



*God's  
Amazing  
Grace*

By  
**Russell Kelfer**

God's Amazing Grace  
by Russell Kelfer  
(1933-2000)

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Printed in the United States of America

Published by  
Discipleship Tape Ministries, Inc.  
PO Box 782256  
San Antonio, TX 78278  
1-800-375-7778  
[www.dtm.org](http://www.dtm.org).

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## About the Author

Russell Lee Kelfer was born in San Antonio, Texas, November 14, 1933 and was welcomed into the presence of his Lord February 3, 2000.

While in high school, he met Martha Lee Williams. As journalism majors working on the school newspaper, they became high school sweethearts with a mutual love of the written word.

At the age of 19, Russell fell in love with The Word, and he was born from above into the Kingdom of God.

He and Martha were married June 23, 1953 and have two children, Kay and Steven. The lights of Russell's life were his four Cottingham grandchildren, Lauren, Miles, Emily, and James Russell.

When an eye injury while he was a student at the University of Texas precluded the reading required to finish his journalism degree, Russell gave up his dreams of becoming a writer to go into the family business, Kelfer Tire Company.

Over the years the tire salesman was used of God in ways which illustrate the Scriptural principle which was the theme of his homegoing celebration: "For ye see your calling, brethren, how that not many wise men after the flesh, not many noble, are called: But God hath chosen the weak things of the world to confound the things which are mighty" (I Corinthians 1:23). God called Russell to a variety of Kingdom tasks for which he had no worldly credentials, proving to all of us that "My grace is sufficient for thee: for my strength is made perfect in weakness". (II Corinthians 12:9.)

Russell never once sought the many projects that came his way. God gently led him into them, usually by way of such small beginnings that as he would say, "I didn't have sense enough to be frightened".

He was always most comfortable in his one-to-one relationships. Speaking to groups never, ever became easy. The butterflies were always there, but he felt they were God's tool for keeping him dependent.

Around the world his spiritual children join us in thanking the Father for allowing us to see Him in Russell.



*His  
voice  
had  
the  
sound  
of  
a  
great  
waterfall*

***Revelation 1:15  
(J.B. Phillips)***

Photo: Multnomah Falls  
Courtesy of Bettye Springer

## Chapter 1

# Lest Any Man Should Boast

It was a most humiliating experience. Joseph had planned nearly a year for this event. He had rebuilt the engine in his vintage sports car, reconstructed the front suspension, and tuned the engine at least a thousand times. It was the event of a decade for him—the vintage classic car race. The prize was \$10,000.00, but it wasn't the money he was after. What he lived for was to make his mark as thousands of interested onlookers marvelled at his sleek, slick, speedy rebuilt Chrysler. He had dreamed the dream over and over. He had his victory speech memorized. And at last the day came.

Even as they lined up at the starting gate, Joe was overwhelmed with confidence. None of the opposition measured up (at least in his eyes) to his vintage "300." None had the lines, and certainly none had the engine. The gun sounded. The race began. Confidently, Joe dropped his gem in gear and began what surely would be his ride for the roses.

Immediately, he took the lead. In fact, he was so far in front that his special rear view mirror could barely make out the next car, a black vintage Cadillac owned by his neighbor down the road, Jed Simpson. Smugly, he gunned his crafty Chrysler a little more, as he looked back one more time to see if he had put enough distance between his crown jewel and its closest competitor. That was his mistake. As he rounded the next bend, *while looking in his mirror to see himself outdistancing the competition*, he misjudged the edge of the road ever so slightly. It only took a minute. Joe and his jewel went careening down the grassy slope, finding their waterloo to be a huge oak tree about 500 yards downhill from where the other cars could still be heard racing by. The front end of the car was a mess, and Joe, trapped behind the wheel with

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what appeared to be a broken leg, could do nothing but pray and wait, and prayer was totally foreign to him.

He called out for help, but of course, nobody heard him. "What had happened?" he asked himself. "Where did I go wrong?"

His visions of winning now turned to something more practical: how to get out of the car and how to get what was left of the car up that grassy hill and back home to its garage where months of rehabilitation awaited both him and the car. There seemed to be no good answer.

Surely, when he didn't appear at the finish line, someone would notice. Or would they? No one had seen him go out of control. He felt so abandoned, so alone. Hours went by. They seemed like days. The pain he felt in his leg was nothing compared to the pain he felt in his ego. He had written his whole family that he had the race in his pocket. Now he would have to admit that both he and his Chrysler were not invincible.

It was nearly sunset when the Barnett family came walking by. They were one of the families from the low-income housing project down the road; families that wouldn't even live there if Joe and his friends had won their battle at city hall. But they had lost, and these poor, but hard-working neighbors of his seemed to hold no grudges. Seeing what had happened, they rushed to his side, helped him out of the car, and Bill Barnett was about to hoist him up on his shoulders and carry him up the hill, when Joe protested. "I can't leave my car here," he said, nearly weeping. "I have to get my car home."

It was a sight to behold. The Barnetts went and got their vintage pickup truck, (though it wasn't vintage to them, just old), and tying an old chain to the front of Connie Chrysler, they towed both it and its reluctant loser up the hill toward Joe's house. Here was an old beat up unpainted truck that barely ran, pulling Joe's jewel up to safety.

As fate would have it, the victors and their families were coming back up the road just at the time when the Barnetts managed to pull Joseph and his bent up baby back up to the highway. Not only did he not win the race, he was humiliated in the process. And had it not been for this unlikely savior



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of a neighbor, he might have stayed at the bottom of that hill forever.

“I guess it was just grace that we came by,” Bill Barnett mused as he unchained the once graceful Chrysler while his two oldest sons carried Joe into the house. “Just grace.” Joe opened his billfold and was about to peel off three \$20 bills, an amount of money that would have meant a lot to the Barnetts at any time, and especially at the end of the month, just days before his paycheck at the railway depot was due. “Oh, no way,” said Bill Barnett, when he saw the money. “Like I said, it was grace, *and you can’t pay for grace*. It is undeserved and free.” With that, he and his boys climbed in their noisy, battered truck and drove away.

“You can’t pay for grace.” What did they mean by that? And what is this grace stuff, anyway? It was the next day when Joe was recovering at St. Jude’s hospital from his knee surgery that he noticed a small Gideon Bible on the table. “Grace,” he thought. “I think that’s a term I heard one time as a child in Sunday School.” He looked in the back of the Bible and found a list of words, something called a “concordance,” until he saw that word: grace. Fortunately, it sent him looking for Ephesians 2. After a long search, he found these verses and began to read:

For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God:

Not of works, lest any man should boast.

(Ephesians 2:8,9)

Not of yourselves. It is the gift of God...not of works, lest any man should boast. It was that last phrase that got to Joe. “Lest any man should boast.” His whole life had been a life of boasting. “I’ll get that job at the computer company,” he had boasted. “I’m the best engineer in the area.” Sure enough, he did. “I’ll buy that house for a song; they’re desperate,” he boasted. Sure enough, they were, and he did. It seemed that all of his life, he had called the shots, predicted victory, and won. Now he had, like Babe Ruth, pointed to the fence in left field and grinned, but he struck out. Grace? Undeserved? Free? What did all of this mean?

It was the next afternoon when he found out. It was, of all people, the Barnetts who came to the hospital with a bunch

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of flowers they had picked from their neatly groomed yard, and as they crowded around the bed to wish Joe well, he blurted out, *"Tell me about this grace thing you mentioned yesterday."* They were all but expecting the question, and they were ready with the answer. About fifteen minutes later, Joseph McDaniel, already in the hospital for a broken knee, went into God's delivery room and came out a new babe in Christ. For the first time in his life, he understood sin; he heard about a Savior, and he accepted God's amazing grace.

It was a most unlikely place and a most unlikely group, to be sure. Later, as he gave his testimony to the little church up the road, he said this: "I'm so glad I didn't win that race. It wasn't until I became a loser that I understood grace. My Chrysler and I might have won the race and lost everything. By losing the way I did, I had to be lifted up and carried by someone else; someone who had no reason to help me. I had only done harm to them, but they understood grace. So they gave me what I didn't deserve, love, so I would come to understand what I didn't have, Jesus."

He had to lose in order to win. He had to go downhill and let someone carry him up to understand grace. It seems like there ought to be a better way. But for Joe, at least, the road down led up. Joe was beginning to understand grace. Do you?

In a sense, it is one of life's mysteries. It is something you need more than you will ever need anything else. You have to have it or you'll die, and yet you don't deserve it and never will. It's free, but it costs something. If you've never experienced it, you probably don't even know you don't have it.

Once you receive it, you need more; but you'll only get more as long as you realize it's a gift. If you try to pay for it, you can't have it; if you try to work to pay it back, you lose the joy of having received it.

It is one of the supreme expressions of God's nature, but only He determines when and if and to whom He gives it away. When He does, it is often to those you and I wouldn't choose. He seems to give it away more freely when we're in trouble or in need or desperate. It is elusive, yet it is the fuel that makes the Christian life run, the Christian grow, and

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the Christian message real.

It is amazing grace, indeed. There have probably been more songs written about it than all of God's other attributes combined. It is mentioned in nearly every sermon and referred to in virtually every Christian book. It is key to our salvation. Without it, we are lost and bound for an eternity in hell apart from God, yet once we experience it and are born again into the family of God, we become vessels hooked up to an unceasing flow of it; and the more of it we allow to flow through us, the more filled with joy we are, the more filled with peace we are, and the more we are able to be literally changed into Christ-likeness.

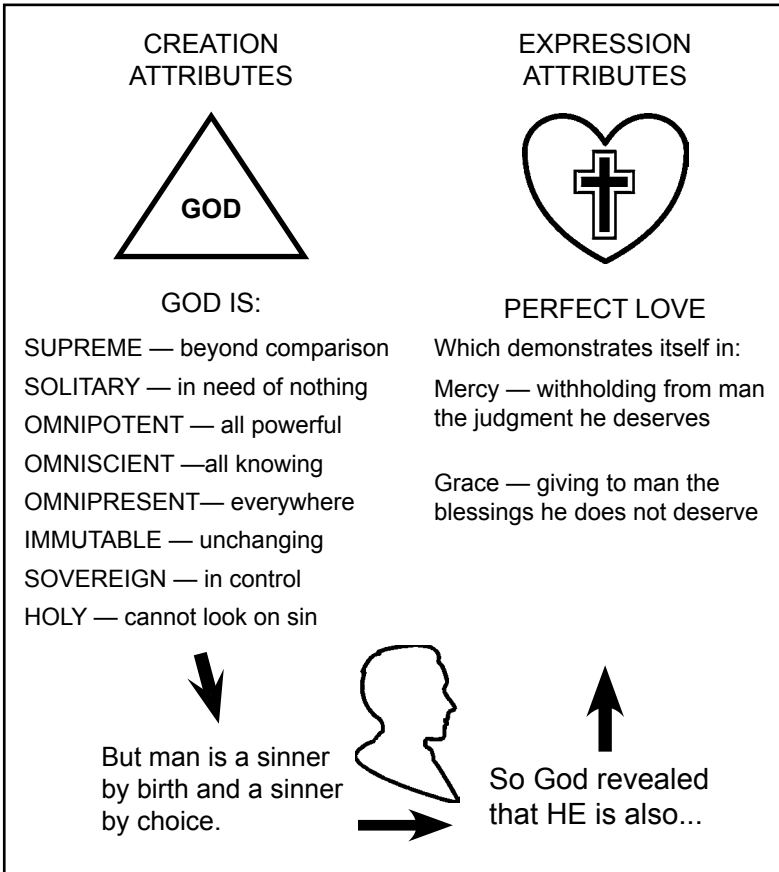
It produces spiritual fruit; but to whatever degree we revel in the fruit, we steal the rewards and lose the grace. Most Christians seem to understand what it means to be saved by grace, but beyond that, it seems a mystery, indeed. The purpose of this study is to try to plumb the depths of the Word of God and to ask God to do two things:

- 1- Teach us through His Word what the grace of God is all about.
- 2- Lead us by His Holy Spirit into a life more controlled by that grace.

We need to begin by looking at the attributes of God, and for the purpose of this study, we are going to group them a little differently. We are first going to look at the attributes that make God who He is and which set Him apart from His creation. We are then going to look at His "expression" attributes, those characteristics of His nature that allow who He is to be revealed to us. When we see them in that light, we can begin the long process of walking towards the end of the tunnel by way of that beautiful light called "grace".

(See illustration on the next page.)

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If you are prone to demand of God things you think He owes you, or if you are prone to whine at God for things He hasn't done for you, you might do well to spend a year or two on each of these attributes. The more time you spend beholding who God is, the more perfectly you will understand the depth of His grace. Consider who He is:

**1- He is supreme.** He is incomparable. That means that He is beyond comparison. You cannot compare God with anything you know about or anything you see. He made it all. It all came from His mind and His heart and His hands. You cannot take the most loving person you know of and say that God is even more loving. You cannot defy the reality of His love by taking the reflections of His love and multiplying

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them by infinity. You can see a tiny bit of it by looking at His creation. “The heavens declare the glory of God” (Psalm 19:1). Yet, this world has been so corrupted by sin that even our ability to see God through this universe is somewhat obscured by the cloud of iniquity that hangs over it, but you can come to progressively understand it through His Word. Jesus said:

Search the scriptures; for in them ye think ye have eternal life: and they are they which testify of me.

(John 5:39)

God cannot be measured by human measuring sticks because He is supreme. He is incomparable. Do not fashion your concepts of God by enlarging your concepts of what you can see and feel and touch; He is incomparable. Instead, learn through Scripture.

**2- He is solitary.** Not only is He incomparable, He is in need of nothing to sustain Himself or satisfy His needs. He does not need you. He does not need me. He does not need the angels. He does not need the earth or the universe. He does not need our worship, though it is like sweet incense to His nostrils. Were it to be removed, His nature would not be changed one iota. He does not need our gifts. Whatever we give Him, He gave to us in the first place. He wants our gifts because of what giving does for us, not for what it does for Him. He is without need of anything; therefore, all of His decisions can be made based on what is best for His creation, not on meeting His own needs. He has none.

**3- He is omnipotent.** That simply means there is nothing He cannot do. He can make the sun stand still. He can make the clouds disappear. He can make a river part. He can bring water from a rock. He can carve out the waters with His hands, and He only needs to speak and the earth will crumble. Therefore, whatever need we have is no problem for God. If He does not meet that need with the show of power we pray for, it is not because it is too difficult, but rather because it is not best for us. There is nothing He cannot do.

**4- He is omniscient.** There is nothing He does not know. He knows the past as though it were the present; He knows the future as though it has happened. He knows not only what we do, He knows what we think. What goes on in the

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heart and the secret places of the mind is the measure of our spiritual maturity in His eyes.

For man looketh on the outward appearance, but the Lord looketh on the heart. (I Samuel 16:7b)

**5- He is omnipresent.** There is no place He cannot be, and no place He isn't. He is everywhere all the time, so there is never a time when you call upon Him that He is not near. Conversely, there is no use trying to run from Him or hide from Him as Adam did. "Whither can I go that He is not there?" asked the Psalmist. Answer: Nowhere.

Whither shall I go from thy spirit? or whither shall I flee from thy presence?

If I ascend up into heaven, thou art there: if I make my bed in hell, behold, thou art there.

If I take the wings of the morning, and dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea;

Even there shall thy hand lead me, and thy right hand shall hold me.

If I say, Surely the darkness shall cover me; even the night shall be light about me.

Yea, the darkness hideth not from Thee; but the night shineth as the day: the darkness and the light are both alike to Thee. (Psalm 139:7-12)

**6- He is immutable.** He is the only thing that will not and cannot ever change. He is "the same yesterday, today, and forever." (Hebrews 13:8) We may try to adjust our methods to the changing world we live in, but we must never change our message, because He is the message, and He will never change. Because He cannot change, His Word cannot change, either.

The grass withereth, the flower fadeth: but the word of our God shall stand for ever. (Isaiah 40:8)

**7- He is sovereign.** He is not only omnipotent and omniscient, He is sovereign. Not only can He do anything, He does whatever He chooses. No one, not even and especially Satan, can stop Him. He will choose what is best, and what He chooses, He will do.

There are many other aspects of His nature, as well. He is perfect goodness, perfect righteousness, perfect truth. But

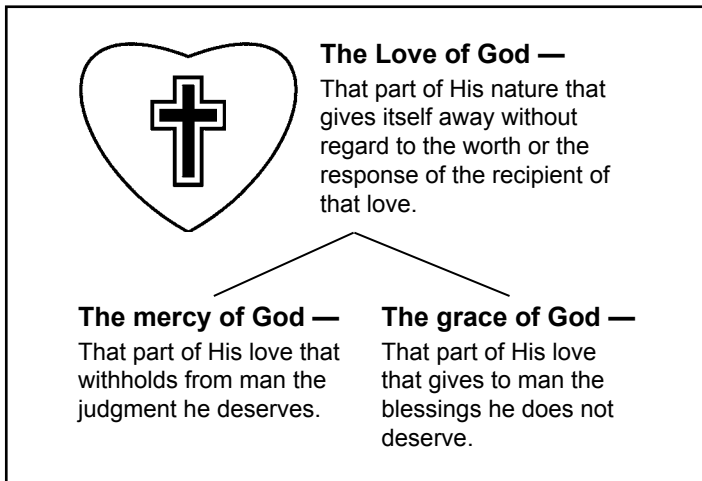
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there is one more attribute that creates a problem for man. It is that...

**8- He is perfect holiness.** That simply means that He cannot look upon sin, participate in sin, tempt anyone to sin, or derive pleasure from sin. Sin is the antithesis of God. It defies everything He is. It defies His supremacy, denies His omnipotence, scorns His omniscience. Sin seems to elevate the creature to the Creator and places man, who is designed to be a servant of the Most High, in a position of co-godship. When that happens, all that God is becomes prostituted. God hates sin. It defrauds His righteousness. It makes His holiness a sham. There are only two things He can do when that happens:

1- He can judge the sin and destroy the sinner.

2- He can exercise another attribute of His divine nature: His love. Love, remember, is the active expression of God's nature that gives itself away without regard to the worth or response of the one being loved. It has two active ingredients: mercy and grace.



Oh, the matchless love of God! It allows God to deal with the sin, while restoring His relationship with the sinner. Calvary was the result of God's love.

For God so loved the world, that He gave... (literally gave Himself away). (John 3:16)

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He gave Himself to those who did not deserve His love, who could not earn His love.

Greater love hath no man than this, that a man would lay down his life for his friends, (John 15:13)

But God commendeth his love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners (total rebels; absolute enemies), Christ died for us. (Romans 5:8)

And so the love of God was defined in its absolute terms on a Roman Cross. That love, we will find, was an act of supreme mercy, for He chose to create a vehicle by which those sins could be forgiven.

It was also an act of perfect grace, for not only did He create the vehicle, He gave to man the enablement both to choose to be saved and to exercise that choice by faith. It would not be of works, lest any man should boast. So His mercy made a way to remove the offense; His grace gave to us the ability to choose that way. And it was totally undeserved.

Grace has many definitions. In its simplest form, I believe you can define it this way:

***Grace – God doing supernaturally what we cannot do naturally, knowing that we do not deserve it, cannot repay it, and may not appreciate it.***

These are its key characteristics:

**1- Grace is free.** It is a gift. You cannot earn a gift or it's no longer a gift, and you cannot pay for it. It has already been paid for. Any attempt to repay someone who has given you a gift is an insult. And to whatever degree you attempt to earn grace, to that degree you break the heart of God who gives it to you as an expression of His love. Our job is to accept it. Period.

**2- Grace is undeserved.** Not only is it free, it cannot be effective unless you realize that it is totally, completely, without exception, undeserved. The key is not that you get more of it than you deserve. You deserve nothing. Zero. Zilch. Nada. We deserve hell, not one tiny millimeter more. Period. That will be a key to our understanding of why grace and humility are so closely connected in Scripture. Pride is the Satanic intrusion into the world of grace. It says that to some degree, at least, you can share God's glory. Satan cannot



grasp grace, and his goal is to see that we don't, either.

**3- Grace is sovereign.** God gives grace to whom He chooses, when He chooses, and as He chooses. It is seldom given the way we would give it were we God. His ways are too much higher than ours. Therefore, you can never presume upon it, demand it, or program it.

**4- Grace is eternal.** Everything God gives is eternal because He is eternal. Therefore, the focus of His grace will be spiritual, for only that which is spiritual is eternal. More about that as we progress.

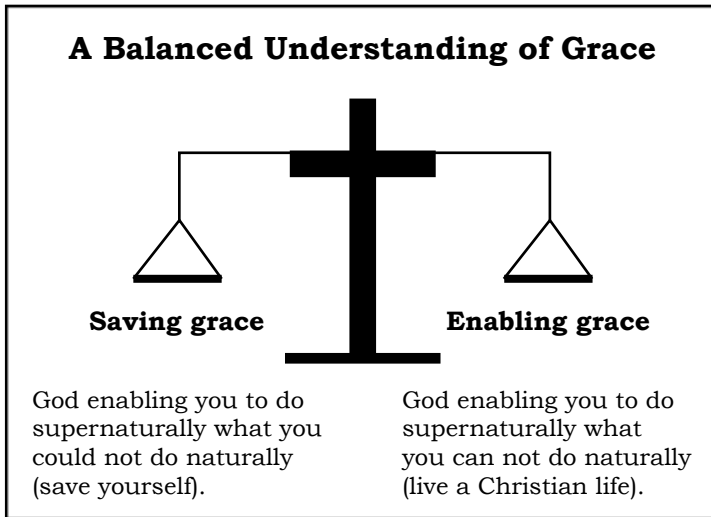
If you want to remember those four ingredients, think about grace as the fuse that links His love to man. Once the fuse is installed at conversion, several things can blow the fuse and stop the flow of grace, but as long as the fuse is intact, the power is ours.

**F**ree   **U**ndeserved   **S**overeign   **E**ternal

In our next chapter or two, we will examine the kind of grace we all sing about and seem to understand: *saving grace*. It is the miracle of God's provision for us to have the faith to believe, and having believed, to receive the free gift of salvation He has made possible. It is free, undeserved, sovereign and eternal. But saving grace is only the beginning, and it is that second aspect of grace that most seem to either overlook or misunderstand. It is *enabling grace*. Enabling grace is defined exactly the same way as saving grace, but with one exception. *Saving grace* is God, doing supernaturally what we cannot do naturally (save us from our sins), knowing that we do not deserve it, cannot repay it, and may not appreciate it. *Enabling grace* is God doing supernaturally what we cannot do naturally (live the Christian life), knowing that we do not deserve it, cannot repay it, and may not appreciate it.

There are, however, some big differences in how it is appropriated and the part we play in receiving it. Try to see grace, then, in two parts. Only then will you have a balanced understanding of grace.

*(See illustration next page.)*



*Saving grace* has been often described as “God’s Riches at Christ’s Expense.” *Enabling grace* might be described this way:

**God’s R**edemption **A**ctive in the **C**hristian **E**xperience

It is God enabling us to do, minute by minute, supernaturally what we cannot do naturally, and we can do nothing in the spirit realm apart from God. Jesus couldn’t, and we can’t. It is totally undeserved. It is totally free. It is totally sovereign. It is always eternal.

It takes grace, for instance, for you to exhibit agape love. You can’t do it unless God gives you the grace. Agape love allows you to love the unloveable, to love your enemies, to love your mate as Christ loved the church. You can’t do that naturally. You can artificially manufacture some of the outward attributes, but they will be phony. The only way you can love someone who is not loveable is for God to give you the grace to do so.

But, as we will find in a few chapters, *we are told to ask for that grace*. We are told to come boldly to the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need. (Hebrews 4:16) This is not saving grace. It was written to believers. Saving grace isn’t grace to help in time of need. This is *enabling grace*. This is God empowering us both

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to will and to do of His good pleasure. As we ask, God gives us not only the ability to love, *but He even imparts the desire to love.* (If we ask)

However, there is a catch. You must ask humbly. Though you are told to ask for it, it is still free and undeserved. One reason you are told to ask is to remind you that you do not, in and of yourself, deserve it, and you cannot ever earn it or pay God back for it. So, the minute you presume upon it or assume you deserve it or exalt your position in the eyes of God as though because of who you are or what you do, God is obligated to give it, *you will not receive that grace.* He doesn't want your help; He doesn't need your works, your worth or your worry. He only wants you to humble yourself the way you did when you were saved. That's what that verse means:

As you have therefore received Christ Jesus the Lord,  
so walk ye in him: (Colossians 2:6)

How did you receive Him? You realized you were a sinner who could not save yourself. There was nothing you could do naturally to be saved. It had to happen supernaturally, and you had to ask. So you became nothing. He became everything. You acknowledged you were lost. He found you. You cried out, and He saved you. It was

Not by works of righteousness which we have done but  
according to His mercy He saved us, (Titus 3:5a)

You became a servant. He became your Lord.

That's how you received Christ Jesus, the Lord, and only that mindset frees the enabling grace of God to flow through your life. You cannot have agape love unless the grace of God enables you. You cannot have a pure heart unless God's grace enables you. Your heart is deceitful and desperately wicked. So is mine. God said so. Left to our own devices, we will be drawn to that which is impure, untrue, and unholy. As believers, we have the Holy Spirit and the Word convicting us, *but we still sin.* What is the key? Grace. Only God can enable us to withstand temptation, choose obedience, and live in victory.

Only grace can allow us to endure suffering and glorify God. He wants us to understand that

tribulation worketh patience (Romans 5:3b)

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Knowing this, that the trying of your faith worketh patience.

But let patience have her perfect work, that ye may be perfect and entire, wanting nothing. (James 1:3,4)

Paul didn't like the idea at first. He told God to get rid of this "thorn" he had, so he could have the strength to serve Him more fully. God said, "No, my grace is sufficient for you." This was not saving grace; this was enabling grace—the grace that enabled Paul to grow by appropriating God's power supernaturally to do what he could not do naturally.

The key to it all, however, be it saving grace or enabling grace, is for us to come to see the reality of how undeserving we are. Until we grasp that, we will not communicate saving grace correctly to the lost, and we will not appropriate enabling grace in the measure it is available to us. God gives grace. It is free. But He gives it to the humble, those who know they are nothing, can do nothing and can become nothing apart from...grace. That's why He said so clearly that "He resists the proud, but gives grace to the humble." (I Peter 5:5b) We need to spend some time, a lot of time, understanding what this grace is and how to appropriate it. It just may hold the key to victory for some of us for the "rest" of our lives. Ask yourself, "What is grace?" and come up with some capsule definitions. Here are a few to get you started:

**What is grace?** Grace is all that God is, providing all that God does for someone who has no right to it at all.

**What is grace?** It is total pardon to a convicted criminal because the Father of the one he killed dropped the charges.

**What is grace?** It is a beautiful flower that bloomed in the midst of the desert only because God decided to water it.

**What is grace?** It is a thief on a cross on his way to paradise seconds before he should have died.

**What is grace?** It is eleven losers entrusted with eternity.

**What is grace?** It is green leaves on a once dead tree.

**What is grace?** It is a prodigal welcomed home with no basis for his welcome but that he came home.

**What is grace?** It is letting Lazarus die so he could come to life; it is letting Jesus die so we could come to life.

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*What is grace?* It is God saving the likes of you and me.

Remember: *to whatever degree you have come to feel that you deserved to be saved, you have broken the heart of God, because you have trampled underfoot the grace of God.* If it ceases to be undeserved, it ceases to be grace.

Oh, the pride that has infected the Christian community and each of our lives, as well. And oh, the spiritual pride that has eaten into the fiber of our churches until we advertise our goodness and our programs and our giving, and thus close the valve on God's grace and make it a joke.

What do we have that God did not give us? And if He gave it to us, what right do we have to boast about it?

But he that glorieth, let him glory in the Lord.

For not he that commendeth himself is approved, but whom the Lord commendeth. (II Corinthians 10:17,18)

We are embarking on a journey that I pray will take us to the very heart of God. To make that journey, however, we must be willing to walk down the path that leads to surrender and dependence. The grace of God is the heart of God transplanted in your spirit, allowing Him to literally become Jesus Christ in your body, speaking, responding, giving, loving, serving, even as He did 2,000 years ago in the body the Father gave Him. It was not necessarily a beautiful body. He had no beauty that men should desire Him. It was not necessarily a self-image success story. He was despised and rejected of men, a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief. He was the King, and He thought it not robbery to be equal with God, because He was God.

But He made Himself nothing. He lived a life of perfect grace. Never did He try to do in His own strength what only God could do. He accepted His body, His rejection, and His lack of physical benefits, (He had no place to lay His head) and appropriated a kind of power that made even being nailed to a Roman Cross a joy.

who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is set down at the right hand of the throne of God. (Hebrews 12:2b)

Then He turned to us and said,

I am the vine, ye are the branches: He that abideth in

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me, and I in him, the same bringeth forth much fruit:  
for without me you can do nothing. (John 15:5)

But He added,

My grace is sufficient for thee: for my strength is made  
perfect in weakness. (II Corinthians 12:9b)

And, oh, Beloved, it is, but only when we allow it to be. Only when we look in the mirror and stop admiring what we see, can we access that grace as it was meant to be. Only when we look into the mirror of the Word and see our sins as God sees them, will that grace be able to flow, and only then will we and the church in our day taste revival and renewal and transformation. Only when that happens, will a lost and dying world around us realize that this man Jesus is the Son of God, indeed.

We can't do it by playing church. We can't do it by pretending to be holy when our hearts are hotbeds of impure thoughts and impure desires. We can't do it as long as we allow a bitter spirit to fester in our souls, buried beneath a self-righteous spiritual facade. We can't do it as long as we are clinging to our legalistic limitations that bind God to our framework or our system. In fact, we can't do it...period. But God can, and God will, if we'll get out of His way and let Him. It may mean losing one of the races of life until we come to the end of ourselves the way Joseph McDaniel did. That will be the greatest moment of our spiritual pilgrimage, though it may seem to be the hardest.

My challenge to you and to myself is for us to ask God one on one to begin the process of revealing the debris of self that we are still carrying around in our spiritual knapsacks. It will mean taking on the mind of Christ, and that means humbling ourselves until we become nothing, so He in us can become everything. It means asking God *to do whatever it takes to give us an understanding of grace*. For Jesus, that meant a cross. According to Luke, it will mean the same for us.

And He said to them all, If any man will come after me,  
let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and  
follow me. (Luke 9:23)

(That prayer won't be answered easily. Many won't want to pray it at all. It wasn't answered easily for Jesus.

### Lest Any Man Should Boast

But because He said “Thy will be done,” you and I are in the family of God, redeemed, transformed, and guaranteed eternity in glory. And when we begin to let that kind of grace flow through us—free, undeserved, sovereign, and eternal—we will begin to see our lives become portraits of grace, and we will see others drawn to Him as well. We will experience that provided we never, ever forget:

(It is) Not of works, lest any man should boast.

(Ephesians 2:9)

And that includes us.





## Chapter 2

# It Wasn't Free to Him

The scene in the hospital waiting room was one of utter confusion, filled with both elation and grief. A lot had happened in the last twelve hours, and its effect on the different sets of parents and friends who were gathered there was varied, to be sure.

In one end of the waiting room was a group from the lower east side, most of whom lived in the projects. They included a large group of older teens and young adults dressed in leather jackets, with unusual haircuts and earrings worn in strange places. They were reasonably subdued, but they were obviously tough and were quite aware that they were being observed. A policeman stood in the corner writing out a report which caused them to be subdued.

In the other corner of the room was a somewhat distinguished man, who wore a doctor's white jacket. His wife and his daughter were with him. His face was drawn, his eyes red, his family obviously in deep mourning. At that moment, there sat with him a newspaper reporter from the Daily Chronicle, pen in hand, taking notes about something she deemed to be newsworthy.

As the story unfolded, it was indeed a unique one. The group from the projects were part of a gang known as the "Gestapos." They were constantly under surveillance and were known to have an initiation rite that required new members to kill someone in a drive-by shooting or some even more ruthless way to prove they were "men." One of the Gestapos gang had a younger brother named "Rick" who was dying of heart disease. Nothing but a transplant would suffice, and no heart had been forthcoming. The operation would have been covered by welfare, but he was not on the top of the list, and a turn for the worse had made death seem imminent.

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The doctor was a heart specialist, the best transplant surgeon in the city. He had been called on to do the surgery. The reason for the tension and the newsworthiness of the story was that the donor would turn out to be the doctor's only son, Arthur. The reason his heart was available was that he had been killed in a drive-by shooting earlier that evening. The prime suspects in that shooting were the young men who were milling about on the opposite side of the waiting room.

Would this man give his son's heart to the very people who probably took his son's life? The doctor and his family were Christians, and they had been in the hospital chapel praying. If he decided to give the heart to this lad, would he do the operation himself? Would he take the heart out of his own son and give it to someone who was possibly involved in his son's death? Who could ask anyone to do that?

The tension was building. If the doctor chose to will his son's heart to the gangster's brother, there was still the issue of the doctor's fee. Some would be covered by Medicaid, but the doctor's fee would be astronomical, and only a small portion would be covered.

The doctor, weary and worn, called the mother of the dying boy to his side, and as the policeman and the gang members all looked on, he said: "I'll do the surgery. I'll give your son my son's heart, and it will be free. *That is what God did for me.*"

The room erupted in cheers and jubilation. The doctor sat back down and wept uncontrollably. "Jeb gets a new heart," they shouted, "and it will be free!" Softly, the policeman turned to the cheering family and whispered, "No, my friends, *it may be free to you, but it wasn't free to Him.*" It cost the one who would do the surgery the life of his son. He was willing to give his son's heart to the very ones who took his life, but it wasn't free to him. Then why did he do it?

It's called **grace**. Part of understanding the grace of God is coming to the deeper understanding that although grace is free, and indeed it is, it wasn't free to God.

God, the Perfect Father, let the ruthless mob take the life of His only Son, just so He could transplant His precious, sinless heart into the souls of the very people who crucified Him. "It's free!" we cry, and indeed it is to us. But, ***It wasn't***

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***free to Him.*** *Unless we come to grips with what it cost the Great Physician to make that transplant, we'll never really have a grasp of grace.*

The only way to understand grace is to take a trip to Calvary. Calvary is grace defined. Unless you come to understand, or at least begin to understand, the price God paid that day for your sins and for mine, grace can easily become something we take for granted; something we respond to like that family in the hospital. "It's paid for, and it's free!" To really understand grace, we must come to understand that *"It wasn't free to Him."* *That, Beloved, is an understatement.*

### **Consider Who He Is**

Let us begin by remembering just who it is we are talking about. Let's not ever forget who paid the bill. Let's not ever forget who transferred our liabilities to His account and His assets to ours. It was the Living God. It was the Creator God who spoke, and the worlds came into being. It was the One who only needs to speak, the Psalmist said, and the earth crumbles. It was the Solitary One who has no need of man nor angel to exist and to exist in utter perfection.

It was the Holy One, the One who cannot look upon sin. It was the Victorious One, the One who has never tasted defeat and never will. It was the Omniscient One, the One who knows the beginning from the end and knew before He created us that this moment would come when this decision would need to be made.

This was the Only True and Living God deciding to die for you and for me. Not a good trade. Not a reasonable offer. He only had to blink an eye, and He could have created an entirely new universe devoid of human existence or devoid of sin. He could have created a world of robots who only responded to His every move and never violated either His words or the intents of His heart. It would have been much easier than what He did. Or He could have created a system of works and allowed anyone who made so many sacrifices or attended so many meetings to be redeemed. He could have blanketed the world with nothing but good, destroying Satan and leaving man with only one choice: obedience. He could

have.

But He didn't. He knew in eternity past that He wouldn't because there is an element in the nature of God called "love" that is free, undeserved, sovereign and eternal. It demonstrates itself in mercy by forgiving sin, and in grace by enabling righteousness in the life of a sinner. Because of that love, *He could not choose any other alternative*. He had to go to that cross and give us something we did not deserve, could not pay for, could not earn, and could not lose.

He looked down at this world that was encrusted with sin, afire with rebellion, a sea in hypocrisy and literally dying in its own iniquity, and He loved it. He loved us so much that it never entered His mind to do anything but call for the bill and pay it out of the storehouse of His own goodness. There is no other explanation, but the love of God. There is no human reasoning to explain it. Any other path He would have taken would have been more plausible.

To allow His own Son to die and transplant His heart into the hearts of those arrogant, self-righteous rebels who have denied His existence and laughed at His absolutes seems to violate every tinge of human wisdom. But we aren't dealing here with human wisdom. Aren't you glad? We are dealing with a kind of love that even our theological tongue-twisters and Greek definitions cannot paint into the consciousness of our minds. This was the eternal God who needed nothing, giving everything, so that we who had nothing to offer would end up with everything at His expense.

If you can, imagine that the king of a famous empire learns that the meanest, most vile criminal in the penitentiary is dying of an incurable disease. The king's son has the only blood that could be used in a transfusion to save his life. His crime? He tried to assassinate the king. Even while in prison, he had vowed to bring down the kindly monarch, one way or another.

Then imagine that king offering his own son's blood, *knowing full well that his son will die during the operation*. You are getting a tiny glimpse of grace. God, the Sinless One, dying for the sinner. God, the Holy One, dying for the unholy. God, the Creator, dying for the vilest of His creation. And He did it with no coercion and no mitigating circumstances that

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justified His behavior as though it were reasonable or even sensible, from a human perspective.

The only factor governing His decision to save you and to save me was the desire of His heart to give us something we did not have. Doing so did nothing for Him; it neither added to His stature nor assured Him anything in return. But He *had to*. His love demanded it.

That, Beloved, is grace. It is God giving all of Himself to the least deserving sinner who ever lived in exchange for nothing. Before you begin to exempt yourself, ***you are the least deserving sinner who ever lived.*** We all tie for the award. *“There is none righteous, no not one.”*

### **Consider Who We Are**

That leads us to the next consideration. If that's who God is, then how would you describe the motley crew He died for? To understand how undeserving we are of His grace, we must realize that our view of righteousness is nothing like God's. We view righteousness as relative righteousness. We compare our goodness with society in general, and often with those who have seriously violated moral and ethical standards, and determine that God really got a bargain with us, because we're above average. There is no such thing as *relative righteousness, for there are none who are righteous.*

For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God;  
(Romans 3:23)

You can no more be partially righteous than you can fly without wings. To look at a giant airliner in the sky and say, “Wow, look at it fly,” and then jump two feet off the ground and say, “See, I can fly, too” makes no sense. Either you can or you can't. There's no such thing as “relative flying.” That plane can fly, and you can't.

That eagle can soar, and you can't. That robin can fly, and you can't. Why? Because you have no wings. Sin clipped your wings. You were born a sinner, and you have sinned. The minute you did, you fell to earth, and someone who can jump four feet instead of two can't fly either.

It's preposterous to think that because your sins are a little less obvious than someone else's, you are more

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righteous than they. There is no relative righteousness. You only have God's righteousness to compare yourself with, not the guy down the street who makes you look like a saint. Let the Scripture tell you one more time:

They are all gone aside, they are all together become filthy; there is none that doeth good, no, not one.

(Psalm 14:3)

Every one of them is gone back: they are altogether become filthy; there is none that doeth good, no, not one.

(Psalm 53:3)

They are all gone out of the way, they are together become unprofitable; there is none that doeth good, no, not one.

(Romans 3:12)

None. Zero. Nada. No one. That means that when it comes to being worthy of being redeemed, *you are no more deserving than a serial killer on death row*. The gravity of his sins, where society is concerned, is greater, so the price he owes society is greater; but from the vantage point of eternal significance, he's no greater a sinner than you are. No, you may be the greater sinner in a sense. You parade around church on Sunday morning as a deacon or an elder or a teacher or a preacher or a committee chairman, and your heart may be so filled with lust you couldn't think a clean thought if you drank Drain-O. You may look like a saint on the outside, and inside you still harbor bitterness towards your mother or your father or your first wife or your last pastor.

You are, apart from God, rotten to the core. The only difference between you and that guy on death row is circumstances and choices, but your heart is no better than his in God's eyes. You are a sinner. You can't fly and never will apart from something called "Amazing Grace."

Which brings us back to the foot of that cross. At the cross was a "cross-section," if you will, of the incredibly undeserving recipients of the grace of God. Let's take a short journey back to Calvary and look at ourselves. I know you are thinking, "But I wasn't there." Yes, you were. You were there and so was I. We were all represented by one or more of the groups or individuals who passed in and out of Jesus' Calvary experience. We were there!

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**We killed Him.** He died for us, and He died *because of us*, but He also died *by our hand*. **We killed Him.** We sentenced Him to death, tied Him to the electric chair of eternity, and pulled the switch. And as we did, He only loved us.

We not only sentenced Him, we watched it all as though it were some kind of a spiritual side show. We killed Him, and immediately, even before it was done, He forgave us. Oh, Beloved, return with me to Calvary and see what we did; then see *what He did*, and marvel for the rest of your life at the incredible grace of God. We never should be able to visit that cross and take grace for granted, for every time we see Him die and hear Him whisper, "Father, forgive them for they know not what they do," we ought to be reminded, "*It wasn't free to Him.*"

We killed Him. We were there. Which group were you in? Or were you a part of more than one? Had grace not intervened, and Jesus come to live inside of you, which group would most have characterized your attitude towards Jesus Christ? Before you came to Him, what would it have taken for you to have voted for His death?

There were at least seven groups represented at that cross. Each of them had a different perspective on who He was and on what they should do based upon who He was. There were at least seven groups or individuals represented. Look careful at them and ask God to let you see yourself, *apart from God's amazing grace.*

The most obvious was **Judas**. He did the dirty deed. He sold the King of Kings for a few day's wages. To him, spendable money was more important than spiritual riches. Given a choice of being the custodian of God's riches or man's, he chose that which can be corrupted, destroyed, and eaten by moths. When it was all over, all it cost him was his life...physically and spiritually.

Then Judas, which had betrayed him, when he saw that he was condemned, repented himself, and brought again the thirty pieces of silver to the chief priests and elders, Saying, I have sinned in that I have betrayed the innocent blood. And they said, What is that to us? see thou to that. And he cast down the pieces of silver in the temple, and departed, and went and hanged himself.

(Matthew 27:3-5)

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Once Judas saw what he had done, he was sorry; but those, who led him to betray the only hope he had, were unconcerned at his confession. Why? They had watched his life and had capitalized on it. Here was one who claimed to be one of His, who, when tempted to compromise, would rather earn an extra dollar than please the heart of God. He would bend the truth, take money that wasn't rightfully his, and alter the books, if need be, just to satisfy his desire for financial success.

Before you sentence Judas, look at your life before Christ came in. What were your reasons for living? People or things? Had God not come to you with His amazing grace, what would be your focus in life today? Or better still, even as a believer with God's indwelling Spirit living in you, given a chance, is money what motivates you? Even as a Christian, given a choice between making one more deal, seeing one more customer or patient or client, or spending time with God, what is your natural choice? Given a choice of supporting a missionary on the field whose ministry will touch and change the heart of dozens or even hundreds of people who will one day be in heaven with you, or buying a new car or a new stereo: *which comes first?*

You're right. You don't have to give up anything to be a Christian, but you have to be willing to give up everything to be a disciple. Yes, your salvation was free. *But it wasn't free to Him.*

Or maybe you can identify with brash, outspoken **Peter**. "Those other guys..." he muttered, "They may betray you, but not me." Mr. Sanguine you are. You always have the answers. You see what's wrong with everyone else. You have these huge spiritual pliers that you think were given to you by God to pluck boards out of other people's eyes. No one quite measures up to your standards.

But when the heat is on, and the light of God's truth is focused on your heart, it is filled with spiritual pride. And when the heat is on, that same arrogant brashness that makes you so visible in the church, makes you a fool. "I'll never betray You," you cry. Don't ever say that. Say, "Except for the grace of God, I would curse and deny I ever knew you." That's the truth. You can live a victorious life today, in



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spite of your arrogance, but only because of grace. It didn't cost you a nickel, but it wasn't free to Him.

Or perhaps you can identify with ***the other ten***. They didn't sell him out, and they didn't curse and deny they knew Him. They just cut and ran when the heat was on. As long as Jesus was giving them free loaves and fish, as long as Jesus was talking about never getting thirsty again, as long as Jesus was healing the sick and casting out demons; He was their man.

But let Him disappoint them, and they were gone. These were not men who experienced only a sermon or two on Sunday morning. These guys ate, slept, walked and talked with the Master day after day. They heard the parables, listened to the principles, watched His sinless life, and said, "This is for me." They left their careers, their friendships, their homes and followed Him...until the pain started, until the rejections overcame the plaudits of the crowd, until the spotlight of fame turned to the spotlight of interrogation. Then, they decided, "*We thought it would have been He who would have changed the world.*" Indeed, it was. But He was going to change it from the inside out. They wanted political change, economic change, acceptance from without. They didn't get it. Not yet. Do you? Even as a believer, do you grasp that the kingdom is spiritual, the stakes are eternal, and the road to spiritual victory is paved with the very things that caused these ten "close followers" to follow no more? Or when the heat is on, do you begin to doubt that God is who He says He is, and that His Word means what it says it does. If so, you would have cut and run, too. You would even today, if it were not for God's *amazing grace*. Deserve it? God forbid. Yes, it was free, but not because of your worthiness, but rather because of your depraved condition. Yes, it was free, *but it wasn't free to Him*.

Or do you identify with the ***chief priests and the scribes***? They grew up in the church and were elected to all the committees. They went to the right schools, and knew more doctrine than the seminary professors; but they didn't know God. Left to themselves, they were willing to bribe and lie to get rid of this kind of God-man who claimed to be worthy of worship and who claimed that they were, in and of themselves, nothing. Then, when they did rid themselves

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of Him, even the issue of their paid traitor's repentance did not move them. They were more concerned with keeping the law by not wrongfully using the money Judas returned. Their traditions meant everything. A relationship with God meant nothing. Was that you before God's amazing grace reached down and touched your heart?

Were you an affront to His Lordship? Were you parading around as a Christian leader without Christ? And even now, with Christ's indwelling Spirit living in your heart, *are you more interested in keeping the status quo than in selling your soul for the Kingdom?* Are your goals still temporal in spiritual clothing? Are you more concerned with how you are viewed in the church than how God sees your heart? Then don't fault these guys. They were fools, and they missed the King of Glory. But would you have, too, had it not been for God's amazing grace. He reached down and touched you and cleansed you and saved you. And yes, it was free. *But it wasn't free to Him.*

Maybe you identify with **Pilate**. He believed He saw something in Jesus worthy of honor and nothing in Him worthy of death. But take a stand at the expense of political expediency? Not on your life. Spiritually, it cost him his. He was afraid to buck the crowd. He knew the difference between Jesus and Barabbas. He also didn't want to fight the system, so he became passive on the one issue in life where no man can ignore making a decision. He did nothing. And died. He did nothing. And Jesus died. Rather than lose a popularity contest, he refused to contest the greatest lie ever told, that Jesus was not God.

Even as a Christian, do you tend to do the expedient thing, rather than take a stand? Is your silence at the key moments in life the ultimate condemnation of your heart? Beloved, that's what your whole life would have been like had it not been for God's amazing grace. Had God not decided that in your worthlessness, He saw potential; that in your weakness, He saw strength; that in your rebellion, He saw renewal, your name might well be Pilate, too. And your life might well be known as his is known, even today, 2,000 years later, as one of life's greatest cowards. That's you...were it not for God's amazing grace. What did it cost you? Nothing. Don't ever forget it. And don't ever forget...it wasn't free to God.

