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Sufficient Grace

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Text.--2 Cor. 12:9: "And He said unto me, 'My grace is sufficient for thee; for My strength is made perfect in weakness.' Most gladly therefore will I rather glory in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me."

These are the words of Jesus Christ to Paul. Paul had been favored with many wonderful revelations of heavenly things, and tells us that, lest he should be thereby exalted above measure, there was given him a thorn in the flesh, the messenger of Satan, to buffet him. It is useless for us to speculate beyond what is written in respect to this thorn. Suffice it that we know God's design in sending it -- namely, to keep his servant from being exalted unduly, to guard him against self-reliance, and to keep alive in his heart his sense of dependence on God. The thorn being uncomfortable, Paul prays that it may depart from him. Christ had a different plan in mind. He lets it remain, but promises abundant grace to meet the exigency. When Paul comes to understand the plan, he accepts it with joy.

The principle of the divine plan is this: Christ would destroy the spirit of self-dependence -- the great and most besetting temptation of His children. They are continually prone to trust in themselves rather than in Christ. This must be counteracted and cured.

I. The case of Paul illustrates Christ's manner of dealing with His saints.

II. The manner in which we may avail ourselves of this grace of Christ. What are its conditions?

I. The case of Paul illustrates Christ's manner of dealing with His saints.

He must first give them thorns, and make them feel their weakness and wants; then He shuts them up to rely on Himself alone, leading them to die to all dependence on themselves, and to enter with the fullest committal upon dependence on Christ alone. This is needful to the end that they may avail themselves of His strength and may discard their own.

- 1. "My grace is sufficient for thee," said Christ to Paul; and if we may believe what Paul says of his sinful ways, this must be a very strong case. Paul said he was the chief of sinners. He had been a Pharisee of the strictest sect; in his mad zeal against the friends of Christ, he had persecuted them even unto strange cities; and manifestly, taking into view all the circumstances of the case, he had some reasons for magnifying the grace that could reach such an one as Saul of Tarsus. If Christ could pardon him, it was safe to conclude He could pardon anybody. If grace could humble a soul of self-righteous as his had been, what could it not do? If a man so tempted on every side, once standing high in public favor, but now accounted as "the filth and off-scouring of all things," could yet find grace sufficient to bear all for Christ's sake joyfully, then nobody need doubt the all-sufficiency of this grace.
- 2. Grace, as here used, implies favor in place of frowns; forgiveness where punishment is richly deserved. So much for the past. For the present and the future, it implied the bestowal of all that direction, support, and consolation which is needed. Christ means to assure Paul that His grace was ample to pardon all the past, and to give strength for every trial and exigency in the present and in the future. This grace is given, not to hamper but to help; adequate to all emergencies; adapted to meet all present circumstance; evermore sufficient for all his need. Jesus would stand by him as One worthy to save. He would provide for all his wants, and in every strait, open a way of escape. Inasmuch as Paul felt painfully his great responsibility in going forth to the battles of the Lord in his ministerial work, Jesus sought to meet precisely this want in the promise -- "My grace is sufficient for thee." "Let the thorn remain," He would say, "let the burden rest on your shoulders, but be assured My grace shall suffice for thee, for My strength is made perfect in weakness. I have laid on you these burdens on purpose that in you I might illustrate the riches of My grace."
- 3. Hence each Christian may apply to himself these precious words -- "My grace is sufficient for thee." Even to Paul, Jesus said -- "My grace is sufficient for thee" to meet all thy responsibilities and discharge all thy duties.
- 4. This is true of all relations of life. Are you parents? Under all your trials and amid all your wants, the grace of Jesus is sufficient for you. Are you magistrates? You may expect the same. In no extremes of trial, need you suppose your case to be so peculiar as to lie outside of the pale of this exceedingly great promise. For Christ's strength, nothing is too hard. In all states of health, the promise holds good. Are you extremely nervous? And while weakened by this infirmity, does there come on you great and apparently crushing responsibilities? You need not pray Christ to deliver you from these circumstances, but only to give you sufficient grace. This is all you need. You may be brought into peculiar relations to the bad temper of others, and these may be really thorns in your flesh; but even so, Christ's grace is sufficient for you, and you have but to ask and receive. These things are to you the thorn in the flesh. If Christ has manifestly brought you into these circumstances and created these conditions of your state, then these are thorns of His sending.

