***Frustrating the Grace of God, No. 8

Paul's Example of Living the Grace Life - CSP008***

When someone dies, people often say that he has gone to his reward. People mean by that that the deceased has gone to heaven rather than to Hades, and then onto the lake of fire. The word reward, however, is not exactly correct, because it implies that the destiny to heaven was earned by the deceased by something that he did. But the Bible, as you know, very clearly teaches that salvation to heaven is a gift from God. It is not a reward which is earned by living a good life, or serving God, or deserving in any way by any human effort. Ephesians 2:8-9 makes that very clear. The grace of God in salvation is extended to the lost sinner simply on the basis of the death of the Lord Jesus Christ on the cross. That's what makes it possible for God to give salvation to those who will accept it. Christ died as the final Lamb of God, bearing the moral guilt of the sins of all mankind, and thus He's satisfied with what God's holy character demanded – death, for sin. But Christ paid that debt for us.

1 John 2:2 tells us that Jesus Christ is the propitiation (the satisfaction) for our sins. So now, God the Father (that holy God) can justify someone who believes the gospel of the grace of God, and who believes in Christ as his personal Savior. That person may be given salvation as a free gift. That's a very simple statement. It's all that John 3:16 says. It's all that the whole gospel of John says repeatedly. But it's so hard for people to be able to say, as Paul said to the Philippian jailer, "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and you'll be saved." That is because they always want to bring in some human doing.

However, Romans 4:4-5 say "To the one who works, his wage is not reckoned as a favor, but as what is due; but the one who does not work, but believes in Him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is reckoned as righteousness." If you work in any way for salvation, you won't get it. That leaves large denominations who are all taking their people into the lake of fire under the impression that are pleasing God.

Once a person is saved in the dispensation of the church, he also not only has received the grace of God in salvation, but he enters the grace way of life. That, folks, is such an unknown among Christians today – the grace way of life. Yes, that word falls off of preachers' mouths all the time – the grace of God. But the people who sit out there don't have the foggiest notion what it means to live under the grace system of God. In 1 Corinthians 15:10, the apostle Paul says, "But by the grace of God, I am what I am. 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."

The apostle Paul says, "When God saved me by His grace on that road to Damascus, I knew what had happened. I knew that I had been changed from my destiny of hell because of my religion of Judaism to my destiny in heaven, because of the grace gift of God." He said, "When I had that, I also knew something else. That grace gift called upon me now to be His witness; to live for Him; and, to be his servant. Why? Because Paul had a special calling? Because he was the preacher in the pulpit? Because he was the missionary in the field? Never make that mistake. There is not one thing different between the calling of the great apostle Paul (who wrote most of the New Testament) and each one of you. We are all in that same gift of grace, and the duty of grace.

1 Peter 5:10 points out: "And after you have suffered for a little while, the God of all grace, who called you to His eternal glory in Christ, will Himself perfect, confirm, strengthen, and establish you." Well, the grace life is not a bed of roses. There is going to be suffering for a while. To live the grace life means to suffer.

At one of the big churches in town, the preacher's sermon is on the outside board every week. The sermon recently was "The Suffering Church." I wondered, when that sermon was preached, whether that suffering church understood that it was because they were living the grace life that they suffer in Satan's world. Did they understand that this suffering is because you are a grace Christian?

So our brother and sister now suffer upon the death of their son in that highway accident as part of the grace of God in their lives – as part of the fact that we are living in the enemy's territory, and we are under his gun constantly. But we're going to win. God's Word says, "Greater is He who is in us (the Spirit of God) than he (Satan) who is in the world." After a little while, the reunion is all going to be there. That is the comfort. The family all is rejoined. It'll be perfect, confirmed, and strengthened. We will be established by the grace of God. That's why we have been spending so much time studying the concept of frustrating the grace of God. This is segment number eight.

Some Christians live their whole lives frustrating the grace of God – talking lots of religious mouth talk, but not knowing the experience of the power system that Christ provided for us. This life of grace includes the Holy Spirit permanently indwelling the believer. It includes our possessing a completed revelation of the Bible with the New Testament Scriptures to guide us in our thinking. So our thinking is no longer human thinking contaminated by the sin nature, but it is God's thinking. That's what 1 Corinthians 2:16 means when Paul says, "For who has known the mind of the Lord that he should instruct Him? But we have the mind of Christ." When I think, I'm thinking the thoughts of the God man, Jesus Christ. That's what it means to be filled with the Spirit. That's what it means to be living under the grace life.

