

The Administration of Grace - 2-28-10

Ephesians 3:1-2

**For this reason I, Paul, the prisoner of Christ Jesus for you Gentiles — 2 if indeed you have heard of the dispensation of the grace of God which was given to me for you,
NKJV**

Does anyone's translation say something different than dispensation? (stewardship, administration) What do those words mean to you?

This word primarily signifies "the management of a household or of household affairs." It's basically the administration of the authority by which a household is run.

So in that sense the word means governance. So Paul here is talking about a governance of grace.

For this reason I, Paul, the prisoner of Christ Jesus for you Gentiles — 2 if indeed you have heard of the (administration or the governance) of the grace of God which was given to me for you,

Note: A "dispensation" is not a period or epoch (a common, but erroneous, use of the word), but a mode of dealing, an arrangement or administration of affairs.

What dispensation or administration came before the administration of grace? It was the administration of law or torah. But now we have an administration of grace.

Ephesians 3:2-5

**2 if indeed you have heard of the dispensation of the grace of God which was given to me for you, 3 how that by revelation He made known to me the mystery (as I have briefly written already, 4 by which, when you read, you may understand my knowledge in the mystery of Christ), 5 which in other ages was not made known to the sons of men, as it has now been revealed by the Spirit to His holy apostles and prophets:
NKJV**

This is almost an identical declaration to the one Moses made in Deuteronomy 5 when he repeated the Ten Commandments and declared that God did not make this covenant with your fathers or the generations past, but has now made it known to you.

Deuteronomy 5:1-3

And Moses called all Israel, and said to them: "Hear, O Israel, the statutes and judgments which I speak in your hearing today, that you may learn them and be careful to observe them. 2 The LORD our God made a covenant with us in Horeb. 3

The LORD did not make this covenant with our fathers, but with us, those who are here today, all of us who are alive.
NKJV

So in each of these passages, Deuteronomy 5 and Ephesians 3, there is a declaration of governmental transition being made.

For the children of Israel, unlike their fathers before them, in order to live under the blessings of the covenant God had made with them they could no longer live in an administration of lawlessness. They now were a people of law.

Likewise for us, unlike those before us, in order to live in the authority and the power of the new covenant we must recognize that we are no longer a household governed by law but one governed by the administration of grace through God the Holy Spirit. Law releases the power of sin unto death. Grace releases the power of righteousness unto life.

Now, that gets us back to considering the meaning of grace. Last week we said that many, especially protestant Christians, would define grace as “unmerited favor.” It is partly that, but we said that a better, more encompassing definition of new covenant grace would be “God’s Empowering Presence.”

International Standard Bible Encyclopedia (Revised) article on grace:

“Grace is a renewing power as well as a free gift of pardon and acceptance. Grace present within the life of the church is shown in the churches overflow of generosity toward others (2 Cor 8). In Titus 2:11-13 Paul speaks of grace disciplining a life into righteousness, sobriety, and piety. *(This indicates that grace is necessary for sanctification as well as justification. We need the power of grace to get into the kingdom and we need the power of grace to live as kingdom people on the earth)* Paul speaks of the power of grace within him when he speaks that what he is, he is by the grace of God. The promise that grace will be sufficient for him in his personal distress is also a promise of inner power through grace. (2 Cor 12) It should be noted that Paul speaks of sin in the same way. Grace and sin then become the dominate powers of the new age and the old age respectively. *(Many are perfectly willing to acknowledge the power of sin while ignoring the power of grace. In the old age under the old covenant we were slaves to sin. But in the new we are set free by the power of grace to live righteously. There is power residing in each of us to defeat sin. It’s the power of grace.)* Grace and Spirit stand for the dominate power of the new age. In this connection the Spirit gives grace gifts. *(Grace gifts are empowered gifts!)* The one Spirit gives differing grace gifts to individuals and to the community. In Romans 12:6 Paul speaks of gifts differing according to the grace given to us. *(If grace is just the ticket into the kingdom then every believer would get the same thing, right? But this says clearly that there are different levels of grace which is different levels of empowerment.)* So grace powers and Spirit powers are the same. This suggests that Paul makes no sharp distinction between grace and the Spirit as a source of personal power in the Christian age.”

So limiting grace to “unmerited favor” greatly misrepresents the notion of grace in the New Covenant (Testament). Actually, “unmerited favor” is the translation of the Hebrew word for grace in the Old Testament. And that is an appropriate definition of grace in the Old Covenant. In the Old Covenant the administration of God’s house was law and that administration constantly kept people in a place of condemnation. Unmerited favor was the only way of escape from that system.

