

“In Defense of the Truth: Studies in 2 Corinthians”

#13, “Wasting God’s Grace,” 6.1-2.

“Grace” is foundational to the Christian faith. This English word occurs more than 120 times in the N.T. and χάρις, the Greek word that translates it, more than 150 times. We are saved by grace and kept by grace. We serve by grace and our prayers come before the throne of grace. There is no area of our Christian experience that is not the result of grace, even our labor for the Lord! Cf. Paul’s testimony in **1 Cor 15.10**, “But by the grace of God I am what I am, and his grace toward me was not in vain. On the contrary, I worked harder than any of them, though it was not I, but the grace of God that is with me.”

But we can never take God’s grace for granted. In our text, Paul, as God’s spokesman, pleads with the Corinthians to not receive God’s grace in vain. What does this mean? To whom is he speaking? Is it possible for a Christian to receive God’s grace in vain? Doesn’t Scripture teach that grace is “irresistible?”

Certainly, the unsaved can and do resist God’s grace. No less theologian than R. C. Sproul affirms, “men can and do resist the grace of God . . . It is irresistible in the sense that it achieves its purpose. It brings about God’s desired effect.”

There is also “common grace” which Wayne Grudem defines as “the grace of God by which he gives people innumerable blessings that are not part of salvation.” Paul speaks of this as “God’s kindness . . . meant to lead you to repentance?” in **Rom 2.4**.

In light of the context (note the “then” in **v.1**, making these verses the conclusion to what he has said prior to this in his exhortations regarding being reconciled to God), Paul no doubt feared for the salvation of some of the Corinthians. Note **2 Cor 13.5**. As the *Spirit of the Reformation Study Bible* notes, “Paul may have meant that . . . some within the visible church might prove that their faith was not saving faith.”

But Christians can receive God’s grace in vain as well! As Homer Kent notes, Paul “was concerned lest any true believers . . . should falter in their Christian lives, and at the judgment seat of Christ would be found empty.” How can a Christian receive God’s grace in vain?

I. By failing to walk in accordance with grace.

- A. “Vain,” *kenos*, means “empty;” i.e., received to no purpose; not affecting its intended result.” A waste of grace!
- B. Note **Eph 2.8-10**. Grace should produce works but works are not a means of grace. When people attempt to live the Christian

life in the power of the flesh, grace is emptied of its value.

John MacArthur, “Most of the Corinthians were saved but hindered by legalistic teaching regarding sanctification . . . Some were not truly saved but deceived by a gospel of works, which was being taught by false teachers.”

- C. At the other extreme, God’s grace can be turned into licentiousness, “license to sin,” claiming that we are “under grace.”

1 Pet 2.16, “Live as people who are free, not using your freedom as a cover-up for evil, but living as servants of God.”

Gal 5.13, “you were called to freedom, brothers. Only do not use your freedom as an opportunity for the flesh, but through love serve one another.”

- D. Such abuse of God’s grace is symptomatic of apostasy! **Jude v.4**, “For certain people have crept in unnoticed who long ago were designated for this condemnation, ungodly people, who pervert the grace of our God into sensuality and deny our only Master and Lord, Jesus Christ.”

II. By failing to grow in grace—**2 Pet 3.14-18**.

- A. By not giving heed to God’s word—**Acts 20.32**, “And now I commend you to God and to the word of his grace, which is able to build you up and to give you the inheritance among all those who are sanctified.”

1. It is an act of grace that God has given us his word! It is the means he uses to sanctify us and to reveal his will to us.
2. Yet there is a shocking degree of ignorance of Scripture today, because it is not read and studied in the pew and is seldom proclaimed in context from the pulpit.

- B. By continuing to serve sin—**Rom 6.12-18**.

1. We can know God’s word and yet not be obedient to it, which will keep us from growing in grace. God’s word is “our Master’s voice.” Cf. **Lk 6.46**, “Why do you call me ‘Lord, Lord,’ and not do what I tell you?”
2. Consider the admonition of **Tit 2.11-14**, *q.v.*

III. By failing to fulfill our ministry.

- A. Paul understood that his was a ministry empowered by grace. Read **Eph 3.1-7**.
- B. Note **Eph 4.7**, *q.v.* *SRSB*, “All Christians have a common bestowal of grace; salvation through faith. Each Christian is given some particular gift of grace to benefit the church.”
- C. Each of us has been “graced” with gifts for ministry. **1 Pet 4.10** “As each has received a gift, use it to serve one another, as good stewards of God’s varied grace.” Note also **Rom 12.6-8**, *q.v.*
- D. Consider the implications of **1 Cor 3.10-15**. As Philip Hughes notes, “Paul is here [i.e., in our text] thinking in terms of the judgment-seat of Christ.” Read **1 Cor 3.10-15**.

Note **v.2**. “For” connects the exhortation of **v.1** with a quotation of **Isa 49.8**, followed twice by “behold.” Cf. **5.17**. Paul declares that *this* is the time of which Isaiah spoke! *ESV Study Bible*, “Paul identifies his apostolic ministry with Isaiah’s prophetic role of calling Israel to repentance and perseverance in view of the coming day of redemption and judgment . . . [He] declares that this time . . . has already arrived in Christ!”

Philip Hughes, “The ‘now’ is the season of this present age of grace, bounded, on one hand, by the advent in humiliation of the incarnate Son and, on the other, by His future coming in glory.” *Now* is the time to receive God’s grace in earnest! “Receive,” δέχομαι, here “is the equivalent to faith,” *TDNT*. To receive God’s grace is to receive Christ!

Carl Laney tells of a Saxon king who put down a rebellion in a distant province of his kingdom, then placed a burning candle in the archway of the castle and announced that all who had rebelled would be spared if they put down their arms and took an oath of loyalty to the King. Clemency and mercy were offered, but the offer was limited to the life of the candle.

Kenos is translated “foolish” in **Jas 2.20**, “But do you want to know, O foolish man, that faith without works is dead?” [literally, “O empty man.”] Nothing could be more foolish, or make life more empty, than receiving God’s grace in vain! Don’t waste His grace!