

Grace Not in Vain

2 Corinthians 6:1-2

Do you ever wonder if you are truly a child of God? Does it trouble you that you don't have the complete confidence that you will be with the Lord when you die? In the last few days, this question has been compounded by revelations about the personal life of a Christian apologist. Recent articles¹ from conservative writers have voiced the alarm about this situation. Sincere people who came to salvation through the Gospel that these men preached are now wondering if those same preachers were ever really saved. When these works of iniquity come to light, passages such as 1 Corinthians 6:9-11, Galatians 5:19-21 and Matthew 7:21-23 are worthy of your careful consideration. What can we learn about these situations from 2 Corinthians 6:1-2? Simply put, don't take God's grace in vain.

In the context of one of the most astounding restatements of the Gospel, the Apostle Paul wrote: **"We then, as workers together with him, beseech you also that ye receive not the grace of God in vain. (For he saith, I have heard thee in a time accepted, and in the day of salvation have I succored thee: behold, now is the accepted time; behold, now is the day of salvation.)"** (2 Corinthians 6:1-2)

We (as workers together with Him)

1 Corinthians 15 introduced us to two aspects of God's grace: saving grace and serving grace.

Saving grace: **"Moreover, brethren, I declare unto you the gospel which I preached unto you, which also ye have received, and wherein ye stand; By which also ye are saved, if ye keep in memory what I preached unto you, unless ye have believed in vain. For I delivered unto you first of all that which I also received, how that Christ died for our sins according to the scriptures; And that he was buried, and that he rose again the third day according to the Scriptures:"** (1 Corinthians 15:1-4) By God's grace, this is the foundational Christian message that was preached and received. This is the foundation upon which we stand; we were saved by believing this message. But why would he say, "unless you have believed in vain?" In the context, Paul was answering questions about the resurrection. There were those who taught that there was no resurrection.

The apostle emphasized that **"if Christ be not risen, then *is* our preaching vain, and your faith *is* also vain"** (1 Corinthians 15:14). But then Paul went on to show that Christ is risen from the dead. Their faith was not empty; God's grace was not some meaningless chase. We commonly use the acronym "G.R.A.C.E." to emphasize "God's Riches at Christ's Expense." This is saving grace. Paul's preaching was not vain, and he was a living witness to the life-changing impact of the Gospel.

Serving grace: **"But by the grace of God I am what I am: and his grace which was bestowed upon me was not in vain; but I labored more abundantly than they all: yet not I, but the grace of God which was with me. Therefore whether it were I or they, so we preach, and so ye believed."** (1 Corinthians 15:10-11) Paul referred to the fact that God's grace given to him "was not in vain." The Good News of Jesus Christ's finished work is not a fantasy or a vanity. Those who place their faith in Christ's finished work do not do so in vain. In fact, that amazing grace of God will work in you and through you just as it did in the life of the Apostle Paul. The apostle spoke for all Christian servants when he wrote, "we are workers together with Him!" Here we could spell "G.R.A.C.E." a different way: "Godly Responses Activated by Christ's Enablement." This is serving grace: God's grace laboring in us. But what if a Christian preacher returns to worldliness and lives for his lust, working iniquity? In 1 Corinthians 15:11, Paul put the emphasis on the

power of the Gospel that was preached, not the preacher who preached it. No preacher adds any personal power to the power of God's amazing grace in the Gospel. Our salvation is based on Christ's message, not on some human messenger.

What is grace?

The Greek word [*charis*] in its various forms encompasses a wide range of meanings. You may hear it said that someone "has grace" in the sense of outward beauty, loveliness, favor or charm. You can see this use of the word in Colossians 4:6 where the apostle refers to gracious speech. But in today's text, when we speak of "grace" in these passages, we are thinking of God or man showing kindness and goodwill. In Luke 2:52, Jesus grew in favor with God and men. In his sermon in Acts 7, Stephen described Joseph as having favor with the king of Egypt. When we speak of God's grace, we are thinking of His undeserved kindness – God's unmerited favor toward sinful people. Passages such as Ephesians 2:8-9 and Romans 3:24 show us this meaning of God's undeserved kindness. In Romans 4:3-5, salvation by this grace is exactly the opposite of salvation by works. And we could also think of grace as an influence or power at work in someone. In 2 Corinthians 8 and 9, grace is a gift, and by its influence, it can produce a gracious giftedness in giving to others (either of oneself or one's possessions). In 1 Corinthians 15:10, God's grace was described as the animating power working in the Apostle Paul. God's grace labored in the apostle. This was what enabled Paul to be a co-worker with God.

