

LIVING BY GRACE

1 Cor. 15:10

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By Mike Burnham

Grace is one of the most beautiful words and one of the most fantastic concepts in the Bible. Many of us frequently quote Ephesians 2:8-9. And John Newton's beloved hymn "Amazing Grace" is said to be the all-time favorite hymn in the United States. And did you know that every one of Paul's and Peter's letters, in the opening and closing verses uses the word grace? Meaning, "May the grace of God be with you or is with you."

When we think of grace, we almost always think of being saved by grace. That is why (Ephesians 2:8-9) is so familiar to us. But the Bible teaches we are not only saved by grace, but we also live by grace every day of our lives. It is this aspect of grace that seems to be so little talked about or taught by Churches.

Most of us tend to base our personal relationship with God on our performance instead of on His grace. If we've performed well---whatever "well" is in our opinion---then we expect God to bless us. If we haven't done so well, our expectations are reduced accordingly. In this sense, we live by works rather than by grace. Paul said, "But by the grace of God I am what I am", but we say, "God helps those who help themselves."

Grace is not meant to be a one-time experience. Every day of our lives is an experience of God's grace.

GROWING IN GRACE

2 Peter 3:18... The term "*growing in grace*" is most often used to indicate growth in Christian character. But I think a more accurate meaning is to continually grow in our understanding of God's grace, to become progressively more aware of our own continued spiritual weakness and the unmerited, unearned, and undeserved favor of God. As we grow in grace this way, we will grow in our motivation to obey God out of a sense of gratitude and reverence to Him.

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WHAT IS GRACE?

What is the grace by which we are saved and under which we live? GRACE is God's free and unmerited favor shown to guilty sinners who deserve only judgment. It is the love of God shown to the unlovely. It is God reaching downward to people who are in rebellion against Him.

Grace stands in direct opposition to any supposed worthiness on our part, (Romans 11:6). Our relationship with God is based on either works or grace. There is never a works-plus-grace relationship with Him. Grace is either absolutely free, or it is not at all, something that is free cannot be earned.

Romans 8:32... The fact that God deals with His children on the basis of grace without regard to merit or demerit is a staggering concept. It is opposed to almost everything we have been taught about life. We have been generally conditioned to think that if we work hard and "pay our dues" in life, we will be rewarded in proportion to our work. "You do so much, you deserve so much" is a commonly accepted principle in life.

But God's grace does not operate on a reward for works basis. It is much better than that. God is generous beyond all measure or comparison. God's grace does not stop at saving us; it provides for all our needs and blessings throughout our entire lives.

Paul used the argument of the greater to the lesser to teach us God's generosity. He said if God gave His Son for our salvation (the greater), will He not also give us all blessings (the lesser)? No blessing we will ever receive can possibly compare with the gift of God's Son to die for us. And Paul based the assurance that we can expect God to "freely" meet all our other needs throughout life on the fact that God has already met our greatest need.

THE PARABLE OF GRACE

Matthew 20:1-16... This parable grew out of Jesus' encounter with the rich young man, when Jesus told him to sell his possessions, give to the poor, and follow Him (Matthew 19:16-22). Peter, reflecting on all this, said to Jesus, "*We have left everything to follow you! What then will there be for us?*" Like a lot of other Jews of his day and a lot of us today, Peter thought he was operating on the basis of merit, and he was already adding up his merit points.

Jesus does not rebuke Peter, instead, He assures him there will be a reward for him and the other disciples. Not only that, everyone who has sacrificed for Jesus' sake will receive "a hundred times as much." That's ten thousand percent. I believe that Jesus used such a large amount to tell Peter and us that God's reward is out of all proportion to our service and sacrifice. He is saying that in the Kingdom of Heaven God's reward system

is based not on merit but on grace. And grace always gives far more than we have "earned."

One thing to notice in this parable is that the first labourers laboured under a law and contract and were paid according to their labor. The rest laboured in simple faith and trust and were paid far more than their labour called for, in one case, almost 12 times more.

The landowner of Jesus' parable, who represents God, was a very gracious and generous man. From the very beginning he was as concerned for the welfare of the workers as he was for his vineyard. He readily agreed to pay the first workers a day's wages--a fair amount. In the culture of that day, the workers needed the money to buy food for their families. They lived a day-to-day existence (today, we live from paycheck to paycheck). That's why landowners were instructed to pay a hired man "his wages each day before sunset, Because he is poor and is counting on it" (Deut. 24:15). If you watch the news you can see this same practice going on today in Israel with both Jews and Arabs.

The landowner was not only fair with his workers; he was progressively more generous with each group of workers he hired throughout the day. Each worker, regardless of how long he had worked, received a day's wages. He received, not what he had earned on an hourly basis, but what he "needed" to sustain his family for a day. The landowner could have paid them only what they had earned, but he chose to pay them according to their *need*, not according to their work. He paid according to grace, not debt.

The parable focuses particularly on those workers who were hired at

the eleventh hour. They were treated extremely generous, each one receiving twelve times what he had earned on a strict hourly basis. Why did the landowner hire these workers at the eleventh hour? Because they "*needed*" to receive a day's wages. They had been standing all day waiting for someone to hire them so they could earn money to support their families. They needed to work more than the landowner needed their work. He hired them, not because of his need, but because of their need. He represents God in His gracious awareness of our needs and His continuous work to meet them. God calls us to serve Him, not because He needs us, but because we need Him.

Many have felt that the landowner was unfair. They agree with those workers who labored a full twelve hours, right through the heat of the day, that they should be paid more than those who worked only one hour. In the strict context of labor relations, they are right. A person should be paid in proportion to his work. But Jesus was not teaching principles of labor relations. He was teaching principles of grace. He said, "*The kingdom of heaven is like...*" and proceeded to tell the parable. In effect, He said to Peter, "In the kingdom of heaven the operative principle is not merit but grace." (Here we have the principal of election. What did the first workers get? Justice or what they deserved. What did the rest get? Grace and mercy. Did anyone get injustice? No! Are all men created equal? No! Are all dealt with the same? No!

