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Grace Doctrine

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Theologically, grace is the most difficult doctrine in all of Scripture. Most all believers rejoice at hearing the word “grace;” however, only a handful of believers have a grasp of this subject. Nonetheless, it is the foundation of everything that we are, or will ever be, in this life, or in eternity to come. It is the foundation of our so great salvation, the foundation of our atonement, namely, propitiation, justification, regeneration, reconciliation, sanctification, redemption and adoption into the Royal family of God. Grace is a perfect mirror of Who and what God is; and it is a reflection of His handwork.

As a believer grows in his spiritual life to the point where he has an understanding of the grace of God towards him, his life and his spiritual sense of destiny are forever changed. Another way of saying this is, show me a believer who understands grace and applies it, and I will show you a believer that truly understands God; and has great tranquility in his soul. Grace causes one to relax; it replaces pride, and brings one to a total humility. Grace makes one aware that whatever he is, or could become, spiritually depends totally on who and what God is. With this in mind, let us review a prayer of David, recorded in the Old Testament. Clearly, David understood grace:

“. . . Blessed art Thou, O Lord God of Israel our father, forever and ever. ‘Thine, O Lord is the greatness and power and the glory and the victory and the majesty, indeed everything that is in heavens and the earth; Thine is the dominion, O Lord, and thou dost exalt Thyself as head over all. Both riches and honor come from Thee, and Thou dost rule over all, and in Thy hand is power and might; and it lies in Thine hand to make great, and to strengthen everyone. ‘Now, therefore, our God, we thank thee, and praise Thy glorious name. **BUT WHO** am I and who are my people that we should be able to offer as generous as this?

For all things come from Thee, and from Thy hand we have given Thee. ‘For we are sojourners before Thee . . . O Lord our God, all this abundance that we have provided to build Thee a house for Thy holy name, it is from Thy hand, and all is Thine. ‘Since I know, O my God, that Thou triest the heart and delightest in uprightness, I, in the integrity of my heart, have willingly offered these things; so now with joy I have seen Thy people, who are present here, make their offerings willingly to Thee. ‘O Lord, the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Israel, our fathers, preserve this forever in the intentions of the heart of Thy people, and direct their heart to Thee [in the Name of the One who saved

us. Amen]” (1 Chronicles 29:10-18).

What a marvelous grace attitude by King David! He understood perfectly that apart from the grace of God that he would have weighed zero on the scale of the Supreme Court of Heaven. At this juncture, may I assert that apart from the grace of God, no one can ever amount to anything before God. Apart from His grace, no believer, even the most self-righteous, self-elevated, and pious, could ever qualify to enter Heaven, for we fail God every day. If we do not fail Him in our actions, we fail Him in thoughts. Keep that in your frame of reference as we study this vital subject, a subject that has been the target of distortion for centuries.

Here is the outline for this in-depth study of grace:

1. Introduction to grace
2. Definition of grace
3. God displays His grace in creation
4. God’s grace in the Garden of Eden:
 - a. Before the fall
 - b. After the fall
5. God’s grace toward Abraham
6. God’s grace towards Israel
7. God’s grace provides a Savior
8. Grace in salvation of mankind
9. The Apostle Paul—a man of grace
10. The satanic attack on Grace
11. Grace vs. works in salvation
12. Spiritual orientation to Grace:
 - a. In marriage
 - b. In human relationship
13. The application of grace by Joseph
14. King Saul, an anti grace believer
15. King David applies grace:
 - a. Toward Saul
 - b. Toward Mephiboseth
16. Sharing in God’s grace.

As we approach this doctrine, we do not approach it as though we have attained to the fullness of the understanding and application of grace, but as those who have been graced out by God; and have been given the privilege to communicate His grace. Let us begin to develop our outline.

The word “grace,” “hen” in the Hebrew and “charis” in the Greek, has been employed by the Holy Spirit through the writers of Scripture to convey a variety of meanings ranging from goodwill and mercy to “kindness given by a master to his slave.” It has come to signify the kindness of God towards man. We are going to restrict this exposition of the doctrine of grace to deeds or favors bestowed by God to humanity, or given by one

person to another. There term that we need to keep in mind throughout this study, it is “UNMERITED FAVOR.” Many believers have come short of understanding grace simply because of their failure to fully understand this phrase. What is an UNMERITED FAVOR? The English meaning is clear; it is deed, such as an act of kindness, given to one who is undeserving. If the one bestowing this favor discovers even an iota of merit in the recipient, then it is no longer an UNMERITED FAVOR, but a reward! Let us conclude the introduction by offering four illustrations:

When I was in High School, I had a fellow classmate whose academic performance was below standard. This fellow later dropped out of school. Apparently, he suffered from a form of mental retardation. He tried hard, but when he took examinations the results never reflected on his hard work.

On several occasions he was caught cheating on examinations. Once he copied from my examination paper without my awareness. He was not caught during the examination, but afterward. How did the teacher know that he cheated? The student copied my answers word-for-word from. To further indict himself, he copied my name too! On another occasion he copied directly from our textbook, including the phrase, “...As we studied in the previous chapter.” I know that it will cause some of you to laugh; however that is not my purpose.

Imagine for a moment that the teacher ignores his academic crimes and passes him with an honor grade. Then, based on his academic records, the student applies and is accepted at one of the world’s best universities. In this case, what the teacher did for him is nothing but an UNMERITED FAVOR!

The government has just advertised a position to be filled as soon as possible. The starting salary for this executive position is \$150,000 a year. After reviewing the requirements for the position, you apply for the position, even though you are not fully qualified.

During the job interview, the interviewer reveals that he has interviewed hundreds of applicants who hold job-related doctoral degrees and each had completed more than fifteen years in the field, both of which are principle qualifications. Upon reviewing your curriculum vitae, the interviewer discovers that you have no high school diploma, let alone any degree, and not a day’s experience in the field. Just as he was about to laugh at your application and to tell you that you did not qualify for the position, the department head walks in, and says, “Give this gentleman the position and ensure that he gets all the necessary training.” The interviewer, recognizing that this is an order from his superior, leans back in his chair in total shock. Reluctantly he leans forward and says to you, “Sir, you are hired!” That’s grace, an UNMERITED FAVOR! Obviously, you never earned or deserved a position of this kind--you know it, your employer knows it, and those who know you know it.

Imagine owing the Internal Revenue Service \$1,000,000, in back taxes, interests and penalties. You are arrested, cuffed, and promised that you will stay in jail until the last

penny is paid. The IRS has confiscated every known asset and your Bank account over drawn by \$10,000. As far as you are concerned, you are helpless to do anything about the situation. In fact, you have concluded that you are going to live and die in that prison since you cannot come up with the money.

One day, a wealthy stranger hears about your situation and writes two checks. One covering your debt to your bank and the other for every penny you owe the IRS. Then the Judge issues a release order. The jailor walks into your cell and says, "Madam, you are free to go, for an anonymous person has paid all your debts!" You have received an UNMERITED FAVOR! That's what grace is all about!

Luke records our final illustration: "A man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho, when he fell into the hands of robbers. They stripped him of his clothes, beat him and went away, leaving him half dead. A priest happened to be going down the same road, and when he saw the [HELPLESS] man, passed by on the other side. So too, a Levite, when he came to the place and saw him, passed by on the other side [without showing him grace].

But a Samaritan, as he traveled, came where the [HELPLESS] man was; and when he saw him, he took pity on him. He went to him and bandaged his wounds, pouring on oil and wine. Then he put the man on his own donkey, took him to an inn and took care of him. The next day he [the Samaritan] took out two silver coins [a lot of money at that time] and gave them to the innkeeper. 'Look after him,' he said, 'and when I return, I will reimburse you for any extra expense you may have'" (Luke 10:30-35). Again, this man is the object of an UNMERITED FAVOR. He probably would have died, had the Samaritan--a total stranger--not come to his rescue.

From these four illustrations, some principles emerge:

- The life history or biography of the one who receives an unmerited favor is never an issue; however, if it were considered, then the deed is no longer an unmerited favor but a reward.
- The credit belongs entirely to the one doing the favor.
- Therefore, once the gracious act takes place, it becomes an irrevocable one.

This brings us to the definition of our subject.

DEFINITION OF GRACE

The Lexical Aids (Greek Dictionary) to the New Testament defines grace in this way: "A favor done without expectation of return; absolute freeness of the loving kindness of God to men finding its only motive in the bounty and free heartedness of the Giver; unearned and unmerited favor." The exposition of the doctrine of grace ANCHORS on this definition. Therefore, we need to expound on it:

1. "A FAVOR DONE WITHOUT EXPECTATION OF RETURN": Many believers

often have ulterior motives when they help others. It is a wrong application of doctrine; however, it is not within the scope of this exposition of the biblical doctrine of grace to cover that subject now. We can deal with it at a later time. What we have here is “a favor done without expectation of return.” Who does the favor? God does the favor. It is imperative that we examine some of the attributes of God:

1. God is Righteous: “Righteous are You, O Lord . . .” (Psalm 119:137a) God has always been righteous; there has never been a time when He was not. In addition, righteousness is the foundation of His throne. The Psalmist declared: “Righteousness and justice are the foundation of Your throne . . .” (Psalm 89:14a) Ironically, a synonym for an ulterior motive is hypocrisy. It is a blasphemous assumption to think that God would have an ulterior motive when He does a favor for any helpless member of the human race!

2. God is veracity: God cannot and will not lie. If God could lie just one time, it would destroy His integrity, which is insulated in righteousness and justice. Though the thought is blasphemous, it would dash forever our hope in Him for eternal salvation, and Satan and all the rebellious angels would escape the Lake of fire! However, the Bible makes it clear that “. . . His righteousness endures forever.” (Psalm 111:3) Indeed, every believer should take great comfort to know that nothing in heaven or on earth could ever move God to lie. Concerning God’s veracity, in the Old Testament Moses wrote, “God is not a man, that He should lie, nor the son of man that He should change his mind . . .” (Numbers 23:19)

God cannot say one thing and mean another. For instance, in Ephesians 2:8,9, the Word of God is crystal clear: “For it is by grace [UNMERITED FAVOR] you have been saved [Greek: *sozo* in the perfect tense, i.e., saved in a moment and remains saved forever!], through faith [a non-meritorious system of learning and belief], and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God, not of works, so that no one can boast.” The PILLAR that holds everything in Ephesians 2:8 and 9 is GRACE. Apart from the grace of God, one’s faith in Christ is meaningless. And the Greek meaning of grace is nothing short of an unmerited favor. Many false teachers have tried to add works to saving grace, such as baptism and lordship salvation, but by doing so they have caused many to err. What is most disturbing is that many of these false teachers are theologians.

They ignore the interpretive principle that theologians call “illegitimate totality transfer.” Illegitimate totality transfer is an attempt to bring meanings to a word that cannot be possible in light of the context. For instance when one suggests any work as a condition for salvation, he has a head-on-collision with Romans 11:6: “And if [salvation faith is] by grace, then it is no longer by works; if it were [works salvation], grace would no longer be grace.” Furthermore, those who say that grace means that one should bear good fruit are polluting the word. Scripture reveals that in the thinking of God, grace means only one thing: UNMERITED FAVOR, and that’s it!

God is immutable: Immutability means that God cannot change. All of His attributes are in perfect harmony, including immutability. Neither His love, nor His justice, nor His righteousness—nor any other attribute--can ever change. God is absolutely stable. It is the quintessence of human arrogance, or worse, a blasphemous assumption to ever think or imagine that a person's obnoxious behavior can cause an attribute of God to change, or could cause God to change His mind or His policy. Today, millions of believers try to humanize God, and by doing so make mockery of themselves and their worship. They shout "Hallelujah!" and clap their hands, jump high and higher, thinking that God is jumping along with them. They think that they can manipulate God's love.

If we, as humans, were tasked to deal in with the instability of all mankind in love, we would likely have had a heart attack or a stroke brought on by high-powered blood pressure on the first day. His love does not swing like the pendulum of human love. God's happiness cannot depend on any human merit because His attribute of love (1 John 4:8) is fixed. He loves us the same whether we are failing or succeeding in our spiritual lives. Consider how many times you fail God in a day, a week, a month, or a year? How many times do you pause to name those failures per 1 John 1:9?

The truth of the matter is that God is Immutable, and that no aspect of His essence can be altered by human effort. His Immutability guards the rest of His essence or attributes, namely, eternal life, Justice, Sovereignty, Omnipresence, Omniscience and Omnipotence. In the light of His Immutability, Malachi recorded God saying, "I the Lord do not change" (Malachi 3:6a). The author of the book of Hebrews affirmed: "But You [God the Father] remain the same, and your years will never end" (Hebrews 1:12b). Regarding God the Son, he asserts: "Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever" (Hebrews 13:8). Therefore, it makes sense to conclude that if God says that one's salvation is the product of His grace (and He did: Ephesians 2:8), He meant just that, and NOTHING ELSE!

Now that we have established that it is ABSOLUTELY IMPOSSIBLE for God to tell a lie or to change His mind with regard to His promises, we can go forward to examine the phrase, "A FAVOR DONE WITHOUT EXPECTATION OF RETURN." Let us go back to Ephesians 2:8: "For by grace are you saved [in a moment and remain saved forever] through faith...." Keep in mind that in the provision of salvation, mankind is always the recipient while God is the provider.

MANKIND AS THE RECIPIENT OF SALVATION: It is necessary to take a close look at the condition of man after the fall, outside the Garden of Eden. The instant Adam and Eve chose to disobey God they became spiritually dead. As a result of their sin, they constructed a BIG, impassable, line of demarcation between themselves and God. They instantly became spiritually dead, helpless spiritual corpses. It should be pointed out that the Holy Spirit has used words and phrases in the Bible that a human mind can comprehend. Everyone understands that a corpse is incapable of doing anything. That is exactly the spiritual condition of everyone born into the human race. The apostle Paul put it this way, "Therefore, just as through one man [Adam] sin entered into the world, and

[spiritual] death through sin, and so death spread to all men, because all sinned” (Romans 5:12).

In light of this verse, because of Adam’s original sin, everyone born into this world arrives spiritually dead. What can God have to do with a spiritually dead corpse? Or more to the point, what can a spiritually dead man have to do with God—his enemy? Of course nothing! The apostle Paul asserted, “Once you were alienated from God and were enemies in your minds because of your evil behaviors [i.e., your spiritual death]” (Colossians 1:21). In the human realm, what things do enemies have in common? At least animosity and the potential for war. Another question: when two enemy aircraft are engaged in a battle, what do they do to each other? Smile and wave? No, they endeavor to destroy one another. Similarly, as God’s enemies, God’s objective would have been to destroy every member of the human race, “[since] all have sinned [or have become God’s enemy] and fall short of the glory of God” (Romans 3:23). However, He chose another route, namely, grace.

GOD THE PROVIDER OF SALVATION:

“But God demonstrates His own love in this: While we are still sinners, Christ died as a substitute for us” (Romans 5:8). “You see, at just at the right time, when we were still powerless [helpless], Christ died for the [sinners]” (Romans 5:6). After God imputed all the sins of the whole world to Christ on the cross, and judged every one of them in His justice and fairness, He took His salvation solution to every member of the human race. But there was a problem. Those for whom this good news was intended were spiritually dead; therefore, they could not possibly comprehend the message. “The man [a spiritually dead person] without the Spirit does not accept [or understand] the things that come from the Spirit of God” (1 Corinthians 2:14).

Because of this, God the Holy Spirit comes to the rescue of these spiritually dead corpses and temporarily awakens them so that He can help them understand what the three members of the Trinity have done for them. The Holy Spirit does not go beyond making the issue of salvation clear, for that would be an intrusion on the freewill of mankind. Why does God come to our rescue? We might think that He had an option to let us die and go to the Lake of fire forever. As God He does not need our help to maintain His eternal state, nor does he need us to make Him happy. The author of the Book of Job emphatically questioned: “Can a man be profitable to God? Surely he who is wise is profitable to himself” (Job 22:2). And God Himself unequivocally poses the question, “Who has a claim against me that I must pay? Everything under heaven belongs to me” (Job 41:11). The question then, is why did He choose to rescue us—the totally depraved ones in every sense of the word?

Let us go to the Scripture for the answers: “But God, being rich in MERCY, because of His great LOVE with which He loved us, even when we were dead in our transgressions, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved)” (Ephesians 2:4,5). His act was entirely consistent with His mercy and unique love toward mankind, the depraved ones. The BIG question is, when you as a believer perform an act of mercy to a

helpless individual, do you expect to receive something in return? You may pause for a moment and meditate on this question. If man with an old sin nature can help a helpless individual without an expectation of return, how about God, the Author of mercy? Hence the partial definition of grace, “A favor done WITHOUT an expectation of return...”

God does not benefit from us, we benefit from Him. God’s concerns and actions toward man overwhelmed King David, and he poignantly asked, “What is man, that you are mindful of him, the son of man that you care for him?” (Psalm 8:4). Therefore, one can conclude based on the phrase “a favor done without expectation of return” that God, on the basis of His great mercy extends His grace in the provision of salvation to those who believe in Christ with no condition attached.

Therefore, no biblical scholar can do justice to grace by adding anything to it. The apostle Paul wrote, “But if it [salvation] is by grace, it is no longer on the basis of works, otherwise grace is no longer grace” (Romans 11:6). The apostle Paul is saying in essence, that no one can add anything to grace without destroying its meaning. With this last statement in mind, I say to you, who have personally believed in the Lord Jesus Christ, may “the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit, be with you all. Now to Him who is able to do exceedingly abundantly beyond all that we ask or think, according to the power [whose power? God’s] that works within us, to Him be the glory in the church and in Christ Jesus to all generations forever and ever. Amen” (11 Corinthians 13:14; Ephesians 3:20-21).

To be continued in Volume 16-2

DEFINITION OF GRACE

In the previous study we learned that the Lexical Dictionary to the New Testament defined grace as “a favor done without expectation of return; absolute freeness of the lovingkindness of God to men, finding its only motive in the bounty and the free heartedness of the Giver; unearned and unmerited favor.” We singled-out the phrase, “a favor done without expectation of return,” and saw that what is at issue is the integrity of the one doing the favor. Thus, if the one providing the favor has an ulterior motive, such as an expectation of receiving something in return, it is not grace at all. Also, we examined the integrity of God as the author of grace; and of course, we learned that His integrity is flawless!

In other words, it is blasphemous to assume that God embraces an ulterior motive. Such a view reduces God’s divine essence into something base. In fact, many who make such an assumption seek to humanize God. Doctrinally speaking, if we are going to understand God as He has revealed Himself in the Bible, we must lay aside all misconceptions about God. First, we must understand that God is not a man. Moses declared: “God is not a man” (Numbers 23:19a). Second, we must understand that God neither thinks, nor functions as humans do. “For My thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways [of doing things] My ways . . . for as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are My ways [of doing things] higher than your ways and My thoughts [are higher] than your thoughts” (Isaiah 55:8,9).

When, in His grace, God does something for a helpless person, that one ought very clearly to know that God expects nothing in return. Whether the recipients of His grace show gratitude to Him by responding to His plan or not, it does not change His love which remains constant, neither increasing nor diminishing. Likewise, God's happiness is an absolute. He welcomes our gratitude, but He cannot be manipulated by it. Our lack of gratitude cannot upset Him. Nothing will alter what He accomplishes for us by means of His unfailing grace. Keep in mind that whatever God does for us, He considers it a gift; and His gifts are always irrevocable (Romans 11:29). "God is not a man, that He should lie, nor a son of a man, that He should change His mind [after He has done an act of grace]" (Numbers 23:19).

Let us illustrate this point by examining one of the miracles performed by our Lord Jesus Christ: "As He [Jesus Christ] was going into a village, ten men who had leprosy met Him. They stood at a distance [because they were helpless and unclean] and called out in a loud voice, 'Jesus, Master have pity [or mercy] on us!' When He saw them, He said, 'Go show yourselves to the priests.' And as they went, they were cleansed. [Note the act of grace--unmerited favor]. One of them, when he saw he was healed, came back, praising God in a loud voice. He threw himself at Jesus' feet and thanked Him for he was a Samaritan. Jesus asked, 'were not all ten cleansed? Where are the other nine? Was no one found to return and give praise to God except this foreigner?'" (Luke 17:12-18). There is no account that leprosy recurred in the other nine, nor should there be! If it had, then what Christ performed was not a gracious act of mercy. Notice that the recipient's attitude has no bearing on grace. If it did, grace would no longer be grace.

It is disheartening to see so many Bible scholars and theologians promoting false doctrines such as "Lordship salvation" and other brands of works-salvation. Their failure to distinguish between grace and works, and between spiritual birth and growth has distorted the grace of God in the minds of millions of believers and unbelievers. Who would deny a birth certificate to a newborn simply because of his lack of physical development? In fact, the application for a certificate of birth is made soon after delivery. And if the youngster failed to grow, no one would think to revoke the birth certificate. Similarly, our spiritual growth, or lack of it, does not alter the status of our citizenship in heaven. Does this mean that we should not endeavor to grow spiritually? Far from it! I thank God because by His matchless grace I am making spiritual progress on a daily basis. My appreciation for the grace of God has not changed my thinking about trying to glorify God; rather, it has given me a sense of relief, knowing that my salvation, spiritual growth, and resultant glorification of God is a matter of His grace alone.

You may say, "Well, the purpose of God in saving those who place their faith alone in Christ alone is so that they may worship Him." That is true, but do you know that no one can worship, serve, or glorify God apart from the ministry of God the Holy Spirit? Even the filling of the Spirit, given to us when we are in fellowship, is grace. "For it is God who is at work in you, both to will and to work for His good pleasure" (Philippians 2:13). It is God's will that we glorify Him, but that choice is a matter on an entirely different level from our so great salvation. Clearly, the grace of God continues after salvation.

He is the One who provides all the necessary assets for us to worship and serve Him. Because of our imperfection, God completely excludes our efforts, both before and after salvation. His divine operation must remain perfect. The great difficulty for us is that we are easily drawn into thinking that God cannot do without us, that our efforts and contributions can sway the Supreme Court of Heaven. This erroneous thinking leads many in their self-absorption to produce lengthy lists of what they have done for God. Some regard themselves as so important that a church or Christian organization could not survive without them. This kind of arrogance reinforces spiritual deficiency and malnutrition with the sad result that these seldom come to understand grace.

In this doctrinal exposition, we will look at some believers of the past who understood the grace of God—those who understood that their efforts were nothing apart from His grace. For example, one of Job’s accusers, who had no concept of suffering for blessing, posed these pivotal questions: “Can a man be profitable to God? Can even a wise man benefit Him?” (Job 22:2) Eliphaz assumed the answers to both questions were “Yes,” and that Job had failed. Nothing could have been further from the truth. God exonerates Job saying, “Who has given to Me that I should repay him? Whatever is under the whole heaven is Mine” (Job 41:11). King David understood the issue clearly: “What is man, that You are mindful of him, and the son of man that You care for him?” (Psalm 8:4). Any believer who holds that “God cannot do without me,” simply cannot orient himself to grace. Therefore, as a believer in the Lord Jesus Christ, if you are full of self-importance, or feel that God needs your help, you have the opportunity to change your mental attitude before it is too late. Now, let us examine the next phrase in our definition of grace.

“...ABSOLUTE FREENESS OF THE LOVING KINDNESS OF GOD TO MEN”

In the English Bible the Old Testament word translated “lovingkindness” is the Hebrew noun *chesed*. When used of God in the Old Testament, it denotes His kindness and mercy toward mankind. The Lexical Dictionary to the Old Testament defines lovingkindness as “the attitude of love which contains mercy.” Other definitions include: “Love, benevolence, kindness, good will, favor, mercy, and unending love.” In the Septuagint (third century B.C.), the Jewish translators of the Old Testament Hebrew text, rendered *chesed* as the Greek *eleos*, often translated “mercy” or “compassion.” The concept of grace is always in view. Before developing these definitions, we need to note that lovingkindness originates with God as His integrity. Without integrity, having or showing lovingkindness to another is impossible. When our integrity fails, so will our lovingkindness; but God’s integrity can never fail. Within this framework, let us examine some corollary definitions.

THE UNFAILING LOVE OF GOD:

Grace is part of the unending love of God. One Greek word in the New Testament summarizes God and His unending love. That word is *agape*, the highest love of all. Not only does *agape* belong to God, it is His very being: “God is love” (I John 4:8b). Let us examine more closely the Greek word *agape*, a love that does not and cannot fail.

When used of God, *agape* is His integrity, and His integrity is His love. Today, *agape* is

difficult to define because it is bandied about in misleading ways. The Holy Spirit used Paul's genius to give us a summary of agape in one short, magnificent chapter. About two-thirds of the way through his dissertation, Paul makes it very clear that "love never fails" (I Corinthians 13:8). Consider these principles regarding God:

1. God is perfect and eternal. He has always existed.

2. God is immutable. His immutability applies to all of His other attributes. In other words, none of His attributes are subject to change. Nothing in this world or in heaven can alter God's essence. "For I, the Lord, do not change; therefore you, O sons of Jacob, are not consumed" (Malachi 3:6). The sons of Jacob (i.e., the Jews) failed the Lord in many ways, but because of God's immutability they never suffered complete destruction. God never failed them. Humanly speaking, their failures were so colossal that they warranted God's total annihilation. But, fortunately for Israel, divine viewpoint always supersedes human points of view. God's immutability ensures that He always keeps His promises. God promised Abraham and his descendants a vast land described in Deuteronomy: "Then Moses climbed Mount Nebo from the plains of Moab...there the Lord showed him the whole land—from Gilead to Dan...all the land of Judah as far as the Western sea...and the Lord said to him, 'this is the land I promised on oath to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob when I said, 'I will give it to your descendants [forever]'" (Deuteronomy 34:1-4; Genesis 13:14,15).

