

Self-Study Courses through Niceville Assembly of God

Distance learning and self-study are among the most dynamic and fastest-growing educational strategies in colleges and churches across America. Though different from traditional classroom study methodology, the goal is the same: to guide students through a systematic approach to spiritual formation.

This course has been carefully written and prepared so that you may experience intellectual and personal growth in the convenience of your home and at your own pace. Do not expect home study to be an easy shortcut to learning; it requires high motivation and self-discipline, since there are no prearranged class times. If you follow the process faithfully, however, your investment of valuable time will pay rich dividends in increased understanding and spiritual growth!

To assist students in grasping the concepts presented in self-study courses, a qualified Course Advisor is available to answer any questions you may have and to help guide you through the materials. Simply e-mail your questions or comments about course content to dguthmuller@nicevilleag.com. Your question(s) will receive prompt attention by your Course Advisor!

Suggestions for Studying

You cannot study the Bible as though it were just another book. Those who wrote it were inspired by the Holy Spirit, so you need the Holy Spirit to illuminate its truth to your heart and mind. With an open Bible, the Holy Spirit, a textbook, and a study guide, you're in the classroom of the Holy Spirit. As a student of the Holy Spirit, you'll achieve the goal of this course--anointed learning. Here are some study tips:

1. Set aside quiet and regular times for your study. Concentration is easier if you turn your mind to your studies at the same time each day.
2. Pray as you begin each study session. Ask the Lord to help you understand the material and make appropriate application to your life.
3. Look over the lesson objectives and the questions at the back of this workbook prior to reading each section.
4. Read through the lesson. Look up scripture references and take any notes that may be helpful. You may want to highlight pages or take notes in the margins as specific points make an impression on you.
5. Close the book and try to think through the main points. Think about what you've learned and seek ways to apply it in your personal life, in discussion with family and friends, in a Bible lesson, etc.
6. Answer the study questions in the back of the workbook. To get the most out of this study, be sure to use the manual properly. Don't simply turn to the section designated and search only for the answer, leaving the rest of the valuable material unread.
7. Take your time. No bell will ring to force you to move on to new material.
8. Make good use of reference tools, such as a study Bible, a comprehensive concordance, and a Bible dictionary. An up-to-date English dictionary will help you understand words that may be unfamiliar.
9. If you have access to the internet, you may want to use online resources such as <http://www.biblegateway.com/>, <http://www.bible.org/>, <http://www.e-sword.net/>.
10. Email any questions you may have concerning this course and its contents to dguthmuller@nicevilleag.com. Please indicate which course you are taking and the specific page number(s) which is/are in question.
11. When you have completed all study questions, you may check your answers against the answer key in the back of the workbook. Don't "cheat"! Remember, the only person you will be cheating is yourself!

Personal Goals and Progress

Learning Goal

From this course I hope to be able to:

Study Goal plan to schedule the following time(s) for study:

Monday:

Tuesday:

Wednesday:

Thursday:

Friday:

Saturday:

Sunday:

Hours per Week:

Progress

Date Course Started:

Date Course Completed:

Personal Commitment

I hereby submit myself to the Holy Spirit and commit myself to becoming the person God created me to be.

Signature

Date

Grace Part 1: Empowering Grace

Course Syllabus



Description

There is no subject in the Bible more important than divine grace. Yet, it is the most misunderstood. In Part 1, the writer methodically presents an in-depth Biblically-based understanding of divine grace, explaining the difference between common grace, saving grace, and empowering grace. Whether you are in need of saving grace, grace to overcome an addiction, or sustaining grace, this study is a must.

Objectives

Modern Day Christians often limp along with a fundamental understanding of divine grace but not the power that goes along with it. The overall course objective is intended to provide you with a revelation of the grace of God and a new way of looking at yourself and your past history. If you are not pleased with the facts of your life and your past history, you will find steps that can help change that perspective. God wants to tear down the mental grids that limit our thinking and give us a fresh perspective--one that transforms every area of life.

