

Overview of
God's Grace



Moses C. Onwubiko

OVERVIEW OF GOD'S GRACE

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Printed in the United States of America

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Acknowledgments

May I take this moment to express my deepest appreciation to the board members of Grace Evangelistic Ministries and to the associates and churches who are partners with us in God's service. Your financial and prayer support is indeed yielding fruit for the glory of our Almighty God. Your commitment and dedication to our Lord's work is beyond human calculation!

My deepest gratitude goes to Colonel R. B. Thieme, Jr., formerly pastor of Berachah Church, 5139 West Alabama; Houston, Texas, for his faithful communication of sound Bible doctrine. Colonel Thieme is a prolific author, who possesses a noteworthy command of the original languages of the Bible: Hebrew, Greek, and Aramaic. For his perseverance on behalf of our Savior and His Word, I give unending thanks.

I am also profoundly grateful for the accurate systematic teaching of the late President and founder of Dallas Theological Seminary, Dr. Lewis Sperry Chafer, for his work on uncovering the truth of the Church Age.

To crown my gratitude, my standing ovation goes to my best Friend, the King of kings, Lord of lords, the bright Morning Star, my eternal Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. His efficacious sacrifice on the Cross more than 2000 years ago has made it possible for me to communicate the Word of God today in this book.

Moses C. Onwubiko

Open Invitation

The information in this book can't benefit you unless you are born again, that is born spiritually. The good news is that you can be born again into God's family at this very moment!

When our Lord Jesus Christ was hanging on the Cross, He had you personally on His mind. No sin has ever been committed, no matter how horrible, that wasn't poured out on to Jesus Christ on the Cross and judged (I Peter 2:24). As the God-Man, Jesus Christ endured all afflictions, insults, and pain so that He might provide eternal life for you. The issue now: Do you believe His payment for your sins is enough to get you to heaven?

Every good person has also sinned and falls short of God's perfect righteousness. God condemns everyone (Romans 3:23). Therefore, both the good and the bad need a Savior. Regardless of how good you have been or how sinful you have been or how terribly you have failed in the past, you can begin a new life as a member of God's family right now. How? Simply by silently telling God the Father that you are believing in His Son, Jesus Christ, as your personal Savior. The very second you put your trust in the Lord Jesus Christ, you automatically become a member of God's family! Jesus Christ Himself said:

“Unless you believe that I am He, you will die in your sins (John 8:24b).”

The issue is faith alone in Christ alone.

For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that [salvation] not of yourselves, it is the gift of God, not as a result of [human] works, so that no one may boast (Ephesians 2:8-9).

For God so loved the world [so much] that He gave His [only begotten] Son, [the uniquely-born One, so] that whoever [anyone, including you, who] believes in Him shall not [never] perish but have eternal life (John 3:16).

Will you believe in Him now? Faith alone in Christ alone is the only way to have eternal life. You may wish to pause now and believe in the Lord Jesus Christ. If you have believed in Him as your personal Savior, then continue to read.

To The Believer In Christ

Because you are a member of God's family through faith alone in Christ alone, you have direct access to your heavenly Father; therefore, your sins have become a family matter. In order to understand and benefit from reading this book, God the Holy Spirit must control your soul; however, the Holy Spirit can't control your soul if you have any unconfessed sin in your life.

If we confess [acknowledge] our sins, He [God the Father] is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins [known] and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness [unknown sins] (1 John 1:9).

In confession—the acknowledgment of your sins directly to God, not to others—you, the sinner, come to a common agreement with God on the fact that your negative thought or word or action was a sin. God has already condemned and judged it as a sin, and He expects you to admit to Him that it is a sin. Confession to God has been provided as the only means of being restored to a proper relationship with God after you sin. As with salvation, restoration to fellowship with God is based on grace alone and not on your works.

When you have no unconfessed sin in your life you are, once again, restored to fellowship with God. You are controlled by the Holy Spirit; who is no longer quenched or grieved. This is true spirituality.

Now in the privacy of your soul, you should pause and acknowledge any unconfessed sin(s) to God so that the Holy Spirit can make the doctrines in this book clear and effective in your life.

My Prayer for the Reader

Dear Heavenly Father,

Father, I pray for those who will read this book, that their minds may be fully enlightened with regard to Your unfathomable, unparalleled, immeasurable, and matchless grace. I humbly ask that their inner eyes be opened to behold “how wide and long and high and deep” is Your unchanging grace toward the entire human race. May their understanding of this doctrine serve as a link to other Biblical doctrines, such as salvation by grace and the eternal security of those who have personally trusted in the Lord Jesus Christ. May Your children, for whom this glimpse of Your grace is new, enjoy a sense of relief at the end of this Biblical exposition. And we ask that Your promise in John 8:32 which states, “You shall know the truth and the truth shall set you free,” be fulfilled for those who will approach this teaching with a humble heart and an open mind. May they be set free from the slavery of legalism. Thank you, Father, for answering this prayer, which is offered in the Name of the King of kings, Lord of lords, and our Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen.

Preface

You are living and operating in the Church Age, the most wonderful time of human history: a time when God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit reside in a believer's mortal body; a time of the completed canon of Scripture; a time when God's ***GRACE*** is highlighted, italicized, capitalized, and underscored! Simply put, there has never been a time like this in all of history.

Grace has been the anchor of God's policy in all His dealings with His creation; however, His grace is really brought to light in this period of human history. For instance, in the Jewish Age, God had a program which was governed by a set of laws: to be specific; 613 laws. Their spiritual life in those days was measured with the yardstick of the Mosaic Law. But on the Cross, Christ fulfilled the Law in its entirety, and instantly opened a new chapter for the entire human race. The apostle John pointed this out when he wrote,

For of His fullness we have all received, and [that's] grace upon grace. For the Law was given through Moses; **grace** and truth were realized [i.e., brought to light] through Jesus Christ (John 1:16-17).

For Christ is the END of the law for righteousness to everyone who believes (Romans 10:4).

This new chapter seriously affects how we live our spiritual lives and how we serve God, even in our offerings to local churches and missionary organizations. It is grace all the way!

Overview of God's Grace, is a foundational book on the issue of grace, designed to prepare the believer's soul with great expectation toward other grace books, such as *Paul: A Trophy of Grace*; *Joseph: A Pillar of Grace*; and *King David and His Lifestyle of Grace*.

Prologue

As a believer grows in his spiritual life and comes to understand the grace that God extends to him, his life becomes “sweeter than honey.” Show me a believer who understands grace and applies it, and I will show you a believer with a sweet life ... one who understands God and has great tranquility of soul. Knowledge of God’s grace toward us causes us to relax and brings us to a place of humility where we depend on God’s strength rather than our own. Grace causes us to become acutely aware that we depend entirely on Him.

Fellow believers in the Lord Jesus Christ, we hope this *Overview of God’s Grace* will encourage you to hold tenaciously to sound Bible doctrine and cause you to give the highest priority to learning God’s Word which will cause you to think with divine viewpoint. Bible doctrine is the anchor that provides tranquility of soul, contentment in life, and true happiness now and forever. No wonder the Psalmist challenged:

O taste and see that the Lord is good ... (Psalm 34:8a).

How sweet are Your words to my taste! Yes, sweeter than honey to my mouth! (Psalm 119:103).

We can tap into the rich resources of God’s happiness and His love by listening and meditating on His Word each and every day as taught by a well-prepared pastor-teacher. All other attempts to reach spirituality lead to self-induced misery!

The word “grace” should be a melody to the believer’s ears, but too few know its meaning. For the handful that do know, the joy is great! While, theologically, grace is the most difficult doctrine in Scripture, it is the very foundation of everything that we are in this life or will be in eternity. It is the basis of our salvation, atonement, propitiation, justification, regeneration, reconciliation, sanctification, redemption, and adoption into the Royal Family of God. Grace is the mirror image of who God is and a reflection of His handwork. Grace is like looking into the face of God.

David's clear understanding of grace was revealed in his Old Testament prayer:

“Blessed are You, O Lord God of Israel our Father, forever and ever. Yours, O Lord, is the greatness and the power and the glory and the victory and the majesty, indeed everything that is in the heavens and the earth; Yours is the dominion, O Lord, and You exalt Yourself as head over all. Both riches and honor come from You, and You rule over all, and in Your hand is power and might; and it lies in Your hand to make great and to strengthen everyone. Now therefore, our God, we thank You, and praise Your glorious name. But who am I and who are my people that we should be able to offer as generously as this? For all things come from You, and from Your hand we have given You. For we are sojourners before You, and tenants, as all our fathers were; our days on the earth are like a shadow, and there is no hope. O Lord our God, all this abundance that we have provided to build You a house for Your holy name, it is from Your hand, and all is Yours. Since I know, O my God, that You try the heart and delight in uprightness, I, in the integrity of my heart, have willingly offered all these things; so now with joy I have seen Your people, who are present here, make their offerings willingly to You. O Lord, the God of Abraham, Isaac and Israel, our fathers, preserve this forever in the intentions of the heart of Your people, and direct their heart to You.” (1 Chronicles 29:10b-18).

What a magnificent grace attitude! David knew that our *very best* adds up to nothing in the plan of God. If we don't fail Him by our actions, we fail Him in our thinking. Keep this point in mind as we roll up our sleeves and plunge into an *Overview of God's Grace* whose subject has been the target of distortion for centuries. We don't approach this study as though we have attained full understanding and application of grace, but as those who have been graced-out by God and given the privilege to communicate His grace. We will, all of us, be forever learning God's grace.

