

SUFFICIENT GRACE

"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." II Corinthians 12:9.

There is a thorn in every life. Either some sad thing is added or some good thing is withheld. There is no song that human hearts are singing but what it has some note of haunting sadness. There is no rose but what it has some thorn unseen amid its leaves. There is no garden without some weed in it. There is no day but what it has its hour of pain. There are no eyes but those which at some time have been blinded by silent tears. There is no sky, however clear and beaming, but what it holds the hidden vapor of some cloud. All have limitations of one form or another -- physical, mental, moral, social or spiritual.

In many respects Paul was a highly privileged man. God had lavishly endowed him with superior qualities and capacities. He had taken advantage of the learning of the schools in his day. He walked through scholastic halls, breathed a scholastic atmosphere and yet never lost the common touch. Then by divine grace he was called into the fellowship of the saints, and separated unto the gospel of Christ, and made an apostle of the Lord Jesus Christ. He was divinely chosen to communicate the Word of God to others. He was privileged above many.

In spite of this fact, Paul had a thorn in the flesh about which he spoke very frankly. This thorn was given to Paul after he had been saved and had been blessed with many spiritual privileges. It was given to him for a gracious purpose, namely, to keep him from being unduly proud. Like us, under similar circumstances, Paul wanted to get rid of this affliction which robbed him of much personal joy and he thought hindered his efficiency in service for Christ. To him his handicap was exceptionally grievous. Each of us thinks that his thorn is worse than any other. But there is no hint that Paul complained about his condition. Instead, he prayed definitely and earnestly for the removal of his thorn in the flesh. He longed desperately to be free from it.

Paul received an answer to his prayer, but it was not the one which he expected. In this respect it is interesting to observe that God always gives us an answer when we truly pray. After Paul had asked Him thrice to remove his handicap immediately, God responded by telling him that He would not do what he had requested, but that He would do something far better for him. In substance God answered, "No, Paul, I will not remove the thorn, but I will give you the power to endure it, and will make it a blessing to you." "My grace is sufficient for thee; for my power in weakness is perfected." In other words, "I will not remove your thorn, but I will give you grace to bear it. I will not lift your burden, but I will give you strength to carry it. I will not rid you of trouble, but I will show you how to triumph in and over it." When Paul sought the way of subtraction, God's way was that of addition. The burden was not reduced, but the sufferer was endowed with more power. Relief came by way of vision and not by way of release. Man's way is to lessen the load, but God's way is to strengthen the shoulders carrying the load. God has a way of answering our prayers, not according to our wishes, but according to His will.

God's will is always best. You will recall that John Bunyan's greatest desire was to preach the gospel. Imagine then his disappointment when he landed in Bedford jail, and found himself deprived of his freedom, as well

as his opportunity to preach. How natural it would have been for him to indulge in self-pity and become rebellious! Instead of doing so, he decided that it was an opportune time for him to do some writing. As a result, we have his immortal Pilgrim's Progress, and through it Bunyan touched vastly more people than he could have reached through his preaching.

I. Who Made This Promise?

It was Christ Jesus Who said, "My grace is sufficient for thee." It was the Son of God, the Mediator between God and men, the Saviour of men, Who made this promise.

"He said unto me." Christ spoke directly to His tested servant. What a beautiful evidence of Christ's concern! Perhaps there have been times when some dire agony has wrung from your hearts the cry,

"Does Jesus care when my heart is pained
Too deeply for mirth or song?
When for my deep grief I find no relief,
Though my tears flow all the night long?"

Perhaps no statement in the Bible has brought more comfort to Christian hearts than this one, "My grace is sufficient for thee." Does not the explanation of its pre-eminent appeal largely lie in the fact that it is the record of a personal experience?

II. What Did Christ Promise?

The promise which He made to believers in Him was that of sufficient grace. "My grace is sufficient for thee." This sufficiency is not a bare adequacy, just covering the extent of the need, with no overlapping margin. This sufficiency is large beyond expectation, desire or necessity.

This glorious promise applies to all believers in Christ. There is not a single exception. However varied the experiences and circumstances of believers, there is something here which is adequate regardless of their variety. His grace is sufficient for all classes of believers, in all circumstances and in all generations. This promise is judicious in its purport. It is not intended to gratify our wishes, which are often foolish, but to meet the real needs of our lives.