Grace Part 1: Empowering Grace

(Niceville Assembly of God, Niceville, Florida)

(Boyce A. Teas)



Preface

This is Part 1 of a two-part study on the grace of God. Part 2 is *Breaking Out of Legalism*. Except otherwise noted, all Scripture is taken from the New International Version (NIV) of the Bible.

SECTION I – UNDERSTANDING GRACE

It is more than a cliché to state we stand by faith only by the grace of God (Ephesians 2:8-9). The word “grace” is used 156 times in the New Testament. Although doctrines, such as sanctification, divine healing, and spiritual gifts, etc., are important, none is as important as the grace of God. That is because grace is the only basis on which God can give something and still retain His integrity. Love is God’s motive for doing what He does; grace is His means or method. Love is the why, and grace is the how. The Hebrew word for grace in the Old Testament is “chen” (k-hane). It comes from a root word “chanan” (khaw-nan) which means “to bend or stoop in kindness to an inferior; to favor; bestow; to be merciful” (The New Strong’s Exhaustive Concordance of the Bible; pages 2,580 and 2,603). This is a picture of God bending down and being merciful to sinful humanity and offering grace.

A. Definition

Simply put, grace is *God’s unmerited favor that is imparted through saving faith in the Lord Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior that causes the heart to rejoice*. Whatever we receive from God, whether it is eternal life or the ability to serve in some capacity in church, it is a gift that comes from God’s grace without earning it. If you have to earn something, it’s not a gift!

The Greek word used for grace in the New Testament is “charis” (Khar’-ece). It means the divine influence upon the heart and its reflection in the life, gratitude, favor, and gift.” *Charis* is used 101 times in Paul’s writings, who starts off most of his letters with, “Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ” (Romans 1:7; 1 Corinthians 1:3; 2 Corinthians 1:2; Galatians 1:3; Ephesians 1:2; Philippians 1:2; Colossians 1:2; 1 Thessalonians 1:1; 2 Thessalonians 1:2; 1 Timothy 1:2; 2 Timothy 1:2; Titus 1:4; Philemon 1:3). By adding “*ma*” to “charis” (grace), we get “*charisma*” (khar-is-mah). “*Ma*” means *grace made specific; a portion of; result of; a gift; an endowment*. Adding “*ta*” is the same as adding an “s” in our language. For example, *charismata* is the plural form of charisma. “Charismata” are *portions* or *gifts of grace*. The word charismatic comes from this root word. What all this means is that the different gifts described in the Bible are *gifts (portions)* of God’s grace that comes to us through the Lord Jesus Christ. Here are some passages where the word “*charisma*” (*grace gift*) is used:

- *Eternal life* is listed as a charisma (grace gift) in Romans 3:23. It is Biblical *incorrect* to say that I am saved, but not a charismatic. Anyone who is born again is a charismatic!
- *Christ's righteousness* is listed as a "charisma" (grace gift) in Romans 5:17.
- *Serving* is listed as a "charisma" (grace gift) in Romans 12:7.
- Paul describes all kinds of grace gifts in Romans 12:8.
- *Celibacy* is listed as a "charisma" (grace gift) in 1 Corinthians 7:7.
- Nine special *manifestations of the Spirit* are listed as grace gifts in 1 Corinthians 12:8-11. Each manifestation is a "charisma" (i.e., word of wisdom; word of knowledge; special faith; gifts of healings; miraculous powers, sometimes called gift of miracles; prophecy; discerning of spirits; message in tongues; and interpretation of tongues prophesy).
- In 1 Corinthians 12:28, Paul mixes various leadership roles and spiritual manifestations, noting they are grace gifts.
- *Leadership gifts* are also listed in Ephesians 4:11. Here, the person and/or leadership style (i.e., administrator, apostle, pastor, etc.) is an individual "charisma" (grace gift).

What is interesting is the use of *charis* (grace) started off as a secular term, namely a greeting. In the Greek world during ancient times, men in a tavern would lift their glasses and toast one another and say, "Charis [grace] to you." It was equivalent to the modern day phrase "cheers" (which means good will). The secular use of "*charis*" never conveyed the New Testament meaning, however. First, nonbelievers bless only their family and friends. God's people bless their enemies (Matthew 5:44; Romans 5:8). Secondly, the grace (good will) the world gives is not constant. That is because it depends on a person's state of mind and is based on circumstances. Thus, it can change according to one's mood or what is going on in the person's life at the time. That's not how the grace of God works. God's grace does not depend on feelings or mood swings but on the finished work of Jesus on the Cross and nothing else.

