

# Devotional Thoughts From God's Word

## Essays In Grace

Your word I have treasured in my heart,  
That I may not sin against You.- Ps 119::11



John H. King

# ESSAYS IN GRACE

John H. King

“Grace is the church’s great distinctive. It’s the one thing the world cannot duplicate, and the one thing it craves above all else—for only grace can bring hope and transformation to a jaded world.” - Philip Yancy

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To Those Who have Learned to Trust God

# Contents

Introduction.....	1
Understanding Grace.....	11
Defining 'Grace'.....	15
Grace in the New Testament.....	19
Grace in the Old Testament.....	35
Grace & The Natural Mind.....	51
Divine Fairness.....	77
Grace as a Theology.....	85
Grace is God's Idea.....	97
The Hidden Message of Grace.....	104
Grace & the Favor Principle.....	114
A Reasonable Grace.....	122
Grace Is Not a License to Sin.....	126
Grace Is Not God's Favor.....	133
Grace Is Not Only Positional.....	140
Grace Is Not Contrary to God's Law.....	146
Grace & The 'But' Principle.....	159
Grace & The Continuum.....	167
Grace & Culture.....	184
The Fruit of Grace.....	195
The Fruit of The Spirit.....	205
The Paradox of Grace.....	206
Living in The Grace of God.....	217

The following list of English translations might help to identify the limited use of them in this work. [<https://solarmythology.com/translations/bibles.htm>]

- AMP Amplified Bible 2015
- AMPC Amplified Bible Classic Edition 1965
- ASV American Standard Version 1901
- BBE Bible in Basic English 1965
- CEV Contemporary English Version 1995 (NT - 1991)
- CSB Christian Standard Bible 2016
- CWB Clear Word Bible 1992
- ERV Easy to Read 2015
- ESV English Standard Version 2003
- ICB NCV International Children's Bible, New Century Version 1986 (NT - 1978)
- JPB J.B. Phillips New Testament in Modern English 1958 (Revised 1972)
- KJ21 Twenty-First Century King James Version 1994 (NT - 1992)
- KJV AV King James Version (also known as Authorized Version) 1611
- MLB NBV Modern Language Bible also known as New Berkley Version 1959 (NT - 1945; NT revised 1969)
- NASB New American Standard Bible (NASB) 1971 (NT - 1963; Revised 1996)
- NET New English Translation 2005
- NIrV New International Reader's Version (NIrV) 1996
- NIV New International Version 1978 (NT - 1973)
- NKJV New King James Version 1982
- NLT New Living Translation 1996
- NRSV New Revised Standard Version 1990
- TEV Good News Bible also known as Today's English Version 1974 (NT - 1966; Revised 1993)
- YLT Young's Literal Translation 1862 (Revised 1887, 1898)
- WIL Williams New Testament in the Language of the People 1937; Reprinted 2000 as Millennium edition.

## Overview of Chapters.

1. Understanding Grace:
  - When we have explained grace we will finally know all there is to know about God.
  - Grace: The Full and United Exercise of the Attributes Of God.
  - "According as his divine power hath given unto us all things that pertain unto life and godliness, through the knowledge of him that hath called us to glory and virtue." - 2 Peter 1:3
2. Defining 'Grace':
  - God's grace was borrowed from the vocabulary of God's Heaven—not as an explanation but only an exclamation that there is a Heaven to come.
  - Grace: The Spirit at Work - The Arrabon.
  - "In whom ye also trusted, after that ye heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation: in whom also after that ye believed, ye were sealed with that holy Spirit of promise, Which is the earnest of our inheritance until the redemption of the purchased possession, unto the praise of his glory." - Ephesians 1:13-14
3. Grace in the New Testament:
  - The Old Testament does not help much in determining grace in the New.
  - Grace: An Inclusive Act of Mercy.
  - "Shew thy marvelous lovingkindness, O thou that save by thy right hand them which put their trust in thee from those that rise up against them." - Psalm 17:7
4. Grace in the Old Testament:
  - Grace: God's Deliverance in accordance with the Old Covenant.

- "Of which salvation the prophets have enquired and searched diligently, who prophesied of the grace that should come unto you." - 1 Peter 1:10
5. Grace & The Natural Mind:
    - Grace: The Missionary's Challenge.
    - "But none of these things move me... so that I might finish my course with joy, and the ministry, which I have received of the Lord Jesus, to testify the gospel of the grace of God." Acts 20:24
  6. Divine Fairness:
    - All things are fair—not in love and war—in grace.
    - Grace: The Restoring of All Things
    - "For in that He put all in subjection under him, He left nothing that is not put under him. But .. not yet see. But we see Jesus, who was made a little lower than the angels, for the suffering of death crowned with glory and honor, that He, by the grace of God, might taste death for everyone." - Hebrews 2:8-9
  7. Grace as a Theology:
    - All true theology is a study in the grace of God.
    - "Grace ... be multiplied to you in the ... knowledge of God and of Jesus our Lord." - 2 Peter 1:2
  8. Grace - a Divine Idea:
    - Grace: God's bounty which He lavishes upon us ... with or without our awareness.
    - Completely and Only: The Provenance of God.
    - "For the law was given by Moses, but grace and truth came by Jesus Christ." - John 1:17
  9. The Hidden Message of Grace:
    - Grace: The trail of Biblical history that led to Calvary.
    - Grace: The Creator at Work.
    - "Therefore if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new." - 2 Corinthians 5:17

10. Grace & the Favor Principle:
  - We are all God's favorites.
  - Grace: The Kindnesses of God.
  - "That in the ages to come he might shew the exceeding riches of his grace in his kindness toward us through Christ Jesus." - Ephesians 2:7
11. A Reasonable Grace:
  - God acting for reasons within Himself.
  - Grace: The Good Pleasure of The Lord.
  - "It is God who works in you both to will and to do of his good pleasure." - Philippians 2:12
12. Grace Is Not a License to Sin:
  - Grace Is Free, Not Cheap
  - We are freed to serve God.
  - Grace: The Redemption of God.
  - What then? shall we sin, because we are not under the law, but under grace? God forbid." - Romans 6:15
13. Grace Is Not God's Favor:
  - Grace: The impartial provisions of Salvation for all and any who seek Him.
  - God's response may appear to be one thing for one person but something else for another, but He is always and only a HOLY God.
  - "Remember, you both have the same Master in heaven, and he has no favorites." - Ephesians 6:9 [ Galatians 2:6].
14. Grace Is Not Only Positional:
  - Salvation is not only Positional But Relational.
  - Grace: God in Covenant Relationship with Us.
  - "But we all, with unveiled face, beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory, just as by the Spirit of the Lord." - 2 Corinthians 3:18
15. Grace Is Not Contrary to God's Law:
  - Christ frees us from legalism.

- Grace: The Fulfillment, not the Abrogation, of the Mosaic Law.
  - "The law itself is holy, and its commands are holy and right and good." - Romans 7:12
  - "Do we then make void the law through faith? Certainly not! On the contrary, we establish the law." - Romans 3:31
  - "...even so might grace reign through righteousness unto eternal life by Jesus Christ our Lord." - Romans 5:21
16. Grace & The 'But' Principle:
- Sinful past but glorified future.
  - Grace: The Ultimate Blessing.
  - "But where sin abounded, grace did much more abound" - Romans 5:20
17. Grace & the Continuum:
- Grace: The Impartiality of God.
  - Imagine a place where competitions, comparisons, and judgments do not exist.
  - "And they shall teach no more every man his neighbor, and every man his brother, saying, Know the LORD: for they shall all know me, from the least of them unto the greatest of them, saith the LORD: for I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more." - Jeremiah 31:34
18. Grace & Culture:
- Grace: Transcending Culture.
  - The Gospel is not the property of any religion—and indeed cannot be—because God's grace has been extended to all.
  - "Go into all the world and preach the Good News to everyone" - Matthew 16:15 NLT
19. The Fruit of Grace:
- Grace: The Fruit of The Spirit.
  - Yielding tot the Spirit: The treasure house in which all other graces are contained.

- "love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance." - Galatians 5:22-23

20. The Paradox of Grace

- Grace: God does not just turn life over; He brings life right side up.
- "I am crucified with Christ, nevertheless, I live...." - Galatians 2:20

21. Living in The Grace of God:

- Grace: to be lived!
- Grace, not only for us, but is also administered by us and through us to others as a witness to its reality.
- "And God is able to make all grace abound toward you; that ye, always having all sufficiency in all things, may abound to every good work." - 2 Corinthians 9:8

# Introduction

*God's Grace, an introduction in this life to the life to come.  
"...even so might grace reign through righteousness unto eternal life by Jesus  
Christ our Lord." - Romans 5:21*

I struggle with a thought that is probably on few minds. Most Christians are blessed with a faith that does not ask stupid questions whereas I keep poking my ignorance, sometimes just for the fun of it. Ignorance doesn't like to be poked—at least not mine.

What if God intends on forgiving your worse antagonist, and God might do for them what He did for the thief on the Cross. With his final, clear, thought, a man, who spent his adult life robbing and killing, asks the Savior simply to think of Him once He arrives where He is going, and the Savior informs him, "I'll bring you along with me. How's that!" And, no doubt, the thief was grateful. And what if that person were someone you struggled emotional not to hate?

In the U.S.A. it is a political season at the time of writing this book and the parties are sharply divided on many issues. It seems like the promise of national unity is a pipe dream. The former president is running against the current one and the nation is equally divided causing much angst in the electorate. The media is divided, as well. Each side loves one of the two candidates and hates the other. And the loved one can't do any wrong, while the hated one can't do anything right. The spun lies—as the other side sees it—is almost enough to want to take up arms—not weapons, but

## Introduction

fists. But, no! Very bad idea. The side in power, as of this writing, is in the process of using the justice system to imprison their opponents! The current president is being accused of taking bribes while the former president has been indicted 4 times for 91 “crimes.”

What if God plans to forgive our current President—as they say—for selling out our nation’s security for personal financial gain? I ask this to those who think he did and must not go unpunished. What if, though, he is going to get away with it—not because of a corrupt system, but—because God forgives the repentant? Or, maybe, somehow, everything that is happening is part of prophecy and in God’s plan.

And what if our previous president is going to beat the rap of all 91 indictments—not so much on legal grounds, but—because it is providentially ordained of God. And if he is guilty of any, what if he repents! I put this question to those who hate him and think he deserves life imprisonment. What if God is behind his freedom. God might even put him back in the White house!

Worse still, what if one gets his comeuppance but the other does not! Now someone is yelling, “Unfair!!”

Take Manasseh, king of Judah for 55 years according to 2 Chronicles 33. “He caused his sons to pass through the fire in the Valley of the Son of Hinnom.” Hinnom is Hebrew for “Hell fire,” the valley where he sacrificed Jewish infants. [At least he didn’t believe in abortion.] But then there’s this, verse 12-13: “he implored the LORD his God, and humbled himself greatly before the God of his fathers, and prayed to Him; and He, God, received his entreaty, heard his supplication, and brought him back to Jerusalem into his kingdom.” This deserved at least 3 exclamation points!!!

There was Jonah and the king of Nineveh.

Quiz: Which one ended three days wrapped in seaweed in the abyss where the air wreaked with a foul

## Introduction

stench so pervasive it is thought to the modern mind to be an impossible story?

Hint: Not the king of Nineveh. He got away with untold Assyrian atrocities while God's servant suffered!

Answer: Correct, Jonah! But there was the "qiqayon" [the gourd in Jonah 4:6]. It was probably the vine in the squash family that God used to teach Jonah something about grace.

Just maybe for all our theology, we, too, still have a lot to learn about grace. It is nice to know that many Christians are discovering that true litigation is not fought in a court of law but on one's knees, that it is not against any person but against evil itself that we must wage a spiritual war, and it is ultimately God's grace that wins because we "know that the LORD saves not with sword and spear: for the battle is the LORD'S..." [1 Samuel 17:47].

Would we ever try to try what Moses tried, telling God if He didn't want the people we love, He doesn't want us, either? Exodus 32:32 [NET], Moses told God, "But now, if you will forgive their sin..., but if not, wipe me out from your book that you have written."

Some people turn against God because He doesn't answer their demands—they misconstrued as real prayer. But God's grace cannot be threatened or coerced because that's the point of Grace: God does what *He* wants to do when He wants to do it. We should be grateful always knowing He loved us enough to die for us. If God were to answer our prayers, just because we prayed that would be favoritism and not grace. If faith were defined as "anything we ask of God, He does," He just became a Jeannie-in-the-bottle and we would be in charge. And what if our prayers conflict—what I want is the opposite of what you want, like 2 football players on opposites teams asking Him to give them a win.

## Introduction

We must leave God to be God and allow our prayer to be more conversational rather than instructional. Prayer is the greatest opportunity to get to know the God Who died for us and, thereby, to participate or share in His greatest victories when He answers.

## Grace

What exactly is God's grace? If it were a place, we might locate it on the map and ask directions to go there. If it were a commodity, like a healing or a financial sum, we might ask for it. If it were a set of moral or ethical principles we might seek to live it. If it were an abstract concept we might go to college to get a degree in it. If it were theologically knowable, we might seek to understand it. If God's grace were a predictable response on His part we might study it as a science and discover under what conditions to receive it. But if it is God intervening in our affairs, then, no prescription or formula will suffice to explain it, since ours is a living relationship that thrives on God doing for us and in us what He wants when He wants. Prayer is designed to recognize that the all powerful and loving God is in charge of our lives.

It has been confirmed enumerable times in the heart of each believer that we lack an adequate understanding of God's love to explain even in a most elementary way what God will do next for us. We only know with an unwavering faith that He will and we will ultimately recognize His active Presence as the sole source of all we desire to be or to have. We have come to call this "grace"—and rightly so.

But we are now 2,000 years into a discussion about God's grace which began with Paul [Ephesians 2:7-8]—a subject that baffled the most educated minds of his day [1 Corinthians 1:23]. We need to return to this beginning to appreciate what God has done. Perhaps, we should start by asking why Paul chose the word "grace" to describe the unearned and undeserved favor of God. The one thing we

## Introduction

can say about grace is that no one ever hated receiving it. There is nothing repulsive in grace. In truth, often it is requested!

To seek a gracious judgment, for example, in the ancient Greek society was considered showing partiality or favoritism (Who doesn't like being treated special?). So "to give grace" was to give pleasure. The word was often translated as *love*, *charm*, *favor*, or even, *gratitude*. Grace is said to bring joy. In fact, these 2 words: *grace* and *joy* have a common origin in the New Testament.

Grace includes *kindness* and *sympathy*. Even the word "forgiveness" derives from it. And the Greeks even developed a phrase, "out of consideration for" or "out of regard for" from the concept of "grace" or "being gracious." And so it became the gracious gift of God [Exodus 33:19]. In Luke 17:9 "to have grace" is "to be grateful."

## The Myrtle Tree

There is a metaphorical reference to the myrtle tree in describing grace.<sup>1</sup> One article I came across in my research explained, "Both the myrtle tree and its flowers are adored by many and thus became a symbol of ... love, good luck, and prosperity." The article went on to describe a "happiness ... [that was] perfect [and] long lasting [and] good ... " The tree is also known for its healing properties. "One story tells us of how Venus visited the island of Cytheraea. ...she covered herself with sprigs picked from the myrtle tree and from that day on the myrtle tree was sacred to Venus. After this it was believed that the myrtle tree could inspire true love and good fortune and the Greeks planted the trees across the landscape for all to behold."<sup>2</sup>

In the Greek mind grace and beauty belonged together, and in our language, too. The 3 Graces according to

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1. The Myrtle Tree accessed 12/21/23 [tree2mydoor.com](http://tree2mydoor.com)

2. Ibid.

## Introduction

Hesiod were worshipped. They were three goddesses in Greek mythology (Euphrosyne, Aglaia, and Thalia), in whom beauty was deified.<sup>3</sup> Somehow being graceful and beautiful are inseparable ideas. In modern thought a woman's graceful appearance adds to her beauty. But I dare say we have not associated God's beauty with His grace, but we probably could. There is an element of "beauty" in God's glory! (But this is another study.) What we are saying is that God's grace is always favored. Perhaps, that's why the one all encompassing word to describe God's grace is His *kindness* [Ephesians 2:7; Titus 3:4].

One last thought: "Grace to God," an expression found throughout Paul's writings [Romans 6:17;7:25; 1 Corinthians 16:3; 2 Corinthians 8:16, etc.] is his way of saying "thanks." It is also salutary with Paul [Romans 1:7]. Grace, nonetheless, would not become simply a word of greeting with him—no more than its sister term, peace. With Paul, these words packed a lot of love and were his constant prayer, "The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you. Amen" [1 Thessalonians 5:28].

## The Power of Grace

I am tempted [poor choice of words] to quote the Theological Dictionary<sup>4</sup> in talking about how effective, how powerful, and accomplished is God's grace. If we say God did the impossible for me, we are talking about His grace. The power of grace is displayed in overcoming sin [Romans 5:20f]. Romans 5:21 reads [in the NET] "so that just as sin reigned in death, so also grace will reign through righteousness to eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord." Sin kills but grace makes eternally alive [through the Cross of Christ].

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3. Charity accessed 12/21/23 <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Charites>

4. Gerhard Kittell, *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*. (Wm. B Eerdmans Publishing Company, Grand Rapids, MI: 1974), Vol IX page 359

## Grace is More, Much More

I began this discussion in describing the message of grace as something that flummoxed me. On the one side, I keep wanting to look under the hood, to see why things are as they are or how things work. Unlike the philosopher or the theologian that seems satisfied with partial explanations of things they probably still do not understand, I keep wondering and searching as if my very soul depended on my knowing! I share this to add: our salvation is not dependent on *what* we know but *Who* we trust—our Savior!

To explain: when I pastored I expected to be able to identify Christian character within church people in accord with Scripture, but the worse things humanly possible were seen in the church! I, for example, resigned myself to the thought that there has to be a ministry of mercy some are called to [Romans 12:8] which explains why most Christians simply do not show it!

So, I thought that—yes—we sin, but [this is a big BUT!] because we are believers, we *repent*. It is not the sinlessness that characterizes believers but the repenting! I went on to research a few human traits I hoped were expunged when we were “born again.” We get angry but not vengeful. Or there must be a level of evil Christians by nature are not capable of.

If grace is in our lives, where is the empowerment that comes with it? My point is that God’s grace has to make a difference in us as believers, as Christians, as representatives of Christ. Either this, or I have been rambling out nonsense, as the Greeks accused Paul of doing [Acts 17:18].

The Theological Dictionary concluded that, in fact, “the elect are a small group. The small number shows that election is a miracle, not the normal case.”<sup>5</sup> Maybe that’s it,

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5. Ibid.

## Introduction

but these are not elect because they are faultless [although, that is God's idea behind sainthood and Christlikeness]. They are elect in spite of their faults which speaks loud and clear of grace.

## Temperance

This led me to another word, *temperance*, that seems important to Paul, though, I failed to give it the honor it deserved. When was the last time you heard a sermon on this—yes—fruit of the Spirit?! Paul brought it up talking to Felix about faith in Christ [Acts 24:24-25]. And again he listed it with the fruit of the Spirit—of all places! Peter agreeably maintained that it is one of those traits we must earnestly seek to have in our lives [2 Peter 1:6]. In verse 8 Peter exclaimed “For if this thing be in you, and abound, it will make you that ye shall neither be barren nor unfruitful in the knowledge of [not the work: not what we do but what we are becoming in] our Lord Jesus Christ.”

We are talking about “temperance” which I thought meant “self-control.” But that makes no sense! If temperance is self-control—if I am in control—how can I credit God's grace with what God is doing in my life?

Where I went wrong was to think that either grace or self-control, alone, is going to make me holy, where in truth, it is a *marriage* of the two, a *relationship* between God [grace] and me [temperance] that works. Philippians 2:12-13 are for me key verses in understanding all of this: “Wherefore, my beloved, as you have always obeyed, not as in my presence only, but now much more in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling. For it is God who is doing the work in you both because He wants to, out of love for you, and because it gives Him great pleasure to do so.” [For both His happiness and ours!]

### **Fear and Trembling**

Oh, fear and trembling? Fear and trembling generally are spoken together suggesting that they are two aspects that are not seen separate in an alert and sober mind and heart. They are distinguished from being terrified or amazed because these latter ideas are momentary emotions triggered by some sudden, perhaps unexpected, event or circumstance. Fear and trembling are more a perspective on life.

The Old Testament use of these words is more severe. There they speak of an anxiety that threatens life itself and a deliverance for which we must trust God [Psalm 55:5]. In the Old Testament parlance “fear and trembling” is something you never want to experience but with Paul, they are a necessary aspect of Christian character.

Paul’s use is less alarming. The analogy that comes to mind to explain Paul’s use is: driving at night down an unfamiliar, winding country road with no shoulder which should require a consistent alertness lest you drive into a ditch. But keep in mind, you are an expert driver! Elsewhere Paul uses the terms to indicate a serious commitment, as when Titus was commended to the Corinthian believers and Paul recalled “how with fear and trembling [they] received him [2 Corinthians 7:15]. Slaves were invited to serve their masters “with fear and trembling, in sincerity of heart, as to Christ” [Ephesians 6:5]. And when Paul went to Corinth, knowing the controversies that were circling in the churches there, he made what I call an emotional decision ahead of time to talk about Jesus and nothing else. His resolve was unshakeable because as he put it, “For I determined not to know anything among you except Jesus Christ and Him crucified. I was with you in weakness, in fear, and in much trembling. [1 Corinthians 2:2-3].

“Fear and trembling” described me for decades in ministry each time I ascended the pulpit or lead a prayer meeting or taught a group of believers whose hunger for

## Introduction

God's Word required nothing less. Fear and trembling speaks to an active and consistent prayer life.

God brings the rain but the farmer co-operates with God by planting seed and later harvesting the crop. Temperance was never simply self-control, but a commitment to work with God on our own behalf. We are enjoined to cooperate with God in the matter of our holiness with an alert sense of urgency and commitment.

## Mercy

Perhaps, Paul could have used the word *mercy* instead of grace. In the Old Testament the term mercy was closer to idea Paul was advancing. But, as we shall see, grace was the better term. One Teacher at Bible College explained, "Grace for our circumstance; mercy for our transgressing." Perhaps, "mercy" would have better owned the idea of God's gentle touch upon the soul to assuage the agony of sin and free us to be happy in Him. But mercy came to refer to alms for the poor whereas grace had a far broader meaning to include the work on the Cross [Ephesians 2:7-9].

## Understanding Grace

*When we have explained grace we will finally know all there is to know about God.*

*"...we preach Christ crucified, unto the Jews a stumbling-block, and unto the Greeks foolishness ." - 1 Corinthians 1:23*

Is it possible that Paul's most important and inspired treatise on God's grace could be misunderstood by even those who through salvation believe in it? Is it best not to try an explanation but simply accept the Biblical emphasis of a salvation "by grace through faith" [Ephesians 2:8]? Could God's gift, unearned and undeserved, still be confused as a reward for good works?

When Paul discussed this eternal truth with a mixed group of Stoic and Epicurean Greek philosophers, as far as they were concerned, he was a "babbler" [Acts 17:18] saying nothing meaningful. On the continuum of finding happiness and meaning in life (the philosopher's quest) between seeking pleasure for pleasure's sake (Epicureanism) to seeking to live a virtuous and meaningful life in harmony with nature (stoicism) *the message of grace could not be found!* The word, babbler, itself, metaphorically depicts a crow going about picking what it would and flying off with it as if it had value to adorn its nest or to be eaten. To the Greeks, Paul sounded [1 Corinthians 1:23] stupid, silly, absurd, spouting useless and impractical nonsense. I like to say: Paul's puzzle piece of grace did not fit the philosophers' mental puzzle—how they saw life.

## Understanding Grace

The message of grace was hard for the Greeks to comprehend because, even, the word Paul used to explain this divine gift in the classical sense meant a kindness which spoke of *favoritism*—something Paul, in no uncertain terms, was specifically *not* saying [Galatians 2:6; Ephesians 6:9; Colossians 3:25].

Even Peter caught this truth [1 Peter 1:17] though he found Paul, in terms of the Mosaic Law, difficult to understand. His profound honesty is noteworthy [2 Peter 3:15-16]. "This is what our beloved brother Paul also wrote to you." Peter wrote, "with the wisdom God gave him—speaking of these things in all of his letters. Some of his comments are hard to understand, and those who are ignorant and unstable have twisted his letters to mean something quite different."

Peter meant the Jewish deep thinkers, erroneously, understood Torah Law must be followed to gain divine favor for forgiveness. The Jews did not think Paul a fool because fools don't believe in God [Psalm 14:1] and clearly Paul did. But they were offended. What he promoted was contrary to what they expected to hear him say. Paul's teaching confused many of them because they understood God's Law to be a system of punishments and rewards, not unearned and, certainly, not undeserved [Deuteronomy 27-30]. They argued: "This man is persuading people to worship God in a way contrary to the law!" [Acts 18:13].

Let's not kid ourselves here: God will take eternity to continue adding to our understanding of His grace [Ephesians 2:7] or as the NET translates "to demonstrate in the coming ages the surpassing wealth of his grace in *kindness* [There's that word again.] toward us in Christ Jesus." But for now we must look at it as a puzzle with some pieces we have yet to put into place. Someone once said, "Studying the grace of God is like marking out the boundary of a lake only to discover we have come to the immeasurable sea."

### **The Puzzle Frame**

There is a process to putting a puzzle together—at least, we teach the children this. The first step is to identify the "frame" or the outer pieces which only attach on 3 sides, not four. This represents a border that helps complete the picture, as much as the artist intended we saw. In Bible terms, "The LORD our God has secrets known to no one. We are not accountable for them, but we and our children are accountable forever for all that he has revealed to us, so that we may obey..." [Deuteronomy 29:29 NLT].

For us, the picture of God's grace is framed by a simple Bible truth, which, if we failed to see it as the outer boundary of our knowledge, we cannot put the picture of this beautiful truth together. It is the revelation of God as the knower of men's hearts. Jeremiah 17:10 NET "I, the LORD, probe into people's minds. I examine people's hearts...."

### **The Heart-Knower**

God is the "heart-knower." [Acts 1:24 "Lord, you know the hearts of all."] Luke employed a new term in Acts 15:8, "And God, *who knows the heart*, has testified to them by giving them the Holy Spirit just as he did to us." The heart-knower is in charge because He alone can determine the truth of a matter or decide (judge) what is immoral or sin." And He alone knows what we are capable of learning and living within the relationship we are growing into in Him. He alone reads the hunger in our souls for Him.

Many things we wish to know are not in this picture! These are outside the boundary of our puzzle, and like so many questions which the Bible doesn't care to answer, these must await a fuller explanation when we sit in Glory at the Savior's feet.

If the answer to a question is not a piece to this picture—if it has nothing to explain about God's grace and our salvation and witness—God need not share it. If you

## Understanding Grace

think about it, our faith is very active picking up pieces, changing their orientation, and finding Old Testament patterns that match New Testament truth—learning through Bible study, prayer, and living the Christian life, the grace given by the Heart-knower!

It has been in an effort to look inside the heart of God that most theology is written. This becomes an exploratory operation on God's Word to get inside His mind and understand why He does what He does and why He permits what He seems to permit. But the frame of this picture is the message that God knows something about the heart of man that in relation to His great heart offers opportunity—or not—for Him to do what He decides to do. This is why Philippians 2:12-13 looms so large all of sudden (or should) in theological thought because in simple words Paul says God does what He wants, what He desires to do and what gives Him great pleasure [grace is action]. And what He does is give us a new life to live, now, with Him in our picture.

The analogy that “the same sun that melts wax hardens clay” might or might not suffice to explain all this. If it does—to our child-like minds—the only thing I can add is, God knows which hearts are wax and which are clay.

## Defining 'Grace'

*God's grace was borrowed from the vocabulary of God's Heaven to come—not as an explanation but as an exclamation that there is a Heaven.*

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. 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. Grace like Agape love, and a host of other words, will be far more meaningful when we get to Heaven because these are part of *that* culture—not the world's.

An absolutely charming illustration is the Welsh word, *cwtch* (pronounced 'kutch', to rhyme with 'butch'). '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' 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.<sup>1</sup>

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

## Defining 'Grace'

Perhaps, this is a bit like our message to a soldier returning from the war: "Welcome home!!"

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. 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. Protestants<sup>2</sup> 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. Some include "doctrine"<sup>3</sup> among its various meanings. It is uniquely part of the Christian nomenclature.

We should be most thankful to God whose gift of His written Word is one of the biggest and most miraculous gifts of His love imaginable. 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 faith in Him, It is a knowledge we could not have but in glimpses. "For we know in part," Paul cautioned [1 Corinthians 13:9].

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.<sup>4</sup> 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.

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

3. Some scholars maintain that this definition is not Biblical. Faith in Christ is relational! Faith and faithfulness are the same word in the Bible.

4. 1 Corinthians 13:1 "If I speak in the tongues [language] ... of angels"

## Defining 'Grace'

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.<sup>5</sup> Even our word, Love (agape love) is a term used first in our Bible. (Did God invent it!?)

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,<sup>6</sup> 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.<sup>7</sup>

In addition, the language of the Scriptures had the added burden of speaking for *God*,<sup>8</sup> 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.

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5. 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.

6. 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.

7. In New England something can be said to be “wicked” good which has nothing to do with morality or God.

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

## Defining 'Grace'

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

### **Defining Grace**

Grace is a word borrowed from the language of Heaven. We can say this because to understand grace is to understand God. Grace as a gift of God is *the* gift of God, Himself [John 3:16]. To understand grace is to give ourselves wholeheartedly into a covenant relationship with Him. Grace speaks of Christian community and holiness. Grace, like mercy, its twin, is an attribute of God and is part of who He is not just what He does. Hopefully this makes sense.

There is no single act of God that solely represents His love to us. Even the Old Testament puts on the record God's ability to personalize His love [1 Corinthians 12:11]. How He revealed Himself to David, Solomon, or Job shows how He treats us as the individuals we are. If His creation is full of diversity and color, how could we imagine less when it comes to His work in us? Perhaps this is the word "riches" in the acronym "God's Riches At Christ's Expense".

## Grace in the New Testament

*“To refer to Old Testament ‘favor’ does not help much in determining the sense [of grace] in the New Testament.” - “Theological Dictionary of the New Testament”  
vol IX, Page 391.*

Paul’s task was choosing a word for God’s lovingkindness as we read in Psalm 17:7 “Show Your marvelous lovingkindness by Your right hand, O You who save those who trust in You.” Lovingkindness in the Old Testament is a word that embodies a relationship and an obligation in that relationship rather than the idea of favor. “So on God’s side.” The Dictionary reads, “[lovingkindness] particularly comes to denote grace.”<sup>1</sup> God’s lovingkindness rests on covenant to which He has freely bound Himself. As we see in Isaiah 55:3, “I will make a permanent covenant with you on the basis of the faithful kindnesses [shown to] David.” To connect God’s grace to His covenant is sound teaching since the Cross, the supreme example of His grace, is also upon which the New Covenant was founded. In fact, it is accurately known as God’s Covenant of Grace. What is of peculiar interest is Paul’s choice of “grace” as the Greek term

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1. Gerhard Kittell, *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*. (Wm. B Eerdmans Publishing Company, Grand Rapids, MI: 1974), Vol II page 479.

to represent the Hebrew word, *lovingkindness*, for which, even in English, we have no equivalent.<sup>2</sup>

### The Language of Our New Testament

The language of the New Testament has had a surprising history. Dr. Chris Caragounis tells us there were 7 dialects that merged into 1 to form the common language in our New Testament. After the writing of the Bible 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."*<sup>3</sup>

To me, this was the providential hand of God. Paul spoke of the time being right for Christ's incarnation. There was one language—Greek—understood throughout the civilized world whether in Greece, Italy, Palestine, or on the islands of the Mediterranean Sea. Even Alexandria, Egypt became a center for Biblical learning and where our Old Testament was translated into the Greek language.... "But when the set time had fully come, God sent his Son, born of a woman, born under the law<sup>4</sup> [Galatians 4:4].

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.<sup>5</sup>

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2. Throughout this work we will favor the term "kindness" and for those who think they have a sufficient understanding of God's love, the word "agape."

3. Chrys Caragounis. *The Development of Greek and The New Testament: Morphology, Syntax, Phonology, and Textual Transmission*. (Baker Academic. Grand Rapids, MI., 2006) page 21.

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

5. 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

## 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 (common Greek) for the Second has to be an important aspect of providence.<sup>6</sup>

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...."<sup>7</sup> 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 "...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.*"<sup>8</sup> This alone might not give indication that the Greek language was God's choice for our Bible but there is

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(Grand Rapids, MI.:BakerAcademic, 2006.â), 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....*"

6. 2 Timothy 3:16 All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness...

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

8. Chrys Caragounis. *The Development of Greek and The New Testament: Morphology, Syntax, Phonology, and Textual Transmission.* (BakerAcademic. Grand Rapids, MI., 2006) page 2.

## Grace in the New Testament

further reason to believe that this could be so. Aside from simply accepting the notion that God does nothing by accident or with God nothing is incidental, we might find wisdom in His choice of these languages for our Bible.

### Perfection

One 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.” I know: who cares! But read on. (I am guessing my reader has had English in high school?)

Sadly, this “Perfect” form, Professor Burton informs us, was gradually losing force as a separate form.<sup>9</sup> 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 reader 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, passionate for the Truth, and having a matching prayer life and study habits, has a good handle on all this. As a congregant, we can just sit back and take it all in.

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9. Ernest De Witt Burton. *Syntax of the Moods and Tenses in New Testament Greek*. (Edinburgh UK., 1973), page 42. “It should be observed that the Aoristic use of the Perfect is a distinct departure from the strict and proper 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.”

## Grace in the New Testament

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 and the Perfect form. The past form, scholarship points out, affirms the *event itself*. The Perfect affirms the existence of the *results* of the event.<sup>10</sup> This provides a greater emphasis. Salvation is more than status! Salvation is relational! Salvation requires God's eternity in which to be fully experienced. As an event, we can refer to when we got saved [John 1:12] but as a result, salvation now opens up the way for a relationship with God. Our salvation is an act of God made in preparation for an eternity with Him!

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 Paul's mind.<sup>11</sup> 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

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10. Ibid. page. 41.

11. *ibid.*

## Grace in the New Testament

Resurrection of He who is the firstfruits [I Corinthians 15:20] of all God's children and as the confirmation of our justification [Romans 4:25] is of great importance in God's plan for our eternal salvation. Let me say this in a simpler way: Jesus was buried [that was an event] but He wouldn't stay buried. He was resurrected as a result of our being justified. He lives *forever*.

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. We often use the description *permanent*. This form speaks more of *unchanging* rather than *unchanged*. Let me explain.

Unchanging means that this speaks of a state or condition which is *not* in flux or in the process of becoming something else. There is no decay, no rust or rot [Matthew 6:19-20]. It is considered *complete* as to the process or *accomplished* as to its action. This is why we prefer, in English: saying "Jesus *IS* risen." The perfect form describes our Lord's resurrection as the accomplishment, the result, of all that Calvary offered! He not only has risen; He *IS* risen! [Never again to die!]

The word might also carry the notion of "finality," depending on the context. This point is a prima-facie argument which I draw from a review of the form in our New Testament.<sup>12</sup> We might sigh with the generations that have awaited this moment, this 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..."

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12. The intensive perfect. The perfect is sometimes used in classical Greek as an emphatic or intensive present. Ibid. Pages. 37-39

## Grace in the New Testament

All three emboldened words are in this perfect form. It explains itself for any believer who has sought to fill up in their own life the sufferings of Christ [Colossians 1:24] 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 vision of another state just the other side of the finish line in view?

Here the race is practically dropped from thought, and the attention turned wholly to the finish line. Probably the best example might be a mother-to-be who just went through hours of labor and now a child *is born*. There is no reference to the pain in this statement but the wonderful happiness of motherhood.

This form can look back and call some past condition or event final or complete and this form can look ahead at the resulting truth or present state. Jesus's cry from the Cross, "It is finished!" might be such a perfect. Looking back: prophecy is fulfilled. Looking ahead: Satan is forever defeated! The plan of our salvation is finally available!

When the Bible says, many times,<sup>13</sup> about itself, "*It is written,*" it uses the perfect form. I want to explain: The unchanging, indelible, chiseled in stone and heart, and always applicable as eternal Truth, the Word of God *IS* written and it stands so!

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

1. *Permanent and unchanged*: He will never need to return to the cross again [Romans 6:1; Hebrews 9:28].
2. *Complete and unchanging*: His death provided a perfect or complete salvation [Isaiah 49:6 & Acts 13:47] and

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13. Found 80 times in the KJV.

no prophecy was left unfulfilled as regards His death [Acts 13:29 ].

3. *Final and immediate*: Finally the moment had arrived [John 19:28 ]. This means that our salvation was immediately available upon the Savior's death. If I read the account right, Jesus did not come back later for the thief who asked to be remembered. Jesus brought him along to paradise because from the moment the work on the cross was finished our salvation became a reality. Jesus would isolate His disciples from the public sphere until the Spirit was "poured out" but our salvation was with the Savior's death under the new covenant's provision [John 1:12].

John Barclay writes, "The Christ-event ... is in every respect the definitive act of God's grace: final, complete, decisive, and comprehensive."<sup>14</sup> This is a perfect salvation!"

### Paul's Confidence

A word common, but not exclusively, found in describing the perfect form is translated *confident* or *convinced* in the New International Version. 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 King James Version 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 [Romans 8:38-39].

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14. John M. G. Barclay. *Paul & the Power of Grace*. (Eerdmans Publishing Company, Grand Rapids MI: 2020) page 113.

## Grace in the New Testament

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

## Grace in the New Testament

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.

### Grace

A perfect salvation, Paul, credited to the work of God's grace [Ephesians 2:7-9]. Perhaps, seeing grace as a gift is an incomplete representation of this power and miraculous working in our lives as believers [Acts 4:33; 2 Corinthians 12:9]. Even the gifts of the Spirit are known as Charisma or acts of Grace [1 Corinthians 12:31]. God's gifts are not given to us to use as we might or want but they speak of a spiritual empowerment when God chooses to do something through us as His instruments [Romans 6:13].