This unconditional promise still stands. It will be fulfilled during the millennial reign of Christ when He will gather all the Jews from the four corners of the earth. Satan, still trying to be like the Most High, has another plan. He thinks that he can bring about a millennium on his own, but also regards God's promises to Israel as His vulnerability. If he could remove the Jewish race, the promises could not be kept. So as ruler of the earth, Satan promotes anti-Semitism whenever possible, with a view to proclaiming victory in the great angelic conflict. The thought is blasphemous, but if Satan succeeded, God's integrity would have to fail. Racial Jews will survive until the Millennium despite Satan's efforts. The holocaust of the World War II era resulted in the deaths of millions of Jews. Nonetheless, the Lord Jesus Christ who controls history saw to it that other millions survived. The deaths speak to the ruthlessness of Satan; the survivors speak to the immutability of God. Satan will not retreat from his objective; but neither the entire demonic force, nor the failures of the Jews, nor any other factor can alter God's immutability.

3. God's love is perfect and eternal. Thanks to emotion, human love often waxes and wanes with circumstances. Sometimes it swings like a pendulum—between love and hate. Because of His immutability, God's love cannot increase or diminish; He never operates on emotion, nor has He ever sinned in terms of hatred. Whether a believer fails or succeeds in his spiritual life, God's love remains the same, 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, 365 days a year, it is eternal! Isn't it a comfort to know that no matter how huge the failure in our eyes, God never fails us? Conversely, no matter how great our success, God does not love us more; we simply bask under the wings of His eternal love. Yes, God blesses and punishes, but He does both in love.

We can be sure of the fairness of the Supreme Court of Heaven because “. . . whom the Lord loves [all believers] He disciplines, and He scourges every son whom He receives” (Hebrews 12:6-7). Therefore, we have nothing to recommend the practice of sin, and everything to appreciate the beauty of God’s grace toward every believer. God said, “. . . I have loved you with an everlasting love; therefore, I have drawn you [to Myself] with an unfailing love” (Jeremiah 31:3). The word translated everlasting in this passage is the Hebrew noun *owlam*. It means, “without end,” “life time,” and “always.” Simply put, God always loves us, no matter what. “Though the mountains be shaken, and the hills be removed [or your failures be like a mountain], yet my unfailing love for you will not be shaken” (Isaiah 54:10). “. . . lovingkindness stands firm forever” (Psalm 89:2).

Now, let us consider the source of the “absolute freeness of the [unfailing love] of God.” We have already learned that we can exclude man and any of his efforts from consideration (Job 22:2). Also, we know that God’s love exists with or without an object and it cannot fail (I Corinthians 13:8). God’s is free to express His unfailing love to us because of His grace. The ‘freeness’ springs from grace as a component of love. If love cannot fail, neither can any of love’s components. Grace cannot fail. God’s derives His pleasure from His own integrity, rather than mankind’s response. No one can do God a favor. For this reason we must understand that the works of mankind are **TOTALLY SEPARATED** from grace.

The apostle Paul understood this great principle. Through the ministry of God the Holy Spirit, he sought always to separate grace from any kind of works, good or bad. “And if [and it is the case] by grace, then it [salvation] is no longer by works [of any kind]; if it [salvation] were [by works], grace would no longer be grace” (Romans 11:6). Grace and works are mutually exclusive; in other words un-mixable! They can never share the same space at the same time. Those who caught on to this teaching in Paul’s day laid the groundwork for one of the most magnificent periods of human history, the age of the Antonine Caesars. Today, his teaching about grace persists on the pages of his epistles, preserved by the Holy Spirit.

Nonetheless, it seems that very few, including theologians, Bible scholars, pastors, and evangelists seem to understand the distinction in more than a superficial way. While particularly sad, this should not be shocking, because it helps to explain the doctrine of “the remnant.” Throughout Scripture, we have only a few examples of those who really understood God’s Word, followed His plan with precision, and thereby had an invisible impact on history. Today, you have an equal opportunity with all other believers to master grace principles, rejecting legalism in all its forms. Your success and the success of our nation depend upon your doing just that.

Now we have covered two phrases of our definition, grace is “a favor done without expectation of return” and grace is the “absolute freeness of the lovingkindness [or unfailing love] of God to men.” Let us move on to the next phrase:

FINDING ITS ONLY MOTIVE IN THE BOUNTY AND FREE HEARTEDNESS OF THE GIVER

Failure to understand that God is not a man, or that He does not bless us based on the meritorious works that we do, has caused many believers to reject accurate knowledge about God and His plan. These have great difficulty believing that God derives His pleasure solely from what He does for man, and never from what man does for Him. This concept represents a major hurdle in spiritual advance. Believers, by the millions, operate under the erroneous concept that God will bless them because of what they are doing for God. That is one of the reasons why so many are attracted to so-called “Christian activism.” They think they can help God by making the devil’s world a better place. Or worse, they want to encourage change in the devil’s world because God is moving a bit too slow for their tastes. Consider abortion. Ignorant or self-absorbed believers get involved in activism by functioning in one of two columns: pro-life on one side, or pro-choice on the other. We know of cases where some of these believers are so fervent in their points of view that they have rationalized breaking laws. God has warned, “Let every person be in subjection to the governing authorities. For there is no authority except from God, and those, which exist are established by God. Therefore he who resists authority has opposed the ordinance of God; and they who have opposed will receive condemnation upon themselves” (Romans 13:1-2).

Yet, many of these legalistic believers conclude that if the law is immoral, they are justified in helping a moral God by violating nearly any law of their land. We hear reports of burnings and bombings of clinics, destroying the property of others in the name of serving God. Such behavior violates the sanctity of property--God’s law. We hear reports of murder, taking a life in order to save lives in the name of serving God. Such behavior violates the sanctity of human life--God’s law. We hear reports of ministers, apparently ignorant of the Word of God, telling their congregations that “the more you get involved in [activism], the more the Lord will bless you.” Such behavior is not only misleading but also blasphemous. In fact the opposite is true; God will punish. These believers have forgotten that they are the “salt of the earth,” having equal privilege and equal opportunity to advance in their spiritual lives, fulfilling God’s mandates. Arrogance makes activism more attractive than advance, thus they are seduced by their own fallacious thinking. God’s justice punishes everyone who operates under human power or who values his own actions above God’s Word. If laws are immoral, believers who have failed in their spiritual lives have only themselves to blame. The entire nation is punished for their failure.

Consider the case of Uzzah. “So David assembled all the Israelites...to bring the ark of God from Kiriath Jearim. They moved the ark of God from Abinadab’s house on a new cart, with Uzzah and Ahio guiding it. When they came to the threshing floor of Kidon, Uzzah reached out his hand to steady the ark, BECAUSE THE OXEN STUMBLED. The Lord’s anger burned against Uzzah, and He struck him down because he had put his hand on the ark. So he [Uzzah] died before God.” (I Chronicles 13: 5-7,9). Uzzah died trying to help God. He thought it more important to do something about the ark than to keep God’s commandment. The emotion of the moment won out over the rational Word of God, but it cost him his life. God instructed Israel that on penalty of death, no one should touch the holy things of the tabernacle, including the ark (Numbers 4:15). Many believers

today are like Uzzah. They value their actions, or their emotions, over the Word of God. Doing so, they violate God's mandates, and set themselves up for maximum divine discipline from the Supreme Court of Heaven.

As believers in the Lord Jesus Christ, we must be careful about how we serve God. We must value His Word over anything that we can do. The alternative is a head-on-collision with God's justice and the resultant punishment. Activism is not a part of the plan of God at any time in history. This includes the church age in which we live. "It is a terrifying thing to fall into the hands of the living God" (Hebrews 10:31).

God's grace to man "finds its only motive in the bounty and free heartedness of the Giver [God]." God does not bless you because you give. If He did that, His grace policy toward man would become invalid—grace is not for sale. Nor does God do something for us because we did one thing or another for Him. However, when a believer utilizes God's grace provision--namely, Bible doctrine and the enabling power of the Holy Spirit--to advance in His plan and develop capacity; then God increases that individual's blessing. It is true that God blesses or increases the seeds of a generous giver (II Corinthians 9:6-12). However, no believer is a generous giver apart from gratitude in his soul. And no believer can develop gratitude in his soul apart from the consistent intake and application of Bible doctrine. Harboring an ulterior motive—God will bless me—is not giving at all.

God does things for us solely on the basis of His integrity. Consider salvation, one of God's many provisions. The Bible clearly states, "all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God" (Romans 3:23). We know that the righteousness of God is completely intolerant of sin. Because of his spiritual death, man is separated from God. If God is intolerant of sin in man, what does the Bible mean by: "For God so loved the world [spiritually dead ones]" (John 3:16a)? Can we say that God loves sin? Absolutely not! This verse illustrates the principle that God is immutable, and so is His love. His love does not change whether the object of His love is moral or immoral. That makes no difference.

Imagine a little orphaned girl, four years of age. She is homeless, lying by the side of the road, half-covered with snow, on a sub-freezing day. Her heart rate has slowed significantly because of the cold; within thirty minutes she is going to die. Suddenly, she catches your eye; you stop, pick her up, and rush her to a hospital.

What is the first thing that came into your mind in the moment you saw her? Did you want to know her origin? Did you want to know whether her parents were respectable? Did you consider whether she would grow up to become a decent citizen? Not likely, your primary interest was her rescue. "If you then, being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children [rescuing the orphan girl in our illustration], how much more shall your heavenly Father...?" (Luke 11:13). In other words, if sinful man can do honorable things for his fellow man, isn't reasonable to conclude that a gracious God would far-exceed man's best efforts? Your rescue demonstrated a genuine love for this helpless orphan.

Upon learning that she is orphaned; you decide to go step further. You prepare a room for her in your home, and while waiting for her discharge from the hospital, purchase clothing and other things in anticipation of her arrival. I want to pause here and ask you a question: While you were doing all these things were you thinking about how this helpless child might help you? Likely, your only motive is from your bounty and free-heartedness. You are thinking about her well-being. If she lived with you until adulthood, and then moved way without so much as a care to ever visit or say thank you, would her attitude change what happened on the first day that you saw her? Of course not. You may be saddened that she has grown up to be ungrateful; but her actions--or lack of them--cannot change what has been accomplished. If you, as a human being could be the rescuer in this illustration, think about your Creator—God, full of mercy, unfailing love, possessing matchless grace.

The most important thing to remember from this illustration is, that one derives pleasure by showing mercy to a helpless individual. An attitude or act of grace does not expect anything in return; therefore our definition of grace: “A favor done without EXPECTATION OF RETURN; absolute freeness of the [unfailing love] of God finding its only motive in the bounty and free heartedness of the Giver, unearned and unmerited favor.” This brings us to the last phrase.

UNEARNED AND UNMERITED FAVOR

This last phrase of our definition of grace takes us to the heart of our subject. It stresses that the recipient of grace is without any form of merit. Therefore, the one receiving the favor has nothing to boast about. As the helpless orphan girl in our illustration, the recipient of grace realizes that his help has come in time of his need, when he cannot help himself in any sense of the word.

Imagine two young criminals accused of multiple murders and rapes. What began as a residential burglary, became a heinous crime when the family returned home to the burglars' surprise. What followed was a ghastly episode in which only the youngest child escaped death. Her parents and sisters had been terribly abused and then shot one-by-one at close range.

Soon thereafter, the criminals turned themselves in to the FBI and confessed to the crime. To ensure that they had the right men, the surviving girl was asked make a positive identification, which she did without reservation. The criminals were judged, convicted, and sentenced to die by lethal injection. Early on the day of their execution, the warden received a letter from the governor pardoning both men. The execution was canceled because of the governor's act of mercy. Both were released after having served fifteen years in prison.

Clearly, these criminals received “...unearned, unmerited favor.” Similarly, King David, as a believer in the Lord Jesus Christ, committed a heinous crime. What began as a case of adultery, escalated into a murder. The truth unfolds: “Now when evening came David arose from his bed and walked around on the roof of the king's house, and from the roof

he saw a woman bathing; and the woman was very beautiful in appearance. And David sent messengers...when she came to him, he lay with her...and the woman conceived; and she sent and told David, and said, 'I am pregnant'" (II Samuel 11:2,4-5). When David became aware of Bathsheba's pregnancy, he tried to cover up his involvement. He thought he could bring Bathsheba's husband home on furlough, hoping that it would then appear as though he was the father of her child. Talk about hypocrisy, David was caught in the net. When Bathsheba's husband came back, he refused to go to his house. "And Uriah said to David, 'the ark and Israel and Judah are staying in temporary shelter, and my lord Joab and the servants of my lord are camping in the open field [in the war zone]. Shall I then go to my house to eat and to drink and to lie with my wife? By your life and the life of your soul, I will not do this thing'" (II Samuel 11:11). As an officer in David's army, Uriah understood his primary responsibility was to the war. After David exhausted all avenues, including trying to get Uriah drunk so that he would go to his home, he devised a plan to have him murdered on the field of battle. After her husband's calculated death, David took Bathsheba as his wife.

You will recall that this same David was one of the greatest believers of the Old Testament—"a man after [God's] own heart" (Acts 13:22). Also, recall that our Lord Jesus Christ in His humanity was a direct descendant of David and Bathsheba. Many times believers are shocked when a fellow-believer commits a heinous sin. Some even argue that someone who commits one or another sin was never saved. You may be sure that a believer can duplicate every kind of sin that an unbeliever commits. Of course the believer has to go through restraints from the Holy Spirit. And when he ignores the restraints, he is guaranteed to make a bigger fool of himself than an unbeliever.

God sent the prophet Nathan to confront David: "Thus says the Lord, 'Behold, I will raise up evil against you from your own household.... Then David said to Nathan, 'I have sinned against the Lord.' And Nathan said to David, 'The Lord has also taken away your sin; you shall not die'" (II Samuel 12:11, 13). Are you tempted to ask, "How could a believer commit immoral acts, such as adultery and murder?" If so, pay very close attention to the exposition of this pivotal doctrine. You will find that God provides no quarter for self-righteousness among believers. All of us fail in one way or another. Keep in mind that we are not dealing with particular sins; rather, we are endeavoring to draw some principles from David's immoral acts. According to Jewish law, what David did was subject to capital punishment: "...If [anyone] struck [one] down with an iron object [e.g., a spear], so that he died, he is a murderer; the murderer shall surely be put to death" (Numbers 35:16).

In fact, David was indicted from the Supreme Court of Heaven as a murderer: "Why have you despised the word of the Lord by doing evil in His sight? You [David] have struck down Uriah the Hittite with the sword, have taken his wife to be your wife, and have killed him with the sword of the sons of Ammon" (II Samuel 12:9). According to the indictment, what King David earned, deserved, and merited was death. Instead, by admitting his sins to the Father, he received grace—a favor, which he never earned or merited—and as a result, his death sentence was commuted: "...You shall not die" (II Samuel 12:13c). Therefore, from the definition of grace: "A favor done without

expectation of return; absolute freeness of the lovingkindness [or unfailing love] of God to men finding its only motive in the bounty and free heartedness of the Giver; unearned and unmerited favor” some principles have emerged:

1. God the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit are self-sufficient and content in themselves. In fact, there has never been a time when they were not self-sufficient.
2. The Godhead (Trinity) existed in eternity past when there was no creation of any kind, neither a universe, nor angels, nor human beings.

3. The happiness and joy of each member of the Godhead is self-sustaining. The Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit have never been unhappy; no creature has ever changed this happiness. King David declared, “Thou [God] will make known to me the path of life; in thy presence is fullness of joy; in thy right hand there are pleasures forever” (Psalm 16:11). During the earthly ministry of our Lord Jesus Christ, one of His heart’s desires for believers was for them to share His [perfect] joy: “These things [Bible doctrine] I have spoken to you, that My joy [which is Bible doctrine] may be in you, and that your joy may be made full” (John 15:11).

What is this joy? “Thy [God’s] words were found and I ate them, and Thy words became for me a joy...” (Jeremiah 15:16). The Word of God is joy; and it has always existed. Believers share this phenomenal joy through daily perception and application of Bible doctrine. This joy, which belongs to God, provides spiritual-backbone for any believer who taps into it: “For the joy of the Lord is my strength” (Nehemiah 8:10b). Further, the Holy Spirit produces His joy in a believer’s soul whenever He controls it (Galatians 5:22).

4. Because of His immutability, God’s happiness does not increase or decrease. Misunderstanding this principle is the primary reason why believers ignorantly do many unbiblical things in the name of God. They humanize God in their thinking. These believers think that if they get involved in Christian activism, that they will make God happier and/or He will bless them. Nothing could be further from the truth.

5. Therefore, we are not capable of increasing or decreasing His perfect happiness. It is the quintessence of human arrogance to think that our good deeds have enough power to influence God’s happiness or joy. Such an assumption is not only an insult to God who says, “that he does not change” (Malachi 3:6), but also blasphemy.

6. Believers remain imperfect after their salvation. The sin nature, with which we were born, remains in our bodies after salvation as the source of human good and temptations to sin. When we grow careless about our spiritual lives, we choose to succumb to these

temptations and commit personal sins. As imperfect creatures, God views our good deeds, apart from the filling of the Holy Spirit, as inadequate!

7. Therefore, when God saved us by His grace, He recognized that we would remain imperfect, helpless to keep ourselves pure, and thus He maintains His grace policy towards us—the totally undeserving ones.

May I remind you that the purpose of this doctrinal exposition is to open believers' eyes to the grace of God, so that they may understand and appreciate the grace of God towards them, and thus serve Him with awe and reverence. To those who have personally trusted in the Lord Jesus Christ, may “the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and fellowship of the Holy Spirit, be with you all. Now to Him who is able to do exceedingly abundantly beyond all that we ask or think, according to the power [God's] that works within us, to Him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus to all generations forever and ever. Amen” (II Corinthians 13:14; Ephesians 3:20).

To be continued in Volume 17-3....

We want to remind our readers that we are examining one of the pivotal doctrines of Scripture. To understand grace is to understand God's policy toward His creation. Understanding many other biblical doctrines depends on a clear understanding of grace. False doctrines—salvation by works, lordship salvation, and many others—have been put forth and found acceptance because believers reject truth, including the doctrine of grace. Because we live in an age of enormous confusion, it is our objective to combat heresy with the truth of the inerrant, infallible Word of God.

In the previous lessons we analyzed the Lexical aids (Greek Dictionary) to the New Testament, which defined grace as “A favor done without expectation of return; absolute freeness of the loving kindness of God to men finding its only motive in the bounty and freeheartedness of the giver; unearned and unmerited favor.” We scrutinized each phrase of this definition. We saw that grace is totally free from ulterior motives; and that the emphasis is always on the giver rather than on the receiver. We noted that God does not benefit from us, we benefit from Him. God has always existed; mankind is His creation. His perfect happiness has never changed—increased or decreased—because of circumstances or what we do.

God created mankind for His own pleasure; what gives Him pleasure is what He does for and through man rather than what man does for Him. Ironically, this is a great obstacle for believers who find it difficult to accept that God does not need their help, nor anyone else's. This is the principle reason so many believers get involved in all kinds of Christian activism. Many, ignorant of the truth, are running around trying to beautify the devil's world in the name of serving God.

Especially chilling is the fact that very often it is ministers who are the energizers of this activism. Repeat: God has never needed our help—and never will! The apostle Paul poignantly declared: “For it is God who is at work in you, both to will and to work for

His good pleasure” (Philippians 2:13). The only way God can work in a believer’s life is through the enabling power of the Holy Spirit and Bible doctrine. Without these two divine assets we are nothing! Those who have them do not get involved in Christian activism, or anything from the energy of the flesh, especially working to impress God. How can an imperfect human being do something to impress a perfect God? Imperfection is a by-product of imperfect machinery or imperfect workmanship. Similarly, the works of imperfect man ALWAYS result in an imperfect end product. God is perfect, His work is perfect; thus, He does all of the work that gives Him pleasure! You may wish to ponder on this paragraph for a moment before proceeding to the next increment of our study.

In our previous lessons, we established that the Godhead—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit—are self-sufficient and cannot be unhappy. There has never been a time when they were not happy. That they are not made happy by the behavior of any created being is a concept that is very difficult for self-righteous believers to understand.

GOD’S GRACE IN CREATION

Creation is the work of God, bringing into existence the heavens, the earth, and all forms of life . . . ; in both the Old and New Testaments, the entire creation is shown to be dependent upon the Creator. This is not a study of creation or restoration; however, we do want to examine manifestations of the grace of God in His creative acts. In the Old Testament, Ezekiel records the creation of angels; Moses records the creation of man and all living things in Genesis chapters 1-2. Concerning the perfection of God’s creation, Moses wrote, “God saw all that He made, and it was good [perfect]” (Genesis 1:31).

The Creator was our Lord Jesus Christ, the second member of the Trinity: “He [Christ] is the image [Greek: *eikon* = exact image, or reflection] of the invisible God, the first born over all creation. For by Him [Christ] all things were created: things in heaven [including angels] and on earth [including mankind], visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities; all things were created by Him and for Him. He is before all things, and in Him all things hold together” (Colossians 1:15-17).

ANGELS

God [*Elohim*: Father, Son and Holy Spirit] made the decision to create angels, even before the universe (Psalm 148:2-5). The reasons included His pleasure (Revelation 4:11), glory (Isaiah 43:7), and joy (Isaiah 65:18). The Holy Spirit does not reveal much detail about the creation of the angels. Ezekiel describes the most beautiful angel, Satan: “You were blameless [Hebrew: *Tamiym* = perfect] in your ways from the day you were created” (Ezekiel 28:15a).

God is perfect and His handiwork is always a reflection of His perfection! All of the angels were created perfect, with minds and volition. Ezekiel continues: “Your [Satan’s] heart became proud on account of your beauty” (Ezekiel 28:17a). Our focus is angelic creation, not Satan’s choice to rebel along with one-third of the angelic population who followed him. Therefore, notice the beauty, and consider that Satan is described as a

“morning star [i.e., shining one]” when he is barred from Heaven in the middle of the Tribulation (Isaiah 14:12). His perfect beauty and rank are described in Ezekiel 28:12-15.

In summary, the deity of Jesus Christ executed the Father’s plan; bringing angels into existence as perfect beings. The most beautiful and wisest of these was Satan who is quite often mistakenly portrayed as an ugly and deformed creature. For all of his genius, he was stupid enough to think that he could be like God.

BIRDS AND ANIMALS

. . . God said, “Let the waters teem with swarms of living creatures, and let birds fly above the earth in the open expanse of the heavens” (Genesis 1.20).

Then God said, “Let the earth bring forth living creatures after their kind: cattle and creeping things and beasts of the earth after their kind;’ and it was so” (Genesis 1.24).

Consider for a moment God’s provision for the birds of the air: “For this reason I [Jesus Christ] say to you, do not be anxious for your life, as to what you shall eat, or what you shall drink; nor for your body, as to what you shall put on. Is not life [Greek: *psuche*—the soul, imputed by God at birth] more than food, and the body more than clothing? Look at the birds of the air, that they do not sow, neither do they reap, nor gather into barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not worth more than they?” (Matthew 6:25,26). God cares for His creation in grace. “Are not two sparrows [among the most common of birds] sold for a penny? Yet not one of them will fall to the ground apart from the will of your Father” (Matthew 10:29). God’s grace toward His creation is a matter of His choice. His creative design for birds and animals provided for every aspect of their survival.

MAN—ADAM

As we examine the creation of man, and the authority that God bestowed upon him, consider whether there was anything man—who did not even exist prior to his creation—could have done to earn or deserve God’s provision. This is pure grace.

“Then God said, ‘Let us make [Hebrew: *asah* – made after a pattern] man in our image, according to our likeness; and let them rule over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the sky and over the cattle and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth” (Genesis 1:26).

“Then the Lord God formed [Hebrew: *yatzar* – made from existing material] man of dust from the ground” (Genesis 2:7a).

Adam was the only man completely created by God. His perfect body was flawless. It had no sin nature passed along by his father; he had no father. Nor did it carry any genetically transmitted disease; his creation was not haphazard. But the perfect body of Adam was without life. God was not finished.

“. . . and [the Lord] breathed into his nostrils the breath [Hebrew: *neshamah hayyah*—a

spark of His own life]; and man became a living being [Hebrew: *nephesh hayyah*—a soul having life]” (Genesis 2:7b).

The breath of God, the source of all human life (Job 33.4), gave the body of Adam a spirit and a soul, complete with self-consciousness, mentality, conscience, and volition. This simultaneous gift of biological life and soul life marked the completion of man’s creation, but God was not finished with man.

Adam’s mentality was greater than that of any genius—perfect. For example, God brought every animal and bird to Adam “. . . to see what he would call them; and whatever the man called a living creature, that was its name” (Genesis 2:19). But God was not yet finished. The animals and birds had companions, but Adam was alone.

