



stunned by
grace

IT'S BEYOND
AMAZING.



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Scan The Horizon

Over these last many years, we of the grace community have fought hard to proclaim loudly what God has done to us and for us in the finished work of Christ!

We have heralded that we were crucified with Jesus, have been resurrected in Jesus, that we are seated in heaven, have been made righteous, have been made the children of God, are now saints and not sinners, that we have been completely forgiven, and so many other wonderful truths that the body of Christ desperately needs to know.

I wonder though if we have focused so much on what has been done, that we might be neglecting what needs to be done! **You see, God did all those things to us and for us so that His LIFE could flow through us!** Case in point: Titus 3:8.

“This is a faithful saying” — Own that statement! Paul only uses it in the Pastoral letters. Just released from prison, realizing that he is on borrowed time, he uses this phrase to highlight very important issues like Jesus came into the world to save sinners (1 Tim 1:15). So, what he is about to say is VERY important!!!

And what does he say?

We who have believed in Christ are to “be careful.” Normally, we use this phrase in a negative context to maintain a diligent scrutiny of our environment. BE CAREFUL — there are lots of bad things out there in this world. **This is the only time Paul uses this verb in the New Testament and he uses it in a positive instead of a negative manner.** BE CAREFUL — Scrutinize your environment, be watchful, be aware, scan the horizon — so that we can “engage in good works”.

We are to scan the horizon, looking for every opportunity to “DO” good works!

To not only live our lives in a righteous manner as individuals, but also to live in such a way that we sacrificially love and serve others whenever and wherever we can. In fact, the word “engage” is actually used elsewhere to “take the lead, or be the best”. **In other words, the Grace of God NEVER makes us lazy or slack in our walk with God. It actually intensifies our walk as we release the LIFE of Jesus to the world around us.**

Grace people are intended by God to be the best servants, the best friends, the best helpers, the best worshippers. I have a plaque on my wall that says, “Do the kindest things in the kindest way” — that is what real Grace people do.

It just comes naturally to them, because the “GOOD ONE” lives in them.

Let me put it this way: We are to so live our lives that people see that we have been given new and beautiful hearts in the New Covenant economy (Ezek. 36), and their being able to see our beautiful hearts will prompt them to ask, “I love your heart! Where do I get a heart like that?”

And then, we can simply introduce them to the One Who transformed our lives — we can tell them about Jesus!

Identity And Value Are Found In Our Birth

In the realm of humanity, we most often define ourselves and other men by what we/they do.

He is a doctor. I am an attorney. I am just a housewife. He is just a janitor. It seems that in the realm of humanity, not only do we define ourselves by what we do, but we also establish value based on what we do. The more important our "doing" the more important we are, and the less important our "doing" is, the less important we are. **What a tragedy!**

God makes it very clear that identity is found in our birth, and there are in fact only two identities in the world. Those who have been born in Adam, and those who have been born again in Christ.

If you have been born again, you are a child of God.
That is your true identity.

Hence, I am a child of God who "does doctoring"... I am a child of God who "does housewifing"... get the idea?

And what about the value? Value is determined by the price one is willing to pay for something. If I value a pen at a million dollars and try to sell the pen for that sum, but it never sells, in actuality it is not worth a million dollars because no one was willing to pay that price. Finally, I find a buyer who determines he will pay \$5.00 for the pen. Now its value has been determined. **Well, my friends, God determined that He would pay the blood of His own Son for you, blood that is defined in the Scriptures as inestimable, immeasurable value....**

He has determined that you are of infinite value.

A CHILD OF GOD WITH INFINITE VALUE — that is how you should define yourself because that is how God defines you. FASCINATING — these two ways of thinking are found in the Scriptures. When the other Gospel writers told the story of Matthew (Levi), they defined him as a "tax collector"... they defined him according to what he did.

When Matthew wrote his own Gospel, having met and embraced Jesus as his Lord, Savior, and Life, Matthew told the story very differently. He wrote, "and Jesus saw a man!" **He refused to identify himself according to what he did, but instead, according to who he was.** Jesus did not see a tax collector, He saw a man who did not yet know who he was, but he was going to find out, and finding out who he really was radically altered his life. WOW!!!

This One Name Unlocks Your Entire Identity

One of the great glories of the New Testament is the revelation that we have been given a new name. The Bible says we've been given a brand new identity.

You see, before Christ, we were known as sinners, the lost, rebels. **But the glory of the New Testament reveals our new and wonderful multifaceted identities.**

I believe the name we're all most familiar with is "saints." But we're also called ambassadors, we're called the living letters of God, the children of God, and the sons of God. We're called soldiers and farmers, and the list could go on and on. And while those are all wonderful names by which to identify ourselves, in my heart of hearts, I think there's one name that is above all the other names.

There is one identity, that I believe, is greater than all the others.

In Scripture, John calls us "beloved" which is *agapétos* in the Greek and it literally means "those loved by God." I think it's so insightful that this name, this great identity, was written about mostly by the Apostle John, because John was known as "*the disciple that Jesus loved.*" A name given to John, not because Jesus loved him especially, but because **John marveled, was stunned by, and never let go of the fact that he was loved by God.**

Being called His "beloved" is the supreme identity that God has given to us.

I call it our *supreme* identity because all the other identities, or names He calls us by, are birthed firstly out of His love.

It's *because* He loved us that He made us saints, it's because He loved us that He made us His ambassadors. It's because He loved us that He adopted us into His family as His own children.

We are the beloved of God.

"This is how we know what love is: Jesus Christ laid down his life for us." 1 John 3:16a (NIV)
My friend, He stretched out His arms and He said, I love YOU this much.

