

THE ABUNDANCE OF GRACE FOR ZION

Grace and God's purpose

Zion is God's eternal habitation, His dwelling place. The Bible describes God's deep feelings over Zion in many ways. It is God's choice. It is His good pleasure, His eternal excellence, and His chief joy. Because of His deep feelings over Zion, God has an abundance of grace for Zion. This abundance of grace is specifically designed to produce Zion as His chief joy. We need to understand the grace of God in this way. The grace is not operating in our being in a meaningless or vain way, nor merely in an individualistic way. The grace of God operating in us has been specifically designed to make you and me constituents of Zion, members of the household of God.

The course grace takes in us is always toward the producing of God's goal of Zion. We see this principle in 2 Timothy 1:9, which says that God has "saved us and called us with a holy calling, not according to our works but according to His own purpose and grace, which was given to us in Christ Jesus before the times of the ages." This verse gives us a clear unveiling of how God's grace works in tandem with God's purpose. First, God saved us. But that is not all. It is not just a matter of initial salvation. The whole Christian world needs to be conscious of what should normally follow initial salvation. Yes, God saved us, but He also "called us with a holy calling." And that holy calling is the

calling to Zion. It is a calling to be the corporate embodiment and expression of the Triune God in this universe. It is a calling to be God's habitation, Zion, where He occupies and lives in all of us, the redeemed people of God. So we are not only saved, but we are called with a holy calling.

The next part of verse 9 says, "not according to our works." This awesome calling over our lives for Zion, for the church, is not according to our works. It did not originate with you or me. The desires in us for God's house are all desires that have originated with God. They are out of Him and in Him, and now He has imparted them directly into our hearts so that we sense His desires in us — we love the church, we have desires for the church. This is altogether the working of grace.

This calling is not according to our works, but "according to His own purpose and grace." Notice how these two words occur together — *purpose* and *grace*. God's purpose and grace were not given to us on the spot, so to speak, without forethought. No, He gave His purpose and grace to us in Christ Jesus "before the times of the ages." So this purpose of Zion and the grace to produce it has a long history.

Grace as an endowment for God's purpose

Grace is an abundant endowment given to us. And it is given to us for the fulfillment of God's purpose.

IN THIS ISSUE:

- The Abundance of Grace for Zion — Pages 1-3, 6-8
- Called into the Fellowship of His Son — Pages 4-5
- Insert—Announcement

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This is why Paul utters such statements as, “Do not receive the grace of God in vain” (2 Cor. 6:1). In other words, do not waste the grace. The grace is with us — in our spirit. It is there with a purpose. It is to be enjoyed by us. It is with us so that we would take Christ in all things. It is with us to experience Him day by day, moment by moment, through everything, in order that we might be constituted as members of Zion for His expression. Thus, we can see the connection between grace and God’s purpose. We see that grace has a goal. There is an economy, a working out, of grace to accomplish God’s heart’s desire.

The abundance of grace in the Bible

We can see the abundance of grace in the whole Bible. Grace is abundantly and lavishly poured out. And when we go to the end of the Bible, we see the consummation, the final issue, of this grace. What is there? A city. It is the holy city, New Jerusalem. It is the Bride, the Lamb’s wife. He is embodied, He is incorporated, into His chosen, redeemed, and transformed people. What we see there is a full expression of all God’s grace from *eternity past*, through *time* — throughout all the centuries, including the coming millennial kingdom — and into *eternity future*. The city is the consummation of the grace of God. Thus, the Bible ends with these words: “The grace of the Lord Jesus be with you all” (Rev. 22:21).

Thank God for the grace. The grace produces what He desires. So let us not receive the grace in vain. Let us not view even one thing in our inward or outward environment in a light way. God has designed our environments in order that we would take His all-sufficient grace for our daily living. Grace is there so that we would not be a complaining person but a contented person. Let us be happy in Him. Let us be reduced to Him, not having any other goal or motive but Christ Himself, taking grace as our sufficiency. This is the kind of persons He has in Zion, in His building, His habitation.

