

WHAT GRACE DID FOR PAUL

"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." I Corinthians 15:10.

There are many influences that enter into making a man what he is. A man is what he is, in some respects, due to heredity. There are certain physical characteristics and qualities of character that come to him through his ancestors. A man is what he is, in some respects, by association and environment. These have a large part in determining his physical condition and in molding his character. A man is what he is, in some respects, by training. He is a cultured, educated man, instead of an ignoramus, because of the effort he has put forth and the training he has received. A man is what he is largely because of his own choices. God has given to every man the right to choose the way in which he will go. The man in prison, facing punishment for his crimes, is what he is because he chose to go in that direction.

But, above all the influences that enter into the making of a Christian man is the grace of God. Apart from that grace there can be no Christian. In this passage Paul magnifies the grace of God by showing what that grace has accomplished in his own life. "By the grace of God I am what I am." Paul is unquestionable the greatest personality mentioned in the Bible except Jesus Christ. No other man was so manysided as he. Each one can find in him something that is appealing. The practical man recognizes the business capability which leads him to the great centers of population and which makes him use the Roman roads as he travels over the empire. The mystic hails with gladness the spiritual gifts and his sense of the reality of the Unseen. The simple lover of humanity rejoices in the Apostle's powers of affection, in the zeal which reckons nothing of persecution, in the desire to become all things to all men if some thereby may be saved, in the spirit which prompts him to close his letters with loving messages to those whose names are before him. All these things endear this great man to us and cause us to think of him, not so much as a saint removed far from us, but as a wonderfully attractive human character, gifted with a heart that could beat in unison with humanity's needs. He tells us that he owed everything to God.

I. Grace Saved Paul.

We are prone to think of Paul as a great preacher, a great missionary, a great evangelist, and a great worker in the cause of Christ. Whenever we think of Paul we just naturally think of him as a great man that was used mightily of God, but Paul wasn't always a great man of God. There was a time when Paul thought he was doing God a favor if he killed Christians. There was a time when he thought he was serving God by exterminating churches. There was a time when he thought he was really showing God how much he loved Him by cutting off the heads of the servants of the Lord Jesus Christ. Paul wasn't always a great man of God. There was a time when he was a blasphemer and a persecutor of the churches and the Lord's preachers, and it took the grace of God to change him. It was God's grace that made out of him a soul-winner and a missionary for God.

In speaking of his own experience Paul said, "Who was before a blasphemer, and a persecutor and injurious: but I obtained mercy, because I did it ignorantly in unbelief. And the grace of our Lord was exceeding abundant with faith and love which is in Christ Jesus." I Timothy 1:13-14.

God's grace saved Paul. If it had not been for God's grace he would have been a persecutor and a blasphemer and one that was injurious to the cause of Christ all of his life.

One day he started on the road to Damascus from Jerusalem to persecute Christians. He had the letters of authority in his pocket whereby he had the permission of the governor to persecute any who believed in the Lord Jesus Christ. As he went along there shone out a light from heaven above the brightness of the noonday sun and Paul fell to the

ground. He cried, "Lord, what wilt thou have me to do?" God's grace became operative and effective within his life. What had Paul done to deserve salvation? Nothing. There was nothing good in his life whereby he should have been saved. Paul was saved by the grace of God. He wasn't saved by baptism. He wasn't saved by church membership. He wasn't saved by a good life. He wasn't saved by reformation. He wasn't saved by keeping the law. In fact, he counted all this but loss to him. It was the grace of God that saved Paul.

"For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: Not of works, lest any man should boast." Ephesians 2:8-9. "Being justified freely by his grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus." Romans 3:24. "But when it pleased God, who separated me from my mother's womb, and called me by his grace." Galatians 1:15.

Grace transformed Paul from a lost sinner into a child of God. If Paul had been asked as Sir James Simpson, the great Edinburgh physician, was asked, what was the greatest and most welcome discovery of his whole life, he would have answered, as did that great doctor, "The discovery that I have a Saviour." Grace also transformed Paul from a servant of sin into a saint of God; from a persecutor of Christians into an apostle of Christ; and from a busy person into a fruitful Christian.

