

**Excerpts from Life-study of First Peter,
Message 20**

CHRISTIAN LIFE AND ITS SUFFERINGS (2)

Bible Verses:

1 Pet. 2:19 For this is grace, if anyone, because of a consciousness of God, bears sorrows by suffering unjustly.

1 Pet. 2:21 For to this you were called, because Christ also suffered on your behalf, leaving you a model so that you may follow in His steps.

Toward the end of this portion Peter says in verse 19, “This is grace,” and at the end of verse 20, “This is grace with God.” The way Peter uses the word grace in these verses has been a problem to translators. If the Greek word is translated literally, the reader may find it difficult to understand what Peter is saying. Nevertheless, in the Recovery Version we adopt a literal translation. Verse 19 says, “For this is grace, if anyone because of conscience toward God bears sorrows, suffering unjustly.” Thinking that the common reader of this verse would not be able to

understand the meaning if the word grace were used in the translation, some translators have used the word “acceptable.” Certain versions use the word “thankful.” However, neither of these translations is exact according to the Greek text. Furthermore, they do not satisfy the inner sense in the spirit. Therefore, these translations do not “strike home.” This was the reason we decided to make a literal translation in the Recovery Version. Hence, verse 19 says, “This is grace,” and verse 20 says, “This is grace with God.”

What is grace in our manner of life? It is the motivation of the divine life which we received at our regeneration inwardly and the expression of this life outwardly. Then this motivation and expression become gracious, acceptable, in our behavior. When others observe this, they may say that this is grace in our manner of life. Day by day we should give others the impression that grace is with us. This means that they should be able to see grace in our daily life.

We have often seen grace in the lives of saints who have been in difficulty or hardship. For example, a sister becomes ill. Everyone is concerned for her because she seems to be dying. However, as she lies in bed in the hospital, she is full of joy. This is surprising

to the doctors and nurses. The sister is able to bear sufferings that others cannot bear, and she is not afraid of dying. The life that motivates her inwardly is expressed outwardly, even in the midst of her illness. This is grace.

Hebrews 12:28 says, “Let us have grace.” To have grace is to possess grace, take grace, and apply grace. Grace has come and is now with us. What is this grace? Grace is the processed Triune God as the all-inclusive, life-giving, indwelling Spirit in us. In all circumstances and situations we should take grace and apply it.

In verse 18 Peter says, “The household servants, subject yourselves in all fear to your masters, not only to the good and forbearing, but also to the crooked.” Then in verse 19 Peter continues, “For this is grace, if anyone because of conscience toward God bears sorrows, suffering unjustly.” As we have pointed out, conscience toward God means consciousness of God—the consciousness of our relation to God. This consciousness indicates that we are living in intimate fellowship with God and that we are keeping a conscience toward God that is good and also pure (3:16; 1 Tim. 1:5, 19; 3:9; 2 Tim. 1:3). Deep within us, there is a consciousness before God, and this

consciousness regulates and guides us. If anyone bears sorrows, suffering unjustly, because of this inward consciousness, this is grace. Verse 20 is very similar in content to verse 19: “For what credit is it if sinning and being buffeted you shall endure it? But if doing good and suffering you shall endure, this is grace with God.”

This means that we have been called to suffering so that in it we may have the enjoyment of God as grace and express Him. Whatever the circumstances may be, God is our grace, our inner enjoyment. This God is our grace. This enjoyment motivates us and then becomes our outward expression, an expression visible to others. Those who observe this grace expressed from within us will be able to see something attractive on our face, in our attitude, or in the atmosphere around us. They will feel that what they see expressed is pleasant and acceptable. As we have pointed out again and again, this is grace.

Verse 21 clearly says that we have been called to suffer unjustly because Christ suffered on our behalf and left us a model so that we should follow in His steps. Actually, I do not like the word “model,” because it has been spoiled by common usage. Literally, the Greek word means a writing-copy, an

under-writing for students to use in tracing letters as they learn to draw them.

Christ's living revealed in the four Gospels is the master copy used in this spiritual xeroxing. For xeroxing, we must first have a copy. The xeroxed copy made from this original is a reproduction, not an imitation. We know from experience that trying to imitate Christ does not work. We are not able to imitate Him. What we need is not imitation but reproduction. There is a great difference between imitation and reproduction.

