

Ephesians - Fullness: Grace for the Fight

Dr. John Carmichael

[Eph 3:8-13 NASB95] 8 To me, the very least of all saints, this grace was given, to preach to the Gentiles the unfathomable riches of Christ, 9 and to bring to light what is the administration of the mystery which for ages has been hidden in God who created all things; 10 so that the manifold wisdom of God might now be made known through the church to the rulers and the authorities in the heavenly [places.] 11 [This was] in accordance with the eternal purpose which He carried out in Christ Jesus our Lord, 12 in whom we have boldness and confident access through faith in Him. 13 Therefore I ask you not to lose heart at my tribulations on your behalf, for they are your glory.

- Imagine sending a soldier into battle without telling him his assignment, giving him his equipment, or explaining the authority behind his orders. He may be sincere and courageous, but he will fight confused.
- Many Christians live this way spiritually. They know that grace saved them, but they do not understand that grace also equips, empowers, assigns, and sustains them.
- We often define grace only as “God’s unmerited favor.” That is true, but it is not the whole truth. In Ephesians 3, grace is not only what brought Paul into salvation; grace gave Paul a specific assignment and the spiritual ability to fulfill it.
- The Fire Bible describes grace as both God’s undeserved favor and the spiritual ability given to accomplish His purposes. The Life in the Spirit Commentary observes that Paul’s ministry was not merely the effective use of his natural abilities. It resulted from God’s resurrection power working through him.
- Paul was in prison, but he did not write like a defeated man. He understood: who had called him, what grace had been given to him, what assignment had been entrusted to him, what authority he possessed in Christ, and what God was accomplishing through his suffering.
- Paul’s circumstances did not define him because God’s grace had already assigned him.

How does understanding the grace God has given us enable us to overcome discouragement, fulfill our calling, and stand victorious in spiritual warfare?

In Ephesians 3:8–13, Paul reveals four overcoming realities that become clear when we understand our grace.

I. Grace Gives You an Assignment

- a. [Eph 3:8 NASB95] 8 To me, the very least of all saints, this grace was given, to preach to the Gentiles the unfathomable riches of Christ,
- b. Paul does not say merely, “Grace was given to save me.” He says, “This grace was given” so that he could preach Christ among the Gentiles.
- c. Paul’s grace had direction. It came with an assignment.
- d. The phrase “this grace” points to Paul’s particular commission. He had been called to carry the gospel across boundaries that had separated Jews and Gentiles for centuries. Paul did not select this as an attractive career. God apprehended him, commissioned him, and empowered him.
 - i. Grace does not erase your past; it redeems it
 1. Paul calls himself “the very least of all saints.” He remembered that he had persecuted the Church, but he no longer allowed his past to disqualify him from his calling.
 2. [1Co 15:9-10 NASB95] 9 For I am the least of the apostles, and not fit to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God. 10 But by

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the grace of God I am what I am, and His grace toward me did not prove vain; but I labored even more than all of them, yet not I, but the grace of God with me.

3. Paul's humility did not cause him to deny his calling. He just acknowledged Who called him and how he was to succeed.
 4. Humility is not pretending that you have no gift. Humility is knowing that every gift came from God.
 5. As Spurgeon observed, a vessel sinks deeper in the water as it becomes fuller. Likewise, a person who is truly full of grace becomes more humble, not more proud.
- ii. Grace determines your assignment and supplies your ability
 1. Your grace is the particular way God's favor and power operate through you for the benefit of others.
 2. [Eph 4:7 NASB95] 7 But to each one of us grace was given according to the measure of Christ's gift.
 3. You should not try to fight with someone else's armor, imitate someone else's ministry, or carry an assignment God has not given you.
 4. The enemy often attacks by creating confusion about identity and calling. If he cannot steal your salvation, he will attempt to distract you from your assignment.
 - e. What God gives you to do is often where the enemy most fiercely tries to discourage you.
 - f. Application: Examine these questions carefully: What spiritual burden repeatedly returns to my heart? Do people consistently receive help through me? What ability becomes fruitful when I surrender it to the Holy Spirit? What need causes me to say, "Someone must do something"? What assignment has God confirmed through Scripture, prayer, fruit, and the Church?
 - g. Do not identify your grace through ambition alone. Look for the convergence of biblical truth, spiritual burden, divine empowerment, godly confirmation, and kingdom fruit.
 - h. Declare: I am not an accident, and I am not unnecessary. God's grace has given me an assignment, and His power will enable me to fulfill it.

