

Receive Not the Grace of God in Vain

Happy Sabbath to all. Last week, we went over a study by A.T. Jones from the book Lessons on Faith that was dedicated to the explanation of a single verse, Galatians 5:3. It turned out to be a fairly detailed theological examination of the text, which turned out to essentially be a defense of the 7th day Sabbath, and not so much a “lesson on faith” as the book’s title would indicate. I included the chapter in an attempt to go over the entire book, and that was the last of the “Galatians” studies; however, it turned out to be less of a blessing than intended, and therefore in the future I will be more selective about the chapters that we review, even if that means we will not cover all of the sermons available.

This week, we will be looking at one that does, I believe, have great potential for blessing. It is called “Receive Not the Grace of God in Vain.” This will give us the opportunity, not only to see our beliefs and teachings present in the original Adventist message again, but to see how the light of this present generation serves only to strengthen the essence of what Yah has been showing His people ever since they came forth from the various Protestant denominations because of the prospect of the soon return of the Son of Yah.

We begin, then:

[quote]

Can every believer have grace enough to keep him free from sinning? Yes. Indeed, everybody in the world can have enough to keep him from sinning. Enough is given, and it is given for this purpose. If anyone does not have it, it is not because enough has not been given, but because he does not take that which has been given. For “unto everyone of us is given grace according to the measure of the gift of Christ.” Eph. 4:7. The measure of the gift of Christ is Himself wholly, and that is the measure of “all the fullness of the Godhead bodily.” To the fullness of the Godhead there is, indeed, no measure; it is boundless. It is simply the infinity of God. Yet that is the only measure of the grace that is given to everyone of us. The boundless measure of the fullness of the Godhead is the only thing that can express the proportion of grace that is given to everyone who is in this world. For “where sin abounded, grace did much more abound.” This grace is given in order that “as sin hath reigned unto death, even so might grace reign through righteousness unto eternal life by Jesus Christ our Lord,” and in order that sin shall not have dominion over you, because you are under grace.

[endquote]

There is quite a lot we could say about this first section. Reading it, I am immediately reminded of the discussion we had a couple weeks ago about “growing” in grace vs. being “strengthened” in faith. Different words can have different connotations, depending on the setting, but here we see inspiration setting forth the basic idea of what we concluded at the end of our meeting.

No matter how we grow, or are strengthened, we never actually receive MORE faith, or MORE grace. We may become more confident in Yah’s promises, and see the reward of our faith as it is exercised, but all this means is that we are become more aware of what the “only measure” of grace that we have received actually is. Yah has given us all of Himself through His Son, and this is why we can do “all things” through Christ who strengthens us.

And if we have, indeed, been given all of the Father, through the Son, then we not only have, as Peter says, “all things that pertain to live and godliness,” but in fact we have all things that could possibly ever pertain to these things. It does not matter how much more subtle, and experienced, the tempters are, you see. It does not matter how much the flesh would seek to draw us into transgression. John tells us that “Yah is greater than our heart,” (1John 3:20) and thus greater than any flesh-based factor that may affect us.

Jones says, “Everybody in the world can have enough [grace] to keep him from sinning.” Here is one place where I believe increasing light would give us something to teach the brethren of a previous age. While Jones’ statement is certainly not incorrect, and his subsequent discussion bears out the truth of it... because of the darkness of this world, and the wickedness of this generation, the saints of Yah should waste no opportunity to give the strongest possible message. This often involves issues of wording that are so subtle, those who are outside the faith may often wonder, “Can Yah really care about something as minor as that?”

We would say, speaking from the standpoint of an invincible faith, that “Everyone in the world HAS been given enough grace to keep him from sinning.” The Son of Yah has died for that very thing, and as a result, “The grace of God that bringeth salvation hath appeared to all men.” (Titus 2:11) There is no condition to that. It is a simple change, but sometimes these “minor” things can affect the heart of a listener, or a reader, in a way that it otherwise would not. Even the way we pray, giving thanks for the things we are requesting, is a way I have noticed as being subtly different from the way that the world, and the nominal believer, operates. From the standpoint of our testimony, declaring that everyone has the grace enough to cease from sin serves to better declare what it is that Yah has done for us. Everyone can “receive” this grace. Everyone can “utilize” this grace, but the gift has already been given, and we “have” it for the taking.

We continue, speaking of this grace:

[quote]

It is given also “for the perfecting of the saints.” The object of it is to bring each one to perfection in Christ Jesus--to the perfection too, that is fully up to God’s standard, for it is given for the building up of the body of Christ, “till we all come in the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ.” It is given to “everyone of us,” “till we all come” to perfection, even by the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ. Again, this grace is given to everyone where sin abounds and it brings salvation to everyone to whom it is given. Bringing salvation in itself, the measure of the salvation which it brings to everyone is only the measure of its own fullness, which is nothing less than the measure of the fullness of the Godhead.