The vision of grace for Zion in our daily life

We need this vision, this sight. We need to see that our daily life is directly connected to the consummation of the whole Bible, God’s dwelling place. Our

daily life is not one thing, and the church and Zion another thing. Our daily life is actually the content, the reality, of the church. We have enjoyed the song that says, “We have an inner life that’s for our daily life that’s for the meeting life — just Christ! We’ll live the inner life; we’ll have the daily life; we’ll see the meeting life — that’s just the church.” I have an inner life that is for my daily life. And my daily life is for the church life and for the meeting life. So our life is just Christ lived out, and this produces Zion. This shows us the connection between grace and Zion.

The revelation over the Psalms of Ascent

In the Psalms of Ascent we see the unveiling of the abundance of grace for Zion. The Psalms of Ascent are Psalms 120—134. To properly understand these Psalms, we have to lay over them a template, or pattern, of revelation, that is, the revelation of the saints ascending to Zion. These Old Testament saints were making a pilgrimage on the highway to Zion. And this pilgrimage was based upon the revelation of God’s word (Exo. 23:14-17; Deut. 16:16). They were to go up to Jerusalem three times a year. It is this revelation that must be placed like a template over these fifteen Psalms. It is a revelation that my life belongs to God’s purpose. I am not just an Israelite living out here all by myself with my own little plans and purposes. I am a person who belongs to the people of God. I am under the revelation of God’s purpose.

Grace in the Psalms of Ascent — Psalm 120

Grace is defined and described in detail in the Psalms of Ascent. In Psalm 120:1 and 5-7 we read,¹ “In my distress I cried to the Lord....⁵ Woe is me, that I dwell in Meshech, that I dwell among the tents of Kedar!⁶ My soul has dwelt too long with one who hates peace.⁷ I am for peace; but when I speak, they are for war.” The “distress” in verse 1 refers to a condition of dwelling in places away from Zion. In other words, “There is no church life where I am. There is no corporate life. I have been dwelling too long in these churchless places.” The distress and woe must be understood in the context of the saints being away from Zion. It was in this kind of distress that they cried to the Lord, “Woe is me. I have been here too long.”

Grace for repentance

When you are so distressed and you have had enough of it, and feel like you have lived too long in vanity, you have to know that these are signs of the grace of God. You feel like you are wasting your life — wasting your time, your money, your body — wasting yourself. You have the sense, “Oh God, enough is enough. I need to get out of this state.” This is the grace of God working in you. God’s grace often works first to produce in us a deep sense of need.

Romans 2:4 says, “The kindness of God leads you to repentance.” Repentance means to have a change of mind. It is not just a passing emotion. It is a change in our mind, a change in our view, a change in our estimation of things. The Lord said, “Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand” (Matt. 3:2). This is not merely to repent over our individual personal sins. No, it is to repent because there is a larger purpose in this universe. Repent for something higher than just ridding yourself of guilt. Repent for the kingdom. Repent for God’s order of things. Repent for the revelation of what God wants. This is not just a repentance for our personal problems but a repentance that goes to the depths of our being. It is a repentance in which our mind is so changed that we give up a lifestyle in the world for His life in the church. This is the meaning of repentance according to God’s economy.

The kindness of God leads me one day to a distressed state, to say “woe is me,” to say “I’ve been here too long.” This then causes the wheels to turn inside of me to seek God and call out to Him, to cry to Him in my distress — “God, please do something in my life.” In our desperation we call upon Him. Sometimes our calling and crying out is just to get out of our problems. It is just to get out of our difficulties and troubles. Then when the difficulties pass, we are back again where we used to be — living our own life. May God be merciful to all of us that we would repent for the kingdom. This repentance is a result of grace operating in us.

Grace for a little bit of willingness and desire

We cannot repent apart from grace. It is God who gives repentance (Acts 11:18). Some have said that man is capable of touching God apart from grace. But Augustine defeated that concept in his writings against

Pelagius in the fifth century. Augustine taught that, according to the revelation of the Bible, the grace of God underlies every motion in us toward God (cf. 1 Cor. 15:10). In other words, man does not move toward God out of his own nature. All movements in us toward God, whether they are big or small, are grace-movements. So if you have a little bit of repentance and desire for God, you have to nurture it and say, “Thank You, Lord, for this much desire in me for You. I may not have a great amount, but I thank You for this little bit.” Just fan the grace you do have and thank Him for it. That little bit is the grace of God.

