

Understanding God: The Problem With Grace

John H King

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Understanding God: The Problem With Grace

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A brighter day awaits us there
When God will answer every prayer
When every thought for good or ill
By grace surrenders to His Will.

The Problem With Words

We would be naive to think that any language is translatable into another. It is no less the height of a linguistic presumption to boast that what is written or said in another language could be said clearly in English with some degree of simplicity as well as retaining the emphasis or nuance of the original language.

The ignored truth is that each language is culturally infused with explanation and description that cannot be appreciated—or understood—outside the experience which that culture offers.

An absolutely charming illustration is the Welsh word, *cwtch*.

‘Cwtch’ has no literal English translation, but is an emotionally significant embrace and an intrinsically Welsh word that evokes a sense of home. a ‘cwtch’ (pronounced ‘kutch’, to rhyme with ‘butch’) is the Welsh word for a cuddle or hug, but it’s also so much more than that. ... it’s the wrapping of your arms around someone to make them feel safe in the world. That is exactly how a cwtch ought to make you feel: safe, warm, comforted.¹

Or look at a couple German words that should be anglicized if for no other reason they are poetic. *Beinaheleidenschaftsgegenstand* which means “almost a passion.” This is that gale or guy you thought you’d wed but after rethinking a life together backed away for no other reason than a gut feeling that it wasn’t you. And

¹ <http://www.bbc.com/travel/story/20180624-cwtch-the-hug-invented-by-the-welsh>

later you met your *Lebenslangerschicksalsschatz*, your “lifelong treasure of destiny.” This is your “soul-mate?” More like your “destiny.” The wisdom in choosing mate number two over the first shows you have *Fingerspitzengefühl*. This German term means “finger tips feeling” and indicates a person’s intuitive flair or instinct. It describes a great situational awareness, and the ability to respond appropriately and tactfully. ..and life goes on....

There is no end to the examples we could offer to show that a people’s culture and language are inseparably linked in a symbiotic relationship: one says what the other does.

We don’t have to be trained linguists to know that sometimes we need give or receive a *cwetch* because our words were not sufficient to convey our thoughts. A smile often aids in translation.

We might be like the old gentleman who means what he says but fails to say what he means. We fumble at explanations. Our empathy somehow may be turned about (spun) to mean something different. Our sarcasm may be taken “literally.” And at times, enraged and serious, our words float away in the ether and fail to strike at the very problem we thought we just solved.

I worked at an investment firm as a programmer and discovered that portfolio managers did not—nor could they—speak my language. I had to learn the language of the market and translate in order to write code.

I am convinced I have discovered that many words I use in my faith in God have been defined or understood differently by—not only the modern religious skeptic, but

—persons of other faiths. Protestants² might use the phrase “an instrument of His mercy” to refer to a christian being used by God, God working through him or her. Catholics might refer to this as “sacramental.”

The word “faith” is a *christian* term, among other meanings, referring to “doctrine” (orthodoxy) and should never apply to any other religion that focuses on *practice* over *dogma* (orthopraxy).³ Any religion is now called one’s “faith.” Even atheists—in some minds—have a “faith” in science. I could run this point into the ground but won’t. Countless terms carry multiple meanings and we need to be smart about what we say in using them. (Even the word “nuance” has a nuance!)

So we should be more sympathetic toward God whose gift of His written Word is one of the biggest and most miraculous gifts of His love imaginable. When we divisively argue meanings of words, we boast of a knowledge we do not have. True Bible study envelopes a humble recognition of the gargantuan task God faced to say what He did say, *in our language, not His*, to bring us to

² Christians who are not Catholics. We are no longer protesting Catholicism in a reformational sense.

³ Stephen Prothero. p.69-70. “*It is often a mistake to refer to a religion as a “faith,” or to its adherents as “believers.” As odd as this might sound, faith and belief don’t matter much in most religions. Often ritual is far more important, as in Confucianism. Or story, as in Yoruba religion. Many Jews do not believe in God, and the world’s Hindus get along quite well without any creed. When it comes to religion, we are more often what we do than what we think. ... but to be a Christian has typically been to care about both faith and belief. Today the price of admission to the Christian family continues to be orthodoxy (right thought) rather than orthopraxy (right practice). “We believe,” the Nicene Creed begins, and two hundred or so words later Christians the world over have summarized their collective faith. As the term Christianity implies, this faith revolves around the person of Jesus...*”

faith in Him, It is a knowledge we could not have but in glimpses.⁴

In my booklet “The Day After Time” I discuss the difficulty we have academically with the idea of “eternity.” So when we read: *...in the coming ages he might show the incomparable riches of his grace, expressed in his kindness to us*⁵ our intellectualism is overwhelmed. We think we understand. Trust me here ...we don’t! “God always was from eternity past” is a concept we accept unequivocally but like the infinite expanse of His universe, we are outside our understanding.

The language of God is tied to the culture of a spiritual world, The Kingdom of heaven. In some regards this is eschatological, that is to say, we await the Savior’s return to bring this truth into its ultimate reality.⁶ Meanwhile our Bible was written in almost a sacred or spiritual language—not a fully explained treatise on our salvation but merely a declaration of that good news that God is all about reuniting with His creation, taking up where He left off the day after creation, to show us the greatness of His heart.

So when we talk about the grace of God, we only wade on the shore of this vast ocean of His unending and unfathomable love. The language of scripture, meanwhile, has to be simple, child level expressions of more complex “heavenly” ideas.⁷ Even our word, Love (agape love) is a term used first in our Bible. (Did God invent it!?)

Bible Language

⁴ 1 Corinthians 13:9 For we know in part...

⁵ Ephesians 2:7

⁶ 1 Corinthians 13:1 “If I speak in the tongues [language] ... of angels”

⁷ Is not this what Paul is saying in 1 Corinthians 13:11? When I was a child, I talked like a child, I thought like a child, I reasoned like a child. When I became a man, I put the ways of childhood behind me.

What we are trying to say here: beside the meanings of words or the nuance a word might emphasize or the context a word lives in,⁸ there is the general or *cultural limits* placed on a given language. It is the burden of language to facilitate cultural expression clearly, simply, and with a proper and respectable emphasis of those ideas that are the quintessence of that culture. Meanings of words change with cultural change. There is, in other words, a close relationship between a *cultural* practice, social norms and worldview ...and the *language* commissioned to explain these ideas.⁹

In addition, the language of the Scriptures had the added burden of speaking for *God*,¹⁰ representing *His* thoughts in some elementary form that would aid faith in seeking after Him. The culture of heaven, what heaven must be like, we can say with a prima facie reasonableness, is in a real sense, beyond the language of the text. To explain the coming age in the language of this age was never the burden of Scripture. The Bible was written to emphasize christian conduct in time, here and now, in this life, in clear and simple language in order that we might live its message and represent a vibrant witness that the living God is among us. The language of Scripture only introduces a message of grace, not in such terms that would make sense out of *all* that God plans to accomplish for us, His people, but only as the most basic of Divine

⁸ Many words have specific or limited applications. In Hebrew there are 10 words "to kill" used within strict cultural idioms and uses. In English, for example, who ever heard of a petit window or a small girl. Windows are small; girls can be petit.

⁹ In New England something can be said to be "wicked" good which has nothing to do with morality or God.

¹⁰ Exodus 18:15 *Moses said unto his father in law, Because the people come unto me to enquire of God: [KJV]*

truths needed to germinate faith in our hearts and give us a hope for that world to come.¹¹

Jesus said it best to us who are on this entry level of truth: “*You believe in God, trust me... I go to prepare a place for you ...I will come again....*” That much is clear.

There are indicators in both the Greek, the language the New Testament was originally written in, and the Hebrew/Aramaic language of the Old Testament that point to this divine intent.

This booklet, therefore, is not intended as a grammar but a short discussion of some of the characteristics of the biblical languages that support God’s interest in *introducing* a discussion of His grace with us.

¹¹ Albert Einstein cautioned about describing everything scientifically. Like a beautiful piece of music as a variation of wave pressure, faith can be understood merely in theological terms, lifeless descriptions, dead dogmas, instead of the very quality that inspires vision and breathes life into hope. Faith is not the foot, but the step in our walk; it is not the eye but the twinkle that shows us alive and in love, it is not the face but the peaceful smile upon it that responds with a joyous anticipation of better things to come. Faith is the breath of God reviving dead form because by it we come alive to love and to live for Christ. [Taken from “Challenged” p. 23]

New Testament

The language of the New Testament has had a surprising history. Dr. Chris Caragounis in his work *The Development of Greek and the New Testament* offers uncommon insight.

There were 7 dialects that merged to form the Koine (the common language) during the Biblical period. [335 B.C. - A.D. 565], afterward, these dialects separated again. This resilience, this capacity of the Greek language to divide up into dialects and then to reunite and assert itself ... *"for the third time in its longer than 4000-year-long history, is unparalleled in the history of language."*¹² The Greek language combining 7 different dialects¹³ into one common (Koine) language hints at a divine decision. It has never happen before or since in any language! To me, that's the providential hand of God. *"Andriotis [in 'A History of the Greek Language' calls it] a language that even the gods would have been ready to speak."*¹⁴

Paul spoke of the time being right for Christ's incarnation. There was one language understood throughout the civilized world whether in Greece, Italy, Palestine, or on the islands of the Mediterranean Sea. ... and it was Koine.

¹² Chrys Caragounis. p 21.

¹³ Caragounis says [ibid. p. 38] *"Attice Greek could not preserve its purely Athenian character, and entered a course simplification, amalgamating elements from the other Greek dialects... it became ... Koine [the Greek of the New Testament]."*

¹⁴ ibid. pp.33-34.

But when the set time had fully come, God sent his Son, born of a woman, born under the law,¹⁵

Dr. Caragounis is not alone in his observation and the impact this language might have upon faith. There are in fact many scholars of the Bible whose knowledge has deepened their faith in God and the message of His grace.¹⁶

New Testament Greek

Koine was a bit different from the dialects spoken in the Greek Islands. It was different in some respects from the Classical language of Greek literature. In vocabulary and grammar, the language of the New Testament exhibits striking dissimilarities from Classical Greek and yet if one knows the Classical, one knows the Koine. (Perhaps, we might compare American English with the English spoken in the U.K. or Australia.) In consequence, it has been regarded as standing by itself as “New Testament Greek.” In general it had been hastily classed as “Judaic” or “Hebraic” Greek—its writers, for the

¹⁵ Galatians 4:4. Today on the eve of His return, English is a global language.

¹⁶ Bart Ehrman in *Interrupting Jesus* argues that scholarship has discovered through the styles of writing and vocabulary in Ephesians and Colossians that Paul could not have written these letters. “*The writing style of both letters is uncharacteristically Paul’s*” (p. 126.) But Dr. Chrys Caragounis, himself a Greek, a Greek scholar and a doctor of Christian Theology (<http://chrys-caragounis.com/index.html>) supports the writings as genuine (The Development of Greek and The New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2006), 432.): “*The discussion of Pauline texts indicates that while Paul, not infrequently exhibits elements that were deemed.. necessary to good composition, he seldom made a conscious effort to adhere to literary rules for elegance in style... his more felicitous choices of words and compositions seem most of the time to be the result of instinctive feeling and natural taste; they are the spontaneous intellectual outbursts of a great soul...*”

most part, being Jews (with the probable exception of Saint Luke). “*The Koine of the New Testament*,” Dr. Milligan informs us, “*was filled with reminiscences of the Greek of the Septuagint on which it had been nurtured.*”¹⁷

The Koine proved in time to have more in common with the language of the day in the Greek world—the language of the common man. This remains true into modern times.¹⁸

The Problem

But the problem in Scripture was introducing the Cross and the resurrection to a world that had no language for this truth. The Greeks did not believe in a resurrection and had no word for it when Paul reached Mar’s hill in Athens. The fruit of the Spirit are also not natural traits. How do you find the words to even list them!? But the most pressing need was to explain *grace* to a religious world that had no awareness of such a concept. God’s task enjoining language to aid Him in communicating His plan or desires toward us was monumental. His choice of Hebrew/ Aramaic for the First Covenant and Greek (Koine

¹⁷ Dr. Milligan writes in his Introduction to *The Vocabulary of the Greek Testament*.

¹⁸ “It should be clear”, Dr. Caragounis notes, “that the Greek of today is not a different language from the ancient Greek.... ... The New Testament may also have played a part in arresting uncontrolled linguistic change. ... How a particular term, construction, phrase or even custom in older times is to be understood and interpreted may receive important light from the modern phase of the language including the feeling of its speakers. This resource has, to my knowledge, never been exploited although its value ought to be apparent.” Chris Caragounis. *The Development of Greek and the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI.:BakerAcademic, 2006.â), 66 & 71

or common Greek) for the Second has to be an important aspect of providence.¹⁹

Richard Dawkins, one of the 4 horsemen of the new atheism, reasoned that *“It seems probable that language evolves by the cultural equivalent of random genetic drift. ... Latin drifted to become Spanish, Portuguese, Italian, French....”*²⁰ But Professor Caragounis, whose entire career was consumed by a driving interest in understanding the development of the Greek language corrects this notion, clarifying that *“The Vedic-Sanskrit language gave rise to a number of Hindi languages and dialects. While in Europe, the second oldest language, Latin, broke up into the Romance languages [true, but].... Greek, on the other hand, never gave birth to any daughter languages.”*²¹ This alone might not give indication that the Greek language was God’s choice for our Bible but there is further reason to believe that this could be so.