### Passive

The word *grace* itself has a biblical significance not found before the writing of the Scripture in Greek. 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 mystery [Romans 16:25 ] when Paul was commissioned with the ministry of reconciliation [2 Corinthians 5:18 ] to present it as "good news" [Luke 8:1]. This simple phrase is not just a perfect form but it is in a passive<sup>15</sup> form as well. ..and what might that mean?

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15. We assume the reader knows what a passive voice is in English. It is a good start in talking about the New Testament meaning.

## Grace in the New Testament

In the earlier days of ministry I mentioned the passive form in a study group offending one dear sister in the Lord who thought I was saying that women are passive in relationships. I needed to explain what this word “passive” means in a study of the language. It is used when you are saying that whatever happened happened to the person you are talking about not by them. “I was hit by the ball” means the ball hit me not that I hit the ball. I was truly the *passive* recipient of the ball. Whoever threw it at me was the *active* giver. It should be obvious that *we have been saved*, which is passive, shows that we were saved *by* God and we didn’t save ourselves. “For it is by grace you *have been saved*, through faith—and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God” [Ephesians 2:8 NIV]. What the Greek form adds is that we did nothing to cause or perfect our salvation, *nothing*—we were not in the planning or the execution of the plan. From beginning to end [Alpha to Omega] it was all *GOD!* We take this truth for granted but it was never clear until Paul could explain it in a new (common) language—Greek.

### **Middle Form**

If we saved ourselves, that would be what the Greeks knew as the “middle” form. The middle form here would mean that we participated in our own salvation, that we deserve some credit for being saved. Grace would not be unearned. This the Bible clearly does *not* mean! Let me introduce the “middle” form to you.

We know this form as the *reflexive* form in English. A reflexive form usually written with the suffix “self” (myself, him/herself, themselves) doesn’t always have to mean that the person doing the act is doing it to themselves. They might be doing it for themselves, or for their own benefit. But sometimes an action in the middle form gives a more intense meaning. So, the middle form of “I persuade” is not “I am persuaded” but “I obey” [Romans 2:8]. A very interesting word is “to lend” [Luke 6:34]. The middle form of

## Grace in the New Testament

this word means “to borrow” [Matthew 5:42]. In a marriage arrangement, the groom is active, does the marrying, and the bride is middle form, gives herself in marriage [Mark 12:25]. The point is that sometimes the meaning changes enough to make it hard to know why it is in the middle form. But, honestly, for this writing, who cares! For a reason, soon made clear, I wanted to introduce to you a form that isn’t recognized as such in English. Sometimes the middle form is known as deponent<sup>16</sup> which means that the form is nothing special. It’s just the way it’s spelled.

### The Passive Idea

The development of 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.<sup>17</sup> The Hebrew language by cultural mandate ascribes responsibility to every action. This explains why a child born blind was accused of sin in the womb [John 9:2]. Jesus’ disciples asked him, “Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?”

The passive idea, therefore, comes through the Greek language into our Bible. It has a history.<sup>18</sup> It developed out of the so-called ‘middle voice’<sup>19</sup> in Greek. (Yada, yada, yada; I

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16. passive or middle in form but active in meaning.

17. 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.

18. A. T. Robertson. *A Grammar of the Greek New Testament in the Light of Historical Research*. (Broadman Press. Nashville:: 1934) page 798. “In the pro-ethnic language [early Greek] there was ...no passive as there was none in [early] Sanskrit”

19. Ibid. pages. 803, 804, 806, ““The middle voice is very broad in its scope and no one word, not even reflexive, covers all the ground. ... The pre-historic situation [as to the relationship of the middle voice and active voice] is speculative. 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

## Grace in the New Testament

know, but read on.) We are only interested here in the middle voice as it morphs into the passive voice. (If calling it the “middle voice” makes no sense because you are not familiar with the idea, use any word you like. Call it “a non-English idea”) Here’s what we are saying: “*The middle [non-English idea] is older than the passive...the passive rose out of the middle [non-English idea] and ..the middle [non-English idea] marks a step toward the passive.*”<sup>20</sup>

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...”

Is it a co-incidence that the passive idea comes into its own during the time of the New Testament writers just when God presses the Greek language into service to record His New Covenant of grace for us?<sup>21</sup>

The popularity of this form<sup>22</sup> (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 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 points out *the sinner’s*

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the action of the verb on themselves or for their own benefit. The Hebrew Hithpael stem is “parallel-to the middle voice-but not wholly so,”

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.

20. A. T. Robertson. *A Grammar of the Greek New Testament in the Light of Historical Research*. (Broadman Press. Nashville.: 1934) page. 803.

21. In Homer many middle voice forms had in context a passive meaning. *Ibid*, page. 815.

22. 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.

## Grace in the New Testament

*responsibility* in God's judgment. 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 guilty of their charges.

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. Here, we pause to say: hopefully, we can see how this form serves the meaning of God's grace: undeserved, ...even uninitiated by us. Grace and salvation are all *God!*

### "Passive" In The Old Testament

The Old Testament use of the passive idea, however—something done 'to' you instead of (active) 'by' you—is weak in comparison to the New Testament 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.*"<sup>23</sup> 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."<sup>24</sup> The word *honored* which many scholars might call a passive can have a reflexive meaning: 'to show one's self to be great.' If I am right

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

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

## Grace in the New Testament

about this, even Pharaoh was in some sense responsible for his hardened heart [Exodus 7:13].

“As regards its meaning,” Gesenius teaches that this form [the Hebrew passive form] “bears some resemblance to the Greek **middle** [form].”<sup>25</sup> The passive idea in the Old Testament also expresses mutual action (done to one another). It has the meaning of the active with the addition of ‘to’ or ‘for’ oneself. This form came to mean the passive idea, Gesenius writes in his grammar book, “in consequence of a **looseness** of thought.”<sup>26</sup> In Leviticus 25:49 [NLT] we find one of our favorite words, “redeem” which in the Old Testament speaks not only of freedom but also kinship and family [our adoption into the family of God]. “In fact, anyone from the extended family may buy them back. They may also redeem themselves if they have prospered.” According to Wordsworth, Lange tells us, “As the law provided for a redeemer for the poor, ... Christ became the Redeemer for the spiritually poor, reinstating us in our lost estate, and delivering us from the bondage of sin; and this He was entitled to do because by His incarnation He took our nature and became our kinsman.”<sup>27</sup> Under the law, a wealthy man could redeem himself, but this does not represent the message of grace. Our redemption was provided in total through the Savior’s death and resurrection.

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”<sup>28</sup> The Greek language developed a passive that could allow for this truth and

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25. William Gesenius. *Hebrew Grammar*. (Oxford University Press. London: Second English edition, reprinted, 1974.) page 137.

26. *ibid.* p. 138. Gesenius adds, “although the passive use of the Niphal (the ‘passive’ form in Hebrew) was introduced at an early period, and became tolerably common, it is nevertheless quite secondary to the reflexive use.”

27. John Peter Lange. *Leviticus* (Zondervan, Grand Rapids, MI: 7th printing, 1980) Vol 1, Page 192

28. Ephesians 2:8

## Grace in the New Testament

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 [John 1:5]. It was the execution of a plan God drew up [I Peter 1:20] and He alone carried out [Isaiah 63:5] and then offered us for free. And this is only the beginning of His generosity.<sup>29</sup>

How do you say all this in another 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 [John 16:13]. The word *grace* itself—we can postulate—has a biblical significance<sup>30</sup> not found before the writing of the Scripture in Greek.

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29. 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.” [Joseph Thayer. *Thayer’s Greek-English Lexicon*. Hendrickson Publishers, 1996) page. 155.] “...for God’s gifts and his call are irrevocable.” Romans 11:29.

30. *Ibid.*, page. 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

## Grace in the Old Testament

*Novum Testamentum in Vetere latet; Vetus in Novo patet [The New Testament is the old revealed ; the Old is the New concealed]*

In simplest terms: the grace of God in the Old Testament was seen in His deliverance of the humble and afflicted [afflicted means humbled in the Old Testament; there is 1 word meaning both]. But before heading there, we should say a bit more about the difficulty scholarship encountered in their search for the Canon of Scripture. The tenet that all Christians hold to is “The Verbal Plenary Theory of Inspiration” meaning every word is considered inspired [2 Timothy 3:16]. We maintain this in the face of scholarly objections because, if this is not true, in what do we place our faith? We should be interested in the genuineness and authenticity of each book of our Bible, since, our claim is that this is God’s Word<sup>1</sup> and all about His grace that saves.

It seems appropriate to offer a brief history of this study. John Reuchlin, (d. 1522), who was the father of Hebrew philology<sup>2</sup> among Christians, in determining the Old Testament Canon adhered almost entirely to Jewish tradition. But the field of investigating the Hebrew language

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1. “By genuineness we mean that the books were actually written in the age to which they are assigned and by the men to whom they are ascribed as the writers [authors]. By authenticity we mean that the Bible relates truthfully the matters of which it treats, and its contents are the same today as written originally.” [<https://www.gotchoices.net/authenticity/>]

2. This is the branch of knowledge that deals with the structural development of a language (how words are spelled so they are pronounceable). I don’t know how “pneumonia” ended up beginning with the letter ‘p’!

## Grace in the Old Testament

widened gradually in the seventeenth century to include cognate or kindred or sister languages [Sanskrit, Arabic, Ugaritic, Aramaic, and other semitic 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 and by employing the general rules of philology which by then had joined the sciences in linguistic research.

(Thanks for reading this!) The simple explanation is that scholars began to believe that there were words or meanings of words in the writings of Moses that Moses couldn't have known. It would be like reading in Genesis 1, "God created all life according to the genetic code imprinted on their RNA." The words "genetic" and "RNA," obviously, are not Biblical words.

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<sup>3</sup> 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 has suffered to a much greater extent than formerly admitted by biblical scholarship.<sup>4</sup> There appear unintentional corruptions

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3. That every word is inspired. How could they be if Moses didn't write the books of Moses?

4. One of my favorites is Judges 18:30 "Jonathan, the son of Gershom, the son of Manasseh, ... and his sons were priests [to idols]" Someone added an 'N' in the Hebrew to turn the name "Moses" into 'Manasseh' because we can't go

in copying the text: the interchange of similar letters; transpositions and omissions of letters, 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.<sup>5</sup> 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.<sup>6</sup>

But, 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<sup>7</sup> may be still clearly recognized, is to be regarded as a gradual production of the centuries after Moses."<sup>8</sup>

But the critic gave no thought now to divine authorship. Elihu's comment, offered as a comfort to his

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around accusing a descendent of the great prophet/leader making and worshipping idols! See the NIV which correctly ascribes this evil to Moses' grandson.

5. 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.

6. see E. Kautzsch *Gesenius' Hebrew Grammar*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, London: Second Edition, 1910) Introduction.

7. The word 'strata' could refer to a different class of individual. In the new Testament, some critics cannot believe Peter, who was a humble fisherman, could have possibly written the epistles ascribed to him. The wording is so astute that some think a more educated mind compile these books. I believe Peter wrote them. remember he had been with Jesus! [Acts 4:13]. On the day of Pentecost, Peter's message to the crowd was (as the wording suggests) that of an oracle!

8. Ibid. page 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".

friend, Job, has fallen in recent times on deaf ears: “[It is] the breath of the Almighty, that gives them understanding” [Job 32:8]. Paul’s encouraging thought of the revelation of the grace of God now extended to the Gentiles no longer drives the interest of the seminarian. “All Scripture,” Paul affirmed, “is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness [2 Timothy 3:16]. 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 revisiting.

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 dialectic alterations or the scribal missteps 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 written with grammatical errors 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. They say that we believe things that aren’t provable. We naively—they say—endorse the text in our spoken language trusting the

## Grace in the Old Testament

translation to provide the inspiration. It is called “faith,” not dissonance. 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

I walked into a Jewish bookstore in the Squirrel Hill community in Pittsburgh, PA. and enquired about the Old Testament. “You mean the Bible!” the gentleman behind the counter corrected me. Regardless when our Old Testament 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 we read and cherish! Yes, all the quotations in the New Testament from the Old Testament are from the Septuagint [the Greek translation of the Hebrew] and. Yes, in some places the Greek doesn't translate the Hebrew [in some cases because there is no equivalent word and the men who did the translating might use a Greek word that has no Hebrew word for what they think is written]. None of this stood in the way of the Savior or Paul using the Old Testament text. We might say that the text became inspirational when the Savior or an apostle chose it. In this work we are looking at the word *grace* which perhaps could serve as an example.

What was it about Hebrew (and some Aramaic) that God chose it for the record of His earlier dealings with His people? This became an important inquiry for me as I studied it. Critics and skeptics have tried to spin its historical narrative into myths and legends. Scoffers have argued 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.)

## Grace in the Old Testament

Classical Hebrew is admittedly an ancient language. Hebrew in some respects, is a primitive language. In its biblical state, it is in no condition to compete with English or modern technical languages with medical and scientific terms borrowed from, Latin and Greek.<sup>9</sup> What, then, was the value to God in choosing *Hebrew*, a language limited as to what it could say and explain? Was it reasonable of Him to bring us the historical and prophetic record of His earliest dealings with His creation in the Hebrew language?

### Be Reasonable

Let's talk about reasonableness. Reasonableness is a relative idea often culturally based. What sounds reasonable to one person might make no sense to another or might conflict with established social norms or religious thought. God's eternal plan to provide for our salvation appears unreasonable to the philosopher whose logic is based on a natural code of ethics or a line of reasoning limited to the natural sphere of inquiry (the 5 senses). In our journey through our enquiry into God's grace, let's pull over at a rest stop [Hebrews 3:11] briefly to look at the map again and keep in mind where we are going. Sometimes scholarship—it seems to me—gets lost in their many theories and then try to use their GPS of “reasonableness” to get back on course.

I maintain that Paul's description of Christ's crucifixion (by their reasonableness) lists 3 impossible feats in Philippians 2<sup>10</sup> which nonetheless are exactly what happened to provide for our salvation.

- ◆ Verse 7a: He “took upon himself the form of a servant” is illogical since the King of kings cannot be

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9. 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.

10. This subject is detailed in my book *“Jesus, God's Gift of Himself,”* the chapter, “The Incarnate God” lulu.com publishers.

## Grace in the Old Testament

anyone's servant. These 2 ideas represent conflicting positions of authority. But He did and He was!

- ◆ Verse 7b: He was “made in the likeness of men,” that is he was totally human, growing [Luke 2:40], learning through suffering [Hebrews 5:8],<sup>11</sup> and tempted [Hebrews 4:15]. But God cannot be tempted, grow, suffer because He is known as being omniscient, omnipresent, omnipotent. The ability to experience suffering (pain) is theologically called “passibility.” This word comes up a little later because traditional church thought maintains that God had to become human in order to experience suffering. We will take a closer look in the next chapter. Again: He did because He was!
- ◆ Verse 8: He was found in fashion as a man” to die. God cannot die?! He is eternal. But He did!!

To human logic this is foolishness [1 Corinthians 1:21, 23]. But to God the crucifixion of His Son to reconcile us to Himself was a most reasonable plan as well as the only way to provide for our salvation [Acts 4:12]. Understanding this is a lesson in grace. God's grace explains Calvary.

Getting back on the road: Hebrew, we might surmise, was never intended to expound theology or support logical ideas<sup>12</sup> that would prove beneficial to theologians in our age.<sup>13</sup> Hebrew is a language of narration (story telling, oral tradition). A dozen verb forms tasked with a dozen action

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11. Irenaeus remarked that Jesus as God's Son made the impassible passible. [John Stott. *The Cross of Christ Centennial Edition*. (InterVarsity Press. Downers Grove, IL. 2021) Page 321]

12. Logic, itself, was the brain child of the Greek philosopher. Ancient Semitic societies were authoritarian in nature. Oral traditions were passed down because they were authoritative [Deuteronomy 11:19].

13. Harrison, R. K. *Introduction to the Old Testament*. (Hendrickson Publishers, Peabody, MA: 2004) page 417. “...the theological concepts of the old testament do not lend themselves with particular readiness to any attempt at systematization....”

## Grace in the Old Testament

types just wasn't necessary. Philosophers and theologians like the granularity of a Greek word but humble shepherds—not so much. So in Isaiah 1:18 when God invites us to reason with Him, it is more a dialogue than an argument. It is conversational. It is prayer which on our part includes confession which is agreeing with God.

### **Narration and Conversational**

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 becomes a simple child-like conversation. When I was a custodian working in a grammar school, I cleaned among others a room for grade 3, (8 year olds?). On the side board there were on display the children’s papers detailing their summer vacation (I guess). Fun reading! One student strung a short list of short sentences together with “and’s.” Something like this: We went on a plane *and* we went to the beach *and* we went in the water [and then here is the finale] *and* the end.” This was so ancient narrative!

New Testament Greek, on the other hand, provides 2 words for ‘and’ and a couple words for ‘but’ beside an assortment of conjunctives and disjunctives and other transitional phrases that allow Paul in his epistles to make extra long sentences (just what my wife tells me *not* to do!).

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” in 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*. The theology that says that He became God’s Son at birth bears scrutiny because this Jesus was in the beginning with God and was God creating the world [John 1:1-2]. Not to drag us down with philosophical thought but chronologies and beginnings belong in time not eternity. For

## Grace in the Old Testament

an eternal God the span of this age is terminally brief [2 Peter 3:8]. So, get rid of the future idea “will” because it doesn’t even represent the form of the words used, let alone, Isaiah’s style of writing [so says I].

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.<sup>14</sup> The analytical mind fails to appreciate the value of story-telling as a vehicle for learning. The non-technical language of the Old Testament, the anthropomorphic expressions and the picturesque names of God which are, what Thorlief Bowman called, “*the description of His essence* [and ] *spiritual personality*”<sup>15</sup> have been, by some, mistakenly redacted from the history as legend.

I call the Ancient Hebrew a language of the heart, not the academic mind. It is, therefore, descriptive of the dynamics within community. Ancient Israel was what Randolph Richards and Brandon J. O’Brien called a collective culture. I refer you to their work<sup>16</sup> for a fuller understanding of the importance of the language in our Old Testament in the context of their culture.

Collectivist cultures are very different indeed. In a collectivist culture, “the most important entity is the community—the family, the tribe or the country—and not the individual. ... A person’s identity comes not from

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14. 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.

15. Thorlief Bowman, *Hebrew Thought Compared with Greek* (New York: W. W. Norton. Co., 1960), page 106.

16. Randolph E. Richards & Brandon J. O’Brien *Misreading Scripture with Western Eyes: Removing Cultural Blinders to Better Understand the Bible*. (InterVarsity Press. Kindle Edition. 2013)

distinguishing himself from the community, but in knowing and faithfully fulfilling his place [*in* the community]. ... Rather, members of collectivist cultures make decisions based on the counsel of elders—parents, aunts or uncles.<sup>17</sup> The highest goal and virtue in this sort of culture is supporting the community. This makes people happy...."<sup>18</sup>

All of this leads to a conclusion that God has entered the picture to personalize His interest in His creation, to become part of the story. The Old Testament account is replete with God interjecting His approval or disapproval, walking into camp with another covenant He wanted to discuss with an Abraham or Moses or a prophet, intervening in mercy or interfering with, disrupting, their interest in idols, which enraged God with jealousy. So whether jealous or zealous [same word], whether love or hate [showing favor or no], whether in His excitement or anger, God became a very real part of the history of Ancient Israel. Hebrew was commissioned not to logically analyze or theologize anything but to emphasize the emotional aspects of this dynamic relationship, its ups and down, between Creator and created.

### A Ringing Cry

Consider, for an example, the sounds of the heart in a Hebrew word, 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 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.

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17. This is known as authoritarian rather than logical.

18. .Randolph E. Richards & Brandon J. O’Brien *Misreading Scripture with Western Eyes: Removing Cultural Blinders to Better Understand the Bible*. (InterVarsity Press. Kindle Edition. 2013) page 97.

## Grace in the Old Testament

- ◆ It is used in prayer<sup>19</sup> which in the King James (better translation than NIV) reads, “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” [Psalm 61:2].
- ◆ 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!” [I Kings 22:36]
- ◆ 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.” [Isaiah 44:23]
- ◆ 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.”<sup>20</sup> [Isaiah 43:14.]

One noun form of this word is “the ostrich” because it makes this horrific piercing, screeching cry. Job 39:13 reads “The wings of the ostrich flap joyfully” 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.

### Intensive language

We should find it no surprise that the language in the Old Testament features a form that is known as “intensive” There is an intensified use, which means fundamentally “*to busy oneself eagerly*” with the action<sup>21</sup> indicated. (You’re going

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19. 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.

20. But the NIV says “they took pride” The meaning is dubious

21. Kautzsch, p. 141-142

## Grace in the Old Testament

to like this; read on.) *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 form. (There is more to say about this intensive form; so, keep reading.)

### The Narrative

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 gobbledegook. For the Ancients there were no terms like philosophy or reason or logic. These came from the Greeks. Hebrew is *felt* more than debated, *lived* not just discussed, a part of tradition and *culture* and not just a belief or theological position. When one is in emotional pain, a dry theology is no help, but the Psalms mean everything.

One of my favorite intensified forms is in Psalm 18:1 where David declares, "*I love you, LORD...*" 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 this intensified form, but the whole point is that God's love is greater.

(Now here's the good part I promised.) Psalm 116:5 *The LORD is gracious and righteous; our God is full of compassion*. This says—are you listening! He "*busies Himself*

## Grace in the Old Testament

*eagerly*” in being *merciful* (compassionate) toward us.<sup>22</sup> [I thought you would like this.]

### Please

There is an interesting verse put to music by Jewish Christians<sup>23</sup> [Numbers 12:13] where Moses prayed for his sister to be healed of leprosy. 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. Our parents inadvertently taught this nuance to 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 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.

In Psalm 116:18 David promises, “I will fulfill *now* my vows to the LORD. The word translated “now” isn’t translated in many versions. There is a sense that his vow is backed with heart in the presence of all his people,

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22. 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.

23. On Numbers 12:13 accessed 12/22/23 <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IUfs63nJVXw>

### 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 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.”

This is the opening paragraph in the story of grace. God's grace is God's heart in community with His creation, with His people. It is the exercise of all His desires for them.

### A Word About Sin

Even “sin” is part of the story and needs to be explained contextually. Dr. Girdlestone points out that each word for “sin” tells a story about Israel’s backslidden condition. 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..”<sup>24</sup>

### The Hebrew

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.

The Hebrew language, not just the law written in this language, has become a primary source in support of God’s message of grace, “our schoolmaster to bring us unto Christ, that we might be justified by faith” [Galatians 3:24].

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24. Robert B. Girdlestone. *Synonyms of the Old Testament: Their Bearing on Christian Doctrine*. (Eerdmans Publishing Company, Grand Rapids: 1974), page. 76.

## Grace in the Old Testament

If there is inspiration in Scripture—and I personally believe it so—that can't be by accident. It must be by design which means someone authored the Bible intentionally. And that someone, over the span of thousands of years developing a single theme of grace, had to be God.

## Grace & The Natural Mind

*“...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...” - Richard C. Trench. “On the Study of the Words Lectures”.*

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, however, should not be ignored as incidental. Putting God’s truth into our words takes divine wisdom. The barrier: “The natural man receives not the things of the Spirit of God... because they are spiritually discerned” [1 Corinthians 2:14].

Professor Trench tells us “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 ... heavenly truths, or indeed even the nobler emotions of the human heart.”<sup>1</sup>

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1. Richard C. Trench *Synonyms of the New Testament* (Wm. B Eerdmans Publishing Company,,Grand Rapids, MI: 1975) page 197.

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 came [Philippians 2:7] the Prince of Heaven lay aside the royal robes of such a glorious place and donned a beggar's garb. 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 caused by our spiritual poverty of which we were unaware. 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. Even the word "eternal" only meant "indefinite in time but limited" to the Jewish mind. Although the Greeks had a word for eternal, Paul liked to describe it "from age to age" or I like to say that God put the "more" in *forevermore*. Eternity is a very adult word.

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 [Luke 18:17]. It was enough that we had reason again to hope [Jeremiah 29:11]. It was enough that He gave us glimpses through "The Spirit as a deposit, guaranteeing what is to come" [2 Corinthians 5:5]. It was enough to know that with God possibilities existed beyond our impoverished condition. 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: "...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..."<sup>2</sup>

So Jesus began to share on the fringe of such an infinite benevolence. He healed the sick and raised the dead, but the crowds following 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 [John 6:68].

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.

### More 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."<sup>3</sup>

This was scholarship's reaction to the first 8 verses of Genesis 6. The story of [angelic beings? If, indeed these were] the "sons of God" finding human women irresistible and God's repentance that led to the great flood. We could not even begin to explain such an extinction event on this basis because we know that according to chapter 1 [Genesis 1:25] God provided for all life to propagate "after his kind" and here the text speaks of marriage in verse 2 "they took them wives." Only humans intermarry with humans to propagate the species— and someone surmised that the "sons of God"

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2. Richard C. Trench. *On the Study of the Words Lectures*. (publisher. Unknown, New York: W. Widdleton)

3. John Peter Lange. *Genesis* (Zondervan, Grand Rapids, MI: 7th printing, 1980) Vol 1, Page 288

were angelic beings! If, however, we understand that godly men<sup>4</sup> married worldly women, we could accept that intellectually because it follows a pattern [Numbers 31:15-16; Judges 21:14; 1 Samuel 2:22; 1 Kings 11:1; Ezekiel 13:18-19 NET].

### **God Repenting? Impossible!**

So Professor Lewis did what I would do, threw his hands in the air, resigning himself to the text—whatever it meant. What he accepts exclusively on faith alone is Genesis 6:6 “it *repented* the LORD that he had made man on the earth, and it *grieved* him at his heart.”

The word “repented” meant in Ancient Israel that God consoled Himself from the grief sinful humanity caused Him. The word “grieved” means simply that it hurt; “It vexed Him in His heart.” Here is not the place for a study in the passibility of God or His capability of feeling pain, physically or emotionally. Many scholars explain this away but this is simply resigning themselves to the fact that God’s pain is impossible to relate to. Yet, this does not mean that it was not (and is not) real—as the good professor said above. [Ephesians 4:30]. In both Testaments God *grieves*.

None of this says God regretted making man or creating the world and life, nor does it suggest that He had or ever would have changed His mind about His plans for us. Yet, who would have thought that we could in turn relieve God’s pain, as He did ours at Calvary, simply by our repenting of our sin! Is there not a sense in which God’s

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4. C.F. Keil & F. Delitzsch. *Commentary on the Old Testament*. (Wm. Eerdmans Publishing, Grand Rapids, MI. reprinted 1980), vol I, pages 127 ff. “that the connection does not favor the idea of their being angels, is acknowledged.... It cannot be denied that the connection ... with chapter 4 necessitates the assumption, that such intermarriages [Seth’s descendants and the Canaanite women] did take place at the time of the flood.” [Matthew 24:38]. Mixed marriages were forbidden under Torah Law: Exodus 34:16. See also Genesis 27:46]

grace not only deals with our suffering [the product of sin] but it also deals with God's as well.

### Impassibility

Can we live with the notion that God is impassible<sup>5</sup>, that God's immutability means He cannot be subject to passions,<sup>6</sup> that is that He cannot suffer because He is unchanging (and suffering requires a body: corporeality). Even emotions are now thought of in terms of hormones and adrenaline rushes, and the like. All this requires a body. God, in the form of His Son, Jesus, could feel pain because He was incarnate [Hebrews 5:8] and human [Philippians 2:7-8]. But the God of the Old Testament because He is unchanging [Malachi 3:6] cannot have what William Temple called "gusts of feelings."<sup>7</sup>

The purpose for raising this issue here is to highlight the conflict that arises between the language of our Old Testament and our logic when we explain things beyond our ability to understand them. Impassibility to some makes the Old Testament appearances of God Christophanies or anthropomorphic expressions—mere visions. (In today's lingo we might call such appearances a virtual reality as if the Bible was a digitized metaverse or mere legend.)

Does not this perspective on something that is beyond our understanding lead us down a dark hole where all the Scripture that seemingly ascribed feelings to God: His love [Hosea 11:1], His jealousy [Exodus 20:5], His hate [Malachi 1:3], His joy [Zephaniah 3:17], His wrath

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5. God does not experience emotional change in any way, nor does God suffer.

6. "Impassibility is a hold-over from Greek philosophy, which crept in and corrupted the pure, Hebrew view of the dynamic, living God of Scripture and turned it into the conceptual idol of the frozen absolute valued by Plato, Aristotle, and the Stoics." Cp. passibility accessed 1/15/2024 <https://mereorthodoxy.com/beauty-impassible-god-god-emotional-teenager>

7. William Temple, *Christus Veritas* (London: Macmillan, 1924), p. 269. cp Stott. 322

[Deuteronomy 11:17], to name a few, become mere theological terms that no longer move us either. The warnings of the prophets built on such “feelings” are no longer warnings.

It would be the height of selfishness to persist in sinning, yielding to temptations we could and should overcome because God cannot emotionally react to us. How dare we excuse carnality as mere human failure, or resign ourselves in spiritual ignorance to the comforts of a life conformed to this world—all the while knowing this causes God, whatever the Bible might mean by, *grief*? I submit that even believers are at times obliviously content living with a half-hearted commitment to what God gave His life to provide. This ought not be!

Our God is far more than what our theologies profile Him to be. It seems shortsighted to me to conclude that God is without feeling when everything He does for us is wholehearted [1 Corinthians 2:9]. Some Early Church tradition tweaked the language in saying God is not given to fits of emotion but He is affectionate; He is a God of great affections. And how else should we explain a God of love that spent eternity past working on a plan to redeem us! How else should we interpret His focus on creation week when His Spirit “hovered” [Genesis 1:2] over this image in a magnetic bottle called earth and gave Himself to such intricate detail in every aspect of His work to make it perfectly “good.”

He reveals parts of Himself to those few who spend time enough with Him in prayer to observe a very personal side to our Creator/Savior God. That anyone would simply spend time with Him invokes His deep appreciation and gratitude which in and of itself radiates forth a divine blessing. God’s smile is never inconsequential, for even here, though unspoken, He not only gives us joy but He shares in it [Zephaniah 3:17].

### Grace

But if this simple story is perplexing, it should not surprise us that God's grace might also? 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, 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." The Lord said, "...I will have mercy on whom I will have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I will have compassion" [Exodus 33:19]. The meaning of grace, as we understand it, is a free gift of God. This leaves the decision with God on whom to bestow His favor even when His 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,"<sup>8</sup> 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."<sup>9</sup> Proverbs 14:31 is an example: "*whoever is kind to the needy honors God.*" Showing mercy to the poor is often simply giving alms. The word *noble* [nobility] in the Old Testament is a synonym for *generosity*. [Proverbs 19:6].

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8. 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.

9. Gerhard Kittell, *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*. (Wm. B Eerdmans Publishing Company, Grand Rapids, MI: 1974), Vol IX page 377

The Old Testament word for *grace*, the gift not the act, implied *favor* [Romans 9:13; Malachi 1:2]. Was *grace* 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 different things. *Mercy* is a kindness that lessens someone's misery. As such, *mercy* is often given freely. *Favor* is what friends often reciprocate and, as such, is thought deserved. We tend to be grateful for *mercy* but feel that *favours* are an entitlement—or at least a reasonable reciprocity..

### 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* means "to seek *mercy*" and it was requested in the language of the day of 10 brothers, not God, who said, "No!" to Joseph's pleading.

The idea of showing *mercy* can be a very humane thing. In the Old Testament the idea of showing *grace* or *favor* has not yet been elevated into the language of heaven [Ephesians 1:3]. In the Old Testament *grace is favor* not required, though there might be a social obligation attached. Old Testament talk of *grace* or *favor* can be heart felt whether deserved or not. There are just 69 times the word "grace" or *favor* is found in the Old Testament and—forgive my crassness—it seems to parallel our phrase "to be nice." It is often not connected to a plea for *mercy*, though maybe a desire to avoid some impending misery. In Nahum 3:4 the prophet warns about the "charms" of witchcraft. In Proverbs

## Grace & The Natural Mind

31:30 Solomon called such gracefulness deceptive because some people are nice because they want something! The phrase “to find grace in someone’s sight” is a reciprocated kindness. “I have been gracious or nice to you, please be nice in turn to me!”

In Genesis 32:5 Jacob seeks favor from Esau, his brother. Jacob planned to shower his brother, Esau, with gifts intended to aid in his quest for acceptance (thinking Esau would avenge the wrong done him). 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. Jacob intended to purchase a pardon from Esau, which clearly is different from God’s grace, which is unearned and underserved and offered freely. Furthermore, we would have to reverse roles to make this story about God’s love. *We* would be coming to *Him* with gifts begging for *His* forgiveness to placate His hostility or appease Him. This idea is pagan—*not* at all Biblical grace! God’s grace is *God* coming to *us* with a desire to reconcile.

### The Gift or the Giver

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 God’s grace in Paul’s theology intended to put the focus on God, 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.

We sought to distinguish between *showing* grace and *receiving* grace. When receiving grace, we tend to see the gift

more than the giver. To *show* favor, in the Old Testament, is a phrase that puts the spotlight on the *giver* although still it is not clear that the recipient was grateful.<sup>10</sup> To show favor meant “to show oneself friendly” [To be gracious toward someone].

“I will make the Egyptians **favorably** disposed toward this people, so that when you leave you will not go empty-handed” [Exodus 3:21] The Lord told Moses. 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 of the prison warden. 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.

What we are learning is that in the New Testament, grace, as a theological term, became inseparable with who God is toward us—the Giver of all good things [James 1:17]. To know God’s grace is to know Him—unlike favor in the Old Testament which shared nothing much about the *giver* of the favor. Favor in the Old Testament was more like an exchange of gifts or a paycheck for work done. They were more likely to remember the one who *didn’t* favor them instead of who did. They thought they had earned it.

Get to know the baker and not just indulge yourself on the pastries! They say, ask an urbanite where hamburger comes from and they’ll say, “a grocery store” with no thought of a rancher or farmer. It is natural to want to enjoy the blessings God provides without a thought of thanking Him. People are like children at Christmas time who sit on

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10. The Greek word even in the Classic tries to rectify this allusion. Their word grace and grateful come together in one word.

Santa's knee to ask for things with no further thought of him.  
Christmas morning it's all about the toys.

A. B. Simpson wanted believers to correct this faulty perception when he wrote the hymn "Himself."<sup>11</sup>

Once it was the blessing,  
Now it is the Lord;  
Once it was the feeling,  
Now it is His Word;  
Once His gift I wanted,  
Now, the Giver own;  
Once I sought for healing,  
Now Himself alone.  
All in all forever,  
Only Christ I'll sing;  
Everything is in Christ,  
And Christ is everything.

### Grace or Mercy?

But scholarship prompts the question (in the Old Testament): How does one find grace or favor? "*There is a veil of mystery over this process.*"<sup>12</sup> Noah became attractive to God. The same is said of Moses. In 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.'" 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

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11. Simpson's hymn, Himself. accessed 12/23/23 <https://library.timelesstruths.org/music/Himself/>

12. Gerhard Kittell, *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*. (Wm. B Eerdmans Publishing Company, Grand Rapids, MI: 1974), Vol IX page 377

favor to represent true divine grace, as we understand it. 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” in a New Testament sense. “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].”<sup>13</sup>

Of additional interest is how the activity “to show mercy” became detached from the word *grace*. The word *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” [Zechariah 12:10].

### **The Gap between Old Testament Favor and New Testament Grace**

Scholarship calls this a “gap,”<sup>14</sup> 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*

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13. Gerhard Kittell, *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*. (Wm. B Eerdmans Publishing Company, Grand Rapids, MI: 1974), Vol IX page 377

14. *Ibid.*, Page 381

*complex, so that uniform rendering [translating it with one English word like our word “mercy”] is almost impossible”<sup>15</sup>*

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: “Anyone you forgive, I also forgive [show the grace of God]. And what I have forgiven—if there was anything to forgive—I have forgiven in the sight of Christ for your sake.”

“By grace you and I have been saved ...*and have been forgiven!*” [I John 1:9] Since grace is God’s love in action toward us to accept us into fellowship with Himself, grace must be as immutable as He is eternal. Whatever God provides is without limits [Romans 5:17 ] and as such grace is outside law. To say that God’s grace is “outside” law, “*not under the law, but under grace,*” [Romans 6:14] 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 [Romans 2:11 ]. “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” [Ephesians 3:20].

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.

If I may share a footnote in the text itself: The idea that God might introduce to us through His Word something on His heart and leave a fuller appreciation for this truth for later when the Spirit would be given is not strange or unusual. He told Adam and Eve about being one but left a fuller explanation until the Church was born. The big one is the Law until the Cross would represent a new covenant or

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15. Ibid., Page 382

the beautiful story of the kinsman redeemer for Ruth that He would become when He adopted us as family. The Old Testament idea of community has become Christian fellowship in the New. We should never mind seeing some truth in embryo in the Old Testament finally coming to the birth in the New.

### **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—on our Savior.

#### **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*" [Romans 5:17] 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] is one of these."<sup>16</sup>

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16. Richard C. Trench *Synonyms of the New Testament* (Wm. B Eerdmans Publishing Company,,Grand Rapids, MI: 1975) page 166

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. 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.

### **Finding Grace in the Eyes of the Lord**

The term “grace” in the Old Testament is found in the common biblical phrase “*to find grace in the eyes of the Lord.*”<sup>17</sup> The term, grace, in the Old Testament, 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. ... In this polite usage one also finds the humble self-designation, ‘thy servant.’”<sup>18</sup> In Genesis 19:19, for example, Lot pleads with the rescuing angels to allow him to flee to Zoar: “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.” Lot designating himself as the angels’ servant is not a real

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

18. Gerhard Kittell, *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*. (Wm. B Eerdmans Publishing Company, Grand Rapids, MI: 1974), vol V page. 658

relationship but a polite condescension to persuade the angels to allow it.

