

Spiritual Saturation

(v. 25)

“The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit” (v. 25).

Anyone who has read the literature of John Bunyan will recall the story of “Interpreter” taking “Christian” to a place where a fire was burning against a wall. At the wall was another figure trying to douse the flames with water, but he could never quench the fire, for the flames only grew higher and hotter. Christian asked, “What means this?” And the Interpreter answered, “This fire is the service of saintly hearts; he who casts water upon it is the devil. But, in that thou seest the fire burn higher and hotter, thou shalt see the reason of that.” He took him around to the back side of the wall where he saw a man secretly pouring the oil of grace into the fire. The “Man” was Christ who poured forth the oil of grace and maintained the fires of devoted service. As long as the oil of grace was available, the flames of devotion burned hot and high, and Satan’s efforts could not extinguish them!

“Grace” is a word with various usage through the New Testament. It refers to a person who is pleasurable and delightful. It speaks about a gift from kind goodwill. It identifies an attitude in one who receives—a sense of gratitude. In the closing part of Paul’s epistles, “grace” is used to identify a special regulation of believers’ lives.

In these last words of the book of Philemon, we find the concept of “grace.” Here it can very well refer to a prayer-wish from the apostles. Paul prayed that the readers of this brief letter would conduct their lives so that they would be

in God’s special favor always.

These closing words speak about that which Bunyan’s pen described—an awareness of the special grace of God’s favor that keeps the flames of devout service alive.

Within this last verse is an implied lifestyle for God’s saints. Actually, this lifestyle has been discussed throughout the epistle. It is a lifestyle guided by “grace”; saturated with Christian thoughts and feelings (cf. Philippians 4:8). It is a blend of the ordinary affairs of life with the gospel.

“Grace” was to invade and infect every aspect of the readers’ lives. Such a prayer-wish is the grandest desire for any believer in Christ. It is a wish for spiritual saturation, thorough commitment, and absolute dedication to the Lord’s will (cf. Acts 20:32). In an amazingly brief phrase Paul expressed a profound wish for Philemon and his household.

THE ELEMENT WISHED

“Grace.” The term stands most often for the unmerited favor and the generous blessings saints receive from God through Christ Jesus. “Grace” would involve the kindness of God in saving mankind, but it would also include the abundant blessings following salvation.

To possess this “grace” of verse 25 is to possess, in a sense, every blessing and benefit that can come in spiritual matters. Thus, the term is comprehensive. No greater thought can be expressed once the fullness of this word is comprehended.

Paul's desire was for a thorough saturation of his readers with this "grace" of Almighty God. They are to be filled with it. Once they are thus saturated, their entire manner of living will glorify God.

This grace was to affect the readers to the point that their "spirits" would be affected. Paul wished for more than mere mechanical obedience, he sought for a change in the inner will where decisions are made. Those thus saturated would have their hearts and souls guarded by grace (cf. Philippians 4:7).

THE EFFECT PRODUCED

As just noted, once the saints understood the scope of this "grace" and allowed it to penetrate to their "spirits," dramatic changes would occur. The "gospel of practicality" has such a dramatic impact because it is *the only means* by which this "grace" can be reached! Having studied the gospel, having obeyed the gospel, having allowed the gospel to sink to their "spirits," the readers would be saturated with "grace." Once they had reached this saturation point, the following effects would become quite obvious in their lives.

First, *grace would be with their thoughts as they awakened each morning* (Psalms 143:8; 5:3). Each day's dawn brings new challenges to our dedication to God. Often believers are pulled down by temptations and fail to devote the day to God (cf. Isaiah 5:11). But the soul that has been saturated with grace will awaken with renewed devotion (cf. Psalms 118:24). The grace-saturated saint knows well the prayer of Psalms 143:8, "Let me hear Thy lovingkindness in the morning; for I trust in Thee."

The application of this point is quite clear. What are your first thoughts as you awaken each morning? If you are one who is saturated with grace, you will have the habit of offering a brief prayer of thanksgiving to God before you arise. As plans for the day are formed, you will include them in a prayer-discussion with God (cf. Psalms 143:8b).

Second, *grace will govern your conversation* (Colossians 4:6). The Christian who has studied and contemplated the gospel of Christ will banish all impurity and profanity from his mouth! The whole tone of the Christian's speech is to be "with grace"—totally pleasing to God! Such speech reveals the complete submission of the saint to Christ. What about *your* speech? It is to

be with "salt." It is commonly suggested that salt adds flavor and delight to food. In much the same way, the Christian's speech is to add Christian flavor and pure delight to all conversations. Do your words add the "salt" of Christian flavor to conversations at home? . . . at work? . . . at school? (Cf. Colossians 3:17.)