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Maybe you are like the **soldiers** who gathered at the foot of the Cross and gambled over His clothes as they mocked Him and scorned Him. They were professionals. They were paid to kill. He was just one more victim of the system. They were so busy doing their job, they missed their reason for living. They were so busy carrying out their daily duties, they didn't realize that they were killing God by what they did. Sound familiar? That might be you, even as a Christian, when your guard is down. You may still see your career and your daily tasks, even the daily grind, as so consuming that the things you do that kill the heart of God don't even phase you any more. Make no mistake about it. You'd have laughed and gambled, too, were it not for God's amazing grace. Deserve salvation? Oh, dear God, those words are beginning to sound like the world's greatest blasphemy. And no wonder. They are. The fact that grace is free only makes us less deserving. Could we but pay a portion of its cost, we could justify our worth to some degree. No, Beloved, it is free. But it wasn't free to God.

And finally, maybe you best identify with the **milling crowds**. The general public who stood at the foot of the cross knew little if anything about Jesus. To them, this was just another soap opera; a B-rated movie about an imposter who claimed to be God. They passed by laughing, and their laughter covered up a need until they didn't have to face the issues of sin, salvation, a Savior, and a cross. Make jokes about it. Treat it like a story line. Create little religious prejudices and apply them to Christianity as a whole. Find lives that don't measure up and use them to prove that the whole thing is a hoax. Ask for miracles, and when they don't come, laugh and cry with the crowd, *"He saved others; Himself He could not save."* While you're laughing, you miss the fact that *had He saved Himself, He could not have saved others.*

Don't kid yourself. Had it not been for God's amazing grace, you would be milling around that cross today, tossing up one-liners about religious fanatics, with a smirk on your face and death in your heart. Even as a believer, you may be one who takes the cross too lightly. You may be one who lived in sin and experienced salvation, and now that you are saved, you think that because of the security you own in Christ, you can live with compromises and violations of truth

and never get caught, and never lose power.

The trouble is, the power is already gone. And so is the discernment to know its gone. Why? You've joined the crowds at the foot of the cross, and even though that cross saved you, you treat it with such disdain or at least with such little respect, that no one in your family or in your business or in your world takes you seriously as a believer. The milling crowd. They may have been the most foolish of all. They were in the presence of the only one in history capable of saving them, and standing there, they mocked. And Jesus? What did He do? He prayed for them. He forgave them. And then, in the greatest act of love ever shown, He died for them.

### **Consider What He Did**

He died for them. He died for us. The very ones who have sold Him out for a few pieces of silver; who have, when the heat is on, cursed and denied Him; who have when disappointed, cut and run. The very ones who would stand on tradition at the expense of reality; who would remain silent for the sake of political expediency; who would get so busy doing our daily tasks that we never even realized we killed the King of Glory. The very ones who wander by that precious cross, even today *without so much as falling to our knees in utter awe and deep repentance, crying out, "God be merciful to me, a sinner."*

He died for them. He died for us. And He called it grace. I know it was free. It was sovereign. It was eternal. But, remember more than that, it was undeserved. Not partially, totally. There was not one iota of goodness in you before grace came into your life. Had you been there, you would have killed Him, too. Maybe directly, by cursing and denying Him; maybe indirectly, by simply ignoring Him; but you would have killed Him, too. Actually, you did. We all did.

It was not only the fact that *we are not the most worthy in the world*, but the fact that we are totally without merit apart from God's intervention, that made God's love so incredibly perfect.

For when we were yet without strength, in due time Christ died for the ungodly.

For scarcely for a righteous man will one die: yet peradventure for a good man some would even dare to die.

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But God commendeth his love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us.

(Romans 5:6-8)

Three categories. We forget which one we are in. Christ died for the ungodly. While we were yet sinners. Before we became righteous. Before we had the capacity to be “good men.” While we were still nothing but despicable God-rejectors, Christ died for us. While we were still spitting in the face of God, either overtly or indirectly, Christ died for us. While we were following the crowd, laughing at Lordship, Christ died for us. While we were reveling in our theology or our traditions, devoid of a personal faith, Christ died for us.

Do you know what? *If you were the only one who had ever been a despicable, rejector of God, He still would have died... just for you.* How do we know that? We can tell in so many ways, but one stands out to me more than the rest. It is the truth found in these verses:

But, beloved, be not ignorant of this one thing, that one day is with the Lord as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day.

The Lord is not slack concerning his promise, as some men count slackness; but is longsuffering to us-ward, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance.

(II Peter 3:8,9)

After 2,000 years of waiting and watching this sin laden world spit on His cross, mock His dear Name, ignore His claims, and deny His existence as God; He could, at any moment, come again and bring righteousness and judgement to this world at last. And one day, perhaps very soon, He will.

What is He waiting for? *Not every one who will come has come. And until the last sheep is in the fold, He will let the milling crowd laugh, He will let the politicians straddle the fence, the religious hypocrites cling to their traditions, even His supposed followers waffle and deny Him on occasions, but He will not come until that last one has come.*

I don't know. You may be the last, lost one. You may be reading or listening and thinking, “I'm one of those in the crowd,” or “I'm just like Judas or Peter or Pilate.” You may have cursed Him or just ignored Him. And yet, deep in your heart of hearts there is, at this moment, a rumbling of

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conviction that is calling you to walk up to that cross right now and look up. What do you see? That's God up there. God is dying for you. He knows you don't deserve it. Oh, how He knows. The question is: "Do you?"

It is popular today to call men to salvation without calling them to repentance. Jesus is not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance (II Peter 3:9), not just to the safety of security. That's a part of it. But you are a sinner. You were born a sinner, and you have lived up to your heritage. You are as much a sinner as Adolph Hitler was. Do you believe that? It wasn't Hitler's sins, grievous as they were that made him a sinner. It was the fact that he was a sinner that made him sin.

And you, too, are a sinner. Repent today. Come to the only one who can cleanse you of those sins and give you a new heart. Come to the only one who can take that black, dirty heart of yours and wash it in His precious blood and make it white as snow. Come to Him, today. Ask Him to come to you, today. He will. He has. It's done. But you have to ask. You say, "That's too easy." Yes, Beloved, it's easy. He knew how simple it needed to be for us to grasp it, so simple a child could do it.

It's simple. And, yes, it's free. Totally free. You couldn't earn a ten-trillionth of it if you worked for the rest of eternity. If you could, it would be null and void. It wouldn't be grace if it wasn't free. But, even as you lift your heart this moment to come to Him, please vow in your heart that though you will forever sing "Amazing Grace" and marvel that it's free, you will never, ever forget that...*it wasn't free to Him.*

And dear, believing friend, when did you last spend a day just marvelling at the grace of God? A ruthless gang member is what you were to God, not a respectable banker or doctor or repair man. You were part of the gang who killed God's Son in a drive-by, walk-by shooting. You know it and He knows it.

He had two choices: He could have called the police immediately and put you away forever, or He had the option of taking the heart out of His own Son and in the most delicate operation in history, allowing that uncontaminated heart to taste the grime of sin for a season, yet not give in to its deadly disease, placing that heart in your body; the same

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body that participated in killing His Son.

And what did He do? *He called you. He chose you. He loved you. He loved you so much that He called you to His side and said, I'll do it. And it will be free. He did it. And it was.*

Now, in the light of that truth, what manner of men ought we to be? What manner of women ought we to be? Shall we continue in sin that grace may abound? God forbid. (Romans 6:1,2)

For all of us, the reality of grace needs to be more active in our lives. What else can motivate us to godliness like grace? What else can motivate us to evangelism like grace? What else can motivate us to worship like grace?

We didn't deserve it, and we never will. We didn't need to, and we never will. Because a loving God, in eternity past, determined that it would have *nothing to do with what we deserve. We deserve hell.* It would rather have to do with who He is. He is love. And that love, when set free through His infinite mercy to forgive, empowers us with a divine enablement that actually allows the likes of us to become like Him. Pure, holy, unblemished, and free.

And it's all free...to us. But say it one more time with me, lest we forget...*It wasn't free to Him.*





## Chapter 3

# Adopted, Accepted, Adored

### **Published in Rome for the World**

His journalistic workshop was hardly what one would choose. There were no PC's, and not a Macintosh was in sight. In fact, the typewriter was about 2,000 years away from being invented.

There were no halogen lamps to make writing easier, either. It's just as well; his eyesight was apparently so bad, even light might not have helped. He had no literary assistants to proof his work, unless you count a crew of rough looking Roman guards who stood over him watching his every move, and in some cases, chaining themselves to him, making his every move both painful and difficult.

The mail delivery service was a little more primitive than it is today. UPS wasn't on strike, but it didn't matter. There were no chariots painted brown designated to deliver packages overnight. I guess you could say that the setting for creating a literary miracle was hardly evident.

The author himself was a known terrorist. He had made a name for himself hunting down men and women who were affiliated with this man Jesus, seeing that they were imprisoned and punished for their faith in this itinerant carpenter who was walking the hillside gathering followers as He went.

His name, of course, was Paul. At least that was his Greek name. The word literally means "small" or "diminutive" or "little". It was generally thought that he was small in stature and that other difficulties made him less than pleasant to look upon. His Hebrew name, Saul, strangely enough literally meant "desired one," an indication that when God

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took control of his life, his outward appearance would not be the deciding factor in his success.

Although innocent, he was in prison and destined for long term incarceration for standing for the very faith he had once sought to extinguish. Extinguish it, he could not. One day on a Damascus road, this man Paul met someone he had never met before. His name was Jesus. Jesus had been crucified, but He was very much alive; and Paul, who had been dead in trespasses and sins, was now very much alive, as well.

You would think that God would now have removed all the obstacles in Paul's path so he could take the message of His new Savior to the ends of the earth. You would think. But not if you understand the ways of God, for so much higher are those ways than ours. No, God understood that often His choicest servants are best used when hidden from the limelight and left in the shadows where only the aroma of their faith is allowed to drift into the lives of others through the written word.

So it was with Paul. No longer able to travel from church to church to preach and teach, God had set him aside for a deeper work, a work which would be infused with the canon of Scripture and become, in fact, the Word of God itself. God took Paul out of the mainstream and sent him upstream into the quiet place, there to allow truth to flow throughout the world and ultimately throughout the annals of time itself.

So it has been through the years. Consider the years Bunyan's voice was silenced by the locked doors of a Bedford jail. From there came Pilgrim's Progress. Consider Madam Guyon, trapped behind prison walls, but free to write words that would charm and change the hearts of the world. God knows what He's doing, Beloved, and if He has you closed up in some kind of prison experience right now, it is only to accomplish a higher purpose. Paul was in jail, but he was free: free to do the will of God. And so are you.

It was from that Roman prison, about 60 A.D., that Paul wrote a letter we have come to know as the Ephesian epistle. Unlike most of his epistles, this one may not have been written just to the church at Ephesus, but was much more likely to have been penned as an encyclical letter, one designed to be read in all the churches in Asia Minor, possibly first to the

church at Laodicea. It had no specific references to those in Ephesus, no personal greetings or instructions, and made no reference to doctrinal or philosophical issues specific to that congregation. No, it seems probable that this letter was written to all the churches. It was a general epistle, though in content and purpose, it had much in common with another letter he wrote specifically to the Colossian church.

### **An Apostle's Epistle**

Our concern over this epistle has to do with the first two chapters. Those opening words of greeting and instruction form a baseline for understanding what appears to be, I believe, the most transforming subject in all of Scripture, the subject of grace. And as we begin to pull away the layers of Biblical teaching on this subject, we begin by hearing what Paul had to say. The letter, as so many of his did, began like this:

Paul, an apostle of Jesus Christ by the will of God, to the saints which are at Ephesus, and to the faithful in Christ Jesus:

Grace be to you, and peace, from God our Father, and from the Lord Jesus Christ. (Ephesians 1:1,2)

Paul, the little one, had become Paul, the apostle. An apostle was one sent out as an ambassador to accomplish a task. Paul's calling was paramount to understanding this issue of grace. Can you see why? Virtually no one had fewer credentials or was less deserving of the title "apostle" than Paul. He had been an avowed enemy of the cross, a persecutor of the saints. But those very questionable credentials made him a perfect candidate to be an ambassador of grace. For grace, by its very nature, shines most beautifully from the platform of the undeserved.

And so it is with you and with me. It is not our sterling character or our potential to use our supposed God-given talents to aid the kingdom that interests God. He is interested in taking seemingly useless clay, fashioning it in the hands of the Master Craftsman, and making something out of nothing. He is the God of creation, the only one capable of bringing something out of nothing. And that's what He has done with us. We were dead in trespasses and sins; we were deserving

of nothing but hell. Enter grace.

If you see yourself and your value to God any differently than that, you do not yet grasp the glory of grace. You are still seeing grace as something you get more of than you deserve. That's not true. You do not deserve any of it and never, ever will, If you live to be a thousand years old and do penance and good works and live righteously, you are no more deserving of the grace of God than if you were perilously falling from some great sin. Your qualifications for grace are

Not by works of righteousness which you have done, but according to his mercy he saved us,

(Titus 3:5a)

### **According to the Will of God**

Paul, the ambassador and the apostle, begins his epistle "Paul, an apostle of Jesus Christ, by the will of God." We are going to be looking for four great evidences of grace in each of Paul's statements. One of those evidences is that grace is sovereign. God chooses, God does, and God is glorified. He is omniscient; He knows best. He is omnipotent; He can do whatever He deems best. He is sovereign; *He **does** whatever He chooses*. And always, Beloved, always, *what He does is perfect*. It may not seem perfect according to your concept of God's will, because we see through a glass darkly. Our perspective is seeing heaven through the lens of earth. God's perspective is seeing earth through the lens of heaven. What a difference! But Scripture says that God's will is good, acceptable, and perfect. That means it is always in harmony with his Word, always brings joy to His heart, and never, ever is one ten-trillionth of a millimeter off course.

Therefore, God's sovereign use of grace is perfection in the spirit realm. It is not just "good" as we use the word. It is without any margin of error. So if God called Paul to be an apostle according to the will of God, it is all of grace; totally undeserved, totally free, and totally sovereign. If God has called you to any kind of ministry or witness or service, no matter how noble or menial, it, too, is perfect. He will equip you, sustain you, and use you; and the less qualified you are, the more grace you will need. The more grace you need, the more humble you ought to become, and if you do, the grace will flow, the ministry will bless, and God will get the glory.

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It, very simply, is just called “grace.” Nothing as magnificent as this had ever been revealed before or since: God, doing supernaturally, whatever we cannot do naturally, without merit or payment of any kind on our part.

Paul now gives his salutation, and it is, indeed, a key to the rest of the passage. He begins all his epistles with virtually the same words.

Grace be unto you and peace, from God our Father, and  
from the Lord Jesus Christ.

(I Corinthians 1:3;

Philippians 1:2;

Colossians 1::2b;

I Thessalonians 1:1b)

Paul is asking God to give them grace; a kind of grace that would produce peace. Now, this is *not saving grace*. He is writing to the saints at Ephesus, *and to all the faithful (those who by faith have been saved)* in Jesus Christ. The letter was probably written to any or all of the Christians in Asia Minor, and Paul is invoking God’s grace upon them. What was he asking God to do? We will see as the epistle proceeds. I sometimes wonder if we haven’t missed a blessing by not learning to pray this prayer for those we intercede for: “Grace and peace be unto them.” This was, as we will see, more than a perfunctory greeting like “Dear friends, I hope you are well.” This was a request for something totally, incredibly undeserved and free which would alter the lives totally of those he was praying for. It would enable them to do supernaturally what they could not do naturally: live in the spirit realm and lay up treasures in heaven while blessing others and pleasing God at the same time. What a gift! And that’s what it is: a gift. Only God can give it, and He gives it by his sovereign choice. But Paul was saying, “You can invoke it or ask for it, according to God’s will.”

Learn to pray for grace for your loved ones. Learn to ask God to supernaturally infuse their hearts with the enabling power that allows them to be internally changed by external pressures and blessings alike. God delights in giving grace. Give Him the opportunity.

### **Heavenly Places**

The next aspect of God’s grace surfaces as Paul describes this unique relationship between God’s child and God’s

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grace. He says this:

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)

God's grace is not only undeserved and sovereign, it is eternal. Paul now explains where that grace reveals its awesome power: in the heavenlies. He describes the blessings as spiritual blessings. He describes the sole source: In Christ. Beloved, in this one brief verse, a verse most of you have read time after time, lies the hidden secret of grace revealed. It is the divine enabling of the human heart to be spiritually blessed both in times of physical victory and times of physical grief; in times of great pressure and times of great joy; in times of serious disappointment and times of wonderful elation and answered prayer.

The circumstances are not the key to being blessed. The spiritual response to the circumstances are the key, and only grace can allow you to be blessed. We pray "bless Aunt Susie" and what we mean is remove Aunt Susie's problems. We pray "bless Bobby's school work", and we mean help Bobby get all "A"s. But let's go deeper. Grace allows Aunt Susie to have a heart that sees the heart of God and rejoices at whatever He sends. It enables her to see life from God's perspective. As she does, peace floods her soul, and joy fills her heart. She receives grace.

Grace gives Bobby God's perspective of his grades. It allows him to see his education from God's perspective and purposes. He becomes a young man of integrity, filled with the supernatural ability to focus on diligence, faithfulness, and truth. He prays for God to enable him to do his best, and once He does, he is able to rest in the finished task. He has peace, not instability. He focuses his heart on knowing God even in the midst of his studies. God is giving him grace.

Both are being challenged on earth and blessed in the heavenlies. They are being tested in their faith and, as they are, they are gaining spiritual blessings. The people praying for them may be seeking a kind of grace that changes their circumstances, but God's kind of grace uses their circumstances to change their lives instead, even as it did Paul when he prayed for the removal of his thorn. God said,

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“Okay, Paul, I hear you. But I *won't* remove the outward problem, I'll use the outward problem to change your heart. My grace is sufficient for you.”

Spiritual blessings. Heavenly places. In Christ Jesus. Oh, to learn the difference. It will change your prayer life. It will change your perspective. It will change your life!

### **Adopted, Accepted, Adored**

Now, having described both the plan of grace and the purpose of grace, Paul gets down to the portrait of grace. Herein lies a photograph of the heart of God as He redeems the children of God that ought to drive us to our knees in adoration and praise, and give us a deeper understanding of some issues that affect us and our world as well. Paul now gets very personal:

According as he hath chosen us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before him in love:

Having predestinated us unto the adoption of children by Jesus Christ to himself, according to the good pleasure of his will,

To the praise of the glory of his grace, wherein he hath made us accepted in the beloved. (Ephesians 1:4-6)

To the praise of the glory of His grace, He has adopted us, accepted us, and adores us, and it is, indeed, all of grace. Paul now goes from the theology of who God is to the reality of how He feels about us. He catapults us from the lecture hall in the seminary of life to the nursery where a loving parent brings home an incredibly precious gift: a newborn child—not just any child—a child desperately in need of love. This parent chose that particular child and said, “I want him; I want her. I will pay **whatever it costs** to adopt that child into my family. I love them that much. When did He make that choice? Before the foundation of the world.

Remember: He is omniscient. He knew before He chose to adopt you all of the dirty diapers of sin that would have to be changed; He knew all the times you would have to be bottle fed, even when you should have been taking solid foods; He even knew the incredible cost of that heart transplant for which He would receive the bill in full. He knew. And yet, He

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chose you. He walked through the nursery of eternity, looked at beds full of babies-to-be and said, "Whatever the cost, I'll pay it. I want that one to be My child." Beloved, *that's grace*.

Was it because you were so beautiful? Oh, dear God, no. You were covered with a rash of sin, screaming and kicking your legs in rebellion, shoving aside the bottle of His Word, demanding to make your own decisions, run your own life, and do your own thing, *even before you were born*. Pretty? Not hardly. Was it what he saw on your computer print out? Your high IQ? The greatness of your parents? Your potential to be a football star? Not likely, *for not many noble, not many mighty, not many wise have been called*.

No, Beloved, He saw your need.

But God hath chosen the foolish things of the world (that's us) to confound the wise; and God hath chosen the weak things of the world (that's us) to confound the mighty;

That no flesh should glory in His presence.

(I Corinthians 1:27,29)

He chose you because He saw you in need of grace. He saw in you a child who would have enough needs and weaknesses to admit you needed—grace. And so He chose you.

He paid the price and adopted you, because He loved you. Adoption has never been cheap or easy, but always beautiful. Adoption has always involved risks, hence has always had the potential to produce miracles. Adoption takes away the egocentric aura of expectancy and replaces it with the spectrum of faith. Thus, the adopted child has the potential to receive the greatest kind of love of all, *unselfish love*.

Paul went on. Not only did God adopt us, He accepted us just as we were. That, too, is a miracle of grace. Oh, He has plans to change us into His likeness if we are willing, to whatever degree we will let Him. But whether we do or don't, He will never love us any less. He can't. We are accepted in the beloved. Our adoption is so complete that God now sees us in Himself. We are as much a part of Him as Jesus is. Therefore, His love will never let us go. We may choose to rebel, to run away, to break His heart. Still, we will be accepted in the beloved.



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He will be grieved over our rebellion, but He will not love us any less! He cannot and still be God. We who have been adopted have been accepted! This is a spiritual adoption, but as always, the physical images on the screen of life are there to teach us spiritual truth, and that truth can best be applied by viewing it alongside reality. Case in point:

The world today is flooded with homeless, starving children. From Korea to China to India to Russia to Rwanda throughout virtually all of Africa, not to mention the unwanted children in the United States. Thousands upon thousands of babies are dying daily because they have no one to care for them. How few, however, who are looking to adopt, look as believers into the nurseries of the world because *these children may not be as normal, or as culturally acceptable, or as potentially successful in our society as a baby that came from their own womb or at least from their own strata of society.*

But God did not initiate His divine adoption proceedings that way. He went and looked for the ones *who just might not be as wanted, might not be as desired; He went after us.* Sinners. Rebels. Average mentalities. Regular folks, along with many who would be considered the dregs of society until He adopted us and paid the price to bring us into His family, nurture us, love us, feed us from His glorious Word, and wait patiently for the scales to fall from our eyes.

Have we all been success stories? Not quite. He wrote:

Hear, O heavens, and give ear, O earth: for the LORD hath spoken, I have nourished and brought up children, and they have rebelled against me.  
[Loose translation: "been stinkers".] (Isaiah 1:2)

But is He going to give up on us? Not on your life! Then why did He choose the likes of us? It was our great need. And even Christians who are not thinking of adopting can pray fervently for the homeless and needy children of the world that God will provide as many believing homes as possible where godly men and women are willing to do what God did: adopt into their family a baby whose only hope is in God; not in their culture, not in their family, not in their heritage; only in God. What a trophy they will be when God exalts His name through them. Will it be easy? Absolutely not! Was it easy for

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God? Absolutely not. Then why did He do it? To demonstrate His incredible agape love, a love which gives itself away to those who do not deserve it, cannot repay it, and may not even appreciate it.

The third major issue to consider is that God not only has adopted us and accepted us, *He adores us*. He will never leave us or forsake us. He is not gritting His teeth, regretting that He chose us because we are in rebellion or unteachable. Still, He loves. And like the Father of the prodigal, the fatted calf will always be there, waiting for our hearts to repent.

Oh, the difficulties of parenting in this age. I've read the books. I've had children. I have grandchildren. I know. Believe me, I know. But, Beloved, God's example is perfect. You don't have to approve of what they do or even condone their attitudes, *but you are never to stop loving them, because they are yours*. You may deplore what they do, *but you must love who they are, your children*.

We can't disown our children any more than God can. He adopted us permanently into His family and vowed that nothing could ever separate us from His love. Nothing. Then He spelled out nothing. He didn't have to; nothing means nothing. But He did:

For I am persuaded, that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come,

Nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, [nor anything else] shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.

(Romans 8:38,39)

Parenting is a lifelong profession. Oh, they grow up and move away or go away or grow away, but the burden to pray and love them never goes away, nor should it. They are ours forever just as we are God's forever. You say, *"Wait a minute. You haven't met my kids. My children don't deserve my love anymore. You'll never believe what they have done to me, or what they haven't done for me."*

Yes, and God says, "That isn't what grace is all about. They never deserved your love in the first place. You gave it to them freely because your God loves you freely, and grace is meant to be passed on." That's why the parent-child

relationship is so critical to the future of the faith. Discipline must be maintained. Balance must be kept. But above all, in all, and through all there must be love. Love must *never die*. It is part of the adoption formula: He adopted us; He approved of us, and He adores us. He always will. Though the earth be removed and the mountains be carried into the midst of the sea, *our God will love us all the way into heaven, no matter what*. Incidentally, in case you have forgotten, the word is: Grace.

### **The Grace of Royalty**

Which brings us, wonderfully, to the next passage. Paul continues:

Having predestinated us unto the adoption of children by Jesus Christ to himself, according to the good pleasure of his will,

To the praise of the glory of his grace, wherein he hath made us accepted in the beloved.

In whom we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of his grace;

Wherein he hath abounded toward us in all wisdom and prudence;

Having made known unto us the mystery of his will, according to his good pleasure which he hath purposed in himself:

That in the dispensation of the fullness of times he might gather together in one all things in Christ, both which are in heaven, and which are on earth; even in him:

In whom also we have obtained an inheritance, being predestinated according to the purpose of him who worketh all things after the counsel of his own will:

That we should be to the praise of his glory, who first trusted in Christ. (Ephesians 1:5-12)

Oh, Beloved, this marvelous grace of our loving God must cause us to be humbled and realize constantly our unworthiness to have been adopted into this glorious family. But once we are humbled by that fact, we must face the fact that now we are not only adopted into a family, we have been adopted into the *Royal* family. In today's terminology on planet earth that may not mean as much as it used to, but when you're talking about royalty in heaven, it means

everything.

It is, according to verse 6, all for the purpose of bringing praise to the glory of His grace, so our unworthiness becomes even more apparent. But having said that, Paul tells us that the riches of the Kingdom of the King now belong to us. We can be blessed with all the blessings of the heavenlies because the King of Heaven is our Father. He has *adopted* us, *approved* of us, and *adores* us. Look at the benefits of being His child:

1- We have redemption through His blood. (verse 7) God has delivered us once and for all from the eternal penalty of sin. We may end up in the prison of sin for a season, and may, on this earth, suffer greatly by sowing and reaping. But come the harvest, the King will lift us up, draw us to His bosom, and take us home to the Palace for all eternity. It is totally undeserved and free, but it is part of the adoption process, and it is a final, eternal choice on God's part. How lightly we sometimes take it. We complain about the jobs God gives us here. We complain about the hardships we have to bear. We complain even about having to pay for the wrong choices we make here. And we forget, oh how soon we forget, that here is only temporary. God is building a new castle for His family. It is perfectly designed. And if you have been born again, there is a room with your name on it, custom designed and furnished by the King Himself. We should be singing each morning, "Redeemed how I love to proclaim it; Redeemed by the blood of the Lamb."

2- He has offered us the wisdom and understanding only a loving Father can impart to His children. (verses 8,9) He has even called us aside to give us the secrets of His Kingdom and explained the mystery of His great plan. He has imparted to us the capacity to understand it and to share it. It is a pity we often spend so little time sitting at His feet below the throne, drinking in not only the wisdom of the plan, but the majesty of it.

3- He has written a will, and we inherit everything. (verse 11) We are not only heirs of God, but joint-heirs with Christ. The entire spectrum of spiritual riches has been laid at our feet. Deserve it? Oh, dear God, no. Can we pay for it? Of course not; not in a million times a million years. Then

what can we do?

4- We should be to the “praise of His glory”. (verse 12)  
That means our lives should reflect the sheer joy along with the uncommon humility that comes from being picked up out of the orphanage of losers and adopted into the family of the King of Kings. Our countenance ought to reflect His likeness because we have spent so much time at His feet. Our behavior ought never in any way to demean the Crown. A child of the King! An undeserving child of the King. He came. He looked. He saw my need. He chose me. He redeemed me. He paid a price for me I never could ever fathom. And now He has given to me everything He has. How could my life not reflect His values? How could my heart not beat with joy at the mention of His name? How could I not live every waking moment in the sheer ecstasy of knowing that though I do not deserve it and never will, I am a child of the King, and I have been adopted, accepted, and adored?

Oh, Beloved, drink it in! Amazing grace, it is! The King of Kings came down from His throne in heaven, and calling His Son to His side, began a long, slow walk through the annals of time looking for children to add to His family.

Think about it. He could have gone into the homes of mighty men; and He did touch a few. He could have gone into the residences of royalty and fame, but most of them had so little need. So He began His journey into the ghettos of life, into the recesses of life’s dark places where those who seemed so undeserving lived.

He came to my house. He came to yours. We can’t fathom, in retrospect, what He must have been looking for. We had nothing to offer royalty. And we had nothing to offer prospective parents, either. We were soiled with sin, whimpering in self-delusion, whining over our every trial and blessing alike. We saw no need of adoption, for we thought we could make it fine on our own, though in reality, we couldn’t even walk yet.

No matter. He came anyway. He rang the doorbell of our hearts and looked inside. Oh, dear God, He looked inside. He not only knew how despicable our outer behavior was, but He saw the greed, the anger, the selfishness, the pride that dominates our thoughts. Even we can’t see those things

in our children's hearts. But He saw it all. "Dear God," we think, "that ought to finish it off." But no, having seen all of that, He said: "I choose him. I choose her. I will adopt them into my family. They will become royalty. I will give to them everything I have given to My Only Begotten Son."

"But," the overseer of the orphanage replied, "You don't understand. This child is in need of a new heart. Without it, he or she will die. And there is only one heart in the universe that will transplant into his. It belongs to your Only Son."

With that, the King looked down at us again and quietly said, "I'll pay the price. I'll give my Son's heart for this child. I want to adopt this child, whatever the cost."

"But, why?" the overseer asked. "This child is a loser. What has this baby to offer you?" The King answered, "It isn't what this baby can offer me that matters, it's what I can give this child. It's settled. The price will be paid. Draw up the papers. Yes, it will cost me everything, but everything is nothing when you love someone."

And so the merciful, loving King reached down and picked us up, drew us to Himself, made the transaction and adopted us. Now we are His, and now He is ours. We have full access to His throne. Day and night the door is open. We have full access to His wisdom, whenever we have a need. He listens and He answers. We have full access to His storehouse of riches. All the treasures of the Spirit are ours to appropriate, and He never scolds us for asking.

We have full access to His heart, as well. He has promised to share with us, not only the principles of the Kingdom, but the very thoughts of His heart. He wants us to spend so much time with Him that we will become just like Him, and thus be able to minister in the Kingdom, even as He does.

He wants to train us, not in palace traditions, but in kingdom principles. So daily, He sends us out into the highways and back streets of the kingdom to find people as needy as we were, and give our lives to serving them, even as He gives His to serving us. He wants us not to form the palace social club, that's not why He came, but to join the royal service club, washing dirty feet and touching hurting hearts, not as princes, but as slaves. He wants us to understand that what He has done for us is all of grace, and grace never

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stops giving.

Oh, Beloved, burn it into your memory. Drink it in. He has adopted us. He has accepted us. He adores us. I know, to the natural mind it makes no sense. It is inconceivable. God knew it would be. So He invented something called grace.

And in the marvel of His plan, for some unknown but wonderful reason, He included us.

INCLUDED!

Included! Oh, what a precious word  
As it falls from the lips of our loving Lord.  
Chosen from the nursery of hell,  
He looked and said, "I choose you, as well."

No matter how sinful or how defiled,  
I want YOU to become my child.  
I'll die for you on a Roman cross;  
No matter the price, I will pay the cost.

God looked down and saw your need  
And He saw a heart that had to be freed,  
Blessing of blessings, grace free and true,  
God in His mercy adopted you.





## Chapter 4

# His Workmanship

Picture with me, if you will, a magnificent sculpture sitting out in the town square. The entire community had waited for its unveiling. Funded by the city and crafted by the most talented sculptor in the country, it depicted the heritage and integrity of the little town perfectly.

The big day arrived. Next to the sculpture was a somewhat smaller one that had been placed in the city square some years before. Imagine, if you will, the conversation between those two pieces of molded, twisted steel.

“Well, this is my big day,” the new work of art declared. “There’s no one in his right mind who won’t be here today to honor me. I only wish my Dad could be here to see it. He’s a beam in an ocean liner, you know.” “No, I didn’t know,” the smaller piece of twisted metal responded, “Mine was last seen going inside a 40 story office building as a brace. He seems to be holding up fine, but I haven’t heard from him. Hard to get mail past all that concrete, you know.”

At last, the moment arrived. “Just wait till you hear my speech,” Sammy Sculpture boasted, “I’ve been waiting for weeks to read it.”

“You’re kidding, of course,” little Willy Once-was answered, “They aren’t interested in you. They’ll look at you, but they’ll praise the one who made you. You can’t do anything but stand there and keep from rusting. It was the one whose hands fashioned you that deserves the glory. Never once has someone praised me in all these years. I am the example of my creator’s work. He gets the praise. I’m not worthy of praise. I’m his handiwork.” With that the little sculpture turned one last time to his new, larger counterpart and said, “Get it straight, Sammy, you’re not the main attraction. Your job is to point to the one who is. — *The one who made you,*

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*He deserves the glory. You are His workmanship and not your own."*

Now move in your imagination down the street to the Metropolitan Art Gallery, a similar conversation was taking place. Two pieces of beautiful art were being shown by a famous artist. The two paintings were arguing over which of the two was the most beautiful. "I am," said Larry Landscape, "Look at the depth of colors in the ocean and in the sky. I am so proud of my sky. You just have people and places on your canvas. No one wants to look at those."

Freddy Familypic responded, "It doesn't matter what's painted on me. I'm just a piece of canvas. What I become will totally depend on whether or not people who see me like what my creator did. I'm not to be praised. Just wait till the crowd arrives. You'll see."

Sure enough, they arrived. Now I know what you're thinking. You're saying paintings and sculptures don't talk. I know painting and sculptures don't talk, but people do. And people forget, don't they, that they are no more the work of art to be recognized and applauded than those twisted pieces of steel or those delicately crafted works of painted art. The praise belongs to the one whose workmanship they are. The one who designed, sculpted, and painted is the one to be praised. He did it all. The canvas didn't reach out and grab a little paint and say, "Try it here." The metal didn't twist and turn on its own and say, "This will look better."

It all began in the creator's mind and ended with the creator's hands. Until we as Christians come to understand that concept totally, we will miss the essence of grace just as surely as those works of art missed it. We are His workmanship, Beloved, and nothing else. And praise God, for anything less than that would only be worthy of the junk heap of life. Anything less than His handiwork and His workmanship, will never make it into the museum of eternity nor draw the plaudits of men to the real Creator, our Creator God.

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His Workmanship; Oh, what a thought;  
And oh, that more clearly our hearts might be taught  
That glory accrues not to what we have done,  
All glory belongs to God's Precious Son.

And whatever we do, our hearts must cry out"  
His workmanship, never a doubt;  
Calling for men to but look on His face  
And praising His name, sing only of grace.

His Workmanship, pure and true;  
I see Jesus when I look at you.  
I see Him painting from heaven above,  
A portrait of grace; of undying love

I see His patience abounding and free,  
I see His mercy abounding to me;  
He flows through your life in thousands of ways,  
You're His Workmanship; and He's to be praised.

And grace, of course, is what this book is all about; but then grace is what life is all about, isn't it? Life is all about a loving God who could not let a corrupted, rebellious creation die in their sins. He possessed a quality called "love" that simply would not let us walk away, so He determined that it didn't matter what it cost Him, it would have to be free and undeserved for us. So He died in our place. Now He lives in us to work through us. *We are His workmanship.*

Thus our study of Ephesians chapters one and two takes us to the transitional stage of our series, the place where grace forms a trinity of expression, and like The Trinity, though each facet stands on its own, each is indivisible from the others.

Paul is writing a letter to the churches in Asia Minor, and though he is trapped in one of life's prisons, he seems not only content but elated to be there, because God has put him there to carry on a written revelation of the mind of God, a revelation that later would be part and parcel of the Living Word of God.

The focus of that treatise is that one word, "grace." It rises to the surface in virtually every verse, and as it does, it produces a new facet of the diamond of its truth. We will be

heading towards the more practical, day to day expressions of grace now: how will grace affect your tomorrow with your family, at your job, where you are. How can you appropriate the grace of God when the storms of life come? But before we do, it is imperative that we see clearly the progression of how that grace works, lest we separate in any way the magnitude of what God is doing from the magnitude of what God has done. They are one and the same, though they are different. They are the continuation and progression of the heart of God as it first redeems us, then renews us, and finally reproduces us. It is a miracle. New life. New power. New ministry. And all of grace.

We will be looking at Ephesians 1:1 to 2:10. However, rather than read it in sequence, we will be reading it as it divides itself into three phases of grace. We will see Ephesians 1:6,7, and 2:1,2,5,8,9 as part one; Ephesians 1:8,9,17-21, and 2:6,7 as part two; and the final part will consist of Ephesians 2:2-4, and 2:10. We will, of course, observe those passages according to the rest of Scripture, both in this chapter and the ones to come, to see how the whole counsel of God addresses these three grace concepts.

### ***You He Made Alive: The Fire is Ignited***

The basic theme of grace is resurrection. Death to life; nothingness to everything; bondage to freedom; hell to heaven. It is a portrait of absolutes. If you consider grace to be anything else, you've missed the principle. No maybes. Once you were lost, now you are found. Once you were bound for an eternity apart from God, now you are eternally guaranteed a home in heaven where moth and rust cannot corrupt, and where thieves cannot break through and steal. Grace is total, absolute transformation. That is why you must be born again. No one is nearly saved or almost converted. You are either dead or alive; lost or found. You will not find in Scripture anyone wandering in between the two. At any given moment, you should know exactly where you stand with God.

The reason it is so clear is that God decided that the best analogy would be death and life. No one ever mistakes the two. You know if you are alive or not. So Paul makes sure that we understand that before grace can flow through your

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spiritual veins into the recesses of your deepest needs and on into the lives of others, you must pass from death unto life. You must be born again. Here is what he said:

To the praise of the glory of his grace, wherein he hath made us accepted in the beloved.

In whom we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of his grace;  
(Ephesians 1:6,7)

And you hath he quickened, (made you come alive) who were dead in trespasses and sins;

Even when we were dead in sins, hath quickened us (made us come alive) together with Christ, (by grace ye are saved;)

For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God:

Not of works, lest any man should boast.

(Ephesians 2:1,5,8,9)

The passages say He made alive you who were once dead in trespasses and sins. You lived like it. You obeyed Satan and followed him. Even then, when we were all dead in our sins, He made us come alive together by the power of Christ, and it was all of grace.

He made us come alive. He saved us by grace. That's what He did. It was acquired by faith, but even that faith was a gift. There was no admixture of works involved. Nothing we did helped. If we had, we would be proud of it, and it would no longer be grace.

So for the flame to be ignited in our hearts and for our dead spirits to be brought to life by God's living Spirit, something supernatural had to happen. Nothing we could do naturally would even help, let alone cause death to turn to life. No dead man can bring himself to life. That makes no sense at all. No cadaver can wave to the doctor and ask for penicillin. He's dead. No life exists in him at all.

But God who is rich in mercy had a better idea. You He made alive. You He brought to life. He took your dead human spirit and replaced it with His Holy Spirit, and He breathed into you the breath of life, and you came alive in Christ. Then Paul adds again and again, "By grace are ye saved." Grace plus nothing equals life. Remember that.

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Grace plus anything equals nothing. There are two vital formulas for understanding the most important principle in all of Scripture. Grace plus nothing equals life. Grace plus anything equals nothing. You can't add to grace, because without it you are dead, and a dead man can't assist in his own autopsy, let alone in his own resurrection.

You He made alive. Oh, Dear One, catch the utter significance of that statement. You were dead in trespasses and sins. No hope. No life. No power. No joy. Then Jesus came. And by an act of grace, totally undeserved and free, He gave you the greatest gift ever given to man, the gift of life. He made you alive. Paul isn't implying that some were dead and some weren't. All were dead until grace came.

So to be sure we understand that, he adds: "Even when we were all dead in sins, He made us come alive together with Christ." Anyone who is spiritually alive was once spiritually dead. That's what he just said. No one missed the cut. No one slipped by on their good works or their good looks. All were dead. All who are now alive were made alive by God. He did it all. He did it all alone. Life...Death. No one can mistake the two. No one can say there is a third option, not in the physical realm and certainly not in the spiritual realm. It was free, undeserved, sovereign and eternal. He made us alive. Dear God, what a gift! Amazing grace, indeed!

### **Heaven Came Down and Glory Filled My Soul: The Flame Grows**

But that was only the beginning of grace, and that is where our series takes a turn and moves into the life of the believer. Now we want to see what happens when that grace begins to flow unhindered into and finally through our spiritual veins. Ultimately, it ought to change your entire life. Our self-confidence and self-focus is going to be washed into a sea of grace, if we'll let it. All of our worth and worthiness ought to be erased in an ocean of God-centeredness and Christ-controlled existence. We are going to abdicate trying to do in the flesh what God wants to do in the Spirit, and all of life ought to be a life of faith, and that faith is the victory. It's a process, and most of the time, we are not conscious enough of the process to let it have its way.

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Salvation by grace is so much more than a free ticket to heaven. It is that, to be sure; but it is also a working prescription for the abundant life, a life so different that the very pressures that make life a burden to the unbeliever become valves that release this divine enabling power called grace. Those very same pressures become the catalysts to change us.

The process of being changed is what Paul now turns to as he follows the progression of grace to its next phase in our lives. Our next group of Scriptures gives us the perspective we need:

Wherein he hath abounded toward us in all wisdom and prudence;

Having made known unto us the mystery of his will, according to his good pleasure which he hath purposed in himself:  
(Ephesians 1:8,9)

Paul continues praying:

That the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give unto you the spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of him:

The eyes of your understanding being enlightened; (He does it.) that ye may know what is the hope of his calling, and what the riches of the glory of his inheritance in the saints,

And what is the exceeding greatness of his power to us-ward who believe, according to the working of his mighty power,

Which he wrought in Christ, when he raised him from the dead, and set him at his own right hand in the heavenly places, (That same power is yours, the power which set Him)

Far above all principality, and power, and might, and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this world, but also in that which is to come:

(Ephesians 1:17-21)

And hath raised us up together, and made us sit together in heavenly places in Christ Jesus:

That in the ages to come he might shew the exceeding riches of his grace in his kindness toward us through Christ Jesus.  
(Ephesians 2:6,7)

Don't you just want to shout Hallelujah? Paul's praying

that for you.

This is phase two of the grace relationship. Christ has redeemed you *by grace*. All undeserved. All free. All sovereign. All eternal. You have been born again and are now a new creature in Christ Jesus. Now, the issue of grace becomes an issue of being set apart as the new creature you are, by being changed into the image of Christ. You have received the gift. Now you experience the gift indwelt which is Christ living inside of you, taking your mind, your body, your emotions, and inhabiting them in such a way that He lives not only *in* you, but *through* you. Heaven comes down and glory fills your soul. Isn't that what you want? Or do you just want to walk around with a long face and a lot of problems and say, "I've been saved; I'm going to be in heaven, sighing Hallelujah."

The flame has been lit. The fire is burning. Now the task of God is to make the flame glow until it burns so brightly that others may see Him in you and glorify Him. God takes you in His arms and begins to deliver grace and grace and grace in exactly the proportions you need at exactly the times you need it. Look at what He promised us:

**1- All wisdom and prudence will be ours.** We will be able, *because of this amazing grace*, to actually think God's thoughts rather than our own. We will actually be able to exhibit a godly kind of wisdom that the world cannot even understand, let alone duplicate. A situation will come into your life that normally would cause you to run away or become unmanageable or angry; yet some kind of new supernatural power begins to work within you, and you respond with love, not hate and with joy, not fear. God is giving you *grace*.

**2- God begins to unfold the mystery of His will.** You begin to see in Ephesians chapter 1, verse 9 that the plans you have made are not God's plans. He has a secret plan that will literally change the course of your life, and it won't be by what you do, *but rather by what He does*. Neither will it be by the kinds of things you thought would bring success. It may, in fact, come about through the kinds of failures you thought you could never tolerate.

**3- The eyes of our understanding begin to open to see things in the spirit realm.** Heaven comes down and glory fills our souls. We see strength coming out of weakness;



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we see blessing coming from mourning, persecution, and misunderstanding. We begin to experience the power that raised Christ from the dead, and as we appropriate that power, which He has now promised to us who believe, we see the heavens opened and the spiritual battles that are taking place in the heavenlies now have personal meaning to us. We are in the conflict, but not doing the fighting; we are winning, but not struggling. God is fighting for us. Praise God. Heaven came down and glory filled our souls. It's called the abundant Christian life. Isn't that what you want?

The amazing part of it all is that these great expressions of grace are taking place because of the very pressures of life we once desperately tried to escape. Here's how it works: God allows pressures to come into our lives to test us. As they do, He intentionally allows us or causes us to be placed in a position where what we need is something supernatural, *and we can't do it*. In some cases we can imitate it; but the real thing, the attitude and behavior that actually produces eternal fruit, *is beyond us*. Either He does something, or we are in a hopeless condition.

At that point, grace enters the picture. We do not deserve it, yet we know it is available. We are told to ask for it. As we do, something incredible happens. God, living in our hearts, *actually begins to release in us and through us the same incredible power that raised Christ from the dead*. That power, set free in us by grace, begins to do things we cannot, could not, and will not ever be able to do on our own. As He does it instead of us, something else happens. Our faith grows; our hope changes from that which self can accomplish to that which only God can accomplish. Our perspective changes. Heaven matters; earth doesn't. Spiritual things are primary; temporal things slip down the ladder of importance. We are being changed as we receive...grace.

For example, we may be placed where we must suffer or endure pain or hardship. Nothing we do in the physical realm can give us peace or hope. We pray for God to remove the circumstances or ease the pain. Sometimes, He does. Often, however, He releases enduring grace. He gives us supernaturally the ability to stand in the midst of the pain or the suffering and actually begin to see His hand in it, and as we do, we grow more into His likeness.

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A loved one faces the portals of death, and we cry out to God. "No, no, Lord, don't let it happen. Don't take them." Sometimes, He doesn't. But what about the times when it is *His time* for them to come home? He releases, to those who pray, *the grace of comfort*. Many of you have experienced it. Yes, there is sorrow; but there is an uncanny power, a sense of comfort and peace you have never known before. You are able to function in a situation that normally would bring you to despair. You are receiving *comforting grace*.

Maybe you are being abused or persecuted or misunderstood. You are told to love your enemies and to pray for those who despitely use you and persecute you and say all manner of evil against you falsely. You try, but the more you try, the more bitterness seeps into your soul. In agony, you cry out to God for the grace to love them. Later you pass them on the street. Your heart goes out to them; the very same people who tried to hurt you. You hear the words of Jesus: "Rejoice and be exceeding glad, for great is your reward in heaven." You hear Him say, "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do." You begin to think of their problems, not yours; of their needs, not your own. You wake up a few days later finding yourself praying for them, doing good unto them. It can't be you. It isn't. It is God, "who worketh in you both to will and to do of His good pleasure." It is ***agape grace***. It is God enabling you to love the unlovable.

You are placed under severe authority at work or at home. It seems as though nothing you do is ever good enough. You are ready to quit. You say (sob), "No one ever appreciates me" (sob, sob). One morning, on the way to work, you cry out to God: "I give up. Nothing I do seems to work. Oh, God, you take over. Please give me the grace to submit."

You go into work. The same boss does the same unreasonable things. But something's different. This verse comes to mind:

...If ye do well, and suffer for it and take it patiently, this pleases the heart of God.