The Bookends of Grace

The underserved favor of God's grace is so important that it serves as the bookends for many New Testament books. Near the beginning and ending of each of the following books, we can find a reference to God's grace: Romans, 1 & 2 Corinthians, Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, 1 & 2 Thessalonians, 1 & 2 Timothy, Titus, Philemon, Hebrews, 2 Peter and Revelation. This grace is on rich display in verses such as Hebrews 2:9, **"But we see Jesus, who was made a little lower than the angels for the suffering of death, crowned with glory and honor; that He by the grace of God should taste death for every man."**

Grace in 2 Corinthians

Salutation of God's Grace: 2 Corinthians begins with, **"Grace be to you and peace from God our Father, and from the Lord Jesus Christ."** (2 Corinthians 1:2) These words precede one of the keynote passages in 2 Corinthians: **"Blessed be God, even the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies, and the God of all comfort; who comforts us in all our tribulation, that we may be able to comfort them which are in any trouble, by the comfort wherewith we ourselves are comforted of God."** (2 Corinthians 1:3-4). When His children experience trouble, the Father of mercy comforts them and enables them to comfort others with His comfort. Wouldn't you agree that this is amazing grace?

Personal testimony of God's Grace: 2 Corinthians 1:12, **"For our rejoicing is this, the testimony of our conscience, that in simplicity and godly sincerity, not with fleshly wisdom, but by the grace of God, we have had our conversation in the world, and more abundantly to you."** By God's grace, the apostle had a clear conscience and was able to proclaim the gospel simply and sincerely. Here the grace of God is presented in sharp contrast to fleshly, worldly wisdom. "Paul's undivided attention and purity of motive in ministry were in the presence of God."ⁱⁱ

Personal motive by God's Grace: 2 Corinthians 4:14-16 "Knowing that he which raised up the Lord Jesus shall raise up us also by Jesus, and shall present *us* with you. For all things *are* for your sakes, that the abundant grace might through the thanksgiving of many redound to the glory of God. For which cause we faint not ..." Gospel grace points to the end of the race when we will all be gathered into the presence of the Lord. This abundant kindness of God should produce thanksgiving in those who receive it so that God may be glorified.

A Caution about God's Grace: 2 Corinthians 6:1 "We then, as workers together with him, beseech you also that ye receive not the grace of God in vain." The victorious grace of the Gospel of Christ comes with a warning: don't receive the grace of God in vain. Every preacher and every person who hears him ought to heed this warning. Don't take God's grace in vain.

God's Grace causes the believer to keep on giving: 2 Corinthians 8:1, 6, 7, 9, 19; 9:8, 14. Two of these verses demonstrate this gracious giving: "For ye know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that, though He was rich, yet for your sakes He became poor, that you through His poverty might be rich" (8:9). "And God is able to make all grace abound toward you; that you, always having all sufficiency in all things, may abound to every good work:" (9:8). Paul's point in 2 Corinthians 8:7 is "see that you abound in this grace also" – using the powerful grace of God to overflow into the lives of others.

God's Grace is sufficient for every trial: 2 Corinthians 12:9-10 "And He said unto me, My grace is sufficient for thee: for my strength is made perfect in weakness. Most gladly therefore will I rather glory in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me. Therefore I take pleasure in infirmities, in reproaches, in necessities, in persecutions, in distresses for Christ's sake: for when I am weak, then am I strong."

It is God's grace that caused the apostle to say that we are workers together with God. God's sufficient grace was most evident through the window of human suffering. Verse 10 makes it plain that God's powerful grace is available to the believer over a wide range of troubles.