Why do so many people stumble over this parable and consider the landowner to be unfair? I believe it is because we Christians instinctively identify with the workers who had worked all day. We place ourselves in their shoes instead of in the shoes of those who worked only one hour. We look at society around us, instead of at Jesus Christ, and we begin to feel

pretty good about ourselves. We consider ourselves to be twelve-hour workers, and we expect to be rewarded accordingly. That is the way Peter felt. We need to adopt the attitude of the Roman centurion described in Luke 7. The man sent some Jewish elders to Jesus asking Him to come and heal his sick servant. When the elders came to Jesus, they pleaded earnestly with Him, verses 4-5. Notice the Jewish elders' emphasis on "*deserving*."

But the centurion's attitude about himself is remarkable. Instead of thinking of what he should receive because of what he deserved, he freely confessed he didn't deserve anything, verses 6-7. The centurion placed himself in the shoes of the eleventh-hour workers. Because of this he not only experienced the joy of having his request granted, but also the added joy of knowing he had received what he did not deserve. He experienced the joy of knowing he had received a gift---not a repayment of a debt.

WE CAN NEVER OBLIGATE GOD

We can never obligate God by our obedience or our sacrificial service. Even if we were perfectly obedient in all our Christian duties, we would still be forced to say, "*We are unworthy servants; we have only done our duty*" (Luke 17:10).

Suppose you perfectly obey all the traffic laws of Alaska. You always stay within the speed limit, always come to a complete stop at stop signs, always obey every traffic rule. Do you receive any reward? No, that is what you are supposed to do. You have done your duty. You do not, by perfect obedience of the traffic laws, obligate the state to reward you in any manner.

As the Sovereign Ruler of the universe, God has the right to require perfect obedience and faithful service from all of us without in the least obligating Himself. We "owe" Him such obedience and service. If we were to perfectly obey every command God has given and faithfully perform every duty---which, of course, we never do---we still could only say, "I have merely done my duty."

God Himself asserted His freedom from any obligation in (Job 41:11). The word "prevent" denotes the idea of "a claim against" or "obligation". God was not stating a mere theological principle. He was rebuking an attitude of "I'm not getting what I deserve," on Job's part. Job, in defending himself against the false accusations of his so-called friends, had fallen from an attitude of grace into thinking he deserved better treatment from God. He had fallen from an attitude of *"The Lord gave and the Lord has taken away; Blessed be the name of the LORD,"* into an attitude of *"It profits a man nothing when he tries to please God"* (Job 1:21, 34:9). If God were to deal with us today as He did with Job, I wonder how many of us would receive a similar rebuke?

Paul asserts His freedom from obligation to anyone in Romans 11:34-35. The principal stated by Paul is clear: God does not owe anyone anything.

GIVING TO GOD

We actually cannot give God anything that He has not first given to us. David recognized this fact when the leaders of Israel gave so generously for the building of the Temple in 1 Chronicles 29:14,16. David knew he and his people had not given anything to God that wasn't His already. Even our

service to God comes from His hand, as Isaiah said in Isaiah 26:12. Paul summed up the whole question of what we have given to God in Acts 17:25. When every breath we breathe is a gift from God there really is nothing left to give that hasn't been first given to us.

So where does all this emphasis on the fact that God doesn't owe us anything leave us? It leaves us in the blessed position of being eleventh-hour workers in God's Kingdom. It leaves us going home at the end of the day from God's vineyard deeply grateful, knowing that the gracious landowner has been generous beyond all measure. In a word, it leaves us "*content*", and "*godliness with contentment is great gain*" (1 Timothy 6:6).

A multimillionaire was once asked how much money was enough, to which he replied, "one dollar more." The person who is living on the basis of merit is like the multimillionaire. He is never content. One day he thinks he is not being rewarded fairly by God; the next day he is afraid he has forfeited all hope for any reward. It's far better to have the biblical attitude that grace does not depend on merit at all, but on the infinite goodness and sovereign purpose of God. I would much rather entrust my expectations of blessings and answers to prayer to the infinite goodness of God and His sovereign purpose for my life (a purpose He has already declared to be for my good) than rely on all the merit points I could ever possibly accumulate. To realize that grace, all we must do is acknowledge we are no more than eleventh-hour workers.

THE PERIL OF COMPARING

There is another valuable lesson to be learned from the parable of the

generous landowner. God is not only generous, He is also sovereign. That is, God has the right to dispense His blessings as He chooses. Jesus asserts this prerogative of God very clearly with the landowner's question: "*Don't I have the right to do what I want with my own money?*" (Matthew 20:15).

We constantly see believers around us who seem more blessed of God than we are. Some are more gifted in spiritual abilities, others always succeed with little effort, still others seem to have few problems or concerns, and on and on. Probably none of us is exempt from the temptation to envy someone's blessings and to secretly grumble at God.

Yet God in His sovereignty has the right to bless each of us as He chooses, (Romans 9:20-21). God as our Creator has the right to endow each of us at birth with different physical and mental abilities, with different temperament characteristics, and with different natural talents. He also has the right to give each of us different spiritual gifts. Not only does God have the right it is obvious He exercises it. Notice: 1 Cor. 12:4,7,11, 28-30; Rom. 12:4-8; 1 Pet. 4:10-11.

Not only does God sovereignly determine how and to what extent He will bless us, He often blesses those who, in our opinion, seem most unworthy. We see this demonstrated in Jesus' recounting of two OT incidents in Luke 4:25-27. Why were these Jews so enraged? It was because the widow and Naaman were despised Gentiles. In the opinion of the Jews, these people were most unworthy. The reaction was, "How could God bless those Gentile dogs instead of more deserving Jews?"

The fact is, God did bless those two Gentiles while passing right by His own people. Were the widow and Naaman more "deserving" than anyone in

Israel? No! The OT record of his healing indicates that Naaman, by his anger and haughtiness, was very undeserving. God often does bless people who seem to us to be quite unworthy. But that is what grace is all about, because we are all unworthy. Reminds me of the thief on the cross.

How do we feel when someone whom we think does not deserve it is blessed by God? Do we feel, as did the workers in the parable, that we "have borne the burden of the work and the heat of the day" and yet that other person has been blessed more than we have?

The workers who labored all day did not grumble because they received too little pay, but because less deserving workers received the same as they. The reality of the Christian life, though, is that there are no worthy Christians in God's Kingdom. Some are more obedient than others, some have labored more and sacrificed more than others, but none of us measures up to God's Standard, Romans 3:23. None of us wants to get what we actually deserve. We all want grace, but we cannot enjoy grace when there is an attitude of comparing.

