



Stand Firm in God's Grace: Part 3

Introduction:

Standing firm in God's grace should be easy. After all, why would we want to stand anywhere else? God's grace promises abundant life (**John 10:10; Psalm 23**) and the fruit of the Spirit (**Galatians 5:22-23**). We know we need God's grace because of our own sinfulness. We know if we want to stand firm in God's grace we need to listen to God's Word. Why can't we just stop there? The reason is Satan. According to **I Peter 5:8**, he wants to devour us, he wants us to fall away from God's grace, and will stop at nothing to get us to do so. Therefore, standing firm in God's grace is not a passive activity; it is a battle. How do we stand firmly in God's grace while enduring Satan's attacks to get us out of it? Peter explains the key in **I Peter 1:13**. We must hope fully in God's grace. But just hearing that may not be helpful. It seems to say the same thing as stand firmly there. To help us understand what setting our hope fully on God's grace means, we will parallel it with the real life experience of Paul in **II Corinthians 12:7-10**. In that passage, Paul's stand in God's grace is in danger. Satan had administered a thorn in the flesh. For a time, all Paul could see was the thorn and asked for it to be removed. But God responded, "My grace is sufficient for you." In other words, "hope fully in My grace." Let's examine what Peter said in **I Peter 1:13** in light of Paul's experience in **II Corinthians 12:7-10** and see what we can learn about overcoming Satan's attacks by setting our hope fully on God's grace.

Discussion:

I. Get prepared.

- A. In **I Peter 1:13**, Peter says, "Therefore, preparing your minds for action..." (ESV). Other translations say "...gird up the loins of your mind..." This is a picture of a robed soldier. With the robes hanging around his feet, he would have trouble moving around freely. So, if he was about to go into battle, he would wrap the robes through his legs and then tuck them in his belt. That made it a lot easier to move around in battle. Girding up the loins meant preparing for an attack. Satan is going to attack you. You need to get ready and be watchful (**I Peter 5:8**). The best way to prepare is to learn Satan's strategies.
- B. In **II Corinthians 12:7-10**, Paul learned Satan's strategies. He learned where Satan would attack. In **vs. 10**, he declared, "For the sake of Christ, then, I am content with weaknesses, insults, hardships, persecutions, and calamities" (ESV). Paul was preparing to stand firmly in God's grace no matter what Satan hurled at him.
- C. In **II Corinthians 12:7-10**, we see three major forms of attack Satan will use.
 1. *Sufferings*: When Paul explained what he would be ready for, four of the terms dealt with suffering—insults, hardships, persecutions, and calamities. This corresponds with the context of **I Peter 1:13**. That whole letter is about maintaining faithfulness despite suffering (e.g. **I Peter 1:6**). Satan will use suffering to make us believe God's grace isn't helping us and that God is actually against us. Like Job in **Job 13:15**, we must prepare to maintain our hope in God anyway. He is the source of salvation and there is no other.
 2. *Weaknesses*: Satan will exploit any weakness, whether physical, mental, emotional, or spiritual. Since we are growing, we still have weaknesses. Every time we fall prey to one, we wonder if we will actually make it. We cannot imagine how God could save us when we are so weak. Satan is hoping we will lose sight of God's grace and abandon Him. **Romans 5:6-11** prepares us for this attack. God saved us while we were sinners, how much more is He working even now to save us from our own weaknesses?
 3. *Blessings*: This may be shocking, but Satan can even use our blessings to attack us. Because of the blessing of Paul's visions, he was in danger of pride. We can prepare for this attack by humbling ourselves under the mighty hand of God (**I Peter 5:6**) and giving thanks in all circumstances (**I Thessalonians 5:18**). Giving proper thanks reminds us who really deserves the glory for our blessings and work.
- D. Satan will stop at nothing. These three attacks highlighted in Paul's experience just scratch the surface. What we need to see is the preparation. Paul was learning Satan's strategies and getting ready for them. He was girding himself up for battle, preparing his mind for the attack. He knew Satan was coming. He knew how Satan would work. He was planning ahead of time to maintain contentment with himself and God's grace no matter what Satan hurled at him. We must do the same. Do not think, "Oh, I'm saved, nothing matters." Instead think, "Oh, I'm saved. That means Satan is going to attack and I need to get ready."

