

Strong in His Grace

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Strong in His Grace

The Scripture has a great deal to say about the subject of 'grace'. Church reformers defined it as the unmerited favour of God and no one would disagree. This definition certainly applies in the Old Testament where the word 'grace' is often translated as God's 'lovingkindness'. In the New Testament, we are told to come boldly to the throne of grace to find help, and the apostle Paul wrote that God's grace was 'sufficient' for him. Heb 4:16. 2 Cor 12:9. We get the sense that grace is tailor-made, directed, scripted and allocated to us in exactly the right portion for our time of need. 2 Tim 2:1. However, as we apply ourselves to study grace, we find that it is not just an ethereal or vague force and nor is it simply the countenance of God smiling upon us, although we certainly hope this is so.

The apostle Peter told us that grace does four things; it strengthens, perfects, confirms and establishes us. 1 Pet 5:10. In the book of Hebrews, we read that 'it is good for the heart to be strengthened by grace, not by foods'. Heb 13:9. In his letter to Timothy, Paul said, 'The Lord stood with me and strengthened me'. 2 Tim 4:17. We find another reference to 'standing' in Paul's letter to the Galatians. He encouraged them to 'stand firm therefore in the liberty [or freedom] wherewith Christ has made us



free'. Gal 5:1. We need to stand! And as we stand in the presence of God, He will stand with us.


As we read the Old Testament, it is fascinating to observe that believers over thousands of years have lent on the strength of the Lord. The Scripture records that both the orphan and those who were weak in this world, have found His strength to be sufficient for their needs. In the book of Proverbs and Jeremiah, we read, 'Their Redeemer is strong, the Lord of hosts is His name; He will vigorously plead their case'. Jer 50:34. Prov 23:11. And in the book of Psalms, David asked, 'Who in the heavens is comparable to the Lord? Who among the sons of the mighty is like the Lord?' He then told us that He has a strong arm, His hand is mighty and His right hand is exalted. Psa 89:6, 13.

In the New Testament, Paul told us to 'be strong in the Lord and in the strength of His might'. Eph 6:10. He also spoke of 'the surpassing greatness of His power toward us who believe, in accordance with the strength of His might'. Eph 1:19. In this verse, the word 'might' means 'force' or 'vigour'. We can, therefore, determine that His strength is His capacity to exert force on a matter, and we know that His power comes from His authority. John 5:27. The word that is translated as 'strength' in the New Testament has four literal interpretations. It can

mean 'authority' *excusia*; 'power' *dunamis*; 'vigour' *cratos*; or simply His 'strength' *ichsus*. There are some passages where Paul used three or four of those words in the same sentence. These are remarkable statements but our English language doesn't really do them justice.

Although our translations tend to use these words interchangeably, we can see four distinct attributes of the Lord; His authority, power, strength and might. Jeremiah wrote, 'He will vigorously plead their case so that He may bring rest to the earth'. Jer 50:34. The power of God brings us to peace. He can quieten our heart and bring us to rest; to a place where we know that our Redeemer is strong. I do not consider myself to be weak physically or mentally. Nor do I consider myself to be emotionally fragile or frail. But as the years go by and life rolls over me, I am learning and I'm starting to feel like a babe in the woods regarding my understanding of the Lord's strength.


I think of another verse in the book of Jeremiah which says, 'Cursed is the man who trusts in mankind and makes flesh his strength'. Jer 17:5. At the age of 50 plus years, I am learning to stand in the presence of the Lord and am finding the testimony that He is standing with me. When the Scripture says, 'Their Redeemer is strong', it is layered with meaning. When He is redeeming us,



