

Saved by Grace

*“By grace are ye
saved through
faith; and that not
of yourselves: it is
the gift of God.”*

—Ephesians 2:8

THESE WONDERFUL WORDS

These wonderful words speak of our Heavenly Father's loving 'grace' that is promised to his special people of faith who are walking in accordance with his will and purpose during the present Gospel Age. We are given an important perspective concerning the infinite wisdom and loving concern on the part of God, and in connection with his blessings to those whom he is calling to share in Christ's future kingdom. We are thus assured that this calling is working on behalf of our present circumstances and our eternal welfare as New Creatures in Christ Jesus. "The LORD God is a sun and shield: the LORD will give grace and glory: no good thing will he withhold from them that walk uprightly."—Ps. 84:11

EXCEEDING GRACE

The thought of Divine grace being exercised on our behalf points especially to those followers of our Lord who are now being gathered from the world during the present time. The Apostle Paul proclaimed that this exceeding grace of God was for a very special purpose. "Brethren, I count not myself to have apprehended: but this one thing I

do, forgetting those things which are behind, and reaching forth unto those things which are before, I press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus.”—Phil. 3:13,14

One of the words frequently used with reference to the various phases of God’s grace toward his people is ‘exceedingly.’ The apostle tells us that one reason the Law Covenant was given to Israel was that sin might be seen by them in its true sense. In his letter to the Roman brethren he explained this to them. “Was then that which is good made death unto me? God forbid. But sin, that it might appear sin, working death in me by that which is good; that sin by the commandment might become exceeding sinful.”—Rom. 7:13

AWARENESS OF SIN

If no Law Covenant had been made with the Israelites, or if God had not revealed the perfect standards of his Law to his people, the true and exceeding sense of sin in the human family would have become gradually lost. As a result, mankind’s natural impulses would eventually have come to be regarded as right and proper. Selfishness and self-gratification would therefore gain full control, and would have been accepted as the principles governing men’s lives instead of an awareness of the power of sin.

However, the Apostle Paul previously explained to the brethren at Rome, “I was alive without the law once: but when the commandment came, sin revived, and I died. And the commandment, which was ordained to life, I found to be unto death. For sin, taking occasion by the commandment, deceived

me, and by it slew me. Wherefore the law is holy, and the commandment holy, and just, and good.”—vss. 9-12

Paul’s words remind us how mankind has to a considerable extent lost sight of the finer principles of the Divine law, and that many things are said and done which are really transgressions of God’s perfect law. Without having these perfect standards set before us, the apostle points out that these transgressions may not be realized to their fullest extent. Through the Mosaic Law these principles of truth and righteousness were set before men, even as they had originally been when God put them in the heart of his perfect creature Adam.

The psalmist said, “The mouth of the righteous speaketh wisdom, and his tongue talketh of judgment. The law of his God is in his heart; none of his steps shall slide.” (Ps. 37:30,31) When the Israelites were made aware of these perfect standards, they realized they were sinners in ways they had previously not thought about. As Paul had said, ‘Sin revived, and I died.’ Israel had lost the hope of life and the Heavenly Father’s favors and this understanding came to them under the Abrahamic Covenant.

SPIRITUAL ISRAELITES

Those who are called by God during this present Gospel Age are also known as antitypical, or spiritual, Israelites. They have been similarly affected by this understanding and appreciation of sin and its powers of darkness. Before coming to the Lord many of these had wandered in the ways of the world, and where the great principles of right and

wrong were but dimly appreciated by their fallen minds.

By God's wondrous grace he provided for them a mental and moral awakening which took place under the influence of the Holy Spirit and Word of Truth. The ruinous nature of sin was seen in its true light, and to be the source of all the suffering and misery which are the present lot of mankind. The result of this enlightenment was to cause those who were being called by the grace of God to give diligence and to strive against all unrighteousness. They now realized, "All unrighteousness is sin, and there is a sin not leading to death."—I John 5:17, *New American Standard Bible*

Those who came to the Lord in full consecration found that their sins were covered by the wonderful merit of our Lord Jesus' perfect sacrifice. They experienced deliverance from Divine condemnation, and entered into a new condition of justification by faith. They understood, too, that it was only in their hearts that they could live up to the perfect standard of the loving Heavenly Father's perfect requirements. The merit of Christ's blood on their behalf had covered all of their unwilling shortcomings and imperfections of the fallen human flesh.

