

The Word of His Grace

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The Word of His Grace

Grace is a word which is used frequently in the Scriptures. Church reformers defined it as ‘the unmerited favour of God’ and we often find it translated as ‘lovingkindness’ in the Old Testament. But for many people, grace has come to mean survival after a very challenging time. We regularly hear people comment that ‘God’s grace was there’ and, of course, we do experience His unmerited favour and lovingkindness in difficult situations. We would all agree that grace produces an exceptional effect in our lives, and we know that we do not have grace until the Lord gives of His own ability.

A Greek lexicon defines grace as ‘the power and capability requisite for the office’, and Paul told the Romans that grace gave him the authority to address their church. He wrote, ‘By the grace of God given to me I say to you’. Rom 12:3. He wasn’t talking about the favour that God had given to him, nor was he referring to a momentary infusion of power. Instead, the apostle was speaking about something resident within him that had been commended or entrusted to him. Like Paul, we can also receive a word which commends us to the grace for




our specific work. This is not our 9-to-5 occupation, nor is it what we do in the church. But it is the mandate that God has prescribed for the whole of our lives.

In the book of Ezra, we learn of the favour and lovingkindness of the Lord to the Jews who returned from captivity in Babylon to rebuild the temple. We read, 'But now for a brief moment grace has been shown to us from the Lord our God to leave us an escaped remnant and to give us a peg in His holy place, that our God may enlighten our eyes and grant us a little reviving in our bondage'. Ezra 9:8. Because the priests ministered in the temple, they provided a peg or an anchor point for the Jews by tying them to the presence of God. The Scripture records that the Jews were afflicted for seventy years in Babylon because the land itself 'spewed' them out when they refused to observe its Sabbath rest every seven years. Lev 18:25, 25:4. How would our accountants respond in our modern agricultural society if we said we were going to let the land lie fallow for a year! The Jews obviously felt that the Sabbath year was economically unviable and decided not to follow God's instruction. They probably said, 'Yes, we will', but they never did!

God gives grace but are we receiving it? I don't mean, 'Do we wake up feeling good everyday?' But rather, are the various aspects of our lives working? I'm inclined to think

that many churches don't grow because the key people are not operating according to the grace coming to them. One man can lead a group of about seventy people but once the church grows bigger than this number, it must diversify. If a leader does not have the grace to put the necessary structure in place, that group of people will only grow to a certain level. In a business, the director can be a CEO or a micro-manager who has his hands on everything? If he chooses to be a CEO, he will not have time to be a micro-manager. And by definition, if he is a micro-manager, he won't need a CEO because the business will not be able to grow past him. To be a CEO, a leader must know how to trust people, how to train people, how to open doors for them and how to live with the mess they make while they grow. This principle also applies in a church or in any grouping of people.

The ministry of Paul and Barnabas was launched from Antioch not Jerusalem. Acts 14:12. We read in the book of Acts that Paul and Barnabas appointed elders in every place and commended them to the Lord. After preaching in other towns, Paul and Barnabas returned to Antioch where they 'had been commended to the grace of God for the work which they had accomplished'. Acts 14:23, 26. This was a cycle of grace. Before I was involved in full-time ministry, I worked in secular employment and preached many times a week. When I




studied my Bible, I experienced a constant flow of grace in the word, which I assumed was normal. But the day I went full-time, this style of compensating grace ceased and I had to labour in word and doctrine. When we go into a new business, we might also find compensating grace; like the Jews, we may be shown grace for a brief moment or season. Compensating grace brought the Jews from Babylon to Palestine but their experience was different once they arrived. The same thing happened when the children of Israel came up out of Egypt. For forty years there was a style of grace and provision which carried them to the land of Canaan but then it changed. It was no better or worse than before; it just wasn't compensating grace any more.

In seasons of total despair, many people staunchly declare, 'His grace is sufficient'. But I look on and say, 'No it's not! His grace is limited because you are not appropriating the grace that He wants to give you. You have the wrong shoes on. You're in the wrong place. You are doing the wrong thing. You're thinking the wrong way. He wants to give you more grace.' There are cycles of growth in which God wants to commend grace to us for a work. But when that work finishes, the grace may no longer be available to us. There is also a grace that resides within each one. Paul said that grace was given to him to be 'a wise master builder'.

1 Cor 3:10. This was not a grace for a particular work in an increment of time but it was Paul's life-long mandate. There were, of course, many other circumstances in his life where a particular grace came for a season. For some of us, grace may have come for a season which is long past and is not adequate for the place where God wants us now. We need to find 'more grace'. James 4:6.

Paul sought the Lord three times for the removal of the 'thorn' in his flesh but the Lord said to him, 'My power is perfected in your weakness. My grace is sufficient for you.' 2 Cor 12:9. Because of the greatness of his revelation, Paul needed that particular thorn to prevent him from becoming puffed up with pride. 2 Cor 12:7. It was not that Paul was lacking in any aspect of his life and the Lord said, 'Well, you'd better live with lack and My grace will compensate for that'. A particular grace came to him so that he would not become a castaway. The thorn in his flesh was a style of grace which kept Paul measured to a certain reality. Therefore, it wouldn't be helpful for you or me to say, 'His grace is sufficient', in the same way that it was sufficient for Paul. 'Sufficient' grace will mean something different for each one of us.