You’ll be surprised at what happens to you when you praise Him for that little bit of grace. The grace will immediately enlarge into a greater grace, with greater desire for God (James 4:6). I will never forget the day when I thanked the Lord for the little bit of grace I had. It suddenly grew into a greater grace. I had been unwilling for the Lord to touch an area of my life, and I was condemned over the fact that I was not willing. But then I saw from Philippians 2:13 that God would produce the willingness in me. So I gave my unwillingness to Him. Then after a month of beholding Him in the Word and not looking at my unwillingness, God produced willingness in me. It literally filtered right into my will. Where I had not been willing before, I now had a little feeling of willingness.

Then let me tell you what I did with that little bit of willingness. I was just about ready to open the door to go into my office when I sensed a little willingness come up in me. As I walked into my office, I found myself telling the Lord that I felt willing. This willingness was not coerced but was spontaneous and free. I have likened it to my feeling of willingness to enjoy pralines and cream ice-cream. No one has to force me to eat pralines and cream. I am perfectly willing to enjoy it. In the same way, God worked in me a willingness that was written into my mind and heart (Heb. 8:10).

Can you imagine that you would ever be willing over the things that right now you feel unwilling about, the very things that you are saying “No way” to? But let me tell you, God is bigger than you are. And He is big enough for you. He is able to work the willingness into you. That day when I said, “Lord, I’m willing,” it was just a little bit of willingness. But I seized on that little bit of willingness, realizing that this was the

(Continued on Page 6)

Called into the Fellowship of His Son

If I were to ask, What is it that God desires *the most* from you, how would you answer? Perhaps you would say that God desires obedience, or faithful service, or consistent Bible reading. All these answers, though good, are not adequate. Why? Because they are not what God desires *the most* from us. What God desires the most is *fellowship*.

Paul said, “God is faithful, by whom you were called into the fellowship of His Son, Jesus Christ our Lord” (1 Cor. 1:9). God has a call over our lives, and that call is fellowship with Jesus Christ. God wants us to participate in the kind of intimate fellowship that enables us to personally and directly know His Son (Phil. 3:10). The apostle John made a statement similar to Paul’s when he invited others to join him in fellowship. And immediately John clarified who it was that he was fellowshiping with — “and indeed our fellowship is with the Father and with His Son Jesus Christ” (1 John 1:1-4). In other words, John was issuing an invitation for others to enter into fellowship with God the Father and God the Son! What an awesome invitation! By these verses we can see that the goal of the apostles’ ministry was to bring men and women into a direct and intimate fellowship with God.

Of course, in the Gospels we see Jesus Himself inviting men into fellowship when He said, “Come to Me.” Jesus’ message was not to follow a precept, obey a teaching, or organize a religion. His constant call, His ceaseless invitation, was simply “Come to Me”: “Come to Me . . . and I will give you rest” (Matt. 11:28); “Come unto Me and drink” (John 7:37); “Let the little children come to Me” (Matt. 19:14). This is His desire — for men to come to Him, to fellowship with Him, and to personally know Him. Indeed, we see the Lord Jesus in the book of Revelation standing at the door of the church in Laodicea saying, “Behold, I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears My voice and opens the door, I will come into him and dine with him and he with Me” (Rev. 3:20). Jesus wants fellowship! He wants to dine with us. So now we can answer this all-important question — What is it that God wants the most from us? He wants fellowship!

The macro and micro view of our lives

There is a call over our lives, and it is the same call for each of us. Though we may sometimes say, “God has called me to serve Him in this or that particular area,” nonetheless there is a higher and more fundamental call that is com-

mon to every believer. It is the call to fellowship.

This means that if I look at my life on a macro scale — that is, if I look at my life from the big perspective — I can see that from the beginning to the end of my life, God is calling me into the fellowship of His Son. Through my childhood and teenage years, through early adulthood, middle age, and elderly years, God is always and ever calling me to fellowship. In school, in marriage, with children, at work, the call is the same — the fellowship of His Son.

