

Growing in Grace #2 - the Grace of God

by Bob Hoekstra

The sermon emphasizes the importance of understanding and growing in the grace of God, which provides a way for us to live a life pleasing to God and become more like Christ.

Duration: 59:03

Scripture: Matthew 6:33, Romans 6:14, 2 Timothy 2:1, Titus 2:11-12

Topics: "Gods Grace", "Christian Humility"

Description

In this sermon, the speaker discusses the concept of grace and its importance in the life of a believer. He emphasizes that grace is freely provided by God through the person and work of Jesus Christ. The speaker highlights the idea of 'grace upon grace,' explaining that God continually provides for and works in the lives of believers through His infinite measures of grace. He also emphasizes the need for humility in order to receive and experience God's grace, contrasting it with the self-sufficient pride that can hinder our connection with Him. The sermon references Acts 20:32 and Galatians 2:21 to support these teachings.

Transcript

Father, we come with hunger, we come with thanksgiving, we come with eagerness, we come with expectation, we come with delight in You and the joy, the prospect of meeting You again face-to-face in Your Word. We ask You to enlighten us by the work of the Holy Spirit, feed us, strengthen us, unfold some of the glories of Your grace, give us more of a spiritual grasp of it, Lord, to see what You want to say to us, what You have for us, what You want to do in and with and through us. We praise You for the riches of Your grace and ask You to unfold them tonight for Your glory and for our progress in the faith, we pray in Jesus' name, amen.

As we continue our studies on the theme of growing in the grace of God, the topic of our study tonight is directly on the subject, and that is we're going to study the grace of God. This morning the law of God, tonight the grace of God. And you can tell by the title of this series of studies that we're talking about day-by-day Christian living, we're talking about grace for Christians today, grace not only for new life in Christ, but grace to see that life developed.

We're talking about the grace of God unto sanctification more and more. By way of introduction, let's read quickly Romans 6.14 where we were this morning. For sin shall not have dominion over you, for you are not under law but under grace.

Again, this truth, we are not under law, but we are under grace. Our first study, of course, was orienting us to the law of God, and we saw the message of the law of God is be holy, be perfect. We also saw the law of God can't make us holy or perfect, but we did see that the law has the ability to reveal our need, make us accountable before God, let us know what sin is and the fact that we are sinners, and then the law can tutor us to the Lord Jesus Christ.

We also looked at the fulfillment of the law of God in our lives. It all has to do with the Lord Jesus Christ, all the way from justification day-by-day through sanctification. It's fulfilled by Christ who He is, what He's done, what He is to us now, and what He provides.

The law of God. The more I read about, pray about, meditate on, study the law of God, the more I appreciate the grace of God. I respect the law more, but I appreciate grace all the more.

You're not under law, but under grace. Grace is God's plan and God's provision to keep sin from dominating our lives. Who but God would come up with such a plan? If I were God, I know you're all quietly thinking, God, I'm not.

But if I were God, I would think, let's just crack down on the law. Surely that's the key. Thou shalt and thou shalt not.

And if that doesn't work, we'll put it in capital letters. If that doesn't work, we'll go to neon. The amazing thing is that it isn't more and more of the law and a more serious, diligent approach to it that keeps sin from dominating our lives.

But we read sin shall not have dominion over you because you're not under law, but under grace. God's great provision. There is a way to live the life in Christ with sin less and less dominating, having an influence in our walk with the Lord.

And it all has to do with the grace of God. That draws me on. That's that drawing by loving kindness.

Oh, yes. That's what I want. That sounds so good.

God's loyal, steadfast love by His grace providing a way for sin to have less and less of a grip in your life and mine. We also looked at Hebrews 7, 18 through 19. For on the one hand, there is an annulling of the former commandment because of its weakness and unprofitableness.

For the law made nothing perfect. On the other hand, there is the bringing in of a better hope through which we draw near to God. The law of God is unable to set us free from the domination of sin.

It's not designed to do that. It's designed to let us know what sin is and our proclivity personally towards sin. The law makes nothing perfect.

It only demands perfection. Oh, how that causes us to appreciate, to hunger for, to want to grow in the grace of God. Let's ask the Lord to develop a little more this great truth.

Grace, not law. We saw that a bit this morning. We've reviewed it a moment now.