Was that open to the Jew? No, the Jew did not have the Spirit of God indwelling him. So he was not capable, at his best, of being able to think a thought and say, "This is God thinking." But when you are in temporal fellowship and you are schooled in doctrine, the Spirit of God will shine the truth to your mind, and you'll be thinking and deciding (not only in religious matters), in all the areas of life, and it will be God speaking. That's real speaking. That's not this humbug of the charismatics, where they wake up in the middle of the night and see a glow at the foot of the bed and hear voices speaking. It's probably their wife talking in her sleep or something. And they say that God has spoken to them – some nonsense that has nothing to do with the grace of God in our lives.

So the grace of God includes the Spirit of God in us permanently. He never leaves us. We've got the whole doctrine of Scripture. The whole canon of the Scriptures is completed now. We have all the principles laid out for us.

Secondly, the grace way of life enables a believer to live a godly life within the will of God, earning eternal rewards in heaven by fulfilling his life mission. Boy, would the Jew ever loved to have that? Would he ever loved to have the capacity to live a godly life because someone else was doing it for him? We have God the Holy Spirit living out that life, and in the process, that Christian is now living out his days in enterprises for which God rewards him eternally, because he's fulfilling his mission. These rewards are stored as treasures in heaven for his eternal enjoyment. They're the result of a life of divine good service under the guidance of the power of the Holy Spirit. And nobody is exempt.

When Paul was saved, he was saved to do his mission. It was all lined out. When you were saved, you were saved to do your mission. It was all laid out. How do I know that? Ephesians 2:10: "For we are His workmanship." We Christians are God's workmanship. "Created in Christ Jesus." We are new creatures (new creations) at the point of salvation – a new species of human being. "We were created for good works, which God prepared beforehand, and that we should walk in them." The grace way of life is a life of service in the good works of God. That's why the Scripture is so important, that after some time of suffering; after some time of taking a beating at the hands of Satan; and, after some time of taking disappointments in your family; your children; your husband; your wife; your relatives; and, your society, God is going to win. Victory will be yours. The end is going to be great. That is when we live under the power of the Spirit of God.

But what does frustrating the grace of God mean in your life? Well, here is what it means most of all. It is frustrating the work that you should be doing, and the service that you should be performing. A lot of Christians are going to get mad at that. I have more antagonism for this idea that I'm not a free agent out there. I'm not to go about doing whatever I please in life. I'm to go about doing that which pleases God, my Father. And what pleases Him is the outline of a life of service that He gave to me when I was born again spiritually.

This is a grace power system. He gives us a mission, and He enables us to do it. You never send a soldier out on a mission without giving him the equipment and the means of executing that mission. If you don't equip him, he's going to fail. God is a better general than that. So He sends us out on this mission in Satan's territory, but He equips us to do it. That's grace. You couldn't have better equipment.

Knowing that, how should we respond? Titus 2:11-15: "For the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation to all men." That's the first experience of the grace of God we all have – God saving us. That's the hardest thing He had to do, but He made it possible through Christ that He could give us salvation, which we could never earn. "Instructing us to deny godliness (now that we're saved) and worldly desires, and to live sensibly, righteously, and godly in the present age."

Now, how many Christians out in Christendom that swirl around us actually say, "Verse 12 is my life? I'm saved by the grace of God. And now I'm called to deny ungodliness. I'm called to deny worldly desires." They think that they're called to pursue their ungodliness and to fulfill their worldly desires. How many Christians do you know that go about working like crazy; earning money like crazy; and, buying things like crazy? Most of them. If they're in the elitist Bible type churches (that's the country club gang), that is the thing to do. You rub shoulders with the important people. You rub shoulders with the people who are significant in your society. And, you know that you're really something. You're not related to Jesus Christ, as a servant of the Most High God. You're not related in subjection to the Holy Spirit who is crying out to you, "Come on, do your job. Do your mission. Forget that bunch."

"Instructing us to deny ungodliness and worldly desires, and to live sensibly, righteously, and godly in the present age." How can you do that? Only if your preacher is telling you doctrinal principles. Without that, I can guarantee you that you're not going to live a sensible life. You're not going to live righteously. You're going to go spiritually crazy as a Christian, unless there is the Word of God, and you're being alerted to the implications of that Word. Then you can live godly in this present evil age.

