

# Inward Renewal

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[ 0 : 0 0 ]     2 Corinthians 4 verse 15. 2 Corinthians 4 verse 15. All this is for your benefit, so that the grace that is reaching more and more people may cause thanksgiving to overflow to the glory of God.

Gospel ministry is about God's grace, and it's for God's glory. There are many kinds of ministry in the church.

In fact, there are as many kinds of ministry as there are kinds of people. All of us have a ministry of one kind or another, especially when you consider that the word ministry means service.

If God has so designed us as Christians that we serve one another, then we are ministers to one another. Some of us, I know, have a ministry of prayer.

We serve one another in prayer. Some among us have a ministry of friendship. We serve one another by offering and receiving friendship.

[ 1 : 1 4 ]     Some among us have a ministry of encouragement. We serve one another by encouragement. Up until this point, I may have given the impression that the ministry of the gospel is the monolithic office of the minister.

But the higher truth is that we are all ministers of the gospel in one way or another, proclaiming to each other, both by word and work, the grace of God and the glory of God.

It may be by prayer. It may be by music. It may be by sound. It may be by friendship or encouragement. It may be that we run a Bible study in our homes.

Or even only that we do what we can when we can. But whatever form it takes, we are all ministers. And therefore, 2 Corinthians 4 is for us.

The message of this verse is that gospel ministry is about God's grace and for God's glory. What should our ministries sound like and look like?

[ 2 : 2 8 ]     Whether our ministries of prayer or practice or proclamation. It should be about God's grace and for God's glory.

If you believe Hollywood, pirates used to bite their coins to ensure that they were genuine gold and not counterfeit. Genuine, authentic Christian ministry of whatever variety is bitten all through about grace and it's all for God's glory.

So let's look then at each of these in turn. Grace and then glory. The grace of God for the glory of God. Grace first of all.

Paul is often called the apostle of grace and rightly so because although the grace of Christ is the constant theme of all the apostles, it's Paul who most clearly explains to us how in Christ's death and resurrection, grace is extended to sinful human beings such as we are.

Paul didn't invent grace. Paul is merely building upon and proclaiming the grace which Jesus himself spoke of and lived during his earthly ministry.

[ 3 : 53 ] And indeed, the grace of God which fills the whole Old Testament from Genesis to Malachi. The only reason that we can say that gospel ministry is about God's grace and for God's glory is because the whole Bible is about God's grace and for God's glory.

We could speak about such grace even from this chapter. It's the grace of Christ which first brings us to Christ. The grace of God which first opens our eyes to the glory of Christ's gospel.

The grace of God by which we know and experience the truth. The grace of God which liberates us to live underneath the lordship of Christ. The grace of God which makes his light shine in our hearts to give us the light of the knowledge of God's glory in the face of Christ.

The grace of God which fills us with the assurance of future resurrection. The grace of God which fills us with confidence of glory. So undeserved yet so freely given the grace of God in the gospel of Jesus Christ remains unsurpassed.

And it's that grace which forms the basis of Paul's fellowship with these Christians in Corinth modern day northern Greece. It's not an ethnic or cultural similarity.

[ 5 : 12 ] It is not a personality or interest based commonality. It is a fellowship of sinful human beings who can jointly experience the saving and transforming power of the grace of God in Jesus Christ.

That fellowship we enjoy with each other and that ministry we offer to one another is about God's grace and for God's glory. And in this verse verse 15 Paul defines that grace in three ways.

He says first of all it's a grace which suffers then a grace which spreads then a grace which stirs. This is the grace of God both in its cost and its cause its working and its result and it's that grace which made Paul's ministry and makes our ministries as servants of Christ so fulfilling and so challenging.

First of all then it's the grace which suffers. The grace which suffers. Paul begins the verse by saying all this is for your benefit.

The all this to which Paul refers here are the many sufferings he had to endure in the course of his ministry. He confesses that being a servant of God has cost him much if not all.