The Scriptures herald out this theme time and time again. Grace, not law. The first chapter of the Gospel of John, that glorious, quite unique gospel, though touching on the historical progress of the life and ministry of Jesus, it brings so much of the heavenly down into the earthly walk of the Lord Jesus Christ.

John chapter 1, we see grace, not law, is what you and I are dealing with in Jesus Christ. Verse 17, the law was given through Moses, but grace and truth came through Jesus Christ. God used Moses to reveal his holy character in the law, to lay out his standards in the law, to indicate his will in the law, but grace and truth came through Jesus Christ.

In the truth that the Lord Jesus shares, we see the Lord's greatness in his character and his will, but oh, this glorious addition, grace and truth came through Jesus Christ. If the Lord Jesus Christ had not come, we would not have what we need to walk in what God sent in commandment through Moses. Thank God for the law.

2 Corinthians 3 says it has a glory, but it also adds that grace has a glory so great that it makes it look like the law has no glory at all. The glory of the law is the glory of realizing what our problem is. It's our sin before a holy God.

Oh, how much more glorious is the grace of God, which tells us we have a remedy for our problem. Grace and truth came through Jesus Christ. Verse 16, and of his fullness we have all received and grace upon grace.

Verse 14 tells us when Jesus came, he came full of grace and truth. You know what you and I have received? Right out of his fullness, out of the fullness of the grace of God, we have received grace upon grace. In fact, our testimony could be that.

If we had to tell someone how God has worked in our lives, we could boil it down pretty quickly to this. Well, we could say, here's how he's worked. It's been grace upon grace.

And we could add, upon grace upon grace, upon grace upon grace, depending how much time you had to give your testimony. That's how it is with us in the Lord. Out of his fullness, his full supply, infinite measures of grace, we have received.

And then God just deals with us one gracious work, one gracious provision upon another gracious work and gracious provision. It's God's way with us in Jesus Christ. Grace upon grace.

What is grace anyway? For years now, between 15 and 20 years, I've been trying to jot down descriptions of the grace of God. I've given up on a definition. A definition is supposed to capture the whole thing, you know.

We'll let the Lord do that in glory when we get there. But it's still fun and edifying to ask the Lord to give us descriptions of his grace, new slants and perspectives on it to appreciate it and grow in it. Let me share with you my latest feeble attempt.

The grace of God. What is it? If it's grace upon grace we've received and walk in and we're studying, growing in the grace of God, what is it? God freely providing for us through and as we trust in the person and work of his Son, all that we would need, all that we would yearn for, all that we are commanded to walk in and become, but could never deserve, could never earn, and could never produce on our own. Now there's so much more to the grace of God than that, but that kind of stirs my heart.

Just the verses that reveal that part. As we trust in the person and work of the Lord Jesus Christ, God provides all this glorious grace. And it's grace upon grace.

Therefore, Galatians 2.21 should be our testimony as it was the Apostle Paul's. Galatians 2.21, I do not set aside the grace of God, for if righteousness comes through the law, then Christ died in vain. Think of the implications of that.

Jesus would not have had to come to this sin-cursed world, die an agonizing, terrorizing death. Remember how he shuddered as the cup of sin came to him in the garden? Everything in his eternal holy being shrinking back from sin and death, and yet not my will but yours be done. Jesus would not have had to come and go through all that if righteousness were available through the law.

If we foolishly think the law is enough, we're saying the death of Jesus Christ was in vain. It was a waste. No point to it.

That's not so. So we do not set aside the grace of God. We cling to it.

We stand on it. We hope in it. We grow in it.

In fact, that death of Christ was the ultimate demonstration of the grace of God. So often, we tie the grace of God into the death of Christ. We forget to relate it to the resurrection, the ascension, and the ongoing intercessory and living in us ministry of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Maybe you are with the great multitude of us as believers who have made this serious mistake about the grace of God. I did early on. I think I made every mistake you could possibly make concerning the grace of God as far as misunderstanding and misapplying and misappropriating.

I used to think that the grace of God was equal to the forgiveness of God. Major misunderstanding on my part. Now, the grace of God supplies forgiveness, but one of those two realities is far greater than the other.

Do a little check in your own mind with the Lord. Which is greater, grace or forgiveness? Oh, grace is immeasurably greater than forgiveness. Forgiveness is our first deep drink of the cup of the grace of God.

Many of us thought we hit the bottom with that. Thank you Lord, I needed that. Forgiven.

