

## **Grace, The Means of Christian Strength**

***“You therefore, my son, be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus.”***

**2 Timothy 2:1 NASB**

This letter from Paul to Timothy written during Paul’s second and final imprisonment in Rome is the last letter the Apostle would pen prior to his execution at the command of Nero. During Paul’s first Roman imprisonment (Acts 28) Christianity was not a threat to Rome. However, shortly after Paul’s release from his first imprisonment Rome was burned and Nero placed the blame on Christians. Consequently, being a Christian became a crime. As such, the apostle during his second Roman incarceration was confident this second imprisonment would be his last.

At his first defense in the second incarceration no one stood with him (2 Tim. 4:17) but Jesus stood with him and delivered him from the mouth of the lion (2 Tim. 4:17). Eventually, He was deserted by all but the very faithful (2 Tim. 1:15-16; 4:11). He was cold and asked Timothy to bring his cloak when he comes (2 Tim. 4:13). Nevertheless, knowing his death was imminent (2 Tim. 4:6), he also asked that Timothy bring the books and parchments (2 Tim. 4:13). The books were likely scrolls on which were written portions of the Old Testament. Parchments may have been the same or even blank hides made specifically for writing. It is worth noting that even at what he knew to be the very end of his life the apostle is found filling his mind with the priceless Word of God and writing to the saints. This was the soldier of the cross who by the Holy Spirit exhorted all believers to redeem the time because the days are evil (Eph. 5:16) and he is seen doing that very thing at the end of his live.

In 2 Tim. 4:7 Paul penned his own epitaph and the evidence of its validity is seen in this last epistle. For in this final epistle, by the grace of God and the empowerment of the Holy Spirit, the apostle would pick up the pen and write what would be his last words to encourage Timothy, his beloved son in the faith (Acts 16:1; 2 Tim. 1:2). Among the many precious truths the apostle conveyed to Timothy in this epistle that truth of 2 Timothy 2:1, speaks volumes to believers today.

***“You therefore, my son, be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus.”***

The verse is a command but not to be taken negatively as our flesh often does with commands. Paul loved Timothy and God loves His people, thus, a command to stress the absolute importance of the need, the means, and the source of grace.

### **The Need**

The command is to *be strong*. That is to say, “be empowered.” Christians must be strong. They are to pursue holiness (1 Pet. 1:15-16) in a world whose system is characterized as being nothing but “the lust of the eyes and the lust of the flesh and the boastful pride of life...” (1 Jn. 2:16). A world whose god is the active devil (2 Cor. 4:4; Eph.2:2), seeking among the people of God those whom he may devour (1 Pet. 5:7). Daily, believers are engaged in spiritual battle “against the rulers, against the powers, against the world forces of this darkness, against the spiritual forces of wickedness in the heavenly places.” (Eph. 6:12) and are warned not to give such

enemies as these an opportunity in their lives (Eph. 4:27). If these were not enough, within believers there continues to exist the flesh for which they are also warned to make no provision (Rm. 13:14) by taking every thought captive to the obedience of Christ (2 Cor. 10:3-5). It is therefore no wonder that Paul gave Timothy this command. He as well as all of the people of God must be strong and the strength comes from grace!

### **The Means**

Now the apostle did not just issue a command and say get it done. He gave the means as well. Believers are not to empower themselves. They can't. The environment, the enemy, and the internal flesh are too strong. The empowerment must be by some other means than themselves. The answer—grace! The command is to “be strong in the grace...” The word *in* in the Greek speaks of an instrumental means. Thus, the means by which Christians are to be strong is grace.

Like water is to the creation so is grace to the believer. **It is absolutely essential!** Without grace there would be no salvation (Eph. 2:4-5, 8). There would be no sanctification apart from grace (Acts 20:32; 1 Cor. 15:10). If it were not for grace the believer would be without strength (Heb. 13:9). Remove grace and the believer would find himself insufficient for dealing with every one of life's encounters (2 Cor. 12:8-9). It is by the grace of God that we as believers are who we are (1 Cor. 15:10) and without grace the Christian would have neither eternal comfort nor good hope (2 Thess. 2:16). God's grace in Christ is without question, absolutely essential!

Mentioned specifically and by demonstration grace commonly appears in Scripture. In this way grace is also like water. We could say grace is common in its Scriptural occurrences as well as in its occurrences in the Christian life. It is not my point here by any means to minimize the amazing grace of God by comparing it to water and referring to it as common. Instead, it is simply to point out the fact that we as people, even as believers have a tendency to take for granted, even overlook those things that occur frequently in our lives. Regarding the occurrences of grace in the New Testament, have you noticed that both the apostle Paul and Peter opened and closed every one of their epistles with exhortations of grace to believers (Romans 1:7; 16:24; 1 Corinthians 1:3; 16:23; 2 Corinthians 1:2; 13:14; Galatians 1:3; 6:18; Ephesians 1:2; 6:24; Philippians 1:2; 4:23; Colossians 1:2; 4:18; 1 Thessalonians 1:1; 5:28; 2 Thessalonians 1:2; 3:18; 1 Timothy 1:2; 6:21; 2 Timothy 1:2; 4:22; Titus 1:4; 3:15; Philemon verse 3 and 25; 1 Peter 1:2; 5:12; 2 Peter 1:2; 3:18). The purpose for God repeating grace not only in these epistles but all through the pages of Scripture is to stress the absolute necessity of grace before the minds of those who have a propensity to overlook the necessity of those things that occur frequently in our lives.