We, Then

To clearly understand the word "then" we need to turn back to 2 Corinthians chapter 5, which we could call "the all new chapter."

- A new Home (Heaven!) 5:1-2
- A new Life (Immortality) 5:3-4
- A new Spirit 5:5
- A new confidence 5:6-8
- A new appointment 5:9-10
- A new motive 5:11-16
- A new creation 5:17
- A new ministry 5:18
- A new message 5:19-21

In the immediate context of 2 Corinthians 6:1, note the words of 2 Corinthians 5:20-21, "Now then we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God did beseech you by us: we pray you in Christ's stead, be ye reconciled to God. For He hath made Him to be sin for us, who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in Him." Workers together with Him, believers are ambassadors for Christ. He was

our Substitute on the cross; we are His representatives in this world. And what message do we deliver from the King of kings and Lord of lords? **“For He hath made Him to be sin for us, who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in Him.”** Here is the message of the Great Exchange offered to us through the Gospel of Christ. Our Lord offers to give His righteous robes to every repentant sinner. God the Father took the Lord Jesus, who knew no sin, and made Him to be sin for us. Jesus lived the perfect, spotless life that we should have lived. Then, in our place, Jesus died the sinner’s death that each one of us should have died. What amazing grace this is!

We appeal to you also

In 2 Corinthians 5:20 we learned that God is making an appeal to every lost sinner: **“be reconciled to God!”** So, as a worker together with God, Paul also made an appeal: We **“beseech you also that ye receive not the grace of God in vain.”** Perhaps you have been in church all your life, or perhaps this is all new to you. In either case, when you fully comprehend the life-changing nature of God’s amazing grace, it’s time to embrace it, totally and fully. It’s time to repent of your sins, believe God’s grace and place your faith in Him alone. In 2 Corinthians 6:2, Paul made it plain: **“Now is the day of salvation.”**ⁱⁱⁱ

Undoubtedly you have heard the story of the amazing Charles Blondin (born Jean Francois Gravelet, 1824). He walked a tightrope across Niagara Falls so many times that it was routine for him. To spice up the act on one occasion, he pushed a wheelbarrow with a 200 pound sack of potatoes, across to the other side. The crowd was amazed, so Blondin would ask, “Who here believes that I could take you across the falls in my wheelbarrow?” The crowd began to chant, “I believe, I believe,” until Blondin chose one of the chanters to get into the wheelbarrow. As you might well imagine, the chosen person routinely screamed and ran away. Why? The person said he believed, but he was unwilling to fully depend on Blondin and his wheelbarrow. In the same way, so many people say, “I believe Christ” but they are unwilling to fully depend upon Christ to save them. They receive the grace of God – but not fully, and therefore, in vain. In 2 Corinthians 13:5, Paul wrote, **“Examine yourselves, whether ye be in the faith; prove your own selves...”** The book of First John was designed to help you do just that. Does God answer your prayers? Are you producing the fruit of the Spirit (Galatians 5:22). Have you seen evidence that you are indeed a new creation in Christ? Do you love the Word of God? Do you love to fellowship with Christian brothers and sisters?

In these perilous times, now is the time to stop playing games, stop pretending faith, and stop receiving the grace of God in vain. When you stop to consider the enormous power and the remarkable benefits of God’s grace, it is time to run to Christ’s finished work and embrace Him for eternal life.

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ⁱ Kevin Schaal, “Now Ravi too?” Proclaim and Defend, February 14, 2021, accessed at <https://www.proclaimanddefend.org/2021/02/14/now-ravi/> . Jeff Straub, “A Letter to My Brothers,” Proclaim and Defend, February 18, 2021 accessed at <https://www.proclaimanddefend.org/2021/02/18/a-letter-to-my-brothers/>

ⁱⁱ David Abernathy, *An Exegetical Summary of 2 Corinthians*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, TX: SIL International, 2008), 42. Citing Kistemaker, Simon J. *Exposition of the Second Epistle to Corinthians*. New Testament Commentary. Grand Rapids: Baker, 1997.

ⁱⁱⁱThis is a quote from the Servant Song in Isaiah 49. For more information, [click here](#).