

Insulting the Spirit of Grace

by Stella Paterson

Almost daily we hear reports of spurious signs and wonders taking place. In some cases, we hear from those who are deceived and desire to "spread the good news." But in others, we hear from true believers who are deeply grieved at what is transpiring. The pace at which these lying signs and wonders are increasing is both shocking and sickening. The Bible has numerous warnings of the things we now see coming to pass. They should come as no surprise but when the reality of it all "hits home" we often find ourselves voicing, "How can this be? What an insult to the precious Holy Spirit!"

There is something far more insidious we need to consider. It has weighed on my heart ever since I completed "*Tried and Found Wanting*." You may ask, "What could be worse than the things going on all around us that cause such devastation in the Body of Christ?" My response is, "Follow along with me; God's Word holds the answer."

What is grace?

How often have we heard someone say that "grace" is God's unmerited favor? I have yet to find that definition anywhere in a good Bible dictionary of New Testament words. It is another one of those traditions that has been handed down and accepted without question.

Strong's Greek dictionary tells us that grace ["charis"] is this:

"*graciousness (as gratifying)*, of manner or act (abstract or concrete; literal, figurative or spiritual; **especially the divine influence upon the heart, and its reflection in the life**; including *gratitude*)." (Emphasis mine)

Thayer's gives us this definition of grace:

- 1) grace . . . that which affords joy, pleasure, delight, sweetness, charm, loveliness: grace of speech
- 2) good will, loving-kindness, favour . . . of the merciful kindness by which **God, exerting his holy influence upon souls, turns them to Christ, keeps, strengthens, increases them in Christian faith, knowledge, affection, and kindles them to the exercise of the Christian virtues**
- 3) what is due to grace . . . a) the spiritual condition of one governed by the power of divine grace
- b) the token or proof of grace, benefit . . . a gift of grace . . . benefit, bounty

4) thanks, (for benefits, services, favours), recompense, reward.
(Emphases mine)

Look closely at the bold text above, emphasized to show the most important use found throughout much of the New Testament. The conclusion to which I've come is that God's grace is "His divine influence in the person of His Spirit, conforming us into the image of His Son and living His Life through us." The other meanings, when they occur, will become obvious as we read them in context. The point of this article is to expound on a truth that I believe God wants us to understand--especially in this hour in which we live, when everything that can be shaken will be shaken.

Unshakable Kingdom

Let's examine what the writer of Hebrews had to say about a "shaking" which we see already happening. *"Now the phrase, 'Yet once more,' signifies the removal of the things being shaken, as having been made, so that the things which cannot be shaken may remain. Therefore, since we are receiving an unshakable kingdom, **let us have grace, through which we serve God acceptably with reverence and godly fear.** For our God is a consuming fire."* (Hebrews 12:27-29 EMTV)

In our human state, operating with the knowledge of good and evil, we will never withstand the shaking that is taking place. Only the Spirit of Jesus, the Spirit of Grace in-dwelling our spirits can keep us, and make us a part of the "unshakable kingdom." We can never "serve God acceptably" in our own strength. Nor can we even have "reverence and godly fear" without God's Grace.

Jesus' words in John 15:5 put it this way: *"I am the vine, you are the branches. He who abides in Me, and I in him, bears much fruit; because **apart from Me you can do nothing.**"* (EMTV) He abides in us through His Spirit of Grace.

Spirit of Grace

God's grace is one of those things that has been misrepresented and, yes, vastly distorted in recent years. Even in Bible passages, the way the translators have worded in English what began as Greek, the word "grace" [Greek: "charis"] sounds almost anemic. Depending on the "version" of the Bible, it can be even more confusing.

"Grace" can be found in salutations as well as closing remarks in the epistles of the New Testament. Unless we understand true grace, we may skim through these verses with the thought that it is a figure of speech depicting another attribute of God, or just a nice-sounding word to "color" the opening or closing of a chapter.

But let me tell you about the wonderful grace of God, whom I love to refer to as the "Spirit of Grace."

A preacher who had just read something I wrote about the "Spirit of Grace" corrected me and told me the Bible does not say that. Then I showed him Hebrews 10:29 which tells us, "*By how much worse punishment, do you think, will he be deemed worthy who has trampled the Son of God underfoot, and has regarded as common the blood of the covenant, by which he was sanctified, and has insulted the **Spirit of grace?***" The preacher said, "Oh."

That same preacher also said that he was hesitant to preach about the Grace of God for fear the people in "his church" thought he was giving them license to sin. Well, in a way, grace IS license to sin. But then, we need to consider what "sin" is according to New Testament teaching. When it comes right down to it, if we have the Spirit of Grace living in us, we have no desire to "sin" because Grace is at work in us.

Unbelief and sin - faith and righteousness

As can be frequently read on ekklesia4him.net, the most important thing God wants of us is a relationship. He desires that we trust Him, not only for the salvation of our eternal soul but for our daily walk with Him.