[endquote]

I have often wondered, “How is it that anyone can read the pioneer writings and not become – for all practical purposes – a Creation Seventh Day Adventist?” For my part, when I was a mainstream Adventist I was not even aware of who Jones and Waggoner were. I knew of Ellen White, and I read the Sabbath school lessons written by the present-day developers of SDA doctrine, but I did not read the works

of the other authors, nor did I read deeply enough of Mrs. White's writings to recognize her encouragement to seek these documents out.

But had I read, even then, I would have recognized the difference between what Adventists taught, and what Adventists teach. I imagine that I would have gone to an elder of my local Church, and asked "What do these things mean?" and I would have been given some answer that would be an attempt to quiet my conscience, and to soothe me back into complacency. I do not know what my reaction would have been, in my unconverted state.

I thank Yah that He sent His Spirit into my heart, to convict me of what these messages mean, and to connect me with a people who will turn no light away, regardless of what it will mean to accept it. All of us here, who have the desire to look into these works, have a reason to be thankful. But all of us here should likewise feel sorrow, because I am sure that the scenario I am describing here is happening every day to Adventists in different parts of the world. They are finding a spark of truth, and conviction is awakened... but they go to the leading men, those charged with being teachers and under-shepherds of Yah's flock, and they are "herded" back into the fold with pleasing messages and an assurance that "a little sin every now and then cannot be all that bad." They have the advantage, because the churches are taught to use their own experiences, rather than the Bible, as the standard of what is "true."

We continue:

[quote]

As boundless grace is given to everyone bringing salvation to the extent of its own full measure, then if any one does not have boundless salvation, why is it? Plainly it can be only because he will not take that which is given.

[endquote]

Just a brief note... several times when reading this study, this pair of verses comes to mind, that is not actually cited in the study: "Ye lust, and have not: ye kill, and desire to have, and cannot obtain; ye fight and war, yet ye have not, because ye ask not. Ye ask, and receive not, because ye ask amiss, that ye may consume it upon your lusts." (James 4:2, 3)

Why do people not receive the grace of Yah? It is given, yes. They have it for the taking, at no cost but those things that would drag them to spiritual (and in many cases physical) death. But they do not receive it, because even those who ask for grace to overcome sin, often they do not truly believe the words they are saying, nor do they have a desire to really put away all sin. They need to ask even for the pure desire to cease from sin... even the desire for the gift of Yah's grace is itself a gift, and one that the natural man, the man of sin, does not want. It is a miracle, indeed, how anyone is saved, since the natural man does not even seek Yah and His salvation. And yet, when one hears the Gospel, and when one hears the testimony of the witnesses, the Spirit may – against all hope and reason – cut through the darkness that surrounds the heart of the natural man, and awaken a desire to be holy.

At that point, when they ask, it is not "amiss," but it is asked in the urgency of a soul that has begun to recognize its true state... and Yah will never leave such a request unanswered. Let us be the voice in the wilderness, our voices giving the Holy Spirit of our Father doorways through which to enter men's hearts.

[quote]

As boundless grace is given to everyone in order that it shall reign in him against all the power of sin, as certainly as ever sin reigned and in order that sin shall not have dominion, then if sin still reigns in anyone, if sin yet has dominion over anyone, where lies the fault? Clearly, it lies only in this, that he will not allow the grace to do for him and in him that which it is given to do. By unbelief he frustrates the grace of God. So far as he is concerned, the grace has been given in vain.

But every believer, by his very profession, says that he has received the grace of God. Then if in the believer grace does not reign instead of sin, if grace does not have dominion instead of sin, it is plain enough that he is receiving the grace of God in vain. If grace is not bringing the believer onward toward a perfect man in the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ, then he is receiving the grace of God in vain. Therefore the exhortation of the Scripture is, "We then, as workers together with him, beseech you also that ye receive not the grace of God in vain." 2 Cor. 6:1.

[endquote]

These statements bring to mind a passage from Ellen White's writings. It is entirely appropriate as it stands, as she applies it to the Church – to Yah's collective people. But it is equally appropriate when applied to individuals. She said, and I paraphrase (but if anyone knows the reference I can ask Jody to add it to the notes thereafter): A Church cannot judge itself based upon its past blessings, or its past light. Yah has favored many Churches in the past, but through their apostasy and unbelief they have fallen, and another people have been called. The only measure of a Church's true degree of favor with Yah is how well it is seeking, and accepting, the current light, and how thankful it is for the current blessings that are leading it forward. If not, it has received the grace of Yah in vain, and all its past triumphs are of no consequence.

Again, I don't recall the exact words of her statement, but the meaning has remained with me since the reading of them. And again, this can apply to individuals just as easily as to Churches. We may have victories in our past, and great times of blessing and power... but these past victories serve to sustain us only by giving us the reassurance to continue forward, that we do not forget the goodness of our Father in Heaven. There are daily challenges to face and overcome, and there will never be a point where we can say, "I have triumphed enough, I have exercised enough faith."

