

God's Grace ~ Part 17

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

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

"The Sufficiency of God's Grace ~ Part B"

In my last post, we began to look at the sufficiency of God's Grace to get us through our life on planet earth. We'll continue to explore that issue. Our key verse for this mini-series is: ***"But He [Yeshua] said to me, 'My grace is sufficient for you, for power is perfected in weakness.' Therefore, I will most gladly boast all the more about my weaknesses, so that Yeshua's power may reside in me."*** ~ 2 Corinthians 12:9

The Pride of Self-Sufficiency

God never removed Sha'ul's or my thorn, despite our anguished pleas. When Sha'ul wrote these words, it had been fourteen years since he had received the surpassingly great revelations by Yeshua Himself (see 2 Corinthians 12:2). During that time he had suffered many varied adversities. How could he have still needed the thorn to curb any temptation to become conceited? God had an even greater purpose for the thorn. He wanted Sha'ul to experience the sufficiency of His grace. He wanted him to learn that the divine assistance of the Ruach was all he needed. He wanted Sha'ul to learn to lean continually on the Ruach for strength.

Previously, we have seen that God's Grace assumes our sinfulness, guilt, and ill-deservedness. Here we see it also assumes our weakness and inability. Just as grace is opposed to the pride of self-righteousness, so it is also opposed to the pride of self-sufficiency.

The sin of self-sufficiency goes all the way back to the Fall in the Garden of Eden. Satan's temptation of Eve was undoubtedly complex and many faceted. That is, it included what we would now consider a number of different temptations. But one of those facets was the temptation of self-sufficiency.

Satan said to Eve, ***"You will be like God, knowing good and evil."*** (Genesis 3:5) Mankind was created to be dependent upon God: physically, ***"in him we live and move and exist"*** (Acts 17:28); and spiritually, Yeshua said, ***"Apart from me you can't do a thing."*** (John 15:5). God intended our dependence on Him to be conscious and continuous. But Satan tempted Eve to assert her autonomy and self-sufficiency.

Ever since the Fall, God has continually worked to cause His people to realize their utter dependence on Him. He does this through bringing us to the point of human boundary where we have no place to turn but to Him. One of the more dramatic and prolonged illustrations of this is found in His miraculous provision for the Israelite nation in the desert.

After living forty years in the desert, Moshe recounted their experiences in the book of Deuteronomy. This is one of his more vivid recollections: ***"You are to remember everything of the way in which Adonai led you these forty years in the desert, humbling and testing you in order to know what was in your heart — whether you would obey his mitzvot or not. He humbled you, allowing you to become hungry, and then fed you with man [manna is plural form], which neither you nor your ancestors had ever known, to make you understand that a person does not live on food alone but on everything that comes from the mouth of Adonai."*** (Deuteronomy 8:2-3)

God humbled the people and *caused* them to hunger before He fed them. He deliberately brought them to the end of themselves. Then He fed them miraculously with food they had never tasted before. God wanted

them to be acutely aware of the fact that *He* was feeding them; they were dependent on *His* provision every day.

The provision of food, which Israel did not know previously, made plain the lesson that it is not mere food that gives life. Without the divine Word the food itself may not be available. Nothing was possible without Him, and even to eat they had to await His pleasure.

God provided for the Israeli through a continual miracle every day for forty years. He has provided for me and my family through His providential circumstances, also for many years. God wanted the Israeli to realize and remember their utter dependence on Him, so He used an extremity of need and a miraculous provision to capture their attention and teach them a lesson that is difficult to learn. Still, they forgot. How much easier is it, then, for us to forget when God is supplying our needs through ordinary, mundane ways?

It is even more difficult, however, for us to learn our dependence on God in the spiritual realm. A lack of money for food or to make the monthly mortgage payment gets our attention very quickly, and the need is obvious. The money is either available or it isn't. There's no pretending. But we can pretend in the Spiritual realm. We can exist for months—going through the motions, perhaps even teaching Sunday school or serving as an elder or deacon—depending on nothing more than mere natural human resources.

The possible extremity of physical circumstances and my very real dependence on God to meet physical needs serves as a daily reminder of my Spiritual dependence on Him. The physical dependence illustrates the Spiritual dependence, reminding me of Yeshua's words, "Apart from me you can do nothing." Dr. Thompson's words remind me that I am as dependent upon God as the Israeli were. My dependence may not be as obvious, but it is just as real and just as acute as if I had to wait daily for God to rain down manna from heaven. And if I am dependent in the physical realm, how much more dependent am I in the Spiritual realm, where our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against Spiritual forces of evil (see Ephesians 6:12ff for putting on the full armor of God)?

With that question to meditate on, I'll wrap up this mini-series on "The Sufficiency of God's Grace" in my next post.