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!” One scholar comments, “*One may infer an independent ‘Good, good’ or: ‘Beautiful, beautiful!’*”<sup>19</sup> Consider Solomon’s use of the word: in Proverbs 1:9 referring to a parent’s instructions, “They are a garland to **grace** your head and a chain to adorn your neck.” So, when the Psalmist chose to talk about God’s unmerited favor, he chose the word “mercy” instead.

### Show Me Your glory, Lord

Recall Moses’s petitioning God to allow him to see God’s glory [Exodus 33:18]. We have been privileged in this account to witness an incredible moment in Moses’ relationship with God. Only a friend of God would be so free with such a request or presume to be so entitled—so favored. Did Moses know what he asked of God?!

Hans Conzelmann, interpreting God, called it, “[an] almost offensive severity,”<sup>20</sup> 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” [Exodus 33:19]. It was as if God were saying, I’ll do it because I want to not only because you ask.

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19. Gerhard Kittell, *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*. (Wm. B Eerdmans Publishing Company, Grand Rapids, MI: 1974), Vol IX p. 381

20. Gerhard Kittell, *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*. (Wm. B Eerdmans Publishing Company, Grand Rapids, MI: 1974), Vol IX p. 378

## Grace & The Natural Mind

The word for grace<sup>21</sup> or favor does not appear in this dialogue, but it seems obvious that Moses thought himself *favored* enough as God's friend to request it. Moses almost crossed the line in asking for something that would not honor God. (exactly how would it?)

It would have been, thus, totally out of character for this most humble of all servants of God, were God not to dialogue about it. God's words seem to be a sudden outburst in the sternest tones; His statement seems disconnected, discursive, saying "You cannot see me" [Exodus 33:20] but "I will let you see me" [Exodus 33:23].

"To refer to the Old Testament [grace] does not help much in determining the sense in the New Testament,"<sup>22</sup> scholarship cautioned. God's favor is *unmerited*. It is not the result of how good we have been. And is that not what God implied here? Moses is not advantaged by his friendship with God (which Old Testament grace would recognize). Our friendship with God never put us in charge of Him or on an "equal footing" with Him. We remain God's humble servants—and if I may add, His adopted children.

## Mercy and Compassion

The terms used here, *mercy*, *compassion*,<sup>23</sup> are not devoid of God's feelings or heart. Our word "compassion" is a good translation. It is mercy that is freely given, in the Old Testament, *not* grace, not favor. "The verb undergoes its true development ...when it is related to statements about God,"

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21. 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.*"

22. Gerhard Kittell, *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*. (Wm. B Eerdmans Publishing Company, Grand Rapids, MI: 1974), Vol IX. p. 391

23. 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"

says Conzelmann.<sup>24</sup> 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.”<sup>25</sup>

One should never filter out God’s heart and feelings from His thoughts as if to suggest God was somehow obligated against His true desire to answer Moses’s prayer or that God does things robotically or in a purely logical way. “*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.

It might be worth the time to eavesdrop on Moses in the mount [Exodus 34:6] to understand how personally involved God becomes with His people—with us. “And [God] passed in front of Moses, proclaiming, “The LORD, the LORD, the compassionate and gracious [merciful] God, slow to anger, abounding in love and faithfulness...”

### **Thank You. Lord.**

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 [Romans 6:14].

### **Conclusion**

“Grace,” we have observed, “*is never a theological word in the [Greek Old Testament].*”<sup>26</sup> Old Testament terms as, love, mercy, compassion, and covenant” carry the burden of

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24. Gerhard Kittell., *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*. (Wm. B Eerdmans Publishing Company, Grand Rapids, MI: 1974), Vol IX p. 377

25. Ibid.

26. *ibid.* p. 389

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. "In the understanding of grace no line can be drawn from the synagogue (the Old testament interpretation) to the New Testament."<sup>27</sup> The word 'grace' as we understand it was not revealed to Ancient Israel—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 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 21:23].

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."<sup>28</sup>

But dare we suggest that the grammar supports 2 views:<sup>29</sup>

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27. Gerhard Kittell, *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*. (Wm. B Eerdmans Publishing Company, Grand Rapids, MI: 1974), Vol IX p. 388.

28. J. B. Lightfoot, *The Epistle of Saint Paul to the Galatians* (Zondervan Publishing. Grand Rapids, MI: 12th printing 1974 ), page. 139

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

## Grace & The Natural Mind

1. "Cursing God" is everyone who hangs on the gibbet<sup>30</sup>
2. "Cursed by God" is everyone who hangs on the gibbet

If Jewish scholarship in Paul's day held to the first interpretation, which to my way of reckoning seems probable, they would have seen Christ's death on the cross as a profane display of blasphemy instead. Scholarship informs us that "according to the Talmud<sup>31</sup>: 'For one hanged has cursed God (because this intense emphatic punishment was usual only in cases of blasphemy).'"<sup>32</sup> To Jewish thought this was simply a form of capital punishment provided in extreme cases of idolatry and cursing God.<sup>33</sup>

But to Paul, it was a flashing red light identifying an historical marker that spoke of Jesus' crucifixion taking the curse or punishment for Israel's rebellion upon Himself. "He had undergone that punishment," Bishop Lightfoot clarifies, "which under the law betokened the curse of God"<sup>34</sup> 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"<sup>35</sup> [Numbers 25:4-5].

The Talmud saw the first meaning, Paul interpreted it to mean the second one. As Reverend A. Gosman explained, "We may explain therefore either 'he that is hanged is cursed of God,' [as Paul did in Galatians 3:13]<sup>36</sup> ... or he that is

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30. Another word for "a cross" The dictionary says, "an upright post with an arm on which the bodies of executed criminals were left hanging as a warning or deterrent to others"

31. the body of Jewish civil and ceremonial teachings.

32. John Peter Lange..*Genesis* (Zondervan, Grand Rapids, MI: 7th printing, 1980) Vol II, Page 161 "For it is an injury to God" [Raschi].

33. Ibid. page 162.

34. J. B. Lightfoot. *The Epistle of Saint Paul to the Galatians* (Zondervan Publishing. Grand Rapids, MI: 12th printing 1974 ) page 140.

35. *ibid.*

36. And incidentally, as the Greek, Syrian, and Latin versions of this text translate. And most Christian commentators.

hanged is a curse (...insult, mockery) to God, as by most Jewish commentators since the second century [A.D.]."<sup>37</sup>

It is important to understand the scope of the calling God gave Paul to expound on His grace to the Jews. His teachings were controversial as well as the fact that a God who is no respecter of persons was going to kick the door open to the Gentiles, as well.. There were clear undercurrents of disagreement that found grammatical support in the language and culture of the day, making it paramount that the Holy Spirit lead Paul in his discourse with his listeners "that," as he confessed, "I might by all means save some." [1 Corinthians 9:22].

### 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. As Paul exclaimed, "We declare God's wisdom, a mystery that has been hidden and that God destined for our glory before time began" [1 Corinthians 2:7]. God sought for a man who would lock himself away in some secluded prayer chamber for as long as it took and allow Him, God, to reveal to Paul, to quote Isaiah, "the arm of the Lord" [Isaiah 53:1].

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37. John Peter Lange..*Genesis* (Zondervan, Grand Rapids, MI: 7th printing, 1980) Vol II, Page 162

## Paul's Testimony

Paul shared his story with us in Galatians 1:11-12, 15-18: "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 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 [Peter]."

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<sup>38</sup> and the Targums,<sup>39</sup> 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?" [Romans 6:1].

The history of the word "grace" in big steps shows that the meaning changed from deserved favor to undeserved.<sup>40</sup> "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

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38. First 5 Books of our Bible, also known as the Pentateuch.

39. an ancient Aramaic paraphrase or interpretation of the Hebrew Bible

40. 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.*"

of return.”<sup>41</sup> 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.”<sup>42</sup>

What appears obvious to us was at closer examination not so obvious to the Jews in Paul’s day. Paul was teaching that “...*grace ...cannot be based on works*” [Romans 11:5-6].

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 return to, later in this writing: “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 again 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.”<sup>43</sup>

But ...grace must go before mercy, ... and make way for [mercy]. It is true that the same persons are the subjects of

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41. Richard C. Trench *Synonyms of the New Testament* (Wm. B Eerdmans Publishing Company,,Grand Rapids, MI: 1975) page 168

42. *ibid.*

43. *Ibid.* page 169

both, being at once the guilty and the miserable; yet God's 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."<sup>44</sup> Repentance precedes restoration.

Even the order here is reasonable: grace first, then peace. "Grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ" [2 Corinthians 1:2]. 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 logic: "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..." [1 Corinthians 2:9].

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 our natural minds. It takes a spiritual relationship with God in this life and a spiritual teacher to even begin a realistic study of grace. "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" [1 Corinthians 2:14]. Logic and reason alone will fail us.

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44. *ibid.*

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 blessings are timeless. God's touch upon our lives is always life-giving, always with His eternal interests in mind.

### A Final Question

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 for all by faith. 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" [Mark 16:15]. 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" [Acts 4:12]. Neither of these truths are negotiable. But this speaks to our calling, *our* part in God's plan. God's grace speaks to *His* part [Exodus 33:19] 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! But I am saying: *To define grace is like marking out the boundary of a lake only to discover that we have come to the immeasurable sea.* (I said this earlier but it bears repeating.)

## Grace & The Natural Mind

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*” [2 Peter 1:1] 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 to return us to His Garden and to Himself.

But I don’t mind repeating something said earlier [and might be said again] that the heart-knower [Acts 15:8] or He who searches the heart [Jeremiah 17:10] is ever reading the hearts of all His creation and those He knows will not harden to His truth but open to it, like Lydia at Philippi [Acts 16:14] He will never ignore, overlook, or bypass. He will save anyone who seeks Him [2 Peter 3:9] and this always and only because of Calvary. We have the joyous opportunity to introduce this Jesus to our world like John the Baptist did [John 1:36]. We ought to take that commission seriously because in so doing we share in the harvest—something for which later before God we will be most joyful that we did.

## Divine Fairness

*All things are fair—not in love and war—in grace.*

But is God fair! Is grace fair? God's decisions and His judgments [same Greek word] are the expressions of a different and divine reasonableness—not man's [Matthew 16:23].

Interesting fact: There are 2 words for "judge." Both are in our Bible and they have a distinction. In Luke 12:14 when someone wanted to retain Jesus' services to arbitrate an inheritance dispute, Jesus quipped, "Who appointed me an arbiter or mediator over you." Jesus declined the honor. Here *judge* means arbiter or umpire (2 word we can relate to). In Acts 7:27, 38 the word judge or arbiter is the official term of office. But this word is not the word for judge we are familiar with in Scripture. It is not used about our Lord in the New Testament.

The other word "to judge" is used to emphasize the judgments which to the ancients were intended to be in accordance with law and therefore right and fair or to administer justice. This is 1 of 3 robes our God wears: Creator, Savior and *Judge*. He is "the Judge of all" [Hebrews 12:23].<sup>1</sup>

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1. All theology hinges on these 3 ways God relates to us. This is why modern thought attacks these 3 aspects of His agency. Instead of Creation they maintain an evolutionary process. Instead of Judge, they eliminate all references to sin now seen as illness or simply what is natural. And without sin, there remains no further need of a Savior.

## Divine Fairness

Righteousness and justification [Romans 8:1] are also words derived from God's role as Judge. This only gets muddled when we try to fit the Divine principle of justification or righteousness into a framework of human jurisprudence. God's righteousness means "covenant faithfulness" which tells us that God's role as Judge was to rule in the matter of sin in a way that would vindicate His love and thus provide for a reconciliation between Him and us. Most judges have no more to do with a defendant than to pronounce guilty or not guilty if they seek a directive verdict or to pass sentence when a jury finds someone guilty. Then everyone goes home for dinner. But God's judgment had a different purpose. He wanted to fulfill the law or satisfy the provisions of the curse pronounced in Deuteronomy 27. The punishment was death for Israel but God wanted to find a way, still, to set the guilty free. More than this, God wants to bring about the restoration of all things as if the sinning never happened!. This is where we start looking for His definition of *fairness*.

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 story of a family farm<sup>2</sup> 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 amount! After opening their pay envelopes and conferring with one another, they went to the farmer to cry "unfair" because those who endured the heat of the day for 12 hours should be worth 12 times the pay of the guy that worked only 1 hour at day's end. And this probably sounds right to you, too, but I caution reserve and a little thought before you say anything.

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2. I imagine this to be a family farm because they didn't have corporate farming until the industrial age in the 20th century.

## Divine Fairness

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? (A day’s wages.) 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?’

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.” [Matthew 19:30]? 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.

James 4:6 reads, “But he gives us more grace.” This was intended as a quote from Proverbs 3:34 which lacks the word “more” used by James, viz. more than is needed, more than was requested or longed for. So, when you have a God who doesn’t have favorites and offers blessings from an abundance of what He has as well as wholehearted interest in sharing more than what seemed sufficient by our reasoning, is it any wonder the fellow who worked an hour would receive the same day’s wage as anyone else?

God’s ways are definitely not ours [Romans 11:33]. But wisdom knows this [James 3:13] Let’s list a few characteristics evident here in James.

- ◆ Humility is a realization of a total dependance on God and He always responds to this type of heart.. There are too many scriptures to list [Psalm 51:17; James 4:10]. Some our couched in the metaphor of knocking or seeking [1 Chronicles 28:9; Revelation

## Divine Fairness

3:20]. Persons who do not recognize their need of our Lord, simply won't seek Him.

- ◆ Seeking God's mercy characterizes believers because of the new heart He has given us and the God who shows us mercy at salvation wants to continue the relationship [Romans 8:32]. The farmer who hired these workers wants to do right by them in terms of a day's wage.
- ◆ God cannot be half-hearted—and why should He be! His generosity exceeds all expectations. This is the message in the word “more” in James 4:6 [Romans 5:20; James 1:17].
- ◆ God shows no favoritism [Luke 20:21; Acts 10:34; Galatians 2:6]. A friend of mine says, “We are all His favorites.” That makes more sense. We, as parents, might reward effort differently among our children because they put forth different degrees of interest or endeavor, but we do this thinking it will incentivize them to work harder next time. Well, God's grace has been the great equalizer [1 Corinthians 12:23] and in heaven none of our logic will apply.

When we see life through God's eyes or through insight the Spirit gives us, we, too, are quick to shower love on the worse sinner that comes to Him. We cease to audit another's worth spiritually or by any other value system. True fellowship or Christian community has no division or desire to categorize believers [Galatians 3:28]. If no one is a worse sinner than anyone else, why should God distribute blessings as rewards or withhold them as punishments? Not even we like the sound of this. The end of the day in this parable perhaps aligns with the end of time when we all receive the same: eternal life [John 17:3] and a crown of righteousness [2 Timothy 4:8].

We will someday stand before the Lord just as loved and accepted as co-inheritors of the riches of heaven as Peter

## Divine Fairness

or Paul ...or the thief who died beside the Savior. And if this be true [and it is] we might say, according to the above parable, that we all received the same pay regardless of how long we lived for Christ in this life. And I think, further, this will seem to our transformed minds [Romans 12:2] without argument most fair.

### 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 [Romans 6:14]. "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 arabon<sup>3</sup> out of His treasury. I like to envision 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 and each other, 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].

"No condemnation" means acquitted. We were guilty, indeed, but through Christ's death, we are not to be

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

sentenced.<sup>4</sup> God's solution is permanent (perfect) "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 "rewarded" to us based on how we served God in this life.<sup>5</sup> 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

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4. 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 .

5. 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.

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*" [Ephesians 2:8] while the Hebrew language in the Old Testament affirms and acknowledges our total spiritual poverty [Revelation 3:17] and need of this grace.

### Turretin's Argument

Francis Turretin, an Italian Theologian living in the 17<sup>th</sup> century provided five reasons why Jesus' death was true justice. (I write more extensively about this in my book, *Jesus, God's Gift of Himself*.) Jesus' death was *not unjust*, because:

1. *Jesus was human, too*. Sin was punished *in the same nature* in which it was guilty. [Hebrews 2:14-15, 17]. So, *The law was not ignored or violated*. Jesus crucifixion was the perfect fulfillment of all its demands [Romans 10:4].
2. *Jesus agreed to go to the Cross*. He sought the will of God [Matthew 26:42] He took the burden on himself [Hebrews 10:9]. So, *Christ's crucifixion was not in contempt of God's Judgment*. Jesus willingly went to the Cross.
3. *Jesus had power over his own life*, so that he could rightfully determine the circumstances that affect His own life. [John 10:18 ]. So, *Jesus was not involuntarily, unjustly, mistreated*, though, His trial was a mockery. He gave His life voluntarily." [John 10:18]. Jesus was not treated unfairly.
4. *Jesus was resurrected*. He could not be held in death. [1 Corinthians 15:17]. So, *No universal moral law or*

## Divine Fairness

*principle was violated* by depriving an innocent person of life, for Christ, freed from death, *lives forevermore*.

5. *Jesus was victorious*. He rose from the dead. [Hebrews 7:26]. So, *There can be no claim that His death did not deal effectively with sin*. [John 3:7].

Where is grace unfair? Nowhere! "God was ... justified in the Spirit..." [1 Timothy 3:16].

## Grace as a Theology

*All true theology is a study in the grace of God!*

John Stott maintains that “It is when our perception of God and man, or of holiness and sin, are askew that our understanding of the atonement is bound to be askew also.”<sup>1</sup> If this be true of God’s holiness, it is reasonable to add, it is true of God’s grace. Misunderstanding the grace of God or defining grace in a way that represents our interests and not God’s holiness will skew our theology. And the reverse is equally true: a false theology leads to an incorrect understanding of God’s grace.

Christian academicians and seminarians love to debate how secure is our salvation, whether or not God will do for us what we ask simply because we ask by faith, whether salvation is by faith alone, whether water baptism is essential for salvation, whether or not God has a less perfect will for us if we sin, whether or not sinning is still a natural condition for believers. All these questions and more are questions for the Grace of God to answer.

John M. G. Barclay, the Lightfoot Professor of Divinity at Durham University, England, provides a noteworthy look at God’s grace from an anthropological [cultural] and theological perspective. Professor Barclay outlines the various aspects of perfect grace, He identified 6 traits that can be used to describe God’s grace which

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1. John Stott. *The Cross of Christ Centennial Edition*. (InterVarsity Press. Downers Grove, IL. 2021) Page 90

## Grace as a Theology

subsequently determines our understanding of God and might begin to answer the many questions we ask. Consequently, grace is said to be 1 or more of these 6 perspectives of grace as God's perfect<sup>2</sup> gift. We pause here to list them because it is an excellent summary of the theological differences that has birthed a robust denominationalism within the Church. The good professor notes at least these 6 "perfections in the giving of God"<sup>3</sup> [Later we will return to these aspects of what Barclay calls the "perfect" gift.]

1. Singularity - This is the belief that God is only beneficent. "every perfect gift is from above" [James 1:17]. To "give grace" meant to give pleasure. The word was often translated as *love, charm, favor*. Grace is said to bring joy.<sup>4</sup> If God's gifts are defined as grace, He can only be benevolent and kind. "But thou, O Lord, art a God full of compassion, and gracious, longsuffering, and plenteous in mercy and truth" [Psalm 86:15].
2. Non-circularity - There are no strings attached to God's gifts. He asks for nothing in return. Reciprocity is not part of God's grace because it is unmerited. Because God's gift of grace is a gift of reconciliation, it became the gift of Himself, the *Giver*, and as such requires nothing on our part to initiate it or cause it but an acceptance of it is an acceptance of Him, and a relationship by its nature is not reciprocal, per se, but a mutual participation and a shared love. "Truly our fellowship is with the Father, and with his Son Jesus Christ" 1 John 1:3; [1 Corinthians 1:9].
3. Priority - God's gifts are given uninitiated and unsolicited and unknown to the recipient (Prevenient

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2. John M. G. Barclay. *Paul & the Power of Grace*. (Eerdmans Publishing Company, Grand Rapids MI: 2020) page 17.

3. *Ibid.* pages 13.

4. Henry George Liddell & Robert Scott. *A Greek-English Lexicon* Oxford at the Clarendon Press. London: 1968), Page 1978f.

## Grace as a Theology

grace ).“When we were enemies, we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son” [Romans 5:10].

4. Efficacious - God’s gifts produce or bring benefits (blessings) such as eternal life or healing (The Charismata) “The manifestation of the Spirit is given to every man to profit withal” [1 Corinthians 12:7]. See also 1 Corinthians 14:3.
5. Superabundance - God’s gifts are lavish, “exceedingly abundant above what we ask for or think of” [Ephesians 3:20 NKJV].
6. Incongruity - the gift is undeserved, unmerited, and unearned. “There is none righteous. ... Grace ... not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: Not of works, lest any man should boast.” [Romans 3:10; Ephesians 2:8-9].

The good professor concludes, “How it [grace as God’s gift] is nuanced may reflect the influence of varying scriptural resources and ... traditions.”<sup>5</sup> In this work, I have approached this idea from the point of grammar. The ability of a language to express an idea is tied to the culture but, as one of my sons and I have debated, we are not sure which should be addressed first as the cause of the other. Professor Barclay comes from the anthropological or cultural side; I have chosen to begin with the language. Hopefully we will meet in the middle and find Paul sitting there waiting for us.

All true theology is a study in the grace of God! All theology worth studying is a livable truth. If our theology is only an academic exercise it proves itself powerless to make a difference in believing it [James 2:26]. Understanding God’s grace should be easier to explain when it is our testimony as a believer, when we live its message, when we are examples of followers of Christ [Mark 8:34; John 13:15]. When we decide to practice our faith, it becomes a reality. Our faith comes to life (we own it), and it is no longer only

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5. John M. G. Barclay. *Paul & the Power of Grace*. (Eerdmans Publishing Company, Grand Rapids MI: 2020) page 36..

## Grace as a Theology

an argument. Our salvation should be a natural expression of who we are, now, as believers in Christ. Our salvation should be a practical way of life that others can observed.

But our imperfections and the occasional misstep into something we know Christ would never do or where our Savior would never go or what He would never say, is like David said “always before me” [Psalm 51:3]. It seems appropriate to explain it theologically, to fit this puzzle piece into the picture that is my life and represent it as a real part of me in the scheme of things. “It is my old nature!” [Romans 7:5]. I must still be carnal {Romans 7:14}.

At this point, should we be asking God, “Where is grace?” Is grace just another word for God’s forgiveness when we sin or is it also a divine empowerment against sinning, “according as his divine power hath given unto us all things that pertain unto life and godliness,” Peter reminds us, “through the knowledge of him that hath called us to glory and virtue” [2 Peter 1:3]. Somehow the weak moment in sin becomes magnified and the life we have known “in the Son” [1 John 2:24] and the hours of Christian fellowship [1 John 1:3] seem no longer enough to confirm that our salvation is real. When, however, Peter spoke of a “knowledge of him that hath called us to glory and virtue” is this not a workable or livable theology that testifies to the power of grace!

It might be observed that the New Covenant according to Jeremiah 31:33 is a matter of a new heart and not strict adherence to a moral or religious code. It is the heart that God looks at, above all else even, when our actions don’t do justice to the inward changes being perfected by the Spirit’s presence [Ephesians 4:30].

As with David, so with us, God is seeing the heart and not our failures when we ask Him to help us back up upon our spiritual feet. As crazy as things got in the Corinthian church, even with all the charismata (The Spirit’s

gifts) Paul never gave up on any of them [2 Corinthians 2:7, 10]. Paul never theologized sin away, either [Romans 6:1].

### **Falling Short**

I know some very erudite minds will disagree but consider another perspective on Romans 3:23 “For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God.” The word “sinned” is totally past. We were sinners. The “coming short” of God’s purpose and will for our lives is ongoing. But this means that we remain in need of the grace of God. Without Him we would have no recourse but to listen to our own impulses and interests [carnality]. Without God’s grace there would be no other path through life than what we could imagine as vain as it might be. God’s grace gives us an alternative way [John 14:6] through the Will of the God who created us. To “reach” rather than “fall short” of God’s glory is to live the purpose and life God intended when He created us.

### **A Lavished Grace**

Romans 3:23 doesn’t even imply that God’s glory remains unattainable but it is only reachable through grace. To this we add Paul’s personal testimony in Philippians 3:12 “Not as though I had already attained, either were already perfect: but I follow after, if that I may apprehend that for which also I am apprehended of Christ Jesus.” Simply, it is impossible to outgrow our need of His grace [Ephesians 2:7].

A knowledge of our Lord according to Peter [2 Peter 1:5] is built on a foundation of faith and virtue, i.e. faithfully living for Christ. What Peter is expounding, he stated in verses 2-4, our Lord’s promises backed up by His power and resources enable us to live for Him, to become holy [1 Peter 1:15], “to partake of His nature.” This is a real theological study!

## Grace as a Theology

According to 2 Peter 1:2 it is in living God's Truth that grace has the greatest opportunity and freedom to work in our lives. If we use the word "kindness" instead of grace—because grace is God's kindness, Ephesians 2:7—we discover more and more the *kindness* of God at work in our experience and circumstances. The NET reads, "May grace ... be lavished on you as you grow in the rich knowledge of God and of Jesus our Lord!" And now instead of living a life that falls short of His glory, according to the NET in verse 3 Peter preached, "He called us by his own glory." As scholarship explained, "God calls us by the means of a glorious, great, rich, and wonderful grace."<sup>6</sup>

### God's Grace at Work: A Real Theology

In other words, we learn Christ [Matthew 11:29] by living for Him. Knowing God is not an academic exercise but a living relationship. We must live Truth to know Truth. A true theological study is only obtained when it is practiced. We are 2 year olds learning to walk even with the stumbles and tumbles as we grow. All this means is that a real study in theology makes us more aware of how active God's grace is in our lives. An adventure into theology (The study of God) must not become a cold intellectualism or something we do to get a 4 year degree in "whatever." So, instead of the standard systematic approach where the title of every chapter is an "ology" we can overview the Westminster Confession from an historically more practical perspective.<sup>7</sup> This is a study in God's grace.

Grace is God's self-expression. The grace of God is always an agency of His attributes. God's grace cannot contradict, take form or add to who God is. So we should be able to map aspects of His grace to His attributes.

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6. John Peter Lange..*Genesis* (Zondervan, Grand Rapids, MI: 7th printing, 1980) Vol XII, *The 2 Epistle General of Peter*, Page 12

7. This approach is more detailed in my work on "The Cross" at [lulu.com](http://lulu.com) publications.

## The Westminster Confession

In the Westminster Confession of Faith, God is described as the “one only living and true God, who is **infinite** in being and **perfection ... without ... parts... immutable ... eternal**, incomprehensible, almighty ... most holy...**most absolute...**”<sup>8</sup> (emphasis added).

Because He is immutable (unchanging), eternal, and infinite, without parts, and perfect in all His attributes and actions, we can describe God’s grace in terms of four aspects of His being:

1. **God is immutable;** He will not change. He cannot be other than Who He is. God cannot compromise, be compromised or deny the full expression of His holiness. He cannot be disingenuous or contradict Himself. He cannot be anything other than what He always is. Whoever God is, He cannot improve on His perfection, decide to reevaluate or redefine His attributes or to set His principles aside, by which He governs His actions and His dealings with mankind [Leviticus 19:4, 15; Numbers 20:12; Hosea 11:9].
  - God’s grace, which is the gift of Himself in fellowship with us, is a faithful representation of His person, who He is—*holy*. Grace, therefore, will show no favoritism. It cannot! Having favorites is treating different people in different ways that would depend on some aspect of their being or behavior —what Barclay calls their worth, “a grace that matches no merit”<sup>9</sup> [Romans 4:1-8]. Thus we say God’s grace is unmerited and incongruous.

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8. Accessed 4/21 <https://bpc.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/06/D-ConfessionOfFaith.pdf> CHAPTER II *Of God, and of the Holy Trinity*

9. John M. G. Barclay. *Paul & the Power of Grace*. (Eerdmans Publishing Company, Grand Rapids MI: 2020) page 115..

## Grace as a Theology

- Favoritism is compromised and often by its very nature contradictory—different for different people. A God who is no respecter of persons [Acts 10:34] is a God who expresses perfect singularity. He is consistently merciful even in judgment [Psalm 89:14].
  - What God did God does. The record of God's actions toward His creation are a display of His unchanging holiness. The underlining will and council of God are foundational to every act. He is no respecter of persons. God's activity is perfection, that is, coherent, united and consistent [Ezekiel 36:23; Amos 4:2]
1. **God is infinite;** He cannot be or do or give less than Who He is - the size of His compassion. Divine self-expression must be always nothing less than infinite, infinitely wholehearted, infinitely real, infinitely resolute, focused [Romans 8:28-31]. The Augsburg Confession (1530) calls God an immeasurable power. Westminster Confession of Faith calls Him "most absolute." His love is infinite in affection and desire. God's wrath cannot be measured. His grace cannot be exhausted. He brings the riches of heaven with Him [ 2 Kings 13:19; Romans 8:32; 11:33; Ephesians 3:20].
    - Thus His grace is superabundant and lavish [Ephesians 2:7].
  3. **God is eternal;** God cannot be more than Who He is. He cannot grow or learn or develop or become better. Time is a measure of growth, decay, change, process—none of which impacts God or His actions. God lives and moves in eternity. All God's thoughts, actions, His purposes are eternal , not subject to time,

have only and always eternity in view and eternal value [Isaiah 55:11; Ephesians 3:11; Philippians 1:6]. God's Word always has the end result in view, the final consequence; a completed plan which is a single event, "single, all encompassing, utterly uncontradictable action"<sup>10</sup>

- God's grace is eternal. He gifts His grace to us, Paul taught, in "the ages to come" because they are exceedingly rich, abundant [Ephesians 2:7].
4. **God is without parts;** All of God's attributes are in the background of all of his actions;<sup>11</sup> His role as Creator, Judge, and Savior is indivisible as is His being, the Trinity, in 3 persons. God never displays certain attributes more than others. God simply *is* his attributes [2 Peter 1:4].
- "... what the Westminster divines were seeing in Scripture was that when God reveals who He is, He says, "I am who I am," meaning, "I'm not made up of parts. I am not the kind of being who, if I cease to be loving, I'm still God. I am always all I am. I am My attributes."<sup>12</sup> In this regard we say that God is not complex but simple.
  - The Augsburg Confession (1530) calls God an indivisible power. (1530)
  - The doctrine of the Trinity made clear that God is self-sufficient<sup>13</sup> [Isaiah 59:16; 63:5].

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10. Ibid.

11. Ibid. 252ff.

12. On God is without parts. accessed 12/25/23 <https://www.ligonier.org/podcasts/ask-ligonier/what-does-it-mean-that-god-is-without-parts>

13. Ibid. 242

## Grace as a Theology

“Yahweh must undertake the mission of justice for Yahweh’s own self.<sup>14</sup> ... Yahweh acts alone, without accomplice, without any human agent”<sup>15</sup> explains Walter Brueggmann.<sup>16</sup>

- Dr. Vidu explained, “It is not that the crucifixion produced a change in God, from which point God was enabled to engage in another particular action. Rather, crucifixion, resurrection, glorification, as well as God’s adoption of us ... all are elements of a *single* ... action, whose success depends in no measure on anything needing to happen on the human side that would somehow escape his control”<sup>17</sup> [Italics added].
- This is the very definition of *singularity*. “ all are elements of a *single* ... action....”
- Saying “no measure on anything needing ... on the human side” we are affirming that God works alone; His plan of salvation was drawn up and enacted independent of human effort, collusion, or forethought [Isaiah 43:25]. God’s grace is, therefore, unsolicited and uninitiated by man exhibiting *priority* and *incongruity*.

## Grace

To understand God’s grace is to understand God’s dealings with us. This is grace at work in us! This is why I came to appreciate a new definition of the Righteousness of

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14. Walter Brueggmann. *Isaiah 40-66*. (Westminster John Knox Press. Louisville, KY,1998) page 200

15. Ibid. page 226

16. Walter Brueggmann. *Isaiah 40-66*. (Westminster John Knox Press. Louisville, KY,1998) page 200

17. Adonis Vidu. *Atonement, Law, and Justice*, (Baker Publishing. Grand Rapids, MI: , 2014). page 260

## Grace as a Theology

God expounded by N.T. Wright and others: "God's Covenant faithfulness." A salvation that reconciles me to God also brings me into a covenant relationship with Him as my Creator. This is a salvation "by grace through faith" which is to say, "all God and nothing I could add but to accept it. My part is to receive the grace God offers and enter into it through simple trust. The righteousness of God is God honoring this new covenant enacted through Christ's death and resurrection.

N. T. Wright concluded: "When God fulfills the covenant through the death and resurrection of Jesus and the gifts of the Spirit, thereby revealing his faithful covenant justice and his ultimate purpose of new creation, this has the effect both of fulfilling the original covenant purpose (thus dealing with sin and procuring forgiveness) and of enabling Abraham's family to be the worldwide Jew-plus-Gentile people [incongruous] it was always intended to be."<sup>18</sup>

And he added this delightful recognition of the grace of God at work: "I have often reflected on the strangeness of the task to which Paul devoted his life: telling pagans that there was a single creator God rather than a multiplicity of gods was bad enough, but adding that this God had made himself known in a crucified Jew, who had then been raised from the dead, was bound to cause hoots of derision, and, if Acts is to be believed, sometimes did. Yet Paul found that when he told his story, when he proclaimed that this Jesus was indeed the world's true Lord, people (to their great surprise, no doubt) found this announcement making itself at home in their minds and hearts, generating the belief that it was true, and transforming their lives with a strange new presence and power."<sup>19</sup>

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18. N.T. Wright. "Paul" (Fortress Press Minneapolis, MN: , 2009) page 25.

19. Ibid. page 100.

## **Grace - The Total Expression of The Attributes of God**

Grace is the total of all God does in every act of His love for His creation. We might suggest seeing His grace, to use Barclay's idea, as His perfect gift [James 1:17] As such it is always:

- 1) as regards God's attributes, inseparable and united (singularity) [John 17:11];
- 2) as regards God's desires toward us, without reserve or favoritism and always wholehearted (incongruity) [Romans 8:32];
- 3) as regard His covenant, without repentance and for our good (efficacy) [Romans 11:29; Jeremiah 29:11];
- 4) as regards His purpose, holy and eternal (priority) [1 Thessalonians 5:23];
- 5) as regards His power and agency, unlimited and infinite (superabundance) [Ephesians 2:7];
- 6) as regards His will, self-determined and self-motivated (non-circulatory) [Isaiah 43:25];
- 7) as regards His authority, autonomous and sovereign (impartial) [Isaiah 45:6].

The following chapters, it is hoped, will magnify this view from a mere theological discourse to a deepening faith in the awesome faithfulness of our God and an ever increasing passion to follow Christ and to live a testimony worthy of His grace.

## Grace is God's Idea

*Grace is God's bountiful involvement in our lives which He lavished upon us, on our behalf, with or without our awareness.*

In so many ways, God's grace is a real part of the believer's life but we remain unaware of much of this work on our behalf [Romans 11:33 ]. "For he shall give his angels charge over thee, to keep thee in all thy ways." [Psalm 91:11]. I doubt we are very much aware of their presence. He was providing for our salvation at Calvary while we were, Paul said, "enemies" [Romans 5:10]. Much of Christian theology remains debatable (a fact not debatable) because we do not see eye to eye on everything with other Christian denominational interpretations of scripture. Even though we share a common belief—a common faith—in a simplistic Truth: Christ died for us to reconcile us to God (something we could not do on our own) there exists dozens of theories on the Atonement. If there remains controversy over the essential truths that describe Christianity, it exposes, to some degree, our ongoing ignorance about the grace of God.

More Godly men and women of renown, whose knowledge of God's Word more than I could ever hope to attain to, have questioned, in a friendly reminiscent way, why God didn't tell all of us everything when we were young. It is almost comical to hear such discussions. But think it through: God telling us everything about His grace *all at once!* This is preposterous because over the years we grow spiritually and become more capable of understanding things we couldn't in our younger days. If this is true about

## Grace is God's Idea

natural things (some subjects are for adults only) how much more about spiritual things that Paul called—he used the word—*deep* [I Corinthians 2:9-10]. One scholarly saint, whom God used extensively in church planting and bringing the Gospel to thousands, shared with me that he knew he needed to get some Christian experience before preaching on the parables of Christ. He felt too immature in the earlier days of his ministry to do justice to the lessons these stories taught.<sup>1</sup>

According to John 16:8-10, The Holy Spirit does the leg work; He does the research—not us—and He reveals what and when He will to us. Paul claimed that, “Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which God hath prepared for them that love him. But God hath revealed them unto us *by his Spirit*: for the Spirit searches all things, yea, the deep things of God [I Corinthians 2:9-10]. Even this had to be revealed to Paul. It doesn’t sound like natural reasoning.

The most obvious meaning behind these verses is implied in the use of the word “reveal” without saying what was revealed because Paul wanted to emphasize His primary source of spiritual truth—God! And what was so deep? God’s grace!

There is a debate whether Ephesians 1:17 speaks of a different (or secondary) class of revelation. Paul wrote them: “That God may give *you* the spirit of ... revelation,” In writing to the Corinthian church, however, Paul was speaking of the message of Grace God gave *him* and his fellow-laborers [to include the Gentiles]. The revelation from God (spoken of to the Ephesians) to all other believers is a simple confirmation of this truth. Scholarship calls Ephesians a “secondary’ revelation.<sup>2</sup> Said simply: What Paul was given

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1. This is a undocumented reference to a breakfast meeting I had many years ago with Chuck Smith [of Calvary Chapel fame].

2. Frederick Louis Godet. *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*. (Zondervan Publishing House. Grand Rapids, MI: 19710, page 147 ff.

## Grace is God's Idea

by the Spirit became the Word of God, our Bible, but what the Spirit reveals to us is not something beyond that truth but only a confirmation or explanation of it.

