

Adult Quarterly

THE SUFFICIENCY OF GOD'S GRACE

Lesson 1	God's Grace for Desperate Times	3
Lesson 2	Grace Brought God's Blessings	8
Lesson 3	Questioning God's Grace	13
Lesson 4	God's Grace Affirmed	18
Lesson 5	Testifying of God's Grace	23
Lesson 6	Salvation Is by God's Grace	28
Lesson 7	Calling of God Is by Grace	33
Lesson 8	Empowered by God's Grace	37
Lesson 9	God's Grace upon His Churches	42
Lesson 10	Grace for Speaking	47
Lesson 11	Grace for Singing	51
Lesson 12	God's Throne of Grace	56
Lesson 13	Growth in Grace	61

Editor in Chief: Kyle W. Elkins, kyle.elkins@bogardstore.org

Business Manager: Dean Grigsby, dean.grigsby@bogardstore.org

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About the Writer



David O. Johnson was born in Hot Springs, AR in 1953, was saved at the age of 7 and baptized by the Ethel MBC, Antlers, OK. Brother Johnson surrendered to the Gospel Ministry in 1976 and was ordained by the Trinity MBC, Camden, AR. He received training from Louisiana Missionary Baptist Seminary (Minden, LA), Missionary Baptist Seminary (Little Rock, AR) and Baylor University (Waco, TX). Brother Johnson has pastored churches in Arkansas, Louisiana, Texas and Oklahoma. He presently serves as the pastor of Adams Chapel MBC, Chidester, AR. He has served as moderator of local and state associations, a member of the Standing Missionary Committee of the ABA, Secretary-Treasurer of Missions for the Baptist General Assembly of Oklahoma and has served on the Baptist Sunday School Committee. Brother Johnson has been writing BTC literature for Bogard Press since 1994. He is the author of one book, *What We Believe and Why* (published by Bogard Press). Brother Johnson is married to the former Dianne Bryant. He and Dianne have three children (Rebekah, Wendy and Timothy) and seven grandchildren (Blake, Bryant, Caedmon, Hannah, Brady, Jordan and Isaac).

God's Grace for Desperate Times

APPLICATION

To show that regardless of the circumstances, God's grace is sufficient.

SCRIPTURES TO READ

Text: Genesis 6:1-8.

Related Scripture: Genesis 19:19-22; Exodus 33:12-17; Psalms 37:21-26; 84:11; 119:21; Proverbs 3:34; Jeremiah 1:5; Amos 5:15; Luke 1:30; Acts 2:41-47; 4:33; 14:26; Romans 5:15-20; 6:14; Galatians 1:15, 16.

Devotional Reading: Paul Found God's Grace To Be Sufficient, 2 Corinthians 1:5-11.

Introduction

God's grace. What is this theme that will be the focus of these lessons? One definition of grace is God's favor bestowed on those who are undeserving. The Old Testament word comes from a root that means to bend or stoop in kindness to an inferior. Since the subject is God's grace, the idea presented is of the infinitely superior God stooping down to offer His favor to those who are undeserving. The New Testament word implies being happy and well-off. Here, the picture is of one who has done nothing to deserve the favor of another; yet, the one who is greater grants kindness to the lesser. God certainly was not required to offer grace to a created race of beings, but He is so loving and kind that He willingly offered to humanity something it could never deserve. This is His grace being bestowed on those who are less than He.

Often, grace is only applied to teaching on salvation. While God's grace definitely has its part in salvation, it does not stop

there. His grace is necessary for every aspect of life. An example of this came in the life of Paul. He had been called by God to be a missionary, but Paul had a physical ailment. He called it “a thorn in the flesh” (2 Corinthians 12:7). This thorn was so difficult that he compared it to “the messenger of Satan to buffet me” (verse 7). Paul prayed to God for the removal of his problem, but God answered, “My grace is sufficient for thee” (verse 9). God would not remove the difficulty but would help Paul succeed in his work in spite of the problem. God’s grace would direct the glory to Him, not Paul.

People often do not recognize the hand of God in their lives when life is smooth and without care. God’s grace is needful in the good times and the bad times. It is during the bad times when people recognize their need and cry out to God for help. God’s grace is available during these desperate situations. God’s people should never fail to approach Him for help. He has promised, “Let us therefore come boldly unto the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need” (Hebrews 4:16).

1. _____ **The Sinfulness of Humanity** **(Genesis 6:1-5)**

When God created Adam, He formed him in a state of innocence. Adam had not sinned but had the capacity to choose for himself. This does not mean God created a sinful being, for Adam was not formed with sin in him. The time came, though, when Adam had a choice to make. He could obey God’s command not to eat the fruit of a particular tree or he could rebel against God. He chose the latter. His act of rebellion cast all his descendants into a state of sin. Time went by and the population of the earth increased. Some of Adam’s descendants had chosen to follow the path God had selected for them. The offspring of Seth chose to “call upon the name of the LORD” (Genesis 4:26). This phrase has two possible meanings. One was that they began calling out to God in prayer and worship. The other is that they began to call themselves by God’s name much like saved people today call themselves Christian. Seth’s descendants endeavored to worship God and serve Him properly. However, that was not true of all people. The descendants of Cain did not have the spiritual outlook they needed. As a result, the people of earth

were divided into two groups. The sons of God referred to those who worshiped and served God. The daughters of men described those who cared little or nothing about God. Their focus was on fleshly pursuits rather than a right relationship with God.

The time came when those whose minds had been focused on God began to notice the physical attractiveness of those who pursued worldly things. The sons of God became so distracted that most began acting and living like the daughters of men. God was now left out of the equation of living. Sin had become widespread in the world and few cared about godly activities.

During His earthly ministry, Jesus spoke of the last days and described them as following the pattern of the days of Noah (Matthew 24:37-39). He gave an accurate description of modern times. Activities in the world have taken on such an attraction that many of God's people have departed from their godly responsibilities. They think sporting events or recreational activities are more important than going to church or being involved in church ministry. The world is their focus for a time. Parents have sacrificed their children to entertainment rather than drawing them into lives of service to God. The Lord cannot be pleased. His reaction to the people of Noah's day reveals how He looks at such behavior today.

2. _____

The Judgment of God (Genesis 6:3, 6, 7)

Even when facing a time of judgment, humanity still has the offer of God's grace. As the Lord looked down at the people of the human race and saw their rebellious lives, He pronounced a time of testing during which the Spirit would continue to convict and draw people. God knows all things. Nothing can be hidden from His understanding. Though in His omniscience God knew the people would not repent and turn to Him, His grace and mercy was so great that He gave them that additional time to turn from their wicked ways and remember who God is. But His offer was limited. It would not continue forever. The time would come when judgment would be carried out upon the world.

As God continued to watch His creation, He "saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every imagination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually" (verse 5). People had turned their backs on God and cared nothing

for His ways. The phrase “only evil continually” shows the focus of their attention was on evil behavior from one day to the next. As a result, God stood ready to judge. “My spirit shall not always strive with man” (verse 3). God’s mercy and grace was sufficient to continue convicting and drawing people to Him. He did not want anyone to continue in his rebellious lifestyle. But, He will never force a person to act against his own will. Each person will make a personal decision about God. His desire is that all people come to Him in repentance and faith. If they refuse, then judgment will come.

The warning issued by the Lord: “I will destroy man whom I have created from the face of the earth; both man, and beast, and the creeping thing, and the fowls of the air; for it repenteth me that I have made them” (verse 7). His mercy has a limit. When people continually refuse His offer of grace, the time will come when they will no longer have the opportunity to be saved. This is a warning for people to stop trying the patience of the Lord. They need to come to Him now!

3. _____ The Man of God (Genesis 6:8)

In God’s examination of the world and its awful sinfulness, He found a man who gained His approval. This man was Noah. “Noah found grace in the eyes of the LORD” (verse 8). Remember that this word “grace” has the thought of a superior stooping with favor toward an inferior. Noah was not sinlessly perfect. He was a man just like all others. The difference with him was that his desire was to commune with God and to serve Him. This had been his family heritage. Noah’s great-grandfather was Enoch, the man who walked with God (Genesis 5:24). He was so spiritual that God took him prior to death. Noah’s grandfather was Methuselah, the man who lived longer than any other. With this great heritage, Noah had received great training on how to live for God. His life reflected his spiritual education. So, God’s favor being extended to him showed that he would be a good representative for the Lord and would do what was expected. He was God’s man for his time.

People today look at biblical characters and think of them as being spiritual giants. Noah was just a man who was committed to the Lord. He wanted his life to be pleasing to God. People can still make the choice to love the Lord and to live for Him. The

problem for many is that they choose the way of the world over the things of God. As a result, their lives simply do not please the Lord. They wonder why their lives seem to be falling apart. When God is not the foundation for decisions and actions, then nothing but failure can come. The promise is made, “Whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap” (Galatians 6:7). This is not merely a possibility. It is a certainty. God’s people must carefully order their lives so that the goal of every action is pointed toward accomplishing God’s will. We need to be His person for our generation.

Conclusion

Noah faced difficult, even desperate, days. God had called him to a special work, a work that would produce ridicule from those around him. He was to prepare for God’s judgment to come. Doing so required great faith. Never had anyone seen rain and great floods. Yet, that was exactly what God had promised. How could he perform the task assigned? “Noah found grace in the eyes of the LORD” (Genesis 6:8). With God’s help, great things could be accomplished. Today the Lord still stands ready to help His people. Will we trust Him and find the grace needed to help in desperate times? He will not refuse. We should go to Him right now for help.

Grace Brought God's Blessings

APPLICATION

To show how God desired to be a blessing to His people.

SCRIPTURES TO READ

Text: Numbers 6:22-27.

Related Scripture: Genesis 1:3-31; 50:15-21; Joshua 21:43-45; Psalm 34:9, 10; Matthew 7:11; Luke 2:40; John 1:14; 3:27-35; Acts 20:24-28; Romans 5:15; 2 Corinthians 9:14; Ephesians 1:6; 2:7; Titus 3:3-7; James 1:17; 1 Peter 5:10.

Devotional Reading: God's Grace—Favor Was upon Joseph, and Joseph Was Gracious to His Family, Genesis 43:29-34.

Introduction

The lesson text comes from the time when Israel had been delivered from Egyptian bondage. God's mighty hand and stretched out arm had so plagued the nation of Egypt that the people of that land thrust the people of Israel out. God had graciously delivered His chosen people from a difficult circumstance. Moses led them into the wilderness to meet with God and to worship Him. The Lord gave them instructions on how they were to live. These verses described the way the priests were to close every time of worship. These words were a reminder of the grace of God extended toward them even while they were in difficult circumstances.

Often God's people today fail to recognize the grace of God as He works in their lives. Remember that grace has been defined as God stooping down to help people who are undeserving. This is a necessary part of the principle of grace. If someone deserved what he was getting, then it would be wages, not grace. God's

grace can never be deserved. This is what makes it so amazing. The Creator of the universe, the God of Heaven and earth willingly stoops down to help those who are infinitely below Him. Every day God's people have His grace available. This blessing to Israel reveals what He is willing to bestow on His people.

1. _____ God's Grace Provides Spiritual Blessings (Numbers 6:23, 24)

As the priest began his blessing, his first statement indicated benefits of a spiritual nature. The word "bless" (verse 24) is the same word used in other places to command people to bless the Lord. When it points to this function of worship, it carries the thought of kneeling before and adoring God, of placing one's approval on Him and giving Him worship because of who He is. When the word refers to God's dealing with humanity, it points to His willingness to bestow benefits on people. The Lord had promised Abraham, "I will bless thee, and make thy name great; and thou shalt be a blessing . . . and in thee shall all families of the earth be blessed" (Genesis 12:2, 3). God promised Abraham that he would be blessed by the Almighty and would consequently be a blessing to others. God's agreement with Abraham included spiritual blessings. In the words assigned to the priests to speak over the congregation, God offered similar blessings.

The greatest of spiritual blessings God offers humanity is the gift of eternal life. His desire for all people is that they might be saved. He is "not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance" (2 Peter 3:9). His grace is sufficient for all people to come to Him and be saved (Titus 2:11). The only reason people will not receive eternal life is when they are unwilling to repent of their sins and trust Jesus as their Savior. His blessing is available to all, but all must come to Him according to His plan. God's grace will provide the spiritual blessing of eternal life when people come to Him in faith.