[ 6 : 40 ] From the beginning of this chapter we learn that Paul's reputation had suffered at the hands of false teachers whose message was very far away from the grace which liberates. Paul has suffered mentally emotionally and even physically.

He's been hard pressed and perplexed and persecuted and struck down. He carries in his body the scars of a dying Christ. Death is at work in him and he's old before his years.

That's how much it had personally cost him to be a servant of the grace of God in Christ. Ministry for him was not a walk in the park or even a run in the park.

Rather it was running the gauntlet of rejection and suffering. 75 years ago the German theologian Dietrich Bonhoeffer who himself was martyred for his faith in Christ coined the phrase cheap grace.

We might also call it easy believism. Bonhoeffer wanted to highlight the danger of a costless discipleship when a Christian despises the grace of God by failing to build upon it a life of love and discipleship and holiness.

[ 8 : 03 ] What does it cost us to believe in Christ? perhaps little or nothing in our society but much in the Nazi dominated society in which Bonhoeffer operated.

But if cheap grace is a danger for those who receive the message of the gospel it is entirely as hazardous for those who proclaim the message of the gospel.

When when it costs the preacher little to proclaim the grace of Christ then it will benefit those to whom he is proclaiming it even less.

That's why Paul can say all this is for your benefit. I hope we can follow the trend of his thinking here that the more he has suffered for the gospel of Christ the more authentically the power of the grace of God in Christ is seen in his proclamation that the weaker he is as a man the stronger the gospel he preaches the most powerful sermons I've ever heard have not come from the mouths of polished orators but from the hearts of people who have genuinely suffered for their faith in Christ and have a burning desire to proclaim the grace of God.

Many years ago when Kathmer and myself were still living in London before Samuel was born the pastor of the church of which we were members was going through a very hard time.

[ 9 : 40 ] There was an illness in his family and there were petty arguments in the congregation. Every Sunday when he stood up to preach you could see the worry lines in his brow and how it seemed that he had aged even from the previous week.

I have to say that the best sermons I ever heard that man preach were delivered during these days of personal trial and suffering because when he spoke of the sustaining and transforming power of the grace of Christ you weren't listening to his words as much as you were hearing his heart and boy it was powerful.

And now as I look back all those years I wonder if he could say of that time all that was for your benefit. His ministry was about God's grace and for God's glory.

A grace that suffers it's a grace secondly which spreads it spreads this grace is contagious if it's grace at all it's a grace which spreads Paul writes all this is for your benefit so that the grace which is reaching more and more people literally we read so that the grace which having spread through the many the active word here is reaching which can also be translated as spreading increasing or even super abounding when a suffering servant of the Lord proclaims the grace of God the message he preaches spreads grows increases the grace becomes contagious and there are two senses here in which the grace of God in the gospel of Christ spreads in the first instance the grace of God spreads to more and more people that's the meaning the NIV translators have plumped for and it's entirely legitimate as the gospel is going forth more and more ordinary

Corinthians people are hearing the gospel of the grace of God and responding in faith and trust the church is growing in breadth as more slaves and more free men more men and more women more Jews and more Gentiles are experiencing for themselves the saving and transforming power of grace that ministry which is all about God's glory and for God's grace and for God's glory is reaping a harvest in Corinth that's what Paul is saying we might expect it to because when the gospel is preached in authenticity and vulnerability God's power opens the eyes of men blinded by the God of this age but in the second instance the grace of God in Christ spreads in and among the Christians in Corinth the church is not merely growing in breadth it's also growing in depth not merely in quantity of members but in their quality we might call it each one is sinking down roots deep into the gospel of Christ and pursuing love and holiness and the glory of

[ 13 : 16 ] God for them grace is far from cheap it is a costly conflict the second result of the proclamation of the gospel is no less important than the first we tend in our desire to quantify success to focus only on numbers but in the economy of God the depth of Christian discipleship is entirely as important as its breadth and the point is that a grace which costs the minister to proclaim it will most often result in a grace which spreads in and from those he's called to proclaim it to that's why there's such an intimate connection between the clauses in this verse all this is for your benefit so that the grace which is reaching more and more people for grace to spread listen very carefully for grace to spread most often requires its servants to suffer surely it's a price worth paying surely it's a cost worth bearing lest