WOMAN—*ISHAH*

“Then the Lord God said, ‘it is not good for the man to be alone; I will make him a helper suitable for him.’ So the Lord God caused a deep sleep to fall upon the man, and he slept [the first anesthesia]; then He took one of his ribs, and closed up the flesh at that place [the first surgical procedure]. And the Lord God fashioned [Hebrew: *banah* - built] into a woman the rib which he had taken from the man and . . .” God performed the first marriage when He “. . . brought her to the man” (Genesis 2:18, 21,22). She was the only woman completely created by God, and had all the qualities of her perfect husband who named her Woman [Hebrew: *Ishah*]. God gave to them a perfect environment.

GOD’S GRACE IN THE GARDEN OF EDEN

No rain, no storms, no oppressive heat, no freezing cold—perfect weather. No predatory animals—nothing to fear. No arguments, no tears—perfect soul rapport. They shared capacity for life, love, recreation, and happiness—perfect joy. They had all the food they could eat (Gen 2.16)—perfect cuisine. And just think; they had no sin natures. But imagine—greater than all this put together—Jesus Christ came every day to teach them Bible doctrine (Gen 3.8). Wow, talk about a grace package!

There was only one thing they lacked, and that was eternal life. As perfect beings, Adam and the Woman could have lived forever, one day at a time. We really cannot appreciate God’s grace in creating human life without understanding His purpose. Recall that we briefly mentioned a great pre-historical angelic rebellion of which Satan was the leader. God condemned the rebellious angels to eternity in the Lake of Fire. Satan protested the sentence, so God created man, with volition, to resolve the issue (Ephesians 6:10-17, esp. v. 11,12).

Like the pre-revolutionary angels, man’s volition was free to choose for or against God. So God designed a test for Adam and the Woman: “. . . “From any tree of the garden you may eat freely; but from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat from it [dying] you will surely die” (Genesis 2:16,17). Failure to observe this single prohibition would result in spiritual death (no relationship with God)

and eventual physical death.

Notice that even though God had to test the volition of Adam and the Woman, His grace provided every other tree for their sustenance. In fact, God told them, “I give every green plant for food” (Genesis 1:29,30). And these plants were also the staple of all animals and birds until after the great flood when meat first became a part of man’s diet in the days of Noah (Gen 9:1-3).

Of the creation of man we can sing with David: “I will give thanks to You, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made; Wonderful are Your works, And my soul knows it very well.” (Psalm 139.14)

GOD’S GRACE AFTER THE FALL OF MAN

We explained in our book, *The Biblical Doctrine of Salvation*, how Satan deceived the Woman, and both she and Adam chose to disobey God when they ate the forbidden fruit. Each was responsible. The result was instant spiritual death—separation from God in every sense of the word—and their bodies began to age so that eventually they would die. In their spiritual death, Adam and the Woman became aware of their nakedness and sought to adjust to each other by making loin clothes from fig leaves. This was the first good work in the history of mankind—man solving man’s problems apart from the grace of God.

God is never impressed by human good, not then, not now, not ever. God rejects man’s efforts—no matter how impressive or sophisticated the works may be to others! That’s exactly the point what we want to hammer down. Grace is GOD DOING ALL THE WORK, and mankind receiving the results of HIS production! So how does God deal with man’s failure?

“Then the man [Adam] and his wife [the Woman] heard the sound [footsteps] of the Lord God [Jesus Christ as a theophany—the only member of the Trinity who is visible] as He was walking in the garden in the cool of the day . . . ” (Genesis 3:9a). What is the first thing God did? In grace, He sought out fallen man—lost, helpless, and in need of a Savior. God’s attitude in the Garden, thousands of years ago, remains His attitude today. “For the Son of man has come to seek and to save that which was lost” (Luke 19:10).

How did Adam and the Woman react? “. . . and they hid from the Lord God among the trees of the garden” (Genesis 3:9b). No doubt, in Bible class, they learned the principles: “Where can I go from Thy Spirit? Or where can I flee from Thy presence? If I ascend to heaven, Thou art there; if I make my bed in [the grave], behold, Thou art there” (Psalm 139:7,8) and “Can anyone hide in secret places so that I cannot see him?” Declares the Lord. ‘Do I not fill heaven and earth?’ declares the Lord” (Jeremiah 23:24). For the first time they had reason to avoid contact with their Creator, but God had no reason to react in kind. Grace always finds a way.

“But the Lord God called to the man, ‘Where are you?’” (Genesis 3:9c), or better, “Why

are you where you are?" Omniscient God was neither shocked nor surprised, nor did He need clarification as to their exact location. He knew billions of years ago, all which is knowable. He knew the day, even the exact second, that the Woman would succumb to Satan's ploy. He knew that Adam's sin of cognizance would follow—and had already made a grace provision for each of them, just as He has for us.

Nothing in the lives of God's creatures is obscure to him. David sang, "My frame [bones or skeleton] was not hidden from you when I was made in the secret place [the privacy of his parents' room]. Your eyes saw my unformed body [embryo]. All the days ordained for me were written in your book before one of them came to be" (Psalm 139:15a, 16). Jeremiah adds, "Before I formed you [by means of] the womb [actually, zillions of years in eternity past] I knew you" (Jeremiah 1:5). No matter how enormous our failures seem to us, nothing we can do ever takes God by surprise.

Adam explained, "I was afraid because I was naked; so I hid" (Genesis 3:10). Is nakedness a cause for fear? Are you afraid when you bathe or shower? Nakedness was much more to Adam and the Woman. Their nakedness was entirely new and, of course, it was the result of their sin. Before sin, grace clothed them with perfection, but now they were face-to-face with the reality of their failure. Fear and guilt, mental attitude sins impossible before the fall, invaded their souls. Spiritual death is a state of confusion. Since when do a husband and wife need to hide their naked bodies from one another? The Lord asked, "Who told you that you were naked?" (v.11a), and then He went right to the cause, "Have you eaten from the tree that I commanded you not to eat?" (v.11b). Of course God knew the answers; He knew them in detail billions of years ago.

The answers from Adam and the Woman were at once outlandish and typical. "The man [Adam] said, 'The woman you put here with me—she gave me some fruit from the tree, I ate it'" (v. 12). Though he admits eating, Adam had trouble with his responsibility. He blamed others. Notice that he blames his wife when he was the one in authority. But read it again—he arrogantly blames his Creator. Yes, the God who graciously provided him with a companion is the ultimate target. It is as though he is saying, "God, your grace went too far. None of this would have happened had You left me alone." The Woman's reply was no better: "The serpent deceived me, and I ate" (v. 13b). Both replied accurately as to the facts, but neither was willing to take responsibility for their own decisions. Since then, nothing has changed. Today, the 'blame game' is a polished art form. It is as old as Satan's arrogance in rejecting the reality of, and responsibility for, his sin.

God did not debate them on the merits of their responses. He could have imposed the death penalty immediately, but grace found a way. As immutable God, His love for them did not change, but His righteousness demanded, and His justice executed, condemnation. Why? Judgment and condemnation must always precede salvation. Even as He pronounced the sentence, He proclaimed the way of salvation. Of the serpent He said, "And I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and hers; He will crush your head, and you will strike His heel" (Genesis 3:15). The natural distrust between humans and serpents symbolizes the struggle of the angelic

conflict. But the outcome of this struggle is already known. The humanity of Jesus Christ [offspring of the woman] will crush the head of Satan [the serpent]. When our Lord said, “It is finished!” (John 19:30) on the cross of Calvary, the strategic victory was won. The tactical victory will come at the Second Advent of Christ. So faith alone in Christ alone has always been the only way of salvation (John 14.6).

All of animal and plant life was affected by the fall. The Woman’s womb was activated so that she could bear children in pain. The recreation begun in the Garden became the means of procreation for the human race. The ground was cursed so that Adam would have to work for their survival. After the sentencing, Adam renamed the Woman; now he called her Eve, the mother of all living (Gen 3:20). God replaced their fig leaves (human good) with animal skins (divine good, v.21), before banning them from the Garden of Eden forever (v.23, 24).

God offered salvation on His terms, rejecting human good outright. The blood sacrifice of an innocent animal, which provided new clothing for Adam and Eve, was a type (i.e., a model or pattern) of the perfect Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world (John 1:29). Blood sacrifices would continue until the Cross. When Adam and Eve personally accepted the redemption solution though faith alone in Christ alone, they were regenerated. They would live out their lives with their sin natures, even pass them on to their progeny, but when their bodies died, their immortal souls would be in a place of great blessing. They have eternal life—far more than they had in perfect environment.

Grace found a way: God judged, completely and totally rejected ‘operation fig leaves’—Adam and Eve’s human good, and then offered His blueprint for salvation. It was grace in action: “A favor done without expectation of return [man has nothing good to offer God in return]; absolute freeness of the loving kindness of God to men [first to Adam and Eve, then to everyone] finding its only motive in the bounty and free heartedness of the Giver; unearned and unmerited favor.” David asked, “What is man, that you are mindful of him, the son of man that you care for him?” (Psalm 8:4). Apart from what God provides to us, we have nothing to offer God.

We will never face the test of the Garden; Adam and the Woman did that for us. But, as with Adam and Eve after the fall, each of us must choose whether or not to accept the redemption solution. While we look back, nearly two thousand years, to what happened on the Cross, Adam and Eve looked forward. The object of their faith was exactly the same as ours. God still rejects all forms of human good and provides salvation on His terms; namely, faith alone in the uniquely born Son of God, the Lord Jesus Christ, the One who to whom every sin was imputed and judged, as a substitute for each one in the entire human race.

SUMMARY

In summary, these important lessons have emerged:

God is the Omniscient One (Colossians 2.3): because He knew, billions of years ago in eternity past, that sin would enter the world, He prepared the solution in advance.

In the fall (spiritual death), man became imperfect so that whatever he does (human good) reflects his character—imperfection.

All human efforts to win God's approval are rejected, beginning in the Garden of Eden (Operation Fig Leaves).

As the offspring of Adam, all mankind shares his sinful nature (Romans 5:12).

Nothing man does impresses God (Isaiah 64.6); He is only impressed with His own work.

Salvation is totally and completely the work of God only. The Father's plan was executed by the Son (Who became the seed of the woman), and is revealed to the human race by the Holy Spirit. "But by His [God's] doing [whose doing? Not yours!] you are in Christ Jesus, who became to us wisdom from God, and righteousness and sanctification, and redemption" (I Corinthians 1:30).

If one desires salvation, he must accept divine provision by means of faith alone in Christ alone, devoid of any human good. (Ephesians 2:8,9)

Accepting God's salvation, results in eternal life that can never be revoked. "I give eternal life to them, and they will never perish; and no one will snatch them out of My hand." (John 10.28).

God is perfect and His work is perfect. He initiated salvation by means of His grace. We can add nothing to grace. He purchased you through His Son (1 Peter 1:18,19). He sealed you with His Holy Spirit (II Corinthians 1:22). He is the One who keeps you [saved] by His power (John 10:29). God began your salvation with grace, and you will enjoy His grace forever. With this in mind, we conclude: "Now to Him who is able to keep you from stumbling [i.e., losing your salvation], and to make you stand in the presence of His glory, blameless with great joy [with no accusation against you], to the only God our Savior, through Jesus Christ our Lord, be glory, majesty, dominion and authority before all time and now and forever. Amen" (Jude 1:24-25).

To be continued in Volume 18—lesson 4

As noted previously (Lesson 3), few subjects in Scripture are more difficult to comprehend than the grace of God. Nonetheless, there is nothing more precious to those who understand its overwhelming significance. Grace-oriented believers are the most relaxed and realistic of believers. They reject any temptations to impress God with their human good; rather, they embrace all that God does for them because of His Son, Jesus Christ.

We have carefully examined how God demonstrated His grace in creation. We focused on the creation of man in the Garden to illustrate God's grace provision. In the fall of

man, we saw the striking distinction between man's solution ("operation fig leaves") and God's divine solution (grace). There are three important questions that remain to round out our discussion on God's grace in the creation of man. First, where was man before his creation? Second, what did man contribute during his creation? And third, what motivated man's behavior after the fall—specifically "operation fig leaves"? These questions are vital to understanding the doctrine of grace.

MAN BEFORE HIS CREATION: “Then the Lord God formed man of dust from the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life [Hebrew: *Neshemah hayyah*—a spark of His [God's] own life]; and man became a living being” (Genesis 2:7). The words describing the material from which the human body was formed are of special interest. The Hebrew noun, *aphar*, can be translated as “dust,” “clay,” “mortar,” or “ashes”. It is even used for a heap of “rubbish” in reference to structural ruins. The Hebrew word *adamah*, means, “ground” or “earth.” Therefore, the created body of man is composed of the chemical elements of the pristine earth. To paraphrase Genesis 2:7: “Then the Lord God, Christ Jesus, formed man from the chemicals of the earth and breathed into his nostrils the spark of His life, and man became a human being.” Hence, in Adam's creation, God formed his body from the same elements of which everything—animate and inanimate—were formed, elements that God created. Yet Adam was unique among all creation. King David, an Old Testament hero, sang about this (Psalm 8:3-8):

When I consider Your heavens, the work of Your fingers,
The moon and the stars, which You have ordained;
What is man that You take thought of him,
And the son of man that You care for him?
Yet You have made him a little lower than [angels],
And You crown him with glory and majesty!
You make him to rule over the works of Your hands;
You have put all things under his feet,
All sheep and oxen,
And also the beasts of the field,
The birds of the heavens and the fish of the sea,
Whatever passes through the paths of the seas.

Nevertheless, while the soul that God gave Adam is immortal, when he died, his body reverted to the chemicals of the soil (Genesis 3.19). The *Lexical Aids to the Old Testament* (Hebrew Dictionary) tells us "dust and ashes, is a proverbial phrase to express the lowliness and fragility of human nature." Job used it in bitterness when he thought God abandoned him (Job 30.19). "Then Abraham spoke, . . . I am nothing but dust and ashes" (Genesis 18:27). Of course, Abraham, of all people (as we will see shortly), knew this was not literal, but used the proverbial phrase to assure God that he recognized that he had no standing in negotiating with God to spare Sodom from destruction. Remember that God told Adam, " . . . you are dust, and to dust you shall return." Proverbial or not, any believer in the Lord Jesus Christ, who cannot fully accept that he is nothing apart from God and His marvelous provisions, has a long way to go in the spiritual life.

WHAT DID MAN CONTRIBUTE DURING HIS CREATION? The answer ought to be obvious, but consider this: “Woe to the one who quarrels with his maker [God]—an earthenware vessel among the vessels of the earth! Will the clay say to the potter, ‘What are you doing?’ Or the thing you are making say, ‘He has no hands’” (Isaiah 45:9). Isaiah makes the point that clay is helpless to shape itself into something useful. Thus, when the Lord God formed man in the Garden, God did all the work. Can a lifeless corpse take part in its own burial? Of course not. Nor could the lifeless body of Adam give itself life. The creation of Adam was complete—including body, soul, and spirit—uniquely created in God’s shadow image, by God, and without anyone’s help. This brings us to the last question.

WHAT MOTIVATED ADAM’S BEHAVIOR AFTER THE FALL? The answer to this question is a very simple one — he chose to act as he did—just as he chose to disobey God in the first place. The decisions that we make determine the lives that we live. Adam’s decision to eat the fruit was made without a sin nature. But in that one instant of negative volition (will), the sin nature was born. The sin nature produces **ALL SIN AND ALL HUMAN GOOD**. Through procreation each of us has inherited a sin nature. Then at the very moment we are born, God imputes Adam’s original sin, so that we are born physically alive but spiritually dead. Like Adam and the woman, the very best that we can do with a sin nature in spiritual death is what is called human good. And the engine behind it all is volition, the freedom to choose. Adam could not say, “My sin nature made me do it.” He was responsible for his own decisions.

An entire complex of sins can be summarized in one word: arrogance. Like other sins, arrogance is produced by the sin nature’s area of weakness. Mankind—like Satan (Isaiah 14:12-15)—has a tendency to show off in an attempt to help God or to prove that he can do better than God. Such an attitude is unadulterated blasphemy at best, polished arrogance at its peak! Arrogance is often accompanied by human good produced by the sin nature’s area of strength. Human good—which is always rejected by God—becomes evil when it is intensified to distort Bible doctrine or divine establishment. We saw that Adam and the woman chose the sin of fear from their sin nature when confronted by God (Lesson 3). But before the Lord approached them, their attempt to cover their nakedness—“operation fig leaves”—was human good. The lust for approval originating in their sin natures was distilled into arrogance. It gave them confidence in the false notion that “if they were right with each other, they would be right with God.” Yet they could not say, “Our sin natures made us do it.” They were responsible for their own decisions.

Today, Satan’s forces are constantly busy, working to subtly influence the minds of careless believers with his original sin of pride—arrogance. That is why Peter sounds the warning: “Be of sober spirit, be on the alert [be watchful]. Your adversary, the devil [the enemy of grace], prowls about like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour [i.e., to destroy]” (I Peter 5:8). Those who have no concept of grace and are living according to the world’s standards, are already in Satan’s camp—enemies of the cross (Philippians 3:18,19). These are the monstrous, egocentric, legalistic, believers who have become involved in Christian activism, lordship-salvation, salvation-by-works, etc. Your only

defense is to learn Bible doctrine. Learn grace and think in terms of grace—that's God's way. The alternative is punishment from the Supreme Court of Heaven. No one can say, "Satan made me do it." We are responsible for our own decisions.

GOD'S GRACE TOWARD ABRAHAM

Who was Abraham? What did he have to offer that caused God to impute His perfect righteousness to him? And precisely what did he do that caused God to make his name great? What kind of works did Abraham perform that earned him the title "A friend of God forever?" Let us pay close attention to the doctrinal exposition of the grace of God toward Abraham. After all, the Bible portrays his faith as a pattern for all who will put their faith in the Lord Jesus Christ.

We know from Scripture, that Abraham was a descendant of Shem—the eldest son of Noah. Born Abram, he was the youngest son of Terah, an idolater (Joshua 24:2), who lived in Ur of the Chaldees. The apostle Paul described idolatry this way: "The wrath of God is being revealed from heaven against all the godlessness and wickedness of men who suppress the truth by their wickedness, since what may be known about God is plain to them, because God has made it plain to them. For since the creation of the world's invisible qualities—His eternal power and divine nature—have been clearly seen, being understood from what has been made, so that men [including idolaters] are without excuse. Although they claimed to be wise, they became fools and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images made to look like mortal man and birds and animals and reptiles" (Roman 1:18-20,21). Abram became aware that it does not make sense to worship created—animate or inanimate—things. Breaking with his family tradition, he allowed the flame to know the true God ignite in his soul.

We have noted how God sought Adam after his failure: "But the Lord God [Jesus Christ] called to the man [Adam], 'Why are you where you are?'" (Genesis 3:9). During His incarnation Christ said, "For the Son of man came to seek and to save what was lost" (Luke 19:10). God always reveals Himself to those who respond positively. Abram was no exception. God brought him first to Haran, where his father died, and then to Canaan where he became a believer in the Lord Jesus Christ. That is the sweetness of grace. He could have abandoned Adam and Eve to wander, but He did not. He could have left Abram in Ur or Haran seeking the true God, but He did not. And far more personal, He could have left you, without hope in your depravity, and a guarantee of eternal death in the Lake of fire, but He did not. He stepped out of His glory "to seek and to save what was lost." If that's not grace, what then is grace?

THE IMPUTATION OF GOD'S RIGHTEOUSNESS TO ABRAHAM

"Then he [Abram] believed [Hebrew: *Aman* = believed, trusted] in the Lord [Jesus Christ]; and He [God the Father] reckoned [Hebrew: *Chashab*=imputed, credited] it to him as righteousness" (Genesis 15:6). According to Lexical Aids (Hebrew Dictionary) to the Old Testament; God registered [one's] faith [in Christ] as tantamount to exoneration [i.e., a verdict of not guilty!]. Luke wrote, "Therefore my brothers, I want you to know

that through Jesus the forgiveness of sins is proclaimed to you, and through Him [Christ Jesus] everyone [including Abraham] who believes, is justified from everything from which you could not be justified by the Law of Moses [including justification-by-circumcision, lordship-justification, justification-by-works, justification-by-baptism, and so on and so forth]” (Acts 13:38,39).

The BIG QUESTION is what kind of work did Abram do that caused God to impute His very own righteousness to him? What is your answer to this BIG QUESTION? If you are among the lordship-salvation, salvation-by-works, or salvation-by-baptism proponents, you may want to pause and think hard on this question. Why? Because the answer from the Bible makes very clear, that Abram’s faith was GRACE and NOT WORKS. Abram did nothing except believe in the Lord Jesus Christ as our Lord revealed Himself to him. Is there any work in belief?

PAUL VIGOROUSLY DEFENDS ABRAHAM’S FAITH ALONE IN CHRIST ALONE

The apostle Paul analyzed Abraham’s faith. Beginning in Romans 4:1, he asks, “What then shall we say that Abraham, our forefather [of the Jewish race] according to the flesh, has found? For if Abraham was justified by works, he has something to boast about, but not before God. For what does the Scripture say? **‘AND ABRAHAM BELIEVED GOD,** and it [his faith alone in Christ alone] was reckoned to him as righteousness’ (quoting Genesis 15:6). Now to the one who works [any kind of works], his wage is not reckoned as favor [or grace—Greek *charis*], but as what is due. But to the one who does not work, but believes in Him who justifies the ungodly, his faith [plus nothing else] is reckoned [credited or imputed] as righteousness, just as David also speaks of the blessing upon the man to whom God reckons righteousness apart from WORKS [!]: **‘BLESSED ARE THOSE WHOSE LAWLESS DEEDS HAVE BEEN FORGIVEN, AND WHOSE SINS HAVE BEEN COVERED. BLESSED IS THE MAN WHOSE SIN THE LORD WILL NOT TAKE INTO ACCOUNT’**(quoting Psalm 32:1,2)” (Romans 4.1-8).

For just a moment consider yourself an employee, of XYZ Manufacturing Company. The company requires all employees to show up for work at exactly 6 a.m. and not to leave work until 9 p.m.—every day, seven days a week. You, along with every other employee, sweat fifteen long hours for XYZ, and have nine hours to do other things such as cooking, eating, bathing, and of course sleeping. At the end of the month, the manager approaches to hand you a check and says, “This check is a favor from XYZ to you.” How would you reply? Would you say, “Give me that check now! And don’t you ever give me that line again,” or would you politely say to him, “Sir, with all due respect, this check is not a favor, it is remuneration for my hard work—day-in-and-day-out—it is a compensation for my sweat—how dare you called it a favor.”

Another scenario: You are a parent of a large, but poor family. You cannot afford to buy a used bicycle, let alone a car. Every day you walk 14 miles to and from work. One day, a wealthy man who has observed you for several days on the road decides to do something

for you. He goes to a car dealer and purchases an automobile. Early one morning, he arrives at your house just as you are about to leave for work, rings the bell, and says to you, “Here is a key to this Mercedes—it is my gift to you.” How would you respond? Would you say to him, “Give me that key now; that’s a payment for my sweat?” And more to the point, how would you feel when driving that car? I think that a normal person would be overwhelmed and speechless for some time! Only you and the giver know that you never worked for it, nor did you ever deserve it—it is truly a favor done without expectation of return! The Greek word *charis* (grace or favor) is not just the opposite of *erga* (work); the terms are mutually exclusive!

We have proffered two quite different analogies, in one a salary for one’s work, in the other a grace gift—an unmerited favor. Now we can follow the apostle Paul as he vigorously defends Abraham’s faith alone in Christ alone—as he draws an indelible line between works and grace. Keep in mind that the apostle’s theme is “grace and works are mutually exclusive.” In essence, he is saying that human works are not the means for a relationship with God, nor are human works a requirement to maintain that relationship. It baffles me to see how some believers can be so logical about issues of life in general, but how illogical they become when it comes to matters of spiritual value.

For instance, if human works are not a means of entering into relationship with God, how could they possibly be a means of sustaining that relationship? It does not add up! Or, based on the definition of grace how can one try to add works to grace? What the apostle illustrates in Romans 4 is that works are works; and grace is grace. But most importantly, he demonstrates without equivocation that all attempts to add works to grace results in negating grace; faith plus any system of human effort results in a negation of faith.

The Apostle Paul later summarized: “But if it [salvation] is by grace [and it is], **IT** [salvation] **IS NO LONGER ON THE BASIS OF WORKS**; otherwise grace is no longer grace.” (Romans 11:6). With that in mind, he goes on to defend his argument.

DEFENSE # 1: CIRCUMCISION—A WORK: “And some men came down from Judea and began teaching the brethren [believers in Antioch], “Unless you are circumcised according to the custom of Moses, you cannot be saved” (Acts 15:1). This was the heretical teaching of the Judaizers in the early church. Today this has become the pattern for many modern false teachers who have little or no knowledge of the grace of God. The apostle Paul puts his defense forward: “How then was [faith] reckoned [for righteousness]? [Was it] while he [Abraham] was circumcised, or uncircumcised? Not while circumcised, but while uncircumcised!” (Romans 4:10). Paul asks he readers to remember their history; Abram was a believer long before he circumcised himself and God changed his name to Abraham at age ninety-nine. The act of circumcision had **NOTHING** to do with Abraham’s salvation and justification.

DEFENSE # 2: OBSERVING THE LAW—WORKS FOR SALVATION: “Now we know that whatever the Law says, it speaks to those who are under the Law . . . because by the works of the Law no flesh will be justified in His sight . . .” (Romans 3:19,20).

