

## Chapter 9

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### 1 Peter: The True Grace of God

The First Epistle of Peter was written to the Christians in Asia Minor who were suffering persecution for their faith. It appears that theirs was not the type of persecution that was carried out by the state, the type that usually resulted in martyrdom, but a common suffering inflicted on those who dared to be different and who refused to take part in their society's immoral activities.<sup>1</sup>

The whole letter is devoted to the issue of suffering for one's faith in Christ. We shall follow Peter's presentation of this subject point by point because it provides us with very important elements in our understanding of the Biblical teaching on suffering for Christ and its consequences in heaven. Before we plunge into this detailed survey of Peter's first letter, we have to understand a very important point that Peter himself makes at the very end concerning his purpose in writing this letter about suffering: "I have written to you briefly, exhorting and testifying that this is the true grace of God. Stand firm in it!" (1 Pet. 5:12b). In this statement, we find the precise reason why the author wrote this letter, and our understanding of his stated purpose is crucial for our understanding of the entire letter. To what does Peter refer when he says that "*this* is the true grace of God"? Moreover, what does he mean by "*the grace of God*"? P. H. Davids relates the three attempts that have been made in the past to explain this statement:

First, Peter has spoken of God's grace three times (1:13; 5:5,

10), and these statements include both the future reward at the coming of Christ (1:13; 3:7; 5:10) and God's present relationship to them (5:5; cf., 1:10; 4:10, 14), which is a foretaste of the future (1:6; 2:10). Thus while their present situation may not feel like grace from God, when looked at from the proper perspective they are indeed receiving that grace.

Second, others believe that "this" refers to the suffering itself, both actual and potential, which the Christians are experiencing. Thus the very thing that the believers look on as evil is actually part of God's manifold grace (4:10).

Third, "this" may refer to the letter as a whole. In other words, Peter is saying, "I've written to you a short letter to encourage you and to testify to you that this teaching is really [i.e., 'true'] a gift ['grace'] from God."<sup>2</sup>

Dauids says in a note that the second suggestion was made by N. Brox in *Der erste Petrusbrief*, but immediately Dauids refutes it with these words:

He cites the phrase τοῦτο χάρις παρὰ Θεῶ in 2:19-20 in support. Unfortunately that differs from the χάρις τοῦ Θεοῦ here in that in the earlier passage it refers to human actions that God looks on positively and this verse refers to the grace that God grants. That ταύτην is feminine does not mean that it must refer to the feminine χάρις found earlier, for the feminine pronoun may agree with the predicate noun rather than its antecedent.<sup>3</sup>

Dauids himself explains 5:12 in this way: "But since the phrase appears immediately after the commendation of Silvanus, most likely it refers to the letter as a whole, not to specific references to grace within it. Either way, the clause points to the encouraging fact that God is not absent from their suffering, but values it and rewards it."<sup>4</sup> It should sound strange to us that a statement about the grace of God is turned into a promise of God's reward. We shall understand this singular interpretation in a moment.

The crux of the interpretation of the whole matter of grace in this epistle is in 2:19-20. The New American Standard Bible offers us the following translation of it:

For this finds favor, if for the sake of conscience toward God a man bears up under sorrows when suffering unjustly. For what credit is there if, when you sin and are harshly treated, you endure it with patience? But if when you do what is right and suffer for it you patiently endure it, this finds favor with God.

Now let us have a more literal translation before us:

This therefore is grace: if for the sake of conscience toward God a man bears up under sorrows when suffering unjustly. For what glory (κλέος) is there if, when you sin and are harshly treated, you endure it with patience. But if, when you do what is right and suffer, you patiently endure it, this is grace before God.

One can immediately see that grace is the focus of the whole passage. Peter defines grace, in essence, as suffering due to one's faithfulness to God. This is not a new and unfamiliar teaching for us; in a similar way, Paul wrote to the Philippians that besides the grace of believing in Christ, they had also received the grace of suffering for Him (Phil. 1:29). Paul also wrote to the Corinthians about the grace of becoming poor in order to enrich others, which is in fact the grace of Christ (2 Cor. 8:1-9).