2. _____ God's Grace Provides Security (Numbers 6:24)

Another blessing provided by God's grace is that He will "keep thee" (verse 24). This word pictures a flock of sheep in the wilderness. As the night draws near, the shepherd directs the sheep toward the sheepfold, an enclosure often fenced by a

wall of stones. The shepherds would plant thornbushes on the perimeter of the fence that would grow and provide an almost impenetrable barrier. The sheep would be hedged in during the night and would be safe from danger. The Lord's blessing declared He would hedge them in and protect them. They had security because He was their God.

The same general promise is made to God's people today. Since they have salvation through His marvelous grace, they have His protection and security by His grace. Their salvation is not a temporary fix for their momentary problems. It is an eternal promise of a permanent relationship. Those who are saved have the hope of being with Him for all time to come. This was why Jesus proclaimed the certainty of salvation by stating, "I give unto them eternal life; and they shall never perish, neither shall any man pluck them out of my hand. My Father, which gave them me, is greater than all; and no man is able to pluck them out of my Father's hand. I and my Father are one" (John 10:28-30). This is not something to worry about. When God has made the promise of eternal security, He will keep His promise (2 Peter 3:9).

The question becomes, how can people know they are secure in Him? When people repent of their sins and place their trust in Jesus for salvation, they are granted a relationship that has no ending. The proof of that relationship comes through the indwelling of the Holy Spirit. Paul wrote about how the Holy Spirit is "the earnest of our inheritance until the redemption of the purchased possession, unto the praise of his glory" (Ephesians 1:14). This speaks of the earnest money or down payment made at the purchase of some possession. The down payment secures the item until the purchased possession is received. The indwelling Holy Spirit lives within each believer in anticipation of the time when this body is changed and prepared for its eternal dwelling place. The Spirit of God gives assurance that believers are the children of God (Romans 8:9, 14, 16). God's children are secured in their relationships with Him because His grace is so glorious.

3. _____ God's Grace Provides His Favor (Numbers 6:25)

A special blessing was pronounced on God's people when the priest declared, "The LORD make his face shine upon thee, and be

gracious unto thee” (verse 25). This verse speaks of God’s favor and approval being shown toward His people. The Lord looked upon Israel as the special recipients of His blessing and grace. He spoke of them as being “the apple of his eye” (Deuteronomy 32:10). This phrase pictured the center or pupil of the eye. It spoke of favor and approval. God considered Israel to be a special people, a people He preferred. Because of this favor, He was willing to be “gracious unto thee” (Numbers 6:25). This statement means that God gladly stooped in kindness to an inferior. No one, Israel included, is worthy to stand in the presence of the Lord. Yet, His grace is sufficient so that He freely reaches down to help the helpless and undeserving.

God’s people today stand in the same position as did Israel. Christians in general and churches in particular are recipients of this marvelous grace. God cares enough to reach down to mere human beings and bestow His help in their lives. No one could face even one day without His benefit in life. God is willing to “make his face shine upon thee” (verse 25). The psalmist expressed this thought eloquently, “There be many that say, Who will shew us any good? LORD, lift thou up the light of thy countenance upon us” (Psalm 4:6). No one but God has the ability and the desire to help lowly humanity. His love and grace is so great that He extends His help to hurting and helpless people.

4. _____ God’s Grace Provides Peace (Numbers 6:26)

The blessing of the priest continued when he said, “The LORD lift up his countenance upon thee, and give thee peace” (verse 26). The “countenance” of this verse corresponds to the “face” of the previous verse. They both speak of His favor and approval. Where the earlier reference pointed toward His graciousness that speaks of the loving nature of God, this reference speaks of the results of that favor, that is peace. This is the word shalom, that is used as a greeting by Israelites even today. It speaks of one’s welfare as being healthy, prosperous and peaceful. The source of all peace is none other than Jesus Christ. Isaiah spoke of His having the name, “The Prince of Peace” (Isaiah 9:6). This title speaks of Him as the chief or head of all peace. An adage states, “No Christ, no peace. Know Christ, know peace.” He truly is the source and head of any peace and comfort.

He gives peace with God. “Therefore being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ” (Romans 5:1). This concept returns the thoughts back to God’s provision of grace in redemption. Jesus went to the cross as the sacrifice for sin so that believing humans might receive the gift of eternal life. This idea of producing peace with God is called reconciliation (2 Corinthians 5:19). No one can ever have peace without first having peace with God.

He gives peace for the future. Many people live in dread with what the future might hold. They look ahead with fear about what might come. Jesus gives peace concerning the future. No one must dread the future if he has a relationship with God. What a marvelous story of God’s grace bestowed on humanity so that it can have true peace!

Conclusion

The words spoken by the priests stood as a testimony of God’s grace extended to the people. The Lord placed His approval on the blessing by declaring that He would follow through with what had been spoken. The priests would call down a blessing upon them and God would perform it. He always wanted His people to consider Him. He wanted to be at the forefront of their thoughts. This blessing spoken every time they gathered would remind the people of whom He was.

God’s people today still need to keep their minds on the Lord. With every decision they make, with every action undertaken, their thoughts and their lives should be in consideration of the Lord and His purpose. His grace will continue to be an important factor in the lives of His people. They simply need to trust Him and embrace the daily grace He bestows.

Questioning God's Grace

APPLICATION

To show that in difficult times, one may question God's grace.

SCRIPTURES TO READ

Text: Psalm 77:1-20.

Related Scripture: Exodus 33:19; 1 Samuel 28:16; Job 2:10; Psalms 14:1; 53:1; 75:4; 103:13, 14; Proverbs 14:3; 19:3; Ecclesiastes 7:6; Ezekiel 13:3; Amos 5:15; Malachi 1:2, 3; John 1:11; 3:19; 5:40; Acts 13:38-41; 14:1-4; 26:24-29; 1 Corinthians 1:21-27.

Devotional Reading: God Does Not Forget To Be Gracious, Isaiah 45:13-17.

Introduction

God's grace is sufficient for any need that might arise in life. Of this fact, no one can raise any legitimate questions. But as people go through life, they face times when they are uncertain whether or not God is really there to help them. The Psalm that is the lesson text expressed one person's thoughts on this matter. The human author of this psalm was Asaph, the worship leader for the nation under the reign of King David. He had a knack of expressing the thoughts of so many people as they faced difficulties in life. Here he wanted people to understand that, when they endure hardships and God seems to be absent, He is always present though He might be silent. Asaph's words remind people of how they sometimes feel. They need to remember that God is sovereign, and we are subject to His will.

This song was written in four stanzas, three of which end with the musical notation, "Selah." This word was used seventy-one times in the Psalms and three times in Habakkuk. This musical

notation is a call for the readers, singers or listeners to pause and reflect on the theme just mentioned. As a thought from the writer was spelled out, he wanted them to consider the importance of what was just discussed. In the lesson text, the writer divided his message into four distinct thoughts. These themes take the reader from one mind-set to the next. Though people might question whether God really cares and whether His grace is sufficient, this psalm gives assurance that God is the One to trust. He has sufficient power and concern to reach down to His people and help them as needed.

1. _____

Stanza 1: I Have Troubles!
(Psalm 77:1-3)

Everybody in the world faces times when he cannot see the end of troubles. He does not know how to handle the problem. It could be some health issue where the doctors offer little hope. It could be a financial setback where the family has no idea of how to proceed. The problem could be a family breakup where one spouse does not understand why the other has suddenly abandoned the family. Maybe the problem is with rebellious children. Whatever the trouble, the person simply has no idea of how to find relief from being overwhelmed.

Such a crushing weight bearing down on the soul was exactly what the psalmist experienced in writing this song. His trouble seemed to be unending—“my sore ran in the night, and ceased not” (verse 2). His troubles were so great that his hands were stretched out in prayer before God all the night. Sometimes people’s problems are so great they lose sleep over them. They cry out to God hour after hour because they are uncertain of what to do next. The writer felt such troubles. His nights were spent in agony because he could find no solution—“my soul refused to be comforted” (verse 2).

Just because he felt stress dealing with his problem, the psalmist did not stop his prayers. He continued to bring his petitions before the Lord. He desired an answer but his “spirit was overwhelmed” (verse 3). He had followed the conditions set forth by God. He had not neglected his prayer time but felt no relief. People often go through difficulties like this. They see the troubles but cannot see the solution. They take the need before

the Lord, but it appears that He is not listening. The writer of this psalm had done everything right but felt overwhelmed in grief. How would he respond to these feelings?

2. _____

**Stanza 2: God, Have You
Forgotten Me? (Psalm 77:4-9)**

Recognizing his troubles and taking his needs to the Lord in prayer, this man expected his problems to be eased or solved. But the answer did not quickly come. The problems were so great that he spent hours meditating over why God did not answer. He searched the past for examples of God’s help for the hurting (verse 5). He knew that the Lord had reached down to help others who had been hurting. Then, he thought about his own personal experience. He could recall the times when life had been good and his nights filled with the songs of joy (verse 6). He thought diligently on these matters and could only ask questions. “Will the Lord cast off for ever? and will he be favourable no more? Is his mercy clean gone for ever? doth his promise fail for evermore? Hath God forgotten to be gracious? hath he in anger shut up his tender mercies?” (Psalm 77:7-9). In essence he was asking, “Why has God stopped being gracious to me? Why has He forgotten me in my time of troubles?”

During low points in life, even believers can have feelings of abandonment. They easily see the troubles before them. They know the problems they face but cannot see the hand of God bringing the solution. The questions come—wondering why He has forgotten to help. The reality is that God never forgets. His heart is always toward His children. The problem is that they sometimes do not understand what is happening in their own lives. Difficulties are like a whetstone used in sharpening a knife. Troubles can make life stronger and the individual more dependent on God. No one knows exactly why these issues come in life, but God does. People must be open to His hand in all things of life.

3. _____

**Stanza 3: I Will Trust in You!
(Psalm 77:10-15)**

Asaph’s prayer had turned negative as found in verses 7-9. Often, when people are facing difficult times, their prayers

amount to something like this. They cannot see the solution to the problem. They cannot understand the why of the trouble, so they blame God. Even Job faced those feelings. He had done nothing to deserve the troubles he faced. Why would God single him out as his target (Job 16:12)? Failure to understand can cause great turmoil in the heart of any person, even the hearts of believers. So what are they to do?

The psalmist did not deny the troubles he faced. He did not declare that his problems were at an end. Instead, he simply proclaimed that even in his difficulties, he would continue to trust the Lord. "This is my infirmity: but I will remember the years of the right hand of the most High" (Psalm 77:10). Though the struggle remained, though he could not see the end of the situation, he would remember the many years of God's faithfulness. He would base his future, not on the momentary situation, but on the continuous grace of God. He had been faithful in the past and would be faithful once again. Asaph would continue to trust.

The way for people today to handle what comes in life is to think on God. They will "meditate also of all thy work, and talk of thy doings" (verse 12). It is always easy to keep the mind on troubles and tribulations. When people do that, then they will remain in a negative mind-set. Instead, they must begin to recall all that God has done and then discuss His mighty acts. When this is done, the mind is taken off the momentary problem and focuses on God's goodness, mercy and grace. Had any other god been as helpful as the God of Israel? He has proven Himself true for many generations. Will He suddenly change?

Remember that Job faced problems like few have ever endured. He lost all his wealth and family in one day. Soon his health began to break down. Even his wife turned her back on him and encouraged him to curse God and die. Yet, through it all, Job did not lose faith in God. His statement was, "Though he slay me, yet will I trust in him" (Job 13:15). His trust was so great that he declared, "For I know that my redeemer liveth, and that he shall stand at the latter day upon the earth: and though after my skin worms destroy this body, yet in my flesh shall I see God: whom I shall see for myself, and mine eyes shall behold, and not another; though my reins be consumed within me" (Job

19:25-27). This is the kind of faith people need today. Though we do not understand all that God does, we can trust that He works everything out for our eternal good (Romans 8:28).

Conclusion: Stanza 4

The song written by Asaph concluded with a final stanza declaring, the universe expresses your majesty! (Psalm 77:16-20). All of creation sings the song of God's wonder. The power and beauty of the thunderstorm expresses but a small portion of who God is and how He works. But even that storm can testify of the greatness of God. If the inanimate universe can testify of God's order and precision, then we should be willing to speak of the goodness of God. Even in times of difficulty, no one has the right to turn his back on God. He remains the sovereign God of the universe and can order it the way He chooses. But God's people must always remember that He has not forgotten them. Though we might not understand what is happening, God's grace is sufficient for all our needs.

The apostle Paul faced a personal difficulty, some physical ailment that afflicted him every day. He prayed that God would remove this thorn in the flesh. Instead, God's answer was, "My grace is sufficient for thee: for my strength is made perfect in weakness" (2 Corinthians 12:9). Paul's response to God's assurance was, "Most gladly therefore will I rather glory in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me" (verse 9). God's people can trust Him through whatever might come in life. They do not have to question His grace.