Paul added: “For the promise to Abraham or to his descendants that he would be heir of the world was not through the Law, but through the righteousness of faith” (Romans 4:13). He argues that Abraham was believer long before the Law of Moses came about. The Law of Moses came 430 years after the Abrahamic covenant was last confirmed to Abraham's grandson, Israel. In Galatians he wrote, “What I am saying is this: the Law, which came four hundred and thirty years later, does not invalidate [or void] a covenant previously ratified by God, so as to nullify the promise. For if the inheritance is based on law [works], it is no longer based on a promise, but God has granted [the inheritance] to Abraham by means of a promise” (Galatians 3:17,18). It is interesting to note that the word "granted" is the Greek verb *charizomai*, meaning to give freely or graciously as a favor. Abraham's salvation, therefore, was something initiated, executed, and finalized by grace. And when the Law came, it neither added nor took away anything from what Abraham had already received by grace, through faith alone in Christ alone. Had the salvation-by-works folks understood this concept, they would not have been confused by James' doctrine of justification by divine works—a doctrine that has nothing to do with the justification received as a result of salvation!

“Was not Abraham our father justified by works, when he offered up Isaac his son on the altar?” (James 2:21). If the apostle James were alive today, he might argue his case as decisively as Paul: When did Abraham become a believer in the Lord? Was it when he offered Isaac as a sacrifice on the altar or before Isaac was born? The answer is crystal clear: Abraham became a believer before Isaac was born. Therefore, his obedience to God in offering Isaac added nothing to his salvation; rather it demonstrated a high point in his spiritual growth, which gave birth to his new title, “the friend of God” (James 2:23). This situation demonstrates the difference between the justification of unbelievers by faith (unto salvation) and the justification of believers by divine works. (You may wish to read our book, *The Biblical Doctrine of Salvation*, for more on the doctrine of justification by works.)

Amazingly, it is many theologians and ministers of the Word who, by their failure to examine the infallible Word of God using isagogics, exegesis, and categories, have introduced religion and brought chaos to Christianity. Their isagogic removes the Bible from its historical setting; their exegesis replaces dependence on the original languages with arguments about the best English translation; and their categories emphasize emotion, feelings, and humanizing God.

A correct isagogic recognizes the fundamental importance of analyzing Scripture in its historical setting. Accurate exegesis requires years studying ancient languages, so that every idiom and nuance of Scripture can be precisely translated. And proper categorical development of the doctrines of Scripture must embrace the entire Word of God in a theological framework that will not collapse because it is self-contradictory. The Bible is taught—and learned—“precept on precept, line on line” (Isaiah 28.10).

Instead, false doctrines such as “lordship-salvation,” “salvation-by-baptism,” “salvation-by-works,” “salvation-by-inviting-Christ,” and many others dominate the theological landscape. Neither our Lord nor the apostles ever taught these, nor can these distortions

be found in Scripture. They collectively represent the false gospel—a gospel that cannot, does not, and will not save. They are irreconcilable with the truth of the Word of God. Consider these Scriptures:

"For **BY GRACE** you have been saved through faith [like Abraham]; and that not of yourselves, it is the **GIFT** of God; **NOT AS A RESULT OF WORKS**, that no one should boast" (Ephesians 2:8,9).

"He saved us, **NOT ON THE BASIS OF DEEDS** which we have done in righteousness, but according to His mercy . . ." (Titus 3:5a).

"Who has saved us, and called us with a holy calling [through the gospel message], **NOT ACCORDING TO OUR WORKS**, but according to his own purpose and grace which was granted us in Christ Jesus from all eternity" (II Timothy 1:9).

No wonder Paul was so adamant about drawing a line between grace and works! Apart from his non-meritorious faith in Christ, Abraham did nothing else to secure his salvation, nothing to merit God's imputation of His perfect righteousness. Scripture clearly contradicts anyone who would claim otherwise. Everything any of us have ever received from our merciful God has come to us through the funnel of the immeasurable, matchless, and unfathomable grace of God—no more and no less!

Finally, what about the place of works after salvation? Some will agree that we are saved by grace, but then argue that without works salvation is worthless in this life. Ridiculous! That is the same worn argument that man can do something to impress God, essentially the salvation-by-works heresy with an ornery twist. Of course, the exact opposite is true. Just as God does all the work in salvation, so He does the work after salvation. If we could do just one thing to help God, then our salvation would be nothing. God has not ever needed anyone's help and He never will. The principle is this: Any "good" done by an unbeliever is considered human good. When a believer is carnal (his old sin nature is in control) he imitates the unbeliever in producing human good. And God rejects all human good. Only when the Holy Spirit is in control does the believer produce divine good. The issue is never what the work is, but rather who does the work. Who is in control? In the post-salvation spiritual life God does all the work.

The Bible is very clear that we have been purchased (1 Peter 1:18-19); and now belong to God (1 Corinthians 6:20). It is arrogance to add anything to try to help God. When human works are added to the equation, it is an arrogant attempt to take back what is no longer ours. "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who according to His great mercy [in action] has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, to obtain an inheritance which is imperishable and undefiled and will not fade away, reserved in heaven for you, **WHO ARE PROTECTED [KEPT] BY THE POWER OF GOD** through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time" (1 Peter 1:3-5).

Christ said, “And I give eternal life to them, and they shall never perish; and no one shall snatch them out of My hand. My Father, who has given them to Me, is greater than all; and no one is able to snatch them out of My Father’s hand [!]” (John 10:28,29). Here is one of the true beauties of grace—the believer is held by two omnipotent hands! How could it get better? Paul summarizes what it means when a person becomes the object of the eternal love of God by saying, “For I am convinced [by the Holy Spirit] that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor any other created being, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is [concretely rooted] in Christ Jesus our Lord” (Romans 8:38,39).

God is perfect and His work is perfect. He initiated salvation by means of His grace. We can add nothing to grace. He purchased you through His Son (1 Peter 1:18,19). He sealed you with His Holy Spirit (2 Corinthians 1:22). He is the One who keeps you [saved] by His power (1 Peter 1:3-5). God began your salvation with grace, and you will enjoy His grace forever. “Now to Him who is able to keep you from stumbling [i.e., losing your salvation], and to make you stand in the presence of His glory, blameless with great joy [with no accusation against you], to the only God our Savior, through Jesus Christ our Lord, be glory, majesty, dominion and authority before all time and now and forever. Amen” (Jude 1:24-25).

(to be continued in Volume 19—lesson 5)

In our previous doctrinal exposition (volume 18, lesson 4), we examined the status of man before creation. We learned that man is nothing apart from the grace of God, and examined God's grace towards Abraham. Also, we noted the apostle Paul's vigorous defense of Abraham's faith alone in Christ alone as the ONLY means for an eternal relationship with God the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit—the only way that is compatible with grace!

We reviewed the apostle's emphatic assertion that one's salvation, which commences with grace, cannot be made contingent on works that follow! Let's try to illustrate the fallacy that God's plan can include our human good. An automobile engine's power is derived from highly refined oil, or gasoline. You can see the engine, read its specifications, and see other engines moving up and down the street, but your engine isn't going anywhere without fuel. Likewise, spiritual power for believer's soul is only available through the fuel of God's grace provision—and there are never any shortages. Now consider a man who starts his car, and then pours a pound of sugar into the fuel tank (Warning: Do not try this at home!). Sugar may be a source of energy for your body, but never for an automobile engine.

What do you think will happen to the engine? The carburetor, which converts the liquid fuel into a highly combustible vapor, will quickly become encrusted with the crystalline molecules of sugar and the engine will be cut off from the source of its power. The engine won't take you anywhere unless you push or pull it. Now, consider the thousands who after salvation decide that God's grace just isn't quite enough. First they add a little human power and as the engine begins to sputter, they incorrectly assume the solution is

to add even more. They have long since, gotten out and started pushing. And for all that pushing, where are they going? Certainly not where God would have them. God's power in their lives has been blocked by the sugar of their human good. Just as the engine will not operate with sugar, God's plan will not operate with human works.

This is why God inspired the apostle Paul to so decisively reject the sanctification-by-works heresy in Galatia. "You foolish (*Anoetos: Greek = lacking intelligence- in this case without spiritual common sense*) Galatians," he wrote, "who has bewitched you (*i.e., led you into false doctrine*) . . .? I would like to learn just one thing from you: Did you receive the [Holy] Spirit (*a grace gift at salvation*) by observing the law (*i.e., working for your salvation*), or by believing (*i.e., faith plus nothing*) what you heard (*i.e., the simple grace gospel message*)? Are you so foolish? After beginning with the [*grace gift of the Holy*] Spirit, are you now trying to attain your goal (*spiritual maturity*) by human effort? (Galatians 3:1-3)

In the same context, he continued, "Consider Abraham; he believed [in] God (*the Son as He revealed Himself to him*), and it (*his faith plus nothing*) was credited for him as righteousness." He added, "Understand, then, that those who believe are children of Abraham. The Scripture foresaw that God would justify the Gentiles by faith [alone], and announced the gospel in advance to Abraham: 'All nations will be blessed through you.' So those who have faith (*alone in Christ alone*) are blessed along with Abraham, the man of faith. For as many as are of the works of the Law (*rely on salvation by works*) are under a curse (*still unbelievers*)" (Galatians 3:6-10a).

Believers today are the spiritual progeny of Abraham, saved in exactly the same way that he was saved. The Holy Spirit reaches out from the time of Paul through two millennia and asks this same question of the modern Judaizers, those who teach lordship-salvation, salvation-by-works, and sanctification-by-works—how can you start with grace and switch to works?

Abraham exemplifies God's standard for salvation in every generation—it is faith alone in Christ alone. Anyone who chooses to add works of any kind to simple faith for salvation remains an unbeliever-separated from God. This sounds extreme, but consider God's Word: "What then shall we say? That the Gentiles, who did not pursue [God's] righteousness, have obtained (*Greek: katalambano = laid hold of, apprehended*) it, a righteousness that is by faith, but Israel (*God's chosen people*), who pursue a law of righteousness (*i.e., salvation by works*), has not obtained it. Why not? Because they pursued it (*i.e., salvation*) not by faith but as if it were by works . . ." (Romans 9:30-32a).

So how can a person who understands this simple truth resolve to reject it?" In one word, the answer is arrogance! Some personally reject this truth, because it calls into question the salvation of friends and family already departed. Others reject it publicly. When confronted with the truth, these false teachers say, "If people understood that salvation is simple and eternal, they would live immoral lives." I know a pastor in a denomination that rejects the doctrine of eternal security, who personally accepts its truth. But he says that he cannot teach what he believes for two reasons. First, he fears that he would lose

his job. Second, he fears that it would encourage his congregation to live in sin.

Those who embrace false doctrine face the justice of the Supreme Court of Heaven! God has never needed anyone's help—not then, not now, not ever! Whether for discipline or blessing, God deals with us in grace—a policy that has never changed. Do you recall what happened to Uzzah when he reached out to stabilize the Ark when it was being moved to Jerusalem (GNT, Vol. 16)? He was trying to help, but it was the last time that he'd try that. When we get out of alignment with grace, God always corrects us. "For those whom the Lord loves (*Greek: agapao = unfailing love of the object, wholly based on character of the giver—here believers out of fellowship*), He disciplines, and He [skins alive] every son whom He receives" (Hebrews 12:6).

Now we are ready to examine one of the pivotal doctrines of Scripture: God's grace toward His chosen people.

GOD'S GRACE TOWARDS ISRAEL

Who are the Israelites? And how does God's grace apply to Israel in time and in eternity? Exactly what did Israel do to earn a special place in God's plan? Why was this race the source of our Lord Jesus Christ's humanity? Before answering these questions, let's review the definition of grace. Grace is "a favor done without expectation of return; absolute freeness of the loving kindness of God to men finding its only motive in the bounty and free heartedness of the Giver; unearned and unmerited favor." We will see that God's grace toward Israel is totally apart from human merit.

HISTORICAL ISRAEL: THE BEGINNING

The city of Ur, on the banks of the Euphrates, about 200 miles inland from the Persian Gulf was the birthplace of Abram (c. 2060 B.C.). Abram was born a gentile and was to become the first of a new racial species. He grew up, married, and then moved with his father's family to Haran, a town about 200 miles inland from the northeast corner of the Mediterranean. After his father's death in Haran, God told Abram—still childless—to move away from Haran to a place where He would provide land, seed, and blessing. We find the first phase of Abram's remarkable journey, begun in faith at age seventy-five, outlined in Genesis 12-16. Despite Abram's failures, God made his ninety-ninth a banner year. Abram, in obedience to God's command, circumcised himself and at that moment He became the first Jew in history - the father of the new racial species.

Abram became Abraham while his wife Sarai, now 90, became Sarah. And it wasn't just their names that God changed but He also revived their sexual ability. A year later Sarah delivered her first child whom God named Isaac or "laughter" (Genesis 17-21) - the promised son and heir by Sarah. His mother died when Isaac was 38. Two years later he married, but it wasn't until age sixty that Isaac and Rebekah had twin sons—Esau and Jacob (Genesis 22-25). Abraham remarried and had six more sons. These along with Ishmael, the son of his adultery, and his grandson Esau became the fathers of Arab tribes. When Abraham died at 175 years, his grandson Jacob was 15. As an adult Jacob deftly

wrested the birth right from his brother to become the heir of the promise. Joseph-his favorite son-was just nine years old in Jacob's 100th year. That year, after a humbling, all-night wrestling match with God the Son, God changed Jacob's name to Israel (literally one who strives with God. Genesis 32). Joseph's jealous brothers sold him to traders who took him to Egypt where he became regent. By means of God's grace he prepared Egypt for famine, a famine that eventually reunited him with his family. Joseph and his eleven brothers became the fathers of the tribes of Israel-thirteen in all-including Joseph's double-portion, the half-tribes of Ephraim and Manassas.

GOD'S GRACE IN ISRAEL'S BLESSING: "And I will make you (Abraham) a great nation (Israel), and I will bless you, and make your name great; and so you shall be a blessing" (Genesis 12:2). God made this covenant with Abraham and his progeny unconditionally. Had the promise required human merit, it would not have been grace! The promise was repeated after Abraham's death: ". . . the Lord appeared to [Isaac] . . . and said, 'I am the God of your father Abraham; do not fear, for I am with you. I will bless you, and multiply your descendants, for the sake of my servant Abraham'" (Genesis 26:24). Note that God's promise to bless Isaac and his progeny was for the sake of Abraham. And what had Abraham done to merit God's blessing on his descendents? Nothing. In all the Scriptures, no shred of evidence supports that Abraham did anything but exercise non-meritorious faith in Christ! Further, notice these promises extend to those not yet born! What could they do to merit this blessing? Nothing. "The Lord did not set His love on [Israel] nor choose you because you were more in number (or more righteous for that matter) than any of the peoples, for you were the fewest of all peoples" (Deuteronomy 7:7). Israel grew-outnumbering their hosts-during their stay in Egypt, and a new king who did not know Joseph came to power and enslaved the people. Even in slavery, God demonstrated His grace to the fledgling nation.

In His omniscience, sovereignty, eternal purpose, and grace, God called out Abraham and made a unilateral covenant to specially bless his family. This sovereign decision was not based on any special quality of any in the family; rather it was based solely on God's integrity. The only spiritual issue was non-meritorious faith in the person of Christ. Fully comprehending the doctrines related to God's grace toward Israel requires a detailed examination of both Testaments of the infallible, inerrant Word of God. The Bible distinguishes between racial, religious, and regenerate Israel. "But it is not as though the word of God has failed. For they are not all Israel who are descended from Israel; nor are they all children because they are Abraham's descendants, but: "through Isaac (Isaac believed, Esau did not) your descendants will be named." That is, it is not the children of the flesh who are children of God, but the children of the promise are regarded as descendants." (Romans 9:6-8)

All of those whom God miraculously brought out of Egyptian captivity were regenerate, born again by faith alone in Christ alone. But while under divine testing in the wilderness they demonstrated their lack of spiritual growth and momentum as well as capacity for their newly gained freedom by continually failing to trust God and apply doctrine. It came to the point that God was prepared to start over. "And the Lord said to Moses, 'I have seen this people (Israel), and behold they are an obstinate (stubborn, hard-headed,

hard to care for, and hard to lead) people. Now let Me alone (while you go back down the mountain), that My anger may burn against them, and that I may destroy them; and I will make of you (Moses) a great nation" (Exodus 32:9,10). Note that God has never been angry, not even once. Anger is a sin. So why does the Bible say that God was angry? This is an anthropopathism; there are many in the Bible and each is divinely inspired. They ascribe to God a human characteristic, which He does not-and cannot-possess. The Holy Spirit used anthropopathisms to convey divine policy in terms that man could quickly understand. Now back to God's proposal.

Any average person's ego might regard this as a tempting, even mouthwatering offer, but not Moses-he not only understood grace, but he had all the ingredients of a great leader: humility, authority orientation, loyalty, and integrity. Not only was he loyal to God and His Plan, but also to those whom God charged him to teach doctrine and lead into the land promised to Abraham. So it is not surprising to find him imploring God not to harm His people. "Then Moses entreated the Lord, his God, and said, 'O Lord, why [must] your anger burn against Thy people whom Thou hast brought out from the land of Egypt with great power and a mighty hand? But now, if Thou wilt, forgive their sin-and if not, please blot me out from the book (an impossible request) which Thou has written.'" (Exodus 32:11, 32) Moses was willing to give up his salvation if God would not punish Israel! In a moment we will take a look at how God handled some of Israel's failures, and Moses' failures too. But first let's step back for a moment to look more closely at God's gracious deliverance of Israel from Egyptian bondage.

GOD GUIDED ISRAEL IN GRACE:

"Hence God led the people around by the way of the wilderness to the Red Sea; and the sons of Israel went up in martial array from the land of Egypt." (Exodus 13:18) And the Lord was going before them in a pillar of cloud by day to lead them on the way, and in a pillar of fire by night to give them light, that they might travel by day and by night. He did not take away the pillar of cloud by day, nor the pillar of fire by night, from before the people" (Exodus 13:21-22). The pillar of cloud and fire was neither earned nor deserved-that's grace. And that grace was consistent day and night. Imagine, over two million believers with their flocks and cattle. They had just walked away from their homes. They had no specific knowledge of where God would take them or the dangers that lay ahead. But God the Omniscient One manifest himself in the pillar as their Navigator! No wonder Moses and the sons of Israel sang, "In your unfailing love you will lead the people you have redeemed. In your strength you will guide them to your holy dwelling" (Exodus 15:13). Though Israel often failed, God never failed them! Now, let's take a look at how God dealt with some of Israel's failures.

FAILURE #1 (Exodus 14): "As Pharaoh approached, the Israelites looked up, and there were the Egyptians, marching after them. They were terrified and cried out to the Lord. They said to Moses, 'Was it because there were no graves in Egypt that you brought us to the desert to die? What have you done to us by bringing us out of Egypt?' Didn't we say to you in Egypt, 'Leave us alone; let us serve the Egyptians (as slaves)?' It would have been better for us to serve the Egyptians than to die in the desert'" (v.10, 11). Listen to the

sarcasm! While still in Egypt, God set the stage for Israel's liberation through a series of ten miracles. Now, in the sights of the pursuing Egyptian army they panic. They forget God, His promises, the doctrine taught by Moses, and the logical conclusion that if God had brought them this far He was not going to abandon them now. They had their eyes on the problem, while Moses had His eyes on the solution, the Lord. "But Moses said to the people, "Do not fear! Stand by and see the salvation of the LORD, which He will accomplish for you today; for the Egyptians whom you have seen today, you will never see them again forever. The LORD will fight for you while you keep silent" (v. 13,14).

Their lack of faith in these crucial moments merited discipline, perhaps their capture by the Egyptian army. But were they captured? "Then Moses stretched out his hand over the water . . . the waters were divided and the Israelites went through the sea on dry ground" (v. 21,22). Had they earned this miraculous provision? Once safely across, God told Moses to stretch out his hand a second time. This time the waters closed back and swallowed the entire Egyptian army (v. 26-28). "That day the Lord (in His matchless grace) saved Israel from the hands of the Egyptians, and Israel saw the Egyptians lying dead on the shore. And when the Israelites saw the great power the Lord displayed against the Egyptians, the people [respected] the Lord and put their trust in Him and in Moses His servant" (v. 30,31). It was a powerful lesson for Israel, but for most it would soon be forgotten.

FAILURE #2 (Exodus 15): "Then Moses led Israel from the Red Sea and they went into the desert of Shur. For three days they traveled in the desert without finding water. When they came to Marah (literally, bitter), they could not drink the water because it was bitter So the people [of Israel] grumbled against Moses, saying, "What are we to drink?" (v. 22-24). Just three days since the miracle at the Red Sea they had forgotten how God provided! God tested the Israelites at Marah and they failed. Though they whined, mewed, groaned, and grumbled, God's grace prevailed and the water became sweet (v. 25).

FAILURE #3 (Exodus 16): "In the desert the whole community grumbled against Moses You have brought us out into desert to starve this entire assembly to death" (v.2-3). Again, the long history of God's provision-most recently, the miracles in Egypt, the Red Sea deliverance, and the water at Marah-is forgotten! Miracles are never the basis of spiritual strength. Absent doctrine in their souls, they became irrational, wishing that God had killed them in Egypt rather than face starvation in the wilderness. Once again, human viewpoint suggests God should have just abandoned them right there. Fortunately, we never get everything we deserve from God's justice. "Then the Lord said to Moses, 'I will rain down bread from heaven. The people are to go out each day and gather enough for that day. In this way I will test them to see whether they will follow my instructions" (vs. 4). God, in His unfathomable grace, provided fresh quail every evening and fresh bread every morning (v. 13-15). What did God demand in return for this provision? Nothing, but He did set some rules. Israel would have to know how to follow instructions in order to conquer the Promised Land. Therefore, the instructions (v. 16, 19, 23, 26) were both a test and a training exercise. One of these was to gather only one day's supply; "however, some of them paid no attention to Moses" (v. 20) gathering more than a one-day

supply. The Lord indicted them. "Then the Lord said to Moses, 'How long will [Israel] refuse to keep my commands and instructions?' (v. 28) Some failed the Lord, but His grace did not fail them. For forty years Israel neither earned nor deserved this grace provision that they called manna.

FAILURE #4 (Exodus 17): Israel "camped at Rephidim, but there was no water for the people to drink." So they "quarreled with Moses and said, 'Give us water to drink [right now!] . . . Why did you bring us out of Egypt to make us and our children and livestock die of thirst?' (v.1-3). Again, they have clearly failed to trust God's provision. Nonetheless, undeserving in every sense of the word, God provided water for the Israelites. He told Moses to strike the Rock, and water came out of the Rock and they drank to their satisfaction (v. 6). Are you ready for a quiz? From what we have studied so far, is there any good work the Israelites performed to earn God's love and provision? Of course not! Keep in mind that the Rock Moses struck is a type (or symbol) of the Lord Jesus Christ. Concerning this unique Rock, Paul wrote, "For they (the Israelites) drank the same spiritual rock that accompanied them, and that rock was Christ" (I Corinthians 10:4). Moses striking the rock once symbolized Christ being struck once with the sins of the whole world. "For Christ also died for sins once for all" (I Peter 3:18).

FAILURE #5 (Numbers 20): **THE FAILURE OF LEADERSHIP:** "In the first month the whole Israelite community arrived at the Desert of Zin . . . Now there was no water for the community, and the people gathered in opposition to Moses, . . . why did you bring us up out of Egypt to this terrible place? It has no grain or figs, grapevines . . . there is no water to drink!" (v.1-5). You might ask, "Why can't the Israelites trust God just for one day?" But are we doing any better several thousand years later? When you face uncertainty, do you pause to count your blessings and anchor your trust in God? How many times have you failed the Lord since you became a believer? Had you kept a log of all your sins and human good since that day, you would have a tangible, albeit partial measure of the extent of God's grace on your behalf. Have you ever committed a sin that God would not forgive? Of course not! No wonder Jeremiah wrote, "My soul hath them still in remembrance, and is humbled in me. This I recall to mind, therefore I have hope. It is of the Lord's mercies (His unfailing love and grace in action) that we are not consumed [and forgotten], because His compassions [cannot and] will not fail. They are new every morning (actually 24 hours a day): great is [His] faithfulness" (Lamentations 3:20-23). No one is worthy to receive anything good from God, let alone eternity in heaven. Only God's grace makes it possible!

As great as he was, Moses was fed up with Israel's complaints! God told Moses to take the rod (with which he struck the rock at Marah), his brother Aaron, and the Israelites to the rock, where in their presence He would speak to the rock. "So Moses took the staff from the Lord's presence, just as He commanded him. . . . [And] Moses said to them, 'Listen, you rebels, must we (*Moses and Aaron*) bring you water out of this rock?' Then Moses raised his hand and struck the rock twice with his staff" (v. 9, 10). Moses failed on two counts, but his failure can be summarized in one word: arrogance.

Do you recall when Moses struck the rock at Marah? That was an object lesson

representing the substitutionary death of Christ. At the cross God did all the work necessary to secure our salvation. Here the rock is an elevated rock, a picture of Christ in resurrection. This time Moses was told to speak to the rock, because we speak to the resurrected Christ.