Now, if I look at my life on a micro scale — let’s take a single day — from the beginning of the day when I awake to the end of the day when I go to bed, God is calling me into fellowship. So often when we awake, we are in a hurry to get dressed, quickly eat, and get out the door. But in the midst of our rush, do we realize that God is calling us to stop and take time for fellowship? As the day progresses and certain environments come — perhaps we are caught in a traffic jam, or we get blamed for something at work, or we have some sort of disagreement at home — do we see that at every point of the day, God is calling us into fellowship? This is not a call to boil over in frustration, or to defend and justify ourselves, or to solve problems. Everything that comes our way is simply a call to fellowship. Yes, even in the traffic jam! Yes, even at work or at home!

What is fellowship?

Let us define what the term “fellowship” actually means. The Greek word for fellowship is *koinonia*, meaning a communion, a communication, an interchange, a mutual sharing, an intimate discourse, a giving and receiving, and a joint-participation that occurs between two parties on a common level. Fellowship is an opening up to another person to share all that is within you, whether it be your joys or burdens; and then in turn it is opening to receive whatever the other person has to share and impart. In other words, fellowship implies a transmission, an impartation, between two people.

It is important to understand that fellowship does not consist of merely living together in close proximity. It is not a mere co-existence. It is very possible to be in close quarters with someone but never have any true fellowship. For instance, when we get into a crowded elevator, we are certainly in close proximity with others, but most likely there is no fellowship! There is no communication or face-to-face interchange. Everyone is usually very quiet and looking straight ahead. But this is not what the Lord desires! He does not want to live in close proximity to us and yet have no fellowship. He does not want to just live in our

spirit and never commune with us or have any intimate discourse with us. He wants face-to-face fellowship!

It is also important to understand that fellowship occurs between people who are on the same level. The root word of *koinonia* is *koinos*, which means “common.” The implication is simply this: for two parties to have fellowship, there must be some degree of commonality between them. There must be a common plane, a common level, that both are standing on. For instance, a master and slave do not have fellowship. A master is above his slave and a slave is below his master. There is no horizontal fellowship but rather a vertical dictating of commands. Moreover, a master is not obligated to disclose the reasons or purposes behind his commands, and the slave has no position to ask why he is being told to do this or that. The slave is expected to obey without question. But a relationship between friends is different. A friend is not above or below us — a friend is on the same level as we are. Thus, the communication between friends is one of fellowship. There is an openness, a transparency, a disclosing of inward motives and reasons. And by such a fellowship, there is the opportunity to come to an intimate knowledge of one another.

Jesus told His disciples that He no longer called them slaves, but friends (John 15:14-15). And He explains to them why: because “a slave does not know what his master is doing” and because “all things that I have heard from My Father I have made known to you.” Do you see the difference here? Jesus recognized the distinction between a slave and a friend. And the most amazing thing is this — He calls us His friends! Not only so, He also calls us His brothers and His partners (John 20:17; Heb. 1:9; 3:14). This means that we have been brought up to a common level with the Son of God. We have horizontal fellowship with the Father and with the Son.

Christ, our common ground

At first this may seem impossible or even irreverent. How can God and I be placed on the same level? How can Christ call us His friends? Moreover, how could God ever relate to me or I to Him? God is the Creator and I am a mere creature. God is infinite and I am finite. God is holy and I am sinful. It appears as though there is no common ground between us. And how could God ever truly know what it is like to be a man — He can't relate to me or my problems! And how can I ever relate to God's realm — to the realm of the spiritual, the divine? It seems impossible!

Yet, we must realize that God and we do have a common ground. Our common ground is Christ! How can this be? First, we must see that Christ came down to our

level. Paul says that the Son of God emptied Himself, taking the form of a slave, coming in the likeness of men (Phil. 2:7). What mercy! What condescension! What stooping! God became a man! Then the writer of Hebrews tells us that Christ is not one who “cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but was in all things tempted as we are, yet without sin” (Heb. 4:15). And that “in all things He had to be made like His brothers, that He might be a merciful and faithful High Priest in things pertaining to God, to make propitiation for the sins of the people. For in that He Himself has suffered, being tempted, He is able to aid those who are tempted” (Heb. 2:17-18). These verses tell us that Christ became like us in all things. He was even tempted in all things. Yet, He was without sin. Thus, He came to our level and lived a genuine human life. Hence, He can now relate to us and He can sympathize with us.