(I Peter 2:20 author's paraphrase)

Suddenly, a kind of supernatural power comes over you. You see your boss as the hand of God testing you. He corrects you for something you did not do. Quietly, you submit. What

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happened? God gave you a mountain of *submissive grace*. You were enabled supernaturally, to do what you could not do naturally, submit to unjust authority. Once you reached the place of desperation apart from God, and cried out to Him, *He who lives in you submitted for you*—He understands. Of Him it was written,

Though he were a Son, yet learned he obedience by the things which he suffered; (Hebrews 5:8)

Temptation rears its ugly head again in the area of impure thoughts and desires. For years you have fought the battle and seemingly always lost. A situation comes up that makes you extremely vulnerable. You can try again in your own strength, or you can give up and cry out to God, “I am unclean and I dwell in the midst of a people who are unclean. God be merciful to me.” And what will happen? You will pass in and through that situation and hardly know the temptation was there. You will “stiff-arm” it and walk around it and not even entertain it. Why? You never have before. It is because God heard you cry and gave to you “*the grace of holiness*.”

There are seemingly no limits. Every command in Scripture that you are to obey, including those most difficult assignments that involve taming the tongue, are now within reach. Why? You’ve never been able to curb your sarcasm or your gossip before. You’re *so desperate*, you saw it as sin, but nothing you’ve ever tried worked, and you realized curbing your tongue was impossible apart from a miracle of divine grace. So one day, you cried out to God in anguish, for your tongue had again become a flame of fire that destroyed another’s reputation. You repented and begged God for grace to control your tongue.

It was as though you found a sentinel at the doorpost of your tongue you never had before. As you start to say something condemning or destructive, it is as though God puts heavenly tape over your mouth, and the words don’t come out. You are perplexed, but encouraged, over your newfound self-control. It isn’t self, Beloved, it’s God. He is giving you *controlling grace*. He is allowing His Spirit to do with your tongue supernaturally what you cannot do naturally, and the result is behavior that brings praise to God.

### **His Workmanship: The Light Spreads**

In the chapters to come we will explore some of those facets of God's amazing grace. As we watch His precious hand put pressure on us to cause us to see our inadequacies, we will see how grace abounds. We want to learn how, on a day-to-day basis, we can appropriate that grace and literally see our lives changed. The third phase of the trinity of grace comes when God allows that grace in us to be so transparent and so phenomenal that it affects the lives of others as well as our own.

Wherein in time past ye walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that now worketh in the children of disobedience:

Among whom also we all had our conversation in times past in the lusts of our flesh, fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind; and were by nature the children of wrath, even as others. *(In other words, by nature we are stinkers!)*  
(Ephesians 2:2,3)

For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them.  
(Ephesians 2:10)

Once we were, now we're not. Once we did, now we don't. Why? Because we are His workmanship, that's why. Like the painting and the sculpture in the opening illustration, we will have caught a glimpse at last of who we are in Christ. We are His workmanship, and once that thought totally captivates our hearts, we will begin to see, not only our character changing, but our ministry changing as well.

The reason will be that even the transforming of our nature will not call attention to itself or to us, but to Christ alone. As that happens, the grace that flows in us and through us will be like a beacon leading people to Christ and to the fullness of dwelling in Him. These verses will become reality. Scripture says:

Ye are the light of the world. A city that is set on an hill cannot be hid.

Neither do men light a candle, and put it under a bushel, but on a candlestick; and it giveth light unto all that are in the house.

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Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and *(What? Pat you on the back? No! And see your good works and)* glorify your Father which is in heaven. (Matthew 5:14-16)

We are the lights that light up the lives of those who live in darkness. If we are truly being flooded with grace and not operating in our own energy, but in His, our very presence will be the glow of God's divine presence, the glory of God shining through the vessels He has prepared and anointed. It will change the world. As light enters, darkness flees. As light envelopes, darkness disappears. We will be the lights, but we will not be The Light. The Light will shine from within us, and it can never be extinguished.

According to this passage our job is simply to let the light shine. What will happen? When they see grace (Christ enabling us to do supernaturally what we cannot do naturally) they will see those works, those acts of grace, those demonstrations of divine love, those acts of servitude whereby we stop focusing on ourselves and give our lives away, and as they see the works, they will not glorify us, but rather they will immediately see the Light and glorify the source of the light, our Father who is in heaven.

As our study proceeds, then, we will ultimately look at what kinds of work the Spirit does, and how those works will ultimately bring glory to God and not to us and to bring people to Christ. And it will all be...of grace. The key will be understanding that we are *His workmanship*. He is the artist; we are only the canvas. If we do the works, we are to be praised. If we are only His workmanship, He is to be praised. And that is not an easy transition to make. Satan has a thousand bags of tricks in his arsenal of deception to make us feel that God saved us so we can go out and do "good things" for Him.

No, Beloved, we can't do anything for God. He needs nothing from us but surrender and obedience. As we surrender, heaven comes down and glory fills our souls. As we obey, His light begins to penetrate the darkness and shines through us, even as the Shekinah glory of God shone so brightly in the wilderness. And even as then, men seeking to find their way out of the desert of despair will *see our good works, which will be nothing more than grace revealed,*

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and they will glorify the Father because He is obviously the source of it all.

The ultimate question, I believe, and the key to releasing God's divine energy in all of its fullness may well be this: *Are you truly willing to become the canvas upon which God paints, or will you continue to insist on helping with the painting?*

It is not a trivial question. Wrapped up in your response and in mine is the issue of real lordship. Grace is free. It is unmerited. It is sovereign. It is eternal. We cannot add to it or take from it or it ceases to be grace. It is total, complete, and without need of any admixture to make it work; in fact, anything we try to add causes it to cease.

But as we said at the outset, Satan has an antidote for grace, but it will only work if we let it. It's called spiritual pride. If he can somehow convince us that God needs us or that He didn't really mean what He said, we block the flow of grace, and God begins to resist our pride, instead of giving the grace He gives only to the humble.

Are you ready to become nothing more than the canvas God paints upon for the rest of your days? It will also become the source of rest for your days, because the canvas need expend no energy. Its job is to remain in place and quietly allow the Master artist to create whatever kind of image He chooses to create.

For some it may be one of ease and grace, with little to disturb the mind. For some it may be one of transition and change, causing people to examine and rethink their preconceived notions. Or it may be a portrait of a raging storm, with fierce winds blowing across a stormy sea; an image so real the canvas itself shakes from the force of it.

But either way, it will be God's workmanship. And it will be so yielded to the Master's touch, that it will not flinch when He makes a sharp movement or sweeps across the horizon, seeming to erase what you considered to be your most beautiful scene. He will, you see, have in His precious heart a picture of what He desires to have when the work is done. It will be beautiful, Beloved, so beautiful that men will look at it and actually be able to see the reflection of the Artist by looking at you.

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Imagine that! Coming to the place where people see you and recognize Him. It's called a "family resemblance." It's not hard in physical families to look at Junior and see an image of Mom and Dad. But oh, in the spiritual realm, the image is eternal, and the reflection is one of character, not simply features. It takes a lifetime for that image to appear in all its splendor. It happens from one degree of glory to another.

Isn't your desire to be like Moses as he descended from the mountain top and his time with God? Don't you want God's glory to so shine from your face that others will see that glowing light of God's grace and be drawn to Him instead of you? Then become a sheet of canvas. Ask God to erase or cover all of the works you have done and begin again with the brush strokes of His grace to create something so awesome, so incredibly filled with Christ, that anyone and everyone who looks at you will simply say as we have said before:

His Workmanship, pure and true;  
I see Jesus when I look at you.  
I see Him painting from heaven above,  
A portrait of grace; of undying love.  
  
I see His patience, abounding and free,  
I see His mercy abounding to me;  
He flows through your life in thousands of ways,  
You're His Workmanship, and He's to be praised.

*Our Father and our God,*

*I pray for myself this morning and for everyone listening that by your grace we may take a deep breath and put down the paint brush. May we stop picking the colors and choosing the scenery and begin being grateful for the privilege of just being the canvas. Father, you do the drawing, and may it be so transparent that the grace which flows into it turns around and reflects back the image of your son, Jesus Christ, so that a lost and dying and hurting world will look at it—at us—and see your image and be changed. Father, we just want to be the canvas from now on. You do the painting; He'll get the glory.*

*In Jesus' name,*

*Amen*





## Chapter 5

# The Grace of Weakness

When was the last time you were asked to fill out a resumé? It's not as simple as it used to be. There are people whose job is to do nothing but that. There are computer programs that do it for you. But they all have a common factor: they magnify your strengths almost to the point of absurdity.

You have to be able to do four things, it seems, to sell yourself to a prospective employer. All of them are in violation of Biblical principles:

1- You have to ignore your weaknesses. Nobody wants to really know that you apologize for selling your best product because you think it's overpriced, or that you break out in a cold sweat every time you are asked to give a proposal. Pretend it doesn't exist. Ignore your weaknesses, they say. It's "creative" salesmanship. God says, "It's lying."

2- You have to exaggerate your strengths. You once starred in a play in Junior High School. Put down: *Obvious theatrical abilities. Performs well before large groups.* Never mind that you haven't had the nerve to stand up in front of five people since. You take some obscure incident in your life and blow it out of proportion. That now becomes your strength, and strength is what they are looking for.

3- Replace specifics with generalities. So you can only understand very simple instructions; complex procedures cause you to panic. Write down: *"Especially gifted in performing concise tasks."* It doesn't say anything, but that's to your advantage.

4- Create a new vocabulary. If the words don't mean anything, there's no basis for comparison. You are no longer "computer illiterate," you are now *"digitally challenged."* It's not that you can't spell, you are *"creative with words."* So

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you can't keep anything straight? You now possess "*random organization.*" You tend to overlook details? That makes you "*a global visionary.*" Have problems getting to work on time? Call yourself a "*time management designer.*" Can't add two and two? You must be a "*contemporary mathematician.*"

The mood of the day is "Don't tell me anything bad about yourself. I want to know how good you are; how strong you are; how smart you are." So we oblige by designing new words and ignoring real issues until we begin to believe ourselves. After all, we tell ourselves, *we are what we think.* And after all, the world is looking for strength.

Strength is always defined in physical terms. The athlete who wants to succeed often does so by injecting steroids into his system until he is big enough to block a street corner. The announcer will say with awe, "He's a 325 pound bundle of strength." Indeed. In the financial world, strength is now measured in buyouts, takeovers, and mergers. It isn't how good your product is, or how good your service is, it's how many of your competitors you can run out of business or buy up until you are in control. Bigger, you see, is better.

In retail, strength is defined by growth and size, as well. Megastores now sell everything from bath powder to gun powder, from speakers to sneakers. You get your groceries in one end of the store and your appliances in the other end. Megastores are matched by maxi-malls, and no one dares be a startup anymore. It's better to belong to a chain or a franchise. That way you get recognized. It doesn't matter that they all have the creativity of a donkey; it's safer, because it's bigger.

Even the medical profession has gone the way of big business. No more "friendly little hospitals." They can't compete. Now the Baptist Hospital buys out the Lutheran Hospital, and somebody nobody heard of before buys out the Methodists. Now it's the North, Northeast Community Hospital #13.

Religion has fallen into the "strength" trap, as well. No longer do churches measure their success by changed lives, but by budget size, building size, attendance ratios, number of ministers, and even "satellite churches" who remain tied to the mother church so they are counted as one. They are

often not even called “churches,” but “campuses.” It is about as subtle as a hurricane. We now even judge the value of God’s work by its “strength”. The megachurch syndrome has captivated even the secular press, who now seek out only large church pastors when they want an opinion on the latest issues. After all, they pastor the biggest churches; they must be “spiritually strong.”

And on and on it goes. The world is spiraling into a cocoon of bigness. Soon there will only be one computer company, one hamburger company, and one soft drink manufacturer. Then they’ll buy each other out, and you’ll be able to turn on your IBM and have to promise to buy a Coke and a Big Mac before it will boot up, or Bill Gates will come personally and unplug it.

Big. Strong. Mighty. It’s a sickness in our day. Gone is the criteria of character, integrity, service. Gone is the ability to dial the phone and talk to anything but a machine. The elderly, and I am one, have to master “press one if you have a middle initial between ‘K and L’ or ‘press the pound button’ (whatever that is) to speak to another recording.” So they just quit calling anyone.

What is our obsession with strength and size? What has gone wrong? It goes back a long, long way. Satan began teasing Eve by taunting her to “not settle for less than it all.” “Can’t eat of that tree? Why not? What right does God have to keep something from you? If you’re going to be the best, you deserve it all.” So she went for it all and lost it all. God’s plan is so different from man’s. God sees strength as internal. Man sees it as external. God sees power as spiritual. Man sees it as physical. God looks at the size of a man’s heart. Man looks at the size of his bank account.

God had to do something to bring life back into perspective, so He invented something called “grace.” Grace was a way back to reality. It was a commodity that exercised itself in proportion to a person’s weakness, rather than his strength. It only began to function when man couldn’t. It only did what man couldn’t do. It only worked when man knew he was without strength. The stronger a person thought themselves to be, the less grace they were able to receive, and the more they thought they deserved it, the less they would be able to

appropriate it.

No small wonder 2,000 years have come and gone and man is still mystified by this thing called "grace." We can accept that God used it to save us because we have experienced it, but as we begin to dip into the deeper waters of God's transforming grace, the enabling power He makes available to the Christian who knows that apart from God He can do nothing, causes us to chafe and even rebel. It is far too foreign to the natural mind, and as society rushes towards Armageddon, human strength has become the measuring stick of success in virtually every walk of life. We who call ourselves Christians seem to have more and more difficulty grasping the concept of the grace-controlled life than the men and women whose lives paved the way for us in generations past.

Read the works of the great men and women whose lives have stood the test of time. Read of George Mueller and Oswald Chambers and Watchman Nee and Harry Ironsides and Arthur Pink and Françoise Fenelon. Every word they wrote sent forth the fragrance of God's sovereignty and omniscience and love. They were so infused with a knowledge of God from spending time in His presence, that their own talents and abilities were bathed in the essence of God's grace, and their every expression of Scripture spoke of what God could do, not man.

Now go into today's Christian bookstore. It is an ocean of "How-to" books that focuses on man's problems rather than God's nature and on man's methods, rather than on God's higher ways. It isn't hard to find material on what to do if, but so often there is lacking that precious seed of humility that speaks of the awesomeness of God's incredible provisions that only are released when man gets out of the way. Even our evangelical theology has lost some of its power because we have entered into the holy place with God and decided to co-labor to build the kingdom.

God does not need us to build the kingdom, Beloved. The kingdom is God's to build, not ours. The problems are God's to solve. The church is His, not ours. Until we come experientially to grasp that His is the Kingdom, the Power, and the Glory, we will labor relentlessly and build man-made

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houses for Him to dwell in, man-made programs for Him to work through, and man-made glory for Him to share, and *He will have none of it.*

It is that precious commodity called “grace” that makes the difference. We have tried to simply understand the awesomeness of its power and the uniqueness of its grasp upon us by looking at how God demonstrated it by choosing the likes of us in eternity past: adopting us, accepting us, and adoring us, paying the total cost Himself to transplant into our spiritual beings the very heart of His precious Son. The more we see of what He did and how He did it, the more in awe we ought to be of His free, undeserved, sovereign and eternal grace. And the more in awe we become, the more we ought to be humbled that He would even choose to consider giving such grace to us.

It is that humility that equips us to receive *enabling grace*. As we saw in Ephesians chapters one and two, that enabling grace, though also free, undeserved, sovereign and eternal, can actually be appropriated by asking for it, provided that as we ask, *maintaining an attitude of dependence, unworthiness, and humility*. As we begin to believe we deserve it, don’t need it, or can share in God’s glory for it; God begins to actually resist us, and the flow of grace ceases.

Unfortunately for many, that formula lasts a lifetime. Christians can actually live out their existence trying to live for God and never experience the sheer joy of letting Him live out His grace-filled life through them. His desire, however, is that we enter into that rest which He has prepared for us. He often has to allow into our lives certain kinds of needs so we will be more likely to cry out for grace.

We now embark on the road of practical Christian living to see just how God goes about providing grace when we need it, and how that provision becomes the beacon that shines through us and leads others to Christ. We are going to begin at our most vulnerable place, where we are weak, for that is the door where all grace must be initiated. In a very real sense, this is the foundation stone from which all of grace is revealed. For no matter the resume you write, no matter the circumstance that cries out for grace, as long as we think we have even one tiny fragment of the strength to

meet that need, we quench the Spirit's desire to pour out grace upon us. It is the acknowledgment of human weakness which releases divine strength.

It is that same acknowledgment of human weakness that the flesh simply abhors. We will justify our inadequacies in a thousand ways and even use words that indicate we know we're the ones who can't, all the while entering into the process *as though we can*. God, remember, looks on the heart, and it is that state of total despair and complete surrender that He waits for. For some of us, it takes so very much to get us out of the way. And yet how patient He is; how tenderly He waits; how quietly He listens to our pleas for help, all the while watching as we try in our own energy to do what we were never designed to do: produce spiritual fruit apart from Him. Oh, what a patient, loving God we have.

### **The Preparation for Grace**

The process of preparing the human heart for grace, and in particular, for the relinquishing of man's strength for God's began a long, long time ago. Originally, God designed man to operate in His image. An image simply obeys. Your image in the mirror simply is a reflection of the real thing. It does what its origin does because its origin is real. By design, an image simply reflects the will of its source.

But God, in love, designed us with a free will. He made us with the ability to look at the source, the real thing, and decide moment by moment to be a reflection. We were designed to be images, not sorry, inadequate sources, but *images by choice*.

Enter sin. Enter the curse. Man made a really bad decision. Eve decided and Adam concurred, that rather than be an obedient image, they would prefer to be inadequate sources. They decided, at Satan's beckoning, to become like God. Enter chaos, confusion, and death. Now, instead of simply watching God and allowing His power and His choices to become theirs, Adam and Eve decided to make their own decisions, utilize their own power, and make God into some kind of a genie they would call on if all else failed.

Originally, all of God's creation was designed for man to enjoy. In Genesis chapter 1, God turned over the keys to His

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creation to man:

So God created man in his own image, in the image of God created he him; male and female created he them.

And God blessed them, and God said unto them, Be fruitful, and multiply, and replenish the earth, and subdue it: and have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over every living thing that moveth upon the earth.

And God said, Behold, I have given you every herb bearing seed, which is upon the face of all the earth, and every tree, in the which is the fruit of a tree yielding seed; to you it shall be for meat.

And to every beast of the earth, and to every fowl of the air, and to every thing that creepeth upon the earth, wherein there is life, I have given every green herb for meat: and it was so. (Genesis 1:27-30)

It was all ours. Everything God made, He made for us to enjoy. He only made one small exception, and it was for our benefit, not His. There was one tree man was not to touch. Of course, Eve listened to the voice of the stranger, Adam followed, and mankind fell into the cesspool of sin. The result? Man's strength was removed, because he was no longer an obedient image. Now man had the freedom to either try to live in his own strength or appropriate God's. His natural bent would be, from this time on, to try to do in his own energy what God had intended to impute supernaturally. Even the universe and its ability to sustain man became his enemy, because now the divine energy of God, who created it and sustained it, would not be an automatic source of power.

Unto the woman he said, I will greatly multiply thy sorrow and thy conception; in sorrow thou shalt bring forth children; and thy desire shall be to thy husband, and he shall rule over thee.

And unto Adam he said, Because thou hast hearkened unto the voice of thy wife, and hast eaten of the tree, of which I commanded thee, saying, Thou shalt not eat of it: cursed is the ground for thy sake; in sorrow shalt thou eat of it all the days of thy life;

Thorns also and thistles shall it bring forth to thee; and thou shalt eat the herb of the field;

In the sweat of thy face shalt thou eat bread, till thou

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return unto the ground; for out of it wast thou taken: for dust thou art, and unto dust shalt thou return.

(Genesis 3:16-19)

Not only would the power be gone, the very ground God created to produce fruit for man would now become his enemy. Man's arrogance and pride would cause God to create resistance where once there was cooperation; conflict where there was once comfort. There was now a war on to see whether man would fight that battle alone or call upon His God and become the image he was created to be. And as sin abounded, the conflict intensified. Thus did God respond to Cain:

And he said, What hast thou done? the voice of thy brother's blood crieth unto me from the ground.

And now art thou cursed from the earth, which hath opened her mouth to receive thy brother's blood from thy hand;

When thou tillest the ground, it shall not henceforth yield unto thee her strength; (Genesis 4:10-12a)

The natural strength of nature had now turned against man. The power God had built into the universe which was designed to give man the freedom to experience God's energy, now became a powerhouse of resistance, and man's friend became man's enemy. From that point on, man began a long, slow descent into the abyss of self-destruction, until at one point, God had to destroy all but one family and begin again.

The progression has not abated; but God had a plan, a wonderful plan. He wanted man to be able to appropriate, moment by moment, the power he had relinquished through sin. He wanted man to be able to allow God's supernatural power to enable him to do the things he once was created to do. He wanted man to be able to enter again into God's heart and allow God's energy to enter into man's life, until the image was clear once again. Once that image was evident, God's plan of evangelism would begin to restore man, one at a time, to His image. Unbelieving man would look at those who had been restored and, seeing God's image, would desire Him, as well.

To have that image clearly seen, man would have to get out of the way. He would have to stop trying to be anything



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on his own, and let God be God in him. He would have to stop trying to imitate God and let God do supernaturally what man could not do naturally. It would be called “grace,” but what it would literally be would be a return to the very process God initiated when He created man. It would be God’s universe, God’s man, God’s power operating in and through an obedient image. We need to realize that the Bible is all in one book. Thus, we find that the entire Old Testament was a looking glass through which God’s people were able to foresee that process. And God allowed certain men and women to experience it, as He allowed the nation Israel to gather their strength from God when they were willing, and to actually watch Him do for them what they could not do for themselves. Thus, they saw corporately, a portrait of what man would one day experience personally, grace.

Watch as the progression unfolds.

1- The very process of aging itself began to demonstrate the weakness principle. Man now was born to die. Listen to the cries of man as the reality of weakness settled in. Oh, Beloved, if you are younger, don’t minimize the effect that aging can have, for as the physical body begins to fall apart, desperation and discouragement often set in. How often men and women who think they can make it without God suddenly find, when the body begins to fail, a need for strength from somewhere outside themselves. Listen to these cries for mercy:

Cast me not off in the time of old age; forsake me not when my strength faileth. (Psalm 71:9)

Now also when I am old and grayheaded, O God, forsake me not; until I have shewed thy strength unto this generation, and thy power to every one that is to come. (Psalm 71:18)

The days of our years are threescore years and ten; and if by reason of strength they be fourscore years, yet is their strength labour and sorrow; for it is soon cut off, and we fly away. (Psalm 90:10)

2- National warfare and national crises led to a demonstration of how God alone could deliver them. He had to become their strength. This was a corporate picture of a personal truth. Look at how the Scripture describes it:

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And Moses said unto the people, Remember this day, in which ye came out from Egypt, out of the house of bondage; for by strength of hand the LORD brought you out from this place:... (Exodus 13:3)

And it shall be when thy son asketh thee in time to come, saying, What is this? that thou shalt say unto him, By strength of hand the LORD brought us out from Egypt, from the house of bondage: (Exodus 13:14)

He delivered me from my strong enemy, and from them that hated me: for they were too strong for me.

(II Samuel 22:18)

God is my strength and power: and he maketh my way perfect. (II Samuel 22:33)

3- God's leaders and God's Word began to explain the principle and the place weakness would play in appropriating strength. Then they began to show the relationship between personally seeking God's face and finding that power.

The LORD is my strength and song, and he is become my salvation: (Exodus 15:2a)

Be strong and of a good courage, fear not, nor be afraid of them: for the LORD thy God, he it is that doth go with thee; he will not fail thee, nor forsake thee.

(Deuteronomy 31:6)

Seek the LORD and his strength, seek his face continually.

(I Chronicles 16:11)

For the eyes of the LORD run to and fro throughout the whole earth, to shew himself strong in the behalf of them whose heart is perfect toward him.

(II Chronicles 16:9a)

4- David, through the Psalms, personalized the process. He began to cry out to God to give him the strength to overcome; a matter of prayer and the heart.

The LORD is my rock, and my fortress, and my deliverer; my God, my strength, in whom I will trust; my buckler, and the horn of my salvation, and my high tower.

(Psalm 18:2)

It is God that girdeth me with strength, and maketh my way perfect.

(Psalm 18:32)

The LORD is my light and my salvation; whom shall I fear? the LORD is the strength of my life; of whom shall

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I be afraid? (Psalm 27:1)

There is no king saved by the multitude of an host: a mighty man is not delivered by much strength.

(Psalm 33:16)

My flesh and my heart faileth: but God is the strength of my heart, and my portion for ever.

(Psalm 73:26)

5- God through it all begins to make weakness into a blessing if it causes men to seek after His strength rather than their own. He shows that success often leads to defeat and defeat often leads to God.

And it shall be, when the LORD thy God shall have brought thee into the land which he sware unto thy fathers, to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob, to give thee great and goodly cities, which thou buildedst not,

And houses full of all good things, which thou filledst not, and wells digged, which thou diggedst not, vineyards and olive trees, which thou plantedst not; when thou shalt have eaten and be full;

Then beware lest thou forget the LORD, which brought thee forth out of the land of Egypt, from the house of bondage.

(Deuteronomy 6:10-12)

Strengthen ye the weak hands, and confirm the feeble knees.

(Isaiah 35:3)

He giveth power to the faint; and to them that have no might he increaseth strength.

Even the youths shall faint and be weary, and the young men shall utterly fall:

But they that wait upon the LORD shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings as eagles; they shall run, and not be weary; and they shall walk, and not faint.

(Isaiah 40:29-31)

### **The Presentation of Grace**

Then Jesus came. God Himself came to earth in meekness and in weakness. One day He will come with great power and might. But first He had to come to demonstrate the very concept of grace. God became a slave, so man could become a king. God came to serve, so man could be saved. The One who never sinned came in total surrender to His Father's will so He could demonstrate that the image could be restored;

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that through God's indwelling Spirit, man could once again simply obey the source of the image and become transparent vessels through whom the Light could shine until others, seeing that Light, would come to His Father.

That is why He said:

Then answered Jesus and said unto them, Verily, verily, I say unto you, The Son can do nothing of himself, but what he seeth the Father do: for what things soever he doeth, these also doeth the Son likewise.

(John 5:19)

I can of mine own self do nothing: (*Why? Because an image cannot originate.*) as I hear, I judge: and my judgment is just; because I seek not mine own will, but the will of the Father which hath sent me.

(John 5:30)

Then said Jesus unto them, When ye have lifted up the Son of man, then shall ye know that I am he, and *that* I do nothing of myself; but as my Father has taught me, I speak those things.

(John 8:28)

Paul, speaking of the Savior, said this:

Since ye seek a proof of Christ speaking in me, which to you-ward is not weak, but is mighty in you.

For though he was crucified through weakness, yet he liveth by the power of God. For we also are weak in him,...

(II Corinthians 13:3,4)

And then Paul made this analogy:

Because the foolishness of God is wiser than men; and the weakness of God is stronger than men.

But 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;

(I Corinthians 1:25,27)

Then he gave his own life as an illustration:

For his letters, say they, are weighty and powerful; but his bodily presence is weak, and his speech contemptible.

(II Corinthians 10:10)

And he said unto me, My grace is sufficient for thee: for my strength is made perfect in weakness. Most gladly therefore will I rather glory in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me.

Therefore I take pleasure in infirmities, in reproaches,

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in necessities, in persecutions, in distresses for Christ's sake: for when I am weak, then am I strong.

(II Corinthians 12:9,10)

Drawing this conclusion:

Finally, my brethren, be strong in the Lord, and in the power of his might.

(Ephesians 6:10)

Looking backwards, the writer of Hebrews makes this observation about the great men and women of the faith listed in Hebrews 11:

*(They)* Quenched the violence of fire, escaped the edge of the sword, out of weakness were made strong,...

(Hebrews 11:34)

The Bible, Beloved, is a single book. Its message has not changed. Man stepped in and intruded on God's plan. God created an alternate plan which was locked in His heart even before the foundation of the world. It was called "grace." It needed one thing to work. It needed man to be nothing more than an image, a reflection that mirrored the will of the One who made Him. As long as man would allow God to be the source and thus the power, man would be successful, joyful, and peaceful in his endeavors. At any point where man deviated from the role of a responder or an image, God would let him be his own god until, through weakness, man came to the end of himself, cried out for God to empower him again, and surrendered. Each time he did, God's love overpowered and man was renewed again.

It happened corporately to Israel and individually to the men and women God lifted off the pages of history to demonstrate His mercy. But at some point, He knew that man would have to see the image and a final price would have to be paid so the image could indwell His people and never leave them.

So God came to earth. For 33 years, He *always did those things that pleased the Father*. What the Father spoke, He spoke. What the Father did, He did. He was nothing more than the express image of the Father, full of grace and truth. The Truth never changes. Grace never fails. Then He conquered death, went back to the Father and now sits at His right hand *so that whenever we fail to be the images we were created to be, He intercedes for us, the Father forgives*

*us, and we can become agents of grace once again.*

The key has always been weakness. As long as we think we can, we can't. As long as we have one ounce of spiritual pride left in us, we quench His Spirit and deny Him giving to us the level of grace He desires. So the process of living the Christian life must include what Paul said he took pleasure in: infirmities, reproaches, necessities, persecutions, distresses. What a strange assortment of things to rejoice over. Look at what they mean:

**1- Infirmities** – ἀσθενεία *astheneia* {as-then'-I-ah} The word literally means “physical weakness caused by sickness or bodily failure.” It is the very thing we spend so much of our time, money and prayer seeking to avoid. It is the frailty of health that makes normal activities either impossible or difficult. Paul said, “Wow, that's neat. When I am sick, then He can be strong in me.”

**2- Reproaches** – ὑβρις *hubris* {hoo'-bris} The word means a wrong springing from insolence, an injury, affront, insult; injury inflicted by the violence of a tempest. It is the joy of being railed at, misunderstood, wrongfully becoming the subject of the violent rage of another. What a strange thing to be thankful for. Why would such things be helpful? Because, like physical illness, they bring you to nothing. There is no defense against it. There is nothing in the natural realm you can do. Only a supernatural response will do. Peter says of Jesus:

For even hereunto were ye called: because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that ye should follow his steps:

Who did no sin, neither was guile found in his mouth:

Who, when he was reviled, reviled not again; when he suffered, he threatened not; but committed himself to him that judgeth righteously:

Who his own self bare our sins in his own body on the tree, that we, being dead to sins, should live unto righteousness: by whose stripes ye were healed.

(I Peter 2:21-24)

**3- Necessities** – ἀνάγκη *anagke* {an-ang-kay'}

*1) necessity, imposed either by the circumstances, or by law of duty regarding to one's advantage, custom, argument*

2) *calamity, distress, straits*

It is simply a description of circumstances out of control. Paul was shipwrecked. Life's necessities were in danger. His life was in danger. Paul rejoiced. It gave him a chance to experience grace.

**4- Persecutions** – διωγμος diogmos {dee-ogue-mos}

The unjust treatment that comes when you stand for your faith and the world uses it against you. Paul's imprisonment was persecution. He rejoiced in it. He said the lost are being saved, and the brethren are being strengthened. He called it "grace."

**5- Distresses** – στενοχωρια stenochoria {sten-okh-o-ree'-ah}

A narrow place; a dire calamity, an extreme affliction. This is another word used to describe your life when circumstances have you in a corner. It is the end result of the other four. It means, for all intents and purposes, it's over. There is no way out. Jesus at Calvary is a good example. Unless God had a higher purpose, it was over. He did. It wasn't. He was about to unveil from His throne on high, at last, a living portrait of grace. God became weak for our sakes. His weakness sent Him all the way to a Cross, so we could be guaranteed a crown.

Now, Beloved, look at Paul's life. Not just his thorn but his life. He described the Christian life yielded to grace this way:

Of the Jews five times received I forty stripes save one.

Thrice was I beaten with rods, once was I stoned, thrice I suffered shipwreck, a night and a day I have been in the deep;

In journeyings often, in perils of waters, in perils of robbers, in perils by mine own countrymen, in perils by the heathen, in perils in the city, in perils in the wilderness, in perils in the sea, in perils among false brethren;

In weariness and painfulness, in watchings often, in hunger and thirst, in fastings often, in cold and nakedness.

(II Corinthians 11:24-27)

When you ask God for His grace to pour through you, is that what you mean? Are you willing, should God desire to use the canvas of your life to paint such a portrait, to become that weak, so He can show Himself that strong? Or do you have preconceived limits to which you plan to hold God? That's

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your privilege. You can draw the lines anywhere you choose. The only problem is that you are limiting the grace of God.

God has many ways to provide grace. God has one primary requirement: weakness. So we go full circle. As we begin our journey, seeking God's grace to flow through us and back into a needy world, may we never, ever forget that to ask for grace is to ask God to make us weak. To ask God to make us weak is to ask Him to take from us anything and everything we glory in.

In the past few weeks, God has been giving me a tiny glimpse of grace by allowing things to come into my life that have caused me to be weaker, and thus more dependent. My first response was to cry out to God for Him to remove the problems and restore my strength. Then He spoke so tenderly through His Word: "But, child, my grace is sufficient for you. How can you teach others of the blessing of weakness if you cry out for deliverance when I make you weak? Sit still. Let Me be your strength." How faithful He has been.

Oh, Beloved, could it be that you are there today? Have life's circumstances descended on you like an ominous cloud and taken away your strength? Do you feel weary and defeated from it all? Beloved,

Even the youths shall faint and are weary and the young men shall utterly fall:

But they that wait upon the LORD (appropriating His enabling power) shall renew their strength; shall mount up with wings as eagles; they shall run, and not be weary; and they shall walk, and not faint (Isaiah 40:30,31)

How can that be? It is called grace. It is God waiting to do supernaturally what you cannot do naturally. You have two choices: You can chafe at your weakness and cry out to be delivered, or you can quietly submit to the Master Artist as He paints on the canvas of your life a brand new, much deeper image of Himself. What will you ask Him for? Deliverance from the storms? Or Grace through the storms? You decide. The choice is yours. There is a good chance that He will give you what you ask for.



## Chapter 6

# The Grace of Holiness

Just a mention of the word and our minds are flooded with visual images of another sphere of life. We are transported from the world where we live to a world where God is, and we somehow mistakenly forget that the two worlds have been made one in Christ.

It is a simple, easily definable word, but Satan has once again tried to redefine it making it something unattainable, and thus unrealistic. I'm not at all sure most of us grasp what it means. I'm also not at all sure we really want to know, for tucked within the context of its meaning, there is a whole new level of understanding of who God is, what God wants, and what we can become in Christ. The word is **“holy.”**

Like a doorway into the inner chambers of God's sanctuary, this one word ushers us into a realm of spiritual depth that opens up the heart of God to sinful man, yet also tucked within is an aura of mystery. Without this thing we call “grace,” true holiness is far beyond our reach. Grace is ours for the asking, but we tend to shy away from holiness because the mystery surrounding it makes us uncomfortable about seeking it.

We need to know how to become holy. Not just holier than we are, but truly holy as He is holy. You say, “That's too noble a venture. God never intended it.” Scripture is our only basis for defining the will of God for us, and Scripture says,

Be ye holy; for I am holy.

(I Peter 1:16b)

Let us then pursue diligently our search for the grace of holiness. Let us steal into the secret place of God's presence and ask Him to

Open our eyes that we may behold wondrous things out of His Word. (Psalm 119:18 author's paraphrase)

He will. And as He does, may we bow in adoration and

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submission as He makes His nature known to us. He has called us to “*be holy.*” It is his will for our lives. It is not something we do, it is something He does. Without His amazing grace, we can no more be holy than a dog can write a book or a horse can draw a picture. Without His indwelling, transforming, enabling power, we do not possess the capacity to holiness, nor do we possess the desire for it.

It is all of grace. But once we understand that and begin to search for it, *we can begin to acquire it without so much as a hint of works on our part.* That’s a miracle, and He’ll do it, but we must ask Him to and let Him. As simple as that sounds, it obviously is more complex than it seems because most of us would not describe ourselves as “holy.”

We would describe Jesus that way, and yet as we look at His precious, sinless life, we must admit that if we were going to define holiness with Him as the standard, we must redefine the word, for His was not a life lived out in a monastery or in the clouds of heaven. His was a genuine, real-world foray into the realms of relationships and realities. He fellowshiped with dirty people, ate with publicans and sinners, spent much of His time visiting the hospitals of life, the funeral homes of life, and the ghettos of life. The only ones He couldn’t seem to stomach were the religious zealots of His day; the very ones who people had used to define “holy” up until then.

As Jesus redefined holiness, He broke the mold and refashioned it using inner qualities as His guidelines, with humility and purity being His benchmarks. He not only expected us to understand it, but to seek it; not only to grasp it, but to take hold of it, or rather let it take hold of us. If we go back to Scripture we read:

Grace be to you, and peace, from God our Father, and from the Lord Jesus Christ.

Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who hath blessed us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ:

According as he hath chosen us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before him in love:

(Ephesians 1:2-4)

Paul was praying that we would have the grace to be

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blessed with the spiritual blessings God designed for us in eternity past. What were those blessings? That we should be **holy** and **blameless** as we stand before His throne.

Holy? Blameless? “I think not,” you mutter under your breath. Oh, Beloved, I think so. I don’t think God teases His children. I don’t think He tells us in His Word that He wants us to be something we can’t be. The key is not that we are to labor to become holy; the key is that we are holy, and He wants us to experience it. The quality itself is built into the new nature. We don’t have to manufacture it; in fact, we can’t. We only have to let God be Himself, and we will discover that, in Christ, we indeed are holy.

But as he which hath called you is holy, so be ye holy  
in all manner of conversation;

Because it is written, Be ye holy; for I am holy.

(I Peter 1:15,16)

This passage is saying that holiness is imputed to us. That is why God gave us a “Holy” Spirit. We could never experience true holiness without His indwelling life in us. Holiness is an imputed quality. You cannot look at God and imitate His holiness. Man has tried that for centuries. The cults have pretended to do that. The imitation looks good on the outside and impresses the unbelieving world, but true holiness is not behavior that changes character; it is character that changes behavior, and character can only be changed by God from the inside out.

God imputed to us His very nature at Calvary, and by grace gave us His Spirit of Holiness to indwell us and transform us into holy men and women. We now are holy. Because we chose to be? No, because He who called us and saved us is holy. Therefore, what He is we are. The only reason we can be holy is because I AM is holy and I AM is alive in my heart and in yours if you have trusted Christ.

Secondly, holiness is not only imputed; it is imparted. Because we are holy, (and only because we are) we are to demonstrate that holiness in all manner of conversation (behavior). Everything we do and say ought to exude holiness. It will be repugnant to the natural mind and impossible for the unbeliever to achieve, but holy lives must be the result of holy hearts. Never is it the other way around. You don’t

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become holy by acting holy; you act holy because God in you, when free to be Himself, can act no other way.

What, then, is holiness? We read in Scripture of “holy ground” (Exodus 3:5), of a “holy nation” (Exodus 19:6), of a “holy sabbath” (Exodus 20:8), of the “holy place” (Exodus 26:34), of “holy garments” (Exodus 28:2), of “holy seed” (Ezra 9:2), of a “holy habitation” (Psalm 68:5), of a “holy temple” (Psalm 138:2), of “holy works” (Psalm 145:17), of a “holy mountain” (Ezekiel 28:14), of the “holy Scriptures” (Romans 1:2), of a “holy sacrifice” (Romans 12:1) of “holy hands” (I Timothy 2:8), “holy women” (I Peter 3:5), “holy prophets” (II Peter 3:2), and last, but not least, of a “holy city” (Revelation 11:2).

So not only people, but things can be holy; and not only individuals, but a nation can be holy, prophets can be holy, a city can be holy. What does it mean? Your friendly concordance will tell you this:

*ἅγιος hagios {hag'-ee-os} - most holy thing, a saint*

It is translated 161 times in Scripture as “holy,” 61 times as “saints.”

That doesn't help a lot, does it? Literally, it means “something set apart unto God.” It is something God has called His own and separated from that which is not His own. It means that God has divided all of life into two parts: that which is His by creation alone, and that which is His by virtue of divine sovereign selection. Everything in life is in one of those two groups, but everything and everybody in the “holy” or “set apart” group has a special calling and a special purpose. They are part of royalty and, as such, everything about them is different. The Bible is a “Holy Bible” because it is set apart by the God who wrote it as His word to His people for His purposes. It is holy. Moses stood on “holy ground” because God was speaking to him, and God had, at that moment, set him apart for a special purpose and was speaking directly to him. It was, indeed, holy ground. Look at how God Himself explained it:

For thou art an holy people unto the LORD thy God: the LORD thy God hath chosen thee to be a special people unto himself, above all people that are upon the face of the earth.  
(Deuteronomy 7:6)

Look at what that passage says:

**1- It was a sovereign selection.** God has chosen you to be special by adoption. It is not that you have earned sainthood by serving, or even by being. You cannot earn sainthood. Every believer is a saint, a set apart one. Because you are God's by selection, you are "holy." Because you are "holy," your title is saint. You are not "Lord Jones" or "Sam, the Earl of Smithsville," you are "Saint Samuel." If you are a believer, you are a saint. When Paul addressed the "saints at Ephesus," he wasn't addressing a select group of holier than thou believers whose lives or ministries made them special. He was addressing all the believers at Ephesus, for all believers are saints. Sainthood conferred by man as a result of a life well lived is not only non-Biblical, it is total heresy. Sainthood is bestowed by a sovereign God to everyone who takes Him at His word and receives His free gift of grace. Sainthood by grace. A sovereign selection.

But ye are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, an holy nation, a peculiar people; that ye should shew forth the praises of him who hath called you out of darkness into his marvellous light:

Which in time past were not a people, but are now the people of God: which had not obtained mercy, but now have obtained mercy. (I Peter 2:9,10)

Look at those key words. They form the foundation of our sainthood: "chosen," "royal," "holy," "peculiar." Their meaning will unfold as we see the patterns of holiness blossom before our eyes. First of all, you are part of a chosen generation. God called you out of darkness into His marvelous light. You were not chosen because of what you could do or even be. You simply obtained mercy.

Part of the problem with today's concept of holiness is that there is some kind of competition going on in the Body of Christ to see who can win the most medals in heaven for holiness. Legalistic structures get built on top of the foundation of grace so that if you do this or don't do that you win Brownie points for being holier than the people who don't do what you do, or do behave in ways you wouldn't. In countries and churches all over the world, born again men and women are being refused membership in the church because of what they wear or don't wear; what they sing or

don't sing; how their children do or don't behave. The trouble is, *based on their criteria, Jesus could never earn membership in their theologically exclusive club.* The church is a group of weak, selfish sinners who, by some marvelous sovereign act of God, have been born again and adopted into God's immediate family by grace. Jesus died for sinners, remember? And if the church is unwilling to accept them into the fold because of how they dress or wear their hair or whether or not they give a certain amount of money, the church, in that instance, is not acting on God's behalf. It has ceased being a New Testament church and has resorted to Old Testament law as its plumbline, thus forfeiting its right to be an agent of God's grace.

Holiness is not a badge you wear, it is a privilege you bear. It is not a source of personal pride, but an invisible magnet drawing you to humble repentance and deep recognition of personal sin: not in others, but in yourself. It is sovereign, and it is undeserved. Never forget it. But it is free, and it is eternal. God will never allow holiness to become something you do to gain recognition. It will always be an unconscious outpouring of who He is, and the recognition will go to the One who sent His Holy Spirit to be Holy in us. One reason we do not understand holiness is that we do not understand grace. The ultimate degree to which holiness flows through your life will depend, not on your determination or your moral diligence, but on your willingness to yield to the nature of God in humble surrender. You possess no holiness apart from God. Until Jesus came into your life, you had zero capacity to be holy. Zero. Since He came into your life, your capacity has gone from zero to 100. You have exactly the same capacity to be holy as George Mueller or Spurgeon or Billy Graham or Mother Theresa.

Your capacity to be holy is based on what a sovereign God did for you in eternity past when He included you as a part of a chosen generation, an adopted member of the Royal Family. You are His, and you are holy. Now you must allow the holiness you possess to possess you. That involves choice, but it is still free, undeserved, sovereign and eternal.

**2- It involves a definite distinction.** Not only were we chosen, we were chosen to be a special people above all people on the face of the earth. We are a peculiar people. That doesn't

mean odd, it means special. It means that as a member of the Royal Family, while you have certain privileges, you also have certain responsibilities. One of those responsibilities is to never, ever forget who your Father is, and to never, ever forget the price He paid to adopt you.

It was all of grace. God, as we saw in an earlier study, searched the orphanages of eternity, and looking for weakness, saw our need and chose us to be a special people unto Himself. He chose Israel as a preview, to show us how He could take a people who were destined to be nothing and make them a showcase of His glory, and by turning weakness into strength, declare His name through all the earth. Now He has chosen the likes of us, called us out to be the church, set us apart unto Himself, and made us different from the inside out. Only to the degree that we are decidedly different will grace be able to reveal itself. God never intended the church to run from the world and hide; but neither did He intend for the church to run to the world and become part of the world to win the world. We are to be totally different, and that difference will be the magnet that draws men and women to Christ. That difference is called “holiness.” It is not simply a difference in what we do, though that is one barometer (see I Peter 4:1-5). It is primarily a difference in who we are which translates eventually into what we do.

Beloved, you can fool the world a lot of the time and fool many believers much of the time, but you can't fool God any of the time. Holiness is a choice, and while it seems for the most part to be an invisible choice, your Father knows. He sees your heart. Whether or not you experience the holiness you possess, then, appears to be affected by certain major processes explained in Scripture. Before we can seriously look at how to appropriate the grace of holiness, we must come to understand those processes. That will be the focus of the remainder of this lesson. In the next chapter, we will take an average day in our lives and see how the processes might become reality.

### **3- Those three processes are the pathway to purity.**

A set apart people must be different from the inside out, so for now, we look at what makes up a holy life. Children of the King simply cannot place themselves in a position to be defiled, or they damage the reputation of the Crown, and

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they defame the Name of the King who paid such a price to adopt them. We must be different, and that difference is a reflection of whether or not the character of the King is being reproduced in us. His character, as we learned in an earlier lesson, cannot look upon or condone anything that produces that which is repugnant to His nature. He is holy. He, Himself, is set apart, because He is the source of the qualities that set us apart. Now we must become progressively pure as the King's Kids, or we will become progressively less holy in our experience. There is no neutral ground. Holiness is not a static quality. As He who called us "is," we are to be "becoming." That is an absolute.

There are, however, three gates that His holiness must pass through on the way from His heart to yours. None of them are "of works, lest any man should boast." The gift is free and undeserved. You couldn't earn the right to be holy if you lived to be a thousand times ten thousand years old. You don't need to earn it. It was given to you the moment you came to Christ. It is written, "Be ye holy, for I AM is holy." And I AM now lives in you. So the issue isn't walking through doors to earn it; the issue is that God has given it to you *positionally*. (He sees you as holy.) He has imputed it to your account, and God wants to impart it to you *experientially*. He wants it to be a reality in your day to day experience. There are, however, some man-made obstacles that get in His way. Our job is to simply, quietly, open the gates that block the flow *and let His holiness pour through us*. The problem is that we either ignore Scripture and refuse to be responsible to be gatekeepers, or we try in our own energy to become holy by plans, programs, prayers, or processes.

One more time: Holiness won't be achieved by what we do. It will be imparted by what God has done. Our job is to ask for it, and keep the gates open.

There are three gates that block the way from God's heart to ours where holiness is concerned. Now these are not popular subjects. Get ready for your defenses to rise up and fight these principles. That's a good sign. Satan hates it when we look at absolutes, and these are absolutes.

Gate 1- The doorway into the heart is the eye. The Bible says you are what you look at. If what you look at and listen



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to is *different, peculiar, set apart*; the pathway of holiness is clear. It may vary some from one person to another, but not nearly as much as we would like to believe. The Scripture minces no words:

The light of the body is the eye: if therefore thine eye be single, thy whole body shall be full of light.