Actionsart

The Greek language during the Biblical period, developed the Perfect form²² for emphasis to describe a state of being, not an activity. I will explain shortly. The perfect form shows the result or accomplishment of an act and not the process or activity that got us there. The best way to say this is in looking into New Testament scriptures that use this form.

¹⁹ 2 Timothy 3:16 All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness...

²⁰ Richard Dawkins, *The God Delusion* (New York:Houghton Mifflin Co., 2006), 189.

²¹ Chris Caragounis. p. 2.

²² The dictionary refers to the word “form” as “a set of forms taken by a verb to indicate the time (and sometimes also the continuance or completeness) of the action in relation to the time of the utterance: *the past form.*”

The history of the Perfect is brief. It disappears after the Bizantine period after the Bible was completed. What adds to our difficulty is that we are forced to use a form in the English translation that provides a different emphasis . Biblical verbs emphasize “aktionsart” which is the German word for a “Type of Action.”

There are many types of action but English form cares more about the *time* when the activity occurs:²³

- ◆ *Present* form: I am typing this section.
- ◆ *Past* form: I already typed the first paragraph of this section.
- ◆ *Future* form: I will hopefully complete this section soon.

Here are some types of *action*:

- ◆ *Completed action.* We use a past form in English. Philippians 4:11 *I am not saying this because I am in need, for I **have learned** to be content whatever the circumstances.*
- ◆ *Conative action:* attempted unsuccessfully. Galatians 5:4 *You who are **trying to be justified** by the law have been alienated from Christ; you have fallen away from grace.*
- ◆ *Inceptive action.* The beginning moments of a condition: Acts 15:12 *The whole assembly **became silent** as they listened to Barnabas and Paul telling about the signs and wonders God had done among the Gentiles through them.*

²³ Is there a different between dozing and falling to sleep [falling asleep?], getting sleepy?? This should be a matter for aktionsart in the Biblical world.

- ◆ *Iterative.* Happening over and over again. Acts 3:2 *Now a man who was lame from birth was being carried to the temple gate called Beautiful, where he was put every day to beg from those going into the temple courts.*
- ◆ *Customary action:* of general truth. Matthew 7:17 *Likewise, every good tree bears [consistently] good fruit, but a bad tree bears [consistently and only] bad fruit.*
- ◆ *Continuous:* ongoing. Luke 24:32 *They asked each other, "Were not our hearts burning within us while he talked with us on the road and opened the Scriptures to us?"*
- ◆ *Progressive.* Something going on for awhile whether being repeated or simply taking some time to complete.²⁴ Something done in stages or over time, etc. Matthew 25:8 *The foolish ones said to the wise, 'Give us some of your oil; our lamps are going out.'*
- ◆ *Momentary* or instant acts or viewed as complete with no reference to the process leading up to the completion. [This one is the Aorist I spoke of]. Acts 5:5 *When Ananias heard this, he fell down and died. And great fear seized all who heard what had happened.*

For action words there is also the question of *mood* & *voice* and the nuance implied in different forms: A wish might be weaker or stronger, more probable or more possible. A command might express obligation or be just a warning. Some of these distinctions come with synonyms

²⁴ There is even in Hebrew grammar a distinction between progressive duration and simple duration [durative action]. see Kautzsch p. 315. In Exodus 15:12 the earth was said to "swallow" the Egyptians "one after another" gradually consuming them all. In Numbers 23:7 Balaam began his parable saying, "*Balak brought me [lead me place to place, step by step: in stages] from Aram.*"

of an idea and sometimes the verb, the action word, provides an implied emphasis.²⁵ There is also the idea of gradual action distinct from action completed, gradual change as oppose to exchanges. It is the burden of language to clarify many of these distinctions depending on how important they are to the cultural understanding and whether or not there are other words that can modify one's thoughts.

John 1:12 reads more accurately in Greek than it might in Hebrew: *Yet to all who did receive him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God.* *To become* is not a gradual process but a state of being. Salvation is an instant conversion (I might say: "out of time," because there is no timeframe that represents conversion). No one is partially saved or in the process of being saved. The use of a present form when speaking of salvation is iterative not progressive.²⁶

In Hebrew, however, "becoming" can speak of a "passage from one condition to another."²⁷ Something in flux.²⁸

²⁵ See Burton. p. 38 #77

In Mark 4:39 we read Jesus command a Galilean storm, "*Quiet! Be still.*" The wording He "*rebuked the wind, and said unto the sea*" suggests that He addressed the wind with a more vociferous and commanding tone. To the sea He simply admonished, "hush." The word "quiet" is in a form and mood combination found only here in the New Testament, it is so emphatic. His language was strong and very much a rebuke. BUt "be still" is a gentler tone that suggests that the waves were only reacting to the wind and not the cause of the turmoil.

²⁶ 1 Corinthians 1:18 *For the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are **being saved** it is the power of God.*

Acts 2:47 is clear: *And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved.*

²⁷ Bowman, p. 39

²⁸ Of interest is Heraclitus's doctrine of flux, all things changing, Plato, it is said, remarked that he had not a language in which to say it. (He was greek) cp.

<https://www.iep.utm.edu/heraclit/>

This is not the emphasis in John's Gospel. We are not in the process of becoming God's children. The adoption papers were signed already at our conversion.

Perfection

One verbal construction which should be of interest is what is known as "the Perfect." In English the construction is the helping or auxiliary verb, *had* or *have*, with a past verb form: I *have arrived*, He *has saved* us, etc. But what the perfect form might mean in English has nothing to do with what it means in the Greek. The English indicates some activity starting in the past continuing in or to the present. The English perfect is not like the Greek perfect. The Greek form that answers to this "English" idea is called "the Aorist."

Sadly, this "Perfect" form, Professor Burton informs us, was gradually losing force as a separate form or actionsart.²⁹ Today, in modern Greek, there is no perfect form.

I ask you, my reader, to give me an opportunity to offer some biblical examples. I may bore you as a writer but the sacred text is far from boring. It is also important to know that much of what we are attempting to explain is discernible in the context of a verse; so, the preacher trained in Scripture, passion for truth, and a matching prayer life and study habits, has a good handle on all this. As a parishioner, you can just sit back and take it all in.

²⁹ It should be observed that the Aoristic use of the Perfect is a distinct departure from the strict improper sense of the form in Greek. The beginnings of this departure are to be seen in classical Greek, and, in Greek writers of a time later in the New Testament, the tendency was still further developed, until the difference between the tenses was lost. p. 42

My burden here is to point out the difficulty in understanding all God wants to share with us through His Word, the gargantuan task God had to write in an earthy language about a heavenly idea such as “grace.”

The truth we ultimately face is Ephesians 2:7-9.

...in order that in the coming ages he might show the incomparable riches of his grace, expressed in his kindness to us in Christ Jesus. For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God—not by works, so that no one can boast.

This truth, as simple and exciting as it sounds, goes beyond the theology we preach to explain it. The first interest for me here is the phrase: *have been saved*. This is a perfect form in the Greek. What does it really mean?

Scholarship refers to the Greek Perfect as describing *a state of being*.

There is in the biblical text a difference between the past form [we have called an “Aorist”] and the Perfect form. The Aorist, scholarship points out, affirms the *event itself*. The Perfect affirms the existence of the results of the event.³⁰

Take First Corinthians 15:4 quoted often during Holy Communion in many churches:

For what I received I passed on to you as of first importance [Or you at the first]: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, that he was buried [simple past: Aorist] and that he was raised [PERFECT form] on the third day.

The burial is simply a past event. Of the Resurrection there is an existing result, prominently before

³⁰ Burton. p. 41

Paul's mind.³¹ Our Lord's burial in a borrowed grave served prophecy as a confirmation of who He was and what was happening in His death, but after this, there is no more to say. But the resulting Resurrection of He who is the firstfruits³² of all God's children and as the confirmation of our justification³³ is of great importance in God's plan for our eternal salvation. The perfect form describes our Lord's resurrection as the accomplishment, the result, of all that Calvary offered!

But this form offers more. Let's examine it more closely. The perfect describes a state which means whatever activity brought it about has finally concluded and this is the complete result. It speaks not of change but of UNchange. We often use the description *permanent* because if there are changes we cannot speak of a final "state". This form also speaks more of *unchanging* rather than *unchanged*. Unchanging means that this speaks of a state or condition which is *not* in flux or in the process of becoming something. It is considered *complete* as to the process or *accomplished* as to its action. Perhaps the best English statement would be to say, "Jesus *IS* risen."

The word might also carry the notion of "finality," though the language does not need serve this nuance. This point is a prima-facie argument which I draw from a review of the form in our New Testament.³⁴ We might sigh with the generations that have awaited this moment, this

³¹ *ibid.*

³² I Corinthians 15:20 But Christ has indeed been raised from the dead, the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep.

³³ Romans 4:25 He was delivered over to death for our sins and was raised to life for our justification.

³⁴ The intensive perfect. The perfect is sometimes used in classical Greek as an emphatic or intensive present. It is possible that under this head should be spliced certain imperfects of the New Testament more commonly assigned to one of the previous uses [actions]. Pp. 37-39

prophecy to be complete, and cry excitedly, “*At last, salvation has come to us!*”

Take 2 Timothy 4:7, and bear in mind that Paul (still breathing, still ministering, but facing the end of his ministry and time here) gave out this final sigh, “I made it!”:

I have **fought** the good fight, I have **finished** the course, I have **kept** the faith...

All three embolden words, verbs, are in this perfect form. It explains itself for any believer who has sought to fill up in their own life the sufferings of Christ³⁵ and have come to that point near death when looking back they are grateful to God for giving them a plan for life and empowering them to live it. Scholars refer to this as *completed* activity. The race is run, the victory won. But is there not here also this sense of release? Of finality? Of a glorious entrance into another state the other side of that finish line?

There is also a sharp line of distinction between the perfect of *completed* action and the perfect of *existing* state. To the latter [perfect of existing state]... are to be assigned those instances in which the past act [the race, for example] is practically dropped from thought, and the attention turned wholly to the existing results [the finish line]. Probably the best Anglicized example might be a new mother who just went through hours of labor and now junior *is born*. There is no reference to the pain in this statement but the wonderful happiness of motherhood.

³⁵ Colossians 1:24 Now I rejoice in what I am suffering for you, and I fill up in my flesh what is still lacking in regard to Christ's afflictions, for the sake of his body, which is the church.

While under the former [completed action]... are to be placed those instances in which it is evident that the writer had in mind both the past act and the present results. Jesus's cry from the Cross, "It is finished!" might be such a perfect. Prophecy is fulfilled and Satan is defeated! As a "perfect of existing state" Jesus might have been referring to the plan of our salvation, finally available!

When the Bible says, many times,³⁶ about itself, "*It is written,*" it uses the perfect form. I want to explain: The unchanging, indelible, chiseled in stone and always applicable as eternal Truth, Word of God *IS* written and it stands so!

In Matthew 27:43 Jesus's accusers threw this back in His face,

He trusted in God; let him deliver him now, if he will have him:
for he said, I am the Son of God.

Trusted is a perfect form. This is clearly a stronger way of saying "He believed." Another perfect form that explains this usage, John 6:69 "We have believed [a perfect] and know [another perfect] the Thou art the Holy One of God." I think to give this the proper emphasis in English, we should string some exclamation points on the end: *We KNOW you are the Holy One of God ... absolutely no doubt!!!!!!*

When Jesus cried from the Cross, "*It is finished!*" He spoke in this form, according to the text, meaning that His death has brought a salvation which can be said to be

³⁶ Found 80 times in the KJV.

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1. *Permanent and unchanged*: He will never need to return to the cross again.³⁷
2. *Complete and unchanging*: His death provided a perfect or complete salvation³⁸ and no prophecy was left unfulfilled as regards His death.³⁹
3. *Final and immediate*: Finally the moment had arrived.⁴⁰

A word common, but not exclusively, found in describing the perfect form is translated *confident* or *convinced* in the NIV. Here are a few references which suggest to me that Paul had a deeply rooted faith or trust in the Lord. His confidence (in the KJV it is translated *persuasion*) in His relationship with Christ was unassailable, unconquerable, unchangeable. Using this perfect, He assured the Roman believers:

For I am **convinced** that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord.⁴¹

³⁷ Romans 6:1 The death he died, he died to sin once for all; but the life he lives, he lives to God.

Hebrews 9:28 so Christ was sacrificed once to take away the sins of many; and he will appear a second time, not to bear sin, but to bring salvation to those who are waiting for him.

³⁸ Isaiah 49:6 & Acts 13:47 he says: "It is too small a thing for you to be my servant to restore the tribes of Jacob and bring back those of Israel I have kept. I will also make you a light for the Gentiles, that my salvation may reach to the ends of the earth."

Hebrews 5:9 and, once made perfect, he became the source of eternal salvation for all who obey him

³⁹ Acts 13:29 When they had carried out all that was written about him, they took him down from the cross and laid him in a tomb

⁴⁰ John 19:28 Later, knowing that everything had now been finished, and so that Scripture would be fulfilled, Jesus said, "I am thirsty."