B. Dimensions of Grace

Read John 1:14-17. Verse 16 provides us with two important facts concerning grace. First, grace is resident in the person of Jesus Christ. If you have Christ as your personal Savior you have grace! Our hope is in the person of Christ! Secondly, grace is a many-faceted gem--"one blessing after another." Rick Joyner says there is "common grace, saving grace, special grace, and great grace" (*Morning Star Journal*; volume 7; number 4). Max Lucado says there is "saving grace, major league grace, and sufficient grace" (*In the Grip of Grace*, 1996). Does all this mean there is more than one kind of grace? No! They are simply describing the different benefits or facets of God's grace (Hebrews 4:14-16; Matthew 5:45). Like water which can satisfy one's thirst and also be used to wash one clean, God's grace meets different needs.

SECTION 2 - COMMON GRACE

There are three dimensions of God's grace: (1) common grace; (2) unmerited favor for pardoning sin; and (3) God's sustaining power of grace. Common grace is God's unmerited favor for sustaining life on this planet. John 1:16, "From the fullness of His grace we have all received one blessing after another." Note the word "all." Whether they realize it or not, the ungodly are receptors of God's grace. Common grace is God's benevolent attitude towards His creation that benefits both the saved and unsaved. Jesus referred to this when He said, "Your heavenly Father makes the rain to fall on the righteous and on the unrighteous" (Matthew 5:45). The lost sinner doesn't deserve the good weather he or she is experiencing when out boating on Sunday instead of being in church and worshipping the Lord. Yet, God provides it through His grace. Even the devil could not exist for a moment without God allowing him to do so. Does this mean that God is responsible for the evil Satan and his followers do? Certainly not! It simply means God does not take the right of choice away. All gifted people, whether saved or unsaved, have been given their talents by God through common grace. This includes doctors, musicians, athletes, writers, etc. Even if he or she is an atheist, a surgeon could not operate without the skills God has given. The choice to use the natural God-given gifts and talents for good or evil belongs to the holder and not the giver.

Have you ever wondered why God didn't give you a gift or talent as He did to someone else? I have. I used to ask why God doesn't give me a musical talent. Here I am with a love for music, but tone-deaf. The answer as to why God doesn't give us what He has given to someone else is found in 1 Corinthians 12:12-26. Comparing the Church to the human body, the apostle Paul shows how the wide diversity of gifts assures unity in the corporate body of Christ - the Church. He points out how each gift or talent given by God contributes something necessary to the common life and growth of the whole. There is no room for pride. Nor, should we feel inferior to other believers or nonbelievers for that matter. Each individual is essential to the proper function of the corporate body of Christ. Not only is each member of the body equally important, each is needed to make the body complete. As Paul points out in Ephesians 2:10, "We are all God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do." While common grace is extremely important, it is not the way to win the lost. We can turn our church services into beautiful productions in order to draw people to Jesus, but it will be perceived by the world as nothing more than entertainment if we rely solely on natural gifting. While there is nothing wrong with using the most naturally talented people to head up programs in church; people are not drawn to the Lord by intellectual ability, natural talents, programs, beautiful edifices, great music, or sound systems, etc. They are drawn to Christ by God's Spirit (John 6:44). That is because the unregenerate do not have the spiritual discernment to understand the good news about Jesus (1 Corinthians 2:14; Matthew 13:14). If we are going to accomplish our purpose of winning the lost, (Matthew 28:18-19) we must look beyond common grace. We must draw on God's anointing; spend time seeking the presence of the Lord and the leading of the Holy Spirit, etc.