It is astonishing to see the kinds of extremes that Protestant commentators will go to in order to get rid of the kind of grace we find here in First Peter. Kelly explains it away with this comment on verse nineteen of the second chapter of First Peter: "The opening clause literally reads 'this is a grace,' i.e., an act which is intrinsically attractive and thus wins God's approval (cf., the same phrase expanded in 20 below). For this sense of 'grace' (χάρις), so unlike the distinctively Pauline one, cf., Lk. 6:32-34 (sayings of Christ which, in the view of many, the present passage echoes)."<sup>5</sup>

Then, Kelly has this to say about verse 20: "It is no accident that, instead of using credit (κλέος: 'glory,' 'prestige') as in the first half of the verse, he reverts to a fine thing (χάρις: see on 19) in the second."<sup>6</sup>

Now let us examine the explanation given by Davids for verse 19:

What "wins God's favor" (an unusual idiomatic use of the Greek word χάρις, often translated "grace"—the same expression appears in Luke 6:32-34, which could be the source of this teaching) is enduring or "bearing up under" injustice, which here refers to the insults, blows, and beatings a slave might receive if the master was in a bad mood or made impossible demands. . . . What he means, then, is that God is pleased with Christian slaves who bear up under unjust suffering, not because there is no other option or because of their optimistic character, but because they know this pleases God and conforms to the teaching of Jesus.<sup>7</sup>

The big question that should immediately occur to us is this: For what reason would God be pleased to see unjust suffering? We are

given no rationale for this, and so we are left with the horrifying idea that it “pleases God” to see such injustice. But that is not all! Regarding verse 20, Davids has this to say about the fact that a master punishes a Christian slave for “doing good”:

This does impress God. The construction “receives credit” is literally “this is grace (τοῦτο χάρις) before God.” There is no question of fame or boasting before God (and thus the change in vocabulary from κλέος of the first part of this verse or ἔπαινον of 2:14), but neither is this simply “grace” only because God’s grace produced it. This endurance is an act that finds favor with God, on which he smiles with approval. It is a deed of covenant faithfulness to the God who has extended grace to them (1 Pet. 1:10,13; 3:7; 4:10; 5:5,10,12) and as such leads to the paradoxical joy already mentioned in 1:6-7.<sup>8</sup>

The unjust suffering “impresses God” and even “finds favor with” Him, so that He actually “smiles with approval” while gazing at it! Even more astonishing is the fact that the word “grace” is translated as “receives credit,” and later in 5:12, Davids says that God “rewards it.” Now, in the basic New Testament understanding of the term, grace means the free gift of God; but here “grace” is made to mean exactly the opposite: it is something that “receives credit” from God. If words can be made to stand on their head like this, to say exactly the opposite of what they normally say, then everything can be read in the Scriptures!

The key to the correct understanding of this passage is in the phrase “this is grace before God,” τοῦτο χάρις παρά Θεῷ. The preposition παρά preceding Θεῷ in the dative in the New Testament “is used when the probing judgment of God decides the real truth: δίκαιοι παρά τῷ Θεῷ before God, R. 2:13; Gl. 3:11.”<sup>9</sup> Reisenfeld adds that in such constructions “it is presupposed that human judgment is misleading.”<sup>10</sup> The best example of this is in 1 Corinthians 3:19: ἡ γὰρ σοφία τοῦ κόσμου τούτου μωρία παρά τῷ Θεῷ ἐστίν, “the wisdom of this world is foolishness before God.”<sup>11</sup> The same Greek construction can also be seen in 2 Thessalonians 1:6: δίκαιον παρά Θεῷ ἀνταποδοῦναι τοῖς θλίβουσιν ὑμᾶς θλίψιν, “For after all it is only just for God to repay with affliction those who afflict you.”

Paul’s use of this phrase helps us to get at its meaning. What is of the greatest help, though, is the fact that Peter uses it exactly in the same way. In 1 Peter 2:4, he mentions that Christ, the “living stone,”

was “rejected by men, but choice and precious in the sight of God,” *παρὰ δὲ Θεῷ ἐκλεκτόν ἔντιμον*. People rejected the “living stone,” but God’s estimation of it was different: He considered it chosen and precious. Then, fifteen verses later, we find Peter using exactly the same construction. Should we not read it in the same way? Let us then translate verse 19 following the pattern of verse 4: “From the point of view of this world, suffering unjustly is considered a tragedy, but in God’s evaluation, it is grace (or, God considers that it is grace).” This rendering of 2:19 is linguistically consistent with Peter’s previous sentence, and with the Pauline use of that construction. We will later find that this interpretation is also consistent with all that Peter writes in this letter about suffering for Christ, and, we will be able to understand the sense in which Peter can say at the end of his first letter that *this* suffering “is the true grace of God” (5:12).