“Look at the birds of the air;
they do not sow or reap or store away in barns,
and yet your heavenly Father feeds them.
Are you not of more value than they?”
(Matthew 6:26 NIV)



“Are not two sparrows sold for a farthing?
and one of them shall not fall on the ground without your Father.
But the very hairs of your head are all numbered.
Fear ye not therefore, ye are of more value than many sparrows.”
(Matthew 10:29-31 KJV)

Grace at Large

Many believers have come short of living by grace because they don't understand the phrase, "UNMERITED FAVOR," which means a deed; an act of kindness proffered to someone who is undeserving. If the slightest merit on the part of the recipient is factored in, then it is no longer UNMERITED, but a reward or payment! It would be deserved! Here are four illustrations that will help introduce our subject:

Illustration 1: In high school, there was a fellow classmate whose academic performance was below standard. Apparently, he suffered from a type of mental impairment. He tried hard, but when he took tests, the results never reflected his effort, so he eventually dropped out.

On several occasions, the lad was caught cheating. One time, he copied from my test paper without my knowing it, and he was caught. How did the teacher know he cheated? The student not only copied my answers word-for-word, but 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 it will cause some of you to laugh (and it is funny); however, humor is not the purpose of my reflection. Imagine, for a moment, that the teacher ignored that student's academic crimes and gave him a passing grade or higher. Then, based on his academic records, the student is accepted at one of the best universities. In this case, that would have been UNMERITED FAVOR!

Illustration 2: The government has just advertised a position with a starting salary of \$150,000 per year which is to be filled as soon as possible. You apply for the position although you know you don't qualify. During the job interview, you learn that many applicants hold job-related doctoral degrees and each has completed

more than 15 years in the field, both of which are principle qualifications. Upon reviewing your *curriculum vitae*, the interviewer discovers that you don't have even a high school diploma, let alone a degree, and to top it off no experience. Just as the interviewer was about to laugh and tell you to hit the road, 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 he must obey, leans back in his chair somewhat shocked and disgruntled. Reluctantly, he says, "Be here tomorrow morning at 9:00!" Now that would be grace extended to an undeserving applicant: UNMERITED FAVOR! Unearned!

Illustration 3: Imagine owing the Internal Revenue Service \$100,000 in back taxes. You are cuffed, arrested, and told that you will stay in jail until the last penny is paid. The IRS has confiscated all your assets, and your bank account is overdrawn. You are helpless in making retribution and you have no doubt that you will live and die in prison! Yet, one day, a wealthy stranger hears of your plight, has great sympathy, and writes a check to your bank to cover every penny of what you owe the IRS and any accumulated bounce charges. To your astonishment, the jailer walks into your cell and tells you that the judge issued a release order, and you are free to go! Someone paid all your debts! Is there any doubt as to this being UNMERITED FAVOR? That's what grace is all about!

Illustration 4: Luke records our final illustration:

"... A man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho, and fell among robbers, and they stripped him and beat him, and went away leaving him half dead [helpless]. And by chance a priest was going down on that road, and when he saw him, he passed by on the other side. Likewise a Levite also, when he came to the place and saw him, passed by on the other side [ignoring him]. But a Samaritan, who was on a journey, came upon him; and when he saw him, he felt compassion, and came to him and bandaged up his wounds, pouring oil and wine on them; and he put him on his own beast, and brought him to an inn and took care of him. On the next day he took out two denarii and gave them to the innkeeper and said; 'Take care of him; and whatever more you spend, when I return I will repay you.'" (Luke 10:30-35).

This helpless man was the object of an UNMERITED FAVOR. He probably would have died, had the Samaritan—a total stranger—not come to his rescue.

Some principles emerge from these four illustrations:

- Neither lifestyle nor good deeds are ever an issue in receiving unmerited favor. If they were considered, even slightly, then the favor is no longer unmerited, but a reward or compensation.
- The credit in an unmerited favor belongs entirely to the giver.
- Once the gracious act is performed, it becomes irrevocable. If nothing is done to earn the favor, then nothing can be done to remove the favor.

Understanding Grace

The Lexical Aids (Greek Dictionary) to the New Testament defines grace (Greek: *charis*; Hebrew: *hen*) 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 Holy Spirit employed the writers of Scripture to convey a variety of meanings to the word Grace ranging from *goodwill and mercy to kindness given by a master to his slave*. It has come to signify the kindness of God toward undeserving man. What is at issue in our definition is the integrity of the one performing the favor—the giver. If the giver has an ulterior motive, such as secretly wishing for something in return, it is not grace at all. Expecting something in return is not an uncommon practice among men, but it is blasphemous to assume that God deals with us in this manner. Such a view reduces God’s divine essence into something base, humanizing God. If we humanize God (assign human tendencies to Him), then He is vulnerable to failure and likely to break promises. If that were the case, He wouldn’t be God. So let’s look at a few of God’s attributes that distinguish Him from the human race, keeping in mind Isaiah:

For My thoughts are not your thoughts, nor are your ways [of doing things] My ways ... for as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are My ways higher than your ways and My thoughts [higher] than your thoughts (Isaiah 55:8, 9).

Understanding God: The Provider of Grace

Attributes of God Revisited

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. The Psalmist declared, “Righteousness and

justice are the foundation of Your throne ...” (Psalm 89:14a). And the Bible makes it clear that “... His righteousness endures forever” (Psalm 111:3). Therefore, it would be blasphemous to think that God has an ulterior motive when He does a favor for a helpless member of the human race! A synonym for an ulterior motive is hypocrisy. So, thinking that God wants something in return for His blessings would be the same as calling Him a hypocrite. God is not a hypocrite; God is Righteous!

God is Veracity: God cannot and will not lie. If God lied just one time it would destroy His integrity, which is insulated in righteousness and justice. The very thought is blasphemous and would dash forever our hope in Him for eternal salvation, and Satan and all his rebellious angels would escape the Lake of Fire! Indeed, every believer should take GREAT comfort in knowing that nothing in heaven or on earth could ever move God to lie. “God is not a man, that He should lie, nor a son of man, that He should repent [change His mind]” (Numbers 23:19). Lying and changing one’s mind is associated with the human race, not God. God cannot say one thing and mean another.

God is Immutable: Immutability means that God cannot change. All 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 profane assumption to ever think that a person’s obnoxious behavior could cause an attribute or policy of God to change or that good behavior could cause grace blessings. “For I, the Lord, do not change; therefore you, O sons of Jacob, are not consumed” (Malachi 3:6). The sons of Jacob (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 deserved total annihilation. But, fortunately for Israel, divine viewpoint always supersedes human viewpoint. God’s immutability ensures that He always keeps His promises.

In not understanding God and His essence (character), millions of believers try to humanize Him, and by doing so make a mockery of themselves and of God. They shout “hallelujah!” while clapping their hands and jumping around ... and they think God is jumping with them. When they cry, they think God cries with them! People assume they can manipulate God with their whims and antics. Our Father’s love does not swing like the pendulum of human love. God’s happiness and favor does not and cannot depend on our

moods, our sincerity, or our deeds, because His love (1 John 4:8) is fixed. He loves us the same whether we fail or succeed. To say that God changes His love toward us according to our behavior is to humanize God. We need to be secure in His unchanging love; but we also need to show the proper respect to a holy and awesome God. Just consider how many times you fail God in a day, a week, a month, or a year. How often do you pause to name those failures according to 1 John 1:9?

Simply put, no aspect of our Father's essence can be altered by human failure or success. Gratefully, His Immutability stands guard over the rest of His essence (attributes): Eternal Life, Justice, Sovereignty, Love, Omnipresence, Omniscience, and Omnipotence. In light of this, 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). It makes sense to conclude that since God says that our salvation is the product of His grace (Ephesians 2:8), He meant just that and NOTHING ELSE! God does not possess mood-swings.

Failure to understand that God is not a man, or that He does not bless us based on the meritorious works of the flesh, has caused many believers to reject accurate knowledge about God and His plan. They have great difficulty believing that God derives His pleasure solely from what He does for man and never from what man does for Him. Understanding this concept is a major hurdle that needs to be cleared for the believer to continue his spiritual advance. Believers by the millions operate under the erroneous concept that God will bless them because of what they do for God or what they give up doing. 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.

For example: Believers may get involved in activism by functioning in one of two camps: 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 point of view that they rationalize 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 uninformed or self absorbed 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 burning and bombing of abortion clinics, and destroying the property of others in the name of serving God. Such behavior violates the right of private property—God’s law. We hear reports of murder and of 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 or the more you give, 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 and to fulfill God’s mandates. Arrogance makes activism more attractive than just advancing in the spiritual life, thus they are seduced by their own false 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 there before God. (1 Chronicles 13:5, 7, 9-10 NIV).

Uzzah died trying to help God. Because the Ark of the Covenant was sacred Uzzah thought it more important to protect the Ark from falling than to obey God's commandment not to touch it. 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 feelings, over the Word of God. By doing so, they violate God's mandates, and set themselves up for maximum divine discipline from the Bar of His Eternal Justice. 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. Such actions will bring judgement and the Bible tells us "It is a terrifying thing to fall into the hands of the living God" (Hebrews 10:31).

Meaning of Grace/Favor: Now that we have established that it is ABSOLUTELY IMPOSSIBLE for God to lie or to change His mind or to break promises, let's put the definition of grace under the microscope:

"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."