The Spirit is in our lives sharing, teaching, convicting, encouraging us [John 16:8-10] as we progress through this life with its many possibilities, good and bad. If God were to tell *all* at salvation why would Paul affirm the “we see through a glass, darkly” [1 Corinthians 13:12] Godet in his commentary defines “the deep things of God,” which Paul wrote about as “designated God’s essence, then, His attributes, volitions and plans.”<sup>3</sup> What we have been calling His *grace*.

In the Corinthian text there is a contrast to be made between the words “revealed” [already to Paul] and “searches” [the unceasing activity of the Spirit]. The grace of God is effectively bringing us into a fuller, living, knowledge of the God Who wants us to know Him. This is most evident in Paul’s choice of words in verse 11 translated in the KJV, *knoweth*. The RSV translation, however, recognizes in the text 2 different words used, “For what person **knows** a man’s thoughts except the spirit of the man which is in him? So also no one **comprehends** the thoughts of God except the Spirit of God.”

What man knows, he perceives.<sup>4</sup> The Spirit, however, actually does *know* the mind of God in a comprehensive way. There is another distinction we might make. Perception is sense knowledge, what the dictionary calls “seen with the mind’s eye.”<sup>5</sup> Paul explains this by adding “the spirit of the man which is in him,” that is, academic knowledge is born out of this innate ability of the natural man to learn.

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3. Ibid. page 148.

4. There is a saying that perception is reality. Though this idea is suspect, scientifically speaking, it points out that this source of knowledge is weak compared to a revelation from God.

5. Joseph Thayers. *Thayer’s Greek-English Lexicon*. (Hendrickson Publishers, 1996), page 118.

## Grace is God's Idea

The Spirit, however, *knows* God. From the Spirit we receive a revelation “grounded in His personal experience”<sup>6</sup> or personal relationship within the Trinity. The Spirit has a knowledge of the ageless Divine plan to save us, *grace*.

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 they have lived or reputation they have obtained, through seeking God, can receive the vast and limitless benefits of His grace. 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. Theories of the 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 [Isaiah 1:18].

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 in eternity. For now, why should anything else consume our interest or drive our passion for truth? As Paul affirmed, “I resolved to know nothing while I was with you except Jesus Christ and him crucified” [I Corinthians 2:2].

### God's Secrets

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. Moses taught, “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” [Deuteronomy 29:29]. The word “follow” means that God shares details that we can put into practice.

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6. Ibid.

## Grace is God's Idea

The Spirit is within our lives to enhance clarity about His work in us and inspire us with the message of the Cross and the power of the resurrection. 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. "When he, the Spirit of truth, comes," Jesus assured us [and the Spirit has come] "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" [John 16:13].

We admit that our questions are many but answers should not be conjured up through a rambling theology 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. Perhaps, we might paraphrase Jesus' directive to Peter when he wondered about someone else's relationship with the Savior. "... what is that to you? You follow me." [John 21:22].

When Jesus enjoined us to "trust" Him [John 14:1] He admonished us to trust in God's grace. Whether or not heaven will hold all the answers to the questions that have beleaguered the Church, we can be confident God will tell us what we need to know or what He wants us to know, when He wants us to know it. This is more God's interest in telling us than our "need to know."

## Theologies Galore

I have never met a theology based on human reasoning that wasn't incomplete, though, it intended to represent the "whole Gospel" in scope. Because theology is a study of God we should not be too surprised to learn that we have not figured Him out yet. We learn that every thing He does always is an expression of everything He is without contradiction. This is God's grace always creating, rescuing, teaching, directing. He is Creator, Judge and Savior in all He does on our behalf. As believers, we get to participate in the

## Grace is God's Idea

blessings, share in the victories, and develop in a living relationship with God—all benefits of His grace.

### Natural Revelation

Is not the very earth we dwell on an example of God's gifts? Are not the regulatory movements of the stars, that we set our clocks to, a natural revelation of God's grace in time, helping us mark the march of history or the age of rocks or the advancement in learning.

And yet God is thought only a myth, an idea born of a desperate ignorance and once relied on when life became hopelessly tragic. Is a divine revelation only a left-over tradition from the "dark ages" when science was heretical and mankind was even willing to buy hope with indulgences? Was the value of 2 centuries of theological dialogue and argument only to control an unruly populous through fear and empower a ruling class of clergy to get rich. (During the Gilded Age in American history studies suggest as much.)

Man has always been, in essence, discovering himself, his genius and power. According to ChatGPT,<sup>7</sup> "It's difficult to quantify the exact percentage of discoverable knowledge that has been uncovered by science."<sup>8</sup> Does this mean that man's intelligence and creative powers now can replace God?

### A Witness

Now more than ever the Grace of God needs to be evident in the testimony of the Church! God's grace at work in us should release our minds and excite our passions to know more about the Creator God who gave us science and the possibility of discovering that nature reflects His glory.

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7. Wiki says "ChatGPT (Chat Generative Pre-trained Transformer) is a chatbot developed by OpenAI and launched on November 30, 2022."

8. ChatGPT accessed 12/26/23 <https://poe.com>

## Grace is God's Idea

God's grace is God's gifts and should this not include every scientific discovery? No one should be more enthused to worship God than the scientist but, sadly, this is not always the case.

James informed us that "*every* good gift and *every* perfect gift ... [is] from above" [James 1:17]. We have vastly limited the meaning of *grace* when it only represents a ride on God's chariot to His Kingdom in the sky, We should be thankful to God for so many more things! David exclaimed, "The heavens declare the glory of God; and the firmament shows his handiwork." [Psalm 19:1]. God's grace heals. His grace goes to war for us against every evil. His grace motivates a host of angels to descend into our world to protect us. His grace guides us through life and rescues us from untold dangers [Romans 8:31].

But the primary part of God's work is not outside us [dealing with our circumstances] or through us [our ministry] but *in* us [conforming us to the image of Christ].

## The Hidden Message of Grace

*How active God's grace was in Ancient Israel is only apparent now by following the trail of history that led to Calvary. "Lord, you be the judge and prove that I have lived a pure life. I have depended on you, Lord, to keep me from falling. Look closely at me, Lord, and test me. Judge my deepest thoughts and emotions. I always remember your faithful love. I depend on your faithfulness." - Psalm 26:1-3 ERV*

E. P. Sanders, American New Testament scholar, argues that the covenant is the hidden presupposition of Jewish literature even when the word hardly occurs. If this be true about the covenant, it is reasonable to think it also true about God's grace. Though the language of the Old Testament was not designed to understand grace in its pure Pauline sense, Paul could cross-reference Old Testament accounts, history, and prophecies to confirm its importance in our salvation and point out in a more visible way what God was up to and why. God's covenant made with Abraham, specifically, has been called a "Covenant of Grace" based on Paul's interpretation in Romans 4:3-4 "For what saith the scripture? Abraham believed God, and it was counted unto him for righteousness. Now to him that works is the reward not reckoned of grace, but of debt." Paul is clearly endorsing grace over law [Romans 6:15].

Interpreting Abraham through the eyes of a Paul has caused some Christian faiths to replace circumcision with water baptism and in turn to baptize infants. It is not the purpose of this work to discuss this, pro or con, but to

## The Hidden Message of Grace

simply point out that God's grace can be read between the lines of the Old Testament text.

Because we live in time we place too much emphasis on chronologies or the order of things, ignoring the fact that God is eternal. We are the disciples asking Jesus in Acts 1:6 "Will you *at this time* restore again the kingdom to Israel?" And this has led to multiple eschatological timelines as to when the Lord will return (before, mid, or after) the Great Tribulation. We have also divided Biblical history into dispensations. In some cases the lines between the ages of Biblical history in our theologies are drawn thick in permanent ink. So, nobody could possibly be called "saved" before Jesus died for sin though God would extend to a faithful Old Testament monarch or prophet an I.O.U. Some cannot even accept the idea that on Calvary our Savior forgave all sin, but only of sins repented: "If we confess ... he is faithful ... to forgive " [1 John 1:9]. The Spirit's work in the Old Testament is said to be *upon* His servants while in the New His work is *in* us.

David, however, in writing the Psalms had some very serious insider knowledge about the heart of God even though the New Covenant had not yet been written upon the human heart. David was under Torah law. It was as if God were anxious to talk about His grace and He failed to honor our dispensational boundaries.

The Psalms of David, for example, give testimony to a man who has known the grace of God, which is, in an elementary sense, known as the mercy of God in Old Testament parlance. David's prayer of repentance rings of New Testament truth: "*Create* in me a clean heart, O God; and *renew* a right spirit within me. Cast me not away from *thy presence*; and take not thy holy spirit from me. *Restore* unto me the joy of thy salvation; and *uphold* me *with thy* free spirit" [Psalm 51: 10-12].

*Create, renew, Thy presence, restore, uphold*, how are these terms not typical of *grace*! God's mercy delivered David

## The Hidden Message of Grace

or forgave him at times from something he has done wrong and at other times from the pursuit of those who sought to do him harm. And there was clearly a heart to heart relation between God and him [Acts 13:22]. It is in a remarkable way a study in the grace of God, but in a sense, concealed in a cultural language that was never designed to explain it. The burden of Old Testament History and prophecy was to underscore man's need of grace without a clear understanding of how that grace would be administered, that is, through the Cross. The meaning of God's grace (even the use of the word 'grace' to represent it) would await Paul's ministry and calling [Galatians 1:12].

God's grace, even dressed in the bright, even ostentatious, garb of His glory and power, a cloud by day and fire by night, was never evident in the language of a people whose mindset saw only right from wrong, reward and punishment. The Law of God [The Torah] was never perceived for what it really was, a schoolmaster to teach us about sin and our need of a Savior [Galatians 3:24]. When Paul explained it, he paid a heavy price in persecution, even with his life [Acts 18:13; 21:21].

Moses' covenant with God, according to Hebrews 10:1, was a *shadow* cast by the Cross when God's Son illuminated it. But this explanation escaped the religious mind in Paul's day because whatever God did through Christ's death could only be viewed as a punishment. As a punishment why would God afflict that on an innocent man—let alone the Son of God or the Messiah! This idea did not conveniently fit the paradigm of being responsible for one's own crimes—*lex taliones* or the law of retribution [Deuteronomy 24:16].

Even we see Calvary as a debt paid *as well as* forgiven—even if these ideas should be mutually exclusive! A crown of righteousness which will be given to every believer [2 Timothy 4:8] is thought of as a *reward* and not a gift [1 Corinthians 3:14]. And yet Paul taught "Now to him that

works the reward is not reckoned as of grace, but of debt" [Romans 4:4] pointing out a difference!

### **The Favor Principle**

I call this "The Favor Principle" that even makes sense in our minds because "there is no free lunch" or "nothing is free" or "no one does anything for nothing" or "quid-pro-quo" or we look for the strings attached to the gift, what Barclay called "reciprocity." Even our society is more comfortable calling a gift an *entitlement* rather than dealing with the uncomfortable feeling of *gratitude* or thinking that now we are in someone's debt.

The Favor principle is also apparent when we must blame someone for something happening of which we disapprove or find offensive or hurtful. Even God has been blamed for natural disasters, famine, and plague, as acts of evil [Jeremiah 35:17]. Every act must be assigned a degree of responsibility somewhere between "everything is my fault not yours" to "nothing is my fault but yours." Someone once said "No good deed goes unpunished" imputing a fair value or worth to every action.

But what if grace is not administered by this rule; what if God decides for some personal reason, "for his own sake" [Isaiah 43:25] to show mercy to an enemy! [Romans 5:10] or bring a dying criminal with Him [Luke 23:42-43] simply because the man asked to be remembered (whatever that means). And what if the heart-knower [Acts 15:8] cares more about intent [Hebrews 4:12] than action when He decides to show mercy. The love of God doesn't have to make sense, only be accepted! [Romans 10:13].

So when Jesus revealed that "...the Son of man will come in the glory of his Father ... [and] give to every man the reward of his works" [Matthew 16:27], we find these words most sensible even though they are perfectly Jewish in

## The Hidden Message of Grace

scope and later God's grace, thanks to Calvary, would have something to say about it [Ephesians 2:8-9].

When Peter and Paul taught that God plans to review the record of our lives on judgment day [1 Corinthians 3:13; 1 Peter 1:17], we immediately think reward or punishment even though there is nothing in their words that would suggest anything other for believers than God's grace at work [Romans 8:1]. Grace does not ignore our actions—how we live—as if they didn't count. God's grace is God at work in us while we are living in covenant relationship with Him. This clearly underscores the value of what we *do* as important [Philippians 2:12-13; James 2:26].

God didn't hate Esau, but Esau thought He did [Romans 9:13]. Grace is a divine choice for reasons often that escape us [Romans 9:15]. Jesus would come through Jacob's ancestral line which explains the language. So it was absolutely necessary that Esau be the first twin born and Jacob being born fast on his heels [Genesis 25:26]. But because none of this fits the paradigm, as a favor reciprocated, it appears as hate and not grace (The firstborn should inherit the blessing).

### David and God's Grace

So, getting back to David, dare we look for God's grace in the Psalms as an exegetical tool? When we search through the context of a Psalm shouldn't we be looking at all the players in the script—David ... *and God!*

David's 26<sup>th</sup> Psalm, for example, begins, "Lord, you be the judge and prove that I have lived a pure life." This sounds perfectly self-accommodating but there are words here that explain it otherwise. There is lacking here any self accusation or confession of sin which we might expect when humbly imploring God's mercy—as, indeed, we read in the previous Psalm: "Do not remember the sins of my youth...; According to Your mercy remember me..., O LORD" [Psalm

## The Hidden Message of Grace

25:7]. If Psalm 26 spoke of God's mercy, we could easily see God's grace at work, but alas .. No. Maybe both Psalm 25 and 26 belong together as one. We could accept this because we do not know that David did *not* write them together.

But David makes no boast either of his many achievements of which he is now historically renown. He simply affirms before God that his intentions have always been to serve his Lord faithfully [1 Kings 11:4; Acts 13:22]. And if he failed God, it was proof of his further need of God's mercy which he repentantly sought [2 Samuel 24:10]. There is an "Easy to Read" version which reads, "I have depended on you, Lord, to keep me from falling." That's grace!!

David's thoughts are not self-deprecating nor self-justifying—no more than are they seeking God's judgment to prove him perfect in his walk with God. David wouldn't have seen himself in that light—not after his night of passion with Uriah's wife [Psalm 25:18].

There is a curious blessing offered by Solomon at the dedication of the Temple in 1 Kings 8:58. The New Living Translation reads, "May he [The Lord] give us the desire to do his will in everything." And in verse 61 he added, "Let your heart therefore be perfect with the LORD ..." Various translations understand "perfection" to mean being, *committed, devoted, wholly true, faithful, or loyal*. It is the word "peace," being at peace in our relationship with God which meant in Israel to "walk in his statutes, and to keep his commandments." And Solomon prayed that God would grant such a heart after God's! The Hebrew reads, "Cause our hearts, Lord, to reach unto You."

In Psalm 119:33-36 David prayed, "Lord, teach me your laws, and I will always follow them. Help me understand your teachings, and I will follow them. Obeying them will be my greatest desire. Help me follow your

## The Hidden Message of Grace

commands, because that makes me happy. Give me the desire to follow your rules, not the desire to get rich.”

David retained a sense of his own responsibility in obedience to God’s Word, but can we not see God’s part? One commentary interpreted this to mean that “David ... talks of God judging Him and his own trust in God, not in the sense of a self righteousness or righteousness of works, but with the express confession, that his dependence is on God’s lovingkindness and Truth.”<sup>1</sup> In Psalm 26:3a David prays, “Thy lovingkindness is before my eyes” and in Psalm 26:3b, “I walk in Your truth.” This, constitutes the basis of the position of his *heart* and life...<sup>2</sup> David’s prayer was accompanied by an “unwavering trust in God” [Psalm 26:1]. David’s language here underlines this dependency—it is now what we know as *grace*.

Charles Spurgeon called it “a solemn appeal to the just tribunal of the heart-searching God.” [Jere 17:10; Acts 15:8]. In the language there are hints of the covenant relationship that existed between David and the Lord.<sup>3</sup> And though David’s actions did not always show it [2 Samuel 11] his *heart* sought to live within this covenant [Psalm 25:4-5; 42:1; 51:17]. Perhaps, unknowingly (because there was no word for it in his language) David wanted God’s *grace* in his life.

So we understand that when he began his prayer with, “Lord, You be the judge!” David was not defending his own actions as much as he was appealing to a covenant God’s faithfulness to be merciful.

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1. John Peter Lange..*The Psalms* (Zondervan, Grand Rapids, MI: 7th printing, 1980) Vol v, page 195

2. Ibid.

3. The word “lovingkindness” in the King James version in Psalm 26:3 scholarship tells us arises ...in covenant relation. It is not primarily a disposition but a helpful act [love in action] corresponding to a relationship of trust, and faithfulness... The meaning ... fluctuates between (covenant) faithfulness and love or grace, so the translation usually has [mercy], but occasionally [righteousness].” [Kittel. vol II, Page 479].

## The Hidden Message of Grace

One interpretation references David's early struggles as Judah's king while the northern tribes were still under "The House of Saul" [2 Samuel 3:6]. In a civil war following, Abner, the cousin of Saul and the Captain of his army, was assassinated in a revenge killing by David's captain, Joab. (Abner had killed Joab's brother, 2 Samuel 3:30.) David understood death in battle but not outright murder! It may be that David alluding in verse 1 to his integrity [Psalm 26:1, compare 2 Samuel 3:28] is a reference to Joab's out-of-control murderous behavior [2 Samuel 3:39]. David previously was on record that he would not raise his hand against "the Lord's anointed" [1 Samuel 24:10].

The word *integrity* [Psalm 26:1 KJV] is, first and foremost, a condition of the *heart* [1 Kings 9:4]. David has before appealed to his integrity when God was called on to vindicate him or prove his innocence. "... judge me, O LORD, according to my righteousness, and according to my integrity that is in me." [Psalm 7:8]. The occasion of this earlier Psalm was when Cush, the Benjamite (probably Shimei, [2 Samuel 16:5; 19:16] of Saul's household scandalously accused David of treason—a pumped up charge with no truth to it. As already noted, David respected the anointing God placed on Saul even though Saul's behavior contradicted it; and David's integrity, his innocence, vindicated him.

When the NIV reads David asserting, "I have led a blameless life" it is not his actions but his heart that was more in context with this testimonial. David would rather be judged by God and not man! [2 Samuel 24:14]. And, dare we add, He would rather God judge his heart and not just his actions?

But there is more here to his testimony because he had a heart after God's, having from a young age spend a considerable time in meditating on his Creator and Lord and writing poems which later would be put to music to remind all Jewry that, through tragedy or blessing, God remains true

## The Hidden Message of Grace

to His covenant agreement with us—His promises. This is why it gets easy to free this Psalm from its historical moorings, see God’s grace in it, and find application even in our own lives.

It is the ERV that correctly divests David’s words of a self-promoting justification and contends David actually prayed, “I have depended on you, Lord, to keep me from falling.” I think it reasonable to conclude that David’s faithfulness to God was undeniably linked to God’s faithfulness to him!

Then the young king used an interesting word that even made scholars wonder how to interpret it: “Test [prove] me, Lord.” On the end of the word in the Hebrew language there is added an ‘h’ which makes the prayer stronger.<sup>4</sup> David wasn’t challenging God with a self-justifying attitude but beseeching Him for mercy!<sup>5</sup>

This makes sense when we learn that the word itself speaks of the work of a goldsmith. We are reminded of 1 Peter 1:7 NET, “Such trials show the proven character of your faith, which is much more valuable than gold ... and will bring praise and glory and honor when Jesus Christ is revealed.”

“Put to the fire my deepest thoughts and emotions,” David prayed. David knew that the God who knows the heart [Acts 15:8] would interpret him aright [Psalm 51:17].

David was, as we are and should always be, found with a deep abiding gratitude to God for giving him a heart after God’s own. With us, it is part of the New Covenant [Jeremiah 31:31; Ezekiel 36:26], and it is this heart that God

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4. I contend that the ‘h’ or ‘ah’ is a breathing mark to indicate ‘longing’. The Hebrew NA’ in similar style is known as a particle of entreaty like our word *please*. The Greek after a fashion uses their word DE translated ‘now’ in the Shepherds’ mouths at the Savior’s birth [Luke 2:15 KJV].

5. “The shade of meaning conveyed by [this word] with ... [‘h’] is not always so perceptible ... but [it] is frequently emphatic,” scholarship tells us [Gesenius’ Hebrew Grammar #48 k].

## The Hidden Message of Grace

looks upon [1 Samuel 16:7]. Was not David praying that God would filter out all deception and hypocrisy from his feelings and thoughts and keep his heart pure! This explains his prayer “Judge me, Lord. I trust you. Examine me!”

What all this reduces to for me is the following interpretation of Psalm 26:1-3 [this is not a word for word translation which would be most likely forced]:

Lord, You alone know my heart: judge me by this. I have intended always to be honest and true to Your Word and not deceitful. And I am dependent on You in all things. Examine my heart: if my intentions are false; purify me of all guile and any hidden desires. Indeed You are a faithful God, a God of covenant for whose love You made me. I can testify continually of Your mercy in my life. I want to want to live every day faithfully in covenant with You.

It is in this truth, David can now appeal to a covenant God’s faithfulness to protect him from his enemies. And God does! It is because God keeps His Word, which we know as His promises, that we can appeal to Him in Covenant with us, and so we should. Our faithfulness to Him is characterized by a heart that seeks Him out in prayer and a life lived without guile, deceit, trickery and lies. The covenant we have with Him allows God to examine our intentions and thoughts and when necessary to put them to the fire of His judgment not to punish but purify. It is in this covenant relationship that our prayers are answered and our trust in Him is vindicated.

## Grace & the Favor Principle

*We are all God's favorites.*

*"But God, being rich in mercy, because of his great love with which he loved us ... made us alive together with Christ ... and he raised us up together with him and seated us together with him in the heavenly realms in Christ Jesus, to demonstrate in the coming ages the surpassing wealth of his grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus." - Ephesians 2:4-7*

God's grace is difficult to appreciate for the human mind because we operate on "the favor principle." We like to think that we deserve the good things in life. We understand life in terms of rewards and punishments. But is this how prayer works? Does God do things for us just because *we* live a certain way. Does He reward us for good behavior? Is answered prayer nothing more than God responding to the good things about us? Does God have to answer prayer a certain way that we expect of Him because in our minds: He promised? There are scriptures that—context aside—seem to suggest as much. Would this not be an act of favoritism which, admittedly, many Christians actually imagine as a consequence of their faith or lifestyle?

Does this perspective on truth adequately describe *grace*? Would this not put *us* in charge of *our own* blessings? This would, then, be a favoritism because God would have reacted to what we decided He should do. And even a "No" answer to prayer could be seen as a *lack* of favoritism or disfavor. A blessing could be deserved as a reward for faith or services rendered to God or for pious living, and a discipline would equally be "deserved" for not living a

## Grace & the Favor Principle

righteous life. This makes sense to religious minds because of the way our logic seems to work but is it grace?

I had an uncle, now with his Lord because he loved the Lord, who mortgaged the family home to finance a gas station-garage combo as a business for himself and his 2 sons, my cousins. In a professional way, the “boys” didn’t want to follow in dad’s footsteps. Consequently, my uncle could not alone handle the responsibility of this new business and he lost everything, garage, house, and all in bankruptcy. He and my aunt moved to another state where he worked out of a hospital laundry room to make ends meet. More than once he asked me (I was pastoring at the time) what sin he had committed that God would punish him so. He committed no sin. None of this had anything to do with sin, but we are prone to think in terms of punishments and rewards even when if God isn’t.

### Paul & Grace

Paul testified that after his conversion he went into the Arabian desert—for how long, we do not know—and didn’t see Peter and the other apostles until 3 years after returning [Galatians 1:17]. God was teaching him about the message of grace that necessarily had to embrace the non-Jew or those who knew nothing about Mosaic laws or what righteousness was all about! If grace is, indeed, *unearned and undeserved*, it has to be made available to all, otherwise, we are back to talking about a divine favoritism that would contradict this principle! Do we really understand and appreciate in our Christian walk what grace is?

We should also ask how Paul decided on the word “grace” to describe what God told him about salvation! The word in the language of the poets and Classics spoke of *kindness* [Ephesians 2:7]. For the one receiving it, grace is *gratitude* because, if you think of it, there is nothing unwelcoming about kindness.

## Grace & the Favor Principle

The word never lost its idea of favoritism, however, because kindness is always *pleasurable* or pleasing to whomever receives it. And to believe that the one receiving the kindness must deserve it for some reason is a logical conclusion. (All these ideas in Greek writings describe the Greek word *grace* but is this the Biblical understanding?)

Look closer at the logic of the Classical authors. If something was done *for* someone, it was said to be “*for grace*” and it was always free. It was a kindness. Kindness that is real kindness is never compelled or required—no more than love is. Keep in mind that the person showing kindness might still feel compelled, constrained, or impassioned within themselves to do so for some very personal or private reason—like love. If something is done “*with grace*” it is said to be “pure good will.” To decide anything or judge a matter “*in grace*” was interpreted as partiality—perhaps, it is humanly impossible to decide anything without bias.

Perhaps, there is a simpler way of looking at this. *Grace*, because it is freely given and not a reward, should engender *gratefulness*. *Favor*, if it is reciprocated or given to a specific person for a specific reason can be an *entitlement*. God’s grace is undeserved because it is unearned. Let’s not qualify this statement or define it conditionally. Let God be God. Let Him show mercy on whom He will show mercy [Exodus 33:19; Ephesians 2:7].

### **The Theology of Favoritism**

If God does not show favoritism, He must have another reason for doing what He does for us. Let’s theologize a bit. God acts; God doesn’t *react*. This is to say: God does not crisis manage, He does not need to *discover* what He already knows (He is omniscient). Nor does He change His mind in an act of remorse—even though such

## Grace & the Favor Principle

language is used in describing His dealings with man in an historical context *for our admonition*.

We might get tangled up in a theological net of determinism<sup>1</sup> talking about omniscience when our logic works its magic in our minds. Here is one long sentence: if God knows the future, it is already decided and cannot change, else God would know a lie which cannot be because He cannot lie; so, all things are predetermined and we are predestined for heaven or hell regardless of what we do or think—and that, for the Christian, is God's grace! [Wow! This sentence was brought to you compliments of human reasoning.]

God, indeed, is all-knowing. He knows the end from the beginning of all things, and one of the most inspiring truths of Scripture is found in Acts 15:8 where God is called the *heart-knower* (This is a word found only in the Bible and subsequent church writings). A God Who already knows *us* knows how to deal with us, knows if and when we will respond to His grace without denying us the freedom in relationship with Him to do just that. God does not react to our circumstances, let alone, put us in charge of our own futures. In an eternal sense, He embraces our entire life in every moment in dealing with us.

Grace, then, is God acting for reasons within Himself. In theology the word is *aseity*<sup>2</sup> or the property by which God exists of and from Himself. It refers to the Christian belief that God does not depend on any cause other than Himself. This represents God as absolutely independent and self-

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1. the doctrine that all events, including human action, are ultimately determined by causes external to the will. Some philosophers have taken determinism to imply that individual human beings have no free will and cannot be held morally responsible for their actions.

2. The word is often used to refer to the Christian belief that God contains within himself the cause of himself, is the first cause, or rather is simply uncaused. Notions of aseity as the highest principle go back at least to Plato and have been in wide circulation since Augustine, though the use of the word 'aseity' began only in the Middle Ages.

## Grace & the Favor Principle

existent. So, again, God does what God does simply because it pleases Him to do it and He seeks no further cooperation from us than to accept it by faith. He doesn't have to crisis manage His desires because His plans always work as He planned them. But did He give us a heart after Him to believe? Yes [Jeremiah 31:33; 2 Peter 1:1]. But why, then, didn't He do the same for everyone? It looks like our understanding of grace has painted us into a corner and there is no door or window to crawl through.

### The Potter & The Clay

Paul faced this same question which he responded to in Romans 9:19-21 "You will say then to me, Why does God yet find fault? For who can resist His will? Nay but, O man, who are you that replies against God? Shall the thing formed say to him that formed it, Why have you made me thus? Has not the potter power over the clay, of the same lump to make one vessel unto honor, and another unto dishonor?"

Ouch! It sounds like Paul was saying that God's going to do what God's going to do, and if I were you, I would seek His mercy [Deuteronomy 4:29]. Bishop Vincent Donovan, a Catholic missionary to the Masai in Tanzania, had to clarify to the tribe's people that they were not choosing God; He was choosing them: "He has searched us out and found us. All the time we think we are the lion. In the end, the lion is God."<sup>3</sup>

Is it possible we misunderstood Paul's metaphor of the potter and the clay? Paul continued [Romans 9:22] "What if God, willing to shew his wrath, and to make his power known, endured with much longsuffering the vessels of wrath fitted to destruction..." Paul was not meaning to say that God predetermined some to destruction, no more than a potter would intentionally put a lump of clay on his wheel

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3. Bishop Vincent Donovan. *Christianity Rediscovered*. (Orbis Books, Maryknoll, NY: 2003). page 61ff.

## Grace & the Favor Principle

he knew would be unworkable. Jeremiah explains it this way, “And the vessel that he made of clay was marred in the hand of the potter: so he made it again another vessel, as seemed good to the potter to make it [Jeremiah 18:4]. In other words, God works with what we give Him—how yielded we are to His guiding hand.

Our verse 9:22 does not have the word “What” before the “if.” The translator supplied this because without the word “What” the sentence is incomplete (known as an aposiopesis).<sup>4</sup> The verse does not say that the unsaved are prepared for destruction but “fitted” for destruction. The difference being that prepared suggests God actually intended to make them that way, but fitted simply means that this is how they ended up. What else was the potter to do?)

What makes this interpretation far more natural is Paul’s word “longsuffering” This word simply does not belong if we conclude that God “made” the unsaved for His wrath. Longsuffering means God lovingly tolerated much evil but eventually the tares must be burnt [Matthew 13:30]. Paul explained himself in verse 33 “Behold, I lay in Sion a stumbling stone and rock of offense: and whosoever believes on him shall not be ashamed.” [Romans 9:33].

### **A Covenant Relationship**

A covenant relationship with God requires that we are free to enter willingly into that relationship—something that could not be true if our lives were predetermined, accept if our freedom to participate in that relationship was what was predestined or predetermined on Creation day.

Here is where I appeal to Acts 15:8 and the “heart-knower.” God created us in some way “free” to choose Him and He knows how to read the human heart in search of

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4. suddenly broken off in speech

## Grace & the Favor Principle

those who will chose Him. That act of creation, how the human brain works or the heart, the seat of emotion, responds is not just physical or animalistic because we were created with a “spirit” or a part of us that even after Adam and Eve left Eden remained capable of being aware of God. “The Lord knows those who are His” [2 Timothy 2:19].

### **Covenant Faithfulness**

God is the Creator and what He made when He made us remains a bit mysterious to us. His respond to our prayers is not out of favor.. He does not do for us what He does as a consequence of how we live. *His* plans are good for us because *He* is good. Said another way: God did not decide to love us after He made us—let alone, because of something we did. He created us *to be loved* by Him! Now, if one gives this salient point its proper force, one begins to see grace.

Again: nothing God does is for a reason outside of Himself. Everything He does, He does as an expression of who He is and what pleases Him. God’s actions encapsulate all His attributes in a single eternally significant personal choice.

God’s reasons for doing what He does are always eternal because He is eternal. His actions are the working out of His plan which has to do with His coming Kingdom and our citizenship in that Kingdom. His dealings with us are always expressions of His mercy [singularity]—as even Ancient Israel understood it. Righteousness, scholarship teaches, is best understood, then, as God’s “Covenant Faithfulness.” The “New Covenant” in Christ [Jeremiah 31:31; Hebrews 12:24] is a new heart that now is capable of learning to follow Him.

### **Positional Salvation But Relational**

We see salvation as a *condition* of the soul, and I get it: You cannot be partially saved. When John wrote [John 1:12]

## Grace & the Favor Principle

“as many as believed on Him these have now the right to be the children of God,” he wasn’t describing a process but one’s position now in relation to God. (This is good New Testament Greek.) But salvation is not just a state of being; salvation is a relationship with God. When we think *righteousness* must be either sanctification [made righteous] or, for the time being, a forensic measure [declared righteous] instead of what it really is the “covenant faithfulness” of God in relationship with each believer in christian community [Ephesians 4:16] we ultimately risk arguing for a grace that as a gift is reciprocated (faith plus works) or one that is not efficacious (faith without works).

Even sanctification ends up being describe as a “*second definite work*” of God’s grace, referring to a particular experience, rather than a dynamic aspect of a *submission* to the Spirit or the act of *following* Jesus wherever He leads, or a *growing relationship* with Him.

So, when Paul encourages us to “work out our own salvation” [Philippians 2:12] and adds “with fear and trembling” we are at a lost to reconcile this with grace—and yet it is the very essence of grace at work in us because it is (and there can be no better definition of grace than this) “*God who works in us both to will and to do of His good pleasure.*”

## A Reasonable Grace

*Grace means God acting for reasons within Himself.  
"God working in us both to will and to do of His good pleasure." - Philippians  
2:13*

Understanding God's Grace is not a requirement for salvation. Faith is only accepting it. A definition of Divine Grace must wait. In the meanwhile, we spend lifetimes in theological debate to describe it. When John the Baptist, imprisoned, inquired of whether or not Jesus was the Messiah to come, Jesus did not tell him, He showed him! [Luke 7:22]. So with us, we learn about God, Who He is, by observing the move of the Spirit of God among us, the miracles of the Father's touch upon us and the change Jesus and salvation makes in our lives. There is no biblical word for academics. Experience is the way to knowledge as the language of Scripture makes clear. And so with Grace. Grace is the continuing record we get to observe and study of His working in us [This is why I like the mantra: "Follow the Grace of God."].

Paul explains in Philippians 2:13 "God working in us both to will and to do of His good pleasure." Each word is important here: It is God and God alone that is at work, and He does His work *in* you and me. He does what He does because it *pleases* Him. In the language of Scriptures the words, *counsel*, or *willing*, or *pleasure*, are often interchangeable [comprehensive; all-embracing: a single overarching principle]. If this be so about God, there is no second best with Him. His perfect will is His only will! God's

## A Reasonable Grace

intentions and His desires come from the same great heart of love. Isaiah 46:9-10 "Remember what I accomplished in antiquity! Truly I am God, I have no peer; I am God, and there is none like me, who announces the end from the beginning and reveals beforehand what has not yet occurred, who says, 'My plan will be realized, I will accomplish what I desire,'"

We also consent as reasonable that *Grace means God acting for reasons within Himself*. [It is the term aseity]. *This represents God as absolutely independent and self-existent.*" Exodus 33:19 "I will be gracious to whom I will be gracious, I will show mercy to whom I will show mercy." Much is clarified about grace here. God does not do anything, even for Moses, based on Moses' prayer when that prayer contradicts God's desire in the matter before them. Answered prayer is always dependent on a divine consent that makes it perfectly clear that God's answer was God's intention all along. Prayer is a gracious invitation for us to join Him in the victorious answer He already purposed before we asked. The primary New Testament reason for prayer, as I observe it, is "to join God in a solemn commitment" to see something happen, or an answer enacted. Prayer is also helping carry God's burden [Genesis 18:17; Daniel 2:28].

The actual Greek word *proseuchomai* breaks down this way, *pros euch omai*: "*Pros*" means toward. Our prayers are directed toward God. In John 1:1, John heralds Christ's advent with this opening, "the Word was *with* (pros) God" There is a union of thought and heart nuanced in this preposition. A "*Euch*" in the New Testament is a *vow*, and vows are commitments! Acts 18:18 speaking of Paul, "He had his hair cut off at Cenchræa because he had made a vow." Even the word "because" in this verse offers an explanation as to why He cut his hair: he made a vow! And the ending "*omai*" is a spelling used to reflect back upon the subject [It's that 'middle' idea we spoke of].

## A Reasonable Grace

Prayer connects us to God! Prayer is not our way of getting God to do something. Prayer is God's way of getting us to recognize what He is doing and has done! We do share our own needs, of course, but even here this is our opportunity to commune with Him and hear from Him while He responds to our requests.

Grace is God doing what God wants to do and He gets great pleasure out of doing it because it brings Him and us closer or as part of a covenant relationship. Additionally, as must be stated unequivocally, God wants no one lost. This is not just the message of the New Testament [2 Peter 3:9 "not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance."] but the Old as well [Romans 10:19; Isaiah 65:1 "I am sought of them that asked not for me; I am found of them that sought me not: I said, Behold me, behold me, unto a nation that was not called by my name."].

We add one other important detail of grace: God is the heart knower [Acts 15:8]. Jeremiah 17:10 "But I, the LORD, search all hearts and examine secret motives. I give all people their due rewards, according to what their actions deserve." When Lydia heard the message of the cross from Paul God opened her heart [Acts 16:14]. The great heart knower saw her heart, like David of old, she had a heart after God's [1 Samuel 13:14] and He knew this. There is something about each person which God only can discern or recognize about their reception of His message and grace that supports or challenges His interest in them [Hebrews 4:12]. When the church's witness glorifies God as at Corinth we can anticipate "The secrets of [the] heart are disclosed, and in this way [they] will fall down... to the ground and worship God, declaring, 'God is really among you.'" [1 Corinthians 14:25].

We recognize that even faith which is our belief in the revelation of Jesus' death and resurrection [Romans 10:9-10] is a gift of God [Matthew 16:17; 2 Peter 1:1] and we know that God's grace is God's independent interest in our

## A Reasonable Grace

salvation even before we knew about it [Romans 5:10]. We also know that God does not desire anyone to be lost [Matthew 25:41], and we know that we are commissioned to share in the joyous harvest of souls through our prayers and our witness. Sowing seed [John 4:37] is scattering the seed because our witness is broadcast into all ears [Acts 17:20] and before all eyes. God knows who will be open to the message. [Acts 17:32].

We best understand that we are commissioned to bear witness and to pray, as, these are our way of participating with God in His great work for the souls of men. Leave everything else to His grace.