No, no. That was the first gulp out of an ocean of grace. Oh Lord, help us not to relegate the grace of God only to forgiveness.

Listen, if forgiveness was all the grace of God we ever got, wouldn't you be willing to praise Him and serve Him and hang out with Him forever? I would. But see, it's far better than that. It's grace upon grace.

The grace of God is far more than forgiveness. And most of the studying we'll be doing in this series is related to this issue of grace upon the grace of forgiveness. Grace for growing, grace for maturing, grace for serving, grace for becoming more and more like the Lord Jesus Christ.

So we don't want to set aside the grace of God. It's through the grace of God that the righteous life of Christ becomes more and more our portion and our walk. Let's once again take a quick reminder of God's justifying grace and then let the Lord build on it concerning God's sanctifying grace.

Romans 3.24, we looked at a few verses around that. Let's just read that one verse. We are those who have called upon the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and we now number among the ones being justified freely by His grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus.

Remember what justification is. Being declared by a holy judge, God Himself, innocent, not guilty. Even though we know on our own we were everything but innocent, we were totally guilty.

Guilty of sin and deserving of eternal death. The holy judge is also a loving and gracious judge. And through the death of Christ, Romans tells us, God can be just and the justifier.

Oh, He wants to be our justifier, but He can't just sweep sin under the rug. He's not a compromiser. He is holy.

He can't act like He's not holy. But He had a way to be just, to remain true and holy and righteous and be the justifier of we, ungodly, guilty sinners who call on the name of the Lord for forgiveness and salvation. Justification, it's freely given to us by grace.

Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Isaiah 55, come you who have no money, buy milk and bread and wine and feast on the things of God. We don't have anything to barter with God for, but He offers it to us freely by His grace.

We confess our bankruptcy, He gives us His riches of forgiveness as we trust in Jesus Christ. Justified freely by His grace. Christ is our Redeemer, paid the price of redemption, paid the price to buy us out of bondage to sin and back to fellowship with God.

Justified by grace. Ephesians 1 describes it in a beautiful way. Ephesians 1.7, in Him we have redemption through His blood.

And I love the attention God brought early on to the beautiful truth of being in Christ. Oh, that's where the grace is. And that's where we live.

Again, I can't believe how many years I overlooked that glorious phrase in the Scriptures. But we'll hold on there, we're going to study that a couple studies down the road. In Him, which is where we are now, we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins.

Now those are things that are involved in justification. Redemption by the blood of Christ, the precious price paid, the priceless blood of the eternal righteous Lamb. That redemption price, bringing us forgiveness of sins, that's what's involved in justification, being declared innocent by a holy God.

And it's all according, look at the end of verse 7, Ephesians 1, according to the riches of His grace. The riches of His grace. God did not bankrupt His treasures of grace in His forgiving of us.

He didn't spend it all. He's got plenty left. The riches of His grace.

There are treasures untold of to draw on to live day by day by the grace of God. The riches of His grace. I have been one who, in years past, greatly underestimated the riches of the grace of God.

I don't want to do that anymore. I want to realize more and more how vast these treasures are. They're there to draw on, to live by.

They're there in heavenly places to draw on for our walk in earthly realms. The riches of His grace. Where do we draw on those? In God's sanctifying work of grace day by day, our next heading.

Let's think the rest of our time together tonight about God's sanctifying grace and matters related. It's the heart of our study in these six visits together. Titus chapter 2, verse 11 and 12.

Years ago when I began searching the scriptures for indicators that the grace of God was there not only for forgiveness, but for living and growing and serving and maturing and for victory and for progress. Titus 2 is one of the places God speaks of this among many, many. Titus 2, 11 and 12.

For the grace of God that brings salvation has appeared to all men. That again is the aspect of the grace of God that most of us are familiar with. In fact, every Christian has to be familiar with that to enter into the salvation of the Lord.

The saving grace of God. For the grace of God that brings salvation has appeared to all men. God has offered salvation to all men by His grace.

But for those who receive it, receive salvation by His grace, that same grace carries on a further ministry, teaching us, us being those who know the saving grace of God that has appeared. Teaching us that denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously and godly in the present age. God's grace, which brings salvation, also teaches us to turn from ungodliness and walk in godliness.

God's grace teaches us and trains us unto a godly life. Godliness, another way to talk about sanctification or growing in Christ's likeness, may be the ultimate way to speak of sanctification. Denying ungodliness and living soberly, righteously and godly in this present age is related to the teaching, training ministry of the grace of God that brings salvation to all men.

