

"Grace Be With You"
(Philippians 4:23)

Introduction: There are many different ways that the relationship between Christ and His church may be pictured. Sometimes the Christian is pictured as a branch that is organically connected to the vine, who is Christ, from which it draws its life. Sometimes he is pictured as one of the members of Christ's body, such as an ear or an eye, or a mouth or an arm. Sometimes the Christian is pictured as one brick in the larger edifice of God's Temple which is filled with the Spirit of God and is fitted as a place where the people of God lift up holy praises unto the Lord. Sometimes Christians are represented as the bride of the coming Bridegroom who is one spirit with Him. There are many ways in which the church is pictured, but most often the metaphors used are living and vital ones. There is a living connection between Christ and His people. He is the source of all of their life and health and strength, so that in Christ, you may do all things, but apart from Him, you can do nothing.

The Bible has a term for this power, this strength, this source of life which Christ gives to His people. It is called "grace." Grace is God's unmerited favor. It is given in its strictest sense only to His children. It is given as a gift not only to those who do not deserve it, but to those who in fact deserved just the opposite. Instead of God's wrath, through grace God gives His love. Instead of punishment, God gives reward. There are many benefits given to the people of God through grace. But grace may also be thought of as a substance, as something which is imparted to the believer. We may not know exactly what it is, but we do know what its effects are in our lives. When grace is given to one who has no grace, it changes his heart and disposition. Whereas he was the enemy of God, grace causes him to love God. Whereas he had no inclination to good and virtue, now he is inclined toward the good, toward the virtuous. Whereas he had no desire to serve God, now he desires to serve Him. Grace is a very powerful thing. Even the smallest amount of it in the soul of a man changes him from the child of the devil to a child of God. It transfers his citizenship from the kingdom of darkness to the kingdom of light. Though it may be as a drop of water in an ocean of sin, it still overcomes and gains the victory.

Paul realized the importance of grace. It was something that he highly valued in his writings. And something which was typical of Paul in the closing of his letters, was to make sure that he, by virtue of the authority invested in him by his Lord, pronounced a closing benediction upon his readers. Knowing that he had just given them many commandments from His Lord and that they would not be able to do them apart from the grace of Christ, he exercised one of the means of grace, which, when received by faith, was able to strengthen them. Every means which God gives to His church to strengthen them in grace is precious. And it is good and fitting that we should know what they are and how to use them if we are to expect to be strong in the Lord's service. And so what I want you to learn from this morning's message is,

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ is the only thing which can strengthen your spirit to do the works of God.

First I want you to see where the grace comes from, and secondly, the means by which God gives it to you.

I. All Grace Comes Only From the Mediatorial Work of Christ.

A. You Must Always Remember that All Mankind, Including Yourselves, Have No Possible Claim on the Grace of God.

1. Even man as he was created had no claim on the grace of God, because grace by definition cannot be earned; it is given gratuitously.
 - a. God did enter into a covenant with man, promising life to him and to his posterity on the basis of his obedience.
 - b. But God was not bound to give him anything for his obedience.
 - c. Man by virtue of his creation already owed God perfect and perpetual obedience.
 2. And after the Fall, man was rendered incapable of doing anything at all that could possibly please God in any way.
 - a. If perfect man did not deserve anything from God, how much less fallen man?
 - b. No one at any time has ever been able to claim any grace for himself.
- B. In Light of This, Paul Says "THE GRACE OF THE LORD JESUS CHRIST BE WITH YOUR SPIRIT."
1. It is the grace which was merited by Christ in His role as covenant Mediator which Paul refers to in his benediction.
 - a. It is the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ.
 - b. It is that which Christ earned in His redemptive work.
 - c. "FOR YOU KNOW THE GRACE OF OUR LORD JESUS CHRIST," Paul wrote, "THAT THOUGH HE WAS RICH, YET FOR YOUR SAKE HE BECAME POOR, THAT YOU THROUGH HIS POVERTY MIGHT BECOME RICH" 2 Cor. 8:9).
 - d. Whereas Adam would have been given far more than his work would have earned, Christ actually earned everything that the Father gave to Him by doing the will of the Father perfectly.
 2. But here is where it becomes grace: when it is given to us. We did not earn it, but it is given freely to us as a gift of His grace.
 - a. "FOR THE WAGES OF SIN IS DEATH, BUT THE FREE GIFT OF GOD IS ETERNAL LIFE IN CHRIST JESUS OUR LORD" (Rom. 6:23).
 - b. "FOR ALL HAVE SINNED AND FALL SHORT OF THE GLORY OF GOD, BEING JUSTIFIED AS A GIFT BY HIS GRACE THROUGH THE REDEMPTION WHICH IS IN CHRIST JESUS" (3:23-24).
 - c. Christ earned it; it is not grace to Him, but it is given to us as a gracious gift through Christ Jesus our Lord.
- II. Secondly, God Gives the Grace of Christ to You Through Several Different Channels. God has not only provided grace through His Son, He has also ordained that that grace be made available through the means of grace. They are not several different graces, but all the same grace, which are given through different channels and received by faith alone.
- A. You Are Familiar with Those Means. You Have Heard of Them Very Frequently.
1. Prayer is a means of grace.
 - a. Jesus said, "AND WHATEVER YOU ASK IN MY NAME, THAT WILL I DO, THAT THE FATHER MAY BE GLORIFIED IN THE SON. IF YOU ASK ME ANYTHING IN MY NAME, I WILL DO IT" (John 14:13-14).
 - b. When you pray, you are not simply speaking words into the