Second, we must see that Jesus did not merely come down to our level, give us a sympathetic pat on the back, and leave us to our misery. No! If all Christ could do for us as our Great High Priest was give us a little sympathy, His salvation would be woefully short. Christ did much more than this! He came down to our level in order to scoop us up and raise us up to His level. How did He do this? As a man, Jesus passed through death and resurrection. And in resurrection, He was glorified. Then as the glorified God-man, He ascended and entered heaven and sat down at the Father's right hand. So today we must realize that there is a man in the glory! What an awesome fact that Christ put on humanity, uplifted it, and glorified it. Yet, when He did this He did not do it alone. In His death and resurrection, the Lord Jesus scooped us up and took us with Him. Indeed, He made us one with Him. The New Testament tells us that we were crucified with Christ. Then we were buried with Christ. Then we were raised and made alive with Christ. Then we ascended and were seated with Christ in the heavenly places. In other words, as He passed through the process of death, resurrection, ascension, and enthronement, He took us with Him. That is, He scooped us up from our low and miserable level and brought us to His level.

So consider — He came all the way down to our level in order to lift us up to His level! Amazing! So now we are on common ground. He can relate to us and we can relate to Him. We are in a horizontal relationship with Him. Not only so — wherever we are, He is there; and wherever He is, we are there. We are with Christ! As a result, we have fellowship! We have face-to-face fellowship with Jesus. There is an intimate discourse with Him day by day, moment by moment. And as we spend time fellowshiping with Him, we come to know Him. This is what God has called us into.

— Kirk Eland

(Continued from Page 3)

grace. And the moment I stepped out of the boat by faith and began to speak, “Lord, I’m willing,” it released a river of willingness in me — “God, I’m willing for everything! I didn’t realize how willing I was! Lord, take everything in my life.” I could not believe what happened to me just by following that little feeling of grace operating in my will.

We have to see that the grace of God is working to produce willingness in us for Zion. We need to recognize the signs and symptoms of grace working in us. Let me illustrate. When we go to the doctor, he looks at our symptoms in order to tell what the problem might be. In the same way, when God is leading us to Zion, the distress in our environment and the feeling of being ready for a change are the signs of the grace of God operating in us to bring us a step closer to Zion.

Associating the Lord with the hills — Psalm 121

In Psalm 121 we take another step toward Zion. Here we see the leading of grace under revelation. Verses 1-2 say, ¹ “I will lift up my eyes to the hills — From whence comes my help? ² My help comes from the Lord, who made heaven and earth.” In Psalm 120 you have been away from Zion too long. Then in Psalm 121 the grace expands a little more so that you can now lift up your eyes to the hills. This is not lifting up your eyes to just any hills. These are not common hills. These are the hills of Zion. Zion refers to the place God has chosen. For an Israelite to say, “My help comes from the Lord,” means that he was calibrated to Jerusalem, to Zion. In the thought of an Israelite, the Lord and His chosen place of Zion were always connected.

It takes grace to lift up your eyes and to look to the hills. It is revelation when we associate “the hills” with “the Lord.” It is the grace of God when we begin to associate the Lord with His purpose. This is not just help coming from the Lord in an individualistic way but help coming from the Lord by way of what the hills signify. That is, it is help coming from the Lord in the corporate gathering of Zion. To associate the corporate gathering of the church with the Lord Himself is a sure sign of a greater grace working in us. The Lord makes this association of the church with Himself in Matthew 16. After Peter’s confession, “You are the Christ, the Son of the living God,” the Lord responded, “Upon this rock I will build My church.”

As believers loving Christ, there is an intuitive feeling in us that we belong to one another. We belong to the church. We belong to the Body. We are saved with a corporate life in us, a life that is being built together with other members. We are saved as a member. We are not saved merely as an individual cubicle all by ourself. We have become members of His Body. We have been added to the Lord together.

The book of Acts tells us that when people were saved, they were “added to the Lord, multitudes of both men and women” (5:14). That is how we are saved. And to enjoy the fullness of this salvation is to enjoy the fellowship in the church. This touches God’s desire and then it becomes our desire. So we can see that the grace of God is over us in this way, causing us to lift up our eyes to the hills — to this corporate Zion.