Let's put this definition under the microscope. There's no better example of the first phrase, "*A favor done without expectation of return ...*" than our Lord Himself:

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 [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—and 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 NIV).

There's no account that Christ caused the leprosy to return to them, nor should there be! If He had caused a relapse, then what He did for them wasn't a gracious act of mercy, but it anticipated a “thank you” in return. Their attitude did not cause our Lord to grace them out in the first place, neither did their lousy attitude cause Him to remove His grace. We'll learn more about the Giver of grace as we begin to look at the initial recipients of grace: Our first parents.

Mankind: Recipient of Grace

Man: Candidate for Salvation

Adam and Eve became candidates for salvation the instant they chose to disobey God. Right then our first parents died spiritually and we inherit their spiritual death. Did you know that we are all born spiritually dead and we can do nothing to change that? 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 [spiritual] death spread to all men, because all sinned—”(Romans 5:12).

Adam and Eve were now on the opposite side of a barrier between themselves and God—candidates for His saving grace.

What can a corpse do to improve its helpless status? Nothing! Is it any different with the spiritually dead? No! So what could God possibly have to do with the spiritually dead? Or more to the point, what would a spiritually dead corpse have to do with God—his enemy?

Once you were alienated from God and were enemies in your minds because of your evil behaviors [spiritual death] (Colossians 1:21 NIV).

In the human realm, enemies have only animosity and the potential to war in common. Do pilots of enemy aircraft, engaged in battle, smile and wave at each other? No! They endeavor to destroy one another. Similarly, as God's enemies, one would think that His objective would have been to destroy every member of the human race, "For [since] all have sinned [or have become God's enemies] and fall short of the glory of God" (Romans 3:23). However, He chose a way to deal with us: GRACE—unmerited favor!

The Provider of Man's Salvation

You see, at just at the right time, when we were still powerless [spiritually dead], Christ died for the ungodly [sinners] (Romans 5:6 NIV).

But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were yet [still] sinners, Christ died [as a substitute] for us (Romans 5:8).

God took His salvation solution to the entire human race by imputing all the sins of the whole world to Christ on the Cross and judged each one of those sins by His justice. But there was a problem; we were all spiritually dead, incapable of understanding 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 2:14a NIV).

God the Holy Spirit came to the rescue with a perfect solution; a temporary understanding of what the Trinity, (God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Spirit), has done for us. However, He does not go beyond making the issue of salvation clear. If He did, that would be an intrusion on the free will of mankind. Did we merit this perfect solution? Emphatically NO! This is God's grace in action—providing for mankind and removing that impassable barrier for anyone who believes in the work of Christ on the cross—doing for mankind what he could not do for himself.

Why does God bother? Why didn't He just let us die and go to the Lake of Fire forever? He surely didn't need our help to maintain

His eternal status, nor does He need us for His happiness. The author of the Book of Job asked this question: “Can a man be profitable to God? Or a wise man be profitable to himself?” (Job 22:2). And God, Himself, poses the question: “Who has a claim against Me that I must pay? Everything under heaven belongs to Me” (Job 41:11 NIV). Simply put, God does not benefit from us, we benefit from Him. We can see that King David was overwhelmed by God’s grace when he asked, “What is man, that You take thought of him, and the son of man that You care for him?” (Psalm 8:4). The question, again, is why did God choose to rescue us—the totally depraved and totally undeserving—rather than just let us slip away?

The Scripture has the answer:

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).

He LOVES us and has MERCY toward us.

Concerning mercy, most people have, at one time or another, performed an act of mercy toward a needy individual. Think about it: If a mere mortal, with an Old Sin Nature, can offer mercy without expecting anything in return, how much more God—the Author of mercy—can offer! He extends mercy by providing salvation to those who believe in Christ with no condition attached—faith alone in Christ alone—expecting nothing in return. After all, what could a spiritually dead and helpless person do to merit the gift of eternal life? Concerning His love, whether the recipients of His grace are grateful or not, His love remains constant, it neither increases nor diminishes and takes nothing back (Romans 11:29)! He welcomes our gratitude, but He cannot be manipulated by it. Our lack of gratitude cannot upset Him; our positive response cannot make Him happier.

Man’s Efforts Excluded from Grace

Many false teachers have tried to add works to saving grace, causing grave error. What is most disturbing is that a large number of these false teachers are theologians. They ignore the interpretive principle of “illegitimate totality transfer” which is an attempt to bring meaning to a word that cannot be possible in light of the

context. For instance, when anyone suggests human effort (works), such as baptism or “making Christ Lord,” as a condition for salvation, he has a head-on-collision with Romans 11:6: “But if it [salvation] is by grace, it is no longer by works, otherwise grace is no longer grace.” Furthermore, those who say that grace means bearing good fruit are polluting the Word. Scripture reveals that grace means only one thing: UNMERITED FAVOR, and that’s it!

Failure to distinguish between *grace* and *works* and between *spiritual birth* and *growth* has distorted the entire meaning of grace. Just as no one would deny a birth certificate or citizenship to a newborn because of his lack of physical development, similarly our lack of spiritual growth 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 that because of His matchless grace, any believer can make spiritual progress on a daily basis. Appreciation for the grace of God does not change the objective to glorify God—rather, it gives a sense of relief to know that salvation, as well as spiritual growth, and the resultant glorification of God are a matter of His grace alone.

You may be thinking that the reason God saves those who place their faith in Christ is so they will worship Him. This is true, but do you know that no one can worship, serve, or glorify God apart from the ministry of God the Holy Spirit? And, let’s not forget the *filling of the Holy Spirit* that we are given when we recover fellowship by simply naming our sins to God.

If we confess [acknowledge] our sins, He [God the Father] is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins [known] and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness [unknown and forgotten sins] (1 John 1:9)

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, and He gave us the necessary spiritual tools to accomplish just that—in grace. We did nothing to earn those tools. He even gave us the free will to choose to use them or not! Thankfully, the grace of God continues after salvation. He is the One who provided physical life at birth, salvation by means

of Christ, the choice of how we live our spiritual life after salvation, and the means to accomplish it through God the Holy Spirit. Our efforts are excluded, both before and after salvation. Grace is the only way to bridge the gap between His perfect plan and imperfect man.

His divine operation must remain perfect, and if any part of it depended upon us, it would cease to be perfect. We put ourselves into the equation when we think that God cannot do without us, that our efforts and contributions can sway His decisions. This erroneous thinking leads many, in their self-absorption, to keep a mental list of what they've done for God. Some think they are so important that a church or Christian organization could not survive without them. This kind of arrogance is a spiritual deficiency or malnutrition of the soul. The sad result is that these believers seldom come to understand grace.

The Unfailing Love of God

Absolute Freeness of God's Lovingkindness to Men

The second phrase of our definition of grace is, “**absolute freeness of the loving kindness of God to men.**” The Hebrew noun for lovingkindness is *chesed* and 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, goodwill, favor, mercy, and **unfailing love**.

In the Septuagint (third century B.C.), the Jewish translators of the Old Testament Hebrew text rendered *chesed* as “mercy” or “compassion.” The concept of grace is always in view and always originates from God's integrity. Without integrity, lovingkindness would be impossible. When integrity fails, lovingkindness fails. But God's integrity can never fail; therefore, His lovingkindness never fails. Within this framework, let us carefully examine the word used to describe God's perfect love.

One Greek word in the New Testament summarizes God's unfailing love: *Agape*—the highest love of all. Not only does *agape* belong to God, it is His very being for “God is love” (1 John 4:8b). When used of God, *agape* is part of His essence, and love is fused with His integrity. *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” (1 Corinthians 13:8). Not only does God’s love never fail, it is perfect and eternal, because God is perfect and eternal. God’s love is not like ours which, thanks to human emotion, often waxes and wanes with circumstances, but God does not operate on emotion. Because of emotion, sometimes, human love swings like a pendulum, between love and hate. Because of His immutability, God’s love cannot increase or diminish as our love does. Whether a believer fails or succeeds in his spiritual life, God’s love remains the same, 24-hours a day, seven days a week, 365 days a year. It is both immutable and eternal!

Isn’t it a comfort to know that no matter how colossal our failure, God never fails us or stops loving us? Conversely, no matter how great our success, God does not love us more. We simply rest under the wings of His eternal love. Psalm 91:4 tells us just that: “He will cover you with His pinions, and under His wings you may seek refuge; His faithfulness is a shield and bulwark.”

God said:

I have loved you with an everlasting love; therefore, I have drawn you [to Myself] with lovingkindness [an unfailing love] (Jeremiah 31:3b).

The word translated “everlasting” is the Hebrew noun *owlam* which means, without end, lifetime, and always. **Simply put, God always loves us, no matter what.**

Though the mountains be shaken [or your failures be like a mountain], and the hills be removed, yet My unfailing love for you will not be shaken (Isaiah 54:10a NIV).

I will declare that Your love [unfailing love of God] stands firm forever (Psalm 89:2a).

Yet, we also need to keep in mind that whether we are being disciplined or blessed by the Lord, both are measured out to us from His love. We can be sure of fairness from the Supreme Court of Heaven because “Those whom the Lord loves [all believers] He disciplines, and He scourges every son whom He receives” (Hebrews 12:6). If love cannot fail, neither can any of love’s components fail, such as GRACE.