"Looking for the blessed hope." You know what the blessed hope is, don't you? The rapture. "And the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior, Jesus Christ, who gave Himself for us, that He might redeem us from every lawless deed, and purify for Himself a people for His own possession." And there we stop. There is the average church. There is the average Christian: "Oh, I'm saved."

**Inequality in Heaven**

One man once told me, "I don't like your preaching, and your stating that some of us are not going to be equal to others in heaven. I thought we were all going to be equal." No, you're not. You're all going to be equal as far as salvation. You'll all have a nice apartment in the New Jerusalem – people for His own possession. You'll be the children of God, "But zealous for good works." That's the rest of the verse.

So to Titus, Paul says in verse 15, "Now Titus, these things speak and exhort and reprove with all authority. Let no one disregard you." That's a comforting verse to me: "Tell people these things. Let them know that frustrating the grace of God in their lives by never performing their mission of service is a deadly way of life. It's going to upset them. But you speak; you exhort; you encourage; and, you reprove. You point out forthrightly what is right and what is wrong in the conduct of the people in your group. You do it with all authority." What kind of authority? Charismatic authority? No, the authority of doctrine. "So don't let anybody disregard you." That means don't let anybody intimidate you from speaking. That's true for all of us. The grace power system enables a Christian to defeat the old sin nature; the world; and, Satan, and to obey his heavenly Father in heaven. And Paul tells Titus, "Go for it."

There's also 1 Corinthians 15:58: Paul says, "Therefore, my beloved brethren, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that your toil is not in vain in the Lord." I often see Christians who think they are doing the work of the Lord, and all they're doing is their own work. All they're doing is pursuing some hot shot interests that they have, and it's a hobby with them. Some of them poke their noses into other people's business. To them, that is the work of the Lord, under the guise that they're going to be sympathetic and helpful. But all they want to do is to know what the hot scoop is that's going on.

But God says, "You, My beloved brethren, don't be wishy-washy. Always keep abounding in the work of the Lord." Well, if you've been given a lifetime, and it's going to take a lifetime to perform your particular mission in life, what else can you do but to abound in the work of the Lord? You might say, "Well, I have to go to work." That's right, and that employment is part of your work of the Lord. Isn't that what the Bible says? Don't do it as unto pleasing men, but do your work as to please God in your employment. That's exactly what it is. Why is it? Because that's part of doing the work of the Lord. What does Jesus say to the husband who will not provide for his family? "You, who will not care for your family, you're worse than an infidel. Do your job and do not take food from other men's earnings for yourself." The work of the Lord is what we're called to, and our employment is part of the work of the Lord, so that your toil is not in vain.

What Christians are doing so often is just in vain. It's nothing. God has nothing to do with it. It's all these programs in churches. When you get into a big church, brother, it's very hard not to have programs. They're going to have seminars, and people who wouldn't sit and listen to exposition of the Word of God get all aglow when there's a seminar going. They can't wait to get to it. They could live on seminars. What do you get from a seminar? You get a big kick, and you get a big jag of enthusiasm. Then you go home. Two weeks later, it's all gone. You're off to another seminar. You're off to another rally.

When I wrote my master's thesis on the ministry of the local church in the Greek Department of Dallas Seminary, that's one of the things I pointed out – that the curse of the local church is the fact that it's operated on a football rally system – football rallies to get people excited and then go home. After the rally is over, and you've left the gym, and all the cheerleaders are gone, what do you have? A hoarse throat. But there's nothing of reality there. That's exactly the thing we're up against now.

However, it is possible for a Christian to live a life which frustrates the potential that he has for divine good service; for the potential for victory over evil; and, for earning rewards in heaven. It is possible to beat the devil in this attack, and enable you, no matter what hits you in life, to come up a victorious good soldier of Jesus Christ.

It is possible to beat the devil, but what happens? For most Christians, he beats them, and the potential of the grace way of life is frustrated in these believers who have so many assets because they live in the church age. Luke 9:23-25: "He (Jesus) was saying to them all, 'If anyone wishes to come after Me, let him deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow Me.'" Your cross is the mission of service that God has ordained for you in your lifetime, as Jesus's mission was the cross to die for the sin of the world. "Follow me." Most Christians are following the world. They're following the elitists; they're following the human viewpoint of the world; and, they're following themselves.