II. Grace Gives You an Announcement

- a. [Eph 3:8-9 NASB95] 8 To me, the very least of all saints, this grace was given, to preach to the Gentiles the unfathomable riches of Christ, 9 and to bring to light what is the administration of the mystery which for ages has been hidden in God who created all things;
- b. The Greek verb translated "preach" means to announce good news. Paul's task was not to advertise himself. His assignment was to announce what God had accomplished in Christ.
 - i. Our message is the unfathomable riches of Christ
 1. "Unfathomable" describes something that cannot be completely tracked, traced, or measured. You can begin exploring the riches of Christ, but you will never reach their limit.
 2. In Christ there is: forgiveness for every sin, freedom for every captive, adoption for every spiritual orphan, reconciliation for every outsider, strength for every battle, access for every believer, hope for every sufferer, and resurrection life for everyone who believes.

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3. [Rom 11:33 NASB95] 33 Oh, the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are His judgments and unfathomable His ways!
 4. Spiritual warfare becomes overwhelming when we study the enemy more than we study the riches of Christ. We should not be ignorant of Satan's schemes, but neither should we become preoccupied with darkness.
 5. The Christian's confidence comes from knowing the immeasurable sufficiency of Christ.
- ii. Grace turns revelation into proclamation
1. Paul wanted "to bring to light" what had previously been hidden. The mystery was that believing Jews and Gentiles were now joined together as equal members of one body in Christ.
 2. Grace is not a private treasure to be hoarded. It is good news to be announced.
 3. [Mat 10:8 NASB95] 8 "Heal [the] sick, raise [the] dead, cleanse [the] lepers, cast out demons. Freely you received, freely give.
 4. If God has given you grace: tell someone what Christ has done, encourage someone with what Christ has taught you, serve someone through the gift Christ has placed in you, and carry light into a place where darkness has been operating.
- c. Application: You may feel too broken, insignificant, or ashamed to be used by God. Paul's testimony answers those feelings: the grace that forgave your past can make your life an announcement of Christ's riches. Do not make your pain the center of your testimony. Make the riches of Christ the center of your testimony.
- d. Declaration: My life will announce that Jesus saves, heals, delivers, restores, baptizes in the Holy Spirit, and gives overcoming power.

III. Grace Makes the Church an Answer to the Powers

- a. [Eph 3:10 NASB95] 10 so that the manifold wisdom of God might now be made known through the church to the rulers and the authorities in the heavenly [places.]
- b. Paul pulls back the curtain on the spiritual realm. The Church is being observed by "rulers and authorities in the heavenly places."
- c. These terms may encompass the angelic beings who marvel at redemption and the demonic powers that oppose God's purposes. Either way, Paul's point is breathtaking: God is displaying His wisdom in the spiritual realm through the Church.
 - i. The Church displays God's many-colored wisdom
 1. "Manifold" carries the idea of something many-colored, intricately varied, or beautifully woven together.
 2. The Life in the Spirit Commentary compares God's wisdom to a multicolored tapestry. People from different families, ethnicities, social positions, and personal histories are joined into one body through one Spirit.
 3. Individually, we may appear to be disconnected threads. In God's hands, we become a display of His wisdom.
 4. [1Co 12:13 NASB95] 13 For by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body, whether Jews or Greeks, whether slaves or free, and we were all made to drink of one Spirit.
 5. The Church is not merely an audience watching a service. The Church is God's redeemed community demonstrating Christ's victory.
 - ii. The Church announces defeat to the powers of darkness

