

Established -- Strengthened -- Settled

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The God of all grace

The God of all grace who hath called us unto His eternal glory, by Christ Jesus, after that we have suffered awhile, make you perfect. stablish, strengthen, settle you. To Him be glory and dominion for ever and ever. Amen" (I Peter 5:10,11). These words contain a prayer for a very special blessing. But in order to obtain it we are cast upon the God of all grace -- God, who performeth all things for us. Thus we have in this verse four things:

- (1) The God of all grace.
- (2) His effectual calling.
- (3) The necessary suffering.
- (4) The certain blessing.

1. The God of all grace

We must not dwell on the first of these (if we are to consider the others), for it is a subject in itself - a vast subject. For we are lost in wonder, love, and praise, the moment we enter upon the consideration of "the God of all grace," and survey His sovereign grace, His redeeming, grace, His saving grace, His justifying grace, His providing grace, His abounding grace, His exceeding grace: and all this uninfluenced grace, invincible grace, inexhaustible and immutable grace. What grace! All treasured up in Jesus Christ who is "full of grace," and He alone. It can never be said of any mortal as it is said of Mary, "Hail, Mary, full of grace!" in perversion of Luke 1:28, in all the Romish versions. No, all grace is treasured up for us in Christ, and He holds it at His own disposal. Let us pass on to the second point.

2. His effectual calling

"Who hath called us unto His eternal glory," not, who is calling us, not, who may call us, but "who hath called us," a past, completed act, and that not to a temporal glory, nor to a fleeting transient glory, but to a glory which knew no beginning and can know no end. If He has called us, it is to His eternal glory. If He has called us, we shall have experienced our inability to obey. That is why it is here, "The God of all grace." When God commands, the first thing we do is to discover our inability to obey; it is this which fills us with anxiety to be saved.

When He calls, we immediately discover that we are like Mephibosheth in II Samuel 9. We are at Lo-Debar, a "place of no pasture." We have nothing really to sustain us, we are clothed in filthy garments, we are not worthy to come into the King's presence, not meet to sit at the King's table, and, moreover, "lame on both feet" (verse 13). When King David called Mephibosheth, how could he obey? But David called him not for his own sake. He said, "Is there yet any that is left of the house of Saul that I may shew him kindness for Jonathan's sake?" (verse 1). "Fear not: for I will surely shew thee kindness for Jonathan thy Father's sake" (verse 7). Still, how could he obey, being lame on his feet? We learn in verse 15, only by being sent for, fetched and carried. And so with us. The Lord Himself must be the

carrier, the sender, the fetcher, or the appointer of those who shall do so. Like the man sick of the palsy; he was carried to the Lord Jesus Christ, and it is written, "Jesus seeing their faith." Why is it that we immediately and universally think of the four and not of the five. Why do we exclude the man himself? Had he no faith, no desire? How do we know but that it was he who urged his friends to carry him? It is only our own perversity that thus limits God's grace. Yes, and "When Jesus saw their faith" He saw the desire of His own heart, the work of His own hands. Where there is the Master's gracious call, there will also be His careful carrying.

"Who hath called us unto His eternal glory?" How does He call? By Jesus Christ, it says. Yes, it is all by Christ, with Christ, through Christ, in Christ. Called by Christ to the experience of identification with Him in the glory of God the Father, we are comforted with the fact that as the Head is, so are the members of the body of Christ. As the Father sees Him, so He sees His members. They are glorified together in the purpose of God. But as Jehovah the Spirit brings them into the apprehension of what they are in Christ, it is then that they discover their corrupt and depraved condition. It is then they cry, "I am black," "I am vile," "I am undone." But the declaration of His grace-filled lips is, "Thou art all fair, my love, there is no spot in thee." That is glory! Can we believe it? Only as He brings this precious truth home to us by the power of the Holy Spirit. It is thus that we, as the members of His body, realize something of the glory we possess in and through Him.

3. The necessary suffering

"After that ye have suffered awhile." Have we been called to His eternal glory? Then we have the call to suffering also. Has Christ left us the legacy of His peace (John 16:33)? He has left us the legacy of tribulation also. Then in the world we shall have tribulation. Do the consolations of Christ abound in us? Then the sufferings also abound (II Corinthians 1:5). But we have this testimony concerning them: "That no man should be moved by these afflictions: for yourselves know that we are appointed thereunto, for, verily, when we were with you, we told you before that we should suffer tribulation, even as it came to pass, and ye know" (I Thess 3:3,4). Is it not a mercy to know this blessed truth, so that we may not be moved? To know that there is not a pain or anxiety or trial or care but what comes in all wisdom, and is accompanied by infinite love.

Have you experienced any of them? What have you done with them? Does your conscience condemn you for having taken them to anyone but to Him, who calls you by them to Himself? May the Lord ever enable us to carry our anxieties, our cares, our distresses and our sorrows to Himself. He alone can comfort us, He alone can deliver us in His own good time. Hence we pray in our service, "We commend to Thy Fatherly goodness all those who are anyways afflicted in mind, body or estate, that it may please Thee to comfort and relieve them according to their several necessities, giving them patience under their sufferings, and a happy issue out of all their afflictions." Our hearts respond to that. There is true fellowship there. "The God of all grace who hath called us unto His eternal glory by Christ Jesus, after that ye have suffered awhile, make you perfect, stablish, strengthen, settle you." Christian sympathy breathed in that prayer.

