

GRACE TO OVERCOME

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I touched on the topic of grace last week.

It's an important topic — yet not one we hear much of (I don't recollect hearing any sermons in my Church of God days)?

But the term is used frequently in the New Testament. "Charis" is used over 200 times — far more frequent than ... say ... "Love".

Virtually every letter opens and closes with "grace". Even the last verse in the Bible. Paul wrote often about grace.

But what about us? Is it in our minds continually?

If we're not conscious of grace in our lives — it is likely we'll miss out on its benefits — its power and impact.

Let's look at Paul.

Acts 20:22-24

22 **And see, now I go bound in the spirit to Jerusalem, not knowing the things that will happen to me there,**

23 except that the Holy Spirit testifies in every city, saying that chains and tribulations await me.

24 **But none of these things move me; nor do I count my life dear to myself, so that I may finish my race with joy, and the ministry which I received from the Lord Jesus, to testify to the gospel of the grace of God.** *(Paul is not going to swerve from his course)*

His message was about the gospel ... the good news of the grace of God.

Acts 20:32

32 "So now, brethren, **I commend you to God and to the word (message) of His grace, which is able to build you up and give you an inheritance among all those who are sanctified.** *(This grace build us up)*

It implies that Paul had spoken ... and taught ... a great deal about grace.

Acts 13:38-39

38 Therefore let it be known to you, brethren, **that through this Man is preached to you the forgiveness of sins;**

39 **and by Him everyone who believes is justified from all things from which you could not be justified by the law of Moses.**

Acts 13:42-43

42 So when the Jews went out of the synagogue, the Gentiles/people begged that these words might be preached to them the next Sabbath.

43 Now when the congregation had broken up, many of the Jews and devout proselytes followed Paul and Barnabas, who, speaking to them, **persuaded them to continue in the grace of God.**

Either Paul had been discussing the grace of God ... explicitly ... or Luke believed the Word accurately reflected Paul's teaching.

And note: "continue" ... remain ... with the message of grace — which was very different from what most had heard.

Acts 14:1-3

1 Now it happened in Iconium that they went together to the synagogue of the Jews, and so spoke that a great multitude both of the Jews and of the Greeks believed.

2 **But the unbelieving Jews stirred up the Gentiles/peoples and poisoned their minds against the brethren.**

3 Therefore they stayed there a long time, speaking boldly in the Lord, **who was bearing witness to the word (message) of His grace**, granting signs and wonders to be done by their hands. *(God endorses their message by granting signs and wonders)*

You can't talk about God's purpose for mankind ... and how to live it out ... without explaining all about grace.

Believers need to hear about grace! It's a great tragedy if we never think about it.

Acts 14:23-26

23 So when they had appointed elders in every church, and prayed with fasting, they commended them to the Lord in whom they had believed.

24 And after they had passed through Pisidia, they came to Pamphylia.

25 Now when they had preached the word in Perga, they went down to Attalia.

26 From there they sailed to Antioch, **where they had been commended to the grace of God for the work which they had completed.**

Commended to the grace of God. For what reason? Just empty platitudes?

Commended to the grace of God. One translations says: “Entrusted to the grace of God”. Another translation: “Handed over to God’s powerful grace”.

Either Luke ... or believers in Antioch ... had realised the importance of grace in their journeys.

So ... what does grace mean?

It is often explained as “unmerited favour”. That is true ... though incomplete ... there is more to it than that.

Certainly God’s favour is available. And we don’t earn it. It’s not a reward or wage. It’s not performance-based. It’s not that we get more grace because we work harder.

Analogy. Grace is like the sun’s rays. There is nothing you and I can do to make the sun shine more.

But we can choose to stand in the sunshine — or go indoors into a dark room. Whether we enjoy pleasant warm sunshine — or live in a dark cave ... is up to us.

The grace itself doesn’t change. It is up to us whether we receive and walk in grace.

Back in New Testament times ... most believed you had to gain any god’s approval by works or sacrifices — whether they were pagans or even most of the Jews.

God's unmerited favour and grace was different to what they'd all heard.

But grace (charis) is more than "just" unmerited favour.

One Bible scholar wrote: "In Paul's writings ... charis is never merely an attitude or disposition of God. Consistently it denotes effective divine power in the experience of men".

Working among us ... building us up.

Dr James Strong (of Strong's Exhaustive Concordance): "Graciousness ... especially the divine influence upon the heart, and its reflection in the life".

We should be able to see the influence of the grace of God in our lives.

My view: "Grace is the dynamic power of God ... working in the inner man ... to strengthen us ... establish us ... and to keep us from falling".

Like the sun shining I was talking about earlier. It doesn't "just" shine. It has a dynamic effect on many living things. They need the sun's light and warmth to grow strong ... to blossom ... to mature ... to bear fruit.

Grace can do the same through its influence in the heart.

1 Corinthians 15:9-10

9 For I am the least of the apostles, who am not worthy to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God.

10 **But by the grace of God I am what I am, and His grace toward me was not in vain; but I laboured more abundantly than they all, yet not I, but the grace of God which was with me.**

Paul laboured more than all of the apostles. "Yet — in reality — it's not really me. It is God's grace working within me".

