***Frustrating the Grace of God, No. 1

CSP001***

We're going to study the subject of the grace of God, and specifically the frustrating of the grace of God. The average church Christian in all of his sincerity and devotion does not understand the principle of life under grace. He does not know what it means to be grace oriented. Christians don't know how to go about it, and consequently, they waste their whole lives.

This is why we read in the book of the Revelation that in heaven, as Christians stand before God--specifically the Judgment Seat of Christ where our works and life service are evaluated, there will be tears running down the cheeks of Christians. The Lord will comfort them. He will not be able to reverse what we have done in squandering our lives; losing our orientation; and, wasting ourselves in living as if we were unsaved people, but He will be able to comfort us, and we will see the justice of the fact that He denies us the treasures that He had set aside for us. It is the grace of God that wants to do that. It is amazing how Christians are constantly frustrating the grace of God. Why on earth, I don't know. They get mad at the preacher who's trying to save them that embarrassment in heaven, and that great sorrow in heaven. They get mad at the voice who is telling them the truth instead of sitting up and paying attention.

**The Apostle Paul**

Now I'm sure you realize that if we think in Scripture of Christian leaders, the par excellent example of the grace of God is the apostle Paul. That was his mission. He was the one who had to roll back this great devotion to Judaism; to the Mosaic Law; to the Old Testament Levitical priesthood; and, all the principles of rules under which they lived--613 of them, to be exact. Paul said, "God has done that, and He has shown you that you cannot produce righteousness. You're sincere. You try. You do. But you break down every time. Now we have established that. I've been called to be the apostle of the grace of God. And I've been called to show you that in the church age there is a power release you may tap into that will make your life magnificent on earth and enriched in heaven beyond your fondest dreams.

There is more to being saved than going to heaven. You may ignore that if you wish. You may get mad at the preacher who tells you that, but after all, he is only quoting Scripture. The apostle Paul had a deep sense of gratitude for the grace of God in his life. This is a sense that we often ourselves are guilty of losing our awareness of--that grace that has been exercised toward us. In 1 Corinthians 15:10, the apostle Paul says, "By the grace of God, I am what I am. And His grace toward me did not prove vain, but I labored even more than all of them. Yet not I, but the grace of God with me." Paul says the grace of God made him what he was.

Now we have to take a moment to look back at what he was. This is just as you and I must take a moment to look back on what we once were before our saved condition, and what we once were in our saved condition before we were trained in doctrinal principles. By the grace of God I am what I am now. All these people that you and I agonized for; that we can't get to come out to church; that we can't get to be in Christian service; that we can't get out to fellowship with the people of God; and, that we can't get to be students of the Word of God--all of those people are frustrating the grace of God. That is the great occupational hazard of the Christian life. I can never get used to the fact how Christians don't want to be told that, and they don't want to be disturbed.

From where Paul began, the contrast was so enormous. "By the grace of God, I am what I am. His grace toward me did not prove vain." For most Christians the grace of God proves vain. They're frustrated. They won't let Him do what He will do through us. So when the time of crises comes in life, we have no grace of God to carry us. We have neutralized it. We have been living outside of its power grid. So now we blunder around like any unsaved person. Paul said, "In me, that wasn't the way. It did not prove vain." But he said, "What it did for me, yeah, I knocked myself out more than all the other people my age in my generation." But he said, "It wasn't I who was doing this service. It was the grace of God." That's right.

And that's why you won't do things with your life that you should be doing. It is because you have frustrated the grace of God in your life, so you're not investing your life in His service. You're finding out how to exercise your old sin nature and stay out of service. You're not investing your time in the work of God. You have a life already to live. You're not investing your money in the work of the Lord. You're piling it up like the fool who built bigger barns only to die and leave it to somebody else to spend.

The apostle Paul had a deep sense of gratitude for the grace of God in his life. He gives us a very important doctrinal principle. It wasn't he. It was the grace of God that was free to work in him. Now if you want to shut it off, then have a happy time. But when you get to heaven, you're going to regret it. But if you want to turn loose the grace of God, you will know what it is to live. And I'm not only talking about heaven. I'm talking about all those things. More and more I can't even keep track of the enormity of the grace of God leading us to be what we should be; to remember what we should remember; to do what we should be doing; and, to be able to do it.