Even Paul, when he said, "I have run the race, and I have finished my course..." Did he then go to the jailors and say, "Since I have finished my course, I will recant my words and go home?" No, he continued to testify to the truth until (tradition tells us) he was beheaded by a Roman blade. When we "finish" our course, it is because WE are prepared for the judgment... not that our labors on the earth are necessarily finished yet. We rest spiritually, but our hands and our mouths are never idle in the service of Yah.

[quote]

The grace of God is fully able to accomplish that for which it is given, if only it is allowed to work. We have seen that grace being altogether from God, the power of grace is nothing but the power of God. It is plain enough therefore that the power of God is abundantly able to accomplish all for which it is given-- the salvation of the soul, deliverance from sin and from the power of it, the reign of righteousness in the

life, and the perfecting of the believer unto the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ—if only it can have place in the heart and in the life to work according to the will of God. But the power of God is “unto salvation to everyone that believeth.” Unbelief frustrates the grace of God. Many believe and receive the grace of God for the salvation from sins that are past but are content with that and do not give it the same place in the soul to reign against the power of sin, that they did to save from sins of the past. This, too, is but another phase of unbelief. So as to the one great final object of grace--the perfection of the life in the likeness of Christ-- they do practically receive the grace of God in vain.

[endquote]

This is very similar to the meaning of the EGW quote that I paraphrased. Jones places more emphasis than any other author of his generation that I have read, on the purpose of Yah’s blessings as the perfecting of the saints. How different the world would be now if those who had heard these words spoken, and the first who had read them, had said, “This is wonderful! Let us commit, by the very grace of God we are encouraged to receive, to accomplishing this.”

How different the world will be in just a short time if we, now, stand by our commitment to this, and to sharing this Gospel with others.

[quote]

“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 succored thee: behold, now is the accepted time; behold, now is the day of salvation.) Giving no offense in anything, that the ministry be not blamed.” Nor does this word “ministry” refer simply to the ordained ministry of the pulpit. It includes everyone who receives the grace of God or that has named the name of Christ. For “as every man hath received the gift, even so minister the same one to another, as good stewards of the manifold grace of God.” Therefore he does not want anyone to receive the grace of God in vain, lest that grace and its blessed working be misrepresented to the world and so men be further hindered from yielding to it. He does not want His grace to be received in vain, because when it is, offense is given in many things, and the ministry of grace itself is blamed. Yet when the grace of God is not received in vain but is given the place that belongs to it, “no offense” will be given “in anything,” and the ministry will not only be not blamed but will be blest.

[endquote]

The verse that Jones quotes there, for the record, is 2Cor 6:1-3. And again I say, How different the world will be, in just a short time, if we take this message to the world through every avenue Yah opens up for us. As stated, the ministry is not restricted to “ministers,” that is, those on whom the Church has laid hands as an elder, or evangelist. If you have been baptized, loving hands have already been laid upon you in the grave to “self,” and the hand of Yah Himself has called you forth to a new life. Even if you are not yet baptized, there is a path for you to walk in the light, sharing what you have learned with others. This grace ought not to be received in vain. Because He has heard us, and “succored” or helped us, we are charged as ministers of Yah to claim all the power of the Godhead over sin, and to declare it boldly, so that the Spirit can reach others in turn.

[quote]

And now to show how complete and all-pervading the reign of grace will be in the life where it is not received in vain, the Lord has set down the following list, embracing “all things,” and in which we shall approve ourselves unto God. Read it carefully:

[endquote]

Here is the list, and it has quite a number of items, so I will simply relate them as Jones does, again from 2 Corinthians, chapter 6:

[quote]

In all things approving ourselves unto God,

In much patience,

In afflictions,

In necessities,

In distresses,

In stripes,

In imprisonments,

In tumults,

In labors,

In watchings,

In fastings;

By pureness,

By knowledge,

By longsuffering,

By kindness,

By the Holy Ghost,

By love unfeigned,

By the word of truth,

By the power of God,

By the armor of righteousness on the right hand and on the left,

By honor and dishonor,

By evil report and good report;
As deceivers, and yet true;
As unknown, and yet well known;
As dying, and, behold, we live;
As chastened, and not killed;
As sorrowful, yet always rejoicing;
As poor, yet making many rich;
As having nothing, and yet possessing all things.

This list covers all the experiences that can ever enter into the life of any believer in this world. It shows that where the grace of God is not received in vain, that grace will so take possession and control of the life, that every experience that enters into the life will be taken by grace and turned to making us approved unto God and building us up in perfection unto the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ. “We then, as workers together with him, beseech you also that ye receive not the grace of God in vain.”

[endquote]

This phrase in particular struck me from Jones’ closing statements: “every experience that enters into the life will be taken by grace and turned to making us approved unto God.” Knowing this, and believing this, we will be joyful. As we discussed last New Moon, we can be joyful, and thankful, for every experience that befalls us, whether it is the times in which we are living, or the challenges that we face – and overcome – every day of our divinely blessed lives.