Let us begin precisely where Peter begins. He tells his readers that through the resurrection of Christ, they were “born again to a living hope” (1:3), in order “to obtain an inheritance which is imperishable and undefiled and will not fade away, reserved in heaven for you” (1:4). We again find ourselves on familiar territory: the purpose of our salvation, its ultimate goal, is the inheritance in heaven. Furthermore, Peter declares: “You were called for the very purpose that you might inherit a blessing” (3:9). Peter does not specify what the inheritance is or what the blessing contains, but all the way through the letter, he tells us that we have been called to follow in the footsteps of Christ in suffering (2:21), and that Christ is now “at the right hand of God, having gone into heaven, after angels and authorities and powers had been subjected to Him” (3:22). Then we as believers are told that if we are partakers with Christ in His sufferings (4:13), like Peter himself was, then we will be partakers “also of the glory that is to be revealed” (5:1). Again we find that the destiny of man was illustrated and fulfilled by Christ, just as in the Epistle to the Hebrews and in the epistles of Paul.

However, this celestial destiny will be ours entirely by grace: “Fix your hope completely on the grace to be brought to you at the revelation of Jesus Christ” (1:13). Peter goes so far as to call the inheritance, “the grace of life,” in the context of saying that women are “fellow heirs” with their husbands (3:7). The work of equipping the chosen ones for glory is being done by “the God of all grace, who called you to His eternal glory in Christ” (5:10). Furthermore, in the fourth chapter, Peter presents yet another interesting view of this grace

of God; he writes that it is “manifold” or “varied,” and that God’s children have been made “stewards” of the “manifold grace of God” (4:10).

Whenever we find Peter writing about suffering, about its purpose and its achievements, we have to keep in mind that it is all a work of grace, and that God is at work through it. Consequently, there is no merit for the one who endures hardship and suffering, and there can be no boasting of its achievements.

Let us now analyze what Peter has to say about sufferings. His first comment on this subject is found right at the beginning of the letter, where he says that we have been “born again to a living hope,” and this “hope” is our inheritance in heaven, in which we “greatly rejoice” (1:3-4, 6). But, before we can reach that inheritance, Peter tells us that we must go through a process of testing, a process that will purify us just as gold is purified by fire. That process, if we will have passed successfully through it, will result in “praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ” (1:7). The pattern is exactly the same as in Romans 5:1-10; even the key words are the same: “tested by fire” is δοκιμαζομένου and the result of the process is the “δοκίμιον of your faith.” In Paul’s writings, the result is δοκιμή, translated as “proven character” in modern versions of the Bible (Rom. 5:4), and the verdict at the coming of Jesus is δόκιμον (2 Tim. 2:15) or δδόκιμος (1 Cor. 9:27). Peter chose to use the form δοκίμιον, having the same meaning as δόκιμον, that is, “tested and approved,” or one who has successfully passed the tests of faithfulness and reliability. We are then told that the consequence of this positive verdict will be “praise and glory and honor” (1 Peter 1:7). The “praise” will be God saying to His faithful child, “Well done, good slave,” as he stands before the judgment seat of Christ. The “glory” will be sharing in the glory of Christ that was given to Him as a result of *His* sufferings (3:22; 4:13-14). *This* is certainly what “obtaining the inheritance” means, and what an extraordinary “honor” it will be to be given dominion with Christ over all of God’s possessions!

When we, at present, “see” with the eyes of faith the glory of Christ that will also be ours, we “greatly rejoice with joy inexpressible and full of glory” (1:8), even though we are presently “distressed by various trials” (πειρασμοῖς, 1:6). When the mind is set on the things of heaven, the present momentary (“for a little while”) sufferings, although painful, cannot overcome the unspeakable joy that overwhelms our entire being.

