

Growing in the Grace of God

Lesson 2 **The Grace of God**

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Opening Prayer

Father, we come with hunger. We come with thanksgiving. We come with eagerness. We come with expectation. We come with delight in You and joy for the prospect of meeting You again face to face in Your Word. We ask You to enlighten us by the work of the Holy Spirit. Feed us. Strengthen us. Unfold some of the glories of Your grace. Give us more of a spiritual grasp of it to see what You want to say to us, what You have for us, and what You wish to do in and with and through us. We praise You for the riches of Your grace and ask You to unfold them tonight, for Your glory and for our progress in the faith. We pray in Jesus' name. Amen.

Introduction

As we continue our studies on the theme of *Growing in the Grace of God*, the topic of this session will be more directly related to the subject in that we shall deal with the grace of God specifically. Last session we covered the law of God. This session we shall cover the grace of God. And you can tell by the title of the series of studies that we shall speak to the concerns of day-by-day Christian living. We shall expound on grace for Christians today: grace not only to come to the new life in Christ, but grace as well to see that life developed. We shall look at the grace of God unto sanctification more and more.

By way of introduction, we shall quickly return Romans 6:14, which we recall from last session.

For sin shall not have dominion over you, for you are not under law but under grace. (Rom 6:14)

Again, this truth rears forth: we who believe are not under law, but stand under grace. Our first study, of course, oriented us to the law of God and we saw the ultimate message of the law of God is, “Be holy. Be perfect.” We also saw that the law of God, being deficient, cannot make us holy or perfect. But we also noted that the law of God has the ability to reveal our need, make us accountable before God, and alert us to sin’s reality and the fact that we are sinners. And then the law can tutor us to the Lord Jesus Christ. We also looked at the fulfillment of the law of God in our lives, centering around the life and work of our Lord Jesus Christ. The entire work of our salvation, all the way from justification through sanctification is fulfilled by Christ. All our salvation—initiation, process, and fulfillment—find their base in who He is, what He’s done, what He is to us now, and what He provides.

The more we read about, pray about, meditate on, and study the law of God, the more we appreciate the grace of God. We respect the law more through study as well—but as great as our appreciation for the law becomes, our appreciation for God’s grace should grow and increase all the more. “You are not under law, but under grace.”

Grace is God’s plan and God’s provision to keep sin from dominating our lives. Who but God would come up with such a plan? If I were God—I know you are all quietly thanking God that I am not—but if I were God, I would think, “Let’s just crack down on the law. Surely that is the key. Thou shalt and thou shalt not. And if that doesn’t work, we’ll put it in capital letters. If that does not work, we’ll go to neon.” The amazing thing is that it is not an increased focus on the law and a more serious, diligent approach to it that keeps sin from dominating our lives; but as we read, “Sin shall not have dominion over you, because you are not under law, but under grace.”

God provides greatly for His people. There is a way to live one's life in Christ with sin bearing less and less domination, and having an ill influence in our walk with the Lord. And it centers upon the grace of God. Now that truly draws me on. That is drawing by lovingkindness. Oh, yes. That is what I want. That is what we should all want. That sounds so good! God's loyal steadfast love, by His grace, provides a way for sin to have less and less of a grip on your life and mine.

We also looked at Hebrews 7:18-19.

¹⁸For on the one hand there is an annulling of the former commandment because of its weakness and unprofitableness,
¹⁹For the law made nothing perfect; on the other hand, there is the bringing in of a better hope, through which we draw near to God. (Hbr 7:18-19)

The law of God is unable to set us free from the domination of sin. It was never designed to do that. It was, however, designed to let us know what sin is and reveal our personal and individual proclivity towards sin. The law makes nothing perfect; it only demands perfection. Oh how that causes us to appreciate, to hunger for, to desire growth in the grace of God.

Grace Beyond Law

We shall see the Lord develop a little more of this great truth that grace, not law, is that which makes perfect our faith. We touched upon it briefly last session, but really this will be the focus of that which follows. The Scriptures herald this theme time and time again. "Grace, not law! Grace, not law!" The first chapter of the Gospel of John—that glorious and eminently unique gospel—though touching on the historical progress of the life and ministry of Jesus, brings so

much of the heavenly purpose down into the earthly walk of the Lord Jesus Christ. In John 1 we see that it is grace and not law that believers adore in Jesus Christ.