I came in here yesterday afternoon looking over our setup. A few things need to be straightened out. And the Lord was there guiding. And all of a sudden, I thought of something. I said, "Oh yes, we need that. Thank you Lord. I almost forgot that." And then I would do it again. And if there had been somebody here, they would have thought they were listening to a nut because sometimes I'm even talking out loud to Him while I'm walking around this auditorium getting this thing straightened up, and so on. And I'm saying, "Oh yes, I need to do this. You're right about that. I'll take care of that right now." But this is what it means for the grace of God not to be frustrated in your life, but to function. Now what fool would not want that? Only somebody who is very short-sighted.

Now how big a thing this was for the apostle Paul is shown when we look back on the life of this man, and who he was, as a Pharisee of a Pharisee who hated Jesus Christ, and who had no use for the followers of the way of grace salvation. That's why Paul's moment of personal salvation is such a traumatic experience for him spiritually. He could not believe that he was wrong, just as you and I think that God is out of step, and we're the ones who are in the know. That's what he thought. He thought that he was in the know, and these Christians were out of step with God. It was just the opposite.

In Acts 22:4-5, Paul is reminiscing about his salvation experience as he was on the road to the city of Damascus. He said, "And I persecuted this way to the death." I persecuted this way--the way of Christianity--over against what? Over against the Judaism with all of its rules and regulations for its lifestyle, and its dependence upon human energy to please God, instead of on God energy which is the only way you can please Him.

So he said, "I persecuted this way." How badly? "To the death." He killed people. He caused Christians to be to be executed. Why? Because they were blasphemers. They were blaspheming against God. They were saying, "Jesus is Lord." That means He's Savior. That means He's God. Later, Paul says "I was a murderer." He never got over this. But he did it in all sincerity, and he later observes it in ignorance. That's the problem. People who are ignorant of Scripture do these terrible things. People who have been trained in doctrine, but want to be negative toward it, are just as ignorant as if they've never been taught, and they'll do these things.

"And I persecuted the way unto the death, binding and putting both men and women into prisons. As also the high priests and all the council of the elders can testify; from them I also received letters to the brethren and started off for Damascus to bring to even those who were there to Jerusalem as prisoners to be punished." The High Priest sent unto Damascus to round up all the Christians there. They said, "Bring them back here. If they blaspheme and claim Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, we will execute them." How would you like to have a mission like that?

In Acts 26, Paul did it with zeal. Acts 26:9-11: "So then I thought to myself that I had to do many things hostile to the name of Jesus of Nazareth. And this is just what I did in Jerusalem. Not only did I lock up many of the saints in prisons, having received authority from the chief priest, but also when they were being put to death, I cast my vote against them. And as I punished them often in all the synagogues, I tried to force them to blaspheme. And being furiously enraged at them, I kept pursuing them even to foreign cities."

This is what Paul the man of grace was doing? Forcing people to blaspheme so they could be executed? This sounds like something out of the Middle Ages with Torquemada and the Inquisition. He was furiously enraged. He was mad. In whose cause? The cause of Satan. He thought it was the cause of God. But it was the cause of his old sin nature. When was the last time you got really furiously enraged over something that was the cause of the Lord God, like not having enough teachers when they are needed; not having enough funds in the academy when it's needed; or, not having enough people to pass out the Word of God? When were you furiously enraged over something like that? Not Paul. He was furiously enraged at those who were dedicated to Christ.

Then when he wrote the book of Galatians, he touched on this again in Galatians 1:13-14: "For you have heard of my former manner of life in Judaism, how I used to persecute the church of God beyond measure, and I tried to destroy it. And I was advancing in Judaism beyond many of my contemporaries among my countrymen, being more extremely zealous for my ancestral traditions." Paul said, "I was a Pharisee of a Pharisee, and I was more zealous than all those who were in my age bracket. In doing what? In wanting to destroy the church of God? Don't you wish there were some people sitting here listening to this, who in their own subtle ways think they are serving God when in fact they are destroying the church of God? There are people who are no longer in this congregation because they sought to destroy what God was doing, and God jerked them out by their hair roots, and they're off in some other church now, on the treadmill of running their lives off to tears at the Judgment Seat of Christ. If you don't think that's so, I'm going to look at you, and I'm going look at them across the circle at the Judgment Seat of Christ. I'm going to nod knowingly, and you will remember. But God, in grace, saved Paul.