## Grace Is Not a License to Sin

*Free to serve God is absolute and total freedom.  
“What then? shall we sin, because we are not under the law, but under grace?  
God forbid.” - Romans 6:15*

The New Living and the New International Versions of Romans 7:25 interpret the word “flesh” (used in all other English translations) as our “sinful nature.” Based on this interpretation an argument might be made against Paul’s own teaching about the power of God’s grace. It concludes that somehow sinning is natural even for Christians. This idea approaches a condoning of sin. It is because of this theology that Christians are said to have 2 natures: the old and the new, but Paul was talking about old *behavior* that needed to end [Colossians 3:10; Ephesians 4:24]. Sinning must end! God has given us new hearts after His [Jeremiah 31:31]. Paul’s discussion of the flesh is a study in carnality, a lifestyle, habits, behavior—*not* our nature.<sup>1</sup>

We have been wanting to explain why Christians sin—even occasionally. And if they do, why does God forgive us but exercises vengeance on everyone else!

### Limited Atonement

So, some, theologize a limited atonement, a limited forgiveness by God for only the elect. 2 Peter 3:9 reads “The

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1. In Greek there are 2 different words used: *σαρκινος*, to reference nature, and *σαρκικος* for behavior. It is this second word used in our Bible for carnality.

## Grace Is Not a License to Sin

Lord ... is longsuffering to us-ward, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance." Is this longsuffering or God's tolerance limited to only people He intends to save or does it speak merely of those He knows will accept Him? Who are the 'us-ward'? We looked already at Romans 9:22 in "*Grace & the Favor Principle*" where we could not fit the word "longsuffering" in the context of God's wrath unless He wanted to redeem them, but they didn't repent or seek Him! If He had limited His atoning grace, would it not show favoritism and, in effect, contradict Paul's explanation that grace is extended to all?

Christians have also been selective in listing sins: homosexually is a sin but divorce isn't? Neither one honors the monogamous, one man, one woman, definition of marriage. Ascertaining the Biblical perspective on Truth, without spinning it to fit what we might want it to mean, is indeed challenging. Most Christians simply honor those few Scriptures that support some denominational distinctive without a serious study that could expose blatant inconsistencies. Some believers avoid any serious study of God's truth lest it demand a life style they might not be comfortable living!

### **Grace as Freedom of Will**

A **self-justifying** principle concludes that since we are natural sinners, only saved by grace, God's salvation does not require anything of us in turn. It concludes that no matter what evil man proposes or acts upon, God's grace will rectify it. When we say we are justified or declared righteous by faith alone, some well-meaning believers correctly point out that a true salvation is following Christ. They correctly argue that faith and faithfulness both are part of our salvation. Dietrich Bonhoeffer astutely observed, "He

## Grace Is Not a License to Sin

... grants faith *to those only who obey Him*"<sup>2</sup> [italics added]. Francis Godet wrote, "God acting first as Judge to pardon (to declare man just) [gifting us faith], and afterwards as Spirit to quicken and sanctify [faithfulness]."<sup>3</sup> Dietrich Bonhoeffer who was martyred for his faith, pointed out that although grace is free it is not cheap! There is a cross for each of us to bear which is actually the act of self-denial. [Matthew 16:24].

Freedom from law is not freedom to do whatever we want. It is a freedom to follow Christ. Paul faced this idea with some of his Jewish countrymen: Romans 3:8 "You falsely imagine I am saying, "Let's do evil things that good things may come of it." Francis Godet, also, noted when grace is seen as God forgiving without any corresponding act of repentance on our part, it becomes a leniency that opens us up to the idea that the end we seek in life will justify any means to getting there. This argument, Godet interpreted, "has always been sought to justify the greatest crimes in history by representing the advantages in which they have resulted to the cause of humanity." Grace is not a license to do evil.

If God works all things for the good [Romans 8:28] or, as with Joseph of old, "what man intended for evil, God purposed for good" [Genesis 50:20]—if these be so—is it just or right for God to judge? If He created the Torah only to accuse us of an evil, of what by nature we had become, have we not made Him more glorious by contrast? Why His wrath then?

One can see how divine grace has been abused. Ultimately, this idea claims, God, who has no favorites, must save everyone. We know this is unscriptural. What has been forgotten is that restoration is always preceded by true repentance. Repentance is turning around and returning to

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2. Dietrich Bonhoeffer. *The Cost of Discipleship*. (Touchstone Books. NY:1959), page 84

3. Francis Godet. "Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans" (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing, 1970), page 93.

## Grace Is Not a License to Sin

God. And this means a restored relationship, a reconciliation, with our Creator. "...we know that all things do work together for good," Paul noted, but the caveat is "to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose" Grace is not a divine entitlement.

### **Grace Is Free, Not Cheap**

It is the plague of youth to not "know the value of a dollar" (one of dad's favorite sayings). I flunked out of college the second year because I didn't take my education seriously. Courses I didn't want to take I treated with disinterest—even disdain (a fact I regret since I could use that knowledge now). Years later I returned to college—now a married man with 3 sons—and somewhere between then and now I grew up. I graduated this time summa cum laude. In my youth I didn't know the value of an education. When we don't pay for it, we tend not to see the value of it—whatever "it" is. And this is seemingly true for some "would-be" Christians.

Some spiritually young Christians among the Jews were not valuing their salvation as they should have [Hebrews 5:12-6:1]—if I may be blunt—because they didn't pay for it. (Jesus did!) They were flunking out instead of graduating, learning to live the message of grace [Hebrews 6:6]. Paul, though, did not write them off as ignorant or unteachable [Hebrews 6:9]. That wasn't it. They simply didn't value the grace of God as it should have been, like me as a young man in my first college experience.

Dietrich Bonhoeffer correctly taught that God's grace is free but not cheap. Not only did it cost the Savior to provide it but it includes a cross also for each of us following Him [Matthew 16:24]. God saved us as a total act of mercy requiring no effort or task on our part [except to believe, allow Him to do so] but going forward grace requires that we "work out our own salvation" [Philippians 2:12] "with fear and trembling," i.e. with a single focus as the most

## Grace Is Not a License to Sin

important thing we could ever do. But are we going on the strength of our own will? No! "For it is God who works in us" [Philippians 2:13] both "to will and do of His good pleasure," [no better definition of grace than this!]. Psalm 115:3 "Our God is in heaven and does whatever he pleases." And what He "pleases" is to be reconciled to us and be in covenant relation with us. A relationship is a commitment to participate in a harmonious union with Him. Dietrich Bonhoeffer tells us "...grace and discipleship are inseparable."

### **Grace is not above God's Justice**

Grace does not preclude (or prevent) judgment. Francis Godet contended, "No final judgment is any longer possible if the beneficial consequences of sin ... justify the sinner." In other words: if we allow sinning as a means to some good end [and that end would be grace saving us], that end, then, [saving grace] would justify the sinning? There could be no final judgment.

But mercy is not fooled. "Be not deceived; God is not mocked: for whatsoever a man sows, that shall he also reap." [Galatians 6:7]. The HeartKnower knows a true request for mercy and He always responds in love: "a broken and a contrite heart, God, will not disregard" [Psalm 51:17].

Mercy is not naiveté. Mercy is not forgiveness without a life-changing act of repentance. Mercy has a judgment to perform, something atheism will mistakenly label vengeance or brutality. No one is more capable of wielding a sword victoriously than the merciful. Said another way, believers should rightly see God's mercy even in His judgment—especially in His judgment. God's reaction is not vengeful as much as it is the expression of the highest love. Isaiah, using God's word for judgment (vengeance) records the Lord's mindset: "For the day of vengeance *is* in mine heart, and the year of my redeemed is come" [Isaiah

## Grace Is Not a License to Sin

63:4]. God burns the tares in harvesting the wheat. God's judgment and His redemption are one and the same act of Divine love.

### **Grace does not react to sin**

"Shall we continue in sin, that grace may abound?" [Romans 6:1]. To see grace as an act of forgiveness without repentance, is to make grace [or mercy or God's kindness] sin's servant [Romans 6:19]. Sin does not have authority over grace. Grace has authority over sin!

God has deemed we share in that victory by allowing God's work in us to be perfected with our co-operation by yielding to His Spirit [Philippians 2:12-13]. "I am crucified with Christ," Paul explained, "nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me: and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of [trusting in] the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me. I do not frustrate the grace of God" [Galatians 2:20-21].

There is no sin God's grace cannot conquer! Paul clarified, "...where sin abounded, grace abounded much more" [Romans 5:20]. In the war for the souls of men, God's victory over sin is decisive [Colossians 2:15].

### **Is Grace Irresistible?**

1 Corinthians 15:10 in the NLT reads "But whatever I am now, it is all because God poured out his special *favor* on me—and not without results. For I have worked harder than any of the other apostles; yet it was not I but God who was working through me by his grace." This translation debates some of our conclusions using the word *favor*, adding "not without results" which translated the word *vain* in the King James version. It also says God's grace is doing the work *through* us. How do we interpret the word, *through*. A better translation reads "But by the grace of God I have become what I am; and his grace to me was not in vain, but I worked

## Grace Is Not a License to Sin

harder than all of them; and not me, but the grace of God with me." Let's look closely at this verse:

**Whatever I am now:** a saved believer and an apostle to the Gentiles.

**Not without results.** God's grace was not powerless in me

**Working** This was Paul's *laboring*: praying, toiling, traveling about [all this] but not without grace. Grace makes our efforts fruitful [Romans 15:19].

**Through me** - *with me*, Paul indicating how God's grace wants us to share in His great work. The dictionary understands this as the assistance of God's grace in our lives.<sup>4</sup>

It is this fellowship with the Spirit of God whether in prayer or laboring for the Kingdom that necessitates, on our part, a willing participation in God's calling and work. The grace of God assisting us (not in salvation but with salvation) makes a discussion of irresistibility non sequitur. The question is not whether or not we had a part in our own salvation. We didn't! Even our faith is a gift of God. The question is: Is it natural to continue in sin after salvation? No!

We are in covenant with God through Christ (Galatians 2:20) and regrettably our lack of a sense of devotion to the work of God, in us or through us ["with fear and trembling" - Philippians 2:12] grieves the Spirit of God [Ephesians 4:30]. This is not an argument against a genuine awareness of our security in Christ. But we are encouraged to overcome sin. "Put on your new nature, created to be like God—truly righteous and holy." [Ephesians 4:24 NLT]. There is a new you inside that wants out to live for Christ. Let him/her!

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4. Joseph Thayers. *Thayer's Greek-English Lexicon*. (Hendrickson Publishers, 1996), page 598.

## Grace Is Not God's Favor

*God's response may appear to be one thing for one person but something else for another, but He is always and only a HOLY God.  
"God shows personal favoritism to no man" - Galatians 2:6*

There remains a tinge of favoritism in our understanding of grace [Acts 25:3, 9] that needs to be corrected. "He makes His sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust" [Matthew 5:45]. My uncle one afternoon responding to a 5 year old's inquisitiveness who asked why it rains, explained, "to provide water for the garden." To which the lad retorted, "Why, then, does it rain on the sidewalk?" We, indeed, often use logic to explain what we clearly do not know enough about to make such assumptions. And sometimes our logic suggests God does have favorites—even though He told us multiple times this isn't so.

Some Biblical terms suggest God shows favoritism because the *translation* of some words are nuanced in our language to conclude as much.

### **Rewards and Awards**

*Rewards* is an example. Are these not handed out for excellence in something accomplished? "I have fought a good fight," Paul spoke confidently, "I have finished my course, I have kept the faith: henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness..." [2 Timothy 4:7-8]. Are not rewards a measure of personal achievement in some way? If

## Grace Is Not God's Favor

we maintain that those so rewarded are more worthy than those who do not receive such rewards, are we not defining grace as merited? Do we mean to suggest this! Since such "excellence" brings the reward, does it not sound reasonable to say that the reward was "earned"? How is this idea to be placed into the picture of God's grace? It doesn't seem to fit!

AH! "But," some will argue, "the reward is itself the gift of grace! We would not have achieved it without Him!" Or one might contend, "Salvation, itself, is not an award or rewarded because it is not of ourselves" [Ephesians 2:8]. But this must limit an understanding of salvation to the moment when one is saved [John 1:12] or a positional salvation, but, as we will argue, grace is not only positional.

In Ephesians 6:8 Paul, in underlining the importance of pleasing God and not man, taught, "Knowing that whatever good thing any man does, the same shall he receive of the Lord..." To the Corinthians, Paul wrote that God plans to torch the results of a lifetime of activity and (Young's translation alone used the word *wage* while all other English translations called it a reward—a distinction without a difference) , "if of any one the work doth remain that he built on it, a wage he shall receive" [1 Corinthians 3:14]. Whatever this wage represents, it doesn't impact our salvation [1 Corinthians 3:15]. But the question remains: if we receive wages, does that not mean God's grace now is in some regard dependent on what we do and not solely on God? And if this be true, is this not favoritism? Or just maybe, as in Jesus' story of the vineyard [Matthew 20], everyone receives the same reward.

Regarding the sinner, Paul calls his wages: *death* [Romans 6:23; 2 Corinthians 11:8] or "the hire sin pays"<sup>1</sup> but the apostle is quick to change the wording with the believer; eternal life is a "*gift of God*" [Romans 6:23, italics added].

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1. Joseph Thayer. *Thayer's Greek-English Lexicon*. Hendrickson Publishers. Peabody MA.: 14th printing, 2019) page. 471.

## Grace Is Not God's Favor

Peter agrees about the sinner calling them dumb animals who deserve “the wages for their harmful ways” [2 Peter 2:13].

In 2 Corinthians 5:10 the NIV translates the word *reward* as “what is due us.” But in Colossians 3:25 Paul seems to contradict himself [?]. The NIV reads, “Anyone who does wrong will be *repaid* for their wrongs, and there is no *favoritism*” [Italics added]. Here, the dictionary clarifies, Paul’s use of the word *favoritism* speaks of a *partiality* that is based on one’s station in life, one’s class, “and not their intrinsic merits.”<sup>2</sup> So the NET offers another understanding of Colossians 3:25 “For the one who does wrong will be repaid for his wrong, and there are no *exceptions*.” [Italics added].

But isn’t a believer’s *intrinsic merit* “Christ in you” [Colossians 1:27]? Returning to Ephesians 6:7-8, “good things ...done” are defined as “doing the will of God *from the heart*” [Italics added]. To this, Eadie in Lange confessed, “The Christian doctrine of reward is often lost site of or kept in abeyance, as if it were not perfectly consistent with the freest bestowment of heavenly glory.”<sup>3</sup>

When this is all digested we must take care not to impose an idea on Scripture that as regards grace is self-contradicting! Some believers might imagine rewards being distributed in Heaven based on our accomplishments in this life, but if those accomplishments go to the credit of God’s grace, a point Paul makes repeatedly [Romans 12:3, 6; 15:15], it seems less likely that Paul would imagine anything more than receiving a crown of righteousness [2 Timothy 4:8]. James and Peter agreed [James 1:12; 1 Peter 5:4].

Favoritism is earned because by its very nature, it is selective. Unconditional favor is an oxymoron. In the arena

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2. Ibid. page 551.

3. John Peter Lange..*Ephesians* (Zondervan, Grand Rapids, MI: 7th printing, 1980) Vol XI, page 218

## Grace Is Not God's Favor

of human reasoning *unmerited* and *rewarded* are mutually exclusive ideas! So, how do we reconcile in our reasoning, “what is due” with “no favoritism” We need to ask ourselves: does our understanding of this word, found in our New Testament, fit the Pauline idea of grace?

Here is where some will conclude that if we sin, it is our fault; if we do good; the credit goes to God. And if grace is a vital part of our Christian life, how is this not a most reasonable thing to conclude. Paul said it best “Christ lives in me. So the life I now live in the body, I live because of the faithfulness of the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me” [Galatians 2:20].

### **Grace Influenced by Dispensationalism**

Maybe grace has a dispensational meaning to its use in Scripture. After all, God made Adam and Eve “one” and then later allowed divorce among men, which He hated. And we already know that the Old Testament use of the term, grace, meant “favoritism.” Dispensationalism is a biblical idea, to be sure [John 14:17]—not to be overstated.

Also, how many Biblical terms are there that might have a distinct “Jewish” flavor to them? Take, for example, the word “right” in Acts 8:21 “having a heart right with God.” Paul, early in his ministry, used the term in Acts 13:10 speaking of the “right” ways of God. Everywhere else Paul used the word “righteousness” which had a greater significance to gentile converts. We know that Jesus during His sojourn here had to utilize Jewish metaphor, parables, and ideas in talking about God’s Kingdom. The religious world was not yet ready for the Pauline idea of grace.

How unmerited is *dispensational* grace? If we are true dispensationalists [a belief in stages to God's revelation and plan of salvation] we might feel that at Jesus' death and resurrection, God transferred His affections to His Church and no longer cares about Israel, His Old Testament people.

## Grace Is Not God's Favor

This is favoritism and it is not biblical grace! "God has not cast away His people, Israel." Paul corrected us [Romans 3:1; 11:1]. God's grace is no respecter of persons [Acts 10:34]. It was on this principle of God's mercy, Paul could affirm that the invitation to come to salvation was now extended also to the Gentiles. In fact, that was God's heart all along!

Can we accept as an act of an unmerited choice of God to prefer Jacob over Esau for the Savior's lineage? But grace is now an eternal matter not a chronological one. How is it not favoritism if God chooses one over another for eternal salvation? It should seem obvious that we have something wrong in this reasoning. We are, little doubt, ascribing to Pauline words our own cultural meanings and at times ending up where we might not want to end up—logically.

What we contend, scripturally, is that the "Heart-knower" has foreknowledge about you and me and all His creation that He alone is privileged to. So maintaining that the Scriptures can be divided along dispensational boundaries chronologically does not need to weaken the Pauline concept of God's grace. When God seems to have favorites based upon His choices, we must concede our ignorance in areas in which He is most wise. His grace is not thereby tainted with favoritism. Every divine gift is still distributed—not on the basis of merit or worth but upon faith, an idea which itself is a gift of God—lavished upon us in which the only requirement is an open hand to receive them.

### **Never Assume ... Only Believe**

If we see only a positional salvation, an act of God to save or not save, we are susceptible to false assumptions about grace. If we argue, however, for a dynamic, growing, living, relationship between us and God, God is not obligated to be consistent in the type or kind of blessing He bestows, only in His attention to each of us (like a parent

## Grace Is Not God's Favor

toward a child). For believers to audit what they think is the amount of attention God gives one believer over another, how often each one's prayers are answered, or how more spiritual one believer is than another, is to suggest, by making comparisons, that God has favorites.

We might argue that the difference in such blessings is not on God's part but the believer's (for example: whether or not they tithe according to Malachi 3:10) but then God would be reacting to each believer on the basis of their behavior which is reciprocity, which is favoritism.

The omniscient God Who foreknows us [Romans 8:27-29] does not react because He does not need to. The need to wait on our behavior, to react to what we do, does not exist with God. He knows all things ahead of time. This would be favoritism if our behavior—and not His desire toward us—moved Him to bless us.

Did Jesus have favorites when He took Peter, James and John on special field trips into mountains and homes leaving the other 9 to face opposition and challenging situations in His absence [Matthew 9:2 & 14]? Or did their ministries or their spiritual growth require these moments alone with the Savior? And how sure are we that Jesus did *not* give special attention to the others. The account of Jesus' appearances after His resurrection bring other disciples like Philip and Thomas into relief [John 14:5 & 9].

### **Anselm**

Anselm, Archbishop of Canterbury, almost 1000 years ago, explained why Jesus had to be both divine *and* human, "Our situation is compounded by the fact that in order to compensate God we need to give back more than we owed originally and by the gravity of our offense, having dishonored God, so that the debt we have incurred is of infinite proportion. So **no one but God could pay a debt** of such magnitude, but **no one but man is obliged to pay it.**

## Grace Is Not God's Favor

(Cur Deus homo 2.6)<sup>4</sup> It follows that our salvation requires God become man." The idea of favoritism has no part in any of this because Jesus did it for all. His responses may appear, at times, in our misdirected logic, to be one thing for one person but something else for another, but He is always and only a HOLY God. And our debt is always and only beyond our capacity to pay back God's goodness. If this be so, how can we speak of merit or worth in the matter of grace!

### **The Condition of Each Heart**

But why treat King Saul different than King David? [1 Samuel 18:12, 19:9, 28:6; 2 Samuel 3:1, 18] The obvious answer was the condition of each man's heart. David confessed his sin in covenant language because his covenant was with God alone, "Against You, You only, have I sinned, And done this evil in Your sight—That You may be found just when You speak, And blameless when You judge" [Psalm 51:4]. The Heart-knower, knew David's heart was "after His own" [1 Samuel 13:14], but Saul's was not [1 Samuel 9:19]. Believers know that what God wants is our love, our hearts, in covenant relation with His. If there is favoritism, it is in our interpretation or understanding—not in the heart of God.

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4. William Lane. Craig. *Atonement and the Death of Christ: An Exegetical, Historical, and Philosophical Exploration*. (Baylor University Press , Waco, TX.: 2020 ) page 118.

## Grace Is Not Only Positional

*Grace is God in Covenant Relationship with Us*

*“But we all, with unveiled face, beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory, just as by the Spirit of the Lord.” - 2 Corinthians 3:18*

### Grace as a Status

Salvation is more than status. Salvation is a relationship with Christ. We are to “grow up into him in all things” [Ephesians 4:15] which is the dynamic salvation has brought. It is true that salvation is a spiritual state. There is no such thing as partially saved, but how is it possible for us to commit even 1 sin after that? John told us “Those who have been born into God’s family do not make a practice of sinning, because God’s life is in them. So they can’t keep on sinning, because they are children of God.” [1 John 3:9 NLT]. Still sinning but saved is not the Bible message!.

The Jews, however, argued that Paul was reasoning:

- ◆ When we sin, God shows mercy.
- ◆ When God shows mercy He is fulfilling His Covenant.
- ◆ Therefore, let’s sin so that God can be faithful to His Covenant.

They could also have accused Paul of thinking that God’s mercy or His forgiveness is needed because we sin; so, because God loves to show us mercy and be forgiving, we can keep sinning. When we call ourselves sinners only saved

## Grace Is Not Only Positional

by grace, we risk condoning sin when this is exactly what Paul was against.

In Romans 3:5 Paul repeated the Jewish argument: "If our breaking God's Law proves God's covenantal faithfulness, what are we saying: Is God unjust to bring down His wrath!? I am using your reasoning." Francis Godet concluded, "It is from the depths of the human conscience that the apostle fetches his question."<sup>1</sup> God's faithfulness cannot be a license for us to break covenant with God, no more than a spouse's faithfulness to the marriage contract would give their partner the freedom to be unfaithful.

## Our Redemption

Paul never spoke of Jesus as our redeemer, but rather, our *redemption!* [1 Corinthians 1:30]. We are not free to do whatever we will. Our freedom is a freedom to be in relationship with Christ, our continuing redemption. Christ redefines "freedom" in terms of this relationship. The New Covenant *is* Christ because it is a relationship with Him, it is practiced and made real to us by following Him.

When we say that Christ is the author of redemption instead of His Father, we fail to appreciate our daily need for redemption because our focus is on that historical event rather than the Christ-centric life we are admonished to live.

## Theological Static

I refer to a "static" theology in contrast to a dynamic theology. A static view of God's relation to us, as believers, sees only our position in Christ without reference to the dynamics of spiritual growth. A study of God should "spur [us] on to love and good works" [Hebrews 10:24]. A static view is a "faith without works" theology that projects a view

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1. Francis Godet. "Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans" (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing, 1970), page 136.

## Grace Is Not Only Positional

of God that, to use Dorothy Sayers words, “surround[s] [Jesus] with an atmosphere of tedium. We have very efficiently pared the claws of the Lion of Judah,” Sayers observed the preacher’s sermon, “certified him ‘meek and mild,’ and recommended him as a fitting household pet for pale curates and pious old ladies.”<sup>2</sup> A static theology encourages no movement, no advancement in the kingdom, no practical or applied view of Who God is in our lives that brings spiritual healing and growth. With a static theology of grace, we can debate biblical matters with no conviction because there is no work of grace that seems important past the moment of salvation. Saving faith alone seems worthy any serious theological thought. We tend to theologize about God as if He were a Being that could not relate to us in a way commensurate with where we are in our spiritual journey.

Static speaks to the never changing aspect of our salvation. In a static relationship, grace has the single task of keeping us from judgment [John 10:28-29; Romans 8:1]. To discuss theology as a dynamic relationship between God and us suggests that there are aspects to our spirituality which are ever changing, growing, learning, developing. This is at least implied in 2 Corinthians 3:18 where Paul speaks of our being changed “from glory to glory” [from God into us] into the same image (Christ-likeness) by the Spirit. Life is movement. Perhaps, we should say that movement indicates life. In death, all movement ends, all growth ends.

### Marriage

The best example of this is the marriage bond. It not only represents Christ and the believer in relationship [Ephesians 5:32] but many can relate to this dynamic on a human level. To some, sadly, marriage is just a legal contract which 2 people cannot disavow without attorneys and a lot

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2. Dorothy Sayers. *Creed Or Chaos* (Manchester, NH: Sophia Institute Press, 1974), 8ff

## Grace Is Not Only Positional

of money. When the contract represents the marriage, it is a static relation in which, possibly, love has long since abandoned but they must live separate lives together. A dynamic relation is one that recognizes that marriage is more than a wedding, it is a lifetime of accepting challenge, arguments and makeups, confrontation and discovery. Any marriage is filled with highs and lows. But these 2 are discovering that there is a difference between love and romance. A wife discovers that her “man” is more than her protector; he has needs. A husband is discovering that a wife is not a “doll” to play with but there is a real woman inside her worth knowing. This is a dynamic relationship, and in a sense, so it is between us and God.

Grace has not abandoned us and never, ever, will [Hebrews 13:5]. Grace does not merely save us; it aids us in the daily challenge of living. The mantra, “Godliness is living life with one eye on God” like a ceaseless prayer-life [1 Thessalonians 5:17] is far more descriptive of our relationship with God and His grace. “Now He who searches the hearts knows what the mind of the Spirit is, because He makes intercession for the saints according to the will of God.” [Romans 8:27]. The Spirit’s rather intimate and personal involvement in our lives speaks to this dynamic relationship.

### **Job**

In grief, we need that divine relationship with the God of peace and not a theological explanation. Just ask Job. His friend Eliphaz argued that innocent persons do not suffer [Job 4]. Bildad told him God rewards the Good [Job 8]. Zophar rebuked Job [Job 11:1] not because he was indifferent to his friend’s pain but because he struggled to recognize what part God played in all of this for Job [Job 11:5]. We should be grateful to The Lord and Job for allowing us to eavesdrop on his troubles and peek in on his pain. Everywhere in this text, if you look for it, you will find grace

## Grace Is Not Only Positional

at work. It was as if God wrote the script of a story about someone who would experience every trial and heartache known to man, so that we could read how grace works when God's Job even on an ash heap keeps his faith and determines never let go of the God who is his only source of help.

And speaking of the marriage relationship, most advice is one sided by friends who mean well but who could not begin to understand what a couple are feeling and thinking. Every relationship is different because the 2 people who make up that relationship are different. We need the Lord not another theological discussion. We need to focus on our relationship with Him which began that moment He entered our hearts.

### **Controversy**

Many of the controversies within Christianity arise because we have taken a snapshot of the moment of salvation and not the movie of the life of the believer in relation with their Lord. Even the term "believer" speaks to the trust we have, the faith, with Christ. We can argue theology because it ceases to have relevance in life itself. These dogmatic differences grow in a theological medium of a positional Salvation [again: though, the moment of Salvation marks our new position in Christ]. These debates are challenged when the emphasis is put on yielding to the Spirit, following Christ and living life with one eye on God [relational] while we "grow in grace, and in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ" [2 Peter 3:18].

I have discovered that as believers we can discuss doctrine with disinterest—other than winning an argument. And unless, as believers, we have a commitment to peace, this might lead to division. Churches are fragmented over such matters and few, it seems, are serious about the impact all this might have on young believers.

## Grace Is Not Only Positional

Because dissension around doctrine within some congregations is a constant concern, one pastor informed me that his solution was kicking out all those who disagreed with him. There can be no infighting if the quarrelers have all left, but this thins the ranks considerably. The larger the church, the more likely that everyone does not hold to the same understanding over doctrine. Within one denomination, I was informed, the denominational position on a subject is not necessarily that of any particular member of that church. This is more likely to be true if those in attendance are not weekly encouraged to live their faith and let the grace of God have its perfect work in them [Hebrews 13:21]. A practicing faith needs no further apologetic or defense. The dynamic of grace is God at work within each believer and collectively within Christian community [1 Thessalonians 4:9] bringing us together.

### Deeper Thoughts

This is difficult to delineate because it sounds like I am creating controversy to speak against controversy. No. There is no biblical topic off limits to hungry hearts. And in our hunger to know God's Word, we often over emphasize points of interest and major in minors—at least according to someone who disagrees with us. Disagreement peacefully administered is healthy. How else do we learn? We are not suggesting that there is something more to discover than what Jesus did and taught, as if to conclude that the Savior's death and resurrection is not everything to believers. They are! But we are saying that the provisions of Calvary are God's grace at work [Romans 8:4]. Grace is more than our theologies. God is not limited to what we think we know about His Word. He often escapes the enclosure of our understanding to do something that is awesomely mind-blowing. Jesus' words have a spiritual meaning to us, "Launch out into the deep, and let down your nets for a draught" [Luke 5:4].

## Grace Is Not Contrary to God's Law

*Following Christ frees us from all forms of religious legalism.  
“Do we then make void the law through faith? Certainly not! On the contrary, we  
establish the law.” - Romans 3:31*

Living by grace frees us from all forms of religious legalism but this does not mean we are living outside law. The grace of God authenticates God's law. “The law was our schoolmaster to bring us unto Christ [Galatians 3:24]. God's grace has written His law on our hearts. “The righteousness of the law [is] fulfilled in us, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit.” [Romans 8:4]. The Old Testament Law—all 614 injunctions—were fulfilled in Christ, not torn up or annulled [Matthew 5:17].

The Old Testament Law verified our need of a redemption found only in Christ. In Romans 3:20 Paul taught, “By the law is the knowledge of sin.” In Romans 3:10 he wrote, “There is none righteous, no, not one” The Law was the shadow of God's Holiness cast upon the record of history [Hebrews 10:1]. We have called the law the antitype [the symbol] of Christ.

### **Grace is a Freedom from Legalism**

Romans 6:14 “You are not under the law, but under grace.” Grace demonstrates that God's law was not meant to deny us freedom, culturally imprison us, or through self-denial obligate us to an unhappy life [Matthew 5:3-12]. God's grace releases us from the anxiety of being personally

## Grace Is Not Contrary to God's Law

responsible for our future happiness because grace leads us in the path of a divine calling [Matthew 11:28-30] in which God's provisions supply our necessities [Philippians 4:18]. Religion, now, becomes a personal choice, within the Christian message. The church organ or church pews are no longer a necessary aspect of a spiritual experience or worship service because we are free to serve God from the heart and choose what expressions of that worship will be ritualized. It isn't the church building or the spirituality it depicts that is necessary any longer but the fellowship and the praying together, and coming under sound Biblical teaching. Some even do this wearing slacks and sneakers. (And this I am sharing because it's true not because I don't miss the organ or I don't dress up for Sunday—I do!)

### **Following Christ**

But we are still left with an abstract idea: What does it mean to *follow* Jesus? The church's attempt at an answer often reduces to a legalism or a religious duty and not a changed life. One of Jesus' last instructions sounds straight forward enough: "...observe all, whatever I did command you, and lo, I am with you..." [Matthew 28:20]. Bonhoeffer says it well, "When we are called to follow Christ, we are summoned to an exclusive attachment to his person. The grace of his call bursts all the bonds of legalism. It is a gracious call, a gracious commandment. It transcends the difference between the law and the gospel. Christ calls, the disciple follows, that is grace and commandment in one. "I will walk at liberty, for I seek Thy commandments" [Psalm 119:45]. Said differently: If we are following Christ as He encouraged us to do by inviting us to join Him in loving each other and the lost, what other instruction would we need? None! When we are expressing the fruit of the Spirit there is no law written as powerful as this one written on the heart [Galatians 5:22-23]. Grace is the Gift of God Himself in a reconciled relationship with us. Bishop Lightfoot on Paul's

## Grace Is Not Contrary to God's Law

letter to the Philippians wrote: "Though the gospel is capable of doctrinal exposition, though it is eminently fertile in moral results, yet its substance is neither a dogmatic system nor ethical code, but a **Person** and a **Life**."<sup>1</sup>

### Is Forgiveness Grace or Mercy?

Following Torah Law, in the minds of its followers, was all about forgiveness [Leviticus 19:22; 1 Kings 8:30]. But God never held them in unforgiveness [Numbers 14:20; Romans 3:25]. He held them in unbelief in order to make them candidates for His mercy [Romans 11:32; Galatians 3:22]. Calvary is an answer more in response to His grace than His wrath. P. T. Forsyth, the Scottish theologian of early last century, wrote, "The atonement did not procure grace; it flowed from grace."<sup>2</sup> John Calvin agreeably commented, "The work of atonement derives from God's love, therefore it did not establish it."<sup>3</sup>

On Luke 23:34 where Jesus announces His forgiveness upon those who were putting Him to death, we read a curious note. "These words are absent in the early and diverse witnesses."<sup>4</sup> Bruce Metzger added, "... [this thought] though probably not a part of the original Gospel of Luke, bears self evident tokens of its ... origin, and was retained ... in its traditional place by unknown copyists relatively early in transmission of the Third Gospel."<sup>5</sup> It might have been that Christ's forgiveness was made clear in the text because it is self-evident in His death for our sins! In law this is a *res ipse loquitur*, something that speaks for itself. This

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1. J. B. Lightfoot. *Saint Paul's Epistles to the Philippians*. (Zondervan Publishing Company. Grand Rapids, MI: 15<sup>th</sup> printing. 1976) Introduction

2. P. T. Forsyth. *The Cruciality of the Cross*. (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1909) p.78. cp. Stott. 172

3. Calvin's Institutes 2.16.4

4. Bruce Metzger. *A Textual Commentary of the Greek New Testament*. (United Bible Societies.. London-New York: 3<sup>rd</sup> edition. 1975), page 180.

5. Ibid.

## Grace Is Not Contrary to God's Law

forgiveness announced from the Cross by our Savior has been rightfully retained in every version of our Bible in interpreting the event.

Mercy is the Old Testament word because it excludes an entitled favoritism. It is a pure act—non-reciprocated—of lessening another's poverty or pain. Mercy is responding to suffering with love or dealing with another's shame and remorse through forgiveness.

We are most likely to be a bit confused over grace and mercy—which is which—because they go to the heart and mind of God, a heart and mind we, as believers, are still discovering. Even the Hebrews were confused. In the later writings the term '*grace*' in their language was replaced by the word '*mercy*.' Here are some explanations that might help:

- ◆ One of my college professors taught that mercy is God's way of dealing with everything that is wrong in me while His grace is His way of dealing with everything that is wrong in my world, my circumstances, relationships, etc. (I cannot make such a clear distinction between them.)
- ◆ Mercy is more a judicial term [a merciful judge] and grace is God laying aside the judicial process altogether in a loving regard for our human condition.
- ◆ Mercy removes the bad and grace provides the good in its place?
- ◆ Johann Albrecht Bengel taught: *grace removes guilt; mercy removes misery.*
- ◆ Richard Trench concurred: "The [grace] of God, the gift of his free grace that is displayed in the forgiveness of sins, is extended to men as they are guilty, his [mercy] as they are miserable." An explanatory rendering of John 3:16 might read: "God so loved the world with a pitying love (mercy) that

## Grace Is Not Contrary to God's Law

he gave his only begotten Son (grace) that the world through him might be saved.”

- ◆ “Mercy is God not punishing us as our sins deserve, and grace is God blessing us despite the fact that we do not deserve it. Mercy is deliverance from judgment. Grace is extending kindness to the unworthy.”

The grace of God is the ultimate explanation that makes sense out of all biblical history, the ultimate expression of His mercy. Grace is the only theological term we really need learn. Since the term means ‘gift’ we can and should say simply that grace is the gift of all things from God beginning with and proceeding from His death. But this is far too simplistic; we are substituting one word ‘grace’ for another ‘salvation.’

Grace is more the *act* of God *giving* than the gift. It is more like knowing the chef and not just the taste of His cuisine. In saying: “The exceeding riches of his grace in his kindness toward us through Christ Jesus” Paul is referring to “the wealth of His kindness through Christ Jesus.” *Kindness* is not a commodity but a term of relationship. God is engaged in giving of Himself...to us. His love is inexhaustible.

God keeps giving and giving causing our salvation to take on deeper meaning and significance as we go deeper and deeper into relationship with Him—a relationship that in eternity at long last will be unhindered by our human weakness to temptation and our inability to comprehend deeper, more profound, truth about God.

What other gift might we want when we get there? What else dare we cherish above the divine provision that took the crucifixion of our Savior to provide? This is to say, then, that if I can comprehend what the grace of God is all about, I can comprehend the depth of His love for me. “He that spared not his own Son, but delivered him up for us all,

## Grace Is Not Contrary to God's Law

how shall he not with him also freely give us all things?" [Romans 8:32]

When our eternity begins in earnest in His revealed presence, then, I dare to think, we will finally begin to understand more fully the divine logic behind everything God did on our behalf. We will, then, find completely reasonable how a merciful God could have taken responsibility for—or why He permitted—much of the ‘evil’ that is in our history and in our world [Isaiah 45:7]. And foundational to all this, grace will finally explain Calvary.

