

A Call to Consistency

2 Corinthians 6:1-10

Paul's first letter to the church at Corinth had as its great concern the discipline of the church. His second letter has as its chief burden the discipline of a Christian, and the first five chapters, which we have already studied, have to do with the theme of discipleship.

In 2 Corinthians 1 is the *price* of discipleship, "...we had the sentence of death in ourselves, that we should not trust in ourselves, but in God which raised the dead."

The theme of 2 Corinthians 2 is that of the *privilege* of discipleship, "...we are unto God a sweet savor of Christ, in them that are saved, and in them that perish."

The theme of 2 Corinthians 3 is that of the *practice* of discipleship, "...we all, with open face beholding as in a glass the glory of the Lord, are changed into the same image from glory to glory..."

The theme of 2 Corinthians 4 is that of the *power* of discipleship, "For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, worketh for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory."

The theme of 2 Corinthians 5 is that of the *purpose* of discipleship, "...we pray you in Christ's stead, be ye reconciled to God."

When we come to 2 Corinthians 6 we find the theme concerns the *consistency* of discipleship, We then, as workers together with him, beseech you also that you receive not the grace of God in vain."

My question to you tonight is this – what does grace have to do with consistency? Let me answer that by sharing from my personal experience.

I was saved when I was nine years old, but I never really served the Lord with any amount of commitment until I rededicated my life and He called me to preach. Soon after surrendering to preach I enrolled in a very conservative Bible college and I was taught in my early Christian walk to be disciplined, to work hard, and to maintain obedience to standard Christian duties. **I developed a lifestyle that increasingly became more rigid.** **My prayer time had become longer.** Witnessing had to be done more often – any place I went I “**must not**” miss an opportunity for God. As time passed this disciplined life transitioned into a *Christian experience* that was *no longer joyful or fulfilling.* You see, I believed that God had saved me “**by grace, not of works lest any man should boast.**” **But the standards that I had set for myself were no longer obtainable.** I spent long hours going back in my mind to when I was saved, but grace remained something that had happened to me in the *past*. **The Cliff Black who once believed he could conquer the world now walked around conquered by the world.** **I was miserable. I was becoming overwhelmed with temptations, failures, and fears.** And I prayed that God would show me how to regain that joy that once gripped my life. **It was then that God has began to teach me new things about *grace* – its *power* and its *purpose.*** And when I truly begin to understand something of God’s amazing grace in my life, I began to recapture that *peace* and *joy* that God intends for His children to experience in our daily living.

Look with me as we seek to understand how our understanding of grace is the foundation of consistency in the Christ life.

First of all, Paul says that grace is now. The King James Version reads like this in verses 1-2, “We then, as workers together with him, beseech you also that ye receive not the grace of God in vain. (For he

saith, I have heard thee in a time accepted, and in the day of salvation have I helped thee: behold, now is the accepted time; behold, now is the day of salvation.)” **The New King James Version reads like this,** “We then, as workers together with Him also plead with you not to receive the grace of God in vain. For He says: In an acceptable time I have heard you, and in the day of salvation I have helped you. Behold, now is the accepted time; behold, now is the day of salvation.” **The Greek reads like this,** “As God’s partners, we beg you not to accept this marvelous gift of God’s kindness and then ignore it. At just the right time, I heard you. On the day of salvation, I helped you. Indeed, the right time is now. Today is the day of salvation.”

I am convinced that an understanding of what Paul is saying here will change the way we teach and preach this passage of scripture.

First of all, we must understand that Paul is writing to the church in Corinth. We know this because on several occasions throughout this work he addresses his readers as Christian believers. **In 2 Corinthians 1:1 he says** “...unto the church of God which is at Corinth...” **In verse 8 he calls them “brethren” and later acknowledges that is by faith that they stand.** Then, in chapter three he states that clearly they are **“an epistle of Christ.”** **The question that we need to settle tonight is,** “To whom is 2 Corinthians 6:1-3 written?” **Was it to the believers in the church of Corinth? Or was it to the sinners in the city of Corinth?** I am convinced if you take this scripture in its context you have to conclude that it was written to believers. **While it is true that this passage has been primarily used to influence a response from non-believers during revivals and evangelistic services, of which I am guilty, nevertheless, I believe that Paul is dealing with much more than attempting to inspire his readers to make a decision to believe on Christ.** Both before and after this text, Paul addresses readers as his beloved. **If this text was written to believers what does Paul mean when he says,** “As God’s partners, we beg you not to *accept* this marvelous gift of God’s kindness

and then ignore it”? I am convinced that Paul is reminding those believers at Corinth (and us) not to be saved by God’s “marvelous” grace and then “ignore it”!

In other words, Paul is teaching us that *grace* is much more than merely an *event* that takes place when an individual is “born again” into the Kingdom of God. Grace is much more than an *abstract idea* that must be understood. Grace is more than a *spiritual principle* that can be learned and unlearned. Grace is a dynamic intervening work of God that is real and tangible. It is a true encounter between a supernatural God and frail humanity. Grace is power from above dispersed to meet the needs of our lives.