Let's highlight some principles about the **Unfailing Love of God** that we should never forget:

- God is free to express His unfailing love to us because of His grace (Romans 11:6).
- God is immutable so His unfailing love will never change toward us (Malachi 3:6).
- God's love is eternal because He is eternal, so His love for us is eternal (Deuteronomy 33:27a).
- We must exclude any of our efforts (Job 22:2).
- God's love exists with or without an object and it cannot fail (1 Corinthians 13:8).

Our Father derives His pleasure from His own integrity, rather than from mankind's response to it. For this reason, we must understand that the works of mankind are **TOTALLY SEPARATE** from grace. No one can perform a favor for God. The apostle Paul understood this great principle through the ministry of God the Holy Spirit. Paul endeavored to separate grace from any kind of works, and so we read:

And if [and it is the case] by grace, then it [salvation] is no longer by works; if it were [by works], grace would no longer be grace (Romans 11:6).

Grace and works are mutually exclusive; in other words, unmixable! They can never share the same space at the same time—as night and day cannot. Those who understood and were motivated by Paul's teaching laid the groundwork for one of the most magnificent periods of human history, the age of the Antonine Caesars. Paul's teaching about grace is preserved till today in the pages of his epistles. Nonetheless, it seems that very few people, including theologians, Bible scholars, pastors, and evangelists seem to understand the distinction in more than a superficial way. Throughout Scripture, we have only a few examples of those who really understood God's Word and followed His plan with precision, thereby having an invisible impact on history. Today, you have an equal opportunity with all believers (even Old Testament heroes) to reject all forms of legalism and master grace principles. Your success and the success of our nation depend upon your doing just that through the power of the Holy Spirit.

Love's Only Motive: the Bounty and Freeheartedness of God

God's grace to man "**finds its only motive in the bounty and freeheartedness 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 something for Him. Another way of saying it is there are no trade-offs with God. Instead, 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; however, no believer is a generous giver apart from gratitude in his soul (2 Corinthians 9:6-12). And no believer can develop gratitude in his soul apart from the consistent intake and application of Bible doctrine. Harboring an ulterior motive that God will bless in return is not giving at all.

God does things for us solely on the basis of His integrity—for instance, 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 man's spiritual death, he is separated from God. If God is intolerant of sin in man, what does the Bible mean by: "For God so loved the world [sinners—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—it 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 and barely breathing. 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 will your heavenly Father give ...?” (Luke 11:13).

That’s to imply, if sinful man can do honorable things for his fellow man, isn’t it reasonable to conclude that a gracious God will far-exceed man’s best efforts? Your rescue demonstrated a genuine love for this helpless child.

Upon learning that she is orphaned you decide to go a step further. You prepare a room for her in your home, and while waiting for her discharge from the hospital, you 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 wondering how this helpless child might pay you back one day? Or that she might support you in your old age? Likely, your only motive is from your bounty and freeheartedness. You are thinking about her well-being. If she lived with you until adulthood, and then moved away without caring to ever visit or to say thank you, would her attitude have redirected your act of human decency had you known it ahead of time? 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, were the rescuer in this illustration, think about your Creator—God, full of mercy, unfailing love, possessing matchless grace. Would God take back what His Son did for us on the Cross because of our indifference or sin? A thousand times, No!

The most important thing to remember 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 freeheartedness of the Giver, unearned and unmerited favor.” This brings us to the last phrase.

Man’s Unearned and Unmerited Favor

This last phrase of our definition of grace takes us to the heart of our subject, which we could not help but touch on throughout our dissertation, thus far. This phrase stresses that the recipient of grace

is without any merit; therefore, like the helpless orphan girl in our first illustration, he has nothing about which to boast.

Or, take for example, a warden who receives a letter from the governor, pardoning a criminal on the day of his execution. The execution was canceled because of the governor's act of mercy, and not because of any merit of the criminal. Clearly, this is "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 and took her, and when she came to him, he lay with her ... and the woman conceived; and she sent and told David, and said, "I am pregnant" (2 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 her husband was the father of her child. Talk about hypocrisy! David was caught in the net—the tangled web of deception. But Bathsheba's husband, Uriah, refused to enter his home as it would have broken a military honor code.

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 (2 Samuel 11:11).

As an officer in David's army, Uriah understood his primary responsibility was to the war.

After he exhausted all avenues, even trying to get Uriah drunk enough to go home, David devised a plan to murder Uriah on the field of battle. David then took Bathsheba as his wife!! Amazingly, this same David was one of the greatest believers of the Old Testament—"a man after [God's] own heart" (Acts 13:22). Keep in mind

that our Lord Jesus Christ, in His humanity, was a direct descendant of David and Bathsheba: Evidence that God treats all sinners in Grace.

More times than not, believers are shocked when a fellow-believer commits a scandalous sin. Or some even argue that they were never “really saved.” Except for the sin of unbelief in the Lord Jesus Christ as personal Savior, you can 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 the believer ignores the restraints, he is guaranteed to make a bigger fool of himself than an unbeliever can.

Are you tempted to ask, “How could a believer commit immoral acts, such as adultery and murder?” If so, pay very close attention to this crucial 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 he [anyone] struck him [someone] down with an iron object, so that he died, he is a murderer; the murderer shall surely be put to death” (Numbers 35:16). In that regard, David was indicted by the Supreme Court of Heaven as a murderer and God sent the prophet Nathan to confront David:

“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” (2 Samuel 12:9).

According to the indictment, what King David earned and deserved was death! Instead, by admitting his sins to God the Father, David received grace—a favor which he neither earned nor deserved. As a result, his death sentence was commuted:

“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” (2 Samuel 12:11, 13).

Just like the governor in our illustration who pardoned a man who had been sentenced to die.

Hence we arrive, once more, at the doorstep of our 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.”* Here are some important principles which should be part of our thinking, thus far in our doctrinal journey:

1. God the Father, God the Son, and God 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. Because of His immutability, God’s happiness does not increase or decrease. Misunderstanding this principle is the primary reason that 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 doing things for God, they will make God happier and perhaps become objects of His blessing. Nothing could be further from the truth. 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:

You [God] will make known to me the path of life;
in Your presence is fullness of joy; in Your right
hand there are pleasures forever (Psalm 16:11).

4. 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 or weight 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.
5. 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 temptation 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!

6. Therefore, when God saved us by His grace, He recognized that we would remain imperfect, and helpless to keep ourselves pure. In lieu of this fact, He maintains His grace policy towards us—the totally undeserving ones.

Before we move forward, may I remind you that the purpose of this doctrinal study is to open believers' eyes to the grace of God, so that they may understand and appreciate the grace of God toward them and thus serve Him with awe and reverence. Understanding many other biblical doctrines depends on a clear understanding of grace. False doctrines—salvation by works, lordship salvation, and many others have been accepted because believers reject truth, especially 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 infallible Word of God.

We have scrutinized these phrases: “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 saw that grace is totally free from ulterior motives, and 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 our actions. 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. This is a great obstacle for believers who find it difficult to accept that God does not need their help, nor anyone else's. Not understanding this is the main thrust or reason why 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, ministers energize 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 bribing God with “seed money” or anything from the energy of the flesh, especially working to impress God. How can imperfection impress perfection? And 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 let this thought sink in before proceeding.

God Displays His Grace

In Creation

To round out our study, we need to examine God's grace as manifested in His creative acts. 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, all creation is shown to be dependent upon the Creator. 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 firstborn 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).

Also John the apostle tells us:

All things came into being by Him, and apart from Him nothing came into being that has come into being (John 1:3).

In Angels

God the Father in consultation with the Son, and the Holy Spirit decided 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).

God is perfect and His handiwork is always a reflection of His perfection! Therefore, all angels were created perfect, with the ability to think and to decide. Even Satan was described as the most beautiful angel: “You were blameless [perfect] in your ways from the day you were created ... Your heart [Satan’s] became proud on account of your beauty” (Ezekiel 28:15a, 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 [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 and brought angels into existence as perfect beings. The most beautiful and wisest was Satan who is quite often mistakenly portrayed as an ugly and grotesque creature. For all of his genius, Satan, in his blind arrogance was stupid enough to think that he could be like God.

In 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 worried about your life, as to what you will eat, or what you will drink; nor for your body, as to what you will put on. Is not life [Greek: *psuche* - the soul, or life 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, nor reap, nor gather into barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not worth much 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 NIV).

God’s grace toward His creation is a matter of His choice. His unique design for birds and animals provided for every aspect of their survival.

The Creation of Mankind

The Man: Adam

So far, we’ve learned in our study, that Adam and Eve were candidates for salvation the instant they chose to disobey God, but before we examine that further, I want you to consider whether there was anything man—who did not even exist prior to Creation—could have done to earn or deserve God’s provision. We are going to see how man, God’s very own creature, tried at first to provide his own solution.

Adam was the only man completely created by God, and it was pure grace when 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). His body was flawless and without a sin nature passed along by a human father; he had no human 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 still not finished. He

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). The animals and birds had companions, but Adam was alone. But God was not finished yet.

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.” *Aphar* is even used for a pile 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, for 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 in 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.

While Adam’s God-given soul is immortal, his body reverted to the chemicals of the soil at death (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). “And Abraham replied ... I am nothing but dust and ashes” (Genesis 18:27). 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 he had no negotiating power 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.

The 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]. 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] 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 them a perfect environment.

