

# **Truth for Today**

*The Bible teaching radio programme*

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## **The God of all Grace: The God of all Grace**

If there is one man in the New Testament who could write about the grace of God it is Peter. You might say that Paul was the most outstanding recipient of God's grace in view of his conversion as he persecuted Christ's church. But Paul states that he persecuted the church in ignorance. Peter, however, had been with Jesus throughout His ministry. He had been there when Jesus did the most remarkable miracles. Peter was the leading apostle and part of a select group, which also included James and John, whom Jesus chose to be with Him on special occasions. Peter had even walked on water. He had seen the glory of Jesus on the Mount of Transfiguration. He had been with Jesus in Gethsemane. And it was Peter who confessed Jesus as, "the Son of the Living God". But in spite of all this, Peter, who had promised to die for his Lord, three times denied that he knew the Saviour who loved him.

After the resurrection of Jesus, the angel told the women at the tomb in Mark 16:7, "...tell His disciples - and Peter - that He, Jesus, is going before you into Galilee; there you will see Him, as He said to you." It is the God of all grace who immediately ensures that the wayward disciple learns that Jesus is alive. Later, on the beach at Galilee in John 21, the Lord Jesus asks Peter, "Simon, son of Jonah, do you love Me more than these?" Three times Peter had denied Jesus and three times he is questioned about his love for Christ. What followed was the amazing grace of the Lord Jesus in not only restoring His beloved disciple but also calling him to the service of a shepherd, the single mindedness of a disciple and the suffering of a martyr.

The resurrected Christ changed the brash, strong-minded fisherman into the gentle shepherd who wrote the letter, which contains our subject for this morning, "the God of all grace".

**The God of all grace** permeates the whole of 1 Peter and especially the last chapter, chapter 5. In this chapter there are several aspects of the grace of God. First we have spiritual leadership and the **grace to shepherd**. "The elders who are among you I exhort, I who am a fellow elder and a witness of the sufferings of Christ, and also a partaker of the glory that will be revealed: **Shepherd the flock of God** which is among you, serving as overseers, not by compulsion but willingly, not for dishonest gain but eagerly; nor as being lords over those entrusted to you, but being examples to the flock; and when the Chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the crown of glory that does not fade away." (verses 1-4).

Peter's next theme is the **grace to submit**. "Likewise you younger people, submit yourselves to your elders. Yes, **all of you be submissive** to one another, and be clothed with humility, for "God resists the proud, but gives grace to the humble. Therefore humble yourselves under the mighty hand of God, that He may exalt you in due time, casting all your care upon Him, for He cares for you." (verses 5-7).

If the grace to submit is a passive subject, Peter's next theme, the **grace to be sound minded and steadfast**, is a challenging active one, "Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil walks about like a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour. Resist him, steadfast in the faith, knowing that the same sufferings are experienced by your brotherhood in the world." (verses 8-9).

Then we come to the **God of all grace** and the progress which comes from the **grace to suffer, strengthen and settle**, "But may the God of all grace, who called us to His eternal glory by Christ Jesus, after you have suffered a while, perfect, establish, strengthen, and settle you." (verse 10).

Finally, we have the **grace in which we stand**, "To Him be the glory and the dominion forever and ever. Amen. By Silvanus, our faithful brother as I consider him, I have written to you briefly, exhorting and testifying that this is the **true grace of God in which you stand**. She who is in Babylon, elect together with you, greets you; and so does Mark my son. Greet one another with a kiss of love. Peace to you all who are in Christ Jesus. Amen." (verses 11-14)

Firstly then, the **grace to shepherd**. It is a mark of the grace of God in the life of Peter that, although he was such an outstanding spiritual leader, he does not appeal to his readers on the basis of his apostleship but as "a fellow elder". True spiritual leadership is always by example. At the beginning of his discipleship Peter had been called by the Lord Jesus to be an evangelist. At the end of John's Gospel, he is called to be a pastor. This involved feeding and caring for the Lord's people. There is no higher calling then to look after the people for whom Christ had died. But what Peter had come to understand through God's grace was that this work is only effectively accomplished by humility.

Christ had taught His disciples that the greatest amongst them would be those who served. "He who is greatest among you, let him be as the younger, and he who governs as he who serves" (Luke 22:26).

