**The Grace of God, “In Vain”?**

If it is possible to receive the grace of God in vain, then this should be avoided at all costs. If it is not possible, then why is Paul urging people not to do so? “we beg you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God. He made Him who knew no sin to be sin on our behalf, so that we might become the righteousness of God in Him. And working together with Him, we also urge you not to receive the grace of God in vain” (2Cor. 5:20-6:1). In context, Paul is writing to believers, to Christians!

Jesus, in this passage died, “so that we might become the righteousness of God” (v.21). If his grace does not cause me to “become” righteous, then it failed in it’s purpose, “in vain”. So Paul avoids this in his own life at all cost. He personally lived his life, “giving no cause for offense in anything” (6:3). Yet there were many believers, Christians, in Corinth who received this grace of God, seemingly in vain. Specifically, “many of the Corinthians when they heard were believing and being baptized.” (Acts 18:8), but in a few short years they failed in “becoming the righteousness of God” (5:21). After giving them about a year (2Cor. 8:10, 9:2), to repent, Paul was ready to punish them. “I am afraid that when I come again my God may humiliate me before you, and I may mourn over many of those who have sinned in the past and not repented of the impurity, immorality and sensuality which they have practiced… I say in advance to those who have sinned in the past and to all the rest as well, that if I come again I will not spare anyone…” (2Cor. 12:21-13:2). Paul at the end of this letter urges, begs, “Test yourselves to see if you are in the faith; examine yourselves! ” (2Cor. 13:5). Have I believed in Jesus, been baptized into Jesus, but failed in becoming like him? Self-examination is difficult, how do I really know? God designed the church to help us not be self-deceived (Mat. 18:12-18, 1 Cor. 5).

Secondly, has the “grace of God” motivated me in sharing that grace with others? “But by the grace of God I am what I am, and His grace toward me did not prove vain; but I labored even more than all of them, yet not I, but the grace of God with me. Whether then it was I or they, so we preach and so you believed.” (1Cor. 15:10-11). Paul associates the grace of God given to him, with what it caused him to do in sharing that same gospel of grace with others. As Jesse recently said in one of his messages, “It is a humbling thing to look back on the week and see how many times I have shared the gospel” (to that effect). It is humbling indeed. May we be motivated by love to share the gospel to all who are in need. Dan Peters