The leading of grace under revelation

Let us continue with Psalm 121:3-8: ³ “He will not allow your foot to be moved; He who keeps you will not slumber. ⁴ Behold, He who keeps Israel shall neither slumber nor sleep. ⁵ The Lord is your keeper; the Lord is your shade at your right hand. ⁶ The sun shall not strike you by day, nor the moon by night. ⁷ The Lord shall preserve you from all evil; He shall preserve your soul. ⁸ The Lord shall preserve your going out and your coming in from this time forth, and even forevermore.”

Many saints have gained much help from this Psalm through the years. But in most cases it has been understood mainly in an individual way — the Lord will be *my* keeper and *my* shade; the Lord will preserve *my* going out and *my* coming in. But we must observe that this is a Psalm of Ascent, sung while going up to Zion for God’s corporate purpose of dwelling together in unity with all the brethren. So this Psalm speaks of the Lord’s leading and the Lord’s protection over our going out and coming in, in the context of the revelation of His corporate purpose.

What kind of leading do we expect from the Lord? What do we understand to be the leading of the Lord? Of course, in some things we do not fully understand His leading, except to know intuitively that He is leading us in a certain direction. At other times we know that the Lord is *not* going in a certain direction. This happened with Paul in Acts. He was attempting to go in one direction, but the Spirit of Jesus did not allow

him to do it (16:6-7). Believers have many experiences of being led by the Lord that are of this nature. But the leading in Psalm 121 is a leading, a preserving, a watching over us, that is under a revelation of going to Zion. In other words, the leading of the Lord is under the revelation of living for God's corporate purpose of the church. This kind of leading touches God's revealed will concerning His eternal purpose to build up Zion.

In eternity past God had a purpose — that His Son with His Body would express His fullness in this universe. This purpose is coupled with grace. And this purpose is Mount Zion, the church. When I am under this revelation, the Lord's leading in my life will take on a new dimension. His leading will no longer be merely a private, personal leading. It will not be a leading without revelation of what the universe is about. Instead, when we are under revelation, every aspect of our Christian life — why I am saved, why I am growing in the Lord, why the Lord performs miracles, why I read the Bible, why I pray, why I bring people to Christ — has God's eternal purpose in view.

When we are under the revelation of God's revealed will of Zion, there is definite direction in our being led. Abraham is a good example of one who experienced the leading of grace under revelation. Here we see a man being led under revelation. Hebrews 11:8-10 says, ⁸ "By faith Abraham, being called, obeyed to go out unto a place which he was to receive as an inheritance; and he went out, not knowing where he was going. ⁹ By faith he dwelt as a foreigner in the land of promise as in a foreign land, making his home in tents with Isaac and Jacob, the fellow heirs of the same promise; ¹⁰ for he eagerly waited for the city which has the foundations, whose Architect and Builder is God." Abraham looked for the city. He expected the city whose Architect and Builder is God. Abraham was going out and coming in under a leading of the Lord that was based upon revelation.

If you are a believer today under revelation and you want God's leading in your life, then you would pray in this way, "Lord, I am a consecrated person. I am not here for the world but for You alone. I am on the altar to be consumed for Your good pleasure. Lead me, Lord. Lead me." He will say to you, "Have you seen My good pleasure? Have you seen the church? Have you seen what I am building? Have you seen what I desire? Have you seen the Bride? Have you seen the

churches? Have you seen Zion?" Then your response to this revelation is a full consecration of your life — "Lord, I give You my life to exist for Your desire." Then your going out and your coming in — God's protection and preserving of your life for His purpose — becomes the result in your experience. This is awesome. Let us come up a little higher. Let us come up to Paul's prayers for God's eternal purpose in Ephesians 1:16-23 and 3:14-21 and see why we are saved. Then this revelation becomes the factor that clarifies the Lord's leading in our lives.

Being glad about Zion

In Psalm 122 we see more details about the nature of grace in Zion. Verses 1-2 say, ¹ "I was glad when they said to me, 'Let us go into the house of the Lord.' ² Our feet have been standing within your gates, O Jerusalem!" One of the manifestations of grace here is in the Psalmist's response — "I was *glad*." Now let me ask, what kind of response is in you when I say that you were made for the church? When you hear about God's corporate purpose and being wholly consumed for this, are you glad? Or are you sad? Well, you might have mixed feelings. There might be a part in you that is holding on to your own life and to the world and to your own purposes. And that part feels sad. But that is the way it is supposed to feel, because it is flesh. It will always feel sad. But read your symptoms. Read the sadness and realize that the source is your flesh. And once you read that, you can rise up, have a dividing of soul and spirit, and identify that this is the flesh and it will always feel that way. So we can tell the enemy, who is trying to live out his sad feelings through our flesh, to be quiet! Hallelujah, there is a part in us — our spirit — that is glad!

