

God's Saving Grace

Introduction. The good news of the gospel is that God has the power to transform lives. We have undoubtedly known alcoholics, drug addicts, adulterers, thieves, and others won over to Christ. The Bible records that the maniac at Gadara, the despised tax collector Matthew, blind Bartimaeus, the adulterous Samaritan woman, Zacchaeus, the Roman centurion, Cornelius, the Ethiopian eunuch, the Philippian jailer, Lydia, and many others became believers in Christ.

Of all the conversions ever recorded, none was more remarkable than Saul's. He never lost the wonder that God and could redeem someone like him, and he viewed himself as the supreme example of God's saving grace.

Paul's purpose in writing his first letter to Timothy was to charge him with the formidable task of correcting the church at Ephesus. A major part of that task involved dealing with the false teachers (1:3-10). Since they were presenting a false gospel, Paul gives his testimony concerning the nature of the true gospel: it was "glorious" (1:11). In contrast to the errorists' false view of the law, Paul shows that its proper use brings conviction of sin. His testimony in 1:12-17 is therefore an integral part of the epistle, explaining God's wonderful, amazing grace.

I. ***The Source Of Grace***

- A. Grace may be defined as God's loving forgiveness, by which He grants exemption from punishment. Grace includes the promise of temporal and eternal blessings to guilty and condemned sinners, without any worthiness on their part.
 - 1. When a person works an eight-hour day and receives a fair day's pay for his time, that is a wage. When a person competes with an opponent and receives a trophy for his performance, that is a prize. When a person receives appropriate recognition for his long service or high achievements, that is an award.
 - 2. But when a person is not capable of earning a wage, can win no prize, and deserves no award -- yet receives such a gift anyway -- that is a good picture of God's grace.
- B. The Bible repeatedly affirms that God the Father (Acts 20:24; 1 Corinthians 1:4) and His Son Jesus Christ (John 1:17; Romans 3:24) are the sole sources of grace.
- C. Paul was certainly conscious of the grace of God in his life (1 Corinthians 15:9-10; Ephesians 3:8). Furthermore, Paul was thankful for God's grace in four ways.
 - 1. Paul was conscious of God's gracious choice of him (Romans 1:5).
 - 2. Paul was strengthened by God's grace (Romans 5:2).

3. God graciously considered Paul faithful or trustworthy (1 Corinthians 7:25).
4. God's grace put Paul into service (Colossians 1:23-25).

II. ***The Need For Grace***

- A. The grace of God was especially vivid in Paul's mind because of his past. As a great sinner, he needed great grace.
 1. A "blasphemer" is one who slanders God, who overtly speaks evil of Him (Acts 6:11; 26:11; cf. 2 Timothy 3:2; 2 Peter 2:11).
 2. As a "persecutor," he zealously believed that in order to protect Judaism, he must destroy the gospel (Acts 8:3; 9:1-2, 4-5; 22:4-5; 26:9-11; Galatians 1:13).
 3. An "injurious" person is one with no normal concern for human kindness ("violent aggressor," "insolent opponent"). This is a person driven by violence and contempt for others ("despiteful," Romans 1:30).
- B. As a blasphemer, Paul violated the first four of the Ten Commandments, which speak of man's relationship to God. As a persecutor and injurious man, he violated the last six, which speak of man's relationship to man.
- C. Given Paul's violent past, it is no wonder that Ananias and the disciples (Acts 9:13, 26) were slow to accept him. Remembering what he had been delivered from helped Paul to maintain a humble, grateful attitude (Galatians 2:20; 6:17).