II. Think soberly.

- A. In **I Peter 1:13**, Peter said we need to be sober-minded. He repeated that exhortation in **I Peter 5:8**. One of the things Satan will do is attack our peace of mind. He doesn't want us to think reasonably about any temptation. He wants us to think irrationally, unreasonably. He wants us to get bound up in fear and anxiety.
- B. If you were struggling with alcoholism, you might hear someone say "think through the drink." That is, think about where taking that one drink of alcohol is going to lead you. Irrational thinking will cause you to want some liquid escape. You need to think soberly about what is going on. You need to think through the drink. We need to follow the same advice in the face of any temptation. Think through the situation soberly. Where will the decision lead you? And if you are having trouble thinking soberly, call a friend.
- C. Notice how this is highlighted in the story of Paul in **II Corinthians 12:7-10**. Paul could have easily awfulized this situation with the thorn in the flesh. I can imagine myself saying, "Who on earth would listen to a guy like me with this huge thorn in the flesh? If no one will listen to me, I won't be able to do successful work. Churches won't support me. God will probably dump me." On and on it could go. Instead, Paul was able to think soberly through what was going on. God had blessed him in great ways. He had been granted awesome revelations. If he wasn't careful, he might succumb to conceit and pride which would cost him his soul as he abandoned his dependence upon God. Sure, Satan was using the thorn in the flesh to tempt Paul away from God. But God was able to use that exact same thorn in the flesh to help save Paul. When Paul thought through the whole situation soberly, he could actually see the good that would come out of it for God's glory and his own salvation. He could actually see God's grace at work even in what seemed to be an undesirable situation. He was able to avoid the conceit. He was able to endure the thorn in the flesh. He was able to prepare for more of Satan's attacks. He could see that God's grace was indeed sufficient for him and he could keep his hope firmly planted in God's grace.
- D. When some trouble hits we can play a tape in our head that awfulizes the whole situation. A friend of mine calls it crazy-making. I can give you an example of this kind of unreasonableness in my own life. When we moved to Indiana back in 2010, the insurance company we had contracted with to insure our empty house in Tennessee made a drastic mistake. In addition to debiting our personal checking account and setting up a monthly draft for the obscene amount they charge for vacant dwelling insurance, they charged the entire year's worth of insurance to my escrow account. On a Friday evening, I received an escrow review that said my mortgage payment was going to double in order to make up for the overage and prepare for the next annual insurance bill. Keep in mind we were already paying mortgage on that house and rent for our home in Indiana. You can imagine that didn't sit well with me. I immediately began to run tape in my head as if watching a video. I had it all worked out exactly how it was going to happen. I was going to call the insurance company and the mortgage company. They were going to give me the run around. They were going to make me keep paying the extra amount. I wouldn't be able to afford it. I would have to hire a lawyer, but wouldn't be able to afford that either. We wouldn't be able to pay our bills for trying to make those extra payments. We would lose the house to foreclosure. We would probably get evicted from our present home for being unable to pay the rent. We'd be living under the bridge in a Suburban, which, by the way, broke down before this was finally resolved. You can imagine with my thoughts filled with this kind of thinking the escape of my favorite sin seemed pretty inviting. Not to mention with that kind of stress filling my mind, living at peace with my family was practically impossible. Here we are four years later and none of what I envisioned in those few minutes came to pass. We have been able to make all of our payments. God did get us through the couple of difficult months that it caused. And two and a half years later, the house was finally sold. But in those few moments, Satan attacked my thinking. Fortunately, I had some friends I knew to call who helped get my thinking back to a sober center.

III. Look ahead.

- A. In **I Peter 1:13**, Peter said to set our hope fully on the grace that "will be brought to you at the revelation of Jesus Christ." We do go through attacks right now. We will go through suffering, we are still beset with weaknesses, even our blessings can cause us problems. However, we didn't ask for God's grace so that everything would be perfect right now. Rather, we asked for God's grace to lead us through all that we must face in this life so that when Jesus is revealed in His final coming we might be saved by Him then.
- B. Peter's letter is filled with this understanding. It begins in **I Peter 1:3-5**, that we have been born again to a living hope of an imperishable, undefiled, and unfading home in heaven that is being reserved for us to be revealed in the last time. That is what we are looking forward to. The hope of God's grace is not a problem free life. The hope of God's grace is that eternal reward He is leading us to. We need to look ahead to that. Peter ends his letter with the same thought in **I Peter 5:10** explaining that after we have suffered Satan's

attacks, God “will Himself restore, confirm, strengthen, and establish you.” Don’t get distracted by what is going on now, look ahead to the promise God is giving you that He will save you by His grace.