What happened to Moses? He got his eyes on people instead of the Lord. His reaction was arrogant and blasphemous. Could Moses bring water from the rock as he suggested? No, that was something only the Lord could do. There were times when God authorized Moses to rebuke Israel, but this time he took God's prerogative upon himself. He thought he would set the opposition straight, when God wanted to teach them a lesson about grace. Striking the elevated rock sent the wrong message. Nonetheless, God demonstrated His grace ". . . water gushed out, and the community and their livestock drank" (vs. 11b).

Because of their leadership roles, the Lord took Moses and Aaron aside and announced their punishments privately. Their punishment denied them entrance to Promised Land; however, their failure did not cause them to lose their salvation-no matter how heinous, sins can never cancel our so great salvation. Although Aaron's failure resulted in his death, Moses recovered his fellowship and continued his advance to become of the founder of the Jeshurun fraternity into which all winner-believers are inducted (Deuteronomy 33.26, cf. Isaiah 44.2). "And the Lord said to Moses, '... you have found favor (grace) in my sight" (Exodus 33:11b).

PRINCIPLE: God always deals with us on the basis of His integrity-the foundation of His policy of grace-not on the basis of any quality that we possess. Grace emphasizes who and what God is, not who and what man is. God's grace provides what we can never earn nor deserve-His righteousness and His eternal life. Without these we cannot spend eternity with God. Apart from grace, all humanity would be thrown into the same Lake of Fire prepared for Satan and the fallen angels (Matthew 25:41). But that fate is reserved only for those who refuse to accept God's grace gift through faith alone in Christ alone.

PRINCIPLE: After death, sin and failure are never an issue. In fact, even when unbelievers appear at the Great White Throne judgment, Jesus Christ will not mention any of their sins, because He paid the penalty for all of them on the cross. On that day they will be indicted by their own good deeds (Revelation 20:11-15). The Scripture makes it clear that our good deeds are filthy rags in God's sight (Isaiah 64:6). And no one has enough righteousness to merit salvation or eternal life (Romans 3:10; Psalm 14:1-3, 53:1-3). We must have the same righteousness possessed by the perfect humanity of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ, in order to live with God forever (Gen. 15:6; Rom. 4:3; Jas. 2:23). That is the righteousness imputed to us as a grace gift at the moment we follow the pattern of Abraham-faith alone in Christ alone.

GOD IN THE FLESH, GRACE INCARNATE

Both Israel and her leaders had a long history of failure, but God's grace always found a way. It was fourteen centuries after Moses' death that God made His most dramatic overture to Israel. In fulfillment of promises begun in the Garden of Eden, God sent His uniquely born Son. However, "[God the Son] came to His own (Israelites), and those who

were His own did not receive Him" (John 1:11). Before Christ began his ministry, the spiritual corruption of Israel's leadership was complete. "But when [John the Baptist] saw many of the Pharisees and Sadducees (Israel's leaders) coming for baptism, he said to them, 'You brood of vipers...'" (Matthew 3:7). In His humanity Christ grieved over Israel's spiritual condition. "And when He approached [Jerusalem], He saw the city and wept over it" (Luke 19:41b). And after excoriating the Pharisees, Christ lamented, "O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, who kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to her! How often I wanted to gather your children together, the way a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, and you were unwilling" (Matthew 23:37).

PAUL LAMENTS ISRAEL'S REJECTION OF CHRIST:

"I am telling the truth in Christ, I am not lying, my conscience bearing me witness in the Holy Spirit, that I have great sorrow and unceasing grief in my [right lobe]. For I could wish (but it is impossible) that I myself were accursed, separated from Christ for the sake of my brethren, my kinsmen according to the flesh, who are Israelites, to whom belongs adoption as sons and the glory and covenants and the giving of the Law and the temple service and the promises, whose are the fathers, and from whom is the Christ according to the flesh, who is blessed forever. Amen" (Roman 9:1-5). Are we missing something here? To Israel belongs adoption as sons-an irrevocable status as we have studied. To Israel belong the covenants made with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. To Israel belongs the Old Testament canon of Scripture. To Israel belongs the lineage of the humanity of Christ. Yes, Jesus Christ came from the royal line of Israel! The same Israel whom John the Baptist called "brood of vipers," those for whom Moses, and now Paul, wished to trade their own salvation!

How can we explain God's grace toward Israel? The point we want to hammer down is this: Grace is what God does for man on the basis of God's integrity, never, repeat never because of man's character-good or bad! Israel illustrates that God's plan is a grace plan. In love He both blesses and disciplines.

ISRAEL'S FUTURE

Because of Israel's rejection, God put Israel on hold and inserted the Church Age. During the Church Age spiritual Israel are Christians, just as gentiles-race is not an issue. But God owes racial Israel another seven years. The remainder of the Age of Israel will come at the end of the Church Age and before the Second Advent (coming) of Christ. This time-called the Tribulation or the Time of Jacob's Trouble-will be a period of tremendous evangelism. Sadly, many believers and unbelievers will die horribly during the Tribulation. Nonetheless, only believers in the Lord Jesus Christ will survive to enter the Millennium.

Here is the scenario: When Christ returns at the end of the Tribulation (the Second Advent), he "will display wonders in the sky and on the earth, blood, fire, columns of smoke. The sun will be turned into darkness before the great and awesome day of the Lord comes" (Joel 2:30-32). Why must the sun be turned into darkness? So that everyone

will see the Bright Morning Star, King of kings, and Lord of lords! "And I (the Lord Jesus Christ) will pour out on the house of David (Israel) and the inhabitants of Jerusalem a spirit of grace and supplication. They will look on Me, the One they have pierced, and they will mourn for Him" (Zechariah 12:10a). In the New Testament we read, "Look, He is coming with the clouds, and every eye will see Him, even those who pierced Him (Israelites)" (Revelation 1:7).

Of course, then as now, not all racial Israel is spiritual Israel. So Christ "will purge from [Israel] the rebels and those who transgress against Me" (Ezekiel 20:34a). No unbelieving Israelites will survive God's justice. Now, the Pauline epistle makes sense: "And so all [spiritual] Israel will be saved, as it is written: The deliverer will come from Zion; He will turn godlessness away from Jacob. And this is My covenant with them when I take away their sins. As far as the gospel is concerned, they are enemies on your account [i.e., the gentiles]; but as far as election is concerned, they are loved on account of the patriarchs, for God's gift and His call are irrevocable [!]" (Romans 11:26-29).

GRACE PROTECTION OF ISRAEL

"I will bless those who bless you, and whoever curses you I will curse" (Genesis 12:3a). This unconditional promise has nothing to do with what the Israelites do-good or bad. The annals of history are littered with broken anti-Semitic nations. No person, no family, no nation can afford to dabble in anti-Semitism. We have noted many of Israel's failures, but it must be made crystal clear that God is completely competent to mete out Israel's discipline. He doesn't need anyone else's help. Those who assume that God needs their help with Israel-or any other issue for that matter-are in line for severe discipline of their own.

Let's summarize lessons we have learned:

Lesson # 1: God is unchanging and His grace remains undiminished-neither increasing nor decreasing. Previously, we have learned about the immutability of God, which undergirds His entire essence and function. In other words, God's grace does not swing like a pendulum.

Lesson # 2: Grace is unconditional; therefore, it is not swayed by man's character-good or bad. We have noted that God's grace provides for Israel despite their colossal failures. He could have abandoned them as a nation at any time, but His grace promise is based on His integrity.

Lesson # 3: Grace is anti-works in every sense of the word. The Pauline epistles make it crystal clear that grace and works are mutually exclusive. "And if by grace, then it is no longer by works; if it were, grace would no longer be grace" (Romans 11:6).

Lesson # 4: The arrogant believer adds works to God's grace to magnify self; but a humble believer seeks to remain filled with the Holy Spirit to magnify God.

Lesson # 5: What God begins in grace continues in grace! Israel remains insulated by God's grace. The forces of darkness and the territorial claims of others notwithstanding, spiritual Israel will inherit the Promised Land forever. Likewise, the forces of darkness and the objections of legalists notwithstanding, every believer will inherit eternity in Jesus Christ!

Lesson # 6: What we have been, what we are, and what we can be in God's plan is totally a matter of His grace. Paul sets forth this principle: "For I am the least of the apostles and do not even deserve to be called an apostle But by the grace of God I am what I am, and His grace to me was not without effect. No, I worked harder (divine work-utilizing grace provisions) than all of them (other apostles)-yet not I, but the grace of God that was with me" (I Corinthians 15:9,10). Paul is not bragging about his work; rather he is accurately identifying the source. When you take an inventory of your life as a believer, who gets the credit? Apart from God's grace, even the best would be gone and forgotten.

Grace is not a license to live one's life without regard to God. If we fail in our spiritual lives, grace will not fail us; rather in His grace God will punish us severely. All punishment of believers is accomplished in time and never in the eternal state. The apostle Paul put it this way: "What shall we say, then? Shall we go on sinning so that grace may increase? May it never be!" (Romans 6:1-2a) In love, through grace, God blesses and punishes.

In conclusion, though Israel failed God, God did not fail them. Israel will survive to fulfill God's purpose. No sophisticated system of weaponry or intrigue can destroy them. God will fulfill His promises to Abraham and his progeny. By the same token, all believers have failed God, but the grace of God will never fail them: "If we are faithless (fail Him), He will remain faithful for He cannot deny Himself" (II Timothy 2:13). Thankfully, the issue is God's integrity, not Israel's, not ours.

God is perfect and His work is perfect. He initiated salvation by means of His grace. We can add nothing to grace. He purchased you through His Son (I Peter 1:18,19). He sealed you with His Holy Spirit (II Corinthians 1:22). He is the One who keeps you saved by His power (John 10:29). God began your salvation with grace, and you will enjoy His grace forever. With this in mind, we conclude: "Now to Him who is able to keep you from stumbling (i.e., losing your salvation), and to make you stand in the presence of His glory, blameless with great joy (and no accusation against you), to the only God our Savior, through Jesus Christ our Lord, be glory, majesty, dominion and authority before all time and now and forever. Amen" (Jude 1:24-25).

To be continued in Volume 20-lesson 6

"And I [God the Father] will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your seed and her seed; He shall bruise you on the head, and you shall bruise Him on the heel" (Genesis 3:15).

CONDEMNATION IN THE GARDEN OF EDEN

Genesis 3:15 is pivotal to our understanding of how the grace of God provided a Savior for the undeserving human race. Previously, especially in our book entitled *The Biblical Doctrine of Salvation*, we showed how God pursued the first couple in human history-Adam and the Woman-when they became spiritually dead. While trying to hide themselves from God, He pursued them with love, integrity, and grace. We saw how God's righteousness demanded their judgment, and judgment resulted in their just condemnation. Remember that-minus sin-Adam and the Woman could have lived forever in the Garden, but they had no eternal life. Despite its inherent ugliness, the beauty of condemnation is that it makes salvation and eternal life possible. Yes, if one is not condemned, then there is nothing from which to be saved.

CONDEMNATION AT BIRTH

With the exception of the virgin-born humanity of Christ, every innocent little baby is born condemned, spiritually dead. Did someone mumble, "That's not fair?" Think again. Babies are not condemned for personal sin, but because at the moment God gives the newborn life, He also imputes Adam's original sin. Why? Because, as in Adam's case, condemnation must precede salvation. This imputation affords equal opportunity for salvation. This is the beauty of God's grace and integrity-He is fair to all. You do nothing for your condemnation; you can do nothing for your salvation. Without condemnation there would be no need for a redemption solution.

THE REDEMPTION SOLUTION

What was Adam's status in Genesis 3:15? Answer: Spiritual death and total depravity. Yes, unlike babies, Adam and the Woman were God-conscious adults, painfully aware that they were separated from God and without hope. Before he chose to sin, Adam knew exactly what the consequences would be. Now-in spiritual death and separated from God-he was in no position to make peace with God so he hid. Yet, it was when he was totally obnoxious to God that God promised a Savior, for that is the message of Genesis 3:15.

The apostle Paul wrote, "Therefore, just as through one man (Adam) sin entered into the world, and (spiritual) death through sin, and so (spiritual) death spread to all men, because all sinned (when Adam sinned)" (Romans 5:12). "For while we were still helpless, at the right time Christ died for the ungodly" (Romans 5:6). "But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died [as a substitute] for us" (Romans 5:8). Adam and all believers in the Old Testament looked forward to the Cross. God promised to send His Son (deity of Christ), the uniquely-born One (The Impeccable Lamb of God-the Man, Jesus Christ) who would go to the Cross and there receive the imputation and judgment of the sins of the entire world-thereby removing sin as an issue for eternal relationship with God. Only the God-Man was qualified to be Savior. So when Adam and the woman expressed faith in the promised Savior, God gave to each of them His very own Eternal Life.

GOD THE OMNISCIENT ONE

God knows everything about everyone, including thoughts, decisions, and actions. Even more, He knew these things billions of years before He created the dust-man, before

Adams's failure. David wrote, "O Lord, you have searched me and you know me. You know when I sit and when I rise, you perceive my thought from afar. You discern my going out and my lying down; you are familiar with all my ways. Before a word was in my mouth, you know it completely, O Lord. Your eyes saw my unformed body. All the days ordained for me were written in your book (the Decree of God) before one of them came to be" (Psalm 139:1-4, 16a). God told Jeremiah, "Before I formed you in the womb I knew you . . ." (Jeremiah 1:5). So why did God create man knowing that He would fail? While God is not the author of sin and did not decree sin or failure, he did know all about them. Man had to be a volitional creature-able to choose for or against God-in order to resolve Satan's appeal case. You will recall that before the fall, the only volitional test for Adam and the Woman was whether to obey God's command regarding the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil.

MAN'S FAILURES MET BY GOD'S GRACE

Since the fall, mankind has many volitional tests and everyone has failed. In this study, we have recounted many of these failures, which were recorded in the Word of God for our benefit. The lesson to be learned in every case is that God's perfect justice meets each failure with love through grace. No one deserved more punishment; no one deserved less punishment; no one deserved a different kind of punishment. Therefore, when you fail, you may expect punishment that is fair, always perfect in every sense of the word. None of us can ever earn or deserve God's love and grace. God's love is eternal and immutable, never swayed by any of our sins, failures, or successes. The issue is His integrity, not our lack of it. God loves the carnal or reversionistic believer just as much as He loves the spiritually mature believer who advances all the way to maximum glorification of God. Grace emphasizes who and what God is, and what He does for man. While we bask in His grace, we cannot manipulate or take advantage of it.

BLESSING OR PUNISHMENT

As a believer, you are the object of God's love and grace in time and forever. You may ignore God, but God will never ignore you. Whether spiritual or carnal, His grace policy continues unabated. On the Cross, Jesus Christ paid the penalty for all of your sins in full; however, personal sin destroys your fellowship with God, removing you from the spiritual life-you instantly become a carnal believer. When you choose not to utilize God's grace provision for recovering the filling of the Holy Spirit (I John 1:9), you have no spiritual life. When you fail to grow in grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ, through the perception, and application of doctrine, instead of advancing you are retreating.

In fellowship, His love and grace pours out blessing; but in carnality, the same love and grace pours out punishment. You are punished for your failure to stay in fellowship, which precludes execution of the spiritual life. The punishment continues until you change your mind and use the SOLUTION (1 John 1:9) to recover your fellowship with God. If you choose to perpetuate your carnal status, divine punishment intensifies. Eventually, the sin face-to-face with death results in a miserable, horrible death. But all the while-warning punishment, intensive punishment, dying punishment-God's love for you cannot change. You will go to heaven when you die-God's grace, love, and integrity

guarantees it-but you will have missed out on all the wonderful, unique, special blessings God has designed just for you personally because you did not acquire the capacity from doctrine to receive them. No, you did not make consistent daily decisions to grow in grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ-other things needed your attention. Something was more important to you than Bible class-you didn't see its value. So instead, you receive the discipline God has designed just for you personally. It's fair. It's just. It's love. It's grace. And never forget, it's your choice.

THE PROTOEVANGELIUM

Genesis 3:15 (quoted at the beginning of this lesson) is the first (proto-) declaration of salvation (-evangelium) and one of the key prophetic passages in the Bible. The context of the protoevangelium is God's pronouncement of a sentence on the serpent (Satan) who had just won a massive victory. His sentences on the Woman, all of creation, and Adam follow. You recall that God judged Satan and condemned him to the Lake of Fire long before man's creation. Satan appealed, thereby postponing his sentence. Then God created man to resolve Satan's case. If just one human being chose for God, Satan's case was lost. Not only did Adam choose against God, but as a result abdicated rulership of the planet to Satan for the remainder of time. Matters could not have been worse. But God's grace found a way to turn the entire situation around.

In the middle of His sentence on Satan, God provided a glimpse of His eternal plan to provide a Savior-our Lord Jesus Christ. "And I will put enmity (personal hostility) between you (Satan) and the woman (Eve) and between your seed (unbelieving humanity) and her seed (humanity of Jesus Christ); He (Jesus Christ) shall bruise you on the head (mortal wound) and you shall bruise Him on the heel (the Cross of Christ)." Keep in mind that Adam and Eve were listening to this in spiritual death. "But a natural man (soulish; i.e., unbeliever without a human spirit) cannot accept the things of the Spirit of God; for they are foolishness to him, and he cannot understand them, because they are spiritually [evaluated]" (I Corinthians 2:14). Therefore, it was God the Holy Spirit who made the gospel clear to them.

1. ENMITY BETWEEN SATAN AND THE WOMAN: "And I will put enmity between you and the woman." Enmity is the Hebrew word *eybah*, a noun meaning "personal hostility." In addition to this use, Brown, Driver, and Briggs' Hebrew and English Lexicon cites its use elsewhere between individuals and nations. This phrase acknowledges that Satan has become the world's ruler. For all time his world-system would be the source of hostility and distraction for humanity. "Therefore whoever wishes to be a friend of the world (Satan's system) makes himself an enemy of God" (James 4:4b).

2. ENMITY BETWEEN SATAN AND CHRIST: "...and between your seed and her seed..." "Your seed" speaks to Satan's followers, unbelieving humans (cf. John 8:44), while "her seed" ultimately speaks to the humanity of the Messiah, our Lord Jesus Christ. Though not delineated until much later (Isaiah 7:14), "HER seed" also emphasizes the unique virgin birth of Christ.

3. CHRIST'S BRUISE: "...you shall bruise him on the heel." (Note that this phrase and the next are taken in reverse order, following their sequence in time.) The bruise on the heel refers to the unparalleled suffering of Christ's humanity on the Cross. "And He (Jesus Christ) was foreknown before the foundation of the world (in eternity past), but has appeared in these last times for us" (I Peter 1:20). During those three hours of supernatural darkness, God the Father poured out and judged every sin of human history on His uniquely-born Son. The penalty for every sin of every person who ever lives was paid in full. Grace provided the perfect work to which we can add nothing. While we may never fully comprehend what it meant for perfect Christ to come face-to-face with all of our sins, we have assurance that the heel wound was not fatal. Christ's resurrection ensures that Satan's rulership will terminate.

4. SATAN'S BRUISE: "...He shall bruise you on the head." This phrase prophesizes Satan's defeat by our Lord Jesus Christ. The bruise on the head will terminate Satan's rulership of the world. Now his coup d'état in the garden was doomed to failure. Knowing this, Satan did everything within his power to thwart the plan of God. The angelic infiltration was designed to prevent the true humanity of Christ's hypostatic union (Genesis 6). God answered with the great flood and the race started over with Noah and his family. His temptation of Christ was designed to prevent the Cross, but the Cross became reality and Satan's back was broken. At the Second Advent, Satan will personally suffer defeat at the hands of our Lord. Jesus Christ will reign for one thousand years and then Satan and his millions will receive the sentence pronounced at his original trial. They will be cast into the Lake of Fire forever (Matthew 25:41), along with all who have rejected Christ as savior (Rev. 20:11-15).

Adam and Eve neither earned nor deserved God's justice and grace on that great day, nor has anyone since. God the Son would take the form of a servant to become the sin offering for the entire world! Succeeding generations learned many more details about the coming Messiah, but each was responsible for the details they had. In every generation the only way of salvation has been faith alone in Christ alone-as Christ was revealed to them.

ISRAEL'S DELIVERANCE

There are no accidents in God's plan and purpose for believers. God used the 430 years of Egyptian bondage to hone the character of the Israelites. Now it was time for nationhood. Nine plagues, each demonstrating the awesome power of Israel's God, had not convinced Pharaoh to release His chosen people. So, in one night, the tenth and final plague would launch Israel as an independent nation. It was the night of their national regeneration. No human agent could claim credit for this event, it was wholly the work of God. In sovereignty (His decisions are final) and omnipotence (all-powerful), He accomplishes whatever pleases Him. When God speaks, all human debates, suggestions, and discussions are over. In stark contrast to Pharaoh's failure to keep his promises, this final plague-like everything else He does-was anchored entirely in God's integrity.

THE INSTRUCTIONS - Exodus chapter 12 (excerpted)

1. Now the Lord said to Moses and Aaron in the land of Egypt...
3. Speak to all the congregation of Israel, saying, on the tenth of this month they are each one to take a lamb for themselves, according to their fathers' household, a lamb for each household.
5. Your lamb shall be unblemished male a year old; you may take it from the sheep or from the goats.
7. Moreover, they shall take some blood and put it on the two doorposts and on the lintel of the house.
12. For I will go through the land of Egypt on that night, and will strike down all the first-born in the land of Egypt, both man and the beast; and against all the gods of Egypt I will execute judgments-I am the Lord.
13. And the blood shall be a sign for you on the houses where you live; and when I see the blood I will pass over you, and no plague will befall you to destroy you when I strike the land of Egypt.
28. Then the sons of Israel went and did so; just as the Lord had commanded Moses and Aaron, so they did.

Have you ever noticed how instructions often get changed as they pass through a chain of command? Each recipient tends to add a slight 'spin' to the instruction as they received it. Sometimes this is beneficial; the originator may not have had all the facts. Other times, it can be fatal. God always has all the facts. His instructions must never be spun, amended, or ignored. Notice that Moses and Aaron precisely conveyed the instructions the Lord had given them. It was a matter of life and death.

THE PASSOVER LAMB

Beginning in the Garden of Eden and throughout the Bible, animal sacrifices are a type of the perfect "...Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world" (John 1:29).

The paschal lamb was very special, a male yearling without blemish. The "tenth of this month" is analogous to the incarnation of Christ. For three days-analogous to the public ministry of Christ-they watched over the lamb to ensure its perfection. In B.C 1441, the lamb was slain by each household, representing Christ's death on the Cross. Without this sacrifice, there could be no salvation. Annual observations of Passover were unique in that they memorialized a yet future event.

THE ANIMAL BLOOD

In the Old Testament, the system of animal sacrifices always illustrated the future salvation work of the Savior. In this case, the blood of the sacrifice was to be painted on the door in the form of a cross, "on the two doorposts and on the lintel of the house." Every household that followed this instruction would be secured from the ravages of the plague. Against this background, a simple picture of salvation and eternal security, a nation was born. That evening, every Israelite household ate roasted lamb. Eating is non-meritorious just as belief is non-meritorious. The roasted lamb represented the work of Christ on the Cross as He was judged for the sins of the human race.

That night, in every household where the blood was not found, the Lord killed all the "first-born in the land of Egypt, both man and the beast." Notice that blood was necessary and belief was sufficient for salvation. God had provided everything.

THE BLOOD OF CHRIST

Because there is so much misunderstanding and false doctrine, it is important that we define our terms at the outset with a dogmatic statement of doctrine. It is vital to understand that the "blood of Christ" refers specifically to the substitutionary spiritual death of our impeccable Lord Jesus Christ on the Cross. With reference to the Cross, the blood always is used as a spiritual metaphor, never in the literal, physical sense.

There is no power in Christ's physical blood. Christ did not bleed to death. And an angel did not collect His blood in a bowl and take it to fill a fountain in heaven. None of these concepts have any basis in Scripture. We sometimes hear the phrase "pleading the blood" used as some kind of mystical formula for protection or forgiveness. Again, there is no basis in Scripture for that kind of religious mumbo-jumbo. Consider Paul's afflictions: "imprisonments, beaten times without number, often in danger of death. Five times I received from the Jews thirty-nine lashes. Three times I was beaten with rods, once I was stoned, three times I was shipwrecked, a night and a day I have spent in the deep. I have been on frequent journeys, in dangers from rivers, dangers from robbers, dangers from my countrymen, dangers from the Gentiles, dangers in the city, dangers in the wilderness, dangers on the sea, dangers among false brethren..." (II Corinthians 11:23-26). Is there any record that he ever pleaded the blood? Did anyone in the Bible ever do this? The closest that we can come to a "yes," are the many martyrs of the Tribulation (Daniel's 70th week) in Revelation 12:11. They are said to overcome the accuser, Satan, by means of (1) the blood, (2) the Word, and (3) their willingness to die rather than obey Satan. But this 'blood' is the same substitutionary spiritual death of Christ on the Cross that saves believers during the Church Age. It is disheartening to see how far believers have gone into the heresy of religion!

Prior to the cross, the human nature of Christ faced more undeserved suffering than any other human being will ever face. He met that suffering through the power of the Holy Spirit and doctrine. But none of those sufferings, including beatings and bleeding, had anything to do with providing our so great salvation. Nor did any of those sufferings compare to the suffering He received while being judged for the sins of the world on the Cross. During His sixth trial, by order of Pilate, He was literally skinned alive with a Roman mastix and a crown of thorns was put on His head (John 19:1-3). Scourging included rubbing salt into the bare flesh to increase pain and cauterized the wounds. We know from Isaiah that His abuse was so intense that His form was unrecognizable, but He did not die. "...so His appearance was marred more than any man, and His form more than the sons of men" (Isaiah 52:14). He bled when His hands and feet were brutally nailed to the Cross, but He did not die. (So far, our salvation was yet future).