It was this willingness to serve which marked Christ Himself and which should characterise each of us. Beside the Lake of Galilee, there is a statue of the Lord Jesus and Peter. As an inscription, it has the Lord's last recorded words to Peter whilst He was still on earth, "You follow Me." As a lifelong follower and servant of Christ, Peter appeals to his fellow elders to shepherd the flock of God. But he does add something. He was a witness of the sufferings of Christ. Although he does not mention the authority of his apostleship, he does refer to the fact that he had personally witnessed the sufferings of Christ. This weight of experience would have an impact on his hearers.

He encourages them to shepherd the flock of God which was among them. Our first responsibility is to the people of God locally. Local responsibilities are very important and Peter reminds his readers of these. He then encourages them to serve as overseers willingly. The idea of an overseer is someone who literally looks over others to ensure everything is going well. Years ago, overseers were employed in the textile industry to ensure production was kept on target. They were usually men who had a reputation as hard taskmasters with little compassion for the workers who served under them. Peter paints the picture of shepherds who cared for God's people with tender hearts.

Years ago I stayed at a friend's farm. Early in the morning, he invited me to see his sheep. We went to a large barn. Inside there must have been 200 or so sheep. We stood looking over the vast flock. All the sheep looked just the same to me. My friend looked intently at his flock, then started moving through the sheep. He took hold of one and carried it to the side of the barn and gave it an injection before letting it return to the flock. I was not a shepherd and did not know one sheep from another, let alone their state of health. My friend was a shepherd and by overseeing the flock could instantly see which animal needed attention. We need pastors today who have the eyes and heart to see the needs of God's people and apply the word of God sensitively to their hearts.

The Lord Jesus is the Good Shepherd in John 10, the Great Shepherd in Hebrews 13, and is the Chief Shepherd in this chapter. The Good Shepherd died for us - John 10:11: "I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd gives His life for the sheep." The Great Shepherd was raised for us - Hebrews 13:20: "Now may the God of peace who brought up our Lord Jesus from the dead, that great Shepherd of the sheep". The Chief Shepherd will come again and reward those who have served Him: verse 4: "you will receive the crown of glory that does not fade away."

After writing to the elders, Peter turns to his next theme: the **grace to submit**. He points out the importance of younger people recognising and accepting the authority of the spiritual leadership. Authority is an important principle in the Bible. It is important in family life, at work, in society and in the Church of God. Peter first emphasises the importance of younger people responding positively to leadership and then adds that all Christians should be **submissive** to one another and show humility. It needs the God of all grace to help us all to demonstrate a genuine humility. Charles Dickens created a very unpleasant character called Uriah Heap. Uriah Heap was forever telling people that he was "ever so humble" whilst deceiving his way through life. False humility is hypocrisy.

We also live in a world that promotes assertiveness and has little sympathy with humility. But Peter writes, "God resists the proud, but gives grace to the humble" (see Proverbs 3:34). And he goes on to encourage the people of God to, "humble yourselves under the mighty hand of God, that He may exalt you in due time, casting all your care upon Him, for He cares for you, (verses 5-7). Micah 6:8 says, "He has shown you, O man, what is good; and what does the LORD require of you but to do justly, to love mercy, and to walk humbly with your God?"

Peter was a man who knew that the Lord cared for him. Before he denied Jesus, the Lord Jesus had said to him, "But I have prayed for you, that your faith should not fail; and when you have returned to Me, strengthen your brethren." Luke 22:32. Peter had learned to trust God implicitly and you can see how the grace in his heart led him to write, "Casting all your care upon Him, for He cares for you." There is nothing we cannot cast upon the Lord Jesus. I remember when we used to do summer camps for children. We used to take a green rucksack every year. My wife would get everything we needed for the day, towels, flasks, first aid kit, books etc and put it into our rucksack. Not only was it full but things were tied to it as well. When we could get no more into it, she put it on my back! There is no burden too big for Jesus to bear; only faith that is too small to throw our burdens on Him.