God's Grace in the Garden of Eden

The first man and woman didn't have to face rain, or storms, nor oppressive heat or freezing cold; they had perfect weather. There were no predatory animals to contend with; nothing to fear. No arguments, no tears—perfect soul rapport. They shared capacity for life, love, recreation, and happiness—perfect joy. Adam and Eve had all the food they could eat (Genesis 2:16)—perfect cuisine. And just think: No sin natures. But imagine, greater than all these things put together, Jesus Christ came every day to teach them Bible doctrine (Genesis 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. Do you recall that we briefly mentioned a great, prehistoric, angelic rebellion of

which Satan was the leader? God condemned the rebellious angels to eternity in the Lake of Fire, and Satan strongly protested the sentence and declared God to be unfair. So, God created man with the same ability to choose (volition) as the pre-revolutionary angels had in order to resolve the issue. Just like with angels, man was free to choose for or against God.

Then, God designed a volitional 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 2:16b, 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 (Genesis 9:1-3). We can sing with David over God’s creations:

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

We explained in our book, *The Biblical Doctrine of Salvation*, how Satan deceived the Woman (Genesis 3:1), and how both she and Adam chose to disobey God when they ate the forbidden fruit. Each was responsible (Genesis 3:6). The result was instant spiritual death—total separation from God—and their bodies began to age so that eventually they would die. But, the good news is that now that they were no longer “perfect” they became candidates for God’s salvation by grace, as we mentioned.

In their spiritual death, Adam and the Woman became aware of their nakedness and sought to adjust to each other and to God by

making clothing from fig leaves (Genesis 3:7). 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 we want to hammer in. Grace is GOD DOING ALL THE WORK and mankind receiving the results of HIS production! At best, their human good could only attempt to cover up—superficially—with fig leaves, never touching the real problem. So how does God deal with man’s failure?

What did God do? In Genesis 3:8, we read that “They heard the sound of the Lord God [Jesus Christ as a theophany—the only member of the Trinity who is visible] walking in the Garden in the cool of the day ...” What is the first thing God did? In grace, He reached out to 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 the man and his wife hid themselves from the presence of the Lord God among the trees of the Garden” (Genesis 3:8b). No doubt, they learned principles in their daily Bible class at the Lord’s feet and therefore should have realized:

“Where can I go from Your Spirit? Or where can I flee from Your presence? If I ascend to heaven, You are there; if I make my bed in Sheol [the grave], behold, You are there” (Psalm 139:7-8).

“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 NIV).

For the first time, Adam and the Woman had reason to avoid contact with their Creator, but God had no reason to avoid them. Grace always finds a way. **Always!**

“But the Lord God called to the man, ‘Where are you?’” (Genesis 3:9 NIV), or more accurately, “Why are you where you are?” Omniscient God was neither shocked nor surprised, nor did He need to search for their hiding place; He knew precisely where they were and why. He knew, billions of years ago, all that 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).

God told Jeremiah: “Before I formed you in [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?” (Genesis 3:11a), and then He went right to the cause, “Have you eaten from the tree that I commanded you not to eat?” (Genesis 3:11b). Of course God knew the answers; He knew them in detail gazillions 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, and I ate it” (Genesis 3:12 NIV).

Though he admits eating, Adam had trouble with his responsibility. He blamed others. Notice that he blamed 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” (Genesis 3:13b NIV).

Both replied accurately as to the facts, but neither was willing to take responsibility for their own decision. 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 didn’t debate the validity of their responses, nor did He impose the death penalty which He could have! Instead, grace found a way—immediately! As immutable God, His love for them did not change, but His righteousness demanded condemnation, and His justice executed it. Why? Judgment and condemnation must always precede salvation, thus making them candidates for God’s saving grace. 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 (ongoing spiritual battle between the fallen angels and elect angels). 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 plan for man’s salvation was complete. At the end of history Christ will return (Second Advent) and reign for 1,000 years. History ends with a battle where Christ physically defeats Satan (tactical victory) and casts him into the lake of fire forever. Every person, beginning with Adam and Eve, who has ever believed in Christ, will then go to the new heaven and new earth to live with Him forever. This tactical victory fulfills the strategic victory on the Cross. 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, and the ground was cursed so that Adam would have to work for their own survival. The Woman’s womb was activated so that she would bear children in pain. Recreation begun in the Garden became the means of procreation for the human race. After the sentencing, Adam re-named the Woman; now he called her Eve, the mother of all living (Genesis 3:20). God replaced their fig leaves (human good) with animal skins (divine good, Genesis 3:21) before banning them from the Garden of Eden forever (Genesis 3:23-24). God offered salvation on His terms, rejecting human good (represented by the fig leaves) outright. The blood sacrifice of an innocent animal, which provided new clothing for Adam and Eve, was a type (prototype 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.

Adam and Eve accepted the animal skin covering provided for them by the same theophany of Christ who came in the cool of the evening to teach them. They chose God’s way—the redemption solution He provided for them—rather than their way. Choosing God’s solution to their sinful state, rather than their own, is the non-meritorious equivalent of faith alone in Christ alone. By their faith in the Lord and His grace provision for them they were regenerated, just as Church Age believers are today. Adam and Eve would live out their lives with sin natures, which their progeny would genetically inherit, but when their bodies died, their immortal souls would be in a place of great blessing. They were given, by means of grace, eternal life—far better than perfect environment.

Grace Found a Way

God's Redemption Solution: Human Good Rejected

God completely and totally rejected “Operation Fig Leaf” (Adam and Eve’s human good) and then offered His blueprint for salvation. This was grace in action:

1. A favor done without expectation of return (man has nothing good to offer God in return).
2. Absolute freeness of the loving kindness of God to men (first to Adam and Eve, then to each person ever born).
3. Finding its only motive in the bounty and freeheartedness of the Giver.
4. Unearned and unmerited favor.

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 2,000 years ago to what happened on the Cross, Adam and Eve looked forward to it. The object of their faith was exactly the same as ours; the Lord Jesus Christ. 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 to whom every sin was imputed and who was judged as a substitute for each person in the entire human race.

By way of review, these nine important lessons have emerged:

Lesson 1: 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.

Lesson 2: At the Fall (spiritual death), man became imperfect so that whatever he does from his own strength (human good) reflects his imperfect character. What is in the soul comes out in action and deed.

Lesson 3: Beginning in the Garden of Eden with “Operation Fig Leaf”, all human efforts to win God’s approval are rejected.

Lesson 4: As the offspring of Adam, all mankind share his sinful nature (Romans 5:12).

Lesson 5: Nothing man does impresses God (Isaiah 64.6); God is only impressed with His own work.

Lesson 6: Salvation is totally and completely the work of God alone. 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 (1 Corinthians 1:30).

Lesson 7: If one desires salvation, he must accept divine provision by means of faith alone in Christ alone, apart from any human good (Ephesians 2:8-9).

Lesson 8: 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).

Lesson 9: 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)—eternal transaction. He sealed you with His Holy Spirit (2 Corinthians 1:22)—eternal sealing. He is the One who keeps you [saved] by His power (John 10:29)—eternal security. God began your salvation with grace, and you will enjoy His grace forever.

The Overwhelming Significance of Grace

As stated, and it deserves repeating, few subjects in Scripture are more difficult to comprehend than the grace of God. However, 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 Leaf") and God's divine solution (grace). There are two important questions that remain in order to round out our discussion on God's grace in the creation of man.

- What did man contribute during his creation?
- What motivated man's behavior after the fall, specifically, "Operation Fig Leaf"?

What Did Man Contribute at His Creation?

The answer ought to be apparent, 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 points out that clay is helpless to shape itself into something useful. Thus, when the Lord God formed man in the Garden, God had to do all the work. Can a lifeless corpse participate in its own burial? Of course not. Nor could the lifeless body of Adam begin to

breathe of its own accord. The creation of Adam was complete—including body, soul, and spirit—uniquely created in God’s shadow-image, by God, and without anyone’s advice or assistance. This brings us to the last question.

What Motivated Adam’s Behavior After the Fall?

The answer to this question is simplistic—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 (free 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 physically, God imputes Adam’s original sin, so we are born physically alive but spiritually dead. Like Adam and the Woman, the very best that we can produce with a sin nature in spiritual death is what is called human good. And the engine that runs 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 which is produced by the sin nature’s area of strength. When human good—which is always rejected by God—intensifies and distorts Bible doctrine or divine establishment it becomes evil.

We saw that Adam and the Woman chose the sin of fear when confronted by God (Chapter 3). And, before the Lord approached them, their attempt to cover their nakedness was but an act of human good. The lust for approval (from the sin nature) 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. Each, alone, decided what they were going to do, and they did it.

Today, Satan's forces are busily 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 around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour [destroy] (1 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 egocentric, legalistic, believers who have become involved in Christian activism, lordship-salvation, salvation-by-works, and other man made programs. 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. We are now poised to examine God's grace toward Abraham.

God's Grace Toward Abraham

Who was Abraham? What did he do to cause God to impute His perfect righteousness to him? And precisely what did he do to cause God to make his name great? What kind of magnificent work did Abraham perform that earned him the title "A friend of God forever?" Let us pay close attention to the grace of God toward Abraham, for 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. Abram became aware that it does not make sense to worship created things, animate or inanimate. The apostle Paul explained idolatry this way: "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 1:22-23). Abram broke with his family tradition and pursued his desire to know the true God.