If we are called to His eternal glory, we shall be called to suffering also. If we are called to experience spiritual union with a risen Christ in the heavenlies, to enjoy fellowship with the Father, Son and Holy Spirit (Ephesians 2:6), we shall also experience conflict with wicked spirits in the same heavenlies (Ephesians 6:12). The very place of favour is the scene of conflict. You see this in the case of the Lord Jesus Himself. "Lo, a voice from heaven saying, 'This is My beloved Son in whom I am well pleased.'" Then was Jesus led up of the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted of the devil." You see the same in His servant Paul (II Corinthians 12:1-10). Paul was in the third heaven, blest with extraordinary revelations of eternal glory, yet there was the necessary suffering, "a messenger of Satan to buffet

him." "A man in Christ," yet a man "buffeted" by an angel of Satan. But after he had suffered awhile he was stablished, strengthened, settled by those gracious words, "My grace is sufficient for thee for My strength is made perfect in weakness." This brings us to...

4. The certain blessing

"Make you perfect." What are we to understand by these words? It is a word of simple meaning, but full of instruction. It means to adjust, put in order again. Among the Greeks it was the technical surgical term for setting a bone, a medical term for making up and preparing medicine. It was also a nautical term for fitting out, refitting or repairing a ship. We have its various meanings, all true in a spiritual sense, expressed in this prayer; it is the prayer for us to pray, and it expresses the work of God for us. The following are some occurrences of the word, and they illustrate its use: (Matthew 4:21), "He saw other two brethren... with their father mending their nets." (Galatians 6:1), "If a man be overtaken in a fault, ye that are spiritual restore such a one." (Hebrews 10:5), "A body hast Thou prepared (margin fitted) Me." (I Corinthians 1:10), "Perfectly joined together." Who can mend our ways and repair our nets? Restore us when overtaken in a fault, prepare our hearts, join us together in the same mind, the same mind that was in Christ Jesus, but the God of all grace?

It is He also who can stablish us. This speaks of permanency. "It came to pass when the time was come that He should be received up He steadfastly set His face to go to Jerusalem (Luke 9:51); i.e., His purpose was stablished, fixed, settled; nothing could move it. "And the Lord said, 'Simon, Simon, Satan hath desired to have you (plural) that he may sift you (plural) as wheat, but I have prayed for thee that thy faith fail not, and when thou art converted strengthen (i.e., stablish) thy brethren'" (Luke 22:31,32). That is the very thing Peter is doing by the Holy Spirit here in our text. He was obeying by the Spirit this very command. May he by these words stablish us his brethren now. His very example stablishes us, for though Peter failed and fell, his faith did not fail, it was the faith of the operation of God, and neither men nor demons, neither Peter's sins, Peter's wavering, or Peter's doubting could ever mar the fair beauty of that faith which stood not "in the wisdom of men, but in the power of God" (I Corinthians 2:5).

Peter's faith had many a shaking, but it was stablished upon the truth of his God, upon the person and work and righteousness of Jesus Christ. A faith, so stablished by the "God of all grace," reconciles the heart to His mysterious and sometimes perplexing providences, and nothing shall ever remove it from its foundation. Peter does not say that we are to arrive at any state of perfection, or at this stablishing by praying, by believing, or by any act of faith or act of surrender as it is popularly called. No. He looks to the God of all grace to do it all for us.

"Strengthen." Why are those who are stablished in Christ to be strengthened? Because in themselves they are weak and often faint and weary. See how we read of this strengthening in the case of Paul (II Corinthians 12:5-10). Paul had no strength out of Christ, and yet he was "strong in the Lord, and in the power of His might" (Ephesians 6:10). He could do all things through Christ strengthening Him (Philippians 4:13). He was "strengthened with all might according to His glorious power unto all patience and long-suffering with joyfulness" (Colossians 1:11). God, having commanded strength for His people, secures it to them in the Son of His love, and performs it in them by His Spirit. Therefore this is their supplication. "Strengthen, O God, that which Thou hast wrought for us" (Psalm 68:28). "Settled." Settled means grounded, founded as on a foundation. What mercy to be grounded and settled in the faith so as not to be "moved away from the hope of the gospel" (Colossians 1:23). It is a great blessing to be on God's sure foundation, but it is a greater blessing to be settled thereon. If we know anything of this spiritual settling upon the one foundation which God has laid in Christ, that settling will be experienced in connection with suffering, stablishing, and strengthening.

Those who are by the God of all grace called unto His eternal glory, and are suffering for a little while in fellowship with a despised and rejected Lord, who are perfect only in Christ, those whom He is establishing, strengthening and settling in the faith, the fear, the truth of God, will be able to sing the glorious doxology .of I Peter 5:11, "To Him be glory and dominion for ever and ever. Amen."