

# A Constant Grace Part 2

a sermon in the series  
Hebrews: An Epistle of Encouragement

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## Hebrews 13:20-21

*Now the God of peace, that brought again from the dead our Lord Jesus, that great shepherd of the sheep, through the blood of the everlasting covenant, 21 Make you perfect in every good work to do his will, working in you that which is wellpleasing in his sight, through Jesus Christ; to whom be glory for ever and ever. Amen.*

The writer of Hebrews brings to a conclusion this wonderful epistle. He does so by once again exalting the Lord Jesus Christ. The whole theme of the book of Hebrews has been the superiority of Christ. The recipients of the epistle were people who had been religious prior to their conversions. They were Jewish and steeped in the religion of their fathers and the Law of Moses. Their Jewish relatives and friends who had not accepted Christ ridiculed these newly converted. They scoffed at the Christians and were constantly tormenting them to return to Judaism. Their argument was that Judaism was the true religion of God, and Christianity was really a cult. Jesus was nothing more than a would-be Messiah. He was born in poverty; He was nothing more than a carpenter who had delusions of grandeur and thought He was the Savior. And He died a shameful death, the death of the cross, and to the Jews this was a major offense. They would have reminded all of their Christian relatives and friends, "You know what the Holy Scriptures say that he who hangs from a tree is cursed by God. This Jesus was hung on a tree. He was cursed by God and therefore can't be the Savior."

Other arguments hurled at the Christians would be, "Jesus was not resurrected, and besides you don't have a place of worship, where is your temple? Where is your altar? Where are your sacrifices? You have no one to mediate for you. We have a high priest who can mediate for us, but you don't have any of these things. All you have is this Messiah who died and did not rise from the dead. If he rose from the dead, where is he?" That was the constant bombardment that these Jewish Christians endured from their friends and loved ones.

## **THE AIM OF GOD**

One of the purposes of the writer of Hebrews was to write to these persecuted and discouraged people and show that Jesus is much better and far superior to anything they had under Judaism. If you remember last Sunday we showed you that this summation is like a grand finale,

if you please. Tonight, in addition to this, I want you to see in verses twenty and twenty-one the aim or purpose of the saint. What is your purpose? What should be the aim of your life? It is in verse twenty-one he says

*...working in you that which is well-pleasing in his sight..*

In one phrase, without a complete sentence, the author tells us what the aim and the purpose of the Christian life is all about. Here it is, mark it, look at it, and study this phrase. This phrase will give meaning to your life. God is “working in you that which is well-pleasing in his sight.” What is the chief purpose and aim of man? In the shorter catechism of the Westminster Confession the first question is, “What is the chief end of man?” The answer is, “To glorify God and enjoy him forever.” That is a biblical answer and it is what this phrase in Hebrews chapter thirteen and verse twenty-one is stating. God’s ultimate purpose for your life is to glorify Him and enjoy Him forever. God is working in you. But what is He working? He is working in you to do that which brings Him the greatest pleasure, and what is the greatest pleasure of God? His own glory. The joy of God is His exaltation among all peoples.

A New Testament church is made up of believers whose main passion is that all people throughout the entire world, starting in their own neighborhoods, know the glory of Christ. All Christians have this passion, but often we wrestle with it, especially in how to manifest this passion. Some have more of it than others. That is the aim of God—to develop this passion in us all.

Now how do we know this is the purpose of God? The weight of all Scripture is proof of it. All through the Bible we are told again and again. We see it in God’s person Himself. God is Creator. As creator He has two special prerogatives. First, He can do anything He wants to do with His creation. He made it. God made us and for that reason He can do absolutely whatever He wants to do with us.

In Romans chapter nine and verse thirteen it is written, “Jacob have I loved, but Esau have I hated.” There is much about this statement that we do not understand, but it certainly tells us that God can do this if He wants to. And evidently, He did so and it is ok, because God can do anything He wants. And whatever He does it is the wisest, most loving, and the most righteous. We can say this because of God’s nature. It is His nature to do nothing but the wisest, most loving, and most righteous. And it His nature to pursue His own glory above everything else.

This is why He chose Jacob over Esau; it was love for His own glory. The Apostle Paul reasons with us in the following verses. For example, Paul asks in verse fourteen of Romans nine, “Is there unrighteousness with God?” His answer is “God forbid.” What is Paul’s justification for saying that there is no unrighteousness in God for choosing Jacob and not Esau? It is verses fifteen and sixteen, “For he saith to Moses, I will have mercy on whom I will have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I will have compassion. So then it is not of him that willeth, nor of him that runneth, but of God that showeth mercy.” The truth about man is that all of us are guilty and undeserving of any mercy or compassion from God. Jacob as much as Esau deserved

judgment rather than grace. Yet God, in order to display His grace, chose to show mercy to Jacob and not to Esau. Salvation is not dependent upon you choosing Christ. It is not dependent upon you doing something—running, working, or pursuing some activity. Righteousness comes from God who shows mercy. It is here against the backdrop of our sin we see the glory of God's grace.

