

Is God's Grace Not Sufficient?

by Al Diestelkamp

After pleading three times for a *"thorn in the flesh"* to depart from him, the apostle Paul was told by the Lord, *"My grace is sufficient for you"* (2 Cor. 12:9). There has been much speculation about just what that *"thorn"* was that troubled the apostle, but it remains just that -- speculation. Perhaps there was a purpose behind the Holy Spirit not inspiring Paul to reveal the exact nature of that *"messenger of Satan"* that plagued him. Maybe it's intended that we learn that there may be things or circumstances in our lives which we must suffer through, consoled by the knowledge that God's grace is sufficient for us.

When one is faced with serious illness, often the question is *"Why me?"* Some Christians have difficulty understanding why their prayers for healing are not answered in the way they hoped. I am not suggesting that people quit praying in such situations, but also remember that they are recipients of God's grace, which is even better than physical healing.

There are Christians who are working at jobs that are less than ideal, and long for other opportunities. There is nothing wrong with trying to advance one's career and earning potential as long as that does not jeopardize his spiritual relationship with Christ. However, if in that pursuit, the child of God would be required to compromise his convictions, the attitude must be that God's grace is sufficient.

In Jesus' explanation of the parable of the sower, He identifies four types of people who *"hear the word of the kingdom"* (Matt 13: 18-23). *"Wayside"* people fail to understand the word, and Satan snatches the word away, causing them not to believe. *"Stony-places"* people hear, and happily receive the word, but stumble when tribulation or persecution comes. *"Those among the thorns"* also receive the word, but allow worldliness to choke out any fruitfulness. I think it's safe to say that those represented by the *"Stony"* and *"Thorny"* soils don't value God's grace sufficiently to endure the trials or to make the necessary sacrifices. In contrast, those represented by the *"good ground"* recognize that God's grace is sufficient no matter what else happens to them.

Sometimes the level of persecution seems almost unbearable to the one on the receiving end. It is especially hard to take when mistreatment comes from our own brethren. Occasionally a gospel preacher will be treated badly by some within the congregation among whom he is working. When a faithful gospel preacher is asked to take his Bible elsewhere, causing grief for him and his family, it is a good time to reflect on how good God has been in bestowing His grace. If he is living right, and preaching as he should, he can boldly say, *"The Lord is my helper; I will not fear. What can man do to me?"* (Heb. 13:6).

The call to repentance is a time when a person must appraise the value of God's grace. If a person who owned a business establishment that thrived on evil were to avail himself of God's grace, repentance would demand that he shut that business down. The financial hardship that might result would be worth it because God's grace is sufficient.

A person whose past practice and inclination is toward homosexuality must become celibate, choosing to *"suffer with the people of God"* over *"the passing pleasures of sin"* (Heb. 11:24). This is no more than God asks of the single heterosexual man or woman who chooses, or is unable, to marry.

Likewise, in our efforts to evangelize we often are faced with people whose lives have been complicated by divorce and remarriage. More often than not, the cause for divorce was not *"for fornication,"* which, according to Jesus, means that any subsequent marriage involves adultery (Matt. 19:9). No doubt, true repentance in such cases is very difficult and tests one's faith, but even then, God's grace is sufficient.

It doesn't matter what inconveniences or emotional distresses that accompany repentance of sins, God's assurance is, *"My grace is sufficient."*

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