God's Grace Affirmed

APPLICATION

To show how God is willing to affirm His goodness toward His people.

SCRIPTURES TO READ

Text: Exodus 34:1-9.

Related Scripture: Genesis 13:14-17; 17:1-8; 24:7; 28:10-15; Exodus 32:11-13; Deuteronomy 1:8; 2:31-33; Joshua 24; 1 Samuel 10:18; Psalm 105:42-44; Hosea 12:13; Acts 7:1-50; 20:22-24; Romans 4:13; 6:14; 1 Peter 1:13.

Devotional Reading: As the Stars of Heaven, Genesis 15:1-15.

Introduction

The Bible is filled with expressions of God's marvelous grace. Almost from the beginning, the Lord expressed Himself in terms of grace and mercy. Adam and Eve fell from their original state through an act of rebellion. A less merciful and gracious God would have immediately eliminated them and started fresh. Instead, God was willing to provide a plan whereby they might gain a positive relationship with Him. This act of grace was planned even before God created the universe (1 Peter 1:20). Just a few generations provided another example of the infinite grace and mercy of God. The people of Noah's time had turned their backs on their Creator. Their thoughts were continually on evil (Genesis 6:5). Once again, a less merciful and gracious God would have annihilated the human race. Instead, God provided a plan whereby humanity might survive. Noah and his family were preserved through the awful judgment that fell upon the earth. God provided a sign to remind humanity of God's

grace—a rainbow. This sign would be proof of the grace of God in preserving humanity.

All people are recipients of God’s offer of grace. He called Abraham to depart from the wicked city of Ur of the Chaldees. This call included a promise—through Abraham all families and nations of the earth would be blessed (Genesis 12:3). The ultimate fulfillment of that promise was God’s only begotten Son, Jesus Christ. He was the expression of God’s grace to a lost and dying world. Through Jesus and His offer of salvation, all people have God’s blessing offered to them. Paul wrote the definitive statement on God’s grace, “For the grace of God that bringeth salvation hath appeared to all men” (Titus 2:11). All people have the opportunity to receive His grace. They must simply turn to Jesus in repentance and faith and call upon Him for salvation.

This lesson will focus on a time when the people of Israel had rebelled against the Lord. Even in their rebellion, they had the opportunity to receive God’s grace. He always wanted to bless them. They were His people and would be granted His grace. This can remind people today of the marvelous grace of God. It is not that people deserve His goodness. That would be wages not grace. God’s love for humanity requires Him to reach down to those who are undeserving and grant them His mercy and love.

1. _____ **The Problem (Exodus 34:1-4)**

God’s initial commandment to Moses breaks into the middle of the narrative. Moses had ascended Mount Sinai to receive instructions from the Lord. He had been on the mountain forty days and nights (Exodus 24:18). The people in the camp thought something terrible had happened to Moses. The people wanted a god that was visible, not a mysterious, invisible God. They cried out to Aaron to form them an image to use in worship. He agreed to their demand and fashioned a golden calf to serve as their image of worship (Exodus 32:4). Aaron even declared a feast to celebrate this idol and called it a celebration of Jehovah (verse 5). During their celebration, God told Moses to return to his rebellious people. The Lord said He would destroy them and raise up from Moses a new nation (verse 10). Moses did not fully comprehend the depths to which the people had sunk. He pleaded with God not to destroy them. When Moses arrived at the camp, the worldliness and rebellion became real to him.

He was extremely angry. He took the tables of stone which had been formed by God's hand and cast them to the ground in the midst of the people (verse 19). This act symbolized the breaking of God's Law. The people had rebelled in the most basic way. The first commands God had given the people concerned their relationship with God. They were not to worship any other God or bow before any image. These things were an abomination to Him. Now danger had come to the entire nation. Something had to be done.

Moses received further commandments from the Lord. God had been appeased through Moses' prayer of intercession. The Law had to be confirmed. Moses returned to God and received instructions concerning the national life of Israel. The instructions began with a command for Moses to form new tables of stone upon which to write God's basic Law. It appears that God had formed the first tables of stone and had written on them with His own finger (Exodus 31:18). Now Moses would have to expend his efforts in providing the tables. This was to be done quickly for Moses had to meet with the Lord early the next morning. Moses followed the instructions of the Lord and prepared the tables of stone so that he could receive God's Law once again.

People often go through difficult days. Without considering the consequences of their actions, they do things that take them in the wrong direction. They do not intend to rebel against God; they just mess up and do the wrong thing. Then, God's chastisement fell upon them and they wondered why. God's people should always be aware of their actions. Paul encouraged people to "walk circumspectly, not as fools, but as wise" (Ephesians 5:15). Peter encouraged his readers to "be sober, be vigilant: because your adversary the devil, as a roaring lion, walketh about, seeking whom he may devour" (1 Peter 5:8). People need to be alert and aware of what is happening around them. Satan is always on the prowl seeking to defeat the people of God. When they fail, believers should readily return to the Lord begging for His forgiveness. His grace will be available to help in difficult days (Hebrews 4:16).

2. _____ The Presence (Exodus 34:5-8)

Moses prepared to meet with the Lord once again. He had done everything he could in preparation for this special time.

When Moses arrived at the summit, the Lord came down to commune with him. But rather than beginning the meeting with a general conversation or even an immediate proclamation of His Law, the Lord “proclaimed the name of the LORD” (verse 5). Who better to explain and announce the character and majesty of God than He?

His explanation of His own character was expressed in terms that showed why He extended His grace to such a rebellious people. He is “merciful and gracious, longsuffering, and abundant in goodness and truth, keeping mercy for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin” (verses 6, 7). This truth is expressed many times in the Bible. The psalmist wrote, “The LORD is merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and plenteous in mercy” (Psalm 103:8). In the New Testament, James declared that God is “full of mercy” (James 3:17). However, just because God is merciful and full of grace does not mean that He excuses sin. Those who rebel against Him will be held accountable and will pay the consequences for their actions. God declared that the sins of the parents will produce consequences for generations to come (Exodus 34:7). Parents’ foolish actions can produce troubles for their children.

God’s presence that came to Moses on that day was both a source of comfort and a challenge to righteous living. Knowing that God cared enough to meet with him should have caused Moses to rejoice over the loving-kindness of the Lord. But it also produced a sense of awe. When Moses beheld the glory of God, he hurriedly fell before the majesty of God and offered Him the worship He was due. Moses expressed his wonder at God’s glory. He felt humbled before God and wanted to show respect to the Almighty. Many people today disrespectfully call Him, “the man upstairs” Instead, we should fall before Him in humility and praise and exalt Him above all others. He is God!

3. _____ The Provision (Exodus 34:9)

Moses’ prayer on the occasion of his glimpse of God shows the attitude people should have as they approach the Almighty with their petitions. While believers have the privilege of approaching God as “Abba, Father” (Romans 8:15), they should also understand His majesty and glory. Moses had humbly bowed in the presence of the Lord. He did not want to presume

on the mercy of God, but gave Him worship and praise. Now was the time for him to bring his petitions before the Lord. His request began with a simple statement, “If I have found grace in they sight, O Lord” (Exodus 34:9). Since God was meeting with him on this occasion, God’s grace had definitely been extended to Moses and his people. In this statement, the man of God was calling upon that wondrous grace of the Lord. Since grace had been extended, Moses wanted to know that God had forgiven the sin of the people and pardoned their rebellion. He wanted to know that God would continue to lead them as they traveled toward the Promised Land. His prayer was for God’s help to be with them always. This was a request for God’s grace to continue working in the national life of Israel.

People should seek God’s grace in every situation they face. Times might be difficult or they might be fairly easy. Whatever people face, they need God’s help to make it through. As they approach Him with their petitions, they can have confidence that He cares for them and will help them through whatever issues they face. He truly is a gracious God.

Conclusion

For the entire history of the human race, God’s grace has been evident. He had grace with Adam and Eve. He had grace with Noah. He had grace with Abraham. He has grace today. The important thing for people to remember is that God’s grace is available to help in every situation. All we have to do is to approach the throne of grace with confidence, and we will find “grace to help in time of need” (Hebrews 4:16).

Testifying of God's Grace

APPLICATION

To show the testimony of Paul of God's grace.

SCRIPTURES TO READ

Text: Acts 20:17-32.

Related Scripture: Genesis 18; Ruth 2:4-14; 1 Samuel 1:18; Esther 2:17; Psalms 23:6; 93:5; Isaiah 30:18; Zechariah 9:17; Luke 1:30; 2:52; Acts 13:22; Romans 4:13-21; 15:16; 2 Corinthians 6:1; Galatians 2:9; Hebrews 11:4, 11; 2 Peter 3:9, 15; 1 John 4:14.

Devotional Reading: Immanuel—"God with us," Matthew 1:18-23.

Introduction

Paul's testimony of God's grace was one that sprang from experience. He had been one of those who first set out to destroy the followers of Jesus. He was zealous for the Law and wanted to protect its integrity against all he perceived as its opponents. He had the ear of those in power and was able to receive letters of authorization that enabled him to travel from place to place persecuting those of "that way." He arrested many and gave testimony against them. On one of those journeys, the Lord appeared to Paul. This one who had been a persecutor of Christians now recognized that Jesus really was alive and was the Son of God. He immediately turned from a persecutor of Christians into a preacher of the gospel. Did he deserve to receive forgiveness for his violence? No, just like all people, Paul only deserved condemnation. That is where grace comes in. Grace is God's willingness to bestow life where only death is deserved. Paul had dealt suffering and death to those who followed

Christ. Now God offered him grace. Paul took advantage of that opportunity and became a disciple of Jesus. He knew what grace was all about.

The lesson text came at a time when Paul was heading toward Jerusalem. He believed God wanted him there and he was determined to follow God's will. While on the way, Paul was given the opportunity to meet with the leaders of the church at Ephesus. Paul had ministered to that church and blessed it in many ways. Now he was given another opportunity to share further testimony of God's grace with people he loved. He wanted to help them one more time and endeavored to share a message that would encourage them. This message of God's grace is the focus of this lesson.

1. _____ **Paul's Ministry in Ephesus** **(Acts 20:17-21)**

The history Paul had with the saints at Ephesus had begun a few years earlier. On his second missionary journey, Paul stopped in Ephesus and briefly preached in the synagogue. The people were receptive, but Paul had committed to return to Jerusalem for a feast. He promised to return to them if God so directed. As Paul continued to reach out to new communities with the gospel, he had the occasion to return to Ephesus. He found certain people who had been saved but did not understand. Paul told them the way of Christ and baptized them. This new church began to learn more about the Lord. Paul stayed with them for about three years preaching and teaching the Word of God. One evaluation of the work there: "So mightily grew the word of God and prevailed" (Acts 19:20). Paul had to continue his missionary endeavors. He traveled on to other places. In the lesson text, Paul had returned to the region and was near enough to Ephesus to meet with the church leadership. His conversation with them began with a reminder of his ministry in the city of Ephesus.

Their time together had sometimes been difficult. Even while ministering in the city, people had stood against him. One of the groups who violently opposed him was the Jewish population of the city. He endured "many tears, and temptations" (Acts 20:19). These words speak of trials and adversity that accosted Paul and his team. Since tears were shed, these troubles must have been quite difficult. He was accustomed to problems. He had faced

persecution in almost every city he entered. This time his own people turned against him. They set an ambush to trap him. But such troubles would not stop this minister of the gospel.

With God's grace supporting him, Paul continued his work in the city. He continued teaching the people both publicly and privately. He did not hide in secret to talk about God's gift of salvation. He was willing to stand in public areas and preach the gospel. He was also willing to enter people's houses to share the good news with individuals. Paul's ministry was not restricted to one group of people. He testified "both to the Jews, and also to the Greeks, repentance toward God, and faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ" (verse 21). All people needed to hear about the grace of God.

2. _____ **Paul's Challenge to Them** (Acts 20:22-28)

Paul's future at this point was uncertain. He had ministered in cities for many years. At almost every stop, he faced difficulties and opposition. On this journey, Paul felt compelled to return to Jerusalem and minister there. God had revealed that Paul would be arrested when he got to Jerusalem (verse 23). For many people, this news would have stopped ministry efforts. Paul was not guilty of only trusting God during good times. Whatever condition he endured, he knew he was doing God's work. He would continue on. His goal in service was "that I might finish my course with joy" (verse 24). To this time he had been faithful in preaching and teaching. "I have not shunned to declare unto you all the counsel of God" (verse 27). Though the work might have been difficult and dangerous, he did not cower down in fear or seek to conceal any truth. His purpose had been to openly and fully preach the message of God.

