

(Knowing God's Way) 18. the True Grace of God

by Zac Poonen

Zac Poonen's sermon emphasizes the importance of understanding and living under the true grace of God, which leads to humility, obedience, and unity among believers.

Scripture: John 17:21, 1 Peter 1:2-3

Topics: "Humility and Unity", "True Grace of God"

Description

Zac Poonen emphasizes the importance of understanding the true grace of God as outlined in 1 Peter, contrasting it with the counterfeit grace that promotes sin. He explains that true grace leads to sanctification, obedience to Christ, and the manifestation of God's character in our lives. Poonen highlights the necessity of humility in receiving grace, as pride blinds us to spiritual truths and hinders our relationship with God. He also discusses how grace fosters unity among believers and equips them for service, urging Christians to live in harmony and support one another. Ultimately, Poonen calls for a deeper reliance on God's grace to overcome sin and reflect Christ's likeness in our lives.

Transcript

"This is the true grace of God. Stand firm in it" (1 Pet.5:12).

Here at the end of Peter's first letter, he says that what he has written in his letter is all about the true grace of God. In these days when false grace is being preached so much, it is good to go back to 1 Peter to see what the TRUE grace of God really is, and to stand firm in it.

The fact that Peter uses the expression "the TRUE grace of God" in the first century itself indicates that even in those days a counterfeit grace was being proclaimed by the agents of Satan, who had "turned the grace of God into licentiousness (licence to sin) (Jude 4).

Right at the outset, Peter tells us that all believers are "chosen according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, by the sanctifying work of the Spirit, that they may obey Jesus Christ and be sprinkled with His blood" and for such believers, he prays that God's "grace and peace may be theirs in fullest measure" (1 Pet.1:2).

God chose us in order to sanctify us (make us holy) and to lead us to obey the Lord Jesus Christ. This is what the true grace of God is meant to lead us into; and so Peter prays that those who desire this in their lives may experience God's grace in fullest measure.

Peter then says that "as to this salvation, the prophets who prophesied of the grace that would come to you made careful search and inquiry" (1 Pet.1:10). The grace that we experience under the new covenant was not experienced by anyone in old covenant times. Even the prophets could only prophesy about this grace as something that would come in the future. They could not experience it themselves.

Peter then urges all believers to "fix their hope completely on the grace that is to be brought to them at the revelation of Jesus Christ." (1 Pet.1:13).

When Christ returns in glory, we will experience a special grace that will transform us totally into His likeness. From the beginning of our Christian life to the very end, God's work in us is entirely one of grace.

Peter also speaks of receiving grace for a happy married life:

"You husbands likewise, live with your wives in an understanding way, as with a weaker vessel, since she is a woman; and grant her honor as a fellow heir of the grace of life, so that your prayers may not be hindered." (1 Pet.3:7).

God wants Christian married couples to live together in peace and harmony. Their home must be an island of peace in a strife-torn world. And for this, abundant grace is required.

Peter then goes on to speak of spiritual gifts: "As each one has received a special gift, employ it in serving one another, as good stewards of the manifold grace of God." (1 Pet.4:10)

Every spiritual gift is to be used only to SERVE others, as a means of dispensing the true grace of God to them. The grace of God is many-sided. Therefore God has chosen people from different backgrounds and with different personalities and temperaments and placed them all together in Christ's Body so that each of them can display some unique aspect of God's grace through his/her life and ministry.

The Humble Receive Grace And Revelation

"You younger men, likewise, be subject to your elders; and all of you, clothe yourselves with humility toward one another, for God is opposed to the proud, but gives grace to the humble." (1 Pet.5:5).

Here Peter speaks about the importance of learning submission to spiritual authority in our younger days itself.

If a young man is saved by the age of 20, it is usually God's purpose that he should have an effective ministry by the time he is 35 years old. But for this to be fulfilled, that man should learn the all-important lessons of brokenness and humility by the time he is 35. And those lessons can be learnt only as he submits to spiritual authority. Only thus can He receive grace to exercise spiritual authority later in his home and in the church. Young people who do not submit to spiritual authority invariably end up losing the ministry God had in mind for them.

This does not mean that we don't have to humble ourselves once we are older!! Subjection to elders must be learnt when we are young. But following Jesus along the way of humility is something that we have to keep on doing until our dying day. That is the only way to keep on receiving grace until the very end of our

lives.

Bible-knowledge cannot give us grace. It is an amazing fact that our Lord was crucified by Bible-believing Jewish zealots, and not by the heathen Romans or Greeks who had no knowledge of the true God.

The leaders of the only true religion on earth in Jesus' day (Judaism) and the scholars of the only true Scriptures (Genesis to Malachi), were the ones who called Jesus a deceiver, a heretic and the prince of devils. Those scribes and Pharisees were intelligent, Bible-believing, well-educated and ardent for the truth of the Scriptures. Yet they were totally blind spiritually. They did not get grace. Why?

The answer to that question is important, because history has repeated itself again and again in the Christendom.

Ardent Bible scholars even today, are totally blind to the true Jesus of the Scriptures and to the true grace of God. Like the Pharisees of old, they too are unable to receive the hidden wisdom of God (1 Cor.2:7-10). The reason in both cases is just the same: They are proud and seek the honour of men.

Jesus said to the Pharisees, "How can you have faith who receive honour from one another and do not seek the honour that comes from God" (Jn. 5:44).

Those who live before the face of men, seeking their own honour can never receive revelation on the true meaning of the Scriptures, for God blinds them to the truth (Mt.11:25).

God has written the Scriptures in such a way that the wise and intelligent will not be able to understand it, if they do not humble themselves. That cannot be said about any earthly book. There is no book in the world that requires humility as an essential qualification in order to understand it, except the Bible.