⁴¹ Romans 8:38-39

Paul had an unshakeable confidence in the Lord's work in which he shared:

- ◆ He *knew* that his ministry was not tied to his former education or the prestige it allegedly offered:
 - *...we ... serve God by his Spirit, ... boast in Christ Jesus, and ... put no **confidence** in the flesh ... [i.e.] circumcised on the eighth day, of the people of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of Hebrews; in regard to the law, a Pharisee; - Philippians 3:3, 5*
- ◆ He *knew* that somehow his sufferings emboldened other believers to share in the Gospel:
 - *And because of my chains, most of the brothers and sisters have become **confident** in the Lord and dare all the more to proclaim the gospel without fear. - Philippians 1:14*
- ◆ He *knew* his service to the Lord was not in vain:
 - *being **confident** of this, that he who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus. - Philippians 1:6.*
 - ***Convinced** of this, I know that I will remain, and I will continue with all of you for your progress ... in the faith, Philippians 1:25.*
 - *That is why I am suffering as I am. Yet this is no cause for shame, because I know whom I have believed, and am **convinced** that he is able to guard what I have entrusted to him until that day. - 2 Timothy 1:12*

Paul's trust and confidence in the Savior and in the message and ministry God entrusted to him was beyond the devil's reach.

But we have this treasure in jars of clay to show that this all-surpassing power is from God and not from us. We are hard pressed on every side, but not crushed; perplexed, but not in despair; persecuted, but not abandoned; struck down, but not destroyed. - 2 Corinthians 4:7-9

The perfect is the best form to testify to such a strong and enduring confidence in the Lord and Paul's record confirms it.

Passive

The fulcrum of the biblical message for you and me is the exciting reality: *'We have been saved!'* We have had two thousand years to study and theologize this simple phrase and now we have a basic understanding as to what this means, not only intellectually but in personal experience. But this was brand new in Paul's day. This was a mystery⁴² when Paul was commissioned with the ministry of reconciliation⁴³ to present it as "good news."⁴⁴ This simple phrase is not just a perfect form but it is in a passive⁴⁵ form as well. ..and what might that mean?

⁴² Romans 16:25 Now to him who is able to establish you in accordance with my gospel, the message I proclaim about Jesus Christ, in keeping with the revelation of the mystery hidden for long ages past,

⁴³ 2 Corinthians 5:18 All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation:

⁴⁴ Luke 8:1 After this, Jesus traveled about from one town and village to another, proclaiming the good news of the kingdom of God. The Twelve were with him,

⁴⁵ We assume the reader knows what a passive voice is in English. It is a good start in talking about the Greek passive.

Understanding God: The Problem With Grace 24

For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God⁴⁶

The development of these forms, the Perfect and the Passive, I maintain, had to be under a divine mandate to reveal in its simplest terms this profound expression of the divine heart toward His creation. The Hebrew, to begin with, (The Old Testament) has no true passive.⁴⁷ The Hebrew language by cultural mandate ascribes responsibility to every action.⁴⁸

The passive idea, therefore, comes through the Greek language into our Bible. It has a history.⁴⁹ It developed out of the so-called '*middle voice*'⁵⁰ in Greek. The middle voice for convenience of definition is said to be a reflexive form.⁵¹ But that oversimplifies things. We are

⁴⁶ Ephesians 2:8 NIV

⁴⁷ It might be argued that Hebrew has a passive stem but not in the sense that something is happening to the subject of whom it can be said, they are in no way responsible.

⁴⁸ This explains why a child born blind was accused of sin in the womb. The theory of reincarnation used to explain this verse has no merit in Jewish beliefs.

John 9:2 His disciples asked him, "Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?"

⁴⁹ "In the pro-ethnic language [early Greek] there was ...no passive as there was none in [early] Sanskrit" Robertson. p. 798.

⁵⁰ The Greek Middle Voice is more a transitional form from active to passive. It has been designated as a reflexive form in which the subject performs the action of the verb on themselves or for their own benefit. ["The middle voice is very broad in its scope and no one word, not even reflexive, covers all the ground." The Hebrew Hithpael stem is "parallel to the middle voice-but not wholly so," Robertson. p. 804, 806], Many middle forms carry an active force. For more, google Linda Joyce Manney who wrote at length about this voice as it impacts thought in modern Greek. The pre-historic situation [as to the relationship of the middle voice and active voice] is speculative." Robertson. p. 803

⁵¹ There is no middle voice form in English. A reflexive in English is simply as: active verb with a reflexive pronoun, myself, him/her self, etc. I hit myself ..by accident. Long story...

only interested here in this voice as the spelling or form (if not the meaning) morphs into the passive voice. Here's what we are saying: "*The middle is older than the passive...the passive rose out of the middle and ..the middle marks a step toward the passive.*"⁵² One scripture stands out in this regard and is a bit puzzling: Acts 22:16 "*Get up, be baptized and wash your sins away, calling on his name.*" This is a middle voice form. Does it mean "baptize yourself," which is a middle idea or "be baptized," which is a passive idea, though the form isn't passive. The compromise accepted by some, including me, is "submit to baptism..." You decide.

Is it only co-incidental that the passive idea comes into its own during the Classical and Koine period just when God presses the Greek language into service to record His New Covenant for us?⁵³

As to where the name 'passive' comes from: Robertson references the Latin "*patior,*" to suffer and Matthew 17:12⁵⁴ "*So also the Son of man will suffer at their hands.*" We know by our theology that Jesus's suffering was in every sense undeserved and unearned since He was guiltless and sinless, but how sure are we that the words used say that! It was necessary here to add: "at their hands." To make this point clear.

The popularity of this form⁵⁵ (The passive replacing the middle in common speech) comes with various shades of meaning that make it more challenging to interpret as a pure or true passive. Luke 12:9 says "*But whoever disowns*

⁵² Robertson. p. 803.

⁵³ In Homer many middle voice forms had in context a passive meaning. See Robertson, p. 815.

⁵⁴ Robertson. p. 815. ὁ υἱὸς τοῦ ἀνθρώπου μέλλει πάσχειν ὑπὲρ αὐτῶν

⁵⁵ The spelling or form of both the passive and middle voices are often the same for both with a number of verbs. We depend heavily on context and the use of the words to interpret the text.

me before others will be disowned before the angels of God." Those who deny will be denied. They *are* responsible for what happens to them. This is a passive but more semitic in tone though good Greek. In Acts 22:30 "Paul was being accused by the Jews" but he rejoins, "fake news!" Acts 24:13 "... they cannot prove to you the charges they are now making against me." If we can believe Paul—and we can—this is a true passive. He was not egging them on and into litigation.

The Greek *passive*, as a *true passive*, speaks of an uninitiated action against or upon someone who receives it. We depend on context for detail.

The Hebrew use of the passive idea, however—something done 'to' you instead of (active) 'by' you—is weak in comparison to the Greek concept. The so-called passive form in Hebrew, Professor Bowman tells us, "*indicates that the action...is done to the subject as coming from the outside.*"⁵⁶ But it does not, thereby, say that the subject was in no way responsible for what happened. Much of what happened to ancient Israel, for example, that was painful and punitive did not exonerate them or prove they had no part in their own demise.

Here is an example of Hebrew thought on this subject where a passive in Hebrew is not a true passive: in Haggai 1:8 the Lord instructs "*Go up into the mountains and bring down timber and build my house, so that I may take pleasure in it and be honored,*" says the LORD."⁵⁷ The word honored which many scholars might call a passive can have a reflexive meaning: '*to show one's self to be great.*'

⁵⁶ Thorleif Bowman. *Hebrew Thought Compared to Greek* (New York:W. W. Norton. Co., 1960), 35.

⁵⁷ The word honored is the Niphal of כָּבַד and can also mean '*to show one's self great.*'

If I am right about this, even Pharaoh was in some sense responsible for his hardened heart.⁵⁸

*“As regards its meaning,” Gesenius teaches that this form [the Hebrew passive form] “bears some resemblance to the Greek **middle** voice.”⁵⁹ It also expresses mutual action (done to one another). It has the meaning of the active with the addition of ‘to’ or ‘for’ oneself. It comes to mean the passive idea, Gesenius informs us, “in consequence of a **looseness of thought.**”⁶⁰*

The idea behind the grace of God is much stronger as our theology contends and as Paul pointed out, *“this is **not from yourselves, it is the gift of God**”*⁶¹ The Greek language developed a passive that could allow for this truth and added it to the perfect form to begin to describe what God provided through His grace at Calvary. The gift of God through Christ’s death and resurrection—as the acronym was created to show (“God’s Riches At Christ’s Expense”) was offered on Calvary to us who did not even know it was being offered!⁶² It was the execution of a plan God drew up⁶³ and He alone carried out⁶⁴ and then offered us for free. And this is only the beginning of His generosity.⁶⁵

⁵⁸ Exodus 7:13.

⁵⁹ Gesenius’ p 137.

⁶⁰ *ibid.* p. 138.

⁶¹ Ephesians 2:8

⁶² John 1:5 The Light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not comprehend it.

⁶³ I Peter 1:20 He was chosen before the creation of the world, but was revealed in these last times for your sake.

⁶⁴ Isaiah 63:5 I looked, but there was no one to help, I was appalled that no one gave support; so my own arm achieved salvation for me...

⁶⁵ The word for gift used in Ephesians 2:8 is not as strong as the word found in Hebrews 6:4 where the word “gift” there means gratuitous gift or the benefactions of a sovereign. In Ephesians, the emphasis of the “gift” is “the recipient’s abiding possession.” [Thayers. p. 155] “...for God’s gifts and his call are irrevocable.” Romans 11:29.

How do you say this in any language and not come into conflict with the cultural interpretation of the words and the forms that the listener uses to filter what they are hearing! Obviously the Spirit interprets for the hungry heart.

But when he, the Spirit of truth, comes, he will guide you into all the truth. He will not speak on his own; he will speak only what he hears, and he will tell you what is yet to come.⁶⁶

The word *grace* itself has a biblical significance⁶⁷ not found before the writing of the Scripture in Greek—a closer look we save for later.

⁶⁶ John 16:13

⁶⁷ Thayers, p. 698. “The spiritual condition of one governed by the power of divine grace.... ‘status gratiae’ e.g. Romans 5:2 “through whom we have gained access by faith into this grace in which we now stand.” See also I Peter 5:12; 2 Peter 3:18 and 2 Timothy 2:1

Old Testament

John Reuchlin, (d. 1522), who was the father of Hebrew philology among Christians, in determining the Old Testament Canon adhered almost entirely to Jewish tradition. But the field of investigating the Hebrew language widened gradually in the seventeenth century to include cognate or kindred languages changing scholarship's understanding of the origin and authenticity of the canon. A fuller study of the historical evolution of Hebrew came in the 1800's when the linguistic phenomena could be more fully described. Scholars of the day explained the organic connexion (the historical-critical method) of these phenomena in Hebrew by comparison with sister languages: Sanskrit, Arabic, Ugaritic, Aramaic, and other semitic languages, and by employing the general rules of philology which by then had joined the sciences in linguistic research.

Two observations were made. First, The Hebrew language fell into 2 periods: The earlier period before the Babylonian exile and the second after the exile. The Old Testament writings (by and large) belonged to this *second* period. This scholarly conclusion has become a contentious issue with the fundamental belief in a verbal plenary theory of divine inspiration. How can "every word" be from God when the text dates grammatically hundreds of years *after* the supposed writers of it.

Another academic blow fell when such observations more and more led to the belief that the original text (wherever it is) has suffered to a much greater extent than formerly admitted by biblical scholarship.

There appear unintentional corruptions in copying the text: the interchange of similar letters; transpositions and omissions of letter, words, even entire sentences because the copyist's eye fell or the missing piece was reinserted in the wrong place because one's eye lost its place in copying.⁶⁸ Simply said, the scribe's eye would wander. This led to erroneous repetitions and misspellings that might represent a different thought.

All of this became the work of the "textual" critic to observe in an effort to ascertain, if possible, what was originally written.⁶⁹

Gesenius, in his grammar, informs us:

*"The beginning of ...Hebrew literature generally is undoubtedly to be placed as early as the time of Moses, although the Pentateuch [Moses' writing] in its present form, in which very different strata may be still clearly recognized, is to be regarded as a gradual production of the centuries after Moses."*⁷⁰

But the critic gave no thought now to divine authorship. Elihu's comment, offered as a comfort to his friend, Job, has fallen in recent times on deaf ears: [It is] *the breath of the Almighty, that gives them understanding*.⁷¹ Paul's

⁶⁸ Consider Isaiah 2:2 written pre-exile and Micah 4:1 written post. Is it possible that whoever wrote Micah penned these words in Isaiah?

Isa 2:2 In the last days the mountain of the LORD's temple will be established as the highest of the mountains; it will be exalted above the hills, and all nations will stream to it.

Micah 4:1 In the last days the mountain of the LORD's temple will be established as the highest of the mountains; it will be exalted above the hills, and peoples will stream to it.

⁶⁹ see Kautzsch. Introduction

⁷⁰ Kautzsch. Introduction. 13 n

What Gesenius is observing, for example, is the use of certain archaic words of epicene use (a masculine form for both genders), a "boy" also used for a girl or one pronoun used for both genders. Now the critics see this as a later redaction. Deuteronomy 22:15 "the young woman" is written about a girl but says "boy".