But Paul is not content to leave it with Jacob and Esau. He is led by the Holy Spirit to shut every mouth and end all debate—God is who He is and He can do as He pleases, and it pleases Him to glorify Himself. Verse seventeen the argument continues, “For the scripture saith unto Pharaoh, Even for this same purpose have I raised thee up, that I might show my power in thee, and that my name might be declared throughout all the earth.” The Apostle said that God raised up Pharaoh to show how powerful He, God, is.

The whole chapter disturbs our man-centered theology. It is not our glory that God is concerned with but His own. Paul concludes that no one has the authority to reply to God. God has the right of Creator to do with His creation whatever He desires, and it is His desire to be glorified above all things. I have no right to say to God, “Stop! You can't do this to me! You don't have the right!” The Bible says to us, “Who art thou that repliest against God?” But should I continue in futility and say, “But this is not fair. That is not free will, Lord.” The answer of the Spirit is, “Shall the thing formed say to him that formed it, why hast thou made me thus?” But if I want to stubbornly argue my case and say, “God, that is not love; you can't do this.” The Bible casts down my argument, “Hath not the potter power over the clay, of the same lump to make one vessel unto honor, and another unto dishonor?”

God is the Creator and as the Creator He has the right to do anything He wants to do with His works of art.

Now the second prerogative of a creator is he has the right to take pleasure in what he created. Colossians chapter one and verse sixteen says God through Christ Jesus created all things for His pleasure. “For by him were all things created, that are in heaven, and that are in earth, visible and invisible, whether they be thrones, or dominions, or principalities, or powers: all things were created by him and for him.” There you are. There is the purpose of everything, for the good pleasure of God. Everything is for God's own enjoyment. God's joy and delight is Himself. Everything that exists is a creation of God and it exists for God.

In this culture where doctrine has been thrown aside for weak human emotions, we are taught that we are the center of God's universe and everything was created in this earth for us. Have you not been taught that? God created the world, and man is the center of His creation, and everything is for man? But that is not what the Bible says. The Scripture states clearly that everything is for God. Man is only a part of the plan of God's own glory. Thus, as Creator He has the right to do whatever He wants with His creation, and He created everything for His pleasure.

The question is what is God's pleasure concerning His saints? Our text says it is His working in His saints to bring glory to Himself. God is using you to exalt Himself. God is using you to reflect His goodness, His power, His mercy, His intelligence, His wisdom, and His might. You are a vessel created by God to demonstrate something wonderful about God so that people will marvel at His glory. This is the momentous purpose in which we are involved. "Working in you that which is well pleasing in his sight."

This is a greater purpose for which to live our lives than material wealth, men's applause, or great knowledge. This is the grand purpose, the greatest of schemes, and the loftiest of ambitions—to live to the glory of God. Oh, if that theme catches your heart it will empower you. You are part of something bigger than just sixty, seventy years on this planet. God is working something that is eternal in you.

"I don't make the headlines. Nobody knows about me, nobody will ever know about me; I will live and die in obscurity. How is that bringing glory to God?" Dear friend, one day God will line you up beside some of the greatest saints, and there, kings will see you. Presidents, queens, and prime ministers will look upon you with envy, for they did not accept your Savior. Perhaps you may not make the headlines of the newspapers or even be a name among the saints. But on that Day of Judgment kings, prime ministers, presidents will be banished from the presence and glory of God. But you will be handed the scepter of the kingdom; you will be given the crown of a king. Upon you will be conferred the authority that no emperor or potentate ever possessed. And all creation will bow before the Lord God and say, "Great grace!" The angels will look at you and say "Amazing grace!", and they will bow down to God and worship Him.

You must not look at your life upon this earth and measure it by only what you do and achieve on this earth. Your life must be measured by the glory of God. That is the momentous purpose for which we live.

Christianity is the only religion where God is doing the work for man to be like God, and not man working to become like God. The text says God is working in His saints. It is God working in you that which is well pleasing in His sight. Oh, thank God for this truth! It did not say "Christians working to do that which is pleasing to God." Rather, it says God is working in you. Do you tire of this theme? "Preacher, don't you know anything else to say?" You know how I preach, I preach expositionally. I only preach what the text says. This is a repeated theme throughout the Scriptures. It constantly is reminding us that the source of our power, strength, and might is not we, ourselves. It is God in us.