But if thine eye be evil, thy whole body shall be full of darkness. If therefore the light that is in thee be darkness, how great is that darkness!

(Matthew 6:22,23)

How “single” is your eye? The word means “whole” or “sound” or “without disease.” Not physical disease, but spiritual disease. Whatever the eye lets into the brain goes to the heart. This may not be a good medical explanation, but it is a correct Biblical interpretation. If you think you can program your brain with anything that encourages the lower nature and not entertain serious spiritual warfare, you haven’t read Scripture carefully. And if you think you can continually program it with anything less than what pleases the heart of God and not create a database in the computer of your mind named “spiritual strongholds,” you are playing the devil’s game and listening to his lies. You are what you see. And what you see may not be wicked by the world’s standards, or even by the church’s standards. The question is whether it edifies. Could you turn to God while you are enjoying that movie or that television program or that magazine or that book and say, “*Lord, are you enjoying this?*” or “*Lord, let me tell you how this experience is causing me to know more about your nature.*” If you can’t do that, turn it off, leave it alone, put it down, or close your eyes. You are programming the hard drive in your mind with thought processes and visual images, even though you are not doing it consciously, and you will eventually become what you see and what you hear.

If you don’t believe it, just listen to the radio in your car, and then see what song you find yourself humming an hour later. You don’t even remember hearing it, but it’s been placed in your mind, and it has automatic replay. The music you listen to will program the melody of your heart just as clearly as the things you see. You aren’t becoming holy by not watching or hearing those things. You are holy. God made

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you holy. But that positional holiness will never make it into your life and stay there *experientially* unless you guard the gate into your eyes and ears.

How critical is it? Let Scripture answer that for you:

And if thy right eye offend thee, pluck it out, and cast it from thee: for it is profitable for thee that one of thy members should perish, and not that thy whole body should be cast into hell. (Matthew 5:29)

Your answer is probably something like this: "But I am so much more cautious about what I see than most people. Why you'll never believe what *they watch*." God answers:

And why beholdest thou the mote that is in thy brother's eye, but considerest not the beam that is in thine own eye?

Or how wilt thou say to thy brother, Let me pull out the mote out of thine eye; and, behold, a beam is in thine own eye?

Thou hypocrite, first cast out the beam out of thine own eye; and then shalt thou see clearly to cast out the mote out of thy brother's eye. (Matthew 7:3-5)

Your first responsibility is not to become the guardian of the eyegate of the world or even of the church. You can write your congressman or picket places that carry pornographic material, but that's not your primary calling. Work on your own eyegate. If every believer did that, so many of our other problems would take care of themselves. While men and women may, in many cases, be affected by different kinds of eye input, the principle is the same.

Men are often much more attracted to that which appeals to the lower nature. If the women in their lives don't understand that, they may even cultivate or encourage watching things or reading things that are blocking the flow of holiness into their husband's life. Women, on the other hand, may tend to be more affected by the things that appeal to a discontented spirit. Men may be drawn to lust by looking at other women; women may be drawn to lust by looking at others' possessions, but *communication and prayer can cause each of us to be sensitive to the other's weaknesses*.

The key is that each of us knows what affects us. Oh, how well we know. And how holier than thou we can be.

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Often we will even become champions of self-righteous causes designed to decry the very things we think about and desire. Rather than guarding the eyegate, we become “eye protectors” for society. It’s dangerous. We justify our own lack of moral discipline by condemning society. Society, Beloved, has always been rotten. Pornography is not new. Moral infidelity is not a recent invention. Read the book of Proverbs. Society is Satan’s playground, and as it hurls itself towards Armageddon, it will only become increasingly evil. But that is all the more reason why every single person who bears the name of Christ and is part of the Royal Family should separate themselves more than ever before from the defilement that so characterizes the world we live in.

In times past, we were not royalty, but now we are. As children of the King, we simply cannot give the eye the liberty of ushering into the mind things that are ultimately guaranteed to destroy it. Oh, that we, as believers, would come to understand the meaning of that one little word, “flee.” It is such a critical word. Listen to Scripture:

And a stranger will they not follow, but will flee from him: for they know not the voice of strangers.

(John 10:5)

Flee fornication. Every sin that a man doeth is without the body; but he that committeth fornication sinneth against his own body.

(I Corinthians 6:18)

Wherefore, my dearly beloved, flee from idolatry.

(I Corinthians 10:14)

But thou, O man of God, flee these things; and follow after righteousness, godliness, faith, love, patience, meekness.

(I Timothy 6:11)

Flee also youthful lusts: but follow righteousness, faith, charity, peace, with them that call on the Lord out of a pure heart.

(II Timothy 2:22)

Submit yourselves therefore to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you.

(James 4:7)

Flee moral impurity. Flee idolatry. Flee youthful lusts. Resist the devil and he will flee from you. What does it mean to “flee”? Again, our concordance will help us out.

φευγω – pheugo {fyoo’-go} – to flee away, seek safety by flight; to be saved by flight, to escape safely out of danger; to vanish

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It means get on your Honda and hightail it out of town. It means you are not to hang around long enough to see what can happen. You are to flee youthful lusts as though they were a murderer out to kill you, and you have one way of escape. You can stand there and wait to be killed, or you can seek safety by flight. God has given you a way of escape. It begins with the gateway to the soul which is the eye. Protect it. If your eyes have been dilated and are not to be exposed to bright light and the doctor gives you dark glasses to protect you, would you wear them? Or would you leave them home and go out into the brightest light you could find just to see what happened? If you knew that unless you wore protective goggles on your job you would certainly ruin your eyesight, would you wear them? Then why do we refuse to put on the protective shield of holiness that God gave us and not let Satan's data of destruction into the computers of our minds?

I believe this generation is blessed by having computers to use as parables or illustrations of the human mind. The mind is so complex we often cannot understand how it works. By looking at the simple things that make a computer receive information, retain information, access information and categorize information, we can get a simpler glimpse of the complexities of the human brain. Some of us have "Macintosh minds." Unless it's "user friendly," we just can't get it. Whatever it takes, study the way your computer works. It helps us understand how important the data we input really is.

Gate number one, then, involves what we look at. Guard it with your life. It will determine what you become. If you think your fellowship with God is not impacted by what you watch, try watching something suggestive or compromising and worship God for His holiness at the same time. Try it.

Gate 2- The doorway to the heart is your thought life. The heart, remember, is what you think when you think no one knows what you think. It is what you would do were there no restraints and no consequences. It is the real you; not the one your friends see at church; not even the one your family sees at home. It is the inner chamber of your thoughts. It includes those not so silent movies that keep playing in the theater of your mind. They may be immoral; they may be outbursts of anger you hold inside but are not afraid to replay in your

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thoughts, so long as no one but you sees them. They may be some kind of fantasy that you feel comfortable with because you have concluded it will never really come to pass.

It may be a constant rerun of your saying what you wish you could say to your mate, your children, your pastor, or your neighbor; but you know you never will, so you just say it to yourself. Or so you say. God looks on the heart, Beloved. The Psalmist made it clear:

Thou knowest my downsitting and mine uprising, thou understandest my thought afar off.

Thou compasses my path and my lying down, and art acquainted with all my ways.

For there is not a word in my tongue, but, lo, O LORD, thou knowest it altogether. (Psalm 139:2-4)

The word on your tongue has yet to be spoken, but God hears it. He has a front row seat in the theater of your mind, and He sees every scene; He hears every word. He hears you railing at your husband inside, while you paste a smile on your face for the children's benefit. He sees you lusting after that person or that thing, all the while pretending to campaign against such lust. It breaks His heart. He sees you as a hypocrite. A hypocrite is a "play-actor" who is acting out on the stage of life one kind of existence while his or her heart is showing a totally different production.

What goes into the eyegate goes to the heart. And what is manufactured in the heart is the real you. If you do not begin to monitor your thoughts on a second by second basis and shut down the theater before the production begins, you will become a neurotic hypocrite, fooling even yourself into thinking you are growing in holiness, when all you are doing is improving your performance on the stage of life. Scripture is clear:

The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked: who can know it? (Jeremiah 17:9)

Somehow, we each think that we are the exceptions to the rules. "Yes," we surmise, "The heart is deceitful, but I have a handle on mine." The man or woman who thinks that way is doubly deceived. Guard your heart. It is the real you. The second your thoughts begin to drift towards that which does not magnify the Name of the Lord, shut it down. Close

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the doors. Enter into the Room of the Word and begin to meditate on Scripture. Satan will flee, and your heart will begin to become increasingly holy. More about that in our next chapter.

Gate 3- If you have guarded your eyes and your thoughts, the doorway is open to God's thoughts and God's Spirit. We are free to love what God loves and hate what God hates. God hates anything that defiles His nature. He is grieved over anything that produces lust, greed, discontentment, anger, fear, anxiety, gossip, or anything else that does not produce the fruit of the Spirit.

The problem is that we can't seem to stop. We have programmed our computer-like minds with unholy thoughts, and we have focused the lens of our eyes on unholy things for so long that even if we make resolutions, strive, become accountable, and grit our teeth until we have to see the dentist, we still seem to drift back to that folder in our computer marked "spiritual strongholds," and unconsciously, it opens and spits out data we just don't want to see.

The key is grace, and the key to grace is weakness. The key to weakness is humility. God knows how hard it is. He knows, in fact, that it is impossible for you to behave in a holy manner even though you are holy, positionally, except for the grace of God.

Naturally, you will follow the patterns you have set for yourself by programming your eyes and your mind all these years. But *supernaturally*, you can become experientially holy. God gives us an unconditional guarantee. You must, however, come in desperation, in humility, and with an understanding that you do not deserve God's holiness. You cannot pay Him back for His holiness, and apart from Him you could not and would not ever be holy. Having reached that mindset, you cry out to God daily, hour by hour, minute by minute. Every time the enemy attacks, you whisper to God, "Please, Lord, give me the grace to be holy."

Something supernatural will happen. The patterns on your hard drive will slowly be erased. The motivation to be holy will begin to increase, until you cannot believe that your wicked, deceitful heart is actually longing to be free from the hypocrisy that has characterized your Christian life. The

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warfare won't go away; Satan will come at you from every direction. That's good. You'll be less likely to forget that it's a spiritual battle which you can't win apart from grace. Instead of focusing on your becoming holy, the focus will be on God's holiness and the incredible grace He wants to impart to you that will literally *cause you to be holy, because He is holy*.

As you cry out to God, you must understand that only time spent in His presence will acquaint you with His holiness enough for you to continually desire it, and as you spend time in His presence, your own sin and hypocrisy will become clearer and clearer and clearer. You will begin to grieve over what you have been and the years you have wasted, and find you are not satisfied with a less than a holy life.

You will also hunger and thirst after righteousness in ways you never did before. Most of all, your nature will be changing. You will become increasingly holy. It will be a miracle; it will be a joy; and it will be all of grace.

Yes, there will be a price. The things you have enjoyed and pretended not to enjoy will have to go. Yes, your inflated opinion of your own spirituality will have to dissolve in an ocean of reality. And yes, the facade will have to go. But in its place there will emerge, day by day, a new you. And that new you will desire more and more to please the heart of God. The grace of holiness is ours for the asking.

And there will never be a better time to ask.





## Chapter 7

# The Grace of Holiness: Is It All Relative?

There has been a constant struggle throughout the history of Christendom to strike a balance in the issue of holiness. Satan has had a field day at every turn. Both the definition of it and the performance of it have been characterized by a pendulum that swings from one extreme to another.

On the one hand, we are called out by God to be separate and distinct and different. We are to be “holy” ones, not contaminated by the sin in the world nor drawn to it.

On the other hand, we were sent into the world to be lights; and as such we are to infiltrate a sinful, lost and dying world by penetrating the darkness. Jesus, our example of perfect holiness, spent time with publicans and sinners, and unlike the Scribes and Pharisees, He touched lepers and blind men and ate with the tax collectors and thieves.

He was accused by the religious hierarchy of fellowshipping with the wrong crowd, and thus was considered “unholy.” He healed on the Sabbath and forgave prostitutes and murderers of their sins. Holy? To the hierarchy, He didn’t seem to understand or grasp the meaning of the word. To them, holy meant uncontaminated. Seeing that wounded man by the side of the road meant don’t touch him or you’ll be unclean.

Not so with Jesus. He lived and died for dirty, common folks, many of whom had no place in society at all. He loved lepers, and nobody in his right mind loved lepers. He spent the bulk of His time visiting sick people, dying people, outcasts and rejects; people the religious leaders would not so much as allow into their supposedly uncontaminated presence.

So either Jesus didn’t understand the concept of holiness, or they didn’t, because they were at opposite ends of the

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spectrum in practice. They had so separated themselves from the real world, they didn't even understand the kinds of real needs people had. Jesus, on the other hand, condemned their hypocrisy and called them "play-actors" on the stage of life and referred to them over and over by saying, "Woe unto you, Scribes and Pharisees, you hypocrites."

The problem was complicated by God's specific instructions to the church and to us. Paul put it this way:

Be ye not unequally yoked together with unbelievers: for what fellowship hath righteousness with unrighteousness? and what communion hath light with darkness?

And what concord hath Christ with Belial? or what part hath he that believeth with an infidel?

And what agreement hath the temple of God with idols? for ye are the temple of the living God; as God hath said, I will dwell in them, and walk in them; and I will be their God, and they shall be my people.

Wherefore come out from among them, and be ye separate, saith the Lord, and touch not the unclean thing; and I will receive you,

And will be a Father unto you, and ye shall be my sons and daughters, saith the Lord Almighty.

(II Corinthians 6:14-18)

God was calling us to come out and be separate. That doesn't seem, on the surface, to fit with Jesus' lifestyle, so we have to see what it is He is trying to tell us. It has to do with "yoking." It has to do with two people or groups of people joining together in a common spiritual goal as equals. We are told that you cannot join light and darkness, and you cannot join the temple of God with the temple of Satan. It is impossible. That is why Israel was told never ever to intermarry with non-Jews. The reason was clear. It would be a spiritual union, and they would be non-compatible spirits.

Now when these things were done, the princes came to me, saying, The people of Israel, and the priests, and the Levites, have not separated themselves from the people of the lands, doing according to their abominations,...

(Ezra 9:1)

And then the Scripture mentions the Canaanites, the Hittites, the Perizzites, the Jebusites, the Ammonites, the

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Moabites, the Amorites, the “Parasites”, and all the other “ites”.

For they have taken of their daughters for themselves, and for their sons: so that the holy seed have mingled themselves with the people of those lands: yea, the hand of the princes and rulers hath been chief in this trespass.

And when I heard this thing, I rent my garment and my mantle, and plucked off the hair of my head and of my beard, and sat down astonished (astonished).

(Ezra 9:2,3)

A loose translation might be, “I couldn’t believe my ears!”

This does not mean that we do not infiltrate and become friends with non-believers for the sake of taking light into darkness or leading them to Christ. Jesus is our example. But it does mean that *any* relationship that creates a union of two people only one of whom is a believer is a distinct contradiction to the will of God. That may be hard to accept, but the principles are clear. God has a better way. The fact that God wants us to be “separate” doesn’t mean we don’t interact, but He has literally “severed” or “cut us off” from spiritual relationships with unbelievers.

And ye shall be holy unto me: for I the LORD am holy, and have severed you from other people, that ye should be mine.

(Leviticus 20:26)

That word “separate” which we read in II Corinthians 6, is an interesting word. Your concordance describes it like this:

αφοριζω – *aphorizo* {af-or-id'-zo} – *to mark off from others by boundaries, to limit, to separate*

*1a) in a bad sense: to exclude as disreputable, not belonging*

*1b) in a good sense: to appoint, set apart for some purpose, those who belong*

In this case, it literally meant “to be placed in a different sphere based on ownership.” It meant you could divide the world into two categories; those who rightfully could claim God as their Father by virtue of divine adoption, and those who couldn’t. Those who were His were asked to “come out from among them.” God asked them not to blend into the woodwork, not to become indistinguishable as children of the

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King. If the world looked at them and couldn't differentiate between those who represented royalty and those who didn't, God had a problem.

He had placed a seal upon His own, an emblem of ownership. That seal was the Holy Spirit, who now living in them gave them the capacity to be holy as God is holy—to be set apart, to be different. If, when the world saw them, they did not see the holiness of God, there would be a world of darkness with no lights to lead men out.

God told His children if you're going to be the set apart ones, the holy ones, you can't touch the "unclean" thing. Touching was a crucial issue. Eve reached out and "touched" the thing God told her to leave alone. It wasn't what it appeared to be. It appeared to be a way out, a way to become independent. It turned out to be a way into bondage. Instead of becoming independent, Eve simply changed images. She now began to reflect the image of Satan, God's enemy, and unless God intervened with grace, she would never again experience the love of God.

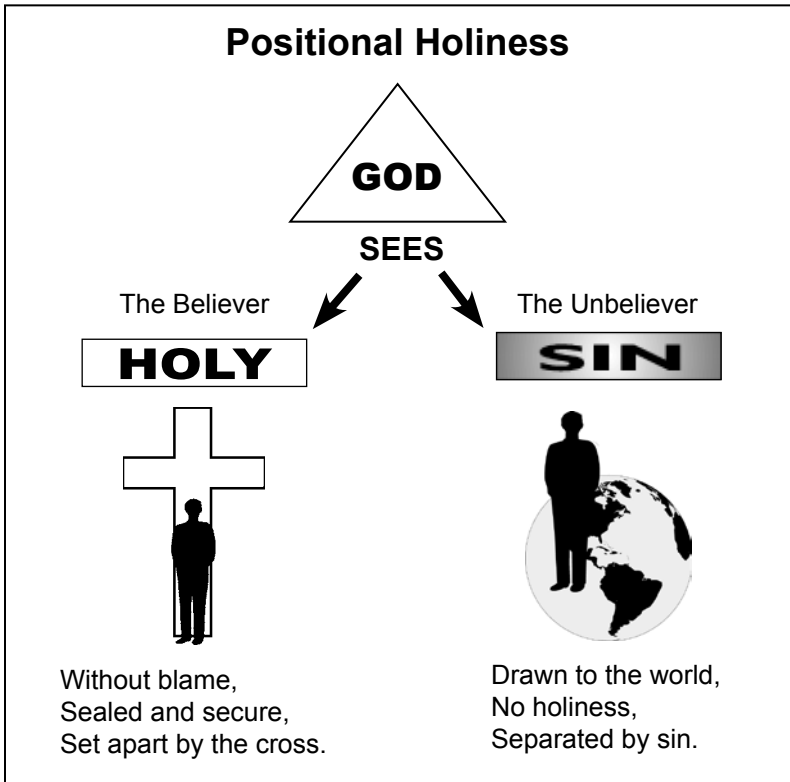
Touching involves a choice. It needn't be a physical act of touching; it involves any act of the will that chooses something or someone or some course that causes it *to be no different than the world*. We have been instructed to

Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world,  
(I John 2:15a)

Everything we reach out and touch that does not draw us closer to God's heart is violating His desire for us to be separate. While the world is reaching out for things and for thrills, the believer is to be reaching out to God for strength and for wisdom and for spiritual blessings even at the cost of material gain. There are, it seems, two kinds of holiness. There is "positional" holiness and "possessional" holiness, if you will.

Positional holiness involves how God sees us. He sees us "in Christ," and thus totally freed from the penalty of sin by virtue of our divine adoption and by virtue of what Jesus did on the Cross.

(See the diagram on the next page.)

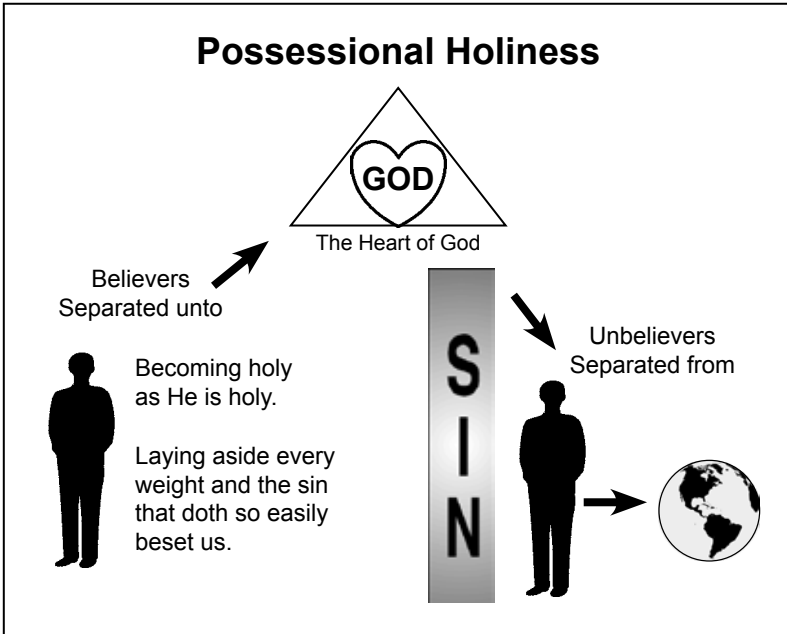


If we have been born again, God looks at us through the blood of Christ and sees us as holy and pure. We are saved, sealed, and secure. We have been lifted up and set apart, separated from the rest of the world. There is no doubt about our ultimate destination, and there is no doubt about the source of our salvation. We are “in Christ” and in Him we are children of the King, heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ. By virtue of undeserved and free grace, we have been adopted into the family, and the very holiness of God has been imputed to us.

“Possessional” holiness, on the other hand, (if there were such a term), might better describe our day to day struggles as believers, and might as well describe the sheer wonder that awaits us if we dare to close the gates that give Satan access to the eye and the mind and choose to allow the wonderful grace of God to demonstrate itself through our weakness. We

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actually begin to humble ourselves, confess sin for what it is, (an affront to a holy God), and we begin to get nearer and nearer to the heart of God.



As we begin to possess the holiness that is ours, things that used to be acceptable to us now break our hearts because they break God's heart. The closer we get to God's heart, the more sensitive we become to sin. We can't stand to look at things that God wouldn't look at. We can't stand to think thoughts that would not glorify His name or His nature. We can't stand to do anything that would bring harm to another or to the reputation of God.

Instead, we long just to sit at His feet and worship, and to hear His Word as He whispers it through His Spirit. To see others come to Him is our fondest dream. To impact other believers so that they, too, long to know Him better brings us more joy than a new house, a new car, or a thousand promotions at work. Every thought we think relates to Him. Every desire of our heart centers around His will. We, who have been set apart unto holiness, are becoming the holy men and women we already are in Christ. We are possessing experientially what we already are positionally. Life is

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beginning to make sense at last.

We do not chafe over Hebrews 12:1 any more, nor do we struggle to make ourselves let go of things that defile the name of God. It says:

Wherefore seeing we also are compassed about with so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which doth so easily beset us, and let us run with patience the race that is set before us,

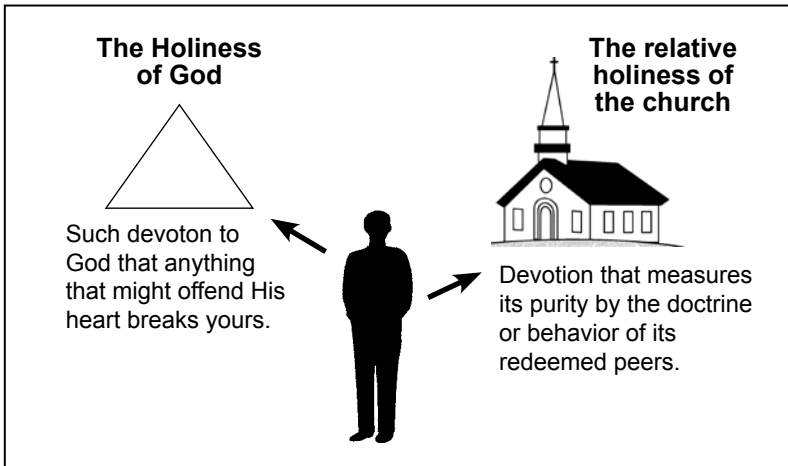
Looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith; who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is set down at the right hand of the throne of God. (Hebrews 12:1,2)

The laying aside of “weights” now becomes a pleasure. All we care about is running the race in the energy of the Lord, rather than in our own. Then, we can mount up with wings as eagles, but we can’t run with besetting sins strapped on our backs, or even with the weight of supposedly “good” things that are not of God. So we joyfully, willingly strip ourselves of those weights and sins because our eyes are on Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith, and if we are going to run in His energy, we certainly can’t be encumbered with our sin.

We are becoming progressively holy, and God is doing it. All we are doing is *letting Him*. It is called “grace.” It is the grace of God making us into the holy, set apart men and women that we already are in the mind of God. But unless we are willing to ask Him to do it and willing to progressively humble ourselves and reject and resist sin, it won’t happen. We will simply quench the Spirit and reject the grace of God.

The problem is, that in the real world, most of us don’t experience that level of grace day by day. We want to, and in our better moments, we even long to. But we get caught up believing one of Satan’s lies: that there is such a thing as “relative” holiness, and that doesn’t mean the holiness your relatives demonstrate, nor does it mean that God is pleased when we devote our lives to spiritual mediocrity, as long as we stay in step with, or better yet, a step above our Christian peers. We cannot see and touch Jesus, so we mistakenly begin to take the absolutes of Scripture and gauge their effectiveness or importance based on the most spiritual people we know, or based on how the average Christian in

our sphere of relationships deals with them.



A wife will justify her bitterness based on the fact that her husband is a deacon, but to her he is a fraud. Therefore, if God is allowing him to be recognized as spiritual, God surely won't condemn her bitterness. And besides, she surmises, "I'm justified." A teenager justifies his bent toward immorality based on what he sees his Christian parents watch or do. He's not confident his parents are what they claim to be. He isn't interested in what they tell him; he's judging what he can do based on what he thinks they really are and do.

As society allows moral values and family values to plummet, the church scrambles to redefine absolute holiness based on what it construes to be "reality," when, in reality, it is only defying the plan of God and breaking the heart of God. God's standards of moral purity have not moved one inch since they were formed in His heart of holiness, and they never will. Thou shalt not commit adultery has always been an absolute and always will be. God will not change His Word to adjust to a degenerate society. He will rather let that society reap what it has sown and destroy itself; *but God's elect, His set apart ones, must become increasingly holy as the world's concepts of holiness decline.* It is the hour to which we have been called. When the darkness descends, the light shines more brightly. When man has no hope and life has no meaning, God's Word and God's people are on center stage as never before. The spotlight of eternity shines upon



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our hearts, and we are to be, in essence, men and women of moral purity who are living the set apart lives to which we have been called, not just outwardly, but inwardly.

When morals decline, God is calling His people to repent and be renewed in the spirit of their minds. It is His clarion call to holiness. Peter reminds us that as we near the end times, the call becomes even more intense:

But the day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night; in the which the heavens shall pass away with a great noise, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat, the earth also and the works that are therein shall be burned up.

Seeing then that all these things shall be dissolved, what manner of persons ought ye to be in all holy conversation and godliness, (II Peter 3:10,11)

Satan wants us to respond to “relative” holiness and judge what is acceptable by what is “normal” in Christian circles, and if we are a “cut above” the unbelieving world, we find ourselves filled with self-righteous pride in our values. Dear God, help us. Help us to return to standards of biblical holiness that are progressively drawing us nearer and nearer to the heart of God and further and further from the mainstream of moral hypocrisy that so characterizes the world we live in and the church of the twentieth century. Man’s double standard must not become ours. Man’s declining moral values are what man can do in the flesh. God’s consistent moral values are what man can do supernaturally by grace. The unbeliever cannot live in that realm, for without the Holy Spirit, true holiness is impossible.

Grace, then, is the answer. We are to draw near unto God, and He will draw near unto us. We are to resist the devil, and he will flee from us. It is to be a constant, consistent process. We must not be satisfied that we are not losing ground, either. We are to be growing, in ever increasing splendor, from one degree of glory to another. That means that there ought to be a tenderness towards sin and towards people in our hearts today that was not there a year ago, a month ago, a day ago. With every passing hour, Jesus ought to be more real to us and more dear to us.

If He is anything less than that, we are not allowing

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the Holy Spirit to continue the process of making us more holy. We have been set apart by God as His special, chosen vessels. He wants to impart to us His very nature. How we can be satisfied with such mediocrity in the light of His grace is a mystery. The only answer is that we have been deceived. We have become complacent and fooled by the lie of "relative holiness".

We point to the great revivals in history with a sense of fondness and only wish that we had lived in times such as those. Beloved, we live in times such as those.

Anytime God's people, who are called by His name, shall humble themselves and pray and turn from their wicked ways and seek His face, He will hear from heaven and forgive their sins...

(II Chronicles 7:14 author's paraphrase)

Anytime? Anytime. The promise is based on our desire to be holy, and the time is now. I believe we are living at the edge of time. I believe the Scriptural prerequisites for Christ's return have, one by one, been quietly placed in the vaults of eternity, and our great God could be calling, even this moment, for the archangel to unpack his trumpet, and God, Himself, may well be preparing to *shout*. It could be today. The question is: if God is preparing to call us into His presence, and if He is preparing to come again and every eye will see Him, dare we waste a moment planting our feet on the soil of this earth as though this is going to be our final home?

If we were to live in one country and be sent for a few days to another on a special business assignment, we wouldn't take all our furniture and all our clothes and all our mementos with us. Knowing we were only on a brief visit, we would travel light, confident that when we got home, everything of value would be waiting for us there.

Beloved, in the light of eternity, we are only here for a day. We are on special assignment, and it makes no sense to invest in this foreign soil to which we've been sent. This will all be burned up very soon. Only that which is spiritual and thus eternal will be saved. But all of that will be saved, and it will be waiting for us as treasure when we get home.

The only thing that matters, then, is that which pertains

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to the kingdom of God. When we get to heaven, the issue won't be how successful we were, how much money we made, or how popular we were. It won't be how well we did in school or how good we were in football. The issue will be *to what degree did we allow the grace of God to pour the holiness of God in us and through us to a lost and dying and hurting world*. Were we faithfully bathed in His holy presence? Did we spend hours at His feet drinking in His holiness? Or were we too busy investing in things that were passing away? Did appropriating His holiness hold such a high priority in our lives that we were willing to guard the gateway to our eyes and to our heart and allow no compromises to pass through? Or did we buy the lie of "relative holiness" and fill the hard disk of our minds with half truth and half trash?

Those are questions we have to answer today. Not tomorrow. Today. Tomorrow may not come. Tomorrow may usher in eternity. Today is the day. And we must face honestly before God how serious we want to be about whatever days remain in our lifetimes individually or in the life of the church collectively. We have, Beloved, been called unto holiness. That, quite simply, is what we have been called to become. Our ministry will flow out of our being, if we let it, but we cannot manufacture it or program it and bring glory to God. God is glorified when grace is expressed. You can't do it. I can't do it. But God can.

How holy are you willing to become? If that's what God desires, what price are you willing to pay? That's the question.

There are at least three principles in Scripture relative to holiness that must be examined and personalized before we leave this vital subject:

### **1- You and I are now the temple of God. The temple must be kept holy or the name of God is defiled.**

But the LORD is in his holy temple: let all the earth keep silence before him. (Habakkuk 2:20)

Know ye not that ye are the temple of God, and that the Spirit of God dwelleth in you?

If any man defile the temple of God, him shall God destroy; for the temple of God is holy, which temple ye are. (I Corinthians 3:16,17)

The temple of God is the dwelling place of God. As you

approach it, awe should be the response in your heart. You are nearing the Holy One, as you enter into His Holy place. There ought to be a hushed silence as you contemplate the wonder of *being in His presence*. Never would it enter your mind to enter that temple with anything less than respect and purity. Never would you take lightly the privilege of entering the once forbidden Holy of Holies.

Now, go look in the mirror. I know, it may be a shock, but do it anyway. You are looking at the temple rebuilt. You are now the temple of God, and you are holy, because the Holy Spirit dwelleth in you. How dare we be careless as we enter or be apathetic in our worship. God alone will be our witness should we defile that temple, be it with lustful thought or unbridled anger or seething bitterness. That would be like trashing the dwelling place of the Most High God. You say, "But I would never do that." But, you have, if you have in any way hindered God from taking you to the next stage of intimacy that leads to the next level of conviction and holiness. The temple is holy, beloved. The temple is holy. And you are the temple.

**2- These temples of ours are now to be the place where the sacrifices take place.** The sacrifices represent our acts of worship. In the New Testament, a different kind of sacrifice takes place, because the sacrifice for sin has been paid for, once and for all. What kind of sacrifice is God looking for now? Romans 12:1 tells us:

I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service.  
(Romans 12:1)

Here is the only sacrifice God wants from you and from me. He wants our lives. He wants our bodies, filled and flooded with holiness. It is the reasonable thing to do, Paul says. The literal word "sacrifice" is translated from a word:

ψυσια – *thusia* {*thoo-see'-ah*} – a sacrifice, victim

It is a picture of a person or an animal that has been laid on the altar and sacrificed; placed there to die. That is our reasonable service, says Paul. That word, "reasonable" means:

λογικωσ – *logikos* {*log-ik-os*'} – reasonable (pertaining to speech or reason or logic spiritual, pertaining to the soul)

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It is that which makes logical sense *from a spiritual perspective*. Looking at life through God's lens of love, nothing else makes sense. Our lives ought to be laid on the altar daily; and we ought to count it a privilege to die daily, but we can't. In our own energy, we can't even die. It is not something the natural man can do. It is a choice followed by an act of surrender and an acknowledgment that apart from the free, undeserved grace of God, we will struggle and strive and take one step forward and two steps back. Jesus died daily. He said over and over, "I do only those things that please the Father." What did that mean? It meant that only as He died to His own will could the Father enable Him supernaturally to live apart from sin and unto holiness. So He died and He died and He died and He died.

Even as He faced Calvary, He knelt in that garden and died again to His own feelings and His own plans. "*If it be possible, Father...nevertheless...*" He prayed. And that "nevertheless" was His dying to self spiritually. It ultimately meant His dying, period. He who knew no sin became sin for us. He became a *living sacrifice*.

**3- To be a living sacrifice, you have to die, and to die you have to humble yourself until you see sin as God sees it.** What a great memory verse this is.

For thus saith the high and lofty One that inhabiteth eternity, whose name is Holy; I dwell in the high and holy place, with him also that is of a contrite and humble spirit, to revive the spirit of the humble, and to revive the heart of the contrite ones. (Isaiah 57:15)

Look who is speaking. The one whose name is "Holy." The one who "inhabits eternity." The one who spoke the worlds into being. The one whose very name causes the angels to fold their wings and worship. The one whose sinless life made holiness a reality for you and for me. He is speaking. Be still now. Be perfectly quiet. When the Holy One speaks, we, like the angels, ought to bow in adoration and listen with our hearts. Don't say a word. Just listen. The Holy One speaks:

I dwell in the high and holy place, with him also that is of a contrite and humble spirit, ... (Isaiah 57:15)

God is saying that He has called *those who are of a contrite and humble spirit*, to be with Him *in the holy place*,

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near to His heart, What is a contrite spirit? Let Scripture define itself:

The LORD is nigh unto them that are of a broken heart; and saveth such as be of a contrite spirit.

(Psalm 34:18)

The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit: a broken and a contrite heart, O God, thou wilt not despise.

(Psalm 51:17)

For all those things hath mine hand made, and all those things have been, saith the LORD: but to this man will I look, even to him that is poor and of a contrite spirit, and trembleth at my word.

(Isaiah 66:2)

A literal translation of the word contrite is “dust”; matter broken down to its lowest form, shattered and scattered into nothingness. It is a broken heart, according to Psalm 34:18 and Psalm 51:17. It is a heart that trembles at every word God speaks because it has been broken. It thinks nothing of itself and everything of God; therefore, every violation of God's Word causes it to tremble, not just in fear, but in grief.

Do you tremble over your sins? Is there such grief in your heart over any violation of God's best for you that your heart begins to weep? Or has the fact that you have been able to compromise for years with seemingly no major consequences caused you to become calloused and cold about breaking God's heart? *God does not deal with most sin in an immediate cause and effect way because we then would become legalists, serving Him in direct response to how it affected us.* He wants us to be faithful because we love Him, not because He is going to zap us if we don't. The sin/zap/repent plan didn't work for Israel, and it won't work for us, either. We must obey out of love, and that love must be energized by grace.

Revival, we see according to Isaiah 57, can only come to those who see sin as God does, who repent in dust and ashes, and who possess a contrite heart and a humble spirit. You don't become contrite by programming it. You become contrite the way Job did. He spent hours and hours and hours at the feet of God until finally a little light bulb went on and he said, “Uh-oh. I've been justifying myself all this time: how good I am, how noble I am, how obedient I am—until he finally cried out,

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I have heard of thee by the hearing of the ear: but now mine eye seeth thee.

Wherefore I abhor myself, and repent in dust and ashes. (Job 42:5,6)

Having reached the end of himself and having gone from strength to weakness, he finally fell at God's feet and listened and listened and listened to what He had to say. Once Job saw who God was, what *he* was became very clear. He was a self-centered sinner who had gauged his own holiness on self-evaluation and peer acceptance, rather than on his nearness to the heart of God. Having seen God, he saw his sins and repented in dust and ashes. And, Beloved, nothing short of that kind of repentance will bring about revival—in you, in me, in the church at large. Revival will not be something we do; it will be something God does, when we see sin for what it is.

Beloved, take the next week and ask God to peel one more layer of self from your spirit. Ask Him to show you sin in your life that you have not seen as sin. Spend enough time with Him for Him to do it. Don't be in a hurry. It won't happen in a hurry. Wait on the Lord. For one week, instead of focusing on what you want Him to do for you, focus only on what He wants of you: repentance and a contrite heart.

As He convicts your heart of sin, no matter how seemingly insignificant your flesh construes it to be, write it down. Then go before God and offer to do whatever it takes to be cleansed. Make restitution if necessary and be renewed and strengthened in a way that perhaps you have never experienced before. Don't be afraid to ask God for a miracle. That's the business He's in. Ask Him to transform your spirit into one of humility and contrition. Ask Him to make sin real to you so He can make His grace real to you in a fresh and vibrant way. Then drive a stake in the ground. Write it down. Draw a picture. Write a song. Do something to remind you in days to come of what a wonderful, forgiving God you have. You are a child of the King. You have broken the King's heart. He has forgiven you. Now, tell the King that you never want that sin to break His precious heart again. Left up to you, you cannot do it. Praise God, it is not left up to you. There is a thing called "grace," the "grace of holiness." And it is yours for the asking.





## Chapter 8

# The Grace of Holiness: Making It Work

He was a mastermind with automobiles. He understood the way the internal combustion engine was designed. He had a grasp of the concepts behind automatic transmissions. He even knew more than anyone around him about how a computer module controlled the flow of gasoline and how the cooling system worked. He was a marvel when it came to understanding cars.

Engineers would call him from around the world for his expertise. He was offered jobs in Detroit, Tokyo, and Berlin. In his head were the secrets General Motors and Honda wanted to explore. His family, though amazed at his knowledge, knew the one thing, however, that none of his vocational suitors knew. It was this: Though he knew everything there was *about a car*, He had never driven one.

He was, you see, afraid to drive. Whenever he got behind the wheel, panic set in. So this one who was considered an expert in the field of transportation was totally unable to enjoy and appreciate the fruits of his labors. He was petrified of the very thing he taught others about.

Don't laugh. God has the same problem with many of us. We search the Scriptures, ponder the principles, grapple with the Greek, try to handle the Hebrew, and in the end, convince ourselves and others that we, by nature of our information, have become experts on living the Christian life.

God, however, isn't impressed. If we can't drive the car we designed, we're still on foot. If we can't operate the computer we built, we only have an expensive paperweight. And if we have an intellectual grasp of grace, but don't know how to appropriate it on a minute by minute basis, we are an affront to God, for *"to whom much is given, much will be required."*

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(Luke 12:48) God judges our faithfulness in proportion to what we know. If we understand factually how to let God be Himself in us, and then in the marketplace of life, never quite let go and believe that it is His life to live, not ours, we become candidates for “Hypocrite of the Year” awards.

Grace is not an intellectual pursuit. It is an experiential walk through the real world, utilizing the supernatural enabling power of God to live *in* that world, while living *above* it. It is God being allowed to do what we can't, and we can't live the Christian life. Praise God, He never asked us to. He only asked Jesus, while on this earth, to be an image. He is only asking us to do the same.

We have to die before we can be resurrected, and we have to die to self before grace can make strength out of weakness and take control of our lives. We don't like the idea of dying, and we don't like the idea of not being in control. So we study faith, grace, and sovereignty with the same intellectual intensity we would use to study geography, psychology, or mathematics. How foolish! This is not an academic pursuit. It is the pursuit of holiness, and it will not be achieved through knowledge, but through the appropriation of grace.

Unless we leave this study having allowed Jesus Christ to take control of our thought life, our eye-gates, and our self-motivated desire to live for God, we will only be more accountable and less spiritual. Therefore, this third and final lesson on the grace of holiness will be devoted almost exclusively to the practical aspect of letting the grace we've learned about actually flow through our lives. We are going to ask God to allow His grace to take hold of our lives.

This, Beloved, is where Satan puts his slimy foot down. He hates it when we study grace, but as long as we file it away in the notebooks of our “Layman's Guide to Intellectual Information,” he'll only laugh and assume that we now know what we're missing, but that will only add to our frustration. What he can't handle, however, is the actual experiential appropriation of that grace which multiplies itself, as the literal power of God flows through us, and we become simply “images” that reflect His nature as He lives through us. That makes the devil very nervous. *Faith is the victory that overcomes the world. And Satan does not want us to win*

*that victory. So expect warfare, but know this, the incredible blessings that accompany that grace make the warfare more than worth it.*

We are in the process of applying the grace principles to the holiness of God, for His holiness is that all-encompassing attribute which appears to be a valve that releases His other attributes. His holiness is that part of His nature that separates Him from man and separates His children from the world of contamination and sin. It brought about the release of mercy, for it demanded that He deal with the sin question or else we could never again fellowship with Him. It released divine grace, because unless He imputed His holiness to us, we could not experience His love, even if we were forgiven. So His holiness became the central focus of our redemption. It revealed that while God hates sin, His love was so great that He would pay the price for our sins, lest we be cut off from His presence forever. Oh, what love! Oh, what love, indeed!

The problem is that we accept His saving grace as having been accomplished and praise Him for it. We sing of it, pray about it, rejoice over it. On a day to day basis, however, that incredible freedom that comes when we draw on that grace has escaped many of us. We know so well that we ought to be more holy than we are, that we actually play-act rather than find a way to experience the life God paid for us to experience.

If we are appropriating His holiness by grace as we ought, several things will be characteristic of our lives:

**1- We will be spending more and more time alone with God.**

It won't be something we *have* to do. Wild horses won't be able to keep us away from His presence.

**2- We will be hungering and thirsting for righteousness.**

Our appetite for the Word of God will become insatiable. We will long to memorize, meditate, and personalize it. It will not depart out of our mouths. It will become like frontlets before our eyes.

**3- We will be increasingly sensitive to sin.**

This is the key. The anger, the pride, the lust, the discontentment: these things will be passing away. Things we once thought acceptable now break our hearts because

we know they break God's heart.

**4- We will be growing more into His likeness every day.**

Spiritual maturity will be a natural by-product. We will see God give us wisdom we never knew we could have. A ministry will develop out of that wisdom; a ministry God gave us without our manipulating it or programming it.

**5- Our hearts will become increasingly pure.**

There will be a quiet honesty with God that only comes when we know He knows what we really think, and we don't want to play games anymore. The theater of our minds will stop playing fantasies for us to enjoy while pretending they don't exist. We will know that until every thought is captive to Christ, we are not truly growing pure.

No one but you can judge whether those things are happening in your life or not. But most of us, if we're honest, would have to admit that not only is that *not* a picture of our hearts; *in many ways, we are actually lowering our standards of holiness to conform to the degenerate condition of the world we live in*, and we are unconsciously, perhaps, justifying things we considered sin before.

We will look in this study at three major issues involved in appropriating the grace to be holy.

**The Dynamic of a Decision**

Throughout Scripture, there is one thing that is crucial that is often overlooked in the Christian life, and that is the dynamic of decisions. The decisions of life are the keys that make up the course of our lives. Eve made a decision in the garden that changed her life and ours as well. Adam made a decision to do what Eve did. Cain made a decision based on jealousy and anger. And what about Moses?

By faith Moses, when he was come to years, refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter;

Choosing rather to suffer affliction with the people of God, than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season;

Esteeming the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures in Egypt: for he had respect unto the recompence of the reward.

By faith he forsook Egypt, not fearing the wrath of the

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king: for he endured, as seeing him who is invisible.

(Hebrews 11:24-27)

Decisions. They make or break our lives. We see the importance of them in the physical realm: decisions on what school to go to, what person to marry, what city to live in, what job to take. One decision can change our lives for good or ill.

What I think we don't realize, however, is the importance of *spiritual decisions*. They are, I believe, more crucial than all of the other choices we make in life combined, for they impact, not just our circumstances or environment, but the three things in life that are most important: our eternal destiny, our eternal rewards, and our inner tranquility. Over and over, the children of Israel were told to do two things:

1- Decide once and for all what place God was going to play in their lives,

2- Make some kind of memorial or remembrance so they would never ever forget what He had done and what decision they had made.

In Joshua, chapter 24, Joshua was confronting the people with a decision they had to make. Listen to the conversation:

And I have given you a land for which ye did not labour, and cities which ye built not, and ye dwell in them; of the vineyards and oliveyards which ye planted not do ye eat.

Now therefore fear the LORD, and serve him in sincerity and in truth: and put away the gods which your fathers served on the other side of the flood, and in Egypt; and serve ye the LORD.

And if it seem evil unto you to serve the LORD, choose you this day whom ye will serve; whether the gods which your fathers served that were on the other side of the flood, or the gods of the Amorites, in whose land ye dwell: but as for me and my house, we will serve the LORD.

(Joshua 24:13-15)

Everything they had was of grace. The lands, the cities, the vineyards were all of grace. They didn't work for them; they didn't deserve them; they couldn't earn them if they tried. Joshua wanted the people to understand that they couldn't have presumptuous expectations based on their worth or their work. They deserved nothing, so they had a

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decision to make. Either they had to acknowledge that it was all of grace and let God be 100% in charge of their life and their land, or they needed to understand that *by not giving God total control, they were yielding control to the gods of this world*. There was no third choice.

Joshua shared with them that he had personally come to that fork in the road and made his choice. *“As for me and my house,”* he proclaimed, *“We will serve the Lord.”* He was not being proud or arrogant. In humility, as a leader soon to depart to glory, he wanted them to know that the choice was real, and that it applied to those at the top of the religious heap as well as those at the bottom. His decision had been made. It was clear cut, obvious, and was not subject to review. Jehovah was not an important part of Joshua's life, Jehovah was Joshua's life.

The people responded to Joshua's leadership:

And the people answered and said, God forbid that we should forsake the LORD, to serve other gods;

For the LORD our God, he it is that brought us up and our fathers out of the land of Egypt, from the house of bondage, and which did those great signs in our sight, and preserved us in all the way wherein we went, and among all the people through whom we passed:

And the LORD drave out from before us all the people, even the Amorites which dwelt in the land: therefore will we also serve the LORD; for he is our God.

(Joshua 24:16-18)

They had the right idea. They gave God the glory for their deliverance from the enemy, and based on what God had done, they determined to follow Him and serve Him. Their problem was that they were serving Him for the wrong reason. The “therefore will we also” in verse 18 tells the tale. They weren't worshipping Him for who he was, but rather for what He had done. Joshua wanted them to understand that “fair weather” believers would not suffice in the Kingdom. He warned them of the consequences of making a decision for God to be everything, and then, when the contrary winds began to blow, making Him out to be anything less.