⁷¹ Job 32:8

encouraging thought also no longer drives the interest of the seminarian:

All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness,⁷²

Perhaps, we need to determine what Scripture is in “all scripture” or perhaps, the theory that every word is to be considered divinely handwritten needs tweaking.

Or perhaps, we need to simply recognize that just having the Bible is the miracle and we need not question the course divine providence took to get it to us. Our focus needs to remain on the message not the philological changes that have not—because they could not—destroy the message of grace contained within its pages. To us, it is and remains the Word of God, not because it is scientifically verifiable nor because we have to blindly assume the text must be grammatically and syntactically perfect. Just because somehow the language (or the oral traditions) of Moses might have been toyed with in the wording or translated into a more current version of the Hebrew language, post-exile, should not shake faith. The message is intact.

The fact that some ancient script which might have been closer to what Moses might have chiseled in stone or scratched on vellum or penned on papyrus came to us changed linguistically should be incidental to our interest in studying the message itself. Let each reader decide for themselves whether or not what he or she is reading is God inspired.

As christians we have been accused of having a cognitive dissonance when it comes to the Bible. We

⁷² 2 Timothy 3:16

naively—they say—endorse the text in our spoken language trusting the translation to provide the inspiration ...and rightly so! It is called “faith.” And we live by that.

Over the course of decades of studying and teaching this sacred work, I have read nothing that gave me pause to doubt my faith. And I am not alone.

Sounds of the Heart

The Hebrew is divided into three sections: The *Torah* ('Teaching', also known as the Five Books of Moses), the *Nevi'im* ('Prophets') and the *Ketuvim* ('Writings')—hence **TaNakh**. (pronounced, Tanack). I wanted to purchase a copy; so, I walked into a Jewish bookstore in the Squirrel Hill community in Pittsburgh, PA. and enquired about the Old Testament. I was promptly corrected. “You mean the Bible!” came the response from the gentleman behind the counter. Regardless when this bible was written or compiled, post-exilic or earlier, this was Jesus's bible. This was the only bible Paul knew and referenced. This is the bible I read and cherish!

What was it about Hebrew (and some Aramaic) that God choose it for the record of His earlier dealings with His people? Critics and skeptics have tried to spin its historical narrative into myths and legends. Scoffers have cried “tilt” arguing that this book is riddled with contradictions and unscientific explanations. And there are words with meanings which are not or cannot be clearly translated. (Ninety Hebrew words in our Old Testament are found only once.) But did I point out already: This was *Jesus's* bible?

Arabs and Jews would debate which of their two languages: Hebrew and Arabic, was earlier. Which one was spoken in the Garden of Eden? In which one did Adam and Eve communicate their love to each other? My point? Hebrew is an ancient language. Did God choose

Hebrew, simply because He chose Jacob and his descendants? God chose Moses ...and Moses spoke Hebrew...not Coptic (Egyptian)?

Hebrew in some respects is a primitive language. In its biblical state, it is in no condition to compete with English or modern languages that are so technical, analytical, and filled with made-up terms borrowed from, Latin, Greek, French, German, and more.⁷³ The words “computer” or “TV” are not in early Hebrew, not only because the words are not there, but the concepts, the history of invention and discovery, all of it is missing. We understand this. The culture was agricultural and the language must be alive within this culture. Abraham shepherded sheep. What, then, was the value to God in choosing *Hebrew*, a language limited as to what it could say and explain?

God does nothing by accident or by chance, nor is He limited by necessity to choose something because there was none better or more appropriate. He is the Creator and He probably could have woven into their language a few logically sound ideas that would prove beneficial to theologians in our age.⁷⁴ What reason wisdom had for giving us the Tanakh in Hebrew with some Aramaic is probably known only to Him but I, for one, see good reason for this beautiful language:

⁷³ I Peter 4:18 quotes the LXX translation of 11:31 [*“If it is **hard** for the righteous to be saved, what will become of the ungodly and the sinner?”*] But this is not what the Hebrew says. The word in Greek [μόλις] for ‘hard’ [KJV: scarcely] has no Hebrew equivalent.

⁷⁴ Old Testament theology cannot be viewed systematically. Dr. Harrison points out in his “Introduction to the Old Testament” that “...*the theological concepts of the old testament do not lend themselves with particular readiness to any attempt at systematization....*” Harrison p. 417

Hebrew has only two (2) tenses or verb forms and neither has anything to do with time. One speaks of activity that is done, stopped, finish, complete. And the other describes the opposite, an activity still ongoing. There is no perfect form as in Greek. There is no present form! No need for one since the moment is passing even as we speak of it. When a verb describes something in its beginning stages, a writer could show it continuing on by using a participle (an 'ing' form).

More to the point: Hebrew is a language of narration (story telling, oral tradition keeping). A dozen verb forms tasked with a dozen action types just wasn't necessary. Philosophers and theologians like the granularity of a Greek word but humble shepherds—not so much.

Narration and the Conversive

Narration is what this language is all about. It is the language of story and song, of proverb and parable. A Hebrew writer strings actions together with “and’s” which are called conversives (conversational) as if it were the only conjunction available (there are very few.) Biblical Greek on the other hand has 2 words for “but” and 2 words for “and”

When Isaiah wrote:

For to us a child is born, to us a son is given, **and** the government will be on his shoulders. **And** he will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.⁷⁵

⁷⁵ Isaiah 9:6

It is more correct in Hebrew to delete the word 'will' above and understand all these honorifics to describe Who Jesus *has always been*—not only future, but past and present.

And in narration, events need not be chronological but *contextual*. We are very dependent on the context in Hebrew for meaning. Genesis chapter two does not contradict the first chapter (some say that the order of events are not the same). Chapter two is a summary of the first chapter with an emphasis on Adam and Eve, from which the story continues.⁷⁶

Tri-literal monosyllables

Every Hebrew verb—well 99.44% pure—are tri-literal monosyllables. This is saying that most words in Hebrew are only three (3) letters without vowels.⁷⁷ While Greek separates the nuances of an idea into many words, Hebrew combines them.

Onomatopoeic roots

A primitive feature of Hebrew is that many words (not all) are onomatopoeic roots. The sound you make in pronouncing the word gives indication of its meaning. In Greek, I have one: *PTUO*. What does *ptuo* mean? Say it before looking at this footnote.⁷⁸ *Baalzebub* was the master

⁷⁶ The discussion which the documentary hypothesis introduces: Gen 1 is Jehovahistic and Gen 2 is Elohimistic is beyond the scope of this booklet but noteworthy since it, too, shows the author's purpose differed in chapter 2 from chapter 1.

⁷⁷ Yes, there are 2 vowels, 'e' and 'o' that when written are said to be plene [a full spelling], when missing, defective, but that is only important to the professors of linguistics that probably have forgotten how to smile or have a good time.

⁷⁸ to spit

or lord (Baal) of what?⁷⁹ One of my favorites is Psalm 42:1 “As the deer *pants*... so *pants* my soul after you, Lord.” The Hebrew word is ‘*aurag*, the cry of the deer (the actual sound the deer makes.)

Compound verbs

There are no compound verbs in Hebrew. (Compound verbs are a major feature of Biblical Greek—not Hebrew.) Compound verbs are verbs whose meaning depends on a preposition which is prefixed to the verb (part of the word): take, for example, the word *shut*. The meaning is different when used with up, *shut ... up*, or down, *shut something down*, or in, *shut-ins*, or out, *shut someone out*.

Compound verbs are a more analytical feature of a more technical language that uses verbs in specific ways with specific meanings and not dependent as much on the context (or the story) as in Hebrew. If you want to go bonkers learning compound verbs, learn Greek. Our New Testament depends heavily on them which helps our theological understanding of Truth. But the Old Testament is a Psalm or a testimony not depending on such refined or honed use of words which is probably why a word in Hebrew can be only 3 letters without vowels.

Compound verbs appeal to the intellect but onomatopoeia, echo-mimetic words, appeal to the *heart*. The language of our Old Testament is prose and poetry instead of a technical—or even a theological—manuscript. Consider, for an example, the sounds of the heart in the Hebrew word *rinnah*, which the dictionary calls “a ringing cry.” Before we do, I must tell you when my wife let’s out a screech and I come running, I am completely unnerved

⁷⁹ flies. say zzzabub. That’s the buzzing a fly makes.

until I learn the reason *why*. She can do the same thing if she is excited, humored, angry, or frightened. Very hebraic in thought. The Hebrew word is used in various ways.

- ◆ It is used in prayer⁸⁰ which in the King James (better translation than NIV) *“From the end of the earth will I cry unto thee, when my heart is overwhelmed: lead me to the rock that is higher than I.”*
- ◆ It is used in proclamations. *“As the sun was setting, a cry spread through the army: “Every man to his town. Every man to his land!”⁸¹*
- ◆ It is used to express joy and praise. **“Sing for joy, you heavens, for the LORD has done this; shout aloud, you earth beneath. Burst into song, you mountains, you forests and all your trees, for the LORD has redeemed Jacob, he displays his glory in Israel.”⁸²**
- ◆ Some think it also can mean a cry of mourning. *“Thus saith the LORD, your redeemer, the Holy One of Israel; For your sake I have sent to Babylon, and have brought down all their nobles, and the Chaldeans, whose cry is in the ships.”⁸³*

One noun form of this word is “the ostrich” because it makes this horrific piercing, screeching cry.⁸⁴ We could say that whereas Greek assigns different words for different ideas, Hebrew uses one word to embrace many meanings leaving the narrative, the story, the context, to explain.

⁸⁰ From the ends of the earth I call to you, I call as my heart grows faint; lead me to the rock that is higher than I.

⁸¹ I Kings 22:36

⁸² Isaiah 44:23

⁸³ Isaiah 43:14. But the NIV says “they took pride” The meaning is dubious

⁸⁴ Job 39:13 “The wings of the ostrich flap joyfully”

Intensive language

The Hebrew has seven verb 'stems' (one is active, another 'passive,' another reflexive....) unlike English or Greek (and many languages) that are constructed differently. There is an intensified stem, too, which means fundamentally "*to busy oneself eagerly*" with the action indicated by the verb.⁸⁵ *To laugh* becomes *to make sport or jest*. *To ask* intensified means *to beg*. *To drink one's fill* goes to *to be inebriated*. Some persons are identified by their actions as of a profession: *to practice* sorcery in 2 Chronicles 33:6 is in this stem.

Hebrew is a language of narration, of the heart, and of the land. It is a non-technical approach to seeing life and explaining life. And if this is true (and I think as much, but my argument is *prima facie*) then faith and hope and love and peace and security are terms tied to one's way of life with heartfelt conviction and not an academic discussion of existentialistic gobbledygook. For the Ancients there were no terms like philosophy or reason or logic. These came from the Greeks. Hebrew is felt more than opined, lived not just discussed, a part of tradition and culture and not just a belief or theological position.

One of my favorite intensified forms is in Psalm 18:1 where David declares, "*I love you, LORD...*" (Is not David saying, *I will love you Lord forever!*) This word, love, used by David here is *NOT* intensified. But elsewhere it *is* found in Scripture in the intensified form where it applies to God and speaks of His *mercy* and *compassion*. God's love toward us is intense! Isaiah references a mother's love in Isaiah 49:15 in the intensified stem, but the whole point is that God's love is greater.

⁸⁵ Kautzsch, p. 141-142

Psalm 116:5 *The LORD is gracious and righteous; our God is full of compassion.* This says—are you listening! He “*busies Himself eagerly*” in being *merciful* (compassionate) toward us.⁸⁶

Expletives

Hebrew, like other languages, like English, has its “expletives.” Some English expletives: Wow! Yikes! Huh!? Oh. Heh? Hot dog! (Not the meat) and, of course, the magic word, “*please.*” In Hebrew *please* is used in a modest and submissive request. One verse that highlights this word is Numbers 12:13 when Moses was praying for his sister who had leprosy.

So Moses cried out to the LORD, “Please, God, heal her!”

Moses in the Hebrew said *please* twice: *please God heal her please.* In the Greek translation, no Greek equivalent is written.

In English we have reduced our word *please* to a magical term—a password of sorts—that opens doors for us. We know how susceptible people’s feelings are to this word when humbly spoken. Even without meaning, it services our selfish interests instead of being a part of our prayer life. Moses, however, spoke this word twice with honest feeling, an honest longing for God to heal his sister.

In Exodus 32:32 Moses is interceding for Israel at a critical time. God is thinking of letting them all drop in the wilderness and starting over. Moses calls out to God, “But now, *please* forgive their sin.” There is a lot of feeling

⁸⁶ Lamentations 3:22-23 Because of the LORD’s great love we are not consumed, for his **compassions** never fail. They are new every morning; great is your faithfulness.

behind this simple expletive. It is an expression of burden or a troubled heart crying for mercy and not playacting as a selfish means to a greedy end.⁸⁷

Jussive

Hebrew has something called the jussive, like the expression *let us* or *let me* to express desire this form is used with you, he, she or they. *Let them, May you, He should, Oh, that you would, let no one....* ...and my favorite? In Genesis , the first chapter, God on each day of creation excitedly works the clay exclaiming, “*Let there be...! And it was so!*” God was excited on this famous first week. The Scripture also witnesses [Genesis 1:2] the Spirit *hovering* over the earth like a mother eagle brooding over and cherishing her young.⁸⁸

We have taken the “spirit” out of the text with our intellectualism and academic rangling. Instead, we ought to be seeing God’s focused activity, His enthusiasm, His heart ...His love the week He made man.

