

WORD OF TRUTH

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Issue 3

SUFFICIENT GRACE

And he said unto me, My grace is sufficient for thee: for my strength is made perfect in weakness. Most gladly therefore will I rather glory in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me”(2 Corinthians 12:9).

Saul of Tarsus, that Pharisee of the Pharisees, and persecutor of the early Christian church, was taught many things after his jolting confrontation with the living Christ on his way to Damascus to persecute more Christians (Read Acts 9:1-29). That meeting with the resurrected Savior changed Saul's life forever. Not only was his name changed to Paul sometime after this meeting, but he was made an apostle by the Lord to declare His gospel in preaching and in writing, and build His local assemblies in various cities. Bible scholars Robert Young and Merrill Unger both believe it was Paul himself who changed his name. *Saul* was a proud name among the Jews. Another Benjamite, Israel's first king, Saul the son of Kish, had that name. After being converted, Saul of Tarsus had a humility he had not had before. So he adopted the name *Paul*, which in Greek means *little* because he saw himself as the *least* of all saints, not worthy; and *chief* of sinners. It was that way for the rest of his life. He wanted Christ to be recognized as the highly exalted one, not **any** man.

In this second canonical letter to the church at Corinth, in chapter 11, Paul warns of false apostles which were preaching *another Jesus, another spirit and another gospel*. He warns that these false teachers are ministers of Satan. Because these *false* apostles influenced many to turn against Paul, even though it was largely he who established the Corinthian church; Paul also relates some of the persecutions and difficulties he has personally suffered, and defended his own actions as a *true* apostle appointed by the Lord..

Then in chapter 12, Paul shifts gears and discusses “*visions and revelations of the Lord*” (verse 1). He tells in the third person something that happened to “a man” he knew (which we find later is *obviously* Paul himself). This “person” was caught up to the third heaven, to Paradise itself, and saw things, and heard unspeakable words that man is not permitted to utter. The word *Paradise* is only found three times in the KJV. It is speaking of that spiritual realm where God's throne is; most often called heaven, or as here, the *third* heaven.

In verse five Paul says that he will boast of “this man's” experiences, but not of himself except in his frailties and infirmities. The apostle was not by nature a boasting man. Much of the defense he gave in chapter 11 was because those false apostles had stirred up people against him saying “*For his letters, they say are weighty and powerful, but his bodily presence is weak, and his speech contemptible*” (2 Corinthians 10:10). Imagine professing Corinthian Christians saying this about the man who *organized* the church in Corinth! The influence of false teachers caused some to accuse Paul of being a *false* apostle. After all, he was not one of the *original* twelve. So Paul lets them know that it was God who appointed him, and he is equal to all the other earlier apostles. In

verse six he says he can boast and not be a fool, but wanted no one to put him on a pedestal . He knew that the third heaven experience would be cause for criticism, or on the other hand, exaltation.

In verse seven he shows that God kept him humble, and from over exalting himself by “a thorn in the flesh” -- “a messenger of Satan”, to buffet him. The pain and suffering was evidently a physical thing, *a thorn in the flesh* -- so powerful that he sought Christ three times about it. He asked if the Lord would “let it depart”. Paul evidently was praying **directly** to Jesus Christ. After all he had met Him on the Damascus road in that remarkable transformation. We normally are taught to pray to the Father in Christ’s name, but we are **not** forbidden to address either member of the Godhead. Perhaps Paul was remembering that Christ had sought the Father three times in Gethsemane to let the cup pass from Him. Consider this: *”I besought the Lord thrice’, i.e. frequently and fervently. God respected not the **arithmetic** of our prayers, how many they are; nor the **rhetoric** of our prayers, how neat they are; nor the **geometry** of our prayers, how long they are; nor the **music** of our prayers, how melodious they are; nor the **logic** of our prayers, how methodical they are; but the **divinity** of our prayers, how heart-sprung they are. Not gifts, but graces prevail in prayer”* (John Trapp-1647).

The Lord answered him directly **“My grace is sufficient for thee: for my strength is made perfect in weakness”**(*2 Corinthians 12:9*). A remarkable answer, and a great lesson for Paul, and for us. *“These words should be engraven on the palm of every believer’s hand”* (Charles Hodge- 1797-1878). We know that *grace* is the Greek word *charis*, which is found over 120 times in the Bible, and in regard to God’s grace to man means His love, and favor, and care, all strictly **unmerited** to unworthy sinners such as we all are.

It may seem incredible to some of us that God would use a messenger of Satan for the purpose of keeping any of God’s children humble, especially the apostle Paul, but that is exactly what God did in this case. We need to fully understand that Satan is “God’s devil” as Rolfe Barnard once said. He was not the first one to see this. Martin Luther said it in the 1500’s. Also, John Calvin said *“Satan...can do nothing without God's will and consent”* (Institutes I: xiv:17) But what we may not realize that is more incredible is Christ’s answer to the apostle, and ultimately for us. He is saying that in every situation that we may face, *His grace is sufficient*. For the child of God this is a promise, sustenance and a comfort through any trial, any loss, including death.

It also may seem incredible that Paul would say **“Most gladly therefore will I rather glory in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me”**(verse 12, latter part). Then in verse 13 he says **“Therefore I take pleasure in infirmities, in reproaches, in necessities, in persecutions, in distresses for Christ’s sake; for when I am weak, then am I strong”** Just try to grasp that if you can, beloved. Paul says I take *pleasure* in infirmities, persecutions, distresses etc.. **Pleasure in suffering?** Was Paul crazy? No! He was a “sold out” servant of Jesus Christ, and knew that what Christ told him was exactly the truth. Christ’s strength was made perfect (brought to it’s peak effect) -- in weakness! We do not generally regard the apostle Paul as weak, but he felt it. He sensed it. Read his words in Romans seven to see that **without the grace of God** he was as vile as any sinner. Remember that Paul said he was the *chief* of sinners. **“Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners; of whom I am chief”** (*1Timothy 1:15*).