The natural mind (no matter how clever) will consider the revelation of the Spirit that comes forth from a humble brother as foolishness (1 Cor.2:14). One requires grace to understand God's Word.

Proud theologians today proclaim many different interpretations of the Scriptures. But they are totally unaware of their blindness.

We have to humble ourselves before the face of God, and finish with seeking the honour and approval of men. Then God will REVEAL to us what He hides from others.

God resists the proud, but He gives grace to the humble.

If we are proud, then even if all our doctrines are right, we shall end up like the Pharisees, deceived and blind concerning spiritual realities. Then we shall not be able to recognise the true prophets of God in our day, any more than the Pharisees could recognise Jesus, the True Prophet of the Lord in their day.

All sin has its origin in PRIDE and SELFISHNESS. In the same way, all the virtues of Christ have their origin in HUMILITY and SELFLESSNESS. The more we humble ourselves, the more we will receive grace from God. Then we shall live in victory and manifest Christ's character more and more in our lives. If anyone does not have victory over sin, that would indicate clearly that he has not humbled himself - because all who humble themselves will certainly receive grace (1 Pet.5:6), and all who come under God's grace will certainly get victory (Rom.6:14).

There are many false ideas of humility in Christendom.

But this is the test by which we can evaluate ourselves unfailingly: Have we got victory over sin and is the character of Christ being manifested increasingly in us?

Perfection Through Suffering

"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." (1 Pet.5:10)

Here God is called the God of ALL GRACE. He leads His people through suffering in order that He might impart His grace to them and "perfect and establish them". Paul experienced God's all-sufficient grace through receiving a thorn in his flesh (2 Cor.12:7-10).

Peter's first letter too has much to say about suffering as the means by which God dispenses His grace to us.

We read that, "Christ also suffered for you, leaving an example for you to FOLLOW IN HIS STEPS WHO COMMITTED NO SIN Since Christ has suffered in the flesh, arm yourselves also with the same purpose, because he who has suffered In the flesh HAS CEASED FROM SIN" (1 Pet.2:21,22, 4:1).

Here we are clearly told to follow the example of Christ Who suffered, so that we might not sin at any time. Grace is meant to make us holy,"as He Who called us is Holy" (1 Pet.1:16).

Peter reminds us that "if we suffer in the flesh, we shall cease from sin and live the rest of our life, doing the will of God" (1 Pet.4:1,2).

To "suffer in the flesh" does not mean becoming sick in the body, for no-one has ever stopped sinning thereby. It does not mean being beaten and bruised for Christ's sake either, for no-one has stopped sinning that way either. It refers rather to denying the desires of Self, which are in opposition to the will of God. Sin brings a certain pleasure. To suffer is the opposite of enjoying that pleasure. If we are willing to suffer in each and every situation, then we can cease from sin. God will help us if we are willing. In fact, He even works to make us willing (Phil.2:12,13). But so often we resist His workings. That is why we remain defeated.

Christ suffered in the flesh, and we are to arm ourselves with the same mind. Jesus walked this way of self-denial all His life. He came to earth in the flesh and never did His own will but always the will of His Father, no matter how much suffering that may have involved (Jn.6:38). Thus He never sinned. Now we also have the opportunity to "follow In His steps Who committed no sin" (1 Pet. 2:21,22).

This is the gospel (good news) of the grace of God.

In his second letter, Peter reminds us that the good news is that God by His divine power has granted us "EVERYTHING necessary for a godly life" here on this earth (2 Pet.1:3,4). And if we have received a faith "of the same value" (2 Pet.1:1 margin) as Peter's, we shall receive the same grace that he received and partake of God's nature as he did.

Then the character of Christ - "moral excellence, knowledge, self-control, perseverance, godliness, brotherly kindness and love will be ours in increasing measure" (2 Pet.1:5-11), making us fruitful and freeing us from all blindness and shortsightedness (v.8,9).

Everyone who abides in Jesus will bear MUCH FRUIT (Jn.15:5). And so if these virtues of Christ are not being manifested increasingly in us, it would indicate that we are not abiding in Jesus and that we are not living under the true grace of God.

Grace Makes Us One

Those who humble themselves not only receive grace for victory, but also grace to become one with each other. Just as we saw earlier that husband and wife can receive grace together as "joint-heirs of the grace of life", even so believers too can receive that grace that makes them joint-heirs along with other believers in Christ's Body.

Jesus prayed on the last night of His earthly life that we might be ONE AS HE AND THE FATHER ARE ONE (Jn.17:22). And He prayed that we experience this oneness here in this world (Jn.17:21,23).

This is not a unity of understanding but a unity of spirit . Because of the sinfulness of our nature and the limitations of our minds that have been warped by sin, we may not see "eye to eye" in every matter with each other here on earth. But that has nothing to do with our spiritual unity. In our hearts, we can still be one.

All lack of unity is because we want to do our own will and not the will of the Head. This has nothing to do with our understanding of doctrine. It has only to do with whether we are willing to deny our own will and do the Father's will alone.

Jesus always obeyed what He heard from His Father. His food was obedience to His Father's will (Jn.4:34).

Jesus was one with the Father. It is into this oneness that we too are called through the true grace of God.

Jesus always overcame evil with good. Evil had no power over Him, because He was always rooted in doing good. So shall it be with us, if we too obey the word to "overcome evil with good" (Rom.12:21). When others hate us and scandalise us, we can conquer their evil by doing them good. This is possible when we receive the true grace of God.

Then we shall be kept, as Jesus prayed, from the evil that is in the world (Jn.17:16), and we shall become one with all others who walk the same way.

The church that Jesus is building is one that has received grace - the true grace of God - to be built together in unity, under Christ the Head. Only such a church will triumph over the gates of Hell (Matt.16:18).

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