For the law was given through Moses, but grace and truth came
through Jesus Christ. (Jhn 1:17)

God used Moses to reveal His holy character in the law, to lay out His standards in the law, and to indicate His will in the law. But grace and truth came through Jesus Christ.

In the truth that the Lord Jesus shares, we see the Lord's greatness and His character and His will. But oh, this glorious addition as well—grace and truth came through Jesus Christ. If the Lord Jesus Christ had not come, we would not have what we need to walk in the righteousness of God. Thank the Lord for His law, but do not ever be content to stop there. 2 Corinthians 3:7, 8 says the law has a glory, but it also adds that grace has a glory so great that it makes it look like the law has no glory at all. The glory of the law is the glory of realizing our deficiency. It reveals our sin before a holy God. How much more glorious is the grace of God which tells us we have a remedy for our problem! Grace and truth came through Jesus Christ.

And of His fullness we have all received, and grace for grace.
(Jhn 1:16)

John 1:14 tells us that when Jesus came, He came full of grace and truth. And now, do you know what you and I have received right out of His fullness? Out of the fullness of the grace of God, we have received grace upon grace. In fact, our testimony should be considered due evidence of that fact. If we want to explain to someone God's grace in our lives, we could point directly to the

history of our personal Christian experience; even the fact of our salvation is abundant evidence of God's work of grace. It has been grace upon grace! And we might even add grace upon grace upon grace. Upon grace upon grace! How often you reiterate this truth depends upon how much time you have to give testimony to the work of God in your life.

That is how grace manifests between the Lord and us. Out of His fullness! Out of His full supply of the infinite measures of His grace, we have received abundantly. And then God just deals with us as one gracious work—one gracious provision upon another gracious work and another gracious provision. That is God's way with us in Jesus Christ: grace upon grace.

Defining Grace

What is grace anyway? For years now, between fifteen and twenty years, I have been trying to jot down descriptions of the grace of God. I have given up on finding a final definition. A definition is supposed to capture the whole thing, but our language and thoughts are just far too limited in scope to accomplish the task. We shall simply let the Lord do this out of His glory when we meet Him in glory. Still, it is always good and edifying to see the Lord's descriptions of His grace—new slants and perspectives that will continue to build our appreciation for that wonderful grace.

Let me share with you my latest feeble attempt. The grace of God, what is it? If it is grace upon grace we have received and walk in, and we are studying to understand growth in the grace of God, what is it? Grace is God's free provision for us through His Son. And grace manifests itself as we trust in the person and work of His Son by granting us all that we would need, all that we would yearn for, and all that we are commanded to walk in and become. And all this is granted despite our inadequacy and the fact that we could never deserve, could never earn, and could never produce the merit that would earn or deserve these gifts on our own.

There is really so much more to the grace of God than that. That we know so little, and that which we do know is so great, really kind of stirs my heart. Even just the verses that reveal that part work joy in my heart. As we trust in the person and work of the Lord Jesus Christ, God provides all of this glorious grace. And it is without any doubt, grace upon grace.

Therefore, let Galatians 2:21 be our testimony even as it was the apostle Paul's.

I do not set aside the grace of God; for if righteousness comes
through the law, then Christ died in vain. (Gal 2:21)

Think of the implications of that. Jesus would not have had to come to this sin-cursed world, die an agonizing and terrorizing death. Recall how He shuddered as the cup of sin came to Him in the garden. Everything in His eternal, holy being shrinking back from sin and death and yet He submits to the Father: "Not My will but Yours be done." Jesus would not have had to come to the cross and go through all of that if righteousness were available through the law. If we foolishly think the law is enough, we are saying the death of Jesus Christ was in vain. It was a waste. There was no point to it. If we say that, we trample the blood of Christ.

"So we do not set aside the grace of God." We cling to it. We stand on it. We hope in it. We grow in it. In fact, that death of Christ was the ultimate demonstration of the grace of God.

