

Receive Not The Grace Of God In Vain

“And working together with him, we entreat that ye receive not the grace of God in vain (for he saith, at an acceptable time I hearkened unto thee, and in a day of salvation did I succor thee; behold, now is the acceptable time, behold now is the day of salvation); giving no occasion of stumbling in anything that our ministry be not blamed; but in everything commending ourselves as ministers of God ...” (2 Cor. 6:1-4a).

In the previous chapter the apostle has asserted that he (and the other apostles) were ambassadors of Christ; that God was entreating the Corinthians (and all men) to be reconciled to God because he (Christ) who knew no sin had been made sin on our behalf that we might become the righteousness of God in Him.

Second Corinthians 6 expands on the point the apostle made in chapter 5 — because the apostles were ambassadors of Christ, they were workers together with Him in accomplishing the work of God. Human instrumentality is directly involved in preaching the gospel of Christ to the world which needs to hear the good news of the gospel. God did send His Son to this world that He might be the propitiation for our sins, who also spent three years to reveal that gospel to His twelve; training them to be the bearers of His truth; to be His ambassadors to those for whom He planned to die. Not only did He spend those years of His public ministry in training them, preparing them for the trials they would encounter (yes, even the rejection of the majority who needed that gospel); He promised His apostles that when He returned back to His father, He would send them the Helper, the Comforter, who would refresh their memory of what He had taught them and that that Holy One would reveal to them the whole truth, some of which at the time He spoke to them, they were not yet able to bear (Jn. 14:16-18; 16:12-13). These apostles were His hands, feet, tongue; His messengers because God put this treasure in earthen vessels (2 Cor. 4:7). Furthermore, because this time of pleading with men “be ye reconciled to God” (2 Cor. 5:20), would far outlast the lifetime of all the apostles, they were in turn to train others in the same truths. Paul wrote elsewhere of this work: “And the things which thou has heard of me among many witnesses, the same commit thou to faithful men who shall be able to teach others also” (2 Tim. 2:2). So Paul writes “and working together with him” — with God (2 Cor. 6:1).

As workers with God, he urges, “We entreat that ye receive not the grace of God in vain.” Such an urging necessarily implies that man can be saved by the grace God, yet by falling into sin, still be lost. Certainly the apostle made this point to the Galatians when he wrote them, “Ye are severed from Christ, ye who would be justified by the law, ye are fallen away from grace” (Gal. 5:4). To this point, however, Calvinists respond, “These were not yet saved for the apostle had previously urged ‘be ye reconciled to God’ showing they were not yet reconciled, saved.”

We disagree with this latter conclusion. The Corinthians had been saved, they had once been reconciled to God. In his first letter to them, the apostle said, “Or know ye not that the unrighteous shall not inherit the kingdom of God? Be not deceived: neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor effeminate, nor abusers of themselves with

men, nor thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor extortioners shall inherit the kingdom of God. And such were some of you, but ye were washed, but ye were sanctified, but ye were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and in the Spirit of our God” (1 Cor. 6:9-11). In short, the Corinthians had been reconciled to God.

But, “like a dog turning to his own vomit and the sow that had washed to her wallowing in the mire” (2 Pet. 2:22), many of the Corinthians had turned away from the gospel; once more they needed to be reconciled to God. If they would not be, they would have received the grace of God in vain.

The words, “at an acceptable time I hearkened unto thee, and in a day of salvation did I succor thee,” are a quotation from Isaiah 49:8. And while the Isaiah prophecy tells of the help God would give His Son in His earthly mission, it was the Messianic age of which Isaiah spoke so Paul could appropriately say, “Now is the acceptable time, behold, now is the day of salvation” (2 Cor. 6:2). It was, it is an acceptable time for men to be reconciled to God — to so live that we receive not the grace of God in vain!

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