It was grace that saved Paul, and if you are ever saved, it will be by the same matchless, amazing grace of God whereby Paul was saved. You can be baptized, you can join a church, you can turn over a new leaf, and you can live a respectable life, but that won't save you. It takes the grace of God that was manifested in the crucifixion of the Lord Jesus Christ for your salvation. It was grace that saved Paul. It was grace that saved you and that saved me. Every person who ever gets to heaven will get there by salvation through the grace of God.

II. Grace Sustained Paul.

Paul could not have kept himself. He had the same kind of nature that you and I have. Paul had an awful temper, as was evidenced on various occasions. One day they had him up in court and the high priest said something to him that he didn't like and he called him a whited sepulcher.

"For the which cause I also suffer these things: nevertheless I am not ashamed: for I know whom I have believed, and am persuaded that he is able to keep that which I have committed unto him against that day." II Timothy 1:12. "Who shall also confirm you unto the end, that ye may be blameless in the day of our Lord Jesus Christ." I Corinthians 1:8. "And grieve not the Holy Spirit of God, whereby ye are sealed unto the day of redemption." Ephesians 4:30.

Paul says that we are sealed unto the day of redemption. Our redemption here means the time when this old body is changed at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. When Christ comes again, if you are alive, He will change your body without you dying. If you are dead, He is going to catch up the remains of that body and transform it to look like the Son of God Himself. That is the day of redemption Paul is talking about. Paul was saved by grace, and it kept him.

III. Grace Made Paul Successful.

It was the grace of God that transformed Saul into Paul. It was the grace of God that made a worker out of the man who was a blasphemer and a persecutor of the Lord's churches. If somebody makes a sacrifice for you, you are going to love that person. If there is anything to you, you cannot accept a sacrifice from any individual without loving that person in return. The Lord Jesus became my sacrifice at Calvary. He became Paul's

sacrifice. It was that grace which was manifested at Calvary that took Paul and transformed him into a successful worker for the Lord Jesus Christ.

Paul was a handicapped man. As far as his service for the Lord was concerned he had a lot of handicaps. "For his letters, say they, are weighty and powerful; but his bodily presence is weak, and his speech contemptible." II Corinthians 10:10. Paul's letters were powerful, but, as far as his bodily presence was concerned, he was a physical weakling. Paul was a handicapped man, yet God made him a successful worker. In spite of every difficulty that he had, he kept right at the job and did a marvelous task in the service of the Lord.

The grace of God that saved Paul, and the grace of God that kept Paul, made out of Paul a successful worker. If you are saved, it will make a worker out of you, too. The grace of God makes a worker out of any saved individual. It is the grace of God that makes a successful worker out of any individual.

IV. Grace Made Paul Victorious.

Paul had difficulties just like any man today who stands up for the Word of God. In his difficulties Paul found that God's grace took care of him. He had a thorn in the flesh and he went to God three times in prayer, asking God to take away that thorn. God's reply was, "My grace is sufficient for thee." (Read II Timothy 4:10-18). How Paul must have suffered! What he must have gone through when no man stood by him! What was it that helped Paul in all of his difficulties? What was it that helped him in all of his problems? It was the grace of God that gave him victory over all his difficulties and problems.

V. Grace Enabled Paul To Face Death.

Knowing that the time of his departure was upon him, Paul said, "For I am now ready to be offered, and the time of my departure is at hand. I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith: Henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, shall give me at that day: and not to me only, but unto all them also that love his appearing." II Timothy 4:6-8. Do you think that you can face death like that? Nothing but the grace of God can enable man to look at death in this manner. Take a person who does not have anything but church membership, and he will be scared when he comes down to die. A stranger to God is not ready to die, but for the person who knows the Lord Jesus Christ death has no sting. Nothing but God's grace can give you the victory over death.