He is doing two things. Firstly, He buys us back from the dead because that is the meaning of 'redeem' or 'ransom'. In the Old Testament, the firstborn of man and beast was redeemed by a financial transaction. Our redemption is not transacted in human monetary terms, but we know the Lord has the capacity and the resources to purchase us, to bring us back to Himself. And secondly, He redeems us to the place of a firstborn son. In the book of Hebrews we read that we are to be the church of the firstborn. Heb 12:23. The Lord exerts His power or His grace to bring us back from the dead; but He does not put us in a neutral position where we are content to be simply alive, but takes us to a place where we can stand in His presence. In Paul's letter to the Philippians, we read that He transforms our bodies into conformity with the body of His glory by the exertion of His power. Phil 3:21. If we were simply made alive again, we would be like a prisoner who has spent a long time in jail but who is not repatriated when released; we would not be recovered in any way. And we know statistically, that a very large percentage of long-term prisoners go back into custody because they have no capacity to assimilate into society. The grace of Christ is the exertion of His power as our Redeemer, and it brings us right across to our individual place as a son before Him.

There are a number of verses which speak of the Lord's strength or vigour. We read in the book of Ephesians, about 'the surpassing greatness of His power toward us who believe... in accordance with the working of the strength of His might'. Eph 1:19. Paul also encouraged his readers to 'be strong in the Lord, in the strength of His might'. Eph 6:10. And in his letter to the Philippians, Paul said, 'I can do all things through Him who strengthens me'. Phil 4:13. In Peter's first letter, he stated, 'Whoever serves is to do so as one who is serving by the strength which God supplies'. 1 Pet 4:11. As I read these verses, I have an image in my mind of His inherent authority and His capacity to be powerful. He exerts His strength or force on something and, thereby, demonstrates His vigour. As Christians, we are to rejoice in weakness, because we know that when we are weak He is strong. 2 Cor 12:10. However, I don't believe that we are to remain in a state of weakness. We can be confident that He is at work in our lives exerting His might and power; He is engaged with us and our Redeemer is strong.

We read in the Gospel of John, 'In Him was life'. John 1:4. Because Jesus Christ overcame the grave and ascended, we know that His life is more powerful than death; therefore, His life is more powerful than our weakness. Grace is the substance of His life coming to us and it comes firstly as a word. In the book of Acts, Luke called




it 'the word of His grace' and it comes as a message proclaimed. Acts 14:3. We hear the message, believe it, apply faith to it, and grace becomes active in our lives as the authority, power, might and strength of God. We know the weakness of God is stronger than men and the foolishness of God is wiser than men. We come to know the life of God by the foolishness of the message preached. Think of the logic of that! If the foolishness of God is wiser than men, and preaching is the foolishness of God, then preaching the word of His grace is still wiser than men.

Grace comes as a word. And when it comes to us, we are commended or committed by it to the grace that is coming in that word. That puts the matter very simply. Anyone of any intellectual level can hear the word of the message preached; they can hear the word of grace coming to them as individuals. The apostle Paul said that this word of grace was spreading to many people. 1 Thess 1:8. Of course, the grace that came to him was to proclaim the message and his desire was to get the word of grace out to as many people as possible. When they received his message and believed, Paul could commend them to the word of that grace. It was the authority, power, might and strength of God for their particular work. Acts 14:26. Grace comes as an abundant supply but not as a overarching cloud that covers us all.

Acts 4:33. It is the composite of every quota of grace that rests on each individual. Peter called it 'manifold' or 'varied' grace. As we stand in the grace with others, we will know abundant grace which Paul said was 'sufficient' for him. 2 Cor 12:9. 'Sufficient' grace or 'abundant' grace implies more than the minimum necessary for survival but it is a plentiful supply for everything that we will need or do. This means that the grace coming to us is exactly the authority, power, might and strength that we need for the whole of our lives.