Again we see, the grace of God is not just for forgiveness, it's also to grow in godliness. This word teaching us, there's another word in the New Testament somewhat similar that can be translated teaching, is the word for being disciplined. It's by the grace of God we start out as disciples of the Lord and God's grace just keeps working with us, discipling us, training us, transforming us unto the image of Jesus Christ.

God's sanctifying grace. Here's one of the most obvious statements that God's grace is for sanctification. It's actually the theme verse for our series of studies, 2 Peter 3.18. But grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

To him be glory both now and forever. Amen. We're to grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord.

Grace is a realm in which we are to grow and develop. Grace is the means by which we are to grow and develop. We're to increasingly understand, appreciate, appropriate, draw, and live by the grace of God.

And as we do, we grow. We grow in and by the grace of God. Just like a child basically doesn't make itself grow.

The life that is there is nurtured by what is given to that life. We feed that child, take care of that child, and minister to that life. It blossoms and grows and develops.

So it is with God. We are children of God by the grace of God. And what nurtures this grace gift of life from God is more of that grace.

It's kind of like the Word of God. The Word of God, it's written in 1 Peter, is the seed bearing the life that God wants to share with us. Born again by the living and abiding seed of the Word of God, Peter wrote.

That's in chapter 1 of 1 Peter. The metaphor switches in the very next chapter. We're too long after the pure milk of the Word, that by it we may grow in respect to salvation.

The Word is what God used to birth us by giving us the Gospel and we believed on that life-bearing seed. But then that same Word of God became milk to us to nurture and grow us up. That's just a parallel pattern of the grace of God.

It's the grace of God that gave us salvation and new life in Christ. It's the grace of God that nurtures that life and develops that life and brings it to what the Lord wants it to be. That's why we're told.

But grow in the grace of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. We'll talk later about growing in the knowledge of our Lord, the knowing of our Lord, getting acquainted with our Lord, which is also directly related to His grace at work in us. We are to grow in the grace of God.

This is speaking of the process of sanctification. Grow in the grace of God? That's not about justification. That happens in a moment.

A culmination of the process of God calling us, wooing us by His truth and His Spirit. But once birthed, once given new life by the grace of God, we're to grow in grace, develop in and by the grace of God. Sanctification.

Day-by-day process of maturing more and more under the fullness of the stature of Christ, as Ephesians 4 puts it. Here's another powerful picture of the grace of God under sanctification more and more. Acts 20, verse 32.

Remember Acts 20. At this point in the unfolding of the early church, the Apostle Paul has gone throughout much of the Mediterranean world, planting the seed of the Gospel, thereby planting churches. He's on his way to Jerusalem, where chains and bonds and trouble await him.

Looks like the last time by Ephesus, strong church, place he had ministered, where Timothy pastored and spoke on behalf of the Apostle Paul through the epistles written to him often. Paul calls the leaders of the church down to the coastline at Miletus and begins to pour out his heart to them in their last visit together before they gather around the throne someday. In Acts 20, verse 32, Paul said to these church leaders, So now, brethren, I commend you 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 are sanctified.

Sanctified used here in a past tense sense. There are really three aspects of sanctification, past, present and future. When we came to Christ, we were sanctified like that in the sense that we were set apart from the world unto God.

Another translation for sanctification would be being set apart for the glory of God, the purposes of God and the use of God. In one sense, that happened when we were taken out of Adam, placed in Christ. It happened when we were called out of the world and became a part of the body of Christ.

We were sanctified, set apart to God, past tense. Someday in the future, there's a great full sanctification awaiting us where we will be totally set apart from everything else for the glory of God, the use of God, the purposes of God for eternity and nothing will interfere with that. Called elsewhere in the Scriptures glorification.

But the rub of it all that we live in is the present ongoing process of sanctification. The learning, the stumbling, the maturing, the growing. Right in the middle of this verse, there's a glorious relationship of grace to the process day by day of sanctification.

Paul was commending the brethren from the church there to God and to the Word of His grace. The Word of His grace. One of the great titles for the Word of God is the Word of His grace.

It's His Word all about His grace. The Word of His grace. God's Word about His grace is described here as being able to do two things.