Being in the church inwardly

Psalm 122:2 says, "Our feet have been standing within your gates, O Jerusalem." The verb *have been standing* is in the perfect tense, telling us that before they physically arrived at Zion, they were already inwardly there. How are you in the church? Are you inwardly in the church? Young people, in what way are you in the church? You may say, "My father and

(Continued on Page 8)

(Continued from Page 7)

mother were in the church before I was born, so I am in the church.” Of course, it is good to be in the church, even if initially you are in it only outwardly. But there must come a time when, in your own consciousness, you are not in the church because of your parents, but you are inwardly in it. You have seen the church by revelation, and inwardly you are in Zion.

We all need to be inwardly in Zion, in the church. “My feet are within your gates, O Jerusalem.” We have this inward experience of the grace of God by being under a revelation of His heart’s desire for Zion. And we have not only seen His heart’s desire, but we have seen the grace that He has given to carry it out so that we could enjoy Him to the full. Psalm 122:2 teaches us that we must be a person who is inwardly in the church, not just outwardly there. If we are merely in the church outwardly and we do not inwardly contact the Lord to take grace, we can be sure that around the corner — next week, next month, next year — there will be some environment that will offend us, something that will happen to make us unhappy. And we will discover that our flesh and natural life do not want to be in Zion.

Letting the cross work inwardly in us

If we only view things outwardly and do not let the consuming fire of the cross inwardly burn and consume our flesh and self-life, we will find it hard to dwell in Zion. We must let the trials and pressures reduce our outer man and renew our inner man (2 Cor. 4:16-18). But if we escape the cross, then we allow our outer man to grow and become a frustration to the church. For example, you feed your self-life with reasonings. You feed it by getting support from others’ opinions that agree with yours. So your self-life grows and grows, and there is no death working in you (2 Cor. 4:12). There is no cross. There is no inward reality of Zion within you.

The undealt-with self is always a festering ground for the enemy. It happens with all of us. We get offended. We get neglected. Certain things do not turn out to our liking. We all have these experiences. None of us are immune from these things. We cannot, in ourselves, live the church life. Do not think you are “cut out” for the church. You are not, and I am not. The flesh is not cut out for the church. We have been called to live an impossible life! And there is only one life that can live the church life. It is His life, and it is His supply

of grace. Again and again we need to run to this fountain of grace and tell Him, “Lord, I’m stressed out. Lord, I’m mad.” And He’ll say, “Yes, I know. That’s the way you’ll always be when these environments come. But I have grace for you. I have the same grace that made the blaspheming Saul into the apostle Paul.” This is the kind of grace God has for us.

We are no match for this grace. Just look at Him. Believe Him. Trust Him. He will do it. Be deliberate. Be specific. Don’t be general. Tell Him specifically what your problem is. Tell Him the nature of your sin. Tell Him the kind of rebellion that is in you. Be specific with the Lord. He likes that. Then He can come and pour the oil in and do in you what you cannot do in yourself. Then you will find yourself praising Him, thanking Him — “Lord, You did it all. You did it all.” The Psalmist said, “In my distress I cried to the Lord.” It was not when his stress was relieved, but in the middle of it. This looking to the Lord is an experience of grace. And by all these experiences of grace, we are inwardly, not just outwardly, in the church.

Under this revelation we let the cross work in us inwardly. That is the kind of leading there is in Zion. You may say, “Well, the Lord is leading me here or leading me there.” But in Zion He leads us to die to self and live to Christ! He leads us to the experience of slaughter: “We are counted as sheep for the slaughter” (Rom. 8:36). The abundance of grace is seen when the saints enjoy the Spirit to put to death the self-life in its many forms. That is where Zion is. That is where the sweetness is. It is where the cross is working.

— Bill Freeman

the Christian

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