

11. Sufficiency of God's grace

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Perhaps you know the story of the farmer who heard grand tales about the riches that were to be had for anyone who discovered oil. He heard about the oil that was supposed to be lying in abundance under the land somewhere in the State where he lived, just waiting to be discovered and make the finder fabulously rich.

He thought, "Finders keepers. I will be a rich man. I will find that oil." So the farmer allowed his desire for wealth to get the better of him. He sold his farm and put everything he had into the effort to find oil, in hopes of enjoying a better life. But he spent years traveling his State in a futile search for oil and returned to his home town broke and discouraged.

It was only then that he learned the new owner of his farm had found a large reserve of oil on the property and had become fabulously wealthy and beyond. The former owner had owned great wealth all the time in the legal sense, but he never truly possessed or enjoyed his wealth because he forsook it to chase after a fruitless dream.

A lot of Christians today are like that impatient farmer. They're running all over the spiritual map looking for something to give them the edge in their Christian life – some spiritual "secret" that will unlock the fullness of God's riches. And all the time, they are sitting on God's riches in the form of His grace.

Ladies and gentlemen, we don't begin the Christian life by grace and then move on to something better. Our Christian life will take a giant leap forward when we start to understand grace and what it means in our life.

Galatians 3:3 Are you so foolish? Having begun in the Spirit, are you now being made perfect by the flesh?

A. THE GIFT OF GRACE

The first thing I want all of us to see is the gift of grace. The best thing we can do with a gift is to receive it with gratitude. Let me give you several distinguishing marks of God's gift of grace.

Romans 11:6 And since it is through God's kindness, then it is not by their good works. For in that case, God's grace would not be what it really is—free and undeserved. NLT

What is true of God's work with Israel is true of God's work with us. Human works, our own efforts to make ourselves acceptable to God, are so opposite to grace that the two cancel each other out. The apostle Paul teaches us this:

Galatians 2:21 I do not set aside the grace of God; for if righteousness comes through the law, then Christ died in vain."

Human works as epitomized in trying to keep the Law are not only counter to grace; they are counterproductive to grace. Remember, sin finds its power in the Law according to 1 Corinthians 15. Even though the Law isn't sinful, we are – so when our sinful flesh runs up against God's law, the flesh immediately wants to rebel and sin.

If you are a performance-based Christian, a fancy way to say "a legalist" – you won't appreciate grace. In fact, your performance will cancel the very grace you

pray for. A lot of Christians don't realize that after they get on their knees and ask God to help them, they get up off their knees and cancel that request by gritting their teeth and trying to perform to win God's approval.

1) Grace is free to us

Though grace is free to us, very costly to God the Father and His Son Jesus. Free means no charge at all, no strings attached.

Suppose I invite you to dinner and we have a great evening, but when you get ready to go home I surprise you with a bill of fifty dollars for the meal. Our relationship would change drastically from one of grace to one of obligation. The meal would no longer be a gift of grace but merely a service for which I charge you a fee. What makes grace so marvelous is that it is absolutely free.

2) Grace is also an all-inclusive offer

Ephesians 1:3 Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ
Too many Christians accept Christ as Savior by grace but then they seek to live the Christian life by the works of the Law. That's because they're confused about grace.

What most people really want to know is, "If God is so gracious, why doesn't He just take away the trial or the suffering? Why doesn't He keep the thorns from growing in our lives?"

2 Corinthians 12:7-10 And lest I should be exalted above measure by the abundance of the revelations, a thorn in the flesh was given to me, a messenger of Satan to buffet me, lest I be exalted above measure. 8 Concerning this thing I pleaded with the Lord three times that it might depart from me. 9 And He said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you, for My strength is made perfect in weakness." Therefore most gladly I will rather boast in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me. 10 Therefore I take pleasure in infirmities, in reproaches, in needs, in persecutions, in distresses, for Christ's sake. For when I am weak, then I am strong.

Unlike the self-centered the Word of Faith movement heresies, the Bible clearly teaches us here. God's answer was sufficient grace to endure the thorn and power to minister in spite of the weakness caused by the problem. The apostle Paul wanted God's grace and power more than he wanted relief from the pain of the thorn, so his answer was: "For when I am weak, then I am strong."

So the question that needs to be asked is from God to us, not us to God. His question to us is, "Do you want to see My grace operating in super-abundant power in your life?"

If your answer is, "Yes, Lord, more than anything," then be ready to accept the thorns. When problems come, it means God is getting ready to show you more of His grace, because where He's taking you is greater than where you are now. All you need to know is that His grace is sufficient. Getting spiritually mature is not easy, but it's worth it.

Grace is not only a gift; it is a great gift. Paul almost ran out of superlatives describing grace in 2 Corinthians 9:8:

2 Corinthians 9:8 And God is able to make all grace abound toward you, that you, always having all sufficiency in all things, may have an abundance for every good work.