Yet at the same time, regarding grace, some make the mistake of thinking that grace was only instrumental at the beginning of salvation. However, not only were we saved by grace but we continue to live under the grace of God (Romans 6:14-15). The spiritual gifts belonging to us are according to grace (Rm. 12:6). Paul said his conduct as a believer in the world was according to grace (2 Cor. 1:12). Grace empowered the believers of Macedonia to give even while in the midst of affliction and poverty (2 Cor. 8:1-3). God is able to make all grace abound toward Christians (2 Cor. 9:8). The speech of believers is to be adorned with grace (Eph. 4:29; Col. 4:6). God's throne is called “the throne of grace” to which Christians are exhorted to draw near in order that they may receive mercy and may find grace in time of need (Heb. 4:16). The hearts of

Christians are strengthened by grace (Heb. 13:9). We Christians are to serve one another as good stewards of the manifold grace of God (1 Pet. 4:10). God called us by grace and it is by grace that God will perfect, confirm, strengthen, and establish us (1 Pet. 5:10). No wonder Peter exhorts believers to stand firm in grace (1 Pet. 5:12) and grow in grace (2 Pet. 3:18). Furthermore, he opened and closed each of his epistles with grace (1 Peter 1:2; 5:12; 2 Peter 1:2; 3:18).

The apostle Paul knew first-hand the ability of God's grace to empower the believer to live to God's glory. In 1 Corinthians 15:8-10 he wrote,

***“<sup>8</sup> and last of all, as it were to one untimely born, He appeared to me also. <sup>9</sup> For I am the least of the apostles, who am not fit to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God. <sup>10</sup> But by the grace of God I am what I am, and His grace toward me did not prove vain; but I labored even more than all of them, yet not I, but the grace of God with me.”***

In 2 Corinthians 12:7-10 Paul relays the encounter he had with the Lord wherein he learned of the sufficiency of God's Grace. In the light of the awesome power of grace there is little wonder as to why Paul at what he knew to be the end of his life commanded Timothy, his son in the faith to be strong in grace.

### **The Source**

The command does not end with grace but goes on to show the source of grace, “You therefore, my son, be strong in the grace that **is in Christ Jesus.**” Christ Jesus the Lord is indeed the source of God's grace for the believer. It is through Christ that God extends to every one of His elect His saving, sustaining, sufficient, efficacious grace. Were it not for Jesus, Who, through His death on the cross took on Himself God's wrath on behalf of God's elect it would not be the efficacious grace of God that we received but His wrath (Eph. 2:1-10). Grace was not poured out on God's people because of who they were or what they did or do. If that were the case then grace would be a meritorious disbursement. And if grace were a meritorious disbursement it could not be grace. Instead, grace is God's unmerited favor poured out on the people of God because of Who Christ is and what He did (Gal. 2:20-21).

The empowerment of grace comes by knowing Jesus. How is it that the believer grows in his or relationship with Christ? The answer in brief is by studying the Word of God. The Scripture gives us specific revelation concerning Jesus. This is not to be understood as saying that somehow every single verse or word in the Bible speaks either explicitly or implicitly about Jesus or that Christians are to somehow read Christ into every verse. Neither does it mean that the Bible is coded with some secret formula that once discovered unveils Christ. Such practices are merely elaborate schemes of men to divert the careful student of the Word from the clarity of the truth concerning Christ. Rather, Scripture plainly conveys the truth concerning Jesus as it reveals in its pages the history of redemption and since Jesus is the redeemer, Scripture straightforwardly testifies of Him (Jn. 5:39; Luke 24:25-27; 1 Jn. 1:1-4). If a believer is to be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus he must be a student of the Word for it is the written Word of God that brings us the knowledge of God and Jesus and through knowledge of God and Jesus comes grace (2 Pet. 1:2-3).

Dear Christian, be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus. Be careful of those things that would rob you of grace; Such as false teachers (Col. 2:6-8; 2 Pet. 3:17-18) and the pride of the flesh (Jm. 4:5-6; 1 Pet. 5:5-6; Heb. 12:15). These are enemies of grace. Instead take every thought captive to the obedience of Christ (2 Cor. 10:5).

Pastor David Martin