In Acts 22:6, we have the salvation of Paul: "And it came about that as I was on my way approaching Damascus about noontime, a very bright light suddenly flashed from heaven all around me. And I fell to the ground and heard a voice saying to me, 'Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me?' And I answered, 'Who are you Lord?' And he said, 'I am Jesus the Nazarene whom you are persecuting.' And those who were with me beheld the light, to be sure, but they did not understand the voice of the one who was speaking to me. And I said, 'What shall I do Lord?'" At that point, salvation came to the great apostle. To call the one he was speaking to up there "Lord," which means "God," showed that he realized he was wrong, and he believed the One that was speaking to him. So he asked for advice from the One who was now the God that he had been persecuting and from the God whom he now accepted as his Savior. And notice that first he was saved; and, then he became his Lord. Don't show that you're an uneducated Christian by talking about making Christ your Lord and Savior.

Some lady called me on the phone the other day asking some questions. We got into this, and I pointed that out to her, and she was shocked. She said, "How could we have been misled like that? Of course, you're right. He is Savior, and then Lord." If he is not your Savior, he cannot be your Lord, because to be your Lord means that you're in temporal fellowship, with all known sins confessed. Otherwise you are your own lord.

"And he said, 'What shall I do Lord?' And the Lord said to me, "Arise and go on into Damascus, and there you'll be told of all that has been appointed for you to do.'" Salvation is now established. Now, Paul, it's time for service. Paul could have said, "No, no, no. I'm going to be a rich Pharisee. I've got good big connections in business, and I know how to do these things. I know how to Jew people down and gentile people's prices up. Why should I get out of what I'm doing? You want me to what?" And God would say, "Yeah, you're to be a witness and to be a servant. You're not here for the good life. That's incidental--the bonus, that's not the core."

**The Doctrine of Special Selection**

"But since I could not see because of the brightness of that light, I was led by the hand by those who were with me and came into Damascus." He was blind. "And a certain man, Ananias, who is devout by the standard of the law and well-spoken of by the Jews who lived there, came to me, standing near me and said, 'Brother Saul, receive your sight.' And at that very time, I looked up at him, and he said, 'The God of our fathers has appointed you to know His will, and to see the righteous One, and to hear an utterance from his mouth.'" And that's the only way anybody is ever saved--when the God of our fathers decides that He wants you to be saved. That's the doctrine of special selection. Not everyone is saved, but those who are saved, are saved by the doctrine of [election](https://www.christiandataresources.com/jd01-01_saintsbecausecalled.htm) -- that God chooses you for salvation. When he does that, the blindness goes off your eyes, and suddenly you see that Christ is the Savior and that you must accept Him.

Verse 15: "For you will be a witness for Him to all men of what you have seen and heard." You should not think that the experience of the apostle Paul is any different than any of the rest of us. It's not as dramatic, but you're liable to think, "Oh, boy. He was selected for a special divine service." Well, so have you been. Of course, he didn't get off into all these things of life--the burdens of life. Go back and read the story of the sower and the four seeds again. See where you fit in there. The burdens of life crush and push out the things of God's service. No, Paul had his niche. Paul had his cross of service, and we have ours. There is no difference. It's the same thing. The problem is whether we want to do it or not.

He expanded on this on another occasion in Acts 26:12-20. On this occasion, Paul was standing before King Agrippa, and he said, while thus engaged, persecuting Christians, "I was journeying to Damascus with the authority and commission of the chief priests. At midday, O king, I saw on the way a light from heaven, brighter than the sun, shining all around me and those who were journeying with me. And when we had all fallen to the ground, I heard a voice saying to me in the Hebrew dialect, 'Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me? It is hard for you to kick against the goads.'" This is referring to that goad that they use to make cattle move. To kick against that sharp point is a stupid thing to do. If you want to have your good life instead of the life of God, and if you want to have bitterness against God instead of receptivity, go ahead and kick against the sharp point. You'll bleed.

"And I said, 'Who are you, Lord?' And the Lord said, 'I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting. But arise and stand on your feet. For this purpose I have appeared to you, to appoint you a minister and a witness, not only to the things which you have seen, but also to the things in which I will appear, delivering you from the Jewish people, and from the gentiles to whom I am sending you.'" So here again, what did Paul have? He had a mission. "I'm sending you to the gentiles to open their eyes so that they may turn from darkness to light, from the dominion of Satan to God, in order that they may receive forgiveness of sins, and an inheritance among those who have been sanctified by faith in me. Consequently, King Agrippa, I did not prove disobedient to the heavenly vision."