On the fourth of October 1974, the Romanian secret police ordered a house search of our home in Ploiesti. Seven policemen invaded our house, and in the course of seven hours, they turned every room upside down, confiscating my entire library, as well as all of my personal papers and notes. I was forced to sign each book before it was taken away, and as I was doing this, my eyes fell on a book with this title: *Joy Unspeakable and Full of Glory*, followed by the subtitle: *Is it Yours Right Now?* I stopped, staring at that book cover, and began to pray, "Lord, if this joy is not mine *now*, it will never be! Please, Lord, make it mine now!" At that very moment, my whole being felt as though it had been inundated with light. From that time on, I was no longer the victim of a house search, but the host of seven men to whom I witnessed about my faith and my Lord! The joy of the Lord had become my strength (Neh. 8:10), and all through those subsequent years of persecution, that joy was constantly with me. As a result, I often preached about "joy unspeakable and full of glory," encouraging many others with it. Amazingly, the fact that I was able to preach about joy, in *those* situations during *those* times, determined many others to stand up for the Lord in the same way.

Let us now turn our attention to the passage in which Peter speaks to the Christian slaves, telling them that their suffering for their faithfulness to God is His grace to them (2:19, et seq.). Why is it grace? Peter answers this question in verse 21: "For you have been called for this purpose, since Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example for you to follow in His steps." Before we stop to analyze the meaning of this statement, we must understand what Peter meant by the "purpose" to which we have been called. Although this sentence shows Christ as our pattern, it does not spell out the purpose for our calling.

Peter does not end his discussion of Christ's example with these verses in chapter two. He develops it in the rest of the chapter and all the way through chapter three. In 3:8, he comes back to the issue with the words "to sum up"; in verses eight and nine, Peter summarizes what he has said thus far about suffering like Christ. His précis shows the kind of attitude a Christian should have in the midst of hardships and trouble: "Let all be harmonious, sympathetic, brotherly, kindhearted, and humble in spirit; not returning evil for evil, or insult for insult, but giving a blessing instead" (just like Christ!). Why should we be like this? Peter gives us the reason in the rest of verse nine: "For you were called for the very purpose that you might inherit

a blessing.”

Coming back to the issue of the inheritance, Peter affirms that it will be given to the one who demonstrates the character of Christ and that it will come as “a blessing.” What form will this “blessing” take and what content will it have? Peter answers these questions by continuing to tell us more about the sufferings of Christ as the pattern we should follow. The discussion reaches its climax when Peter shows that in Jesus’ case, the inheritance or the “blessing” was His exaltation to “the right hand of God,” after all the beings that populate the heavens “had been subjected to Him” (3:22).

We now have before us the complete panorama of the pattern that Christ offers us! The content of the “blessing” is equivalent to the content of our calling, as Peter concludes in 5:10: “the God of all grace, who called you to His eternal glory in Christ.” With this entire picture in mind, we can better understand what Peter wants to say in 2:21. When Christ suffered, He suffered for us, for our sins “once for all, the just for the unjust, in order that He might bring us to God” (3:18). “With [the] precious blood” of Christ, we were redeemed from the futile way of life that we inherited from our forefathers (1:18-19). However, in addition to the redemptive purpose of the sufferings and death of Christ, His suffering and death also had the purpose of making Him our model, example, and pattern. The word *ὑπογραμμόν* used by Peter for “example” is very significant (2:21). Its basic meaning can be illustrated in the following way. In the schools of Peter’s time, children wrote on a slate, as we still did fifty years ago in my Romanian elementary school. The slates we used each had the entire alphabet printed in beautiful calligraphy on the top. In Peter’s time, however, that was not the case; the practice then was that the teacher would come into the classroom and would write a sentence on top of each slate. After that the students would try to imitate the beautiful writing of the teacher by writing that sentence again and again until each had filled his or her own slate. Well, the sentence on the top of the slate, written by the teacher himself, was called *ὑπογραμμός*!

We can now appreciate the beautiful and expressive illustration that Peter gave us in 2:21. With His own life on the earth, Christ wrote a complete account of man’s glorious destiny. As we see His example, we must copy it with our own lives here on earth. Then, if we strictly follow Christ’s example or, switching metaphors, if we closely “follow in His steps,” by taking the same road and by walking in the same



way, doing exactly as He did, we will have the same heavenly positions with Him in eternity!