- C. Let’s see how this played out in Paul’s real life example in **II Corinthians 12:7-10**. As we already pointed out, because Paul was able to think soberly about the whole situation, he was able to discern God’s grace in it. He was able to see how the visions could cause conceit but how God’s grace would allow him to have humility, which would allow him to continue to rely on God’s grace. He was able to look ahead and see the eternal salvation he would have by relying on God’s grace instead of demanding his thorn be removed. He could see that God’s grace was sufficient. He didn’t need God’s grace and a thorn-free life. He didn’t need God’s grace and a life without weaknesses, insults, hardships, persecutions, and calamities. He could put his hope fully in God’s grace.
- D. But notice something further. Understanding that God’s grace was sufficient didn’t simply mean looking to the judgment day and relying that God would save him on that day. Understanding God’s grace was sufficient meant being able to look at what was going on right then and accepting it. He didn’t have to mold God’s grace to look like what he expected or wanted. We might think God’s grace should take the form of removing thorns. But Paul was able to accept that God’s grace in this case actually meant enduring and learning from a thorn. He was able to live with grace on God’s terms instead of demanding God administer grace on Paul’s. Hoping fully in God’s grace means accepting the grace God gives us. It means accepting that what we are facing today is, in fact, a form of God’s grace. Paul was able to examine the situation and see how it was God’s grace. We may not be able to do that in every situation, but we can have faith that what we are facing is in fact a form of God’s grace. It means recognizing that whatever we face today, God can and will use it to save us (cf. **Romans 8:28-30**). We can do that because we know God will give us all we need and all we need is what God gives us. We don’t have to have anything more. God’s grace is sufficient. We can hope fully in it. We can accept grace on God’s terms and not ours.

IV. Follow through God’s way.

- A. Sadly, some of us are afraid when we teach hoping fully in God’s grace, we are giving folks permission to live immoral lives and then expect God to save them by His grace. First, we need to remember the foundation we laid two lessons ago. God’s grace is not permission to sin; but power to overcome sin. But further, we need to see that hoping fully in God’s grace is not about ignoring God’s will and expecting God to save us anyway.
- B. **I Peter 1:14** goes on to say that we need to follow God like obedient children, instead of going back to the ways we followed when we were children of wrath like the rest (cf. **Ephesians 2:3**). When we hope fully in God’s grace, we don’t ignore God’s instruction. Instead, we put our faith in it. We know God’s way works to accomplish the freedom from sin that we want, so we just do what He says. Let me see if I can illustrate this. Consider investing for your retirement. One of the greatest pieces of advice you will ever receive is diversify, don’t put all your eggs in one basket. Even if you hear of a great potential investment with a promise of a huge return, you want to hold some of your investment in reserve in case something goes wrong. Yes, that will reduce some of the profit if your investment proves true, but it will also hedge your bets if the investment proves false. You have hope in your investment, but you do not hope in it fully. You have reservations. When we hope fully in God and His grace, we are hoping without reservation. We are ready to invest our entire lives in God’s grace without reservation. We put all our eggs in His basket. If we have reservations, we put some of our hope in ourselves, in our money, in our righteousness, in our sins, in whatever else we think might give us some payoff. But when we hope fully in God’s grace without reservation, we put our everything into God and His grace. We completely submit ourselves to Him.
- C. Let’s see how this played out in Paul’s real life example in **II Corinthians 12:7-10**. When Paul prayed three times that his thorn be removed, God said, “My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness” (ESV). Paul could have rebelled against that. He could have tried to demand his own personal strength (even using noble motives to claim it). He could have gone on in his own understanding, “But God, I could do so much more for you if you remove my weakness, my thorn in the flesh.” But he didn’t. He accepted what God said and then he based his life on it. He said, “Therefore I will boast all the more gladly of my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may rest upon me. For the sake of Christ, then, I am content with weaknesses...” (ESV). Paul didn’t claim God’s grace was sufficient and then run off to do whatever he wanted. Instead, recognizing that God’s grace was sufficient, he surrendered himself to God’s will and based his life on it. Where his weaknesses hindered him, he trusted God’s grace to grow him and provide him victory in God’s way and God’s time.

Conclusion:

If you want the abundant life, freedom from sin, and victory over Satan, you need God's grace because it is not God's permission to sin, but God's power to overcome sin. If you want to stand firmly in God's grace, you must listen to God's Word because God's word is God's guide to get God's grace. But Satan is attacking with everything he can think of to get you to turn from God's grace. The only way to stand firm in God's grace is to anchor your hope fully in it. Abandon yourself to God and His grace without reservation, knowing that no matter how Satan attacks today, God will do exactly as He has promised in **I Peter 5:10**. He "will himself restore, confirm, strengthen, and establish you" (ESV). You can trust Him to do that. You can trust Him to save you. You can trust Him to win the victory through you. So, no matter what Satan has done to you or how you have responded, get back in the fight. God's grace is sufficient. You will be victorious if you stay with Him. All you have to do right now is the next right thing because you can trust that God's grace works.