During His incarnation Christ said, “For the Son of man came to seek and to save what was lost” (Luke 19:10). We saw evidence of this when God sought Adam after his failure in Genesis 3:9. God always reveals Himself to those who respond positively. Abram was no exception. God brought Abraham first to Haran where his father died, and then to Canaan. Sometime in his life journey, he became God conscious and later placed his trust in the Lord Jesus Christ (Genesis 15:6). That is the sweetness of grace.

God could have abandoned Adam and Eve and left them to wander, but He did not. He could have left Abram in Ur or Haran seeking the one true God, but He did not. And far more personal, He could have left you and me, without hope and in a depraved condition with only 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.” Now that’s grace!

The Imputation of God’s Righteousness to Abraham

Then he [Abram] believed in the Lord [Jesus Christ]; and He [God the Father] reckoned [Hebrew: *chashab*—imputed, credited] it to him [Abraham] as righteousness (Genesis 15:6).

According to the *Lexical Aids to the Old Testament*, God registered faith [in Christ] as tantamount to exoneration, 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. Through Him [Christ Jesus] everyone [including Abraham] who believes, is justified from everything you could not be justified from by the Law of Moses [justification-by-circumcision, lordship-justification, justification-by-works, justification-by-baptism, and so on and so forth] (Acts 13:38-39).

Getting back to our question, what kind of work did Abram do that caused God to impute His very own righteousness to him? What is your answer to this? If you are among the lordship-salvation, salvation-by-works, or salvation-by-baptism crowd, you may want to pause and rethink your position. Why? Because the answer from

the Bible makes it very clear: Abram’s salvation by faith alone in Christ alone 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? If there is, could it be perpetuated day in and day out, moment-by-moment, until our bodies return to dust and ash?

Paul Vigorously Defends Abraham’s Faith Alone In Christ Alone

The apostle Paul analyzed Abraham’s faith. Beginning in Romans 4:1, Paul 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 CREDITED TO HIM AS RIGHTEOUSNESS” [quoting Genesis 15:6]. Now to the one who works [any kind], his wage is not credited as a 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 credited as righteousness, just as David also speaks of the blessing on the man to whom God credits 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).

Grace vs. Works

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 remain until 9 P.M.—every day, seven days a week. You and your coworkers sweat 15 long hours for XYZ and have only nine hours to do other things such as cooking, eating, bathing, and, of course, sleeping. At the end of the month, the manager hands you a check and says, “This check is a favor from XYZ to you.” How would you reply? Would you grab

the check and sarcastically say, “Yeah, right!” or would you politely say to him, “Don’t you mean it’s payment for all my hard work, it’s not a favor.”

Another scenario: You are a parent of a large, but poor family. You can’t afford to buy a used bicycle, let alone a car. Everyday, 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 dealership and purchases an automobile. Early one morning, he arrives at your doorstep just as you’re ready to leave for work. He rings the doorbell, and says, “Here’s the key to your very own car—it is my gift to you.” How would you respond? Would you say to him, “Give me that key; I deserve this.” But more to the point, how would you feel when driving that car? A normal person would probably be overwhelmed and speechless for some time! The individual may even be too shaky to drive. Only you and the giver know that you didn’t work for it, nor did you 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 working, 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 life in general, but how illogical they become in spiritual matters. 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 doesn’t even make sense! Or, based on the definition of grace, how can one try to add works to grace? It’s like adding oil to water—they still don’t mix! What the apostle illustrates in Romans is that works are works; and grace is grace. But most importantly, he demonstrates without question that all attempts to add works to grace result 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).

Breaking this argument down to a simple illustration: If you add poison to water the water is now contaminated and becomes poisonous. Likewise adding works to grace contaminates and nullifies grace.

The apostle Paul continues to defend his argument:

Defense 1: Circumcision—A Work

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 false teachers who have little or no knowledge of the grace of God. The apostle Paul puts his defense on the table:

How then was it [faith] credited [for righteousness]? While he [Abraham] was circumcised, or uncircumcised? Not while circumcised, but while uncircumcised[!] (Romans 4:10).

Paul asks his readers to remember their history; Abram was a believer long before he circumcised himself and God changed his name from Abram to Abraham at age 99. The act of circumcision (a symbol of human work) 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 3:19a, 20a).

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 a 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 Paul 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 it [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. If the salvation-by-works crowd had 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's the theologians and ministers of the Word who, by their failure to examine the infallible Word of God using isagogics, exegesis, and categories, who have introduced religion and brought chaos within the ranks of Christianity. Their isagogics remove 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 of 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 upon precept, line upon line” (Isaiah 28:10). Instead, false doctrines such as “salvation by inviting-Christ-into-your-heart,” and many others dominate the theological landscape. Neither our Lord nor the apostles ever taught these false concepts, 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 may 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 (2 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 God's perfect righteousness. Scripture clearly contradicts anyone who would claim otherwise. Anything (and 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!

Are There 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 a twist. Of course, the exact opposite is true. Just as God does all the work in salvation, so He does the work after salvation. God hasn't 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 (Old Sin Nature 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. This is the good works spoken of in Ephesians 2:10. *The issue is never what the work is, but rather who does the work and who's in control.* As in salvation, so in your spiritual life after salvation, God does all the work (Philippians 2:13).

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 arrogant 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 [grace 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).

Herein lies one of the true beauties of grace—two omnipotent hands hold up the believer! How could it get any 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 began your salvation with grace, and you will enjoy His grace forever.

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 [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).

Condemnation

Condemnation in the Garden

Now, let's go back to the Garden, where we learned that God pursued Adam and the Woman after they died spiritually. While they tried to hide, God 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 didn't have the eternal life necessary to live with God. Despite its inherent ugliness, the underlying 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. It would be like trying to save a man from drowning when he's not even WET!

Condemnation at Birth

With the exception of the virgin-born humanity of Christ, every innocent babe 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 can do nothing to cause your own 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: Spiritually dead and totally depraved. 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. In spiritual death and separated from God, Adam was in no position to make peace with God, so he hid. Yet, it was when he was totally disobedient to God that God promised a Savior:

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).

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 God-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. 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).

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).

Why Did God Create Man?

So why did God create man knowing (in His Omniscience) that man would fail? God is not the author of sin and did not decree sin or failure, but He did know all about them beforehand. David was well aware of God's omniscience when he 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 on my tongue, 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, 16 NIV).

The answer to our question is that **Man had to be a volitional creature, able to choose for or against God in order to resolve Satan's appeal.** Remember 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 had many volitional tests that we've failed. Many of these failures are 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. When you fail, you may expect punishment that is fair and always perfect because God is perfect. It bears repeating: No one ever earns or deserves God's love or grace. God's love is eternal and immutable, and 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 never ignores you. Whether spiritual or carnal, His grace policy continues without a hitch. On the Cross, Jesus Christ paid the penalty for all our sins in full. But, in Time, our personal sin destroys our fellowship with

God and removes us from the spiritual life. You instantly become a carnal believer. And if you refuse to use 1 John 1:9 to recover your fellowship, you invite discipline and make your own misery. You set your life in motion in a negative direction. Instead of advancing through the perception and application of doctrine, you are retreating.

In fellowship, God's **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 carnal believer meets the sin face-to-face with death—a miserable and horrible death. But all the while, through warning punishment, intensive punishment, and dying punishment, God's love for you does not change. When you die you will go to heaven—God's grace, love, and integrity guarantee it. However, you will miss out on all the wonderful, unique blessings God has designed just for you, personally, because you did not acquire the capacity from doctrine to receive them. 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, and you didn't see its value. So instead, you received the discipline God 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 very reason man was created is to choose.

The Protoevangelium

Genesis 3:15 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 major victory. God's sentence on the Woman, on creation, and on Adam, followed. You will 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 for the human race—our Lord Jesus Christ.

And I will put enmity 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) (Genesis 3:15).

Let's scrutinize this vitally important declaration, but please keep in mind that Adam and Eve were now in spiritual death, and

A natural man (soulish; spiritually dead; an unbeliever without a human spirit) does not accept the things of the Spirit of God; for they are foolishness to him, and he cannot understand them, because they are spiritually appraised (1 Corinthians 2:14).

Therefore, it was God the Holy Spirit who made the Gospel clear to them as He does for the entire human race.

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 domain) makes himself an enemy of God (James 4:4b).

Enmity Between Satan and Christ

“... and between your seed and her seed” “Your seed” speaks of Satan’s followers ... unbelieving humans (cf. John 8:44), while “her seed” ultimately speaks to the humanity of the Messiah, our Lord Jesus Christ. Later in Isaiah 7:14, “HER seed” also emphasizes the unique virgin birth of Christ.

Christ’s Bruise

“... You shall bruise Him on the heel.” The bruise on the heel refers to the unparalleled suffering of Christ’s humanity on the Cross. (Note “Christ’s bruise on the heel” comes after “Satan’s bruise on the head” in the text. However the order is just the reverse in time.)

And He [Jesus Christ] was foreknown before the foundation of the world [in Eternity Past], but has appeared in these last times for the sake of you (1 Peter 1:20).

During those three hours of supernatural darkness, while Christ was on the Cross, 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 His heel wound was not fatal. Christ’s resurrection ensures that Satan’s rulership will terminate.

Satan’s Bruise

“... He shall bruise you on the head.” This phrase prophesies 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. Satan even sent his fallen angels to earth to intermingle with humans in an attempt to prevent Jesus Christ from being truly human. Children of angel/human parents would only be half human. Jesus Christ had to be truly human and truly God (Hypostatic Union) to be qualified to mediate

between God and Man (Genesis 6). God answered this great threat with an even greater flood, and the human race started over with Noah and his family (the only true humans left). (Genesis 6). God answered with the great flood, and the human race started over with Noah and his family. Satan's 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 1,000 years, and then Satan and his minions 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 (Revelation 20:11-15).

