

# The Grace of God

Pastor Bill Farrow

2 Corinthians

## The Greeting (1:2)

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Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. <sup>11</sup>

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- Paul's greeting takes the form of a **common ancient Near Eastern blessing**: “**Grace**” (or “**mercy**” in Jewish letters) and “**peace**.”
- Normally at this point, the first-century writer would go on to wish his reader(s) good health--much as we say, “Hope all is going well.”
- While in the colloquial language of the time this may indeed have included **some reference to physical well-being**, there is **little to cause us to think** that there was any direct appeal to the hearer’s physical state of being.
- But this is not a personal letter, in the normal sense; **it is an Apostolic one...**
- Paul, **instead, directs attention to and specifies the source of good general health for the believer** - God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.
- It is this kind of Christian blessing that **he invariably uses to round off his opening greeting**.
- While we do not wish to be “metaphysical”, we ought to note that **it seems clear that in Paul’s mind spiritual health was central to the overall well being of the individuals in question, MORESO than their physical well being**.
- It is **not so much the Paul is claiming that physical well-being comes as a result of or flows out of spiritual understanding**.
- That is **far too Greek and idea and far too Gnostic** for Paul to endorse.
- It is simply that we, as believers **ought to recognize that our entire person’s health and welfare rests in the hands of an omnipotent and sovereign God**.
- This is not a matter of sowing and reaping, of planting and gathering.
- As we noted over the last two weeks, **this is a matter of the slave recognizing and acknowledging the reality of the slave/master relationship** in all of its fullness.

## Not Objectionable to Believers

- This is **not objectionable to genuine believers**, but it does run contrary to the human manner of thinking.
- Men **want things to be under their own authority** and power and they wish their own will to be the linchpin upon which the affairs of their lives turn.
- **This is a “tell”, by the way**, for the theology of a teacher.
- Does the teacher place **the burden of the cause, the trigger of blessing** of something that you and I do, or is there **clear recognition and acknowledgment** that even this ability comes from His hand?
- Remember, no one is endorsing a lay down and let God approach to Christian living.
- But **Man-centered theology** is just that, it is man-centered and has more to do with what I do and then God responding than it does with the other way around!
- **Biblical theology** has more to do with God doing and my responding!
- When one comes to the Lord one begins a journey whose every turn teaches us that it is, in fact, **our God that stands at the helm of these larger matters in life (not to mention the smaller ones)**.
- Paul seeks to remind us that all of our efforts at peace and security do not rest so much under our own control, **but are in the hands of God and are a function of His grace**.
- And **we need to see and remember that from the beginning**.

## Ownership forms Foundation

- It is possible to see these wishes here in Paul’s greeting **in a very general sense**, but we ought also acknowledge that **they at least form the basis for the specific discussion of God’s grace and peace extended to His people that follows in the book**.
- For that is, indeed, one of the foundational issue to which the entire rest of the book speaks – **is it God or is me?**
- **Grace**, of course, speaks of good done one who does not deserve or earn that good, **particularly when speaking of a superior’s treatment of an inferior**.
- God’s grace is described in a number of ways in the Bible:
- Is described as:
- Great. (Ac 4:33),

- Sovereign. (Ro 5:21),
- Rich. (Eph 1:7; 2:7),
- Exceeding. (2Co 9:14),
- Manifold. (1Pe 4:10),
- All-sufficient. (2Co 12:9),
- All-abundant. (Ro 5:15,17,20), and
- Glorious. Eph 1:6.
- One could spend a sizable amount of time exploring and developing those ideas!
- In the preaching and teaching of the Gospel, **one would expect the bestowal of Grace.**
- That would seem to be **normal and expected.**
- Actually, there is a **“double” bestowal of grace here**, as the very ability to preach on the Apostle’s part was a gift of God’s grace to begin with.
- The Apostles, though they may have had some oratory capacity to begin with, **were singularly unsuited to preach effectually the Gospel of God.**
- Like all preachers, they could recite and enlarge upon the words, **but the ability to preach it in fashion as to bring spiritual results was (and still is!) a gift of God!**

## “Great” Grace

- Dr. Luke speaks of the grace of God shed upon the disciples in the early preaching of the Gospel as **“great” in Acts 4:33:**

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And with great power the apostles gave witness to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus. And great grace was upon them all.<sup>[2]</sup>

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- “Great” is an adjective and speaks of **the measure of a thing.**
- It speaks of said measure as being **large, noticeably larger than one would expect.**
- It can be used of **number, size, even of intensity and effort**, etc.

