

God's Grace

When someone is young in the faith they generally say things that later they wish they had never said. It is true that “*beginners in the faith*” will often blurt out things that you cannot put a whole lot of faith in. However, when some “*seasoned warrior of the faith*” has last words to leave, they, certainly, deserve attention. One of my teachers in Bible School said, “*Don't try out your theology too quickly, or you will spend the rest of your life explaining why you didn't mean what you said.*”

I would like to share with you the last words of the three strongest voices in the New Testament, apart of Jesus Christ. They all say, exactly, the same thing. Each of these men, when they finished their different ministries, comes to the same common conclusion.

In Peter's last words, he is writing to Christians, scattered throughout Asia, he says, they were “*suffering manifold temptations.*” Peter's last words are found in 2 Peter 3:18, He says, “*grow in grace.*”

Paul's last words were written from prison. He is writing to a young preacher, whom, he hopes, will “*take up the torch.*” His own life is now ending. Outwardly, it appears that his life is a failure. He writes, “*All they that are in Asia have forsaken me, only Luke is with me.*” His very last words are recorded in 2 Timothy 4:22. Those last words were, “*Grace be with you.*”

John's last words were written to the churches of Asia. What a miserable picture he portrays. The churches were faithless, they had lost their first love, and they were lukewarm. But, as he writes to them, his last words were, “*The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you all.*”

Note: The last word of each of these men was “*grace.*”

Peter says, “*Grow in grace.*” Paul says, “*Grace be with you.*” John, “*The grace of our lord Jesus Christ be with you.*”

Let's look at John first. He was writing from Ephesus. He looks across the sea. The memory of the isle of Patmos is fresh in his mind. After a lifetime of service, what was his reward? He was banished to the Isle of Patmos, there to sit alone. Then, he receives the Revelation. He sees the Great Tribulation that is to come. He sees the ultimate victory of God over all creation. He sees the defeat of Sin, the Marriage Supper of Christ and His Church. He sees the eternal New Heaven and the New Earth. He sees the time when “*God will wipe away all tears from our eyes.*” But, all that is to come, what about **now**, as John sits in Ephesus? The church seems to be falling away, and John departing words are, “*The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, be with you all!*”

Peter was writing from Babylon, a place where sin reigned. From all outward appearance, earthly defeat was his portion. History tells us that Peter was crucified upside down. How often, in the last years of his life, did his mind go back to Lake Tiberius in Galilee, when Jesus asked him, “*Do you really love me?*” How often did he think of Jesus' words, “*When you were young, you girded yourself, and walked where you wanted too.*” Jesus is speaking in John 21:18, in the

figurative language. He is describing Peter's self-centered life, when he did what he wanted to, when he would go where he chose to go. How many times did he think of that time in Jerusalem where he had denied the Lord? God forgave him, of course. He knew that. But, how many times did he wish he could relive that scene? Peter had matured in wisdom. He had followed the Lord, and now is at the end of his life. In Peter's writings, there is this sense of humble-awareness of what the Lord had done for him. His last word is recorded in 2 Peter 3:18. He writes to the saints, "*Grow in grace.*"

Paul's circumstances as he writes his last words is, he is sitting alone in a dark prison. Every plan he made was thwarted. The world rolled on above him, unconcerned. This would have defeated any ordinary man. But, Paul's last response was, "*Grace be with you!*" 2 Timothy 4:22.

Grace! What is Grace?

What is this "*grace*" that lifted these men above the clouds of despair? What is this "*grace*" that each of these men communicated as their last words? What was their understanding of grace?

When we approach Paul, we find a mind that sweeps every detail. When he covers a subject, he doesn't miss anything. He had been a tent-maker, a builder, **now** he is a "*spiritual tent maker,*" weaving every thread into the building of the Church of God.

What was "grace" to Paul?

I believe the key to the answer of this question is found in Titus 2:11-12. It says, "*For the grace of God that bringeth salvation hath appeared to all men, teaching us to denounce ungodliness and worldly desires, living a life of temperance, honesty, and godliness.*"

In Paul's writings we find a "*pattern of a perfect life.*" We see the ideal path for living the Christian life is laid out before us, and realize that it would be so wonderful if only we could attain the kind of life he presents. Throughout the Pauline Epistles, we see a master plan of Christian living. We say to our self, "*Here is a life that no circumstance can dim its enthusiasm, no defeat could slow it down.*" When we read Paul's writings we say, "*This is the key to all life, but how can we acquire this iron-handed approach to the things of God?*"

At first, it appears that this disciplined life can be carried out by will power alone. However, Paul testifies himself in the 7th chapter of Romans, "*We can not make it in our own strength!*" However, Paul ends his life by saying, "*This Christian life is all by God's grace alone!*" He says, "*God's grace is not just at the beginning of our salvation, it is essential for ALL of our Christian life!*"

GRACE IS THE UNMERITED FAVOR OF GOD!

Let that thought sink in – "*God's underserved favor!*"

If you pick yourself up, even if you are bruised and bloody, and say, “Well, at least I deserve a little bit of credit,” then, it is not grace. “Grace,” means, “**No merit from the recipient, but the gift flows entirely from the heart of the giver.**”

And Paul is not just talking about grace the began our salvation, but, he is talking about grace for the whole walk of our Christian life, from start to finish. He says, “*It is grace the saves, us and, also, it is grace that teaches us.*”

Satan comes along and says, “*Who do you think you are? If you can't do any better than that, you don't deserve a place in heaven at all!*” We need to say, “*Devil, you shut your mouth, the greatest teacher of all time, the Holy Spirit, said, 'Grace be with you' and He defined that grace as something that brings salvation to me and that grace that teaches me is the unmerited favor of God.*” That's what Paul's view of God's grace is!