Adam and Eve neither earned nor deserved God's justice and grace on that great day, nor has anyone since then. God the Son would come as a servant to become the sin offering for the entire world! Succeeding generations learned many more details about the coming Messiah; each generation was responsible for making a decision based on the knowledge they had. Throughout all time 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 slavery to hone the character of the Israelites. Now it was time for nationhood. Nine plagues were released on Egypt by God to convince Pharaoh that he should free the Israelites, God's chosen people. Each plague put more pressure on Egypt and demonstrated the awesome power of the God Israel served. But Pharaoh remained unmoved. So, in one night, the tenth and final plague would launch Israel as an independent nation. It was the night that broke them out of bondage and set them on the path to 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 God does—was anchored entirely in His integrity.

The Instructions: Exodus Chapter 12 (excerpted)

1. Now the Lord said to Moses and Aaron in the land of Egypt ...
2. 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 father's household, a lamb for each household.
3. Your lamb shall be an unblemished male a year old; you may take it from the sheep or from the goats.
4. Moreover, they each shall take some of the blood and put it on the two doorposts and on the lintel of the house.
5. 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 beast; and against all the gods of Egypt I will execute judgments—I am the Lord.

6. 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.
7. 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 get passed down the chain of command? (Just like that game the kids used to have fun playing, called Telephone.) 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 or death.

The Passover Lamb

As we have noted instructions regarding the Passover were not only specific but also meaningful. The paschal lamb was very special, a male yearling without blemish. The instruction “on the tenth of this month” is analogous to the incarnation of Christ. The three days they watched over the lamb to ensure its perfection are analogous to the public ministry of Christ. On the day of the passover in B.C 1441, the lamb was slain by each household, representing the future sacrifice of Christ’s death on the Cross. Those who obeyed God’s instructions completely, were spared. Each year from that time on, Israel observed the Passover feast commemorating God’s gracious deliverance. This celebration was unique because Israel memorialized a yet future event; Christ’s death on the Cross, without which there could be no salvation.

The Animal Blood

Beginning in Genesis 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). 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 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 emerged. 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 received the judgment of the sins of the human race. That night, in every household where the blood was not found, the Lord killed the first-born and all the “first-born in the land of Egypt, both man and beast.” Notice that blood was necessary and that belief was sufficient for salvation. God had provided everything. That’s what grace is all about!

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 is always 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; nor did an angel 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 (2 Corinthians 11:23b - 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 with 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, which included 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* (scourger’s whip) 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 cauterize 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 52:14b).

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 beside Him, placed faith alone in Christ alone. Our Lord assured this new believer that he would be with Christ in Paradise that very day.

Then, 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. Christ suffered as our substitute, making full payment for our sins. What did any of us ever do to deserve what He did for us? 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. Not one bit of bitterness crept into His soul as He suffered in our stead. This was the “blood of the Lamb without spot or blemish,” and 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 COMMIT [deposit] MY SPIRIT. And having said this, He breathed His last (Luke 23:46).

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 (60 ft. x 30 ft. x 6 in. 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 (1 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 (2 Corinthians 5:20a). Those who know the pertinent doctrine should make it known to a lost and dying world. Always at the ready, the believer must never make an issue of himself or anyone else, but must 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: “Lord ... You have the words of eternal life. 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 easy to understand. “... 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 other than just that—those believers who teach salvation by works or salvation because of something we do are *anathema* (accursed) (Galatians 1:8). Salvation is God’s EXCLUSIVE monopoly. “Salvation belongs to the Lord” (Psalm 3:8a) and “My salvation shall be forever ...” (Isaiah 51:6b). In essence, those who distort the Gospel are saying that they know better than God; that 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, lying down, 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 being in 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 complete list is 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).

- 1. All of the believer's sins and transgressions are blotted out:** “Everyone who believes in Him receives forgiveness of sins” (Acts 10:43b).
- 2. The believer receives a human spirit:** In the process of “regeneration,” the Holy Spirit makes the dichotomous (body and soul) unbeliever into a trichotomous (body, soul, and spirit) believer. “That which is born of flesh is flesh [physical birth], and that which is born of the [Holy] Spirit is [human] spirit” (John 3:6).
- 3. 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).
- 4. 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). God from 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? (1 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? (1 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 the Holy Spirit at the moment of salvation.

We need to be very clear that from the Day of Pentecost (30 AD) to the exit-resurrection of the Church, regeneration (spiritual birth) 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, which is the Body of Christ. It's that simple, but it wasn't so simple at the beginning of the Church Age.

From the Day of Pentecost, four groups of believers actually received the baptism of the Holy Spirit *after* they were saved.

1. Jews in Jerusalem (Acts 2)
2. Racially mixed Jew-Gentiles in Samaria (Acts 8:12-17)
3. Gentiles in Caesarea (Acts 10-11)
4. John the Baptist's uninformed followers in Ephesus (Acts 19)

The apostle Paul's question in Acts 19:2 underscores the point that the Holy Spirit is received when one believes in Christ. He asked: "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 yet brought into union with Christ. Does that sound strange? These citizens of Ephesus were disciples of John the Baptist. They had only placed faith in the coming Messiah but were not present on the day of Pentecost when the apostles and other believers received the baptism of the Holy Spirit.

After this brief transitional period from the Dispensation of the Hypostatic Union (time when Christ was on earth) to the beginning of the Church Age (Day of Pentecost to the exit resurrection), there is no excuse for any believer to ever ask for the Holy Spirit. His baptism, indwelling, sealing, spiritual gift(s), and filling are all part of the so-great salvation package He gives each believer.

While the baptism, indwelling, sealing, and spiritual gift(s) of the Holy Spirit are permanent and irrevocable, the filling of the Spirit (only) is lost whenever a believer sins, but is recovered by using (1 John 1:9). Once 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 (confessing) your sins to God the Father.

Spiritual Fuel

We have closely examined the status of man before creation. We learned that man is nothing apart from the grace of God, and examined God's grace toward 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've heard the apostle Paul's emphatic assertion that one's salvation, which begins with grace, cannot be made contingent on works that follow!

Let's try to illustrate the fallacy that God's plan includes 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 vehicles moving up and down the street, but your engine isn't going to take you anywhere without fuel. Spiritual power, as fuel for the believer's soul, is only available through God's grace provision—and there's never a shortage or price hikes! What would happen if someone poured a pound of sugar into the fuel tank of your automobile? (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 would happen to the engine? The carburetor, which converts the liquid fuel into a highly com-

bustible vapor, would quickly become encrusted with the crystalline molecules of sugar, and the engine would be cut off from the source of its power. This car 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, in essence, gotten out and started pushing. And for all that pushing, where are they going? Certainly not where God would have them go. God's power in their lives has been blocked by human good (sugar in the spiritual engine). 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 sacrilege in Galatia. He wrote:

You foolish [Greek: *anoetos* - lacking intelligence—in this case without spiritual common sense] Galatians, who has bewitched you [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 [working for your salvation], or by believing [faith plus nothing] what you heard [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 NIV).

In the same context, he continued:

Consider Abraham: "He believed [in] God [the Son as He revealed Himself to Abraham], and it [his faith plus nothing] was credited to him as righteousness." 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. All who rely on observing the Law [rely on salvation by works] are under a curse [still unbelievers]" (Galatians 3:6-10a NIV).

Believers today are the spiritual decedents 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 salvation-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. It deserves repeating: 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 pursued a law of righteousness [salvation by works], has not attained it. Why not? Because they pursued it [salvation] not by faith but as if it were by works ...” (Romans 9:30-32a NIV).

So how can a person who understands this simple truth decide 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 who rejects teaching the doctrine of eternal security, but 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 justice from 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? 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 scourges [skins alive] every son whom He receives” (Hebrews 12:6).

Now we are ready to examine the most pivotal doctrine of Scripture: God’s grace toward His chosen people.

God's Grace Toward 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 tiny nation 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 freeheartedness 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 (who was still childless) to move away from Haran to a place where God would provide land, seed, and blessing. We find the first phase of Abram's remarkable journey, begun in faith at age 75, outlined in Genesis 12-16. Despite Abram's failures, God made Abram's 99th year 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 a 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); Isaac was the promised son and heir. His mother, Sarah, died when Isaac was 38 years old.

Two years later, Isaac married Rebekah, but it wasn't until he was age 60 that they had twin sons—Esau and Jacob (Genesis 22-25). After Sarah's death, Abraham married Keturah and had six more sons, Zimran, Jokshan, Medan, Midian, Ishbak and Shuah. These, along with Ishmael, the son of Abram's 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 birthright 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. 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 is 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 him [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 Abraham's descendants? 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 made a covenant to specially bless Abraham and his family. This sovereign decision was not based on any special quality of anyone 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 lack of 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.

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 then 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 of these 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, respect for authority, loyalty, and integrity. Not only was he loyal to God and His Plan, but also to those whom God charged him to teach and to lead. For God had commanded him to teach doctrine and lead the Israelites into the land promised to Abraham. So it is not surprising to find Moses imploring God not to harm His people.

