

The Meaning of Grace for the Christian (John G. Panagiotou)

[Ξένες γλώσσες / In English](#)



Do Something With Your Life

As Christians, we are called to go into the world a little more sensitive, a little more different than when we arrive on this planet at conception. We are called to eternal life in the Kingdom of God with Jesus Christ and to lead others to that same destination. If that hasn't been accomplished then the main objective of our lives has not been realized and is for not.

In the Christian believer's life there are no coincidences. Each of us is here not by chance, but by God's Providence. We have been called to be blessed and to be a blessing to others. Yet, the flip side of this coin is that each of us is created in the image and likeness of God and is endowed with the gift of free will. What we do with what we have been given is entirely up to us. We can proclaim the Gospel or we can squander the Gift. The choice is ours to make.

Yes, with God there are no accidents and every moment is the right one for everything including one's death. God's will always works with our human freedom which we can use for good and for ill. When and how we as Christians die is in God's hands, to be accomplished according to His will.



ST. PAUL'S CATHEDRAL, LONDON
DESIGNED BY W. H. WOOD

Salvation is an Ongoing Process

Having said this, it is important to remember, the words of the Apostle Paul in Ephesians 2:8-9 when he writes, “For by grace are you saved through faith and this is not of your own, but it is a gift of God, not by works lest any man boast.” In the original Greek, it is important to note here that the meaning is that it is not our faith that saves us, but rather Christ’s faith in us and through us that saves us.

The connotation is of a continual ongoing process. We are so flawed that we can’t even believe correctly or sufficiently for our own salvation. It is all contingent upon the Person of Christ the Word of God. For Christ did not come to make bad people into good people, but rather dead people into alive people.

It is all rooted in Love. It is the love of the father who waits expectantly day after day for the prodigal son. It is the love of the Savior who outstretched His arms on the wood of the Cross and in doing so embraced the whole world with His love. Love surpasses all understanding and “perfect love drives out fear” as the Apostle John reminds us in his First Epistle 4:18.

The Cross Shows Us the Way Home

A common story relates that Charles Dickens when growing up a poor youth in 19th century drab London, his mother would tell him that he would not ever get lost and not find his way home if he would only look for the St. Paul’s Cathedral which was near his neighborhood. “Look to the cross which sits atop the massive dome. Then

you will not be far from home. Look to the cross.”

The Apostle Paul goes on to write in Romans 12:2, “Do not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind.” It is this life in Christ that is typified by the life of grace within the believer. Christian theology can be summed up in total with the phrase “in Christ”. For without Him, we can do absolutely nothing.

We do not worship a church denomination, a book, a creed, a philosophy, or a liturgy, but instead we worship a Person — Jesus Christ. In Him, we find the ultimate truth of lives, for He is Truth Incarnate.

God Calls and Equips

The Apostles with the exception of Paul, were all uneducated men of lower socio-economic status: fishermen and tax collectors. They were not the professional clergy or scholars of the day. They were not men of high political status. They were commoners with no “connections” as it were. Yet, God called them. Just as He calls each of us. For we sing the beautiful hymn, “Here I Am Lord” and we are reminded that whomever God calls He equips. Fear not, brothers for Jesus has risen on the third day as He foretold. As the fourth century Church Father St. John Chrysostom wrote in his Paschal homily about the Resurrection, “[Hades] took a Body, and lo, it discovered God.”

This is the great message of the “Good News” — the evangelion (gospel) that we are called to proclaim just as the myrrh-bearing women on that first Easter Sunday morning at the empty tomb. And with them, we can boldly proclaim: Christ is Risen!

In the second century, St. Ignatius of Antioch was on his way from Antioch to Rome to face execution for being a Christian. As he made his way to Rome he wrote to the fellow Christians asking them not to do anything to impede his imminent death by being thrown into an arena with lions. He wanted to witness for the Lord Jesus through his martyrdom. He wrote the following: “For if you hear my voice no more, I shall become a Word of God; but if you are in love with my bodily existence, I shall merely be an echo.” [St. Ignatius of Antioch’s Letter to the Romans 2:1]

We all may not be called to render our lives literally in the arena to the point of death as did the martyr Ignatius, but we are all called to bear “witness” to Christ in our daily lives in the original sense of the Greek word “martyria”. In either case, like every Christian witness, the Christian’s testimony is finalized in death. Archimandrite Vasileios, the abbot of Stavronikita monastery on Mt. Athos reminds us that they can take everything from us: reputation, position, family, career,

money, social status, etc., but they can never take away our ability to witness to the reality of the Risen Christ in our lives through our own suffering and death.

Six Practical Suggestions

So, what do we do tonight, tomorrow and the days that follow? I offer you the following six practical suggestions.