So often we tie the grace of God into the death of Christ but forget to relate its power to the resurrection, the ascension, and the on-going intercessory and living-in-us ministry of the Lord Jesus Christ. Maybe you are with the great multitude of us, who have made this serious mistake

about the grace of God. I did early on. I think I made every mistake you could possibly make concerning the grace of God, as far as misunderstanding it and misapplying it and misappropriating it.

I used to think that the grace of God was equal to the forgiveness of God—a major misunderstanding on my part. We know now that the grace of God supplies forgiveness, but one of those two realities (that of God’s grace and that of God’s forgiveness) is far greater than the other. Consider for yourself; truly grace is immeasurably greater than forgiveness.

Forgiveness is our first deep drink of the cup of the grace of God. Many imagine they have hit the bottom of the cup with that first sip. “Thank You, Lord, I needed that. Forgiven!” No, no. That was the first gulp out of an ocean of grace. Do not relegate the grace of God only to forgiveness.

If forgiveness were all the grace of God we ever got, would you not be willing to praise Him and serve Him and live in His glorious presence forever? I would. But thankfully, it is far better than that! Again, it is grace upon grace. The grace of God is far more than merely forgiveness (as good as it is!). And most of the studying we will be doing in this series is related to this issue of grace upon the grace of forgiveness. Grace for growing. Grace for maturing. Grace for serving. Grace for becoming more and more like the Lord Jesus Christ. So we do not want to set aside for a moment the full beauty of the grace of God. It is through the grace of God that the righteous life of Christ becomes more and more our portion and our walk.

God’s Justifying Grace

Now we shall briefly review God’s *justifying* grace and then let the Lord build on it concerning God’s *sanctifying* grace. Recall the words of Romans 3 from last session. We are those who have

called upon the Lord Jesus Christ and we now number among the ones who have been granted the saving work of His grace.

Being justified freely by His grace through the redemption that is
in Christ Jesus. (Rom 3:24)

Remember what justification is—the declaration of our innocence without guilt by a holy Judge, God Himself. Even though we know that on our own we were everything but innocent, still God has judged us innocent. We were entirely guilty: guilty of sin and deserving of eternal death. The holy Judge is also a loving and gracious Judge. And through the death of Christ, Paul tells us, God can be just and the justifier. He wants to be our justifier, but He cannot just sweep sin under the rug. He is no compromiser. He is holy. He cannot act like He's not holy. But He had planned a path to justice, to remain true and holy and righteous, and prepared a manner in which to be the justifier of we ungodly, guilty sinners who called on the name of the Lord for forgiveness and salvation.

Justification is freely given to us by grace, for “blessed are the poor in spirit for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.” And remember Isaiah’s admonition to embrace God’s grace in this manner: “Come you who have no money, buy milk and bread and wine and feast on the things of God” (Isa 55). We do not have anything worthwhile with which to barter with God for our redemption; instead, He offers justification to us freely by His grace. We confess our bankruptcy and He gives us His riches of forgiveness as we trust in Jesus Christ. Justified freely by His grace. Christ is our redeemer. Christ paid the price of redemption. Christ paid the price to buy us out of bondage to sin and back to fellowship with God.

Justified by grace. Ephesians 1:7 describes it in a beautiful way. “In Him we have redemption through His blood.” I love the attention God brought early on to the beautiful truth of being in Christ. That is where the grace is and that is where we live. Again, I cannot believe how many years I overlooked that glorious phrase in the Scriptures. But we shall study that a couple sessions from now. “In Him,” which is where we are now, “we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sin.”

Now these are things that are involved in justification. *Redemption* by the blood of Christ, that most precious of costs! The priceless blood of the eternal, righteous lamb that brings us *forgiveness* of sins. The declaration of innocence by a holy God “according to the riches of His grace.” To spend the riches of His grace, God did not bankrupt His treasure house of grace in His forgiving of us—for inestimable is the vastness of His wealth of grace. He did not spend it all. He has an infinite surplus remaining. And these riches are ours to be had—they belong to His children.

God’s Sanctifying Grace

There are treasures untold to draw on, to live on day by day, and to rely upon by the grace of God. I have been one who, in years past, greatly underestimated the riches of the grace of God. I do not want to do that anymore. I want to realize more and more how vast these treasures are. They are there for us to draw upon. They are there for us to live by. They are there in heavenly places to draw on for our walk in earthly realms.