"For whoever wishes to save his life will lose it." Saving your life means using your life up for yourself. "But whoever loses his life for My sake, he is the one who will save it." You can lose your life by not being able to do all those things you'd like to do in life, because God says, "I want you to do this, and I want to do this." I know what it is to say, "Boy, I wish I could go and do this, but I can't. I've got to do this church thing and that church thing. I can't even go off on a vacation because I have to do these church things. I think I'll save my life for myself. I'm off on vacation." You'll lose it. You'll lose the life. But if you lose it for His sake, you will save it. "For what is a man profited if he gains the whole world and loses and forfeits himself?" He is profited nothing. You've forfeited yourself. You've wasted your life. Your eternal potential of rewards has been squandered.

In 1 Corinthians 16:13, Paul says, "Be on the alert. Stand firm in the faith. Act like men. Be strong." This is a wonderful verse. Here it is. Christians be on the alert. That means be diligent. Diligent in what? In your Christian service. That's what grace is all about. Stand firm in the faith. Be sound in doctrine. How can you be if the preacher isn't cranking out the principles of doctrine because he's going through a book of Bible verse-by-verse and picking up the doctrinal principles that are being taught in those verses? How can you stand firm and not be double-minded and wishy-washy and carried off with the "Rah, Rah" of the world's system? It is amazing how many people sit in Berean Church, especially young people, then they go out into the world system, and they get into a religious system where it's all emotions. It's all carrying on by their emotions, and they are being played for fools. And they think that they've finally come to a wonderful relationship with God. "Act like men:" People bearing responsibility, which is what the man's role is in the spiritual realm. And be strong. Be physically strong. Be spiritually stable.

**Be on the Alert**

I want to tell you that you have four verbs here in this verse in the Greek language. "Be on the alert" is a present active imperative. Present tense means all the time. Active means you decide that you're going to be on the alert in God's business, and of the potential of you being hit by Satan by a side blow. "Let him who thinks he stands take heed, lest he fall." The Scriptures say, "The devil goes about as a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour." So you yourself are the one who is going to have to maintain your confession of sin and temporal fellowship, so that the Spirit of God is out there to run interference for you – when the devil tries to hit you, blind from the side. And it's imperative.

Please, Christian, be on the alert in your life that the devil is going to sidetrack you away from the real value of your life. You're going to get sick tomorrow. Suddenly you're not going to feel well. Then all of a sudden you're out of here. You say, "Wait a minute. I'm not that old. Wait a minute. I wasn't that sick. I just sat down to watch TV. Then they walked in, and I'm sitting there dead. I missed the whole program." That's how it happens. It's just that quick.

So God is telling you, "Stay on the alert. The devil is there."

**Stand Firm**

The second verb is "stand firm." It's present active imperative again. All the time you stand firm in true doctrine. All the time you are responsible actively to do this. And God says, "I command you." That's going to be a problem sitting up at the Judgment Seat of Christ, and for you to answer why you had false doctrine, especially if you attend this church. You'll have some real explaining to do then, friend, if you're off into the false doctrine. And there are people like that. These chairs would be filled by all those people who are out there and no longer with us because they don't like the doctrine that they hear here. The false doctrine has captivated them to be with the elitist Christians, where things are jiving and jumping, and where the people who are in the know (supposedly) go.

**Act like Men**

The third verb is "act like men." This one is a present middle imperative. Present tense means all the time. Middle voice means that if you men will do this, it will redound to your great blessing. It will prosper you on this earth. It will give you a joyous family. It will glorify the Lord Jesus Christ. It will cause your children to act in respect toward you and toward the Word of God. It will all redound to your benefit. Middle voice means it bounces back to you. But it is again imperative. So far, we have three verbs, and God is telling you, "Do it. I'm not asking you. So you get there and act like men."

Some of these chairs here are empty because the men who would be here filling them did not act like men. Their wives took them over. Their wives intimidated them. Their wives told them what to do. Their wives laid down the law, and that was all it took. With their tails between their legs, like beaten dogs, they followed their wives out of here. Boy, are they going to have a sweet time at the Judgment Seat of Christ. If the Lord is not unmindful, and He remembers the good things we do in His service, do you think he is unmindful to remember the things that have been done in his disservice? I don't think so. All of that is up there on the account, and all that is why it's called the Judgment Seat of Christ.