In chapter four, Peter continues to explain how we are to follow the example or the pattern set by Christ. First of all, we must develop the same mind, the same way of thinking that we see in Christ (4:1-2). Peter says to literally “arm yourselves also with the same mind” (τὴν αὐτὴν ἐννοιαν ὀπλίσασθε, 4:1; the NASB uses “purpose” instead of “mind”). Peter places a great emphasis on the way his readers think and on the necessity of developing a true world-view, a right way of looking at the world and at life. In 1:13, he calls them to “gird up the loins of your mind” (διανοίας, literal translation). Both the farmer who has to do very heavy work and the man who has to lift heavy things must gird up their loins. Peter uses this phrase metaphorically to show that the development of a Christian mind is heavy work! In 3:8, he writes, “Τὸ δὲ τέλος πάντες ὁμόφρονες,” which can be translated as “think in the same way with regard to the end”; that end or goal is the inheritance. In the same verse and again in 5:5, Peter calls them to ταπεινοφροσύνη or humility of mind. But it is in chapter four that Peter says more about this Christian mind, which is the mind of Christ.

First of all, a person who thinks like Christ does not live according to the dictates of the flesh but lives according to the will of God. This is the basic meaning of the rather difficult text of 4:1-2. What follows from verse 3 to verse 10 explains the difference between a worldly mentality and a Christlike mentality. The essence of what Peter says is that the people of this world live for their own pleasure; they live selfish lives. But the one who becomes wise by prayer (σωφρονήσατε . . . εἰς τὰς προσευχάς, 4:7) has an unfailing and fervent love toward others, employing all the gifts given to him by God in the service of others (4:8-10). Peter portrays the same image of Christ as the one we saw in Philippians 2:1-8, where the mind of Christ means serving others and sacrificing everything one has for others!

Peter concludes that if we live like this, we will then prove to be “good stewards of the manifold grace of God” (1 Pet. 4:10). Our conclusion, therefore, is that the essence of the grace of God is in living sacrificially for others; this truth is exactly what we found earlier in the other authors we studied.

Moving on, we discover yet another aspect of suffering in the teaching of Peter. It is found in 4:12-13: “Beloved, do not be surprised at the fiery ordeal among you, which comes upon you for your testing,

as though some strange thing were happening to you; but to the degree that you share the sufferings of Christ, keep on rejoicing; so that also at the revelation of His glory, you may rejoice with exultation.”

In this passage, Peter includes the same elements that he had mentioned in 1:6-8. In the first place, sufferings and persecution for Christ are a “fiery ordeal” (πυρώσει, one word in Greek; 4:12a); and secondly, they have the purpose of testing the saints (πειρασμόν, as in 1:6-7). But now, Peter introduces a new and indispensable aspect of suffering: when Christians suffer for the right cause, which is the cause of Christ, they “share the sufferings of Christ” (κοινωνεῖτε τοῖς τοῦ Χριστοῦ παθήμασι, 4:13a). In this letter, we are not told in what sense we share in His sufferings. It is true that whenever Peter speaks about the sufferings of Christ, he always refers to Christ’s historic sufferings; but in this place, he does not specify to which sufferings he refers, the historic ones or the present ones. Moreover, due to the fact that Peter is so close in his theology both to the teaching of Jesus and to that of Paul, we can safely assume that Peter also shares the belief that when believers suffer, Christ is present in them through the Holy Spirit, and that Christ suffers in them in such a way that *their* sufferings are a sharing in *His* sufferings.

In order to be able to visualize the whole Petrine teaching on the concept of partnership with Christ, we must add here what Peter writes about himself in the first verse of chapter five: “Therefore, I exhort the elders among you, as your fellow elder and witness of the sufferings of Christ, and a partaker (κοινωνός) also of the glory that is to be revealed.” The first thing we need to analyze here is the meaning Peter gives to the word “witness” in this sentence. The simplest way to read it is to say that Peter is describing himself as a witness of the historic sufferings of Christ. The problem with this interpretation is that while Peter was a witness of Jesus’ sufferings at the trial, it is apparent from the Gospels that he was not present at the crucifixion. Hence, it is improbable that Peter used the word “witness” in the sense of an “eyewitness” to a certain event.

The whole paragraph suddenly becomes more meaningful if we interpret “witness” to mean “one who bears witness.” Peter tells the elders that he is a co-elder and, by extension, a co-witness with them to the sufferings of Christ. As Peter bears witness to Christ’s sufferings, death, resurrection, and exaltation, he suffers with them and with Christ because of the hostility of the world. Due to this partnership with Christ in His sufferings, Peter can then say that he is

also a partner with them and with Christ in the glory of Christ that will soon be revealed.