Summary

This has not been a grammar on Hebrew. The purpose here was to point out that the First Covenant was written with much feeling expressing God’s unchanged longing for His people’s faithfulness and love. This testament is not a covenant in the legal sense as a

⁸⁷ Psalm 116:18 I will fulfill my vows to the LORD [this expletive is written here but isn’t translated. There is a sense that his vow is backed with heart] in the presence of all his people,

⁸⁸ Deuteronomy 32:9-11 For the LORD’s portion is his people, Jacob his allotted inheritance. In a desert land he found him, in a barren and howling waste. He shielded him and cared for him; he guarded him as the apple of his eye, like an eagle that stirs up its nest and hovers over its young, that spreads its wings to catch them and carries them aloft.

document drawn up to protect the Divine interests in His creation—it was not an intellectual treatise—but a letter at times explosive with anger but lovingly written to call us back to Himself. It should be read no other way if we want to understand with strong emphasis the original spirit of the language... if we want to understand God!

The first 7 verses of Psalm 78 is an excellent example of the passion of the language and the God who enjoined us to hear His heart through it. There is no logic here, no reasoning, just an appeal to the divine authority and the love that calls us to keep the message alive implanted in the hearts of the following generations:

My people, hear my teaching;
listen to the words of my mouth.
I will open my mouth with a parable;
I will utter hidden things, things from of old—
things we have heard and known,
things our ancestors have told us.
We will not hide them from their descendants;
we will tell the next generation
the praiseworthy deeds of the Lord,
his power, and the wonders he has done.
He decreed statutes for Jacob
and established the law in Israel,
which he commanded our ancestors
to teach their children,
so the next generation would know them,
even the children yet to be born,
and they in turn would tell their children.
Then they would put their trust in God
and would not forget his deeds
but would keep his commands.

A Word About Sin

Dr. Girdlestone knows how uniquely pictorial is the Hebrew language. Just speaking it is prose.

"The pictorial power of the Hebrew language is seldom exhibited more clearly than in connection with the various aspects of evil. Every word is a piece of philosophy; nay, it is a revelation. The observer of human affairs is painfully struck by the wearisomeness of life, and by the amount of toil and travail which the children of men have to undergo to obtain a bare existence; he sees the hollowness, vanity, and unreality of much that seems bright and charming at first; ...

The Hebrew Bible meets us with a full acknowledgement of these manifold aspects of human suffering, and blends wrong doing and suffering to a remarkable degree, setting forth sin in its relation to God, to society, and to a man's own self."⁸⁹

The Hebrew language brings the Word of God to life. It holds back nothing that will help us face the reality of our existence, that will push back against self-aggrandizement, dangerous pride, self-justification and a proclaimed self-reliance that denies God His rightful place in our lives.

⁸⁹ Girdlestone. p. 76

Grace

The first missionary ever to leave the comforts of familiar surroundings and loving companions was God Himself in the person of His Son. The language barrier should not be ignored as an incidental difference.

Moffat in his *Missionary Labors and Scenes in South Africa* gives us a very remarkable example of the disappearing of one of the most significant words from the language ... the disappearing as well of the great spiritual ... truth whereof that word was at once the vehicle and the guardian. The Bechuanas ... employed formerly the word 'Morimo,' to designate 'Him that is above,' or 'Him that is in Heaven,' and attached to the word the notion of a supreme Divine Being... Thus is it the ever repeated complaint of the Missionary that the very terms are well nigh or wholly wanting in the dialect ... whereby to impart to him heavenly truths, or indeed even the nobler emotions of the human heart.⁹⁰

In the person of His Son, Jesus, God learned our language through much hardship⁹¹ because language is more than words, it is culture and ideology down to the very pondering of the human heart. Jesus faced a paganism in all of us, a darkness, when He came to our world that had nothing in common with the one He left. When He gave up the comforts of the Kingdom from which He came⁹² the Prince of Heaven lay aside the royal robes of such a glorious place and donned a beggar's garb.

⁹⁰ Richard C. Trench *Synonyms of the New Testament* pg 197

⁹¹ Hebrews 5:8 Son though he was, he learned obedience from what he suffered

⁹² Philippians 2:7 he made himself nothing

He was unrecognized and unwelcome but He was God's ambassador, God's first missionary; so, He learned to live among us. He experienced the pain and joylessness of a spiritual poverty we were unaware of because we came to accept our world for what it was, not knowing there was any better.

So the burden of God became the task of sharing His world with us in the language of young children, a language of expression and feeling, a non-technical language that must not try—because it could not—to describe or represent the glories of God's heaven, God's eternity, the infinite resources of His grace. It was enough that we might imagine these things and trust Him to explain more later. It was enough that He began to give us a child's vision of love.⁹³ It was enough that we had reason again to hope.⁹⁴ It was enough that He gave us glimpses of possibilities beyond our impoverished condition.⁹⁵ The details of "golden streets" and angelic assemblies in praise will have to wait, meanwhile we imagine what it will be like. Don't be too surprised if it turns out better!

It is our Bible that tells the story of God's missionary journey among us in words that appear common but as Professor Trench reminds us:

⁹³ Luke 18:17 Truly I tell you, anyone who will not receive the kingdom of God like a little child will never enter it.

⁹⁴ Jeremiah 29:11 "For I know the plans I have for you," declares the LORD, "plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future.

⁹⁵ 2 Corinthians 5:5 Now the one who has fashioned us for this very purpose is God, who has given us the Spirit as a deposit, guaranteeing what is to come.

"...words often contain a witness for great moral truths—God having impressed such a seal of truth upon language, that men are continually uttering deeper things than they know..."⁹⁶

So Jesus began to share on the fringe of an infinite benevolence by healing the sick and raising the dead, but the crowds of followers didn't get it. Only a handful of followers, ignorant still in so many details, knew in their spirit that they should not forsake Him.⁹⁷

We, too, long for the fuller revelation of what is meant by grace and the benefits of heaven. The words we now cherish in our theologies and the preachers' sermon notes are indeed the language of children, the early embrace of a God whose love in full awaits that eternal day.

Grace in Hebrew

Professor Taylor Lewis wrote,

[One] may know that a thing is, that it must be, though not how it is. So here, a moral necessity compels us to hold that there is such a region of the divine emotional, most intensely real,—more real, if we may make degrees, than knowledge or intellectuality—the very ground, in fact, of the divine personal being.⁹⁸

Grace is not an easy idea to wrap our thoughts around. God couldn't just say it and we would understand it. It is an idea that needed to be introduced and then made visible through God's interaction with men and finally in the single event on Golgotha. Grace is the overarching theme of Scripture; it is the heart of God, the plan of God,

⁹⁶ Richard C. Trench. *On the Study of the Words Lectures*.

⁹⁷ John 6:68 Then Simon Peter answered him, Lord, to whom shall we go? thou hast the words of eternal life.

⁹⁸ Lange, John Peter. Vol 1, Page 288

and the act of God to provide for our salvation, and that cannot be easily communicated by just grabbing some term from our vocabulary and saying, "Here it is."

And the Lord said, "...I will have mercy on whom I will have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I will have compassion."⁹⁹

The meaning of grace, as we understand it, is a free gift of God. Does this not leave the decision with God on whom to bestow His favor even where God's reasons are not clear!

Being Gracious

There is a difference in scripture when talking about grace as a *gift* and showing grace as an *activity*.

"To show grace,"¹⁰⁰ in our Old Testament speaks of:

"the kind turning of one person to another as expressed in an act of assistance... the process whereby one who has something turns in grace to another who has nothing... a heartfelt movement of the one who acts to the one acted upon."¹⁰¹

Proverbs 14:31 is an example: "*whoever is kind to the needy honors God.*"

⁹⁹ Exodus 33:19

¹⁰⁰ In 56 occurrences in the Old Testament of the idea of showing mercy 41 refer to the Lord as showing it and 26 of these are in the Psalms.

¹⁰¹ Kittell, Vol IX page 377

The Old Testament word for *grace*, the gift not the act, implied *favor*.¹⁰² Was *grace*¹⁰³ in the Old Testament tainted by a cultural misrepresentation of God's heart? It can be shown that what grace meant to the Patriarchs is not what it meant to Jesus or Paul. It would take God a history of dealings with His people and the coming of Jesus to restate the gift of grace in terms of *Calvary* and not Old Testament law.

Said another way, the verb "to show grace" actually came to mean "to show *mercy*." This is important to observe because showing *mercy* and showing favor are two quite different things.

The Old Testament Idea

In Genesis 42:21 Joseph's brothers fess up when they are reunited with him:

We saw how distressed he was when he **pleaded** with us for his life, but we would not listen.

"Pleaded" is our word "to seek mercy" and it was requested in the language of the day of 10 men—brothers, not God—who said, "No!" The idea of showing grace or mercy can be a very humane thing. This idea is not solely an act of God.¹⁰⁴

Also, in Genesis 32:5 Jacob seeks favor—not grace—from Esau. It is an attempt at warming Esau up to forgive him. Jacob sent on ahead donkeys and camels and herds of animals as a gift to his brother Esau.

¹⁰² Romans 9:13 Jacob have I loved but Esau have I hated. see also Malachi 1:2

¹⁰³ the Hebrew רַחֵם (spirit of chen), which occurs 69 times in 67 verses in the Hebrew concordance of the NASB

¹⁰⁴ see page 34 under "Intensive Language."

The idea of finding grace in someone's eyes like Noah had with God suggests favor and focuses less on the giver and more on the gift itself. Noah and his family "earned" the right of being kept safe from the coming deluge because Noah was faithful.

By faith Noah, when warned about things not yet seen, in holy fear built an ark to save his family. - Hebrews 11:7

The Gift or the Giver

With *favor*, there is the sense that "I earned this!" or "I am entitled!" There is no recognition for the thoughtfulness of the giver. Favor as a "gift" puts the focus on the gift itself losing sight of the giver.

To *show* favor, on the other hand, puts the spotlight on the *giver* although still it is not clear that the recipient of such favor might have been honored in turn for their kindness. To show favor meant "to show oneself friendly." [To be gracious toward someone]

And I will make the Egyptians **favorably** disposed toward this people, so that when you leave you will not go empty-handed.¹⁰⁵

This says, that Israel found grace in the sight of the Egyptians. God made Israel look attractive, the kind of people you want to befriend. Grace or favor here is gracefulness. Israel and Egyptians. friends? They certainly appeared graceful or friendly—thanks to God.

In Genesis 39:21 The Lord was with him [Joseph]; he showed him **kindness** and granted him **favor** in the eyes

¹⁰⁵ Exodus 3:21

of the prison warden.¹⁰⁶ Here, referencing God's kindness, there is just a hint at New Testament grace as we understand it. God's kindness and favor join in one act of providence.

Grace or Mercy?

But scholarship prompts the question: How does one find grace or favor? "*There is a veil of mystery over this process.*"¹⁰⁷ Noah became attractive to God.¹⁰⁸ The same is said of Moses.¹⁰⁹ When someone is "favored" is there not a reason? If there is—say, Noah and Moses were obedient and God found this attractive—how is this *unmerited*?

What scholarship has discovered in researching this truth is that the word *grace* in the Old Testament fell out of favor to represent true divine grace, as we understand it.¹¹⁰

How little of the full weight of the grace of God remains in the term... may be judged from the fact that in the Psalms with their full use of the verb [to show mercy] the word [grace/favor] does not occur at all in the context of petition [i.e. prayer].¹¹¹

Of additional interest is how the activity "to show mercy" became detached from the word *grace*. The word

¹⁰⁶ the LORD was with him; he showed him **kindness** and granted him **favor** in the eyes of the prison warden.

¹⁰⁷ Kittell, Vol IX page 377

¹⁰⁸ *ibid.*

¹⁰⁹ Exodus 33:12. Moses said to the LORD, "You have been telling me, 'Lead these people,' but you have not let me know whom you will send with me. You have said, 'I know you by name and you have found favor with me

¹¹⁰ In Psalms 45:2—which has nothing to do with talking to God—it is actually given the meaning, "charm," i.e. captivating powers of speech. In Proverbs 3:22 it means "adornment." My point is that the Old Testament word for "grace" doesn't mean "grace"!

¹¹¹ Kittell, Vol IX page 377

grace was replaced with the Hebrew word for *mercy*. It isn't until we hear this word "grace" on Zechariah's lips (12:10) that God begins to give this word a New Testament meaning:

And I will pour out on the house of David and the inhabitants of Jerusalem the Spirit of **grace** and supplication. They will look on me, the one they have pierced, and they will mourn for him as one mourns for an only child, and grieve bitterly for him as one grieves for a firstborn son.