I feel like I must warn you to not degrade God's work. You must not sit there and feel sorry for yourself that you don't have the abilities and talents that other Christians have. Are you complaining about God's work in you? The text says that God is working you to do that which is well pleasing in His sight. This makes Christianity unique in comparison to other religions. There is no religion where the deity serves mankind by doing the work of man to be like God. All other religions are men working to be like God. Christianity is the only one where God is working in men and women to make them like Him.

Once again this glorifies God. God demands from us the impossible, “Be like Me.” This is the standard by which all men will be judged. You must be like God in order to have eternal life. Yet, it is impossible for man to make himself like God. Our hands and feet are clay, and they are insufficient to do the work of Deity. But God is forming in us the image of His Son, and it is here He gains glory unto Himself. That is where He is getting glory, not that your ministry is praised or headlined in newspapers, but that God is making you like Jesus. Friends, if fame never follows your name but you are like Jesus, God will be glorified. It is an impossibility for a man to make himself like God. Work as he must, work as he would try, he cannot achieve the status of God-likeness. Only by God’s Spirit entering into men or women who humble themselves is the nature of God to be seen in their lives. It is God in them.

## **THE ASSURANCE OF THE SAINTS**

Next, the author gives us in this text the greatest assurance that God is going to do this. This is the assurance of the saints—that God has promised our conformity to Christ’s likeness and that His might is able to make it happen. This is the powerful statement of verse twenty and the first half of verse twenty-one. Most of verse twenty is a parenthetical phrase. The phrase is “that brought again from the dead our Lord Jesus, that great shepherd of the sheep, through the blood of the everlasting covenant.” Let me read to you the sentence as if the parenthetical phrase was not there. This is the way it would read, “Now the God of peace make you perfect in every good work to do his will, working in you that which is well pleasing in his sight, through Jesus Christ; to whom be glory for ever and ever. Amen.” At first reading it does not seem apparent why the parenthetical phrase was added. Some would perhaps argue that the writer of Hebrews is guilty of verbosity. Why then does he insert this parenthetical phrase, “that brought again from the dead our Lord Jesus, the great shepherd of the sheep, through the blood of the everlasting covenant”? To provide assurance to those whom he was writing that he, the author, believed God for this and was praying for its fulfillment. It is a means of assuring his hearers that what he is asking God to do will be done.

Let me show you why he can say that. Here is his thought, that if God could raise Jesus Christ from the dead, then certainly He can work in believers to bring glory to Himself. That is why that phrase is there. It is a means of assurance. It is the same thing that Paul did in Romans chapter eight and verse thirty-two, “He that spared not his own Son, but delivered him up for us all, how shall he not with him also freely give us all things?” Paul’s assurance of God’s continued work and blessing is that Jesus Christ was freely given to us by the Father and is proof that He would give us anything else we would need. If He gave us the very best, in His Son, then certainly He would not withhold from us anything less in value. It is a means of assurance. Tonight, I have all assurance that God is able to work in me. He can work everything that is well pleasing in me to bring Him glory through Jesus Christ.

The writer of Hebrews presents three reasons in this parenthetical phrase to have confidence. First, Jesus is the Great Shepherd of His people. He says that God “brought again from the dead our Lord Jesus, that great shepherd of the sheep.” Oh, there is great comfort in this title, “great

shepherd.” He is such a great shepherd because He loves His flock with an incomprehensible love. Jesus said in the Gospel of John chapter ten and verse fourteen, “I am the good shepherd, and know my sheep, and am known of mine. As the Father knoweth me, even so know I the Father: and I lay down my life for the sheep.” The Great Shepherd’s love for me is evidenced in His dying for me.

A good shepherd will give his life to protect his sheep. Last October when we were driving through the Romanian countryside to Bucharest, we saw many shepherds and their flocks. It was beautiful to watch one of the shepherds reclining in the midst of the flock. Some of the sheep were curled up around him; things that you have heard about in Bible stories or Sunday school, we saw there. I asked Brother Florin about these shepherds and he said he had stopped a shepherd one time and asked him what it takes to be a good shepherd. The old man shepherd said to him, “Son, love your sheep. That is what makes a good shepherd.” Jesus said, “I am the great shepherd, I lay down my life for the sheep.”