And Joshua said unto the people, Ye cannot serve the LORD: for he is an holy God; he is a jealous God; he will

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not forgive your transgressions nor your sins.

If ye forsake the LORD, and serve strange gods, then he will turn and do you hurt, and consume you, after that he hath done you good.

And the people said unto Joshua, Nay; but we will serve the LORD. (Joshua 24:19-21)

“Not us, Joshua,” they cried. “We mean business. We will serve the Lord.” They all walked down the aisle, signed commitment cards, and sang seven verses of “Just as I Am.” It was a moving time. Joshua didn’t let them out of the parking lot just yet, though. He did something I wish Christians today would take more seriously. He created a memorial, a remembrance, something to keep in the forefront of their minds so they would never, ever forget the importance of that decision:

And Joshua said unto the people, Ye are witnesses against yourselves that ye have chosen you the LORD, to serve him. And they said, We are witnesses.

Now therefore put away, said he, the strange gods which are among you, and incline your heart unto the LORD God of Israel.

And the people said unto Joshua, The LORD our God will we serve, and his voice will we obey.

So Joshua made a covenant with the people that day, and set them a statute and an ordinance in Shechem.

And Joshua wrote these words in the book of the law of God, and took a great stone, and set it up there under an oak, that was by the sanctuary of the LORD.

And Joshua said unto all the people, Behold, this stone shall be a witness unto us; for it hath heard all the words of the LORD which he spake unto us: it shall be therefore a witness unto you, lest ye deny your God.

(Joshua 24:22-27)

He did two things: He told them not to waste any time doing whatever they had to do to make things right with God. There was to be no peaceful coexistence between God and Satan. They were to put away everything and every habit that was in any way a compromise. It wouldn’t be God and something. It would be God, period. The second thing he did was to write down what they had decided and build a

monument to it, as a witness in days to come.

Oh, that we might somehow realize that the decisions we make are only likely to be as good as our memory of them, and most of us have the memory of a bird, not an elephant. Joshua made no bones about it. He created both a written record and a living memorial so that both they and their children could never forget about that key decision that was designed to change their lives and the course of history.

Every time you are confronted with truth, you have a decision to make. There are at least a handful of times in every man or woman's life when he or she has to make the kind of decision that will alter the course of their spiritual destiny. It need not be an every Sunday thing. It may only come once every five or ten years. But over and over in Israel's life, and over and over in my life, and perhaps in yours as well, our God leads us to the foot of the mountain and says, Choose you this day what you are going to give your life to. Choose whether or not your God is going to be your copilot, or whether you're going to move into the back of the plane and let Him fly. He may not take you where you want to go, but that's not the issue. He's the only one who knows where you need to go.

Do you want to be God's man or woman *no matter the cost*? Then choose you this day. Are you willing for your life to be poured out for the sake of the gospel, *dying if need be for His sake*? Then choose you this day. Do you want to grow increasingly holy, no matter the cost? Then choose you this day. Not tomorrow. Today. Make a choice. Make a decision. Then drive a stake in the ground and make it such that you can never, ever forget the decision you made.

I can recall only two or three times in my Christian life when God confronted me in such a demonstrable way. In my spirit I knew that He was asking me to go to a deeper level of intimacy with Him, and that to do nothing was to say "no." The last time was only recently, and it had been years since I had felt such a clear word from God. It was "Kelfer, either you make a decision to finish the course well, and that decision includes the fact that you can't do it apart from grace, or I'll just let you go on and live your own life. The choice is yours."

Beloved, some of you may be sensing in your heart of



hearts right now that God has been reaching out to you for some time saying, “Dear one, there is more to knowing me than you have experienced. There is a place of quiet rest near to the heart of God.” There is a place where your heart and God’s can beat as one; where you can be so at one with Him that His holiness will literally overwhelm you and control you, and like leaves that fall in the autumn winds, the sins that have so easily beset you will blow to the ground below, the gusts of God’s grace their downfall.

Then make a decision today. Quietly tell God that whatever it takes, you don’t want to live another day, and certainly not the rest of your life, play-acting, pretending to be all His, while you are, in effect, trying for the best of both worlds. It doesn’t need to be a great heart-wrenching emotional experience. Sometimes those experiences tend to focus on themselves rather than on God. The call needs to come from your spirit, not your emotions. Is God speaking to you? Is He saying, “Don’t waste another day of your life. There is more to life than this”? Then quietly, in your heart of hearts, respond to Him right now. Just surrender your will to His and say in your heart, “Yes, Lord, I’m yours. From now until you call me home, I’m yours. I want everything you have for me. I’m yours. Amen.”

You may not feel all warm and fuzzy inside. That’s not the issue. The issue is: “Is God who He says He is?” If so, He will take you at your word, and you can take Him at His word. There is a deeper walk awaiting you in the days to come.

### **The Crisis and the Cries**

The second issue facing us in appropriating holiness has to do with the intensity of our heart’s search for conviction and purity. We live in an age where man seems to be intense and committed to things that don’t really matter, and at the same time, he’s apathetic and hurried about the things that do.

We are emotional about things that are not eternal. Grown men and women go completely berserk over a football team. Wearing unusual hats, ridiculous colors, and screaming as though our eternal destiny depended on it, they shout, rail, and work themselves into early heart attacks shouting, “Hook

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'em horns" or "Gig 'em Aggies." No wonder our children draw wrong concepts of what's important in life.

On the other hand, when faced with spiritual issues, we tend to stiffen up a bit. "Don't get too intense," we reason. After all, we don't want to get carried away. So we take our somewhat phlegmatic approach into the prayer chamber, and we pray as though we were reading the Gettysburg address backwards in Hungarian. We say words, but with no deep involvement of the soul. We read off the names on our "lists" and instruct God as though He were some kind of new employee who has just reported for duty to carry out our wishes.

We thank Him for who He is without actually contemplating who He is. We read Scriptures without really being in awe that, at that moment, the Living God is speaking directly to us. We ask Him to open our eyes that we might behold wondrous things, but even as we ask, our physical eyes are barely open. Often, we glance at our watches to see if our time is up, as though we have been sentenced to some kind of study hall in school, and the minute we have put in our time, we're out of here. Then we wonder why there seems to be no power as we leave the quiet place for the marketplace. There is no power, because though our bodies were there, our souls never made it to the Throne.

Have you ever read the Psalms and looked for how many times the Psalmist said that he called on the Lord, and *then cried to the Lord?* This is not just a reflection of emotions, but a testimony of the depth of his despair. He was at a place, both with his sins and with his condition, that unless God intervened, He saw no way out. So he cried unto the Lord. Listen to just a few of them:

I cried unto the LORD with my voice, and he heard me  
out of his holy hill. Selah (Psalm 3:4)

This poor man cried, and the LORD heard him, and saved  
him out of all his troubles. (Psalm 34:6)

I cried unto God with my voice, even unto God with my  
voice; and he gave ear unto me. (Psalm 77:1)

O LORD God of my salvation, I have cried day and night  
before thee: (Psalm 88:1)

Then they cried unto the LORD in their trouble, and he

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delivered them out of their distresses. (Psalm 107:6)

Then they cried unto the LORD in their trouble, and he saved them out of their distresses. (Psalm 107:13)

I cried with my whole heart; hear me, O LORD: and I will keep thy statutes. (Psalm 119:145)

I cried unto thee; save me, and I shall keep thy testimonies. (Psalm 119:146)

In my distress I cried unto the LORD, and he heard me. (Psalm 120:1)

Out of the depths have I cried unto thee, O LORD. (Psalm 130:1)

In the day when I cried thou answeredst me, and strengthenedst me with strength in my soul. (Psalm 138:3)

I cried unto the LORD with my voice; with my voice unto the LORD did I make my supplication. (Psalm 142:1)

Perhaps my favorite passage in the Psalms is Psalm 18, where the Psalmist cried out and then described God's response:

In my distress I called upon the LORD, and cried unto my God: he heard my voice out of his temple, and my cry came before him, even into his ears.

Then the earth shook and trembled; the foundations also of the hills moved and were shaken, because he was wroth.

There went up a smoke out of his nostrils, and fire out of his mouth devoured: coals were kindled by it.

He bowed the heavens also, and came down: and darkness was under his feet. (Psalms 18:6-9)

The LORD also thundered in the heavens, and the Highest gave his voice; hail stones and coals of fire. (Psalms 18:13)

He sent from above, he took me, he drew me out of many waters. (Psalms 18:16)

He brought me forth also into a large place; he delivered me, because he delighted in me. (Psalms 18:19)

That Hebrew word, "cried," means to proclaim or call out because there is a great need. It is more than simply the acknowledgment; it is a personalization of that need,

followed by a deep expression of despair. It is a calling out for relief or for answers. It is as though you were trapped in the ocean, sinking, and you saw a boat that could rescue you. You wouldn't softly whisper, "Hey, you, how would you like to help me?"

It would be a cry of desperation. "Help me or I perish!" We, in our generation, have perhaps lost the concept of crying out to God, not just over our circumstantial deep waters, but over our sins. We don't see sin as God does, so we don't cry out for mercy, as God expects. When we are in deep trouble, circumstantially, sometimes we do cry out like that, and most of us will testify that it is in those times that God seems to rush to our rescue. The children of Israel had the same problem. It was only when life's brooks dried up and life's storms were raging that they cried out to God, but *when they did*, the miracles occurred. But how seldom are we that *desperate over our sins*. We need to learn to respond as David did when he finally was confronted over what he had done. He responded, "I have sinned against the Lord." Over and over throughout the Psalms, David, who had learned the gravity of what his sins did to the heart of God, prayed, "I cried unto the Lord."

To cry unto the Lord does not mean you work yourself up into an emotional state. It means that you stay before God until you see sin as He does, and when you do, *you will cry out for two reasons*:

**1- You will cry out because your grief is overwhelming.** You have broken the heart of the one who died for you.

**2- You will cry out because you know that only the grace of God can enable you to overcome that sin and have victory.** You are tired of trying in your own energy, and you are crying out for His enabling power to allow you to do supernaturally what you cannot do naturally: have victory.

### **The Power of His Presence**

Our challenge, then, is to come to see sin as God does and to make a decision to do something about it. The problem is, however, two-fold.

1- Most of us do not consistently spend enough time in the presence of God to see sin as He does.

2- We tend to forget that if we really want to be convicted of sin, we need to ask God for the grace of holiness to capture our hearts. We, in ourselves, have programmed our spirits to become increasingly insensitive to sin. That is what the natural man does. And because the heart is deceitful and desperately wicked, we don't realize we've done it; in fact, we tend to believe that we are becoming progressively more spiritual because other people think we are.

The cure is very simple. In fact, it is so simple we miss it. Revival comes because people pray. *Really* pray. Lives are changed because people pray. *Really* pray. When people *really* pray, they spend quality time in the presence of God until their hearts are one with His. That is, in effect, a definition of prayer. Prayer is not giving God a laundry list of things you want. Prayer is approaching the throne of grace with such awe that all you want is what God wants, and you want to stay there *until you know what He wants*.

Prayer is the process of fellowshiping with God until your heart and His beat as one. It is not a casual experience; it is spiritual warfare. It is not designed to make you feel good. On the contrary, it is designed to take you and break you so God can remake you, and that requires anguish and pain. There is a lie that Satan has successfully sold to the Christian community that says that prayer is an emotional experience designed to make the Christian happy. Prayer is even described as an experience. If certain things happen or certain feelings occur, we have prayed. If not, we have only tried to pray. So Christians begin to try to work up in their own energy an emotional atmosphere conducive to reproducing certain feelings, so they can be happy about their "experience" of prayer.

Prayer is not an experience; it is a relationship. It is two people coming together; one of them being God, the purpose of which is for the worshipper to so take on the mind of the one worshipped that all he wants is to become like the One worshipped. Our supplications or requests only become the outgrowth of our wanting His will to be done in our lives and in the lives of those for whom we pray. We are not trying to tell God how to run His universe or twist His arm into doing for us or for someone else what we think His will ought to be.

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If we are really praying, we are being bathed in His Word and adoring Him for who He is, until all we desire for those for whom we intercede is that His precious will be done. We have requests that we believe are His will based on the Spirit's leading. We have desires that, if it be possible, we want to be His will. But having spent enough time before Him and adoring Him, the last thing we want is for our will to be done, rather than His. So like Jesus, we tell Him what we desire, but humbly and sincerely add, "Nevertheless, thy will be done."

When it comes to our sin, *we know His will*. It is for us to repent and be changed. But we don't have the ability to be changed apart from some kind of divine intervention. We know we have the Holy Spirit in us, but somehow we keep quenching The Spirit and sin continues to abound, often besetting sin that repeats itself until we come to mistakenly believe that either God can't help us, or we can't let Him.

That, Beloved, is when we cry out to God. He knows we can't do it, but He also knows that, in eternity past, He created something called "grace" because we couldn't. So He is simply waiting for us to become so disgusted with that sin and so grieved over that sin that we cry out in despair, "Lord, whatever it takes, take it away. Give me the power, supernaturally, to do what I cannot do naturally."

Then you name that sin. Not in vague, general terms. We love to do that. "Lord forgive me for my bad attitude," we pray. That is avoiding the issue. It ought to be, "Lord, I screamed at Beth again today, please forgive me for my anger and insensitivity. Unless you change my heart by grace, I am hopeless and helpless. I cry out for you to enable me to be changed." Or "Lord, I am still letting my mind run wild, reliving over and over what my boss did and said today. It is because I refuse to see his authority as yours. Please forgive me. Lord, only you can teach me to submit. I plead for grace. Amen."

Get specific. Then write down what you asked God to do. Why? So you won't take it lightly or take it presumptuously when He does it and forget to thank Him. Don't be afraid to be honest with God. He knows all about you. He heard that word on your tongue before you spoke it; in fact, he heard

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the words you never spoke, but wanted to. If they were not exactly what Jesus in you would have thought or said, ask Him to forgive you and ask Him to give you the grace not to want to again. You can't do it in your own power. You've tried. I've tried. We're not naturally holy, but God is. And He now lives in your heart and in mine, and He longs to release the grace we need to become holy, in ever increasing splendor from one degree of glory to another.

The key is asking and knowing what to ask for, and in order to do that, you have to spend time with Him. Lots of time. Quality time. Precious time. Sometimes painful time. Remember, this is war. Satan will do everything he can to keep you off your knees, and if he can't do that, he'll do anything he can to make you think you're a god, and that you can tell God what He can and can't do. That's the lie he pitched to Eve, and she bought it. He's given us the same story, and we keep buying it, too.

You may be saying, "But I don't know if I really want to go that deep. What if it means... Oh, no, Lord, I'm not ready for that." Then just tell God that. Tell Him to increase your faith; but don't back down on seeking what God wants for you. Ask God for the grace of faith. He'll give it to you. Whenever you can't, He will. Whenever you cry, He listens. Whenever you humble yourself, He sends you enabling power that will do exceeding abundantly above all that you ask or think.

No, you can't do it. Yes, you've tried and failed. Praise God. Those two statements prepare you for the greatest adventure of your life: the adventure of grace. It is the process by which you stop trying to do what only God can do and cry out for Him to do it. He is willing. The question is, are we?

This week *could be* one of the most important of your life. It could be the week in which you and God do business about what the rest of your life is going to be like. It could be the time in which you make a decision that, *whatever it takes*, you want to become holy; progressively separated from sin, progressively more intimate in your fellowship with God. It could be the week you drive a stake in the ground and say, "This is it. No turning back." It could be the week you create a remembrance of that decision so the seed-snatcher cannot steal it from you.

It could be the week you and God begin a long pilgrimage of time alone together, and it could be the week you begin to cry out to God for the grace to become the holy man or woman that, in Christ, you already are. It could be. Or it could be... Just another week.



## Chapter 9

# Agape Grace: A New Commandment

Jenny is obnoxious, to say the least. Every word she says grates on your nerves. She represents to you everything that you consider objectionable. She has no friends. She is terribly insecure, and she masks her insecurity with insensitive behavior. When she walks into a room, both you and your friends immediately eye the exits. She is very difficult to love.

Mark is an ingrate. The more you do for him, the less he seems to appreciate it. He was raised with a silver spoon in his mouth, and his acquaintances seem to wish he'd choked on it. He always has to have the last word, but when he does, it never seems to be significant. He uses people to get what he wants, then dumps them like disposable discards. If you were to have a meeting of the people who say they love Mark, you could schedule it in a phone booth and have room left over.

Jean and Sam are a difficult couple to work with. They pretend to have all the answers spiritually, but are inwardly a pair of walking time bombs. They want to be in charge, but are not yet in charge of their own lives. They have the spiritual vocabulary down to a science, but the meaning of the words has, in many cases, not made its way into the every day world in which they live, and the people who live with them and work with them use them as examples of why Christianity doesn't work. No one wants to invite them over. Does anyone love them? Maybe their parents.

Frieda is a difficult wife, and she seems to have as her goal in life to make her husband's life impossible. She berates him at every turn. He doesn't make enough money to suit her; he doesn't spend enough time with the kids to suit her; he isn't spiritual enough to suit her. Even though

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he seems to be doing everything he can to grow spiritually and to support her, she can't find enough things to belittle him for. Does he love her? He wants to, but in reality, he's hanging on for dear life.

What do all these people have in common? Several things:

- 1- They are all people for whom Christ died.
- 2- They are, by human standards, difficult, if not impossible, to love.
- 3- They are all people you and I are *commanded* by God to love.

And it is that strange paradox that we are going to explore as we look at the miracle of agape grace. It always brings about two questions:

- 1- How can God command us to love someone?
- 2- What if I've tried, *and I just don't feel any love for them?*

This is the paradox that Satan has keyed on to bring about the demise of the family, and this is the paradox that the church has allowed to confuse both its definition and its mission where love is concerned. Love has been redefined by the enemy and taken to one of two opposite extremes by the church until the true issue of love and grace and where the two collide in the heart of God is no longer clear.

We need to ask God for the grace to understand and appropriate His love in precisely the way he intended. To do that, we must begin at the beginning and review just what that love is, how it is to be expressed, and how we are to appropriate something we cannot seem to feel.

It isn't difficult to see that Jesus came to earth to demonstrate the love of God. It also isn't difficult to see that He seemed to devote the bulk of His time to loving those society deemed "unlovable." He went to the poor, the downcast, the lame, the leper, the prisoner. He loved a thief on a cross enough to usher him into paradise. He loved a lame man by the pool of Bethesda enough to heal him and set him free. He loved a demented man—a man you and I would have run from—enough to cast out the demons that made him the laughingstock of society. He chose out the twelve and demonstrated the love of God to them. They were

common fishermen, tax-collectors and the like. Those who weren't looked down upon for their status in society were often simply considered castoffs or unimportant in the grand scheme of things.

Christ's very imprint on planet earth was marked by the footprints of a man who laid aside His robes of royalty and became a slave to demonstrate the way love was supposed to work. Yet, even as He spoke the words and lived the life, those closest to Him seemed to miss the impact of it all. They knew that this love He spoke of was something new—something more overpowering than anything they had experienced before — and yet it was more than their minds could comprehend.

Ah, but then came Calvary. Then came that moment in time when God died so man could live. Then came that instant in history when the veil of the temple was torn asunder and the way to the Father was open to all who would come by way of the Son. Then those incredible words came back to haunt them;

God so loved the world, that he gave... (John 3:16)

Suddenly, the pieces began to fit together. God loved. God gave Himself away—totally. He gave the best He had for the least deserving with no expectation of personal gain. It was called grace. God's riches at Christ's expense. God took His own nature and imputed it to fallen man by paying the total price for his salvation. Man was guilty as charged. The Righteous Judge issued the sentence.

And as it is appointed unto man once to die, but after this, the judgment. (Hebrews 9:27)

For all have sinned and come short of the glory of God; (Romans 3:23)

The verdict was in. Now for the sentencing stage of the trial. And here came the shocker. The judge stepped down, took off His robes, laid them aside, and said, "I'll serve his sentence. I'll serve her sentence. Set them free. The sentence is death by crucifixion, and I will go to that Cross in their place. Then they will understand My grace."

So He did, and you and I, because *He did*, now stand in His presence faultless, holy, and without blemish. We

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cannot be tried again. The trial is over. The verdict is in. The price has been paid. We are no longer under the cloud of sin's dread stain. We are redeemed. We are free. And it is all because of His love.

Love. What an unusual word. It is the essence of God's being. God, remember, does not simply possess love. God *is love*. That means that everything God does issues forth from what He is, and since He is love, everything He does and says is a reflection of His love. We have already looked at the two-fold expression of that love to man: His mercy which withholds from man the punishment he deserves, and His grace which gives to man the blessings he does not deserve.

There is, you remember, more than one Greek word translated "love" in Scripture. The one we are interested in, however, is that one word, "agape". It is the word that defines God's nature, and only a Christian can possess it. For unless and until the Holy Spirit inhabits a man or woman, that man or woman cannot possess the attributes of God. But, as a Christian, God not only allows you to love as He loves, He literally commands you to do so. Once again, however, we find ourselves struggling, for so often, *the very people we are told to love are the people we don't want to love, don't feel any love for, and have tried to love and couldn't*.

We know God isn't playing tricks on us. He doesn't do that. He cannot be tempted by sin, neither does He tempt any man. So if God tells us to love someone, it means that it is not only possible, it is essential. Now, who has God told us to love?

You are to love your neighbor with the same intensity and duration and patience of love that you have for yourself.

And thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind, and with all thy strength: this is the first commandment.

And the second is like, namely this, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself. There is none other commandment greater than these. (Mark 12:30,31)

That word "neighbor" is the key. This is what the concordance says it means:

*πλεσιον – plesion {play-see'-on} – a neighbour;*

*a) a friend*

*b) any other person, and where two are concerned, the other according to the Jews, any member of the Hebrew nation and commonwealth*

*c) according to Christ, any other man irrespective of nation or religion with whom we live or whom we chance to meet*

What that means is that God expects us, as believers, to demonstrate His love to everyone we meet, not just those who deserve it, not simply those who return it, and not only those who are loveable. In fact, we will see that the less loveable they are, the more we are to love them, because the less loveable they are, the more grace is required; and the more grace, the more glory to God. No, we are to love every single person God sends across our path with exactly the same love God has for us; and to put it in terms we can understand, we are to be willing to give to them anything we would take for ourselves.

Think about what that means. That means that if, in a given situation, you would excuse yourself for certain behavior, you are to forgive the most unappealing person you know for the same thing. Otherwise, you are not loving them as much as you love yourself. If you think you deserve something based on your worth or your works, be careful. You must impute to everyone you meet a similar standard that leaves room for similar boundaries. Loving your neighbor is something we dismiss because we've heard it so many times, but we are missing the very essence of the Christian faith if we do not understand the gravity of failing to love anyone God sends across our path.

You say, "Well, God may have meant that, but surely He doesn't expect us to take it literally." Oh, really? Then why did He say to us,

There is none other commandment greater than these?  
(Mark 12:31b)

We need to know why He said that loving our neighbor as ourselves (or literally loving everyone we meet as much as we love ourselves) could be likened (in importance) to loving God with all our heart, soul, mind and strength.

You may be thinking, "But I don't love that clerk behind

the counter at the drug store who was rude to me yesterday. I was in a hurry, and he refused to listen to my demands and made me wait when I was in a hurry.” Okay. Have you ever been rude to anyone? Have you ever refused to listen to someone, maybe someone who was demanding his way? Have you ever made anyone wait? You say, “Well, that was different.” Oh, really? I don’t think so. If you were willing to forgive yourself or give yourself that much latitude, *you owe that latitude to them*. You may say, “Okay, I was rude to two people yesterday, but I had a headache.” Then, you’re saying a headache justifies rudeness if you are the headache-ee. Right? How do you know what was going on in that clerk’s life? Maybe his wife left him. Maybe his child is sick. Maybe he had a headache. And maybe he’s not a Christian. How is he going to see the love of Christ in you if you can’t overlook his rudeness and return his rudeness with love? Remember:

Love suffereth long, and is kind; love envieth not; love vaunteth not itself, is not puffed up,

Doth not behave itself unseemly, seeketh not her own, is not easily provoked, thinketh no evil;

(I Corinthians 13:4,5)

Now, suppose you did not demonstrate the love of Christ to that rude druggist. What should you do?

**1- You should confess it to God as sin and ask Him to let you see it as He does.** Clearly define both what you did and the attitude in your heart as you did it. Maybe you didn’t say what you were thinking, but your thoughts were angry enough to start a fire. That’s what God saw and heard: *your thoughts*. Confess it and see it as God does. That person needed to see the love of Christ in you. God allowed him to treat you despicably (or so you thought) in order to test your ability to appropriate the grace of love. You blocked the flow of grace by not allowing His love to flow through you in response to the test. You missed an opportunity to see God in you love a seemingly unlovable person, and you missed an opportunity to watch someone see Jesus in the process. That, Beloved, is a grievous offense. You have justified it based on the fact that he deserved it. God is not concerned with your judgment. You are to “judge not, lest you be judged.” You’re not the judge; He is, and He told you to love that druggist.

**2- You should ask God if He wants you to make**

**restitution or ask forgiveness.** Often He won't. Sometimes He will. He may want you simply to go back and say to that druggist, "Yesterday when I was here, I snapped back at you because I was in a hurry. I am a Christian, and that is not what God would have me do. Would you forgive me?" After he drops a few bottles of penicillin in disbelief, he may respond in several ways. How he responds is not your problem. That you obeyed God is your responsibility. If he didn't know you were rude, and the problem was all in your heart, then maybe all you need to do is tell God, but stay in God's presence until you know.

You're probably thinking, "Then I'll stay in God's presence all day." Now you're getting it. That's not a bad place to be, and you will be allowing yourself to be learning how to become increasingly holy by becoming increasingly sensitive to sin. If God has you go back and apologize to that druggist, chances are you will have a red flag go up before you lash back at someone the next time. That may be the only reason God sends you back. He knows what He's doing.

The general rule that serves as a foundation for all of God's other commandments on love is this: You are to love everyone you meet as God does; and you are to forgive them anything you expect God to forgive you of. That covers a lot of territory. To do anything less is to violate a commandment that God said is the most important of all the commandments He ever gave. Then, to make His point, God got specific so we wouldn't justify our misbehavior and eliminate the very people who need your love the most. Next He said this:

**3- You are to especially love your enemies.** In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus got this specific:

Ye have heard that it hath been said, Thou shalt love thy neighbour, and hate thine enemy.

But I say unto you, Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which despitefully use you, and persecute you;

That ye may be the children of your Father which is in heaven: for he maketh his sun to rise on the evil and on the good, and sendeth rain on the just and on the unjust.

For if ye love them which love you, what reward have ye? do not even the publicans the same?

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And if ye salute your brethren only, what do ye more than others? do not even the publicans so?

Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect. (Matthew 5:43-48)

Uh-oh. You were ready to give in on the druggist, but what about your sister-in-law? She never liked you. When your husband's mother died, she came after you like a barracuda. She has told lies about you, tried to turn your husband against you, and spread rumors about you to tarnish your reputation. She looks for ways to hurt you. She isn't even civil to you. When no one is around, you spend hours fantasizing about how you could get even with her. You pray for her, but you basically are praying that God will see that she gets hers. You delight every time you hear that one of her children is in trouble or her husband is angry with her, even though you know that Scripture says that love:

Rejoiceth not in iniquity, but rejoiceth in the truth;

Beareth all things, believeth all things, hopeth all things, endureth all things. (I Corinthians 13:6,7)

Not only are you to love her, you are to bless her, do good things for her, and pray for her welfare, not for her punishment. You may be saying, "But she doesn't love me." True. But if you only love those who love you, what kind of big deal is that? Even unbelievers do that. That's what Jesus said in verse 46 of Matthew 5. If you only love other believers, how are you any different than they are? That's what verse 47 says. No, you are to love as God loves, because God lives in you. As He prayed, "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do" (Luke 23:34), He sent shock waves into our spirits by demonstrating how God acts when He is misused, abused, and refused. He loves. Otherwise, Beloved, you would still be lost and on your way to hell, because that's the way you treated Him before you became a Christian, and maybe since. And you expect Him to keep on loving you. You gleefully quote, "What can separate us from the love of God? Not tribulation or famine or peril or the sword." (see Romans 8:35) Nothing. Then what should separate your sister-in-law from the love of Christ in you?

What does it mean to "bless" someone? The concordance says it this way:



Agape Grace: A New Commandment

εὐλογεῖω (2127) *eulogeo* {yoo-log-eh'-o}

1a) *to praise, celebrate with praises*

2b) *to invoke blessings*

3c) *to consecrate a thing with solemn prayers*

a) *to ask God's blessing on a thing*

b) *pray God to bless it to one's use*

c) *pronounce a consecratory blessing on*

4d) *of God*

a) *to cause to prosper, to make happy, to bestow blessings on*

b) *favoured of God, blessed*

It means that you ask God to cause that person to prosper, to be favored, to be blessed with God's presence and exposed to God's love. That's what it means. If you "bless" someone, you are expected to be willing to be a part of the blessing. The same word is used to describe what Jesus did for us:

Unto you first God, having raised up his Son Jesus, sent him to bless you, in turning away every one of you from his iniquities. (Acts 3:26)

In James, chapter three, we get a specific use of the word and a description of the hypocrisy we expose in ourselves when we pretend to be praising God while lashing out at people:

But the tongue can no man tame; it is an unruly evil, full of deadly poison.

Therewith bless we God, even the Father; and therewith curse we men, which are made after the similitude of God.

Out of the same mouth proceedeth blessing and cursing. My brethren, these things ought not so to be.

Doth a fountain send forth at the same place sweet water and bitter?

Can the fig tree, my brethren, bear olive berries? either a vine, figs? so can no fountain both yield salt water and fresh. (James 3:8-12)

You can have a wonderful Quiet Time and sing praises to God, then leave the house and lash out at someone else, be it that rude druggist, your sister-in-law, or just some insensitive clod who pulled out in front of you on the interstate. God is

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saying that you are a fool and a hypocrite. God made that druggist for you to love. When you curse him or rail at him, even in your heart, you are, in effect, railing at God. It's the same mouth. It's the same heart. It's the same fountain, and you won't get sweet and bitter water out of the same source any more than a fig tree can bear figs and then olives. How you treat that druggist is really how you are treating God, no matter what you said in your Quiet Time.

One more specific commandment, and we will try to draw some conclusions. That commandment is this:

**4- Husbands are to love their wives as Christ loved the church and are not to become bitter, no matter what they do.**

Scripture says it this way:

Husbands, love your wives, even as Christ also loved the church, and gave himself for it;

That he might sanctify and cleanse it with the washing of water by the word,

That he might present it to himself a glorious church, not having spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing; but that it should be holy and without blemish.

So ought men to love their wives as their own bodies. He that loveth his wife loveth himself.

For no man ever yet hated his own flesh; but nourisheth and cherisheth it, even as the Lord the church:

For we are members of his body, of his flesh, and of his bones.

For this cause shall a man leave his father and mother, and shall be joined unto his wife, and they two shall be one flesh.

This is a great mystery: but I speak concerning Christ and the church.

Nevertheless let every one of you in particular so love his wife even as himself; and the wife see that she reverence her husband.

(Ephesians 5:25-33)

Husbands, love your wives, and be not bitter against them.

(Colossians 3:19)

There is a different commandment for the wife, and we will get to that at a later time, but this one is specifically

for the husband. He plays the role of Christ in the drama of eternity being acted out on the stage of life for the purpose of demonstrating how God loves unconditionally. And we love the fact that He does. He gives and gives, and he forgives and forgives. Again, we have that key definition of love: “He loved the church *and gave Himself for it.*”

That is the definition of love: God giving Himself away without regard for the worth or response of the recipient. Love expressed is mercy and grace. Forgiving and giving. And the reason we are to love our wives like that is because Christ loves us like that. And once again, the very treatment we expect from God we owe to them. Our purpose is the same as His: to nurture our wives in such a way that they respond to our love and become increasingly holy. And if they don't? We keep on loving them just the same, (in fact love them more) just as God does us.

You say, “But it's a two way street. I'll love her when she loves me.” No, my friend, you are the initiator; she is the responder. You play the role of Christ; she plays the role of the church. You love her whether she loves you or not. You honor her whether you think she is worthy of honor or not, *or your prayer life will reflect it.*

Likewise, ye husbands, dwell with them according to knowledge, giving honour unto the wife, as unto the weaker vessel, and as being heirs together of the grace of life; that your prayers be not hindered.

(I Peter 3:7)

Your job, husband, is to love your wife, *no matter what*, because as you do, you are demonstrating the incredible grace of love to a wife, a family, and a world who doesn't deserve it. But then you didn't deserve God's love. While you were yet in sin, He died for you. (see Titus 3:5) It was not by works of righteousness which you had done, *but according to His mercy, remember?*

I know. You've tried. And tried. And tried. You're about to give up. Good idea. Give up. Then let God fill your heart with agape grace. Let Him do through you supernaturally what you cannot do naturally. He will, if you spend time in His presence asking Him to. Then when He begins to let the grace flow, don't step in and quench the Spirit. You can love her like that. You can love your enemies like that. You

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can love your druggist like that. You can love your sister-in-law like that. You can. No, I take that back. You must. It is a commandment. In fact, it is a part of the greatest commandment of all commandments.

Jesus reinforced it in these verses:

A new commandment I give unto you, That ye love one another; as I have loved you, that ye also love one another. (John 13:34)

These things I command you, that ye love one another. (John 15:17)

A new commandment. That's what it was. It was a commandment that was now possible because God was going to make it possible. Grace would move in and give man the same incredible capacity to love on this earth that Christ had when He walked this earth. It was a love so encompassing that no one was excluded. God so loved the world. It was a love so deep it would reach to the needs of the most unlovable and the most needy. He would touch lepers, outcasts, prisoners. He would reach out and touch the aged, the handicapped, the lonely, the grieving.

"As I have loved you," He added, "You are commanded to love one another." Don't push that one under the carpet. Don't downplay it as a generalization that isn't possible in this age. It is not only possible, it is essential. It is a commandment. It is an absolute. But Jesus didn't stop there. The next verse says this:

By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one to another. (John 13:35)

It doesn't say they will know you are a Christian by what church you attend, by how many bumper stickers such as "Honk if you love Jesus" you have on your car, by whether or not you say grace in a crowded restaurant, by how you dress or what Bible you carry. It says *they will know you are a disciple of Jesus Christ, using one criteria: the quality of agape love you demonstrate.*

By this shall *all men know*. It will be a universal sign of your discipleship. If you memorize 14 verses a day, carry a Bible under each arm, attend 12 Bible studies a week, teach Sunday School three Sundays a month and still can't love the rude druggist or your obnoxious sister-in-law or your

less than perfect wife, the world is not going to know that Jesus Christ lives in you.

You want them to know? Then let God's agape love flow through you as His incredible grace frees you to love people the way Jesus does. Anything less than that won't cut it. Not only is it His proof to a lost world, it is His assurance to your own heart.

For this is the message that ye heard from the beginning,  
that we should love one another.

We know that we have passed from death unto life,  
because we love the brethren. He that loveth not his  
brother abideth in death. (I John 3:11,14)

This thing of loving one another is not just an add-on in the Christian life. It is the proof of our relationship with God, both to our own hearts and to a searching world. If we do not love one another, we are not manifesting the evidences of a Christ-inhabited life. To John, it was a valid reason to question your salvation.

"Okay," you say, "Love is crucial, and love is a commandment. I can accept those two principles. But I have tried to love my sister-in-law, and I have tried loving rude clerks, or I have tried loving an unresponsive wife, and I just can't do it."

Correct. You can't. And don't ever for one minute think you can. Which, of course, means that one of three things is true, and with this we go back to the premise of this series of studies.

1- Either God didn't mean it when He said that we are to love one another as Christ loved us, or

2- God meant it, but knew we couldn't do it and just wanted to tease us a little, or

3- God meant it, but never intended for us to do it.

He intended for us to fall down before a loving God and ask for agape grace to flood our souls and for Him to supernaturally give us the power, minute by minute, day by day, to do what we cannot do naturally: love the unlovable. We are to love those who do not love us back, love those who do not appreciate our love, love those nobody else loves.

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I think you know where we are heading. Love is a gift. It was given to us when Christ came into our lives, and only His indwelling Spirit in us can love through us with agape love. But, Beloved, *He commanded us to let it happen*. The choice is ours. The power is His. The responsibility to ask is ours. The responsibility to love is His. It is all of grace. We don't deserve it. We can't earn it. We can't pay Him back for it, but *we can experience it*.

He demands it, not simply for our benefit; it is the hallmark of the church by divine decree, and it is by virtue of this love that all men will know that we are His disciples. The ability to love is God's ability, not ours; but it is our availability that allows it to flow.

Scripture is clear:

The love of God is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Ghost which is given unto us. (Romans 5:5b)

But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, (Galatians 5:22)

And the Lord direct your hearts into the love of God, and into the patient waiting for Christ.

(II Thessalonians 3:5)

It is a gift. The Holy Spirit broadcasts the love of God in our hearts. It is a fruit produced by Him, not by us. The Lord will direct our hearts into His love as we patiently allow it to happen. Paul's prayers were focused on that one thing:

That he would grant you, according to the riches of his glory, to be strengthened with might by his Spirit in the inner man;

That Christ may dwell in your hearts by faith; that ye, being rooted and grounded in love,

May be able to comprehend with all saints what is the breadth, and length, and depth, and height;

And to know the love of Christ, which passeth knowledge, that ye might be filled with all the fullness of God.

(Ephesians 3:16-19)

Is that how you pray for others? Is that how you pray for yourself? Is that how you want others to pray for you? That Christ might be so at home in your heart that His love will permeate your every thought, your every word, your every response? The Christian life is not a journey through

a doctrinal treatise. It is a glorious walk through the real world, watching God in you love people you cannot love with a love you cannot have apart from Him. It is a series of love-related miracles, in which you watch a holy God love unholy people through the unholiest of vessels, your life. And as you do, you stand amazed that not only could He use you, but that He could so much as love you.

The key is understanding grace. The key is coming to the end of yourself and realizing that unless something supernatural happens, you'll never have the quality marriage God wants you to have; you'll never have the kind of responses God intends you to give; you'll never have the capacity to be compassionate that God in you wants to display; and thus the world, *looking at you, may never know that you are His disciple.*

But, by *grace*, they'll know. If you become convinced that, biblically, that's what God expects: that His commandment has not been revoked, but that apart from Him you are impotent to make it happen, you can then begin to appropriate the ability to love as He loves. You can cry out in desperation for the supernatural capacity to demonstrate agape love and watch God's miracles begin to flow.

Get alone with God and *ask Him for agape grace*. Admit to him how helpless you are apart from Him. Name the people you know you need to love, but can't. Confess your thoughts and your responses that violate His love. Ask Him to cleanse you. Meditate on John 13:34,35 and Mark 12:30,31 and I Corinthians 13. Spend time worshipping Him for the love He revealed at Calvary. Then, cry out and ask Him to send you people to love that only HE, in you, can love.

Then, Beloved, hold on to your hat. The doors will open and there will walk into your life people you've never been able to love; and your path will cross that of people who've never really been loved, and at that moment, you will need to claim His promise of agape grace. You will need to cry out: "God, love them through me."

Then, be prepared to see a miracle unfold before your eyes. You will find yourself loving with the very same love with which Christ loves you, but you'll take no credit for it. It won't be you. It will be all of grace. God will be giving His life

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away, and your life will be the vessel He's using.

Now, that's amazing. Amazing grace, indeed.

AMAZING GRACE

Amazing grace, how sweet it is!  
A gift from God above  
That fills us with His precious power,  
And fills us with his love.

It takes our selfish, sinful hearts  
And if, by grace, we pray,  
Allows His love to flow through us  
And give that love away.

Amazing grace and nothing else  
As at His feet we fall,  
Can love through us the very ones  
We naught would love at all.

Amazing grace, dear God, I pray  
I'll set your Spirit free  
To love my neighbor as myself,  
That they see Christ in me.



## Chapter 10

# Agape Grace: The Recipients

It was a cold and dreary night. The wind was whistling through the trees with such force that it seemed as though the very trunks of those giant old oaks were shaking in disbelief. A cold, steady drizzle seemed to be covering the horizon with a cloak of uncertainty, leaving sidewalks damp and streets dangerous.

As the temperature hovered near the freezing mark, the rain was soon to turn to ice. John and Katherine braced for the wintry blast as they emerged from their evening of delightful dining at the Fairview Hotel. It had been a night to remember. Not only was it their tenth anniversary, it was their celebration of John's promotion at work. From director of marketing to CEO was hardly a minor shift in responsibilities. It was a quantum leap to the top of the heap, and not even such inclement weather could dampen his enthusiasm.

As they rounded the corner towards the parking garage that adjoined his corporate headquarters, he suddenly stepped back. He saw some movement in the bushes just ahead. Grabbing Katherine, he lunged backwards, fearing that someone was lying in wait to rob them. She was, after all, wearing her new mink stole, and he was wearing his \$1,000.00 Rolex watch. In today's world, you almost expect to be robbed.

A figure emerged from the bushes. John saw no gun, but bolted nonetheless and began to shout, "Police, police!" His would-be attacker slouched to the ground in disbelief. "Oh, sir," he said, seemingly about to cry, "I mean you no harm. I am homeless, and it is so cold. I was wondering if you could spare me even so much as the cost of a cup of warm coffee.

The homeless shelter is full tonight, and I am so very cold.”

Katherine was shaking, but not from the cold. Scenes of her husband lying dead on the sidewalk were playing in the theater of her mind. John, however, seemed suddenly at ease and unafraid. “Katherine,” he responded, “This man is our Jesus.” Kathy flinched as though her husband’s newfound corporate authority had caused a sudden failure of the brain’s most basic functions.

“Don’t you remember?” John went on. “Last Sunday. The message on love. The message on meeting the needs of *the least of these*? This man could be Jesus. We asked God to send our way *the least of these*.” With that, the new chairman of Ryan Industries reached out his hand to the shivering, dirty, homeless man who was still crouched in the bushes, and said, “Come inside my office where it’s warm, and I’ll give you some coffee and a snack from the snack machine. Then my wife and I will drive you to a motel and see that you have a warm bed to sleep in. You call me tomorrow, and I’ll see if I can help you find a job and a place to stay permanently. God loves you, my friend,” John added, now beaming with excitement, “And we love you, too.”

The man began to cry. “No one has ever said they loved me before,” he whispered, “No one. What do you mean I might be Jesus?” he went on. “I know so little about Jesus, but wasn’t He supposed to be God?” It was a night to remember. The man went inside, and indeed it was warmer there. But more than that, he received a kind of warmth that night he never knew before. He was accepted by someone who had no reason to accept him, and he met someone he had never met before: He met his His Savior, Jesus Christ.

His life was changed, to be sure. But more than that, John and Katherine’s lives were changed, too. They took God at His word and experienced agape grace. They actually loved someone they would not have even been civil to a week ago.

It all started when they listened to a study of Matthew, chapter 25 and vowed to take it seriously. In case that passage is not immediately familiar, let’s read it again:

When the Son of man shall come in his glory, and all the holy angels with him, then shall he sit upon the throne of his glory:

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And before him shall be gathered all nations: and he shall separate them one from another, as a shepherd divideth his sheep from the goats:

And he shall set the sheep on his right hand, but the goats on the left.

Then shall the King say unto them on his right hand, Come, ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world:

For I was an hungred, and ye gave me meat: I was thirsty, and ye gave me drink: I was a stranger, and ye took me in:

Naked, and ye clothed me: I was sick, and ye visited me: I was in prison, and ye came unto me.

Then shall the righteous answer him, saying, Lord, when saw we thee an hungred, and fed thee? or thirsty, and gave thee drink?

When saw we thee a stranger, and took thee in? or naked, and clothed thee?

Or when saw we thee sick, or in prison, and came unto thee?

And the King shall answer and say unto them, Verily I say unto you, Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto me.

Then shall he say also unto them on the left hand, Depart from me, ye cursed, into everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels:

For I was an hungred, and ye gave me no meat: I was thirsty, and ye gave me no drink:

I was a stranger, and ye took me not in: naked, and ye clothed me not: sick, and in prison, and ye visited me not.

Then shall they also answer him, saying, Lord, when saw we thee an hungred, or athirst, or a stranger, or naked, or sick, or in prison, and did not minister unto thee?

Then shall he answer them, saying, Verily I say unto you, Inasmuch as ye did it not to one of the least of these, ye did it not to me.

And these shall go away into everlasting punishment: but the righteous into life eternal. (Matthew 25:31-46)

There are both kingdom issues and physical issues involved in this passage. There are both national judgments and personal warnings involved, as well. It is a theologically

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complex exhortation, and touches on nerve ends that run from the capitols of the world to the ghettos of your city and mine. Because of the complexity of it, it is easy to get so entangled in the theology of the passage that we miss the urgency of it and the personal challenges involved. It is there that the appropriation of God's amazing grace comes into play, and it is there that we will focus the light of God's Word, comparing Scripture with Scripture, and looking at this scathing rebuke of social unconcern by the church in the light of the rest of God's teachings on the subject. What God is asking us to do is not natural. Therefore, only His supernatural grace enabling us can make it happen.

There are six categories of people listed here:

- 1- Those who are hungry
- 2- Those who are thirsty
- 3- Those who are strangers
- 4- Those who are without clothing
- 5- Those who are sick
- 6- Those who are in prison

Notice one thing at the outset. There are no exceptions made based on whether or not they are hungry, thirsty or in prison by virtue of what they have done, or whether they are caught up in life's crises through no wrongdoing of their own. The categories are simply groups of people who are hurting, and who, without someone to show them mercy, will continue to suffer. There are also absolutely no geographical limitations listed either. The Scripture does not limit the hungry to those in your neighborhood, or even your city. The whole world is involved, and in today's global community, that means we are to have a whole different mindset concerning missions.

One thing that constantly emerges when this passage is studied is the reminder that there is no personal issue of salvation resting on whether or not a person relieves suffering. There is, however, a serious warning that meeting needs with agape love is, indeed, *proof of our salvation and proof that the church is in the will of God*. There is also strong indication that nations who fail to meet social needs are subject to divine judgement, particularly the needs of Christians or Jews. Conversely, those who have persecuted

either the Jew or Christians will obviously pay at the hand of God, for by so doing, they are persecuting God Himself. Again, the complexity of these issues will not allow us to take them apart and apply them nationally, but the personal application cries out for some serious soul-searching.

Let's first look at the six categories of people we are to show love to, and see who they are:

1- The hungry – The Greek word and its meaning are clear – πεινωω peinao {pi-nah'-o} – to hunger, be hungry

- a) to suffer want
- b) to be needy

It simply speaks of those who are suffering for want of food. They may be the homeless in your city who, for whatever reason, have no way to obtain daily meals, or it may be believers in Africa or Russia who are living on a few scraps of bread while we ponder whether to have a second dessert or not. If we see them going hungry and we have all we need or more than we need *compared to them, and do nothing about it, we are refusing to feed Jesus*. It is as though He had knocked on the door of our kitchen and asked us if we had anything we could spare for God to eat, and we said, “No, I think I'll keep it all for myself.” Conversely, if we see someone or hear of someone who is without enough food to sustain them, and we take some of what we have and offer it to them, it is the same as having seen Jesus walking down the street and offering Him from our storehouse. He takes it that personally.

