

God's Grace ~ Part 4

"Perhaps there is no word in the Bible more precious than Grace."

~ Rick Countryman, Senior Pastor, Big Valley Community Church
Modesto, Ca.

How Do We Appropriate God's Grace ~ Part B

In my last post in this series, we left off discussing the first means of appropriating God's grace is through prayer. In this post, we will look at the second means of appropriating God's grace through consuming the Word of grace and holding onto God's promises.

Consuming the Word of Grace

Let God's Word comfort, strengthen, fill, soothe, and give you the energy to keep going. Get into God's Word every single day of your life. David prayed, ***"I lie prostrate in the dust; revive me, in keeping with your word."*** (Psalm 119:25) If the answer you were looking for to solve your problems was to look within yourself, you'd already be changed and the problem solved. You need to look to God! He's the only one with sustaining strength.

The grace we receive from God, then, is the aid of the Holy Spirit. We do not understand just how the Holy Spirit interacts with our human spirit, but we do know He most often uses His Word. That is, He brings to our mind some Scripture or Scriptures, particularly appropriate to the situation. He may do this through one of our pastor's sermons, through a Christian book we are reading, through the encouraging words of a friend, or through our own reading or study of Scripture.

In Acts 20:32, Sha'ul said to the Ephesian elders, ***"Now I commit you to God and to the word of his grace, which can build you up and give you an inheritance among all those who are sanctified."*** Earlier in verse 24, Sha'ul had referred to the gospel of God's grace, the good news of salvation through faith in Christ Yeshua. In verse 32, however, he referred to "the word of his grace, which can build you up." The reference here is to the ongoing use of Scripture in our daily lives to build us up in the Christian faith. But Sha'ul specifically called it "the word of his grace," the Word through which we come to understand and appropriate God's grace in our daily lives.

The Bible is not merely a book about God; it is a book from God. ***"All Scripture is God-breathed,"*** said Sha'ul (2 Timothy 3:16). The Bible is God's self-revelation to us of all He wants us to know about Himself and His provision for our salvation and our spiritual growth. It is God's only objective, authoritative communication to us.

If we are to appropriate the grace of God then, we must become intimate friends with the Bible. We must seek to know and understand the great truths of Scripture: truths about God and His character, and truths about man and his desperate need of God's grace. We need to get beyond the "how-tos" of Scripture—how to raise children, how to manage finances, how to witness to unbelievers—and all other such utilitarian approaches to Scripture. Such practical instruction from the Bible regarding our daily lives is indeed valuable, but we need to go beyond that.

Our practical age has come to disparage a firm doctrinal understanding of Scripture as being of no practical value. But there is nothing more practical for our daily lives than the knowledge of God. David's chief desire was to gaze upon the beauty of God (see Psalm 27:4)—that is, His holiness and

sovereignty, His wisdom and power, and His faithfulness and unfailing love. Only in Scripture has God revealed to us the truths about His person and His character.

But the Bible is more than merely objective truth; it is actually life-giving and life-sustaining. The words of Scripture are ***"not just idle words for you—they are your life"*** (Deuteronomy 32:47). Growth in the grace of God—whether that be His divine favor to the unworthy, or His divine enabling to the needy—requires growth in our assimilation of the Word of God. In the biological realm, assimilation is the process by which nourishment is changed into living tissue. In the spiritual realm, it is the process by which the written Word of God is absorbed into our hearts and becomes, figuratively speaking, living spiritual tissue.

If we are to appropriate the grace of God, then, we must regularly expose ourselves directly to the Word of God. It is not enough to only hear it preached or taught in our churches on Sundays, as important as those avenues are. We need a regular plan of reading, study, and yes, even memorization. Bible study and Scripture memorization earn no merit with God. We never earn God's blessing by doing these things, any more than we earn His blessing by eating nutritious food. But as the eating of proper food is necessary to sustain a healthy physical life, so the regular intake of God's Word is necessary to sustain a healthy spiritual life and to regularly appropriate His grace.

I strongly advocate Scripture memorization. In our warfare against Satan and his emissaries, we are told to take ***"the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God"*** (Ephesians 6:17). Charles Hodge commented on this statement: "In order to take up God's Word as a sword, we must have it at hand, in our hearts. We must be like the psalmist who said, ***'I treasure your word in my heart, so that I won't sin against you. I have hidden your word in my heart that I might not sin against you.'***" (Psalm 119:11)

Hold On to God's Promises

There are over 7,000 promises from God in the Bible waiting to be claimed. Here's one of my personal favorites: ***"He invigorates the exhausted, He gives strength to the powerless. Young men may grow tired and weary, even the fittest may stumble and fall; but those who hope in Adonai will renew their strength, they will soar aloft as with eagles' wings; when they are running they won't grow weary, when they are walking they won't get tired."*** (Isaiah 40:29-31). Keep your hope in the Lord and your eyes focused on the hope of Heaven, not just on the here and now.

So, if you desire to appropriate God's grace, you must have the sword of the Spirit - the Word of God - available in your mind for the Spirit to use. In fact the structure of Ephesians 6:17 provides a very instructive insight into the interaction between the Holy Spirit and the believer. Sha'ul said we are to take the sword of the Spirit. That is something we must do. And yet it is the Spirit's sword, not ours. He must make it effective. The bare quoting of Scripture does not make it effective in our hearts, only the Spirit can do that. But He will not make His sword effective unless we take it up.

I have provided a PDF version of **Dressing for Battle** taken from Ephesians 6:10-20 that I recommend you pray every day to be prepared for the enemy's onslaught.