We live in a world full of people. Our relationship with one another is high on the Lord's list of priorities, especially when it comes to our treatment of the widowed, the fatherless and the strangers He brings across our path. But can we carry out His wishes? Is it an easy thing to live a godly life, walking in love? We know that within "self" it is impossible to please God.

Is it a small thing if we fail to please God? No; it is a monumental thing! Let's look at one (most important) thing that will please God. Ever since Jesus settled the sin issue by fulfilling the Law through His death on the Cross, the **one sin has been unbelief**. But when we come to faith in Christ Jesus, He comes to dwell in us as our Righteousness. Therefore, "faith" is the key. It is the thing Jesus is looking for when He returns for His Bride. This brings us to the point that "*without faith it is impossible to be well-pleasing unto God.*" (Hebrews 11:6)

The above verse also tells us that when we come to Him we must believe that He IS God and that He rewards those who diligently seek [Greek: "crave"] Him. How does He reward those who seek after Him? I believe one way is found in what James tells us. "*God resists the proud, but gives **grace** to the humble.*" (James 4:6) If we come humbly to Him, put our trust in Him as God (instead of "self") He gives us His Grace. "His Grace" is His Spirit, given to be our Life, to teach us, to lead us into Truth and to be the Power that molds us into the image of His Son. It is the image of His Son in us that pleases Him. We mortal beings can never please a holy God. It is the **Holy** Spirit of Grace who keeps us faithful in the faith.

Being Holy

God pleaded repeatedly with Israel to acknowledge Him as God. In one place He said to Moses, "*Speak unto all the congregation of the children of Israel, and say unto them, Ye shall be holy: for I the LORD your God am holy.*" (Leviticus 19:2) Then Peter quoted something similar when he said, "*because it is written, 'Be holy, for I am holy.'*" (1 Peter 1:16)

How can we be holy? It is only through death to "self" by submission to [putting our trust in] the power of the crucified and risen Christ in the Person of the Holy Spirit of Grace. Oswald Chambers described this new birth which comes by way of the Cross. He said, "*The new life manifests itself in conscious repentance and unconscious holiness.*" We consciously turn from flesh and self (repent) to the regenerating power of Christ Who makes us holy. His presence in us is our Holiness. He will be seen by others because WE are dead and our life is hid with Christ in God. (Colossians 3:3)

Hebrews 12:14-15a tells us this: "*Pursue peace and **holiness** with all people, without which no one shall see the Lord: looking diligently lest anyone fall from the **grace** of God;*" (EMTV) Here we see how holiness and grace are tied together. Read the remainder of the chapter to discover what else it says.

Never mind the "doing" - what about the "being?"

We were created as "human beings," but with a "revival" of the knowledge of good and evil we have become a bunch of "human do-ers." There is a force at work to draw man back to his former state as a mere creature of mortal flesh. That "force" is also known as the "spirit of antichrist." This spirit will become increasingly prevalent as the return of Jesus approaches. There will be temptation on every side to operate according to our flesh which will be sorely tried. I have heard from email friends who have been experiencing this, and I have been severely tested myself in the past several months.

That same spirit of antichrist is also behind the persecution that will be experienced by the true believers in Jesus. It has been around for centuries but will increase greatly in the days ahead. With the knowledge of good and evil there are the "religious" ones who take New Testament passages and use them as a "law" by which they profess to live and by which they judge those around them. Is the Grace of God absent from their lives? Have they not truly been born from above by the Spirit? They desire to "circumcise" others so they can glory in their flesh, as Paul spoke about in his epistle to the Galatians. Here are his words: "*For not even those who are circumcised keep the law themselves, but they wish you to be circumcised that they may boast in your flesh.*" (Galatians 6:13 EMTV) All they can see is flesh! They do not understand the things of the Spirit. Such living is a grave insult to the Spirit of Grace! And it is all done in the name of Christianity.

Okay! That is enough about the "do-ers." We need to take a closer look at OUR "being."

That "pull" back to our former state is something we all live with. Paul described it this way: *"I say then: Walk in the Spirit, and you shall by no means fulfill the lust of the flesh. For **the flesh lusts against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh; and these things oppose each other, so that you do not do the things that you wish.**"* (Galatians 5:16-17 EMTV)

Have you ever noticed that Paul did not ask the Galatians to pray for him and those who were with him? Unlike the Ephesians, Thessalonians, Colossians or Philippians, whom he commended for their steadfastness, he spoke only to the Galatians about how they had turned *"so quickly from Him who called you in the **grace of Christ**"* to "another gospel." He chastised them at length with strong language and with such fervor we can almost "hear" it when we read Galatians; especially the first three chapters.