The **grace to be sound minded and steadfast**. "Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil walks about like a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour. Resist him, steadfast in the faith, knowing that the same sufferings are experienced by your brotherhood in the world." (verses 8-9)

The devil is described in various ways in the New Testament and a roaring lion is one of the most vivid. Peter certainly knew about Satan's power to devour. In Luke 22:31 Jesus told Peter, "Simon, Simon! Indeed, Satan has asked for you, that he may sift you as wheat." Peter at that time was very self confident and soon discovered what a powerful enemy Satan was. It is no surprise that he describes him here as a roaring lion. But although Satan is powerful, he is not all-powerful. It was the prayers of Christ which resisted Satan's attempts to destroy Peter's faith. We resist him by being sound minded and vigilant. 2 Timothy 1:7 says, "For God has not given us a spirit of fear, but

of power and of love and of a sound mind.” It is important that we use our minds to anticipate his actions. This is what Jesus did. He anticipated Satan’s actions against Peter and then resisted him by prayer. When Satan confronted Jesus at the beginning of His ministry, Jesus overcame him by the word of God. In 1 John 2:14, John writes, “...I have written to you, young men, because you are strong, and the word of God abides in you, and you have overcome the wicked one.” David writes in Psalm 119:11, “Your word I have hidden in my heart, that I might not sin against You!” Peter writes, “Resist him, steadfast in the faith”. This means to be dependent not upon ourselves but upon the revealed word of God. 1 John 4:4 reads, “You are of God, little children, and have overcome them, because He who is in you is greater than he who is in the world.”

Now we come to the God of all grace. Peter traces grace and all its attributes back to God. God has moved in grace towards us through the Lord Jesus Christ. In 2 Corinthians 8:9 we read, “For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though He was rich, yet for your sakes He became poor, that you through His poverty might become rich.” This same grace continues to be supplied day by day in the Christian’s life so that we can live for Christ. This life is progressive and ultimately leads to heaven because God has, “called us to His eternal glory by Christ Jesus.” Peter outlines the progression, “after you have suffered a while, perfect, establish, strengthen, and settle you.” (verse 10).

It has helped me to see this verse in the same way as a plant is matured in a garden. First there is the suffering – the hardening off a plant and taking it out of its pot to place it in the garden. Then there is the perfecting. The idea is completion or arrangement – putting the plant in the right place. Then comes the establishment making sure the plant takes root. It also needs to be strengthened – fed and watered. And finally settled or founded to develop, mature and, of course, bear fruit.

God allows suffering in our lives to build us into stronger, not weaker, Christians. He puts us in the right place in the Church to fulfil the role He wants us to undertake. The local Church is also the place where we establish ourselves and put down roots. It is also the place where we are spiritually fed through the ministry of God’s word, prayer and fellowship. Finally, we settle so that we can grow and mature and bear fruit, more fruit and much fruit (see John 15:2, 8).

When Peter considers the work of God’s grace in the lives of His people his heart overflows with praise: “To Him be the glory and the dominion forever and ever. Amen.” (verse 11).

In the closing verses of our chapter, Peter writes of, “**the true grace in which we stand.**” This is the spiritual state of those who have experienced God’s grace. In the words of Ephesians 2:4-9, “But God, who is rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us, even when we were dead in trespasses, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved), and raised us up together, and made us sit together in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, that in the ages to come He might show the exceeding riches of His grace in His kindness toward us in Christ Jesus. For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, not of works, lest anyone should boast.”

In 1 Peter 2:5, the apostle describes Christians as living stones being built into a spiritual house. Unlike bricks, which tend to be the same size and shape, stones are more interesting and individual but they still have to be shaped to fit the place in the building for which they are intended. Peter’s life had been shaped not only by grace but by the God of all grace. God had personally intervened in the apostle’s life to shape him into the person who would best serve Christ. The shaping was sometimes a painful but necessary process. The same God of all grace is working in our lives and by His Spirit and His word is shaping us into the living stones He wants us to be.

John Newton wrote:

*I am not what I might be;  
I am not what I ought to be;  
I am not what I wish to be;  
I am not what I hope to be.  
But I thank God that I am not what I once was,  
And I can say with the great apostle,  
“By the grace of God I am what I am.”*

*Kindly note that the author of this broadcast was Mr. Gordon Kell, however the voice on the audio is that of Mr. George Stevens.*

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