The Gap

Scholarship calls this a "gap,"¹¹² between Noah and Zechariah, that had to be filled by the word "*mercy*" in the Hebrew. So, if God wanted to talk about unmerited favor or doing something for man which was undeserved, since the Old Testament noun for "grace" didn't work, He had to talk about "*mercy*." Scholarship adds that this word for mercy "*is complex, so that uniform rendering [translating it with one English word like our word "mercy"] is almost impossible*"¹¹³

Here we admit that "grace" in the New Testament did take on a meaning closer to the heart of God. In the New Testament, the word includes *forgiveness*. One Greek word for "forgiveness" comes from the Greek word "grace" as in 2 Corinthians 2:10:¹¹⁴

Anyone you forgive, I also forgive. And what I have forgiven—if there was anything to forgive—I have forgiven¹¹⁵ in the sight of Christ for your sake,

¹¹² Ibid., Page 381

¹¹³ Ibid., Page 382

¹¹⁴ ᾧ δέ τι **χαρίζεσθε** καὶ γὰρ ἐγὼ ὁ **κεχάρισμαι** εἶ τι **κεχάρισμαι** δι' ὑμᾶς ἐν προσώπῳ Χριστοῦ.

¹¹⁵ The perfect here indicates totally, finally, and eternally forgiven.

“By grace you and I have been saved ...*and have been forgiven!*”¹¹⁶ Our salvation and our forgiveness [Perfect form], as we should note, is total, unconditional, and eternal. Since grace is God’s love in action toward us to accept us into fellowship with Himself, grace must be as immutable as He. Whatever God provides is without limits¹¹⁷ and unconditional,¹¹⁸ and as such grace is outside law. To say that God’s grace is “outside” law, “*not under the law, but under grace,*”¹¹⁹ gives us an early glimpse into the difference between grace and favor. Grace follows no code of ethics or morality, ceremonial or otherwise, that justifies favoritism. With God there is none.¹²⁰

Now to him who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to his power that is at work within us,¹²¹

From God’s outreach, in the person of Jesus, to rescue a lost sheep to the magnanimity of a grace that must be as eternal as it is infinite, nothing about God’s mercy is shortsighted or less than wholehearted.

¹¹⁶ | John 1:9 uses an Aorist which emphasizes a complete or total forgiveness but it is without hesitance we can say God’s forgiveness is also “perfect,” final and forever.

¹¹⁷ Romans 5:17 God’s abundant provision of grace

¹¹⁸ If grace is undeserved, how could it be conditional. If it is instead of “law” it must be unconditional. If His grace is an expression of His love, what does this also say about His love toward the saints?

¹¹⁹ Romans 6:14

¹²⁰ Romans 2:11 *For God does not show favoritism.*

¹²¹ Ephesians 3:20

Grace as a Divine Embrace

God's grace ultimately is not the distribution of heavenly things [material gifts] but a term of relationship in which God shares of Himself with us. It is human to think of grace in terms of receiving "things" but this may have no relevance in eternity. I conclude that grace as a gift is God's love shown in relation to us. This correctly puts the focus back on the giver ..God.

The Definition of Grace

Nothing means more to the believer than God's grace because everything God provides is in fact a gift of His grace. We have even defined "grace" as "God's Riches" provided through Calvary. It is "*God's abundant provision ... and ... gift.*"¹²² But what does this word really mean in Scripture, in the Old Testament, in the New Testament? Professor Richard Trench, famous for his linguistic insight, wrote:

THERE has often been occasion to observe the manner in which Greek words taken up into Christian use are glorified and transformed, seeming to have waited for this adoption of them, to come to their full rights, and to reveal all the depth and the riches of meaning which they contained, or might be made to contain. [Grace]¹²³ is one of these.¹²⁴

Professor Trench is referring to "grace" in the New Testament, but first, the Old Testament word for "grace" deserves a closer look. We have already alluded to the fact that in the pages of the Old Testament, the word translated "grace" does not mean "grace" in a New Testament sense.

¹²² Romans 5:17

¹²³ Χάρις

¹²⁴ Richard C. Trench Synonyms of the New Testament pg 166

It is important to point this out. This supports our prima facie contention that God's task of revealing to us His plan of Salvation required providential oversight of the languages employed. The word "grace" needed to be recast or as Trench worded it, "glorified and transformed" before God could begin to share the good news that His love would buy us back, ransom us, from the bondage we willingly chose in Eden when we wanted to know what "evil" was all about.

The term "grace" in the Old Testament is found in the common biblical phrase "*to find grace in the eyes of the Lord.*"¹²⁵ Grace here is not unmerited favor, nor is it, on God's part, an act of mercy. The recipient here is someone who has in some way pleased God. Not to shock or confuse but the Old Testament word for grace came to describe beauty, like our word, gracious. The recipient of God's blessing is someone God sees as attractive, gracious, beautiful, in terms of their relationship with Him. This formula is finally "*reduced to mere politeness.*"¹²⁶

Grace in the Old Testament is better understood as "graciousness," "charm," "beauty" and then "favor." Favor is extended to a recipient who is in some sense attractive to the giver of the favor. Zechariah 4:7 shouts, "Grace, grace to it!"¹²⁷ One scholar comments, "*One may infer an independent 'Good, good' or: 'Beautiful, beautiful!'*"¹²⁸ Consider Solomon's use of the word:

¹²⁵ Genesis 6:8 *But Noah found favor [grace] in the eyes of the LORD.*

¹²⁶ Genesis 19:19 "*Your servant has found favor in your eyes, and you have shown great kindness to me in sparing my life. But I can't flee to the mountains; this disaster will overtake me, and I'll die.*

"In this polite usage one also finds the humble self-designation, 'thy servant.'" Cp. Gerhard Kittell. Vol V p. 658

¹²⁷ The NIV reads "*God bless it! God bless it!*"

¹²⁸ Gerhard Kittell. Vol IX p. 381

They are a garland to **grace** your head and a chain to adorn your neck. — Proverbs 1:9

So, when the Psalmist chose to talk about God's unmerited favor, he chose the word "mercy" instead. Recall Moses's petitioning God to show His face.

Nothing short of an unexpected outburst of profound emotion was unleashed by God in the context of His endearing friendship with Moses. God gave His servant more than a glimpse of His form. God, in sternness tones, perhaps in a discursive manner, seemed to expose His heart. His thoughts did not appear to concern Moses's immediate interest, but His own—tumbling and tripping over Israel's spiritual ambivalence, Israel now praising, now grumbling. Hans Conzelmann called it, "[an] *almost offensive severity*,"¹²⁹ while God exclaimed, "*I will cause all my goodness to pass in front of you, and I will proclaim my name, the LORD, in your presence. [and then almost out of context] I will have mercy on whom I will have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I will have compassion.*"¹³⁰

It must be noted that the word "grace"¹³¹ does not appear in this dialogue.

"To refer to the Old Testament [grace] does not help much in determining the sense in the New Testament."¹³² ^

¹²⁹ Gerhard Kittell. Vol IX p. 378

¹³⁰ Exodus 33:19

¹³¹ In Psalm 45:2 it is "charm" The NLT reads "*You are the most handsome of all.*

Gracious words stream from your lips.

God himself has blessed you forever."

Compare Proverbs 3:22 "*they will be life for you, an ornament to grace your neck.*"

Genesis 39:21 "*the LORD was with him [Joseph]; he showed him kindness and granted him **favor** in the eyes of the prison warden.*"

¹³² Gerhard Kittell. Vol IX. p. 391

The noun “grace” is not found in God’s response to Moses’s petition in Exodus 33:19.¹³³ The terms used here, *mercy, compassion*,¹³⁴ should not be divested [as they would have with the noun, “grace”] of the feelings that seem to drive the divine passion. Our word “compassion” is a good translation. To “show mercy” is not the noun “grace” but the action word, the verb. Mercy is freely given, in the Old Testament, *not* grace.. *“The verb undergoes its true development ...when it is related to statements about God,”* says Conzelmann.¹³⁵ He concludes that God cares about the spiritually and materially, poor and sick, (as Scripture everywhere attests): *“Yahweh loves especially to turn to the weak and lost.”*

One should never filter out God’s heart and feelings from His thoughts here as if to suggest God was somehow obligated against His true desire to answer Moses’s prayer. *“For God so loved ...that He gave....”* reveals God’s total involvement in His actions. This should be evident to any student of theology. What we are saying here is that this truth is totally supported by the words used—or in the case of the word ‘grace’ in our Old Testament, *not* used—in the Biblical record. If we want the catechismal proclamation, Exodus 34:6, it is the Lord speaking!

¹³³ And the LORD said, “I will cause all my goodness to pass in front of you, and I will proclaim my name, the LORD, in your presence. I will have mercy on whom I will have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I will have compassion.

¹³⁴ Not to confuse but the verb form of the idea of “grace” developed separately from the noun. “To be gracious” came to mean “to show mercy”

¹³⁵ Gerhard Kittell. Vol IX p. 377

And he passed in front of Moses, proclaiming, "The LORD, the LORD, the compassionate and gracious [merciful] God, slow to anger, abounding in love and faithfulness..."

It should also probably not go unnoticed that the word "grace" never means "Thanks" in the Hebrew. But in the Pauline doctrine of grace, in the New Testament Greek, it most certainly does:

But thanks be to God¹³⁶ — Romans 6:14

"Grace," we have observed, "*is never a theological word in the LXX [Greek Old Testament].*"¹³⁷ Old Testament terms as, love,¹³⁸ mercy,¹³⁹ compassion,¹⁴⁰ and covenant"¹⁴¹ carry the burden of God toward His creation and are better studies for understanding God's varied outreach to save His people and bring them back into relationship with Himself. The word 'grace' is not supportive in this regard¹⁴²—at least, not yet.

Interpreting Truth

Paul's interpretation or understanding of some of the Old Testament text would be disputed by Jewish scholars—something Jesus also experienced. But unlike Jesus who was a devout Jew but only non-supportive of many extra-biblical pharisaic rituals and traditions, Paul's teachings

¹³⁶ χάρις δε τω θεω

¹³⁷ *ibid.* p. 389

אהב ¹³⁸

חנן ¹³⁹

רחם ¹⁴⁰

חסד ¹⁴¹

¹⁴² "In the understanding of grace no line can be drawn from the synagogue to the New Testament." Gerhard Kittell. Vol IX p. 388

outright challenged Jewish thought. As an example: Paul could read Deuteronomy and see our redemption in the language.

...because anyone who is hung on a pole is under God's curse.
Deuteronomy 21:23¹⁴³

Paul understood this to mean:

Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us, for it is written: "Cursed is everyone who is hung on a pole." Galatians 3:13

It seems obvious to Christian faith that Paul is saying—as Bishop Lightfoot explained—*Christ ransomed us from this curse pronounced by the law, Himself taking our place and becoming a curse for our sakes; for so says the Scripture...*¹⁴⁴

But dare we suggest that the grammar¹⁴⁵ supports 2 views:¹⁴⁶

1. "Cursed by God" is everyone who hangs on the gibbet
2. "Cursing God" is everyone who hangs on the gibbet

If Jewish scholarship in Paul's day held to the second interpretation, which to my way of reckoning seems more probable, they would have seen Christ's death on the cross as a profane display of blasphemy instead.

"*He had undergone that punishment,*" Bishop Lightfoot clarifies, "*which under the law betokened the curse of God*"¹⁴⁷

¹⁴³ κεκατηραμένος ὑπὸ θεοῦ πᾶς κρεμάμενος ἐπὶ ξύλου

¹⁴⁴ J. B. Lightfoot, p. 139

כִּי־קִלְקַלְתָּ אֱלֹהִים תְּלַף

¹⁴⁶ It is not clear whether this form is an objective or subjective genitive. Either is grammatically possible.

¹⁴⁷ J. B. Lightfoot, p. 140

Jesus was, in no literal sense, Lightfoot noted, "*cursed by God.*" Bishop Lightfoot adds "*St Paul instinctively omits these words which do not strictly apply, and which, if added, would have required some qualification.*"¹⁴⁸

Pauline Grace

Paul's theology became a new revelation to early christianity, though, he, too, documented his understanding of truth with Old Testament Scripture. It is significant to add that he relied on the Greek translation of the Old Testament, not just because Greek was by now universally spoken among non-jewish peoples but more so because the Greek language was now offering clarity when it came to a discussion of God's grace and the salvation it offered.

This was no small task on God's part to find that missionary who would seek to know what was hidden from the great minds of the day.¹⁴⁹ God sought for a man who would lock himself away in some secluded prayer chamber for as long as it took and allow God to reveal to him, to quote Isaiah, "*the arm of the Lord.*"¹⁵⁰

Paul shared his story with us:

I want you to know, brothers and sisters, that the gospel I preached is not of human origin. I did not receive it from any man, nor was I taught it; rather, I received it by revelation from Jesus Christ. ...But when God, who set me apart from my mother's womb and called me by his grace, was pleased to reveal his Son in me so that I might preach him among the Gentiles, my immediate response was not to consult any

¹⁴⁸ *ibid.*

¹⁴⁹ 1 Corinthians 2:7 *we declare God's wisdom, a mystery that has been hidden and that God destined for our glory before time began.*

¹⁵⁰ Isaiah 53:1

human being. I did not go up to Jerusalem to see those who were apostles before I was, but I went into Arabia. Later I returned to Damascus. Then after three years, I went up to Jerusalem to get acquainted with Cephas - Galatians 1:11-12, 15-18

It is no mystery that Paul would find resistance among some of the Judean converts to Christ. Their idea of 'grace,' its usage in the Torah and the Targums, was under a complete theological review by the early church, and especially Paul whose calling was to the Greeks, Romans, and other non-jewish cultures. There were, as we pointed out above, more subtle disagreements in the arguments they presented but *grace* as a divine concept was the more difficult idea for the Jewish mindset. As they phrased it: "*Shall we go on sinning so that grace may increase?*"¹⁵¹

The history of the word "grace" in big steps shows that the meaning changed from deserved favor to undeserved.¹⁵²

"There were preparations," Professor Trench observed, "for this glorification of meaning to which [grace] [w]as destined. ... already in the ethical terminology of the Greek schools ... [which, and this is of critical note] implied ever a favour [sic] freely done, without claim or expectation of return."¹⁵³ The professor then compared this Greek change with Christian teaching: "the word being thus predisposed to receive its new emphasis, its religious, I may say its dogmatic, significance; to set forth the entire and absolute freeness of the lovingkindness of God to men."¹⁵⁴

¹⁵¹ Romans 6:1

¹⁵² The one Old Testament scripture that uses the word 'grace' with a New Testament sense—at least implied—is Zechariah 12:10 where he prophesied of "*the spirit of grace.*"

¹⁵³ Richard C. Trench *Synonyms of the New Testament*. p. 168

¹⁵⁴ *ibid.*

What appears obvious to us was at closer examination not so obvious to the Jews in Paul's day. Paul was declaring, "...*grace ...cannot be based on works.*"¹⁵⁵

It should not escape attention that while the Greek language was developing a true *passive* voice (something happening *to* you for which you are in no way responsible) and the *perfect* action form which describes a state of being (complete, permanent and immediate), there is a significant change occurring to the concept of *favor*. All three of these changes affect our interpretation of one verse Ephesians 2:8 which we must look at later:

For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God.