One of the Greek lexicons defines grace as 'the ability of God requisite for the work'. In his letter to the Romans, Paul said that 'we each have gifts that differ according to the grace given to us'. Rom 12:6. He said that he was a minister or deacon in the church by the grace given to him; it was his individual grace for an individual work. Eph 3:7. But he also reminded them of the grace that was in Macedonia; that is the grace to a whole church. 2 Cor: 1. On the news recently, I was interested to watch a segment about a Christian group of ex-bikies called 'The Tribe of Judah' who were giving out hundreds of thousands of dollars in food parcels and goods. There is no doubt in my mind that they are moving in the grace that God has given to them. Many churches could try to do the same thing but may not




be as successful because they have not been given that particular mandate, although the Scripture teaches that we are all responsible for the poor. Nevertheless, we each have gifts that differ according to the grace given, just as the church in Corinth had a different grace to the church in Macedonia.

The next step in understanding this subject of God's grace is to recognise the grace in other people. To do this, we really have to slow down and observe one another and see who God is making each one to be. We have to observe the authority that God is giving to each person and we have to perceive the power that He is exerting toward them. Then we need to recognise where each individual is bearing fruit, in the strength of His might. This new understanding will be cause for great rejoicing! Paul said, 'I am what I am by the grace of God'. 1 Cor 15:10. We are defined by grace and should not define ourselves. If we are self-defining, we may be preoccupied by our successes or failures. I don't want to be defined by my intellect, physical strength, age or stature but I do wish to be defined by the authority, power, strength and might that are coming to me daily.

We are to stand in the grace and grow in the grace that is coming to us. When Paul told Timothy to 'be strong in the grace', he was not asking him to be strong in an

ethereal or vague force. 2 Tim 2:1. Paul was encouraging Timothy to stand in the particular gift of grace that had been given to him as part of God's manifold grace. Paul also told Timothy to 'stir up the gift that is in you by the laying on of my hands'. He was saying, 'Don't lose your confidence. Don't be weak in faith.' 2 Tim 1:6. When we are doing a work and people are relying on us, we must not cast away our confidence. Different things make us cast away our confidence. We may feel unappreciated or weary. Sometimes, we may wonder whether we've run in vain. This is the time to 'draw near with confidence to the throne of grace so that we might find mercy and grace to help in time of need'. Heb 4:16. In the book of James, we read that He gives 'more grace'. He 'resists the proud but gives grace to the humble'. James 4:6. Wherever we have a need, He gives 'more grace'. When we respond to the Lord, He gives more grace. He gives more than we had before because we are doing more or we are doing differently than we did before. He is giving to you and me a different and greater grace.

When we hear the word of His grace, we are immediately obliged to Him as a bondsman. We might say it is the contract of the battlefield where the prisoner is obliged to the victor. Paul called his fellow workers in the gospel, 'fellow ministers' or 'deacons'.



We need to change our thinking about deacons. In the Bible, a deacon was not someone who mowed the grass! The twelve apostles were the 'deacons of the word'. You and I are to deacon the grace of God which has been given to us as the capacity to do a work. In nearly every letter of the New Testament, almost everyone and particularly Peter, Paul and John, introduced their letters by saying, 'Grace and peace to you'. Occasionally they said, 'Grace, peace and mercy to you'. I think they understood our need when they wrote to us. They were not just trying to keep us positive and motivated but they were reminding us of the grace that has been given.

Peter stated that each one has received a gift from Christ which should be used to serve one another. 1 Pet 4:10. We could say that grace is the ground, platform or context in which we can stand and serve. In the book of Hebrews, we read that we are to 'draw near with confidence to the throne of grace'. Heb 4:16. We know that Christ is seated at the right hand of the Father, 'having offered one sacrifice for sins for all time'. Acts 2:33. Heb 10:12. His throne is not a chair but describes His authority and, therefore, His capacity to exercise that authority. The throne of grace was the mercy seat in the tabernacle and temple of the Old Testament. Heb 9:5. Paul said that we are also seated with Christ in heavenly places. Eph 2:6. Therefore, we can draw near

to the throne of grace boldly and with confidence. The Scripture warns us, 'Do not cast away your confidence which has great reward'. Heb 10:35. We can be sure that our Redeemer is strong and He will vigorously plead our case.