



The New Life in Christ

Lesson 14

The Grace of God

As we come to the end of this course it is time to look back at all of the lessons and remember what we have sought to achieve. We have seen from the Bible that the new life in Christ is quite different from the life men and women live before baptism. Discipleship requires a commitment to follow the example of the Lord Jesus and he asks that we count the cost of this before we make our decision.

"For which of you, desiring to build a tower, does not first sit down and count the cost, whether he has enough to complete it?
Otherwise, when he has laid a foundation and is not able to finish, all who see it begin to mock him, saying, 'This man began to build and was not able to finish.'
Or what king, going out to encounter another king in war, will not sit down first and deliberate whether he is able with ten thousand to meet him who comes against him with twenty thousand?
And if not, while the other is yet a great way off, he sends a delegation and asks for terms of peace.
So therefore, any one of you who does not renounce all that he has cannot be my disciple."
Luke 14:28-33

Choosing to be a disciple of the Lord Jesus is the most important decision we shall ever make in our lives, it will affect us now and in the Kingdom age to come.

Sometimes people refuse to make this choice because they say they cannot live up to the standards expected of them. This is very sad. Discipleship is not a heavy burden we take on when we are baptized; rather it is the exact opposite of this. The Lord Jesus takes away from us the heavy burden we carry now.

"Come to me, all who labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.
Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls.
For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light."
Matthew 11:28-30

When a disciple is baptized, a wonderful feeling of freedom and peace enters his or her life. The great burden of sin has been taken away; they now belong to God's family and, whatever happens to them in this life, they know that God has said:

"Keep your life free from love of money, and be content with what you have, for he has said, "I will never leave you nor forsake you."
So we can confidently say, "The Lord is my helper; I will not fear; what can man do to me?"
Hebrews 13:5-6

Part of this feeling comes from knowing that freedom from sin is a gift from God, it has not been earned or worked for in any way, and it is given to us through God's grace.

"But God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which he loved us, even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ- by grace you have been saved-...
For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast."
Ephesians 2:4-9

Grace is a difficult word to define, we can think of it as meaning an 'undeserved favour'. We did not deserve to be saved from our sins, salvation comes through God's great love towards us; we are saved by our faith in His grace.

We first meet the word 'grace' in the life of Noah in Genesis 6.

"Noah found grace in the eyes of the LORD."

Genesis 6:8 (KJV)

Note that Noah *found* grace. The implication of this is that grace is something we have to look for and search out. This is something the Apostle John understood for when he wrote his Gospel, he taught us that we particularly find grace when we look at the example of the Lord Jesus Christ.

"And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth."

John 1:14

"You search the Scriptures because you think that in them you have eternal life; and it is they that bear witness about me, yet you refuse to come to me that you may have life."

John 5:39-40

We find grace, the undeserved favour of the Lord God, when we read His Word and especially as we look at the life of the Lord Jesus Christ and see a man who is merciful and compassionate, who was willing to die for others.

"My Grace is Sufficient for You"

We know that Saul of Tarsus was a dedicated enemy of all disciples of the Lord Jesus. He was involved in the death of Stephen, the first disciple of Jesus to die for his faith. He wanted to destroy the ecclesia and he put disciples into prison (Acts 8:3). We are told in Acts 9 how he set off to travel to Damascus from Jerusalem so that he could arrest disciples there. On the way the resurrected Jesus appeared to him in power and glory and his conversion into the disciple we know as the Apostle Paul began. Paul was made blind by this experience and Jesus told him to travel on to Damascus. Once there he was contacted by a disciple called Ananias who gave him back his sight.

"So Ananias departed and entered the house. And laying his hands on him he said, "Brother Saul, the Lord Jesus who appeared to you on the road by which you came has sent me so that you may regain your sight and be filled with the Holy Spirit."

And immediately something like scales fell from his eyes, and he regained his sight. Then he rose and was baptized."

Acts 9:17-18

There are many lovely ideas in this record. Note how the very first word Ananias says to Paul is 'brother'. This is a man who had been coming to Damascus to put Ananias and other disciples into prison! Yet Ananias knows that Jesus has called him to be a disciple and therefore, as a member of God's family, he will be the brother in Christ of Ananias. The word 'brother' is usually reserved for those who have been baptized; here Ananias uses it because he has had a direct revelation from God about Paul. It is likely that, as Paul regained his sight, the first person he would see was the man who performed the miracle, Ananias, and his name means 'God has been gracious'. The very first thing he saw was a man who represented the grace of God! Paul now understood that he could be saved from his sins by this grace for not only did he receive his physical sight but also spiritual sight so that he could clearly see these spiritual things. When this happened, the very first thing that he did was to be baptized.

We are told by Paul that later he suffered many terrible things as he travelled to preach the Gospel. One thing that really distressed him was an illness that could not be cured. Three times he prayed to God to take it away and the response of the Lord to him was:

"My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness."

2Corinthians 12:9

It is possible that God was asking him to remember Ananias and how he was given spiritual sight many years ago. In all circumstances Paul was to remember the undeserved favour God had shown him and this would strengthen him to face all the challenges of life and discipleship so that later, from prison, he could write:

"Indeed, I count everything as loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. For his sake I have suffered the loss of all things and count them as rubbish, in order that I may gain Christ

and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which comes through faith in Christ, the righteousness from God that depends on faith-
that I may know him and the power of his resurrection, and may share his sufferings, becoming like him in his death,
that by any means possible I may attain the resurrection from the dead.”

Philippians 3:8-11

He was a man who gave up a career, friends, wealth, position and health for the Lord Jesus. Yet he tells us that these things meant nothing to him and we know that the strength Paul gained from understanding the grace of God remained with him for the rest of his life. Some of the last words he wrote speak of it to us.

“For the grace of God that brings salvation has appeared to all men.
It teaches us to say "No" to ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright and godly lives in this present age,
while we wait for the blessed hope—the glorious appearing of our great God and Saviour, Jesus Christ,
who gave himself for us to redeem us from all wickedness and to purify for himself a people that are his very own, eager to do what is good.” Titus 2:11-14 (NIV)

Just as Ananias, ‘God has been gracious’, appeared to Paul, so God has revealed His grace to us. We *know* about the Lord Jesus Christ, in him we have *found* grace.

It is thankfulness for these things that fills our hearts and strengthens us in our decision to follow the Lord Jesus as his true disciples. It is the grace of God given to us that shows us how to behave and speak to others that we might be gracious people in our own lives (Colossians 4:6). We know that, at times, we shall fail but we also know that, if we confess our sins to the Lord God, He is faithful and just to forgive us. We know that we have no strength or ability, no righteousness of our own to offer God. It is His grace that teaches us to turn our backs on this life and to follow the Lord Jesus Christ as his disciples; it is His grace that makes us eager to do what is good and will bring us to His Kingdom.

“He who testifies to these things says, "Surely I am coming soon."

Amen. Come, Lord Jesus!

The grace of the Lord Jesus be with all. Amen.”