Think about the labourers as they go on their way home that evening. As to the amount of money in their pockets, they are all equal: but as to the amount of content in their spirits there is a great difference. The last go home each with a penny in his pocket, and astonished glad gratitude in his heart: their payment accordingly is a penny, and "more." The first, in contrast, go home, each with a penny in his pocket, and corroding discontent in his soul: their payment accordingly is "less" than a penny.

Matthew 20:16...This verse goes back to 19:30, of which this parable appears to be the explanation, (see "For" in verse 1). There are many who

labour under the false pretense that their rewards and blessings will be multiplied by the length of their labour, how much they have given up, and how hard they work. But those who labour, trusting the Lord and living in and by His grace, will receive preference over them. A life based on works tends to make one despise those who receive good things from God whom they think are undeserving. It causes jealousy and rivalry among Christians and that is not to be in the Kingdom of heaven.

The first hired were last in several aspects. They received their reward last; that reward was least in proportion to the time of service; and they were last in good feeling, envious and ungrateful. Many who seem first in the eyes of man will be last in the Kingdom of heaven.

Many are called to labor, but few are chosen to higher privileges because of their motives. There is an election within an election. Those who are chosen appear to be those who are grateful for what they are called to do, trusting the Lord to do what is right and living in and by His grace.

COMPELLED BY LOVE

2 Corinthians 5:14-15....The essential teaching of this passage is that Christ's love compels us to live no longer for ourselves but for Him who died for us and was raised again. The word "constrains" means to "compel or control". It was not a fear of consequences or expectation of reward that motivated Paul. It was the love of Christ revealed in dying for him that continually compelled him and was the driving force of his life.

We are loved and accepted by God through the merit of Jesus, and we are blessed by God through the merit of Jesus. Nothing you ever do will

cause Him to love you any more or any less (Rom. 8:38-39). He loves us strictly by His grace given to us through Jesus (Ephesians 1:3-7; 2:4,5).

Do you think, "Well, if you take the pressure off like that and tell me all of my effort will not earn blessings, then I'm afraid I'll slack off and stop doing the things I need to do to live a disciplined Christian life? The Bible recognizes the possibility that the grace of God can be misunderstood and even abused. Anticipating the question, "Shall we go on sinning so that grace may increase?" (Romans 6:1), Paul wrote the sixth chapter. What had he said to raise the issue? His whole teaching to that point was that justification is by faith in Jesus Christ alone, culminating in his statement in Romans 5:20: "But where sin increased, grace increased all the more." Paul knew that his readers could respond with this attitude: "Well, if that's true, let's go out and sin all we want. The more we sin, the more we cause God's grace to abound." Also see Galatians 5:13.

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That charge was brought against Martin Luther and all the other preachers of the Reformation when they preached salvation by grace alone through faith in Christ. The charge was brought against Paul himself (Romans 3:8). It's also brought against preachers of the gospel today.

The grace of salvation is the same grace by which we live the Christian life (Romans 5:2). We are not only justified by grace through faith, we "*stand*" every day in this same grace. So the teaching of living by grace is open to the same misunderstanding.

The solution to this problem is not to add legalism to grace. Instead, the solution is to be so gripped by the magnificence and boundless generosity of God's grace that we respond out of gratitude rather than out of

a sense of duty. When we load the gospel of the grace of God in Christ with a lot of "oughts", "I ought to do this," and "I ought to do that," we are substituting duty and obligation for a loving response to God's grace. And we are also energizing the flesh by trying to follow the law, (Rom. 7:19,21-23).

Now I believe that we need to believe in and seek to practice commitment, discipline, and obedience. But I believe we need to be committed in these areas out of a grateful response to God's grace, not to try to earn God's blessings.

Romans 12:1....Paul wrote this letter to help those in Rome understand more fully the salvation they already possessed. He spent eleven chapters going through the gospel, showing that salvation is entirely by God's grace through faith in Jesus Christ and then dealing with various questions his teaching on the grace of God would raise.

Not until Paul had spent eleven chapters teaching the gospel of the grace of God "to people who were already believers" did he ask for a response from them: a total commitment of themselves to God. He urged them to, "offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God."

"Offer your bodies" means to make a decisive dedication of your bodies. The phrase "living sacrifices" denotes the idea of a "perpetual sacrifice never to be neglected" and a "constant dedication."

What is the motivation that Paul brings forward for making such a total commitment? He did not appeal to a sense of duty but to the mercy of God (in view of God's mercy). He asked for a response based not on obligation

but on heartfelt gratitude.

Now, the fact is we "do" have a duty and obligation to God. He is the Sovereign Ruler of this world, and in that capacity, He has "laid down precepts that are to be fully obeyed" (Psalm 119:4). But He motivates us to obedience, not on the basis of His sovereign rule, but on the basis of His mercy to us in Jesus Christ.

A person who uses the law as a basis for obedience, insists with threats and penalties; a preacher of grace lures and incites with divine goodness and compassion shown to us; for he wants no unwilling works and reluctant services, he wants joyful and delightful services of God.

Our "motivation" for commitment, discipline, and obedience is as important to God, perhaps even more so, than our "performance." (1 Chronicles 28:9; 1 Corinthians 4:5).

Our good works are not truly good unless they are motivated by a love for God and a desire to glorify Him. But we cannot have such a God-ward motivation if we think we must "earn" God's favor by our obedience, or if we fear we may forfeit God's favor by our disobedience. Such a works-oriented motivation is essentially self-serving; it is prompted more by what we think we can gain or lose from God than by a grateful response to the grace He has already given us through Jesus Christ.

I have asked some in the past why they continued to tithe? The stock response, and I have said it too, was, "I'd be afraid not to." Though we somewhat enjoy giving to the Lord, our basic motivation, in this instance, is fear of the consequences if we did not tithe. That is not being motivated

from a joyful and grateful heart.

By contrast, Paul appealed to Christ's grace as a motivation to give (2 Corinthians 8:2,6-9). Paul wanted them not only to give generously, but to give from a sense of gratitude for God's grace. He wanted people to give, not from a sense of duty and compulsion (verse 8), but cheerfully as a loving response to what God had already given them in Christ.

