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“Parting Words of Encouragement”

Acts 20:32-38

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If you know that you will probably never see a friend or loved one again, you will likely exchange some tender, parting words. This was the case with Paul and the elders of the Ephesian church when he met with them in Miletus. He closed his remarks with parting words of encouragement about God’s grace that are applicable to us today as well. In this study, we will unpack this final passage of Paul’s speech to the Ephesian elders as we seek to better understand God’s amazing grace.

1. **Acts 20:32-38** - *“So now, brethren, I commend you to God and to the word of His grace, which is able to build you up and give you an inheritance among all those who are sanctified. I have coveted no one’s silver or gold or apparel. Yes, you yourselves know that these hands have provided for my necessities, and for those who were with me. I have shown you in every way, by laboring like this, that you must support the weak. And remember the words of the Lord Jesus, that He said, “It is more blessed to give than to receive.” And when he had said these things, he knelt down and prayed with them all. Then they all wept freely, and fell on Paul’s neck and kissed him, sorrowing most of all for the words which he spoke, that they would see his face no more. And they accompanied him to the ship.”*
2. Paul’s final words to the elders from Ephesus had three parts
 - a. First, he likened Christianity to a race—what matters most is not how you start, but how you finish
 - b. Secondly, he provided advice for keeping the Church healthy and gave warnings about threats from within and without
 - c. Lastly, he concluded with words of encouragement (v. 32-38)
3. Paul “commended” the elders to God
 - a. *Commend* in the Greek is **paratithēmi**, meaning “to place trust in for protection”
 - b. Paul was trusting the Lord to care for the people he loved

4. Entrust your life and loved ones to God
 - a. We must trust the Lord with our own lives and those of our loved ones
 - b. Upon His death, Jesus stated, *“Father, ‘into Your hands I commit My spirit.’”* (Luke 23:46)
 - i. *Commit* in the Greek is also **paratithēmi**
 - ii. Jesus trusted the Father to care for Him in death
 - c. **Psalm 31:14-15a** - *“But as for me, I trust in You, O LORD; I say, ‘You are my God. My times are in Your hand.’”*
 - d. **Psalm 139:7-10** - *“Where can I go from your Spirit? Where can I flee from your presence? If I go up to the heavens, you are there; if I make my bed in the depths, you are there. If I rise on the wings of the dawn, if I settle on the far side of the sea, even there your hand will guide me, your right hand will hold me fast.”* (1984 NIV)

5. Rely on God’s grace
 - a. Grace is *“God’s unmerited favor; His undeserved kindness expressed to us through Jesus”*
 - b. Grace builds us up
 - i. The *“word of His grace”* is the message of the New Testament (v. 32)
 1. The message of the Old Testament is that of the law—what you must do for God
 - a. The Old Testament is necessary to understand the character and nature of God, and who we are in relation to Him
 - b. The moral code of the law exposes our sinful hearts and helps us realize how much we need a Savior
 - i. The law does not save us
 - ii. If heaven were gained by following the word of the law, we would all fail
 2. The message of the New Testament is that of grace
 - a. Jesus entered the world to die for our sins and He offers His righteousness in exchange for our sinfulness to all who accept Him by faith as Lord and Savior
 - b. Where the law falls short, grace steps in
 - c. **John 1:17** - *“For the law was given through Moses, but grace and truth came through Jesus Christ.”*
 - d. The thief who was crucified with Jesus made a simple profession of faith, and Jesus assured him, *“today you will be with Me in Paradise.”* (Luke 23:43)
 - i. This man had never gone to a Bible study, been baptized, or participated in any Christian activity,

and yet Jesus saved him because he placed his faith in Christ

3. The law reminds us that we are sinners; grace reminds us we have a Savior

c. Grace gives us an inheritance

i. “Sanctified” (v. 32) is **hagiazō** in the Greek, meaning “set apart”—those who have a relationship with Christ

ii. **1 Peter 1:3-4** - *“Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! In his great mercy he has given us new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, and into an inheritance that can never perish, spoil or fade—kept in heaven for you.”* (1984 NIV)

iii. Our “inheritance” refers to everything God has for us, both in this life and in eternity with Him

1. An inheritance requires a death—Jesus fulfilled this requirement

6. Accepting God’s grace

a. Some try hard to be a “good person” but fail over and over and become frustrated

b. Some are so ashamed of the things they have done that God’s grace seems unattainable

i. Those sins are exactly what Jesus died for

ii. We must not place the emphasis on ourselves, but rather surrender our lives to God and rest in His grace

“Grace, grace, God’s grace,

Grace that will pardon and cleanse within;

Grace, grace, God’s grace,

Grace that is greater than all my sin.”¹

Discussion Questions

1. Read **Acts 20:32-38** to provide a foundation for your Bible study time.

2. What is the significance of Paul “commending” the elders to the Lord? (See #3 above)

3. Read **Psalm 31:14-15a** and **Psalm 139:7-10**. How are we to trust the Lord with our own lives and those of our loved ones? (See #4c and #4d above)

4. What is grace? (See #5a above)

5. What is the main message of the Old Testament? Why is the Old Testament important? (See #5b-i-1-a and #5b-i-1-b above)
6. Read [John 1:17](#). What is the message of the New Testament? (See #5b-i-2-a and #5b-i-2-c above)
7. Read [1 Peter 1:3-4](#). What is the inheritance we have in Christ? (#5c-ii and #5c-ii above)
8. Have you ever attempted to earn God’s favor through being a “good person”? What happened? Have you ever felt like your sins are too great for grace to cover?
9. How should we respond when we are tempted to work for God’s favor or feel like we have sinned too much to receive His grace? (See #6b-i and #6b-ii above)
10. Close your meeting by allowing the Holy Spirit to lead your time of prayer.

* Unless noted, all Scriptures quoted are from the New King James Version (NKJV)

ⁱ *“Grace Greater than our Sin”* by Julia H. Johnston, [Trinity Hymnal | GRACE, GRACE, GOD’S GRACE - Lyrics Hymn](#)