Are you in feeble health? This is your thorn. Are your neighbors, or your wife, or your children, a trial to you? You may go to Jesus for grace. You need not try to tear yourself away from the thorn, or to tear it out of your flesh; the Lord wishes you to come to Him for patience and wisdom to bear and to act the Christian part. You may be sure that if

Christ has put you there, He has counted well the cost and knows how much grace you need and whether He shall be able to supply you. He has not placed you there to make these things a snare and a curse to you, but to empty you of self and really to save you with great salvation.

- 5. His grace is sufficient to enable you to maintain the Christian life with honor to the gospel and with peace to yourself. You may rely on this under all circumstances. When you who are students go from this place to your homes, and under all circumstances so peculiar, you fear you shall fall; know ye that this promise is good for all circumstances in which you have a right to be. If you are in yourself unable to stand there, all the better is your case, for then so much the more, will Christ's strength be made perfect in your weakness. You have a right to believe that you shall be all you ought to be in all the circumstances in which Christ may place you. You may expect of Him all He has promised. You may remind Him of this -- that He has called you to trust His grace; that you have no other ground on which to stand; He has shut you up to the necessity of launching forth upon His faithful word. You may say -- Lord, have I not broken away from all other help and cast my self absolutely upon Thee? Say -- "O Jesus, I expect Thy grace will be sufficient for me; and may I not confide in Thee? I have now before me this present temptation and trial; but, Lord, I expect to live a Christian life, and be a faithful man to Thee -- may I not?" Yes, remember, His grace is all-sufficient, and He cannot withhold it from those who trust Him for it. In all the appropriate circumstances of your life, in all lawful business, you may have grace to help. But if you engage in anything unlawful, you shut yourself off from this promise. In the very act of going into unlawful business or circumstances, you virtually say to your divine Master -- "Of course I must expect to go here alone, for it were simple madness to expect Thy presence with me here." Turning thus from Christ is more than mere unbelief; it is self-sufficiency, and rebellion towards God.
- 6. Most branches of worldly business are essential to our earthly life, and therefore you need not give them up merely because they involve labor and care, for you can perform them in the strength of your Lord. You must not say -- I can not do any worldly business and be a Christian; nor on the other hand should you assume that you can do all sorts of business well by mere grace. You should first enquire if the Lord calls you to that business, for He calls each to the kind to which he is fitted. But mark, let every man have a single eye, and truly aim in all things, to please the Lord. Suppose it to be your duty to preach the gospel, and the Lord lays the conviction of it upon your conscience; yet you say -- "O Lord, let me do something else, anything else, rather than this." Not so, my brother -- you must follow the leading of the Lord and be found in the path of your duty -- else no grace in the universe can be sufficient for you!

II. Let us next inquire into the manner in which we may avail ourselves of this grace of Christ. What are its conditions?

- 1. Paul had the utmost confidence in what Christ said. He constantly expected this promised grace to be at hand and ample. He knew and felt his own entire weakness, but rejoiced rather than mourned, for this. "Most gladly, therefore, will I rather glory in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me." "I take pleasure in reproaches, in necessities, in persecutions, in reproaches, in distresses, for Christ's sake; for when I am weak, then am I strong." The promise of Christ entirely relieved all his anxieties.