It is possible that Paul was dealing with his readers who had found themselves no longer fulfilling the purpose of their calling. Paul desired for his “children” to walk worthy of the calling of God. Paul desired for his “children” to be complete in the One who had created them. Paul was desirous of much more than just making a convert. He wanted his hearers to “become the righteousness of God in Jesus Christ.” Therefore, he calls out in chapter five saying, “Be reconciled to God!” He is addressing those believers who are not in right relationship with Christ. He is addressing those believers who have experienced salvation and the grace of God in the past, and he says, “Come back into right relationship with your Lord.” He calls out again in chapter 6, “Don’t receive the grace of God in vain.” Paul admonished those in the church of Galatia to wake up because they had “fallen from grace.” He was warning those who had returned to a legalistic lifestyle and those attempting to achieve righteousness by their ability to fulfill the law. Paul adamantly declares that this type of lifestyle is vain and that Christ will profit those individuals nothing.

The Bible is simply teaching that *grace* is so much more than changing the eternal destiny of an individual. The work of grace in our lives purposes to do much than grant us access into heaven. God pours out His grace that we might become whole. Salvation consist of

completeness and fullness in this life. It is not only something that we inherit in the afterlife. **We are saved.** **We are being saved.** And we will be saved by grace through faith.

Are you frustrated with your spiritual failures? Have you become disgusted with your sins? Are you tired of falling short of what you know is God's purpose for your life? **Let me challenge today that there is a grace that is sufficient for all your needs and it is present now.** Paul says, "Today is the day of salvation." Now is the acceptable time for you to begin fulfilling your potential in Christ.

Let's take just a moment to look at a few verses on this subject. The Bible says this in John 1:1, "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things that were made through Him, and without Him nothing was made that was made." Verse 10 says, "He was in the world, and the world was made through Him, and the world did not know Him. He came to His own, and His own did not receive Him." Hebrews 1:1-3 says, "God, who at various times and in various ways spoke in time past to the fathers by the prophets, has in these last days spoken to us by His Son, whom He has appointed heir of all things, through whom also He made the worlds; who being the brightness of His glory and the express image of His person, and upholding all things by the word of His power, when He had by Himself purged our sins, sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high."

These verses are a powerful description of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. He came to earth – the earth that He created. And yet, John 1:11 tells us, "He came unto his own, and his own received him not." **Humanity is terribly wicked in its sinful state.** Nevertheless, I believe it is God's will restore humanity to its God-given purpose.

In fact John 1:12 says, "But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, to those who believe in His name." **The word in this verse of Scripture is dealing with authority**

and position. Fallen humanity, through believing on Christ, are given a spiritual right to enter into a son or daughter relationship with God. When a person confess Jesus Christ as Lord and believes in their heart that Jesus rose from the dead they enter into a new relationship with God.

Now then, I want to go with me a little deeper into John 1. Because it is not just God's desire to change people's positions in relationship to eternity, He did something about it. Verse 14 says, "And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we beheld His glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of *grace* and *truth*."

The Word was in the beginning with God. The *Word* created all things. The *Word* was God. **The Word became flesh and blood.** The *Word* dwelt among us in bodily form. Jesus was 100% human and 100% God in one person. **John says, in Jesus we see the glory of God of which we have fallen short.** In Jesus, the very Son of God, dwelt all the fullness of *grace* and *truth*. What does that mean? **It simply means that Jesus is the only Name whereby we must be saved.** Acts 4:12 says, "Neither is there salvation in any other: for there is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved." **It simply means that there is no other plan for men to be saved.** Jesus made this statement in John 14:6, "I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by me."

The Bible says that Jesus was "full" of grace and truth. It would be understandable for us to justify other means of fulfillment if he was *partially* full. If He were only 60% full than we would need to obtain 40% of our needs from another source. **Maybe we would need to deaden some feelings of the past through drugs or alcohol.** If He is *partially* full maybe we would need to find peace with another "god" like Buddha or Muhammad? If He were *partially* full maybe we would need to find satisfaction in extra-marital relationships. **But the Scriptures say that He was "full of grace and truth."** The Bible says in

John 8:32, “And ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free.” We know that it is *truth* that sets us, but do we really understand *grace*?

Look at John 1:16, “And of His fullness we have all received, and grace for grace.” It has also been translated as “grace upon grace.”

I propose to you tonight that we are not living a life of abundance because we are not properly using the *fullness of God’s grace and truth*. Colossians 2:6-10 says, “As you therefore have received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk in Him, rooted and built up in Him and established in the faith, as you have been taught, abounding in it with thanksgiving. Beware lest anyone cheat you through philosophy and empty deceit, according to the tradition of men, according to the basic principles of the world, and not according to Christ. For in Him dwells all the fullness of the Godhead bodily; and you are complete in Him, who is the head of all principality and power.”

I challenge to take a sincere look at your life tonight. What principles have you been living by that have cheated you? What traditions of men have you been following that have kept you out of the fullness of God’s glory? What powers have you submitted to that have cheated you of your purpose and destiny in this earth?

Too many of God’s children are walking in depression, sickness, or discouragement because they are not properly administering the grace of God for His glory. The enemy desires to keep us bound, bruised, and broken so we can not fulfilled our purpose of bringing glory to God in our daily living. God has a tremendous purpose and potential for you – will you be *real*, be *receptive*, and be *responsible* with God’s Grace.