First, pray, pray, and pray. You need to talk to Jesus regularly. You need to have your established rule of prayer in the morning, noon (if possible) and night. Oh, and keep praying throughout the day and night for the Apostle Paul exhorts us in 1st Thessalonians 5:17 to “pray without ceasing”. Even if you don’t know how or what to say, just say again and again the Name of Jesus for there is power in His Name. If you wish, pray the ancient Jesus Prayer which is “O Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God have mercy on me a sinner and save me.” Let the Holy Spirit in and He will do the rest. In Romans 8:26 we read, “Likewise the Spirit also helps our infirmities; for we know not what we should pray for as we ought, but the Spirit itself makes intercession for us with groanings which cannot be uttered.” There must be time for individual, family and small group prayer.

Secondly, read the Scriptures. Try to read a chapter of the New Testament everyday. It was with Scripture that Jesus rebuked Satan with his temptations during the forty days in the desert. We need to get fed on the Word of God. Jesus says in Matthew 4:4, “It is written: Man shall not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God.” Study the Scriptures on your own and/or in a Bible study group. Just get in the Word.

Thirdly, get engaged with and actively participate in the worship life of a Christ-centered church. Notice I said, first and foremost, the worship life — the liturgical life, for those that attend liturgical churches — of the local congregation. I did not say get first involved with committees, social groups, etc. of the church. I said get involved first and foremost with the people of God at and in worship of Our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. All too often, many well-intentioned people get distracted with “church business” instead of being about the “business of the Church” which at its core is worshipping Jesus. The Body of Christ (the Ekklesia — those who have been called out of the world) is what the Christian life in a communal setting is all about.

Fourthly, find a spiritual director whom you can be totally honest with about the most secret and hidden aspects of your life. Seek out a person whom you trust to confide in, confess to, seek counsel from. The Apostle Paul instructs his protege Timothy in the following way about this matter of spiritual fatherhood when he

writes in First Epistle to the Corinthians 4:15, “For though you have ten thousand instructors in Christ, yet you have not many fathers; for in Christ Jesus I have begotten you through the Gospel.”

Fifthly, don’t take a vacation from your vocation. God places us in situations and circumstances for us to do ministry unto His people whomever they may be. It is up to us to be open to His leading and be obedient to where He wants us to serve. It can be the most mundane of circumstances or on the world stage as the “Action Rollo” taught us. The important thing to remember is that it is not about you. It is all about Him. Step aside from the spotlight as it were, and let Him steal your show for His greater glory. In Romans 10:12 we read, “There is no difference between the Jew and the Greek, for the same Lord is Lord of all, and is rich unto all that call upon him.”

A Righteous Man Falls Seven Times Yet Rises Up Again

The road that the Christian walks is not an easy one. You will fall and fail again and again until you take your last breath in this life. The key is that you let Jesus lift you up again and again and again. With that in mind, I leave you with the following story from the life of the saintly monk Elder Paisios.

“Once on Mount Athos in Greece there was a monk who drank and got drunk every day and was the cause of scandal to the pilgrims. Eventually, he died and this relieved some of the faithful who went on to tell Father Paisios that they were delighted that this huge problem was finally solved. Father Paisios answered them that he knew about the death of the monk after seeing the entire battalion of angels who came to collect his soul. The pilgrims were amazed and some protested and tried to explain to the Elder of whom they were talking about, thinking that the Elder did not understand.

Elder Paisios explained to them that this particular monk was born in Asia Minor (modern day Turkey) shortly before the expulsion of the majority of Christians there by the Muslim Turks when they were taking Christian boys and forcing their conversion to Islam. So as not to take him from his parents, they would take him with them to reaping in the fields and so he wouldn’t cry and alert the Turks to his presence, they put raki (an unsweetened anise-flavored Turkish alcoholic beverage popular in the Near East) into his milk in order for him to sleep. Therefore he grew up as an alcoholic.

Having grown up in such a way, the elder told him to pray that God would help him reduce by one glass the glasses he drank a day. After a year, he managed with struggle and repentance to make the twenty glasses he drank into nineteen

glasses. The struggle continued over the years and he reached two to three glasses a day with which he would still get drunk.

The world for years saw an alcoholic monk who scandalized the pilgrims, but God saw a fighter who fought a long struggle to reduce his passion. The moral of the story is this: without knowing what each one is trying to do what he wants to do, what right do we have to judge his efforts?

Remember, that each of us is called to be fighter against the passions whatever they may be in our lives. We are assured of victory because Jesus is the One Who has already won the battle and the war for us by what He has done for us on the Cross and in the empty tomb having risen from the dead on the third day. Amen!

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