

<p>The Apostle Paul: <u>Grace Offered & Accepted</u></p>	<p><u>A Damascus Road experience to a Life Well-Lived</u></p>
<p>“And Saul (Paul) approved of Stephen’s execution. [Saul was a witness, watching over the cloaks of the men who stoned Stephen for blasphemy.]</p> <p>And there arose on that day a great persecution against the church in Jerusalem, and they were all scattered throughout the regions of Judea and Samaria, except the Apostles. ... ³Saul was ravaging the church, and entering house after house, dragging off men and women, committing them to prison.” Acts 8: 1 - 3</p> <p><i>[Am I so convinced of my religious ‘correctness’ that I judge “others”, excluding them from kindness, care and consideration?]</i></p>	
<p>Paul wrote, “⁹So, are we to conclude then that we Jews are superior to all others? Certainly not! For we have already stated that both Jews and non-Jews are all under the bondage of sin. ¹⁰And the Scriptures agree, for it is written:</p> <p><i>There is no one who always does what is right, no, not even one! [Isa. 59: 4; Ps. 14: 3 – 4]</i></p> <p>¹¹<i>There is no one with true spiritual insight, and there is no one who seeks after God alone.</i></p> <p>¹²<i>All have deliberately wandered from God’s ways.</i></p> <p><i>All have become depraved and unfit. Kindness has disappeared from them all, not even one is good. [Ps. 14: 1 – 3; 53: 3]</i></p> <p>¹³<i>Their words release a stench, like the smell of death from an open tomb —foul and filthy! [Ps. 5: 9]</i></p> <p><i>Deceitful lies roll off their tongues. The venom of a viper drips from their lips. [Ps.140: 3]</i></p> <p>¹⁴<i>Bitter profanity flows from their mouths, only meant to cut and to harm. [Ps. 10: 7]</i></p> <p>¹⁵<i>They are infatuated with violence and murder. [Isa. 59: 6]</i></p> <p>¹⁶<i>They release ruin and misery wherever they go.</i></p> <p>¹⁷<i>They never experience the path of peace. [Isa. 59: 7 - 8]</i></p> <p>¹⁸<i>They shut their eyes to the awe-inspiring God! [Ps. 36: 1]</i></p>	<p>And now <i>all who believe in Him receive that gift. For there is really no difference between us, ²³for we all have sinned and are in need of the glory of God.</i></p> <p>²⁴Yet through His powerful declaration of acquittal, God freely gives away His righteousness. His gift of love and favor now cascades over us, all because Jesus, the Anointed One, has liberated us from <i>the guilt, punishment, and power of sin!</i></p> <p>²⁵Jesus’ God-given destiny was to be the sacrifice to take away sins, and now He is our mercy seat because of His death on the cross. We come to Him for mercy, for God has made a provision for us <i>to be forgiven by faith in the sacred blood of Jesus.</i> This is the perfect demonstration of God’s justice, because until now, He had been so patient—holding back His justice out of His tolerance for us. So He covered over the sins of those who lived prior to Jesus’ sacrifice.</p> <p>²⁶And when the season of tolerance came to an end, there was only one possible way for God to give away His righteousness and still be true to both His justice and His mercy—to offer up His own Son. So now, because we stand on the faithfulness of Jesus, God declares us righteous in His eyes!</p>