When I stress God's grace as a motivation for our discipline and obedience, I am not talking about inclination or feeling. We are not to wait until we "feel like" giving or obeying. Motive has nothing to do with feelings or inclination; rather, it refers to the "reason" why we do, or don't do, something. For a person living by grace, that reason should be a loving response to the abundant grace of God already revealed in Christ.

REVERENCE AND AWE FOR GOD

Along with gratitude to God for His grace, we should also be motivated to obedience by a deep sense of reverence and awe for Him. His greatness, majesty, power and pureness are so far above and beyond our ways and thoughts that they compel honor and respect from those who have knowledge and understanding of the holy (Prov. 9:10). When Joseph was tempted to immorality by Potiphar's wife, his response was, "*How then could I do such a wicked thing and sin against God?*" (Gen. 39:9). He did not calculate the possible wrath of Potiphar or the forfeiture of God's blessing. He was motivated by reverence and awe for God. He was concerned about disobedience to a sovereign, holy God, even though that God had allowed him to be sold into slavery by his own brothers.

Paul combined gratitude, reverence, and awe for motivation when he wrote to the Corinthian believers, (2 Cor. 7:1). Paul referred to the promises that God would be our God and Father and would make us His sons and daughters. Here again we see that promises come before duty and that duty flows out of a heartfelt response to the promises of God.

Paul went on to say, "out of fear of God" or "in view of our fear of God." Fear is a sense of awe, reverence, respect, and devotion. It is a recognition of God's worthiness, the infinite majesty of His being, and the infinite perfection of His character. Because of who He is and what He is, God is infinitely worthy of my most diligent and loving obedience and service, even if I never receive a single blessing from His hand. (Rev. 4:11).

THE PROOF OF LOVE

One issue believers frequently struggle with is the relationship between living by grace and obedience to God's commands. How does the Bible say we show our love to God? (1 John 5:3; John 14:15,21,23). That our love for God is to be expressed through obedience to His commands is clear, but our "reason" for loving God and obeying Him is a response to His gracious love shown to us in Christ (1 John 4:10,19). So one clear evidence that we are living by grace is a loving obedience to the commands of God.

Ephesians 5:10....says, "*find out what pleases the Lord*", verse 17 says, "don't be foolish, but understand what the Lord's will is." His will as used here is not His particular will for us in some issue of personal guidance; rather, it is His moral will, like 1 Thessalonians 4:1-5; 5:18. To understand what the Lord's will is and to find out what pleases the Lord are essentially the same; both expressions refer to the specific directions given in the moral

commands of Scripture. Both these verses are themselves commands. That is, we are commanded to know and understand the commands contained in Scripture so we know what pleases the Lord and we can show our love for Him. The most basic meaning of command is "to direct with authority." As the Sovereign God of the universe, He has the authority to require obedience and He does insist that we obey Him.

LAW AND GRACE

ROMANS 6:14,15,21

This brings us to an important issue in understanding the relationship of the law of God to the grace of God. (By law I mean God's moral commands.) Under the reign of grace, is the moral will of God a request or a command? Response to a request is optional; response to a command is not.

Some people believe that, under grace, God's law no longer has the meaning of requirement but is an expression of His desire. They say God desires that we be holy, but God does not require that we be holy. They maintain that we have been freed, not only from the curse and condemnation resulting from breaking the law, but also from the requirements of the law as a rule of life. In other words, to assign the concept of requirement to the will of God is legalism, but to assign the concept of desire to it is grace.

I believe such a view is a misunderstanding of grace. God's grace does not change the fundamental character of God's moral law. Rather, the grace of God provides for the forgiveness and acceptance of those who have

broken the law. The good news of the gospel is that God has removed the guilt we incur by breaking His law and has bestowed on us the righteousness of Christ, who perfectly kept His law (2 COR. 5:21 SEE SPROUL). Legalism does not consist in yielding obedience to the law. Rather, it is to seek justification and good standing with God through the merit of works done in obedience to the law----instead of by faith in Christ (ROMANS 10:3-4; 1:16-17).

Even when the children of a king freely and willingly obey the laws, because they love their father and understand and agree with the laws he has pronounced, they are still subject to the laws of the realm. So we as God's children are subject to the laws of His realm.

Along the highways in Alaska we have white speed limit signs and yellow speed advisory signs. The speed limit signs declare the law of the state. The speed advisory signs caution you to slow down, perhaps because an upcoming curve is too tight to be rounded at the legal speed limit. You can be fined for exceeding the posted speed limit because you have broken the law of the state. You will not be fined for exceeding the advisory speed because you have not broken any law.

The law of God is like the white speed limit sign. It is the declared law of the realm. We have broken that law many times, but Christ has paid our "fine" (which is death) for us. But His paying our "fine" did not abolish the law. Christ's death did not, so to speak, change the speed limit sign to a speed advisory sign. God's law has not become optional because of His grace, merely advisory to keep us from getting hurt as we go through life.

What has changed is our "*reason*" for obedience, our "*motive*" as we

discussed before. Under a sense of legalism, obedience is done with a view to meriting salvation or God's blessing on our lives. Under grace, obedience is a loving response to salvation already provided in Christ, and the assurance that, having provided salvation, God will also through Christ provide all else that we need.

God's law as revealed in His Word prescribes our duty, but love provides the correct motive for obedience. We obey God's law, not to be loved, but because we are loved in Christ.

It is difficult to keep in our minds and hearts the commandment nature of God's will without falling into the trap of legalism. But, ironically, the law of God, viewed as commands to be obeyed, should actually promote living by grace. When we view God's commands as optional we subtly slip into a works mentality. If obedience to God's law is optional, then in our minds we begin to accumulate merit or extra points. "After all, we didn't have to obey, so we must gain some merit by voluntary obedience."

But the person who knows that he is required to obey God's commands, even as a child of God, will see more and more how far short he comes in obedience. And if that person understands the biblical concept of grace, he will be driven more and more into the arms of the Savior and His merit alone.

So, then, God's law, as a rule of life, is not opposed to grace. Rather, used in the right sense, it is the handmaid of grace.