What we must realize is that in the New Testament, grace takes on a whole new dimension.

So what is a good definition of grace? It is God’s empowering presence. It is grace that saves us, sanctifies us, and transforms us through the empowering presence of God the Holy Spirit.

How is it that the notion of power has been almost completely removed from grace in the teaching of the church? It’s like there’s been a religious conspiracy to rob the church of its power. In many ways our theology of grace has been defined by the experience of the church rather than by the scriptures themselves. And this thievery has been perpetrated by the very ones who claim to derive their beliefs from the scriptures and who warn us not to have a faith based on the experiential power of the Holy Spirit.

I want my faith based on both the testimony scriptures *and* the grace of God, His empowering presence in the Holy Spirit.

Remember when the Sadducees came and asked Jesus about resurrection? This is what he said to them:

Mark 12:24

24 Jesus said to them, "Is this not the reason you are mistaken, that you do not understand the Scriptures or the power of God?"

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We need to understand both. Not knowing either the scriptures or the power of God as they relate to grace dis-empowers and paralyzes the church.

**Explain the performance mentality that we bring into our lives in Christ.*

The new covenant declares that we don’t have to earn God’s acceptance. We don’t have to earn His favor. His grace really is sufficient for us no matter what we’ve done and no matter what situation we find ourselves in.

Two most important questions in life:

- 1) What do I think about God?
- 2) What do I think that God thinks about me?

We can never answer the first without being properly grounded in the answer to the second.

From our perspective we tend to see ourselves as people who are stumbling our way toward heaven, two steps forward, one back, and three sideways. We know that we're not perfect. We see our immaturity. We see our rebellion. We see our weakness. And what do we do? We try to cover them up by doing good in the hope that it will improve my position before God. But there is no covering up before God. The good news is that He doesn't assess us by what we do wrong. He doesn't assess us by what we do right. His opinion of us has nothing to do with our performance.

He has an entirely different perspective on us, on our successes, on our failures and even on our weaknesses. He loves our weaknesses! Why? That's the very places where His power shows up in all its perfection.

The Lord said to Paul, "**My grace is sufficient for you, for My strength is made perfect in weakness.**" Paul's response to God's assessment was: **Therefore most gladly I will rather boast in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me.¹⁰ Therefore I take pleasure in infirmities, in reproaches, in needs, in persecutions, in distresses, for Christ's sake. For when I am weak, then I am strong. (2Cor 12:9-10)**

The thing is, God loves weak and imperfect people. A person who recognizes their weaknesses and imperfections and yet doesn't disqualify himself because of them is the very type of person that God uses to do great things. We look at great people of faith in the scriptures and our tendency is to put them on some sort of spiritual pedestal. Oh, that was *Moses*. Oh, that was *Abraham*. Oh, that was *David*. It's even worse for those in the New Testament. That was Saint John or Saint Paul or Saint Peter. When we set them apart as different, we're just conceding that we're not as good or as able as they were to do great things for God as they were.

And yet when we examine their lives we see that they too were total messes. They were weak and imperfect, and still God used them to do great things.

Acts 13:22

22 And when He had removed him, He raised up for them David as king, to whom also He gave testimony and said, 'I have found David the son of Jesse, a man after My own heart, who will do all My will.'

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All My will?

Let's see...David lied and the whole city of priests was unjustly put to death. He numbered the people and seventy thousand of them died in a plague. And let's not even mention the Bathsheba deal.

And yet God testifies of David that he is one who does, not just most but, *all* God's will.

In the Song of Solomon, how does the King say to the Shullamite, “you are all fair, there is no spot in you?” She knew she wasn’t perfect. She was dark on the outside and the inside. She knew that she was blemished. And yet the king’s appraisal was: “you’re perfect!”

How does God, a holy and righteous Judge, say such things about weak and broken and sinful people, and still maintain His integrity? Is He really grading on some sort of a curve?

The answer in one word is: grace.

The key to walking in the power of grace is to see ourselves as the people of grace.

That’s the way that God thinks of us and that’s the way we need to think about ourselves. It’s not as though our imperfections aren’t ignored. They’re just covered.

God has delivered us from the need to perform in order to elevate ourselves out of our imperfections. That was what the Old Covenant required.

The New Covenant declares that God has performed all that He requires for us so that we don’t have to.

God has placed us in His Son and *Jesus* is God’s value system in appraising us. *Jesus* is how God sees us. The heart of the New Covenant is that God has chosen to make us acceptable in the Beloved. He has placed us in Christ.