

Grace in Personal Weakness

Introduction and Review

- ❑ **Grace in Ministry.** Grace gifts provide spiritual needs: Prophecy, Teaching, Exhortation & Leading address the heart & mind to encourage & comfort believers in obeying God (Rom. 12:6-8).
- ❑ Grace gifts provide physical needs: Service, Giving & Mercy ensure that practical needs of believers are met.
- ❑ Grace provides victorious power over sinful memories from the believer's past lifestyle (1Co. 15:10a).
- ❑ Grace provides victorious power for the believer's present ministry (1Co. 15:10b).
- ❑ Even with the gifts of grace & the power of grace, believers cannot be effective without love (Rom. 12:9-10).

I. Grace in Exaltation (2Co. 11:29-12:6)

A. Believer's testing (11:29-33)

Paul's difficulties in life & ministry revealed that he was weak & the Lord is able to deliver from any circumstance. His weakness did not affect his dedication to the Lord & ministry or his love for people.

B. God's revelation (12:1-4)

*A true apostle was verified by signs from God (v. 12) – visions! God's specific revelation to Paul uniquely **qualifies & establishes** him to serve God in this capacity. God knows what is necessary to establish **credibility** for the believer among opponents within & outside the church – exaltation.*

C. Believer's response (12:5-6)

The experience of exaltation did not immediately create arrogance or pride within Paul, but rather humility as he considered his weakness. Paul also does not want other people to have inflated & arrogant opinions of him because of a legitimate & godly past experience of exaltation.

APPL: God is fully aware of the opposition that a believer faces in ministry. He is aware of all the attempts to destroy a believer's credibility & effectiveness in ministry. God will validate His call on your life & vindicate you in His own time & way (Ps. 75:6-7).

II. Grace In Humiliation (2Co. 12:7-10)

A. Believer's testing (v. 7)

*God brought a painful & troubling type of difficulty into Paul's life thru Satan. We do not know precisely what the thorn was, but Satan uses nature, people & illness to afflict believers (Job 1) – **family problems, financial, ungodly people, sickness & death**. God always has a purpose in the pain & trials that believers experience (v. 7a; Jas. 1:2-4; Rom. 5:1-5).*

APPL: Spiritual insight & knowledge can be very tempting with respect to pride & arrogance – but the believer must resist.

B. God's revelation (v. 8-9a)

*Paul knows that God (not Satan) is in control, so he prays with persistence to Jesus for relief – “three times” (v. 8). Jesus responds to reveal His provision, power & purpose for Paul in this situation (v. 9a). **Delay in response & denial to request means God has a better way**. God can provide **relief without removing the trouble**. Sufficient is God's grace; God's power is magnified/exalted by human weakness!*

C. Believer's response (v. 9b-10)

*Knowing the will of God in times of pain & trouble brings **peace & encouragement** to the believer – “more gladly”. Knowing the will of God in times of trouble causes the believer to seek God's **power** for perseverance & God's **contentment; determination not resignation; stepping up not giving up**. Paul is content & well pleased with his present circumstances in life & ministry (11:23-28) – *imprisonments, beatings, shipwrecks, life-threatening dangers, sleepless-ness, hunger, cold & exposure.**

CONCLUSION

These are the dynamics of the Christian life that we are forced to consider today: God exalts & establishes us in ministry, yet He expects us to remain humble. God brings extreme, sometime lifelong, difficulties in our lives and He expects us to find peace & encouragement in our pain; find contentment & power of perseverance in our weakness. Each one of us has to look into the mirror of God's word now & be honest about the way you are handling life's problems. Are you praying to know God's will or only to get relief? Has the Lord already revealed that your thorn will be with you the remainder of your life on earth & you simply have not accepted it? Have you become bitter, resentful, complainer, disillusioned, etc.? Remember that God can give you relief without removing the trouble! The Lord says, "My grace is sufficient..."

And if you are not a Christian, I want you to know today that the Lord's grace is sufficient enough to save you right now, right here. But you must believe in Jesus...

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