Since Paul had left them such a positive example, he now challenged them to follow in his steps and continue preaching God's Word fully to the church where they ministered. They were the overseers of the flock. They had the responsibility to "feed the church of God, which he hath purchased with his own blood" (verse 28). They could not step away from this responsibility.

Sometimes preachers or teachers want to pick and choose what to present to people of a congregation or class. Some messages might be harsh and difficult and they feel uncomfortable with

the messages presented. Churches have the need to hear the whole counsel of God, not just the parts which are pleasant and happy. Sometimes people need to recognize their failures so that they can be corrected. Paul's challenge to the leadership of the church at Ephesus is a challenge to people today. They must not select certain portions of Scriptures to read and teach. They must share all portions of Scripture, even the parts that are unpleasant. Paul encouraged pastor Timothy to "preach the word; be instant in season, out of season" (2 Timothy 4:2). When convenient or inconvenient, when accepted or not, the message of God's grace is necessary for all people.

3. _____ Paul's Warning to Them (Acts 20:29-32)

Paul had warned these leaders to "take heed" (verse 28). This phrase means to pay attention or to be cautious. In any work for the Lord, people will face opposition and difficulty. Paul warned Timothy, "Yea, and all that will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution" (2 Timothy 3:12). That admonition did not say that some people who live for God will face difficulties. All who are truly committed to Him will face certain opposition to their beliefs and standards. Living for God is not a matter of fitting in with the world by carefully hiding one's faith. God's people must stand for Him no matter what happens. The leaders in Ephesus needed to take heed.

Paul's warning included that the members of the church needed to be aware that false teachers would enter their midst (Acts 20:29, 30). Sometimes churches think that if they have stood for the truth in the past, nothing will change in the future. Satan does not have to attack churches that have left their first love or have abandoned their doctrinal distinctiveness. He already has them in his pocket. Churches which diligently stand for the truth will have Satan's fiery darts cast at them. He will attack in ways they do not anticipate. Paul warned Timothy about preaching the Word without compromise. People would rather hear messages that tickle the fancy rather than admonish the soul. Timothy would have to "watch thou in all things, endure afflictions, do the work of an evangelist, make full proof of thy ministry" (2 Timothy 4:5). Anything less than full attention to the dangers would cause his ministry to be at risk. Pastors and

other church leaders must continue to be alert to the dangers in the world today. Satan continues to fight the work of God. He will only be happy if he can cause some strong, Bible-believing church to begin compromising the truth. Churches must be aware of the danger and stand ready to combat error.

Paul turned the church and its ministry over to the grace of God. “I commend you to God, and to the word of his grace, which is able to build you up” (Acts 20:32). Their work stood before them. Paul would have no further opportunity to minister to them. The church needed leadership that would continue to point it in the right direction. That direction was always the grace of God. The Lord would continue to bless as long as they faithfully fulfilled the work assigned to them. They had “the word of his grace” to sustain them in times to come.

Conclusion

Paul intimately knew the value of grace in daily life. God’s grace was essential for any church desiring to go forward in the cause of the Lord. The church at Ephesus needed this reminder, and Paul was willing to oblige. Churches today also need to remember that they can only go forward through God’s grace. They might face difficult days, but His grace is sufficient for every need. Throughout the difficulties Paul faced, it was God’s grace that helped him endure and be successful in his ministry. His understanding of the value of God’s grace was summed up quite distinctly when the Lord told him, “My grace is sufficient for thee: for my strength is made perfect in weakness. Most gladly therefore will I rather glory in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me” (2 Corinthians 12:9).

Salvation Is by God's Grace

APPLICATION

To show that salvation is entirely by God's grace.

SCRIPTURES TO READ

Text: Ephesians 2:1-13.

Related Scripture: John 1:17; Acts 15:11; 18:27; 20:24; Romans 3:24; 4:16; 5:17, 21; 11:6; 2 Corinthians 8:6, 9; Galatians 1:6; 2:21; Colossians 1:6; 2 Timothy 1:9; Titus 2:11; 3:7; Hebrews 10:29; 1 Peter 5:10.

Devotional Reading: False Gospels Are Preached, Galatians 1:6-9.

Introduction

The debate between works and grace for salvation has raged for all of time. From the beginning people wanted to deserve a relationship with God. Adam and Eve first fought this battle. Adam rebelliously took of the fruit of the tree of knowledge of good and evil. He, his wife and all his descendants were cast into a state of sin. Rather than admit his sinfulness to God, Adam tried to cover his guilt by sewing together leaves to make clothing. He thought his efforts might appease God, but he was wrong. Only a blood sacrifice could atone for sin. It required God's grace even then to be reconciled to God.

The next generation faced the same dilemma. Cain and Abel had been taught the right way to worship God. Cain had another idea. Since he was a farmer, he tried to take the works of his hands to offer them to God. Abel understood what his father had tried to teach. He brought a blood sacrifice to the Lord. God accepted the blood sacrifice over the works of Cain's hands. Grace produced God's approval where personal efforts did not.

Down through time people have desired a relationship with God but have sought it apart from the Savior. Nothing has changed in modern times. People will abandon time-honored truths to embrace a belief system invented by human imagination. People will accept a religion that enhances one's view of self, saying that a belief demanding acknowledgment of personal sinfulness and the need for repentance is an old-fashioned religion and fit only to be ignored.

The Bible also gives examples of those who grasped the principle of personal sinfulness and willingly came to Christ as their Savior. Paul is a marvelous example. He had embraced the personal effort avenue to a relationship with God. He had felt that his intense efforts would be sufficient to usher him into Heaven. Then, while traveling toward Damascus, Jesus appeared to him. Paul recognized his own sinfulness and turned to Jesus in repentance and faith and was wondrously saved through God's grace.

Paul taught about the necessity of God's grace in producing salvation. He began by showing the need people have of a Savior. He proceeded to explain the way people can be saved. God's grace is helpful to all people. For those who are lost, they must realize their need for Jesus alone. For those who are saved, they can rejoice in the grace of God bestowed upon them. Both groups will be challenged by the sacrifice of Christ and the grace of God that will produce changes in lives.

1. _____ The Nature of All People (Ephesians 2:1-3)

Paul began his discussion of God's grace by reminding the people exactly where they had been without Christ. They were "dead in trespasses and sins" (verse 1). By nature people are spiritually dead. God created within each human an eternal part. The essence of each individual will never die. All people, whether lost or saved, have that eternal part. A person's relationship with Christ determines the eternal destination. Paul wanted the people to remember that salvation did not come because they were so good and godly. It came because of God's grace.

The reason for the general sinfulness of the world goes back to Adam's rebellion. Each person born of Adam (with a human father) has the nature to sin. Because of that nature, Satan has

ready access to the hearts and minds of all people. “We all had our conversation in times past in the lusts of our flesh, fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind; and were by nature the children of wrath” (verse 3).

The result of this separation from God because of sin is that all people have “no hope” and are “without God in the world” (verse 12). Those without God are in a catastrophic state. This is why they have no hope. True hope comes as people gain a right relationship with God. This can only come by grace through faith.

2. _____ The Sacrifice of the Savior (Ephesians 2:4, 5)

“But God” (verse 4). In contrast to what had been said, Paul would relate a new thought that was built upon what had gone before. In contrast to the sinfulness of humanity, God who is rich in mercy, love and grace was willing to offer a means by which sinful humanity could be reconciled to Him. Two thoughts here describe God’s heart.

He is “rich in mercy” (verse 4). God abounds in mercy. The Old Testament describes this aspect of God’s character by saying He is “a God full of compassion, and gracious, longsuffering, and plenteous in mercy” (Psalm 86:15). God has abundant, overflowing mercy. “Mercy” has been defined as God’s willingness not to give what is deserved. Because of sin, all people deserve to go to hell. God’s mercy is so great that He provides a way for people not to go there. His mercy found its expression in the Son of God as He hung upon the cross. He provides the way of salvation.

God also has a “great love” (Ephesians 2:4). The Son who hung on the cross for the sins of others is the final expression of love. People want to think their love for God expresses it all. That is nothing compared to what Jesus went through for humanity. He endured the physical pain, emotional distress and spiritual suffering of the cross because He loved all people. “For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son” (John 3:16). No greater love could be expressed than what was shown in the sacrifice of the Son. He is the greatest example of love the world has ever seen. He loved those who were His enemies and gave Himself for them (Romans 5:8).

Because of God's infinite mercy and love, He has "quickened us together with Christ" (Ephesians 2:5). Spiritual life is given to those who have been saved. The means by which this relationship is gained is through Jesus Christ. He paid the price. Because of His sacrifice, people can be made alive in Christ.

3. _____ The Gift of Grace (Ephesians 2:6-9)

Grace is God's willingness to give what people could never deserve. Because of the sin nature, no one could ever deserve to go to Heaven. That place is fit only for perfection. Since no human is naturally perfect, no one can go there through personal efforts. It takes God's grace. The means of appropriating that grace into our lives is "through faith" (verse 8). Salvation being through faith means that faith is the channel through which we obtain God's grace and are given salvation. If people refuse to trust Jesus, they will never realize the grace of God that is available to all humanity (Titus 2:11).

Since God's gift is granted by grace, it cannot be gained through works—"not of works, lest any man should boast" (Ephesians 2:9). People would love to gain eternal life through their own efforts because that would mean they were worthy of Heaven. No one can be justified through any deeds he might perform (Galatians 2:16). The reason for this is simple. No one can do any good works. His best deeds are filthy and disgusting when compared to the righteousness of God. Therefore, human works cannot provide the avenue of obtaining eternal life.

Salvation is all about Jesus. His work paid the price of sin. His work extends God's grace to humanity. His work draws people to salvation. "In Christ Jesus ye who sometimes were far off are made nigh by the blood of Christ" (Ephesians 2:13).

4. _____ The Challenge Given by Grace (Ephesians 2:10)

The work of grace in the lives of believers produces a special transaction. Before salvation, they were lost and headed toward hell. When they trusted Jesus as Savior, they were rescued from that condition and made to become the children of God. They are the product of His hand—"his workmanship." This word pictures a craftsman forming something through his skill. What God has produced is a child. That child now has a purpose for life. He

has been formed to perform good works. Does this mean that those works serve to complete the believer's salvation? No, the work of salvation was completed by God. "He which hath begun a good work in you will perform it until the day of Jesus Christ" (Philippians 1:6). It is God's responsibility to save and secure believers. He will do His work. What this idea means is that God has determined that those who are saved should be engaged in good works. This really is not an option. God determined that the saved should perform good works. This is a great challenge for the people of God.

Far too many people run to salvation but walk to service. They honestly desire to have eternal life but are not too concerned with honoring the One who saved them. God's purpose for all His children is for them to accept the charge He has given. He calls us all into service. We must be willing to acknowledge His right to issue commands.

Conclusion

How can people be saved? The world would have people think they can live in such a manner as to deserve eternal life. God has declared all humanity to be under the curse of sin. Because of this nature to sin, people are separated from Him. God's grace enables Him to reach down in love and offer people the gift of eternal life. This produces hope for the future. Paul looked down through time to assure his readers that they had this hope because of grace. "That in the ages to come he might shew the exceeding riches of his grace in his kindness toward us through Christ Jesus" (Ephesians 2:7). Throughout the ages we will be engaged in honoring the Lord because of His mercy and grace extended toward us. Why wait until we get to Heaven? Why not begin worshiping Him now?

Calling of God Is by Grace

APPLICATION

To show God calls men to preach of His grace.

SCRIPTURES TO READ

Text: Galatians 1:13-23.

Related Scripture: Deuteronomy 31:14; Joshua 1:1; Judges 6:12-32; 1 Samuel 3:10-14; Isaiah 6:1-9; Jeremiah 1:4-10; Ezekiel 2:1-5; Hosea 1:1-5; Joel 1:1-7; Jonah 1:1, 2; Micah 1:1; Habakkuk 1:1; Zephaniah 1:1; Haggai 1:1; Malachi 1:1; Matthew 4:18-22; 9:9; 10:1-6; Mark 3:13-19; Luke 6:12-16.

Devotional Reading: God's Call of Moses, Exodus 3:1-17.

Introduction

God calls men to the ministry. Some people wonder what such a statement is all about. They might think that men enter the ministry as a career choice. This idea comes from those who have neglected or failed to understand the spiritual aspects of preaching the gospel and leading the Lord's churches.