Grace and Mercy

And what is the relationship between grace and mercy in the New Testament? Let me quote Professor Trench:

"But while [grace] has thus reference to the sins of men, and is that glorious attribute of God ... his free gift in their forgiveness, [mercy] has special and immediate regard to the misery which is the consequence of these sins,...to assuage and entirely remove it,"¹⁵⁶

But ...grace must go before the mercy, [grace] must go before and make way for [mercy]. It is true that the same persons are the subjects of both, being at once the guilty and the miserable; yet the righteousness of God, which it is quite as necessary should be maintained as his love demands that guilt should be done away ... before the misery can be assuaged; only the forgiven may be blessed. He must pardon, before He can heal; men must be justified before they can be sanctified."¹⁵⁷

¹⁵⁵ Romans 11:5-6

¹⁵⁶ Richard C. Trench Synonyms of the New Testament pg 169

¹⁵⁷ *ibid.*

*“Grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.”*¹⁵⁸ It is appropriate that God’s grace comes first before His mercy and His mercy brings His peace.

Another Dimension

As remarked: the explanation of the infinite goodness of heaven is a story *outside* the scope of our logic¹⁵⁹ ...but somehow, the task of Scripture is to introduce this truth to us, to make us aware of it and teach us the simple first and only step we take in faith to eventually have a part in it. The scriptures are only the introduction to a divine grace so infinite, so much the heart of God, we will need an eternity to get to know Him and thereby get to know what this grace is which now overwhelms are natural senses. It takes a spiritual relationship with God in this life and a spiritual teacher¹⁶⁰ to even begin a realistic study of grace. Logic and reason alone will fail us.

We know this: grace thrives in a dimension beyond the time and space of our natural observations. Nothing God does has only temporal value. Nothing He gives us is a resource exhausted in this life. God’s blessing are timeless. God’s touch upon our lives is always spiritual, always with His eternal interests in mind.

A Final Question

¹⁵⁸ 2 Corinthians 1:2

¹⁵⁹ 1 Corinthians 2:9 However, as it is written: “What no eye has seen, what no ear has heard, and what no human mind has conceived” – the things God has prepared for those who love him....

¹⁶⁰ 1 Corinthians 2:14 The person without the Spirit does not accept the things that come from the Spirit of God but considers them foolishness, and cannot understand them because they are discerned only through the Spirit.

I have answered one troubling question elsewhere: *What about the lost who do not hear the message of the Cross and die in their sin, has God's grace overlooked them? How is that possible for grace?*

There is nothing about God's plan that minimizes the central act of His grace in providing salvation through our Savior's death and resurrection. But aside from God's part in rescuing His lost creation, we are commissioned with a single message unadorned and uncompromising.

He said to them, "Go into all the world and preach the gospel to all creation."¹⁶¹

And Paul alerts us,

Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to mankind by which we must be saved.¹⁶²

This we know well. This speaks to our calling, *our* part in God's plan. God's grace speaks to *His* part¹⁶³ and we are often like Moses wondering by what criteria the Lord judges one a recipient of His mercy and another not. We risk—by our reasoning—theologizing away the limitlessness (outside law) of divine grace. He will have mercy on whom He will have mercy.

Am I implying many paths to God!? God forbid! How appropriate to remind us what has been said about His grace elsewhere: *To define grace is like marking out the boundary of a lake only to discover that we have come to the immeasurable sea.*

¹⁶¹ Mark 16:15

¹⁶² Acts 4:12

¹⁶³ Exodus 33:19 I will have mercy on whom I will have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I will have compassion.

It was important to God—my research encourages me to say—to give us, in the New Testament language, a glimpse of His grace as the influence of His love toward us that is in no way accredited to us. We neither initiated or participated in planning our salvation or executing that plan. Peter’s phrase “*received ... faith*”¹⁶⁴ even uses a word which can only mean, “to receive by divine allotment.” This is a true passive. The Old Testament taught us that the relationship God enjoyed with His creation before the “fall” tugs on His great heart; He wants/needs to return us to that garden state and to Himself.

¹⁶⁴ 2 Peter 1:1

Unfair

God's grace makes no sense—actually He appears unfair—except when His grace and mercy are shown to ... let me be honest: *to me*. Jesus told a story¹⁶⁵ of a family farm where the farmer solicited help at a set salary from idle market dwellers. Everyone receives the same pay. But the farmer went out a few times into the market place to find additional help for the harvest. And all worked for the same pay!

When a worker who labors and endures the entire day in the hot sun gets the same pay with the guy who labored just an hour at day's end, our logical sensibilities are inflamed and we think "unfair!" But it is how *grace* works.

And whatever did Jesus mean when He summarized "*But many who are first will be last, and many who are last will be first.*"¹⁶⁶ Is it not a reference to our inability to guess at the wisdom of God when He distributes blessings. Who we would honor first and who sits on the front row in our imaginations is overlooked for the moment while God seems to elevate the humble and obedient servant sitting in the back row.¹⁶⁷ When He shows His mercy to

¹⁶⁵ Matthew 20:13-15 "But he answered one of them, 'I am not being unfair to you, friend. Didn't you agree to work for a denarius? Take your pay and go. I want to give the one who was hired last the same as I gave you. Don't I have the right to do what I want with my own money? Or are you envious because I am generous?'

¹⁶⁶ Matthew 19:30

¹⁶⁷ James 4:6, 10 But he gives us more grace. That is why Scripture says: "God opposes the proud but shows favor to the humble." Humble yourselves before the Lord, and he will lift you up
Proverbs 3:34 He ... shows favor to the humble and oppressed.

whomever He wants, He surprises our selfish ideas with a love and grace that seems to defy all logic.

A New Law

The message of divine grace is a participation in *all* the benefits of God's heaven *without law*, without restrictions or regulations.¹⁶⁸

But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, forbearance, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. Against such things there is no law. — Galatians 5:22-23

The entire idea of fairness needs to be revisited in the light of a divine grace that does not operate within any external code of social order. Grace is an infinite source, which means whatever God gifts us is only the arabon¹⁶⁹ out of His treasury. I like to illustrate seeing God offering me a small drink from an ocean of blessing. Even if another takes two swallows, how should it matter. The source is infinite!

Grace also is a relational term. Heaven is not a collection of material things. The fruit of the Spirit defines our relationship with God, each other and ourselves, all which can be described in terms of God's love. He has not run out of hugs!

There is in another sense a "law of the Spirit" that grace honors.

Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus, because through Christ Jesus the law of the Spirit who gives life has set you free from the law of sin and death.
—Romans 8:1-2

¹⁶⁸ Romans 6:14 you are not under the law, but under grace.

¹⁶⁹ Greek for down payment or initial guarantee of the full resource to come.

“No condemnation” means acquitted with prejudice. We were guilty, indeed, but through Christ’s death, we are not to be sentenced.¹⁷⁰ And double jeopardy attaches:

Otherwise Christ would have had to suffer many times since the creation of the world. But he has appeared **once** for all at the culmination of the ages to do away with sin by the sacrifice of himself. — Hebrews 9:26

So, the fellow who labored all day in the heat, in thinking he deserves more from his Master who takes care of His servants equally, failed to appreciate the magnanimity of a benevolent authority whose resources are infinite. Not to be philosophical but should God be less gracious or merciful toward someone who accepted salvation near death—like the penitent thief on the cross beside the Savior? Is it even possible for grace to be distributed unevenly or unequally with favor or favoritism or by rule? Of course not! It’s *grace*. If two people were thirsty and allowed to drink their fill from an ocean of water, does it matter how much they drink? Who then should be receiving more than the others? How would this be grace, *freely* given, if, though the provision were infinite, it would be distributed by rule?

Some believe that rewards will be distributed in heaven and there is a story circulating for amusement’s sake that when we get to heaven some clergy will be assigned small tents while a Lazarus or two will be living on huge estates as if the blessings of heaven are

¹⁷⁰ Dr. Vidu's work "*Atonement, Law, and Justice*" in which he traces this history and the evolution of atonement theory speaks to this matter. Cp. Vidu, Adonis. *Atonement, Law, and Justice*, Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Publishing, 2014 .

“rewarded” to us based on how we served God in this life.¹⁷¹ I think we should rethink this notion. If I am swimming in the ocean, even though I am enjoying the shallows near the shore, it is still the ocean. God’s grace can never be anything less than what it is for *all* of us even while “God’s endowment of love without limit” is gifted to each of us. An *infinite* grace is a timeless and immeasurable provision of God.

Through providential wisdom God chose the Koine Greek to write down the explanation of His heart in terms of His free and undeserved, unearned, and unsought gift of salvation. It is a Greek Perfect Passive which declares this with Paul adding, for emphasis, “... *not of yourselves*”¹⁷² while the Hebrew language in the Old Testament affirms and acknowledges our total spiritual poverty¹⁷³ and need of this grace.

¹⁷¹ Jesus did use the term reward μισθός often to His Jewish audience who understood divine favor in such terms and not the greater message of grace. See Luke 6:22-24 which is his record of the beatitudes. The “reward” is the comfort and the overall blessing being eternally with the Savior. There is not “more or less” even implied in such language.

¹⁷² Ephesians 2:8

¹⁷³ Revelation 3:17 You say, ‘I am rich; I have acquired wealth and do not need a thing.’ But you do not realize that you are wretched, pitiful, poor, blind and naked.

The Thematic 'O'

If we believe that God had His hand in preparing the biblical text, we have to seriously consider the language in which this text was originally written. Exegetical grammarians are the experts that use both their art and science to provide for us the best translations. It isn't an easy task. Much of what they do is hidden in the grammatical weeds—like a lawyer's work product—and goes unappreciated by us who enjoy devotionally reading our Bible. They harvest a wealth of truth while we glean in their field some kernel of theological study when a thought here or there inspires hope or revives faith. Aside from the preacher's sermon that might highlight some encouraging verse or text, the scholar's vast library of research remains locked away until it is sadly upon his or her departure to their reward catalogued in some dark corner of a university archive¹⁷⁴ and forgotten.

It has been my interest in this brief work to take a flashlight along so we can read a page or two and use it to suggest that the inspiration behind the scholar is the language. ...and behind the language is God!

An example which should interest us: in the New Testament there is, a letter or vowel, as a suffix or ending that defines the nuance of some greek action words (verbs). This 'vowel' bears an important significance to our theology.

¹⁷⁴ A book I was once interested in which was available in the Washington & Jefferson library in Washington Pennsylvania was Charles Middleton's 363 page work on the Greek definite article [the word 'the']. The book is out of print.

In New Testament Greek some verbs have what is called a *thematic* or connecting vowel, actually, the letter 'o'. An example in English might be the plural form of some words requiring an 'e' before the 's' where the single ends in, say an, 'x:' fox, foxes; box, boxes. In Greek the thematic vowel is not an 'e' but an 'o.' Words with an 'o' connecting the ending usually mean 'to make' whatever the verb says. 'To make a slave' or 'to enslave', 'to make blind' or just 'to blind'.

The verb "to justify" is written in this form and it has a critical role in theological thought. "To justify" should mean by analogy 'to *make* righteous' or 'to *render* someone such as he ought to be.' But further research suggests that "to justify" cannot mean "to make someone righteous." The problem with making our word *justify* mean to *make* right is that, according to scholarship, "*this meaning is extremely rare, if not altogether doubtful*"¹⁷⁵ How they draw that conclusion is not part of our gleaning.

That's when scholarship thought they should look into the Greek Old Testament and they referenced Psalm 73:13, *Surely in vain have I kept my heart pure...* "To keep pure" is in Greek our word "to *make* righteous." Did David really mean to say "I purified my own heart"! No. The better translation would be: "*I have shown my heart upright.*"

So this idea of "showing" or "exhibiting" righteousness—rather than *making* righteous—was discovered.¹⁷⁶

Wisdom is **proved right** by all her children. —Luke 7:35

¹⁷⁵ Joseph Thayers., p 150

¹⁷⁶ Ezekiel 16:51 *you... have made your sisters **seem** righteous by all these things you have done.*

Some scholars interpreted this to mean to 'evince'¹⁷⁷ righteous.