air, but you are addressing the throne of God. And when you ask for the things which God authorizes you to ask, in the name of His Son, that is, on the basis of His acceptance with the Father, then you are using a very powerful means to receive the grace of God.

- c. John wrote in 1 John **5:14-15**, "AND THIS IS THE CONFIDENCE WHICH WE HAVE BEFORE HIM, THAT, IF WE ASK ANYTHING ACCORDING TO HIS WILL, HE HEARS US. AND IF WE KNOW THAT HE HEARS US IN WHATEVER WE ASK, WE KNOW THAT WE HAVE THE REQUESTS WHICH WE HAVE ASKED FROM HIM."
2. The reading and hearing the Word preached is a means of grace.
 - a. Peter said, "LIKE NEWBORN BABES, LONG FOR THE PURE MILK OF THE WORD, THAT BY IT YOU MAY GROW IN RESPECT TO SALVATION, IF YOU HAVE TASTED THE KINDNESS OF THE LORD" (1 Peter 2:2-3).
 - b. You are to have the same craving for the Word of God as a newborn child has for milk to fill its belly.
 - c. And two ways which the Lord has ordained for you to obtain it is through reading and preaching.
 - (i) God has given you His Word, His revelation of Himself and His will, and He expects you to devote yourself to read and understand it.
 - (ii) And He has appointed His ministers to preach it and teach it to you as well. Paul writes to Timothy, "I SOLEMNLY CHARGE YOU IN THE PRESENCE OF GOD AND OF CHRIST JESUS, WHO IS TO JUDGE THE LIVING AND THE DEAD, AND BY HIS APPEARING AND HIS KINGDOM: PREACH THE WORD; BE READY IN SEASON AND OUT OF SEASON; REPROVE, REBUKE, EXHORT, WITH GREAT PATIENCE AND INSTRUCTION. FOR THE TIME WILL COME WHEN THEY WILL NOT ENDURE SOUND DOCTRINE; BUT WANTING TO HAVE THEIR EARS TICKLED, THEY WILL ACCUMULATE FOR THEMSELVES TEACHERS IN ACCORDANCE TO THEIR OWN DESIRES; AND WILL TURN AWAY THEIR EARS FROM THE TRUTH, AND WILL TURN ASIDE TO MYTHS" (2 Tim. **4:1-4**).
 - (iii) You, for your part, are to receive it, and search the Scriptures that you may know that it is the will of your Lord, even as the Bereans, who, "RECEIVED THE WORD WITH GREAT EAGERNESS, EXAMINING THE SCRIPTURES DAILY, TO SEE WHETHER THESE THINGS WERE SO" (Acts 17:11), and you are to keep it, not because it is the word of man, but because it is the Word of God.
 3. The sacraments are a means of grace.
 - a. The Lord has given to His church the two sacraments of baptism and the Lord's Supper.
 - b. Baptism is to be administered but once, but the Lord's Supper is to be observed often.
 - c. The apostle Paul tells us that it is a communing with the risen Christ and a being nourished on the humanity of Christ. "IS NOT THE CUP OF BLESSING WHICH WE BLESS A SHARING IN THE BLOOD OF CHRIST? IS NOT THE BREAD WHICH WE BREAK A SHARING IN THE BODY OF CHRIST? (1 Cor. 10:16), even as Jesus said, "TRULY, TRULY, I SAY TO YOU, UNLESS YOU EAT THE FLESH OF THE SON OF MAN AND DRINK HIS BLOOD, YOU HAVE NO LIFE IN YOURSELVES" (John 6:53).