It was there, as His mutilated body hung on the Cross, that one of the convicts who was crucified along side, placed faith alone in Christ alone. Our Lord assured him that he

would be with Him in paradise that very day. Then, at about noon, the sun was obscured by a supernatural darkness that covered the whole land (Luke 23:44). During the next three hours, God the Father imputed every sin of human history-including yours and mine, those of believers and unbelievers-to the body of His innocent Son and judged Him for each one. Isaiah prophesied the unimaginable intensity of His experience: "But He was pierced through for our transgressions, He was crushed for our iniquities" (53:5a). Through it all, Our Lord remained absolutely perfect. This was the "blood of the Lamb without spot or blemish," His substitutionary spiritual death.

The judgment for our sins caused Him to cry in agony, "ELI, ELI, LAMA SABACHTANI?" that is, 'My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?' (Matthew 27:46) Of course He knew the answer. The Father had to forsake Him while imputing and judging our sins so that His absolute righteousness could be imputed to us in regeneration. Still alive He shouted, "Tetelestai!" (Greek, perfect tense: "finished in the past [moments ago] with results that go on forever") (John 19:30). His spiritual death was complete. And when Jesus had shouted with a loud voice, He said, "Father (fellowship with His Father was restored!) into Your hands I deposit My spirit. And having said this, He let out His breath" (Luke 23:46). Now he was spiritually alive but physically dead.

Jesus Christ died twice on the Cross, first spiritually and then physically. What was finished forever? All that was necessary for our salvation; salvation is the legacy of His spiritual death. The citizens of Jerusalem soon discovered that God had torn the veil of the Temple (60ft. x 30ft. x 6in. thick) in two. The Holy of Holies was no longer inaccessible; the barrier between God and man had been removed by the deaths (plural) of Christ on the cross. Luke did not record the entire statement of Christ at His physical death. It is found in Psalm 31:5: "Into Your hand I commit My spirit; You have delivered Me, O Jehovah, God of doctrine." Yes, Bible doctrine is the spiritual heritage of His physical death.

THE GOSPEL

Because an unbeliever is spiritually dead, unable to understand the Gospel and doctrine (I Corinthians 2:14), God the Holy Spirit makes the Gospel clear. It is the Holy Spirit-not cleverly constructed logic-that convinces unbelievers that their choice of one unpardonable sin-the sin of disbelief-keeps them separated from God forever (John 16:8, 9). God ensures that anyone having positive volition, regardless of geographical location, will hear the Gospel so that they may choose to accept or reject it.

All believers in the Church Age are ambassadors for Christ (II Corinthians 5:20a). Those who know the pertinent doctrine will make it known to a lost and dying world. Always at the ready, the believer will never make an issue of himself or anyone else, but will always keep the focus on the person of Jesus Christ, the life-giving Word. "It is the Spirit (of God) who gives life; the flesh profits nothing, the words that I (Jesus Christ) have spoken to you are spirit and are life" (John 6:63). "Simon Peter answered Him, '...You have the words of eternal life. And we have believed (without adding to faith) and have come to know that you are the Holy One of God" (John 6:68, 69).

SALVATION-THE MECHANICS

It is simple, it is clear; it is lucid and perspicuous. "...for unless you believe that I am He (the Savior), you shall die in your sins" (John 8:24). "Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ and you will be saved" (Acts 16:31)-it is faith alone in Christ alone! Those who teach anything more or less, any who teaches salvation by works-whether raising hands, baptism, confession, lordship, or anything else-are anathema (Galatians 1:8).

Salvation is God's EXCLUSIVE monopoly. "Salvation belongs to the Lord." (Psalm 3:8a); "My salvation shall be forever . . ." (Isaiah 51:6b). In essence, those who distort the Gospel are saying that they know better than God-it is blasphemous. If you added anything to faith alone in Christ alone you are not saved! Nothing can be added to Christ's work on the Cross; nevertheless, Satan continues to enjoy remarkable success at the personal level. Each time someone is taken in by the notion that faith plus something is better than faith alone in Christ alone, Satan wins.

THE MOMENT OF SALVATION

The very moment a person simply believes in Christ-whether sitting, walking, standing, laying, or kneeling; whether in a car, a plane, a swimming pool, or a hospital bed; whether at church, a bar, the beach, or at home-it makes no difference, the miracle of eternal life occurs in an instant! Don't ever let anyone tell you that salvation requires a certain posture or a certain place. Remember, it's nothing but faith. God accepts you where you are, as you are, because of who and what Christ is.

Salvation is an inclusive term that describes at least forty things that personally happen to every believer at the instant of faith. None of these forty things are seen or felt. The entire list appeared in our book, Biblical Doctrine of Salvation. Here, we will review just a few of the things that are part of our "so great a salvation . . ." (Hebrews 2:3b).

The believer has all sins and transgressions blotted out: "Everyone who believes in Him receives forgiveness of sins" (Acts 10:43b).

The believer receives a human spirit: In the process of "regeneration," the Holy Spirit makes the dichotomous (body and soul) unbeliever a trichotomous (body, soul, and spirit) believer. "That which is born of flesh is flesh (i.e., physical birth), and that which is born of the [Holy] Spirit is [human] spirit" (John 3:6).

The believer is made righteous: God imputes His very own righteousness to the believer: "Even the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ (and nothing else) for all those who BELIEVE; for there is no distinction" (Romans 3:22).

The believer is justified (declared righteous): "...being justified as a gift by His grace through the redemption which is in Christ Jesus..." (Romans 3:24). "Therefore, since we have been justified through faith (alone), we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ" (Romans 5:1). The Supreme Court of Heaven forever acquits the believer! He is exempt from the Lake of Fire. "Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus" (Romans 8:1).

THE SALVATION MINISTRY OF THE HOLY SPIRIT

It is an insult to God for a believer ever to pray for the Holy Spirit. "Do you not know that you are a temple of God and that the Spirit of God dwells in you?" (I Corinthians 3:16) "Or do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you, whom you have from God, and that you are not your own?" (I Corinthians 6:19). Apparently there are many who lack this confidence. Every believer of the Church Age has the baptism, indwelling, sealing, spiritual gift(s), and filling of Holy Spirit at the moment of salvation. Some point to Acts 19:2: "Did you receive the Holy Spirit when you believed?' And they said to him, 'No, we have not even heard whether there is a Holy Spirit.'" From their answer, Paul immediately deduced that these believers were not Christians. Does that sound strange?

We need to be very clear that from the Day of Pentecost to the out-resurrection of the Church, regeneration and the baptism of the Spirit are inseparable and always simultaneous. Everyone who is regenerated is at the same time baptized by the Spirit into the Church, the Body of Christ. It's that simple, but it wasn't so simple at the beginning of the Church Age. Starting with the Day of Pentecost-four groups of believers actually received the baptism of the Holy Spirit after they were saved. The first were Jews in Jerusalem (Acts 2); the second, racially mixed Jew-Gentiles in Samaria (Acts 8:12-17); the third were Gentiles in Caesarea (Acts 10-11); and the fourth represented Old Testament saints in Ephesus (Acts 19-our passage). These citizens of Ephesus were disciples of John the Baptist. They had placed faith alone in Christ alone but were not present in Jerusalem when the apostles and other believers received the baptism of Holy Spirit. After this brief transitional period from the dispensation of the Hypostatic Union to the Church Age, there is no excuse for any believer to ever ask for the Holy Spirit since His baptism, indwelling, sealing, spiritual gift(s), and filling are an integral part of his so great salvation.

While the baptism, indwelling, sealing, and spiritual gift(s) of the Holy Spirit are permanent and irrevocable, the filling of the Spirit is lost whenever a believer sins and is recovered by using (I John 1:9). If you are in fellowship the filling of the Spirit is automatic. So we need to be very clear that you cannot ask God for the filling of the Spirit under any circumstances. If you are out of fellowship with God, you can only recover the filling of the Spirit and your spiritual life by naming your sins to God the Father.

FINAL THOUGHTS

Paul—a trophy of grace—wrote, "But by His doing (God's doing, minus anyone's effort) you are in Christ Jesus" (I Corinthians 1:30a); and, "For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God; not as a result of works (of any kind), that no one should boast" (Ephesians 2:8, 9). God is perfect and His work is perfect. God the Son purchased you (I Peter 1:18, 19). God the Holy Spirit sealed you (II Corinthians 1:22). God the Father keeps you saved by His power (John 10:29). God

provides salvation in grace. We have nothing to add. We are the objects and beneficiaries of His grace forever.

(Lesson 7—Continued from volume 20 [Lesson6])

Beginning in this issue, our study of the Doctrine of Grace continues with a focus on:

PAUL—A TROPHY OF GRACE

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

Tarsus, a Roman city located at the northeast corner of the Mediterranean Sea in the province of Cilicia, a center for trade and learning in ancient times, was Paul's birthplace. Many date his birth a few years after Christ's. His Jewish name was Saul. The common notion that the name 'Paul' was assigned at his conversion is incorrect; Paul was simply his Roman name (cf. Acts 13:9).

Paul was born a Jew of the tribe of Benjamin: ". . . I am a Jew of Tarsus in Cilicia . . ." (Acts 21:39). He wrote, ". . . circumcised the eighth day, of the nation of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of Hebrews; as to the Law a Pharisee . . ." (Philippians 3:5).

When he was a very small child, his family moved to Jerusalem (cf. Acts 22:3; 26:4f). Paul held dual citizenship from birth. We may never fully appreciate what it meant to be a Roman citizen, but citizens were afforded special status and protections throughout the vast Roman Empire. Luke gives us insight into some of the privileges enjoyed by Roman citizens in Acts.

Flogging. It was common practice in the provinces to flog non-citizens who had been accused of a crime. In this way, the truth or a confession was often obtained before their courtroom interrogation. This technique was prohibited if the accused was a citizen. In Acts 22:24-28, we read:

" . . . the commander ordered [Paul] to be brought into the barracks, stating that he should be examined by scourging so that he might find out the reason why [those in the Jerusalem mob] were shouting against him that way. But when they stretched him out with thongs, Paul said to the centurion, who was standing by, 'Is it lawful for you to scourge a man who is a Roman and uncondemned?' When the centurion heard this, he went to the commander and told him, saying, 'What are you about to do? For this man is a Roman.' And the commander came and said to him, 'Tell me, are you a Roman?' And he said, 'Yes.' And the commander answered, 'I acquired this citizenship with a large sum of money.' And Paul said, 'But I was actually born a citizen.'"

But on another occasion, Paul was scourged and put in prison before his court appearance. In Luke's account we read:

Now, when they came, the chief magistrates sent their policemen, saying, "Release those men." And the jailer reported these words to Paul, saying, "The chief magistrates have sent to release you. Therefore, come out now and go in peace." But Paul said to them, "They have beaten us in public without trial, MEN WHO ARE ROMANS, and have thrown us into prison; and now are they sending us away secretly? No indeed (they must be out of their minds)! But let them come themselves and bring us out." And the policemen reported these words to the chief magistrates. They were AFRAID when they heard that they were Romans, and they came and appealed to them, and when they had brought them out, they kept begging them to leave the city. (Acts 16:35-39)

Read that again. The chief magistrates left their courtroom and came to prison! Why? Paul was Roman. You will recall that our Lord was literally skinned alive during His sixth trial (cf. John 19:1-3). He was not a Roman citizen. His scourging was so severe, that He became unrecognizable to those who knew Him (cf. Isaiah 52:14).

Restraints. Romans could not be handcuffed before they were convicted of a crime. In light of this, Luke wrote, "Therefore those who were about to examine [Paul] immediately let go of him; and the commander also was afraid when he found out he was a Roman, because he had put him in chains" (Acts 22:29).

Right of Appeal. Paul used the Roman right to appeal his case to the highest authority when he knew that he would not get a fair trial. The Jews wanted him dead. Contrary to Roman law, the chief priests wanted the Romans to hand Paul over to them (cf. Acts 25:15,16). Paul contended, "If then I am a wrongdoer, and have committed anything worthy of death, I do not refuse to die; but if none of those things is true of which these men accuse me, no one can hand me over to them. I appeal to Caesar(!)" (Acts 25:11).

PAUL'S TRAINING

It was the rabbinic custom that every male learned a trade. In this way, no matter what one pursued in life, he always had a marketable skill on which to depend. Our Lord learned carpentry; Paul learned tent making (cf. Acts 18:3). Although Paul often used this skill to support himself during his ministry, his training included much more than a trade.

Historians agree that Paul was among the most educated men of his day. One professor suggests that he held the equivalent of our double-doctorate. Though he developed a comprehensive understanding of Roman life, culture, and laws, he was brought up in Jerusalem under the tutelage of Gamaliel, where he was thoroughly grounded in Judaism (Acts 22:3; 26:4-5; Philippians 3:5) as a Pharisee, Judaism's strictest sect.

After conversion to Christianity on the road to Damascus, his theology was developed without consulting others; instead he independently sought God's guidance by withdrawing for a time into Arabia (Galatians 1:17). Today, Arabia denotes the whole of a vast peninsula bordered by the Persian Gulf and the Red Sea, but in Paul's day Arabia

was the desert region immediately east and south of Palestine inhabited by the Nabataeans. Some writers picture him traveling as far south as Mount Sinai (cf. Galatians 4:25), but it is unlikely that he took a long journey. Most agree that his trip to Arabia provided time to commune with the Lord Jesus Christ whose church he had so vigorously persecuted up to that time. Very quickly, Paul developed a keen sense of his mission and a profound understanding of church age doctrine. After returning to Damascus, it was three more years before he met Peter and James in Jerusalem (cf. Acts 9:29). With a brilliant mind, a thorough command of theology, and an ever-advancing love for God, Paul stood above his peers in many matters!

GOD'S PROVIDENTIAL PURPOSE

As we read the letters of Paul, it is apparent that the Holy Spirit used his broad knowledge of the history and culture of the Greeks, Romans, and Hebrews, and his mastery of Old Testament Scriptures and doctrines, to powerfully disseminate church age truths. Paul was providentially prepared to lead the missionary expansion of early Christianity. God uses prepared men; in Paul's case his preparation was unwitting. His was a grace package!

Have you ever thought about how God uses a person's background for His own purposes? Sometimes a person is thoroughly trained in a secular field only to discover that they have a spiritual communication gift; for example, an engineer might become a pastor. You might ask, "Why waste the time and money to become an engineer if it won't be used?" God never asks such questions. True, the engineer will essentially have to retrain to be properly prepared for advancing his congregation in their spiritual lives. He will have to study a huge body of ancient history in order to teach isagogically. He will have to digest the width and breadth of Bible doctrines in order to teach categorically. He will have to master the original languages of Scripture in order to teach exegetically. But the academic skills and the systematic thinking of one trained as an engineer are well suited to theological studies. God knew about his spiritual gift billions of years ago. Nothing is wasted unless he fails to prepare (and most tragically, it is transparently clear that the majority of those in pulpits today are totally ill-prepared).

Of course not everyone is called to the vigorous academic demands of the pastorate. Nonetheless, every believer has a spiritual gift and that gift becomes fully functional as we advance in the unique spiritual life of the church age. Our advance is predicated on daily learning Bible doctrine and applying it to every circumstance of life. Of course, we can learn nothing without the filling of the Holy Spirit. It is never what you can do for God; it is always what God can do through you. No matter your occupation or circumstances, it is prepare, prepare, prepare. God uses prepared believers.

Do you remember David, the shepherd son of Jesse? No one ever told him—and it is unlikely that he ever imagined—that he would become king over the Jews. As a shepherd, he was learning the ingredients of leadership, patience, caring, loving. Most importantly he was undistracted in learning and applying Bible doctrine—the thing that made his life so meaningful. What we are trying to hammer down is that wherever one

finds himself-in the field of medicine, law, engineering, teaching, carpentry, housekeeping, or any other—when he has learned the doctrine, God will one day use every bit of his life's experiences to further the course of His Kingdom.

SAUL'S ENTHUSIASM TO SERVE GOD

(*Note: We will use Saul to denote Paul before his conversion.*) Stephen was the first Christian martyr. Like our Lord he was accused of blasphemy and brought before the Jewish court (Sanhedrin). Luke records his testimony before the court—a synopsis of Israel's history of failure and rejection of truth—in Acts 7. The court's reaction was immediate and violent; "And when they (*the Sanhedrin*) had driven him (*Stephen*) out of the city, they began stoning him, and the witnesses laid aside their robes at the feet of a young man named Saul" (Acts 7:58). Blasphemy was punishable by death (cf. Leviticus 24:16). He did not just stand by watching, but

Saul was in hearty agreement (*present, active participle of suneudokeo—not a passive consent*) with putting him to death. And on that day a great persecution began against the church in Jerusalem, and they were all scattered throughout the regions of Judea and Samaria, except the apostles. Some devout men buried Stephen, and made loud lamentation over him. But Saul began ravaging the church, entering house after house, and dragging off men and women, he would put them in prison. (Acts 8:1-3)

In the following chapter we read,

Now Saul, still breathing threats and murder against the disciples of the Lord, went to the high priest, and asked for letters from him to the synagogues at Damascus, so that if he found any belonging to the Way, both men and women, he might bring them bound to Jerusalem. (Acts 9:1, 2)

We must note Saul's mental attitude, his enthusiasm to serve God. Our purpose is not to favorably color Saul's blindness to the truth, **BUT TO DEMONSTRATE WHAT GRACE IS ALL ABOUT**. Col. R. B. Thieme, Jr., has summarized the protocol plan of God for every believer with four axioms:

- A wrong thing done in a wrong way is wrong.
- A right thing done in a wrong way is wrong.
- A wrong thing done in a right way is wrong.
- Only a right thing done in a right way is right.

Where there is a conflict between what a person thinks and what the Bible says, the Bible is always correct. Saul's desire to serve God was a right thing, but applied in a wrong way, which completely negated his enthusiasm. Anyone who alleges to serve God in a self-righteous, egocentric way should take notice. These will try to scare believers with

the lake of fire (where they can never go) and add human works to the finished work of the Sacrificial Lamb of God (which negates the unbeliever's faith). God has never needed anyone's help in His affairs. Repeat, God does not need anyone's help—never has and never will—not then, not today and not ever!

SAUL'S PERSECUTION OF THE CHURCH

Paul wrote, "Although, I myself might have confidence in the flesh (*my accomplishments*). If anyone else has a mind to put confidence in the flesh, I far more: circumcised the eighth day, of the nation Israel, one of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of Hebrews; as to the law, a Pharisee, as to zeal, a persecutor of the church; as to the righteousness which is the law, found blameless" (Phil. 3:4-6). His own self-righteousness was the driving power behind Saul's enthusiasm to serve God. That is arrogance! It is the same power that propels the legalists, those that proffer lordship salvation, those who teach salvation by works, and the unprepared of every ilk. Saul was absolutely confident that his every action was godly; he was very positive, but positively wrong. The rapid spread of Christianity intensified his flame within to remove all Christians from Jerusalem and beyond.

Armed with an authorization from the high priest, he set out to purge the synagogues in Damascus. While en route, our Lord appeared and said, "Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting Me . . . I am Jesus whom you are persecuting . . ." (Acts 9:4,5). It was an indictment—and a lesson—from the Supreme Court of Heaven. Saul wasn't just persecuting, abusing, and torturing the saints, he was actually doing these things to Jesus Christ. There on the road to Damascus Saul received his lesson in church age doctrine; the Bible doctrine of positional truth—every believer is in union with Christ. This basic doctrine would become a prominent theme in all of Paul's letters; for example, "Therefore if anyone is in Christ, *he* is a new creature" (II Corinthians 5.17).

Let's take a quick inventory of Saul's status as a religious Jew. Arrogance skills (self-justification, self-deception, and self-absorption) distilled his self-righteousness into hatred. His hatred gave birth to rage, which manifested itself in persecution and torture. The persecution and torture targeted any who believed that Jesus was the Christ (Messiah). However, owing to positional truth, the attacks were effectively directed at our Lord Himself.

Let's take a quiz. If you had been alive in Saul's day, what do you think he might deserve for his behavior? Would you have been willing to help God with his discipline? Ok, let's move on to this century. How often has your mastery of your own arrogance skills propelled you into hatred, rage, gossip, and maligning? How many times have you judged others? Not a very pretty picture, is it? But as long as you are alive there is hope. Only God knows how to judge, because only God has all the facts! And listen, if God can take a Saul and use him as His apostle, he can use you too. How? Bible doctrine! That's all Saul needed. In Saul's thinking anyone who had hung upon a tree was not worthy of worship (cf. Galatians 3:13) and certainly could not be the Messiah. The resurrected Christ gave him the doctrinal evidence that the curse of the cross was necessary, and

temporary. No, Christ will not appear to you; but he has provided a pastor-teacher to inculcate the doctrine you need for your very own spiritual advance. Bible doctrine will enable you to keep your nose out of other people's business, to resist the temptation to judge anyone but yourself. You will be content to let God use (and discipline) others as He sees fit.

FINAL THOUGHTS

Paul—a trophy of grace—wrote, "But by His doing (*God's doing, minus anyone's effort*) you are in Christ Jesus, . . ." (I Corinthians 1:30a); and, "For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God; not as a result of works (*of any kind*), that no one should boast" (Ephesians 2:8, 9). God is perfect and His work is perfect. God the Son purchased you (I Peter 1:18, 19). God the Holy Spirit sealed you (II Corinthians 1:22). God the Father keeps you saved by His power (John 10:29). God provides salvation in grace. We have nothing to add. We are the objects and beneficiaries of His grace forever.

"Now to Him who is able to keep you from stumbling (*i.e., losing your salvation*), and to make you stand in the presence of His glory, blameless (*no accusation against you*) with great joy, to the only God our Savior, through Jesus Christ our Lord, be glory, majesty, dominion and authority before all time and now and forever. Amen" (Jude 1:24-25). Paul's conversion (grace meets Paul)—to be continued—(Volume 22-Lesson 8)

Previously, in volume 21, we examined the highlights of Paul's life and his high-powered enthusiasm to serve God. We observed his enormous passion for God's service and how he used it wrongly, which negated his passion. We are acutely aware that a right thing done in a wrong way is wrong. His desire to serve God was a right thing, but his persecution of believers was wrong. Words are inadequate to express how Paul tormented believers.

In his defense before Agrippa II, Paul said, "So then, I thought to myself that I had to do many things hostile to the name of Jesus of Nazareth. 'And this is just what I did in Jerusalem. Not only did I lock many saints in prisons, having received authority from the chief priests, but also when they were being put to death I cast my vote against them. And as I punished them often in all the synagogues, I tried to force them to blaspheme; and being furiously enraged at them, I kept pursuing them even to foreign cities'" (Acts 26:9-11).

Saul (Paul) was a nightmare and a monster to the new embryonic era—the church! That's right. Wouldn't you think the Lord would bring lightning upon such an opponent to send him straight to the Lake of Fire? Didn't he deserve to be separated from God for all eternity? But was he struck or separated forever? No! Instead, he was assured of the crown of righteousness in eternity! Read it again—the crown of righteousness! That's grace!

In his last epistle, Paul (a.k.a. Saul), who tortured the early Christians wrote, "For I am already being poured out as a drink offering, and the time of my departure [to be with my friend, Jesus Christ] has come. I have fought the good fight, I have finished the course, I have kept the faith; in the future there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will award to me on that day [the depraved one in every sense of the word], and not only to me but also to all [who have been graced out] who have loved His appearing" (II Timothy 4:6-8).

We are examining the most pivotal doctrine of Scripture-the doctrine of grace. What transpired between the time Paul brought distress to the church and the time of his departure? Grace! A favor done without expectation of return; freely given by the loving kindness of God to men, finding its only motive in the bounty and free heartedness of the Giver [i.e. God]; unearned and unmerited favor.

As we move forward in our study, we shall see how Paul's understanding of grace turned around his thoughts, motives, and actions. The more he looked back to who he was before grace found him, the more he saw himself basked in the light of God's nature-GRACE. By the same token, the more you and I understand grace, contrasted with our own depraved natures, the more gratitude we'll have to be graced-out citizens of Heaven-unmerited citizenship!

PAUL'S CONVERSION

In the Supreme Court of Heaven, the righteousness of God condemned Saul of Tarsus for his atrocious and horrific attack on the church-the body of the second member of the Trinity, Jesus Christ. The justice of God demanded swift action...perhaps to be struck down with instant death and be separated from God for all eternity. But, the Son of God pointed to the cross of Calvary where the sins of Saul and everyone else's were condemned by the righteousness of God...poured out on Christ and judged by God's justice. The efficacious sacrifice of the Lamb of God opened the gate of grace wide. Paul walked through the gate, and became the object of God's infinite grace. That same gate stands wide open for you and I.

In Luke's record we read, "And it came about that as he [Paul] journeyed, he was approaching Damascus [where he hoped to torment a few believers], and suddenly a light [the shekinah glory] from Heaven flashed around him; and he fell to the ground and heard a voice saying to him, 'Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting Me?'" (Acts 9:3,4). We can ignore "Saul, Saul..." for a moment and rewrite this passage, "Legalistic believer, lordship salvation teacher, salvation by baptism advocate, salvation by works preacher, why are you persecuting me?"

