

“PARTAKERS OF MY GRACE”

Philippians 1.7

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The Charlie Kirk memorial service near Phoenix has been underway for about forty-five minutes.

“Precious in the sight of the LORD *is* the death of his saints.”¹

While it may seem routine to some, the best way to honor the LORD and pay tribute to His choice servant who has fallen is to faithfully discharge your ministry duties, obligations, and responsibilities without interruption.

God blesses our lives in ways we frequently do not understand. At this time, I want to speak to you about how God blesses believers by blessing those called to minister to believers.

Turn in your Bible to Paul’s letter to the Philippians, an epistle he wrote while imprisoned in Rome. When you find Philippians 1.7, I invite you to stand for the reading of our text:

“Even as it is meet for me to think this of you all, because I have you in my heart; inasmuch as both in my bonds, and in the defence and confirmation of the gospel, ye all are partakers of my grace.”

The particular focus of our attention will be the last phrase, “ye all are partakers of my grace.” What was true for the Philippians with respect to the Apostle Paul is also true for believers in our day. Church members are, to a greater or lesser degree, partakers of God’s grace in their pastor’s life. Do you have a pastor? Hearing someone speak does not mean you have a pastor.

I once talked to a troubled boy. I loved the kid, I liked the kid, and I wanted to see God work in his life. However, he stubbornly resisted the means God had established to bless him. To put it another way, the kid simply would not listen to me. He was far too stubborn, far too proud. Unless he listened to me, for there was on one else who ministered grace to him, it was unlikely that he would ever turn his life around.

Turn to First Corinthians, so I can lay some groundwork for you to follow the train of thought. You folks need to realize that I know I am not much. Whatever is accomplished in my life and ministry is entirely attributable to the grace of God. As Paul wrote in First Corinthians 15.10,

“by the grace of God I am what I am.”

Writing to that troubled congregation, the apostle made sure, before he addressed the specific problems the congregation faced, the members of that Church understood some important truths: First, he made sure they understood that the grace of God *is* available to them as Church members. In First Corinthians 1.4-5, this is clearly stated:

- ⁴ I thank my God always on your behalf, for the grace of God which is given you by Jesus Christ;
- ⁵ That in every thing ye are enriched by him, in all utterance, and *in* all knowledge

Next, in verses 6 and 7, he made plain the fact that the grace of God ***had always been*** available to those Church members:

- ⁶ Even as the testimony of Christ was confirmed in you:
- ⁷ So that ye come behind in no gift; waiting for the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ

¹ Psalm 116.15

Third, in verses 8 and 9, he showed that the grace of God *would always be* available to those Church members:

- 8 Who shall also confirm you unto the end, *that ye may be* blameless in the day of our Lord Jesus Christ.
- 9 God *is* faithful, by whom ye were called unto the fellowship of his Son Jesus Christ our Lord.

Our confidence that God's grace will always be available is partly based upon our confidence in Christ, "Who shall also confirm" believers "unto the end," and partly based upon the character of God, Who is faithful.

Therefore, let no member of our Church deny that God's grace was available, is available, and will always be available to us as we make use of the means of grace God has provided for our use. The Corinthian members' problem was that they had not availed themselves of God's abundant grace. Is that your problem?

Sadly, Church members sometimes do frustrate the grace of God. In Galatians 2.21, Paul wrote, "I do not frustrate the grace of God," suggesting, of course, that the members of the various Galatian congregations were doing that very thing. In Galatians 5.4, Paul referred to falling from grace when he wrote, "ye are fallen from grace."

Precisely what is falling from grace lies outside the scope of this message. Whatever it is, it cannot be a good thing, even though it is a possible thing for Church members. I will insist that falling from grace *is not* losing one's salvation.

What about Second Corinthians 6.1, where Paul and his co-laborers pleaded with the Corinthian members that they "receive not the grace of God in vain"? That is, God's grace is received in vain if it does not produce the result God designs. How are you growing, how are you serving, how are you bearing fruit? If grace is ministered to you by various means but nothing results, you receive the grace of God in vain.

It is when my duties as a preacher take me elsewhere that I am reminded how very much I love you folks, how very central to my existence is this pastoral ministry God has called me to, and how feeble a minister of the Gospel I am. As poor as I am, I would be completely bankrupt but for God's precious grace.

Therefore, because God's grace was, is, and will be available to you, and should therefore be availed by you, and so you will not frustrate the grace of God, fall from God's grace, or receive God's grace in vain, I bring this message from God's Word to our Church members.