We are glad that Christ's grace could sustain such a man. He went everywhere declaring the grace of Christ. His own case was a living illustration of this precious truth. I am telling you, he would say, of Jesus Christ. You all see what a temptation I have in my flesh. All this, Jesus helps me to bear by His grace. All the churches knew of his thorn, and saw how he endured and joyfully overcame through all-sufficient grace. They knew how vile a persecutor he had been and how much had been forgiven him. They say also now that his bodily presence was weak and his speech contemptible (in the eyes of the world) and they were glad of this, for now they saw what Christ could do for His children. They saw he did not come with excellency of speech or of wisdom, as some of the Grecian philosophers claimed to do, but came simply as a saved sinner, full of grace. I remember the case of a poor man who could not pay his rent. While he was sitting in my study, he learned that his landlord threatened to turn him into the street. Now, said he, I shall see the glory of God, for it was always so -- in my emergencies, God comes near. When I am shut up to God, then He always appears. This simple faith was really edifying to me.

Paul is no longer bowed down in sadness. He knows his responsibilities are great and his burdens heavy; but he also knows who has said -- "My grace is sufficient for thee." Oh indeed, he knows Jesus Christ! He has seen Him and heard His voice. Now you may see Paul go on calmly and joyfully, taking pleasure in infirmities, and full of triumphant faith. "Ah," he says, "the power of Christ will rest on me, and I may therefore glory in all these things before all the churches and all the world." Now therefore, wherever he goes, Christ shows in him the fulness of the gospel he preaches. Christ in him preached it; Christ in him lived it; and thus, in the mouth of these two witness, every word is established.

- 2. Again: we must be satisfied with grace for the day. We must have faith to live by the day and by the hour. Suppose these young men, fitting for the ministry, should insist that before they go out to their work, they must have an ocean of grace, so as to need no more little daily rills -- just as if they could not trust Jesus beyond this day, or were going where there is no Jesus. This is wrong.

This grace is like the ancient manna, falling and to be gathered each day for each day's wants. If you gather more, because you are afraid God will not send tomorrow, it rots in your vessel. So of this grace, you need it fresh each day -- grace to preach at the hour; grace to rest and sleep in its time. Sometimes God calls for no labor -- for nothing but peaceful rest. As the mother said to her sick child -- you are too weak to pray loud; but not too weak to trust. So of the wearied body; it is fit only to hang on the Lord and trust. This does not require much strength.

- 3. Another condition is to commit yourself fully to His faithfulness. Without this, all else avails nothing. As singers who strike their notes timidly, hanging back and letting down, murder all harmony in music; or as those who lead in public prayer can do nothing unless they commit themselves to prayer and lead off trusting in God; or as in preaching, men can do nothing save as they commit themselves to God and to their work, and lead off in humble faith; so must every Christian in all his Christian life. Paul said in his heart -- I know that this promised grace is sufficient for me; then, so trusting, he led off and labored with unfaltering step. Only so,

could that grace have availed for all his wants.

When you have committed yourself thus to Christ, this fact becomes a valid argument under all circumstances for you to plead before the Lord.

"Lord, Thou hast given me Thy faithful word and I have believed it. Thou hast led me to believe; Thou hast called me where I am; now, Lord, I have no recourse left but to trust in Thee. I have committed myself to a Christian profession before the world; now, Lord, I must insist on the grace Thou hast promised, so that I may not dishonor Thee. I have left all to follow Thee -- have turned away from my home, from lucrative business, from prospects of fame -- every thing for Thy sake, and now I have no dependence save in Thee; let me now be made strong in Thee."

- 4. Never shrink from responsibility through unbelief. Never say -- I can't. God's children should at least learn what we try to teach our children. When they say -- I cannot ; we answer -- Don't say that, but say, I'll try. Parents may be unreasonable and ask too much of their children; but God never asks too much. The very requisition is evidence that all is right.

REMARKS.

1. In the connection of our text, we have a case in which prayer is answered to the spirit and not to the letter. Paul prayed God to take away the thorn. This was the letter. The ultimate thing he sought as a Christian was, that it might not impair his usefulness, but might glorify God. This he cared for most of all; and to this, Christ answered -- I will take care of that; it shall greatly glorify God and promote your usefulness.