Newly justified believers in Christ saw the exceedingly sinful nature of sin as a result of the revelation that God had given them. It enabled them to see that through sin all deception, trouble, pain, suffering, and death have come into the world. They realized that it cost the Heavenly Father a stupendous sacrifice in order to provide a Savior for man, even his well-beloved Son. He was the

only one able and willing to carry out God's loving plan for human salvation and for the removal of sin and its terrible results.

GROWTH IN GRACE

The word 'exceeding' was used by Paul when writing to Timothy. "The grace of our Lord was exceeding abundant with faith and love which is in Christ Jesus." (I Tim. 1:14) He reminded Timothy that at an earlier time he had not been a true follower of our Lord Jesus, and had persecuted his people. He explained this to Timothy by saying, "According to the glorious gospel of the blessed God, which was committed to my trust. And I thank Christ Jesus our Lord, who hath enabled me, for that he counted me faithful, putting me into the ministry; Who was before a blasphemer, and a persecutor, and injurious: but I obtained mercy, because I did it ignorantly in unbelief." (vss. 11-13) In spite of his past sinfulness, the grace of our Lord was exceedingly abundant on account of the faith and love that the apostle was able to exercise in Christ Jesus.

Although "all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God" (Rom. 3:23), some have drifted much farther from the paths of righteousness than others, and in many cases some of these have been much more responsible for their condition than others have. "Moreover the law entered, that the offence might abound. But where sin abounded, grace did much more abound: That as sin hath reigned unto death, even so might grace reign through righteousness unto eternal life by Jesus Christ our Lord."—Rom. 5:20,21

The grace of God can indeed be described as a favor that is abounding exceedingly toward those who come to him in true penitence and consecration. The proper heart attitude is necessary before forgiveness and justification to life is possible. The child of God may come to him daily to receive forgiveness for his many sins and shortcomings. Such a gracious arrangement for God's favor to continue toward those who have hearts that are right and pure toward him may be thought of as grace that abounds exceedingly.

GROWTH IN FAITH

In the early days of our walk in newness of life with our dear Lord, we may see something of Christ's salvation and the Divine plan as a whole. We may not yet have built up faith in the wonderful promises, and learned to trust him where we cannot trace him. On one occasion, "the apostles said unto the Lord, Increase our faith." (Luke 17:5) Paul addressed this matter, when he wrote, "We are bound to thank God always for you, brethren, as it is meet, because that your faith groweth exceedingly, and the charity of every one of you all toward each other aboundeth." (II Thess. 1:3) We see from the Apostle Paul that it is through the Lord's providence and his wise dealings with us that our faith and confidence in him increases. We have faith in his goodness, love, great wisdom, and power whereby he is able to make all things work together for our highest good as New Creatures in Christ Jesus.

EXCEEDING AND ETERNAL GLORY

The Master has described the course that the Lord's people are called upon to take. He said, "Strait

is the gate, and narrow is the way, which leadeth unto life, and few there be that find it.” (Matt. 7:14) Of necessity, these will meet with many trials and other tests of faith as they seek to take up their cross and follow in the footsteps of Jesus. The apostle, in referring to these experiences, says, “Our light affliction, which is but for a moment, worketh for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory; While we look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen: for the things which are seen are temporal; but the things which are not seen are eternal.”—II Cor. 4:17,18

It is a great aid in enduring the trials of the narrow way to patiently remember that they will soon be over, and that the period during which they are being experienced is short, if we take into consideration the eternity of blessing to follow. How thankful we are to be assisted by the Lord’s promised grace. This makes our trials very light when compared with the eternal weight of glory to be bestowed upon those who shall be faithful. “Great is my boldness of speech toward you, great is my glorying of you: I am filled with comfort, I am exceeding joyful in all our tribulation.”—chap. 7:4

UNSELFISHNESS

The manifestation of unselfishness in a child of God, and a willingness to share with others of that which we have, is surely a manifestation of the grace of God in the heart. Paul spoke of some of the brethren who had gone to exceptional lengths in helping their brethren. “It hath pleased them of Macedonia and Achaia to make a certain contribution for the poor saints which are at Jerusalem.” (Rom. 15:26)