- Surely it is demonstration of the “great grace” of God in **that any are saved**.
- He is gracious, **far and above that which might be expected** in that He deigns to spare any the judgment and condemnation of Hell.
- This is what Spurgeon had in mind when commenting on the surprising fact of the grace of God expended on men found in the phrase “Him that justifieth the ungodly” he said:

“I do not wonder that you are surprised; for with all my familiarity with the great grace of God, I never cease to wonder at it”.<sup>[3]</sup>

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- Matthew Henry commented:

The beauty of the Lord our God shone upon them, and all their performances: Great grace was upon them all, not only all the apostles, but all the believers, “charis megaleu”—grace that had something great in it (magnificent and very extraordinary) was upon them all. 1. Christ poured out abundance of grace upon them, such as qualified them for great services, by enduing them with great power; it came upon them from on high, from above. 2. There were evident fruits of this grace in all they said and did, such as put an honor upon them, and recommended them to the favor of God, as being in his sight of great price. 3. Some think it includes the favor they were in with the people. Everyone saw a beauty and excellency in them, and respected them.<sup>[4]</sup>

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- It is not that the Apostles received grace in greater measure than was normal, **but that the very reception of grace was a great and wondrous thing!**

## Sovereign Grace

- The Apostle Paul speaks of “**Sovereign**” Grace in **Romans 5:21**.

Moreover the law entered that the offense might abound. But where sin abounded, grace abounded much more,<sup>21</sup> so that as sin reigned in death, even so grace might reign through righteousness to eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord.<sup>[5]</sup>

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- “Sovereign” refers **that which is consistent with and characteristic of a ruler**.
- Abstractly, it can speak of **something that is unique and singular**.
- What Paul is speaking of is **a grace that conquered death and now reigns in its place**.

- In the sin of Adam, death entered into the world.
- And we must note that Paul is here **speaking primarily of spiritual death, not merely physical death.**
- Were physical death in view, then we might conclude that once one is a believer, one would not suffer physical death, and yet that is plainly not the case.
- What s in view here is a grace that rules absolutely and “sovereignly”.
- **That is the idea of “reigning” here mentioned.**
- The point that Paul is seeking to make for us is that **just as sin and death once reign sovereignly and surely over all men because of their identification with Adam’s sin, so also now, in the case of believers, grace reigns.**
- It is interesting that **Paul does not say that life reigns, is it not?**
- When one thinks of sin and its penalty, one thinks of death and **it would seem logical that the antithesis to that would be life.**
- **Now, it is true that life is ours in Christ,** eternal life in all of its fullness and glory.
- But what Paul wants us to understand here is that **this is a triumph of God’s grace!**

## **Rich & Exceeding Grace**

- In Ephesians 1:7 Paul speaks of the **“riches of His grace”.**
- In 2:7 he enlarges his idea by speaking of the **“exceeding riches of His grace”.**
- We might look at this in a couple ways.
- First, we might think of it in terms of **the “richness” of the grace of God.**
- God’s grace is **full and compete.**
- It is **full featured and full flavored** if we may.
- It is **not a simple, one-dimensional concept** but is **many faceted** in it meaning and significance.
- We might also think of it **in terms of amount or quantity to put is crassly.**

- Not so much that God has given us “a lot” of grace **so much as He has given us much in the giving of His grace.**
- There are **many benefits to grace**, many things that are ours now because we are children of God, and **many that was ours before, that thankfully, is no longer ours because of that self-same grace.**
- Similarly, we **might also think of this phrase in terms of duration.**
- His grace is rich in that it is **limitless.**
- MacArthur underscores this for us:  

“Salvation, of course, is very much for the believer’s blessing, but it is even more for the purpose of eternally glorifying God for bestowing on believers His endless and limitless grace and kindness. The whole of heaven glorifies Him for what He has done in saving sinners (cf. 3:10; Rev. 7:10–12).”<sup>[6]</sup>

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- The grace of God shed abroad upon men is **a deep well, a plenteous table** at which His children partake.

- Just to note, the apostle Paul puts it:

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“According to the riches of His grace” (Eph. 1:7).

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- Thank God, He did not say “out of His riches,” which would be like a millionaire giving \$1.00 in the offering plate, as it would be “out of” his riches.
- **“According to”** means **“in proportion to”**—and God’s proportionate provisions come without measure.<sup>[7]</sup>
- Think of that for a moment!
- God has given us grace in proportion to or according to His riches!
- Now there is thought that will sustain for eternity!

## Manifold Grace

- In **1 Peter 4:10** Peter speaks of the “manifold grace” of God.

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As each one has received a gift, minister it to one another, as good stewards of the manifold grace of God.<sup>[8]</sup>

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- “Manifold” speaks of being **many faceted**.
- Literally it speaks of be of various colors, variegated or many sorts.
- This helps us in our understanding of the grace of God.
- The grace that God has been shed upon us **in many, many fashions and ways, some of which we are aware, and some of which we are not**.
- His grace is **not limited to one area or one fashion**, but is given in many and multiple fashion and toward a variety of ends.
- It accomplishes many things and serves many purposes.
- We also need to note that these multiple ways and purposes **are not limited to a single individual**.
- God manifests Himself by mans of His church and His grace is manifested in various and multiple fashions by that church.
- As we look around us, we need to take not of and glorify God for what He has and what He is doing in His body – the church!
- We need to be careful that the idea that God’s grace is manifest in manifold fashion **does not lead us to be incautious or careless** and acting without discernment in regard to what actual is a demonstration of His grace and what is not.
- **We are called to be discerning and to take care** for our own souls and for the souls which God has given us to care for and we ought to be very certain that we are exercising that care rightly.
- Not all that claims to be of God is actually of God!
- That being said, what a joy it is to look around us and see the manifold grace of God!
- **He does not show Himself only in our language**, our tradition or according to our preferences!
- **He has done many, many things for us and for others as well!**

## All-Sufficient Grace

- Of course, the idea that God’s grace is sufficient for every trial and difficulty in life **is something familiar, as a concept, to every believer**.
- Paul proclaims this truth later in this very book and we will study that when we get there.

- 2 Corinthians 12:9 is a **pillar of strength for the Christian experience.**

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And He said to me, “My grace is sufficient for you, for My strength is made perfect in weakness.” Therefore most gladly I will rather boast in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me. <sup>10</sup> Therefore I take pleasure in infirmities, in reproaches, in needs, in persecutions, in distresses, for Christ’s sake. For when I am weak, then I am strong. <sup>[9]</sup>

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- The context here is trials and great difficulties **that persist** in our lives in spite of the fact that God could remove them.
- Note that in Paul’s mind **the issue is not blind fate or chance, but the hand of God.**
- **He does not “blame” God** for their presence, **but** he does clearly see that **it is God Who controls whether they are there**, in his life, or not.
- This is the point.
- **God’s grace is all-sufficient** – it can sustain and uphold no matter what the issue that faces us.
- This is, in my view, **an important idea.**
- The word translated **sufficient is used 8 times in the NT** and translates as “be content” three times, “be sufficient” twice, “be enough” once, “suffice” once, and “content” once.
- Its essence is **to be possessed of unfailing strength, to be strong, to suffice, to be enough.**
- Note here that the strength that is possessed in **not our own, but rather is God’s.**
- This is what Paul goes on to say in the next part of the verse in 2 Corinthians 1.
- **God’s strength is sufficient** to defend and ward off any threat.
- **Therefore, we ought to be satisfied and contented** because it thus follows, **because of the goodness of God, than anything that remains in our lives is there, not because He could not prevent it, but because He desires it to be so.** <sup>[10]</sup>
- This is precisely the point that Paul makes and that which we will discuss when we get to that point in our study of this Book.



## All-Abundant Grace

- Further, the Scriptures declare that the God's grace is "all-abundant".
- Romans 5:15-21:

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<sup>15</sup> But the free gift is not like the offense. For if by the one man's offense many died, much more the grace of God and the gift by the grace of the one Man, Jesus Christ, abounded to many. <sup>16</sup> And the gift is not like that which came through the one who sinned. For the judgment which came from one offense resulted in condemnation, but the free gift which came from many offenses resulted in justification. <sup>17</sup> For if by the one man's offense death reigned through the one, much more those who receive abundance of grace and of the gift of righteousness will reign in life through the One, Jesus Christ.) <sup>18</sup> Therefore, as through one man's offense judgment came to all men, resulting in condemnation, even so through one Man's righteous act the free gift came to all men, resulting in justification of life. <sup>19</sup> For as by one man's disobedience many were made sinners, so also by one Man's obedience many will be made righteous. <sup>20</sup> Moreover the law entered that the offense might abound. But where sin abounded, grace abounded much more, <sup>21</sup> so that as sin reigned in death, even so grace might reign through righteousness to eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord. [iii](#)

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- **Notice the "much mores"** in verses 15, 17 and 20.
- **In the same way** that death passed and reigned over all men because of Adam's sin, **so also** life passes and reigns upon believers.
- But the comparison here is not so much one to one comparing the first and second Adam, **as it is comparing the efficacy (among other things) comparing the degree of effectiveness.**
- **Adam's sin abounded in it effect on men; Christ's sacrifice much more abounds to His people.**
- As profound as the effect of Adam's sin and the presence of sin was upon the human race, **the effect and benefit of the grace of God is much more!**

## Glorious Grace

- Paul., in Ephesians 1:6 speaks on God's "glorious" grace.
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...having predestined us to adoption as sons by Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the good pleasure of His will, <sup>6</sup> to the praise of the glory of His grace, by which He made us accepted in the Beloved.<sup>[12]</sup>

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- The idea here is that the praise goes to the glory of His grace.
- His grace is glorious, that is, **it brings Him worship and adoration!**
- This is **the entire point of salvation**, something sadly lost on most men today.
- God has **not set about to save men primarily for their benefit.**
- Salvation indeed does benefit them, and benefit them greatly, but that was **NOT the first purpose** in God's mind for setting about to redeem men.
- That first purpose was **His own Glory and glorification of His own Name.**
- As difficult a thing as that is for us to grasp, **it is essential for us to understand**, lest we fall in grievous sin and twist salvation, as so many do today, into something that bears little resemblance to actual Biblical Christianity.
- And so Paul begins this letter by **reminding the Corinthians of the Mercy of God and the variety and abundance of blessing** that is theirs because of Gods' mercy.
- His intention is to call to their mind **the full spectrum of the Grace of God and thereby, all of His character and power.**
- He moves then to remind them of **the foundation that the Peace of God provides for them in life.**
- We need to note that this is **not new teaching** to the Corinthians, but is a reminder for them of what Paul and others had taught them.



<sup>[1]</sup> *The New King James Version*. Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1996, c1982. 2 Co 1:2.

<sup>[2]</sup> *The New King James Version*. Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1996, c1982. Ac 4:33.

<sup>[3]</sup> Spurgeon, C. H. *All of Grace : An Earnest Word With Those Who Are Seeking Salvation by the Lord Jesus Christ*. electronic ed. Springdale PA: Whitaker House, 1983; Published in electronic form by Christian Classics Foundation, 1996.

- [4] Henry, M. Matthew Henry's Commentary on the Whole Bible : Complete and Unabridged in One Volume. Peabody: Hendrickson, 1996, c1991. Ac 4:32.
- [5] The New King James Version. Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1996, c1982. Ro 5:20.
- [6] MacArthur, J. J. The MacArthur Study Bible. electronic ed. Nashville: Word Pub., 1997, c1997. Eph 2:7.
- [7] Tan, P. L. Encyclopedia of 7700 Illustrations : [A Treasury of Illustrations, Anecdotes, Facts and Quotations for Pastors, Teachers and Christian Workers]. Garland TX: Bible Communications, 1996, c1979.
- [8] The New King James Version. Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1996, c1982. 1 Pe 4:10.
- [9] *The New King James Version*. Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1996, c1982. 2 Co 12:9.
- [10] Strong, J. The Exhaustive Concordance of the Bible : Showing Every Word of the Test of the Common English Version of the Canonical Books, and Every Occurrence of Each Word in Regular Order. electronic ed. Ontario: Woodside Bible Fellowship., 1996. G714.
- [11] *Op Cit.* Ro 5:15.
- [12] *Ibid.* Eph 1:5.