In Second Corinthians 9.8, Paul declared to the Corinthian congregants that

"God *is* able to make all grace abound toward you; that ye, always having all sufficiency in all *things*, may abound to every good work."

That is, Paul stated yet again that God has grace sufficient for each and every one of our needs, enabling us by His grace to do the good works He wants us to do, enabling us to live the life He has called us to live.

Keeping in mind that we have not yet established what God's grace is, only that whatever it is it is available to each and every member of our Church, as well as members of other Churches faithful to Christ, allow me to encourage you with three very simple points:

First, THE NECESSITY OF GOD'S GRACE

There can be no doubt that grace is critically important. After all, what distinguished Noah from everyone else of his generation is stated succinctly in Genesis 6.8:

"But Noah found grace in the eyes of the LORD."

Everyone else perished in the Flood, but Noah found grace. Grace is absolutely necessary, but for what?

First, for salvation from sin's penalty. In Acts 18.27, Luke, the companion of Paul and the author of the book of Acts, described those whose sins had been forgiven, who were saved from the penalty of their sins through faith in Jesus Christ, as those "which had believed through grace." Thus, it is by the grace of God that sinners come to faith in Christ for the forgiveness of their sins. In Romans 3.23-25 we see the same truth stated in a different way:

- 23 For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God;
- 24 Being justified freely by his grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus:
- 25 Whom God hath set forth *to be* a propitiation through faith in his blood, to declare his righteousness for the remission of sins that are past, through the forbearance of God.

So you see, faith is the result of God's grace. This is just another way of saying that believing is the result of God's grace. In other words, it is by God's grace that a person is saved from the penalty of his sins.

Next, grace is absolutely necessary for salvation from sin's power. I do not need to take you back to First Corinthians chapter one to remind you that before Paul addressed their various sin problems, he pointed out that God's grace was, is, and ever would be available to deliver those Church members from the power of their sins. Christians *always* struggle with personal sins. How are believers to experience victory over the sins that plague us? God's grace. But for God's grace in any Christian's life he would be overwhelmed by his sins. So you see, each and every day, in every conceivable way, the child of God has a constant and ongoing need for God's grace, so that he might not be overwhelmed by his sins.

Finally, grace is absolutely necessary for salvation from sin's presence. If you are a child of God, you entertain the hope that someday you will arrive at your anticipated destination of heaven and the presence of the Lord. Of course, if you are not a believer you will surely go to Hell, on your way to your ultimate destiny of the lake of fire, where the worm dieth not and the fire is not quenched. Just how do you think you will actually end up in heaven? Speaking about the Second Coming of the Lord Jesus Christ and your anticipated rendezvous with the Savior at that time, First Peter 1.13 reads,

"Wherefore gird up the loins of your mind, be sober, and hope to the end for the grace that is to be brought unto you at the revelation of Jesus Christ."

So, it is by grace that a sinner is saved from the penalty of his sins. It is by grace that a Christian is saved from the power of his sins during the course of his Christian life. As well, it is by grace that the Christian is brought into the presence of the Savior. Whatever this thing called grace is (and we have not yet established what grace is to this point), it is absolutely necessary for your salvation and eternal well-being.

Next, THE NATURE OF GOD'S GRACE

I am not of the opinion that anyone completely understands what God's grace is, no matter how much you study the Bible. However, there are a couple of things about God's grace that we can understand:

First, grace has to do with God's favor. This can be seen in Luke 2.40, in connection with the Lord Jesus Christ:

"And the child grew, and waxed strong in spirit, filled with wisdom: and the grace of God was upon him."

Did God the Father like the Lord Jesus Christ when He walked the earth as a child? Of course, He did. Was He kindly disposed toward Him? Of course, He was. Did God the Father bless His Son at that time? Yes, He did. So, it is obvious that whatever else grace signifies, it must include favor toward someone, being kindly disposed toward someone, blessing in some way.

Of course, our concern is with God's favor toward believers. In Romans 1.7, we read these words:

"To all that be in Rome, beloved of God, called *to be* saints: Grace to you and peace from God our Father, and the Lord Jesus Christ."

This is a fairly common greeting from the Apostle Paul, following a pattern found in a number of his letters. The greeting is revealing. It shows that those who are beloved of God, who are also described as saints, are recipients of both grace and peace from God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

My friends, the peace that a believer enjoys with God is based upon that same person receiving grace from God. No grace, no peace. Turn to Romans 11.6:

"And if by grace, then *is it* no more of works: otherwise grace is no more grace. But if *it be* of works, then is it no more grace: otherwise work is no more work."

