

## Equipped for the Spiritual Struggle

Harmony M.B.C., June 2, 2013 (Morning)

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**Rev. 22:21** The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ *be* with you all. Amen.

John had just written about things which Christ had assured him would come to pass, and that the people of God were to know about. All of us agree that there are things in this last book of the bible (as well as in other parts of the Word) that are a total mystery to us. We struggle to understand what our Lord has revealed in the writings, but much of it still remains a mystery. Some of the Lord's people have given up on studying Revelation, using the excuse that it is just too difficult to understand, therefore there is no use in looking into it. Most of us are tempted to take this "way out" as we wrestle with the mysteries our Lord has presented in illustrations, metaphor, simile, and predictions of different kinds. But, have you ever thought that part of our calling is about the struggle to know what our Lord tells us in His word? If we forget this, we will get lazy about studying, and we will just fall back again and again on the excuse that we just can't understand it.

Because we are tempted to approach those teachings of the Lord from this angle, our text as the closing statement by John is a really good one. This verse speaks of the very thing that levels the playing field for our spiritual struggles. When we understand this written request by John in its proper context, it encourages us to put forth real spiritual effort to learn more about the Lord...to understand more about what He teaches us.

Because this verse is so central to our spiritual life, I want us to think about at least two things that the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ does for us in our struggles to grow in Him.

I. Part of the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ with us provides the doorway to the understanding we need to see further into the things of God

- Spiritual understanding comes to us through the grace of Christ
  - A prayer of Paul for the Ephesian brethren reveals to us the source of enlightenment, or understanding: **Eph. 1:17** That the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give unto you the spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of him:
    - **Eph. 1:18** The eyes of your understanding being enlightened; that ye may know what is the **hope of his calling** (how we got here), and what the **riches of the glory of his inheritance** (what we have now that we have gotten here) in the saints,
    - Eph. 1:19** And what *is* the **exceeding greatness of his power to us-ward** (how He is able to do it all, and keep it all together for us) who believe, according to the working of his mighty power,
- We have a continual struggle...if we will enter into it...to get spiritual understanding
  - Even with the capacity for spiritual discernment, we are like a person putting a puzzle together. Such work requires the exercise of our minds to think of how the pieces fit; it demands the exercise of our spiritual eyes to see the shape of the connections between the pieces, it demands the exercise of our imagination to think how the whole spiritual picture fits together.
  - Christ's grace will be with us to do this

- There are two aspects of this struggle to gain spiritual understanding. We need Christ's grace for both of them:
  - 1. First, there are lessons to be learned **from the struggle**
    - Part of the lesson to be learned by this struggle is about letting our ignorance and our lack of understanding about the things of God be a teacher to remind us of how earthy, how fleshly, we are.
    - Part of the lesson is to teach us how far we have to go to attain to a minimal level of spiritual understanding.
    - Part of the lesson to be learned is how lofty the mind of God is...how far above us He is in perception and understanding, (SHOW MATH SHEET)
    - And part of the lesson to be learned is the fact that we can gain spiritual understanding if we just try.
  - 2. Secondly, there is spiritual ground to be gained as a **result of the struggle**
    - How many of you learned to print the alphabet without looking at the shape of them or without practicing how to draw them? And what about learning numbers and learning to add, subtract, multiply, divide?
    - The biggest mistake a believer makes is to begin to imagine that spiritual understanding soaks into us if we just listen to preaching and teaching, if we just read our bible every day. While this is a start, there is more. Just like we engaged our mind, our focus, our attention on those A, B, Cs; just like we paid attention to those numbers and how they go together...just that way, we must engage the attention of the spiritual us...focus it upon the things of God...in order to gain spiritual ground...and it is a struggle.
      - **Col. 3:16** Let the word of Christ **dwell in you richly** in all wisdom; teaching and admonishing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with **grace in your hearts** to the Lord.
      - Christ's grace is needed for this labor.

II. Part of the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ with us gives us spiritual commitment to live and act according to the level of our spiritual understanding

- Illustrate: Babies who are handed a book when they are really small will usually immediately put the corner of the book in their mouths...even books are only good for chewing on. Later, as we read to them, when they are handed a book, they will often hand it back to us and look at us expectantly...waiting for us to read it to them. Later still, when they are handed a book, they will open it, look at the pictures and repeat what Mama or Daddy has read to them from those pages. When they start to school, learn how to read, when they are handed a book, they will probably open it and read a few pages.
- That spiritual commitment to live and act according to the level of our spiritual understanding was contemplated by Paul in **Col. 2:6** "**As ye have therefore received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk ye in him:**"
  - Quote verses from "He Lifted Me"
- Also in **Col. 1:10** "That ye might walk worthy of the Lord unto all pleasing, being **fruitful in every good work, and increasing in the knowledge of God;**"
- The fact that Christ's grace is available to empower us to live according to our spiritual understanding is why the Lord can give us this awesome spiritual warning: **James 4:17** "Therefore to him that knoweth to do good, and doeth *it* not, to him it is sin."

- With the opportunity and the tools to gain spiritual understanding, there is a gain in demand for doing right. The Lord teaches us (**Luke 12:47-48**) “And that servant, which knew his lord's will, and prepared not *himself*, neither did according to his will, shall be beaten with many *stripes*. 48 But he that knew not, and did commit things worthy of stripes, shall be beaten with few *stripes*. For unto whomsoever much is given, of him shall be much required:”
- Part of the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ related to this truth is that portion of His grace that keeps us from reverting back to carnal things.
  - **1Cor. 10:13** “There hath no temptation taken you but such as is common to man: but God is faithful, who will not suffer you to be tempted above that ye are able; but will with the temptation also **make a way to escape**, that ye may be able to bear *it*.”
  - Can you guess what makes that way to escape? (Hint: the favor of Christ)
  - **Heb. 2:18** For in that he himself hath suffered being tempted, he is able to succour them that are tempted.
    - Succour = aid, relieve: can you guess what the source of that aid or relief is? (Hint: the favor of Christ...whatever form the aid or relief comes in).
  - **Psalms 37:23-24** The steps of a *good* man are **ordered by the LORD**: and he delighteth in his way. **24** Though he fall, he shall not be utterly cast down: for **the LORD upholdeth him with his hand**.

### III. Closing Comments:

- The grace of Jesus Christ with us reaches into far more than we have covered in this message.
  1. Our confidence in Christ comes from His favor
  2. Our trust in Him to take care of us day by day comes from His favor
  3. The fact that we can be optimistic about our future...both here and in eternity comes from His grace
  4. Discovery of spiritual solutions for dealing with earthly problems comes from His grace
  5. Having comfort and support in our times of need comes from His grace
  6. Our looking forward to a better day comes from His favor