2. When God answers our prayers in this way, we are in danger of overlooking the fact of an answer. We pray for the ultimate end of the glory of God. This God sees, and to this He answers. In Paul's case, if God had removed the thorn, his evidence that God heard his prayer could not have been so vivid as it was without the removal and with the sufficient grace. But sometimes men are too blind to see such answers. This is often a stumbling-block. You wonder why God does not answer your prayer. He does answer it, better than you had thought.. You may not see it as Paul saw, that God has high and useful ends to answer in giving you the thorn in your flesh. He means to illustrate the power of His grace. Often have I seen persons in sore trials. God had led them into wonderfully trying circumstances; and after they have wondered and questioned long, and have finally turned their hearts to prayer, then they see, and they cry out -- There, there, now all is plain to me. I said with Jacob -- "All these things are against me. Joseph is not, Simeon is not; and ye will take Benjamin too;" and what shall I do for my children! Ah, good Jacob, you are for once mistaken! All these things are for you, not against you; your eyes shall yet behold your Joseph, and your Simeon and your Benjamin also; and through all coming ages, men shall study these things and glorify God for them.

So some of you may be saying -- All these things are against me; all this bad health -- this great trial -- all is against me. No, no; not one of them! You say -- When shall these things end? God will take care of that. Ah, but say you, I am going down among the breakers. I have lost my faith! Indeed; but you must not lose your faith!

3. When we have thoroughly renounced our self-dependence and are emptied of pride, it is impossible that we should not accept Christ and sympathize with His promise of help, saying -- "Most gladly will I rather glory in my weakness that the power of Christ may rest on me." When one is really crucified to self, it is easy to commit all to Christ and become lost in Him. Then you will rejoice in His promise and rest in His strength. No longer chafed with restless fears, you sit calmly trustful in His power to save. If the winds blow, let out more cable. So the mariners do. They know when the wind is high, it raises the vessel, and she lifts her anchor and loosens its hold. Then they let on more cable and let the anchor sink down deeper among the rocks, and give the ship no chance to lift it from its hold. So let your faith go down deeper and grasp the rock of the promises more firmly. But do you cry out -- The shore is near! -- I am afraid! No, no; never fear. Let out your cable! Give Providence a chance. Let the Lord have room to come in His glory for your relief.

4. In promoting revivals of religion, do not fret yourself. Give the Lord a chance to work. See to it that you are doing what He can bless. Don't shut Him up to the present moment, but pray and hold on! Trust Him and wait till He shall come in His power. Wait, I say, but not in the way of doing nothing. Do all that His providence and Spirit may seem to indicate. So doing, you may trust Him to come in His glorious power in the best possible time.

You cannot possibly be too confident that His grace is sufficient for all your need. You need not fear any where, if you do your part well, that Christ will not do His part equally well. He will give you success and help you to honor His name. O young man, are you afraid to commit yourself to the work of the ministry lest your strength fail you? Remember Him who has said -- "My grace is sufficient for thee, for My strength is made perfect in weakness."

O sinner, His grace is sufficient also for you. Are you ready to commit yourself to His care? Oh, but you say -- I am not a Christian; what right have I to believe that His grace will avail for me? Come and believe; come now, forsaking the ways of sin; so shall you find His promise is to you in all its perfect fulness. Have you a want? Come with your heart all empty; come, bring empty vessels not a few; His grace shall richly fill them all. Don't say -- my circumstances are so peculiar; -- no matter if they are; no matter if such case never was before; will it therefore lie beyond His power to meet it? Nay, verily, not while His name is Jesus; not while He proclaims of Himself -- "I, that speak in righteousness, mighty to save."

GLOSSARY

of easily misunderstood terms as defined by Mr. Finney himself.