2- The thirsty – διθαω dipsao {dip-sah'-o} – to suffer thirst, suffer from thirst

*a) figuratively, those who are said to thirst who painfully feel their want of, and eagerly long for, those things by which the soul is refreshed, supported, strengthened*

Hungering and thirsting in Scripture often have double meanings. Jesus spoke of “bread come down from heaven” and of “living water,” which would so satisfy your thirst that you would never need to drink of it again. Jesus spoke often of spiritual food and spiritual drink, and many times He used the physical as a portrait of the spiritual. This passage, however, speaks very clearly of the responsibility of the

believer and of the church to meet actual physical needs in order to open spiritual eyes, and it clearly says that by so doing, we actually are giving Jesus food and drink.

Thirsting is, perhaps, an even deeper need than hungering. It speaks of that which sustains life and allows one to go on to where he can find food. They are always separate issues, even when hungering and thirsting after righteousness is concerned.

3- The stranger – ξενος xenos {xen'-os}

- 1) a foreigner, a stranger
  - a) alien (from a person or a thing)
  - b) without the knowledge of, without a share in
  - c) new, unheard of
- 2) one who receives and entertains another hospitably
  - a) with whom he stays or lodges, a host

The word “stranger” used here is someone in need of a place to stay. It may be someone from another land who simply has no roots, or it may be someone, particularly a brother or sister in the faith, who is in need of lodging for a brief time. It has to do with one’s unselfishness with the home God has given them to use. Is it theirs? Or is God the owner of the establishment they call “home,” and is He free to be the gatekeeper who brings whoever He pleases into the realm of your hospitality?

Do you chafe over sharing your life and your lodging with others, particularly those who might not be socially or economically in your world? Then you are, according to this passage, asking Jesus to go somewhere else for the night. He’s experienced that before. The Son of man had no place to lay His head. There was no room for Him even to be born, except in a stable. He understands rejection, but it breaks His heart when His own are too preoccupied or too protective of their worldly goods which He, incidentally, allowed them to have to make them vulnerable to those whose needs might be greater than ours.

4- The naked – γυμνος *gumnos* {*goom-nos*} AV – *naked 14, bare 1; 15*

- 1) *properly*
  - a) unclad, without clothing, the naked body

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- b) ill clad
- c) clad in undergarments only (the outer garments or cloak being laid aside)
- d) of the soul, whose garment is the body, stripped of the body, without a body

These are the people who do not have adequate clothing to wear; be it adequate in the form of having nothing, or not having enough to keep warm, or not having adequate clothing to meet the social standards of the day. It could include the homeless on the street who only have enough clothing to cover themselves, but not enough to change into something clean or not enough to protect them when the currents of the weather blow the frigid blast of winter in their direction. It could also include those who live in a world that condemns them because they cannot be fashionable or acceptable because their clothing is not considered adequate for the role in life to which they've been called.

Mostly, however, this is referring to those who are virtually naked, who simply lack enough clothes to keep themselves clean and warm and acceptable. We cringe when we stop at a traffic light and someone comes up asking for help whose clothes are tattered and unkempt. We recoil when someone enters a mall or a restaurant or even our church whose clothing seems to indicate they are destitute. Instead of praying for them or offering to help them or at least inquiring about their welfare, we are more likely to look the other way, move to another table, or quietly pretend we didn't see them.

When we hear of thousands in other countries who are homeless or the victims of religious persecution or ethnic cleansing or political upheaval, at best we change channels, lest our consciences be pricked or our concern sensitized. When we see films of missionaries laboring among those who have been stripped of their dignity and their resources, we sigh and condemn the dictator or the government that caused it. Seldom is our first concern to see that the naked are clothed, and in so doing, their awareness of God's love heightened so they will listen to the good news that they have been covered eternally by the blood of Jesus Christ.

5- The sick – ασθενεω astheneo {as-then-eh'-o}

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- 1) to be weak, feeble, to be without strength, powerless
- 2) to be weak in means, needy, poor
- 3) to be feeble, sick

Next Jesus addresses those who have no strength, physically. They may be weak from sickness, from deformity, from hunger, from age, but they are unable to physically perform life's normal tasks. They need love, and they need help. They need to be visited, called, written to, and cared for. They need to be aware that their infirmity or their age is not reason to reject them, but it is all the more reason to love them and reach out to them. We live in a society where age is more and more becoming a mixed blessing. Thinking that life is here and now, society does whatever it can to keep people alive longer and longer, all the while relegating them to an institutional kind of existence, devoid of genuine compassion and meaningful lifestyle. They are the lepers of our day. We keep them at arms' length, but we keep them.

There are also the handicapped. We champion their causes, give them better parking places, bigger rest rooms, and better access to public buildings, all the while calling attention to their deficiencies, rather than seeing those deficiencies as a God-given opportunity for the body of Christ to function as it was meant to function. We vote for their causes and look the other way when they enter the hallowed halls of our churches. We patronize them. Jesus *touched them*. We think we are heroes for accepting them. Jesus loved them. Oh, how He loved them. Dear God, help us to return to an understanding of real agape grace.

6- The prisoners – φυλακε phulake {foo-lak-ay'} AV - prison 36, watch 6, imprisonment 2, hold 1, cage 1, ward 1;

It refers to the place where prisoners were kept. That New Testament word is:

δεσμιον – *desmios* {des'-mee-os} AV  
*prisoner 14, be in bonds 1, in bonds 1; 16*

*1) bound, in bonds, a captive, a prisoner*

In our generation, there are a few people and a few organizations who reach out and minister love to the incarcerated. A few. Praise God for them, but Jesus wasn't speaking here of an extracurricular ministry to be assigned to those who dared to step out and be different. He was



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speaking of the everyday responsibility of the local church and the average believer. It was to pray for, love, and reach out to the prisoner, for the one physically imprisoned was a great candidate to be set free in his or her spirit. And Beloved, this is true. Some of the greatest spiritual renewal going on in our generation is going on behind prison walls. Many around the world are in prison because of unjust persecution, often because of their faith in Christ. They are to be doubly loved. Still others are in prison because of wrong choices they have made, *yet they have cried out to God and been forgiven, and while they must often serve their sentences as part of the sowing and reaping, the church now has a special calling to feed them spiritually and reach out to them, knowing they are longing for an inner freedom that supersedes the bonds of prison walls.*

Throughout the United States, and it is true in most other countries as well, there are men and women who are in prison physically, but who have been set free spiritually, having come to grips with their own inabilities apart from God. Many have nothing but time, and they are filling that time with God. The “gray area” of Christianity does not exist in prison. You either stand with Christ or you stand with everyone else. It is a proving ground, and it is fertile ground for transformation. Yet we focus most of our energy either on lukewarm believers who fellowship with us or on those in far away lands, and we seldom feel a need to visit the prisons, write to prisoners, or send materials to prisoners to help them grow in the faith. Jesus says when we do this, “we fail to minister to Him.”

There are six categories of people that we, as believers, are *never to neglect*. If, however, you are justifying your position or the position of the church where these people are concerned, by spiritualizing this passage or nationalizing this passage, let’s go through the rest of Scripture and see just what God might be saying. Let’s do a walk through the Bible and just look up one word in the Hebrew and the Greek and trace it through Scripture. That word would be “poor.” The word “poor” covers all six of these groups, as we shall see, and God has a lot to say about how He feels about the poor.

The Hebrew words translated “poor” in your Bible include

these:

דל {dal} AV - poor 43, needy 2, weaker 2, lean 1; 48

1) low, poor, weak, thin, one who is low

צִלְכָּה {cheleka'} {khay-lek-aw'} or chelekah {khay-lek-aw'}  
apparently from an unused root probably meaning to be  
dark or (fig.) unhappy;

תְּסוּחָה – 659a; adj AV – poor 2, variant 2; 4

1) hapless, poor, unfortunate person

עַבֵּי 'aniy {aw-nee'} AV – poor 58, afflicted 15, lowly 1, man  
1, variant 3; 80

1) poor, afflicted, humble, wretched

a) poor, needy

b) poor and weak

c) poor, weak, afflicted, wretched

d) humble, lowly

They describe anyone who has fallen on unfortunate circumstances and is thus weak, afflicted, low, or needy. They may have no food, no drink, no clothes; or they may be a stranger with no home, the victim of sickness, or a prisoner with no hope. The Greek words used most are these:

πτοχον – ptochos {pto-khos'} – from ptosso {to crouch, akin  
to 4422 and the alternate of 4098};

TANT – 6:885,969; adj AV – poor 30, beggar 2, poor man  
1, beggarly 1; 34

1) reduced to beggary, begging, asking alms

2) destitute of wealth, influence, position, honour

a) lowly, afflicted, destitute of the Christian virtues and  
eternal riches

b) helpless, powerless to accomplish an end

c) poor, needy

3) lacking in anything

So this word “poor” can describe anyone from a destitute beggar to one who is simply powerless to accomplish what they set out to do, or someone lacking anything in life that others have. Primarily, it is used to describe those who have fallen on hard times, either because of circumstances beyond their control or circumstances resulting from their own

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choices. Now what does the Scripture say about the “poor”? There are 200 or more verses that deal with these words. We can only touch on a few. Please take them seriously and personally. The principles are these:

1- God has a special place in His heart for the poor and the unfortunate. Man looks with favor on the rich and the successful. God looks with favor in a different way on the poor and the needy.

He raiseth up the poor out of the dust, and lifteth up the beggar from the dunghill, to set them among princes, and to make them inherit the throne of glory: for the pillars of the earth are the LORD'S, and he hath set the world upon them. (I Samuel 2:8)

When the poor and needy seek water, and there is none, and their tongue faileth for thirst, I the LORD will hear them, I the God of Israel will not forsake them.

(Isaiah 41:17)

2- God has vowed to protect the poor in a special way. No other group in Scripture has more precious promises to claim.

I will greatly praise the LORD with my mouth; yea, I will praise him among the multitude.

For he shall stand at the right hand of the poor, to save him from those that condemn his soul.

(Psalm 109:30,31)

I know that the LORD will maintain the cause of the afflicted, and the right of the poor. (Psalm 140:12)

For he shall deliver the needy when he crieth; the poor also, and him that hath no helper.

He shall spare the poor and needy, and shall save the souls of the needy. (Psalm 72:12,13)

3- God sees the poor as a special field, spiritually, that is ripe unto harvest.

The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he hath anointed me to preach the gospel to the poor; he hath sent me to heal the brokenhearted, to preach deliverance to the captives, and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty them that are bruised, (Luke 4:18)

Hearken, my beloved brethren, Hath not God chosen the poor of this world rich in faith, and heirs of the kingdom

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which he hath promised to them that love him?

But ye have despised the poor. (James 2:5,6a)

### 4- God blesses the leader who blesses the poor.

The king that faithfully judgeth the poor, his throne shall be established for ever. (Proverbs 29:14)

Open thy mouth, judge righteously, and plead the cause of the poor and needy. (Proverbs 31:9)

### 5- God blesses the believer who blesses the poor.

Blessed is he that considereth the poor: the LORD will deliver him in time of trouble. (Psalm 41:1)

Defend the poor and fatherless: do justice to the afflicted and needy. (Psalm 82:3)

If there be among you a poor man of one of thy brethren within any of thy gates in thy land which the LORD thy God giveth thee, thou shalt not harden thine heart, nor shut thine hand from thy poor brother:

(Deuteronomy 15:7)

Deliver the poor and needy: rid them out of the hand of the wicked. (Psalm 82:4)

Jesus said unto him, If thou wilt be perfect, go and sell that thou hast, and give to the poor, and thou shalt have treasure in heaven: and come and follow me.

(Matthew 19:21)

### 6- God demands that the church not favor the rich or humiliate or reject the poor.

She stretcheth out her hand to the poor; yea, she reacheth forth her hands to the needy.

(Proverbs 31:20)

For if there come unto your assembly a man with a gold ring, in goodly apparel, and there come in also a poor man in vile raiment;

And ye have respect to him that weareth the gay clothing, and say unto him, Sit thou here in a good place; and say to the poor, Stand thou there, or sit here under my footstool:

Are ye not then partial in yourselves, and are become judges of evil thoughts? (James 2:2-4)

### 7- God expects the church to focus on ministering to the poor.

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But when thou makest a feast, call the poor, the maimed,  
the lame, the blind: (Luke 14:13)

You cannot separate the call to evangelism from the call to minister to the poor. The trend in today's church is away from meeting human need and away from taking the gospel to the "least of these" because "the least of these" simply "aren't our kind." Oh, yes they are. They are just like us apart from God's amazing grace, and they are our mission field, according to God's amazing word. How dare we pick and choose who we are willing to touch and love and reach out to? How dare we reject or ignore the very people God has signified in Scripture as our primary mission field.

The questions we have to ask ourselves are these:

- 1- Are we willing to love the people Jesus loved?
- 2- Are we willing to ask Him for the grace to do so?
- 3- Are we willing to accept that when we do, we are actually ministering to Him?
- 4- Are we willing to accept that when we don't, we are actually saying to Jesus, "Go away, you're not my kind?"
- 5- Are we willing to become vulnerable, if need be, by opening our homes and our hearts to those we normally would not touch?
- 6- If so, are we willing to tell God we are willing?

Jesus shocked the religious world when He came to earth. The Messiah was expected to go to the religious elite, work within the system, bless the educated, the skilled, the attractive, and the strong. He was expected to pick the winners of this world, the wise of this world, and the mighty of this world, and use their strength, their wisdom, and their might as the base of His kingdom.

He was expected to descend as a King and rule from a throne. Instead, He descended as a servant and washed feet, healed lepers, raised the dead, and loved losers. He went to the poor, the lame, the weak and the dying, *because they knew they had a need*. He met the needs of the hungry, the thirsty, the naked, the stranger, the prisoner, *because without Him they had no hope*.

Then He went back to the Father and said, "As the Father

hath sent Me, so send I you.” And because of a generation of abuses from what we call the “social gospel,” we have allowed Satan to shift our emphasis from ministering to those Jesus sent us to, to those who are socially and economically acceptable. We are willing to send a few of our chosen ones to mission fields where the poor and needy struggle. We see films and slides at mission conference time and weep momentarily over their plight. Then we go back to building our buildings and structuring our programs to be acceptable to more people like us, and we wonder why the church seems to attract so few new converts, and why the world about us seems so unimpressed with our “gospel of love.”

They are unimpressed because we have forgotten our calling. We are to go where Jesus went: to the hospitals, the prisons, the orphanages, the nursing homes, the ghettos, the halfway houses of life where the hurting are, where the dying are, where the suffering are, and we are to touch them, not preach down to them. We are to get down before them and look up to them as Jesus did and let them know that if Jesus were here, He would wash their feet, heal their wounds, touch their fevered brow, wrap His precious arms around their imprisoned souls, and reach out His nail-scarred hands to feed their hungry stomachs. Then He would tell them how they could receive such love for themselves. He would take them to a Cross and let them see the source of the love that was encompassing their lives at last.

Oh, Beloved, the church needs to go to where the dirty people live, the hungry people live, the dying people live. We need to go as individuals and as a body. *We need to become as vulnerable as Jesus was, or we will never become as effective as Jesus was.* In this age of affluence, we tend to think that everyone is blessed; and if they aren't, they are either lazy, or the government isn't doing its job. Yet, all around us and all around the world are the very people Jesus spent His life touching: hungry, lonely, homeless, naked, imprisoned souls who, apart from something supernatural, have no hope. They are the ones most likely to listen, but not if we simply say to them, “Go, be warmed and filled.”

If this chapter is offensive to you, be sure to skip the next one. We are going to look seriously at what God might have us do to change the course of our ministries enough to

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encompass the “poor” of our generation and of our world. It may not be pleasant, but it may be profitable.

I would ask that each of us spend a week praying, asking God to open our eyes that we might behold wondrous things out of His Word about our calling to the poor and needy. We must keep it in balance and not run from it. Are we willing to tell God that we want to reach out and touch whoever He wants us to reach? Are we willing to go through the list of those six groups Jesus mentioned and ask Him if we are available to “the least of these”?

Are you willing, if God should bring it about, to begin praying for the homeless, the prisoner, the terminally ill, the jobless, the friendless, the orphan? Are you willing to examine what you have in the light of what others might have and share more generously with the “least of these”?

Are you willing to personally go to the prisons, the nursing homes, the halfway houses, and the hospitals, if need be, to share your life and share your faith? Are you willing to reexamine who is welcome in your home? Could it be that God is calling you to include some people that *aren't your kind*? Are you willing to reexamine your racial and economic prejudices and call them sin? Are you willing to open your eyes to the crying, the hurting, and the grieving that you pass by on a daily basis?

I did not say “Are you able?” The question is “Are you willing?” For it isn't natural. It has to be supernatural. It has to be of grace. God isn't asking you to do what only He can do. He wants you to examine His Word, surrender to His will, and ask Him for the grace to do what He calls you to do.

Before you ask, remember, He will do it. It is His will.

And this is the confidence that we have in him, that, if we ask any thing according to his will, he heareth us:

And if we know that he hear us, whatsoever we ask, we know that we have the petitions that we desired of him.  
(I John 5:14,15)

He will do it... If we ask. Now, once more:

Are you willing?





## Chapter 11

# Agape Grace A Heart to Serve

It was not at all expected. In fact, if you were to imagine a scenario like this, the roles would have been reversed. We would have pictured Jesus sitting on a throne and His disciples would be bowed down before Him worshipping. At some point, in deference and humility to His Lordship, they would, perhaps, have humbled themselves enough to wash His feet.

But that is not how it happened. You know the story.

Jesus knowing that the Father had given all things into his hands, and that he was come from God, and went to God;

He riseth from supper, and laid aside his garments; and took a towel, and girded himself.

After that he poureth water into a basin, and began to wash the disciples' feet, and to wipe them with the towel wherewith he was girded.

Then cometh he to Simon Peter: and Peter saith unto him, Lord, dost thou wash my feet?

Jesus answered and said unto him, What I do thou knowest not now; but thou shalt know hereafter.

Peter saith unto him, Thou shalt never wash my feet. Jesus answered him, If I wash thee not, thou hast no part with me.

Simon Peter saith unto him, Lord, not my feet only, but also my hands and my head.

Jesus saith to him, He that is washed needeth not save to wash his feet, but is clean every whit: and ye are clean, but not all.

For he knew who should betray him; therefore said he, Ye are not all clean.

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So after he had washed their feet, and had taken his garments, and was set down again, he said unto them, Know ye what I have done to you?

Ye call me Master and Lord: and ye say well; for so I am.

If I then, your Lord and Master, have washed your feet; ye also ought to wash one another's feet.

For I have given you an example, that ye should do as I have done to you.

Verily, verily, I say unto you, The servant is not greater than his lord; neither he that is sent greater than he that sent him.

If ye know these things, happy are ye if ye do them.

(John 13:3-17)

The Creator God of heaven and earth was on His knees bowed before His confused disciples, basin at His side, washing the dirty, grimy feet of these common men. Somehow, the roles had been reversed. Somehow, this picture looks backwards. Somehow, we would paint it the other way. But God had a story to communicate and He wasn't about to let this opportunity pass.

Jehovah had a message to send to the church; a church that would quickly become class-oriented and totally self-absorbed. The message He wanted to send was so revolutionary, it almost went right past them. There is a point when something happens that is so contrary to the natural mind that you miss the point of it. That could easily have happened here. Jesus saw to it that it didn't.

The Master was a master at teaching. He knew how to use visual aids and interactive activities long before the computer age. He also knew that information without application doesn't lead to transformation, so He carefully chose the timing and the intensity of every phase of this demonstration to teach truth, and then concluded by explaining the application portion of His message. It would seem that it would be indelibly engraved, not only on the hearts of those men, but on each of our hearts, as well; for everyone of us has heard the story and heard it preached dozens of times. If you view the church or our lives in the light of it, however, you would have to wonder if we have ever caught how immense and how intense this lesson was

intended to be.

It was time for the Paschal supper. It was a sacrifice different from all the others. It was not of the law, for it was instituted before the law. It is unclear how much of the ceremonial ritual was still obligatory at the time of Christ. It is likely, according to Alfred Edersheim, in his book Jesus, the Messiah, that the participants would appear in festive attire, and that they would, as Jewish law prescribed, recline on pillows around a low table, each resting on his left hand.

We do know that this particular supper began in an unusual manner. The atmosphere was charged with contention because, apparently even before they were seated, the disciples were arguing over who was the greatest (or most important) among them. It was customary, even among the Pharisees, to be seated according to rank, and the disciples no doubt were squabbling over which of them deserved the seat of greatest honor. How sad and yet how fortunate, in a way, because it set the stage for one of Jesus' most important teachings in all of the New Testament.

And there was also a strife among them, which of them should be accounted the greatest.

And he said unto them, The kings of the Gentiles exercise lordship over them; and they that exercise authority upon them are called benefactors.

But ye shall not be so: but he that is greatest among you, let him be as the younger; and he that is chief, as he that doth serve.

For whether is greater, he that sitteth at meat, or he that serveth? is not he that sitteth at meat? but I am among you as he that serveth. (Luke 22:24-27)

The Master was setting the stage for the audio-visual presentation which was to follow. He was contrasting the world's concepts of greatness with God's, and, as always, they were not slightly different, they were 180 degrees opposite. The world has its leaders sit above the masses and exercise authority and be served, not so in the Kingdom. Those who would be greatest must don the cloak of a slave and do the most menial of things for the most undeserving they meet, or else they could not follow in the Master's footsteps, for He was among them as One who was a slave, not a King.

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The supper would normally begin with a pair of benedictions, and then the one who was leading the celebration would commence with the first of two handwashing rituals. It was apparently at this point, before dinner was actually served, that Jesus rose from His place and shocked His followers. They were not shocked that He would rise and lead in the handwashing; but when He took off His upper garment, girded Himself with a towel, and began to pour water into a basin, He was assuming the role of a common slave doing the most menial of tasks. The word used here for “towel” was one used both in ceremonial washing and bathing, and was usually associated with the work of a slave or a common servant.

Peter must have been at the end of the table, and it was with him that the Master began. These men had all walked a good distance, probably in sandals or barefoot, possibly with some other kind of shoes. The grime and dust and dirt would have been most unpleasant. It was the kind of thing aristocracy would never do. That was just the point Jesus was trying to make. Peter, of course, objected. Jesus, of course, responded. Peter gave in, but still didn't have a clue what was going on. Later, he did. But Jesus was trying to take the picture of these squabbling, contentious disciples, who, in the presence of the King of Glory, were actually vying for personal glory and use it as a backdrop to explain *just what the kingdom wasn't*. It wasn't a place to showcase the importance or spirituality of the King's kids. Jesus explained it this way:

But it shall not be so among you: but whosoever will be great among you, let him be your minister;

And whosoever will be chief among you, let him be your servant:

Even as the Son of man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give his life a ransom for many.

(Matthew 20:26-28)

So Jesus girded Himself with a towel and did the thing these men were the least likely to expect Him to do—the work of a servant. Then, He looked them straight in the eye and continued His unusual interactive message. He reminded them that a servant is not greater than his master. And if He, Jesus, their Master and Lord, was sent by His Father to do

the most menial kinds of service to the most undeserving of people, *what did they think they were sent to do?*

Then He gave a postscript to His message that might be added to the end of every message He gave. He said, "It is wonderful for you to come to church and hear these messages, and it is even better if you leave somewhat convicted, understanding what they mean. But, Beloved, it will only make a difference if you leave here and do what you have been taught."

The joy will come in obedience, not in adding to your storehouse of knowledge. Wisdom is understanding and then doing. You choose, God enables, but *unless you consciously choose, you do not free that grace to flow, and you will be more accountable and less spiritual, because to whom much is given, much will be required.*

That may well be the curse of this information-oriented age in which we live. We can learn more and learn it more quickly than any generation in history. We can turn our computers on, type in a subject, and presto, we have data at our disposal that took hours, if not days, to locate 30 years ago. We can click on another box and have visuals, either still or moving, pass before our eyes, so we can imagine more perfectly the setting or the background of what we are studying. It is awesome. We have videos that reenact Bible stories. We have electronic devices that allow us to listen to any message at any time we choose. We have bookstores that sell nothing but books about the Christian faith. We are glutted with information.

But, Beloved, this age of spiritually over-fed, under-exercised saints, with all of our mass of materials, may be one of the least spiritually sensitive in generations. We are so self-serving, so preoccupied with our own comfort and convenience that we think obedience is an option that we can lay aside for some future time when it fits into our computerized calendar to do so. We think that our affluence has made us immune to dealing with the common man. We think our spiritual knowledge has elevated us to a position above having to do the menial things or minister to the undesirables of our age. We have enlarged that list of undesirables to include most of society, until we have built

little clusters of self-satisfied saints, who think ministering means being happy together, thereby insulating ourselves so that no one will upset the status quo.

Meanwhile a world of dying, despondent people, both in our backyards and in the uttermost parts of the earth, are crying out to be loved and served; but we are too busy learning more to hear their cries. We must continue to learn, but learning includes responding to what we hear. Jesus knew these self-appointed would-be diplomats in the coming kingdom didn't grasp what He was saying or what He was doing. So He concluded, "Don't just stand there, go out and serve."

It is to that one commandment that we dedicate this lesson. We have learned three things, I trust, thus far in our study of agape grace.

**1- God expects us to go to the most unlikely people in the world to minister: the sick, the dying, the lame, the prisoner, the hungry, the naked, the lonely, the grieving.**

When we minister to them, we minister to Christ Himself. While our meetings take place in homes or churches where we feed on His Word and absorb His instructions, *much of our ministry should take place in the nursing homes, the funeral homes, the hospitals, and the prisons.* There, He said, we would find people who knew they needed help. And there, we would find people, stripped of their self-sufficiency, and often of their self-worth, who would be humbled enough to seek out The Great Physician.

**2- God expects us, when we get there, to do for them the most menial things, if need be, to demonstrate the love of God.**

We weren't sent to pass out tracts, pat them on the head, and leave the impression that if they paid attention they could become great Christians like us. We were sent to demonstrate physically how our Great God and Savior Jesus Christ laid aside His robes of righteousness and took on the form of a slave to save them from their sins. And like Jesus, we have to use interactive tools to reach them. We are the interactive part. We humble ourselves. We love. We serve. At any point where condescending is perceived, we have lost the battle. The message is no longer clear. If you go as a servant, and once there, lord it over those you came to serve, they do

not see the visual aid God sent them.

**3- It is also clear that serving is not the natural thing to do.** Apart from some supernatural act of grace on the part of God, we simply will not maintain the role of a slave. The flesh hates it. We chafe at the thought of it. Left to ourselves, we will send others, but we won't go. Left to ourselves, if we go, we will do so grudgingly, or so uncomfortably, that those to whom we go will become more uncomfortable than we are. Finally, left to ourselves, we will try, if we go, to do so in our own energy by gritting our teeth, and not only will God's grace be short-circuited, in the process we will miss both the blessing and the eternal reward. We will have stolen God's glory by quenching God's grace.

No, the calling of God for the church is to get outside its hallowed halls and lay aside its sanctimonious superiority and go where hurting, dying people are. Once there, we are to *serve them*. We may not need to wash their feet, on the other hand, what we may be called to do may be much more distasteful than that.

We have come to believe that being a Christian involves coming to church when it's not too inconvenient, learning everything we can that's not too convicting, and then going back into the world, hanging on by our spiritual teeth until the next chance we have to come together and learn more.

We satisfy some of our guilt by giving, either to help pay the bills or better yet, we surmise, to send to missionaries who are struggling in the four corners of the earth. But the average Christian even the more spiritually sensitive ones, still does not seem to grasp that Jesus, in us, wants to take what we've learned, lay aside our robes of spiritual self-satisfaction, and go into the ghettos of life, if need be, and love the unlovable.

I would like us to take this issue of service to the needy and spend the next few minutes looking at three basic thoughts: the priorities, the problems, and the principles. Then, by God's grace, I would pray that we would draw our own conclusions, individually, and *whatever God is saying to us, be willing not just to talk about it, but to do it*. Otherwise, we can add this lesson to a long list of "things we learned about God's will but never did anything about." God help us;

that is not His goal.

### **The Priorities**

Let's simplify and review. We basically need simplicity. That's why God gave us such a simple gospel. That's why Jesus broke His commandments down into such simple instructions. We are the ones who, in an effort to justify our theological positions or our spirituality, tend to make the simple complicated. There are two simple priorities that have evolved thus far. Either they are true or they aren't. Either they are Scriptural or not. If not, ignore them. If they are, don't for a moment think that God does not expect us to do whatever is necessary *in His power to obey*. Let's review them.

**Priority 1- When we minister to the hungry, the thirsty, the naked, the sick, the prisoner and the stranger, we minister to Jesus, Himself.** (Matthew 25:31- 48) That does not mean that the church ignores the banker, the corporate executive, the teacher, the clerk, the doctor or the nurse. It does not mean that we do not become evangelists in our neighborhood, at our office, in our schools. We know better than that. But there are some people so dear to God's heart that He promised to defend them and protect them in ways beyond even what others could expect. He called them the "poor," the "disadvantaged," the "afflicted." To ignore them or not make them a corporate and personal priority is to openly defy the commandments of God where ministry is concerned.

The church must get out of its comfort zone and go where Jesus went. He spent most of His ministry time where the sick were, the afflicted were, the dying were, the grieving were, or the stranger was. Take the gospels and just follow Him. Have you done that? The Bible says, "Not many mighty, not many noble, not many wise have been called." (I Corinthians 1:26 paraphrase) It doesn't say not any. It says not many. Some came, praise God, and laid aside their credentials and took God at His word. Some still do.

But the bulk of His ministry was to the down and out, the crying, the hurting, the lepers, the mentally disturbed, the physically handicapped, the grieving widows. His eyes of compassion focused on them. His arms of love reached out



to hold. He knew they were without strength. He knew they were without hope. Enter the God of grace. There was a two-fold emphasis where meeting needs were concerned. Mark it.

1- He met physical needs outside the circle of His followers in order to draw their attention to spiritual things. He still does. He healed lepers and blind men and then told them of Living Water. The reason we exist is to seek and save that which is lost. We don't help the hungry to make this world a better place to live; we do so to let them know of the love of God and of a better place to live called heaven. We meet physical needs for the same reason He did, to get their attention and win their respect, so we can lead them to eternal life.

2- He also commanded the church to meet the physical needs of its own as an example to a lost world of how God works in God's people. The lost were to know that we are His disciples by the love we show to one another. That's why they had all things in common. The hurting were helped by the healthy, whose motive was the love of Christ which constrained them. They couldn't help it. It was as though the hurting were family. And sure enough, they were.

Likewise, today the church has two callings where the sick, the handicapped, the aged, the stranger, and the prisoner are concerned. We are to reach out to unbelievers when possible, and seek to meet their needs, physically, so they will hear what we say, spiritually; and we are to share what we have within the church body so that unbelievers and believers alike will see Jesus by our love.

**Priority 2- We are to meet those needs in an attitude of utter humility and servitude.** (John 13:3-17) That is what Jesus proclaimed by example as He took on the cloak of a servant and washed the filthy feet of those undeserving disciples. We don't just mail them a check. *We get involved.* We weep with those who weep. We do whatever is needed to make them more comfortable. Like the Good Samaritan, we don't just give to a fund and hope someone who manages the fund cares about the hurting. We volunteer to take them where they need to go, to listen to what they need to say, to let them waken us in the middle of the night if they need us, to give up our own recreation and our own comfort, if need

be, to put them first.

If we need to go into a dirty home, so be it. If we need to wash dirty clothes, so be it. If we need to minister to people we don't admire or always agree with, so be it. Jesus did. If we need to sit in a nursing home at the side of a man or a woman who no longer can even remember his or her name, and love that person as though he were whole, so be it. If we need to sit at the bedside of someone who has no family or friends and show them they have a friend who sticks closer than a brother, so be it. These are not duties we must perform. These are opportunities we have been given by a loving God to minister to His Son, the same Son who died in our place. What an honor. And if He laid aside His robes of royalty to die for us, how can we minister to Him condescendingly?

### **The Problems**

Those are our two priorities, based on Matthew 25 and John 13. We are to focus on the hurting, and we are to do so in deep humility and with a servant heart. The problem, however, is two-fold.

**1- It simply isn't happening the way it is suppose to happen.** I do not say it isn't happening at all. Praise God for the people whose lives reflect these commandments. They are like shining lights, yet often they do what they do so humbly, we do not even know it is happening. Praise God for the men and women who for years have been quietly going to the jails and the prisons, to set prisoners hearts free. Praise God for the men and women who have for years been quietly ministering in the nursing homes, unpleasant though it is, because when they do, they are ministering to Jesus, Himself. But the average church member not only does not do those things, he or she does not often pray for those who do. If the overall impact the church is having in the ghettos and the hospitals and the prisons is any kind of measuring stick, we have become victims of our "holy huddle" philosophy which, in essence, says as long as we stay together and stay comfortable, we must be ministering to each other, if no one else. God help us. What are we protecting ourselves from? We have been called to die, if need be, for the sake of the gospel. Surely, getting dirty is not too big a price to pay.

**2- It simply isn't natural.** Not only is it not happening, it is not natural. Therefore, we can easily lay it aside as something other than the will of God for us. The new theology (but it's not really new) is that if it's God's will, you'll "feel good about it." I doubt if Jesus got the warm fuzzies by hugging lepers or visiting the crippled at the pool or going to visit Lazarus' family when Lazarus was presumed dead. I don't think He enjoyed His encounter with demented souls who were cutting themselves or running around without clothes because they were not in their right minds. I don't think He relished seeing masses of people with no hope. I think He saw His Father's face, though, and He longed to see the joy on that face when His willingness to go where the hurting were brought men and women into the kingdom. Beloved, it isn't going to be natural. If it was, you would not need the Supernatural One to do it. And if you can do it, it won't last. What is eternal lasts, and only God can do the eternal.

### **The Principles**

That brings us to the application portion of our lesson. How do we make it happen? There are four basic principles found in the last three verses of the John 13 passage that, I believe, give us God's perspective.

**1- It has to begin at the top.** Unless the leaders lead, you will never have an example to follow. Jesus said it so well:

For I have given you an example, that ye should do as I  
have done to you. (John 13:15)

So often, in today's church, we think we lead by committee, rather than by commitment. We think that if we meet and talk about it or stand up and preach about it, God must be pleased. I believe that if we disbanded two-thirds of our committees and formed ministry teams to take their places, we would multiply our ministry impact. In committees, we often meet to share our ignorance and argue our ideas, neither of which helps anyone. There is a time and place for committees, but once they have determined a course God wants us to follow, the committee ought to lead the way out into the highways and byways where the people are. Our leaders must not become so insulated from ministry that they are passing out memos from an ivory tower, while the

sick and the dying and the lost are milling about hopelessly below.

**2- Once we see the example, we must follow.** We don't hire people to do the work of the ministry. If we hire them, it is for them to teach us and show us how to do the work of the ministry. Then the laity of the church becomes the ministry team. We watch and we listen, and then we go and we grow. Jesus said it this way:

Verily, verily, I say unto you, The servant is not greater than his lord; neither he that is sent greater than he that sent him. (John 13:16)

We don't have privileges Jesus didn't have. If His calling was to show us, by example, how to touch and love the down and out, it is our calling even more, for we have seen it happen. In like manner, it isn't up to the pastors or the elders to do the work of the ministry for the church; it is up to the pastors and elders to lead. It is up to every member of the body to follow.

**3- The proof isn't in how excited we get about a commandment, but how quickly we obey.** Somehow, we have gotten the idea that the more emotionally enthusiastic or even the more "convicted" we become, the more spiritual we are. The opposite is true. The more we learn, the more accountable we become. The more "convicted" we become, the more understanding we have; therefore, the more wisdom we are supposed to demonstrate. Wisdom, remember, is acting on our understanding.

You may hear a message about spending time alone with God and be brought to tears. Beloved, those tears are no measure of your wisdom. They are either a measure of your understanding or simply an expression of your emotions. Some people cry every time they hear a message. Unless their tears are dried on the aprons of obedience, they become disobedient cry-babies. If that message on spending time with God was of the Holy Spirit, and you were genuinely touched; *you simply, from that moment on, spend more time with God.* The same is true of a message on prayer or a message on sharing your faith or a message on searching the Scripture. The proof can only be measured by your follow through. If it were God speaking, and you only get emotional about it, but

don't change anything; you are now more accountable and a greater hypocrite. Jesus said it so wonderfully in that last verse:

If ye know these things, happy are ye if ye do them.

(John 13:17)

Beloved, if you never memorize but one more verse, that one ought to be the one. It came from the lips of Jesus, Himself. It came on the heels of one of His clearest, yet greatest demonstrations of humility ever given, and it couldn't be any simpler. He simply said: It is one thing to sit in class and say "amen," but that doesn't do a thing for God or a thing for you. Do you want the joy of the Lord? Do you want to thrill the heart of God? Then it's simple. Just leave here and do what God impressed you to do. It's that simple.

**4- The trouble is: we can't do it.** That, of course, is the premise of this whole series. We don't do what God commands us to because it isn't natural. We can make it happen temporarily, perhaps, but there's no staying power, no continuous motivation. What's wrong? What's wrong is that only Christ in you can give you the desire and the ability to love the unlovable, to reach out to the unappealing, and to do so to the glory of God. Paul said it this way:

But by the grace of God I am what I am: and his grace which was bestowed upon me was not in vain; but I laboured more abundantly than they all: yet not I, but the grace of God which was with me

(I Corinthians 15:10)

Do you pray regularly for the handicapped? For the sick? For the lonely? For the prisoners? For the hungry? Does your heart break for those on the mission fields of life who don't have clothes to wear or food to eat, and yet we are paying missionaries to go tell them God loves them? They see pictures of our country and of our churches and hear stories of our affluence, and when our missionaries go and have to turn a deaf ear to their suffering, how can they see the love of God? How can they hear of the love of God?

As you pray, do you ask God to deepen your compassion? It has to come from the inside. Christ lives inside. He who wept over Jerusalem can enable you to care. He can enable you to care for those He cares for, those you might be unlikely

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to want to touch or visit or love. It's called grace.

As you ask God to deepen your compassion, do you make yourself willing to become vulnerable so He can answer your prayers? Are you willing to give up anything God asks you to, so that through your new found poverty, God can give you spiritual riches? If not, your prayers will not be answered.

For ye know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that, though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, that ye through his poverty might be rich.

(II Corinthians 8:9)

And as you pray, claim God's Word and believe that the impossible is possible where grace is involved:

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:

(II Corinthians 9:8)

You can't do it. That's the reason for this study. We need to come to grips with the areas of our lives that are clothed in disobedience and recognize that the harder we try, the less fruitful we sometimes become. Then, one day, deep conviction settles on us, and we cry out to God in anguish and acknowledge our inability while, perhaps for the first time, confessing our availability. It is at those times that something supernatural is likely to happen. God, having seen the desire of your heart to obey and having heard from your lips that you are not sufficient of yourself, is delighted to make all grace abound toward you. In loving the unlovable? In all things, Beloved. All sufficiency in all things to every good work. That's as foolproof a promise as you can get. No limited warranties with God. His is unlimited grace.

If the church were recognizing its need in this area, and if we were crying out to God for the amazing grace to make it happen, we would be seeing miracles unfolding before our eyes day after day after day, and the ministry of the church would take on a whole new aura of excitement. We would not have to beg for people to go to the jails or the hospitals or the nursing homes. There would be a waiting list. People would not be going out of a sense of obligation, but out of a sense of excitement at being able to minister to Christ Himself.

We would not see only a handful of volunteers going into the ghettos to help teach or feed or take medical aid.

## Agape Grace: A Heart to Serve

We would not have to send the same people over and over to the mission field on short-term trips. The list of people wanting to go would be as long as the church rolls.

We would not be seeing churches looking only for new, fancy places to build new, fancy buildings to minister primarily to the upwardly mobile “now” generation, we would see churches quietly moving out into the “less desirable” parts of the city reaching into the neighborhoods where crime is highest and hope is lowest.

We would not see Christians so preoccupied with themselves that they are more interested in improving their own comfort than they are in providing a place for people to live or worship or work who have no place at all.

We would be living in an entirely different world. The hungry would be fed, and, in the process, they would find the Bread of Life. The thirsty would find water, and, in the process, Living Water would flow into their lives. The naked would not have to beg for clothes, and as they found their needs met, they would be clothed in the love of God, as well. The sick would not have to beg for someone to care; they would experience a kind of grace that would impact them, their doctors, their families, and their world. The stranger and the foreigner would not have to live as an alien, but as a member of a family that knows no ethnic or national bounds. The prisoner would not be isolated from love, for the flow of compassion and encouragement from the church to the jails would sweep into their hearts and set them free, indeed.

All that is lacking is agape grace; believers taking God at His Word, and then crying out to Him for His Spirit to do in and through them what only He can do. It will amaze the world. It will encourage the saints. And it will please the heart of God, for as much as we will have done it unto the least of these, we will have done it unto Him. Do you see it? Do you grasp the impact of it? Then I have only one question. No, I won't ask it. I'll let Jesus ask it, and I'll let each of us answer it in our own hearts. The question is:

“If ye know these things, why don't you do them?”





## Chapter 12

# The Grace of Forgiveness

Imagine someone asking you to forgive that person who broke into your house when you were on vacation and stole your most precious possessions, things you can never replace. Forgive? How could you?

Imagine someone asking you to forgive your father, the one who abandoned you when you were ten. Forgive? Not on your life!

Imagine someone asking you to forgive that husband who left you with two tiny children to raise. Forgive? Are you kidding?

Imagine someone asking you to forgive that sister who stole your boyfriend when you were in high school and left you with no one, just for the fun of taking him from you. Forgive her? Never, you say.

Imagine someone asking you to forgive that drunk who ran a stop sign and left you crippled and in pain for the rest of your life. Forgive? Not a chance.

Or imagine this: Imagine someone asking you to forgive the one who killed your only child. You could never do that, you say. I agree. You never could.

But, if you are a Christian, there lives inside of you something called “grace.” It lives in you because God lives in you. And when God came to live in you, He did an amazing thing. He forgave you for killing His Son. Not only did He forgive you, He actually accepted the responsibility for the crime you committed, offered to die in your place, and reached down and saved you from an eternal hell. That is forgiveness. Now He expects something supernatural from you. He expects you to allow Him to forgive every single person who has ever wronged you or ever will, the way He forgave you. He will do it, but you will have to ask Him to, and then allow Him to.

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He wants you to be able to forgive that thief who robbed you, that father who abandoned you, that husband who left you, that sister who hurt you, that drunk who crippled you, just as God in Christ has forgiven you.

And if you refuse? Oh, Beloved, don't even think about it. The consequences of refusing will affect your ability to grow into the likeness of Christ. They will affect your ability to have peace in your heart. They will affect your ability to love other people. They will affect your testimony. They will affect your prayer life, *and most of all, they will affect your ability to be forgiven by God.*

Grave consequences? Indeed. But that is what will happen if you refuse to let the grace of forgiveness flow through your life. Forgiveness means more than refusing to grit your teeth every time you hear that person's name. Forgiveness means wiping the slate clean, sending the offense as far from you as the east is from the west, never to be remembered or repeated again. That's what God did. And this is what God said:

And be ye kind one to another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God for Christ's sake hath forgiven you.  
(Ephesians 4:32)

Forgiveness is an expression of kindness. It is an evidence of a tender heart, and it is motivated by one single thing: what God for Christ's sake did for you. How did Christ forgive you? Think about it. That is the way we are to forgive others. His forgiveness was complete, permanent, unconditional, and undeserved.

Now stop for a moment and close your eyes. Think about that person, dead or alive, that you cannot forgive. It may be someone similar to the ones we mentioned at the beginning of the lesson, or it may be a neighbor who stole your wife, a boss who stole your integrity, or a relative who stole your reputation. Maybe it's someone who simply lives to make your life miserable. Maybe it's a father or mother who abused you or neglected you or never loved you, and you believe that most of the things that make you dysfunctional are the result of his or her abuse or neglect. Every time someone says the word "father" or "mother" your face tightens, your stomach knots up, and your heart begins to race a little faster. Maybe you wish they were dead, or you're glad they are. No, you've

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never forgiven them, and what's more, you mutter under your breath, *you never will*.

That's your choice. But who are you hurting? You are breaking the heart of God. You are making your own life miserable, and you are building a wall between yourself and your Savior; a wall that will keep your prayers from being answered, your heart from being filled with joy and peace, and your loved ones from having an example of the love of Christ in your life.

I know. You've tried. "But," you respond, "there's just no way to erase the anger and the bitterness and the hurt that has been festering all these years." I beg to differ. There's no way *for you to do it*, but God has a package of grace just waiting for you, if you will stop today and begin to understand just how amazing that grace is, and just how available it is when you get desperate enough to want it. *And the only thing that will make you want it is for you to see how grave a sin it is for you not to want it.*

Forgiveness. It is the hallmark of man's relationship with God, and thus it becomes the trademark of man's relationship with man. Without it, we are no different than the unbelieving world. Without it, we are still in our sins, and we are still at odds with all who have ever wronged us. Without it, it will be "an eye for an eye" as long as we shall live. Once wronged always wronged will be our eternal conviction, and the world's concept of transferring guilt by harboring anger over some experience or some relationship will continue to dominate our lives. We will go to our graves without experiencing the sheer joy not only of being forgiven, *but of forgiving others.*

To accept God's forgiveness while refusing to forgive others is an affront to God's grace. He said so in Matthew, chapter 18:

Then came Peter to him, and said, Lord, how oft shall my brother sin against me, and I forgive him? till seven times?

Jesus saith unto him, I say not unto thee, Until seven times: but, Until seventy times seven.

Therefore is the kingdom of heaven likened unto a certain king, which would take account of his servants.

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And when he had begun to reckon, one was brought unto him, which owed him ten thousand talents.

But forasmuch as he had not to pay, his lord commanded him to be sold, and his wife, and children, and all that he had, and payment to be made.

The servant therefore fell down, and worshipped him, saying, Lord, have patience with me, and I will pay thee all.

Then the lord of that servant was moved with compassion, and loosed him, and forgave him the debt.

But the same servant went out, and found one of his fellowservants, which owed him an hundred pence: and he laid hands on him, and took him by the throat, saying, Pay me that thou owest.

And his fellowservant fell down at his feet, and besought him, saying, Have patience with me, and I will pay thee all.

And he would not: but went and cast him into prison, till he should pay the debt.

So when his fellowservants saw what was done, they were very sorry, and came and told unto their lord all that was done.

Then his lord, after that he had called him, said unto him, O thou wicked servant, I forgave thee all that debt, because thou desiredst me:

Shouldest not thou also have had compassion on thy fellowservant, even as I had pity on thee?

And his lord was wroth, and delivered him to the tormentors, till he should pay all that was due unto him.

So likewise shall my heavenly Father do also unto you, if ye from your hearts forgive not every one his brother their trespasses. (Matthew 18:21-35)

So many principles rise to the surface in this passage. Because we have studied it before, we will not dwell on it, but we must remind ourselves of some basic issues:

**1- Man is looking for the exceptions to the rule.** There are none. Peter began his somewhat sanctimonious question by trying to create a legalistic set of minimum standards by which he could satisfy the commandment while still limiting the scope of his forgiveness. The question was "How many

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times do I have to forgive this guy? He keeps on asking for forgiveness, then does the same thing again. At what point can I scratch him off my 'forgiveness' list?" God basically said to Peter, "You can scratch him off your list when I withdraw my grace from you, and I never will." Grace is free, undeserved, sovereign, and eternal. It will never cease to be, because it is a gift, and it has nothing to do with our worthiness or our response. If you are looking for an out, stop looking. Forgiveness is an open-ended offer by God.

If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.

(I John 1:9)

Our forgiveness of others can be no less inclusive than that.

**2- Jesus then tied His forgiveness to ours.** As He often did, the Master told them a story. It was a kingdom story, and it was about a king. This king was looking through his ledgers one day and came across the name of one of his servants who had dipped into the till until the till was dry. He had borrowed 10,000 talents. That was no small amount of money. It was a lifetime of earnings and then some. Some say it was more than ten million dollars. If the borrower is servant to the lender, this guy was indebted forever and ever. When the king saw what had happened, and that the servant was in over his head, he ordered the servant and his entire family sold into slavery. He had the right to execute him, throw him into prison, or force his entire family to work until it was paid.