Then Moses entreated the Lord, his God, and said, “O Lord, why does [must] your anger burn against Your people whom You have brought out from the land of Egypt with great power and a mighty hand?” ... “ But now, if You will, forgive their sin — and if not, please blot me out from the book [an impossible request] which You have 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 a bit 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).

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 just walked away from their homes without specific knowledge of where God would take them or the dangers that lay ahead. But God, the Omniscient One, manifested 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 NIV).

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, The Red Sea

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[!]” (Exodus 14: 10-12 NIV).

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" (Exodus 14: 13,14).

Their lack of faith in these crucial moments merited discipline, perhaps their capture by the Egyptian army. But were they captured? In Exodus 14:21-22 we see that Moses, at God's direction, stretched out his hand over the water; the waters were divided and the Israelites went through the sea on dry ground.

Had they earned this miraculous provision? By no means! 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 (Exodus 14:26-28).

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 feared [respected] the Lord and put their trust in Him and in Moses His servant (Exodus 14: 30-31).

It was a powerful lesson for Israel, but for most it would soon be forgotten.

Failure 2: Exodus 15, Water at Marah

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?” (Exodus 15:22-24 NIV).

Just three days since the miracle at the Red Sea, and they already forgot 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. “Then he [Moses] cried out to the Lord, and the Lord showed him a tree; and he threw it into the waters, and the waters became sweet” (Exodus 15:25a). Once again, God’s ***GRACE*** is capitalized, italicized, highlighted, and underlined!

Failure 3: Exodus 16, Manna in the Desert

In the desert the whole community grumbled against Moses You have brought us out into this desert to starve this entire assembly to death (Exodus 16:2-3b NIV).

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. Minus 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 for you. 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” (Exodus 16:4 NIV).

God, in His unfathomable grace, provided fresh quail every evening and fresh bread every morning (Exodus 16:13-15).

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 (Exodus 16:16, 19, 23, 26) were both a test and a training exercise. One of these was to gather only one day's supply of food; "however, some of them paid no attention to Moses" (Exodus 16:20) 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?'" (Exodus 16:28).

Some of the Jews failed to adhere to the Lord's instructions, 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, Water at Rephidim

They [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 live-stock die of thirst?" (Exodus 17:1b-3 NIV).

Again, they have clearly failed to trust God's provision. Nonetheless, though they were 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 (Exodus 17:6). 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 from the same spiritual Rock that accompanied them, and that Rock was Christ (1 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 ..." (1 Peter 3:18). 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? Obviously not!

Failure 5: Numbers 20, Failure of Leadership, Mirabah

"... 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, grape-

vines ... There is no water to drink!” (Numbers 20:1-5 NIV). You might ask, “Why couldn’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 still remembers and sinks within me. This I recall to my mind, therefore I have hope. Through the Lord’s mercies [His unfailing love and grace in action] we are not consumed [and forgotten], because His compassions fail not [cannot and will not]. They are new every morning (actually 24 hours a day): great is Your [His] faithfulness (Lamentations 3:20-23 NKJ).

No one is worthy enough to receive anything good from God, let alone eternity in heaven with Him. Only God’s grace makes it possible!

As great as he was, Moses was fed up with Israel’s complaints! God told Moses:

‘Take the staff, and you and your brother Aaron gather the assembly together. Speak to that rock before their eyes and it will pour out its water. You will bring water out of the rock for the community so they and their livestock can drink.’ So Moses took the staff from the LORD’s presence, just as He commanded him. He and Aaron gathered the assembly [of Israelites] together in front of the rock and Moses said to them, ‘Listen, you rebels, must we bring you water out of this rock?’ Then Moses raised his arm and struck the rock twice with his staff. Water gushed out, and the community and their livestock drank (Numbers 20:8-11 NIV).

Moses disobeyed God and failed on two counts, but his failure can be summarized in one word: Arrogance.

Do you recall when Moses struck the Rock at Rephidim? That was an object lesson representing the substitutionary death of Christ. On the Cross, God did all the work necessary to secure our salvation. Here the Rock at Meribah 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" (Numbers 20:11b).

Because of their leadership roles, the Lord took Moses and Aaron aside and announced their punishments privately. Their punishment denied them entrance to the 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 spiritual advance. He went on to fulfill God's plan for his life and to become a winner believer.

And the Lord said to Moses, '... you have found favor [grace] in my sight' " (Exodus 33:12).

Every Believer has equal opportunity to become a winner believer by advancing to spiritual maturity and fulfilling God's plan for his life through learning and applying Bible doctrine.

In light of this doctrinal *exposé*, we note the following principles:

Principle # 1: 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 # 2: After death, sin and failure are never an issue. In fact, even when unbelievers appear at the last judgement at the end of time (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 as 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). And that righteousness is 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 to earth; however, "He [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 he [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. "When He approached Jerusalem, He saw the city and wept over it" (Luke 19:41). And after excoriating the Pharisees, Christ lamented: "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 tell the truth in Christ, I am not lying, my conscience testifies with me in the Holy Spirit, that I have great sorrow and unceasing grief in my heart [right lobe]. For I 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 home 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 of Jesus Christ as the Messiah, God put Israel on hold and inserted the Church Age. During the Church Age, Christians are spiritual Israel. And, just as with Gentiles, race is not an issue for salvation: There is equal opportunity. 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 of Christ. This seven year period, 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. But, only believers in the Lord Jesus Christ will enter the Millennium (1,000 year reign of Jesus Christ on earth).

When Christ returns at the end of the Tribulation, 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 2:30-31).

Why must the sun be turned into darkness? So that everyone will see Jesus Christ, the Bright Morning Star, King of kings, and Lord of lords upon His return!

I [the Lord Jesus Christ] will pour out on the house of David [Israel] and the inhabitants of Jerusalem the spirit of grace and supplication so that they will look on Me, whom 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 Israelites who pierced Him” (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 20:38a). No unbelieving Israelite 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 [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 NIV).

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 portion 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! 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, He continues in grace! Israel remains insulated by God's grace. The forces of darkness (Satan and his fallen angels) and the territorial claims of others notwithstanding, spiritual Israel will inherit the Promised Land forever. Likewise, every believer will inherit eternity in Jesus Christ, the forces of darkness and the objections of legalists notwithstanding!

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; but 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 (1 Corinthians 15:9, 10).

Paul is not bragging about his work; he is, rather, 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.

Lesson 7: 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; but rather, in His grace God will discipline us. If we abandon our spiritual life He will punish us severely, if need be, to effect our return to Him, just as he did with King David. 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 (2 Timothy 2:13).

Thankfully, the issue is God's integrity, not Israel's, not ours.

Final Thoughts

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, so 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? “Your words [God’s] were found and I ate them, and Your 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 your [our] strength” (Nehemiah 8:10b).

Further, the Holy Spirit produces His joy in a believer’s soul whenever He controls it (Galatians 5:22). And, it’s all by means of Grace, not because of who we are. And, no one is left out because he is not as good as someone else.

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 [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).



This book is edited from Rev. Moses C. Onwubiko’s doctrinal exposition in *Grace News Today*—our newsletter. If you desire to automatically receive a free copy of *Grace News Today*, write us, and we will be glad to place you on our mailing list.

His Eye is on the Sparrow

(Traditional Hymn)

Why should I feel discouraged, why should the shadows come,
Why should my heart be lonely, and long for heaven and home,
When Jesus is my fortress? My constant friend is He:
His eye is on the sparrow, and I know He watches me;
His eye is on the sparrow, and I know He watches me.

Refrain:

I sing because I'm happy,
I sing because I'm free,
For His eye is on the sparrow,
And I know He watches me.

“Let not your heart be troubled,” His tender word I hear,
And resting on His goodness, I lose my doubts and fears;
Though by the path He leadeth, but one step I may see;
His eye is on the sparrow, and I know He watches me;
His eye is on the sparrow, and I know He watches me.

Refrain

Whenever I am tempted, whenever clouds arise,
When songs give place to sighing, when hope within me dies,
I draw the closer to Him, from care He sets me free;
His eye is on the sparrow, and I know He watches me;
His eye is on the sparrow, and I know He watches me.

Refrain

Notes

Buy Truth, and Do Not Sell It

(Proverbs 23:23a)

Are you aware that sound Bible teaching is a precious and priceless piece of spiritual jewelry? Indeed, church history has shown how difficult sound teaching is to come by, especially in modern day Christianity! So, when God from His oasis of grace leads us to the pearls of truth in His infallible and inerrant Word, we ought to cherish them without reserve. The Bible is the treasure box that holds your capacity to enjoy abundant life, to reap maximum happiness in life, friendship, marriage, business, and to enjoy unprecedented blessings for today and tomorrow; therefore, “buy truth” [stay grounded in the Word] “for wisdom is better than jewels; and all desirable things cannot compare with her” (Proverbs 8:11).

Truth: For you are not under law BUT under GRACE (Romans 6:14b).



Moses C. Onwubiko is an evangelist and international Bible Conference teacher. He is President and Founder of Grace Evangelistic Ministries, which was established in 1997. This ministry is a nondenominational, Bible teaching, missionary organization whose first priority is to take the gospel of "faith alone in Christ alone" to a lost and dying world.

Rev. Moses has taught and proclaimed the gospel extensively in Africa, Asia, Australia, Central America, Europe, the Middle East and North America. He continues to travel anywhere God opens a door.

*"For by the grace of God, I am what I am"
(1 Corinthians 15:10a)*

*By the same token of grace,
I will accomplish that which the almighty
God intends for me to accomplish.
-the author*

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