Compiled by Katie Stewart

1. **Complacency, or Esteem:** "Complacency, as a state of will or heart, is only benevolence modified by the consideration or relation of right character in the object of it. God, prophets, apostles, martyrs, and saints, in all ages, are as virtuous in their self-denying and untiring labours to save the wicked, as they are in their complacent love to the saints." *Systematic Theology (LECTURE VII)*. Also, "approbation of the character of its object. Complacency is due only to the good and holy." *Lectures to Professing Christians (LECTURE XII)*.
2. **Disinterested Benevolence:** "By disinterested benevolence I do not mean, that a person who is

disinterested feels no interest in his object of pursuit, but that he seeks the happiness of others for its own sake, and not for the sake of its reaction on himself, in promoting his own happiness. He chooses to do good because he rejoices in the happiness of others, and desires their happiness for its own sake. God is purely and disinterestedly benevolent. He does not make His creatures happy for the sake of thereby promoting His own happiness, but because He loves their happiness and chooses it for its own sake. Not that He does not feel happy in promoting the happiness of His creatures, but that He does not do it for the sake of His own gratification." *Lectures to Professing Christians (LECTURE I)*.

3. **Divine Sovereignty:** "The sovereignty of God consists in the independence of his will, in consulting his own intelligence and discretion, in the selection of his end, and the means of accomplishing it. In other words, the sovereignty of God is nothing else than infinite benevolence directed by infinite knowledge." *Systematic Theology (LECTURE LXXVI)*.
4. **Election:** "That all of Adam's race, who are or ever will be saved, were from eternity chosen by God to eternal salvation, through the sanctification of their hearts by faith in Christ. In other words, they are chosen to salvation by means of sanctification. Their salvation is the end- their sanctification is a means. Both the end and the means are elected, appointed, chosen; the means as really as the end, and for the sake of the end." *Systematic Theology (LECTURE LXXIV)*.
5. **Entire Sanctification:** "Sanctification may be entire in two senses: (1.) In the sense of present, full obedience, or entire consecration to God; and, (2.) In the sense of continued, abiding consecration or obedience to God. Entire sanctification, when the terms are used in this sense, consists in being established, confirmed, preserved, continued in a state of sanctification or of entire consecration to God." *Systematic Theology (LECTURE LVIII)*.
6. **Moral Agency:** "Moral agency is universally a condition of moral obligation. The attributes of moral agency are intellect, sensibility, and free will." *Systematic Theology (LECTURE III)*.
7. **Moral Depravity:** "Moral depravity is the depravity of free-will, not of the faculty itself, but of its free action. It consists in a violation of moral law. Depravity of the will, as a faculty, is, or would be, physical, and not moral depravity. It would be depravity of substance, and not of free, responsible choice. Moral depravity is depravity of choice. It is a choice at variance with moral law, moral right. It is synonymous with sin or sinfulness. It is moral depravity, because it consists in a violation of moral law, and because it has moral character." *Systematic Theology (LECTURE XXXVIII)*.
8. **Human Reason:** "the intuitive faculty or function of the intellect... it is the faculty that intuits moral relations and affirms moral obligation to act in conformity with perceived moral relations." *Systematic Theology (LECTURE III)*.
9. **Retributive Justice:** "Retributive justice consists in treating every subject of government according to his character. It respects the intrinsic merit or demerit of each individual, and deals with him accordingly." *Systematic Theology (LECTURE XXXIV)*.

10. **Total Depravity:** "Moral depravity of the unregenerate is without any mixture of moral goodness or virtue, that while they remain unregenerate, they never in any instance, nor in any degree, exercise true love to God and to man." *Systematic Theology (LECTURE XXXVIII)*.
11. **Unbelief:** "the soul's withholding confidence from truth and the God of truth. The heart's rejection of evidence, and refusal to be influenced by it. The will in the attitude of opposition to truth perceived, or evidence presented." *Systematic Theology (LECTURE LV)*.