Ironically, when any believer deviates from grace orientation, he becomes Christ's persecutor-an "enemy of the cross of Christ" (Philippians 3:18). The solution for this kind of believer remains the same: Name your sins to God (I Jn. 1:9) and begin to take in the Word of God under a grace pastor/teacher.

What Paul experienced on the road to Damascus became the focal point for his lifestyle of grace. For, when Paul asked, "Who are you Lord?" he received a reply that shook his world upside down: "I am Jesus whom you are persecuting" (Acts 9:5). Paul was in shock. He froze instantly! All along, he thought he was serving God, when in essence, he was attacking his Creator. Paul beheld grace for the first time as he heard the Lord's instruction: "But get up, and enter the city, and it shall be told you what you must do" (v. 6). Apparently, that wasn't what Paul thought he would hear. He was probably braced to hear, "Paul, you're toast!" Or "because you have tormented me, I will torment you-may worms eat you alive!" But on the contrary, he heard the soft, sweet voice of grace from the Lord Jesus Christ saying, "Arise."

Some important principles have emerged:

- i. Paul's attack against God and believers stemmed from ignorance, self-righteousness-polished arrogance. Often, we may think that we are serving God, because someone is praising us, or it "feels" right, without knowing that we are in opposition.
- ii. What Paul truly deserved was cursing. What Paul received was blessing.
- iii. The Lord Jesus Christ bypassed what Paul deserved and offered him an opportunity for regeneration. That's grace in action!
- iv. Obviously, what happened on the Damascus road was fresh in his thoughts when he wrote to the Corinthians: "But by the grace of God I am what I am" (I Corinthians 15:10a). He knew that were it not for God's grace, he would have been struck dead when Christ indicted him.
- v. Paul did not automatically become grace-oriented, but a building block was set in place. Reflect back to how miserable we were when Christ found us. Since then, have we ever failed God? Has God ever failed us? Is the doctrine of grace beginning to register?

"And he [Paul] was three days without sight, and neither ate nor drink" (Acts 9:9). When Paul was struck with blindness, he immediately recognized his error and surrendered instantly to the omnipotence of the Lord Jesus Christ. The three days of blindness were days of dealing with the Lord and soul-searching.

While still cogitating such amazing grace, the Lord called Ananias to restore Paul's sight and to reveal the divine commission to him (v. 11, 12). Ananias refused to go, at first, because he was familiar with Paul's reputation (v. 13,14). "But the Lord said to him, 'Go, for he is a chosen instrument of Mine to bear My name before the gentiles and kings and the sons of Israel'" (v. 15). An ex-killer of Christians, had become an "instrument" of God. That's grace!

He was chosen while he was still blind, still depraved, and had not lifted a finger to undo his monstrous oppression on the church. His salvation came as a result of his faith alone, in Christ alone. There is nothing in Scripture to suggest that he invited Christ into his heart, made Christ Lord or was baptized for his salvation. Ananias baptized him, but not for salvation; he was baptized because he was already saved.

In Acts, we witness a similar salvation (by grace) in Cornelius' house: "Of Him all the prophets bear witness that through His name everyone who believes in Him receives

forgiveness of sins. While Peter was still speaking these words [the gospel], the Holy Spirit fell upon all those who were listening to the message [because they have believed]" (Acts 10:43,44). Peter added, "Surely no one can refuse the water for these [new believers] to be baptized who have [already] received the Holy Spirit just as we did [on the Day of Pentecost], can he? Then he ordered them to be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ..." (v. 47,48). Cornelius, his household, and guests believed in Christ alone and were instantly entered into union with Christ by means of the baptism of the Holy Spirit.

Paul further confirms his and our salvation by grace when he said in Ephesians 2:8,9, "For by grace you have been saved [perfect tense in Greek: saved at a point, and remained saved forever] through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God; not as a result of works, that no one may boast."

He became well aware of the condition he was in when grace found him: Working diligently for salvation, but to no avail. No wonder he wrote, "Nevertheless knowing that a man is not justified by the works of the Law but through faith [alone] in Christ Jesus, even we [including himself] have believed in Christ Jesus, that we may be justified by faith in Christ and not by the works of the Law; since by the works of the Law no flesh will be justified" (Galatians 2:16).

Clearly, Paul's conversion was a perfect manifestation of God's grace. What have we learned from Paul's conversion?

1. In Paul's helplessness, the Lord sent help. He didn't have to travel miles to Ananias, rather Ananias went to him. Similarly, the altar of salvation is brought to us. We can be saved anywhere, any time-right now!
2. The Lord is the One who seeks us in our depraved and lost state. He called Peter, Nathaniel, John, Zacchaeus, and (fill your name in here). He called Paul on his way to Damascus. "For the Son of Man has come to seek and to save that which was lost" (Luke 19:10). Grace eliminates any suggestion of human effort for salvation.
3. God does not deal with us on the basis of who we are, but rather on the basis of who and what He is.
4. If Paul, who callously slaughtered believers, was saved, and commissioned to serve, anyone, regardless of how heinous his sins, has an opportunity to be saved.
5. No matter how genuine we are in service, if it does not conform to God's plan, we are antagonistic to His plan-attacking the Lord. We should be very careful not to add to God's plan. Making an issue of baptism, or making Christ Lord as a prerequisite for salvation, is an attack against grace. God does not need our help; we definitely need His help.

Throughout Paul's epistles, he referred to his salvation and commission as the divine work of grace. In his epistle to Timothy, we read, " I thank Christ Jesus our Lord, who has strengthened me, because He considered me faithful, putting me into service, even though I was formerly a blasphemer and a persecutor and violent aggressor. And yet I was shown mercy, because I acted ignorantly in unbelief; and the grace of our Lord was more than abundant, with the faith and love which are found in Christ Jesus. It is a

trustworthy statement, deserving full acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, among whom I am foremost of all" (I Timothy 1:12-15). What an inspiring statement of grace orientation.

GRACE ORIENTATION:

Grace orientation is a mental attitude which a believer develops over time. The more a believer exposes himself to sound Bible teaching on a regular basis, the more he sees his own powerlessness under the high-powered microscope of the infallible Word of God-the more he strives to raise a Super Structure of grace in his soul through the utilization of grace assets, namely the power of the Holy Spirit and Bible doctrine. First, we learn the doctrine of Harmartiology (sin), which sheds light on who we are-depraved and lost sinners unable to save ourselves!

Second, we learn the doctrine of Kenosis, which opens our eyes to Christ's great love for mankind "...that though He [Christ Jesus] was rich, yet for your sake He became poor, that you through His poverty might become rich" (II Corinthians 8:9); and, "Although He [Christ Jesus] existed in the form of God, did not regard equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied Himself, taking the form of a bond-servant, and being made in the likeness of men" (Philippians 2:6,7). Step by step, the building blocks are put in place. We begin to have an inkling of what it cost Christ to step out of His glory as God and put on humanity.

Third, we are exposed to the doctrine of Soteriology, and we humbly behold the unique and unparalleled sufferings of Christ. Understanding deepens, then awe develops upon studying the atoning work of Christ, namely propitiation, justification, sanctification, redemption, and adoption. When the believer realizes that he was spiritually dead, hopeless, helpless, and useless when God freely imputed His eternal life into him, grace-thinking has begun-the Super Structure well on its way-by a simple act of faith!

Fourth, another block of grace is added when it dawns on the believer that our work never impresses God; what impresses Him is what He does for and through man. Paul understood all these doctrines and beyond. We will develop how doctrine restructured Paul's thinking and motivation as the teaching progresses.

PAUL'S COMMISSION-GRACE ALL THE WAY

"Paul an apostle (not sent from men, nor through the agency of man, but through Jesus Christ, and God the Father, who raised Him from the dead)...For you have heard of my former manner of life in Judaism, how I used to persecute the church of God beyond measure, and tried to destroy it; and I was advancing in Judaism beyond many of my contemporaries among my countrymen, being more extremely zealous for my ancestral traditions. But when God, who had set me apart even from my mother's womb and called me through His grace, was pleased to reveal His Son to me that I might preach Him among the Gentiles...." (Galatians 1:1,13-15)

Paul's commission existed in the Lord's mind billions of years ago, pre-angelic or human history. He was appointed without a vote or winning a contest or being best at anything-from his "mother's womb"(Galatians 1:15). It is true that Paul was by far the most educated man in his day, but his academic prowess had no bearing on his divine commission, nor on the Super Structure forming in his soul.

The building blocks mounted higher as Paul learned more doctrine and the many facets of God's essence permeated his soul. Damascus was the beginning; from there, gratitude soared! "I thank Christ Jesus our Lord, who has strengthened me, because He considered me faithful, putting me into service, even though I was formerly a blasphemer and a persecutor and violent aggressor. Yet I was shown mercy because I acted ignorantly in unbelief; and the grace of our Lord was more than abundant, with the faith and love which are found in Christ Jesus. It is a trustworthy statement, deserving full acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, among whom I am foremost of all" (I Timothy 1:12-15).

In light of this exposition, two lessons have surfaced:

1. Paul's appointment was an issue in eternity past-unmerited. The realization of divine favor bestowed to him was the beginning of grace thinking. Similarly, when you and I understand that we are in God's plan, apart from our meddling, we begin to think in grace.
2. Paul's salvation, and divine commission came to him at the pinnacle of his arrogance-when the cup of his self-righteousness and sin overflowed-when he repeatedly aimed to bring down the One who later saved him. Paul, a master of the Mosaic Law, could barely believe the trade-off. He knew from the Mosaic Law that any blasphemy against God was punishable by death. He had blasphemed and ridiculed God and yet remained alive and received a divine commission! If anyone could echo the lyrics of the song "Amazing Grace" Paul would be first in line. No! Not Paul, but Moses!

Paul had yet another grace lesson.

PAUL'S EMOTION, FAILURE, AND GRACE RESCUE

We need to deviate for a moment to examine some Biblical facts about emotion.

God is not emotional and never has been and never will be. In the book Biblical Doctrine of Salvation, we looked at the doctrine of the essence of God. One characteristic of His essence is immutability; He doesn't have the mood swing that emotion leaves in its wake. Suffice it to say, the only member of the Trinity that had emotion was Christ in His human nature. He manifested emotion when He made His triumphal entry into Jerusalem; He wept for the city (Luke 19:41) and at the grave of Lazarus (John 11:35). Our Lord's emotional response, however, was never sinful nor ever in self-pity.

A major drawback to emotion is that it can be irrational, causing a believer to steer off course as happened to Paul. Another point: Emotion doesn't think nor was it designed to think; it serves as a responder to a thought system designed by God. Normal emotion includes grief, sorrow, joy, excitement, and the like. On the other hand, anger, bitterness, hatred, jealousy, guilt worry, fear, and depression characterize abnormal emotion.

Emotion has eight major characteristics:

1. Emotion is designed to be an appreciator, to respond to thought.
2. It wanes easily, and so does any promise made under its influence.
3. Emotion can actually become a hindrance to one's spiritual advance in God's plan.
4. It can cause a believer to drift from God's plan.
5. It is irrational and thus incapable of making good decisions.
6. Emotion can make or break a believer.
7. Emotion is not criteria for worshipping God. "God is Spirit, and those who worship Him must worship in [the filling of the Holy Spirit] and [Bible doctrine]" (John 4:24).
8. It is not a criteria for decision-making.

Now, we can look at how an emotional decision nearly shortened Paul's ministry. Powered by emotion, he made perhaps the greatest post-salvation mistake of his life—rejection of God's command to not go to Jerusalem. We are not studying Paul's emotional sin, but rather to underline the concept of God's grace in his life even when he failed.

Poignantly, Paul received a series of divine warnings not to go to Jerusalem (Acts 21). Because of Paul's negative volition to divine warning, the prophet Agabus "...took Paul's belt and bound his own feet and hands and said, 'This is what the Holy Spirit says: 'In this way the Jews at Jerusalem will bind the man [Paul] who owns this belt and deliver him into the hands of the Gentiles'" (v. 11). Paul ignored the prophecy and went to Jerusalem, nonetheless.

While in Jerusalem, James, the Lord's stepbrother, and others gave Paul bad advice. Human solution. They strongly encouraged him to observe Mosaic Law for the benefit of those who opposed Paul for not keeping the law (V. 21-24). Under emotional influence, and irrational because of it, Paul acquiesced and entered the Temple where the mob seized him and dragged him out to kill him (v. 31). While in the hands of this embittered religious mob, the Lord, whom he disobeyed, came to his rescue through the Roman army commander.

In Luke's account we read, "And while they were seeking to kill him, a report came up to the commander of the Roman cohort [or battalion]....And at once he took along some soldiers and centurions, and ran down to them; and when they saw the commander and the soldiers, they stopped beating Paul" (v.31, 32). Paul came very close to death, but God in His infinite mercy and grace rescued him.

You may want to take a quiz. How many times have you failed God? I know that my failures probably outweigh yours and Paul's; and yet, through my ups and downs, the grace of God has never let go of me; this is true of you, likewise. Obviously, that was true of Paul.

DOCTRINAL PRINCIPLES AND APPLICATIONS

(A) God never deals with us on the basis of who we are, rather on the basis of who and what He is-gracious and full of compassion (Psalm 112:4). Jacob acknowledged, "...God has dealt with me graciously..." (Genesis 33:11). Here was a man who stole his brother's blessing (Genesis 27); and yet, God did not treat him in kind.

(B) Before we were saved, we were rotten and spiritually decomposing in sin; and yet, graced-out by the Master. Paul put it this way: "And you were dead in your trespasses and sins....But God, being rich in mercy, because of His great [unfailing] love with which he loved us, even when we were dead in our transgressions, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved)" (Ephesians 2:1,4-5). Did you do anything to be saved? Of course not! You were saved by faith alone in Christ alone.

(C) After salvation, we are wrapped in grace. Too often, we fail God, but He has not failed us-not even once! He always welcomes us back with open arms. That's what grace is all about-never earned-never deserved.

(D) Whatever we are or could be is a matter of His marvelous grace. Paul poses the question: "...What do you have that you did not receive? But if you did receive it, why do you boast as if you had not received it?" (I Corinthians 4:7b).

(E) There is no reason for any believer to puff himself up-be it success in business, profession, or whatever. In Paul's case, he was successful in everything he took to task. But when he inventoried his life, he humbly affirmed, "But by the grace of God I am what I am..." (I Corinthians 15:10a).

You may wish to pause as I have done and recount the events of your life. Can you truly say without equivocation that "By the grace of God I am what I am?"

FINAL THOUGHTS

Paul-a trophy of grace-wrote, "But by His doing (minus anyone's effort) you are in Christ Jesus..." (I Corinthians 1:30a); and, "For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God; not as a result of works (of any kind), that no one may boast" (Ephesians 2:8, 9).

God is perfect and His work is perfect. God the Son purchased you (I Peter 1:18, 19). God the Holy Spirit sealed you (II Corinthians 1:22). God the Father keeps you saved by His power (John 10:29). God provides salvation in grace. We have nothing to add. We are the objects and beneficiaries of His grace forever.

"Now to Him who is able to keep you from stumbling (i.e., losing your salvation), and to make you stand in the presence of His glory blameless with great joy, to the only God our Savior, through Jesus Christ our Lord, be glory, majesty, dominion and authority before all time and now and forever. Amen" (Jude 1:24-25).

To be continued-(Volume 23-lesson 9)

(Lesson9—Continued from volume 22 Lesson8)

PAUL'S DOCTRINAL ORIENTATION

We previously noted how Paul excelled beyond his peers and stood aloof in the mastery of the Mosaic Law-how he was well ahead of the Rabbinical elite in religious matters. Prior to his conversion, Paul was actually a stumbling block in the formation of the early church. After becoming a believer, he delayed missionary work and went to Saudi Arabia to spend most of his time in meditation and in the communion of doctrines of the Church Age. The result was that his perception of God's plan for the new dispensation was etched in his right lobe.

Once enlightened and under the direction of the Holy Spirit, Paul wrote, "For I would have you know, brethren, that the gospel which was preached by me is not according to man. For I neither received it from man, nor was I taught it, but I received it through a revelation of Jesus Christ. For you have heard of my former manner of life in Judaism, how I used to persecute the church of God beyond measure and tried to destroy it; and I was advancing in Judaism beyond my contemporaries among my countrymen, being more extremely zealous for my ancestral traditions. But when He who had set me apart (*Greek: Aphorizo = select to office-set apart to serve cf. Romans 1:1*), even from my mother's womb, and called me through His GRACE, was pleased to reveal His Son in me so that I might preach Him among the Gentiles, I did not immediately consult with flesh and blood (literally human beings), nor did I go to Jerusalem to those who were apostles before me; but I went away to Arabia, and returned once more to Damascus" (Galatians 1:11-17).

Upon returning from Arabia, his teachings became the focal point in Christendom. Still, you might ask, "How can I be certain that Paul was doctrinally oriented?" We will use a logical approach to answer this question. It is crystal clear that one cannot give what one does not have-that's just common sense and logic. Paul's epistles were printouts of the Bible doctrine engraved in his soul-the evidence that he was saturated with Church Age doctrine: "Now I rejoice in my sufferings for your sake, and in my flesh I do my share on behalf of His body (the church) in filling up that which is lacking in Christ's afflictions. Of this church I was made a minister according to the stewardship from God bestowed on me for your benefit, that I might fully carry out (*Greek: Pleroo = explain fully*) the preaching of the word of God, that is, the mystery (*Greek: Mysterion = some sacred thing hidden or secret and is only known by the revelation of God, i.e., Church Age doctrine*) which has been hidden from past ages (*dispensation of providence*) and generations; but has now been manifested (*Greek: Phaneroo = to reveal*) to His saints..." (Colossians 1:28-29).

"And we proclaim Him, admonishing (*Greek: Noutheteo = to warn, instruct*) every man and teaching (*Greek: didasko = the thing aimed at when one teaches, didasko is to shape the will of the one taught by the communication of the knowledge of the word of God*) every man with all wisdom (*Greek: Sophia = the knowledge of how to regulate one's relationship with God*), that we may present every man complete (matured) in Christ. For this purpose also I labor, striving (*Greek: Agonizomai = to wrestle, toil*) according to His power, which mightily works within me" (Colossians 1:24-26).

Paul proclaimed that the Lord Jesus Christ was his personal Teacher. In addition to what the Lord taught him, Paul put the Mosaic Law under the microscope of Church Age doctrine, shedding light on the Law and the Prophets. The Holy Spirit directed Paul to use specific Greek words, which indicated his doctrinal orientation. Four of these Greek words are worthy of our attention.

i. The first word is *noutheteo* which means: "to warn, to instruct," or "to put *something* into *someone else's mind*." The apostle Paul warned through the ministry of the Holy Spirit, but he had to master Church Age doctrine before teaching others. These truths had to be rooted in his own soul. Paul was neither selfish, arrogant, nor claimed sinlessness. He, rather, challenged the Corinthian believers to watch his lifestyle and determine if he lived what he taught. Only a believer who offers himself as a pattern for others can confidently say, "I exhort you, therefore, be imitators of me" (I Corinthians 4:16).

ii. *Didasko* is the second Greek word that means: "to teach," but more than that, according to the Greek Lexicon, it means: "*to shape the will of the one being taught*." No one can really infuse another's mind with his own teachings unless the message has had impact on his own soul. Through the enabling power of the Holy Spirit, Paul was able to apply truth to life's situations and thus reshaped his thinking to divine viewpoint. Because his will had been molded to conform to God's plan for his life, he had the courage to teach others to follow his example.

iii. *Sophia* is the third Greek word under discussion. It means: "*wisdom*," and in the spiritual sense, it means "*the knowledge of how to regulate one's relationship to God*." Wisdom, in our context, is an accurate application of Bible doctrine. When one is wise in the spiritual sense, he is said to be *phrenimos* in Greek—*one who is prudent with others and knows how to regulate circumstances*. Paul was spiritually wise and that was what he hoped to impart. The spotlight was turned on him when he wrote to the Ephesians, "Therefore be careful how you walk (live your life), not as unwise men (carnal believers, or unbelievers) but as wise, making the most of your time, because the days are [*short and*] evil" (5:15,16). He was giving them a warning that he already carefully considered, which underlines our premise that no one can give what he does not have.

iv. The fourth Greek word is *agonizomai*. It means, "*to wrestle, to strive*," or "*to toil*." "And for this purpose (*of communicating the infallible word of God*) also I labor, striving according to His power, which mightily works within me" (Colossians 1:29). The Lord Jesus Christ used the same word in John 18:36.

In light of these four Greek words, an important lesson emerges: For a believer to be an effective teacher of the Word of God or the gospel, his message must first make an impact in his own life. And, so it was with Paul—a model for his own preaching—minus self-abasement or self-righteousness and accomplished in the filling of the Holy Spirit to illuminate the mind with Truth. And, it takes time! Since no one can teach beyond his own knowledge, years of academic preparation is vital. There is no short cut when it comes to putting the nuts and bolts of Scripture together. It's not far-fetched to estimate that it takes eight hours or more of diligent study and research to prepare for one hour of accurate Bible teaching. Paul pointed this out when he said, "I labor, striving according to His power (the power of the Holy Spirit)."

A student of the Word may wonder, "Well, Paul only wrote letters to the churches under the empowerment of the Holy Spirit, how do we know that he really studied?" The Holy Spirit knew clearly that such questions would arise and He supplied the answer in advance. In Luke's account we read, "I know that after my departure savage wolves (false teachers) will come in among you, not sparing the flock; and from among your own selves men will arise, speaking perverse things, to draw away the disciples after them. Therefore be on the alert (watchful, vigilant, and of sober mind), remembering that night and day for a period of three years I did not cease to admonish (instruct) each one with tears" (Acts 20:29-31).

Paul taught the church for three solid years, though Luke only recorded Paul's farewell address to the church at Ephesus. If all of his teachings were put in print, we would need a ladder to read the Bible. The years and the number of times he taught each day in Ephesus were literal, not figurative. So if he taught two lessons a day, plus held a job, he would have had to spend most of his nights into the wee hours pouring over God's Word.

In lieu of Paul's farewell address, an important lesson has surfaced: A good Bible teacher, in the course of his studies, should examine his life (under the ministry of the Holy Spirit) to see if what he teaches others affects him and, if so, to allow the doctrine to change his own life before presenting its truth to others. Here is Paul's way of saying it: "You, therefore, who teach another, do you not teach yourself? You who preach that one should not steal, do you steal? You who say that one should not commit adultery, do you commit adultery? You who abhor idols, do you rob temples?" (*Do you exploit people of their money?*) (Romans 2:21-23).

What came from Paul's mouth illustrated his life, so let's examine some verses at face value: "I have coveted no one's silver or gold or clothes." (Acts 20:33). We are not sure how many ministers could say that today, or even how many believers for that matter. He went on to say, "You yourselves know that these hands ministered to my own needs and to the men who were with me. In everything I showed you that by working hard in this manner you must help the weak (the handicapped) and remember the words of the Lord Jesus, that He himself said, 'It is more blessed to give than to receive'" (v.35).

Where Paul had an option of exploitation, versus using his trade as a tentmaker, he chose to work—where he had the choice between lying to get food and starvation, he chose to

starve. No wonder he could dogmatically state, "...I have learned (*through rigorous studies of the Word of God and its correct application*) to be content in whatever circumstances I am. I (*through proper application of doctrine*) know how to get along with humble means, and I also know how to live in prosperity; in any and every circumstance I have learned the secret of being filled and going hungry, both of having abundance and suffering need" (Philippians 4:11,12).

So far, we have demonstrated that Paul's thinking was saturated with doctrine. Why? Let's examine a few reasons.

1. The doctrine of the Church Age was new and different from previous dispensations, thus he had to absorb it all in order to orient to the new era-the Church.
2. Glorification of God was his objective. He knew that God is a God of precision, and to serve God well, he needed to learn and apply precise mystery doctrine to each circumstance he faced. You may recall the principle that a right thing done in a wrong way is wrong. Today, many are serving God in a wrong way which negates service to the Lord and ends up as "wood, hay, and straw" (I Corinthians 3:11-15) at the Evaluation Seat of Christ Jesus (Romans 14:10). This was not the case with Paul.
3. He wanted to know all about the power behind Christ's celebratory victory on the cross and His resurrection: "That I may know Him (*through intensive studies of the infallible Word of God*), and the power of His resurrection and the fellowship of His sufferings..." (Philippians 3:10a).
4. He wanted to master and use the very assets Christ used in His humanity, namely the omnipotence of God's word through the power of the Holy Spirit. Paul knew that Christ put His Father's word above all else; this is made clear in that "Doctrine" was Christ's last word on the cross: "Into Thy hand I commit my spirit; Thou hast ransomed (*Hebrew: Padah = delivered, rescued*) me, O Lord, God of [doctrine!]" (Ps. 31:5). Bible doctrine and flawless application propelled the Lord Jesus Christ to His triumphant victory at His first advent.
5. Paul desired divine guidance, joy, happiness, and peace. "Thy word is a lamp (*Hebrew: Nerah = a light, lamp, prosperity, instruction*) to my feet and light (*Hebrew: Owr = illumination, enlightenment, happiness*) to my path" (Psalm 119:105). Jeremiah's words became Paul's own: "Thy words were found and I ate them (*believed and acted upon them*), and Thy words became for me a joy (*maximum tranquility of the soul*) and the delight (satisfaction) of my [soul]..." (15:16). Do you want divine guidance, happiness, spiritual wealth, and peace? Then stay in touch with doctrine, today, tomorrow, and the next day, and the day after that-all the way to your death.
6. Paul had to make Church Age doctrine his own so he could run according to the rules that safeguard the dispensation of the church: "And also if anyone competes as an athlete, he does not win the prize unless he competes according to the rules" (II Timothy 2:5). When a believer ignores and/or rejects Church Age doctrine, he can't run according to its rules. Allow me to ask this vital question: Is your pastor-teacher feeding you with the spiritual food necessary for this dispensation?