First he says, "This is grace." Then he tells us that Christ has left us a model. The grace and the model are closely related. When anyone observes the expression of the Triune God as grace from within a believer and recognizes that this is grace, there is an indication that this one has become a xerox copy of Christ, the model. To express the Triune God as grace in the midst of unjust suffering is to become a reproduction of Christ. Therefore, instead of saying, "This is grace," it is possible to say, "This is a reproduction of Christ." The manner of life that expresses the processed Triune God as grace is not only grace—it is a reproduction of Christ.

Read the verses and footnotes online: <http://online.recoveryversion.bible/>

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Note: This version is not intended to be printed as material for pursuit during the small group gathering. Instead, it is to be used as additional reference for brothers and sisters who want to prepare in advance for fellowship on the message. We include here notes from the commentaries of the brothers in the life-study radio program. The points from these commentaries can help enrich our understanding and, eventually, our fellowship with the saints on the selected portions of the life-study message. We still recommend that, if possible, the saints still listen to the [audio message](#) in addition to reading the [life-study message](#) for personal pursuit and for preparation for small group gatherings. We also wish to point out that these notes have not been fully polished.

[Commentary:]

Introduction

[CW:] The word, grace, bears tremendous significance in the New Testament. Yet like so many biblical terms, it has almost become like a cliché to many people, and has been greatly devalued in the understanding of most Christians. God's unmerited favor has become the most common definition among believers. And while this thus conveys a certain limited sense of the word, it's obvious by considering Scripture that this definition is grossly inadequate. Consider Peter's use of the word, grace, in 1 Peter chapter 2 verses 19 and 20. "For this is grace," he writes, "if anyone because of a consciousness of God, bears sorrows by suffering unjustly. For what glory is it if, while sinning and being buffeted, you endure? But if, while doing good and suffering, you endure, this is grace with God." John Pester has joined us today for... I think John, I'm here to say, a rather in-depth study of a couple of very important verses in this book of 1 Peter.

[JP:] I certainly hope so, because this word, *grace*, especially as its unveiled and revealed in 1 Peter is a tremendously significant word in the New Testament.

[CW:] I thought John, in preparing this program, we're going to hear in the first portion of Witness Lee's sharing, a little bit about the translation that was involved, of the translation work that was ongoing at the time he was giving these messages in the production of what has become the translation we have published in the Living Stream, which is the Recovery Version, we refer to it from time to time. And for those of our listeners who are not familiar with the Recovery Version, this is a very literal, yet of course, has a more contemporary language, but I think you know a fair amount about the Recovery Version. Give us a very quick overview of some of the principles that were involved in this translation.

[JP:] I think that the overriding principle in the translation of the Recovery Version was to convey the spiritual light and understanding that the Lord has passed down from generations to generations to His church from the beginning. We call it the Recovery Version because there was a period of time when the Bible was locked up, it was a dark book, people didn't understand it, and people didn't appreciate it. But as the Bible began to be opened up in the reformation and through the subsequent interpretations that were supplied by many enlightened men of God throughout the subsequent centuries. Many, many precious truths have been recovered. And so, the focus of the Recovery Version was not to give you facts, biblical archaeology, and those kinds of details. But the principal focus of the Recovery Version in its translation and in the numerous footnotes that it contains is to convey a sense of a spiritual light and truth that the Lord has given to His Body, and which will sustain His Body, and cause His Body to mature and grow and ultimately, bring the Lord Himself back.

[CW:] I think this verse or these verses as we'll see in this program today, really illustrate the benefit of a translation like the Recovery Version. Here are a couple of verses that when you really take these words literally according to the Greek text, they are difficult to understand on their own, and therefore, historically, translators recognizing this kind of difficulty, have frequently opted away from the literal word itself to try to come up with

something that lends the reader a bit more ease of understanding. So, we have... I'd look at the number of translations on these two verses I'd just read, 1 Peter 2:19 and 20. Most of them render this word, grace, as being acceptable or thankful, and it reads something like this, "For this is acceptable, if anyone because of a consciousness of God bears sorrow by suffering unjustly." And it's a little easier to understand, but it is not really according to the original language. The literal word there is grace. So, the Recovery Version has taken the literal Greek term and then relied on the footnote to help add understanding. And I think this is a real benefit of such a verse, isn't it?

