

Do Not Let God's Grace Be In Vain

Franklin Church of Christ
Edwin Crozier
November 21, 2004
PM Worship

Introduction:

How much grace has God bestowed upon you? What are you doing with the grace God has given you? Are you letting God's grace be given to you in vain? While working on a sermon regarding obeying the gospel, I read **I Corinthians 15**. While reading this passage, one statement had a profound impact on me. I want to share it with you and I hope I can impress you with its power. In **I Corinthians 15:9-10**, Paul claims that God had been gracious to him. In this verse, he is not talking about the saving grace of God, but rather the grace that God bestowed making Paul an apostle. Paul said, "By the grace of God I am what I am." He was an apostle because of God's grace. Then he wrote the profound statement to which we must direct our attention. Paul said, "His grace toward me was not in vain." In other words, God bestowed His grace on Paul and Paul was fruitful with it. God has bestowed all manner of grace to each of us—we must not let God's grace be given to us in vain. Examine these two verses and notice four key attitudes that Paul had which allowed God's grace to be fruitful in Paul's life.

Discussion:

- I. Paul recognized how unworthy he was.
 - A. Paul was a gifted man, even before becoming a Christian. He was a leader among men and an example for his countrymen in Judaism. According to **Acts 22:3**, Paul declared that he was schooled at the feet of one of the great Jewish teachers, Gamaliel. In **Galatians 1:14**, Paul expressed how advanced he was in comparison to his peers. In **Philippians 3:4-6**, he demonstrated how much he could boast as a Jew. How easily Paul could have seen himself as worthy of apostleship. How easily could Paul have looked back and stated that he was chosen to be an apostle because of his awesome abilities.
 - B. Paul, however, knew his real situation much better than that. Paul recognized how unworthy he was. In **I Corinthians 15:9**, he said he was the least of the apostles. He claimed he was unworthy to be an apostle. Why? Because he had persecuted the church. He had used his abilities to fight against God. He had been an enemy of the One he professed to serve. He knew what his sins meant. All the giftedness and ability in the world meant nothing, because he had used it to sin. God's grace was able to bear fruit in Paul's life because he understood how unworthy he was of God's grace. Of course, his unworthiness is what made it grace.
 - C. What about us? Can God's grace bear fruit in our lives? Or do we believe we are somehow worthy of God's benefits? How do you look at your life? It is far too easy for us to believe that we were actually pretty good, especially if we were brought up "in church." We do not like to hear how unworthy we are in our modern society. We want to focus on self-esteem. We do not want anyone to feel guilty. We do not want anyone to feel responsible for sin. We do not want anyone to feel unworthy of anything. But if God's grace will be able to bear fruit in our lives, we must recognize our unworthiness. Paul describes what we were before Christ entered our lives in **Romans 3:10-18** and in **Ephesians 2:1-3**. We were unworthy and, of course, that is what makes God's benefits toward us grace.
- II. Paul acknowledged God's grace in his life.
 - A. Paul declared in **I Corinthians 15:10** that he was an apostle by the grace of God. Paul followed the instruction of **Proverbs 3:6**, acknowledging God in all his ways. In this passage, he recognizes God's grace in making him an apostle. In **I Timothy 1:12**, Paul said that Jesus enabled him to work. In **Ephesians 3:7-8**, Paul recognized God's grace in allowing him to preach to the Gentiles. In **I Corinthians 3:5-7**, Paul recognized that even the very opportunities to teach were bestowed by God's grace. In **Ephesians 6:19**, Paul wanted the Ephesians to pray that God bestow His grace to help him speak boldly. When teaching on Mars Hill in **Acts 17:28**, Paul recognized that even the ability to live and move came from God's grace.
 - B. God's grace was not in vain in Paul's life because Paul recognized the benefits, abilities and opportunities for what they were, the grace of God. They were not abilities he had because of his own power. They were gifts. Thus, Paul recognized that his abilities, resources and opportunities were not his own to do with as he wanted. They were gifts from God over which he was a steward and he should use them properly.

- C. What about us? Do we recognize God's grace in our lives? Do we acknowledge God in all our ways? No matter who you are or how you have lived, God has bestowed grace upon you. **Matthew 5:45** demonstrates this. Notice what Paul taught in **Romans 12:3-8**. Each ability you have is a gift from God. Do not view this list as exhaustive—it is an exemplary list. Any ability you have comes from God—it is a gift over which God has left you as a steward. Can you speak? Can you work? Can you serve? Can you give? Can you do anything? That is God's grace in your life. Everything you have is a gift from God. Do you have a house? Do you have cars? Do you have money? That is God's grace in your life and you are a steward of those abilities and possessions. How are you using them? God's grace is bestowed in vain to most people simply because they never recognize what they have is God's gift to them to be used in His service. If you want God's grace to be fruitful in your life, then take note of all the benefits God has given you. Quit spending your time looking at what He has granted to others—look at what He has given to you. Recognize your unworthiness of it and recognize His grace.

III. Paul worked hard.

- A. Here is where the rubber hits the road. When God bestowed His grace upon Paul, Paul worked. Not only that, he worked hard. Despite his recognition of how unworthy he was, even in comparison to the others, he worked hard. He did not sit back and lament his past sins. He did not rest saying he could never do any good for the Lord because of how bad he had been. He did not bemoan what others may have had more than he did. He took the grace that had been given to him and he worked for the Lord. Paul was arguably the greatest worker for the Lord's cause in the first century. Why did he work so hard? He explained in **Philippians 3:7-14**. He counted all things as rubbish in comparison to knowing the Lord. He wanted to go to heaven more than he wanted anything else. And his excitement that God would let him was overwhelming. His joy to be a part of God's plan after all he had done against it was phenomenal. Why would he do anything other than work for this gracious God who had done so much for such a pathetic sinner? Isn't that the kind of service our gracious God deserves?
- B. What about us? How hard are we working for the Lord? He has bestowed us with so much grace. Are we using it to work hard, serving Him? Or are we burying His grace in the pursuit of less worthy goals? Remember the parable of the talents in **Matthew 25:14-30**. Do not spend your time worrying about who has more talents. Do not spend your time thinking about all the things you cannot do or wish you could. Spend your time doing what you can. Work hard with what God has given you. Labor abundantly. As Peter wrote in **I Peter 4:10-11**, use your gifts as good stewards of the manifold grace of God, working hard so that God can be glorified in everything you do.

IV. Paul acknowledged God's grace in his life.

- A. Do not be shocked that this point is the same as the second. Here we find the reason why God's grace was continually fruitful in Paul's life. After Paul had worked hard and labored more abundantly than the other apostles, Paul still acknowledged God's grace. If he worked harder than the other apostles, it was simply because God gave him more ability. If his work bore more fruit, it was simply because of God's grace. He was not better than anyone else. His work was not better. God was the one who was working, whether it was him or the other apostles. God was the one who was really responsible for all the work Paul could do and had done.
- B. When you have recognized your unworthiness... When you have acknowledged God's grace in your life... When you have worked hard as a good steward of God's grace, do not praise yourself. Do not glorify yourself. Glorify God and recognize His grace continuing in your life (**Matthew 5:16**).

Conclusion:

It does not matter who you are. It does not matter what you think about your life. God has bestowed grace on top of grace on top of grace in your life. And it is grace because you are unworthy of it. The question is will God's grace bear fruit to His glory in your life, or will it die on the vine having been given to you in vain. Learn from Paul's example. Work hard and glorify God, acknowledging His grace. I pray that when we stand before God in judgment He can say to us, "My grace was not given to you in vain."