And where do we draw upon those uncountable riches? In God’s sanctifying work of grace day by day. We shall discuss for the remainder of this session God’s sanctifying grace and the matters so related. It is the heart of our study in these six lessons.

Years ago when I began searching the Scriptures for indicators that the grace of God existed not only for forgiveness, but for living and growing and serving and maturing and for victory and for progress as well, I sought out Titus 2.

For the grace of God that brings salvation has appeared to all
men (Tts 2:11)

That again is the aspect of the grace of God with which most of us are familiar. In fact, every Christian has to be familiar with that to enter into the salvation of the Lord; recognizing God's saving grace is essential. "For the grace of God that brings salvation has appeared to all men." God has offered salvation to all men by His grace; but for those who received it, those who received salvation by His grace, that same grace carries on a further ministry. That grace ministers to its subjects through teaching.

Teaching us that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we
should live soberly, righteously, and godly in the present age
(Tts 2:12)

God's grace, which brings salvation, also teaches us to turn from ungodliness and so, walk in godliness. God's grace teaches us and trains us unto a godly life. Godliness may be the ultimate way to speak of sanctification. Denying ungodliness, and living soberly, righteously, and godly in this present age, is related to the teaching and training ministry of that same grace of God that brings salvation to all men.

Again we see the grace of God is not just for forgiveness. It also purposes to grow the children of faith in their godliness. The word here translated in Titus as “teaching us” is similar to another New Testament word that can be translated the same—a word that often refers to the making of disciples. It is by the grace of God that we start out as disciples of the Lord; and God’s grace just keeps working in us, discipling us, training us, and transforming us further into the image of Jesus Christ. This is God’s sanctifying grace.

Here we note one of the most obvious statements revealing that God’s grace is meant for sanctification. This verse is actually thematic for this series of studies.

But grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior
Jesus Christ. To Him be the glory both now and forever. Amen.
(2Pe 3:18)

Grace is a realm in which we are to grow and develop. Grace is also *the means* by which we are to grow and develop in that grace. We are to increasingly understand, appreciate, appropriate, draw on, and live by the grace of God. And as we do, we shall necessarily grow in that grace. Just as a child does not cause itself to grow, so it is with grace. The life that is there is nurtured by what is given to that life: we feed that child; we care for that child; and we minister to that child’s life. Soon the child blossoms and grows and develops—naturally and without force. So it is with God and the grace He grants us. We are the children of God by the grace of God; and what nurtures this grace-gift of life is simply more of that grace. And God is ever-pleased to grant it abundantly.

It is the grace of God that gave us salvation and new life in Christ. It is the grace of God that nurtures that life and develops that life and brings it to what the Lord wants it to be. That is why we are told, “But grow in the grace of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.” We shall later speak of growing in the knowledge of our Lord and knowing our Lord, which is also directly related to His grace at work in us.

We are to grow in the grace of God. This speaks to the process of sanctification. Grow in the grace of God. This is not about justification. That happens in a moment. Justification is the immediate culmination of the process of God calling us and wooing us by His truth and His Spirit. But once birthed, once given new life by the grace of God, we are to continue to grow in grace. We are to develop in and by the grace of God. *Sanctification*, the day-by-day process of maturing more and more unto the fullness of the stature of Christ (as Ephesians 4 puts it), is the single word that captures this concept of growth in grace.

Here is another powerful picture of the grace of God unto sanctification more and more. Acts 20:32. At this point in the unfolding of the early church, the apostle Paul has gone throughout much of the Mediterranean world, planting the seed of the gospel and thereby planting churches. He is traveling his way to Jerusalem where chains and bonds and trouble await him. Paul calls the leaders of the church down to the coastline at Miletus and begins to pour out his heart to them in their last visit together before they gather around the heavenly throne in the glorious future.

So now, brethren, I commend you to God and to the word of His
grace, which is able to build you up and give you an inheritance
among all those who are sanctified. (Act 20:32)

Note that *sanctified* is here used in the past tense. There are really three aspects of sanctification: past, present and future.

When we came to Christ we were sanctified in the sense that we were set apart from the world unto God. An alternate rendering of sanctification in this sense would be to speak of being set apart for the glory of God, the purposes of God, and the use of God. In one sense that happened when we were taken out of Adam and placed in Christ; this occurred when we were called out of the world and became a part of the body of Christ. We were sanctified and set apart to God—all in the past.