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1. Every time the Church: reconciles people whom hatred tried to divide, delivers someone whom Satan tried to bind, restores someone whom sin tried to destroy, welcomes someone whom religion tried to exclude, worships while under attack, and remains united in the Holy Spirit, the Church makes an announcement in the spiritual realm: the wisdom of God has triumphed through Jesus Christ.
2. [Col 2:15 NASB95] 15 When He had disarmed the rulers and authorities, He made a public display of them, having triumphed over them through Him.
3. The enemy wants to isolate believers because the Church's corporate unity is itself an act of spiritual warfare. A divided Church conceals the mystery; a united, Spirit-filled Church displays it.
4. [Eph 6:12 NASB95] 12 For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the powers, against the world forces of this darkness, against the spiritual [forces] of wickedness in the heavenly [places.]
- d. People are not the enemy. Your spouse is not the enemy. Another believer is not the enemy. Another generation, ethnicity, or congregation is not the enemy.
- e. We must stop fighting the people Christ died to reconcile and start standing together against the powers Christ came to defeat.
- f. Application: This week, do something that visibly demonstrates God's wisdom: reconcile with someone from whom you have been unnecessarily separated, pray with another believer against a shared spiritual battle, serve someone who cannot repay you, welcome someone who feels like an outsider, refuse to participate in gossip or division, or use your spiritual gift to strengthen the local Church.
- g. Your act of Spirit-empowered obedience may look small on earth, but it makes an announcement in heavenly places.
- h. Declaration: We are the Church of Jesus Christ. Through our worship, unity, witness, holiness, and spiritual authority, the wisdom of God is being displayed to the powers of darkness.

IV. Grace Gives You Access That Produces Endurance

- a. [Eph 3:12-13 NASB95] 12 in whom we have boldness and confident access through faith in Him. 13 Therefore I ask you not to lose heart at my tribulations on your behalf, for they are your glory.
- b. Paul moves from God's eternal purpose to his present imprisonment. He is suffering, but he has not lost heart.
- c. Why? Paul knows that a prison cannot cancel grace.
 - i. We have bold and confident access
 1. "Boldness" carries the idea of freedom of speech. Because of Christ, we can speak openly and honestly before God.
 2. "Access" means that we have been granted an introduction into the presence of the King. This access does not belong only to pastors, apostles, or unusually spiritual people. Every believer has access through faith in Christ.
 3. [Heb 4:16 NASB95] 16 Therefore let us draw near with confidence to the throne of grace, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need.

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4. The enemy may attempt to use: condemnation to make you hide, shame to silence your prayers, fear to make you retreat, suffering to make you question God, and delay to make you believe prayer is useless.
 5. But grace says, "Come boldly."
 6. Spiritual warfare is not won by panicked Christians shouting into the darkness. It is won by believers who know their position in Christ, enter the Father's presence, hear His voice, and stand upon His Word.
- ii. Confidence in God keeps tribulation from producing discouragement
1. Paul does not deny his tribulations. He interprets them through God's eternal purpose.
 2. His imprisonment looked like defeat, but from prison Paul wrote Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, and Philemon. The circumstance that appeared to restrict Paul became a channel through which his ministry reached generations.
 3. The enemy may influence the circumstance, but he does not get to interpret the circumstance.
 4. Paul says that his tribulations were "your glory." His suffering was connected to the Gentiles receiving the gospel. What looked like Paul's humiliation was serving God's larger purpose.
 5. [2Co 12:9 NASB95] 9 And He has said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you, for power is perfected in weakness." Most gladly, therefore, I will rather boast about my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may dwell in me.
 6. Knowing your grace does not mean you will avoid adversity. It means adversity cannot convince you that your assignment has been canceled.
- d. Application: Do not interpret God's love by the pain of your present moment. Interpret your present moment through the cross, resurrection, promises, and character of God.
- e. When you feel yourself losing heart: Remember the grace God has already shown you. Rehearse the assignment God has given you. Enter God's presence with boldness. Ask the Holy Spirit for fresh strength. Refuse to give permanent meaning to a temporary season. Look for how God may turn the battle into someone else's blessing.
- f. Declaration: I have access to the Father, assistance from the Holy Spirit, authority in Christ, and grace for this season. Therefore, I will not lose heart.
- **When you understand the grace God has given you, you can fulfill your assignment, withstand spiritual opposition, approach God confidently, and refuse to lose heart.**
 - The Grace of God On You Is Greater Than Your Circumstance
 - Do not measure your grace by the size of your struggle. Measure your struggle by the inexhaustible riches, resurrection power, and eternal purpose of Jesus Christ.