

“God’s Powers of Grace”

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Today’s verse of scripture is taken from the book of Ephesians, chapter 3, verse 8a. I’ll be reading from the *Common English Bible*. The Apostle Paul is speaking in this passage. “God gave his grace to me, the least of all God’s people. . . .” This is God’s word for God’s people. Let’s pray. God of grace and mercy, bless our minds and hearts today; we trust you have prepared them. Make each heart receptive, soft, and encourage meekness. Do a good work in us Lord as we pursue you as our life source Let the words of my mouth and the meditations of my heart be acceptable in your sight, O Lord, my Rock and my Redeemer. Amen.

Peace with you! Scholars aren’t sure if this epistle was written by Paul; it may have been written by a student of Paul. None the less, an educated guess would say the apostle Paul in verse 8 is who is being spoken about.

Paul called himself the “least of all God’s people”. In Corinthians he wrote, “I’m the least important of the apostles. I don’t deserve to be called an apostle, because I harassed God’s church.” In Timothy, he said he was the “chief of sinners.” In Acts 7, Paul stood by and watched as witnesses threw the first stones at Stephen for his so-called offensive words against God. He put Christians on trial and had them executed. He did his best to destroy the church—going from house to house and dragging off men and women to put them in prison.

Paul, prior to his conversion was called Saul, probably felt quite self-assured and figured he didn’t need much of God’s presence to do God’s work. He believed he was doing the work of God by blowing the whistle on Christians and having

them removed from having an influence. If one relies on their intellect, great beauty, religious heritage, family, education, experience, money, or great skill to point others to Christ, how will they ever learn to lean on God?

When I was in seminary I heard quite frequently that humility and meekness are two of the most desirable qualities to lead successfully. Meekness is ranked high in order to learn to lean on God and not rely on one's abilities. I imagine the apostle Paul spent his life learning the qualities needed to become successful in Christ. As Christians we're to be relying on God's sufficiency not self-sufficiency—so meekness, what is it?

Moses was revered as a very meek man “more than all people who were on the face of the earth” (Numbers 12:3). Meekness isn't occupied with self, and it's submissive to God. It doesn't insist on its own way and is introspective. It strives for a humble heart and it's teachable. It listens to God in an effort to become conformed to the image of God—to become transformed is at its top priority. A receptive heart listens to God and is open and ready to receive.

The apostle Paul struggled with all these qualities, calling himself the less than the least of all saints. The Greek word less or least in verse 8 speaks of the humility of Paul. He persecuted the church, but God gifted and favored him. Paul held a deep sense for the sins of his past life. He wasn't striving to draw attention to himself. Paul's aim was to point to the grace of God and the need for one's salvation—to truly know Christ in relationship.

To some, Paul appeared as the least among men. Many may have thought he was a hypocrite. After all, how could one go from having Christians murdered to then serving the God they worshipped, Jesus the Christ? Even the disciples had trouble believing Paul was truly converted.

Paul, calling himself *the less than the least of all saints*. In today's society we're taught to speak well of ourselves, to toot our own horn and to be proud of our many accomplishments. Paul didn't think that way.

Now I agree, we shouldn't allow the regrets of our past to dictate our future. But surely we don't want to repeat the mistakes of the past—so to a certain extent, we need to remember the mistakes we made.

We're to let go of yesterday and have a forward leaning posture for ourselves and for others who have hurt us. To grow spiritually, to advance the kingdom, and affect our community we have to follow our life source. We must *hear our way* in humility with God and others and follow our life source.

If we want to make a difference and build up the kingdom of God we turn toward the light and voice of God. We can have all the giftedness and talent in the world, but if we're not relying on God's sufficiency our striving is useless. Paul, the most gifted apostle, was the most intensely aware of his own unworthiness. He was able to distinguish between the gift of grace and the achievement the world admires. It was God's convincing grace that led Paul to stop persecuting others and start looking at himself.

An element in the gift of grace from God creates an introspective, teachable heart that relies on God—not their own opinions and not their own talents. Our own thoughts and words should excel at thinking and speaking the best about others. We rejoice in the good and God's grace when it's evidenced in others. And our aim to become meek and humble is this—to grow in the grace and love of God and its power for advancing the kingdom.

There's something about a sensitivity to our own sin that's very humbling. Yes we let go of the past, but we don't forget the pain of our sin that we caused others. For if we do forget, we have a higher opinion of ourselves than reality

points to. Only by the grace and love of God in Christ our unworthiness has now become of great value to God. Because of the work of Christ we have now become worthy in Christ.

In Philippians 3:7-8, Paul said that knowing Christ in relationship is above all other things. The things Paul counted as gain in this life he counted as loss. What Paul prized and valued more than anything else was knowing Christ Jesus his Lord. He was willing to lose his reputation and everything the world valued and counted those things as garbage. In hope that he would gain Christ and be found in him. Paul's goal was to be fruitful for the kingdom—to be conformable to Christ. For it's only the power of God through Christ who can create in us the meekness and humility we desire.

Let's pray. God of all grace, work in us as we turn to our life source to reign in our lives. For this is what the LORD says: "Let not the wise boast of *their* wisdom or the strong boast of *their* strength or the rich boast of *their* riches" (Jeremiah 9:23). Let us boast in you and you alone as you become a great light we hear throughout the day. Compel us to look and become that indispensable and amazing grace in the world. As we follow you, move in us to become the Christian disciple you are praying for us to become. Amen.