You know you are living in grace when there is abundant joy and peace in spite of your current situation. You don't just have joy, but joy inexpressible and full of glory according to 1 Peter 1:8; not just peace, but the peace that surpasses all understanding as it mentioned in Philippians 4:7.

B. GETTING THE GIFT OF GRACE

Many Christians have been saved by grace but they refuse to have the living grace. I know you may wonder, "Who in the right-minded Christian would refuse the living grace?" They refuse it because they have let go of their dependency on religious rituals and self-centeredness. Here is the way how we can make the grace that saved us reality in our daily walk with Christ.

John 15:4-5 Abide in Me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in Me. 5 I am the vine, you are the branches. He who abides in Me, and I in him, bears much fruit; for without Me you can do nothing.

"Abiding" is a word we don't hear very often these days, but people use another word that has the same basic meaning: bonding. People talk about bonding with another person, forming a connection that brings the two people together in a vital, even life-changing relationship.

That's the kind of bonding relationship Jesus wants to have with us so we can produce the fruit His grace wants to produce in us.

We get the gift of grace for each day the same way we got the gift of grace for our salvation: by receiving it freely from Christ. We should know that the will of God will not lead us where the grace and power of God cannot keep us.

When you receive the gift of grace for your daily Christian living, you no longer just pray, "Lord, I don't want to tell a lie today," but, "Lord, I give You the freedom to express Your truth through me." Grace gets you beyond just praying, "Lord, I'm going to try not to yield to lust today." Instead, you're able to pray, "Lord, by Your grace I allow You to express Your purity of mind through me today."

You may scratch your head and think, "Did you just say that we have to give God permission to do something in our life?" Yes, just like our Lord would honor people's decision to accept or refuse His offer for salvation, He never forces His children to do the things that we refuse to do, including living for Him daily. We have choices to honor Him or not every day in our life. If we choose to honor Him, He gives His living grace to us freely.

When you start living like this, really living by grace, you are able to do things you never thought you could do. You become a loving Christian you couldn't be before. You will be able to control and handle yourself that you couldn't do before. The key to grace living is not more self-effort and trying harder, rather getting closer to Christ. That's where the power of God comes alive in our life:

Philippians 3:10 that I may know Him and the power of His resurrection

C. POWER THAT NEVER RUNS LOW

Many of us carry cell phones nowadays. If you have a smartphone, you can do a lot of things with that gadget. Not only can you call, text to other people, but you can also search things from the internet, it even tells you how long it will take for you to

get to the place you go often. Some time ago, I got in my truck and started the engine. My iPhone beeped. I looked at it. It says, "18 minutes to 3055 W. Helmet Peak Road." As a matter of fact, I was about to come here. I was wondering, "How did this little thing figure out that I am gonna go to church? Is it demon-possessed?" No, it was guessing with my driving pattern. That is known as artificial intelligence.

Though a smartphone seems smart and can do many things, it is limited. It needs a charged battery. If I don't plug it into an ever-flowing power source – wall power outlet each night, its battery will run out soon and it becomes nothing more than an expensive paperweight.

But when you plug that smartphone into a permanent power source, an abiding takes place. The power never runs low because there is a connection between the smartphone and its power source that becomes a way of life.

Too many Christians are living by battery power instead of God's ever-flowing grace. They come to church on Sunday to get spiritually recharged, but if they miss a week, watch out, because their spiritual battery is dangerously low.

Just in case you're beginning to think that the life of grace sounds pretty passive, with nothing for us to do, we need to look at two crucial verses that clarify the relationship between the good works God wants us to do and the grace we need to do them.

Philippians 2:12-13 Therefore, my beloved, as you have always obeyed, not as in my presence only, but now much more in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling; 13 for it is God who works in you both to will and to do for His good pleasure.

This is a passage you need to read all the way through, because if you quit at v12 you may get the idea that the Christian life depends on what you do. But the only reason we can work out our salvation is that God is working within us. In terms of our lives, v13 actually comes before 12, since the key to this is what God is doing in grace. Everything we do is simply an expression of His work.

Works and grace are mutually exclusive when it comes to salvation, but they have an important relationship in a Christian's life. When grace is at work, the works we do for the Lord are inspired and enabled by grace. It's not that we're working to gain God's favor, but we're working out what He has already worked in.

Since we are operating under grace, God's commands become an opportunity to display the character of Christ through us as we draw on the power of God working within us. This is how we activate the gift of grace for daily living.

D. REMINDER

The secret to this "super grace" is allowing Christ to live out His perfect, sinless life through us in the power of His resurrection. The fact is that we are saved by Christ's sinless life as well as by His atoning death. Here is the goal of Christian life:

2 Corinthians 4:11 For we who live are always delivered to death for Jesus' sake, that the life of Jesus also may be manifested in our mortal flesh.

The combination of Christ's righteousness and resurrection power in us is more than enough to put grace to work in our life. With all that power and perfection at work within us, all we have to do is cooperate with the workings of God in grace. As we yield ourselves to Christ, He will fill us with the incredible, life-giving and life changing gift of grace.