Some day in the future there is also a great and full sanctification awaiting us where we will be entirely set apart from everything else for the glory of God, the use of God, and the purposes of God for eternity and nothing will interfere with that. This is referred in the Scriptures by the name, *glorification*.

But here lies the rub: we live in this present, on-going process of sanctification. The learning, the stumbling, the maturing, and the growing are all an immediate portion of our daily experience as believers. Right in the middle of this, Paul's admonition to the Miletans, there is spoken of a glorious relationship through the process of grace, day by day of sanctification. Paul was commending the brethren from the church to God and to the word of His grace. One of the great titles for the Word of God is *the word of His grace*. It is His word and truly, it speaks volumes to His magnificent grace.

God's word about His grace is described here as being able to do two things: to build you up and to give you an inheritance among those who are set apart to God. Of these two things, again,

every Christian is familiar with one of them. Many Christians are unfamiliar with the other of the two. Of course all Christians recognize the fact that grace is able to give us an inheritance among those who are set apart for God. All of us who have been brought out of Adam into Christ, out of the world into the body of Christ, know an inheritance awaits us. We know, by the grace of God, that we are headed for the home of God our heavenly Father. We are bound for that country where Jesus went to prepare us a place. We have an inheritance awaiting us.

The world looks at most of us like we do not have much and they are right in that by sight, we can have nothing better than them. But truly, the Christian joy and hope lies in our inheritance that awaits us beyond the borders of mere sight. Riches beyond measure to plunge into for the glory and service of God for eternity! That is the inheritance awaiting us. And we who know the Lord, know we have that inheritance ahead. We are joint-heirs with Christ. Heaven is our home. Really, there are just a whole bunch of us getting very, very homesick. We want nothing more than to plunge into the inheritance that will multiply our love and praise and worship for our Lord God Almighty. And we recognize that it comes from grace alone.

But far too often, far too many of us have stifled our growth in knowing this other business of grace—this business of sanctification. “So now brethren, I commend you to God, and to the word of His grace, which is able to build you up.” Give praise to God for the heavenly inheritance awaiting you. But that is not the whole story. There is more grace available for other things than just someday receiving that inheritance. There is grace in the word of God for being built up. “The word of His grace which is able to build you up.” Again, we are talking about sanctification. Edification. Growth. Service.

God has granted us a desire to grow in our Christian life and spirit. We have a desire to grow in the things of God, to be strengthened, to get built up, and to become more useable. And just how is this strengthening going to take place?

Sometimes we see maturing, fruitful, effective Christians and we think, “Oh I wish I could make my life like that.” The plain hard fact is that you cannot! But the grace of God can. Sometimes we are tempted to believe that we simply do not have the knack for that kind of spiritual living. We refuse to believe that we, too, can be that effective. We see saints who have grown to great depths of maturity in their faith and we lose heart believing that we could never mature in such a way. No, it is true; we do not have the power to bring that to pass. But the grace of God at work in your life can bring it to pass. There is a way. There is a way to be built up effectively in our life of faith. We must continually commend one another to the word of His grace, which is able to build us up. The power of grace is in God’s word.

Personally, I love to study the Scriptures about the ability of the word of God. I love it. It is one of my favorite themes. It builds faith. It builds expectation. It builds confidence in the Word of God. And studying the power of God’s word leads to me to proclaim it boldly. The ability of the word of God, here called the word of His grace, is able by God’s gracious power to build us up. When men commend their lives to the word of His grace, God proves the power of His grace in their lives. His grace is able to build us up.

His grace is freely provided through His Son and the work of His Son and the provisions of His Son. His grace is all that in which we need to walk. It is all to which He is calling us—and even commanding us. “The word of His grace, which is able to build you up.”

I sat with a young man in Dallas, when I was pastoring there back in the late 60s and early 70s. My heart went out to this young man. He said, “You know, I have been a Christian a few years and I have been trying to figure out how it works and how it doesn’t.” And he said, “I have come to this conclusion. Some can just do it and some cannot. And I cannot.” It broke my heart because in saying that, he was saying he was finished with trying to live the Christian life.