**Be Strong**

We have one more verb that is imperative: "Be strong." No weaklings. Oh, boy, you're going to get hit. The tragedies will come. But you stand up as a member of the royal family of God. You're a king. You're a queen. You stand straight and tall when sorrow is in your heart. This is present tense (all the time), but, lo and behold, it's passive voice. That means that you can't decide, "I'm going to be strong. I'm going to stand like a John Wayne out there on the plain of the west. I'm going to be out there rubbing my hands on my pearl handled revolvers." No, it's passive. Something else makes you strong. It is the Word of God; it is the knowledge of doctrine; and, it is the metabolism of doctrine in your soul by the filling of the Holy Spirit. That makes a strong man and a strong woman. While this is in the masculine orientation, to act like men and to be strong, that's what makes the women strong. And it is, again, an imperative.

This little verse, 1 Corinthians 16:13, has four verbs, and every one of them is a command from God to do it, and get with it. Be on the alert. You're moving through the devil's world. Keep walking with your rifle at port arms. You're looking: up; down; and, around. And Paul says in another place, "You walk circumspectly." Before you put your foot out, you look for the trigger wire of the booby trap, and you walk cautiously down the trail of life while you're serving God. All the while, you're standing firm in true doctrine. You're a person of sound doctrine, so that the devil cannot make a fool of you, and you do not make fools of other people.

One of our ladies had been taking a college course in a school with a religious orientation in the metroplex. She had a professor who was denigrating the integrity of the Bible; the inerrancy of the Scripture; and, in certain other very vital things. He is very arrogant because he has a doctorate degree, so he's something. And she finally wrote him a letter. The gist of it was, "Sir, you should understand what you will be accountable for to God someday before the Judgment Seat of Christ by all these students who are in this religious school, that you're leading astray by what you're telling them, relative to the Word of God, and undermining their confidence in doctrine and their confidence in the truth of Scripture."

That's what it means. Stand firm in the faith. But you must know it first to be able to stand firm in it, because all around us are people who are undermining it. And act with the courage of men. You take your responsibility. You do not wimp out. You don't even get married to be happy. You get married because you think that now I can serve God better with this person in my life than I can by myself. If you get married, and find that all of a sudden you're less effective for the Lord and you're less engaged with the Lord, you've made a big mistake. You want to be sure that getting married enables you to continue acting with your leadership in the spiritual life of your family. Be strong. Stay on top of the physical needs; stay on top of your spiritual needs; and, stay on top of your feeding upon the Word of God. Feed your body right, and feed your soul right.

Acts 1:8 is true of every Christian. That's where we have to begin on this problem of frustrating the grace of God. Jesus is about to ascend to heaven now. He has been teaching them for 40 days following His resurrection. He's been teaching them a whole new ballgame – the whole new lifestyle of grace – the whole new program of the church age. Judaism is now in abatement. It's postponed. The last seven years of Jewish history will not be immediately fulfilled because they murdered their Messiah. Now God is bringing in a new species of human beings, the church age saints. Jesus has been going about explaining this. Now they can understand this. They see what is happening. The bases have been laid for the grace way of life beyond their imagination as Jews.

Acts 1:8: "You shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you." One thing more needs to be done to set this new age into operation. God the Holy Spirit, who is omnipresent, must now come down and be locally present inside of the life of every believer. But He cannot come while the Son of God is here. So Jesus says, "I have to go back to heaven, and the Holy Spirit will come back as the representative of God here on this earth." Ten days later, this happened, on the day of Pentecost – ten days after the ascension, this happened.

**Witnessing**

"And you shall be my witnesses then in Jerusalem (the city at hand) in Judea (the province at hand) in Samaria (the adjoining province), and even to the remotest part of the earth." To whom was he speaking? To the apostle Paul? Was He talking to all of our missionaries that we have on our prayer and support program here at the church? Was He talking to all these guys who are in seminary? He was talking to all of us. The apostles were the representatives of the first group upon whom the church would be built – the apostles and the prophets. This witnessing to all the world is what life is all about. You thought it was to visit Florida, didn't you? You thought it was to go skiing in Winter Park. You thought it was to go climbing mountains. You thought it was to go down to the seashore. Witnessing is propagating what? Propagating the Word of God – the completed Scriptures from grace salvation to a grace way of life of victorious living, and achieving a service for God that brings eternal rewards, that enhances and enriches your eternity.