"LAW AND LOVE"

1 John 4:8....If we realize that the moral law is a written reproduction of the moral character of God and that "God is love, we see that we cannot distinguish between law and love. Both express the character of God. In our case, love provides the motive for obeying the commands of the law, but the law provides specific direction for exercising love. Page | 20

For example, Romans 13:10, Paul said, "Love does no harm to its neighbor." But suppose that were all we knew about love. Suppose we didn't have the Ten Commandments, from which Paul quoted in verse 9. If we didn't have those specific directions, how would we know what it means to harm one's neighbor?

Most of us are familiar to some degree with the description of love given by Paul in 1 Corinthians 13:4-7. Paul did not give a dictionary definition of love; instead, he described it in terms of specific attitudes and actions toward one another. These attitudes and actions are nothing more than various expressions of the moral law of God.

Leviticus 19 is basically an amplification of the Ten Commandments. Let's consider verses 11-18 and paraphrase those verses using the format "Love does not," which Paul used in 1 Corinthians 13.

We can see from this paraphrase that the various expressions of God's moral law, wherever they occur in Scripture, are simply a description of love in action. Leviticus 19 also helps us understand who our neighbor is. He is the hired man, the deaf, the blind, the poor, the great, the person whom we are tempted to lie to, or steal from, or slander. He is the person who has wronged us and against whom we are tempted to hold a grudge. Our neighbor is even the person whose life we might endanger by reckless

behavior. Our neighbor is really anyone with whom we come in contact.

"THE FREEDOM OF THE GOSPEL"

The law is not opposed to grace or love if used in the right sense. "But," some say, "didn't Paul say in Ephesians 2:15 that Christ [abolished] in His flesh the law with its commandments and regulations? Didn't he say that Christ has set us free from the law, and didn't he urge us to stand firm in that freedom?" (Galatians 5:1).

In answer to the first question, Paul surely cannot mean that Christ abolished the moral will of God. In fact, Paul referred explicitly to the Ten Commandments later in the same letter, chapter 6:1,2. Galatians 3:10 gives us a clue as to what Paul meant in Ephesians when he said Christ abolished the law. It is the law viewed as that which condemns and curses for disobedience that is abolished. Paul went on to say in Galatians 3:13----. This verse also helps us to understand the sense in which Paul said we were called to be free in Galatians 5:1.

The issue in the Galatian church was not obedience to the moral law of God; but a "reliance" on the moral law and the Mosaic ceremonial law for salvation. Some Jewish teachers were saying, "The Gentiles must be circumcised and required to obey the law of Moses" (Acts 15:5). Christ has freed us from this Jewish insistence on observance of the Mosaic law. We are freed from the curse on those who rely on the law as a means of salvation. If we don't seek to understand what Paul meant by freedom in the context of the issue he was contending against, we may interpret Paul as saying more than he actually said.

For instance, in the history of the United States, a famous patriot cried out, "Give me liberty, or give me death!" Because we know he uttered this in the context of the American revolution, we understand he was speaking specifically of liberty from the rule of the British monarch. He was not crying out for liberty from all civil law, but from what he considered the tyranny of unjust laws.

In the same manner, Paul did not call for freedom in an absolute sense, but freedom from the bondage of the Jewish law system, which was abolished by Christ in His death.

In the United States, we say we live in a "free country." We understand that freedom to be political freedom: the right to have a say in our government. But we all recognize we are not free to disobey the laws of our state or nation. We are not free, for example, to drive on the left side of the highway.

Some places I've been overseas drivers are undisciplined. Imagine cars stopped at a railroad crossing for a passing train. Instead of lining up behind one another to cross in their proper turn, several cars lined up at the crossing guard across the entire road. Each driver wanted to be first to cross when the guard was raised. But when the train had passed, lo and behold, cars were lined up completely across the road on the other side of the tracks. "Freedom" quickly turned to chaos! That kind of thing happens in a much more serious way when we insist on unqualified freedom from the law of God.

We have indeed been set free from the bondage and curse that results from breaking the law. And we have been called to freedom from works as

a means of obtaining any merit with God. But we have not been called to freedom from the law as an expression of God's will for our daily living.

Look at Romans 7:12,22,25. It seems inconceivable that Paul would want to be free, or urge others to be free, from what was holy, righteous, and good---that in which he himself delighted.

So, then, God's law is not opposed to grace, nor is it an enemy of grace. Neither is the law of God opposed to us as we seek to live by grace. We seek to understand His will and to obey Him, not to be blessed, but because we have been blessed.

HOLINESS: A GIFT OF GOD'S GRACE

HEBREWS 10:9-10

Scripture speaks of both a holiness we already possess in Christ before God and a holiness in which we are to grow more and more (1 Peter 1:13-16). The first is the result of the work of Christ "for" us; the second is the result of the work of the Holy Spirit "in" us (Phil. 2:13). The first is perfect and complete and is ours the moment we trust in Christ; the second is progressive and incomplete as long as we are in this life.

Both types of holiness are gifts of God's grace and are both ours by faith. However, the perfect holiness we have in Christ is how we can appear daily before a perfectly holy God, when even our best deeds are stained and polluted. A misunderstanding of the distinction of the holiness we "do" have in Christ and the holiness we "want" to find in ourselves causes us to mistakenly hope to find in ourselves something that can be found in Christ

alone.

CHRIST OUR HOLINESS

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Read 1 Corinthians 1:30. In other words, it is God Himself who chose us to be in Christ, that we might not glory in ourselves but in the Lord. But what I want to call your attention to is the word "sanctification" or "holiness". While all Christians look to Christ alone for their justification, not nearly as many look to Him for their perfect holiness before God. The truth is that all believers are sanctified in Christ, even as we are justified in Christ.

Apart from Christ we are both guilty and filthy. We are guilty of breaking God's law, and we are filthy in God's sight because of the vile, polluting effect of sin. We need both forgiveness from our guilt and cleansing from our filth. Through justification we are forgiven and are declared righteous. Through the perfect holiness we have in Christ, our moral filth is removed, and we become fit to enter into the very presence of an infinitely holy God and enjoy fellowship with Him.

In Hebrews 10:10,14, notice that our sanctification is a completed work. We will never be holy enough through our own efforts to come before God. But we are holy only through Christ (Ephesians 1:4; Colossians 1:22). Because of our union with Christ, God sees "His" holiness as "our" holiness.