**Frustrating the Grace of God**

There we are--frustrating the grace of God. He could have frustrated all of this. He could refused to go on. He could have refused to abide by the doctrinal principles he was quickly learning here. "But I kept declaring both to those at Damascus first and also Jerusalem, and then throughout all the regions of Judea, and even to the gentiles, that they should repent and turn to God, performing deeds appropriate to repentance." Paul said, "I was not disobedient to this heavenly vision." If you and I want to be disobedient to the heavenly vision of our life calling, then we too will be frustrating what the grace of God can do for us. If you're satisfied this to settle for that, you certainly may. That's your priesthood. Go ahead. Live the good life, and have all eternity to wish you had done better.

Paul wrote the book of Galatians to counter the people who were still trying to live under the Mosaic Law system, and all the accoutrements that are attached--the 613 rules. He wrote the book of Galatians, a very severe book, and in this book, the background of his writing is the fact that he knew what grace was. He understood what God had done for him when he was fighting God tooth and nail. Galatians 1:11-17: "For I would have you know, brethren, that the gospel which was preached by me is not according to men. For I neither received it from man, nor was I taught it, but I received it through the revelation of Jesus Christ (there on the Damascus road). For you have heard of my former manner of life in Judaism, how I used to persecute the church of God beyond measure and tried to destroy it." And we have Christians, and we have preachers, who still are telling Christians how to live under certain elements of Judaism. They want them to live under the principles of holy days, of tithing, and of serving God to get favors--the whole system of Judaism. God says, "It's a Bunco operation. I've proved my point. Man, by his own capacities, cannot please God." So what will you do? Well, you will persecute the church of God and the Christians who resist your Judaism.

Paul says, "And I was advancing in Judaism beyond many of my contemporaries among my countrymen, being more extremely zealous for my ancestral tradition. But when He who had set me apart, even from my mother's womb, and called me through His grace (grace--God calls me because of His grace), was pleased to reveal His Son in me that I might preach him among the gentiles, I did not immediately consult with flesh and blood. Paul says, "When I was saved, I didn't sit down and reason about these things. I didn't sit down and talk to my unsaved Jewish associates about the godly life. I didn't go back to the people under the Mosaic Law to get information from them about how I was to live the Christian life." But we have Christians doing that all the time, and we have preachers. And the more famous they are in their legalism, the bigger churches they have, and the bigger name. And you'll see them on TV. And if you didn't know better, because you haven't been fortunate to be in a church like Berean where you are alerted with doctrinal principles, you could be carried away with their legalism.

Verse 17: "Nor did I go up to Jerusalem to those who were apostles before me. But I went to Arabia, and I returned once more to Damascus." We have previously learned that he went out to the Arabian Desert for three years. What was he doing there? He said, "I didn't go to the apostles. Why not? Because the apostles didn't know a lot about Scripture of the grace age. They knew a lot of Judaism and the Old Testament but they were not up to speed on church age doctrine. That came through the apostle Paul. That's why he wrote so many of the epistles, explaining all of that. So God said, "I want you to go out here. I am the Lord Jesus Christ, and you are going to play the role of Adam."

Just as with Adam, the Lord Jesus Christ sat down personally with Paul and taught him the principles of church doctrine. That's where Paul got it. He didn't figure it out himself. He didn't look to the Old Testament, and he didn't look to Judaism. It was a whole different game--not trying to please God, but able to please God because now God is going to please Himself through the Holy Spirit who lives within you unless you close His mouth and unless you shove Him away. Then you'll be just another dog in a manger. "I didn't go to Jerusalem to those who were apostles before me. I went away to Arabia, and I returned once more to Damascus three years later. Then, three years later, I went up to Jerusalem to become acquainted with Cephas and stayed with him 15 days," and so on.

Well, the apostle Paul had this great grace experience and the great revelation that was now committed to him (for which he was now the steward, as you and I are stewards of grace doctrine). How much grace doctrine floats around the city of Irving, even in the churches? How many people do you think, among all these Christians who press into these churches, can give you a clear gospel message that the Holy Spirit will use to take you into heaven? We are to be his witnesses. That's the last thing Jesus said before He left. Hit that table and pick up those little evangelism booklets that give a clear picture. God is using this, and He is going to use it in a wider outreach than ever before. I can see it on the horizon. And as the means are made available, this booklet is going to make an impact before the rapture of the church, and it will make an impact after we're gone. And this is what Paul did. He said, "I got the gospel straight. I didn't tell people to invite Jesus into your heart. I didn't tell people to give your life to Jesus. I didn't tell people to do anything except to believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and then they would be saved.