SECTION 3 - SAVING GRACE

The second dimension of grace is God's unmerited favor for pardoning sin. It is saving *grace*, not common grace, which brings us into a personal and saving relationship with God. Jesus said in John 3:16, "For God so loved the world that He gave His one and only Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish but have eternal life." Jesus' invitation seems too simple for many. Some have climbed cathedral steps on their knees or walked on hot rocks with their bare feet in an effort to obtain God's mercy. Others turn to water baptism or some other religious act. If we had to do something other than believe to be saved, Jesus would have told us. All He said was, "Everyone who believes in Him will have eternal life" (John 3:15, NIV). John declared, "He came to that which was His own [Jews], but His own did not receive Him. Yet to all who received Him, to those who believed in His name, He gave the right to become children of God" (John 1:11-12). The word "all" includes you!

There is a funny story about a Christian who died and went to heaven. He was met at the gate entrance by Saint Peter. Peter said to the man, "You have to score at least a thousand points before you can get in." Peter noticed that the man looked worried and said, "Well, let's talk about it for a moment. What did you do to get to heaven?" The guy said, "Unless I was sick, I went to church every Sunday." "That's impressive - it's worth 25 points. What else did you do?" asked Peter. The man responded, "Well, I sang in the church choir every Sunday. I even sang solos at times. "That's good," Peter responded. "Your faithfulness in that area of your life is worth 25 points." The guy spoke up and said, "I faithfully paid tithes." Peter said, "Oh, that's very good--it's worth 50 more points." You now have 100 points," stated Saint Peter. "You still have 900 to go." The guy scratched his head and said, "Nine hundred points to go? I'm never going to get into heaven except by the grace of God." Excitedly, Peter said, "That's worth 1,000 points, come on in!" God does not save us based on our worthiness, but on Christ's worthiness. God's saving grace is never something humanity deserves, qualifies for, or earns. It is given to you free of charge based on the sacrifice of Jesus Christ on the Cross. In fact, the word G R A C E can be understood as: God's Riches At Christ's Expense. There is nothing fair about saving grace. It cost the Lord Jesus Christ His life!

A. Need for Saving Grace

Every single human born into this world needs saving grace because "all have sinned and come short of the glory of God" (Romans 3:23). To fully understand the need for saving grace we must go all the way back to the book of Genesis and examine the Edenic covenant and the fall of man. The word *covenant* means an arrangement made by one party which the other party involved could accept or reject, but could not alter. The covenant God made with Adam is the only covenant of "works" without the Redeemer (Genesis 2:8-9, 15-17). It is based on works because of God's gifts being conditional upon man's obedience (Genesis 2:16-17). After Adam disobeyed God, all other covenants between God and humanity were grace covenants based on the *Redeemer's works* which are activated by faith (Romans 11:6; Ephesians 2:8-9). They

are given to us to teach us the need for a redeemer and to reveal the faithfulness of God. Let's examine the Edenic covenant.

In the beginning, God placed two trees in the Garden of Eden, which would impact humanity's future. The first was the "tree of life," which represented God's Son, Jesus, the giver of eternal life (Genesis 3:22). The other was the tree of knowledge of good and evil (Genesis 2:9). This tree represented Satan, the source of sin and death (Genesis 2:17). As the representative for all of humanity, how Adam and his offspring would live depended entirely upon how he dealt with these two trees. If he partook of the tree of knowledge, he and all of humanity would die. If he partook of the tree of life, he and all of humanity would have eternal life. The choice was his, not God's or Satan's! Man was a free moral agent. Otherwise, he wouldn't have been given a choice to partake of the two trees. If innocent man (Adam) chose the tree of life over the tree of knowledge, he would take God into Himself, mingling the two together as one. With God as his life, man could have been the full expression of God throughout the universe and *never been able to sin*. Another possibility, however, was that man would be persuaded, or seduced, into partaking of the tree of knowledge of good and evil, taking sin and Satan (death) into him.

It is important we get a clear view of these three parties: Christ, the source of life, standing on one side, as represented by the tree of life; Satan, the source of sin and death, standing on the other side, as represented by the tree of knowledge; and man, standing in the middle. Man can either choose God or Satan. The choice is totally his. Because the fruit of a tree contains the power of reproduction, God warned Adam not to partake of the tree of knowledge (Satan) or he would die (Genesis 2:16-17). The human heart is like the reproducing power of soil when it comes to choosing spiritual life or spiritual death (Matthew 13:19). Even after being warned by the Creator, Adam went ahead and chose death (Satan) over eternal life (Christ). All of the lusts of the underworld indwelt by Satan were sown in man's flesh as a seed of sin and death when Adam partook of the forbidden tree.