When I teach I always seek the Lord's enabling and anointing and I want my motive to be strictly to glorify God and build up His people. But I know it never is, because deep down inside, I also want to succeed as a teacher. As hard as I try to get rid of that base motive, I know I will never completely get rid of it. I can never reach a point where I can look inside

myself to find the completely pure motives I need to stand before a holy God. But God in His grace has provided a perfect holiness in the person of His Son. Through my union with Him I have been made holy.

WE DIED TO THE LAW

ROMANS 7:7-8

Though the law reveals God's moral will for us, the law in itself has no power to enable us to obey it. Because the law commands obedience without any enabling power, it is in this sense a source of bondage. Instead of being a means of obedience to God, the law actually provokes us and incites us to sin. When we try to live by the law to acquire righteousness before God the law energizes the flesh, the sin nature, and causes a battle within us (verses 21,23).

But Paul said we died to the law (Romans 7:1-6). In what sense did we die to the law? Three passages of scripture should help us understand what Paul meant (Romans 3:20; 6:14; Galatians 3:10). From these passages we can see that we died to the observance of the law as a requirement for attaining righteousness before God. We died to the curse and condemnation that resulted from our inability to perfectly keep the law. Then we see in Romans 6:14 that being under the law is the opposite of being under grace. Because of our sin against the law, being under law implies the wrath of God, whereas grace implies forgiveness and favor. So when Paul said we died to the law, he meant we died to that entire state of condemnation, curse, and alienation from God.

What is the purpose of our death? We died to the law in order that we

might live in the realm of grace. We died that we might serve God in the new way of the spirit (Romans 7:6). The difference between the new way and the old way does not lie in the content of the moral will of God. Since that is a reflection of the holy character of God, it cannot change. The difference lies in the reason to obey and in the ability with which to obey. Serving in the new way of the Spirit is the same as living by grace instead of works.

SEE CONTRASTS BETWEEN WAY OF THE LAW AND WAY OF THE SPIRIT

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Ask yourself, "Am I serving under the old way of a written code, or under the new way of the Spirit?"

"SERVE ONE ANOTHER IN LOVE"

A spiritual principle to keep in mind is: We cannot exercise love unless we are experiencing grace." You cannot truly love others unless you are convinced that God's love for you is unconditional, based solely on the merit of Christ, not on your performance. John said, "We love because he first loved us" (1 John 4:19). Our love, either to God or to others, can only be a response to His love for us.

There are five words all beginning with the letter "L" that we need to keep in right relationship to one another. All five are either used or implied in Galatians 5:13-14. They are "law, liberty, love, license, and legalism." By license I mean an abuse of our freedom in order to indulge our sinful

nature. Only when we have those relationships in proper order will we avoid the traps of license on the one hand and legalism on the other. Grace keeps the law, love and liberty in right relationship to one another.

When you focus on grace you will keep the law, liberty, and love in their proper relationship to one another. But if you focus on any one of them instead of on grace, you will invariably end up in legalism or license.

For instance, if a person focuses on liberty he will have an attitude that, "I may live as I please; I may sin as much as I want because God will still love me and forgive me. This attitude of license results from focusing exclusively on liberty. To counteract this sinful attitude, some have fallen into legalism. They have taught, either directly or implicitly, that God's grace is conditional, that there is a degree to which it is based on our performance. This comes from focusing on God's law to discourage and degrade liberty.

Anyone who is prone to use grace as a license for irresponsible, sinful behavior, surely does not appreciate the infinite price God paid to give us His grace. But also, anyone who tends to use legalism as a hedge against license, just as surely forgets that grace cannot be earned by our behavior.

"THE SUFFICIENCY OF GRACE"

2 CORINTHIANS 12:9

Paul was no stranger to adversity. Earlier in this letter he had spoken of his troubles, hardships, distresses, beatings, imprisonments, riots, hard work, sleepless nights, and hunger (6:4-5). Yet one particular affliction

apparently caused him more pain and grief than all the others combined. He referred to it as "a thorn in my flesh, a messenger of Satan, to torment me" (12:7). The verb, buffet, signifies "to strike with clenched fist, to buffet with the fist."

Paul's reaction to his thorn was one of deep anguish. He said, "Three times I pleaded with the Lord to take it away from me." (v-8). We have no idea what Paul's "thorn in the flesh" was. We do know it was a Satanic attack, but it was given to him at the direction of God.

Paul had had a unique experience. As he described in the opening verses of this chapter, he had been caught up to the third heaven, to God's paradise, and had heard inexpressible things, things he was not permitted to tell. This experience, apparently unique to Paul, could have caused him to be filled with pride had he been left to himself.

But God in His infinite wisdom and love for Paul did not leave him exposed to that temptation, which, apparently, was the reason for the thorn. But God had an even greater purpose for the thorn. He wanted him to learn that the divine assistance of the Holy Spirit was all he needed. He wanted Paul to learn to lean continually on the Spirit for strength. Just as grace is opposed to the price of self-righteousness, so is it also opposed to the pride of self-sufficiency.

Ever since the fall, God has continually worked to cause His people to realize their utter dependence on Him. He does this through bringing us to the point where we have no place else to turn but to Him (Deut. 8:2-3). God humbled the people and [caused] them to hunger before He fed them. He deliberately brought them to where they thought they were going to die.

Then He fed them miraculously with food they had never tasted before. God wanted them to be acutely aware of the fact that [He] was feeding them; they were dependent on His provision every day. The provision of food, which Israel did not previously know, made plain the lesson that it is not mere food that gives life. Without the divine word the food itself may not be available.

Even with God providing for the Israelites needs with miracles for forty years, they still forgot the lesson of dependence. How much easier is it for us to forget when God is supplying our needs through ordinary means? (Deut. 8:17-18).

And if I am dependent in the physical realm, how much more dependent am I in the spiritual realm, where my struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against spiritual forces of evil?

What we want to focus on is 1 Corinthians 12:9; "My grace is sufficient for you," because it opens to us another dimension of God's grace we have not seen as yet.

The Lord said, "My grace is sufficient for you, for My strength is made perfect in weakness." That is, the greater the servant's weakness, the more conspicuous is the strength of the Lord's all-sufficient grace. His power comes to our aid through the ministry of His Spirit in our lives. This is the mysterious operation of the Holy Spirit on our human spirit through which He strengthens us and enables us to meet in a godly fashion whatever circumstances we encounter.