The servant cried out for mercy and grace. He asked for more time, so he could begin to pay it off. This would be like a regular laborer or secretary running up a million dollar bill on his or her Master Card and asking the bank for an extra month. You would obviously just be buying time with no real possibility that they could earn enough to even pay the interest for that month.

The king understood mercy and grace. The man deserved nothing. The king gave him everything. He not only gave him more time, *he forgave the debt entirely*. Here was a man who owed an amount equivalent to the national debt one minute and had no indebtedness the next. Instant forgiveness. A

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brand new life. He had been destined for a life of bondage; now he was free. He had been facing possible extinction. Now he and his family had a new start, a new beginning, a new life. Sound familiar? Sound like your life when you met Christ?

Having received that kind of forgiveness, it only stands to reason that he would be so filled with awe at the king's mercy that he would pass that mercy on to anyone who owed him so much as the equivalent of a penny. He was free. Now he was free to forgive, even as he had been forgiven.

But a funny thing happened on the way home. He ran into an old friend of his who owed him a paltry sum of money (about \$17) He grabbed the man by the throat, began choking him, and demanded his \$17. Now this is the guy who just was forgiven millions, threatening to kill someone who owed him maybe a week's wages, at best.

The one who owed the hundred pence (\$17) fell down and pled for mercy, just as the king's servant had done when the king confronted him. "Please be patient," he begged, "I'll pay it soon." But the one who had been forgiven much forgot what forgiving was all about. Instead, he grabbed the man, threw him in prison, and said "Stay there until you've paid it all."

Some of the king's other servants observed this travesty of justice, however, and went and told the king. The king was furious. He had forgiven a lifetime of indebtedness to this man, and immediately he who had received such mercy showed none to a man whose offense was a fraction as severe.

The king sent for the unforgiving servant and said, "Oh, you wicked man. I forgave you for everything. Could you not forgive your brother a debt that was, by comparison, nothing? I had compassion on you. Should you not have passed on that compassion to him?"

So the king threw the much-forgiven man into prison, the way the man had done to the one who owed him so little. And Jesus concludes,

So likewise shall my heavenly Father do also unto you,  
if ye from your hearts forgive not every one his brother  
their trespasses. (Matthew 18:35)

**3- Jesus describes the extent and intent of our forgiving others.** The extent was to be seventy times seven, unlimited forgiveness. It was to be without boundaries. Jesus said *if ye forgive not every one his brother their trespasses.* (And it was to be sincere forgiveness, not play-acting.) He said, *“if from your hearts ye forgive not every one...”* Man looks on the outward appearance; God looks on the heart. No matter what games you play, if in your heart you still hold that offense against that person, you have not truly forgiven, and God knows that.

His flow of grace and mercy into your life will be blocked by the degree to which you hold in your heart anger, bitterness, or a vengeful spirit towards someone who has wronged you. How do we know that? Jesus said so, in Matthew 6:

Give us this day our daily bread.

And forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors.

And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil: For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, for ever. Amen.

For if ye forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you:

But if ye forgive not men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses.

(Matthew 6:11-15)

And when ye stand praying, forgive, if ye have ought against any: that your Father also which is in heaven may forgive you your trespasses.

But if ye do not forgive, neither will your Father which is in heaven forgive your trespasses. (Mark 11:25,26)

There is much about these verses that we do not understand. But if we focus on what we can understand, we know this much:

1- God’s continued flow of forgiveness in our lives is hindered by our unwillingness to forgive others.

2- When we truly forgive others, God is free to pour out His grace upon us and set us free from the burden of our own guilt.

3- It was written to believers and was a warning against their unforgiving spirits affecting their relationship with God’s forgiveness. It had nothing to do with their salvation.

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More than that, we may not totally understand until we get to heaven. But that much we know. And knowing that, we ought to be rushing to the altar of forgiveness this very moment to lay aside the bitterness and wrath that has our hearts in captivity, before Satan has a chance to erase that truth from our minds.

There are several Hebrew and Greek words used in Scripture that are translated “forgive, forgiveness, or forgiving,” and by viewing them together, we can see what God has in mind when He uses that word. The Hebrew words used most frequently are these:

**נָסָא** – nasa’ {naw-saw’}

This word is used more than 600 times in the Old Testament. It is translated “to bear up,” “to carry away,” “to be carried off.” Sixteen times it is translated “forgive.” One such passage is:

So shall ye say unto Joseph, Forgive, I pray thee now, the trespass of thy brethren, and their sin; for they did unto thee evil: and now, we pray thee, forgive the trespass of the servants of the God of thy father. And Joseph wept when they spake unto him. (Genesis 50:17)

A second Hebrew word is:

**כַּפַּר** – kaphar {kaw-far’}

This word is used 102 times in Scripture and is translated “atonement” 71 times, and in other passages is translated “reconcile,” “forgive,” “pardon.” Its primary definition is “to cover over.” It has to do with our sins being covered over or “buried” by an atoning death, and often speaks of the act of atonement itself. An example of its usage is found in Exodus 32:

And it came to pass on the morrow, that Moses said unto the people, Ye have sinned a great sin: and now I will go up unto the LORD; peradventure I shall make an atonement for your sin. (Exodus 32:30)

A third word is:

**סָלַח** – calach {saw-lakh’}

This word is used 46 times in the Old Testament and is translated “forgive” or “forgiven” 32 times. Thirteen times it is translated “pardon.” It often deals with the corporate sins



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of Israel, and passages such as this:

Hearken therefore unto the supplications of thy servant,  
and of thy people Israel, which they shall make toward  
this place: hear thou from thy dwelling place, even from  
heaven; and when thou hearest, forgive.

(II Chronicles 6:21)

In the New Testament, two Greek words are used that seem to give us the insight we need into what forgiveness really is. The first one is:

αφιειμι – aphiemi {af-ee'-ay-mee}

It is used 146 times and is translated “forgive” 47 times. Its literal meaning is “to send away” or “to let go of” or “to abandon or leave.” It is the word used in the Matthew 18 and Matthew 6 passages we just read. It is also translated “leave” in such verses as:

How think ye? if a man have an hundred sheep, and one of them be gone astray, doth he not leave the ninety and nine, and goeth into the mountains, and seeketh that which is gone astray?  
(Matthew 18:12)

The other Greek word is:

χαριζομαι – charizomai {khar-id'-zom-ah-ee}

It is a cousin to the word “grace” as you can see. It means “to freely forgive” or “to graciously restore or give or forgive.” It not only describes an act, but an attitude on the part of the one forgiving. You find it used 23 times in the New Testament. The Ephesians 4:23 passage we shared at the beginning of the lesson is one. Another is found in Colossians 2, where we read:

And you, being dead in your sins and the uncircumcision of your flesh, hath he quickened together with him, having forgiven you all trespasses;

Blotting out the handwriting of ordinances that was against us, which was contrary to us, and took it out of the way, nailing it to his cross; (Colossians 2:13,14)

Basically, the words blend together to paint a picture of a loving God who has joyfully, willingly made atonement for our sins, covering them over and sending them away, bringing about total reconciliation and now expecting that same process of sending away, even so much as a remembrance

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of them, to be carried over into our forgiving anyone and everyone who has seemingly offended us. The basis for our forgiveness is one of grace. We have been forgiven even though we are undeserving and even though we cannot so much as pay for one ten-trillionth of the cost of that atonement. Therefore, there is no transgression that can ever take place between two people that is not covered by the blood of Christ or that can ever be held against anyone anymore.

I believe Jesus used such extremes in the relationship of the two debtors in that opening passage because He wanted to help us to understand how meager any act of forgiveness is compared to His forgiving our sins. We were totally guilty. We had no hope. We were without merit and always would be. We owed Him more than the equivalent of ten million dollars. We owed Him everything. And not only did He forgive us, He paid the debt we owed. Imagine, if you can, someone who has ruined your life, and you not only forgive them so that the hatred in your heart is gone, you go out and sell everything you have and give the proceeds to that one who ruined your life, knowing that from now on, you will live in poverty, and he will live with the riches you gave him as an act of demonstrating your forgiveness. You can catch a glimpse, at least, of God's act of love for you.

"That'll never happen," you respond. "I'll never do that." Granted. But that's exactly what happened on Calvary, and until we see that clearly, we'll continue to harbor resentment and bitterness towards others or towards society or towards God Himself over incidents that, in the light of what God did for us, are incidental. No, they weren't incidental to you, but look at them in the light of Calvary. In many cases, didn't God use that very rejection, that very hurt, that very catastrophe to bring you to Himself? You are bitter over the very thing that gave you eternal life? In the light of His forgiveness, Beloved, the most heinous of offenses is only a \$17 crime compared to the Cross. How dare we refuse to forgive anyone for anything. That, incidentally, is exactly what Jesus was saying.

Let's define forgiveness, then, based on these passages and those root words. We know this much; when God forgives us, our sins are:

1- Buried, covered, sent away. They are not hidden

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anywhere where they can be reaccessed. They are non-accessible for any purpose. God removes them as far as the East is from the West. That, Beloved, is as far as it gets.

2- It is an act of divine choice. God is omniscient. He knows the beginning from the end, the future before it happens, and the past as though it is today. Therefore, the only way God can forget anything is to choose to. He has said they “are never to be remembered anymore.”

3- It is an act of grace. Literally defined, forgiveness is the gracious sending away of offenses. We are reminded that:

In whom we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of his grace;  
(Ephesians 1:7)

4- It is a permanent act. It cannot be rescinded. It is done by divine decree and recorded in God’s Word as absolute. Therefore, what can separate us from the love of God? Our transgressions? No, nothing can. And because the “grass withers and the flower fades, but the word of our God abides forever” that divine decree cannot change.

Based on these facts, forgiveness is:

An act of grace whereby you release, once and for all, and send away forever any and every offense that exists between you and someone else just as God in Christ has forgiven you, *knowing from God’s Word that your failure to do so will affect God’s future ability to forgive you.* Remember the story of the woman taken in adultery:

And the scribes and Pharisees brought unto him a woman taken in adultery; and when they had set her in the midst,

They say unto him, Master, this woman was taken in adultery, in the very act.

Now Moses in the law commanded us, that such should be stoned: but what sayest thou?

This they said, tempting him, that they might have to accuse him. But Jesus stooped down, and with his finger wrote on the ground, as though he heard them not.

So when they continued asking him, he lifted up himself, and said unto them, He that is without sin among you, let him first cast a stone at her.  
(John 8:3-7)

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The issue isn't the gravity of the sin in your eyes. The issue is that only one who has never sinned has the right to cast a stone. Even if that person is guilty as charged, and even if the sin is inconceivable from a human perspective, it is not as grievous a sin as killing the Son of God. Unless you can come to God as sinless, you have no right to come to God and claim the right to harbor a vengeful spirit.

...Vengeance is mine; I will repay saith the Lord.

(Romans 12:19)

Once again, however, we come to the inescapable conclusion that these are basic facts we have known for most of our Christian lives, and for some of us, that is a long, long time. And yet, for many of us, there remains in the vault of our secret thoughts a storehouse of unforgiveness; little clumps of bitterness that have been spiritualized and covered over with acceptable behavior, but which, were our secret thoughts to be broadcast, would bring both us and the name of Christ great shame.

Why is it that we cannot seem to have victory in this area? It is, again, an issue of grace. Forgiveness, we just learned, is an act of the grace of God. The only way God could forgive us was by grace. We did not deserve it, didn't appreciate it, couldn't earn it, can't repay it. It was a gift from the heart of God to man.

And that, Beloved, is the only way you and I could ever forgive that father who abandoned us, that wife or husband who was unfaithful, that drunk whose carelessness ruined our life, that person who murdered our loved one. They could never, you surmise, deserve forgiveness. They probably wouldn't appreciate it. They surely couldn't earn it. Never in a million years could money repay the tears, the hurt, the grief. Then how?

That same grace that cleared the ledger on your account in heaven, now flows down from heaven and into your heart through the Holy Spirit. When we ask for it and do not impede its actions, *we can actually forgive others with the same grace God used to forgive us*. It is a reusable commodity. It never runs out. It is always available. It is forgiving grace.

Now, let's get practical. How can we put into practice the forgiving grace of God on a daily basis, and even more

specifically, how can we go back and clear up the bitterness and vindictiveness that stays in our soul over past offenses we have never forgiven? Let's look for some clear steps.

**1- Focus on what Jesus did for you at Calvary.** Before you can access the grace of God to forgive others, you must return to the Cross and see the majesty of what He did for you. We take that Cross for granted. We forget what life would be like had He not forgiven all our sins. We forget what death would be like had He not forgiven all our sins. We must take an hour or a day, if need be, and revisit that Hill called Calvary. Watch the Sinless One take your sins and mine and watch the agony as He is separated from the Father by our sins. Watch the veil as it is torn in two. See the Way into the presence of the Father made real by His forgiving death.

**2- See your unforgiving spirit as a greater offense than the one you are holding against that other person.** It is greater for at least four reasons:

- a-It is your responsibility. You can't be responsible for what that person did. You are responsible for whether or not you forgive them.
- b-What they did to you has been paid for in full at Calvary. You accepted full payment when you accepted Christ. Your rights to right treatment never existed and when God freed you of your sins, He took full responsibility for repaying all debts to you. How He repays them is His business. That you accept His right to do so is incredibly important.
- c-Your failure to forgive now becomes a choice; and because the Word is true and clear, you are willingly choosing to limit God's forgiveness of you, and thus choosing to quench the Spirit of God in your life.
- d-You are willingly becoming a stumblingblock to an unbelieving world, who by the way you show love can tell what Christ is like.

Failing to forgive is a far greater sin than any sin anyone has committed or will ever commit against you. Your choice not to forgive is clearly a choice you make and for which you become accountable. The stakes are high. Therefore, the choice is crucial.

**3- Turn the curse into a blessing.** Every time Satan resurrects that anger or that unforgiving spirit, use it as an opportunity to go to God and ask Him if you have offended anyone else, and ask Him to help you make it right. Use what once destroyed your walk with God as a tool to keep close accounts, to keep the fellowship sweeter, to see that nothing comes between you and others; and thus between you and God. Meditate on these verses:

Therefore if thou bring thy gift to the altar, and there rememberest that thy brother hath ought against thee;

Leave there thy gift before the altar, and go thy way; first be reconciled to thy brother, and then come and offer thy gift.  
(Matthew 5:23,24)

The emphasis now is on *whether or not you have offended someone else, not on who has offended you*. If you are offended, you give the offense to God and thank Him that vengeance is His; He will repay. You return love for hate, joy for bitterness, grace for anger. The rest is up to Him. But now you can use the very needles Satan uses to quicken your anger to quicken your sensitivity to your own sin. Satan hates that. God loves it.

**4- Meditate on Scripture whenever you are tempted to anger or to have an unforgiving spirit.** Ephesians 4:32, Matthew 18, Matthew 6 are just a few places to start. Meditate on Calvary. Put together a string of verses on forgiveness and mercy and use them as a praise song to God. Let the Word of God dwell in you richly. Be renewed in the spirit of your mind. In ever increasing splendor, from one degree of glory to another, let the Word of God transform your heart.

**5- Finally, pray often and sincerely for the grace to forgive.** It is not natural. Thus, the need for grace. Grace, remember, is the ability to do supernaturally what you cannot do naturally. You have to ask for it, and then be willing to accept it on God's terms. That person you forgive may never seem to appreciate it. He or she may continue to hate you, even though you expected them to fall on their face in awe at your spirituality. No expectations. God is responsible for them. You will be clear with God. That's the crucial part. The power will return. The freedom will be restored. You will find instant and awesome forgiveness when you confess your sins. Your relationship with God will have seen a huge boulder

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moved away, and the sunlight of the Son's light will fill your heart with a holy cleanliness that anger and bitterness chase away.

The grace of forgiveness. It is a gift from a forgiving God that sets you free and sets Him free to be Himself in you. But remember, only God in you can make it happen. He can do something even more wonderful than that. He can actually fill your heart with love for the very person you have hated for so long. He can fill you with a desire to pray for them, to bless them and to do good to them. He can cause you, like Joseph, to see victory come from trauma, and joy come from defeat. "You meant evil unto me" Joseph cried to his brothers, "But God meant it for good." Once you begin to let God's forgiving spirit flow through you, your eyes will be opened, and you will see how God used even that tragedy, even that misunderstanding, even your anger, though it was not of Him, to create in you a need you never would have had, and thus to find strength where you never would have looked—to God.

### THE GRACE OF FORGIVENESS

Oh, the grace of forgiveness;  
It is strictly a gift from above  
Only God's Holy Spirit  
Can replace hatred with love.

Only the power of His mighty grace,  
Taking total control;  
Can turn an angry, bitter heart  
Into a gracious soul.

But how can we not desire it?  
How can we not be set free?  
How can we not cry out, "Oh, God,  
Look what you did for me?"

And seeing the depth of what He did  
As He died on Calvary's hill,  
How can we let any offense  
Linger in our hearts, still?

*(continued next page)*

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Oh, beloved, it must not be!  
If we are to honor the Son  
And He has completely forgiven us,  
Must we not forgive every one?  
“Forgive us our sins,” we daily pray:  
Lord, as long we shall live,  
May we pray “Oh, God forgive me,  
But only as I... forgive.”



## Chapter 13

# Comforting Grace

Until you have experienced it, you probably cannot fully understand it, but you *can* believe it. You can believe it because you have seen it work in others. It is, indeed, a miracle. The danger is that you will experience it, recognize it as a supernatural act of God, and then forget to praise Him for it. That would be a tragedy. The miracle to which I refer is the miracle of *comforting grace*. It is that overwhelming, enabling power that takes over in a crisis and lifts you up into a sort of God-surrounded cocoon of spiritual protection at a time in your life when, without that protection, you would expect to come apart, either emotionally or physically.

Often comforting grace comes when a loved one dies. You expect to experience hysteria. You expect not to be able to function, but something comes over you. There is an uncanny kind of peace you cannot explain. You have strength to go without sleep, to make arrangements, to face people. It is as though someone had lifted you up for a brief period of time on a plane that is higher than that on which you normally live. It is as though you are lifted on angels' wings and carried through that difficult period. Later, you hear from person after person, "I have been praying for you, that God would give you extra grace."

We tend to smile and say "thank you" without realizing what has happened. People prayed, or we prayed and asked God to give us grace. He delights to do that. Watch Him at the grave of Lazarus, at the side of the woman whose son had died. He is the God of all comfort. He longs to give "comforting grace." So when someone prays for it, He releases from His precious storehouse of love an all-encompassing kind of encouragement and power. He allows us to pass through something *supernaturally* that we could not handle naturally. When He does, it is important that we stop to thank Him for it.

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It happens when we are faced with trauma or serious illness, as well. Perhaps you have been there. The doctor calls and says, "Your tests show a problem. I need to run some more." Or a loved one calls and says, "I have to have this operation." Immediately, you begin to tremble inside. All kinds of fears and possibilities begin to run through your mind. We tend to be paralyzed for the moment. What if...And then our thoughts trail off to a worst-case scenario. What if...

But as the process begins to run its course, for many at least, there comes this unusual peace, a kind of quiet confidence in the sovereignty of God, and the ability to pray "thy will be done" and mean it. The usual "panic" when the doctor walks in the room is replaced with a kind of calm assurance that God is in charge, and the "heart of the king really is in the hand of the Lord." What has happened? Grace.

It happens when a sudden trauma hits you or your family. You are driving along, minding you own business, when out of nowhere comes another car—only when it hits yours, it feels more like a ten ton truck. Sirens sound, police arrive, ambulances screech to a halt. It's like watching one of those police dramas on television, only you're in it.

At first you are shaking too much to give them your name, but little by little, something changes. Your perspective shifts to the person in the other car, even if it was their fault. Your concern turns to your testimony, and how you can give a godly response and still be responsible. It all began when you quietly called out to God to strengthen you or help you. You may not have asked in so many words, but what you really did was ask God for grace. And God, who knew your heart, began to comfort and encourage you.

Comforting grace. It is one of those wonderful commodities that lies in the storehouse of God's wonders and waits to be called on. Once invited, it flows like a river into the heart and life of the believer until He is lifted up beyond the circumstances and into the waiting arms of Jesus. Truly, underneath are the everlasting arms. It is the grace of God that lifts them up and wraps them about our hurting lives.

Comforting grace may differ from some other forms of grace in that it is often available even when we don't ask for it. In fact, often when we don't realize we are receiving it, we

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are. That often repeated passage in II Corinthians 1 is where we must begin:

Grace be to you and peace from God our Father, and from the Lord Jesus Christ.

Blessed be God, even the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies, and the God of all comfort;

Who comforteth us in all our tribulation, that we may be able to comfort them which are in any trouble, by the comfort wherewith we ourselves are comforted of God.

For as the sufferings of Christ abound in us, so our consolation also aboundeth by Christ.

And whether we be afflicted, it is for your consolation and salvation, which is effectual in the enduring of the same sufferings which we also suffer: or whether we be comforted, it is for your consolation and salvation.

And our hope of you is steadfast, knowing, that as ye are partakers of the sufferings, so shall ye be also of the consolation.

For we would not, brethren, have you ignorant of our trouble which came to us in Asia, that we were pressed out of measure, above strength, insomuch that we despaired even of life:

But we had the sentence of death in ourselves, that we should not trust in ourselves, but in God which raiseth the dead:

Who delivered us from so great a death, and doth deliver: in whom we trust that he will yet deliver us;

Ye also helping together by prayer for us, that for the gift bestowed upon us by the means of many persons thanks may be given by many on our behalf.

For our rejoicing is this, the testimony of our conscience, that in simplicity and godly sincerity, not with fleshly wisdom, but by the grace of God, we have had our conversation in the world, and more abundantly to you-ward.

(II Corinthians 1:2-12)

What an incredible passage. Paul and his friends were suffering greatly. This Christian life had not turned out to be a religious party. It was warfare, pure and simple. At every turn there was affliction, suffering, even a horizon filled with what appeared to be certain death. In this same letter to the Corinthians, Paul described life as a minister of the gospel

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like this:

Of the Jews five times received I forty stripes save one.

Thrice was I beaten with rods, once was I stoned, thrice I suffered shipwreck, a night and a day I have been in the deep;

In journeyings often, in perils of waters, in perils of robbers, in perils by mine own countrymen, in perils by the heathen, in perils in the city, in perils in the wilderness, in perils in the sea, in perils among false brethren;

In weariness and painfulness, in watchings often, in hunger and thirst, in fastings often, in cold and nakedness.

(II Corinthians 11:24-27)

Sounds like a real picnic, doesn't it? If anyone had a reason to become bitter, it was Paul. He had given up everything to serve the Lord, and if he was to have our mentality, at least the Lord owed him as comfortable and trouble-free an existence as his unbelieving friends. Right? Wrong.

No, his unbelieving friends, circumstantially at least, would probably have fewer problems. Most of them had not been beaten, shipwrecked, stoned, or left cold, hungry or naked. Most of them were still going to work every day in their first century version of business suits, taking their first century versions of two hour lunch breaks, and going home to their first century versions of the happy home. Paul, meanwhile, having given his life to Jesus after his encounter on that Damascus road, was living a Job-like existence. By man's standards, nothing was going well. He was being picked on, made fun of, attacked, and finally jailed. He was innocent, but he was suffering. He was doing the will of God, but he was being maligned, persecuted and abused.

Something was happening, however, that nobody but Paul could see. Something supernatural. *Paul was experiencing grace*, and the more he suffered, the more he was comforted. The more he was persecuted, the more he was enabled to stand. Just a few verses further into the letter, Paul began to explain how God's strength (His grace) was made perfect when he was in trouble. God's grace was released when he was trapped, imprisoned, traumatized, or sick. In other words, he received supernatural enabling power when his

natural ability to function was impaired or threatened.

Oh, the incredible, comforting grace of God. So profound is it that He actually named His Spirit “The Comforter.” So important a part of His silent ministry to believers is comforting grace, that He was able to say in this passage that He was “The God of all comfort.” Think about that for a moment. It means simply that *all comfort comes from Him*. His spirit is our comfort, for He is Our Comforter. Comforting grace can only come from God. Other people may try to comfort you, and there may be temporary encouragement, but the inner strength to endure suffering can only come from God. He is “the God of all comfort.”

Secondly, not only is He the “God of all comfort,” the passage goes on to explain that “He comforts us in all our tribulation.” It does not say He comforts us when we ask. It does not say He comforts us when we experience it. Whether we ask, and thus open our hearts to realize it, He is comforting us, whether we feel comforted or not. How do we know? He told us so, and He doesn’t lie. He comforts us in all our tribulation, all our sorrow, all our times of trauma, persecution, grief, and despair. He is, at that moment, in the process of releasing *comforting grace*.

Let’s look for a moment at that passage in II Corinthians, chapter 1 again, and ask what it is saying about comforting grace.

**1- Our comfort is not only to make us feel better. It is designed to give us a way to communicate God’s love to others.**

a) It is designed to equip us to have a ministry. The God of all comfort comforts us *that we may be able to comfort them which are in any trouble*, (verse 4a). Comforting grace is a reproducible commodity. It is stored in the spiritual warehouse of our soul and kept in inventory on record in the computer of our heart. It makes a lasting impact, so that when someone else needs comfort, God sends a signal to the inventory manager who calls up some of the comfort we received, and sends a signal to the brain reminding us of how we were comforted, and says, “pass it on.”

b) Not only is it to equip us to minister, it helps define our ministries. We are to comfort them with the *same comfort*

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*wherewith we were comforted of God.* (verse 4b) The man or woman who has suffered great pain has a message to share with those in pain. There is grace to endure it and growth to come from it. The man or woman who has suffered the loss of a loved one has a message to share with those who are grieving. There is comforting grace awaiting them. The man or woman who has experienced deep trials with their children have a ministry. It is to pray for and reach out to other parents who may not know someone who has gone before them and experienced comforting grace.

The man or woman who is struggling with rejection or persecution has an ally. It is the one who has been there and received grace from God. The alcoholic needs to hear from someone who has won the battle. The rejected wife or husband needs to know that God is sufficient when the heart is broken. The God of all comfort has comforted someone in days past, and that someone has a message and a ministry to share with someone who is hurting today. If you are one of those who is saying, "But I don't know how God can use me," think about the valleys you have passed through and the grace you have received, and ask God to take you to people who are needing the very same grace you received. That's one reason God gave you that grace. He wanted you to pass it on.

### **2- Our comforting grace will be proportionate to the depth of our need.**

As the sufferings abound, so our consolation abounds.  
(verse 5 paraphrase)

The deeper the pain, the greater the grace. The darker the sky, the brighter the grace. The more awesome the grief, the more awesome the power. God has different sized packages of grace. He knows the depth of our need and has a gift of grace exactly right for us. "God is faithful. He will not allow us to be tested beyond our ability to bear it." (I Corinthians 10:13 paraphrase) Praise God. The grace is always sufficient, for it is custom designed for the moment of need.

### **3- Others are watching us as we receive grace.**

Even if we never say a word, Paul is saying that "whether we be afflicted, it is for your consolation and salvation, which is effectual in the enduring of the same sufferings which we also suffer; or whether we be comforted, it is

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for your consolation and salvation.” (verse 6)

Not only are believers consoled, unbelievers may well find salvation by watching Christians as they are lifted into the heavenlies while living in the throes of life’s crises under the influence of amazing grace. If you think no one is watching, Beloved, think again. The working of grace in our trials is a living motion picture shown on the screen of the unbelieving heart, and the moral to the story is: Only God can sustain you when the thermostat of life goes out of control.

### **4- Be willing to be open about your problems, but focus on the grace God is providing, rather than on your hardship.**

We would not, brethren, have you ignorant of our trouble. (verse 8)

Paul is saying, “I’m not pretending life is a easy. It’s not. In Asia we were pressed out of measure. (We were pushed to our limits and beyond, *above strength*) In other words, at our best, we were stopped dead in our tracks. Without some kind of supernatural intervention, we didn’t have the strength to go on.” Enter grace. Paul was specific about the depth of the hardship, but he was just as specific about the height of the grace.

### **5- Paul acknowledges that it was the prayers of the saints that made the difference.**

He said,

Ye also helping together by prayer for us, (verse 11a)

That’s another reason they needed to know the depth of his suffering. It affected the kind of grace they prayed for.

### **6- The whole matter hinges on the appropriation of the grace of God.**

For our rejoicing is this, the testimony of our conscience, that in simplicity and godly sincerity, not with fleshly wisdom, but by the grace of God, we have had our conversation (behavior) in the world, and more abundantly to you-ward. (verse 12)

The Christians have been encouraged. The unbelievers stand in awe. Why? Because God has given strength where none existed and wisdom beyond what the human mind could achieve. It had to come from God. Therefore, the praise

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has to go to God. It is all of grace.

The comforting grace of God. It is God-sized power in a heart-shaped box. It is a measure of eternal love applied to a world of broken hearts. It is supernatural energy translated into real-world encouragement. It is the power to be, when there is no reason to be, but God. It is available to every believer *every time he or she passes through difficult times, and it is available in exactly the measure we need*. It is carefully released in such a way that not only are we encouraged, but the world is amazed, unbelievers are saved, and hurting people are brought into the lives of people whose hurts have been helped by amazing grace. It is a vital part of our witness and a vital source of our ministry—this wonderful, marvelous comforting grace of God.

Have you experienced it? Of course you have. Have you thanked God for it each time it has overflowed into your life? Perhaps not. Have you shared it with other believers in such a way as to give glory to God and not to you? Have you allowed it to sweep into the lives of searching unbelievers who need to know there is comfort in pain, at the edge of death, in the bed of sickness, in the ocean that sweeps over you when your heart is broken? There is comfort. It comes from the Comforter, and it is real. But to receive the comfort, you must have received the Comforter; and to receive the Comforter, you must call upon the Son, who alone is worthy to be praised. It is an integral part of your salvation. When you came to Christ, He placed in your heart a receptacle that was designed only to hold the comforting grace of God. He controls the flow of power into that receptacle. It is proportionate to your need and to your willingness to allow it to flow into other lives. The more you allow the grace to flow, the more He allows the grace to grow.

Just what does it mean to “comfort” someone? And when God promised to “comfort” us what was He promising? Why would He name His own Spirit “The Comforter”? Those are some questions we need to ask ourselves as this lesson proceeds. The words from which our English Bible produces the definition “comfort” are very meaningful words.

The Hebrew word used in the Old Testament is found over 100 times, and over half of them are translated “comfort.”



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Most of the others are translated “repent.” The reason is that its literal meaning, “to be comforted or consoled” generally follows feeling sorry over something, often some sin that leads to repentance. The word is:

נָחַם – nacham {naw-kham}

It is found in such verses as:

For the LORD shall comfort Zion: he will comfort all her waste places; and he will make her wilderness like Eden, and her desert like the garden of the LORD; joy and gladness shall be found therein, thanksgiving, and the voice of melody.  
(Isaiah 51:3)

To proclaim the acceptable year of the LORD, and the day of vengeance of our God; to comfort all that mourn;  
(Isaiah 61:2)

As one whom his mother comforteth, so will I comfort you; and ye shall be comforted in Jerusalem.  
(Isaiah 66:13)

God is the one usually doing the comforting. Israel is usually the object of His comfort. He has heard their cries. He has seen their despair. Now He is ready to rush to their sides and bring them comfort and hope again.

In the New Testament, the Greek words are even more expressive. Some of the words and examples of their use in Scripture are these:

ψαρσεω – tharseo {thar-seh'-o}

to be of good courage, be of good cheer. To be encouraged.

But Jesus turned him about, and when he saw her, he said, Daughter, be of good comfort; thy faith hath made thee whole. And the woman was made whole from that hour.  
(Matthew 9:22)

παρηγορια – paregoria {par-ay-gor-ee'-ah}

*comfort, solace, relief, alleviation, consolation*

These only are my fellowworkers unto the kingdom of God, which have been a comfort unto me.

(Colossians 4:11b)

This word is used only once in Scripture, and it means to speak words of comfort to someone who is hurting.

παράκλησις – paraklesis {par-ak'-lay-sis}

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- 1) *a calling near, summons, (especially for help)*
- 2) *importation, supplication, entreaty*
- 3) *exhortation, admonition, encouragement*
- 4) *consolation, comfort, solace; that which affords comfort or refreshment*

Then had the churches rest throughout all Judaea and Galilee and Samaria, and were edified; and walking in the fear of the Lord, and in the comfort of the Holy Ghost, were multiplied. (Acts 9:31)

For whatsoever things were written aforetime were written for our learning, that we through patience and comfort of the scriptures might have hope. (Romans 15:4)

Blessed be God, even the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies, and the God of all comfort; (II Corinthians 1:3)

It is a picture of someone called alongside another to exhort them and encourage them and cheer them until they have been comforted.

παρακαλεω – parakaleo {par-ak-al-eh'-o}  
*to call to one's side, call for, summon*  
*to admonish, exhort, beg, entreat, beseech*  
*to console, encourage, strengthen by consolation*  
*to comfort*  
*to receive consolation, be comforted*

Wherefore comfort one another with these words. (I Thessalonians 4:18)

Now our Lord Jesus Christ himself, and God, even our Father, which hath loved us, and hath given us everlasting consolation and good hope through grace, Comfort your hearts, and stablish you in every good word and work. (II Thessalonians 2:16,17)

This word is also used to describe one called alongside to comfort or encourage. It is closely related to the word used to describe the Holy Spirit. That word is:

παρακλητος – parakletos {par-ak'-lay-tos}  
*summoned, called to one's side,*  
*especially called to one's aid*

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*one who pleads another's cause before a judge, a pleader, counsel for defense, legal assistant, an advocate  
an intercessor of Christ in his exaltation at God's right hand, pleading with God the Father for the pardon of our sins  
of the Holy Spirit destined to take the place of Christ with the apostles (after his ascension to the Father),  
to lead them to a deeper knowledge of the gospel truth, and give them divine strength needed to enable them to undergo trials and persecutions on behalf of the divine kingdom.*

In this Biblical definition of grace, you see the work of the Holy Spirit described, in particular, His work as He gives to us *comforting grace*. He is enabling us to undergo trials and persecutions for the glory of God. He does that by coming alongside and lifting our burdens. It is the burdens that weigh us down; the burdens of grief, of sorrow, of pain, of weariness, of fear, of anxiety. And as circumstances overpower us, Christ comes alongside and is crying out to us,

Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden,  
and I will give you rest.

Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me; for I am meek  
and lowly in heart: and ye shall find rest unto your souls.

For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.

(Matthew 11:28-30)

It is why He could say to us:

Humble yourselves therefore under the mighty hand of  
God, that he may exalt you in due time:

Casting all your care upon him; for he careth for you.

(1 Peter 5:6,7)

When the load gets heavy, and we need someone else to come alongside Jesus is standing there, waiting, literally pleading with us to take the load that is crushing us and give that load to Him. He is saying that His burden is light. We can handle it because He will. His burden is light because He lets the Father carry it. Ours will be light if we avail ourselves of the comforting grace He is offering.

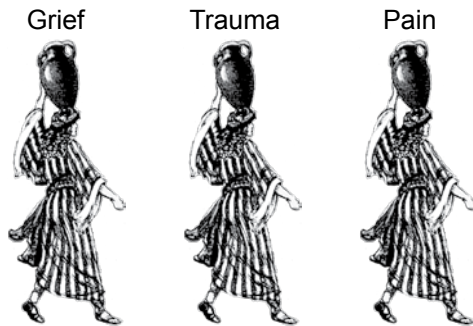
To do that, however, we have to humble ourselves and accept the fact that we can't handle it alone. That is all He is waiting for. He wants us to come in humility and cast those cares on Him. There is more than one New Testament word

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for “casting.” There is one used of fishermen in Mark 1:16 that speaks of letting go of something, not being sure of where it will fall or what will happen to it.

There is, however, another word, and it is the one used in the First Peter passage. It speaks of someone releasing or throwing something into a container or to a given place or person with an understanding of what will happen to it. That’s what Peter is saying. You can cast all your cares *on Him*.

In the real world, that means coming to a place in the midst of your need when either you or some intercessor cries out to God on your behalf. Let’s say you are carrying the burden of grief. A loved one has passed away; your heart is breaking. But prayers go up to heaven on your behalf which say, “Lord, Mary is carrying a load of grief. She will be crushed beneath it. Please send Your Spirit alongside to take it from her.” Suddenly, something happens. Jesus, your intercessor in heaven, sends His Spirit who lives in Mary to walk *alongside Mary and take the load from Mary*. She is still sensing her grief, but it is as though the load has been lifted because it has.



You have either been in countries or seen photos of people, often women, who carry great loads on their heads. It might seem so burdensome to you, you would get a headache just thinking about it. Now, try to picture in your mind people walking uphill along life’s highway, with these huge loads on their heads. See the load begin to move from side to side. See the person struggling to keep their balance. Now, look. Someone they seem to know is walking alongside them. He is reaching up and removing that huge box from atop their

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head. He is carrying it for them. It seems so light to Him. Now watch the face of the one who was carrying the burden before. There is a smile of relief; a glow of gratitude. They are still climbing the hill, *but the burden is gone*. The One called alongside is carrying it for them. That, Beloved, is *comforting grace*.

Just minutes after my fourth grandchild came into the world, each of the other three children wanted to hold the new baby. I can never forget the scene. The seven year old was a little timid, but quite delighted. The six year old was beaming as he got his turn. Then the two year old was told it was her turn. They sat her down, took this newborn baby, weighing over nine pounds, incidentally, and placed him in her arms.

Her eyes got wider. She looked down at the heavy load, then up at her father and uttered those memorable words: "Too heavy!" That's all she had to say. For her little arms, nine pounds was more than she could bear. So she called for her father to take what, to her, was more than she could handle. Lovingly, her father reached down and took it from her.

I'll never forget that. So often, as we go through life, we seem to be walking uphill, but we trudge along, often reeling beneath the load we have on our heads, but still managing to make a little progress. Then it happens. Something comes into our life that causes the load to get even heavier. It may be a serious illness, the grief over a loved one's loss, the trauma of an accident, or the ongoing weight of constant pain or disappointment.

What our God wants us to do is simply cry out, "Too heavy!" When we do, *the minute we do*, He reaches down and takes that burden and begins to walk alongside carrying it for us. He is the God of all comfort, and He is in the process of comforting us in all our tribulation, in all our sorrow, in all our grief. He has a reason: He wants us to pass that comfort on in days to come. For now, however, He is simply enabling us to supernaturally carry a load we cannot carry naturally. He is enabling us by relieving us for a season from the weight of the load.

Are you struggling from the weight of grief? Cry out to God

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in your heart right now, “too heavy!” He will come alongside when you do and lift the weight of that burden from you. Oh, you will still hurt for your loss, but there will be a peace and a freedom that defies human understanding.

Are you living daily with the weight of constant pain? From time to time, does it just become more than you can bear? Then cry out to God, “too heavy!” and feel the weight lifted. The pain may remain, but somehow the burden of the pain, the fear of the pain, the weight of the pain will evaporate into the arms of the pain-bearer, our Lord Himself.

Are you struggling over family problems that seem to have no solution? Do you awaken in the night, filled with fear or frustration over what might happen next? God understands. But before you trudge a foot further with that box of fear on your head, cry out to the One walking alongside, “too heavy!” He will reach over and take it from you and give you comforting grace. Oh, the problems may not vanish, but the weight of them will disappear for a time, and you will be able to see them more clearly. Why? Grace.

Maybe you are facing uncertainty in your life because of a serious illness. It isn't just the disease; it is the weight of the disease: the uncertainty, the decisions, the fears. Like a huge box marked “heavy load,” it seems to rest upon your head, putting pressure on your heart; and the more you think about it, the heavier it gets. Oh, Beloved, cry out to God, “too heavy!” Will He take the disease away? That's not for us to know, just yet. Only He knows what will most glorify His name. He is able, that's for sure; either in the twinkling of an eye, or over a period of time as He uses the process to change our perspective. But regardless, *you were never intended to carry the weight*. It's just too heavy. Give it to Him.

Perhaps that load will suddenly appear on your head today or tomorrow or sometime in the future. You may be walking or riding or sitting, minding your own business, when a totally unexpected trauma or tragedy will appear on the horizon, like that auto accident in the opening illustration. Prepare your heart now, so that when it happens, you won't try to carry the weight of that trauma. You were never meant to carry the weight. Plant the seed in the computer of your mind right now. What you are to do is cry out in that hour of

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need, “too heavy!” and rest.

Your God is a load bearing God. He is omnipotent. There is no load He cannot carry. He is perfect mercy. He understands the load you are under. He is perfect grace. He wants to carry it for you. Learn to pray for others when the weight of the load they are carrying seems to be more than they can bear. That is what intercessory prayer is all about. It is bringing to God people and situations that need supernatural wisdom or power and giving them to Him. He knows what to do. He gives them comforting grace. Don't be bashful. Don't apologize. Ask Him. Remember, *He is the God of all comfort, and He comforts us in all our tribulation.* It is not an imposition to Him. It is a joy and a choice in which He delights.

When the load you are carrying begins to weigh you down, be willing to humble yourself under the mighty hand of God, and cry out, “Lord, too heavy!” Remember: He understands. He knows. He cares. That's what the passage said: “He careth for you.” Give that burden to Him. Cast it in His direction. And I promise you—no, on second thought, *He promised you—**He will give you rest.***





## Chapter 14

# Grace and Peace

There is a place of quiet rest  
    *near to the heart of God,*  
A place where sin cannot molest,  
    near to the heart of God.

There is a place of comfort sweet,  
    near to the heart of God,  
A place where we, our Savior meet,  
    near to the heart of God.

There is a place of full release,  
    near to the heart of God,  
A place where all is joy and peace,  
    near to the heart of God.

(Text and Music: Cleland B. McAfee)

That beautiful old hymn paints a picture of the Christian life in its most complete form. It reveals an inner garden near the palace of the Holy One, where, when the believer has quietly slipped into its confines, there is a kind of holy hush; a place where the winds of adversity that blow upon us are transformed into the gentle breeze of the presence of God. It is a place where the hurried, harried believer can find refuge from the harsh storms that assail him and crawl up into the arms of Jesus and rest in perfect peace.

Perfect peace. Oh, what a mirage that seems to be, and yet God promises, just as the songwriter did, that such a place and such a promise really does exist. The thing that makes it so attractive is not just the relief that it promises us, *but rather the fact that it is near to the heart of God.*

But the question remains: “Must we be in trouble to find that garden of rest? Must our worlds be falling apart before we run to the quiet place?” We know that tribulation worketh patience. We know that God’s strength is made perfect in

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weakness. Do we, then, sit around with a bucket on our heads waiting for God to rain down fire from heaven, so we can pray for grace?

I don't think so. I think like Job, like Stephen, like Paul, like Joseph, like Moses, we will grow in our walk with God as life's cannonballs fly in our direction, and we crawl up into God in utter dependence and pray. But somehow, the Scripture seems to indicate that there is, in the center of the will of God, like the eye of a hurricane, a place of quiet rest where a man and His God can be such intimate friends that God is literally doing the living, and the man or woman is a wonder-filled, awestruck witness to the life that is being lived out in their body. Some call it the "exchanged" life. Others call it "Lordship." I would prefer to call it "the normal Christian life."

It is of grace. We don't deserve it. But it is of God, therefore, we don't need to. It is the supernatural rest of God so captivating and overpowering the Christian that he or she can cry out like Paul:

I am crucified with Christ: 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 the Son of God, who loved  
me, and gave himself for me. (Galatians 2:20)

"I'm living, but I'm not doing the living," Paul cried out. "I'm dead. Christ is alive, and I am watching Him live His amazing life through me." And then Paul gives us God's definition of love. He says, "He loved me and gave Himself for me." Love is God giving Himself away for those who do not deserve it, cannot repay it, and may not understand it. That same Paul, in the midst of years of imprisonment, persecution, hardship, and the facing of certain death, used a prison cell as his personal post office and wrote letters from his heart to the hearts of those outside who were wondering what kind of fear and frustration Paul was suffering from inside those cells of death. In every case, Paul began those letters the same way. He wrote:

Grace be unto you, and peace, from God our Father, and  
from the Lord Jesus Christ. (I Corinthians 1:3,  
II Corinthians 1:2,  
Ephesians 1:2,  
Philippians 1:2,  
Colossians 1:2b,  
II Thessalonians 1:2)

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Grace and peace. The Pauline twins. Like two hearts that are woven together by threads of divine design, grace and peace seemed to be both the cause and effect of each other. Only the grace of God can bring about the peace of God, and oh, how the peace of God draws upon the grace of God for its strength and power. Grace and peace. Two sides of the coin of the enabling life of Christ in us.

As we draw towards the conclusion of our study of God's amazing grace, we need to take a Biblical look at this subject of peace. We need to steal away into that place of quiet rest near to the heart of God and see what there is about it that makes it so special, and what there is about us that causes us to rush from that garden so frequently and leave behind the serenity we found there. Just what is "the peace of God"? Why did Paul pray for it so earnestly? Why did he so often couple it with the word "grace"? Such are the issues we need to explore as we seek to have God's wonderful grace an experiential part of our daily existence.

There is basically one Hebrew word in the Old Testament and one Greek word in the New used to describe this unusual quality. They are:

שָׁלוֹם – shalom {shaw-lome'} or shalom {shaw-lome'}

*1a) completeness, soundness, welfare, peace 1a) completeness (in number)*

*1b) safety, soundness (in body)*

*1c) welfare, health, prosperity*

*1d) peace, quiet, tranquillity, contentment*

*1e) peace, friendship*

*1e1) of human relationships*

*1e2) with God especially in covenant relationship*

*1f) peace (from war)*

*1g) peace (as adjective)*

One hundred seventy-five times in the Old Testament this word is translated "peace." It is used a total of 236 times in all. The Greek word is:

εἰρήνη – eirene {i-ray'-nay}

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1) *a state of national tranquillity*

1a) *exemption from the rage and havoc of war*

2) *peace between individuals, i.e. harmony, concord*

3) *security, safety, prosperity, felicity, (because peace and harmony make and keep things safe and prosperous)*

4) *of the Messiah's peace*

4a) *the way that leads to peace (salvation)*

5) *of Christianity, the tranquil state of a soul assured of its salvation through Christ, and so fearing nothing from God and content with its earthly lot, of whatsoever sort that is*

6) *the blessed state of devout and upright men after death*

Peace. It seems obvious, then, that it has four facets in Scripture. They are intertwined and similar in definition, but vastly different in expression. They are:

### 1- The cessation of hostilities between two warring nations.

And Jehoshaphat made peace with the king of Israel.

(I Kings 22:44)

And Joshua made peace with them, and made a league with them, to let them live:

(Joshua 9:15a)

### 2- The cessation of hostilities between two people.

Depart from evil, and do good; seek peace, and pursue it.

(Psalm 34:14)

Mark the perfect man, and behold the upright: for the end of that man is peace.

(Psalm 37:37)

### 3- The cessation of hostilities between man and God through Jesus Christ and His atoning death:

But now in Christ Jesus ye who sometimes were far off are made nigh by the blood of Christ.

For he is our peace, who hath made both one, and hath broken down the middle wall of partition between us;

Having abolished in his flesh the enmity, even the law of commandments contained in ordinances; for to make in himself of twain one new man, so making peace;

And that he might reconcile both unto God in one body by the cross, having slain the enmity thereby:

(Ephesians 2:13-16)

But he was wounded for our transgressions, he was

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bruised for our iniquities: the chastisement of our peace was upon him; and with his stripes we are healed.