To build you up and to give you an inheritance among those who are set apart to God. Of these two things again, every Christian is familiar with one of them. Any Christians are unfamiliar with the other of the two.

Now what is it that all Christians are familiar with here concerning the Word of God's grace? The fact that it's able to give us an inheritance among those who are set apart for God. All of us who've been brought out of Adam into Christ, out of the world, into the body of Christ, we know an inheritance awaits us. We know by the grace of God we're headed for the home of God our Heavenly Father where Jesus went to prepare us a place.

We have an inheritance awaiting us. The world looks at most of us like we don't have much and they're pretty right. But we have an inheritance awaiting us that is out of sight.

Riches beyond measure to plunge into for the glory and service of God for eternity. That's awaiting us. And we who know the Lord, basically most or all of us know we have an inheritance ahead.

We're joint heirs with Christ. Heaven is our home. And there's just a whole bunch of us getting very, very homesick, aren't we? I want to plunge into that inheritance that will just multiply our love and praise and worship for our Lord God Almighty.

And there's just a whole bunch of us getting very, very homesick, aren't we? I want to plunge into that inheritance that will just multiply our love and praise and worship for our Lord God Almighty. You know, if we told somebody, do you know what? I'm a child of the God Almighty, the only God who exists and He made everything. And He has an eternal inheritance for His Son.

And He's going to let me share in it. And just before desiring to commit you, they might say, what makes you think if there ever was such a thing that you would ever deserve that? And we say, oh, no, no, no. It's by the Word of His grace.

We know the Word of His grace is all that's able to give us an inheritance. We couldn't earn it, couldn't deserve it, couldn't manufacture it. It has to come by the grace of God.

Most Christians know that. But you know, too many of us have not been growing in knowing this other matter that's mentioned in the very same verse. So now, brethren, I commend you to God and to the Word of His grace, which is able to build you up.

Praise God we have an inheritance awaiting us. I like to think about that sometimes. Praise God for it.

It's very encouraging. But that's not the whole story. There's more grace available for other things than just someday receiving that inheritance.

There's grace in the Word of God for being built up. The Word of His grace, which is able to build you up. Again, we're talking about sanctification, edification, growth, service.

We have a desire, don't we, to grow up in the Lord? Surely we've not been tricked by the world, the flesh, or the devil to say, hey, I've got heaven, I'll just coast from here. What a loss. What a bonfire at the Bema.

Nothing but wood, hay, and stubble. We have a desire to grow in the things of God, to be strengthened, to get built up, to be more usable. Well, let me ask you, how is it going to take place? We should be commending one another to the Word of His grace, which is able to build us up.

Praise God for His grace that gives us that inheritance. But let's praise Him and learn about His grace that is able to build us up. Sometimes we look at a maturing, fruitful, effective Christian and we go, oh, I wish I could make my life like that.

Well, you can't. But the grace of God can. And sometimes we think, well, I just don't have the knack like that.

I just can't be that effective. Or that Christian is so mature, I could never mature like that. No, you can't.

But the grace of God at work in your life can bring it to pass. There is a way. There's a way to be built up.

Effectively. Certainly. We just commend one another to the Word of His grace which is able to build us up.

I love to study the Scriptures about the ability of the Word of God. I love it. It's one of my favorite themes.

I find it builds faith. It builds expectation. It builds confidence in the Word of God.

And it leads me to proclaim it boldly. The ability of the Word of God. Here called the Word of His grace.

And it is able to build us up. If we will take into our lives and commit, commend our lives to the Word of His grace, God will prove it. His grace is able to build us up.

See, His grace is Him freely providing through His Son and the work of His Son and the provisions of His Son all that we need to walk in. All that He's calling us to even commanding us to. The Word of His grace which is able to build you up.

I sat with a young man in Dallas when I was pastoring there back in the late 60's, early 70's. My heart went out to this young man. He says, you know I've been a Christian a few years and I've been trying to figure out how it works and how it doesn't.

And he says, I've come to this conclusion. Some can just do it and some can't and I can't. Oh, it broke my heart.

Because in saying that he was saying, I've had it. You know in a sense that's a good place to be in though. Nobody appreciates the grace of God like somebody who's finally been convinced it's their only hope.

It isn't that some can do it and some can't and you can't. It's that nobody can make themselves like Christ. But the grace of God can work on us, in us, and through us.

So more and more there's less of us seeing and more of Christ. And we grow in Christ-likeness. The grace of God can do that.