So the Apostle said, "But when He, who had set me apart even from my mother's womb and had called me through His grace, was pleased to reveal His Son in me, that I might preach him among the gentiles, I did not immediately consult with flesh and blood or go to Jerusalem," but he consulted with Christ himself. That was where his teaching came from.

Now because of this great experience of his grace treatment, he was never very proud of what he had once been. He was never very proud of what he once was doing to Christians, and certainly he was never proud of all those blasphemous things he had said about Jesus Christ. He points that out in 1 Timothy 1:12-16, where Paul says, "I thank Christ Jesus our Lord who has strengthened me because He considered me faithful, putting me into service." That's an interesting phrase. "I'm in the service." Why? "Because I'm faithful." In the military, if we have a mission to perform, whom do you think you're going to want on that mission except faithful competent associates? You don't look out there to take the people who are dragging their feet and who are the incompetents. Paul said, "The very fact that God called me into His Christian service, I take with a great deal of gratitude. It shows that He has evaluated me favorably in my spiritual life."

Then in verse 13, he says, "This is true even though I was formerly a blasphemer, and a persecutor, and a violent aggressor, and yet I was shown mercy because I acted ignorantly in unbelief. There's the rub. Do you think that God is going to ignore the fact that you who have been informed can act against that information? You fritter and twitter away your lives as if you had no calling that was beyond this earth. "The grace of our Lord was more than abundant with the faith and love which are found in Christ Jesus. It is a trustworthy statement deserving full acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners among whom I am foremost of all." The King James Version says, "Of whom I am chief." Verse 16: "And yet, for this reason I found mercy, in order that in me, as the foremost chief of sinners, Jesus Christ might demonstrate his perfect patience as an example for those who would believe in Him for eternal life." Paul says, "If I can be saved and go to heaven, after what I said about Jesus Christ and what I did to His people, anybody can be saved. All you have to do is accept it.

Now the hazard of the Christian life that we're directing our attention to now is failing to live up to the grace of God. Galatians 5:4: "You have been severed from Christ, you who are seeking to be justified by the law. You have fallen from grace." The great hazard is to fall from grace. Some people are still trying to live by the 613 rules of the Mosaic Law. I cringe when I hear Christians, sometimes knowledgeable Christians, who still talk about those 613 rules that they want to live by. It's OK as long as they've been repeated in the New Testament for grace living too, like the Ten Commandments. They're all repeated in the New Testament (except the one about keeping the Sabbath).

We don't live by that moral code because of the Ten Commandments. We kind of use that phrase because people know what that means. We live by the moral code of grace that has been enunciated in the New Testament, and we do that because one of the Ten Commandments is not repeated in the New Testament, and is not applied to Christians; namely, the one about going to church on Saturday. The Sabbath day is never imposed upon Christians because that's not our day. Ours is the Lord's Day--Sunday. But if you want to live by 613 rules of the Mosaic code, where do you get off being selective--taking some and not the others? Anytime I see somebody do that, I know that they're trying to cover up their sins to do something. They know that it's not the will of God, but they find justification wherever they can.

Here, these people were trying to keep the law. Verse 3 says, "And I testify again to every man who received circumcision that he's under obligation to keep the whole law." If you want to go to heaven by keeping the law, you can't break one piece of it. OK. Who's going to heaven? That's the point. No one. You have been severed from Christ--you who are seeking to be justified by the law--you have fallen from grace.

Hebrews 4:16 says, "Let us therefore draw near with confidence to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and may find grace to help in time of need." We who are under the church age privilege, and the assets of the church age, have the promise of Jesus Christ that says, "Anything that you ask in My name (which Jesus defines in another place for us that 'in my name' is being in the will of God the Father), I will do it for you." He says, "I don't care what you ask. If it's in the will of God, I will do it. But if you don't ask, I won't do it." What do you need? Is it the will of God? All you have to do is ask and you will have it. This is because the throne of God for us is a place of grace. It was not for the Jew. It was a place of judgment. "Let us therefore draw near with conference to the throne of grace that we may receive mercy. Do you know what mercy means? The Greek word means "relief for your suffering," whatever it may be. "And may find grace to help in your time of need."