(Isaiah 53:5)

Therefore being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ:

(Romans 5:1)

### 4- That inner tranquility of heart and spirit that accompanies surrendering to the sovereignty of God.

Thou wilt keep him in perfect peace, whose mind is stayed on thee: because he trusteth in thee.

(Isaiah 26:3)

Peace I leave with you, my peace I give unto you: not as the world giveth, give I unto you. Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid.

(John 14:27)

These things I have spoken unto you, that in me ye might have peace. In the world ye shall have tribulation: but be of good cheer; I have overcome the world.

(John 16:33)

It is that fourth and final expression of peace that we will be dealing with in this lesson. All four are the result of a coming together of two groups or two people until a sense of harmony replaces conflict or contention. In the case of the first two, there is an overt need for a treaty or agreement, for two nations or individuals or families have been openly at war. In the case of man's relationship with God, there is an inner kingdom involved, and a once for all treaty must be signed for peace to be a reality. God signed His name in blood at Calvary. All that He is waiting for is for every man and woman to come to Him and surrender to Him and accept the terms of the treaty He has outlined. When we agree to accept what He has done on our behalf, the eternal conflict between us and God is settled, and our eternal peace is guaranteed. His Spirit is given to us as the down payment, demonstrating that God has and always will fulfill His promise.

But that last kind of peace is the one defined by Strong's Concordance as:

*of Christianity, the tranquil state of a soul assured of its salvation through Christ, and so fearing nothing from God and content with its earthly lot, of whatsoever sort that is.*

A "tranquil state of soul." What a wonderful description of that quiet place near to the heart of God. It is confident of its

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security and content with its lot in life. In other words, it is resting comfortably in the sovereignty of God. God's Word is secure. He will never leave us or forsake us, and He is coming for us so He can be with us. Oh, what love. And oh, what peace is ours when we finally learn to rest in that love.

Unlike the eternal peace we receive when we receive Christ: a guaranteed home in heaven where there will be no war, no sin, no grief and no pain; this tranquility of which Paul speaks so frequently and of which Jesus speaks so powerfully is a minute by minute experience. It is always available. Now, what can we learn about it?

1- It is the result of focus. It is reserved for the one whose "mind is stayed on thee," and as long as we, by an act of the will, choose to take our eyes off of Jesus, we lose the peace. It is still present and available, but having not availed ourselves of it, we are the losers.

2- It is an act of faith. "Because he trusteth in thee." That's the reason our minds can be stayed on Him. We are confident of our salvation and satisfied with our lot in life. Therefore, having not seen, yet we believe. Therefore, the size of the rain clouds are not a problem to us. We believe the Word of our God. So long as that faith does not give way to fear, the peace is available. The minute we take our eyes off of Him and begin to doubt, even for a second, that we can trust Him totally, the peace vanishes.

3- It is all of grace. It is a gift. "Peace I give you," Jesus said. You don't deserve it. It is free, undeserved, sovereign and eternal. The minute you begin to rationalize your worthiness into the equation, the peace will depart from your heart. It is a gift, pure and simple, and it is totally without merit.

4- The world will try to imitate it, but they can't. "Not as the world giveth, give I unto you," said Jesus. The world uses physical substitutes to calm the nerves, settle the mind, or remove the evident sources of conflict that destroy the peace. None of it lasts, though. When the alcohol wears off, when the diversion has run its course, you still have to live with yourself. They refer to "peace" as any external effort to calm the stress or ease the pain. But the pain comes from the inside, Beloved. It is the flesh's reaction to the external that defies the peace. Peace only comes from God, and only a believer can have that

kind of peace.

5- When you give way to fear, you lose it. “Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid.” Jesus was giving us the opposites of the kingdom. Fear dissolves peace. Peace overcomes fear.

6- Peace is not circumstantial, it is eternal. “In this world ye shall have tribulation.” That says it all. Tribulation is a guaranteed promise from God. It is a promise we don’t claim. We don’t like it, don’t want it, don’t even want to talk about it. But, though tribulation is guaranteed, so are we guaranteed that the very same tribulation we fear *actually can produce peace*. “Be of good cheer,” Jesus continued, “I have overcome the world.”

Other passages in Scripture further define this all-encompassing peace. One in particular describes its cause and effect.

Be careful for nothing; but in every thing by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known unto God.

And the peace of God, which passeth all understanding, shall keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus.  
(Philippians 4:6,7)

This confirms that.

7- Worry is the antithesis of peace. It assumes that your security and your lot in life is your problem, not God’s; and you’re not sure you can handle it.

8- Prayer is the method God recommends for relinquishing control and obtaining peace. “In everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known.” You take the very things that destroy your peace, and you go to the throne of God and put them down. Having done this, God promises to restore peace to your heart.

9- There is no human explanation for it. “It passes all understanding.” There is no way logically to explain it. It is an internal transformation that comes from relinquishing control of the worries and fears that beset you, allowing God to replace them with something so supernatural that an unbeliever cannot experience it or even comprehend it.

We have, then, a great deal of information about the peace

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of God from the Word of God to help the child of God stay close to the heart of God. It is a free gift that defies circumstances. It is acquired by faith and requires keeping your heart focused on who God is, rather than on what you can see and feel and touch that is troubling you. There is no worldly equivalent or human explanation for it; it is that supernatural. Worry and fear cause it to dissolve, and prayer is the vehicle God has designed to appropriate it.

Those are the facts. Something this supernatural, however, is not limited to facts. Information can help us recognize it and respond to it, but we need to see it in action, if possible, to understand it. Let's look for a moment at Matthew, chapter 14. The feeding of the 5,000 had just taken place. The disciples were tired, but in awe at the miracle working power of this amazing man of Galilee. It is there that we read:

And straightway Jesus constrained his disciples to get into a ship, and to go before him unto the other side, while he sent the multitudes away.

And when he had sent the multitudes away, he went up into a mountain apart to pray: and when the evening was come, he was there alone.

But the ship was now in the midst of the sea, tossed with waves: for the wind was contrary.

And in the fourth watch of the night Jesus went unto them, walking on the sea.

And when the disciples saw him walking on the sea, they were troubled, saying, It is a spirit; and they cried out for fear.

But straightway Jesus spake unto them, saying, Be of good cheer; it is I; be not afraid.

And Peter answered him and said, Lord, if it be thou, bid me come unto thee on the water.

And he said, Come. And when Peter was come down out of the ship, he walked on the water, to go to Jesus.

But when he saw the wind boisterous, he was afraid; and beginning to sink, he cried, saying, Lord, save me.

And immediately Jesus stretched forth his hand, and caught him, and said unto him, O thou of little faith, wherefore didst thou doubt?

And when they were come into the ship, the wind ceased.



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Then they that were in the ship came and worshipped him, saying, Of a truth thou art the Son of God.

(Matthew 14:22-33)

No doubt, the disciples were tired, but filled with enthusiasm. What a day. What a life. Free food for the multitudes out of nothing. You could almost hear them wanting to get the McDonald's franchise for all of Israel. Why, make one "Big Mac" and Jesus could turn it into a mountain of burgers. No telling what He could do with french fries. Talk about a mega-meal. And no doubt, as well, they were probably thinking, now that He has performed this miracle, think of the publicity the church would have. You could just see the Channel Four crew following their little boat wanting interviews with the Master's "Secret Service Agents." Jesus put them in a boat, patted them on the head, and sent them across the sea without Him. Once their little boat was on its way, He sent the crowds away and went up into a mountain to be with His Father. He knew that place of quiet rest, and He knew that *unless He kept going there and spending time with His Father, He could not maintain the peace He needed.* So into the Father's arms He fled once again.

He also knew that a storm was coming, and that little ship bearing the disciples would soon be tossed about with turbulence, but He had a lesson He wanted to teach, so He tarried until the fourth watch of the night, and then He went towards the sea and began to walk towards that little boat. That's right. Walk. He was walking on top of the water. The disciples, no doubt fearful already over the storm, looked out and saw Him walking towards them. The passage says that at first they thought they were seeing a ghost, and they were petrified. In fact, according to the passage, they panicked.

Jesus let them. And when their panic turned to pandemonium, Jesus spoke. "It is I;" He said, "*Don't be afraid.*" Peter, bless his outspoken heart, responded, "Lord, if it's really you, let me walk on the water, too."

Jesus replied, "Okay, Peter, start walking." And sure enough, he could and he did. I can't imagine what was going through his mind. Neither can I imagine what was going through the other disciples' minds. I only know that as he proceeded the storm intensified, and Peter began to look at the circumstances and took his eyes off Jesus.

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The minute he did (make that the second he did), he began to sink. He began to sink big time. You see, either you walk by faith or you don't. Either you believe that God is in control, and life's storms are totally at his disposal, or you believe that life is out of control, for no one else can make a difference. Peter took his eyes off Christ and began to sink. You can just see the water go up as he went down. You can all but hear him crying, "Glub, glub, Lord, glub, save me, glub."

And you can all but see the Master reach out His hand and take Peter's hand *just as he was sinking into the water's depths* and pull him up. You might expect Jesus to say, "Good job, Pete, you almost made it. Next time, you'll be able to walk halfway across." Don't. Jesus wasn't proud of Peter. He responded,

O thou of little faith, wherefore didst thou doubt?

(Matthew 14:31b)

With that, the storm relented, the winds died down, and Jesus, as He reached the boat, found a group of grateful disciples who fell down and worshipped Him. For what? Well, He had not only fed 5,000 hungry mouths, He had walked on water and calmed a storm. Pretty good day, wouldn't you say?

They loved those miracles. They loved a spiritual sideshow. They loved it when Jesus found them in dire circumstances and was able to remove the circumstances. They pictured a life of ease where every problem just disappeared and life's storms went away. They missed it. They had no reason to fear in the first place. Storms are not a problem to God, and just in case they didn't remember that, Jesus walked *on top of the water to remind them*.

They lost the peace of God the minute they took their eyes off Him and looked at the winds of life. To them, the place of quiet rest was wherever the miracles were occurring. To Jesus, it was wherever He was, for He was *always at rest*.

Grace, remember, is God doing supernaturally what we cannot do naturally, and the natural mind cannot maintain a quiet rest. We panic over a bad decision at work and the peace is gone. We panic when the phone rings and it's bad news, and the peace is gone. We panic when we have a job to do and we're afraid of failure, and the peace is gone. We worry over what we can't control, and forget that we can't control

anything. We fear the future and forget that the future is no problem to God. He planned it in eternity past, and *it has never gone beyond His sovereign reign*. And Beloved, it never will.

What was Peter's problem? He wanted a God who could calm storms, feed a hungry congregation, and walk on water. *His confidence was in what God could do*. It should have been in *who God was*. Our problem is the same. We're willing not to be afraid if we know God is going to bail us out of every tough circumstance, and if we know that the minute we call on Him, we'll either be able to walk on water, or He'll calm the storm.

We are constantly looking around for new evidences that God is God. We'll get on an airplane one time and then, after that, we'll trust virtually every airplane and every pilot we see. By faith, we get on board, sit down quietly, and wait for the plane to take off and fly. No, we don't understand how it works or even why it works, but we've experienced it and read about it, and so we trust it.

Somehow, however, we expect God to prove Himself every day. And if He won't, we'll worry. We'll fret. We'll be anxious. And the minute we do, the peace flees like a 90 mile per hour wind. It's gone. That place of quiet rest is history. Now we're on our own. Now, it's up to us to make it across the ocean in that storm.

The key to a life of victory where grace is concerned is maintaining the peace of God. The peace of God, remember, is *"That tranquil state of a soul assured of its salvation through Christ, and so fearing nothing from God, and content with its earthly lot, of whatsoever sort that is."*

Assured of its salvation.

Content with its earthly lot (whatever it is).

What an incredible formula for peace: being satisfied in Jesus. Satisfied that your eternal destiny is settled because God said so, and satisfied that *whatever you have is all you need, and whatever happens, God is in control*. Having reached that conclusion, what is there to fear? What is there to be anxious about?

It is a heart that is converted and content. That's all there is to it. Once a heart reaches that level of confidence in the sovereignty of God and is willing to keep the eyes of the Spirit

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a quiet calm, a satisfied heart, and the absence of fear. That person has entered into the place of quiet rest near to the heart of God.

Bullets may fly. Bombs may fall. Rain clouds may form overhead. No matter. Jesus is bullet-proof, and Jesus owns your life. He is the only bomb shelter you will ever need. He is the only umbrella you should ever have to have. He is your covering. He is your Rock, your Fortress, your Deliverer. He is, indeed, all you need.

Beloved, enter into the rest of God today. The issue isn't what God is going to do for you; the issue is who God is. He is the Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the end. You can trust Him with your life, and you can trust Him with your death. He alone knows what you need to mature in Christ, and nothing can happen to you without His divine permission. In the same way, He alone knows when it is time to call you to your eternal home. There is no need to fear or worry. Enter into perfect peace.

Who made you, anyway? Who knit you together in your mother's womb? Who has collected all your tears and saved them in a bottle? Your God. Who died for you? Who lives in you? Who ever lives to make intercession for you? Who whispers to you every time fear or anxiety enters your heart, *"It is I; Don't be afraid!"*?

You know who. And He longs to hear you say, like Paul, "I am crucified with Christ, nevertheless, I live...yet not I..."

You have two choices. You can try to live the Christian life in your own strength and live with fear and worry as your companions; or you can say to God every single morning, "Father, I do not know where you will take me today. I don't care. I'm yours, anyway. You bought me with a price. Oh, dear God, what a price. Take me wherever you want, and take from me whatever you want. I'm yours, and I acknowledge it. And Father, you can take me home whenever you want. Only you know when that time is best."

"So, Lord, what is there to steal my perfect peace? If my life is yours and my death is yours and my family is yours and my career is yours and my finances are yours and my health is yours, my worry bin is empty. Dear Lord, I long to enter that place of quiet rest, near to your precious heart.

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Please draw me this moment into that holy haven where the total weight of my being is so on You that Satan has no place to attack my armor of peace. Dear Lord, I want to enter into rest.” The first thing you have to do is to ask God for His perfect peace, by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving. That’s your part. God’s part is everything else. God’s promise is: the peace of God that passeth all understanding shall keep you.

But that is only the beginning. That is the “Quiet Time” part. The peace will remain if “your eyes are stayed on Him.” That means that throughout the day, *every day*, you keep meditating through the day on who God is. Take one aspect of His nature and every time your mind is idle, focus on one or more aspects of His character. Write Scripture on cards. Take a hymn for the day that magnifies that part of His nature and “make melody in your heart” throughout the day.

You’ve all heard of the “Peter principle.” This is the original “Peter principle”: When you start sinking, cry out “Lord, save me!” The minute you begin to sense that the peace has fled, realize what you have done. Your eyes and your thoughts have shifted to the storm, and immediately your faith has vanished. It may be only for a second, but that’s all it takes. Cry out to God. Ask Him to restore to you the grace of peace.

He wants to keep you in perfect peace. The keeping is His job. The peace is His peace. The grace is His grace. No, you don’t deserve it. No, you can’t earn it. No, you can’t pay Him for it. It is free, undeserved, sovereign, and eternal. But yes, you can ask Him for it, and unless you do, you will probably miss the blessing of that supernatural peace that only comes when you remain near to the heart of God.

Practice the peace of God, Beloved. Practice asking for it. Practice focusing on Him. Increase the time you spend daily with the Prince of Peace, then determine to keep who He is before you all day long. When the peace begins to vanish, *immediately cry out*. He wants you to have it. He wants to *keep you in perfect peace*.

There really is a place of quiet rest near to the heart of God. There is no turmoil there. There is no fear there. There is no anxiety there. Life’s storms still swirl around you, but you are not sinking. You are quietly, safely walking *on top of the water*.

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Listen carefully. See if you can't hear the Master calling to you amidst life's whirlwinds, "It is I. Don't be afraid. My peace I give unto you." He wants you to come unto Him so He can give you rest. He wants you to crawl up into His arms and let Him give you...peace. Will you do that right now? And will you purpose that in ever increasing measure, you will cherish the grace of peace for as long as you shall live?

Then, Beloved, the place of quiet rest is yours.

# A Challenge to Further Study

## **Chapter 1 – Lest Any Man Should Boast**

1- Why was it important to God for Joseph McDaniel to lose that race? What had that car and that race become to him? Why did he have to fail before he could understand grace? What do you think is the greatest enemy grace has?

2- Find the six most important words in Ephesians 2:8,9. Define them. See if you can find the relationship or the progression in that verse that reveals the heart of God.

3- Why could it “not be of works”? What would happen? Why is that such an affront to God?

4- Study this week at least three of the attributes of God by searching the Scriptures for descriptions of those attributes. What would be different if *any of those qualities did not exist in God*?

5- God’s holiness is the attribute that creates a problem for man. Why is that? What quality of his nature does God exhibit in order to deal with man’s sin? Explain the two-fold expression of that quality.

6- Do you think we make it clear to those we seek to win to Christ how undeserving they are of salvation? Why not? What aspect of man’s nature does this offend? Man is willing to take something free, but he wants to feel he’s getting it because he deserves it, at least in part. Why can’t God allow that?

7- How would you explain the difference between “saving grace” and “enabling grace”? Do you ever pray and ask God to “give you the grace” to do something or to bear up under something? Do you pray for others that God would give them the grace to repent or to bear the loss of a loved one or to endure persecution? Do you understand what you are praying for? For God to give them or us that grace, what must our mindset be?

8- Memorize Colossians 2:6. Write down how you viewed God when you received Christ? How did you view yourself? How should that affect your search for enabling grace?

9- Write out your own “one-liner” descriptions of grace this week and ask God to give you fresh insights on His precious gift to us.

## **Chapter 2 – It Wasn't Free to Him**

1- Try to imagine the illustration at the beginning of the lesson. Now try to imagine that the doctor is God, and that He is transplanting the heart of His Son into the body of someone who is so evil, he deserves to die. Now conclude that this someone is you. How does that affect your concept of grace?

2- What do you think were some of God's alternatives *other than redemption*? What could He have done to clear the world of sin?

3- Why is "relative righteousness" an impossibility? Why do we constantly compare ourselves with other men and women rather than with the holiness of God?

4- Can you honestly admit *that you killed God*? Why is this so hard?

5- Look at Judas. What was his driving motivation in life? How did it end up? Why do you think he committed suicide?

6- Can you identify with Peter? He was bold, aggressive, self-assured. What did God have to do with Peter to take care of his spiritual pride? Have you ever told God, "They may disappoint you, Lord, but I won't"? Why is this so dangerous?

7- The other ten disciples were more passive, but no more supportive. What was *their problem*? Why are we likely to cut and run when the miracles cease? When we feel disappointed in how God answers prayer? What can we do about it?

8- The chief priests and scribes were religious activists. What was their problem? Did they kill Jesus?

9- The soldiers were committed to their tasks. How did this divert them until they missed the King of Glory?

10- Why are we so like the milling crowds who entered into the crucifixion without understanding it? How did Jesus pray for them?

11- Why do you think God is tarrying, and hasn't returned yet? What great encouragement can we glean from this?



### **Chapter 3 – Adopted, Accepted, Adored**

1- Compare Paul's greetings in Ephesians 1 with those of I Corinthians 1:3, II Corinthians 1:2, Galatians 1:3, Philippians 1:2, Colossians 1:2, I Thessalonians 1:1, II Thessalonians 1:2, I Timothy 1:2, II Timothy 1:2, and Titus 1:4. What are the similarities? What are the differences?

2- What do you think is the relationship between grace and peace?

3- To what would you liken an encyclical letter today?

4- Compare Paul's signature "an apostle of Jesus Christ by the will of God" with "Paul, a prisoner of Jesus Christ." What common quality of God is expressed by both titles? What common quality in Paul is expressed by both titles?

5- What kind of blessings was Paul praying for in Ephesians 1:3? Using Matthew 5:1-12 as your baseline, *what do you think a blessing is?* Do you pray and ask God to "bless" people? What do you mean when you do?

#### A Challenge to Application

1- What practical steps can Christians today take to be a part of the solution to the world's growing population of unwanted children? Are you willing to pray?

2- When did God decide to adopt you?

3- Why do you think He did?

4- Write out your credentials for inclusion in the Royal Family.

5- Review in your mind the imaginary trip God made to the nursery of eternity when He chose you. Look at the love in his eyes as He looks at you. Hear Him offer to take His Son's pure heart and transplant it into your sinful body. Hear Him offer to pay the total price. (No co-payment)

6- Promise to spend at least fifteen minutes a day this week alone with God reviewing that transaction and thanking Him for His amazing grace. Ask Him personally and honestly to reveal more of what that grace is all about in the days to come. Worship Him.

#### A Challenge to Memorize

Memorize Ephesians 1:4-6 this week. Meditate on the words: "chosen," "adoption," "good pleasure," "accepted in the beloved".

## **Chapter 4 – His Workmanship**

1- Cross-reference the words “dead” and “alive” in a concordance and see how many times they are used as an analogy for spiritual death and life. Why did God choose these words?

2 - Study the words “wisdom” and “prudence.” What do they mean? How can God give such things to us? Meditate on James 3:17.

3 - Read Paul's prayer in Ephesians 1:17-21. Now read Paul's prayer in Colossians 1:9-15. What similarities do you see?

### A Challenge to Application

1- Try to explain in your own words how enabling grace can be free, and yet we are to ask for it. Can you give a practical example of something in this life that is free *upon request*?

2- Reread pages 63-65 and see what patterns emerge as God gives us grace.

3- Ask God (pg 69) this week *every day* to help you become a willing piece of canvas. Set Him free to do the painting, setting you free to be *His Workmanship*.

4- Ask God to make clear the progression from saving grace to enabling grace to transferring grace as outlined in this study.

### A Challenge to Scripture Memory and Meditation

1- Memorize Ephesians 2:10.

2- Look up, cross reference and meditate on the words: “Workmanship,” “Ordained,” and “Walk.” Write out verses 8-10 in your own words. (Paraphrase them) Pray them back to God as an anthem of thanksgiving that He wants you to be His workmanship.

## **Chapter 5 – The Grace of Weakness**

1- Take those key words in II Corinthians 12:10 found on pages 13 and 14 and cross-reference those words to other parts of Scripture using a concordance. What conclusions do you come to? Give them names that describe how they would be viewed in today's world. (Illus: infirmities=sickness) Now, find other Scriptural characters who experienced the same problems. How did they respond?

2- How does the curse of the ground that accompanied Adam's sin relate to the pressures of work today? Is God using your job to make you weak, so He can give you more grace? How are you responding? Search the Psalms, using the words "strength, power, weak, weakness" as your key words. What other verses and what other thoughts surface?

### A Challenge to Further Application

1- Listing those key words from pages 13 and 14 again, now apply them to your own life. Which of them has God used in your life to bring about a state of dependence and need? How have you responded? If you knew for certain that by crying out for grace, rather than for deliverance, your character would become more Christ-like, would it change the way you respond? Is it possible to know that? Can you prove your answer from Scripture?

2- How do you pray for those you love and those you know who are being made weak through circumstances? Do you pray that God will give them grace, or do you pray that God will solve their surface problems? How did Jesus pray in the Garden? How does that pattern help us? How can this study help you pray?

### A Challenge to Scripture Memory and Meditation

Memorize Isaiah 40:29. To whom does God give strength? What does that mean to you? Does waiting on the Lord mean to wait for Him to do what He wants to do with your weakness? What does it mean to "run and not be weary"?

Memorize II Corinthians 12:9. How is God's strength perfected? Do you "glory" in your infirmities, or do you chafe under them? Ask God to change your heart as you meditate this week.

## **Chapter 6 – The Grace of Holiness**

1- Take the Scriptures found in the paragraph at the bottom of page four and look them up. What do these “holy” things have in common? How did the New Covenant change our concept of holiness? Can you find Scripture to confirm your answer?

2- Why is the third person of the Trinity called the “Holy” Spirit? What is His function in the Godhead? How does what He does for us confirm His title?

3- Have you ever thought of yourself as a “saint”? Why not? When Paul wrote to the “saints” in Ephesus or Corinth or Philippi, to whom was he writing? Read I Corinthians 1:2. Does the tone of this letter indicate these were especially “holy” people?

### A Challenge to Further Application

1- Imagine in your mind that God has placed a sentinel at the gateway to your eyes. All He asks is that before anything passes through that gate, you seek the permission of the sentinel. The sentinel's name is the Holy Spirit. How would that affect the things you normally watch? Does what you watch have to be evil by the world's standards to be wrong for you? Make three lists. Make one list of the things you look at that you know do not edify you. Make a second of things that take time away from you that ought to be spent with God, and make a third list of things that actually create in your mind and heart visual images of things that defile you. Pray seriously for one week over those three lists. Ask God for wisdom to refocus your eyes on that which will free God's holiness to flow through you.

2- Ask God to monitor the theater in your mind this week. Be honest with Him about the things that go on there. Make a list and begin the process of shutting down the theater before the productions begin.

3- Spend the next week worshipping God for His holiness. Confess sin honestly and openly. Plead with Him for the grace to become progressively holy. Pray expectantly. Watch Him do a miracle in your life. He will. When He does, be sure to praise Him.

### A Challenge to Scripture Memory

Memorize I Peter 1:15,16 and Matthew 6:22 and 23 this week.

## **Chapter 7 – The Grace of Holiness: Is It All Relative?**

1- Read and reread II Corinthians 6:14-18 again. Find Old Testament passages that were the foundation for this principle. Based on these verses, *what kinds of yoking relationships do you think God does not approve of?* Make application in today's world. Do you think this is an absolute? How does the principle of being under the authority of unbelievers differ from that of yoking with them? How can you be "separate" and still evangelize their world?

2- Read I Corinthians 3:16,17 again. How does this passage tie in with II Corinthians 6? What does your body being God's temple say to you? Cross-reference this passage and see what else the New Testament has to say on the subject.

### A Challenge to Further Application

1- Try to imagine the difference between "positional holiness" (how God sees you in Christ) and "possessional holiness" (what God desires you to become in experience). Try to view it through the lens of how you see your children growing up. You see them *based on their potential to become*. Because of that, you are patient as they learn to walk, learn to talk, as they respond both correctly and incorrectly to rebuke. You give them room to grow. Your desire, however, is that they progressively become what you envision them to be: men and women of integrity and faith. Thank God that He is so patient with us.

2- Find a picture of yourself (don't stop to admire it) and write across it: "God's Remanufactured Temple; Under Construction." Put it in your Bible or somewhere where you can see it privately when you need to. Use it to remind yourself that whatever happens to that body is happening to the temple of God. Whatever thoughts and pictures it is fed are becoming paintings on the walls of His Holy Temple, *and your signature is at the bottom of the painting*. Ask His forgiveness, and begin immediately removing those that are offensive to Him.

3- Study the word "contrite." Cross-reference it. Ask God to give you an experiential understanding of the principle of contrition and repentance this week. Be ready for Him to answer your prayer. He will. As He does, be sure to write down what He teaches you. It needs to be remembered for the rest of your life.

### A Challenge to Scripture Memory

Memorize Isaiah 57:15. Look up each word. Personalize it and pray it back to God as an act of commitment.

## **Chapter 8 – The Grace of Holiness: Making It Work**

1- Read Hebrews 11:24-27 again. What was Moses' real decision? What were his choices? Can you liken it to a real world choice in today's society? Can you explain verse 27? What other Bible characters made similar decisions? Can you relate to what made them choose the way they did? How did those decisions impact the rest of their lives? Do you know of other Bible characters who made wrong decisions? What happened to them?

2- Read Joshua 24:13-27 again. How is Joshua describing grace? How many choices did they have? Did the decision really boil down to only one choice? What was it? Do you think the people understood the gravity of the choice they were making? Did Joshua think they understood? Do you understand?

3- Why did God keep asking the children of Israel to build altars or make memorials of their sins and of His deliverance? Have you ever done that?

### A Challenge to Further Application

1- Why do we avoid making crucial decisions in our lives? What tools does Satan use to keep you from making key choices where spiritual things are concerned? If you know what they are, what do you do about it?

2- What kinds of "remembrances" do you have to keep your heart reminded of God's great acts of love in your life? When last did you make one?

3- When last did you "cry unto the Lord" about your sin? When last did you stay alone in God's presence until you saw sin for what it was and God for who He is? What keeps you from it? What can you do to change that?

4- Are you willing to take a week and ask God to give you the grace to *want to be holy*? Are you willing to let Him do *whatever it takes*? Are you willing to spend the time with Him to make it happen? Then tell Him. If not, tell Him that, and ask Him by grace to change your heart. He will.

### A Challenge to Scripture Memory

Memorize Joshua 24:14,15 and personalize it.

## **Chapter 9 – Agape Grace: A New Commandment**

1- Write out Mark 12:30,31 in your own words. Look up each key word and cross-reference it. Find out what each word means. How many times in Scripture does God repeat these commandments?

2- Read Matthew 5:43-48 again. Define “enemies.” Using that definition, who are your enemies? Do others hate you, persecute you, or despitely use you? Why does God allow that? What is He expecting of us when it happens? How can you “bless” someone you hate? How can you love someone who does not love you?

3- Read Ephesians 5:25-33 and Colossians 3:19 again. What does that mean? What is the wife to do? Is the husband’s love predicated on the wife’s response? If not, why not?

### For Further Application

1- Make a list of the people you know that you have not shown love to over the past week. They may be loved ones, acquaintances, or simply people who have crossed your path. Ask yourself, “Why did I not respond to them in love?” What rights have you claimed for yourself that you have refused to give to them?

2- Take that list before God. Ask His forgiveness. Ask Him to bring other people and incidents to your mind that need to be confessed. Ask Him to cleanse you of those, as well.

3- Take your list of “enemies” before the Lord. Pray for them, one by one. Ask God to bring blessing into their lives, and then volunteer to be the container in which those blessings are delivered. Ask God for the grace to love them as Christ loves you.

4- This week ask God to bring into your life people who need to be loved, *especially those who may be unloveable, or unloved*. Ask Him to perform a miracle in your life that will change your perspective of love forever. Ask Him to love them through you, *supernaturally*. Ask Him for the faith to expect it to happen, and then for the grace to make it happen. Praise Him in advance for His amazing grace.

### For Scripture Memory

Memorize John 13:34,35.

## **Chapter 10 – Agape Grace: The Recipients**

1- Take the words used to describe those six groups listed in Matthew 25, and cross-reference them throughout Scripture, seeing what else God has to say about each group. Then go to prayer and personalize the challenges and the promises you have found.

2- Do a study of the word “poor” and group some of the other 200 references under the seven principles found on pages 11-13. Try to examine places in Scripture where God used the needs of the poor to glorify His name or to lead them to Himself.

### A Challenge to Further Application

1- Use time this week in your time alone with God to examine your heart attitude towards the poor, the hungry, the prisoner, the sick, the afflicted, the destitute. What thoughts do you have when you see them? What has influenced you the most in your prejudices?

2- Ask God to open your eyes to the commandments of Scripture and the promises of Scripture where the poor and needy are concerned. What could you do *personally* to make yourself more available to those nobody seems to want to love?

3- How available are you to go to nursing homes to visit people who are unpleasant to look at, difficult to communicate with, and often not responsive? Do you see loving them as loving Jesus? When was the last time you made yourself available to go to a prison or write to a prisoner and share the love of Christ? How difficult is it for your heart to break when you see the homeless or starving people of other lands? What do you do when you become aware of their needs?

4- How open is your home to others? How open is your home to those you would not normally fellowship with? Is the “stranger” welcome in your home? Could you be telling Jesus to “go away”?

### A Challenge to Scripture Memory

Memorize and meditate on Matthew 25:34-40 or Psalm 41:1.



**Chapter 11 – Agape Grace: A Heart to Serve**

1- Read John 13:3-17 again. What do you think is the significance of verse 3 in the light of the whole passage? What do you think Peter was saying in verse 8? Can you relate? What do you think he was saying in verse 9?

2- What were the disciples arguing about in Luke 22:24-27? Why do you think they picked this time to do that?

3- Write out Matthew 20:26-28 in your own words. What do you think Jesus was saying in verse 28? How ought that to impact our approach to the church?

4- Read I Corinthians 15:10. How could it all be of grace when Paul said he was laboring more abundantly than all? Can you find the balanced Christian life in this verse?

A Challenge to Further Application

1- What kinds of tasks can you think of in today's church life that would be as menial as foot-washing? If you were given the opportunity do something menial for a beggar, what would your response be? If someone comes into your church who seems to be poorly clothed and obviously in need, what is your normal response? Do you make an effort to befriend them? Do you look the other way? Do you pray that somebody else will greet them so you can escape?

2- Why do you think Jesus picked this particular time to wash the disciples' feet? What do you think He was saying to us?

3- Are you a leader in any kind of ministry? In a Bible Study? In your home? How can you set the example for others to follow in ministering to those in need? What specific things can you do this week? Write them down and ask someone to help you become accountable.

4- Pray and ask God to give you the desire to love those less loveable, and ask for the grace, when given the opportunity, to let His enabling power love them through you. Expect it to happen. Thank Him when it does.

A Challenge to Scripture Memory

Memorize I Corinthians 15:10, II Corinthians 9:8, and John 13:17.

## **Chapter 12 – The Grace of Forgiveness**

1- Write out Matthew 18:21-35 in your own words, putting it in the setting of today's society. Look up the key words as you go. If you like to write, write a short story, using this account as a backdrop. What lessons did you learn from this story?

2- What was Peter's problem? Do you ever struggle with forgiveness? With forgiving the same person over and over? How do you think God feels when you fail in the same area again and again? Do you take I John 1:9 for granted, and then refuse to apply it to those who sin against you? Why do we do that?

3- What do you think Jesus meant when He said that "Likewise shall my heavenly Father do also unto you, if ye from your hearts forgive not every one his brother their trespasses."?

4- Reread the Lord's prayer and explain verses 14 and 15.

### A Challenge to Further Application

1- Is there someone or some ones who have so offended you that the last thing on your mind is forgiving them? Do they sometimes come to mind when you are praying? Why do you think that is? Does your unwillingness to forgive them *from the heart* have an effect on how God responds to your pleas for forgiveness? How do you know?

2- Do you honestly see your failure to forgive as a greater sin than whatever offense that person might have caused you? Ask God to make it plain to you. Ask Him to forgive you for holding a grudge against or having animosity towards anyone.

3- Try turning the curse into a blessing. (Page 196) Every time Satan tempts you to focus on that person or those people who have offended you, use it as a time to ask God to bring to mind those whom you might have offended instead. Honor Matthew 5:23,24 and go immediately and ask their forgiveness.

4- Ask God for the grace to forgive. As you do, ask Him for the faith to believe that He will give it to you. He will.

### A Challenge to Scripture Memory

Memorize Ephesians 4:32

### **Chapter 13 – Comforting Grace**

1- Do a Bible search of the word “comfort.” What other passages do you find that shed light on God’s use of that word?

2- What names do you find in II Corinthians 1:3 that describe God? What do you think it means that God is “the God of all comfort”?

3- If God is comforting us in “all our tribulation,” why don’t we always “feel” comforted?

4- Write out II Corinthians 1:2-12 in your own words. Cross-reference and define each word that you think is significant.

#### A Challenge to Further Application

1- What loads have you been carrying lately? Ask God to reveal to you as you pray, the names on the boxes you have been balancing on your head. Are you afraid to ask for more grace? Do you think it is presumptuous to ask for grace?

2- How do you pray for others who are carrying loads that seem too heavy? How can you discern when it’s a load that God should be carrying? What kind of prayer can you pray for them that you know is in the will of God? Do you usually pray for the pressure to go away, or for God to give them more grace?

3- Ask God to make you sensitive to your own breaking points. Ask Him to show you when the joy departs, the fear envelopes, the power is gone. What should you do then? Are you willing to think of that imaginary box on your head and cry out to God, “too heavy!”? If not, why not?

#### A Challenge to Scripture Memory

Memorize II Corinthians 1:3,4 and I Peter 5:6,7.

## **Chapter 14 – Grace and Peace**

1- Take a concordance and look up the word “peace.” Now group the words based on the four types of peace found on pages 6 and 7. How does one find “peace with God”? How does “peace with God” differ from the “peace of God”? Can you explain this to an unbeliever?

2- Reread Isaiah 26:3. Look up the meaning of the words “keep” and “stayed.” What is the relationship between the two in this passage?

3- What unusual promise is found in John 16:33? Why would Jesus give that promise while He was talking about peace?

4- Read Philippians 4:6,7. What are the prerequisites for peace found in that passage? What is the promise? Is it a conditional promise? What is the relationship between worry and peace?

### A Challenge to Further Application

1- Get a hymnal and look up the hymn, “Near to the heart of God.” Purpose to make that the hymn of the week for the next week. As you sing it, worship God for providing such a sanctuary near to His dear heart. Claim Isaiah 26:3 as you do.

2- Reread the “walking on water” story in Matthew 14:22-33. Imagine yourself on that boat with the disciples. What would be going through your mind as the waves began to cause the ship to toss and turn? What would be your thoughts as you looked out and saw Jesus coming towards you? When He said, “It is I, don’t be afraid,” what would you have done? What do you do daily when He says that to you? Do you continue to fear? Or do you enter into rest?

3- Promise to practice the peace of God this week. It is all of grace, but it is ours for the asking. Have you been asking for it? Have you been quietly taking Philippians 4:6,7 seriously? Why not begin today, and purpose that for the “rest” of your life to “rest” near to the heart of God.

### A Challenge to Scripture Memory

Memorize Isaiah 26:3.

# Questions for Group Discussion

## **Chapter 1 – Lest Any Man Should Boast**

1- God does not need anything from us, yet we feel compelled to do things for Him. What is the difference between doing something out of obedience and doing something to earn favor? Why is it often hard to accept grace?

2- Why is it necessary to realize who we are before we can receive grace?

3- One of Russell’s definitions of grace is this, “Grace is all that God is, providing all that God does for someone who has no right at all.” How has God provided all that He does for you?

4- Why does it break the heart of God when we think that we deserve to be saved?

5- What is the difference between “saving grace” and “enabling grace”?

### Key verse:

For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God not of works, lest any man should boast. (Ephesians 2:8,9)

**Chapter 2 – It Wasn't Free to Him**

1- How would this world be different if God had created salvation based upon works? What difference would it make in how we relate to others?

2- Why is it important to realize the magnitude of His sacrifice for us? Do you think part of our ability to worship depends on our remembrance of His sacrifice? Why?

3- Do you think the Pharisees operated from a view of “relative righteousness”? Why is it impossible for us to see ourselves as more righteous than anyone else?

4- Of the seven groups represented at the cross, which ones can you relate to? How could each of these groups have been impacted if they had grasped the reality of the Cross?

Key verse:

But God commendeth His love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinner, Christ died for us.

(Romans 5:8)

**Chapter 3 – Adopted, Accepted, Adored**

1- What were Paul’s credentials for obtaining God’s grace? When we begin to think we deserve God’s grace, what happens to the grace?

2- As a recipient of God’s grace, we receive his blessings. What kind of blessings are these? How have many Christians misconstrued the idea of “blessings”? Does it mean that God does not bless physically? How can our lives be full of grace regardless of what is happening around us? Can you think of people that are full of grace amidst difficult circumstances?

3- How does the adoption of a child require even greater forethought than planning for a natural childbirth? How is the commitment even greater for adoptive parents. What did God give up to adopt us and what does He promise us as His adopted children?

4- As parents, what are some ways we can model the grace of God?

Key verse:

According as he hath chosen us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before him in love:

Having predestinated us unto the adoption of children by Jesus Christ to himself, according to the good pleasure of his will,

To the praise of the glory of his grace, wherein he hath made us accepted in the beloved. (Ephesians 1:4-6)

**Chapter 4 – His Workmanship**

1- How is grace expressed in a life? What part do trials and the pressures of life play in both establishing grace in our lives and exhibiting grace in our lives?

2- How does receiving grace change our perspective of the world around us? What things become important?

3- In what way is grace tied together with doing the will of God?

4- Russell says, "We are to simply let the light shine." What does that look like in your life?

5- In what area of your life are you tempted to paint your own canvas? What do you need to do to give the Lord control of that area of your life?

Key verse:

For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them. (Ephesians 2:10)



**Chapter 5 – Grace of Weakness**

1. Why is receiving harder than giving? What does it require to receive God's grace? Why do so few of us freely accept it?

2. How have you seen grace shine through weakness?

3. Do you think allowing God's grace to shine through weakness would at times give God more glory than healing or taking away the area of weakness? Why?

4. How does the process of aging reflect the grace principle of building strength out of weakness?

5. How do you handle weakness? Do you think that weakness should be fought against or embraced? What difference does your response to weakness make?

Key verse:

And he said unto me, My grace is sufficient for thee: for my strength is made perfect in weakness. Most gladly therefore will I rather glory in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me.

(II Corinthians 12:9)

## **Chapter 6 – The Grace of Holiness**

1- Our schools and our government are beginning to see the importance of character. Is it possible to teach character and at the same time exclude God?

2- How can we be considered holy even if our actions at times do not show it? How can holiness be revealed in our lives? What is the relationship between grace and obedience?

3- What is the difference between a form of holiness built on legalistic structures and holiness which comes from a heart yielded to God?

4- To what degree does the manifestation of holiness in our lives depend upon what our lives are focused upon? Should our focus be to stay away from certain things or to focus upon getting to know God, or both?

5- Why are weakness and humility keys to the grace of holiness? What should be our motivation to be holy? What is holding you back from receiving the grace of holiness?

### Key verse:

For thou art a holy people unto the Lord thy God, the Lord thy God hath chosen thee to be a special people unto Himself, above all peoples that are upon the face of the earth.  
(Deuteronomy 7:6)

**Chapter 7 – The Grace of Holiness: Is It All Relative?**

1- What is the difference between positional holiness and possessional holiness? How does God view us as Christians? How do we deal with the gap between who we are in Christ and what we behave like now?

2- In our society today, everything is placed on a relative scale. Being honest with ourselves, do we see our selves as being “relatively righteous”? Why can we not compare ourselves to others?

3- If you are convicted not to do some things that others Christians do, does that mean you are better than they are or have a higher calling? Why are some Christians convicted of areas in their lives that they feel are not pleasing to God, when there are others that feel the same action is perfectly fine?

4- What is the key to growing in holiness? How does God reveal His presence to us?

5- How do we present our bodies as a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God? What does a sacrifice do?

Key verse:

I beseech you, therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service.

(Romans 12:1)

**Chapter 8 – The Grace of Holiness: Making It Work**

1- What spiritual decisions have you made that have changed you life? What did Joshua do when he felt like the Lord was leading him to make a certain spiritual decision? How do we know if our commitment is one that exalts God or exalts ourselves?

2- Can you name three things that you are committed to? How many times do you spend involved with these things?

3- Have you ever taken an extended time alone with the Lord? What was the result?

4- How much do you listen to God? How would you convey to a non-believer what prayer is? How is prayer a relationship?

5- As we spend time with Him, we will also be convicted of our sin. Why is it important to name our sin?

6- Now that we have studied the grace of holiness, what is the relationship between grace and holiness?

Key verse:

And the people said unto Joshua, the Lord our God will we serve, and His voice will we obey.

(Joshua 24:24)

**Chapter 9 – Agape Grace: A New Commandment**

1- How does the fact that God loves you change your life? How does God’s love effect those who have never known of anyone’s love?

2- Why is our need for love so great? Can we truly give love if we have not first received love? Why? What does it mean to receive God’s love?

3- What does it mean when the Scripture says, “love bears all things”?

4- What are you really asking for when you pray, “Bless, Uncle George”? What does it mean to bless someone?

Key verse:

Bearth all things, believeth all things, hopeth all things,  
endureth all things. (I Corinthians 13:7)

**Chapter 10 – Agape Grace: The Recipients**

1. What is our responsibility to the poor? What are some ways that we could help the poor besides giving monetarily?

2. Why do think God is particularly sensitive to the poor, the prisoners, and the sick?

3. Who would the strangers be in our society? How can the church better show hospitality to these people?

4. More and more of today's society is becoming elderly. Who should bear the responsibility for meeting their needs? How can we make sure these people do not become the most forgotten people in our society?

5. What preconceived ideas have you had about the poor, the homeless, the prisoners and the sick that you need to lay before the foot of the cross?

Key verse:

And the King shall answer and say unto them, Verily I say unto you, inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these, my brethren, ye have done it unto me.

(Matthew 25:40)

**Chapter 11 – Agape Grace: A Heart to Serve**

1- What attitude is required to wash someone's feet? Why is this attitude essential in both receiving and ministering grace? Have you ever experienced someone doing something for you with an attitude other than humility? What attitude did they have and how did it make you feel?

2- Can you think of instances in the Bible when people served and did the right thing, but their hearts were not really with the people they were serving? What attitude did they have and how did it make you feel?

3- Who are the ones in our community that few people desire to serve? What is our responsibility to these people? Do you think the church spends the majority of its time ministering to one another or to those who are lost and hurting? How should our priorities change, if at all?

4- Why does Jesus stress servant leadership? In what ways did He exemplify a servant leader? In what ways could you become more of a servant leader?

Key verse:

For ye know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that, though He was rich, yet for our sakes He became poor, that ye through His poverty might be rich.

(II Corinthians 8:9)

## **Chapter 12 – The Grace of Forgiveness**

1. Has there ever been a person in your life that you refused to forgive even for a time? What were the consequences? How did it affect you spiritually? Who suffered because of your refusal to forgive?

2. What does it mean to forgive a person? Should you only forgive those who specifically ask for your forgiveness? Why?

3. How is our forgiveness of others tied to God's forgiveness of us? Who gives us the power to forgive?

4. Put yourself in the place of a mother whose son is killed by a drunk driver. How is it possible to forgive that person? Does forgiveness remove the consequences of the action? How then does forgiveness heal wounds?

5. Describe God's forgiveness? Is there anything that anyone can do to you that is greater than what we have done toward God? Why does the lesson say that "an unforgiving spirit is a greater offense than the one you are holding against that other person."

### Key verse:

And be ye kind one to another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God for Christ's sake hath forgiven you.

(Ephesians 4:32)



**Chapter 13 – Comforting Grace**

1- Can you tell of a time when you were comforted by God’s grace? Did He also give you an opportunity to share that grace with another person going through a similar circumstance? What does that tell you of God’s wisdom and purpose?

2- What does it mean to be comforted in “all of our tribulation”? If our comfort does not come from being taken out of our circumstances, what does it come from? Why does God not always take us out of our circumstances as a way of comfort?

3- How does the comfort that is given us help define our ministry? Have you seen that happen in your life?

4- How do we transfer our burdens to God? Why is this such a hard thing to do?

5- What is the difference between struggling with our tribulations and embracing them? Is it really possible to embrace them as we surrender them to God?

Key verse:

Blessed be God, even the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies, and the God of all comfort; Who comforteth us in all our tribulation, that we may be able to comfort them which are in any trouble, by the comfort wherewith we ourselves are comforted of God.

(II Corinthians 1:3,4)

**Chapter 14 – Grace and Peace**

1- Paul introduces many of his letters with the words “Grace and Peace”. What is the relationship between these two words? What effect would it have had on those who heard them?

2- In Isaiah 26:3 what does the phrase mean “whose mind is stayed on thee”? How do we do that? Why is trust in who God is the key to perfect peace? How can each of our worries be tied to a lack of trust in who God is?

3- Why is it that one moment we can have a tremendous peace and the next moment become fearful? What happens when we become fearful or worried? Can you draw a parallel to Peter’s walking on the water and a time in your life when you were walking on water and all of a sudden took your focus off of God? What happened? How hard is it to regain our focus?

4- Often we have no peace because we do not want to relinquish control. What are some things that are hard for you to give over to God? What is your reason for keeping control?

Key verse:

Thou wilt keep him in perfect peace, whose mind is stayed on thee: because he trusteth in thee.

(Isaiah 26:3)



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