[JP:] I think this is a great benefit. And I think this is a prime example and illustration of where a literal translation provides spiritual understanding, if there is a realization of a context, and if there is a proper understanding of the word itself. Most people, when they talk about grace, talk about grace as being unmerited favor in relationship to our salvation. We were sinful, and we were sinners, and we were without any recourse to save ourselves. And God in His.. without any merit of our own, came and gave us the favor of saving us and imparting salvation into us. That's the common understanding of grace, unmerited favor. But in Peter.... uses the very same word, grace. He uses it in a completely different context, which is formed to that understanding. Peter talks about grace in a situation where we are unjustly suffering, but this is grace. So, in order to understand what Peter means by grace, we have to dive in to the depths of the word. First of all, just accept the word, grace, as grace and not try to make it more palatable, and more understandable. But try to... instead of making the word understandable to our concepts, we should conform our concepts to the word. And I think Witness Lee does that very well in this particular Life-Study message. I'm so appreciative of the fact that we're already on the Life-Study message number 20. But we're only toward the end of chapter 2 of 1 Peter. It shows you the significance in the depth of what's there.

[CW:] Why don't we go ahead and join Witness Lee, get in to this message, and we come back, and maybe at the end of the program if we have time, talk about a little bit more about the Recovery Version and how our listeners might be able to get a copy.

Part 1

[CW:] John, I think you've made a very interesting observation here in our introduction, of that... in this sense, in which Peter's using grace, almost opposite of the common understanding about unmerited favor, and this is when we deserve to suffer but instead we get God's mercy and His salvation as a free gift. And certainly this is an aspect of grace, we're not denying that. But in this context, as you have pointed out, it's almost opposite of that. This is suffering, in a sense, we really don't deserve but there's an experience of Christ in the midst of this suffering that is the other sense of grace that we can't mix, or we shouldn't mix isn't it?

[JP:] I think that if we take the view that grace is just unmerited behavior, we miss the whole point of what Peter is talking about in verses 2:11 through 4:19, the subject of which is the Christian life and its sufferings. The Christian life has its sufferings. No one who is in the midst of suffering, whether it's deserved or not, would ask for that as a portion of grace, "Lord, give me more suffering." The Lord's prayer is, "Deliver us from temptation. Deliver us from evil." But very few Christians would say that the suffering that they are going through is a grace. But to Peter, it is. But it's not just the just sufferings or the deserved sufferings that are grace, Peter says that the unjust sufferings that we experienced. We have a consciousness of God, a person has a consciousness of God, there's an intimate, inward fellowship with God, and then as a result of that, there is some unjust suffering and some bearing of sorrows. How many Christians would say that an unjust suffering is grace? We have to realize that that in and of itself shows that there's a deeper understanding of what grace is. And I think we'll see in the next section as we talk about the model of Christ, we'll really come to understand that grace is intimately and directly linked to the

divine life of Christ which we have received. And that's why Witness Lee says that grace in this sense is kind of the inward motivation of the divine life. There is an inward motivation of the divine life in every Christian which allows that Christian to experience God in such extreme circumstances that even though the circumstances are unjust, God is there. God is present. God is enjoyable. God is experienceable, because the very grace that we experience is the very God Himself.

[CW:] You know, we're talking about Peter's use of the word here, but I recall this also was very thematic in Paul's writings, I mean there's place where Paul says, "It's not I Christ", in other words, it's not I but Christ in me." Then in another place, Paul says, "It's not I but the grace..." Which means that it is this grace, which is Christ Himself indwelling us that is enabling us to ride above, or transcend, these kinds of negative experiences.

[JP:] I think all of the apostles, when you get right down to their intrinsic understanding of the word, grace, it was always the inward motivation, the inward operation of the divine life, which is the inward operation of Christ Himself, working in our being, and working out an outward expression that when people see us in the midst of an unjust suffering, they're only response is, "this is grace."

[CW:] Paul also gives us this thought, assuming that Paul was the writer of Hebrews, which we somewhat accept here, we are recognizing that's not universally accepted. He writes in chapter 12 of Hebrews, "Therefore receiving an unshakable kingdom, let us have grace", or let us take grace, "through which we may serve God, well-pleasingly with piety and fear." And we will hear Witness Lee in this coming section bring us back a verse now from 19 back to 18. It sets up the context. "Household servants, be subject in all fear to your masters, not only to the good and forbearing, but also to the crooked, for this is grace." Here's Witness Lee again.