**Poor Christians in Heaven**

There are going to be a lot of poor Christians in heaven. Make no mistake about that. And they will wish that they had done better with what they knew, or they will wish that somebody had alerted them to how the system works. We are called to full-time Christian service. This includes telling the lost the way into heaven based on the gospel of the grace of God. It's participating in a worldwide outreach with the gospel. It means alerting people to where they can find sources of information.

I thought that something was impressive concerning the people doing their garden work. They're going around putting in gardens. They did the kind thing to Mrs. Danish, and said, "We'll come and show you how to put in a garden." Now, our backyard is a jungle. I never go out there without my BB gun. As I walk through it, I always have it on that little metal table when I sit there among all that stuff growing around.

In the process of doing all of that, one gardener was explaining his frustration. This guy comes from New York. He has been a hotshot salesman in the top of the group and head of the gang. He asked, "What's going on here with this spiritual stuff? Why is this spiritual stuff so hard to find? Where do you learn this stuff? Where do you get this?"

A Berean Church member said, "We get it down there at Berean Church. That guy is always explaining doctrine. And do you know what? If you believe it, it works."

So these are the people that Jesus is talking to. You can hand out a brochure. You can take this Christian and say, "Now, here's the next thing you need to do. Study these tapes. Here's a tape brochure for you. You're ready for that stage. And you need the association of Christians. Here's the place you should come."

That's why you should pray for these academy parents. Many of them are so sincere and so genuine, but I can tell that they're shallow. Yet, they're concerned for their children. What they need to do is to be here where the food is.

So how well are you doing with your mission? That's what we have. We're explaining the Word. We're showing people how they can really be saved. We're directing people to that grace way of life that God has provided for them in Christ. How are you doing? That's the issue that confronts every one of us. How are we doing in that life? The sad thing is that for most of us, we're not doing very well. Most Christians are not aware of it. They don't understand what it is that they possess, and that God has made available to them in order to find that life suddenly becomes significant and satisfying, and they've got a purpose.

**The Great Commission**

Matthew 28:19-20 gives us the focus of the grace way of life, and this is a point of frustration: "Go, therefore, make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I commanded you. Lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age." To whom is this speaking? The professional religious worker? No, this is to us. Now, what are you going to do when you stand up before the Judgment Seat of Christ, and they check on your mission, which is somewhere in here, in these two verses – your particular mission and life of service? These two verses are fraught with enormous meaning. Here again, you have to have a little help with the grammar to see what the Spirit of God is putting out here. But if you understand these two verses, you're not likely to go far astray in wasting your life. You'll find that you'll be right on target most of the time.

**Paul's Example of Living the Grace Life**

Someone could have asked the apostle Paul, "Paul, how have you done in fulfilling your mission in life?" The apostle Paul could say, as he did to us, "Here's how I did." In 2 Corinthians 11:23, Paul is comparing himself to all of those haughty prideful Pharisees and Hebrew leaders who think that they are really in there in the service of God. Paul said, "I am what I am by the grace of God. I don't frustrate the grace of God in my life. And here's the evidence that I don't frustrate the grace of God in my life. I'm out there fulfilling my mission."

2 Corinthians 11:23: "Are they servants of Christ? I speak as if insane. I more so; in far more labors, in far more imprisonments, beaten times without number, often in danger of death." Did you know that happened to him? He wasn't just in prison that time with the Philippian jailer. He was in prison many times. He wasn't just beaten that one time. He was beaten many times, without number. And he was often tiptoeing through the tulips because his life was in danger of the people who wanted to kill him under Satan's guidance. Why does Satan kill? To silence. If he can't kill you, he'll try to kill somebody close to you that will silence you; that will undermine you; and, that will neutralize you. This is the devil's way. This is why the Scripture says, "He was a murderer from the beginning." This is his world, and he is free to do his work.

Paul goes on in 2 Corinthians 11:24, and says, "Five times I received from the Jews 39 lashes." He was supposed to get 40, but they counted, and they wanted to be sure he didn't get just one more. So they always stopped at 39, to be sure it wasn't more than 40. How many marks do you and I bear of people beating on us for telling them how to go to heaven, and thus fulfilling the grace of God in our lives? "Three times I was beaten with rods. Once I was stoned."