- d. It is not a literal eating of His flesh and blood that Christ is talking about, but rather the feeding upon that which he merited in His flesh and blood; it is a feeding upon the grace of Christ.
4. The worship of God is a means of grace.
 - a. Worship involves the prayers of God's saints, and the reading and preaching of His Word, as well as the administration of His sacraments.
 - b. It is also the lifting up of the praises of the people of God, which praises the Lord loves to inhabit. The psalmist writes, "YET THOU ARE HOLY, O THOU WHO ART ENTHRONED UPON THE PRAISES OF ISRAEL" (22:3).
 5. The benediction, following the worship service, pronounced in the name of Christ, is a means of grace.
 - a. The benediction is not the blessing of a man, nor is it at the end of the worship service by the will of man.
 - b. It is appointed by Christ to be given by His officer in His name.
 - c. And because it is the Lord's blessing, He declares, "SO THEY SHALL INVOKE MY NAME ON THE SONS OF ISRAEL, AND I THEN WILL BLESS THEM" (Num. 6:27).
 6. There are also other means of grace such as the fellowship of the saints, fasting, the taking of vows, and the reading of godly literature.
- B. But Though There Are Several Different Means to Gain Grace, Yet It Is Still Only One Grace.
1. It is the grace which the Lord merited through His labors, which is freely given to you in Christ. They are not different kinds of grace, but they are all the same.
 2. And it is all blessed of God to the nourishing of your souls when it is received by faith in the worthy recipients.
- III. Be Exhorted Therefore to Make Use of These Means for the Strengthening of Your Souls.
- A. All of the Means in the World and a Thousand Besides Will Do You No Good if You Do Not Use Them.
1. There are many well-meaning Christians who complain of a lack of spiritual power and desire.
 2. But the main reason that you or I or anyone else do not have the strength and power that we would like to have in the Lord is due to our own neglect of the means of grace.
 3. Grace is that which powers our spirits in all the will of God.
 - a. Grace is to our souls like gasoline is to a car, or like batteries to a radio.
 - b. It is the source of power, and when that power source is low, the spirit grows weak like the dimming of a flashlight when the batteries are growing old.
 - c. You need to recharge the grace of God in your souls through the use of the only means which God has given to nourish His life in you.
- B. But, Not Only Must You Be Using Those Means, You Must Also Be

Careful Not to Develop Power Leaks.

1. Sin is that which will rob the power of God from your life.
2. If you are involved in any known sin, or if you are engaged in any activity which you cannot with an absolutely clear conscience do, then you will nullify the grace of God in your soul.
3. You must also with the use of means, repent of all of your sins or you will continue to be a dimly burning light in the world for Christ.

C. Lastly, If You Want to Benefit the Most from the Means of Grace, You Must Understand How They Work.

1. You must realize that they do not work automatically; that is, there is no blessing to the person who simply uses those means.
2. The grace which is offered and given through any of these means of grace, must be received by those to whom that grace belongs through the only means God gives to receive them, namely, through faith.

IV. And So in Closing, Let Me Give You Some Instructions on How to Benefit the Most From These Means.

A. First, and Most Obvious, You Must Be A Christian.

1. You must believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and trust Him to save you, or you will have no grace from these means at all.
2. However, even if you are not a Christian, most of these means of grace may still benefit you as a means to bring you to Christ, for when the Lord does choose to give the gift of faith, He normally does so under the means of grace.
3. Though you would not be allowed to come to the Lord's Table, you may still benefit from the reading and preaching of His Word, as well as prayer for His mercy.
4. The Lord has had mercy on many countless multitudes that are before His throne. There is good reason to believe that He will have mercy on you as well if you flee to Christ.

B. Secondly, You Must Be Disciplined in Your Use of Them.

1. The means of grace are used in specific contexts, usually in the context of worship, so you must be very disciplined in your observance of public, family and private worship.
2. You must attend public worship at every opportunity the Lord gives you.
 - a. Here you have two opportunities to benefit from the worship service of the Lord, whereas in many churches you may only have one.
 - b. What better way to spend the day which the Lord has given to you to build up your most holy faith than to spend it engaged in the things which He gives to strengthen your soul?
3. You must devote yourselves regularly to family worship at least twice a day.
 - a. Fathers, as the spiritual leaders of your households, you are to be using the means of grace to build up your family in grace.
 - b. To read the Word to and to pray for your family, as well as teaching them the songs of the church, is a very important duty in your lives.