It's able to build us up. Oh, we should be encouraged by the grace of God. There are riches to draw on from the grace of God that can build us up in this life now.

That's God's sanctifying grace. Hebrews 13 speaks of another demonstration, explanation, offer of God's sanctifying grace. Hebrews 13.9 Do not be carried about with various and strange doctrines that is weird teachings contrary to the Word of God often contrary to the grace of God.

For it is good that the heart be established by grace. Not with foods that is ceremonial religious foods which have not profited those who have been occupied with them. It isn't religious ritual that matures us and strengthens us.

It's the grace of God at work on our lives. And here's the truth. It is good that the heart be established by grace.

The heart, the inner man, the true spiritual being, the new man, the new person in Christ, the spiritual being that we are. Our spirit, where the Holy Spirit dwells and wants to reveal Christ to us as our life according to Colossians 3.4 The inner man. The heart out of which flows all of the issues of life.

It is good that the heart be established by grace. Established. Stabilized.

Grounded. Made firm and strong and increasingly spiritually predictable reliable in the strength of the Lord. It's good for the heart to be strengthened by grace.

Do you ever get wishy-washy inside? Resolve slipping through your fingers or your ribs? Where did it go? My commitment. My resolve. My certainty.

My dedication. My zeal. My confidence.

Where has it gone? The world just tells you reach a little deeper. You got it in there. It isn't reach a little deeper.

It's open up a little wider. Pour in some more grace, Lord. Establish my heart by grace.

It is good that the heart be established by grace. What a good thing. We probably have a desire inside of us that our private inner spiritual relationship and life and walk with the Lord that it would be stabilized, strengthened, grounded, solid, a firm foundation inside.

How are we going to get it? Many of us did not know that the grace of God was there for that too. As we consider the grace of God, learn of the grace of God, commit our hearts to the grace of God, want to live and walk and serve and grow and function by the grace of God, it establishes our heart. And you know what is going on inside between us and the Lord is what eventually is demonstrated in our life and walk.

The grace of God can reach down in the deepest, innermost part of our being and stabilize us, set us on the solid rock of our salvation. The grace of God, God's work on us, for us, with us, in us, the provision purchased by the Lord Jesus Christ and abundantly freely available to those who believe. Oh, it's good for the heart to be established by grace.

This is something like what Paul wrote to Pastor Timothy in 2 Timothy chapter 2. I saw this on the shoulder of some of the men. I think it was the men's retreat verse or something like that. 2 Timothy 2.1 You therefore, my son, be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus.

Now, clearly, this is not a verse about grace for justification. This is grace for sanctification. It's something we're to be strong in, to grow in the strength of.

Be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus. Paul writing to Timothy, who was already justified, but like all of us, needed to press on in being sanctified. How do we progress in the Christian life? By the grace of God.

I tell you, you've maybe found it out, huh? The Christian life takes strength. In one sense, it's not for weaklings. In the other sense, the only ones who ever make it are the ones who realize they are weaklings.

And they get very interested in the grace of God. We have the picture of the strong Christian life. It's like 40 Bibles in each hand and we're kind of pumping Bible, you know.

And watch me do for God. What a quenching of the Spirit of God. What an ignoring of the grace of God.

What a disqualifying for the grace of God. We are to be strong. I marvel how much strength the Christian life and ministry and service takes.

Probably because it seems like mine's always drained. Lord, I thought you gave me so much. But that was all spent last week.

We're talking today now. What am I going to do, Lord? Be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus. We are in Christ Jesus and here where we are, there is grace abounding.

What are we to be? Strong in it. Get strengthened by it. Learn much about it.

Learn to rely on it. Be strong in it. I want to be a strong Christian, but not in the flesh.

Not in the self-effort, but strong in the grace of the Lord. I began to appreciate the grace of God much 15, 20 years ago after overlooking it, neglecting it shamefully for so long. I've never appreciated the grace of God more than the last 3 or 4 years.

I love pastoring the two churches the Lord had me pastor for 25 years. I found pastors need the grace of God. But as the Lord sent me out to minister to the church across the country and overseas, I found that I needed to learn new ways to draw on new measures of the grace of God.

And that's the way it is with all of us. However far we've come, if we've really come any distance, it's been by the grace of God at work on us and in us. And the things ahead will probably stretch us beyond what the grace behind us already meant.