Peter has already informed his readers that to Christ “belongs the glory and dominion forever and ever” (4:11). The good news he now gives them is that if they are partners with Him in His sufferings, they will be partners with Him in the glory and dominion, as well. We have seen that in God’s plan, mankind is destined to have dominion over all creation. Christ fulfilled that destiny through His suffering and death and became the pattern for all who are called by God to the same glorious, eternal position. But the chosen ones must understand that they have to become like Christ in their character first, for only then will they be able to handle sharing His position of ruling; for this reason, their character has to be severely tested by sufferings and self-sacrifice. They have to demonstrate the same mental attitude that Christ displayed toward God and toward other people.

To that Christlike mental attitude we must now pay special attention. Here is what Peter writes: “All of you, clothe yourselves with humility toward one another, for God is opposed to the proud, but gives grace to the humble. Humble yourselves, therefore, under the mighty hand of God, that He may exalt you at the proper time, casting all your anxiety upon Him, because He cares for you” (5:5b-7).

Peter has already spoken about our need of ταπεινοφροσύνη (3:8), of humility of mind or the habit of thinking humbly. In chapter five, Peter develops this concept further. In essence, to be proud is to desire independence from God, to want to be self-sufficient and to demand to govern one’s own life according to one’s own self-interest. The essence of humility, on the other hand, is total submission under the authority of God and absolute obedience to God’s commands. Paul refers to this second mindset as the essence of Christ and of Christlikeness in Philippians 2:5-8. Pride, the declaration of independence from God, entails a declaration of war against God. God stands against pride and will ultimately destroy it for all eternity. But to the one who accepts to live under His authority, He “gives grace” (1 Pet. 5:5), that is, *He* works His purposes of glory and dominion in that person. Only to the person who knows how to live under authority will He entrust authority over the universe. However, the “God of all grace” is the One who forms that character in us through our sufferings; by means of these trials, He will “Himself perfect (καταρτίσαι), confirm (στηρίξαι), strengthen (σθενώσαι) and establish (θεμελιώσαι) you” (5:10). Davids indicates rightly that in

this verse “the focus is on character. Through their suffering God will produce a fully restored or confirmed character in them.”<sup>12</sup>

Concerning the last item on this list of actions taken by God in order to form us, it is very puzzling that some manuscripts have actually dropped the word “establish” from the list. It literally means “to make a foundation.” Commentators point to what Jesus said in His Sermon on the Mount about the one who hears the words of Christ and “acts upon them”; this person “may be compared to a wise man, who built his house upon [a foundation of] rock” (Matt. 7:24).<sup>13</sup> I propose that we also look at what Paul says to rich Christians; namely, if they accumulate their riches in heaven during their life on earth, then they will have built a foundation (θεμέλιον) for their future existence in eternity (1 Tim. 6:19). Peter gives us a similar idea: the character that God is building in us through suffering becomes the “foundation” for our heavenly existence.

It is important to emphasize at this juncture that God is not the author of our sufferings. Their instigator is the devil, and Christians must be aware of the fact that they are involved in a spiritual war. If they consistently resist Satan’s attacks, standing firm in their faith, they will defeat him (1 Peter 5:9). The devil will then be forced to “flee from” them (James 4:7). We will see this crucial teaching become basic for the Christian theology of martyrdom in the succeeding centuries.

In spite of the fact that the devil “prowls about like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour” (1 Peter 5:8), and in spite of the persecutions and sufferings that are painful and difficult to endure, Christians are encouraged right from the beginning of this letter with the assurance that they are “protected by the power of God” (1:5) so that they *will* be able to obtain their heavenly inheritance (1:4). It is the “God of all grace” who works His glorious purposes in their lives (5:10). Once more, we must stress the fact that although Christians are called to work hard, to fight valiantly, to endure sufferings, to give up all self-interest, and to spend themselves in living totally for others, there is no hint or suggestion that through these things they could earn something or merit something. Instead, it is through these various trials and tribulations that they become like Christ, and as a consequence, they become qualified to share with Him in His glory and dominion. This is indeed “the true grace of God” in which we are exhorted to “stand firm” unto the end!