Who would want a bunch of backslidden, flesh-driven, circumcising legalists to pray for them? They would certainly not be praying according to the will of God, which only the Spirit understands and prays. Have you ever been in a situation where someone said they would pray for you, and you felt like saying, "Please don't!?" I have, but I didn't say anything; I only hoped their words were meaningless and that they would not "pray" for me.

I would like to point out here that we must be watchful about who lays hands on us and "prays" for us. What spirit is in some people, and what might it mean if we allow them to exercise their "spiritual" works upon us? There is great need for discernment!

In the midst of his chastisement of the Galatians for their legalism, Paul's words in Galatians 2:20-21 describe the Grace of God and the difference between "doing and being." *"I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me, and gave Himself for me. **I do not annul the grace of God; for if righteousness comes through the law, then Christ died for nothing.**"* (EMTV) What a powerful truth! When we come to the full realization of Paul's statement, we ought to tremble at even the thought of insulting the Spirit of Grace. And as he told the people at Athens, *"For in Him we live, and move, and have our **being.**"* (Acts 17:28a)

Not mere rhetoric

Now let's look at some examples of how "Grace" was spoken of. It is so much more than nice-sounding rhetoric pronounced to give the hearers a sense of having God's "favor" upon them.

In Acts 4:33, we find "*And with great power the apostles were giving forth their witness of the resurrection of the Lord Jesus. And **great grace** was upon them all.*" (EMTV) They had just been filled with the Holy Spirit and were preaching with Power, having "great grace" upon them.

Acts 13:43 tells us, "*And when the synagogue service was broken up, many of the Jews and of the devout proselytes followed Paul and Barnabas, who, speaking to them, **persuaded them to continue in the grace of God.***" (EMTV)

Again, in the book of Acts, there is another "nugget of truth" in these words: "*So for the present, I entrust you, brothers, to God and to the word of His **grace, which is able to build you up and give you an inheritance among all those who have been sanctified.***" (Acts 20:32 EMTV) It is Grace that builds us up and sanctifies!

The Apostle Paul phrased the new-birth experience in these words: "*For by **grace** you are saved through **faith**, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift [Greek: 'sacrifice'] of God, not of works [Greek: 'toil/acts'], lest anyone should boast.*" (Ephesians 2:8-9 EMTV) There again, we have the inseparable "faith" and "grace."

When Paul was struggling with the messenger of Satan sent to buffet him (his "thorn in the flesh"), he asked repeatedly for God to take it from him. Here, Paul gives us the answer he received: "*And He said to me, '**My grace is sufficient for you, for My power is perfected in weakness.**' Therefore most gladly I will rather boast in my weaknesses, in order that the power of Christ may rest upon me.*" (2 Corinthians 12:9 EMTV) Are we willing to boast in our weakness so that His Grace can reign supreme in and through us?

Now we come to a passage which uses the phrase "have the rule over." It conveys the idea that God approves of a hierarchical system in the Body of Christ and, as in most such cases, is found in the King James Version. The phrase more accurately means "leaders," according to the Greek word from which it was translated. The passage was written as encouragement for believers to be firm in their faith, following the example of those who have gone on before them. Here it is, from the English Majority Text Version: "*Remember your **leaders**, who spoke the word of God to you, of whom considering the result of their conduct, imitate their faith. Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today, and forever. Do not be carried away with various and strange doctrines. For **it is good for the heart to be established by grace**, not by foods, by which those having walked were not profited.*" (Hebrews 13:7-9)

The very last verse of the last chapter of the last book of the Bible provides confirmation of the importance of the Grace of God. Read what it says. "*He who testifies to these things says, 'Yes, I am coming quickly.' Amen. Yes, come, Lord*

Jesus! The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ be with all the saints. Amen.
(Revelation 22:20-21 EMTV)

Would such a book as *The Revelation of Jesus Christ* end with mere rhetoric?

Getting to the point

I know I have "hammered away" repeatedly in various articles on the issue of sin and what it really means. But there is good reason. The most insidious sin is the sin of "unbelief" or "lack of entrusting our spiritual well-being to Christ." I cannot stress enough the seriousness of what I am saying here. It all comes back to the necessity to be born from above by the Spirit of God. That "necessity" is our condition of flesh with which we are born and live with as long as we are on this earth. That is why faith is so utterly essential, but how do we really live it out?

If we desire to be wholly devoted to Jesus, to what do we give our devotion? Are we concentrating on OUR devotion until it becomes the object of our devotion rather than Jesus? Oswald Chambers said that "devotion is not what we do for Jesus but what we are to Him." Has OUR devotion become an idol without our knowing it? Jesus MUST be the center of our attention -- never what we do "for" Him. We need to be so utterly sold out to Him that His Grace can fulfil in us what Jesus requires.