What do we do with that sort of a situation? Where new challenges make us feel at times like we haven't matured, grown, developed or become strong because they look impossible. We just tell God we want to be strong again in the grace that is in Christ Jesus. His grace is immeasurable.

We'll never face anything here on earth that His grace is not sufficient to deal with. Be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus. Being strong in grace is an interesting paradox.

Because we're going to see under our next heading, living by grace has to do with confessing personal weakness. James 4.6 Many of us have been too macho strong to ever be strong in the grace that's in

Christ Jesus. How does that work? This verse explains it.

James 4.6 But He gives more grace. That's the will of God. That's the desire of God.

He's given us so much grace but He gives more grace. Therefore He says God resists the proud but gives grace to the humble. How do you qualify for the ongoing work of the grace of God? Humble ourselves under the mighty hand of God.

Walk humbly with our God. Why? Because God gives grace to the humble. God resists the proud.

Many Christians in self-sufficiency, self-reliance a worldly taught confidence that I can do it! They're not living by the grace of God. In fact, they're fighting, striving, pressing pushing against the resistance of God. See that? God resists the proud.

Those times we thought we could handle it. We were capable. We were sufficient.

Hey, watch me! Do for God! We came up the resistance. Came up against the resistance of God. Can you see us and our energy just flogging away and churning away? And our jogging shoes are smoking.

Because we're treading, but we're going nowhere. There's God with one finger on our forehead. Ooh! When will He learn? You know? And we're just, oh, for God, watch me! Oh, me! It doesn't even take the finger of God to bring our fleshy striving to naught.

God resists the proud. It's not what we can do for God. It's what God can do in and through us.

That's the glory of the kingdom of God. And He wants to give more grace. He yearns to give more grace.

He loves to pour out grace. But He knows it must only be poured upon the humble. Those who admit they need God's work.

God's provision. God's activity in their lives. Be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus.

To find that strength involves admitting we have no strength. Humility. Telling God, I can't handle this Christian life, God.

I need you. God loves to hear that confession in prayer. He knows it's the truth.

We can't handle it. He knows we need Him. That's the truth.

And He wants to give more grace. And He gives grace to the humble. The kingdom of God lives on the provisions of God.

Just like a branch lives on the provision of the life in the vine. So we need the flowing grace of God to flourish in the life we're called to in Christ. And it's as though it were humility is what opens up the gates of that connection.

Branch to the vine. Humility. What you are and have, Lord, I need.

Oh, Lord, I'm looking to You. What's that I hear pouring into that branch? Grace. Grace.

God gives grace to the humble. He opposes the proud. Oh, God forgive us for the self-sufficient pride we've walked in.

God forgive the American church for training people up in religious self-confidence. Oh, Lord, what have we done? We should have been teaching one another to bow humbly before our God. We need such a revival.

Really, we need a reformation again. A reformation of humility. A reformation of grace.

The early reformers cried out, justification by grace. We need some reformers crying out, sanctification by grace. Praise God for those who died to know only by grace we could get justified.

We need some soldiers standing up now and saying, how is the army of God going to move on? How are the children of God going to grow up? How are we going to be mighty? By the grace of God. Being strong in that grace. God's grace does not flow to and through self-sufficient, self-reliant lives, but rather those dependent upon the Lord.

And that's what the verses here in Romans 5 and Romans 1 are about. Living by grace. Let's see how it's related to faith.

Romans 1 Well, Romans 5 first. Let's look there. Verse 2, Through whom, through the Lord Jesus Christ also we have access by faith into this grace in which we stand.

What a tremendous heavenly description of our position and what is there for us. Through whom? Through Jesus. We, you and me, all who are in Christ have access into this grace.

How do we access the grace of God? How is it made available to us? To put it in the vernacular, how do we tap into it? Well, look. First of all, let's realize we stand in it. Sometimes we have the picture of God way, way off somewhere.

And oh, He sure is great and has a lot to offer, but we're way, way, way over and down here and we're just pleading, help me. Help me, I need what only you can give. And God could cry out to us, well, look around you.

You're standing in grace. What do you want? Through Christ also we have access into this grace in which we stand. The very place we stand before God is a place of grace.

That's how we got there. That's how we'll thrive there. Through Christ, grace is now available to us abundantly.

We stand in it. Can you imagine a pauper standing in a field of gold coins and a sign says take all you need. Just give the thanks and glory to the provider.