"Sufficient" -- the supply has exact correspondence with the need; never too much, never too little, but perfect adequacy; never too soon, never too late, but timed to the tick of the clock and to the beat of the heart. Grace for tomorrow's needs will not come today. Christ promised grace in proportion to the need. He did not promise less grace than is needed. He did not promise grace before it is needed. He did not promise more grace than is needed. He gives grace to His people in their necessities, but not until the necessity occurs. He does not fling the gifts of His grace carelessly from His throne without reference to the actual needs of His people. He knows too well our proneness to self-righteousness to encourage the temptation to independence. He knows too well how inclined people are to security to lay in their way this inducement to inactivity.

God's grace is infinite and exhaustless, but it is never dispensed superfluously. We must not expect that grace will be given for the doing of the needless. Grace is only promised for real need. Somebody once

asked D. L. Moody: "Have you grace enough to be burned at the stake?" and Moody replied, "No." The questioner pressed him further: "Do you not wish you had?" "No," replied Moody again, "for I do not need it. What I need just now is grace to live in Milwaukee three days and hold a mission."

"Sufficient" -- the grace of Christ is always sufficient. See that rolling river; it has been flowing for thousands of years, yet it shows no sign of exhaustion. "For thee." Underneath all our care is Christ's care for us. Henry Moorhouse returned home one morning, carrying a parcel, a present for his wife, and was greeted by his lame daughter who asked that she might have the pleasure of taking the present to the room where her mother was. "But you know, dear, that you cannot carry it," he said, thinking of her lameness. "Give it to me, and see," she challenged him. So the present was handed to her, and then she said, "Now I'll carry the parcel, and you carry me!" So it is with ourselves. If I must carry a burden, Christ will carry me. Underneath the child of God are the everlasting arms of an all-sufficient grace which never fails. Grace is imparted at every step of the way; grace for the big things and grace for the little things. "My grace is sufficient for thee." Oh, what a wondrous promise this is! The more one thinks upon it the more glorious it becomes. Here is the source -- "My grace." Here is the supply -- "sufficient." Here is the sustenance it brings -- "Sufficient for thee." The source is infinite. The supply is proportionate. The sustenance is individually adequate.

III. For What Is His Grace Sufficient?

1. To Save.

In this precious promise there is sufficiency for all who would like to become Christians. Those who are struggling with awakened consciences need to be reminded that salvation is through grace. No matter how numerous the sins or deep-dyed the iniquity, His grace is sufficient to save. "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." There is a spring high on the mountain. A man laid a line of pipe to it and installed proper fixtures in his house. God put the spring there, but man laid the pipe to the spring. Thus grace opens a fountain of healing, and faith reaches out for the healing. Grace provides salvation and faith appropriates it.

2. To Secure.

God's grace is not exhausted in saving us. His grace is sufficient to keep us. Can you imagine a man with a foot-log across a branch for use in flood times saying to his child, "Now put your arms around my neck and hold tightly; if you fall, you will be drowned," and then walk the foot-log with his arms down at his sides? It is unthinkable that any father would leave his child to its own feeble and uncertain hold. And yet, it is no more unthinkable than that Jesus Christ would leave our salvation dependent on our own perseverance. Christ said, "My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me: And I give unto them eternal life; and they shall never perish, neither shall any man pluck them out of My hand" (John 10:27-28). "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."

3. To Sustain.

(1) In the midst of our temptations.

It is certain that we shall encounter temptations. Perhaps some of us will be tempted to despondency because of the cares and burdens of life. Whatever the temptation may be, the grace of Christ is sufficient to supply the necessary strength to withstand the temptation.

(2) In the midst of our mistakes.

Since all of us will make mistakes, we certainly ought to be grateful that His grace is sufficient for them.

(3) In the midst of our trials.

Trials make up much of our experience. Just as the laborer needs more to keep up his strength than does the idler, so the more active our service for the Lord the more we shall need His grace.

(4) In the midst of our troubles.

Many of us will have to experience trouble. When the Lord puts us to unusual suffering He gives us unusual patience. His grace is sufficient to give comfort under afflictions.

(5) In the midst of our sorrows.

Sooner or later, sorrow comes to us all. When extraordinary sorrows come, He always gives extraordinary strength and comfort. The shadows flee away when He appears on the scene. His presence means grace sufficient for thee. "Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for Thou art with me." We are assured of His loving presence and grace in every time of sorrow.

"He giveth more grace as the burdens grow greater,
He sendeth more strength as the labours increase.
To added affliction He addeth His mercy,
To multiplied trials His multiplied peace.
When we have exhausted our store of endurance,
When our strength has failed ere the day is half done,
When we reach the end of our hoarded resources,
Our Father's full giving is only begun.
His love has no limit, His grace has no measure,
His power no boundary known unto men;
And out of His infinite riches, in Jesus
He giveth, and giveth, and giveth again."

-- A. J. Flint.