### A Heavenly Culture

Grace is heaven’s *modus operandi* or the way relationships in heaven will be established and expressed. Grace is the driving energy behind the agape love that will unite us and govern our actions. God’s grace underwrites the theocracy we will peacefully enjoy, which we have known simply as “The love of God.” Paul was not speaking metaphorically when he claimed that “our citizenship is in heaven” [Philippians 3:20]. And Jesus was being quite literal when He spoke to Nicodemus about being “born again” [John 3:7] Paul’s teaching, as well, that “old things have passed .. All things [are] new” [2 Corinthians 5:17] is not some philosophical double-talk but a description of the change God has made in us in preparation for living forever with Him [2 Timothy 1:9; Philippians 2:12-13].

When Paul spoke of grace in this setting [Ephesians 2:7] he called it exceeding—more than ever could be exhausted as a resource in multiple eternities [ages is plural]. Paul saw this grace, simply, as our Lord’s *kindness* because this word best explains God’s heart to us who are spiritual infants in understanding and comprehension. Because God is eternal, grace must be, because grace is God’s gift of himself in reconciled relationship with us [John 3:16]. And because grace is eternal, time is no longer a word or idea.

## Grace Is Not Contrary to God's Law

Time no longer exists because death and decay no longer exist [1 Corinthians 15:53].

God's grace is the divine love that began with Calvary and now defines heaven itself. Paul asked, "He that spared not his own Son, but delivered him up for us all, how shall he not with him also freely give us all things?" [Romans 8:32]. Grace is the force behind the new and only covenant in Christ—the only covenant we will ever need or want. It has replaced law codes [John 1:17 It is the law written on our hearts [Ezekiel 36:26] and transforming our minds [Romans 12:2] and giving us a divine perspective that makes written law, simply, unnecessary [Galatians 5:23]. Paul calls us living epistles [2 Corinthians 3:3] because no moral or ethical truth need be expounded beyond the testimony we will become [1 John 3:2].

There can be, for example, no bribes offered in heaven, no deception, or hidden agenda because there can be no selfishness, no "me and not thee" principle at work, no greed [no reason to hoard] because grace is pure giving and caring and loving. The very grace that forgave us, will have no need of forgiveness there because we will not only be at peace with one another, but we will be makers of peace. There will be no hate, no revenge, no gossip or accusing spirit, no devil! God's gift of His Son becomes the light that expels the darkness and now fills heaven with its brightness [Revelation 21:23; 22:5].

In this life freedom is expressed in terms of individual achievement, the right to an individual opinion, the spirit of competition, striving for a better life. Heaven's freedom will be based upon the liberty that is found in Christ and a joyous and satisfying love relationship with God. James called it "the perfect law of liberty" [James 1:25] which brings blessing [happiness].

In heaven none of us will seek God's authority for ourselves. No one will want to be in power over any one else. We will have servants' hearts. The condition that

## Grace Is Not Contrary to God's Law

characterized Lucifer's actions and thoughts will not exist in us [Revelation 12:9].

Christian community and fellowship will be enriched by it, because mercy—a synonym for grace—will have no need to care for. We will lack nothing [Psalm 23:1]. We will want for nothing [Philippians 4:18-19]. There will be no illness there. No poverty on any level or in any form.

In this life there was before Christ came into our hearts the risk of emotional bankruptcy, of being hurt, marginalized, misunderstood, unloved, but the grace that saved us and drew us to Christ and began to reveal God's heart and love to us, will become limitless in the unrestricted, sinless, community of heaven. There, those who have been family outcasts or known familial abuse in this life will discover an exciting truth in the words "Abba, Father." All our joy will require a new language if we are to speak of it then [1 Peter 1:8]. It will not be merely glorious but "full of glory," a veritable ostentatious display of God's excitement in at long last having us home to love [Zephaniah 3:17].

### **The Arrabon**

Paul referred to the Spirit as the *Arrabon* of God [2 Corinthians 5:5] which comes from an Old Testament word meaning "to give in pledge" In Isaiah 38:14 we read these words "undertake for me, Lord, in my oppression." This might be better translated: "guarantee my deliverance and safety," Genesis 38:17 Judah guaranteed payment to a prostitute for her services by giving her his signet ring [as a pledge]. In Proverbs 11:15 Solomon spoke of such a guarantee or surety, "He that is surety for a stranger shall smart for it." This is to say, that it is unwise to co-sign for a car for a stranger, even if they claim to also be Christian. My mom did this and in her widowhood had to work to pay it off, because the party who received the car failed to make payments. Mom was surety for the loan. Our house was probably collateral. Solomon concluded, "he that hates

## Grace Is Not Contrary to God's Law

suretyship is sure.” In English: Shaking hands on such a pledge is a fool’s trust! A free translation of Proverbs 24:21 might read, “My son, fear the LORD and ... don’t go into pledges or bargains with those who don’t keep their word.”

Paul lifted this word out of its world of bargains and deals and elevated it into a heavenly conversation about the Spirit which God gifted us as a guarantee of heaven to come. Since the Spirit is the guarantee, He doesn’t just pledge us a glimpse of heaven, He is, Himself, that very pledge. I can reason that everything the Spirit does and offers, all of which comes through Christ, is descriptive of the new world to come. So later we can view the Fruit of the Spirit, for example, as characterizing Christian Culture in heaven elevated to a glorious state. Grace is the language.

Tucked away in the folds of the Biblical narrative are some interesting descriptives of a heaven with qualities that speak the language of grace. Perhaps, when James says “every good and perfect gift comes from God” we might understand this to mean “everything God gives us is good and perfect” because everything He gives is in reality an aspect of who He is, and this has to be, in turn, a description of heaven. Is not the final chapter of Ezekiel’s prophecy a description of the new Jerusalem [equally as beautiful a description in Revelation 21]? And what makes this heaven? Simply because, “The LORD is there.” [Ezekiel 48:35] or as John saw it: “And I saw no temple therein: for the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb are the temple of it” [Revelation 21:22].

In the language of grace—in Scripture—these are attributes of God. When someone called Jesus “good” the Savior remonstrated “Only God is good!” [Mark 10:18]. He had a different meaning for the word because alongside the Father what man can call themselves “good” [Psalm 14:3].

We have been spending pages and pages on the word gift as an aspect of grace—unearned, undeserved, etc. And *perfect* is another word that has challenged are theological

## Grace Is Not Contrary to God's Law

acumen. If we wish to call ourselves perfect see if James 3:2 describes us: "If any man offend not in word, the same is a perfect man, and able also to bridle the whole body." *Perfect*, according to the Theological Dictionary, describes one "who does the whole will of God ... [whose] heart is undivided in obedience to God."<sup>6</sup> Or as Paul explained to the Colossians in a rather colloquial way: "standing resolute and confident in what God desires for your life [Colossians 4:12; Romans 12:2]. Perfect is often a synonym for "infinite and eternal." A perfect love is unlimited in scope and leaves no room for fear [1 John 4:18]. So, again, we should not be surprised to learn that the word *perfection* in our Bible is an uncommon term. "Applied to man," the Dictionary reads, "it denotes the highest stage of humanity which is reached with the vision of God."<sup>7</sup> It is a blessing "which God alone can give."<sup>8</sup> According to Hebrews 6:1 perfection is going on to applying the entire counsel of God as part of our testimony to the world of what salvation is all about. Speaking of repentance and faith, as dynamic a message as this remains, is only pre-school discourse of spiritual children around the sandbox of a Christianity at religious play.

The difficulty with our use of words like *gift*, *good*, and *perfect* is that in our imagination these describe what heaven will provide. With God, these are what heaven will be because He is there! In Hebrews 1:3 "the brightness of his glory" is nothing other than "the express image of his person." We won't need the sun because we will have the sun: "And the city had no need of the sun ... to shine in it: for ... the Lamb is the light thereof" [Revelation 21:23]. What is love none other than God Himself! [1 John 4:8].

*Holy* is not descriptive of God's actions as much as a description of who He is. "As a predicate of God, 'to be holy'

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6. Gerhard Kittel. *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*. (Wm. B Eerdmans Publishing Company, Grand Rapids, MI: 1974), vol VIII. page 73.

7. *Ibid.* page 78.

8. *Ibid.*

## Grace Is Not Contrary to God's Law

[in the Old Testament] comes to have the meaning of divine, and thus becomes an adjective for God"<sup>9</sup> We should not be surprised to learn that only God can say, "I will be sanctified [honored, treated with respect for who I am, holy] in [and among] you " [Ezekiel 20:41; 28:25; 38:16; 39:27]. This form of the word is only used of Him in the Old Testament! To define "holiness" is to fully understand and appreciate God, and this side of heaven, we are still working on this.

Zephaniah prophesied [Zephaniah 3:13] of a time of peace characterized by an honesty in which no forms of deception or dishonesty exist. And how is this grace? While the devil is the father of lies and his children follow in his steps [John 8:44] Jesus is *Truth* [John 14:6] and we will all be like *Him* [1 John 3:2].

According to Zechariah [Zechariah 3:17] festivals will be a regular feature but not because God will look ahead to Calvary in ceremony and sacrifice. We will look back with celebration on one Sacrifice at Calvary. This joy is beyond current description [1 Peter 1:8]. And how is this grace? Joy is a Fruit of the Spirit and He is the Arrabon.

Some of the Beatitudes clearly represent heavenly traits, because Jesus so designated them in Matthew 5 in the Sermon on the Mount: According to verse 3, the Kingdom of Heaven belongs to the "poor in spirit." Verse 7: tells us we will look upon the King of kings [see God] because we will be pure, in motive, in morals, and in love. We will have eyes capable of looking upon such a gloriously site [cp. Exodus 33:20].

### A Grace Culture

Imagine a grace culture in Heaven. This is more than a reference to the Savior's death and resurrection that by His grace made a way for us to be there. We will be Heaven's

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9. Gerhard Kittel. *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*. (Wm. B Eerdmans Publishing Company, Grand Rapids, MI: 1974), vol XI. page 90.

## Grace Is Not Contrary to God's Law

citizens [Philippians 3:20] which means we will participate in a culture and a language that must reflect the features of Heaven as God's kingdom. Because God is holy, heaven is holy [Revelation 21:2]. Because He is holy, so will we be [2 Peter 3:11].

As the saying goes: Christ did not die so much to get us into heaven as to get heaven into us! God's gift of heaven in us is itself His grace. There is no written code to define our relationships with one another. Grace has rewritten that code in its own language on the human heart making us citizens and not strangers to one another.

Imagine that upon arriving nothing seems unusual because we have already been in training by the Spirit's guidance [John 16:8-10; Galatians 5:22-25] to anticipate it [Jeremiahs 31:34]. The Fruit of the Spirit are not random ideas that sound good but a beautiful description of every believer, how we will act toward one another. We will love each other because Christ loves us [1 John 4:19; John 13:34; Romans 5:5].

Grace indeed has its own language. There is no word for "prejudice" or "class, race, gender, rich," or "poor" because grace does not recognize such distinctions. No one earned heaven. (If there is any talk of supremacy, it will be only praise to the Father.) Abusive language will not exist there because not only is heaven God's gift to us; *we* are God's gift to each other, and God's gifts are perfect [James 1:17].

James attempted to describe Heaven in our language, "the wisdom from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, accommodating, full of mercy and good fruit, impartial, and not hypocritical." [James 3:17 NET].

## Heaven Will Be Good

I think this is closer but still some distance from how things will actually be. In college when we measured

## Grace Is Not Contrary to God's Law

anything in the lab, we took more than 1, usually 3, readings from the scale. Then we threw out the lowest and highest and averaged the rest to get as close to the true measurement as we might.

Here is my measurement of James 3:17—I think it still not close enough to what Christian Community will be like there in the absolute unity of Heaven because it will be as Jesus' unity with His Father and the Spirit [John 17:21]: “The wisdom of heaven, is absent all hypocrisy and absent a descending voice and all discrimination. There will be total harmony and unanimity, the sweetest and most reasonable spirit with everyone wanting to serve each other, each heart filled with caring and ...good.

What is “good”? The wisdom of Heaven is ...good! I think James gave up trying to describe the indescribable beauty of heaven because the beauty will be within each of us and how do you say that!? The NET correctly translates “good fruit” meaning not rotten or poisonous to eat. So we might add the word “beneficial,” maybe even with healing properties, edifying. The dictionary simply defines good as the “benefits of the Messianic Kingdom”<sup>10</sup> and references Romans 10:15; Hebrews 9:11, 10:1.

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10. Joseph Thayer. *Thayer's Greek-English Lexicon*. Hendrickson Publishers. Peabody MA.: 14th printing, 2019) page. 3.

## Grace & The 'But' Principle

*The miracle of God's grace is its ability to give us a "start over" not conditioned at all on our past.*

*'God forgave and restored him:' - 2 Chronicles 33:10*

No matter how we start out, if we finish walking with the Lord all will be restored. This is a mark of God's grace because it is not based on worth or achievement. In every possible way we could imagine, grace is unearned and undeserved. So whatever happens in this life, the message of Joel is clear: repentance brings restoration. The 'But' principle of Scripture encapsulates this as a promise.

God's use of the word "but" is the opposite of human reasoning. It is as if we decide to always share the good news before the bad news, but God shares the good news last. "I like you, but ..." says man *but* God's revelation says, "You are a sinner, *but* ..." and the good news is our salvation. The Law of Moses was fulfilled but the Grace of God is forever. One of the best examples is Isaiah 1:18 because it confirms the way God "reasons." "Come now, and let us reason together, saith the LORD: though your sins be as scarlet, [but] they shall be as white as snow; though they be red like crimson, [but] they shall be as wool."

The Scripture represents this divine mindset on all levels,

- ◆ In a verse: [Psalm 30:5].
  - "...weeping may endure for a night,

**BUT**

## Grace & The 'But' Principle

- joy cometh in the morning.”
  
- ◆ In a chapter: [Psalm 109:2 & 31].
  - “the mouth of the deceitful are opened against me
    - **BUT**
  - For [the Lord] shall stand at the right hand of the poor, to save him from those that condemn his soul.
  
- ◆ In a Book: [Habakkuk 1:2 & 3:19].
  - “O LORD, how long shall I cry
    - **BUT**
  - The LORD God is my strength”
  
- ◆ In a Testament: [Genesis 3:24 & Malachi 4:2].
  - So he [God] drove out the man [Adam & Eve]; and he placed at the east of the garden of Eden Cherubims, ... to keep the way of the tree of life”
    - **“BUT**
  - unto you that fear my name shall the Sun of righteousness arise with healing in his wings”
  
- ◆ In the entire Bible: [Genesis 6:6 & Revelation 21:5].
  - “And it repented the LORD that he had made man on the earth, and it grieved him at his heart.”
    - **[but]**
  - “And he that sat upon the throne said, Behold, I make all things new.”

Grace is more than a mindset but a heart set, as well. God takes His opportunity to be gracious when given it [Romans 10:13]. He is just as likely to bless anyone at anytime. As Jesus observed in Mark 5:45 , “He makes his sun to rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust.” He called Cyrus, a heathen King, His anointed [Isaiah 45:1]. As already mentioned, A murderous thief being executed via a cross for his crimes He escorts to paradise. But it is more than this; for Jesus comforted him saying, “Today, you’re with me” [Luke 23:43]. Even crowds, recognized for their selfish feigned or misdirected interest in Him, were benefitted by the Savior’s compassion [Matthew 14:14].

And He is just as likely to save the criminal as the most lawful person when opportunity presents itself. As best we can explain: The Heart-knower [Acts 15:8, Jeremiahs 17:10] knows whose heart to open unto His revelation of truth [Acts 16:14]. But this still depends on using us to share the message [Romans 10:14]. This is the context of God’s pre-determination (believers predestined) to conform us to His image and glorify us. It is not based on an overpowering of our will but in a co-operative effort with it.

### **God’s Mercy To Manasseh**

There are times when God chooses to show mercy when it seems most unreasonable to do so. Manasseh, King of Judah might come to mind. Here’s what he did as king:

2 Chronicles 33:2-7:

- “He followed the terrible and sinful ways of the nations that the Lord had forced out of the land before the Israelites.
- He rebuilt the high places that his father Hezekiah had broken down.

## Grace & The 'But' Principle

- He built altars for the Baal gods and made Asherah poles.
- He bowed down to the constellations and worshiped those groups of stars.
- He built altars for false gods in the Lord's Temple.
- He built altars for all the groups of stars in the two yards of the Lord's Temple.
- He also burned his own children for a sacrifice in the Valley of Ben Hinnom.
- He also used magic by doing soothsaying, divination, and sorcery.
- He talked with mediums and wizards.
- He did many things that the Lord said were evil and made God angry. (You think!)
- He also made a statue of an idol and put it in God's Temple..."

In verse 10: "The LORD spoke to Manasseh and his people, but they would not listen. Therefore the LORD brought upon them the captains of the army of the king of Assyria, who took Manasseh with hooks, bound him with bronze fetters, and carried him off to Babylon."

And then Manasseh repented: "Now when he was in affliction, he implored the LORD his God, and humbled himself greatly before the God of his fathers, and prayed to Him."

And God forgave and restored him: "And He received his entreaty, heard his supplication, and brought him back to Jerusalem into his kingdom. Then Manasseh knew that the LORD was God."

## God's Forgiveness

The history of God's grace is not just a record of His forgiveness. Tucked away in the record of God's dealings

with Israel's persistent recalcitrance and incorrigibility during their wilderness journey there is this brief remarkable prayer of Moses that God would forgive them. This account in Numbers 14:17-21 is worth a moment of time to review:

**17** And **now**, ~~I beseech thee~~, let the power of my lord be great, according as thou hast spoken, saying, **18** The Lord is longsuffering, and of great mercy, **forgiving iniquity** and transgression, and by no means clearing the **guilty**, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children unto the third and fourth generation. **19** Pardon, ~~I beseech thee~~, [now] the iniquity of this people according unto the greatness of thy mercy, and as thou hast forgiven this people, from Egypt even until now [as you always have]. **20** And the Lord said, I have pardoned according to thy word: **21** But as truly as I live, all the earth shall be filled with the glory of the Lord.

Moses, we concede, was praying but the word "beseech" found in a couple translations was added to explain the word "now" which carries an emotional "please" with it. "Show Thyself mighty by verifying Thy word, Jehovah, long-suffering and great mercy, .... Forgive...."<sup>1</sup> Moses appealed to God's seemingly inexhaustible longsuffering and mercy. Moses interpreted this to mean God could be asked to once again forgive the faithless and disobedient people among them.

But God's response must have been a theological jolt to his faith in verse 20 when He said in effect, "I have already ...but that's not the issue!" Paul in Romans 3:26 didn't call this God's forgiveness but (and the New English Translation is correct) "God in his forbearance had *passed over* the[ir] sins." God kept grinning and bearing their impertinent disobedience and lack of trust in Him. God's forgiveness in a genuine and practical sense would require a redemption through the Savior's death and resurrection. But

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1. C.F. Keil & F. Delitzsch. *Commentary on the Old Testament*. (Wm. Eerdmans Publishing, Grand Rapids, MI. reprinted 1980), vol I, pages 93

## Grace & The 'But' Principle

all this had to go over Moses' head. It is not without profound insight Moses employs the word "vanity" for iniquity, a word which also means guilty or what is punishable.

There is a sense in which this prayer of Moses would have to wait until Paul could affirm that the punishment for our sins had been dealt with by Christ [Romans 8:1]. There is a double entendre in the language because the sin [iniquity] can speak of the punishment itself; so, when God carried our *iniquity* ['made ... to be sin' 2 Corinthians 5:21] Jesus carried off the *punishment*, too. Isaiah 53:12 "Because He poured out His soul unto death, And He was numbered with the transgressors, And He **bore the sin** of many, And made intercession for the transgressors." I doubt Moses understood any of this, but certainly God did! Often in His thoughts and promises are subtle, but undeniable, references to the Cross.

If we are talking about God's forgiveness, we are understanding that whatever punishment was deserved is now erased from the record. The New Living Translation reads Colossians 2:14 "He canceled the record of the charges against us and took it away by nailing it to the cross."<sup>2</sup> Is it possible that in part the cross we carry [Matthew 16:24] is enduring suffering that is unmistakably due to the sins of others? We cannot talk grace without talking forgiveness in this completed act of Christ on the Cross and the part we play in extending and representing it.

Perhaps, we expected verse 21 to complete verse 20: "I have pardoned them as you asked, but they must still be punished." Verse 21 honors the "But-Principle" of Scripture in which God always follows a warning with a promised blessing, a sorrow with a joy, trials with glory [Psalm 30:5], the temporal with the eternal "While we look not at the

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2. Thought I do not agree with the translation, in substance this message is absolutely true. I would not discourage the use of this text to explain it.

## Grace & The 'But' Principle

things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen: for the things which are seen are temporal; but the things which are not seen are eternal" [2 Corinthians 4:18]. The message of Grace is a message of hope not despair; it is the message of the blessings to follow because the curse has been adjudicated.

In Numbers 14:21 instead we read: "...all the earth shall be filled with the glory of the Lord" which is God affirming His promised redemption (freedom) from sin. It will be glorious because it will be a place where God's people no longer rebel, disobey, murmur or complain. "And an highway shall be there, and a way, and it shall be called The way of holiness; the unclean shall not pass over it; but it shall be for those: the wayfaring men, though fools, shall not err therein" [Isaiah 35:8]. Isaiah in 35:9 prophecies that we will be the redeemed and in 35:10 the ransomed.

Even though Isaiah 35 prophecies of the captives return from Babylon, it is unreasonable to limit this promise to a solitary blip on the time line—when God is eternal.<sup>3</sup> To view any verse merely as an historical reference in a time now past is to tear that record from the pages of Scripture leaving but a skeleton of dry theological theory and nothing to hope for. But the God who lived that history has left a path to follow—not just of what He did but—a testimonial to what He does. The spiritually hungry will learn of Him; they will enquire after the meaning of the Old Testament account and inevitably discover that that path leads to Christ.

### Following Christ, Representing Grace

God's grace begins to show itself in the redeemed by their humble dependence on their Lord, their desire to

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3. One word "to sin" when used with greater emphasis (called intensive) means "to atone" and the word sin in this root can also mean the sacrifice or offering for sin. This is why in 2 Corinthians 5:21 "God made him *to be* sin for us" The NLT reads "to be the offering for our sin"

## Grace & The 'But' Principle

follow Him and their heart's cry of repentance when they don't, an almost beggar's interest in His mercy, a strong desire for fellowship, a giver's heart instead of greed, and an inspired burden for the hurting and spiritually dying. There is a marked absence of real vengeance, of a hateful partisanship, of putting self first.

These are only a few of the changes made when God gave them a new heart and began to transform their minds by revealing to them truths that they could share so that they might enjoy lingering in hope-filled dialogue over our Lord's imminent return. John 1:16 [NET] reads, "For we have all received from his fullness one gracious gift after another."

According to Zechariah 4:7: upon returning from exile the cornerstone of the new Temple was laid to shouts of "grace, grace to it." The prophet in verse 6 made clear that this was the work of the Spirit of the Lord of Hosts even though, Zechariah admitted in verse 9 that his hands indeed worked on this great task. We were made for His glory, to participate in a work of grace that will testify of God's greatness. His grace in and through us is our testimony [Revelation 12:11].

## Grace & The Continuum

*Imagine a place where competitions, comparisons, and judgments do not exist.*

Have you read the poem “*Wanted, a Minister's Wife*”?<sup>1</sup>  
(Author unknown). It is 10 stanzas long; here is one:

Wanted—a perfect lady,  
Delicate, gentle, refined,  
With every beauty of person,  
And every endowment of mind,  
Fitted by early culture  
To move in fashionable life—  
Please notice our advertisement:  
“Wanted—a minister's wife!”

Until my wife and I began pastoring, I didn't know that this poem was no joke. Perhaps the author wanted anonymity to disappear into the shadows of some painful memory of their own as pastor. Imagine a place where you are no longer to be judged for any reason, where your performance is never again graded or you don't qualify for something because you are too this or not enough that. We are talking about getting rid of continuums. Computers have a sliding scale to adjust the size of the print or the brightness of whatever you are looking at, but people don't. With me, for example, you get what you get.

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1. accessed 1/3/24 <https://www.poetrynook.com/poem/wanted-ministers-wife>

## Why a Continuum?

I haven't read anywhere the use of the continuum model to explain truth but it is, to me, an accurate representation of the—often misguided—reasoning used in explaining God's dealings with us. A continuum is a logical line we draw in our minds to decide how much is enough of whatever quantity is under discussion. "How much forgiveness is enough," Peter wanted to know: 490 times! [Matthew 18:21-22]. How much gossip is too much and might be classified as sinful? [2 Corinthians 12:20]. Admittedly, our salvation is only the first step in a journey into all God offers us. We employ terms like *progressive sanctification* or being *tested* by God (an idea found dozens of times in Scripture) or *maturing* in Christ in the sense of a gradation or a process. But the idea of a progressive sanctification is not without its difficulty and "to test" means to examine or prove, *not* grade.

David is reported to have written, "You [Lord] test the heart and have pleasure in uprightness" [1 Chronicles 29:17]. God didn't need to test to find out what He already knew, but it became a teaching tool worth promoting in prophetic narrative [Jeremiah 17:10; 20:12].

The two areas where believers are said to progress are

1. In *faith*: "the righteousness of God is revealed from faith to faith" [Romans 1:17]; Godet calls it "the progress which takes place in faith itself."<sup>2</sup> We trust God in the big things because we have learned to trust Him, first, in the small.
2. In *transformation* into the image of Christ: "But we all, with unveiled face, beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory, just as by the Spirit of the Lord." [2 Corinthians 3:18]. Alford, in his

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2. Frederick Louis. Godet. *The First Epistle to the Romans*. (Zondervan Publishing House. Grand Rapids, MI: 1970) page 97.

commentary, employs the phrase “process of sanctification”<sup>3</sup> outright.

But can I obtain a grade from this information to note my spiritual progress? Christians have a tendency to grade each other instead of themselves—an error the Corinthian Church fell into [2 Corinthians 10:12].

### **The Possible Misuse of the Continuum**

It isn't the continuum idea itself that's so alarming; it's the *misuse* of it to which I draw your attention. An example close to my heart: some pastors are graded every three years requiring from the congregation a vote of confidence to continue. In a publication for Protestant Clergy years ago I found a cartoon in which the pastor and his family were seated at dinner in a house of pure glass while parishioners strolled by observing them in a very personal family moment. This illustrated, then, the common understanding that pastors are always on public display. And only a naive innocent would think that pastors were not forever being graded. We use to say, “You are only as good as your last sermon.”

The average congregant probably, at the time, didn't even know what that word “pastor” meant. In fact, in the Bible, it is the same word as “shepherd;” so when Jesus told John [and the others] to “feed my sheep” [John 21:16, 17; 1 Peter 5:2] I naturally assumed they wanted to learn the Word of God! But some churches want pastoral architects and contractors and fund raisers to build bigger and better—for the sake of a more dominant witness in the community. But some pastors, like myself, are poor—poorer—administrators but more into sharing God's Word.

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3. Henry Alford. *The Greek Testament*. (Moody Press. Chicago, IL: 1958) vol II. page 648.

## **Benevolent or Dictatorial?**

There is a continuum for all this that determines how “take charge” a prospective candidate for the pastorate might be. It is the line between benevolent on the one side and dictatorial on the other. Both characteristics are important and noteworthy. Benevolent pastors tend to be good listeners, good teachers of the Word, good prayer organizers, counselors, etc. They are sensitive and caring and probably do most of the hospital visiting themselves. But we also need the ones who “take charge,” who are not intimidated away from the vision God has given them—and they do have vision! They are most likely busy in the “business” of the church leaving the hospital calls to underlings and many other responsibilities to other staff personal. They know how to delegate better than the benevolent guy. Every pastor falls somewhere in the middle on this line.

## **Grace vs The Continuum**

But wouldn't it be great to be somewhere where continuums do not exist? I have come to believe in my studies that the very nature of God's grace makes it fall *outside* the continuum model. For one, a gift of God given undeserved and unearned tells me that He didn't grade me before He saved me. Speaking of grades: heaven has no I.Q. test to give for a good reason: None is needed thanks to God's *grace*. Jeremiah prophesied, “And they shall teach no more every man his neighbor, and every man his brother, saying, Know the LORD: for they shall all know me, from the least of them unto the greatest of them, saith the LORD: for I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more.” [Jeremiah 31:34].

God's lack of favoritism or treating some of us better than others is another indicator that I am not being treated differently from you. There apparently are no shades of

agape love—no “shadow of turning” [James 1:17]. His gifts, His grace, is not only “good” but “perfect.” The commentary interprets perfect to mean “those unalloyed and enduring treasures, which are laid up for us in eternity.”<sup>4</sup> [Ephesians 2:7]. I want to believe that “perfect” has to also include unregulated and no grade because God is wholehearted and none of His gifts are earned. He doesn’t love me less than you, nor you than me.

### Continuums of Ideas

The continuum is one of the yardsticks by which we measure or grade worth but I don’t read of it in the description of the Biblical heaven that awaits us. Again, it would be excluded because of grace—a grace that is unearned and without favoritism.

We have used the analogy of the continuum of ideas that are opposites but, paradoxically, are found combined in various degrees in human thought. This is not an example of cognitive dissonance, attitude changes or ambivalence but a sort of marriage of opposites that represent a tension or a debate within one’s mind answering the question, “How much is too much?” or “How little is too little?” God’s grace operates *outside* this “tension of ideas.” Many conflicts of feeling and thought we experience are not the domain of God’s grace because grace wants us to live above the conflict. It is human to ask God to take sides over an issue but this competitive spirit is absent in God’s kingdom.

The continuum of “fault finding,” for example, mentioned earlier might ask, “Who is to blame for a couple going through a divorce?” On one end we have the husband, and on the other, the wife. Is it all his fault or is it all her fault? Somewhere in the middle: Is it half and half? More his than hers? When we attempt to assign blame, we ask which

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4. John Peter Lange..*James* (Zondervan, Grand Rapids, MI: 7th printing, 1980) vol XII page 52

side is God on? But God's grace forgives so completely and absolutely, would He not seek a reconciliation, if they were both believers? Or if wisdom required it He would want, by His grace, to help everyone live past an amicable departure.

[Humor me here.] We also spoke of the continuum of Hedonism on one side and Stoicism on the other [Acts 17:18] on which people attempt unsuccessfully to find a point of happiness. The believer's happiness is in following Christ and this option is not found on this line. In theological terms we might ask how much attention can we give our bodies, our flesh, without being carnal. We are not only spiritual beings but physical beings as well; so, should we ask if there is a "compromise" somewhere in the middle that would satisfy the will of God? What is too much self-attention? What is too much flesh? What defines carnality since this word speaks of our humanity?<sup>5</sup> Salvation does not mean we cease to be human!

God's grace takes us *out* of this quagmire of confused choices and half truths. His grace moves in another realm. Grace lifts us up, in all our humanity, and puts us on a higher, spiritual, plane: "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who hath blessed us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ:" [Ephesians 1:3] As an old song went, "Lord lift me up and let me stand on heaven's tableland." Here is where our happiness lies! Otherwise, how is it possible to find happiness in persecution? [Matthew 5:10]. The ultimate blessing or happiness comes when we become immune to the struggle of trying to find the eye of the storm when we can live for Christ *in* the storm [Philippians 4:18].

Many aspects of life are not by degree and do not belong on the continuum, because you cannot answer the question "How much?" How pregnant is pregnant? How

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5. In Swahili carnality and humanity are the same word, for good reason.

saved is saved? How many marital affairs is too many? These are irrelevant enquiries. Some comparisons are apples and oranges and don't belong in the same analogy or continuum. They are not true opposites. Men and women, for example. There is such a thing as psychological maleness and psychological femaleness. Any married man knows this and it explains why Paul used the word "love" with him and "submit" with her. It was not to degrade or denigrate the woman in a marriage relationship but to point out that some aspects of love are often an acquired taste for one and not the other.

### **Superabundance of Grace**

Some aspects of life might be gradable but the superabundance of God's provisions in heaven will make measurements obsolete—unnecessary and unwanted. God's grace has provided for us access to an unregulated source of The Fruit of the Spirit [against such there is no law]. Said another way: in Heaven, there are not only no watches or clocks needed [in eternity] but we have thrown away our yardsticks and rulers, as well.

### **Flesh vs Spirit**

For Paul, carnality represented a battle royal between the flesh, the temptation to gratify self, and the Spirit, the Holy Spirit's work in us. This is not a continuum between the physical and the spiritual, as to suggest that, we should look for the sweet spot somewhere in our lifestyles that will give the Spirit His time and the Flesh his time. Grace does not operate in that way. To use Professor Barclay's explanation: "by labeling it "flesh" he [Paul] is placing it [the flesh or carnality] within the sphere of ... ordinary life where

human ... practices *have not been re-ordered in Christ.*"<sup>6</sup> [Italics added].

Paul called this a struggle between the flesh and the Spirit: "For the flesh lusts against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh: and these are contrary the one to the other; so that you cannot do the things that you would" [Galatians 5:17]. This battle rages because the Spirit and the Flesh [carnality] are not on the same plane—one is from Heaven and the other from the earth [1 Corinthians 15:47-48]. The flesh and the Spirit will never find common ground in which to live harmoniously. It is never a question of how much flesh and how much of the Spirit works to balance life? The professor called "flesh" here representative of "misaligned goals and deceptive values *outside* of the Spirit"<sup>7</sup> [italics added].

Our humanity is not in and of itself sinful. Sinning is an *action* that counters the Spirit's work in us. Paul knew we must give no quarter to carnality but demand a total and unconditional surrender of it to the Spirit [Romans 6:6; Galatians 2:20].

I now see carnality as the sum total of natural desires and thoughts *outside* Christ. I could be tempted to utilize my potential and my natural desires for selfish and ungodly ends. This is why the Bible in speaking of immature Christians used a word for carnal that means "pertaining to" the flesh [1 Corinthians 3:1, 3] and not simply what is natural (That is another word). When we confuse these words—as some have—we think God is denying our very humanity rather than elevated it to where He wants it to be—in the image of His Son.

James noted that this is what brings war [James 4:1]. Carnality makes us selfish, greedy, consumers [James 4:3]

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6. John M. G. Barclay. Paul & the Power of Grace. (Eerdmans Publishing Company, Grand Rapids MI: 2020) page 65.

7. Ibid.

rather than givers or investors in Heaven's treasures [Matthew 6:19]. Carnality is the desires out of control, without the fruit of temperance in evidence [James 1:14]. But if we ask, "How much control?" Wrong question!! Temperance is allowing the grace of God through our yielding to the Spirit to guide our actions. There is no compromise—no common ground, no continuum here.

If I may, I think it unwarranted for us to kick ourselves when we're down. This struggle is real because the Spirit is in our lives! And that is a good thing.

### **My Worth**

Philosophically, life becomes perhaps a question of worth, which is a common measuring rod for many decisions, prioritizing the more valuable. But what does grace have to do with our worth, when God shares His heaven with us unearned, undeserved, and without regard to merit. Here's what God thinks of our *worth*: "But God chose what the world thinks foolish to shame the wise, and God chose what the world thinks weak to shame the strong." [1 Corinthians 1:27 NET].

And if I, using another analogy, pull out the scale to weigh my worth against yours—I on one side and you on the other—what might God's grace say about this? Paul wrote, "But God has put the body together, giving greater honor to the parts that lacked it" [1 Corinthians 12:24]. Paul added "For we dare not class ourselves or compare ourselves with those who commend themselves. But they, measuring themselves by themselves, and comparing themselves among themselves, are not wise" [2 Corinthians 10:12].

It is human to compete for worth. In my second year of High School in biology class, the teacher decided to test us using former regency exams in preparation for finals. We all stood and each one in a round-robin fashion had to be seated if they didn't answer a question correctly given by the

teacher. It was eventually down to the smartest girl in the class (who became the valedictorian at graduation) and me. Round and round we went while I was thinking “I can’t beat her; she’s the smart one!” I subsequently gave a wrong answer and lost the contest.

It is human to want to be important, to stand out for something, to be the expert on some subject. My life, as well, was a constant striving after that elusive perfection. I wanted to have worth but I wanted others to have that, too. Consequently, because competition by its very nature meant someone had to lose, I came to appreciate God’s grace, even though losing is a valuable lesson in life.

Is there a dead center point on the continuum from “I am more important than you” to “You are more important than me” where everyone is awarded? We know that eternity has no center point in time and infinity cannot be cut in half in the center. It has no center. And that’s the main point about grace. Barclay astutely observed, “Since ethnicity, status and gender are no longer criteria of super worth [Galatians 3:28] and since God pays no regard to the ‘face’ [Galatians 2:6] but distributes His grace without regard to worth, the normal grounds for competition have lost their significance.”<sup>8</sup>

Is this not why Paul spoke of the “Law of Christ” [Galatians 6:2] and yet he maintained that you are not under the law” [Galatians 5:18]. The realm of God’s grace is not a chaotic realm that needs to be regulated. God’s grace takes us out of the pettiness of confusing choices, of wondering how much is too much or not enough, because we are now living in the Kingdom of an infinite supply!

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8. Ibid. page 67.

## Love

Even the human concept of love goes from a *need* love [eros] before salvation to a *giving* love [agape] with salvation. So if we imagine each one's need to live somewhere between "I am loved by you" to "I love you" as a necessary relational factor for emotional health we get it wrong. Even though we tend to show love to those who show us love in return, as a gift, agape love is not reciprocal or circulatory (to use Barclay's terms). If we decide we cannot love someone unless they love us, who loves who first!? God's love is capable of loving the unloveable. God's love needs not to be reciprocated to be loving. [Don't confuse reciprocity with efficacy.] God's grace because of His love [Romans 5:5] replaces eros as our source of emotional support. If the gift of love is a gift of grace, it is always unearned because "earned" places a price on it when God's love is free.

I think I figured something else out here about grace as to why it is free. Money is God's competitor for your hearts and affections [Matthew 6:24]; so we can never calculate the worth of God's grace even though it cost the Savior His life. That's the way God wants it! Grace is by its very nature immeasurable; so, when we exemplify it in our lives, we have to be doing what we do for the Lord out of a spontaneous affection for all that He is toward others and not for what we can get for it.