- c. It is good to begin and close each day with family worship so that you might bring a blessing upon your household.
4. And you must devote yourselves to personal worship at least once a day.
 - a. Whether it be in the morning or evening, do not skip your time of prayer and reading of the Word.
 - b. Sometimes we let the small devotional booklets used in our time of family worship suffice for the whole day.
 - c. But you will only get out of it what you put into it. You cannot expect much spiritual strength and encouragement from a simple 10 minute devotional.
 - d. You might think that your schedules will not allow you any more time than this. But when you realize that your fruitfulness for God's glory each day will depend on your use of these gracious means, can you really afford not to take the time?
 - e. This goes for you children as well who really want to serve the Lord. Some of you are too young to do very much in the way of prayer or Bible reading so you will have to rely on your parents to read and pray with you. But several of you are old enough to do this on your own. If you want the spiritual strength to serve your Lord in this world, you will need to use these means too.
 - f. I'm afraid most of us go out into the world every morning without even taking time to fill our spiritual gas tanks, and its no wonder then that we don't accomplish much of anything.
 - g. And so secondly, you must be disciplined enough to use these means.
- C. Thirdly, Your Mind Must Be Engaged in Your Use of Them.
1. Remember that the means of grace do not work automatically.
 2. Reading three or four chapters of the Bible each day will have very little affect on your life unless you seek to understand what you have read. And even understanding it and knowing the truths are not enough, you must also put them into action: believe the promises, tremble at the threatenings, obey the commandments, accept the truths.
 3. When you pray, you must also have your mind engaged, not using meaningless repetitions, or form prayers that you are used to saying. You must pray with understanding and intelligently for specific needs and then watch for their answer.
 4. When you worship you must do so according to God's design. Worship is not simply an emotional experience. It is the offering up to God the glory and honor which is His due. And so you must see His glory, meditate upon it, and ascribe it to Him.
 5. And when you partake of the Lord's Supper you must be able to discern the Lord's body, to understand what God is offering to you is not simply bread and wine, but that you are actually communing with the Risen Lord. You are to know what these things mean and be able to partake of them to the glory of God.
- D. Fourthly, Your Heart Must Be Engaged in Your Use of Them.
1. When you read the Bible you must receive in love what your Lord is telling you to do. "IF YOU LOVE ME," Jesus said, "YOU WILL KEEP MY COMMANDMENTS" (John 14:15).

- a. *If you love the Lord, you will certainly listen carefully to what He says and do it.*
 - b. *Your love for Christ must not only excel your love for all of your earthly friends and relatives, it must also excel your love for yourself and your own wishes.*
2. *When you pray and worship you are to lift up your heart in warm affection to God.*
 - a. *God doesn't want words just to come from your lips, He wants your hearts to be engaged. As Keith Green put it in one of his songs, "I want hearts of fire, not your prayers of ice."*
 - b. *And of course, if you love the Lord, you will daily be on your knees offering up your praises and desires to Him.*
 3. *And when you partake of the Lord's Supper you must do so not out of routine or ritual, but with your soul looking up to God seeking to commune with your risen Savior. It is a time to commune with Christ, your heart's desire, not to eat bread and drink wine.*
- E. *And Lastly, If There Is Any Grace to Be Received, It Must Be Received by Faith.*
1. *Grace is offered in the means of grace, but only to those who have faith. It is only received by faith.*
 - a. *An unbeliever who uses the means of grace will not profit by them until they have the gift of faith from God.*
 - b. *Even the believer will not profit much from them if he does not know that there is something which the Lord is wanting to give to him.*
 2. *It is important for you, therefore, to receive the grace which God offers by faith, or you will receive nothing at all.*
 - a. *Believe that the Lord has appointed them for your spiritual growth.*
 - b. *Receive from Him the power which Christ supplies with a heart purified by faith.*
 - c. *Remember, God's means of grace will not strengthen you automatically. You must use your mind, have your heart fully engaged, and receive them by faith.*
 - d. *People of God, discipline yourselves to use these means and to receive all that the Lord wants to give you through them. They are precious gifts, and sources of enablement in the Christian warfare. Through the use of them, you will be an overcomer in the spiritual battle of the ages, or through the neglect of them, you will be weak and unable to fight the battle effectively. Stir yourselves up to a diligent use of these means, and see what the Lord will accomplish through your life. Amen.*