Paul and Barnabas commended elders to the Lord. In the book of Acts, we read, 'When they had appointed elders in every place they prayed for them with fasting




and commended them to the Lord in whom they had believed'. Acts 14:22. To the Ephesian elders, Paul wrote, 'I commend you to God and to the word of His grace which is able to build you up and to give you the inheritance among all those who are sanctified'. Acts 20:32. Paul used the word *paratithaymee* which means 'to place beside'. When Paul commended men to the grace of Christ, he placed them beside the Lord who gave them the capacity to do the work. This action superseded any human intervention which could disqualify them, but only if they walked in the grace.

Paul said that grace comes to us in a word. Acts 20:32. We are commended to the word of His grace which becomes the power and capability requisite for our office and work. If we are to prosper, we must align ourselves with the grace of God for our particular work. Grace is not just an amorphous mass which every Christian can reach into and pull down. God certainly answers prayer but sometimes He says, 'No'. There are those who equate answered prayer with God giving them whatever they want, but that would be a dereliction of duty on His part. If we have a predestination and a pathway to walk, God is going to give us the grace for that pathway. Perhaps the Lord is putting His hand upon us even though we have been walking in His way

for a long time. If He is trying to get our attention, we must not say that the word of grace is for someone else.

We also need to learn to recognise the grace in another. In his letter to the Galatians, Paul said that James, Cephas and John who were pillars in the early church, recognised the grace that was in him and gave him and Barnabas the right hand of fellowship. Gal 2:9. These three men were pillars partly because they could recognise the grace in Paul. Do we recognise the grace that we need? Do we recognise our predestination? Do we recognise the pathway that we should walk? What kind of grace are we asking for? What kind of grace is being commended to us? There is a quotient of grace for each one. Paul referred to 'the stewardship of God's grace that was given' to him. Eph 3:2. He went on to say, 'To each one of us grace was given.' Eph 4:7. It is not just a random homogenous pool into which we can dip our ladle and pull out exactly what someone else pulls out. The grace that you are being commended to is that particular quotient which Christ gives for your work.

If there are aspects of our lives which are just not working, there may not be sufficient grace. Or perhaps we are not appropriating grace because we are not applying ourselves to our predestination. Paul wrote to




the Romans, 'Through the grace given to me, I say to everyone among you not to think more highly of himself than he ought to think but to think so as to have sound judgement'. Rom 12:3. But nor should we think more lowly of ourselves than we ought.

Paul made an interesting comment to the Corinthian church. He said, 'As God is faithful, our word to you is not yes and no'. 2 Cor 1:18. We might think he would say, 'His word to you' but he said, 'Our word'. Paul could make this statement because he had commended the grace of God to various groupings of people, individuals and churches. Not everyone has been given the capacity to commend grace to another. Paul warned Timothy not to 'lay hands upon anyone hastily, nor share in other people's sins'. 1 Tim 5:22. We should not go around laying hands on everyone and commending people to the grace of God! They are to be commended according to their predestination and ability to the grace for the work that God has ordained for them. I look at the work that someone should be doing and I ask, 'Where do they fit and what grace do they need?' Paul said, 'As God is faithful, our word to you was not yes and no. For the Son of God, Christ Jesus who was preached among you by us ... was not yes and no, but is yes in Him'. 2 Cor 1:20. The grace of God is the 'yes' of God to us. Peter stated that He has granted to us all things by His

divine power and through His promises we become partakers of His divine nature. 2 Pet 1:3, 4.

Paul wrote, 'For all the promises of God in Him are Yes, and in Him Amen, to the glory of God through us'. 2 Cor 1:20. If God's promises do not resolve down to a 'Yes and Amen' in our lives, we need to stop and think why God is saying, 'No'. Is it because we are not aligned to His promises which bring the divine nature to us? A key verse is found in Paul's letter to the Corinthians. It says, 'Now He who establishes us with you in Christ and anointed us is God'. 2 Cor 1:21. The word of His grace establishes and anoints us. Oil is poured on our heads, just as it was poured on the heads of the priests in the days of the Old Testament, and it is our authority and capacity to proceed. The prophet Zechariah said that the Spirit of grace was poured out upon us. Zec 12: 10. The 'No' of God will not allow us to proceed.

Esau is an interesting character. He came short of the word of grace for his life and it produced in him a root of bitterness. When people do not realign themselves to the grace of God in the season when He urges them to shift, a root of bitterness can develop. They may say, 'I've served the Lord and His people faithfully so why is this happening to me? I no longer have a part



or portion here.' Throughout the course of our lives, we will all need to make a number of major shifts so the grace of God will continue to come and equip us for the work of the coming season, which may be long or short. Paul said to the Romans, 'For this reason it is by faith in order that it might be in accordance with grace so that the promise will be guaranteed'. Rom 4:16. I would like a guaranteed promise!

In his Gospel, John said that 'we beheld His glory, full of grace and truth'. John 1:14. He continued saying, 'For of His fullness we have all received, and grace upon grace'. John 1:16. In the book of Acts, it says, 'With great power the apostles were giving testimony to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus and abundant grace was upon them all'. Acts 4:33. And later we read, 'Now when the meeting of the synagogue was broken up, many of the Jews and the God-fearing proselytes followed Paul and Barnabas who speaking to them, were urging them to continue in the grace of God'. Acts 13:43. This verse could mean that those following Paul and Barnabas urged the preachers to keep going in the grace. Equally, Paul and Barnabas could have been encouraging their hearers to continue in the grace coming to them.

Each one of us can give thought to where grace is not effective in our lives. We can then wait on the Lord and

be willing to hear a word which will commend us to His grace for an effective work, knowing that He will open a pathway before us.