts of administration, and those speaking in different kinds of tongues. Are all apostles? Are all prophets? Are all teachers? Do all work miracles? Do all have gifts of healing? Do all speak in tongues? Do all interpret?" (1 Cor 12:12-30 NIV)

We have different gifts, according to the grace given us. If a man's gift is prophesying, let him use it in proportion to his faith. If it is serving, let him serve; if it is teaching, let him teach; if it is encouraging, let him encourage; if it is contributing to the needs of others, let him give generously; if it is leadership, let him govern diligently; if it is showing mercy, let him do it cheerfully. (Rom 12:6-8 NIV)

It was he who gave some to be apostles, some to be prophets, some to be evangelists, and some to be pastors and teachers . . . (Eph 4:11 NIV)

As we see, not all of us are called to be an apostle, prophet, pastor, teacher or evangelist. No, there are those who serve, encourage, contribute, administrate, show mercy, and so on. I believe that grace is available to every ministry call to enable the minister to do God's will. Of course, each of us must do all humanly possible to prepare for the ministry to which God has called us. We dare not presume upon God by failing to do our part in preparation. But when we have done our part, we can expect God to provide supernatural, enabling grace to empower us in the performance of our call.

### 2. The Demands of Ministry

Having established that all Christians have a

ministry call, now we will examine Jesus' demands or standards for those in ministry. I have selected just a few to make the point.

**a. Give Up Everything We Have** -- "In the same way, any of you who does not give up everything he has cannot be my disciple." (Luk 14:33 NIV)

This is a blunt statement. It doesn't take a theologian to interpret it. Jesus is saying that nothing is to come between us and Him. No person, no possession, no amount of money, nothing! I understand that we need transportation, clothes, houses, etc., to live in today's world. Jesus was not saying we must rid ourselves of these essential things. But He was saying that none of these things are to *come between us* and His call on our lives. He must be first.

**b. Humility and Servanthood** -- "For everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and who humbles himself will be exalted." (Luk 14:11 NIV)

"They came to Capernaum. When he was in the house, he asked them, "What were you arguing about on the road?" But they kept quiet because on the way they had argued about who was the greatest. Sitting down, Jesus called the Twelve and said, "If anyone wants to be first, he must be the very last, and the servant of all." (Mk 9:33-35 NIV)

In Jesus' day the lowest person in the social order was the servant. The leaders of the Jewish religion were unbelievably prideful and arrogant. Jesus literally turned this order upside down. By humbling Himself and washing the feet of His disciples, He set the example that the Lord of all must be the servant of all. He requires this same attitude of those who follow Him. That's us. This call to servanthood is for anyone who wants to follow Jesus.

**c. Treasures in Heaven** -- "Do not be afraid, little flock, for your Father has been pleased to give you the kingdom. Sell your possessions and give to the poor. Provide purses for yourselves that will not wear out, a treasure in heaven that will not be exhausted, where no thief comes near and no moth destroys. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also." (Lk 12:32-34 NIV)

Here Jesus is making the demand that those who follow Him must not become desirous of worldly goods. Again, I realize that we must have certain things to live. That's not the issue. The issue is the *storing up* and *treasuring* of worldly goods. Everything we give or give up at the leading of the Holy Spirit becomes a "treasure in

heaven."

**d. Family Compromise** -- "Do not suppose that I have come to bring peace to the earth. I did not come to bring peace, but a sword. For I have come to turn "a man against his father, a daughter against her mother, a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law--a man's enemies will be the members of his own household." "Anyone who loves his father or mother more than me is not worthy of me; anyone who loves his son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me; and anyone who does not take his cross and follow me is not worthy of me. Whoever finds his life will lose it, and whoever loses his life for my sake will find it." (Mat 10:34-39 NIV)

Here I believe Jesus is speaking of Christians who compromise so much with family members that they end up condoning sinful behavior, in deed if not in word. I am not talking about family members who sin as we all do everyday. I am speaking of those family members who have chosen to lead an ongoing sinful lifestyle. Ultimately each of us must deal with family members as led by the Holy Spirit. However, I am convinced that at some point, too much compromise grieves the heart of God. Jesus makes it clear that ultimately His call to Christian service comes first. Notice that this principle is not at all condoning our ignoring the ongoing valid demands of family life. Certainly our families must be given enough of our time, love, understanding, caring, etc. This is the obligation of every Christian, whether in active church leadership or not.

These are but a few of the demands Jesus makes on those who have a ministry call on their lives, and remember, that's all of us. Paul said it very well, "As a prisoner for the Lord, then, I urge you to live a life worthy of the calling you have received. Be completely humble and gentle; be patient, bearing with one another in love. Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace." (Eph 4:1-3 NIV) Humanly speaking, meeting these demands is impossible, and I have only named a few! Could it be that God planned it so? Could it be that He never intended us to move in our ministry calling using human power? I think the answer is, "Yes!"

How, then, can I enter my ministry call with all its demands?

Jesus' answer: "My grace is sufficient for you."!

Paul made this statement in Romans, "Through him and for his name's sake, we received grace and apostleship to call people from among all the Gentiles to the obedience that comes from faith." (Rom 1:5 NIV) Notice that Paul in this passage refers to his receiving grace and apostleship. I believe the grace he received became the *enabling power* to do the work of an apostle. In other words, God's grace supplied everything he needed to fulfill the call on his life.