I, also, agree with scholarship that there is no real sacrifice in loving. So, when Paul enjoins husbands to love their own wives as Christ loved His Church and "gave Himself for her" [Ephesians 5:25], he is describing agape love which dwells above personal need. (No Christian husband should misunderstand this injunction.) "The self is not given away in love," we learn, "but given into a relationship with others, a life relationship in which all parties will benefit and flourish."<sup>9</sup>

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9. Ibid. page 70.

## God or Me?

I recall the early days of my schooling I looked into Philippians 2:12-13 (which is what God's grace is all about): "work out your own salvation with fear and trembling ... For it is God who works in you both to will and to do of his good pleasure."

But I was confused. How can *I* do what *God* has promised to do? If my life is predestined to persevere, then, why the "fear and trembling" and why "work." This became a continuum from "I do it" to "God does it" and somehow, it seemed that if I do it God isn't and if He was, I wouldn't.

But my anxiety was unwarranted because God's grace operates above such a tension. Verse 13 defines grace as: " God who works in you both to will and to do of his good pleasure," i.e. God does what He wants [Exodus 33:19]. So our work is working out what God puts in or in Paul's metaphor: "Putting on the new man" [Ephesians 4:24].

## Slave or Free

Are we slaves or free? There is no conflict or tension between these terms with Paul—nor should there be: "For though I be free from all men, yet have I made myself servant unto all, that I might gain the more." [1 Corinthians 9:19]. Peter agreed: "As free, and not using your liberty for a cloak of maliciousness, but as the servants of God" [1 Peter 2:16]. Paul referred to himself often as God's slave [Titus 1:1], a relationship that freed him from the false tension of wondering otherwise what freedom should mean for a believer.

Some think Paul condoned slavery but that debate represents this tension of ideas in which grace will not participate [Galatians 3:28].

## Pecking Orders

Human cultures require a hierarchy which at best is a one among equals, and at worse, a tyranny. But it is difficult to live with no one in charge. Every barn yard establishes the pecking order among the hens with one rooster in charge. Alpha male animals battle to establish domains and nations are defined by their boundaries. Perhaps, the American dream, which is all about owning one's own home with a white picket fence, is a way of telling government, stop pecking on me. Government, on this continuum, is the rooster who pecks but is never pecked. But God's administration of grace operates outside all this. This will bring us to the ultimate gift of God: Christian Community! (This is the next chapter).

## The Continuum of Declared to Made Righteous

There is a theological continuum that has peaked my interest academically because I think it is based on a false supposition, that is, that we go from *declared* righteous at salvation [Romans 4:22] to *made* righteous at the return of Christ [1 John 3:2]. On a continuum, we would assume a process of sanctification taking place to go from one end in time to the other, but sanctification in the New Testament is never spoken in terms of a progression, but as an act of obedience [1 Thessalonians 4:3-4].

I remain a disciple of a progressive sanctification as an explanation for spiritual growth and maturity [Ephesians 4:13] and I don't think Paul would be offended in my saying this. We are declared righteous by faith at salvation, without doubt [Romans 8:1]. Also the grammar strongly supports this meaning. But would God declare something true proleptically. It seems incongruous with Scripture not to expect holiness until our Lord returns [1 Peter 1:16].

To me this is semantics because we are talking about an eternal provision in the temporal sphere. "While we look

not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen: for the things which are seen are temporal; but the things which are not seen are eternal" [2 Corinthians 4:18].

The timeline of this life, the continuum of our progress or growth or faith, is a blip—less than that—recorded in the annals of eternity. If 1 day is a thousand years with God [2 Peter 3:8] my life, so far has been just under 5 minutes long. I can't see why the church should treat "declared" and "made" separately. No continuum is required to explain a dynamic grace at work in us, because this life in eternal terms is brief but significant. Our emphasis should not be on the minutia of a dividing theology but on the glorious message of the overall work of God within the believer. There is a logical connection between "declared" and "made" that does not need also to be chronological. It is because we are creatures of time that we see things on a time continuum instead of how God sees them in eternity. Declared means made! With God, a promise made is a promise kept and a declaration made by His word is an accomplished fact [Isaiah 55:11].

### **Some Comparisons Don't Fit**

A continuum is like a rainbow that blends colors from red to violet, but some ideas though comparable do not fall under this model. When Paul compared sin and grace he was not thinking of different degrees of grace that might be needed to cancel a given amount or type of sin. Nor would he have envisioned the continuum in which progress with time would indicate more grace conquering more sin (as temptingly reasonable as this sounds). He was not auditing humanity's account to calculate how much grace would be needed to pay for sin. He already knew it would take the Savior's death for a one time payment against the entire debt.

When Paul argued that "where sin abounded, grace did much more abound" [Romans 5:20] the Judaizers saw

what some of our dear Catholic friends might imagine, a confessional (I speak respectfully) in which they might weekly go to have the *same* sin absolved realizing no corresponding change in their behavior toward God (I am talking about Israel). Grace conquers sin, but it happened all at once on Calvary. So the question in Romans 6:1 “Shall we continue in sin, that grace may abound?” might be like asking, shall we commit adultery over again because we have the confessional to get it absolved? No priest would condone such reasoning. Though we may need to repent often [1 John 1:9] the act of forgiveness in Christ’s death was and remains a single “once for all time and all people” event [Hebrews 10:10]. The well of God’s grace and forgiveness is deep though we come often to drink.

Because God’s grace is unmerited, free, the Judaizers argued, why change? If God required payment, however, for His largesse—say, in a true repentance or turning from that sin, or some proof that they were serious enough (contrite)—they might have rethought their interpretation of Paul’s message of grace. As we discovered about Old Testament Judaism, the sinner is responsible for his own sinning and must atone, himself. So, what could be simpler than coming in genuine repentance to God and allowing His grace to atone. But grace in Paul’s parlance was a strange sound. There is a certain insightfulness in their conclusion that sin requires punishment but they hadn’t calculated into the forgiveness formula a Savior dying for them.

What we need to see here is that the continuum model won’t serve to explain grace—an argument we have been making all along.

### **The Singularity of Grace**

Mention was made of the singularity of God, the belief that God is only beneficent, in the chapter on *Grace as a Theology*. This is best illustrated by the parable of the Wheat and Tares [Matthew 13:25-30]. Tares are burnt as an act of

mercy toward the wheat, since the field in the parable remains available for future harvests. In eschatological terms: if the saints are to return here into a world now made “new” [Isaiah 65:17; 2 Peter 2:13; Revelation 21:1] there is no where else to put the tares. The fire here speaks to the judgment of God which becomes an expression of His mercy. This was the simplicity of God spoken of in the same chapter. There is no tension of ideas here, no use for a continuum, not only because there is theological unity between the terms but because neither answers the question, “How much” since judgment is final and mercy is superabundant.

If we can see the perfection of God’s gift of His grace, as Professor Barclay represented it, in terms of its singularity, non-circularity, priority, efficacy, superabundance, and incongruity, we can begin to understand why we have lifted it out of the language of a progressive Christianity and would encourage believers to rethink of grace in terms of their own Christian walk and in Christian community.

God’s grace is, therefore, understood to be an eternal and infinite (superabundant) expression of His love (singularly) toward us, requiring nothing from us (non-circulatory) but trust and acceptance and that was prepared for us, undeserved and unmerited (incongruous) before the foundation of the world (prior to us). It is a grace that (efficaciously) deals decisively with sin and empowers us to live for Christ.

### **Heaven**

Imagine a place where competitions, comparisons, and judgments do not exist, where we accept one another without questioning or analyzing, without grades, or progress reports. A place where criticism no longer exists, no blame, no fault, no one smarter or dumber than anyone else. Imagine a place where the continuum model does not exist to explain anything because everything needed is in

## Grace & The Continuum

superabundance and no one earns anything, everything is free. And imagine a place where the government is upon His shoulders, He is the King! And imagine we call it "Heaven."

## Grace & Culture

*The Gospel is not the property of any religion, and indeed cannot be, because God's grace has been extended to all.*

In like manner, there is no continuum with grace and tradition as opposites, representing a tension of ideas, as if to suggest, that some church tradition is needed for salvation or worse, church tradition hinders our walk with Christ (it shouldn't). Christianity is replete with ritual that symbolizes the message of God's grace. We also develop traditional forms of worship, which is what Jewish ceremony was all about in Paul's time. "We are not under the law, but under grace" [Romans 6:14-15]. Paul never advocated the abolishment of the Jewish law and ceremonies: "the law is holy" [Romans 7:12]. He never disowned His Jewish heritage [Acts 21:26; 1 Corinthians 9:22]. But, he never alloyed the message of grace with traditions either. The incongruity of grace (God's gifts are unearned and undeserved) poses a serious problem for those believers that need some means of reassurance that what they are doing is what God wants them to do. Some need to understand that their Christian practices are, in fact, cultural but someday God will say "Well, done" [Matthew 25:21] if they follow Christ. Grace operates outside this paradigm.

The message of Grace is God doing what *He wants* in a relationship with us [Romans 8:29]. Ritual, however, might become a regulation, a law, the means by which the devotee measures their spirituality. On this point we must exercise caution. Many believers find the church service comforting

and something that gives a sense of security [I know I am saved because I go to church and read my Bible and tithe]. The continuum is the perfect model to ascertain how holy they are, by measuring their devotion to the Church, but salvation was never intended by God to be perceived this way.

Grace is unmerited and non-circulatory—we cannot nor should we view our devotion to God as returning the favor. But salvific, saving, grace is *efficacious*—to use the scholar’s word. God’s grace empowers us to live for Christ [2 Peter 1:3]. Works should *follow* faith [James 1:22]. A perfect or pure grace, a gift of God, cannot be conditioned on any aspect of human nature or behavior (it is without favoritism), but we cringe at this idea. It is as if a perfect stranger approached us on the street and handed us a bundle of hundred dollar bills and then walked away! The natural tendency—though, we won’t admit it—would be to run after him and refuse such an unexpected act of generosity.

It is almost as if God went too far when He decided to save us without conferring with us let alone without our knowledge. Paul, talking about the Savior’s death in our stead, wrote “For scarcely for a righteous man will one die: yet peradventure for a good man some would even dare to die” [Romans 5:7]. “Scarcely” is not an Old Testament word. It doesn’t translate into the language of the Jewish culture in Paul’s time. (And they are not alone in trying to fathom its meaning here.) This was a quote from Proverbs 11:31, which in the original reads, “If the righteous receive their due on earth, how much more the ungodly and the sinner!” Somehow Paul took an Old Testament scripture that in the Hebrew language spoke of reward and payment and restructured it to speak of unmerited grace. Paul’s quote from the Greek language doesn’t say what the Old Testament Hebrew said that Solomon said. Rather his translation uses 3 terms of interest: *scarcely* (rarely), *peradventure* (perhaps), and *dare* (a bold move). It is for a *righteous* man that one might

*rarely* die a *vicarious* death, but for a *good* man be *bold* enough to *possibly* die this way. Jesus' death for us was unheard of—virtually unheard of—perhaps, only comparable to the soldier who gives his life for his country. “Such sacrifices are made headlong in the ecstasy of sympathetic generosity”<sup>1</sup> we are told.

When an idea is difficult to accept or understand, as the grace of God being an unmerited gift, we often need some excuse to accept it. We need to justify an act of kindness that came from a stranger with no explanation and no requirement other than, “I want you to be my friend.” The non-believing world finds this advance as an intrusion at best [Acts 18:13], or the thought of a mad man at worst [Acts 17:18]. But believer's might find a more polite way of accepting the gift on condition that I pay you for it. We make salvation dependent on more than grace, which is a self-deceiving act. And if we cannot pay for it outright because the theology says so, we think to justify such largesse by small but repeated acts of religious devotion. James cautions, if we must do this, take care of the widows and the poor. “Pure religion and undefiled before God and the Father is this, To visit the fatherless and widows in their affliction, and to keep himself unspotted from the world” [James 1:27]. But we sometimes build cathedrals, church steeples, and the like instead. (I went too far?)

### **Traditions serve a Good Cause**

It is not realistic to live without tradition or culture. To be blunt: this isn't even possible, unless we propose to live in absolute isolation and go crazy. Traditions bring us together, Traditions are cultural expressions that provide structure to our daily lives. They represent what is regular about us in relation to each other, what is expected and what

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1. John Peter Lange. *Romans* (Zondervan, Grand Rapids, MI: 7th printing, 1980) vol X page 164.

has become reasonable in defining our relationship with everyone else in the group.

Every religious denomination is ritualistic and represents a sub-culture. Even a habit of prayer, a prayer-life, has personal meaning on a cultural level because it is by definition a ritual. Tevye in the play "Fiddler on the Roof" defended Jewish tradition affirming, "Because of our traditions, each one knows who he is and what God expects of him." And I can add, "what is expected of him, in a cultural sense, within the community."

When we are instructed to love others as we love ourselves [Galatians 5:14] we are asked to love others because they are an integral part of our own happiness and sense of community. "No man is an island," the saying goes.

### **Misinterpreted**

As wonderful as this sounds (because it included you and me) Paul's understanding was fraught with misinterpretation. The Gospel message transcends culture because God's grace does! Because no one deserves salvation it is freely offered. Because salvation is prepaid for by another, the Savior, there are not—nor can be—any preconditions: morally, ethically, or in terms of a religious belief or practice. When anyone is first welcome into the community of saints by faith in our Lord's death and resurrection, who knows the cultural baggage with which they might be traveling. Everyone's old life represents among other practices cultural expressions which may no longer serve as guiding principles or even an ethical/moral compass. That is the Holy Spirit's privilege now. [John 16:8-10]. But it will be a while before some are able to make this transition completely [Romans 12:2]. So we live within cultural boundaries that give a sense of security— hopefully, without self-condemnation or poking the conscience [Romans 14:22].

We have depended on culture for meaning, for defined social behavior, networking and community, and a moral and ethical structure that give us a sense of home and belonging, right from wrong, and a hope in all things future. In America, as I write this, the southern border is under a tidal wave of humanity from an unknown number of cultures not assimilating but rushing in to establish themselves, culturally, in ghetto type communities, separated—not by mountain ranges or rivers but—language, codes of conduct, and cultural practices.

This is what has happened in a similar sense within the Church. Our doors are open to all. So we denominationalized to accommodate such a variety of religious cultures and rituals, right down to the spices used in the meals at our feasts and fellowship gatherings. This is not said to denigrate any approach to enjoying Christian community or celebrating our Lord's wondrous gift. Conversely, I point out that our common faith and citizenship in Heaven have afforded us another exogenous social connectivity, outside our former cultural identities, to our Creator/Savior God in His Son [Ephesians 2:6].

We can have "all things in common" [Acts 4:32] because we have Christ in common around which all our possessions, dreams, and lives now have value and meaning. We are able collectively to "set our affection on things above, not on things on the earth." [Colossians 3:2]. It is for this reason we can say that God's grace is outside law [Galatians 5:26] and is outright forgiving instead of auditing hurt on a scale of "blame me to blame you."

But when old cultural norms are recognized as ethically valuable coming, consequently, into conflict with Christ's clear directives to love one another and extend His grace to others as He has to us, we are in trouble of re-interpreting God's grace in, how-be-it, humane terms and compromising our testimony. Worse case: we would be preaching another gospel that is not gospel [Galatians 1:6].

“When God considers people ‘righteous,’”<sup>2</sup> Barclay wrote, “they are being affirmed as acceptable.... In this case, that is because they have been reconstituted in Christ and draw their life and identity from him”<sup>3</sup> [Colossians 2:20]. It is this “identity” that affirms the change God’s grace has made.

Before we go on, Professor Barclay summarizes this thought adroitly: “Ethnic identity, ancestral loyalty, cultural excellence, and all the reconstituted values that stand independent of Christ can no longer be counted as capital worth treasuring. Faith as trust in Christ is the declaration of bankruptcy, the radical and shattering recognition that the only capital in God’s economy is the gift of Christ, a gift given without regard to any other criterion of worth.”<sup>4</sup>

### Culture is Community

“Life in the Spirit,” Professor Barclay reminds us, “is not limited to open ‘personal morality’ but is worked out on the public stage, in the creation and development of communities governed by new values and norms.”<sup>5</sup> Jesus reminds us, “My kingdom is not of this world” [John 18:36], adding, regarding you and me, “They are not of the world, even as I am not of the world.” [John 17:14]. But, though we are not *of* it, we are still *in* it [John 17:11] which means we are still interacting within secular society, but living in peace as best we can [Romans 12:18].

My teen years were characterized by a lot of “church.” Whenever the doors were open, which regularly included 4 services: 3 on Sunday and a Wednesday Evening, I was there. If I didn’t have bus fare, I walked the 3 miles in

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2. *Righteous* here, according to Barclay’s understanding, means socially accepted and legal vindicated in law. This represents a change in standing not condition.

3. John M. G. Barclay. *Paul & the Power of Grace*. (Eerdmans Publishing Company, Grand Rapids MI: 2020) page 48.

4. *Ibid.* page 50.

5. John M. G. Barclay. *Paul & the Power of Grace*. (Eerdmans Publishing Company, Grand Rapids MI: 2020) page 64.

the warmer weather. Often my sister and I got rides to and from. In those days I couldn't get enough of the House of God. It helped (full disclosure) to look forward to conversation with a young lady that I swooned over in secret, but my primary purpose was the service, the teaching, the worship, and the altar rail.

I didn't realize what was happening in me in those early days until years later and hundreds of miles away. In my retirement from the Pulpit, my search for a "church home" was frustrated because I never felt like I belonged anywhere else like I felt at home in that little church in East Buffalo, New York. What was it about that community of saints that drew me in as it did? I have since visited good teaching and lively services. I have wept in worship to choruses new and old. But I was always a visitor, a kind of religious pilgrim, looking for a "church-home," a place I couldn't wait to return to whenever the doors were open.

Every child of God is in part on this same quest to feel totally at home in the House of God, in the presence of the saints. We want to be in a place where we can become lost in worship, shut in with God. We all anticipate with longing hearts (let me get poetic) the sights and sounds of a heavenly and angelic, choir echoing off the ages, resounding through the universe.

What is happening is that as followers of Christ and children of God we are on an extended pilgrimage in a strange land [Hebrews 11:13; 1 Peter 2:11]. As citizens of heaven [Philippians 3:20] we are beginning to recognize that even the words we speak have been elevated. Peace is beyond understanding [Philippians 4:7]. Joy is unspeakable and glorious [1 Peter 1:8]. Fellowship is now not a social gathering but sharing in the Spirit's work [Philippians 2:1] and the sufferings of Christ [Philippians 3:10]. And new to the language, fellowship goes beyond just meeting but now includes giving-a new kind of sharing that we affectionately call our *offering* [ 2 Corinthians 9:13], perhaps, because in

giving to the poor and needy we recognize that we are in reality giving to our Lord [Matthew 25:40]. We could go on. There is an entirely new vocabulary that we use in addressing each other and sharing testimonies. Is it any wonder that *grace* as an act of God has gone places the Greek language before never took it!

Professor Barclay offers the following explanation that provides somewhat of a summary or review of what has been said, “if the new creation is indifferent to traditional regulative norms, it generates new patterns of social existence, new communities which chart a course “at a diagonal” to normal evaluations of worth (neither aligned nor contrary because reset in an altogether different orientation).”<sup>6</sup> He sees this as the “gift-event” God’s grace through Christ that has changed the conditions of our reality and, in fact, reconfigured it. We have no reason not to take Paul literally when he wrote, “all things are become new” [2 Corinthians 5:21].

Dr. Barclay’s phrase “at a diagonal” supports the notion that the tension that could exist if Christianity was simply a cultural change [on a continuum between Religious and Secular] does *not* exist in Christian community. Grace transforms our minds [Romans 12:2] and then gathers us together around the Cross. We not only are *nonconformists* to the present world order, we now live within another reality in which we are realizing “what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God,” i.e. the good for us, accepted by us, and perfect grace of God.

### **Grace Transcend Culture**

The Gospel transcends culture and, therefore, grace transcends culture. There is no continuum that represents a tension of ideas between the Gospel of Grace and culture. Despite the challenges native cultures and languages present

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6. Ibid. pages 72-73.

we should not view the task as a “how much” or “too little” proposition for God. We should not need to christianize a native tribe or society. Recommending such changes should only be in the interest of grace, that is, only what God’s grace would empower the native believer to do or not do in support of their relationship with Christ [Acts 15:28-29].

Notwithstanding cultural norms and practices—good or bad—the grace of God can reach anyone, anywhere. There might be those who have, as Paul noted, “a law unto themselves” [Romans 2:14] which the missionary can exploit in sharing God’s Truth, because any Mission field by definition (a mission)<sup>7</sup> needs Christ and therefore is not likely to be culturally representative of most Christian values or practices. Some tribes practice forms of cannibalism, even. But notwithstanding the challenges native cultures present, grace is grace and God can reach open hearts. How do we know all this? As we have attempted to emphasize: a grace that is unmerited and not a favor reciprocated, must be offered to all.

“The gospel stands or falls with the incongruity of grace,” Professor Barclay wrote.<sup>8</sup> He concluded, as do we, that Paul’s understanding of grace was a divine gift freely given, not earned nor merited. It is impossible not to reach this conclusion when grace is built on *trust* alone in the Savior. Such a grace must be independent of man’s agency or efforts. The plan of salvation was and remains totally God’s idea. And if salvation is God’s plan, so is His grace. Cultural practices cannot dictate what God should or should not do on behalf of a believer.

“There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus.” [Galatians 3:28]. “...where there is neither ... circumcised nor uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, but

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7. the vocation or calling ... to go out into the world and spread ... faith

8. John M. G. Barclay. *Paul & the Power of Grace*. (Eerdmans Publishing Company, Grand Rapids MI: 2020) page 47.

Christ is all and in all” [Colossians 3:11]. And Paul added “according to the promise” [Galatians 3:29]. Grace is all God! This is why we characterized it as God doing whatever He pleases to do! [Philippians 2:13] And He does what He does not just *for* us but *in* us [2 Corinthians 3:18] that we might extend His grace (efficacy) to others through our witness [Acts 1:8; 22:15].

### Grace in Community

What will make heaven a heaven is not the “yellow brick road” [Revelation 21:21] if the scripture is to be read literally as the element, gold. Nor will we be in awed at heavy city gates the size of pearls—as incredible as this sounds. Perhaps when we arrive we will only have a sense things are different; There is something *new* about heaven—something missing; But we may puzzle over what that difference might be. And yet we know it’s heaven!

When my family moved to western Pennsylvania for me to take a teaching position at a small start up Bible school, we took up residence in a small town which I noticed was somehow different and I began to think that that difference was because something was absent that was always part of life before. But for some time I couldn’t identify what that was until it “hit” me, “There are no seagulls here!” I grew up by Lake Erie and the Niagara river in upstate New York and after marrying, we moved to a small town on the Atlantic Ocean. Seagulls were a common site and their chatter—or more at constant arguing and yelling at each other—was background noise that I apparently accepted as part of the package until we moved to a landlocked town with no seagulls. I knew something was different but not exactly what at first.

Heaven just might be like that if the Lord wants to observe our excitement and reactions for a while to the change from this life before He smiles and points out some things that are missing: no pain, no war, no one arguing, no

more depression, and such. What am I trying to say: Heaven will be heaven because of *Christ* and it will be the sweeter because *you* will be there!

In reading Barclay's work, "*Paul & the Power of Grace*" my excitement was raised to write about the Beatitudes in Matthew 5:3-12 as not just character building for following Christ but as a description of God's grace at work within Christian community. This becomes in essence a description of Heaven and of the new earth that is to come.

There is a dynamic about God's Word that allows us, each time we read a passage, to acquire another perspective on the truth presented there. Over the centuries teachings on the Beatitudes [the Beautiful Attitudes] have, no doubt, been in essence, "walk-arounds" on the "Sermon on the Mount." Each step sees in our Lord's sermon another perspective on the Truth to write about.

Indeed, the inspiration in the Beatitudes reveals secrets about our happiness in Christ but we must prayerfully mine them in deeper and deeper excursions into the Word [Psalm 42:7; 1 Corinthians 2:10]. Grab you pick-ax and come along! Solomon wrote "The glory of God hides a matter, but it is the honor of kings to search it out" [Proverbs 25:2].

## The Fruit of Grace

*Love, Joy, Peaceful, Longsuffering, Kind, Good, Faithfulness, Meek, and Self-controlled*

There can be no better example of God's grace than His gift of the Spirit and the clear manifestations of His presence in our lives leading us in being *Loving, Joyful, Peaceful, Longsuffering, Kind, Good, Faithful, Meek, and Self-controlled* [Galatians 5:22-23].

### The Language of Christian Love

It is a formidable task God assigns language, out of necessity of His love, to alert us to our need of a Savior. Formidable because we are living in another realm where the meanings of words are upside down. For this reason, the classical definition of a word designated as a Fruit of the Spirit [Galatians 5:24-25] may lack the appropriate nuance that would represent the mind of the Spirit who authored the text. Richard Trench calls them graces:<sup>1</sup> *love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance.*

- ◆ *Love* is a Biblical word not found in any earlier writings.<sup>2</sup>

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1. Richard C. Trench *Synonyms of the New Testament* (Wm. B Eerdmans Publishing Company,,Grand Rapids, MI: 1975) page 232.

2. Joseph Thayers. *Thayer's Greek-English Lexicon.* (Hendrickson Publishers, 1996), page 693.

## The Fruit of Grace

- ◆ *Joy* which Peter says is so glorious words are inadequate to define it<sup>3</sup> [1 Peter 1:8].
- ◆ *Peace* which Bishop Lightfoot wrote “surpassing every counsel of man ... which is far better, which produces a higher satisfaction, then ... all anxious forethought.”<sup>4</sup> [Philippians 4:7; 2 Thessalonians 3:16].
- ◆ *Longsuffering* “... occurs in the Septuagint, though neither there nor elsewhere exactly in the sense which in the N.T. it bears.”<sup>5</sup>
- ◆ *Gentleness* which Richard Trench called “a beautiful grace” of which “Calvin has quite too superficial a view of ... when commenting on Col. 3:12.”<sup>6</sup>
- ◆ *Goodness*\* was a word unknown before the writing of the Bible.<sup>7</sup> Since Paul references it only 3 times, some scholars will not define it. Some see it as the outward expression of gentleness.
- ◆ *Faith* Lightfoot demurs, “seems not to be used here in its theological sense ‘belief in God.’ ... Rather ... the passive meaning ..*trustworthiness*.”<sup>8</sup>
- ◆ *Meekness* Trench wrote that this word has “a depth, a richness, a fulness of significance which [it was] very far from possessing before.”<sup>9</sup>
- ◆ *Temperance* is defined everywhere in a secular sense, “self-control, to force one’s self to do something, to

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3. Ibid. page 44.

4. J. B. Lightfoot, *Saint Paul’s Epistles to the Philippians*. (Zondervan Publishing Company. Grand Rapids, MI: 15<sup>th</sup> printing. 1976) page 161.

5. Richard C. Trench *Synonyms of the New Testament* (Wm. B Eerdmans Publishing Company,,Grand Rapids, MI: 1975) page 196..

6. Ibid. 232f.

7. Joseph Thayers. *Thayer’s Greek-English Lexicon*. (Hendrickson Publishers, 1996), page 693.

8. J. B. Lightfoot, *The Epistle of Saint Paul to the Galatians*. (Zondervan Publishing Company, Grand Rapids, MI:1974), page 213.

9. Richard C. Trench *Synonyms of the New Testament* (Wm. B Eerdmans Publishing Company,,Grand Rapids, MI: 1975) page 151.

## The Fruit of Grace

exercise control over, be master of, with a strong hand.”<sup>10</sup> But, Paul admitted, “to will is present with me; but how to perform that which is good I find not.” [Romans 7:18].

Do we credit Paul with forethought in the choice of these 9. He left out an entire catalog of saintly qualities that, to our way of thinking, might easily deserve a place in this list (godliness, humility, mercy, even righteousness, patience, and purity, to name a few)? Or do we credit the Spirit with this list in which these words have particular significance and meaning to God? Has He pressed these terms into service having elevated them to a higher spiritual plane to speak of a spirituality they were not, until now, capable of describing.

One thing is obvious that Paul is contrasting the Fruit of the Spirit with at least (Paul added “and such like”)<sup>11</sup> 17 “works of the flesh” in Galatians 5:19-21. Of These 9 graces Lightfoot says “the difficulty in classification in this list [the Fruit of the Spirit] is still greater.”<sup>12</sup>

Some terms like *virtue* and *religious*, and even *to bow down in worship*, have such a limited use, especially with Paul, that we are led to think that God's grace served a much loftier purpose than could be explained using these terms.

As the prophet foretold, “For then will I turn to the people a pure language, that they may all call upon the name of the LORD, to serve him with one consent.” [Zephaniah 3:9].

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10. Henry George Liddell & Robert Scott. compl. *A Greek-English Lexicon*. (Oxford University Press. London: 1976), page 473.

11. ejusdem generis -as the same kind

12. John Peter Lange..*Genesis* (Zondervan, Grand Rapids, MI: 7th printing, 1980) Vol XI, Page 139.

## The Fruit of Grace

“With one consent” interprets the phrase “with one shoulder,” i.e. as one man.<sup>13</sup> To unite them under the Lord’s banner they needed to have a common language in which the vocabulary represents a simple and clear emphasis and common view.<sup>14</sup> For us, Christian fellowship must be Christ-centric and united in a common bond and purpose—around the Cross and its significance. For this to be, we need to experience and identify the Fruit of the Spirit. These terms are the language of the Christian Faith.

Perhaps, it is reasonable to ask: Are the Fruit of the Spirit as part of a Christian testimony evidence of the infilling of the Spirit? This is not to disparage any doctrine but to encourage a deeper enquiry into the meaning and significance of these 9 Christian characteristics as descriptive of our spirituality and salvation.

### Temperance

Let’s start with *temperance*. Temperance, in the dictionary, is defined everywhere in a secular sense, “self-control, to force one’s self to do something, to exercise control over, be master of, with a strong hand.” With the possible exception of Paul’s use of the word in Acts 24:25<sup>15</sup> in conversation with Felix, this definition would seem to *contradict* grace because we know that we need the grace of God in our lives; we cannot live for Christ in our own strength or resolve. “The life which I now live in the flesh,”<sup>16</sup>

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13. F. Brown, Driver, Et. Al. *The Brown, Driver, Briggs Hebrew and English Lexicon*. (Peabody, MA. Hendrickson Publishers. Sixteenth Printing, 2015) page 1014.

14. the modern term is zeitgeist - the defining spirit or mood ... as shown by the ideas and beliefs of the Christian world.

15. And as he reasoned of righteousness, **temperance**, and judgment to come, Felix trembled, and answered, Go thy way for this time; when I have a convenient season, I will call for thee.

16. Is is significant that Paul added these words, though they are redundant (Paul having used the word “now”). The flesh is the seat of all selfishness and carnality outside of Christ. This truth is significant in our study of temperance.

## The Fruit of Grace

Paul testified, "I live by the faith[fulness]<sup>17</sup> of the Son of God" [Galatians 2:20].

It is important to understand why this word, here. Peter saw temperance as a link in another chain connecting a true knowledge of Christ with a Christian life lived victoriously over sin leading to godliness. "And to knowledge temperance; and to temperance patience; and to patience godliness" [2 Peter 1:6]. So even here Paul speaks of a conscious and determined resolve to support a zeal for Christ. As Paul said it to the Corinthian church, "But I keep under my body, and bring *it* into subjection: lest that by any means, when I have preached to others, I myself should be a castaway" [1 Corinthians 9:27]. There is a sense in which, first things first, we, as persons of faith, must recognize in some fundamental way the efficacy, the empowerment, of the grace of God to enable us to live for Him. "For I know that in me," Paul argued, "(that is, in my flesh) dwells no good thing" [Romans 7:18].

So, Paul urged us, because of Calvary, "Reckon .. also yourselves to be dead indeed unto sin, but alive unto God through Jesus Christ our Lord" [Romans 6:11]. He could unconditionally encourage us to "put on the new man, .. renewed ... after the image of him that created him" [Colossians 3:10]. And then 2 verse later "Put on therefore, as the elect of God, holy and beloved, bowels of mercies, *kindness*, humbleness of mind, *meekness*, *longsuffering*;" [Colossians 3:12]. Three of these traits are "Fruit of the Spirit."

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17. Faith in Christ is trust in His trustworthiness. Both translations: *faith* or *faithfulness* are allowed. Since faith is faithfulness, that is, is a term of relation for which we use the word *trust*, we cannot view one meaning here without the other.

## Temperance at War Against Carnality

Putting on Christ is a euphemism, how-be-it most real, for temperance. The commentaries correctly see this word used in contrast to the sins listed in the works of the flesh or carnality.

Carnality in our New Testament, is the same word for “the flesh.” In a number of languages carnal means fleshly. In the NIV translation on Romans 7:25, however, it is translated “the sinful nature” which, I think, is incorrect. We are not talking here about who we are as Christians but how we live. At times these two—the person we are becoming in Christ and the way we act—are not the same. We display what mistakenly appears as a second nature within us—One Christlike and the other sinful, but such a dissociative state would indicate a serious identity issue while Christians, in the interest of personal gratification, are just denying the power they have over sin.

The word most often interpreted as *carnal*, however, means “pertaining to the flesh” and speaks of human desires by which a person can be tempted [James 1:14]. Human or natural desires are not bad in themselves. In Romans 15:27 they are physical needs that deacons minister to. Food is a fleshly desire and we all need to eat, but gorging oneself on a family size bag of snacks might be more a want than a need and possibly should be considered carnal.

But when desires are put in charge of our actions and are inconsiderate of others including God, the Bible calls it carnality. When personal interests and wants are in charge of our lives they become selfish concerns that “wage war against [the] soul” [1 Peter 2:11]. The word used in Romans 7:14 and in 1 Corinthians 3:1 has been described as “wholly given up to the flesh.”<sup>18</sup> Christians, sadly, are capable of this, as the Corinthian Church showed, but ultimately all persons

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18. Joseph Thayer. *Thayer's Greek-English Lexicon*. Hendrickson Publishers. Peabody MA.: 14th printing, 2019) page. 569.

## The Fruit of Grace

reveal their true self. Consider the words of Jude, “I say this because some ungodly people have wormed their way into your churches, saying that God’s marvelous grace allows us to live immoral lives. The condemnation of such people was recorded long ago, for they have denied our only Master and Lord, Jesus Christ. [Jude 4 NLT].

All spiritually destructive activity, thoughts, and abusive speaking, Paul lists under the general heading of “The flesh” as carnality. In brief, carnality is a selfishness void of love. Carnality takes what it wants and is never satisfied, Carnality seeks only gratification. Carnality is always and only selfish and a lover of self. Christ enlightens us to note the difference and to honor the body but not carnality.

Paul speaks for all of us when He cried out to the Lord for help against this inner conflict of interest, “O wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me from the body of this death?” [Romans 7:24]. And the answer is, The Spirit of God will and does. He gifted us—what I might characterize as—a holy temperance. “I thank God through Jesus Christ our Lord. So then with the mind I myself serve the law of God; but with the flesh the law of sin” [Romans 7:25].

*Temperance* is the Spirit’s work in us, *not* to destroy human desire [the flesh]<sup>19</sup> but to *control* it. What Jesus destroyed on Calvary was the devil’s work. “For this purpose the Son of God was manifested, that he might destroy the works of the devil” [1 John 3:8]. A study of carnality links it with selfish *want* or desires and *not* human or physical need, else, it would be a sin to eat! Carnality must be understood and addressed first and foremost before we can begin to build Christian character that is ultimately capable of a supreme and all inclusive godly love. We begin

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19. The phrase destroy the flesh is a Stoic idea not supported in Scripture.

## The Fruit of Grace

with the Fruit of Temperance, a little appreciated gift of Grace. This is grace at work.

We have only begun to appreciate this beautiful grace. Temperance is more than “self-control” Temperance is not willpower but “grace-power.” Temperance becomes a natural expression in Christian community void of all carnality or selfishness.

### **Meekness to Love**

**Meekness** is a disposition to obey, a desire to follow Christ, which requires the believer be divested of selfishness. A desire to follow Christ, as Jesus, pointed out, begins with a poverty of Spirit, a humility that wants to *give* not take, that lives in community and not for self.

It isn't faith that develop from this union of temperance and meekness, but *faithfulness*. Faith as **Faithfulness** [or trustworthiness, same word] is meekness in action. An in depth study of this truth awaits the scholar who would take up the gauntlet. But here, the prima facie argument is to outline the relation among these 9 Fruit.

What is **Goodness** then? As already noted, this word is new to the language. It is descriptive of whatever “good” means as righteousness is descriptive of a righteous person or uprightness is the quality of being upright—staying on the straight and narrow [Matthew 7:14]. What we can say is “God is Good” [Luke 18:19]. I'll leave the sermons to the preachers but we can say that when we follow Christ and yield to the Spirit in how we live, we display goodness. It makes sense, then, to say that such a goodness requires faithfulness.

**Gentleness** is a major expression of God's goodness through us to others. Goodness, in Christian community, has a gentle side to it because it honors God's Word. One scholarly comparison called goodness a mark of Christian character to which kindness or gentleness is its outward

## The Fruit of Grace

expression. In a childlike explanation, we might say, bad people are not nice. We might consent to the thought, then, that whatever gentleness is, it is a characteristic of goodness. Trench called Gentleness “a beautiful word, as it is the expression of a beautiful grace [which] occurs in the N. T. only in the writings of St. Paul.”<sup>20</sup> Trench went on, “‘sweetness’ (2 Corinthians vi. 6), has seized more successfully the central notion of the word.”<sup>21</sup> One can begin to see the value of the Spirit in the believer’s life leading us into meaningful community and fellowship and taking us away from ourselves as an only interest.