7. The final reason: To advance to spiritual maturity and receive his rewards both in time and Heaven. He knew that the only way a believer can "grow in grace and in the knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ" (II Peter 3:18), and be blessed in this life and forever, is through day-by-day perception and consistent application of Bible doctrine.

In Paul's departure from Ephesus, he told the believers (and it certainly applies to you and I), "And now I commend you to God and to the word of His grace (*Bible doctrine*), which is able to build you up (*advance you to maturity*) and give you the inheritance (*reward in time and in eternity*) among all those who are sanctified" (Acts 20:32). In light of this, we can concretely conclude that apart from Bible doctrine permeating our souls, there will be no application; without application, spiritual maturity is a myth. Furthermore, without spiritual maturity, there is no capacity for life-for friendship, marriage, or happiness-no capacity for superior blessings in time or in eternity.

BIBLE DOCTRINE ALONE CANNOT ADVANCE ANYONE

Many Bible communicators stress the importance of learning Bible doctrine while neglecting to highlight and underline its application. No believer can advance one hundredth of a millimeter in his spiritual life without perception and application of doctrine on a regular, daily basis. We learn this vital principle in the Pauline epistles where it is vividly clear that the test of Bible doctrine is in its application.

In Paul's pastoral epistle to Timothy, he wrote, "Take pains with these things (Paul's teachings); be absorbed in them, so that your [*spiritual*] progress may be evident [*visible*] to all. Pay close attention (*watch carefully*) to yourself and to your teaching (*see to it that your teachings reflect your lifestyle*); persevere in these things, for as you do this you will ensure salvation both for yourself and for those who hear you" (I Timothy 4:15,16).

What does Paul mean by "you will ensure salvation both for yourself and for those who hear you?" For one thing, he was not talking about salvation from the Lake of Fire. Keep in mind that salvation is in three increments: past, present, and future. When a person anchors his faith alone in Christ alone, he is saved once and for all (Hebrews 10:14) from eternal damnation. Paul put it this way: "Who has saved us and called us with a holy calling, not according to our works, but according to His own purpose and grace which was granted us in Christ Jesus from all eternity" (II Timothy 1:9). The salvation of a believer in time was wrought in eternity past-billions of years ago-way before we could possibly have had anything to do with it, good or bad. If you have believed in Christ, your salvation is now irreversible history; for there is "no condemnation for those who are in [*union with*] Christ Jesus" (Romans 8:1).

The final increment of Salvation is when God removes the believer from life by death and he receives his resurrection body (I Corinthians 15:51-57). Now, we are subject to salvation in time when each believer is responsible for learning and applying Bible doctrine to all circumstances. A believer who fails to do this walks precariously in harm's way. Paul's message to Timothy can be better understood in Romans 8:13: "For if you are

living according to the flesh (carnality), you must die (*the sin face-to-face with death*); but if by the (*enabling power of*) Holy Spirit you are putting to death the deeds of the body (sin nature), you will live (*you will be saved in time from the sin unto death*)."

The Lord Himself uttered these words: "Everyone who comes to Me and hears (*learns*) My words (*Bible doctrine*) and acts upon them (applies them to his life), I will show you whom he is like: he is like a man building a house, who dug deep and laid a foundation upon the rock; and when a flood rose, the torrent burst against that house and could not shake it, because it had been well built. But the one who has heard and has not acted accordingly, is like a man who built a house upon the ground without any foundation; and the torrent burst against it and immediately it collapsed, and the ruin of that house was great" (Luke 6:47-49).

The Lord's teaching, at this point, envelopes the principle that perception of Bible doctrine without its application is meaningless. Christ further hammered home this crucial truth when a rude woman interrupted His teaching: "And it came about while He said these things, one of the women in the crowd raised her voice and said to Him, 'Blessed is the womb that bore you and the breast at which you nursed.' But He (the Lord) said, 'on the contrary (*wrong*), blessed (*happy*) are those who hear the word of God and observe (*Greek: Phulasso = Guard, watch, apply*) it" (Luke 11:27,28). Prior to correcting this woman, He declared: "...My mother and My brothers are these who hear the word of God and do (apply) it" (Luke 8:21).

James, the stepbrother of our Lord Jesus Christ, put it this way: "But prove yourselves doers of the word, and not merely hearers who delude themselves. For if anyone is a hearer of the word and not a doer (*doesn't apply the doctrine he has learned*), he is like a man who looks at his natural face in a mirror; and once he has looked at himself and gone away, he has immediately forgotten what kind of person he was. But one who looks intently at the perfect law (sound Bible doctrine), the law of liberty, and abides by it (*Greek: Parameno = connotes both retention and application*), not having become a forgetful hearer but an effectual doer, this man (*whomever he may be*) shall be blessed in what he does" (1:22-25).

It is important to reiterate that the doctrine in Paul's soul, and his perseverance in using it, was what transformed his human viewpoint to divine viewpoint, causing him to become humble in his relationship with God and others-it was what prepared him to be a grace-oriented believer-it was what propelled him to spiritual maturity-it was what made his life precious both to the elect angels and to believers of the world.

SAMPLES OF APPLICATION OF BIBLE DOCTRINE

No two believers apply Bible doctrine in the same way, so we are going to throw out random sampling:

1. A believer becomes the victim of malicious gossip: He has one of two options; he can break fellowship with God by reacting in bitterness and seek to get even with

- the mastermind of the gossip, or he can apply the doctrine of "leave all injustice in God's hand." Paul wrote: "Never pay back evil for evil...Never take your own revenge, beloved, but leave room for the wrath of God, for it is written (Deut. 32:35), 'VENGEANCE IS MINE, I WILL REPAY SAYS THE LORD'" (Romans 12:17,19).
2. Things fall apart in one's life: The believer can become panic-stricken about the future and immediately forfeit fellowship with God, lose the filling of the Holy Spirit and tranquility of soul, or he can relax and apply what Paul did: "And we know that God causes all things [sickness, lost of loved ones, lost of employment...lost of wealth] to work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose" (Romans 8:28). Or, the believer can find great comfort and hope in Job's application: "As for me, I know that my Redeemer lives..." (Job 19:25a).
 3. Someone in your periphery (a husband, wife, or friend) does not conform to your standards: The believer can react (a symptom of immaturity) or he can reach into his soul and pull out virtuous love: "Love is patient, love is kind and is not jealous; love does not brag and is not arrogant, does not act unbecomingly; it does not seek its own, is not provoked, does not take into account a wrong suffered...love never fails" (I Corinthians 13:4-8a).
 4. A believer has an opportunity to become rich by exploitation: The believer juggles the doctrine in his soul against the temptation and comes to the conclusion that any profit that is not directly from God is no profit after all! For it's the "blessing of the Lord that makes rich, And He adds no sorrow to it" (Prov. 10:22).
 5. A believer is at the crossroads of life: The believer with metabolized doctrine does not fret. Rather, he waits on the Lord, and while waiting, he reminds himself, "For such is God, Our God forever and ever; He will guide us until death" (Psalm 48:14), and he seriously concentrates on our Lord's words: "I will instruct (guide) you and teach you in the way which you should go; I will counsel you with my eye upon you" (Psalm 32:8).
 6. The believer is in severe suffering: He draws upon God's word in his soul like Job did: "Though He slay me, I will hope (*have absolute confidence*) in Him" (Job 13:15). He holds on, never retreats to self-pity, but reaches the same conclusion as did Job: "But He knows the way (*Hebrew: Derek: journey, course*) I take; when he has tried me, I shall come forth as gold" (Job 23:10). In plain language, "God knows what I'm going through, and He knows how and when to get me out and makes my life more splendid. After all, He alone can blend bad things with good things and comes out with a product of intrinsic good"

As we ride the waves of our spiritual lives, we will face tests in all forms and shapes; the Lord is glorified only when we utilize the same powers that He used in His incarnation, then passed them to us-the power of Bible doctrine and the filling of the Holy Spirit. These divine assets are provided in grace, utilized in grace, and in the filling of the Holy Spirit; without even one of these ingredients, application of Bible doctrine is impossible.

FINAL THOUGHTS

Paul, a trophy of grace, wrote this: "But by His doing (*minus anyone's effort plus nothing*) you are in Christ Jesus..." (I Corinthians 1:30a); and "For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God; not as a result of works (*of any kind*), that no one may boast" (Ephesians 2:8, 9).

God is perfect and His work is perfect. God the Son purchased you (I Peter 1:18, 19)-perfect transaction. God the Holy Spirit sealed you (II Corinthians 1:22)-perfect seal. God the Father keeps you saved by His power (John 10:29)-perfect security. Because God provides salvation in grace, and we are the beneficiaries of His grace, there's nothing to add.

"Now to Him who is able to keep you from stumbling (*losing your salvation*), and to make you stand in the presence of His glory blameless with great joy, to the only God our Savior, through Jesus Christ our Lord, be glory, majesty, dominion and authority, before all time and now and forever. Amen" (Jude 1:24-25).

PAUL'S GRACE-ORIENTATION

To be continued-(Volume 24-lesson 10)

(Continued from Volume 23 lesson 9)

In our previous installment, we examined Paul's doctrinal-orientation. In order to interpret the Scripture accurately, we exegeted Colossians 1:24-26 and arrived at the conclusion that Paul's spiritual life was centered on daily perception of the infallible Word of God. We noted that it was his lifestyle of daily study and application of Bible doctrine which made his life precious to both believers of the world and the elect angels—this caused him to develop a mental attitude of grace. Now we are poised to study Paul's grace-orientation.

PAUL'S GRACE-ORIENTATION

We need to lay our basic groundwork that structured Paul's grace-orientation. The first thing we need to know is, Grace-orientation is a mental attitude, nothing more, nothing less. From the chambers of your soul comes your action, both in deeds and words. "As a man thinks [in his soul] so he is..." (Proverbs 23:7). To be precise, "You are what you think."

The second building block, grace-orientation, is developed through personal experience of God's grace, perception, and application of the inerrant word of God. Subsequently, a mental attitude can be divided into three categories: arrogance, humility, and grace.

ARROGANCE: Arrogant thinking is the most heinous and worst sin of both human and angelic history. Ironically, many believers by the millions are not aware that Satan is the author and master of arrogance. These believers forget or never knew that arrogance was the source of his fall (Isaiah 14:12-15; Ezekiel 28:18). What is even more chilling, is that

many believers have become victims of his prey—Adam and Eve the first victims. The frightening thing is that God makes war against anyone who lives a lifestyle of arrogance.

In the book of Proverbs, God's attitude and warning in regard to arrogance stands tall: "Everyone who is proud in heart is an abomination [Hebrew: *toebah* = *abomination, loathsome, detestable thing*] to the Lord; assuredly, he [the arrogant one] will not be unpunished [from the Supreme Court of Heaven]" (Proverbs 16:5). You may ask, "How can I detect if I am in the arrogant mode?" The answer can be summarized in this poetic expression:

When you think that your own agenda is more important than God's, from the fountain of arrogance you drink.

*When you think that Bible doctrine is secondary, up the hill of arrogance you climb.
When there is one iota of pride in you, down the path of self-destruction you walk.
When you think that you have something to prove to others, the goggles of arrogance you wear.*

*When self-approbation occupies your soul, the bell of arrogance you hear.
When power lust captivates your soul, on the high chair of arrogance you sit.
When you compete with other believers, on arrogance's danger zone you compete.
When you think that your success has something to do with you, the music of arrogance you dance.*

*When God's glory is yours to grab, in the bed of sin-unto-death you sleep.
When you think that others cannot do without you, the coat of arrogance you wear.
When you think that you are better than others, down the valley of arrogance you slide.
When people's praises inflate you, on the door of God's wrath you knock.*

*When you think that you have all the answers, in the room of darkness you wander.
When you stop learning from others, the wealth of knowledge you forgo.
When you think that you have arrived, at the door of the assembly of the dead you stand.*

The Bible is crystal clear: "God is opposed to the proud [makes war against the arrogant believer], but gives [super] grace to the humble" (James 4:6b). Undoubtedly, Paul was very arrogant before his salvation experience, thus he penned: "I thank Christ Jesus, who has strengthened me...even though I was formerly a blasphemer, and violent aggressor" (I Timothy 1:12, 13). Paul, then called Saul, heard the gospel right from Stephen's mouth as he was being stoned, but he rejected it (Acts 7). Rather, in his arrogance, he was consumed with high-powered anger to eliminate Christ's Name and those who identified with Him (Acts 8).

What about Paul's post-salvation experience? Many often think that just by being believers, they would be shielded from succumbing to Satan's disguised strategy to lure them into becoming arrogant. These ought to learn from Paul. Paul, perhaps beginning in spiritual babyhood or adolescence, became arrogant when he was warned several times

through the Holy Spirit not to go to Jerusalem (Acts 21:4, 10-12). “Then Paul answered, ‘What are you doing, weeping and breaking my heart? For I am ready not only to be bound, but even to die at Jerusalem for the name of the Lord Jesus’” (v. 13).

Paul rationalized that his plan to go to Jerusalem would be more fruitful than the Lord’s restriction on him not to set foot in Jerusalem. Evidently, he succumbed to arrogant thinking which nearly shortened his ministry when the Jewish mob pounced on him while he was in the Temple in Jerusalem (v. 27-30). But the Lord, in His inexpressible grace, rescued him (31-33). Un-debatably, his grace-rescue was also a building block in the development of grace-orientation. But not without a price, for his suffering for Christ was intensified from that point on. God keeps His word. Arrogance, wherever it rears its ugly head, shall not go unpunished (Proverbs 16:5). Through Paul’s suffering, laced with his constant focus on Christ, garnished with daily perception and application of Bible doctrine, a fortification of humility was erected in his soul. Block by block.

HUMILITY: Humility is the opposite of arrogance. Humility and arrogance are mutually exclusive; they cannot co-exist in a given moment. Jesus Christ, in His incarnation, was a perfect example of a Man who possessed and lived in humility throughout his allotted time on earth. “Who [Jesus Christ] although He existed in the form of God, did not regard equality with God a thing to be grasped [Greek: *harpagmos=robbery*], but emptied Himself, taking the form of a bond-servant [Greek: *doulos = a slave, one who is in a permanent relation of servitude to another; his will altogether consumed in the will of another*], and being made in the likeness of men. And being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself [Greek: *tapeinoo = to humble, or to bring low*] by becoming obedient to death, even death on a cross” (Philippians 2:6-8).

Humility, therefore, is a state of mind, in which one regards oneself as “Mr. Nobody of Any Significance,” who easily and joyfully submits to any appointed authority. Jesus Christ was a Pioneer of true humility. He submitted unconditionally and unequivocally to the authority and the will of God the Father.

Scripture has a bundle of information to prove that Jesus Christ is equal with the first member of the Trinity, namely God the Father. One piece of evidence is in our context above. Also, in Hebrews we read that, “He [Jesus Christ] is the radiance of His [God’s] glory and the exact representation of his nature” (Hebrews 1:3a). Jesus Christ, in His deity, could have said to God the Father, “*Who do You think you are to give Me instructions on what to do? Do it yourself! After all, we are equal in essence.*” Paradoxically, that would have been arrogance, and perhaps the downfall of the second member of the Tri-union of God. But thank God that our Savior didn’t think such thoughts, for that would have been the end of any chance of our salvation! (Hebrews 2:3b). Much to our relief, He said, “...A [human] body You [God] have prepared for Me” (Hebrews 10:5).

In addition, He affirmed, “My food is to do the will of Him who sent Me, and to accomplish His work” (John 4:34). Instead of being pre-occupied with Himself, He was pre-occupied with the Father’s plan. In light of His mission, His thinking was aligned

perfectly with His Father's when He said: "I can do nothing on My own initiative." He added, "...As I hear, I judge; and My judgment is just, because I do not seek My own will, but the will of Him who sent Me" (John 5:30).

Without a doubt, no believer can possess Christ's thinking and at the same time be arrogant. In Paul's epistle we also read, "Have this attitude in yourselves which was also in Christ Jesus." (Philippians 2:5). Likewise, "*Let Bible doctrine, which is the thinking of Christ, be the lens through which you examine and live your life.*" The truth is that no believer can be saturated with sound Bible doctrine, apply it correctly and consistently, and still be arrogant. The KJV Rainbow Study Bible summarizes it beautifully: "What goes into our minds, comes out as our actions...we have no basis for pride except in our perfect example, Jesus Christ."

There is no doubt that the apostle Paul had already developed a mental attitude of humility when he wrote in Philippians, "Do nothing from selfishness or empty conceit, but with humility of mind let each of you regard one another as more important than himself" (2:3). The compelling question is, do you regard others as more important than yourself? Likewise, Paul challenged the Colossians: "And so, as those who have been chosen of God, holy and beloved, put on a heart of compassion, humility, gentleness and patience; bearing with one another, and forgiving each other, whoever has a complaint against anyone; just as the Lord forgave you, so also should you" (Colossians 3:12, 13).

Obviously, as we previously established, Paul could not have warned, nor admonished the Philippians and Colossians respectively, if he had not carefully considered the things he warned them about. Conversely, if he hadn't diligently considered those words, penned under the ministry of the Holy Spirit, he would have been the most pious, ego-centric, self-centered, self-deceptive, and unapprised hypocrite in all of Scripture. For he said to the Corinthians, "Be imitators of me, just as I also am of Christ" (I Corinthians 11:1). By this we know, Paul considered every word that he spoke, or wrote!

Paul was not bragging nor arrogant when he challenged the Corinthians. In fact, in eternity we will have the privilege to witness the Lord's decoration of the greatest apostle in Christendom. Without question, Paul's humility erected a fortress of grace thinking in his soul. Now, we are ready to tap into the mind of a man whose grace-orientation continues to echo in the halls of Christian history.

GRACE-ORIENTATION: Grace-orientation is another aspect of mental attitude. It is the flip side of humility—these are two sides of the same coin. The truth of the matter is, you cannot attain a state of humility in the spiritual arena and not be grace-oriented. James put it this way: "But He gives a [super] grace. Therefore, it says, **GOD IS OPPOSED TO THE PROUD (ARROGANT BELIEVER), BUT GIVES GRACE TO THE HUMBLE**" (James 4:6). Let's examine the source of Paul's grace-orientation.

SOURCE OF PAUL'S GRACE - ORIENTATION:

PAUL'S SALVATION EXPERIENCE: Without question, Paul's salvation experience was the starting point of grace-orientation. Here was an unbeliever who was committed to do away with Christianity and those who bore its name. Prior to his salvation, he had tortured and imprisoned Christians wherever he found them. On the road to Damascus, armed with high-powered rage, perhaps to inflict the greatest injury ever to Christianity, the Lord met him, and he was converted to Christianity by "faith alone, in Christ alone." Paul could barely fathom that he was still breathing after he heard the Lord's voice and his indictment. After all, he had been in grave error, and Christ's enemy when he heard His voice.

May I ask you, in light of what Paul did to Christians, did he deserve to be saved? Let me direct this question more pointedly: Think of how you were before the Lord found you. Did you deserve to be saved then? Was your life any better than Paul's? Your answers to these questions are vital to measuring the gauge of your understanding of grace. In retrospect to Paul's situation before he was graced-out, he lamented, "It is a trustworthy [*Greek: pistos = worthy to be believed*] statement, deserving full acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, among whom I am foremost of all" (I Timothy 1:15). Yes, you read it correctly! He claimed to be the worst sinner in human history!! Verily, it was at this juncture of Paul's realization of his pre and post-salvation status that the lyrics of the song Amazing Grace could be properly understood:

*Amazing grace! How sweet the sound
That saved a WRETCH like me!
I once was LOST, but now am FOUND
Was BLIND, but now I SEE*

*'Tis grace that taught my heart to fear
And grace my fears relieved;
HOW PRECIOUS DID THAT GRACE APPEAR
THE HOUR WHEN I FIRST BELIEVED*

Not surprisingly, the word "grace" occurs 170 times in the Bible, and the greatest apostle in human history, Paul, used it more than 93 times in his epistles. There is no room for doubt in my mind that no one in all of Scripture, with the exception of Christ in His humanity, had a grip on grace more than the apostle Paul! It would have been difficult for him to finish an epistle without an outpouring of Grace. Grace, to Paul, was the air he breathed in and the air he breathed out. To that end, he's a trophy of grace!

SAMPLES OF APPLICATION OF BIBLE DOCTRINE

Expressions such as, "What a wonderful study of Grace." "Moses, you did a great job." "I have a better understanding of grace now" and so on, are meaningless unless its truth has soaked into your soul and leaks out in your thinking and actions. No one doubts that application of Bible doctrine is the most difficult thing under the spiritual dome; however, it is doable only through the empowerment of the ministry of God the Holy

Spirit, who indwells and works within us. With this in mind, we throw out a random sampling of application:

1. The power lust temptation: Through the application of Bible doctrine resident in a believer's soul, he never seeks to be recognized, or be promoted in any way. He insulates himself with the shimmering truth that true promotion is of the Lord. Further, he knows that his happiness in this life has no connection to promotion. He is content in all circumstances.

2. The temptation to control others: The believer outright rejects the temptation to make "one-mold-fit-all." He reminds himself that God has given each individual the ability to make his own mold and to operate within the limit that He allows him. Thus the believer restricts himself from interfering with God's decree.

3. The temptation to seek approbation: A believer contributes a lump sum of money to a local church or missionary organization and is tempted with approbation lust. The believer, armed with Bible doctrine, rejects the lust to be recognized; he doesn't wait for the pastor to publicize his name. He neither seeks great applause, nor a letter of praise from the congregation. Rather, doctrine in his soul causes him to rejoice, knowing that it is a great honor and privilege accorded him by God to participate in His service.

4. A believer is tempted to give a "bragomy" about what he is doing for the Lord; instead, he refuses to make his service an issue. But with joy, he embraces all that God is able to do for and through him because of His Son, Jesus Christ. He recognizes, that both his salvation and his call to be a co-laborer with God are all a matter of the grace of God.

5. A believer takes an inventory of his successes and is tempted to credit them to his own hard work and persistence: Through doctrine in his soul, he slams his brake on such temptation. Inside his soul, he identifies with Paul's words after his own inventory: "But by the grace of God I am what I am" (I Corinthians 15:10).

Paul, who had a grasp on grace, wrote this: "But by His doing [minus anyone's effort plus nothing] you are in Christ Jesus..." (I Corinthians 1:30a). And, "For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God; not as a result of works (of any kind), that no one may boast" (Ephesians 2:8, 9).

God is perfect and His work is perfect. God the Son purchased you (I Peter 1:18, 19)—perfect transaction. God the Holy Spirit sealed you (II Corinthians 1:22)—perfect sealing. God the Father keeps you saved by His power (John 10:29)—perfect security. Because God provides salvation in grace, and we are the beneficiaries of His grace, there's nothing to add.

"Now to Him who is able to keep you from stumbling (*losing your salvation*), and to make you stand in the presence of His glory blameless with great joy, to the only God our Savior, through Jesus Christ our Lord, be glory, majesty, dominion and authority, before all time and now and forever. Amen" (Jude 1:24-25).

SOURCE OF PAUL'S GRACE-ORIENTATION (To be continued volume 25—Lesson 11)

WORD OF ENCOURAGEMENT

The Lord is in charge of human history. Neither terrorists, circumstances, nor anyone else is capable of engineering the course of history. As a believer in the Lord Jesus Christ who is growing “in grace and in the knowledge of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ,” the Lord’s plan for you is a spectacular one! “‘For I know the plans that I have for you [a believer who is moving forward in God’s plan],’ declares the Lord, ‘plans for welfare and not for calamity to give you a future and a hope [an absolute confidence]’” (Jeremiah 29:11). What sublime comfort to know that a national disaster does not nullify God’s faithfulness to His word! No matter how dark the present seems, no matter how blurry the future looks, the bottom line is that His promises are “yes” and “Amen.” (II Corinthians 1:20).

King David testified, “I have been young, and now I am old, yet I have not seen [not even once] the righteous [a virtuous believer] forsaken, or his descendants begging bread [food]” (Psalm 37:25). “For the eyes of the Lord [run throughout] range the earth to strengthen those [believers who are advancing to the high ground] whose hearts are fully committed to Him” (II Chronicles 16:9). In lieu of this, you ought not to look into the future through the lens of September 11, 2001. “For we walk [look into the lens of the future] by faith, and not by sight [or current circumstances] (II Corinthians 5:7). “...for He Himself has said, ‘I WILL NEVER DESERT YOU, NOR WILL I EVER FORSAKE YOU’” (Hebrews 13:5b). So, notwithstanding your current situation, the Lord knows that He is under obligation to see you through; therefore, keep on waiting on Him, keep on trusting in Him, for He will see you through.

There are no two ways about it: “...Lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age.” (Matthew 28:20b). Has the end come yet? No, it hasn’t. This means that no matter what happens, as long as you are on His course and are growing in grace, you will gently float upon the ocean of His grace.