Bonhoeffer's cheap grace be true not just of Christianity in Scotland today but true of us as Christians but then thirdly you'll notice that it's a grace which stirs it's a grace which stirs there's a fascinating linguistic connection between the word grace and the word thanksgiving in the original language grace you know is the word *charis* a word which many parents have chosen to use in naming their children in the original language thanksgiving as used here in 2nd Corinthians 4:15 is *eucharistia* literally meaning good graces in other words the heart of thanksgiving is grace without grace there is no thanksgiving and thanksgiving is the product of grace

Keith and Kirsten Getty capture the thought very well when they write my heart is filled with thankfulness to him who bore my pain that's probably the only time you'll ever hear me compliment the Gettys from here the grace of God and the gospel of Christ is the foundation upon which we build our temples of thanksgiving so when a person experiences the grace of God and the gospel of Christ what is their response it is praise it is worship it is thanksgiving when they experience the saving and transforming power of grace at work in their lives they cannot but lift up their hearts to God and say thank you for your grace the more grace they experience the more thankful they are in principle if not always in practice the more mature a Christian is the more they've learned to live in the daily experience of Christ's grace the more thankful they become grace stirs the response of thanksgiving and praise a deepening of one's discipleship will inevitably lead to a heightening of one's thankfulness it will lead our praise to super abound so like the sound of waters rushing over a mighty waterfall shall be the praises of our hearts and minds as we respond to the grace of God and the gospel of Christ and when we hear of that grace at work in others our waterfall shall rush only the faster and the praise shall sound only the louder when we hear that others too not just us but others also have come to experience the saving and transforming power of the gospel our thankfulness will super abound when we hear that God is doing a mighty work of grace among the peoples of central Asia our response is thankfulness and praise when we hear that God is doing a mighty work of grace among our children among our friends among our workmates in our city in our nation we cannot but abound in thankfulness that grace that suffers leads to a grace that spreads which results in a grace that stirs here we have another rhythm of gospel ministry this one two three waltz suffering spreading stirring and at the end of this dance you might say to Paul well look was it all worth it was all the suffering worth all the outward weaknesses we've talked about these past few weeks all the inward turmoil and Paul will point to these

Christians who were birthed and grew under his ministry and he'll call upon us to listen to the voices of their thanksgiving and he'll say yes of course it was don't you know that gospel ministry is all about God's grace and it's all for God's glory now all of us here in God appointed ways are ministers of the gospel some of you have a powerful ministry of prayer others of encouragement still others of friendship and there are many other forms of ministry also do we want to see the grace in which we serve and of which we speak spread do we want to hear the overflowing praises and thanksgivings of those we have served then we must first be willing to lay ourselves down on the altar of grace and pay its price whatever price that may be one thing is for sure we will never pay more than the grace

Christ has earned for us God will always out give us and that too will cause our hearts to overflow with thankfulness to our Lord grace grace but then secondly glory and this is a shorter point gospel ministry is about God's grace for God's glory from a very young age we all knew the first question and answer of the Westminster Catechism what is man's chief end man's chief end is to glorify God and enjoy him forever now over the years there have been many helpful applications of this question and answer but one of those which remains virtually untapped is that for the Christian what brings the greatest joy is what brings God the greatest glory let me say that again for the

[ 20 : 56 ] Christian what brings us the greatest joy is when God is greatly glorified so the man or woman in whose heart God has been strengthening and transforming with grace has no greater joy than to hear the name of Christ being lifted up in praise because the hearts of others are also being strengthened and transformed by grace you know I think we can understand this well enough by using pictures from our own experience what gives me the greatest joy in life are not my own achievements but the achievements of those I love I love to hear my wife being praised I love to hear my children being spoken well of it is music to my ears it fills me with joy to know that others think as highly of them as I do what gives us the greatest joy in life is not our own reputation but the reputations of the ones we love and so we ask the question how can we enjoy God that enjoyment which forms part of our chief end in life we enjoy him as he is glorified and worshipped thanked and praised we are filled with joy when we listen to those waters of praise rushing over the waterfalls of our hearts and our minds and our mouths this is what the grace of