III. ***The Power Of Grace***

- A. Paul's wretchedness was met with God's compassion. Paul was living proof of Romans 5:20. Mercy differs from grace in that grace removes guilt, whereas mercy takes away the misery caused by sin (cf. Matthew 20:30-31, 34).
- B. Paul acted ignorantly in unbelief, not understanding the consequences of his actions; however, he still needed forgiveness because he was responsible for his sins (cf. Luke 23:34). An atheist said, "If there is a God, He may prove Himself by striking me dead right now." Nothing happened. "You see, there is no God," he said. Another responded, "You've only proved that He is a gracious God."
- C. He was the foremost of sinners but he received forgiveness because he was not disobedient (Acts 26:19). When faced with the truth, he believed it and repented. The grace of God is surely powerful enough to redeem the worst sinner who is willing to comply, but sinning willfully after receiving the truth can result in eternal judgment (Hebrews 10:26-27).

IV. *The Measure Of Grace*

- A. Although "grace" only appears in vs. 14, it permeates Paul's thought in 1:12-17. God's grace is greater than man's sin and is sufficient to meet all our needs (2 Corinthians 9:8).
- B. Faith has to work (James 2:17, 24, 26). Love and faith are often linked together in the New Testament (2 Corinthians 8:7; Galatians 5:6, 22; Ephesians 6:23; 1 Thessalonians 5:8). The grace imparted to him was seen in the faith and love which it produced.
 - 1. Once upon a time, a husband and wife did not love each other. The man was very demanding, so much so that he prepared a list of rules and regulations for his wife to follow. He insisted that she read them over every day and obey them to the letter. Among other things, his "do's and don'ts" indicated such details as what time she had to get up in the morning, when his breakfast should be served, and how the housework should be done.
 - 2. After several long years, the husband died. As time passed, the woman fell in love with another man who dearly loved her. Soon they were married. This husband did everything he could to make his new wife happy, continually showering her with tokens of his appreciation. One day as she was cleaning house, she found tucked away in a drawer the list of commands her first husband had drawn up for her. As she looked it over, it dawned on her that even though her present husband had not given her any kind of list, she was doing everything her first husband's list required anyway. She realized she was so devoted to this man that her deepest desire was to please him out of love, not obligation.

V. *The Purpose Of Grace*

- A. The trustworthy statement in 1:15 is a condensed articulation of the gospel. In only eight Greek words is found a marvelous summation of the message. The fact that "He came into the world" implies His incarnation and preexistence.
- B. The "world" refers to the world of humanity, which is blind, lost, and condemned to hell because of its hostility to God (1 John 5:19). Christ's purpose in coming into this fallen world was to save sinners (Matthew 1:21; Luke 2:11).
- C. In the realm of sinners, Paul describes himself as foremost of all (1 Corinthians 15:9; Ephesians 3:8). It is hard to imagine anyone worse than a blasphemer of God and persecutor of His church.
 - 1. The ultimate purpose of salvation is to display God's grace, power, and patience, thereby producing a true worshiper of God.
 - 2. Paul's point about Christ's patience was to show that if the Lord was patient with the worst of sinners, no one is beyond the reach of His

grace (2 Peter 3:9). Paul was living proof ("a pattern") that God can save any sinner.

VI. ***The Response Of Grace***

- A. In view of the mercy He had shown so great a sinner, and having begun the passage with thanksgiving, Paul now closes with a doxology, or an outbreak of grateful emotion.
- B. "Eternal" literally means "of the ages." It refers to the two ages in Jewish thought, the present age, and the age to come. God exists outside of time, but He acts within its confines in His scheme of redemption.
- C. God is immortal and imperishable. He will never know death, decay, or loss of strength. All other monarchs but God pass from this life -- and are just as liable to die at any moment as any other men
- D. Because God is invisible, He can be known only by self-revelation (1 Corinthians 2:9-13). That He is the only God is a fundamental truth of scripture (Isaiah 43:10; 44:8; 45:5). He alone is worthy of all honor and glory forever and ever. "Amen" is a strong affirmation of truth.

Conclusion. In contrast to the erroneous teachers, Paul emphasizes the true gospel and his participation in it by God's grace. That grace is available to the worst sinner who comes to the Lord Jesus Christ in humble faith, repentance, and confession. Maybe you are ready to come to Jesus today and be baptized into Christ. If you are, make your submission to God's will known among the assembled saints here today by responding to the gospel call.