Something Paul had to learn. He had been a self-righteous Pharisee ... leaning on his own power and intellect. It took time to "get out of the way" and let God's grace empower him.

Galatians 2:20

20 **I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith of the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me.**

Christ lives in me!

Paul was completely conscious of this. He knew it was not just his abilities. He was empowered by Jesus Christ. Are you and I? Do we see our lives empowered by the grace of God?

Paul had a really hard life. If he'd had to rely on his own abilities he would have failed. Like us?!

2 Corinthians 1:2-4

2 **Grace** to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

3 Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, **the Father of mercies and God of all comfort,**

4 **who comforts us in all our tribulation, that we may be able to comfort those who are in any trouble, with the comfort with which we ourselves are comforted by God.**

In verses 3 and 4 the word "Comfort" is mentioned 5 times.

The Greek word there is from the Greek: Parakaleo — to come along side to encourage and strengthen.

The same Greek word from which we get "The Paraclete" — the Comforter of John 14, 15, 16 — which is the Holy Spirit — which encourages and strengthens.

2 Corinthians 1:8-12

8 For we do not want you to be ignorant, brethren, of our trouble which came to us in Asia: that we were burdened beyond measure, above strength, so that we despaired even of life.

9 Yes, **we had the sentence of death in ourselves, that we should not trust in ourselves but in God who raises the dead,**

10 **who delivered us from so great a death, and does deliver us; in whom we trust that He will still deliver us,**

11 you also helping together in prayer for us, that thanks may be given by many persons on our behalf for the gift granted to us through many.

12 For our boasting is this: the testimony of our conscience that **we conducted ourselves in the world in simplicity and godly sincerity**, not with fleshly wisdom **but by the grace of God**, and more abundantly toward you.

2 Corinthians 1:9 (GNT)

9 We felt that the death sentence had been passed on us. **But this happened so that we should rely, not on ourselves, but only on God, who raises the dead.**

Paul had to learn to be strong in the Lord — in His grace and power. Not to rely on himself. So do we. In this world we'll all face obstacles ... maybe occasional persecution. There is no promise that we can avoid it all — but with God's grace we can live through it and triumph.

2 Corinthians 11:1-4

1 Oh, that you would bear with me in a little folly—and indeed you do bear with me.

2 For I am jealous for you with godly jealousy. **For I have betrothed you to one husband, that I may present you as a chaste virgin to Christ.**

3 **But I fear, lest somehow, as the serpent deceived Eve by his craftiness, so your minds may be corrupted from the simplicity that is in Christ.**

4 **For if he who comes preaches another Jesus whom we have not preached, or if you receive a different spirit which you have not received, or a different gospel which you have not accepted—you may well put up with it!**

Paul is worried about their spiritual health.

FALSE PREACHERS — DANGER!

2 Corinthians 11:12-15

12 But what I do, I will also continue to do, that I may cut off the opportunity from those who desire an opportunity to be regarded just as we are in the things of which they boast.

13 **For such are false apostles, deceitful workers, transforming themselves into apostles of Christ.**

14 And no wonder! **For Satan himself transforms himself into an angel of light.**

15 **Therefore it is no great thing if his ministers also transform themselves into ministers of righteousness,** whose end will be according to their works.

FALSE MINISTERS!

Satan has ministers coming to church!

2 Corinthians 11:22-33

22 **Are they Hebrews? So am I. Are they Israelites? So am I. Are they the seed of Abraham? So am I.**

23 **Are they ministers of Christ?**—I speak as a fool—**I am more: in labors more abundant, in stripes above measure, in prisons more frequently, in deaths often.**

24 **From the Jews five times I received forty stripes minus one.**

25 **Three times I was beaten with rods; once I was stoned; three times I was shipwrecked; a night and a day I have been in the deep;**

26 **in journeys often, in perils of waters, in perils of robbers, in perils of my own countrymen, in perils of the Gentiles, in perils in the city, in perils in the wilderness, in perils in the sea, in perils among false brethren;**

27 **in weariness and toil, in sleeplessness often, in hunger and thirst, in fastings often, in cold and nakedness—**

28 **besides the other things, what comes upon me daily: my deep concern for all the churches.** *(Paul has a pretty tough life)*

29 Who is weak, and I am not weak? Who is made to stumble, and I do not burn with indignation?

30 **If I must boast, I will boast in the things which concern my weakness.**

31 **The God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who is blessed forever, knows that I am not lying.**

32 **In Damascus the governor, under Aretas the king, was guarding the city of the Damascenes with a garrison, desiring to arrest me;**

33 **but I was let down in a basket through a window in the wall, and escaped from his hands.** *(There was no keeping back the Apostle Paul)*

PAUL'S TROUBLES! PLENTY!

Paul was at war continually!

Most of us would have quit! We would not have coped!

So how did Paul cope — write half of the New Testament — finish his course?
By the grace of God!