Part 2

[CW:] Well, he emphasizes again here, John, we have both the inward motivation, we have the outward expression. I'd like to go back to this example he used in the first section. We have an elderly sister in the hospital, suffering an illness, it's going to lead to death. And the suffering is intense, but what is manifested, what's expressed, and all around can see, is really something that can only be described as beautiful and sweet. Of course, we know now, this is grace, isn't it?

[JP:] This is grace, and this is grace is really the outward manifestation of the inward reality of a person living in a consciousness with God and having a consciousness of God. Inwardly, deeply, a person contacts the Lord, experiences the Lord as grace, and there is a spontaneous outflow of that life in the expressions and in the actions of that person. I think it's very critical to realize that when in John chapter 1, it says grace in reality came with Jesus Christ. Grace is always intimately associated not just with the work of Christ, the work of forgiveness, but the very Person of Christ Himself, as He's lived out and worked out in our experience. And it's so impressive to me to realize that this grace is really just Christ Himself. If we're suffering because of something that we have done and deserve, we don't have much complaint, because we reap what we sow. But if we're in a situation of unjust suffering, without the Person and the reality of Christ coming out from within our regenerated spirit, we have no capacity to endure that situation, rather as we'll see in the next verses, when the Lord was in the midst of those kinds of unjust sufferings, He said He was reviled but He did not revile in return. But in our experience, if we don't have the experience of grace and we get put in the midst of an unjust situation, what immediately comes out of our mouth is reviling, because we just do not have the capacity, the supply, to endure unjust suffering. It's difficult enough for us to endure just suffering. But to endure unjust suffering, we need the living Person of Christ, as a real model and pattern, lived and worked out in our being. When we have that, that is grace. And when people see that expression, within people, their response is, "this is grace." There's an appreciation for it. There's

thankfulness for it. But the Person that is imparting that expression, there's not a real realization within them, there's just in the enjoyment and the enjoyment manifests itself as grace.

[CW:] Wow, this is wonderful. You just mentioned a model, a pattern. This comes up in the next verse here in our sequence here. Verse 21, "For to this you were called, because Christ also suffered on your behalf, leaving you a model, so that you may follow in His steps." We want to get into the intrinsic and real, deeper meaning of this portion as well. Here's Witness Lee for our final segment.

Part 3

[CW:] But John, I have to confess that somewhat, purposely, I wanted to cut him off there with this somewhat provocative thought. I ask you to pick this up. What we're talking about, this reproduction of Christ, as contrasted with a more common or typical thought of imitating Christ.

[JP:] I think it's important to realize that most people when they see this verse in 1 Peter, they think of, that Christ has left us a model, a pattern, and we need to imitate Him. I would just ask them to look at the verses immediately follow that exhortation of about Christ being our model, and ask any Christian whether or not they could imitate Christ in those matters: a-He committed no sin, b-there was no guile found in His mouth, c-when He was reviled, He did not revile in return, and d-He kept committing all to Him who judges righteously. That is not a pattern that I can imitate in my natural life. The only Person that has ever done that is Christ Himself. And we have received that Person, and only, when we find ourselves in the midst of those kinds of circumstances, the only way we can extricate ourselves from Him is to take Christ as grace to experience the One who accomplished these things, and have that model worked down in our being in an organic way. This is Peter's realization, that the model that was left was Christ Himself who is now indwelling us, who is now enlivening us, who has regenerated our human spirit. We have been left with the model and the Person who can carry out the model.

[CW:] I want to close with maybe how we opened, and that's by presenting to our listeners the benefit and the value of the recovery version. I've picked up this verse John, and the footnote is on this very word that you are speaking about. It says, this does not refer to a mere imitation of Him and His life, but to a reproduction of Him that comes from enjoying Him as grace in our sufferings, so that He Himself as the indwelling Spirit, with all the riches of His life, reproduces Himself in us, we become the reproduction of the original writing copy, not a mere imitation of Him produced by taking Him as our outward model.

[JP:] Praise the Lord for this. This is grace.

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