The other thing that the writer of Hebrews states in the parenthetical phrase that gives assurance is that Christ is not only the Great Shepherd, but He is a Great Surety. The author says that through “the blood of the everlasting covenant” God will make us perfect. This is not a new term to the author of Hebrews. He has spoken much of both the blood of Christ and the New Covenant that was ratified by the blood of Christ. The author has stated in the seventh chapter that a covenant or testament cannot be activated until the death of the testator. The death is the guarantee that what is in the will can now be transferred to the inheritors. Jesus is our guarantee. His death has provided us the inheritance. “By so much was Jesus made a surety of a better testament” (Hebrews 7:22). His death is all the proof you need tonight that God does love you, and that what He has begun in you He will finish. Listen to me, He will not stop until He is done and He has given you a guarantee, His precious Son.

Further evidence of our guarantee of God’s promise of our perfection is the resurrection. “The God of peace, that brought again from the dead our Lord Jesus.” Now God the Father raised Jesus from the dead. It was the promise of the Father to His only begotten Son that He would not allow His Son to see corruption. Peter cited this promise in his great Pentecost sermon. “Because thou wilt not leave my soul in hell, neither wilt thou suffer thine Holy One to see corruption” (Acts 2:27). The Father in heaven kept His promise to Christ and raised Him from the dead. As Christ was promised resurrection and was raised from the dead, even so we have been promised perfection and we will receive it. Surely if God could raise the dead, He can perfect us.

## **THE AGENCY OF GOD’S WORK**

Now the agency of the saint is the last point, and I will finish with this. We will bring this book to a close. He has showed us the purpose of God and the assurance of the saint. Thirdly, and finally, is the agency of God’s work. Now I use the word “agency” to mean someone whom you go through to get something accomplished. Look at the last phrase of verse twenty-one. “through Jesus Christ, to whom be glory forever and ever Amen.” Everything he has said in verses twenty

and twenty-one is accomplished through Jesus Christ. In other words, God is making you perfect, equipping you for every good work that you might do His will. He is doing all of that through Jesus Christ. What does this mean? It means a great deal to me, I hope it does to you. It means that the merit of this kind of working of God's will is not our work; it is not by our being deserving but is by the deserving of Jesus Christ. I feel like I am in heaven right now as I speak about so high a truth. I am talking about something that is miles above us. It is most glorious. God is working in us to His glorious pleasure, not because we deserve it, but because His Son deserves it and has earned it for us.

When will we understand this and totally, whole-heartedly embrace it? When will we believe our perfection is not based upon our performance but wholly lean on Jesus' name? Trusting in no other frame but leaning on His name, trusting in what He has earned for us. Everything that God does in us is because of Jesus. Dear child of God, listen, you don't have to be discouraged tonight about your performance. I don't mean you shouldn't repent if you have sinned. I didn't say you should not confess your sins. I didn't say you should not be grieved when you disobey the Master. But I am not talking about how faithful you are tonight. I am talking about how faithful God is.

It is the ploy of Satan to get you discouraged and depressed about how little you do for God. But this is a trick since what little you do is done through Jesus Christ and not you alone. This is also the meaning of this phrase, "through Jesus Christ." Our faithfulness in service to God is made acceptable through Christ. Jesus sanctifies our labors because whatever we would offer is still not acceptable to God. God's working in and through us is marred by our fleshly corruption. When I am preaching, it is not acceptable to God because I am doing it. In fact, it becomes unacceptable because I am doing it. It becomes tainted because I have remaining corruption that distorts all that I do. Yet, if I do what I do to God's glory through Jesus Christ, my service is made acceptable.

I would hope that you would be encouraged by this word. God judges our performance through His Son. God has made our lives and us acceptable through the mediation of Jesus Christ. Jesus ever lives to make us to be unto Him praise and honor and glory "forever and ever Amen." That is a wonderful way to end a book. After saying all that the author has said, he ends by once again glorifying the superiority of Christ.

This is the message of the entire epistle—the superiority of Christ. This has been our overwhelming task to show this as we trekked through the pages of this sacred book. How much this is to be our focus and love, our dear Savior's superiority! Let anything and everything that would try to distract from Him be damned. Let our names and our reputations crumble like dust and be scattered by the winds. Let nothing be compared to Him who is fairer than ten thousand worlds. May only His name endure. The author of our Epistle to the Hebrews has set His case before us and the evidence is irrefutable: Christ is unsurpassed! It is well and good that our dear writer not conclude this book without again telling us that Christ is our everything. He is our very lives, working in and through us to display His greatness. Oh, how true it is, our life is Christ.

It is Christ working in us for His own glory, displaying His power and mercy through us so that in the end He is the one that is glorified. May God glorify Himself in us! Amen and Amen.