2 Corinthians 12:7-10

7 And lest I should be exalted above measure by the abundance of the revelations, **a thorn in the flesh was given to me, a messenger/angel of Satan to buffet (beat) me, lest I be exalted above measure.**

8 Concerning this thing I pleaded with the Lord three times that it might depart from me.

9 And He said to me, **“My grace is sufficient for you, for My strength is made perfect in (your) weakness.”** Therefore most gladly I will rather boast in my weaknesses, **that the power of Christ may rest upon me.**

10 Therefore I take pleasure in weaknesses, in reproaches, in needs, in persecutions, in distresses, for Christ’s sake. **For when I am weak, then I am strong.** *(When I am weak in myself and lean on the grace of God — I am strong)*

Paul learned that God’s grace was “sufficient”.

Thayers says: “to be possessed of unfailing strength”.

The Creator of the universe is giving His power to Paul. It is sufficient. More than enough!

Ephesians 6:10

10 Finally, my brethren, **be strong in the Lord and in the power of His might.**

Be strong in the Lord. How do you do that? Well ...

2 Timothy 2:1

1 You therefore, my son, **be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus.**

Timothy faced challenges. He needed help! He needed the grace that comes from the Lord Jesus Christ.

2 Timothy 4:16-18

16 At my first defence no one stood with me, but all forsook me. May it not be charged against them.

17 But **the Lord stood with me and strengthened me**, so that the message might be preached fully through me, and that all the Gentiles/peoples/nations might hear. Also I was delivered out of the mouth of the lion.

18 **And the Lord will deliver me from every evil work and preserve me for His heavenly kingdom.** To Him be glory forever and ever. Amen!

One translations says: “The Lord poured power into me”.

2 Timothy 4:17 (WEYMOUTH)

17 **The Lord, however, stood by me and filled me with inward strength,**

Or — when I am weak — then I am strong. 😊

1 Timothy 1:12-17

12 And I thank Christ Jesus our Lord who has enabled me, because He counted me faithful, putting me into the ministry,

13 although I was formerly a blasphemer, a persecutor, and an insolent man; (*violently arrogant*) but **I obtained mercy because I did it ignorantly in unbelief.**

14 **And the grace of our Lord was exceedingly abundant, with faith and love which are in Christ Jesus.** (*Paul knows that he owes everything to God's unmerited favour*)

15 This is a faithful saying and worthy of all acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am chief.

16 However, for this reason I obtained mercy, that in me first Jesus Christ might show all longsuffering, as a pattern to those who are going to believe on Him for everlasting life. (*Paul is a good role model for other people*)

17 Now to the King eternal, immortal, invisible, to God who alone is wise, be honor and glory forever and ever. Amen.

1 Timothy 1:14 (AMPLIFIED)

14 **And the grace (unmerited favor and blessing) of our Lord [actually] flowed out superabundantly and beyond measure for me, accompanied by faith and love that are [to be realised] in Christ Jesus.**

God's grace is super-abundant! He doesn't do things by half!

Despite Paul's "baggage" from his early life — and continuing troubles — God's grace was sufficient!

Paul was a trained Old Testament scholar. He would be familiar with:

Isaiah 40:28-31

28 Have you not known?

Have you not heard?

The everlasting God, the Lord,

The Creator of the ends of the earth,

Neither faints nor is weary.

His understanding is unsearchable.

29 **He gives power to the weak,**

And to those who have no might He increases strength.

30 Even the youths shall faint and be weary,

And the young men shall utterly fall,

31 But **those who wait on the Lord**

Shall renew their strength;

They shall mount up with wings like eagles,

They shall run and not be weary,

They shall walk and not faint.

But — we do need to be familiar with God's grace and power for our lives. As New Testament writers were.

It is very easy for grace to be forgotten and ignored.

We need revelation!

Ephesians 1:15-20

15 Therefore I also, after I heard of your faith in the Lord Jesus and your love for all the saints,

16 do not cease to give thanks for you, making mention of you in my prayers:

17 **that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give to you the spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of Him,**

18 **the eyes of your understanding being enlightened; that you may know what is the hope of His calling, what are the riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints,**

19 **and what is the exceeding greatness of His power toward us who believe, according (equal to) to the working of His mighty power**
20 **which He worked in Christ when He raised Him from the dead and seated Him at His right hand in the heavenly places,**

A prayer for wisdom and revelation to know:

- I) Hope
- II) Glorious Inheritance
- III) Exceeding greatness of His power toward us

Ephesians 1:19 (AMPLIFIED BIBLE)

19 **And [so that you can know and understand] what is the immeasurable and unlimited and surpassing greatness of His power in and for us who believe,**

This is something we need to know — and understand. Not just “information” — it’s “revelation”. It comes via God’s spirit.

We can pray for it. We can personalise verses 17-20 — putting our name there.

God’s grace is there! There is a Throne of Grace where we can go — boldly.

But we need to become as aware of Grace — as comfortable with it — as Paul and the other New Testament writers!

Read about grace and reflect on it — be humble — ask for revelation of it!

GOD’S GRACE MAKES THE WEAK STRONG.

“If you’re weak — you’ll fail.
If you’re strong — you’ll prevail”.

Finally. The very last verse of the Bible says: “**The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you all. Amen**”.

God’s sign off is grace.