Third, *grace will guide us in selecting friends* (Ephesians 5:11). The soul that has been saturated with grace will know to choose companions carefully. The influence of Christ's grace will guard against our being with others who indulge or condone immoral acts. The Christian who is controlled by grace will draw a definite line of exclusion and never compromise! "No fellowship" will be the rule with the base and ungodly influences of society because grace has affected our spirits!

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Fourth, *grace will moderate trials and tribulations in this life* (Psalms 94:18, 19; 1 Corinthians 10:13). As Paul approached Jerusalem at the end of the third missionary tour, he knew that danger lay ahead. But he was able to face that danger because his spirit was saturated with grace (cf. Acts 21:10-14). The grace saturated soul does not expect a life free from pain. It does expect a life sustained with strength from God because of its faith and trust in God. For all who trust in God's will, the trials of life become more manageable because this grace has a moderating influence. We may not have the answers to all the why's of tribulation, but we will have sufficient strength to endure (cf. Hebrews 12:1-13). When intense trials bring deep anguish and we are forced to face the utter impotence of human strength, grace will comfort us (cf. Romans 8:26; Psalms 46:1ff.).

Fifth, *grace will direct our daily living habits* (2 Corinthians 1:12). Paul's emphasis here is certain—"We live by God's gracious love, not human wisdom" (SEB). The soul that is saturated with grace never has a problem choosing between right and wrong because that choice was made when the gospel was obeyed! Are you living each

day directed by God's grace? Can every word, thought, and deed (even those of your "secret" world) pass this scrutiny of God's "grace test"?

CONCLUSION

The best reason for having a life saturated with grace, perhaps, is found in an old illustration that speaks of our lives being like a roll of costly material. This material is passing swiftly through our hands, and we must embroider our pattern on it as it goes. We cannot wait to pick out a false stitch, or pause too long to examine our work. The only way to do the stitching so that we will be guaranteed "perfection" is to keep our eyes on our great Exemplar, Jesus Christ. In constantly looking at Him, we will make the right stitches. When our work is finished, He cuts it off and finishes it, smooths away its rumples, and cuts away its frayed ends. Then even its spots and mistakes are seen to fit into a purpose and completes the whole. In the same way, a life that is saturated with grace will yield a beautiful end. Isaiah spoke of our lives being like material on a loom, and when life is over the product is woven complete and cut off from the loom (Isaiah 38:12b). Think about that scene. Suppose your present life (living habits, speech patterns, associations, etc.) was to hang as a tapestry upon a wall and was open for all to see. What would it be like? This is Paul's point in verse 25—live life that is saturated with grace, and your "tapestry" will be a masterpiece for *all* to enjoy!

Paul knew the greatness of grace in his life. He was aware of its motivation to live godly (cf. Titus 2:11ff.; 1 Corinthians 15:10). We need to share the apostle's insight to this grace. All that we hope to be depends on how we respond to God's grace. If we do not saturate our spirits with grace, the following will occur. . . .

Early morning plans will lack God's presence.
Speech will not edify and glorify.
Companions will be chosen with disregard.
Trials and tribulations will be intense and
hopeless.
Day-to-day habits will be formed without
God.

Remember the picture of "Interpreter" taking "Christian" behind the walls. The flames of your devotion and zeal can exist only as they are fed with the "oil of grace." This occurs *only* as you live faithfully in steadfast trust to God's Word! Never is the gospel more practical than

when it seeps into and controls even the smallest acts and thoughts of daily living!

An artist solicited permission to paint the portrait of the queen. The favor was granted, and it was a great favor because it would make the man's reputation and fortune. A place was fixed and a time was set. At the fixed place the queen appeared; but the artist was not there—he was not yet ready. When he did arrive a message was communicated to him that her majesty had departed and would not return. Such will be the calamity of many on the last day. The King Eternal has consented to meet man. He fixed in His covenant and has promised in His Word, the object, place, and time of the meeting. The "ob-

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ject" is the salvation of a lost soul; the "place" is "in Christ," the church; the "time" of the meeting is "now"! The Lord has been true to His appointment, but many have failed to meet Him thus far because they are "not yet ready." If the book of Philemon emphasizes but one point it is this—the practical gospel must be obeyed, and it must be obeyed immediately! Failure to do so results in tragic consequences—we have no fellowship with God or brethren, we refuse the source of direction that can bring peace and blessings into our lives, and, we stand guilty of rejecting the Savior's death and intercession for us! How severe will be the penalty for all who thus despise the "gospel of practicality"! (Cf. Hebrews 10:26-31.)

Having observed the great love of God and the willingness of Christ to die so that we might live, surely the honest heart is ready to obey God's will. Do as Onesimus did when he heard the old, old story—believe in Christ as God's only begotten Son, confess this faith before men, repent of living according to self and resolve to live according to God, and be baptized for the remission of sins thus being placed "in Christ" where all spiritual blessings are found! (Acts 16:30-34; 22:16; Romans 6:4ff.; Galatians 3:27; etc.).

—John Kachelman