

The God of All Grace...

Grace: “The free flow of divine benevolence.” Not—“unmerited favor.” The word in Greek *charis*—is the root of the word for “free gift.” Now it is obvious that a gift is a gift, and not something merited, or earned; but, to call attention to the fact that it is unmerited, is to destroy the impact of the giving. It is to give with one hand, and take away with the other.

Benevolence, of course, means good will. The angels announced, “Peace on earth, good will to men.” To limit this to “men of good will,” as some have translated it, once again, makes God’s gift to earth, dependent on human goodness, which destroys the very meaning of grace. That the people of earth are decadent, and unable to help themselves, is the persistent message of the Bible. God has, literally, bathed the world in His grace. In spite of the many distortions and perversions of God’s creation, and in spite of human abuses of it, there is still a pervasive note of life and goodness in the midst of it all. It is like the radiation of light from behind an eclipse. Everywhere, there are still the unmistakable hallmarks of the Creator. The prophet, Jeremiah, in the midst of his lamentations over the disastrous destiny of Israel, yet cries out—“*It is of the Lord’s mercies that we are not consumed, because His compassions fail not. They are new every morning: great is thy faithfulness*” (Lamentations 3:22,23). Learn to trust God with your circumstances, and you will see the aura of light from behind the eclipse that now seems to cover the sun. Satan will try to convince you that God’s grace is limited. “Where is the mercy of God? Would a God of mercy allow such things to happen?” The truth of the matter is that we do not know what God is doing. There is a generation gap, as with parents and children. We must trust Him to work it all out. “Shall not the God of all the earth do right?” Ultimately, we will see that God knew what He was doing all along. Appearances are so often deceptive. Trust in God—not in appearances.

“Who has called you unto His eternal glory in Christ.”

The eternal glory of God is the realm of spirit reality. The essential nature of God is Spirit. The essential nature of the universe is energy. The source of the energy of the universe is God. The channel of the energy of God is Christ, the Logos. “*I am the way*”—the channel of God; “*the truth*”—the essential reality of all things; “*the life*”—the source of all existence.

When we come to Christ, He gives us His Holy Spirit. Thus, we become “partakers of the divine nature” and thus we become an essential part of His eternal glory. Jesus said that only the Spirit gives life; the flesh profits nothing. “*My words are spirit and they are life*” (John 6:63). Forever, we are tied to that which is real. No circumstance on earth; no material misfortune; no physical distress, or human anguish, can take away the ultimate glory of the children of God. Here is apostle Paul to the Romans—“*For I am persuaded that neither death nor life, nor angels nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord*” (Romans 8:38,39). And Jude said, “*Now unto Him that is able to keep you from falling, and to present you faultless before the presence of His glory with exceeding joy*” (Jude 24).

“After that you have suffered a little.”

If God is a God of grace, why all the pain? The first answer that comes to mind is—we don't know, altogether. We get into a lot of trouble, and certainly embarrass God, with our childish human answers to such questions. There is no single, thorough answer in the Scripture, although there are many helpful insights. Job, for instance, suffered as a proof to Satan of the faithfulness of God's people, under affliction. Israel suffered as a penalty for idolatry. Jesus suffered as the sacrificial lamb. To my knowledge, none of God's children, discussed in the Bible, suffered, simply because they could not muster enough faith to be delivered.

But, we do not always know the reasons. Suffering seems to be an essential part of our earthly pilgrimage—of our oneness with Christ. *“If we suffer, we shall also reign with Him”* (II Timothy 2:12). And Paul says to the Romans—*“And if children, then heirs, heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Christ; and so be that we suffer with Him, that we may be also glorified together. For I reckon that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which will be revealed in us”* (Romans 8:17,18).

Suffering is really regarded as a gracious gift from God. *“It is a gracious gift unto you, on the behalf of Christ, not only to believe on Him, but also to suffer for His sake.”* (Philippians 1:29, Greek). But why gracious? Because, if we would share the fellowship of His resurrection, we must also share the fellowship of His suffering. (Philippians 3:10). But why is that so necessary? I don't know—you'll have to ask God.

The suffering is described as “a little.” Perhaps for a little time; perhaps a little bit. In either case, in the words of Paul, *“For I reckon that the sufferings of the present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us.”* A few years of suffering, for an eternity of glory. That seems a fair enough exchange. One thing is certain—the suffering does end; the glory prevails. “This, too, shall pass.”

It is quite consistently true, that for those who are submissive to Christ in their sufferings, and yield it up as a sacrifice to Him, there is adequate grace to cope. It is difficult for one to watch another suffer, and not wonder, seriously, how one might personally cope with such a situation. At that point, it is easy to question the grace of God. But, there are myriads of God's afflicted children on the earth, who would testify to the fact that in the crisis, they did sense the sustaining grace of Christ. Furthermore, without attempting to substitute psychological process, for faith, it must be observed that throughout medical history, the human system responds to a positive attitude in the midst of one's afflictions. There is certainly grace in the embracing of one's lot in life, and receiving it from the hand of God.

Restore, establish, strengthen, give foundation to.

Katartidzo: “to mend, put back together, restore, unite.” Not, “make perfect.” as in the King James version. In the faulty assumption that there is an earthly goal of perfection, many a Christian has lived in perpetual defeat. The goal of perfection, is out of reach at the earthly level. The Bible does not use the word, “perfect” as we understand it, of the earthly condition. Even in the Gospels, where Jesus said, *“Be ye perfect, as your Father in heaven is perfect,”* the word

used there—*teleo*—means, “fulfilled.” Fulfillment for us means coming to the purpose for which God made us—that is to be spirit beings. When we take the Spirit of Christ in us, we become partakers of the divine nature, and are thus fulfilled. To attempt, on the earth, to be perfect, as God is perfect, is to put ourselves in the worst kind of bondage. The Greek word in this passage in Peter—*katartidzo*—means to be “mended,” or “restored.” That makes sense. An heirloom vase is broken. It cannot be disposed of. It is mended, by an expert. Once again it becomes serviceable, and displays the blooms for which it was intended. It is restored, but not perfect. As long as we are on the earth, we will bear the scars of our decadent heritage, but we are restored, and serviceable, and cherished. We are now received by God. We are blameless, but not flawless.

We are urged to walk worthily of the Lord. We are exhorted to take care of our conduct. But provision is made for the inevitable lapses that come. “*My little children, these things I write unto you that you sin not. And if anyone sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ, the righteous One*” (I John 2:1). Carefulness of conduct does not make us spiritual—it will never remove the cracks from the vase—but, being spiritual, we care about our conduct and avoid the snares that Satan has laid for us. We take satisfaction in being able to display, again, the blooms of God’s glory.

Not only are we mended and restored, but we are also given a footing on the foundation of God. The Greek word, here translated, “settle,” is from the word *themelion*—foundation. We are established forever in the “city which has foundations, whose builder and maker is God.”

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