<p>¹⁹ Now, we realize that everything the law says is addressed to those who are under its authority.</p> <p>This is for two reasons: Firstly, so that every excuse will be silenced; no single person can boast of his or her innocence before God.</p> <p>Secondly, so that <i>the entire world will be held accountable to God’s standards, to His judgment.</i></p> <p>²⁰ For by the merit of observing the law, no one earns the status of being declared righteous before God, for it is the law that fully exposes and unmask the reality of sin.</p> <p>²¹ But now, <i>independently of the law</i>, the righteousness of God is tangible and brought to light through Jesus, the Anointed One.</p> <p>²² This is the righteousness that the Scriptures prophesied would come. It is God’s righteousness made visible through the faith in Jesus Christ.” Rom. 3: 9 - 22</p>	<p>²⁷ Where, then, is there room for boasting? Do our works bring God’s acceptance? Not at all!</p> <p>It was <i>not our works of keeping the law</i> but <i>our faith in His finished work that makes us right with God.</i></p> <p>²⁸ So our conclusion is this: God’s wonderful declaration that ‘we are righteous in His eyes’ can only come when we put our faith in Christ, and not in keeping the law.</p> <p>²⁹ After all, is God the God of the Jews only, or is He equally the God for all of humanity? Of course, He is the God of all people!</p> <p>³⁰ Since there is only one God, He will treat us all the same—He eliminates our guilt and He makes us right with Him by <i>faith</i> no matter who we are.</p> <p>³¹ Does emphasizing our faith invalidate the law? Absolutely not. Instead, our faith establishes the role the law should rightfully have. <u>Rom. 3: 23 - 31</u></p>
<p>“Although it may not accomplish a thing, I need to move on and boast about supernatural visions and revelations of the Lord.</p> <p>² Someone I’m acquainted with, who is in union with Christ, was swept away fourteen years ago in an ecstatic experience. He was taken into the third heaven, but I’m not sure if he was in his body or out of his body—only God knows.</p> <p>³ And I know that this man (again, I’m not sure if he was still in his body or taken out of his body—only God knows) ⁴ was caught up in an ecstatic experience and brought into paradise, where he overheard many wondrous and inexpressible secrets <i>that were so sacred</i> that no mortal is permitted to repeat them.</p> <p>⁵ I’m ready to boast of such an experience, but for my own good I refuse to boast unless it concerns my weaknesses. ⁶ However, if I were to boast, it wouldn’t be ridiculous at all, for I would be speaking the truth. Yet I will refrain, lest others think higher of me than what I demonstrate with my life and teaching.</p> <p>⁷ The extraordinary level of the revelations I’ve received is no reason for anyone to exalt me.</p>	<p>⁶ And now the time is quickly approaching for my release from this life and I am ready to be offered as a sacrifice.</p> <p><i>⁷ I have fought the good fight, I have finished my race and I have kept the faith.</i></p> <p>⁸ There’s a crown of righteousness waiting in heaven for me, and I know that my Lord will reward me on His day of righteous judgment. And this crown is not only waiting for me, but for all who love and long for His sudden appearance.</p> <p>⁹ Please come as soon as you can;</p> <p>¹⁰ Demas deserted me and has left to go to Thessalonica, for he loves his own life. [betrayal] Crescens has gone to Galatia, and Titus has gone to Dalmatia. [missing friends]</p> <p>¹¹ That leaves only Luke with me, so find Mark and bring him with you, Timothy, when you come, for Mark is a tremendous help for me in my ministry.</p> <p>¹² I have also dispatched Tychicus to Ephesus to minister there. [sending help to the hurting!]</p>

<p>For this is why a thorn in my flesh was given to me, the Adversary’s messenger sent to harass me, keeping me from becoming arrogant. ⁸ Three times I pleaded with the Lord to relieve me of this.</p> <p>⁹ But He answered me, <i>“My grace is always more than enough for you, and My power finds its full expression through your weakness.”</i></p> <p>So I will celebrate my weaknesses, for when I’m weak I sense more deeply the mighty power of Christ living in me. ¹⁰ So I’m <i>not defeated</i> by my weakness, but delighted! For when I feel my weakness and endure mistreatment—when I’m surrounded with troubles on every side and face persecution because of my love for Christ—I am made yet stronger. For my weakness becomes a portal to God’s power.” <u>2 Cor. 12: 1 - 10</u></p>	<p>¹³ When you come, please bring the leather book bag along with the books I left in Troas with <i>Carpus</i>—especially the parchment scrolls. ¹⁴ You need to know that <i>Alexander</i>, the jeweler, has done me great harm. May our Lord give him what he deserves for all he has done. ¹⁵ Be careful of him, for he arrogantly opposes our ministry. [betrayal; not judgment]</p> <p>¹⁶ At first there was no one I could count on to faithfully stand with me—they all ran off and abandoned me—but don’t hold this against them. ¹⁷ For in spite of this, my Lord Himself stood with me, empowering me to complete my ministry of preaching to all the non-Jewish nations so they all could hear the message and be delivered from the mouth of the lion! ¹⁸ And my Lord will continue to deliver me from every form of evil and my Lord will give me life in His heavenly kingdom.</p> <p>May all the glory go to Him alone for all the ages of eternity!” <u>2 Tim. 4: 6 - 18</u></p>
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Paul accepts the Grace given by God alone and runs his race, focusing on the prize.
¹² I, Paul, admit that I haven’t yet acquired the absolute fullness that I’m pursuing, but **I run with passion into His abundance** so that I may reach the purpose that **Jesus Christ has called me** to fulfill and **He wants me to discover.** ¹³ I don’t depend on my own strength to accomplish this; but *one thing I do, I forget all of the past as I fasten my heart to the future instead.* ¹⁴ I press toward the goal, for the prize of the upward call of **God in Christ Jesus.**” Phil 3: 12 – 14

Paul runs the race in God’s strength, acknowledging that **ALL is God**, none of it is ‘Paul’.
*“**My grace** is always more than enough for you, and **My power** finds its full expression through your weakness.”* So I will celebrate my weaknesses, for **when I’m weak I sense more deeply the mighty power of Christ living in me.** ¹⁰ So I’m *not defeated* by my weakness, but delighted!” 2 Cor. 12

Paul comes to the end of his race ‘still running’, praising God and trusting God in all things. Paul is building and encouraging, warning and preparing his generation & those to follow. Paul **‘finishes well’.**



*“I have fought the good fight,
 I have finished my race and
 I have kept the faith.”*
2 Tim. 4: 7