Thus, the fall of man was receiving Satan into his body! Read Romans 7:23-24. Sin is the embodiment of Satan. Therefore, Adam's choice was more than simply choosing good or evil, but of receiving God as life or Satan as death. Romans 7:20: "...it is no longer I who do it, but it is Sin living in me that does it." Galatians 2:20: "It is no longer I...but Christ." Here, we have the contrast between "no longer I...but Sin," and "no longer I...but Christ." The word "sin" in the book of Romans should be capitalized, for it is personified. It is like a person. Romans 6:14: "For Sin shall not be your master..." Romans 7:18: "I know that nothing good lives in me, that is, in my sinful nature." Although we call Adam's sin "the fall of man," in reality, it was the fall of the entire planet, or, as John called it, "the sin of the world" (John 1:29). Because Adam represented the entire creation to God, the entire creation fell into a depraved state when he disobeyed God (Romans 8:20-22; Genesis 3:17-19). Adam's disobedience is the reason we have weeds and stickers to contend with in our gardens. It is the reason some animals are predators, etc.

When Adam chose to live according to the tree of knowledge of good and evil, he not only brought sin to the human race, he brought about three kinds of deaths: *moral*, *spiritual*, and *physical* (Genesis 2:17; 5:5; John 17:2; Romans 5:12). Here was a holy God who could not have anything to do with sin, and humankind who was sinful and could no longer be holy. Adam and Eve made a vain attempt to cover themselves with their own efforts by sewing together fig leaves (Genesis 3:7), but it was not enough to keep God from seeing them as they really were, naked and sinful. God killed an innocent animal and took its skin to provide garments to hide their nakedness (Genesis 3:21) to foreshadow Christ's substitutionary atonement for sin on the Cross and the requirement to be clothed with Christ rather than with good works (Galatians 3:27; Hebrews 9:12; Matthew 26:28). While we all have to physically die until Jesus returns, we do not have to spiritually die. Paul deals with this in Romans 5:17 and 1 Corinthians 15:21-22. He points out that since death came through one man (Adam), life (resurrection) came through one Man, Jesus. Paul calls Jesus the Second Adam or "Second Man" (Adam) in 1 Corinthians 15:47. Spiritually speaking, God only recognizes this Second Adam (Jesus) and His spiritual offspring, those who believe in Him (Romans 8:29).

Satan was no doubt pleased with his accomplishment when Adam chose the tree of knowledge (death) over the tree of life (Genesis 3:6-7). What Satan failed to realize was that, like a mouse, he had walked into a trap of his own making! You don't try to catch an annoying mouse that is running loose in the house by running after it. You place something in a trap the mouse likes. The mouse enters and becomes trapped thinking it has succeeded in getting a delicious meal. All the homeowner then has to do is to walk over, pick it up, and throw it out. Satan was like an annoying mouse running loose in the universe. What the devil failed to realize was that by enticing Adam to partake of the tree of knowledge of good and evil, he was actually walking into a trap set by God to get rid of him. Man was the bait God used to catch Satan and imprison him in man's flesh. Through the incarnation, God put man's flesh upon Himself, brought that man to the Cross, and put Him to death, destroying Satan along with man's flesh where sin dwelt (Hebrews 2:14). Then, God brought man into resurrection where He and man became one again. God can now enter a person's spirit when he or she repents and believes in Jesus (Philippians 3:10).