**Malachi 3:7-10**

For example, how easy it is to fall away from the grace of God. Paul says you are fallen from grace. How easy is it for Christians to fall from grace? We've been talking recently about our responsibility of financial support for God's work. We call that the doctrine of grace giving. Some of you called my attention recently to some very famous preachers on TV who were preaching very powerful sermons on tithing to these Christians that listen to them. And they were preaching it on Malachi 3:7-10. So I want to read that for you so that you will understand the principle of Jewish giving. And don't forget that this is Jewish giving. What we're going to lead to in the next session from frustrating the grace of God, is the bitterness that frustrating the grace of God leads to in your life--the things that Christians will do when they get bitter against God. It all begins because they frustrate the working of grace.

Oh, how preachers like to pound away at this Malachi passage. Here God is condemning Israel because of their failure to play square with the good material things that He has given them. They were stealing from children, from orphans, and from widows. They were acting with great moral evil, and enjoying the good times that their money gave them access to. Malachi 3:7-10 says, "'From the days of your fathers, you've turned aside from My statutes (you've turned aside from the 613 doctrines of Judaism) and have not kept them. Return to Me, and I'll return to you,' says the Lord of hosts. 'But you say, How shall we return? Will a man rob God? Yet, you're robbing me. But you say, How have we robbed you? In tithes and offerings.'" Now you notice there are two things there. "You have robbed me in tithes"--that's tithes under the Jewish system--that belonged to God. Nine-tenths belonged to the Jew.

He also says, "You have robbed me in offerings." Most Jews, as many Christians, never gave an offering. Many Christians pride themselves in giving tithes. That's OK if you want to play that Jewish system instead of by the leading of the Holy Spirit, you can settle it at the Judgment Seat of Christ. But at least look at the doctrinal principle. If you give a tithe, you haven't given an offering. So don't kid yourself, and don't treat us as if we don't know better. Some Christians haven't given an offering in years. God says, "Will a man rob God? Yet, you are robbing me. But you say, 'How have we robbed you?' In tithes and offerings."

They were obliged to give a tithe, but they also were responsible to give offerings to sustain the work of the Lord in Israel. "'You are cursed with a curse, for you are robbing Me--the whole nation of you. Bring the whole tithe into the storehouse, so that there may be food in my house, and test me in this,' says the Lord of Hosts, 'if I will not open for you the windows of heaven and pour out for you a blessing until it overflows.'" The storehouse is the temple--the Jewish temple. Bringing your tithes into the temple. Well, you don't have a temple. So how do the preachers explain this? Well, we have a church. The church has become the temple. Then you go one step more and you use the word "temple" in the name of your church, such as "North Temple Church" or "The North Side Temple Church," and you use the word "temple" in there. And you are completely far afield into the Judaism system, and you can imagine what people in a congregation like that learn.

This was the old system of giving. 10% belonged to God. That was the tithe, and you gave that with no asking. That was a religious income tax. The Jew had nine-tenths. Out of that he gave offerings. Many Jews, as many Christians who tithe today, never gave God an offering. They just gave the 10% tithe, but they never gave God an offering. Then they wondered why things wouldn't go too well for them. God was still true to the principle that He would really prosper them if they played square with Him with their money. That was true. That principle is still true. But on a grace basis, it's approached differently.

**2 Corinthians 8-9**

Now over in the Christian era, one can frustrate the grace of God. This is my point. 2 Corinthians 8-9 constitute the comparable New Testament passage on Christian giving. This is leading into the deeper things we'll talk about in the next session about frustrating the grace of God, and what we could be if we let Him operate for us. 2 Corinthians 8:1: "Now, brethren, we wish to make you known to you the grace of God." What grace is he talking about? The grace of giving. "Which has been given in the churches of Macedonia, that in a great ordeal of affliction their abundance of joy and their deep poverty overflowed in the wealth of their liberality." Paul is collecting funds for the poor saints in Jerusalem. These people in Macedonia are poor folks. Yet they're giving. A tithe? No, they're giving far more than that. Some of them don't have much. They're poor people, in poverty. And he said that they give to overflowing out of their poverty.

This is not unlike when Jesus looked at the widow at the temple and said, "Do you see that lady? She just gave two little coins. She's given more than all of you rich guys who've been giving out of the abundance of what you have. God compares your giving to what you kept--not to what you gave. And with this woman, she gave her very livelihood." Now she comes up tops in giving, even though, numerically, she can't compare to all you rich folks.