As much as any other passage in the Bible, this verse shows that, however grace is acquired, it is not deserved by meritorious works.

To put it another way, you do not earn God's favor by doing good deeds. The point is, there is nothing you can do to purchase God's favor, for as soon as it is paid for by someone (as soon as it is worked for), it is no longer grace. How important is this to understand? There are few things more important.

You cannot earn, nor will you ever deserve, salvation from the penalty of your sins. You cannot earn, nor will you ever deserve, salvation from the power of sin in your Christian life. No Christian ever earns or deserves any of God's blessings, no matter how obedient or consecrated his life is. Thus, though you may be saved from your sins and experience victory over sins in your Christian life, you still do not deserve to go to heaven. That, too, is a blessing God gives to His own by grace.

Abraham's selection by God was by grace. Joseph's imprisonment was by grace. Job's trials were by grace. The martyrdom of John the Baptist was by grace. The thorn in Paul's flesh was by God's grace.

Finally, THE "MEANS OF GRACE"

Just because grace is not something that a person can *earn* by working for it, does not mean that grace is not something that a person can *acquire* by working for it. What I mean by that is that the method by which God sometimes gives grace to His children is by means of things He wants us to do. This gives rise to a phrase the Puritans used to call the "means of grace," by which they referred to something God wants His children to do through which He blesses them with grace. Thus, though doing stuff does not make anyone deserve God's grace, doing stuff is the means by which God blesses His children. For example:

First, there is the grace of Church membership and faithfulness as a member. No one deserves to be saved. No one deserves to be Scripturally baptized after conversion to Christ. And no one deserves the blessing of Church membership and the profound spiritual benefits that can be had as a Church member. That said, who can deny that God's plan for *every* Christian is to be a Church member, where discipleship takes place, where equipping for the work of the ministry by gifted men is accomplished, and where the very best context for addressing the sin issues we have in our lives is accomplished. The first major step for a Christian to avail himself of the means of grace is membership and faithfulness in his Church.

Then, there is the grace of speaking. Written to a congregation, in Ephesians 4.29, we read these words:

"Let no corrupt communication proceed out of your mouth, but that which is good to the use of edifying, that it may minister grace unto the hearers."

This means that you are an instrument through which God gives grace to other Christians by means of the words that you speak to them; words that edify and encourage, words that instruct and exhort, words that benefit and bless. Of course, in order for this means of grace to operate effectively, the person you speak to must be of a mind to *listen*, to pay attention, to *heed* your words.

A specific kind of this means of grace is preaching. When Puritans referred to making use of the means of grace they usually meant attending Church services and sitting under the preaching of God's Word. Though First Corinthians 1.21 does not specifically make mention of grace, since preaching is the ministry of the Word the preacher must be understood to be someone God uses to minister grace to the hearer, since salvation is by grace through faith in response to the preaching of God's Word:

"For after that in the wisdom of God the world by wisdom knew not God, it pleased God by the foolishness of preaching to save them that believe."

I think it is easy to see how ignoring preaching, refusing to heed the preaching, and not even attending your Church to hear your pastor's preaching, would all be examples of frustrating the grace of God. As an aside, do you imagine that God will use me to minister grace to someone attending our Church who ought to be attending his home Church? Or that God will use someone else to minister to one of our members who ought to be here but isn't? It is not God's pattern to reward misconduct.

Another means of grace is praying. Hebrews 4.16 reads,

"Let us therefore come boldly unto the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need."

Several observations related to this verse: *First*, "the throne of grace," showing us that all grace, all divine favor, every blessing (no matter how undeserved) comes from the throne of the God of all grace. God's favor and blessing are what every person needs, and what no one can do well without. *Second*, some grace can be had by praying for it. Not that anyone deserves God's grace, but there is grace come from God that will never be obtained but by asking for it, just as there is grace come from God that will never be had but by listening to preaching or paying attention to the counsel of a mature Christian. If you do not pray, there is grace from God you will not get:

"ye have not, because ye ask not."

Third, grace must be sought. Notice that Hebrews 4.16 reveals that you go to God in prayer to "find grace to help in time of need." In like manner, you go to Church to find grace through preaching, or you seek the advice of a mature and wise believer as a means of finding grace. The point I seek to make here is that you need grace and you are responsible to go after it by Scriptural means, and to seek it as something you need.