Another time he wrote, “Whiles by the experiment of this ministration they glorify God for your professed subjection unto the gospel of Christ, and for your liberal distribution unto them, and unto all men; And by their prayer for you, which long after you for the exceeding grace of God in you.”—II Cor. 9:13,14

The question may be asked as to why the poor saints at Jerusalem should receive financial help from these Gentile brethren? Paul records for our information, “It hath pleased them verily; and their debtors they are. For if the Gentiles have been made partakers of their spiritual things, their duty is also to minister unto them in carnal things.”—Rom. 15:27

To find a reason for this, we must go back to the early days after Pentecost and note the sacrifices made by the Jerusalem church in order that the Divine purpose might be fulfilled—that the glad tidings of salvation might go eventually to “the uttermost part of the earth.” (Acts 1:8) The scriptural account tells us that these Jewish brethren sold their houses and lands, and brought the money and laid it at the apostle’s feet. (Acts 4:34,35) This was their only means of survival, because prejudice and animosity made it difficult to earn a living. This resulted in there being ‘poor saints’ at Jerusalem deserving the help of their better-off Gentile brethren. If one gives much in the way of service it is surely because one loves much, the result of the exceeding grace of God in their heart.

IN POWER AND WORD

In Ephesians 1:19, Paul says, “What is the exceeding greatness of his power to us-ward who believe,

according to the working of his mighty power.” He would have us know this, whether it be in the way of assistance toward measuring up to the standard of character set by the Master, or in the way of power to overcome in other directions. All vital progress results from the exceeding greatness of his power operating in the mind and heart. It is a power upon which we can place no limit. None of the called ones can possibly say it is not possible for him to be an overcomer and to attain a place in the little flock. This would be like saying that the great power of God is insufficient to accomplish this in his life.

We must admit that any failure on our part means that we have not been laying hold of, and responding sufficiently to, the grace and strength promised in such abundant measure. Paul, in calling our attention to God’s power operating for the development and exaltation of the church to the Divine nature, tells us that it is the same power that was sufficient to raise Jesus from the dead and to set him at God’s right hand in heaven. For our encouragement, the apostle reminds us that this same great power is being used on our behalf.

Paul further tells us that this exceeding richness of God’s grace that we have begun to experience is to be continued increasingly even unto the ages to come—the countless ages of eternity. “Even when we were dead in sins, hath quickened us together with Christ, (by grace ye are saved;) And hath raised us up together, and made us sit together in heavenly places in Christ Jesus: That in the ages to come he might shew the exceeding riches of his grace in his kindness toward us through Christ Jesus.

For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God.”—Eph. 2:5 -8

Speaking of the grace of God operating in the calling of the church, Paul also reminded us that God is prepared to strengthen us. “That Christ may dwell in your hearts by faith; that ye, being rooted and grounded in love.” (chap. 3:17) “Now unto him that is able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that worketh in us.” (vs. 20) If at any time we feel discouraged or cast down, let us remember that God has promised to do for us exceeding abundantly through the various channels by means of which he operates to encourage his people. The power by which he is pleased to help us is exactly suited to our needs, and is being exercised in accordance with his infinite wisdom.

THE EXERCISE OF HIS POWER

The apostle has frequently spoken to us about God’s great power and grace to help and encourage his people, and to bring them off conquerors. This is emphasized by his use of the words ‘exceeding’ and ‘exceedingly’ and he speaks in this same way of his own deep love for the brethren and of his desire to help them. (I Thess. 3:10) He also prayed exceedingly for his own progress and growth in grace and especially because such progress would make him more useful to others.

THE DIVINE NATURE

We are told that when the members of the church have apprehended that for which they have hoped, and have reached the presence of his glory, they also will have reached a state of ‘exceeding joy’ of

which Jude wrote. “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

What lengths, breadths, heights, and depths of joy will be the portion of the overcomers suggested by the unspeakable Divine nature. Words are imperfect vehicles of thought when we attempt to describe this glory. It was not only the Master of which the psalmist spoke prophetically, but also of the church, when he wrote, “Thou wilt shew me the path of life: in thy presence is fulness of joy; at thy right hand there are pleasures for evermore.”—Ps. 16:11

In his endeavor to express for our learning and encouragement concerning the exceeding riches of God’s grace provided for us in Christ Jesus, Paul proclaimed, “As it is written, Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which God hath prepared for them that love him.”—I Cor. 2:9 ■