Paul wrote about the call to ministry when communicating with the church at Corinth. The men God called to serve in ministry were selected on different criteria than human consideration. People look at such factors as personality, organizational skills, speaking ability and human intellect. Notice what Paul said: "For ye see your calling, brethren, how that not many wise men after the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble, are called: but God hath chosen the foolish things of the world to confound the wise; and God hath chosen the weak things of the world to confound the things which are mighty; and base things of the world, and things which are despised, hath God chosen, yea, and

things which are not, to bring to nought things that are: that no flesh should glory in his presence” (1 Corinthians 1:26-29). God knows other qualities are more valuable than natural talents. This should not be taken to mean that talents and abilities are not important. One could consider many biblical saints and servants. Ezra was a ready scribe who had been trained in this great work. He had studied Scripture so that he could give its meaning. God did not require Ezra to turn his back on education. The Lord used his natural skill to accomplish a great work. But the focus of his work was not on personal advancement. Ezra wanted the nation of Israel to return to the Lord. The focus of ministry today is more than human skill. God receives honor, “that no flesh should glory in his presence” (verse 29).

In the lesson text, Paul endeavored to show what happened in his call to ministry. He wanted the readers to understand God’s reason for calling men into the ministry. It was and is about His glorious grace being bestowed on His servants. Ministers are to speak about God’s grace offered to all people.

1. _____

**Paul’s Past Before Grace
(Galatians 1:13, 14)**

Paul had been blessed in that God had assigned him a tremendous task. His background had given him certain skills that had prepared him, but his past was in opposition to the followers of Christ. Paul was ashamed of his former life. He had worked diligently to advance his position among the Jews and had succeeded. He “profited in the Jews’ religion above many my equals in mine own nation, being more exceedingly zealous of the traditions of my fathers” (verse 14). None of his peers had attained his position so quickly. He had the ear of the high priest and had the responsibility of searching out the followers of Jesus and bringing them bound to Jerusalem for trial.

All of this took place while Paul was religious but lost. He felt his religious fervor was sufficient to help him deserve Heaven and did not believe Jesus was the Messiah, the Christ. He had never considered the need for a personal relationship with God. He was zealous for his religion, but that was all. Many people fall into this same condition. They love religion and church, but they will not break down and recognize their natural, sinful conditions. Jesus described this kind of person when He declared, “The time

cometh, that whosoever killeth you will think that he doeth God service” (John 16:2). This was like King Manasseh who was so committed to his false religion that he willingly offered up his son as a sacrifice to Baal (2 Kings 21:6).

The Bible is clear in its description of humanity without Christ. “There is none righteous, no, not one: there is none that doeth good, no, not one. For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God” (Romans 3:10, 12, 23). Because of their natural condition, all people are in need of God’s grace. Paul finally understood this and trusted Jesus as Savior.

2. _____ God’s Purpose of Grace (Galatians 1:15, 16)

God has a purpose and plan for everyone. Paul knew God had separated him from birth for a distinct purpose. How could this be? Can God know what will transpire long before it happens? Peter knew believers were “elect according to the foreknowledge of God the Father” (1 Peter 1:2). God knows all things from the beginning of time (Acts 15:18). He can look down through the portals of time and know what will take place during every moment on earth. Because of this foreknowledge, God knows who will and who will not accept Jesus as Savior. There is no coercion that forces people to act against their own personal will. If God can know those who will be saved, then He also can determine a plan for their lives. God has given a purpose to each person. Paul understood this principle and acted upon it. He knew God had determined that his life would be spent as a missionary and rejoiced in the fact that God had counted him worthy to call him into the ministry (1 Timothy 1:12). The calling of God was not based on Paul’s prior history of service. That was distinctly against the cause of Jesus Christ. The calling of God was based on His marvelous grace. Without regard to Paul’s unique talents and skills, God had determined that he would best serve in the capacity of reaching out to the world with the gospel of Jesus Christ.

God has a special purpose for each child of God. We are “created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them” (Ephesians 2:10). He has already determined how each person will best serve Him. It is up to us to yield to His will and accomplish His purpose for our lives.

3. _____

Paul's Preaching of Grace (Galatians 1:17-23)

Paul accepted God's call and "conferred not with flesh and blood" (verse 16). The idea is that he did not consult with human advisors or seek their opinion of what he should do. He had understood the course his life should take because he realized God's purpose. He wanted to perform the task assigned to him. Even the apostles of the Lord could give no better advice than what he had received from God. So, Paul set about to fulfill his responsibility.

God called Paul to become a great missionary. Paul traveled throughout Syria and Cilicia (verse 21). This statement probably described what had taken place on his first missionary journey. The island of Cyprus had received the gospel during this trip. He also reached the cities of Iconium, Lystra and Derbe. Souls were saved and churches established because Paul was committed to God purpose. He continued traveling because this was God's call. He yielded his life to the Lord because of all God had done for him.

God has a plan for each person. Not everyone will be called into the ministry. Each man should consider if this is the calling for his life. This will not be based on human abilities. Remember, not many who are wise, mighty or noble are called into the ministry (1 Corinthians 1:26). His calling is based on His purpose. All people should consider what God's purpose is for their lives. God does more than just call men to preach. He calls His children into lives of service. All must be willing to yield to His purpose.

Conclusion

The call to ministry is a definite call, a call through the grace of God. He condescends to place a burden on the heart of a man. That person has been given a purpose. Now he must determine whether to obey the call or not.

What does God want from your life? He never saves anyone without a purpose. He has a plan for each of our lives. We must be willing to seek His plan and then obey. His grace is sufficient to help us accomplish His purpose. We simply must yield to Him and serve where He chooses.

Empowered by God's Grace

APPLICATION

To show how God by His grace empowers His people for the work to be done.

SCRIPTURES TO READ

Text: 1 Corinthians 15:1-11.

Related Scripture: Genesis 28:15; 31:3; Exodus 3:11, 12; 31:1-11; Deuteronomy 31:23; Joshua 1:5; Matthew 28:18-20; Romans 8:31; 15:15; 1 Corinthians 1:4; 10:20; 15:23; 2 Corinthians 6:1; 9:14; Ephesians 3:8; 4:7; 1 Timothy 1:14; 2 Timothy 2:2; Hebrews 13:5; 1 Peter 5:5.

Devotional Reading: Gideon Is Chosen and Qualified by God's Grace, Judges 6:11-24.

Introduction

When considering God's grace, people often only think of the grace needed when a person comes to Christ as Savior (Ephesians 2:8). While grace is necessary in salvation, grace is also needed in life. Paul faced a terrible frailty. He had been given "a thorn in the flesh, the messenger of Satan to buffet" him (2 Corinthians 12:7). The identity of that problem is not clearly defined in Scripture. Many people have speculated long and hard about what it could have been. The important thing about this issue was the way Paul handled it. Three times he prayed that God would remove the difficulty so that his ministry could be more effective (verse 8). God's answer to the hindrance was, "My grace is sufficient for thee: for my strength is made perfect in weakness" (verse 9). God knows all things. For some reason, He knew it was beneficial both to Paul and to all others for him to face this circumstance. As a result Paul concluded that, since

it was God's will for the thorn to remain, he would gladly bear the infirmity so that God would receive the greater glory. Paul needed God's grace to continue on in light of the problem he faced.

Going through life today can be no easier than it was in the days of the Bible. Troubles arise almost every day, and God's people must know how to face them. To endure difficulties every day might be beyond the abilities of most people. They might need help. God is always there to aid those who will trust Him and rely on His strength and grace. To do the work of God demands His "grace to help in time of need" (Hebrews 4:16). Thankfully, that grace is available. This lesson deals with the grace that empowers believers to do God's work.

1. _____ **Grace for Salvation Through the Gospel (1 Corinthians 15:1-4)**

The work of grace was extended through the sacrifice of Jesus Christ upon the cross of Calvary. This wonderful act of mercy, grace and love provides the means by which people can enter a relationship with God. This thought was presented by Paul as he discussed the fact that grace empowers people toward the work God wants them to do.

The message Paul preached was the gospel of Jesus Christ. The components of the gospel are the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus "according to the scriptures" (verses 3, 4). The message Paul presented was not some new thought or new belief system. It was the story foretold in the Old Testament where the Son of God would come to earth, suffer and die for the sins of the world and would rise again the third day. This truth was the gateway through which people could come to God. Jesus gave the illustration of the gates during His earthly ministry. He spoke of the broad way and gate as being the way to destruction because it was the way of human preference and works. He also described the narrow way and gate. It was the way people could travel and gain entrance into Heaven. The way people must go to gain eternal life is through the truth of the gospel.

Salvation is based on the death, burial and resurrection of the Savior. One's eternal destination is built on a person's response to this truth. Paul said there were two ways to respond to the gospel. A person can receive the gospel or believe in vain. The

idea of receiving the gospel is to take to oneself, to associate with something or someone. This statement presents the thought of taking the gospel and making it intimately your own, of believing so completely that the person is willing to base eternity on what Christ has done. This is what Jesus said when He declared, “Whosoever believeth in him” (John 3:16). The person realizes Jesus is exactly who He claims to be and trusts Jesus to impart eternal life. The person has received the gospel. The one who has believed in vain is a person who hears the truth of the gospel but does not make it personal. He does not trust Jesus to do all that is necessary. His faith is vain—empty and without effect. It does not mean that God is unable to save. The fault is in that person. His faith is not real. He might have gone through the motions but never really trusted Jesus to save. As a result, that individual will not have a personal relationship with Christ.

God’s grace for salvation is available to all people (Titus 2:11). His desire is that all people will come to Him in repentance and faith and be saved (2 Peter 3:9). God has done His part. Now each person has a choice to make. Will he receive the gospel or have an empty, vain faith?

2. _____ Grace Shown Through the Resurrection (1 Corinthians 15:5-9)

A significant part of the gospel story is the resurrection. Without the resurrection, no one would be able to receive salvation for the sacrifice of Christ upon the cross would have no power. The resurrection is “the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth” (Romans 1:16). God’s grace is expressed through the resurrection of Jesus. God wanted all people to understand the importance of this truth. As evidence, He allowed vast numbers of people to witness the fact of Jesus’ life after the crucifixion.

The Old Testament Law declared that no testimony in court was valid unless it was verified by multiple witnesses. If only one person saw a crime, that one could not verify the guilt of someone. It took two or three witnesses to confirm the guilt. When God brought the Son out of the grave, He did not want anyone to question the reality of the resurrection. The Lord appeared to numerous people on many occasions during His time on earth after the crucifixion and resurrection. A few of these eyewitnesses were listed by name in Paul’s account. Their names

included Peter (Cephas), James and Paul. Others mentioned were the twelve. This was the designation of those men the Lord had selected to serve in a special office and to accompany Him during His earthly ministry. This means the surviving eleven men along with Matthias, the replacement of Judas, would have seen Christ alive after His crucifixion. A larger group was mentioned as numbering over five hundred souls who saw Him alive after His passion. At the writing of Paul, a large number of those witnesses remained alive and would readily testify of what they had seen. God was gracious enough to make sure the believers of that era had ample evidence of the resurrection of Jesus.

What does this mean for today? The evidence available then was proof of what the Scriptures teach about Jesus. Certainly, He died on the cross. He was placed in a borrowed tomb as further evidence of His death. On the third day, Jesus came out of the tomb. He was alive and remains so today. The evidence, then, should convince us today. Jesus is alive.

3. _____

Grace That Enables (1 Corinthians 15:10)

The grace that authorizes a relationship with God is the grace that enables one after he becomes a child of God. Paul's declaration was, "By the grace of God I am what I am" (verse 10). If anything good had come from Paul's life, it happened because God's grace had done a work in his life. Paul could accomplish nothing apart from what God had granted the ability to do.

The work of grace in Paul's life "was not in vain" (verse 10). The thought presented here was that Paul's salvation had produced tremendous results. He had not backed away from the responsibility God had given him. He was a ready workman in the cause of Christ. Grace had produced within Paul a fervency that prompted him to engage in activities that promoted the work of God. How many times are people saved only to accomplish little or nothing in the cause of Christ? That is a sad commentary on what people expect from God. They expect everything from Him but intend to do nothing for Him. Paul said that was not the focus of his life. He wanted the work of grace in his life to produce something spectacular, and it did. He became a missionary who reached everywhere he could. Souls were saved and churches

were established in many places because Paul wanted God's grace to be extended to all people. His honest self-evaluation of ministry: "I laboured more abundantly than they all: yet not I, but the grace of God which was with me" (verse 10). This was not boasting of his accomplishments. He said anything achieved during his ministry was because of the grace of God. The same is true today. If we actually do something in the work of God, His grace is the means by which it is performed. God receives the glory.