That time they did kill him, but God raised him up again and brought him back to life after letting him peek in on heaven and see what was there for him. But then God said, "You must never tell what you saw in heaven, Paul. And I'm going to give you this thorn in the flesh."

This was some physical ailment. We suspect it was an eye problem, because he always had somebody write the letters for him, and then he would take the pen and say, "See what large letters I have written."

But whatever it was, every time that thing came up, he said, "God, I know why you gave me this, and I'm not going to say anything about what heaven is like – the marvels that I saw there. But I wish you'd take this away from me." Three times the Lord said, "No, my grace will carry you through, Paul. I'm going to leave this physical ailment with you. You're going to know that you're going to have to depend on Me, because you're not hotshot physically well off." That, for some people, will lead you astray.

"Three times I was beaten with rods. Once I was stoned. Three times I was shipwrecked. A night and a day I spent in the deep." Oh, boy. Have you ever been floating around in the ocean by yourself all night and all day?

Our group was on a dive at Cozumel one time. It was a night dive. We were going around seeing all those eels that come out – those green eels and all those things that float around under there. And they give you big lights. We were like a bunch of automobiles under there by the lights. And we're all watching our pressure gauges to see how much air we have left. I had checked mine. We still had plenty of time.

I always stick close to the dive master because he's showing us all the things around. All of a sudden, the dive master is looking at his watch; he's looking at things; and, he's looking around. And all of a sudden he looks at me and he calls the other group around, and he indicated, "Everybody up." So we're all slowly moving our way up. You have to let your bubbles be above you so you're decompressing as you go up. We get up, but we're kind of off from where we should be. Our boat is off there. So we put the light on our heads; we waved at the guy in the boat; he saw us; he got the signal; he came over to where we were; and, he picked us up. So we all went home.

The dive master had not fully explained why he was calling the dive off. The next day, we were at supper, and he said, "I don't know whether you people realized what danger we had gotten into on that dive." The dive was a 40-foot dive – a shallow dive. He said, "I looked down at my depth gauge, and we were at 65 feet. So I knew that we were caught in a current, and it was taking us out into the Gulf. That's why we came up."

Two or three people didn't get the signal, and they were looking for them the next day out there, because they'd gotten in that current, and they didn't watch their depth, and didn't realize that something was taking them up. I don't know whatever happened out of the disposition of that to get them back, but it had to be scary to finally come up. Being a night dive makes it scary enough, if you don't see your boat close to you. But at least you know it's nearby.

Paul had a ship sink under him, and then he's there all by himself, with all the stuff under the water that could come and have a nightly snack on you.

Verse 26: "I have been on frequent journeys in dangers from rivers; dangers from robbers; dangers from my countrymen; dangers from the gentiles; dangers in the city; dangers in the wilderness; dangers on the sea; and, dangers among false brethren. I've been in labor and hardship through many sleepless nights in hunger and thirst, often without food, in cold and exposure."

What is our experience in the grace of God? All of this is the grace of God to him. Apart from such external things, there is the daily pressure upon me of concern for all the churches; all the Christians who go astray; all the Christians who go yo-yo for emotionalism; and, all the Christians who get put off. No matter how wonderful they have been for many years, they get put off because of some little stinking thing that they don't like, and everything else is thrown aside, because they have lost the power of the Spirit of God to guide them.

"Who is weak without my being weak? Who is led into sin, without my intense concern? If I have to boast, I will boast of what pertains to my weakness. The God and Father of the Lord Jesus, He who is blessed forever, knows that I am not dying. In Damascus the ethnarch under Aretas the King was guarding the city of Damascus in order to seize me." In Damascus, they said, "When Paul leaves, you kill him." Satan gave the word, "This man is preaching the gospel of the grace of God." That's what it means to live in grace. The devil is going to frustrate the grace of God.

So verse 33: "I was let down in a basket through a window in the wall, and so escaped his hands." When was the last time they let you down? "They let me down in a basket over the wall to escape from our spiritual enemies, to save our lives."

We have not begun to fight, but we will in the next session, on the issue of frustrating the grace of God.

Dr. John E. Danish, 1999

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