Verse 3: "For I testify that according to their ability, and beyond their ability, they gave of their own accord." There was nobody forcing them. They were not legalistic tithers or anything like that. These people knew grace giving. The Holy Spirit was the one who gave. They gave to their ability, and beyond their ability. Where on earth are we going to find Christians who give to the limit of their ability--these who have multiplied thousands of dollars in reserve, and beyond their ability? The poor woman gave beyond her ability. It is very hard to find many of us Christians who give beyond our ability--let alone, up to it. "Begging us with much entreaty for the favor of participation in support of the saints." Paul said, "No, no. You can't afford this." And they replied, "No I want to. I'm begging you. I want to help those people. The Spirit of God has laid this upon my heart. I'm not going to say 'No' to Him. He'll take care of me." Paul said, "You're right." Logistical grace will be there. You won't starve.

Verse 5: "And this, not as we had expected, but they first gave themselves to the Lord and to us by the will of God." There's the answer. Why did they give out of their poverty? Because they first had given themselves to the Lord. Everything a Christian has belongs to God. These people understood the doctrine of stewardship. The Jew had 90%. That was his. How much does a Christian have? Well, God has ten-tenths, and the Christian has zero-tenths. That's the difference. This is the grace system. It all belongs to God. You are entitled to use it as He leads you for your needs; for His service; and, to take care of His business. Why on earth do you think he gave it to you?

Consequently, "Not as we had expected, but they first gave themselves." When they did that, they faced the Lord and said, "I am your servant. I will be a good steward. I will not be a false steward. I will be found faithful. I'm not going to stand at the Judgment Seat of Christ with my relatives spending my money on themselves; on the world system; and, on my regrets, when I see that you had this to give me. Am I willing to see that this was my reward, and now I'm denied it, while I let those suckers back there have a good time on what I gave them?

Verse 6: "Consequently, we urged Titus that as he had previously made a beginning, so he would also complete in you this gracious work. Now, verse 7, on that background: "But just as you abound in everything, in faith and utterance and knowledge and in all earnestness and in the love we inspired in you, see that you abound in this gracious work also." That you abound in this grace also. What grace? The grace of being able to be a grace oriented giver.

In my almost half-century in the ministry, boy, have I ever seen grace oriented givers. They do it very quietly behind the scenes. I've seen these grace oriented givers become all the more prosperous. I have also seen some of these grace oriented givers fall behind when they got caught up in the world system, so that they did less than that which they once did when God was with them in maximum blessing that brought them to the high point in life where they are now. That I have never understood. My faithfulness and my material things have carried me to a Zenith of a relationship with God. Then they say, "Now Lord, you have to excuse me because, man, am I going to have a good time enjoying this ambition, this vision, and all of this I want to do?" And, bingo! They go down from there on.

So it's easy to fall from grace in the church dispensation while expressing devotion to it with our mouths. Now, frustrating the grace of God is a very serious defect in the Christian life. I hope that I've been able to alert you a little bit here from the experience of the apostle Paul, and the challenge that he gives us that he rose to the moment. So, whatever comes in life--blessings or the bad things--the grace of God carries us through.

And the principle of the priesthood of the believer makes it your personal decision whether you are going to offer the sacrifices that the Bible calls spiritual sacrifices. Christians make sacrifices. They're spiritual. They're not material like the Judaism system. This is the spiritual sacrifice of what the Bible calls the sacrifice of your substance. Tithing for the Jew wasn't a sacrifice. It was an entitlement. Offerings for the Jew were a sacrifice. I don't care how many big preachers are on television telling you the opposite. The reason they're doing that is because it is much easier to get Christians to do something by saying, "Boy, if every one of us gave 10% out of our income, can you imagine how much we would be able to do anything with a big congregation?" Man, that's big time stuff. But what happens with that money? Alright, you run the religious organization. Does anybody get rewards in heaven for it? No, you gave it on the wrong basis. It was legalistic giving. Those preachers are going to have something to account for before the Lord someday.

It's much harder to get people to rise to where they understand: "God, I am your steward; I humbly kneel in Your presence; and, I will take the good times with the bad times. But you are my Lord, and you are the One who calls the plays in my life. What I don't fully understand now, I know that I have a consultation scheduled in heaven with You that will make these things clear." If you do not let the grace of god work in your life, you will frustrate the grace of God. And I'll tell you where you'll go. You're going to go right down into the trap of bitterness, and that's real misery. Is that what you want?

Dr. John E. Danish, 1971

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