But in a sense, that is a good place to be. Nobody appreciates the grace of God like somebody who has finally been convinced that grace is their only hope. It is not that some can do it and some cannot. It is that *nobody* can make themselves like Christ. But the grace of God can work on us, in us, and through us—and it will. So more and more, our own efforts become less visible and more of Christ takes the place of what was once our image—and so we grow in Christlikeness. The grace of God can do that. It is ever able to build us up. We should find great encouragement in the grace of God, for there are riches to draw on from the grace of God that can build us up in this life now. That is God’s sanctifying grace.

Hebrews 13 speaks of another demonstration of God’s sanctifying grace.

Do not be carried about with various and strange doctrines. [That is, weird teachings contrary to the Word of God, often contrary to the grace of God.] For it is good that the heart be established by grace, not with foods [that is, ceremonial, religious foods] which have not profited those who have been occupied with them. (Hbr 13:9)

It is not religious ritual that matures us and strengthens us. It is the grace of God at work on our lives. The heart must be established by grace. The heart is the inner man, the true spiritual being. This is the new man, the new person in Christ. The heart is where the Holy Spirit dwells and wants to reveal Christ to us as our life according to Colossians 3:4. The heart is that out of which flows all of the issues of life.

It is good that the heart be established by grace. Established. Stabilized. Grounded. It is good that the heart be made firm and strong and increasingly, spiritually predictable. It should be built by grace to become reliable in the strength of the Lord. It is good for the heart to be strengthened by grace.

Do you ever get wishy-washy inside? Does resolve seem to slip through your fingers or your ribs? "Where did it go, my commitment? My resolve? My certainty? My dedication? My zeal? My confidence? Where has it gone?" The world about you would just ask you to reach a little deeper for the world would say that it is in a man's depths that he finds resolve. No, we do not need to reach a little deeper; rather, we should open up a little wider. "Pour in some more grace, Lord. Establish my heart by grace." A heart established in the grace of the Lord is a heart of resolve and a heart of dedication.

God's people have been given an inner desire for the stabilization of our private, inner spiritual relationship with the Lord. We are given a desire for a life and walk with the Lord that is stabilized, strengthened, grounded, solid, and a firm foundation. How are we going to get it? The grace of God exists for this too.

As we consider the grace of God, learn of the grace of God, and commit our hearts to the grace of God, that grace will naturally establish itself in our heart. And as our heart is gradually built a firmer foundation in God's grace, so that foundation will gradually find demonstration in our life and walk. The grace of God reaches down into the deepest and innermost part of our being and stabilizes us, setting us on the solid rock of our salvation.

The grace of God is God's work on us, for us, with us, and in us. It is the provision purchased by the Lord Jesus Christ and both abundantly and freely available to those who believe. Take joy that your heart be established by grace. Paul speaks to this in 2 Timothy:

You therefore, my son, be strong in the grace that is in Christ
Jesus. (2Ti 2:1)

Now clearly, this is not a verse about grace for justification. This is grace for sanctification. It is something in which we are to be strong—something in which we are to grow in the strength. Be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus. Paul was writing to Timothy, who was already justified, but like all of us needed to press on in being sanctified. How do we progress in the Christian life? By the grace of God!

Living by God's Grace

The Christian life takes strength. In one sense it is not for weaklings. In a better sense, the only ones who will make it are the ones who realize they are weaklings. For it is they who recognize their weakness that become very interested in the grace of God! We have the picture of the strong Christian life. It is like we have got forty Bibles in each hand and we are kind of pumping biblical

iron. “And watch me do this for God!” Oh, what a quenching of the Spirit of God. Oh, what an ignorance of the grace of God. Oh, what a disqualification of the grace of God.

We *are* to be strong and I marvel at how much strength the Christian life and ministry and service takes. We are in Christ Jesus and it is here, where we are, that grace is abounding. Be strong in it. Get strengthened by it. Learn much about it. Learn to rely upon it. Be strong in it. I want to be a strong Christian—but not in the flesh and not in my own self-effort. Be strong in the grace of the Lord.