Gentleness is a benign kindness that is more than tolerant of others but accepting of them. No word describes this better than “**Longsuffering**.” Ephesians.4:2 “longsuffering, forbearing one another in love,” Richard Trench taught, “beautifully expounds the meaning which [Paul] attaches to the word.”<sup>22</sup>

The first 3 Fruit are elsewhere in Paul’s writings ascribed to God. “The kingdom of God is .. **Peace**, and **Joy** in the Holy Spirit.” [Romans 14:17]. And we know that “God is love.” [1 John 4:8]. The order in the Fruit is also reasonable. Tolerance in love leads to *peace*, harmony and unity. It is a veritable definition of it! And when we are at peace among ourselves, as believers [as well as best we can with all others] there is *joy*. There is no joy in disharmony and disunity.

And all these 8 Fruit define **Agape** *love*. To describe God’s love outside the nuances supplied by these 8 Fruit of the Spirit is to see God’s love with a selfish interest that denies the importance of loving others as Christ loved us [John 15:17]. Christian community and fellowship is built on this foundation, as Paul, howbeit, a bit cryptically, explained, “the body ... edifying ... itself in love” [Ephesians 4:16].

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20. Richard C. Trench *Synonyms of the New Testament* (Wm. B Eerdmans Publishing Company,,Grand Rapids, MI: 1975) page 232.

21. *Ibid.*

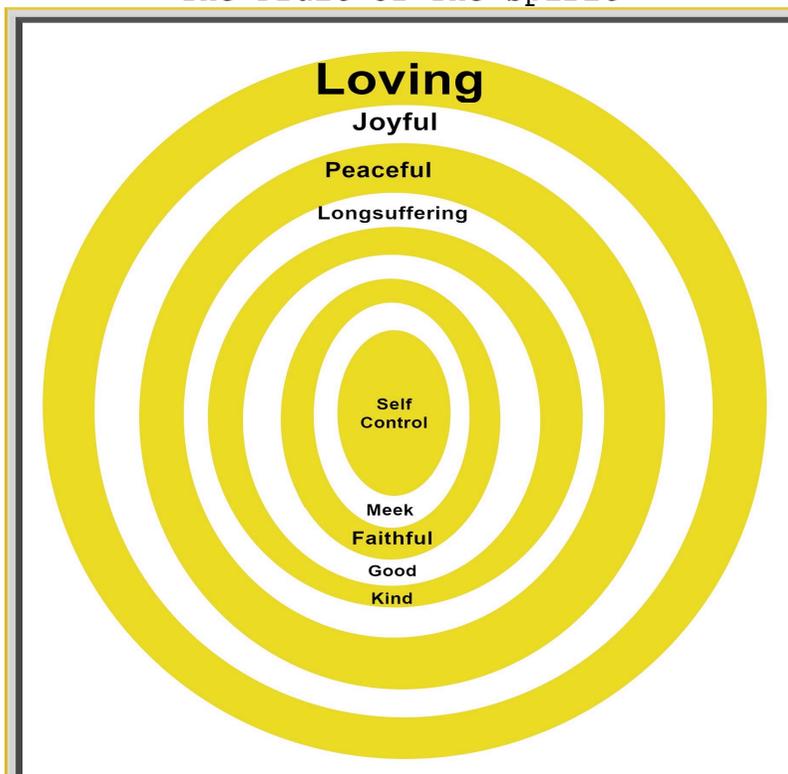
22. *Ibid.* page 196.

## The Fruit of Grace

As the arrabon [2 Corinthians 1:22] I see the Spirit as an introduction to heaven, the first installment of our inheritance in Christ [Ephesians 1:14]. The Fruit are a glimpse behind the Gates of Pearl into another life free from “hate, sorrow and grief, division and partisanship, fighting and arguing, violence, lies and deception, mistrust, pride, and selfishness: the works of the flesh. This is an exceedingly rich grace [Ephesians 2:7].

The Fruit of the Spirit are relational. They are expressed in a relationship with the Lord and each other. Let's start with Agape love. Love is characterized by joy —a happiness in being with the person loved. But there is no joy without harmony-peace. And for peace to exist we must be accepting of who they are [which is what longsuffering means]. Longsuffering without kindness is not longsuffering and kindness is a product of a “good” heart [Goodness, the Christian quality that comes from being Spirit-led]. To be Spirit-led means faithfulness and trustworthiness. Faithfulness is in turn a natural expression of the disposition to be faithful [meekness]. A love so nuanced requires that we harness the flesh (carnality) which wars against the Spirit, “We have died to what controlled us, so that we may serve in the new life of the Spirit” [Romans 7:6 NET].

The Fruit of The Spirit



There is a relation among these 9 spiritual qualities suggested in their generally accepted meanings by scholars that can be represented in a target motif. Each level or trait is defined by the “rings” or qualities within its circle. When Paul taught there is no common ground between God’s desire toward us and carnality [Galatians 5:16-17] he underscored the primary role of temperance in our “walk in the Spirit.” This truth must not be minimized.

## The Paradox of Grace

*Grace does not just turn life over; Grace brings life right side up.*

Corrie Ten Boom wrote:<sup>1</sup>

My life is but a weaving  
Between my God and me.  
I cannot choose the colors  
He weaveth steadily.  
Oft' times He weaveth sorrow;  
And I in foolish pride  
Forget He sees the upper  
And I the underside.  
Not 'til the loom is silent  
And the shuttles cease to fly  
Will God unroll the canvas  
And reveal the reason why.  
The dark threads are as needful  
In the weaver's skillful hand  
As the threads of gold and silver  
In the pattern He has planned  
He knows, He loves, He cares;  
Nothing this truth can dim.  
He gives the very best to those  
Who leave the choice to Him.

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1. accessed 2/5/24 on tapestry <https://www.challies.com/articles/gods-tapestry/>

## The Paradox of Grace

Professor Barclay sees this as the paradox<sup>2</sup> of grace.<sup>3</sup> As Jeremiah prophesied concerning the New Covenant ratified on the Cross, The Lord promised to “turn our mourning into joy, and comfort us, and cause us to rejoice in our sorrow” [Jeremiah 31:13]. And here is the paradox: “cause us to rejoice in our sorrow.” In a real sense sorrow is the underside of the tapestry and we are prone to see it more often than the actual masterpiece God is weaving in us.

- ◆ Mark 9:35 “If anyone wants to be first, he must be last of all and servant of all.”
- ◆ Romans 5:3 “...we glory in tribulations...”
- ◆ Romans 4:17 “God ... calls into existence the things that do not exist.”
- ◆ Philippians 3:10 “That I may know...the fellowship of his sufferings...”
- ◆ 1 Corinthians 1:25 “...the foolishness of God is wiser than men; and the weakness of God is stronger than men.”
- ◆ 1 Corinthians 1:27 “God hath chosen the foolish things of the world to confound the wise; and God hath chosen the weak things of the world to confound the things which are mighty;”
- ◆ 2 Corinthians 8:2 “How that in a great trial of affliction the abundance of their joy and their deep poverty abounded unto the riches of their liberality.”
- ◆ 2 Corinthians 12:9 “my strength is made perfect in weakness. Most gladly therefore will I rather glory in my infirmities”

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2. a seemingly absurd or self-contradictory statement or proposition that when investigated or explained may prove to be well founded or true

3. John M. G. Barclay. *Paul & the Power of Grace*. (Eerdmans Publishing Company, Grand Rapids MI: 2020), page 115.

## The Paradox of Grace

- ◆ Galatians 2:20 “I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live....”

### **The Last shall be First**

Until we get to where we are going in God’s Kingdom, grace needs to make sense out of the senseless, find value in that which in our human understanding would never be seen as valuable, and rescue us, through a transformed mind, from a mindset that could not understand God that we might more perfectly know and love Him.

When Jesus taught “The last shall be first” we probably didn’t take Him literally but everything about grace is upside down from human reasoning. Barclay called this work of grace “The redefinition of the self, whose identity, goals, and values are formed anew by a powerful presence deeper than the normal conditions of human life.”<sup>4</sup> Our Lord while sitting on the Throne of Heaven proclaimed “Behold, I make all things new. .. Write: for these words are true and faithful” [Revelation 21:5].

The Christian’s life is a paradox, but not totally mysterious, in which we have hope in tribulation [Romans 5:3-4], comfort through trial [2 Corinthians 1:4]. A victory means there was an enemy. In a metaphor: mountain tops are only real because of the valley between.

Paul reminded us that “[God] made him [Jesus] to be sin for us, who knew no sin” to reconcile us to God [2 Corinthians 5:21]. This truth still puzzles many a logical thinker, although, it points out that since sin had to be addressed in order to make available to us the new birth [2 Corinthians 5:17] His death became *that* death to sin which then made possible for us to become “the righteousness of

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4. John M. G. Barclay. Paul & the Power of Grace. (Eerdmans Publishing Company, Grand Rapids MI: 2020), page 123.

God," i.e. live a holy life in relationship with God "in him" [2 Corinthians 5:18].

### The Two Shall Be One

Perhaps, one of the biggest or most puzzling paradoxes is a heterogenous marriage which, in God's design, represents Christ and the Church [Ephesians 5:32]. A wife was intended by God to be a "helper" for her husband. We alluded earlier to the idea that whatever helper meant (Paul's word was "submit") it was unregulated. It was not what a wife does but what she *is* in relation to her husband and, sadly, we may have lost the meaning of this early Hebrew term [Genesis 2:18]. It came to mean "assistant" which was then culturally interpreted in ways that took it far away from God's creative design for marriage. The word "husband" dropped out while men became their wives' *masters*. Later God would share with Hosea His intention for correcting this by reintroducing the word "husband" [Hosea 2:16]. Divorce was allowed [Matthew 19:8] even though God abhorred the idea [Malachi 2:16].

So what kind of marriage math works to produce one out of two?<sup>5</sup> I cannot document what I say next but according to the late Dr. Abram Maslow, Psychologist, there is such a thing as maleness distinct from femaleness. Men and women are psychologically different<sup>6</sup> God made them as compliments—the only 2 pieces to complete one picture—a marriage relationship.

Gay relations are build on homogeneity or the notion that they "get each other" and they support each other's interests, emotionally and psychologically. But God intended to utilize this *difference* to provide a true emotional and

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5. It is this number 2 that led Christianity in disallowing polygamy, polyandry, and polyamory as well as bigamy and adultery.

6. Something, in itself, should caution against homosexuality and gender transformation.

## The Paradox of Grace

psychological completeness. Married people need what each offers the other because it is not part of their own psychological makeup. Marriage provides a way of giving need-meeting and satisfying “help” instead of having to take it in an animalistic, or abusive, and selfish way. A heterogenous relationship recognizes that they are indeed the compliment of each other.

Women do not think like men—a point any husband has discovered true in discussion with his wife. And women often admit that their husband does not listen. No, his problem might be one of understanding not listening. But all this back and forth is a critical part of discovering oneness—like the baby bird breaking its way out of the egg shell. A married person’s ability—not to communicate, but—to *learn* to communicate supports this discovery process and leads to a deeper romance and abiding love. Yes, it is a paradox!

## The Beatitudes

Nothing makes the point, that God’s grace is paradoxical, more than the Beatitudes, having the believer’s happiness dependent on a life filled with poverty and persecution. But this is more than paradoxical; It is paradoxical because it represents another culture, a heavenly culture [Philippians 3:20], rooted in Holiness [Proverbs 9:10], and in the heart of God [I John 4:16].

1. **“Poverty of spirit”** [Matthew 5:3] is the first mark of a humility that has voluntarily handed over everything to God. It is a simple sign of a giving heart; but more than resources, it is the mindset of the believer who has relinquished even their future or what they could become to the desires of God. This entire act screams: *unconditional* and, as such, it is the cry of the heart to allow God’s grace to take ownership of all they have and are.

## The Paradox of Grace

2. It is this person, for whom **mourning** [Matthew 5:4] means associating with Christ's sufferings [Philippians 3:10], carrying God's burden for others [John 7:37], and accepting joyously a longing for the full realization of our "adoption" in the resurrection to come [Romans 8:23]. None of this speaks of unbearable sadness or overwhelming sorrow because grace is efficacious. God's grace, paradoxically turns sorrow to joy [Isaiah 51:11]. Believers do not find pain in pleasure, but we do find happiness and fulfillment in carrying our Lord's burden or being with Him in the yoke of service to God [Matthew 11:28-30].
3. So we become increasingly "prone" or disposed to follow the Savior's footsteps, and the only anxiety comes, not because we need to know where they lead, but when we panic erroneously thinking we have lost the trail. Meekness is a Fruit of the Spirit, a grace in its own right, because like grace it is unsolicited. **Meekness** [Matthew 5:5] is the heart crying out to God, "Point the way, Lord; Lead me in the path to follow" [Psalm 25:4].
4. That path is the path of righteousness [Psalm 23:4] and the only right way to proceed [John 14:6]. There are not many ways to God; there are not many ways to happiness. There is only one; it speaks to the singular gift, a **hunger after the righteousness** of God [Matthew 5:6], which procures our happiness in Christ.
5. There is, now, nothing more central to a believer's happiness than being a giver, being **merciful** [Matthew 5:7]. It is as if all that has happened before: learning humility, discovering the heart of God in mourning, living with a longing to follow in our Lord's steps, seeking out the path of righteousness in prayer—all this—has now brought us to the place of

## The Paradox of Grace

- a desire to be an instrument of His mercy, to love mercy, for there is no other life to live [Micah 6:8].
6. This is in essence grace in its purest. It speaks to being “**Pure in heart**” [Matthew 5:8], to having a heart after God alone, to have a heart like His, a giving heart. Purity is a singularity. Oh to have a heart with no other desire than serving God by serving others. Purity is also unalloyed, not hypocritical, totally spontaneous, unselfish, and real in its interest in following Christ.
  7. Peace is also a Fruit of the Spirit; so, by itself, it is a gift of God’s grace. Having peace makes us **peacemakers** which shows the efficacy of God’s gift. We have here an interesting syllogism:
    - Peacemakers are the Children of God [Matthew 5:9],
    - The Children of God are those led by the Spirit [Romans 8:14],
    - Therefore to be a peacemaker means to be Spirit-led.
  8. God’s grace has now enabled us to thrash and hack our way through the underbrush and brambles of tribulation and **persecution** [Matthew 5:10-11] because we have learned that happiness is not the hedonist’s quest for self or the stoic’s passive resignation to nature; it is the vision of another culture of the Kingdom God under a covenant of grace for which we were created; found only in following the Savior.

### Sanctify His Name

Our lives should put God’s love on display as a living testament to His grace. Not in word only but in deed also we are called to “testify ... of the grace of God” [Acts

## The Paradox of Grace

20:24]. Being a Christian is all about living the grace of God. We must eventually turn the corner. The grace that worked in us must now work through us—shine forth from us [Romans 5:5 NLT reads “God has given us the Holy Spirit to fill our hearts with his love”]. If we, as believers, are commissioned by God to promote His love and interest in souls does it not seem reasonable to conclude that God’s grace must be represented to our world by us, by what we now do and say?

God’s grace has a reputation because the Church has a reputation which must exemplify the forgiveness of the Savior as well as His spontaneity in loving the otherwise unloveable, showing uncommon compassion to the needy, and a wholehearted, all out, giving of ourselves in service to God to bring the message of the Kingdom to hopeful hearts.

If our lives must exemplify God’s grace, there is a sense in which we are presenting His gift of Salvation to others with a certain gracefulness, a certain deference to His generosity. The ultimate test of a disciple’s commitment and dedication to the Lord [in this way] is their ability to represent the Good News [God’s grace] —as only good news can be represented—with an undying hope, an enduring peace, an unconquerable love, an unquestioning faith, and an unquenchable joy.

### **Grace is Who God Is**

God’s grace is the unpretentious and humble demonstration of His holiness in the person of the Savior of men. Grace is the transparent revelation of His character which was on display when God walked among us in the person of His Son. Many will not see what the few who come to believe in Him will see. It is our privilege and calling as His witnesses to be ambassadors of His grace—even though this comes in conflict with those old carnal patterns of thought and behavior that must now be forgiven and

## The Paradox of Grace

forgotten and replaced by what best heralds through us God's great heart for His creation, for humanity.

- **I am crucified with Christ,**” Paul willingly relinquished his will to God's,
- **nevertheless I live;** [the greatest paradox of all, perhaps: “whosoever will lose his life for my sake shall find it” - Matthew 16:25]
- **yet not I, but Christ liveth in me:** [It is no longer about me but Christ, only Christ]
- **and the life which I now live in the flesh** [in this body]
- **I live by the faith** [trust in His faithfulness]
- **of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me.** [It's all about the Cross].
- **I do not frustrate** [make meaningless in my life]
- **the grace of God.** [Galatians 2:20-21a].

If a believer is to be a living instrument of God's grace, they must be Spirit- led. “For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, they are the sons of God” [Romans 8:14]. And if one is led by the Spirit they are not operating under a strict set of instructions but allowing the Lord to open doors of opportunity [Revelation 3:18] and direct them [Acts 16:9]. Being a disciple of Christ, accordingly, frees us from legalism because we follow Him and not a set of rules. “...if ye be led of the Spirit,” Paul taught, “you are not under the law” [Galatians 5:18].

### Is Serving Our Lord Really a Sacrificial Gift?

There is a curious reading in Philippians 2:3-4 “Let nothing be done through strife or vainglory; but in lowliness of mind let each esteem other better than themselves. Look not every man on his own things, but every man also on the things of others.” Other translations interpret the words

## The Paradox of Grace

“strife or vain glory” as “selfish ambition or conceit.” The New Living Bible reads, “don’t try to impress others.”

But what should interest us is in the New International reading where the word “also” in verse 4 is *missing*: “not looking to your own interests but each of you to the interests of the others.” Most Biblical scholars like to keep it in. Bishop Lightfoot interprets, “Let them look beyond their own interests to those of others.”<sup>7</sup> How disinterested [not influenced by considerations of personal advantage] ought we be when getting involved in the care of others? Is it wrong for us to complain that we also need to take care of ourselves, else, we will not have the energy or ability to help them?

How hard it is to put ourselves last, because that means to many: *not at all!* But what are we to make of the context of Philippians, chapter 2? Our Savior-God became incarnate, laid aside His “omni” cloak to die for us. Yet one might correctly argue that Jesus’ death and resurrection, though a selfless act of extreme and supreme love, nevertheless, benefitted Him, as well. The Cross was intended by God to reconcile His creation unto Himself, so that He would have us to love. How is that not a benefit to God?

This debate is found elsewhere. The New Living Translation of Hebrews 12:2 reads “Because of the joy awaiting him, he endured the cross” And then footnotes: “Or *Instead of the joy.*” It almost sounds sacrilegious to ask but this is the instrument and source of God’s grace and, as such, it seems acceptable to ask if the sacrifice of ourselves for others or putting others before ourselves—if this—benefits us, is it really a sacrifice?!

Paradoxically, the most meaningful thing one could do for themselves—just because they love themselves—is

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7. J. B. Lightfoot. *Saint Paul Epistle to the Philippians*. (Zondervan Publishing House, Grand Rapids, MI., 15<sup>th</sup> printing, 1976), page 110

## The Paradox of Grace

serve the Lord and others. We were created for His love. We are recognized as social beings which means we thrive individually in community—and as believers, in Christian fellowship. When the Savior introduced us through adoption to our brothers and sisters in Christ, we became part of an eternal family [Romans 8:15]. There can be no sweeter “Welcome Home” than to hear Jesus say, “Entered into the joy of your Lord” [Matthew 25:21].

## Living in The Grace of God

*Grace, not only for us, but is also administered by us and through us to others as a witness to its reality.*

*"But none of these things move me, neither count I my life dear unto myself, so that I might finish my course with joy, and the ministry, which I have received of the Lord Jesus, to testify the gospel of the grace of God." - Acts 20:24*

I have endeavored in writing to document my conclusions without simply copying another author's ideas; but once in a while my excitement begs I copy a thought worth being repeated. When, for example, moral and doctrinal crises in the Corinthian Church arose, an anticipated offering for the poor in Jerusalem was in jeopardy, which, as regards giving, according to Dr. Barclay, lead to a full disclosure of Paul's "theology of grace."<sup>1</sup> Paul's treatise on God's grace through ministry now clearly included *monetary* gifts [2 Corinthians 8-9], which Barclay called "the relationship between the Christ-gift and the practice of generosity."<sup>2</sup>

In the Old Testament generosity was associated with nobility [Proverbs 19:6] because they had the surplus to give to the poor who had nothing. This word came to mean "willing spirit" [Exodus 35:5]. But with Paul, Barclay points out, offerings are an expression of God's grace through the instrument of the believer. "Inasmuch as ye have done it

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1. John M. G. Barclay. *Paul & the Power of Grace*. (Eerdmans Publishing Company, Grand Rapids MI: 2020) page 133.

2. *Ibid.*

unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto me," Jesus taught [Matthew 25:40].

Barclay observed, "This is one of those cases where it helps enormously to read the text in Greek, since English translations necessarily use different words for [the word] "grace" and so obscure the connection between them" [The word *grace* is translated: in 2 Corinthians 8:7 "grace;" in 8:19 "offering;" in 9:15 "thanks"]. ... The different uses of "grace" suggest that divine grace flows through believers and is expressed in their giving to others, and that the momentum of this flow generates thanks to God in recognition of the source of the gift."<sup>3</sup> It is worth considering that one form of praise to God is in giving to others in need. Perhaps, someone did think of it by combining "thanks" and "giving" into a single word.

When our pocket-books get involved in an act of grace, is it not proper to say, "God finally has all of us"? Barclay now adjusts his thoughts by changing giving *to* the poor into giving *with* the poor. No one is exempt from the privilege of being an instrument of God's grace to others! No believer's heart wants to be left out! The poor in Macedonian, as an example, wanted "in" on the offering for the poor in Jerusalem, even though, they, themselves, were no different: "Their deep poverty abounded unto the riches of their liberality," Paul exclaimed [2 Corinthians 8:2].

In reality, everything God gives us is meant for sharing. And because His gifts are an endless supply, we are always in a position to share. The word "fellowship" in the New Testament is a sharing. Luke's description of "all things in common" [Acts 2:44] is no misprint but a definition of the word *fellowship*.<sup>4</sup> This explains Paul's fury when the poor

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3. Ibid.

4. Biblical fellowship is a sharing of one's resources whereas communism is a government run program of equity. The Biblical idea is citizens in a free and open community helping and serving one another. The government idea is a controlled servitude.

came to a fellowship gathering hungry while the wealthy gorged themselves on their many dainties. “Do you despise the church of God and shame those who have nothing?” [1 Corinthians 11:22]. Ouch!! Paul’s point is: fellowship *is* sharing *is* giving!

But unless we drive past the point: God’s grace to us must now become God’s grace *through* us. We are commissioned, as a part of our testimony, to display divine grace in action—in all its glory: unearned, unrestricted, unimpeded, unreciprocated, unsolicited, and unlimited.

In this brief work, we have attempted to understand what God’s grace is. The word in a lexicographical sense [in the dictionary] alone cannot encapsulate its entire meaning. There are nuances to the word, shades of meaning, like hues in a rainbow, that are essential to understanding its fuller significance. Professor Barclay gave us 6 characteristics of a gift, and because grace is the gift of God [the word “grace” means “gift”] he discussed these in his work in “*Paul & the Power of Grace*.” To these I added from the grammar in the word “saved” in Ephesians 2:7 the contributions made by the passive and perfect forms. It is time to try and put this all together.

God’s gift *for* us [Jesus’ crucifixion] then given *to* us [salvation] then worked *in* us [our transformation being conformed to His image] then given *by* us to others [in calling and ministry] is God’s merciful kindness [love] shared in Christian community and lived before the world.

### **Grace, therefore, is God’s gift given:**

1. As regards incongruity: Grace is unmerited, undeserved, and unearned. Martin Luther reportedly taught: “Sinners are attractive [to God] because they are loved; they are not loved because they are

attractive.”<sup>5</sup> “The scripture hath concluded all under sin, that the promise by faith of Jesus Christ might be given to them that believe” [Galatians 3:22].

2. As regards singularity: Grace is unrestricted, unalloyed, un-compromised, undivided, unchanged, and unchanging.<sup>6</sup> “The gifts and calling of God are without repentance.” [Romans 11:29]. “For God hath concluded them all in unbelief, that he might have mercy upon all.” [Romans 11:32].
3. As regards efficacy: Grace is unhindered, unimpeded, productive, and empowered. “Believers are not left as they were, altered only in their legal status before God. They are reconstituted and re-oriented by the receipt of grace, such that the practice of love and generosity, and the power of the Spirit, is integral to the expression of salvation.”<sup>7</sup> “Great grace was upon them all” [Acts 4:33].
4. As regards reciprocity: Grace is non circulatory, that is not requiring something in return.<sup>8</sup> Peter cautioned Simon the sorcerer, “Your money perish with you, because you thought that the gift of God could be purchased with money!” [Acts 8:20].
5. As regards priority: Grace is unsolicited, uninitiated, and unexpected. “Whom He foreknew” [Romans 8:29; Psalm 22:9; Ephesians 1:4].

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5. John M. G. Barclay. *Paul & the Power of Grace*. (Eerdmans Publishing Company, Grand Rapids MI: 2020), page 155.

6. Singularity says God is always and only merciful but the “Simplicity” of God teaches that all God’s attributes are expressed in every act.

7. John M. G. Barclay. *Paul & the Power of Grace*. (Eerdmans Publishing Company, Grand Rapids MI: 2020) page 141-2.

8. Since grace brings us into a relationship with God, participation in that relationship and sharing in Christian community are necessary aspects of this grace.

## Living in The Grace of God

6. As regards superabundance: unlimited, immeasurable, and unbounded: “the exceeding riches of his grace” [Ephesians 2:7].

We must add 4 more qualities that describe God’s kindness, His love, His mercy:

- ◆ In a perfect sense God’s gifts as part of our salvation are complete and permanent. “In the ages to come he might shew... his grace” [Ephesians 2:7].
- ◆ In the use of the passive form, they are totally and only God to which we have *not* contributed in any sense. (Barclay used the phrase: ex nihilism == out of nothing.) “Not of works” [Ephesians 2:9].
- ◆ God’s gifts are only One, the gift of Himself. Nothing about grace is external to a reconciled and loving relationship with God. “God...gave..His Son” [John 3:16]. “But of him are ye in Christ Jesus, who of God is made unto us wisdom, and righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption” [1 Corinthians 1:30]. We enjoy an endless supply of cookies because we live with the Baker.
- ◆ Grace is always and only Christ-centric. Everything God gives was given at Calvary and traces back to the Cross. “For I determined not to know any thing among you, save Jesus Christ, and him crucified” [1 Corinthians 2:2].

### God’s Gift of Himself

In terms of grace, it is God’s gift of Himself [John 3:16]. This is why continuums that try to determine “How much?” make no sense: In Malachi 3:10, our Lord spoke of a blessing that God would “pour ... out ... that there shall not be room enough to receive it.” I wouldn’t tie this promise to money, alone, because it is simply how God works—and,

subsequently, how He wants to work through us. And although Jewry understood this as a reward for the tithe or their faithful compliance to the Law, such a blessing was only contingent on opening the heart to receive it! Faith!

### **Applying Grace**

The above list of characteristics which are also called a perfect gift of grace are applicable in the believer's actions that indicate the reality of their salvation. "By their fruits ye shall know them" [Matthew 7:20]. "The total reformulation of the self." Barclay wrote, "It is not a piece of information, nor a possession that one could add it to other possessions, but a comprehensive relation that transforms the self at the deepest level and in all its dimensions. And that includes social and ethical practice."<sup>9</sup> Jesus called this the new birth [John 3:3] and Paul saw this as all things changed [2 Corinthians 5:17].

Here is where we can boldly talk about God's grace as the life force that energizes and introduces the believer to a new and heavenly culture. Grace transcends man's cultures because it comes with its own: The grace of God is now written upon the heart.

### **Follow His Grace**

How one spends money is a question auditors try to answer because, like the books in a person's library, spending habits tell a true story of how a person lived. In like manner a believer is encouraged in their own experience to "follow the grace of God" to validate in their mind the reality of their salvation. God's grace in our lives tells the story of who we are becoming in Christ [2 Corinthians 3:18] and part of the account is written in our actions, how we participate in Christian Community. Who we are and what

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9. Henry Barclay Swete. *The Gospel According to St Mark*. (Macmillan and Co. London England: 1898) page 124.

we do are intricately interconnected. When a Christian man claims that something he did was out of character for him as a Christian, he is simply in that moment not faithfully living his faith.

### **Grace, not just Peace**

There might, also, be a difference to consider between the peace of God and the grace of God which I only loosely make and do not introduce as a hard and fast theological distinction. The peace of God seems more passive while the grace of God is more active. God's peace protects and supports us in the storm [Philippians 4:7] while grace walks us through it [Isaiah 43:2]. So following the grace of God is suggested to encourage a believer to take note of those times the Lord directed them past, around or through a trial. This path started at the Cross. In times of utter despondency or anxiety, it will lead back to the Cross and show them how far God's grace has brought them. As Newton wrote that "grace my fears relieved .... 'Tis grace hath brought me safe thus far, And grace will lead me home."

Said another way: We should overlay the above characteristics of God's grace with our own testimonies and note how our lives exemplify grace. Take forgiveness, for example:

1. As regards incongruity: Our forgiveness of others is never based on anything good or bad about the person we are forgiving [Matthew 18:22]. In fact, they probably did something terrible—at least in our minds.
2. As regards singularity: Our forgiveness of others should never be laced with judgments about them, but simply and only forgiveness [2 Corinthians 2:10].
3. As regards efficacy: True, pure, forgiveness provides for relational healing. Its psychological, emotional as well as spiritual benefits are many [2 Corinthians 2:7].

## Living in The Grace of God

4. As regards reciprocity, Forgiveness needs to be unconditional [1 John 1:9]. There must be no string attached to our desire to forgive any more than we thought it reasonable that a string be attached when we wanted to be forgiven.
5. As regards priority: unsolicited and unexpected [John 20:23]. The best forgiveness comes from someone, from whom you didn't have to beg for it. A forgiving heart does not need to have a meeting with the mind to decide if or when to forgive. Forgiveness for the Christian heart should be automatic and spontaneous. Our forgiveness in Christ's death had been in the plan of God from the foundation of the world [Revelation 13:8].
6. As regards superabundance: Forgiveness is not 70 times 7 but infinite and forever [Hebrews 8:12].

This same can be applied to all the Fruit of the Spirit across every relationship: with other believers and within our own selves. This is the grace of God on display [Romans 3:26].

### **Peace-Harmony-Unity**

It is important to emphasize that we are discussing Spiritual gifts. Persons who do not know the Lord cannot express nor even appreciate these aspects of a Spirit-led way of life. These are not just human traits but a quality of the new self "created according to God's likeness in righteousness and purity of the truth" [Ephesians 4:24] and "renewed in knowledge according to the image of their Creator" [Colossians 3:10].

One Beatitude is self-evident without deep study: "Happy are the peacemakers for they shall be called the sons of God" [Matthew 5:9]. Happiness is being at peace with those in our life and this characterizes the child of God. Bishop Lightfoot called peace "a principle that guides

Christian conduct.”<sup>10</sup> Like electrons orbiting its atom requires a force to stay together, peace is the force of character within believers that holds the church together.

God’s peace has a threefold ministry to us: (1) peace with God, reconciled to Him [Romans 5:1], (2) peace with others, fellowship and unity within Christian Community [Romans 14:19], and (3) peace within ourselves and the absence of anxiety, worry, fear, all inner turmoil [Philippians 4:7].

Peace is not the vote of a church council, nor is it a constitutional provision, which membership might require. Peace should be the goal of every sermon, every instruction, every lesson, every teaching in the Word, every expression of kindness, act of ministry and every prayer: “He gave some, apostles; and some, prophets; and some, evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers; For the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ: til we all come into the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ” [Ephesians 4:11-13].

Peace is a gift of God’s grace, and as such follows the gift model we have been using:

1. Incongruous: Christian unity is not based on class, race, gender , or any other category. It is based upon a peace God gives “endeavoring [to] keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace” [Ephesians 4:3].
2. Singularity: There is one God, one Body of Christ, One Church. All things are from Him, and we exist for Him. And there is one Lord, Jesus Christ. All things are through Him, and we exist through Him. [1 Corinthians 8:6].

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10. J. B. Lightfoot. *The Epistle of Saint Paul to the Galatians*. (Zondervan Publishing Company. Grand Rapids, MI: 1974) page 212.

3. Efficacy: God's peace not only unifies believers into a single Body of Christ but our witness depends on this. Christian unity is a vital part of Evangelism. Jesus prayed that "they all may be one, as You, Father, are in Me, and I in You; that they also may be one in Us, that the world may believe that You sent Me" [John 17:21].
4. Non-reciprocal: There are no strings attached or caveats or conditions on God's peace to us and neither should there be from us to others. "And all things are of God, who hath reconciled us to himself by Jesus Christ, and hath given to us the ministry of reconciliation" [2 Corinthians 5:18].
5. Priority: God's peace is given at salvation; we shouldn't have to prayer for peace within the Body of Christ, just show it. Though the word is not splashed across the pages of the Book of Acts, it surely was in evidence when the Church was birthed. Acts 5, the story of Ananias and Sapphira and their subsequent death after defrauding this young work of God, is a story of the devil's craft to fracture the Body of Christ and destroy fellowship by disrupting peace. God had to do what He did. God's peace and unity is a given among us. This is why it is more appropriate that we "seek" it, that is, be zealous to show it. "seek peace and pursue it" [1 Peter 3:11].
6. Superabundance: How abundant is this grace? It passes understanding, i.e. God's peace is "over our heads." [Philippians 4:7].

### **Peace and the Perfect Passive**

We spoke about the importance of our salvation as a total work of God within us and not in any regard something we helped accomplish. "Not of works" Paul taught [Ephesians 2:7]. We pointed out how the language needed to

be developed to make clear this simple truth because within Jewry the belief persisted in the language that everyone is responsible for what happens to them—a forgiveness through Law. This idea needed to be addressed for Paul to introduce God’s unmerited favor through salvation. Paul spoke of the “Blotting out the handwriting of ordinances that was against us” [Colossians 2:14]. If this speaks of God’s grace—and it does—it speaks equally of God’s peace.

In Mark 9:50 Jesus compared our peace to a salt’s saltiness. The future apostles had been quarreling over who was Jesus’ favorite. Jesus compared our peace to saltiness. H. B Swete pointed out that “disputes about precedence endangered the very existence of the new life.”<sup>11</sup> Jesus revealed that our peace was gifted us. “My peace,” Jesus clarified, “I give you. I do not give to you as the world gives” [John 14:27 NIV]. We are urged to *live out* this grace given us by God [1 Thessalonians 5:13; Romans 12:18].

The perfect form is easier to appreciate because as a divine gift peace is a characteristic of the Kingdom of Heaven [Matthew 5:9]. His peace is eternal.

### Context & Grace

Usually in interpreting the Bible, scholars look for meaning in the context,<sup>12</sup> the culture, in which the scripture resides. A deeper dive into the text might include the language. But seldom is reference drawn to the impact the grace of God, as contextually relevant, might bear on the meaning of Bible words. We can so easily disassociate, say,

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11. Henry Barclay Swete. *The Gospel According to St Mark*. (Macmillan and Co. London England: 1898) page 201.

12. In theology, the german phrase is often used: *sitz im leben*. It stands for the context in which a text, or object, has been created, and its function and purpose at that time. The *Sitz im Leben* is also used to refer to the social, ethnic and cultural setting of a site at a particular era. When interpreting a text, object, or region, the *Sitz im Leben* has to be taken into consideration in order to allow a proper contextual interpretation. Should this not include whatever God had in mind!

## Living in The Grace of God

the Fruit of the Spirit, from the grace of God as if this were not the actual context of the words used, when it decidedly is. The Fruit of the Spirit should be considered another level of charismata or divine gifts and, as such, aspects of His *grace*.

The easiest association can be made as regards the eternal aspect of God's gifts. Which one of the Spirit's Fruit might be temporal? None! So when Ephesians 2:7 speaks of a superabundant supply of grace, is this not a superabundant love, and joy and peace, etc.? Paul taught "For the kingdom of God is not meat and drink; but righteousness, and peace, and joy in the Holy Spirit." [Romans 14:17].

The greater sadness comes when we fail to interpret the Fruit of the Spirit in terms of the impact of God's grace upon our behavior and character, when we can envision joy without rejoicing with those who rejoice, a peace without becoming a peacemaker, a love but one that lives within cliques, a selective tolerance instead of *longsuffering*. How ordinary and perfectly human our Christianity can become when we do not appreciate [enough] what God has gifted us and enabled us to become like Christ in order that we might "sanctify His name," and represent our Lord to our world.

### Summary

God's grace has to accompany us into stressful situations (when we face them) that the Bible calls trials or tribulation [Acts 14:22]. Grace enables us to be always patient while anticipating God's promise of deliverance [Romans 5:3]. Paul's definition of trials from the word itself, means to be "pressed out of measure, above strength, insomuch that we despaired even of life" [2 Corinthians 1:8]. This is always the ultimate task of God's grace to step in where human ingenuity and resources are not sufficient and where God must intervene [2 Corinthians 12:9; Hebrews 4:16].

## Living in The Grace of God

Grace, therefore, cannot be confined to a page of theology or a sentence in a sermon or a scriptural quotation for children—and still be *grace*. Grace, like oxygen must be breathed in to bring life. It is not enough that it floats about in the ether.

Grace needs to be a vital part of who we are in Christ. Perhaps, when Jesus taught us to pray: “Forgive us as we forgive,” Matthew 6:12, this should be a template for action that is far more than just forgiveness. Perhaps, everything God does *for* us [in us or to us] needs to be reflected *through* us like the sun’s rays shining through the cathedral stained-glass windows featuring the saints. Grace is not grace while it remains a theological term only.

Our peace is better received from God when we show His peace to others. Our joy is contingent on the joy of others because we have embraced them spiritually in fellowship. God’s love might remain only a study until we show it unconditionally to others. All this speaks to the dynamic of Christian community. Perhaps, the most convincing thought comes from Jesus’ sermon on the mount: “Blessed are the merciful: for they shall obtain mercy” [Matthew 5:7].

**“The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you all. Amen” [Romans 16:24].**

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