Conclusion

Paul understood the value of grace in the lives of all people. For those who are lost, grace is of utmost significance. Without God's grace, people are doomed to hell. How horrible that destination is. No one would choose to spend eternity there. Yet, so many people neglect the grace that is offered to them and, thereby, choose hell over Heaven. God's grace is sufficient for all people to come into a right relationship with Him.

God's grace is also important for believers. His grace enables and empowers them to engage in His work and to be successful in the endeavor. Without Him, you are nothing. But with God and His grace, you can accomplish many things. Paul declared, "But by the grace of God I am what I am" (verse 10). So, what are you? You can be a significant part of God's work when you yield to Him and let His grace work in your life. Why not let God's marvelous, matchless grace do a great work in your life?

God's Grace upon His Churches

APPLICATION

To show how God's grace is upon His churches.

SCRIPTURES TO READ

Text: 2 Corinthians 8:1-24.

Related Scripture: John 14:26; 15:26; 16:7-16; 17; Acts 1:8; 2; 4:4, 23-37; 5:14; 6:1-7; 10; 13:1-3; 14:21-23; 15:1-35; 20:27-35; Romans 1:1-7; 1 Corinthians 1:1-7; Ephesians 1:1-9; Philippians 1:6; Colossians 1:1-17; 1 Thessalonians 1:1-8.

Devotional Reading: God's Grace upon the Church at Ephesus, Ephesians 1:1-12.

Introduction

While the concept of grace is most often applied to individuals, a certain aspect of it applies also to churches. Since churches are composed of individual believers who have experienced the grace of God and have followed His instructions in joining together to form a body, churches must also be storehouses of God's grace. This does not mean that people can only find the grace of God through a church as some religions teach. The ability to bestow grace has not been delegated to any church or any individual. Only God has the ability to grant grace. What it does mean is that churches should be examples of grace in the world today. Each individual has the daily need for "grace to help in time of need" (Hebrews 4:16). God willingly grants needed grace so that each believer has the ability to live as God deems appropriate. As a part of a church, those individuals joining together become united expressions of God's grace. Grace working in the lives of believers will be a testimony of the wonderful love of God

extended toward all people. Grace working in believers' lives can be the means by which people come to realize they need God. Grace has a work in churches.

The lesson text tells of a time when the church at Corinth had agreed to participate in a special gathering to help the saints in Judea. A great drought had fallen over the land and people faced difficult days. Jewish law provided for the care of people less fortunate, but the believers in Christ had been excluded from normal society because they were considered to have abandoned their faith in Judaism. As a result, no one was obligated to help them. Churches in various regions around the Mediterranean Sea had determined to send help back to the churches that sent missionaries with the gospel. Now the time to gather the collection had arrived. Paul considered this to be grace extended from church to church. But this grace of helping was merely an outflowing of the grace God had bestowed upon individuals. They were seeking to help those who were in need.

This same kind of grace needs to be exhibited among churches today. Difficult times can bring tremendous opportunities for churches to reach out into the community and help those who are hurting. Some people might worry about being taken advantage of. While this will sometimes happen, grace still needs to be at the forefront of a church's heart. God's grace is always extended to the undeserving. His grace flowing through churches will also follow this pattern. This lesson seeks to focus the attention of each person on the value of extending grace toward others.

1. _____ **The Evidence of Grace Within Them (2 Corinthians 8:1-7)**

Paul often encouraged one church by showing it the example of another church. Since the subject under discussion was the offering being received for the saints in Judea, Paul wanted the members of the church at Corinth to know they were not alone. They could look at the example of the churches in the region of Macedonia. These churches would have included those at Philippi, Thessalonica and Berea. Paul drew attention to their willingness to receive an offering. Many churches had purposed to receive a benevolence offering. Paul gave some principles for giving which were based on how these churches had gathered their gifts.

They gave joyfully (verse 2). The churches of Macedonia did not give out of their great wealth. They daily faced “a great trial of affliction” and “deep poverty.” Even when facing difficult days themselves, they were willing to help others. They gave cheerfully (2 Corinthians 9:7). No one should give from a grudging heart. People should have joy in the opportunity to give to God. Their joy was so great that they were not content to give meagerly to the Lord. Instead, they went beyond their abilities and gave sacrificially (2 Corinthians 8:3).

They gave from their hearts (verse 5). Giving ourselves to God indicates that we are so in love with God that nothing else matters. Those who look at the offering plate grudgingly have not given their lives to God. This must be the first order of business. God is not concerned with gifts as much as hearts. He wants people totally committed to Him. When their hearts are right with Him, then every aspect of their lives will fall into the proper order. Not just giving, but church attendance will be what it should. Bible study will be what it should. Every aspect of life will be right when the heart is right. These churches had their hearts right and gave themselves to Him.

Paul encouraged the members of the church at Corinth to abound in their gifts of grace (verse 7). With these great examples standing before the church members at Corinth, Paul encouraged them to engage in the giving of grace. They had been involved in various aspects of Christian living—faith, witnessing, spiritual understanding, faithful service and love for the brethren. Now Paul wanted their faithfulness in this matter as well. They could not neglect what they had promised to do. It would be a blot on their faithful record.

Churches today should recognize the great opportunities that are available. Many people in the world face hurts and loss. Churches can minister to others. Such service will be evidence that God’s grace continues to work in the lives of believers. They must show the world how loving and gracious their Savior is. They show them through their good works of grace.

2. _____ The Expression of Grace from Them (2 Corinthians 8:8-15)

The motivation to extend grace to others comes down to whether or not love reigns in the hearts of church members. This

church received the challenge “to prove the sincerity of your love” (verse 8). Love needs to be genuine, not faked. The ultimate motivation for helping others is a heart of love. Love was why Jesus came to earth to extend saving grace to all people (John 3:16). Experiencing His love will stimulate similar behavior in those who have received it. “For the love of Christ constraineth us” (2 Corinthians 5:14). “Constraineth” has the idea of being compelled to do something. The love Christ expressed toward people should drive them to greater service. His grace should reproduce grace in the lives of believers. He is the example of One willing to extend grace toward the undeserving. “For ye know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that, though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, that ye through his poverty might be rich” (2 Corinthians 8:9). The Lord did not have to come to earth to provide salvation. He chose to do so because of His wondrous grace.

People must do more than merely see need in others. There must be a performance of ministry toward them (verse 11). When a church has received God’s help through grace, then it must also be willing to reach out to others with the same expression of grace. Paul used an illustration to show the value of helping others. It reflected on the time when God provided manna for the Israelites while they wandered in the wilderness. He gave the people exactly what was needed to continue living. “He that had gathered much had nothing over; and he that had gathered little had no lack” (verse 15). When God’s grace is extended to people, they can give it to others and their own will not be diminished. God’s grace is as infinite as He is. People can generously bless others without fear that they will have to do without a blessing from God. The love of Christ will compel us to stretch our imagination in seeking ways to minister to others.

3. _____ The Earnestness of Grace in Them (2 Corinthians 8:16-24)

Paul always maintained concern for the churches he had worked with. One of the greatest burdens he bore was the daily “care of all the churches” (2 Corinthians 11:28). This weight bore more heavily upon him than even the times of persecution he faced. Earlier he had sent to the church at Corinth the young man Titus so that he could help to prepare the church for the

upcoming collection. Titus did this willingly because God had put “the same earnest care into the heart of Titus for you” (2 Corinthians 8:16). One reason Paul brought up the concern he and Titus held for the members of the church was to incite within them the same kind of compassion. The members had already committed to help in this offering. In doing so, they had extended grace toward other believers. Now Paul wanted to encourage them to continue expressing their love toward others and help them when the opportunity arose. Now was the time.

Churches should always be open to opportunities to extend grace toward others. This might be in helping other churches when they face difficult days. It might be in benefiting individuals who are struggling. The heart of grace and compassion that motivated Jesus to come to earth as the sacrifice for sins should dwell within each of His children. “Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus: who . . . made himself of no reputation, and took upon him the form of a servant” (Philippians 2:5-7). He is our example, and we must follow in His steps.

Conclusion

Paul called upon the members of the church at Corinth to be examples of grace. They had the opportunity to aid other Christians who were hurting. They had promised to do so. Now was the time to follow through and perform the task that they had embraced. They could give help to others.

Churches today must always be ready to be the conduits of God’s grace on earth. People everywhere need help in life. It might be they need Jesus as Savior. It might be they need help during difficult times. Churches can extend grace to them and help in whatever people might be facing. God extended His grace toward us. We should extend His grace toward others.

Grace for Speaking

APPLICATION

To show how God provides grace to speak.

SCRIPTURES TO READ

Text: Colossians 4:1-6.

Related Scripture: Numbers 22:28; 23:5, 12, 16; Deuteronomy 18:18; Proverbs 15:23; 25:11; Ecclesiastes 10:12; Isaiah 50:4; 51:16; Jeremiah 1:9; 5:14; Matthew 10:19, 20; Mark 13:11; Luke 4:32; Acts 4:5-31; 1 Corinthians 2:4; Ephesians 3:8; 1 Thessalonians 1:5; 1 Timothy 4:5; Hebrews 4:12; 1 Peter 1:21.

Devotional Reading: God Gives the Grace To Speak, Exodus 4:10-16.

Introduction

Living in the proper way is sometimes difficult. People tend to look at life as a means to satisfy personal desires. When things do not go the way a person has anticipated, that individual often becomes upset because of frustrated longings. People find it difficult to speak and act appropriately because what they wanted did not happen.

As with all the letters Paul wrote, this epistle to the church at Colossae served the purpose of correcting some problems faced by the congregation. Paul wanted to help people he cared about and wanted them committed to the service of God. Such service would always begin with the grace that God had bestowed upon them. Any act of ministry must be built upon grace—God's unmerited favor. Every aspect of the lives of church members must be governed by grace. The words of the lesson text revolve around this truth and challenge each reader to make sure grace is at the forefront of every service performed. God's people must speak grace in every area of life.

1. _____

Speaking Grace in Prayer (Colossians 4:2, 3)

Prayer is a vital part of the Christian life. Believers should constantly communicate with God. To do less is to declare that one's relationship with Him is flawed. Think about communication with God in terms of earthly friendships. When a person refuses to talk with a friend, one must wonder what happened to the friendship. When people refuse to talk with God, they must examine what is wrong. God desires this communication and His children should want to talk with the Heavenly Father.

Prayer should be a constant part of life. To "continue in prayer" (verse 2) means to be constantly diligent in prayer. Often people only pray in times of difficulty. Some great problem has arisen and the person wants a quick solution. God deserves more than merely being the answer to problems. He deserves to be treated like the Heavenly Father. People should desire to communicate with Him.

Prayer should also be filled with thankfulness. Thanksgiving is quickly coming. This season has been set aside to remember all the blessings of God and to express appreciation for them. The problem is that people often wait until then to express their thankfulness. The attitude of gratitude should be a constant part of their prayers. God deserves to hear words of appreciation for all He has done.

Prayer should have a purpose. When Paul encouraged the church at Colossae to pray, he described a specific object for its prayers. "Withal praying also for us, that God would open unto us a door of utterance" (verse 3). He knew the task ahead would be difficult. He was a prisoner in Rome at the writing of this letter. He wanted additional opportunities to preach the Word in Rome and other places. He wanted this church to join him in praying for these opportunities.

People's prayers should be seasoned with grace. God's help is needed in everything in His work. Without His help, nothing of any substance can be accomplished. Paul encouraged the church at Colossae to speak grace through its prayers.

2. _____

Speaking Grace in Ministry (Colossians 4:3, 4, 6)

Paul desired for the church at Colossae to pray for his outreach ministry. Paul was at that moment being held prisoner,

but he had every confidence God would release him to travel to new areas to preach the gospel where it had not been heard. Paul's desire was for the church to pray for God's grace to be extended to him so that his work could continue.

Paul asked the members of the church to pray for additional opportunities to preach the Word of God to the lost. "The mystery of Christ" (verse 3) was a way Paul used to describe the message of the gospel. It was not that the gospel was mysterious—hidden and unknown. The details of the gospel had not been revealed in Old Testament times, but they had been uncovered and made known to people through Jesus Christ. The places Paul went had never heard such a story. It sounded strange to them. When Paul preached about Jesus in Athens, some philosophers said that Paul was "a setter forth of strange gods: because he preached unto them Jesus, and the resurrection" (Acts 17:18). It was mysterious to them. Paul wanted to explain the truth of the gospel so that people could know Jesus as Savior.