I truly began to appreciate the grace of God fifteen or twenty years ago after overlooking it and neglecting it shamefully for so long. And now I have never appreciated the grace of God more than I have in the last three or four years. Pastoring the two churches the Lord has had me pastor for twenty-five years, I have found just how much pastors need the grace of God. But as the Lord sent me out to minister to the body of Christ across the country and overseas, I recognized that I needed to learn new ways to draw on new measures of the grace of God.

And that is the way it is with all of us. However far we have come, if we have really come any distance at all, it has been by the grace of God at work on us and in us. And the things ahead will probably stretch us beyond what the grace behind us already met.

What do we do with that sort of a situation—where new challenges make us feel at times like we have not matured, grown, developed, or become strong, because these new challenges look impossible? We beg God for the strength again in the grace that is in Christ Jesus. His grace is immeasurable. We shall never face anything here on earth with which His grace is not sufficient to deal. Be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus.

Being strong in grace is an interesting paradox. Living by grace has nothing to do with our own strengths and efforts, but everything to do with confessing our personal weakness. Many of us have been too macho-strong to ever be truly strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus. How does that work? James 4:6 explains.

But He gives more grace. ...

That is the will of God. That is the desire of God. He's given us so much grace, but still He gives us more.

But He gives more grace. Therefore He says: "God resists the proud, but gives grace to the humble."

How do you qualify for the on-going work of the grace of God? Humble yourselves under the mighty hand of God. Walk humbly with our God, for God gives grace to the humble. God resists the proud. Many Christians in self-sufficiency, self-reliance, and a world-taught confidence are not living by the grace of God. Rather, they are fighting, striving, pressing, and pushing against the resistance of God. Note that. God resists the proud. Those times when we thought we could handle the situation, when we imagined we were capable, and when we believed in our own sufficiency, we came up against the resistance of God. We beat against the wind. We ran as if on a treadmill: furiously, but without headway. There is God, with one finger on our forehead holding us back—but we are often too stubborn and self-sufficient to notice. God resists the proud.

Do not consider what we can do for God. Consider instead what God can do in and through us. He wants to give more grace. He yearns to give more grace. He loves to pour out grace. That is the glory of the kingdom of God. But He knows it must only be poured upon the humble. Those who admit they need God's work, God's provision, and God's activity in their lives.

Be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus. Finding that strength involves admitting we have no strength. Humility. Remembering that no man can handle this Christian life, the believer cries out to God, "I need You!" God loves to hear that confession in prayer. He knows it is the truth. We have no strength. He knows we need it and He will happily grant it. And He wants to give more grace. He gives grace to the humble.

The kingdom of God lives on the provisions of God. Just as a branch lives on the provision of the life in the vine, so we need the flowing grace of God to flourish in the life we are called to in Christ. And it is humility that opens up the gates of that connection. The branch to the vine of God's grace is humility.

I pray God would forgive us for the self-sufficient pride in which we have walked. I pray that God would forgive the modern church for training people up in religious self-confidence. We should have been teaching one another to bow humbly before our God—to prostrate ourselves before His throne. The modern church needs revival. We need another reformation: a reformation of humility and a reformation of grace. The reformers of the 16th century cried out, "Justification by grace!" We need some reformers crying out, "Sanctification by grace!" Praise God for those who died to proclaim that only by grace are we justified. Now, however, our need is as great for some soldiers to stand proclaiming that only by grace are we sanctified. How is the army of God going to move on if not by grace? How are the children of God going to grow up if not by grace?

How are we going to be mighty if not by grace? Rejoice in the grace of God. Embrace that grace being strong in that grace. God's grace does not flow to and through self-sufficient and self-reliant lives, but rather, through those who are dependent upon the Lord.

Through whom [through the Lord Jesus Christ] also we have
access by faith into this grace in which we stand. (Rom 5:2)

What a tremendous heavenly description of our position and what is there for us. We—you and me, all who are in Christ—have access into this grace. How do we access the grace of God? How is it made available to us? First of all, we must realize that we already stand in it! Sometimes we have the picture of God way, way off somewhere. We moan and fret and plead for grace begging for God to offer us some of His richness. And God could cry out to us, “Well look around you. You're standing in grace!”

Through Christ also, we have access into this grace in which we stand. The very place we stand before God is a place of grace. That is how we got there. That is how we shall thrive there.