**a. For His Name's Sake** -- Notice that Paul also said, "Through him and for his name's sake . . ." John tells us that grace and truth came through Jesus Christ. (Jn 1:17) That literally means that Jesus brought grace with Him when He came.

For what purpose? To accomplish His will in earth by enabling those whom He called with His supernatural powers through His grace. For it is "for his name's sake" He gave this grace! You see, He gave this grace which calls people from among the gentiles *to the obedience that comes from faith!* This calling people to obedience involves the whole work of the church, does it not? This involves all of the ministry callings. Jesus must do this in earth for His very reputation is at stake -- "for his names' sake."!

"Fine," you may say, "but how do I know this applies to *me*?"

"But *to each one of us grace has been given* as Christ apportioned it." (Eph 4:7 NIV, emphasis added.) So, we see from Scripture that He has given this grace to each one of us according to the needs of the ministry calling He has given us.

**b. How Can I Release The Power of Grace in my Life and Ministry?** -- Once we see that the power of this grace is indeed available to us, the question becomes, "How can we access and release this power?" I see the answer as twofold.

First, I believe grace is quantitative. By that I mean we can access part or all of the grace available to us. To the degree we are obedient to the demands that Jesus has made on us, His abundant grace is available to us. Have we forsaken all to follow Him? Do we humble ourselves and serve the body of Christ? Have we treasures in heaven? Have we held the line without compromise, and so forth? If we are submitting to the demands of discipleship our Lord has made, 100% of the grace needed for our ministry is available to us.

Second, even though this grace is available, it must be accessed by faith, for Paul wrote, "Therefore, since we have been justified through faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have *gained access by faith into this grace* in which we now stand . . ." (Rom 5:1,2 NIV, emphasis added.) One reason we have written this article is to show that God's grace is there for the asking. I am convinced that once we see that He has made every provision for us by His grace, it is much easier for us to come boldly before the throne asking for this provision of grace. However, I am also convinced that there are times in our lives when we reach the end of our faith. We are like the man who told Jesus, "I do

believe, help me overcome my unbelief." (Mk 9:24 NIV) It is at these times that we must ask Jesus even for the faith to ask for the grace for what we are facing. I heard someone recently put it like this. God's grace is like a huge lake and our faith is the bucket by which we appropriate it. There are times when we need a bigger bucket. So we need to ask God for a bigger bucket so we can ask for a larger portion of grace. There is absolutely no doubt in my mind that when we do this, Jesus is always faithful to give us all the grace we need.

### **Can We Reject This Grace?**

Let's now examine this statement of Paul's. "You who are trying to be justified by law have been alienated from Christ; you have fallen away from grace." The implication is that the person, by his will, can render that grace ineffective! Paul is putting this falling away from grace in the context of trying to justify yourself by works. I believe this same principle can be extended to other areas of our lives, such as willful sin, laziness, or whatever.

Let me demonstrate how our will enters into this power. Let's imagine a small man driving a large diesel truck that has power steering. The small, weak man can exert a little energy to turn the steering wheel of the truck. Then the power steering mechanism supplies great force to steer the wheels of the truck. A few pounds of pressure on the steering wheel causes thousands of pounds of force to steer the truck even in deep dirt and mud! But if the man didn't *use his will* to turn the steering wheel, *the powerful steering mechanism doesn't work.*

To carry our analogy a step further, we can also reject God's grace by trying to turn the wheel ourselves. Now imagine the driver of this big truck being a very large man with lots of muscle. He could, by his own strength, drive a truck without power steering. But look at the energy and work he would have to do every time he wanted to turn the truck, even slightly. How much easier, quicker, and better to use the power steering mechanism, even for the man who could, by his own strength, turn it a little. That's how God wants His grace to work in our lives and ministries. No matter our natural skills and abilities, we can really do very little of everlasting value without calling on God's abundant grace.

If we, as the Apostle Paul, purpose to cooperate with the grace of God, we too, will release that powerful force exerted by the grace of God to sanctify us for His good work. As we obey the word of God, we loose His grace to energize and enable us. As we will to obey His word we, like the truck driver, are turning the steering wheel that begins the mighty power to steer the truck. Let us loose the power of God's grace in our lives.

## Conclusion

It's easy to imagine the Apostle Paul looking back at the loss of his worldly possessions and comparing them with the supernatural gains he realized through grace as he penned these words:

But whatever was to my profit I now consider loss for the sake of Christ. What is more, I consider everything a loss compared to the surpassing greatness of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whose sake I have lost all things. I consider them rubbish, that I may gain Christ. (Phi 3:7-8 NIV)

His words lead us to believe that he had found the access key to the treasures of Christ. And those treasures are accessible through grace. In light of all of this Paul could then say:

"I can do everything through him who gives me strength." (Phi 4:13 NIV)

"To keep me from becoming conceited because of these surpassingly great revelations, there was given me a thorn in my flesh, a messenger of Satan, to torment me. Three times I pleaded with the Lord to take it away from me. But he said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness." Therefore I will boast all the more gladly about my weaknesses, so that Christ's power may rest on me. That is why, for Christ's sake, I delight in weaknesses, in insults, in hardships, in persecutions, in difficulties. For when I am weak, then I am strong. (2 Cor 12:7-10 NIV)

For when I [the human "I"] am weak, then I [the spiritual "I"] am strong. This wonderful strength is only through the divine enablement of God's amazing grace. Let each of us seek every bit of this grace that continually overflows into our lives and ministries.

Amazing grace -- how sweet the sound!

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