

Good Gifts of God's Grace

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Now our Lord Jesus Christ himself, and God, even our Father, which hath loved us, and hath given us everlasting consolation and good hope through grace, Comfort your hearts, and stablish you in every good word and work (2 Thess. 2:16-17).

Paul's work in Thessalonica abruptly ended due to persecution. He was forced to leave the city for the sake of his life. In the aftermath, he wrote two letters to the church in Thessalonica. He attempted to encourage saints and answer questions they had regarding the faith. In the above-cited text, Paul wrote words that are profoundly rich with encouragement.

The Grace of God

Paul articulated the practical meaning of the grace of God. Simply defined, grace means "gift." The grace that God pours into our world is evidence of His unending love for us. There are many gifts that God has given to us. Most significantly, He has given us His Son, Jesus, for our salvation. Jesus famously explained, "For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life" (John 3:16).

The grace of God is an overwhelming subject. However, Paul's statement in second Thessalonians represents a concise explanation about grace. All of the blessings and or promises of God represent specific gifts of God's grace. In our theme text, Paul mentions two gifts of God's grace: everlasting consolation and good hope. We will examine both gifts.

Everlasting Consolation

Consolation is generally understood to be comfort or encouragement. Typically, consolation is sought when something bad has happened or is approaching. The saints at Thessalonica needed consolation. They were being persecuted. Some of them had died. Some thought the recently departed would be excluded from sharing in the Lord's return. They needed to be strengthened to continue in the faith.

There are many ways we can give and receive consolation. We might visit someone who is sick. We might extend hospitality to someone who has suffered the loss of a loved one. One of the blessings of being part of God's family is having other saints console us in our times of distress. However, our greatest consolation is Jesus.

When Jesus was an infant, Joseph and Mary took Him to the Temple to be dedicated to God. At the Temple, there was an older priest named Simeon. He had hoped that he would lay his eyes on the "Consolation of Israel." The Spirit revealed to Simeon that he would see the Lord's Anointed before he died.

When Jesus' parents brought Him to the Temple, Simeon took Jesus into his arms and said, "Lord, now you are letting your servant depart in peace, according to your word; for my

eyes have seen your salvation that you have prepared in the presence of all peoples, a light for revelation to the Gentiles, and for glory to your people Israel” (Luke 2:29-32).

Simeon knew that he would not live to see Jesus grow up and bring salvation to the world. Yet, Simeon was not troubled. Having been blessed to see the Consolation of Israel, he could die in peace.

The everlasting consolation of Jesus offered by the grace of God can give us peace throughout our lives. Paul once wrote about experiencing a peace beyond full comprehension that is in Jesus (Phil. 4:7). Regardless of the troubling circumstances in life, the consolation of Jesus is accessible and unchanging. Even more, like Simeon, the everlasting consolation of Jesus can bring us peace in death.

Good Hope

Everlasting consolation and good hope are related gifts of God’s grace. Why could Simeon depart the earth in peace? Why can we die in peace? Answers to these questions are given in what God accomplished through Jesus.

Hope is often considered to be some measure of optimism or wishful thinking. The good hope offered by God’s grace is based on a historic event: the resurrection of Jesus. God offers us consolation in death and good hope for eternal life because He raised Jesus from the dead. What God did for Jesus in death is what He has promised to do for us.

Experiencing consolation and hope requires faith. Of course, we have reasons to believe and trust God. The resurrection of Jesus is the primary evidence intended to compel us to believe and obey.

Finding Consolation & Hope

Works or Grace?

So, why does God’s grace matter to us? Well, everyone in the world searches for consolation and hope. Everyone experiences hardships and tragedies. Everyone has sinned. Everyone has to face death. But, how?

Most people search for consolation and hope by works. The world’s major religions and secularism teach a form of “salvation” by works. We are supposed to be good people, help others, and minimize harm in the hope of finding peace in death. Most people seek consolation for their sin by good works. They rationalize their sin by thinking, “I know I’ve done some bad things, but at least I did...”

Such pursuits of consolation and peace are futile. Hoping our good will neutralize or outweigh our bad is not hope. It may be wishful thinking, but it’s not hope. Such rationalizations will not bring us peace. It will eat us alive. Christianity is the only religion that does not teach this philosophy. Christianity offers consolation and hope by grace.

God does not expect us to earn our salvation. He does not expect us to find peace in death by being good citizens, leaving a legacy, or being successful in business. Trying to find peace through our works is futile. One of three results will happen if we seek peace through our works. We will become depressed and defeated by our failures, become inflated with pride by our successes, or remain in a constant state of doubt and insecurity. God asks us to believe, trust, and obey His grace: Jesus. In so doing, we will experience consolation and hope.

Conclusion

Like Paul and the saints at Thessalonica, we must learn to trust and rely on the good grace of God. Our works are no substitute for God's grace. Only God's grace can equip us to serve. Only God's grace can bring consolation to the guilt of our past sins. Only God's grace can give us hope for the future.