The verb, "is sufficient" is the same one translated "be therewith

content" in 1 Tim. 6:8. Food and clothing refer to the necessities of life, not the luxuries. If we have the necessities we are to be content; that is, we are to realize they are sufficient.

It is the same with God's grace in the spiritual realm. God always gives us what we need, perhaps sometimes more, but never less. The spiritual equivalent of food and clothing is simply the strength to endure in a way that honors God. Receiving that strength, we are to be content. We would like the "luxury" of having our particular thorn removed, but God often says, "Be content with the strength to endure that thorn." We can be confident He always gives that. God supplies perfectly measured grace to meet our needs. For daily needs there is daily grace; for sudden needs, sudden grace; for overwhelming needs, overwhelming grace.

There is a lesson about grace in the way God distributed the manna to the Israelites in the desert (Exodus 16:16-21). Three times the text mentions that each person could gather "as much as he needed." There was an ample supply of manna for everyone. Not only was there an ample supply, God in some mysterious way saw that no one had an overabundance, regardless of how much manna he gathered (v-18). Furthermore the gathering was to be a day-to-day activity (v-21). They were to gather only what was needed each day---except on the day before the Sabbath. They were not allowed to store up for the future.

God's distribution of the manna illustrates the way He distributes grace. There is always an ample supply; no one ever needs to go without. But there is only as much as we need---and even that is on a day-to-day basis. God doesn't permit us to "store up" grace. We must look to Him anew each day for a new supply. Sometimes we must look for a new supply

each hour.

A self-sufficient attitude is obviously detrimental to our relationship with God, so He works to keep that from happening. He allows our thorns to remain, giving us grace sufficient to cope with them only day by day. From time to time He brings extra-ordinary crises into our lives, far beyond our ability to endure, so that we will not rely on ourselves, but on Him (2 Corinthians 1:8-10). Page | 31

Paul's attitude toward his weakness was vastly different from our usual modern response. We dislike weakness and glory in self-sufficiency and man-made accomplishments. Even Christians flock to hear the sports superstar or the popular entertainer give his or her testimony, simply because of that person's fame or status. How many of us would make any effort to hear a man who said, "I will boast all the more gladly about my weaknesses....I delight in weakness....for when I am weak, then I am strong?"

Paul wrote from experience because he "had been there." The anguish he experienced was real anguish, and the grace he received was real grace.

Paul was not the first of the biblical writers to tell of the sufficiency of God's grace. Jeremiah, a prophet of God who endured much hardship and affliction also experienced this grace (Lamentations 3:19-23).

A beautiful expression of the sufficiency of God's grace is found in the poem of Annie Johnson Flint, called, [He Giveth More Grace].

He giveth more grace when the burdens grow greater;
He sendeth more grace when the labours increase;

To added afflictions 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 limits, his grace has no measure,
His power has no boundary known unto men;
For out of his infinite riches in Jesus,
He giveth, and giveth, and giveth again.

"APPROPRIATING GOD'S GRACE"

Christians are not passive recipients of this grace of sufficiency; We are to appropriate it day by day or hour by hour, just like the Israelites had to gather day-by-day the manna God provided.

Paul urged Timothy to "be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus" (2 Timothy 2:1). Timothy apparently had a problem with timidity. He needed moral strength because he was prone to be timid about testifying about the Lord, and many other things (2 Tim. 1:78; 1 Cor. 16:10). Paul wanted Timothy to deal with the problem by appropriating the grace that is in Christ Jesus and to be strong in it.

"THE LEAST OF ALL GOD'S PEOPLE"

EPHESIANS 3:8

As difficult as it is to seek to present the truth of God's word

accurately, it is even more humbling to realize that, though I try to, I have not lived up to the truth I am teaching. I also have the same problem as Timothy about timidity. Sometimes I look in the mirror and say to myself, "who do you think you are to be teaching others when you should be taught yourself?" This is a good verse to give us courage to continue. I realize that I really do not deserve to teach such awesome subjects as grace or holiness, but that I do so by the grace of God---by His free, unmerited, unearned, and undeserved favor. Paul's testimony of receiving his office as a minister of the gospel purely by the grace of God was a very personal statement. He never ceased to be amazed that God chose him, the foremost persecutor of the Church, to be the apostle to the Gentiles (1 Cor. 15:9).

Not only did Paul consider himself the least of the apostles, but less than the least of all God's people, to express the depth of his amazement that God would call him to be an apostle. Paul felt unworthy of such a calling.

Every ministry of the church is performed by the grace of God by people who are unworthy to be doing it. Romans 12:6; Paul was referring to spiritual gifts given to every believer to enable us to fulfill the ministry or service God has appointed for us in the Body of Christ. Note that Paul said these spiritual gifts are given according to the grace of God, not according to what we deserve. The Greek word for a spiritual gift is [charisma], which means "a gift of God's grace." (1 Peter 4:10) The spiritual gifts we have, and the ministries we perform are gifts of God's grace. None of us deserves the gifts he or she has been given. This means the most "worthy" and the most "unworthy" of all Christians both receive their gifts and their ministries on the same basis. The "unworthy" person surely does not deserve his gift, but neither does the "worthy". They both receive them as unmerited favors

from God.

It's an awesome responsibility to attempt to speak on behalf of God. Yet That is exactly what we do when we preach, teach or write. We are putting ourselves in the position of being God's spokesman (1 Peter 4:10). Peter said, "If anyone speaks, he should speak as one speaking the very words of God."

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Paul never lost sight of his unworthiness. To lose sight of our unworthiness is to risk exercising our gifts and fulfilling our ministries in a spirit of presumptuous pride, as if God were fortunate to have us on His team. But we are not to focus on our unworthiness too much for that is also an expression of pride because we are still focusing on ourselves. We are to simply acknowledge the reality and open ourselves to the grace of God.

The only worthiness we have for entrance into God's Kingdom is in Christ. The only worthiness we have with which to come before God is in Christ. And the only worthiness we have to qualify us for ministry is in Christ. Our focus must therefore be outside ourselves and only to Christ (2 Cor. 3:5; 1 Cor. 15:9,10).

All grace flows "in Christ".

If you feel incompetent in God's service you're in good company. Paul felt that way also.

"THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN GRACE AND REWARDS"

Such a strong emphasis on God's grace apart from human worth or

merit does lead to the question of the relationship of grace and rewards. If all our efforts are the results of God's grace, what room is left for "faithful service?"

Didn't Paul teach that we must appear before the judgment seat of Christ to receive what is due us? Doesn't God promise rewards to His faithful servants?

God does promise rewards, and we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ. But these rewards are rewards of grace, not merit. We never by our hard work or sacrificial service obligate God to reward us (Romans 11:35). If all our service to God is made possible by His undeserved favor and made effective by the power of His Spirit, then we have really brought nothing to Him that we did not first receive from Him. Even the good works we bring to God are in themselves defective, both in motive and performance. The best we can do falls short of what God requires, but the truth is, we never actually do the best we can, let alone what would meet God's perfect standard.

Preceding the parable in Matthew chapter 20 that we looked at, Jesus promised a reward "a hundred times as much," or ten thousand percent. God's rewards to us will not only be of grace, but will be gracious, that is, generous beyond all measure.

The grace of God in our service to Him does not stop us from getting rewards, but rather makes them possible. Augustine said it this way: "Our rewards in heaven are a result of God's crowning His own gifts." Rewards are promised even though they are not earned.

This is God's amazing grace: He saves us by His grace. He transforms us more and more into the likeness of His Son by His grace. In all our trials and afflictions, He sustains and strengthens us by His grace. He calls us by grace to perform our own unique function within the church and then by grace He gives to each of us the spiritual gifts necessary to fulfill our calling. As we serve Him, He makes that service acceptable to Himself by grace, and then rewards us a hundredfold by grace.

"THE THRONE OF GRACE"

In Hebrews 4:15-16, we are encouraged to go to God in prayer asking for the grace we need. The throne of grace is a figurative expression for God seated on His throne as the God of all grace. It is obviously not the throne itself but God on the throne who will give us His grace in time of need. In Revelation 6:16-17, God is portrayed sitting on His throne as the God of wrath and judgment. In Isaiah 6:1, God is portrayed as seated on His throne as the God of infinite majesty and holiness.

But in Hebrews 4:16, we see, not a throne of wrath, nor even a throne of infinite majesty and holiness, but a throne of grace. We are encouraged to come to this throne, not with terror because of His wrath, nor with awed fear because of His holiness, but with confidence or freely, because of His grace. To us who are His children, He is the God of grace seated on His throne of grace.

Verse 15 says "we have not an high priest which cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities." The double negative is equivalent to a very strong positive assertion: "We "do" have a high priest who "can" and "is" touched with the feeling of our infirmities or weaknesses. The word

"touched" means to "have the capacity for sharing or understanding the feelings of another person. This feeling can be felt only by a person who has experienced the same or similar trials and who, because of the experience, understands what the other person is going through and has a desire to relieve the other's distress.

Jesus was tempted in every way, just as we are. That is, Jesus was tempted, or tried, in all the various ways human nature is afflicted. He was born into poverty and experienced rejection from His own family, reproach by the leaders of His day, desertion by His friends, and excruciating physical pain on the cross. The absence in Scripture of any reference to Joseph after Luke 2 leads to the assumption that He lost His legal, earthly father before He was thirty. Isaiah 53 tells us that He was a "man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief." Jesus does fully understand and sympathize with us in our times of trials. Because He can enter into our hurts and does sympathize with us, we can approach God's throne with confidence, without being ashamed to lay our weaknesses before Him. He understands and He cares.

We are encouraged to come to the throne of grace so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need. The word "mercy" may be defined as "the goodness or love of God shown to those who are in misery or distress, no matter what they deserve. Grace here refers to the divine working through the help of the Holy Spirit. We approach the throne of grace needing first mercy, because we come as ones in misery or distress. God in His mercy then gives us grace---that is, divine enabling through His Spirit---to help us in our time of need.

How does God administer His grace to us? Through prayer, we draw

nearer to God. Through the Word, it is called the "sword of the Spirit" (Eph. 6:17), as He uses it to transform our minds. Through providential workings in our lives. Job and Joseph are examples of those who saw the hand of God in their circumstances. When things went bad for Job, his response was, "The Lord gave and the LORD has taken away" (Job 1:21). Joseph, when he finally revealed his identity to his brothers who had sold him into slavery, saw beyond their evil act and said, "So then, it was not you who sent me here, but God" (Genesis 45:8).

Through the ministry of others. We should be channels of grace to one another. But we are more inclined to be ministers of grace to others than to allow others to be ministers of grace to us. The times when we need an extra measure of God's grace are often the times when we are most reluctant to let other people know we need it. (Ecclesiastes 4:9-10).

In Matthew 18:21-35 shows that the free grace of the Father's forgiving love is the pattern for his children in their forgiveness of one another. It was in response to Peter's question: "How many times shall I forgive?"

The servant owed millions of dollars. There was no way he could pay his debt. This servant illustrates a person who is living by works. He foolishly thought he could work his way out of debt. But the master knew that only grace would meet the man's needs, so he freely forgave him and canceled the debt.

The unmerciful servant wanted to pay his own way. Many Christians behave like the unmerciful servant and for the same reason. They have not admitted their own total and permanent spiritual bankruptcy, they don't

recognize the infinite extent of God's grace to them. They still see themselves as basically "good", and because of that, they expect everyone else to be "good" also. Because they don't recognize their own continued bankruptcy before God, they insist that everyone else pay his own debts.

But Christians living by grace recognize their own spiritual bankruptcy. They see the vast contrast between his sins against God of "several million dollars" and his neighbor's sins against him of only a "few dollars." And because of this, he both understands and responds to Paul's instruction, "Forgive as the Lord forgave you." By having a deep awareness of what you have received, helps you to extend that same spirit of grace to others.

The parable in Luke 17:7-10 helps us to have contentment and keeps us from comparing ourselves to others. God is not selfish or callous like the master in Jesus' story. But [we are] the servants of this parable. When we have done everything we were told to do---and who of us has come anywhere close to that standard?---we should say, "we are unworthy servants; we have only done our duty."

When we realize that we have not received what we actually deserve, but daily receive what we don't deserve, it brings great wealth of spirit, even if we are living in poverty. Paul said in 1 Timothy 6:6 that "Godliness with contentment is great gain." All the wealth and prestige in the world with discontentment results in poverty of spirit.