What about Peter? Peter was the most human of all of Jesus' disciples. Paul comes across as almost superhuman. If Paul were the only one we read about in the New Testament, we certainly would develop a spiritual inferiority complex. But, Peter gives us hope. It seems that Peter was always learning, “*a little piece at a time.*” Peter doesn't have Paul's mind, a mind that collects all the information, analyzes it, synthesize it, and arranges it in order. Peter was more sporadic, fast moving, impulsive, and rash, spontaneous, headstrong, and hasty, even hot headed and reckless. Peter hears only the first half of a sentence, and doesn't wait until it is finished, and he is off and running. One minute he is sure he would never deny the Lord, even if they kill him, then he can't even stay awake when Christ asks him to watch and pray with Him. When he wakes up, he grabs his sword and cuts off a soldier's ear –(which is quit a feat, to cut his ear off without cutting his head of shoulder) – In the next few minutes, he denies the Lord three times. After Christ's resurrection, he dashes that long distance from Jerusalem all the way to Galilee, to inspect the empty tomb. He knows that Christ has risen from the dead, however, when Jesus doesn't appear, in the first few minutes, he says, “*I'm going fishing.*” Then, when Jesus' does appear, Peter is the first one out of the boat, and he walks on the water.

Remember the time Jesus was washing the disciples' feet? Peter said, “*You're not washing my feet. I don't deserve it!*” Jesus said, “*If I don't wash your feet, you will not be with Me in My kingdom.*” Peter said, “*Not my feet only, but wash me all over!*”

There was never anything half way about Peter. It was all, or nothing! This seasoned warrior's last words to the church were, “*Grow in grace!*” He did not say, “*Grow in the knowledge of grace,*” he said, “*Grow in grace!*” He said, “*We grow in the knowledge of the Lord, Jesus Christ*” but, we “**grow in** grace.”

When we accept Jesus Christ as our Savior, we are translated, by God's grace, into a sphere of grace, we receive the gift of salvation, we are in God's sight, justified, and we are placed in a “*sphere of grace.*” This place of grace is a state of being, a dimension of life that opens all the riches of God's goodness. We don't merit any gift of God. They are all the “unmerited” gifts of God.

Peter was an “*instant solution*” man. He wanted to save the world by sundown. When you analyze Peter, you find that he had a over commitment to the moment. Peter, impulsively, wanted to do everything in his own strength. He says, “*I can't fail.*” Jesus told him, “*Satan has desired to have you, that he may sift you as wheat, but I have prayed for you that your faith fail not.*” Jesus did not pray, that he wouldn't fail, because He knew Peter would fail. Jesus said, “*I pray for you that your faith will not fail, and, when you are established after your failure, then you will strengthen your brethren.*” Jesus said, “*The lesson you learn through your failure, take it to others!*”

After a lifetime of learning, piece by piece, Peter's message was, “*Grow in grace.*” Peter says to troubled Christians, who have failed again and again, “*Grow inside the sphere of grace, God's unmerited favor!*” He says, “*Don't let your stumbling, failing, take you out of God's grace, But grow inside grace, don't try growing outside of this grace! Don't lose heart as you are developing in grace. Don't feel like you will never make it, but keep on growing in grace.*”

Have you seen the little badges some people wear that simply says, “**P.B.P.W.M.I.A.S.G.**”? It stands for, “*Please Be Patient With Me I Am Still Growing.*”

There is a great word in the New Testament that many people do not understand. It's the word translated in the King James as “*manifold.*” This word is found in 1 Peter 1:6, “*Now for a season, if need be, ye are in heaviness through manifold temptation.*” This word, “*manifold*” has reference to the many colors of the spectrum. This passage in 1 Peter 1:6 is talking about going through various kinds of trials for a passing moment (“*a passing moment,*” compared to eternity). Peter knew about “*manifold trials.*” Every time he got up off the canvas, some new trial knocked him down again.

Peter speaks of “*manifold tests and trials,*” but he also speaks of God's “*manifold grace.*” It's found in 1 Peter 4:10, which says, “*As every man hath received the gift, even so minister the same one to another, as good stewards of the manifold grace of God.*” As there is a wide spectrum of the colors of trials, just so, God has provided the manifold shades of color of His grace to match each one.

God's Word also teaches, “*God will not suffer you to be testes above that you are able, but will, with every test make a way of escape, that you will be able to bear it.*” **Don't miss this!** God provides a particular way of escape for each particular trial.

God provides an exact, specific, particular grace for whatever test, or trial, you may be going through! Peter is speaking of the amazingly manifold grace of God. That's Peter's view of God's grace! It is a grace that is always adequate in any situation!

Peter, who learned things a step at a time, looks back over his life and sees how God's grace, again and again, provided a precise way of escape for each temptation. God provides an exact, specific, particular grace for whatever temptation, or trial, you may be going through. Peter is speaking of the amazingly manifold grace of God. That's Peter's view of God's grace. It is a grace that is always adequate in any situation!

John defines grace as only John could, "*Jesus, full of grace.*" Paul says, "*Grace is the force that keeps and teaches us in our Christian walk.*" Peter says, "*Whatever the multi-colored temptation, face there is a deliverance color to match.*" That's grace! Grace brought you here, it will teach and keep you, and it is sufficient for whatever temptation you will ever face.

Paul says, "*Grace is the force that brought you this far, keeps you, and teaches you in our Christian walk.*"

Peter says, "*Whatever the multi-colored trials you face, there is a deliverance color to match!*" That's God's grace!

God's grace brought you this far, it will teach and keep you, and it is sufficient for whatever trial you will face.