Let me pose a few questions. Is Jesus first in our heart and our thoughts or is first place held by things we THINK are honoring to Him? Do we hold in exaltation OUR worship, being careful to set aside a special time each week, or even each day? Do we not realize "our worship" can become an idol because that is what we focus on? Yes, we do worship Him at those times, so you may wonder, "What is the problem with that?"

Thousands of years ago, Isaiah addressed that same problem, following a vision he had, with a word from the Lord "to Jerusalem and Judah." It seems the Lord had become fed up with their sacrifices, their planned meetings and the usual ordinances of the Law that had become their focus. He even told them "*When you spread forth your hands, I will hide my eyes from you: yea, **when you make many prayers, I will not hear: your hands are full of blood. Wash you, make you clean; put away the evil of your doings from before my eyes; cease to do evil; learn to do well; seek judgment, relieve the oppressed, judge the fatherless, plead for the widow.***" (Isaiah 1:15-17)

It was during the days of Uzziah, Jotham, Ahaz, and Hezekiah, kings of Judah, that Isaiah had that vision and spoke those words. But let's take a closer look at Uzziah and take a lesson from his life.

Uzziah's name means "*strength of Jah* [God]." Like so many others of old, King Uzziah became "strengthened" in SELF. And he dared to go into the temple,

incense in hand, to burn incense unto the Lord. This greatly angered the priests, the sons of Aaron, who were the only ones consecrated to burn incense in the temple. They ordered Uzziah out of the sanctuary but he became "wroth" with the priests. At that very moment the LORD God struck the king with leprosy in his forehead. He later died in shame as a leper.

Do we trust in the "strength of God," His Grace, to perform His righteousness in and through us? Or do we, calling ourselves by His Name, carry on in our own strength, thereby insulting the Spirit of Grace?

In the sixth chapter of Isaiah, he tells of something that happened "*in the year that King Uzziah died.*" It is significant that he mentions Uzziah in leading up to his experience of "seeing the Lord." I'm sure Uzziah's downfall was fresh on his mind, after what the king had so arrogantly done, because Isaiah was awe-struck and humbled at what he "saw."

The Lord was "*high and lifted up*" and the hem of His garment (train) filled the temple. There were seraphim above, and they cried "*Holy, holy, holy, is the LORD of hosts: the whole earth is full of his glory.*" At this moment the door posts moved and the house was filled with smoke.

At the revelation of the Holiness of God, there burst from Isaiah's lips these words: "*Woe is me! for I am undone; because I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips: for my eyes have seen the King, the LORD of hosts.*" Then one of the seraphim took a coal from off the altar and touched Isaiah's mouth, telling him that his iniquity was *taken away* and his sin *purged*. Now Isaiah was prepared to hear the Lord's call and to go and do His bidding. (Read Isaiah 6 for the whole story.)

Following Jesus

What is it that Jesus bids us do? His expectation of those who are His disciples can be found throughout the New Testament. To put it simply, one word says it all. That word is "Love!"

That same message can be traced back to the Old Testament. For example, we all know the familiar 18th verse that follows the earlier quoted verses from Isaiah chapter one. "*Come now, and let us reason together, said the LORD: though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they are red like crimson, they shall be as wool.*" As the Lord God said, their hands were "full of blood" because of their meticulous adherence to sacrifices and meetings, etc. At one point, He even likened them to Sodom and Gomorrah. In obedience to Him, their treatment of the oppressed, fatherless and widows would change everything in the eyes of God, and their "sins" would become as white as snow. And just as the New Testament tells us, "Love covers a multitude of sins."

Jesus always went aside to spend time with the Father before He went about doing His Father's will-and so should we. If Jesus is the Son of Love and His Spirit of Grace dwells in us, His Life will pour out from us to the "oppressed, the fatherless and the widows." That is the working out of our devotion to Jesus. He does it by bringing us into situations where His Spirit can produce His fruit.

May we seek the Lord for a revelation of His Grace so that we can come to that place where we would never insult the Spirit of Grace. This is a very serious matter and we really do need a revelation if we are going to truly walk by the Spirit. May we never be as Uzziah, and take it upon ourselves to desecrate what God sees as "Holy" by doing what WE think will please Him. As the writer of Hebrews said, "*It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God!*" (Hebrews 10:31 EMTV)

We need to submit to the Master and let Him be master. Ask the Lord for a deep understanding of these words: "*For sin shall not be master over you, for you are not under law but under grace.*" (Romans 6:14 EMTV) There is a secret to letting the Lord be master over us. It can be found in these words from R. A. Torrey*: "*If you won't stay long with Him, you won't be much like Him.*" The more we spend time in the presence of Jesus, the more His Spirit of Grace will mold us into His image, and the less of "self" there will be. Only the Spirit of Grace is able to do that work of regeneration in a believer.

(**The Power of Prayer and the Prayer of Power* by R. A. Torrey. I highly recommend this book on prayer.)