But something else that Paul saw in the sufficient grace Christ spoke about here. Adam Clarke (Methodist), and John Gill (Baptist), *both* say this about the latter part of verse 9: “***That the power of Christ may rest upon me***”. They both say it means “that His power may *tabernacle* over me”. Greek scholar A.T Robertson says “only here in the New Testament the Greek word for rest *episkenose* is used. The expanded meaning of this word is ‘to tent upon, to rest upon me’” Kenneth Wuest translates it thus “Therefore most gladly will I the rather boast in my weaknesses in order that the power of Christ (*like the Shekinah Glory in the Holies of Holies of the Tent of Meeting*) may take up its residence in me (working within me and giving me help)”. The Amplified Bible gives this rendering “That the strength and power of Christ (the Messiah) may rest (*yes, may pitch a tent over and dwell*) upon me”. What I am trying to convey is that His **sufficient grace** will protect and *envelope* us. Both John Darby’s translation and the Modern King James Version render it “dwell upon me”. When you have God dwell *with you, upon you* and *in you*, then you have **nothing** to fear. What a blessing! What a comfort!

For Paul, it was a promise he already knew in his heart. In all the things he suffered which he described to the Corinthian church in the latter part of chapter 11, he surely knew that God had already seen him through these things, and would see him through *anything else necessary*. It is just that daily thorn in the flesh was disturbing him, and wearing on him, and he needed this reminder **directly** from Jesus Christ. He was preparing for other things including what was probably his last voyage, which took Paul to Rome where he was to die for the cause of Christ. On that voyage, there were trials; the dangerous storms, shipwreck on the island of Melita. There a viper bit him, but it did him *no harm*. He shook it off into the fire (see Acts 28:1-6).

Once at Rome, Paul was able to have a private quarters with a soldier guarding him. There he was enabled to address inquirers among the Jews who came to him. They had many questions about this *sect* of Christians (v.22). Some believed, and some did not (v.24). Paul attributes this to the sovereign will of God as described in Isaiah 6:9-10, and foretold that upon hearing, many more Gentiles would believe (v.28). At the end of the book of Acts, we see that Paul received all who came to him and was faithfully preaching and teaching about Jesus Christ. We know that Paul wrote his last epistle (2 Timothy) from Rome, and that there he died. He found, *as we will*, that **the grace of Jesus Christ is sufficient for the child of God.**(cw)

Evangelism: Christ's Imperative Command

By W. F. Bell

Evangelism is central in both Scripture and church history. Evangelism is simply the preaching of the gospel, or the earnest efforts of the church to spread the gospel. The word "evangelism" does not occur in the New Testament, but the word "evangelist" is found (Acts 21:8; Eph. 4:11; 2 Tim. 4:5), and comes from two Greek words, *eu*, meaning well or good, and *angelos*, meaning messenger. The word "gospel" comes from the Greek word *euangelion*, meaning simply "good tidings." The one proclaiming these good tidings is the "evangelist," the messenger carrying the announcement. Evangelists were the traveling missionaries in the early church, for the early church took evangelism seriously. See Acts 8:25 & 35.

Our great Commander-in-Chief has given his marching orders to the church in Matthew 28:19-20. These commands constitute the Magna Charta of evangelism. The central verb of this passage is formed on the noun for "disciple" (*mathetes*) and should be translated "making disciples" (*matheteuo*). The other verbs are participles: going, baptizing, teaching. All of these verbs are very important, but the imperative (first aorist) "make disciples of all the nations" is of **greatest** importance. The Lord Jesus Christ himself is our gospel, and he is the one who sends his church into the world to make disciples unto him.

Personal witnessing is central in the labors of any New Testament church, as missionary endeavor is the very heart of Christ's commands. Missions is a good Latin word meaning *to send*, and gospel missions is the sending of evangelists and missionaries to carry the gospel to all the world. Is it not right then to ask ourselves: How much do we care, share and dare for Christ and the souls of men? True evangelism is carried on by burning hearts that are filled with love for Christ and compassion for sinners. Christ Jesus **alone** saves men (and this is never to be minimized), but it is **every** Christian's responsibility to witness of Him who is "mighty to save"

Dare we profess to strongly believe the Bible if we fail to obey our Lord in this all-important area of evangelism? Let us all preach Christ with our lives and lips! ***"Therefore they that were scattered abroad went everywhere preaching the word" (Acts 8:4).***

"Oh that I could do more for Him! Oh that I was a flame of pure and holy fire, and had a thousand lives to spend in the dear Redeemer's service....The sight of so many perishing souls every day affects me much, and makes me long to go if possible from pole to pole, to proclaim redeeming love."— *George Whitefield*

"The truth is as old as the everlasting hills. Therefore, dear friends, be not touched with that Athenian madness of always seeking after some new thing. Did you ever hear of new gold? To all intents and purposes, all gold that is worth having is old".--- *Charles Spurgeon*

"God doesn't call the qualified, He qualifies the called."

"Prayer: Don't give God instructions – just report for duty!"

"It is easier to preach ten sermons than it is to live one"

(All three anonymous-Thanks, Charles Rosson, for sending to me to share with you)

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