Through Christ. Grace is now available to us abundantly—through Christ. We stand in it.

Imagine a pauper standing in a field of gold coins and a sign says, “Take all you need—just give the thanks and the glory to the provider.” The pauper, befuddled, stands in the midst of this wondrous field of bounty crying out, “I'm poor! Help me!” In spite of the silliness of the picture, that is often the way we behave toward the abundant riches of God. In Christ, we stand in grace. We have access to it through Him.

Yet how do we avail ourselves of the bounty of grace? “Through whom also we have access by faith into this grace in which we stand.” By faith we draw on the grace of God. Believing God.

Trusting in God. Relying on God. Depending upon God. Accepting what He has said, what He has done, and what He offers is the simple key to accessing these riches.

For in it the righteousness of God is revealed from faith to faith;
as it is written, "The just shall live by faith." (Rom 1:17)

Martin Luther and others, hundreds of years ago, by the revealing work of the Spirit and the grace of God, courageously and appropriately applied this glorious truth to justification by faith, drawing ever upon the grace of God. But we have seen in many places that same grace is there for sanctification. And how do we appropriate it? How do we draw on it? How do we access it? By faith of course! The just shall live by faith. God's justified ones live by faith alone. Initially, continually, and increasingly, we live by faith. Our lives and spirits are sustained by trusting in the Lord, by depending upon the Lord. We count on Him and He supplies His grace. The just shall live by faith

To Conclude

In reflection and conclusion, here is a thought to consider. Since we are justified and sanctified by the impact of the grace of God in and upon our lives, does this mean that man does nothing in his growing and serving by the grace of God? Some hear the message of the grace of God and then imagine there is no contribution on their part. Truly, it is God's grace and it is not about we can do but what He can do in and through us. Does that mean we are to do nothing and are mere robots to the grace of God? Not at all. We get fully engaged and entirely involved in the life of grace.

But it happens in ways related to trusting and depending on the Lord. It is the whole matter of learning to live by faith—walking by faith, not by sight. The perplexing thing in all of this is that we all have a question that is almost burning in us but we are almost afraid to say it because once we say it, it sounds funny. How do you do faith anyway? But the answer lies not in how do we do it, but how do we grow in it. We grow in our faith by this day-by-day trusting the Lord in whatever He has revealed to us, in whatever He has provided for us, and in whatever He has unfolded for us in the Word applying that grace to the circumstances at hand in this moment.

Whether like the prophet Elijah off by the Brook Cherith having to let the ravens feed you and living such by faith or being on top of Mount Carmel, calling down fire against the hundreds of false prophets—we always must live by faith. The key is not *activity*. The key is not *inactivity*. The key is trusting in the Lord. The just shall live by faith.

We shall see time and again in these studies on growing in the grace of God, that such growth in grace hinges upon faith.

Therefore it is of faith that it might be according to grace.

(Rom 4:16)

The striving of the flesh—whether to be great and mighty or live up to the standards of God—never goes with the grace of God. But believing God fits the grace of God. Faith and grace go together hand-in-glove. Drawing on the grace of God and living by the grace of God involves learning day by day to trust God in whatever is at hand, to work in and through our lives by the resources and impact of His grace upon us.

Closing Prayer

Father, we thank You that You have told us the truth. You are the truth. We can believe in You. Keep speaking to us Your glorious truth. We want to depend on it—depend on You. Keep opening up for us Your wondrous grace. We want to count on it, to live by faith in it. Teach us, Lord, this glorious relationship between faith and grace. Grace is Your provision. Faith is our response. As we study, session after session, show us more and more that the way to grow in grace is by trusting in You every step of the way. Reveal it to us. In Jesus' name. Amen.

The Grace of God

(Study #2 of 6)

Introduction:

Romans 6:14

Hebrews 7:18, 19

Grace, Not Law:

John 1:17, 16

Galatians 2:21

God's Justifying Grace:

Romans 3:24

Ephesians 1:7

God's Sanctifying Grace:

Titus 2:11, 12

2 Peter 3:18

Acts 20:32

Hebrews 13:9

2 Timothy 2:1

Living by Grace:

James 4:6

Romans 5:2

Romans 1:17

Conclusion: