

The Power of Ministry Grace, Part 2

2 Corinthians 4:13-18

2 Corinthians 4 verse 15, "For it is all for your sake, so that as grace extends to more and more people it may increase thanksgiving, to the glory of God." Motivation in ministry excited by love. This is such a marvelous verse because I think it so beautifully and simply summarizes the motivation for every true Gospel ministry, for every true pastor, every shepherd, every elder, this is why we do what we do. This is why "...we proclaim not ourselves," verse 5, "but Jesus Christ as Lord," and ourselves as your slaves for Jesus' sake." It's so grace, verse 15, will extend and superabound, and so that it'll be increasing thanksgiving among everyone, to the glory of God. This is why we do what we do. Grace is such a vital concept.

But, listen, how often grace is poorly explained, poorly understood, by, even by some Christians. How many times have you heard when someone has committed a pretty grave sin, and you hear someone say, "I think we just need to give her some grace."

To any casual observer, giving grace, sounds like overlooking sin. Giving grace, in that sense, sounds like ignoring sin and just letting it go, never confronting it. Give them grace, means to, Ah, pretend it didn't happen. That is not grace! You might make a case, *might*, make a case that it's mercy. But you got to realize in the Scripture even mercy sees, and acknowledges, and deals with sin, because of the sake of mercy.

So, maybe it's mercy. Overlook certain faults, and mistakes, and things. I understand mistakes, faults, errors; but sins? Maybe mercy, certainly not grace, not in the biblical sense. Grace deals with sin; doesn't let it go, doesn't overlook it. Simple definition for the word, grace; it's very profound definition: Grace is unmerited favor. It's a benefit conferred upon someone freely, not on the basis of any merit. No hard work, no job well done, no A for effort. God doesn't show grace, because you have such a wonderful personality, Grace is purely an expression of divine goodwill. Grace is gift. So, seeing grace as gift, as unmerited favor, it's a good start. And we can see how there is a common, and a universal aspect of God's grace.

We see his grace everywhere, really. He shows grace by letting a kid enjoy an ice cream cone on a hot, summer day. We can see God's grace in giving sunshine to the beachgoer and rain to the farmer. We can see God's grace in the air we breathe, in the food we eat, in the relationships that we enjoy, in the babies that are born, in the sunrises, sunsets, in the flowers that grow across the countryside. Beauty, joy, satisfaction, contentment, all of those are an expression of God's common grace: favor, from him, that is unmerited, it's unearned, and it's a favor that he shows to all humanity. He shows that favor, by the way, without any exception, without any qualification. The very worst sinners, Hitler himself, enjoyed good food, saw beautiful sunrises, sunsets, had his perch up in the Eagle's Nest and had magnificent views. God even gave grace to him.

But Paul's talking, here, about a very particular grace. He's talking about God's special grace, a redeeming grace for his people, and his people alone. If you turn a few pages to your right to 2 Corinthians 8:9, you see a saving grace of God, which is a particular expression of God's grace, to save his people in Christ. Paul writes, there, chapter 8, verse 9, "For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was

rich, yet for your sake he became poor, so that you by his poverty might become rich." That is a special, particular grace of God for his elect, for his people. God gave Jesus Christ, the Lord, to them. Though rich, becoming poor; through his poverty you become rich. That is favor. That is unmerited. The incarnation of Christ, it's his earthly ministry, it culminated in crucifixion, and then eventual resurrection, all for our forgiveness and justification. Someone described it as, quote, "...the act of loving condescension in the willing humiliation of Jesus Christ." That's right. All of that together, then, is a special grace, it's a particular grace, a saving, redeeming grace of Christ.

But look across the page at chapter 9, verse 8, because this is another kind of grace which is also particular, and this is empowering grace, 2 Corinthians 9:8. Paul writes, "...God is able to make all grace abound to you, so that having all sufficiency in all things at all times, you may abound in every good work." Man, notice the universal terms, there: all sufficiency, all things, all times, abounding in every good work. That's called empowering grace. So, the first particular grace is a redeeming grace; a grace that causes salvation. And

it's a grace that empowers sanctification, too. The second particular grace is an empowering grace, which is what empowers the work of the ministry.

From start to finish, the grace of God is the power at work in every true ministry. That which energizes and sustains our ministry is also what motivates our ministry. The saving, sanctifying, empowering grace of God, we want to see that effectual, productive, transforming grace of God, we want to see that superabounding. We want to see that just magnified. We want to see it explode and spread everywhere. And that's the word that Paul uses, here, *pleonazo*. *Pleonazo*: To greatly abound, to superabound, to be, and, you can describe it in terms of not just extent, but intensity, so, more intense, more pervasive, extending to more and more people, more places, with increasing intensity, increasing effect; superabounding.

Listen, this is the beauty of Gospel ministry. This is the real joy. Whenever God allows us to see some of the fruit of ministry, as pastors, as shepherds, and really, for all of us, as Christians, when we're involved in ministry we get to see some of the fruit of ministry. By God's kindness, we get to see

that sometimes. We get a front row seat to see God's grace in action with its power to save, to sanctify, to strengthen, to overcome. We see God's grace deliver people from slavery to sin.

God's grace is active to deliver people. God's grace teaches forgiven people to forgive others, to reconcile and restore relationships. God's grace gives the desire for righteous thinking, for righteous living. It clears the conscience, it clarifies the mind, it resolves the will, it brings dignity and blessing by living that way. All by God's grace. God's grace turns formerly covetous, greedy, bitter, discontented people into, now, grateful people, gracious people, contented, rejoicing in the satisfaction of knowing, knowing God as Savior, because I am so unworthy, and what a great Savior, and then obeying Christ as Lord because every single one of his commands means life for us. And God's grace superabounds.

It has a corresponding effect on thanksgiving. Thanksgiving is, then, the response that overflows from this heart that is enraptured with God's grace. Grateful heart, abounding in hearts that are forgiven. Thankfulness flowing forth from those who are being transformed, because they see their progress in the

Gospel. Flourishing in those who, overcome by grace, setting sins aside, and living in righteousness. All such gratitude coming out of that, as they personally experience the grace of God in their own lives. And then, not only in us, but when we see it happening in other people, when others become recipients of God's grace, when others are being saved, when others are beginning to grow, when others are receiving God's empowering for grace, not only for salvation and sanctification, but then, as they're deployed in ministry.

Now we see God's empowering grace to strengthen them for doing the work of the ministry, and that pattern just repeats itself over, and over, and over. On and on it goes, all through history. A grace like this goes through Paul to the Corinthians, through the Corinthians to other churches. That grace goes through all those faithful churches down through history, all through history, reaching us, eventually. Here we are, because of this grace. It superabounded, because look, it changed the entire western world. It's fueled missionary enterprises to other parts of the world. And, by the grace of God, we want to see his grace extend even further, superabounding in and through

us, extending and spreading out from us to our own Jerusalem, and Judea, Samaria, and to the uttermost parts of the earth.

And, the more the grace of God abounds in us, when that happens, the more thanksgiving saturates our own gospel witness to others. We're not reluctant witnesses to the saving grace of God. We're not reserved when we're talking about a Gospel that saved us. We are excited, we are thankful people. We are so filled with gratitude we cannot contain talking about what God has done for us. And that's what brings the saving grace of God to others, teaches them to praise and thank God with us. What motivates all this? It's love, isn't it? It's love for God. I love him for what he has done in me, to me. I love seeing God honored as God. I love to hear him praised and thanked for the manifest goodness that he shows to people every single day.

Love motivates this Gospel ministry. Love for others, as well. To see our neighbors, family, friends, coworkers, to see even pure strangers, saved, sanctified, converted, delivered, set free, redeemed, rejoicing, thankful, and then witnesses of all that to others, that's what we love to see. So, it's love that drives our local evangelism. It's love that motivates our

formal outreach efforts. Love motivates our informal efforts, too, loving our neighbors by telling them the Gospel truth, teaching them the grace of God. It's love that drives our church's ministry as a corporate body, livestreaming our preaching, broadcasting our preaching on the radio, extending the grace of God to our region, to our state. It's love that drives the entire missionary enterprise.

The whole missionary impulse is driven by this love. We want to see the grace of God increase; we want to see it spread around the world. We want to see it do its powerful work to convert more and more worshipers to God, so that they give all honor, and all praise, and all glory to God, because, why? Because he's so worthy. He's the only one worthy! Love him, so we love others, and we want to see them converted, become worshipers. If our ministry is not saturated then by divine grace, then it's not ministry at all; it may have the form, the shape of ministry, it may look from outward observance to be ministry, but if it's not animated by the grace of God, if it's not driven by his grace and his power, it's not ministry. Call it something else, because it's God's grace that has got to be working in and through the leaders of a church, in the church

itself to produce conviction, and resolution, and motivation.
The grace of God produces faith, hope, and love.

And those three virtues are at work in a fourth grace, aspiration in ministry. Aspiration in ministry that's educated or instructed by glory. Paul comes, as you see in verse 16, he comes full circle from the opening statement. He says, "So we do not lose heart." Said the same thing back in verse 1, "Therefore having this ministry by the mercy of God, we do not lose heart." And yet, that ministry that we have, by the grace of God, it means affliction for us. It means difficulty. It means trouble, sorrow, pain. It could lead to broken relationships, and rejection, and scorn, and reviling, and slander. It can even, become hostile and violent: persecution, even death. But our minds are instructed by divine glory. We look beyond what is seen at what is unseen.

We look beyond the trouble, and we see the triumph. Sets our perspective, it directs us to worthy aspiration, to worthy ambition, it teaches us what's worth aspiring to. We'll cover all that in last few verses, here. "So, we do not lose heart. Though our outer self is wasting away, our inner self is being

renewed day by day. For this light momentary affliction is preparing for us an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison, as we look not to the things that are seen but to the things that are unseen. For the things that are seen are transient, but the things that are unseen are eternal.” Let me give you just a one-sentence summary of all of that: walk by faith and not by sight.

Walk by faith and not by sight. Faith in unseen realities gives perspective. It sets the mind on things above, not on the things that are on the earth. And the more you do that, though your mortal body wastes away; while that’s happening, the outer man wasting away, the glory of God shines brightly in us evermore, revealing the true, spiritual life inside, day by day renewing us after the pattern of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ. Notice the contrast in that section, verses 16-18. Verse 16, he’s teaching by way of contrast. Verse 16, the outer self versus the inner self, wasting away versus daily renewing. Verse 17, lightness versus weightiness, momentary versus eternal, affliction versus glory. Verse 18, as well, things that are seen versus things that are unseen, things that are

transient and temporary versus things that are, then, eternal, lasting, permanent.

In verse 16, though the outer self, the body, is dying, the inner self, the life of the inner man, the spiritual life that we have, given to us from God, God is renewing that spiritual life every single day. He injects his life into us. How does he do that? Though the outer man wastes away, how does he renew us day by day? Well, he does this by the grace of affliction for the sake of the Gospel, which is in verse 17. It's not just suffering for suffering's sake, it's affliction for the sake of the Gospel. "Through," verse 17, "affliction he is preparing for us," or, as the other translations put it, producing in us, "an eternal weight of glory..." Another translation says, "For our momentary, light affliction is working out for us an eternal weight of glory far beyond all comparison."

God uses affliction to chip the clay pot, to put cracks in the earthen vessel, to expose the treasure that he has deposited within each one of us. Affliction, he uses it for the sake of other people, also. It's so that we can see his work in us, the things of earth grow strangely dim in the light of his glory and

grace. But it's also for the sake of others. He chips all this away so that others can see how we suffer righteously, how we go through affliction, and it reveals even more glory from God. "Affliction," as one commentator said, "is like a sharp knife that cuts one cord after another that holds us to this earth and to its earthly glory." Good way of putting it.

Paul describes the affliction as light and momentary, which is not to deny the pain of any of it. This isn't some kind of a philosophical stoicism, denies the reality of nerves within our body that alert us to pain, hunger, fatigue. The denial of our emotions that are truly hurt by people when they treat us so poorly, when we're trying to just be faithful to Christ. Why would they do that? Why would they say such things? 'Course we're going to think that. 'Course it hurts. Any affliction, internal, external, it's light. It's bearable. Why? Because it is momentary. Affliction doesn't last. It's just part of this temporary life, part of a passing existence. Two seconds into the eternal state, the light, momentary nature of affliction is going to come into sharp focus, then become a distant memory.

The affliction doesn't compare well to the glory. They're not equal at all. In comparison to the affliction, or contrast, is affliction light, momentary, the glory is weighty. It's eternal. In fact, it's weighty because it's eternal. The word, weight, used here is *baros*, for which we get the word, barometer. Barometer is an instrument for reading barometric pressure. Barometric pressure is a measure of the weight of air in the earth's atmosphere, and it's a weight that presses down on us at any given moment. That's weight. Concept of weight connects to that Hebrew word for glory, *kāḇôḏ*. The root meaning of *kāḇôḏ* is heaviness, weightiness.

Affliction can only be light precisely because it is momentary. Lenski says that "Every moment and its pain are over in a moment, and so the next. It is never anything *but* momentary. The moments keep flying away. They never amass and concentrate. Not one moment is able to continue even for a day." End Quote. Glory is the opposite of that. It's not light, but weighty, precisely because it is eternal. Lenski provides us a really helpful illustration, he says, when, "When ten years' worth of affliction are spread out over all the seconds of the ten years, well, the spread becomes very thin and light. But if

ten years' worth of affliction were centered in one second, that would be weight, indeed. In contrast to the affliction, which is light, momentary, spread over years, the weight of eternal glory is centered in one second." Lenski says, "The glory is one incomprehensible, weighty concentration, being timeless, eternal." That is such a perfect way to illustrate what Paul is conveying about the glory of God, here.

How does Paul maintain this perspective about affliction, "It's light, momentary; it'll pass"? How does he maintain this mindset about suffering for the sake of the Gospel? How does he, verse 1, verse 16, "never lose heart," but always maintain good courage, patient endurance, hopefulness, confidence? Well, by looking, verse 18, looking, "not to the things that are seen but to the things that are unseen. For the things that are seen are transient, the things that are unseen are eternal." Affliction is useful to help us see that because it helps us to despair of ourselves. Affliction that is greater than us helps us to see, very quickly, that it's not by our own strength. It's not by our own power, it's not by our own cleverness, our own intellect, our own ingenuity, our own planning, our own preparation. It's not because we have enough insurances bought and paid for.

Affliction helps us to give up on our own power, forsake any human solution, and turn all attention and devotion to God. Things seen, things not seen, the verb *blepo*, visual perception, physical sense of sight. But we are looking, that's the verb, beginning of the sentence, verb *skopeo*, we're concentrating on, we're fixing our gaze, and our eyes, and our attention watchfully upon those things that cannot be seen, the invisible realities of life, spiritual realities. Those things are revealed to us by God in Scripture. And the more we fix our gaze, the more we focus our spiritual perception, and the vis, invisible God, made visible, by the way, in Jesus Christ, the more our attention turns away from temporary, passing realities of this physical life, like affliction for the sake of Christ.

We turn to the invisible realities, the weight of eternal glory. The more we're being renewed by God, day by day, even though our outer man is wasting away, it doesn't matter to us. We let this body go. Not, let it go, like don't exercise and don't eat right, I'm saying we refuse to pay attention to it, be too concerned about it anymore. We've seen that Paul has described a true ministry. Accept no substitute. Pastors and

elders, Christian men, Christian women, may the God of all grace
pour out all this grace upon us, so that we're faithful in
Gospel ministry.