Hold your head high in this dark world, you are the beloved of God!

A Very Real Word of Encouragement

In most ancient letters that we hold in our possession, the standard "good-bye" was *erroso* meaning "be strong."

That was obviously intended by the writers of those letters to be an encouragement to their recipients. It is also though, a commentary on the world we live in. **We need to be encouraged to be strong because this is a dark and scary world.** We need strength to navigate our way through its savage twists and turns that it all too often brings our way. So yes, as the ancient writers encouraged, "Be strong!"

That, however, is not really much of an encouragement. At least, not to an honest man or woman who has encountered just how treacherous this world can be.

Why? Because the trials of life teach us that we are not all that strong.

It is like we are on battery power and the demands of life all too easily burn out our batteries. I believe most of us use the time in between difficulties as a means of providing us with a way to somewhat re-charge our batteries for the next round of difficulty we are going to have to face.

The ancient New Testament letters, however, did away with the word *erroso* as a standard means of saying goodbye. They chose to use instead the word *charis* meaning grace. Now that is a glorious and very real word of encouragement. **Grace is the offering to us, of the very Person of God. It is the new economy established by Jesus in the New Covenant, that God is no longer distant and unreachable, but actually, lives inside all of us who have placed our faith in Him.**

Grace means that at the moment of faith, God will be all that He is, to all that we need. Because of Grace, we no longer have to navigate through this dark and desperate world by ourselves and with our own resources. **Wherever we go, God goes with us.** Whatever we endure, He is right there offering His strength for us to stand victorious in the midst of the dark days that a fallen world can bring to us.

I bid you, His grace!

The Life We Need

One of the misconceptions that I am finding among people who hear us teach grace is that we are against the Law.

Nothing could be further from the truth. **As true believers, we, like David, love the Law because it comes with a glorious God-given purpose.** What is that purpose? Well, it is two-fold.

The first purpose of the Law is found in 2 Corinthians 3:5-9. There we learn that the Law has a purpose, and that is to kill and condemn us. Isn't that wonderful? In fact, it is even called a "ministry of death and condemnation." Now, why would God give us a Law that would kill and condemn us? The answer, of course, is to kill and condemn us.

Remember that we as human beings were all birthed under the lie that we shall be as God. Every one of us born on this planet is a God-wannabe. God gave us the Law, which is holy, perfect, and good (Romans 7:12) to keep us from a false hope that one day we just might be able to be like God. **The Law came with a demand on our lives but provided no power for us to fulfill that demand.** Alas! We are left to our own resources to try and keep the Law, and there is not one of us in and of ourselves who will ever be able to do that — hence the Law kills and condemns us. It pronounces every one of us guilty as sinners before God.

An old proverb went something like this, "Run John, run, the law demands. But gives him neither feet nor hands." So the first purpose of the Law is to provide us with a great need for Life, as we are all pronounced dead and condemned by the Law. Wonderful!

The second purpose of the Law is then to lead us to Jesus (Galatians 3:24) because He has the market cornered on Life. He who has the Son has the Life says the New Testament. In John 10, Jesus affirms this when He told the disciples that **He came for the express purpose of giving us Life, an abundant Life because the Life He was giving to us was His own Life.** Incredible! We have been given the Life of God for us to experience and express, and this wonderful Life came to us because the Law first affirmed our death and then led us to the only true source of Life. Wonderful indeed!

The rest of that proverb goes as follows, "But grace an even greater brings, it bids us fly and gives us wings." **The truth is that we would never have found the Life we need without the Law first affirming our need for Life.** I love the Law, don't you? It was the tool that brought us to Jesus.

Receivers Instead of Achievers

A paradox is defined as something that sounds contradictory but is actually true. We find such a paradox in the first letter Paul wrote to the Thessalonians.

There he told them to make it their ambition, to be zealous and to strive eagerly — but let's not complete that sentence just yet...

When I see a phrase that calls me to STRIVE or to be AMBITIOUS, I instantly think of the culture of the world we live in, and conclude that I need to "strive" to be a "mover-and-a-shaker," or have "ambitions" to become an influencer or motivator; a heart charger who yearns for impact in this world. That is what I would expect would follow a call to "strive" or "be ambitious."

Paul, however, had no such conclusion to that phrase. Instead, he said that **we should strive to be quiet; that we should be ambitious to mind our own business and take care of our own work.** Pretty strange command, isn't it? Not really though, when you think about it. **We are made by God as human beings, called on the first full day of our existence in Genesis 2 to REST!** Oh, we went out to work on the 8th day, but we worked from a position of rest. We labored, but not to achieve, because we had already been given everything by God. WONDERFUL!

Man sinned, however, and we bought the lie that we should eat from the tree of right and wrong, and **in that instant we went from human beings who received all that they needed from the hand of God, to become human doings, achieving for themselves. This became our new normal, our default mode — to perform. To do.**

The glory of the New Covenant placed us back into relationship with God and provided the potential for us to once again become receivers instead of achievers. **To rest instead of LABOR. To simply be significant in Christ instead of trying to achieve significance.** This is not easy for anyone, because we have been conditioned to achieve instead of receive. That is why the author of Hebrews said, "Labor to enter into the rest."

In other words, it is hard work to rest.

And that is why Paul here in Thessalonians said that we should make it our ambition to lead quiet lives. We have been made some kind of special in God's eyes. It is time for us to really believe that and let it dramatically influence the way we live.

Thank you!

I trust this work will result in an increase of freedom in your life.

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You are loved!
Pastor Josh