This same desire should reside in the hearts of all church members. They should want to find opportunities to share their faith with others. The world is in need of a Savior. God's people must be careful how they speak the good news. Their "speech be alway with grace, seasoned with salt" (Colossians 4:6). Having speech flavored with grace presents the idea of being thoughtful and caring in the presentation of the message. Among the Greeks, salt was the symbol of wisdom. Having answers to questions seasoned with grace and salt means that people should be prepared and compassionate in their dialogue with the lost. No one should seek to bludgeon people with the gospel. It is a message of love and grace. Wisdom will enable God's people to speak His message carefully and lovingly.

3. _____

Speaking Grace in Life (Colossians 4:5)

Christians' lives are a tool by which they can share the gospel and speak grace into the lives of other people. Their "walk" (verse 5) speaks of how people conduct their lives. They should do so with wisdom. This word speaks of the practical skill necessary to conduct one's life in an appropriate, beneficial manner. It describes a wisdom that is from above, not from earthly understanding. When God's people live according to godly principles, their conduct is a testimony of what they possess

within. Their outward actions reflect their inner condition. They are the children of God and should act accordingly.

This wise manner of living is done in the sight of the world. Jesus taught this principle during His earthly ministry. He compared the life of a Christian to a light shining in the world, “Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven” (Matthew 5:16). As lights in the world, Christians are to shine brightly into darkness. The light they shine is not their own righteousness. It is the light of the Savior. He is the ultimate and true light that “shineth in darkness” (John 1:5). When God’s people shine His light into the world, they give testimony of what He can do. They reflect the goodness, love and mercy of the Savior. People can grasp the grace of God by watching it play out in the lives of believers. Their walk should be with wisdom and grace.

Paul also encouraged Christians to live, “redeeming the time” (Colossians 4:5). This phrase has the idea of buying up every opportunity in life. Far too many opportunities of service are wasted because people do not want to take the time or expend the energy to work for God. Think of all Christ did in providing the way of salvation. He was willing to suffer loss for the good of others. He died on the cross, not for Himself, but for all people. Christian people today should remember all Jesus did and base their actions on His glorious gift rather than on their laziness and unconcern. Their lives should speak grace through all they do.

Conclusion

Grace for speaking about God is necessary in today’s world. Much of the world is filled with bitterness and hatred. People seem to think they have the right to hate others simply because of their ethnic background, economic standing, religious beliefs or some other outward part of life. People often react before knowing circumstances. Grace is necessary for God’s people to reach out to a dying generation and to draw them to Christ. This is exactly what Jesus did in coming to earth as the sacrifice for sins. Since we are the children of God, we must exhibit His heart of mercy and grace in the world today. Speaking with grace will enable us to help more people. God will help in this endeavor if we will make ourselves available for His use. May we always have grace for speaking to people about Jesus.

Grace for Singing

APPLICATION

To show spiritual songs manifest grace in praise and thanksgiving.

SCRIPTURES TO READ

Text: Colossians 3:12-17.

Related Scripture: Exodus 15; Judges 5:1-3; Psalms 30:4-6; 47:6; 57:7-11; 59:16, 17; 68:4; 84:11; 89:1, 2; 96; 98; 104:33, 34; 105; 108; 145; 146; 147:1; 148—150; Acts 16:25; Ephesians 4:7; 5:19; Revelation 5:9.

Devotional Reading: Admonished To Sing of God's Works, Psalm 33:1-8.

Introduction

Songs can often move the human psyche. Some part of the make-up of the human heart responds to the movement and sound of music. William Congreve wrote, "Music hath charms to soothe the savage breast, to soften rocks, or bend a knotted oak" (The Mourning Bride, Act 1, Scene 1). Music can calm the troubled heart and ease a troubled situation. The Bible gives an example of the soothing nature of music. King Saul was troubled. His anger would flare up, and he would strike out even at those closest to him. In these times of emotional upset, the advisors called for David to play music on his harp, and his troubles would be eased (1 Samuel 16:23). This natural response to music can turn the heart toward worship.

Musical expressions are mentioned many times throughout the pages of Scripture. The book of Psalms is a hymnbook used by the Israelites to voice their praise to God for His goodness, mercy and grace. The Psalms could move people toward worship and cause them to voice their praise to God. When Israel was delivered from Egyptian bondage and had arrived safely on the

other side of the Red Sea, the people joined a chorus of worship for God's grace in delivering them. "Then sang Moses and the children of Israel this song unto the LORD, and spake, saying, I will sing unto the LORD, for he hath triumphed gloriously: the horse and his rider hath he thrown into the sea" (Exodus 15:1). The Lord had benefited them on that day. God's people today should learn from those saints and be eager to express their praise to God through the use of their voices in singing to the Lord. Churches have a time when the people can lift their voices in worship to God.

Since singing during a worship service is an opportunity to offer praise to God, no one should just sit there refusing to sing. He has no excuses—"I just cannot sing. I do not have the talent." God never required the song to be professionally presented. He encouraged all people to participate by instructing, "Make a joyful noise unto the LORD, all the earth: make a loud noise, and rejoice, and sing praise" (Psalm 98:4). "Make a joyful noise," has the figurative meaning of splitting the ear with sound, or to shout for joy. It is not the beautiful melody that the Lord appreciates. He loves the words and the heart of the song. When singing to God, people should focus on the words more than the melody. For those who have beautiful voices or talented hands, they should use their talents to the best of their abilities, but no one should refuse to sing because he thinks he cannot do so beautifully. All should sing with grace toward God.

1. _____ **The Manifestation of Grace (Colossians 3:12-14)**

People's hearts should show forth God's grace. This is like a museum with its many exhibits. The purpose is to demonstrate something that people need to see and understand. God's grace being manifested in the lives of believers is important because they become the means by which other people can seek the glory, goodness and grace of the Savior. The lives of God's people become the exhibit, the manifestation of God's grace.

Grace is manifested in people's inner attitude. Paul described the "elect of God" as having "bowels of mercies, kindness, humbleness of mind, meekness, longsuffering" (verse 12). Each of these deal with the way a person looks at himself. Often people in the world think first of themselves then consider the needs of others. That is not the exhibit of grace God wants from

His people. The phrase “bowels of mercies,” shows that these attitudes spring from the heart, not from outward feelings. No one will deal kindly with others unless the needs of others are more important than one’s personal needs. This shows a humble heart and mind, one that does not seek self first and others later. This attitude is a manifestation of what believers have received. The Lord did not come to earth for some personal gain. He came to die on the cross for others. This was His exhibit of grace. God’s people must follow this example.

Grace is also manifested in the way people treat each other (verse 13). The outward demonstration of the inward attitude gives testimony of the grace received. Forgiving others and bearing patiently with their faults is foreign to the thinking of most people. They would rather forget about others and pursue their personal desires. God wants His people to follow the example of Christ when He was willing to forgive sinners. They do not deserve this forgiveness, but His grace caused Him to reach down with love and compassion and help the helpless. God’s people should reflect His attitude in their actions.

Grace will further be manifested in the way people respond to God (verse 14). The most important thing (above all these things) is a heart that loves. The Lord was asked what the most important commandment was. He responded, “Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind. This is the first and great commandment. And the second is like unto it, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself” (Matthew 22:37-39). People will never really love others until they first love God. The deepest expression of love toward others begins with a heart that has experienced God’s love. “In this was manifested the love of God toward us, because that God sent his only begotten Son into the world, that we might live through him” (1 John 4:9).

Here is the exhibit of grace: a person has received God’s gift of eternal life. Grace makes a change in attitude and behavior. God is pleased when His people are willing to be demonstrations of grace toward other people.

2. _____

The Expression of Grace (Colossians 3:15)

Since grace has been experienced, peace should reign in the lives of all believers. Peace has the idea of quietness, rest and

even prosperity. This peace should rule in the hearts of those who have trusted Jesus as Savior. Why does this peace have such control in life?

God's peace comes because of a relationship with Him. "Therefore being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ" (Romans 5:1). Someone has written, "No God, no peace. Know God, know peace." No one can have true peace in life without a relationship with God. He might have momentary safety and security, but it is only temporary. The peace that people have with God is eternal. They need never fear because they are secure in the hands of the Savior. They have peace—quietness, rest and prosperity, and it comes because of the grace of God.

Having peace with God should create within the heart an attitude of gratefulness. The celebration of Thanksgiving is swiftly approaching. The hearts of people are turned toward thankfulness. It is sad to think that people especially God's people, have to be reminded to be thankful. They should feel gratitude toward God each day. The problem is that sometimes they forget what God has done in giving them eternal life. His grace was sufficient for their need when they repented of their sin and turned to Jesus as Savior. Without His grace in their lives, they would still be doomed to hell. But His grace was available and sufficient. They have been saved but sometimes do not think about it. They take their eternal destination for granted. As a result, they are not thankful. People should always be grateful for what God has done.

Remembering what God has done in providing the gift of salvation should make His people thankful. This provision came as a result of God's marvelous grace. We should express our feelings toward God in light of His gift.

3. _____

The Product of Grace (Colossians 3:16, 17)

God's grace has been extended toward all people. Those who have experienced the grace of God that brings salvation should have gratitude. Since they have felt the grace of God, how should they react to this glorious blessing? They should have hearts that are overflowing with joy. Maybe the best way to express that joy is through lifting their voices in songs of praise to the One who

saved them. Some truths are taught concerning the songs they are to sing to honor the Savior.

Songs should be based on biblical truth and spiritual understanding. Often people are drawn to a song because the melody is pleasing. While melody is important in a song, what makes it important and spiritual is the content. Some songs become popular because of their rhythm or melody, but their content disagrees with clear biblical truth. The teaching and admonition that comes through music can be spiritually true or false. God's people must be careful that each song is based on the Word of God so that the message taught will be biblically accurate. No one would tolerate a preacher imparting doctrinal error. Neither should one accept error that comes through music. Spiritual understanding can only come through spiritual truth.

Songs are to be expressions of thankfulness in the hearts of those who are singing. When singing scriptural songs, the heart and mind are drawn into the presence of the Lord. Those who are singing receive benefit from the song and impart help to others who are worshiping. They are praising God for the grace He has bestowed upon them.

Conclusion

Songs are an important part of our service to the Lord. Songs reflect what goes on in the heart. We as God's people can be used by Him as we open our lives to His leadership. His grace has been sufficient to save and continues to be sufficient as we engage in service to other people. We must make sure our songs of worship always lift Him up and promote His truth to all people. No one should embrace songs that do not speak of the grace of God. He is worthy of all praise.

God's Throne of Grace

APPLICATION

To show that one's prayers are directed to God's throne of grace.

SCRIPTURES TO READ

Text: Hebrews 4:12-16.

Related Scripture: Numbers 11:1, 2; Deuteronomy 9:26-29; 1 Samuel 1:10, 26, 27; 2:1; 8:6-9; 12:9, 23; 1 Kings 8:30; 9:2-9; Nehemiah 1:4-11; Job 42:8; Daniel 3:11; 6:10; John 14:16; 16:26; Acts 4:31; 2 Corinthians 9:14; Ephesians 3:8-13; James 5:13, 16; 1 Peter 3:7; Revelation 1:4.

Devotional Reading: Believers Have Access to God, Ephesians 2:18-22.

Introduction

Who needs grace in his daily life? Everyone needs God's grace to make it through his days. Often people do not recognize their need and, therefore, never come to God's throne of grace to plead for His. James wrote about this failure, "Ye have not, because ye ask not. Ye ask, and receive not, because ye ask amiss, that ye may consume it upon your lusts" (James 4:2, 3).

The Bible gives many examples of men and women who recognized the value of bringing their needs to the throne of grace. Hannah felt a deep need for a son. She prayed to God, and He granted her request. Queen Esther recognized a special need among her people. They were threatened with annihilation. She called upon Mordecai to join her in prayer and fasting. Because of their prayers, the king granted her an audience and answered her request to preserve the Jewish people. Elijah was a normal man who had the natural feelings of any person. Because of the sinfulness of the Northern Kingdom of Israel, he prayed that

God would shut the windows of Heaven and it would not rain. God granted the request and it did not rain for three years and six months (James 5:17). He prayed again and God opened the skies, and it poured rain upon a people enduring a drought. These people had requests granted because they went to God in faith.