God at work in us drives us toward an other focus direction and motive that it will be God people speak much of not us and so everything we do in the pursuit of the spread both in breadth and depth of grace is a journey toward our own joy in life yes even the sufferings we endure as Christians it is for our lasting joy because we know that through these sufferings the grace of Christ super abounds in us and through us not long ago I was privileged to be at a prayer meeting I call it a privilege because that's what it was I knew very well a certain man at this prayer meeting in fact he became a believer through my ministry but I'd always thought him to have a rather shallow

Christian experience his spoken prayers were infantile and over the years he had never seemed to mature I despaired of him ever growing up as a Christian but then I went to this prayer meeting and in open prayer he prayed I could hardly believe the difference prayer meeting and my heart soared as I heard him pray clearly over the intervening months he had been growing in his faith and his prayers were now rich in scripture full of Christ and rather than being childish were childlike the grace of God had been at work in him God received the glory and I was filled with joy such a simple thing the fluency of a person's prayers but it brought glory to God such a simple thing that a person who once struggled to tell the truth about anything now struggles to tell a lie it brings glory to God such a simple thing a gospel word shared about a suffering

Christ and yet it brings such glory to God and the glory that these simple actions bring to God bring joy to us because the more God is glorified in and through us the more joy we will experience in our Christian lives when we become consumed with self and how we feel and how we we're doing we're on the slippery slope to despair but when we become consumed by the glory of God we're on the staircase to joy why then serve Christ why be a minister of Christ in whatever form that ministry takes knowing that for that grace to spread will require us to suffer ultimately it is because we want to see God glorified the American preacher

John Piper has very helpfully paraphrased the first question and answer of the Shorter Catechism by saying God is most glorified in us when we are most satisfied in him I would urge you to read everything Piper has written I pray it would do your soul as much good as it's done mine but I would have to say that according to the theology of this verse it would be more accurate to say we are most satisfied in God when he is most glorified in us we are most satisfied in God when he is most glorified in us if we think on that it will fill us with a new determination to preach and practice the gospel of grace gospel ministry in whatever form is about

[ 27:18 ] God's grace and for God's glory there may be some here who are still strangers to that grace and in whose lives God has not been glorified and I urge you to turn to Christ today and believe in him for yourself but for those of us who perhaps have for many many years experienced Christ grace for ourselves in its multi-colored variety it is time to intentionally pursue joy in our Christian lives by intentionally living for the glory of God I'm asking are there secret sins unconfessed but we're not willing to give them up because they're just so pleasurable do we not realize that these temporary pleasures are robbing us of the deeper joy of glorifying God and yes it may cost us to proclaim the grace of God but surely in the light of the cross and resurrection of our

Lord there is no price too steep to pay for his glory and our joy gospel ministry in whatever form is about God's grace and for God's glory is anyone here willing to pay its price to engage in the proclamation of the gospel both by word and work so that thanksgiving will superabound to the glory of God what form shall your ministry take shall you choose a ministry of prayer of preaching of practical service of music of sound of encouragement of friendship of hospitality whatever form it shall take it must be about God's grace and for

God's glory as we pray oh Lord we thank you for this teaching from your word we confess that there are times when we are so self-centered and think what's in this for me Lord we ask that as Christians in the light of the cross and resurrection of Jesus you would help us always to be other focused what's in it for them and most importantly oh Lord what's in it for you for our greatest joy comes when you are most greatly glorified when we hear Jesus being spoken of well when we hear your glory being exalted and when your spirit is at work in your church here we are oh Lord your servants fill us then with a sense of sacrifice and willingness in Jesus name amen