And the pauper stands there crying out, I'm poor, I need resource. That's often the way we are. In Christ we stand in grace.

We have access to it through Him. How do we avail ourselves of it? Through whom also we have access by faith into this grace in which we stand. It's by faith we draw on the grace of God.

Believing in God, trusting in God, relying on God, depending upon God. Accepting what He has said, what He has done, what He offers. And as Romans 117 puts it, we live by faith.

Romans 117, talking about the Gospel, says in it the righteousness of God is revealed from faith to faith as it is written, the just shall live by faith. Martin Luther and others hundreds of years ago courageously but appropriately by the revealing work of the Spirit and the grace of God applied this glorious truth to justification by faith drawing on the grace of God. We've seen many places that same grace is there for sanctification and how do we appropriate it? How do we draw on it? How do we access it? Same way, by faith.

The just shall live by faith. God's justified ones. How do we live? By faith! Initially, continually, increasingly.

By faith. By trusting in the Lord, depending on the Lord. We count on Him.

He supplies His grace. Reminds me of a quote that I copied down from Pastor Chuck Smith's book, *Why Grace Changes Everything!* Including the way we live our Christian life. On page 160, Pastor Chuck wrote, I have found that I must rely daily upon the strength and power of Jesus Christ to live the life He wants me to live.

Oh my goodness, Chuck, haven't you caught on yet after all these years? You still have to depend on the Lord every day? You can't do it on your own yet? Praise God, He knows better. We're never intended to do it on our own. Day by day, we must depend on the resources, the provision, the life graciously shared with us by the Lord Jesus Christ.

The just shall live by faith. By faith! By trusting! Being justified by faith, growing in grace by faith. In reflection and conclusion, a thought.

At this point, many of us have a question like this in our minds. Some I know it's been building already. We've talked about it.

Does this mean, since we're justified and sanctified by the impact of the grace of God in and upon our lives, does this mean that man does nothing and is growing and serving by the grace of God? Some hear the message of the grace of God and all of a sudden it's like, okay, the key is what? Nothingness? What do we do? Go sit on a mountain and what? Wait or ohm? What do we do? It's God's grace. It's not what we can do, but what He can do in and through us. Does that mean we're just kind of robotic? Not at all.

Not at all. We get fully engaged and totally involved in the life of grace. But it happens in ways related to trusting and depending on the Lord.

It's a whole matter of learning to live by faith. Walking by faith, not by sight. The perplexing thing in all of this is we have a question that's kind of burning in us, but we're almost afraid to say it because once we say it, it sounds funny.

It's like, hey, how do you do faith anyway? It isn't how do we do it. It's how do we grow in it. We grow in it by this day trusting the Lord in whatever He's revealed to us, provided for us, unfolded for us in the Word, applied to whatever is at hand now.

Bible study? By faith. Heading home tonight? Getting the kids down for bed? By faith. Getting them up in the morning? By faith.

Going to work? By faith. Trusting in the Lord to be at work. Whether it's like the prophet Elijah off by the brook Cherith having to let the ravens feed you and doing it by faith.

Or being on top of Mount Carmel calling down fire against the hundreds of false prophets. It's by faith. The key is not activity.

The key is not inactivity. The key is trusting in the Lord. The just shall live by faith.

And we'll see time and again through these studies on growing in the grace of God that it hinges on faith. Romans 4.16 if you want to add it to your conclusion notes. Romans 4.16 Therefore it is of faith that it might be according to grace.

The works of the flesh, the striving of the flesh to be great and mightier, live up to the standards of God doesn't go with the grace of God. But believing God fits the grace of God. Faith and grace go together like hand in glove.

We'll see that. Drawing on the grace of God, living by the grace of God involves learning day by day to trust God in whatever is at hand to work in and through our lives by the resources and impact of His grace upon us. Growing in the grace of God.

It's so related to the just shall live by faith. Let's pray together. Father, we thank You that You've told us the truth.

You are the truth. We can believe in You. Keep speaking to us Your glorious truth.

We want to depend on it, depend on You. Keep opening up for us Your wondrous grace. We want to count on it.

Live by faith in it. Teach us, Lord, this glorious relationship between faith and grace. Grace Your provision.

Faith our response. As we study session after session, show us more and more the way to grow in grace is by trusting in You every step of the way. Reveal it to us in Jesus' name, Amen.

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