Then, though surprising to some, there is the means of grace which is the grace of giving. In Second Corinthians 8.1, Paul made reference to the willingness and the ability God gave to the members of the Macedonian Churches to give to Paul's relief effort, even though they were very, very poor:

"Moreover, brethren, we do you to wit of the grace of God bestowed on the churches of Macedonia."

This grace of giving was not tithes, since tithing is not giving at all, but returning to God that portion of your income which actually belongs to Him and which He wants returned to Him. The grace of giving is giving above your tithes, to special projects that members work together to support, doing together what we cannot or only feebly do alone. With Paul it was a collection for Christians in Judea facing starvation. For us it may be ongoing offerings above the tithe to reach out through our missionaries to plant Churches, or a one-time yearly offering to recover the funds we have lost during these difficult times to support the ministry of our Church, an

offering we call the PayCheck Sunday special offering. Through the act of giving to the cause of Christ, God blesses Church members, and it is a matter of grace.

I conclude this message by pointing out the grace of partaking of my grace. I mentioned at the beginning that I once talked to a kid who did not do a good job of listening to me. Turn to Philippians 1.7 once again to see what that kid robbed himself of. In the last phrase, Paul reminded the Philippians, “ye all are partakers of my grace.” I am not claiming greatness. Neither do I claim great skill. However, God has called me and others like me and equipped us for the Gospel ministry. To be sure, many men are called and given a much greater measure of grace than I. Still, there are some people in this world who God has provided grace for through my life and ministry. Those people who should listen to me, who God is pleased to bless through my preaching, do themselves a great disservice when they miss Church, when they do not pay attention, or when they refuse to do what God’s Word that I preach tells them to do. Some people listen to me but do not follow my counsel, will not respond to me as their pastor, or insist on being a sheep who refuses the benefit of the shepherd. Such people may be among those who “receive the grace of God in vain.” In Ephesians 4.7, we are told by Paul that “every one of us is given grace according to the measure of the gift of Christ.” That is, every member is given grace by God and has the capacity to impart grace into the life of others in some way. However, one who has been called to the Gospel ministry, who is equipped by God to minister grace to those who hear him, should be listened to with special care, because the grace available to a member in his Church is not guaranteed to be provided in another congregation. Meaning? God commits to blessing you in your Church, but not necessarily to the same degree in another congregation.²

Some of you in this room do quite well in your Christian lives, in part, because you pay attention when your pastor ministers the Word. You do not frustrate the grace of God. You see yourself as needy, and you both want God’s grace and make use of God’s grace when it is available.

You are serious about praying, serious about listening to sermons, serious about reading your Bible, serious about being a good and gracious giver. Can I tell you something? God’s grace is evident in your life.

But some people make a point of staying as far from a pastor’s influence as they can. They are not committed to making good use of their Gospel minister to their own benefit. Of such, I would also suspect they do not study their Bible or pray as they ought.

Are you aware of how important God’s grace for living is? It is not apparent that some seek after grace by the means God has ordained. Not that I am a special man. My feet are feet of clay. However, like Paul, I can say, “by the grace of God I am what I am: and his grace which *was bestowed* upon me was not in vain.”

My desire for every member is for you to avail yourself of God’s abundant grace. “Noah found grace in the eyes of the LORD.” The word “found” translates a Hebrew verb, *aum*, meaning attain to, find.³ Did God make use of some kind of means to impart grace to Noah? God typically uses means.

God did not inject Noah with grace. God did not download grace into him while he sat in a recliner. Though Noah did not deserve God’s grace, he somehow availed himself of the means of grace to acquire that grace. Noah almost certainly listened to the preaching of Enoch. And he certainly prayed.

The point that I seek to make is this: You need God’s grace. There is some grace God has for you that can *only* be obtained by the right use of means, by praying for it, by reading the Bible for it, by attending Church for it, by listening to wise counsel for it, or by listening carefully to the preaching of God’s Word for it.

² Thomas M. Strouse, *En Epheso: An Exegetical Commentary On The Epistle To The Ephesians*, (Newington, CT: Emmanuel Baptist Publications, 2009), pages 183-185.

³ Francis Brown, S. R. Driver & Charles A. Briggs, *The New Brown-Driver-Briggs-Gesenius Hebrew And English Lexicon*, (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 1979), pages 592-594.

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An undeniable fact of the Bible is God's design to give grace to His children through the life of another believer, frequently a preacher. I invite you to partake of my grace. Listen when I preach. Learn when I teach. Respond when I counsel. God greatly blesses me when I can be a blessing to you.

A final thought. Secure for yourself grace from God through giving when comes the time for our PayCheck Sunday special offering next week.