And without controversy great is the mystery of godliness: God was manifest in the flesh, **justified** [I almost want to say: vindicated'] in the Spirit,... — 1 Timothy 3:16

Jesus's death and resurrection were clear evidence that God's plan of Salvation worked.

So, the commentators and lexicographers decided to look at another meaning for the 'o'. They discovered that the word "worthy" with an 'o' never means "to make worthy" but "to *declare* worthy."

Wherefore also we pray always for you, that our God would **count you worthy**¹⁷⁸ of [this] calling, and fulfill all the good pleasure of [his] goodness, and the work of faith with power. — 2 Thessalonians 1:11

We learn that to justify means 'to *declare* or pronounce righteous.' And that is so important to see in translation:

For we maintain that a person is justified [**declared righteous** before he actually becomes righteous] by faith apart from the works of the law. — Romans 3:28

¹⁷⁷ "To display clearly, constitute outward evidence." — Merriam-Webster.

¹⁷⁸ There are other words as well that have the 'o' to mean 'to declare' Acts 10:15 "Do not **call** anything **impure** that God has made clean." 1 Peter 1:11 "trying to find out the time and circumstances to which the Spirit of Christ in them **was pointing** when he predicted the sufferings of the Messiah and the glories that would follow." Mark 12:4 "Then he sent another servant to them; they struck this man on the head and **treated him shamefully**." [mark with disgrace]

A Brief Summary

Is our salvation a *declaration* of our righteousness,¹⁷⁹ a vicarious *imputation* of Christ's righteousness,¹⁸⁰ or a quality of our new nature?¹⁸¹

All three! There is a work begun in each believer that is evident in a growing relationship between them and the Savior and with other believers in fellowship.¹⁸² In many ways this is a process: in our behavior,¹⁸³ in our knowledge of God's holiness,¹⁸⁴ and in our desire toward God compared to other interests.¹⁸⁵

Dear friends, now we are children of God, and what we will be has not yet been made known. But we know that when Christ appears, we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is. — 1 John 3:2

But what is the emphasis here of *declaring* us righteous?

...know that a person is not [declared or pronounced] justified by the works of the law, but by faith in Jesus Christ. So we, too, have put our faith in Christ Jesus that we may be [declared or

¹⁷⁹ Romans 4:5 *However, to the one who does not work but trusts God who justifies the ungodly, their faith is credited as righteousness.*

¹⁸⁰ 1 Corinthians 1:30 *It is because of him that you are in Christ Jesus, who has become for us wisdom from God—that is, our righteousness, holiness and redemption.*

¹⁸¹ 1 John 2:29 *If you know that he is righteous, you know that everyone who does what is right has been born of him.*

¹⁸² 1 John 1:3 *We proclaim to you what we have seen and heard, so that you also may have fellowship with us. And our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son, Jesus Christ.*

¹⁸³ 1 John 1:9 *If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.*

¹⁸⁴ 2 Peter 1:3 *His divine power has given us everything we need for a godly life through our knowledge of him who called us by his own glory and goodness.*

¹⁸⁵ Philippians 1:6 *being confident of this, that he who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus.*

pronounced] justified by faith in Christ and not by the works of the law, because by the works of the law no one will be [declared or pronounced] justified. — Galatians 2:16

Righteousness is not a matter of law but a matter of grace. It is a work of grace within the believer

- to transform our thinking and
- to conform us to Christ and away from the world.

The evidence is a growing awareness that the desires of God toward each of us best represent

- who we are becoming and who we ultimately want to be,
- what makes us most happy, and
- a perspective that sees the circumstances of our life more and more as God sees them along with
- a sense that how God is leading is indeed best.

Do not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is—his good, pleasing and perfect will. — Romans 12:2

In terms of the biblical Greek, there is nothing unusual or uncommon about this form (it is even found in the Classical Greek) but there is no Hebrew equivalent. Though God imputed righteousness unto Abraham because of his absolute trust in and obedience to God¹⁸⁶ the language suggests he was a righteous man, not only declared righteous. The Greek form establishes the christian doctrine that it is not a work or effort on our part that provides for this righteousness which is now part of who we are. It was Jesus as a sin offering that made

¹⁸⁶ Genesis 15:6 וַיַּחְשְׁבֵהוּ לְצַדִּיקָהּ (ἐλογίσθη αὐτῷ εἰς δικαιοσύνην) *he **credited** it to him as righteousness.*

provision for us to become like Him. *“Christ in us, the hope of glory,”*¹⁸⁷

God made him who had no sin to be sin [offering] for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God. — 2 Corinthians 5:21

¹⁸⁷ Colossians 1:7 *To them God has chosen to make known among the Gentiles the glorious riches of this mystery, which is Christ in you, the hope of glory.*

Determinism

For one instructor, while in Bible College, I was given a reading assignment: *“Life in The Son”* by Robert Shank. This was a study of the doctrine of perseverance. This was one book among many that was written to either support or refute the so-named ‘tulip’ doctrine. Here is the acrostic:

T - total depravity

U - unconditional surrender

L - limited atonement

I - irresistible grace

P - the perseverance of the saints

This controversy was not limited to school days. I was disciplined out of one church because I didn’t spell this flower the right way. I agree with the ‘T’ and ‘U’ but not the ‘L’ and ‘I’ and the ‘P’ only conditionally.

What were we not admitting here? What truth were we missing? This controversy (also known as the Calvin-Wesleyan Controversy) was tearing protestantism apart.

The tulip doctrine is a study in God’s grace and we were overwhelmed by it! His, seeming, selective approach to adopting sons and daughters into His family troubled our theological waters until intellectually flailing in the morass we traded brotherly caring for self-survival. We needed our church and our faith but not necessarily our fellow believers.

Here is the scripture:

For he chose us in him before the creation of the world to be holy and blameless in his sight. In love he predestined us for adoption to sonship through Jesus Christ, in accordance with his pleasure and will— to the praise of his glorious grace, which he has freely given us in the One he loves. In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, in accordance with the riches of God’s grace that he lavished on us. With all wisdom and understanding, — Ephesians 1:4-8

This contention also was known by its philosophical label, free will verses determinism. Did we choose God or did He choose us? And if He chose us, did we have a say in the choice or “what God wants, God gets”? Can anyone lose their salvation after accepting Christ as their Savior?

I am intentionally leaving the scripture references to my reader because this disharmony is actually off topic. I want to highlight the glorious grace of God and how it has once more confused our logical sensibilities. God’s grace is freely given. If He works off a set of rules or on some principle, this is known only to Him. The only principle I can affirm loudly is Deuteronomy 4:29:

But if ... you seek the LORD your God, you will find him if you seek him with all your heart and with all your soul.

We are only the day laborers in Jesus’s story who work all day for the same wage as the fellow who may come near sunset. God sometimes doesn’t make complete sense to us.¹⁸⁸

Ephesians 2:8

¹⁸⁸ Isaiah 55:8 *“For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways,” declares the LORD.*

Paul summed it up for us writing the church at Ephesus, “For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God.”¹⁸⁹

Saved is a perfect passive form. As passive it confirms that our salvation is indeed “*all God*” Even our faith is a gift of His love.¹⁹⁰ As a perfect it means when we accept Christ our salvation is immediate and unchanging.¹⁹¹ And it is final. Salvation is a state—a relationship. Never figure on God to regret He loved you.

This is an expression of His grace. It is our 50,000 foot view. As we live it and get closer and closer—zoom in on—the details of this relationship, more wonders meet us. We have only begun to learn¹⁹² what Jesus did on Calvary and what that salvation means to us.¹⁹³

My View

I imagine that in relationship with God we need some degree of freedom of expression while God’s grace, as a service of His love toward us, works to bring us closer to Himself. It is a dynamic relationship in which God intervenes and interferes to bring to our attention what He desires us to know. Perseverance is a parental term. It is God not giving up on us ...not ...us not giving up on God.

The dynamic of grace, also, is a divine activity mostly hidden from our logic. So, we ask questions reasonable to our childlike understanding of His wisdom ...but questions that are on a child’s level of an awareness

¹⁸⁹ Ephesians 2:8

¹⁹⁰ 2 Peter 1:1

¹⁹¹ Romans 11:29 *for God’s gifts and his call are irrevocable.*

¹⁹² Cp the entire second chapter of Paul’s letter to the Ephesians

¹⁹³ Ephesians 2:7 *in order that in the coming ages he might show the incomparable riches of his grace, expressed in his kindness to us in Christ Jesus.*

of the reality in which we play. In unseen ways God's grace protects us. God's providential care writes our personal history as a testimony to His grace.

When Jesus cautioned us about tomorrow's worries, He was telling us to trust God's keeping power, to rely on God's faithfulness. Paul summed it up by enjoining us to call Him, "Abba"¹⁹⁴ and rightly so; for, we are His children.

And if this isn't sufficient to confirm how much He loves us, consider that He shared it all in a letter, the Bible, which He carefully worded, choosing the words down to the very language they were written in to let us know.

¹⁹⁴ a child's word for 'daddy' in Hebrew

Final Thought

There is so much to learn. In so many ways, God's grace in dealing with us is beyond guessing.¹⁹⁵ Our view of God's plan for our future is a 50,000 foot view with little detail visible to our understanding. This simple point has escaped our attention since our active imaginations have, theologically speaking, built a ground level picture.

Our Lord has only begun to surprise us!

Since ancient times no one has heard, no ear has perceived, no eye has seen any God besides you, who acts on behalf of those who wait for him.¹⁹⁶

The details we argue as believers are mostly intellectual filler. Like the inactive substance that makes up most of a pill, much of our theology is inert and harmless as long as we learn not to argue too vehemently and not with a vitriolic passion that suggests we know what we are talking about.

However, as it is written: "What no eye has seen, what no ear has heard, and what no human mind has conceived"—the things God has prepared for those who love him¹⁹⁷

But we have our positions and a need somehow to distinguish ourselves from others who are persuasive in

¹⁹⁵ Romans 11:33 *How unsearchable his judgments, and his paths beyond tracing out!*

¹⁹⁶ Isaiah 64:4

¹⁹⁷ I Corinthians 2:9

what they promote. We must defend the faith! Our voice has to be a "Thus saith the Lord!"

But beyond the message of the Cross, does it?

God has gifted us with an exciting message of great news in the story of His grace. Anyone, regardless of what they have done or what life or reputation they are living, can join the saintly band that is marching to a glorious place with Him that we call "heaven." We don't really need to know how God made this offer possible, other than through His death and resurrection in the person of His Son. What happened exactly on that Roman cross? Did He die to forgive us? To reconcile us? To appease His wrath ...against us or against sin? Was it the ultimate sacrifice for love? Did He pay our debt or ransom us ...or both? The theories of our atonement are many but none can deny that *this was grace!*

"Come now, let us settle the matter," says the LORD. "Though your sins are like scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they are red as crimson, they shall be like wool."¹⁹⁸

What we need to know only is that now the veil is rent and we have an audience with our God. There is much to know, much to learn. Now begins the journey with Him, talking to Him, getting to know Him ...a journey that will walk us into His living presence and into eternity with Him. For now, why should anything else consume our interest or drive our passion for truth? Jesus death is our starting line.

For I resolved to know nothing while I was with you except Jesus Christ and him crucified.¹⁹⁹

¹⁹⁸ Isaiah 1:18

¹⁹⁹ I Corinthians 2:2

What He has told us in Scripture is worth our time exploring but only within the boundary of that revelation. Outside that circle of knowledge there is so much more to know ...someday in glory.

The secret things belong to the LORD our God, but the things revealed belong to us and to our children forever, that we may follow...²⁰⁰

And what about the Holy Spirit and the end times and Israel's relation to the Church? Unless we missed it, the Spirit is within our lives to enhance clarity and train our perspective on that Cross and the power of the resurrection in our witness for our Lord. The Spirit truly hides in the shadows, works in the background, to put Jesus, His death, resurrection and intercessory work in the spotlight of eternal truth.

But when he, the Spirit of truth, comes, he will guide you into all the truth. He will not speak on his own; he will speak only what he hears, and he will tell you what is yet to come.²⁰¹

And we ask, "Why me?" Was I chosen by grace or could I have said or done something that turned God's ear first? Why did He call me and not so many others? Why is the way that leads to destruction so wide and well traveled and so few take the narrow path to God?²⁰² How has grace not worked to redirect them!?

We admit that our questions are many but answers should not be conjured up through a rambling theology

²⁰⁰ Deuteronomy 29:29

²⁰¹ John 16:13

²⁰² Matthew 7:14 But small is the gate and narrow the road that leads to life, and only a few find it.

that feels a need to defend the plan of God or justify what we think we know or observe about God's dealings with His creation.²⁰³ I am always brought back to Jesus's final words to His disciples when they were near overwhelmed with apprehension and so many questions. They were restless, anxious; for, so the word "troubled" means in John 14:1 when Jesus spoke peace to their hearts.. And to ours: "*You believe in God.*" You do, don't you! And then Jesus summed up what grace is all about making a thousand questions no longer necessary: "*Trust me!*"

²⁰³ John 21:22 Jesus answered, "... what is that to you? You must follow me."

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