Often people see little value in bringing their needs to God. They just muddle through life hoping everything will turn out fine. If something good happens, they think they were fortunate. If something bad happens, then it is just a fact of life. They do not consider bringing their burdens to God and asking for His help. The Lord gave a parable about a widow who faced an adversary. She brought her need to a human judge. He was not a godly man and really did not care about people. The woman continually approached him for help with her problem. Finally, the judge thought, "Though I fear not God, nor regard man; yet because this widow troubleth me, I will avenge her, lest by her continual coming she weary me" (Luke 18:4, 5). The lesson of the parable was that if an ungodly human will grant a request because of inconvenience, God in His great compassion and mercy will care enough about His people to lovingly grant their petitions. God wants His people to love Him enough to communicate with Him and to bring their needs to Him.

God's people should recognize that their Heavenly Father stands ready to hear and respond to their prayers. His place today is on His throne of grace. Just that title should remind people of the graciousness of the Savior. May we learn the importance of directing our prayers toward the throne of grace.

1. _____ **God Cared Enough To Give His Word (Hebrews 4:12, 13)**

The Bible is God's revelation of Himself to humanity. Throughout its pages, His character is revealed. God shows His marvelous grace that is available to all people. But the revelation of God's personality and purpose is not all that is given within the pages of God's Word. It also points out the reality of the human condition. It will pierce "even to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit, and of the joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart" (verse 12).

People often have the idea that their actions are hidden to all but them alone. They think they can engage in any kind of

behavior and have no one find out. The Bible shows this is not true. Every person and every action is “manifest in his sight” and “all things are naked and opened unto the eyes of him” (verse 13). Some might question how this statement shows that God cares for His people. If He did not care, then it would not matter how they acted. He would just let them live without concern about their behavior. But He cares about His people. He wants them to be examples to the world of His grace and righteousness. This cannot happen if their actions do not reflect the character of the Heavenly Father. Therefore, God knows what is going on in the lives of His people.

The Bible shows Christians how to live. When Paul wrote of the inspiration of Scripture, he declared that the Bible was “profitable” for Christian living (2 Timothy 3:16). It was given “that the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works” (verse 17). Two words in this verse are important. Perfect has the idea of being complete or lacking nothing. The Bible is valuable because it instructs people how to grow spiritually mature. Their strength comes through an understanding of Scripture. Without the awareness granted through the Bible, believers might behave as “children, tossed to and fro, and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the sleight of men, and cunning craftiness, whereby they lie in wait to deceive” (Ephesians 4:14). They gain through a study of the Word of God. “Thoroughly furnished” (2 Timothy 3:17) presents the thought of being fully equipped. The Bible gives the instruction necessary for people to know how to live for Christ. The Lord is not satisfied when His people continue living like the world. He wants them changed. This change happens as they grow in their understanding of biblical concepts.

God’s grace is evidenced through His willingness to give His Word. An uncaring god would not be concerned with the failures of his people. Our God cares deeply. He offers the instruction necessary for His people to grow up and act like mature Christians.

2. _____ God Cares Enough To Be Our High Priest (Hebrews 4:14, 15)

The biblical concept of a high priest was that of the spiritual leader. When the people of Israel came out of Egyptian bondage,

they traveled to Mount Sinai. While there, they received instructions on how they were to conduct their national and spiritual lives. God separated the tribe of Levi to be the priests at the house of God. From that tribe He separated Aaron to be the high priest. He and his descendants would help the people in their spiritual pursuits. David used the anointing of Aaron as an illustration of the blessedness of unity (Psalm 133:1, 2). Israel was a special people to God, and He had given them a spiritual leader.

Today, no earthly person serves as the high priest. That office is held by Jesus Christ. He is “a great high priest, that is passed into the heavens, Jesus the Son of God” (Hebrews 4:14). The word “great” in this verse indicates largeness of character and ability. Jesus is not a mediocre High Priest. He serves in this office with intensity, He is full of virtue and authority, He is highly esteemed in his position, and He has wonderful excellence. All these things are included in the idea of His being the Great High Priest. No one can compare to Him as He fulfills His office.

How does His service as High Priest benefit God’s people? Two primary ways are mentioned in the lesson text. He knows how people feel. He has been “touched with the feeling of our infirmities” (verse 15). Having come to earth in human flesh, Jesus has felt what people endure in life. This was not done by imagining how people might feel. He actually was born on earth and lived more than thirty years here. He felt hunger, fatigue and pain. He knows how people feel. As a result, He is able to minister to their needs and to help them through their difficulties.

Another way He helps people is through His experience in being “in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin” (verse 15). Peter put it another way. Jesus left “us an example, that ye should follow his steps” (1 Peter 2:21). The Lord showed people how to live so that they might bring glory to the Father. The gracious God cared enough about His people to provide them an example which daily benefits them. His grace continues each day of a person’s life.

**3. _____ God Cares Enough To Answer
Our Prayers (Hebrews 4:16)**

When people are in need, they can be assured that God stands ready to listen to their cries. This compassion comes

about because of the experience of the great High Priest, Jesus Christ. He feels the hurts of His people because He has been there. He desires to help them through their difficulties because He loves them.

Too many people enter into prayer with fear and trembling. People can come to God with boldness (verse 16). “Boldly” in this verse describes being outspoken or having assurance. The thought given in another place is that the people of God can come to God in prayer crying out “Abba, Father” (Galatians 4:6). The word “Abba” is akin to the modern term of endearment—daddy. God’s people can approach Him with the boldness of a child coming to Daddy with some special request. There is no need for fear and trembling. He is Daddy. The child can come boldly. Since He truly is the Heavenly Father, then His children need not fear His presence. He loves them intensely.

Coming to Him in prayer indicates He is willing to hear and answer those cries. People have the assurance that “we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need” (Hebrews 4:16).

Conclusion

The question returns to our thinking, “Who has the need of grace in his life?” The better question, “Who is so foolish as to think he does not need God’s grace continually?” Every person faces situations every day in which God’s help is needed. No one should hesitate to bring his needs to the Lord. God loves people and cares enough to sustain them each day. All it takes is His grace to make it through the darkest circumstance. That grace is available. All you have to do is come to the throne of grace to find help in time of need.

Growth in Grace

APPLICATION

To show that by the grace of God one can mature spiritually.

SCRIPTURES TO READ

Text: 2 Peter 3:1-18.

Related Scripture: Luke 12:24; John 15:1-8; Romans 6:4; 8:29; 1 Corinthians 3:9, 10; 2 Corinthians 5:7; Galatians 5:16; Ephesians 2:10; 4:1; Philippians 1:9-11; 3:17; Colossians 1:6; Hebrews 5:14; 13:9; 1 Peter 2:2; 2 John 4, 6; 3 John 3; Revelation 2:2-5, 9, 10, 19; 3:8-12.

Devotional Reading: God's Provision for Spiritual Growth, Ephesians 4:11-16.

Introduction

The people of God should never be content to remain at their present level of spiritual development. Wherever they are spiritually, they should draw even closer to the Lord. How can this be accomplished? People often look at other people and conclude that they are doing just fine. This comparison with other people is inadequate in determining the level of spiritual growth. Paul wrote about the foolishness of this behavior. "But they measuring themselves by themselves, and comparing themselves among themselves, are not wise" (2 Corinthians 10:12). Using human beings as one's measuring stick does nothing to raise the standard of spiritual growth. People must examine their lives against the spiritual standard of the Word of God. Christians must not gauge their lives "in the words which man's wisdom teacheth, but which the Holy Ghost teacheth; comparing spiritual things with spiritual" (1 Corinthians 2:13). The reason for this is that "the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God: for they are foolishness unto him: neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned" (verse 14).

God's people should grow to the point of being able to know God's purpose for their lives.

Peter is an example of spiritual growth in the life of a believer. He had been a fisherman by occupation when Christ called him to become a fisher of men (Matthew 4:19). Even as a disciple of Christ, Peter still needed to grow spiritually. On one occasion the Lord spoke of what was going to happen in His life. Peter did not like the thought, so he commented, "Be it far from thee, Lord: this shall not be unto thee" (Matthew 16:22). This worldly, faithless statement had come on the heels of a marvelous statement of faith that Jesus is "the Christ, the Son of the living God" (verse 16). Just a little while later, Peter again contradicted the Lord when he declared he would never deny Him. Yet, that night he denied the Lord three times. This man who did not remain faithful to Jesus that night was soon changed by the grace of God. The denier became the great preacher on the day of Pentecost. The sermon touched hearts and three thousand people were saved, baptized and added to the church. Peter had needed to experience spiritual growth so that he could become the tool God needed in His work.

This lesson illustrates the need for God's people to grow spiritually. This maturity cannot come without having that purpose in life. We can "grow in grace, and in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ" (2 Peter 3:18).

1. _____

Growth Is Needed Because of Spiritual Ignorance in the World (2 Peter 3:1-7)

The world is filled with spiritual ignorance, but this is nothing new. People tend to forget about God and refuse to accept His purpose for their lives. Worldly people are scoffers (verse 3), which speaks of those who mock or make fun of something. This thought certainly describes many people today. They look at the people of God as being foolish because they accept the Bible as the Word of God. Since they have rejected the existence of God, they can walk "after their own lusts" (verse 3). Morality and godliness are unimportant to them.

This mind-set reminds us of the attitude of the people of Noah's day. Noah was "a preacher of righteousness" (2 Peter 2:5), but his message was rejected because the people had never seen an event like Noah described. Their sinfulness and rejection

brought severe judgment, “the world that then was, being overflowed with water, perished” (2 Peter 3:6). Their rejection did not change the judgment of God. Their refusal to acknowledge the reality of God did not change the truth. God was still on His throne and His judgment poured upon that rebellious people.

The world today is in a state of spiritual ignorance. God’s people must be determined to understand more about God. Through spiritual understanding, churches can begin to turn the world to the Lord. We cannot be content to remain spiritual babes in Christ. We must grow up and become spiritual adults so that we can help people come to the Savior.

2. _____ Growth Is Needed Because the Lord Is Coming Again (2 Peter 3:8-14)

Those who doubt God complain, “Where is the promise of his coming? for since the fathers fell asleep, all things continue as they were from the beginning of the creation” (verse 4). Though people may doubt whether the Lord will return, it remains a fact. Jesus is coming again. The problem is that people want God to follow their schedule rather than His own. God’s timing is always perfect. To His eternal mind, one day is like one thousand years and one thousand years is like one day (verse 8). The day will come when the Lord returns. It will be unexpected, “as a thief in the night” (verse 10), but it will come. God’s people must get ready for that day.

Because the Lord is coming again, Christians should change their manner of life—“what manner of persons ought ye to be in all holy conversation and godliness” (verse 11). The Lord told His people to be lights in the world (Matthew 5:14). Their lights shine as they perform good works on earth (verse 16). Their lives testify of the goodness of God and glorify Him. Every believer will give an account of his life. This accounting will take place in the presence of the righteous Judge, Jesus Christ. No one will be ready to stand before God unless he has endeavored to grow spiritually. John encouraged people to “abide in him; that, when he shall appear, we may have confidence, and not be ashamed before him at his coming” (1 John 2:28).

Since Jesus is coming again, God’s people must be getting ready. Readiness begins as they determine to grow spiritually. This growth will not always be easy, but it is required by the Lord. We should desire to be mature adults in Christ.

3. _____ **Growth Comes Through Grace and Biblical Understanding (2 Peter 3:15-18)**

A great challenge from the Bible comes in the final verse of the lesson text: “But grow in grace, and in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ” (verse 18). People’s lives can become more productive and beneficial when they are willing to grow in the things pertaining to God and His work. But how can people actually become more mature? This verse lists two avenues of growth: grace and knowledge.

Growing in grace indicates the individual has submitted to the help provided by the Lord. No one has the ability to mature spiritually by personal abilities. It has to come through God. He graciously imparts the ability to grow, but it does take some personal effort. This is where the knowledge comes in. Spiritual growth takes place when people are willing to apply themselves to a study of God’s Word. Paul admonished Timothy, “Study to shew thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth” (2 Timothy 2:15). People must apply themselves to understanding Scripture. Peter described the writings of Paul and other Scriptures as sometimes “hard to be understood” (2 Peter 3:15, 16). This did not mean the people could excuse themselves from study because of the difficulty of the task. They were to apply all their efforts to finding the true meaning of Scripture. Their efforts would be rewarded by God’s help in understanding. Far too often, people would rather someone stand before them giving the sense of the Word than to expend the energy to study Scriptures for themselves. Growth comes as people study and apply the biblical message. God’s grace enables them in their struggle.

Conclusion

God wants His people engaged in finding their purpose for living. Part of this search comes as they study the Bible. God’s grace is ready to help in their struggle. Sometimes people find it simply easier not to bother with study. God is never pleased when His people are content with remaining the same. He wants them to become stronger and more mature. This can only happen when they are willing to study the Word and depend on God. Then, His grace will enable them to be exactly what God wants.