In addition to trapping Satan in man's flesh, the "tree of the knowledge of good and evil" was designed to test man's faith and obedience to God (Genesis 2:16). This doesn't mean God is responsible for Adam's fall. Adam was a free moral agent to choose. God didn't place the tree of knowledge of good and evil and the tree of life in the Garden (Genesis 2:9) to entrap, but so that man could choose between life and death (Genesis 2:17). There can be no obedience from the heart unless there is the freedom to disobey! Without giving humanity a choice between good and evil God would have done just as well to create robots and program them to do His will. God doesn't want robots He wants sons and daughters who will do His bidding (will) out of love for Him. The choice to partake or not partake of the tree of knowledge of good and evil was Adam's alone, not God's or Satan's. When Adam disobeyed God he caused a sin barrier to be erected between God and his offspring (humanity). Humanity was

condemned and lost at this point (Romans 5:18). For the first time in the history of the universe, humankind could now go to hell, the place where evil angels were being held for final judgment. Hell was originally created for the devil and his evil angels (Matthew 25:41). The only way man could be restored to a right relationship with the Creator and escape eternal separation from God is through a pardon. In our justice system one can be pardoned without having to pay for the crime committed. For example, if the crime is against the state, the governor of that state can pardon the offender. If a crime is committed against a federal law, the president has the authority to pardon the offender. A pardon doesn't mean the person is not guilty. It simply means he or she does not have to pay for the crime he or she has committed. When President Gerald Ford pardoned former President Richard Nixon, he was saying "although Mr. Nixon is guilty, he doesn't have to pay for his crime." As commendable as that gesture was, that is not how God works. In God's system of justice *someone* has to pay for the offense *before the pardon can be issued* (Romans 6:23)! By taking Adam's place on the Cross, Christ died for all of humanity for all times, making it possible for people to be saved by grace through faith (Ephesians 1:4-5; 2:8-9). When we repent and accept Jesus as Lord and Savior we become born again (John 3:3), spiritually alive and indwelt by God's Spirit (Galatians 3:5; 4:6), dead to sin (Romans 6:1-18) and exempted from God's wrath (Romans 1:18; 8:1). If that isn't something to shout about what is?

What happened to the two trees in the Garden? One survived the judgment of God, but the other did not. Only the tree of life is listed in Revelation 22:2 in God's future eternal kingdom. Death, as represented by the tree of knowledge of good and evil, will be cast in the lake of fire along with all who refuse to partake of Jesus (Revelation 20:13-15). The meaning of the tree of life is that one cannot be good enough within themselves to enter God's eternal kingdom. The only way in is to repent and ask Christ to be your Lord and Savior (John 4:24; 14:6). What God began with the Edenic covenant through the first Adam in the Garden, He completes by grace through Jesus, the Second Adam (1 Corinthians 15:45) on the Cross. Jesus took Adam's place as our representative to God came to planet earth and lived without sin to qualify as the Lamb of God. He then died on the Cross to pay the penalty for sin and then rose from the dead "for our justification" (Romans 4:25). While it was the Lord's death that made it possible for us to receive a pardon, it was His resurrection that made it possible for us to go to heaven. No one could leave this planet until Christ rose from the dead (1 Corinthians 15:12-27). You say, "What about those who died under the Old Covenant before Jesus came?" Although God pardoned people in the Old Testament when they repented of their sins and offered the required sacrifices they could not go to heaven. No one could go to heaven until Jesus actually died on the Cross and rose from the dead (1 Corinthians 15:12-20). When a believer died his or her soul went to a place in the lower parts of the earth (Ephesians 4:9). The Hebrew word for this place is *Sheol*. It is called *Hades* in the Greek. Translators did a poor job translating these two words into English. Both words are incorrectly translated "Hell;" "pit;" or "grave" throughout the Bible (Genesis 15:15; 25:8; 35:29; 47:30; Numbers 27:13; 2 Samuel 12:23; Matthew 22:31-32; Luke 16:19-31; 23:43; Hebrews 11:13-16). Neither of these terms is the true meaning of "Sheol" or "Hades." Their actual meaning is "*place of departed spirits.*" Neither word refer to the hell of final punishment, the grave (the receptacle of the body), or the mere

state of being dead as to the body. They are simply places where souls, both godly and ungodly, were held until their final disposition (judgment). Hades had *two sides*, one for the wicked and one for the godly. The side where godly people resided was called *paradise*. The other side was called hell. An expanse (chasm) separated the two groups. Believers were in a state of bliss on the paradise side. For example, the penitent thief who died with Jesus on the Cross went into the paradise side of Hades (Luke 23:43). The wicked were in torment on the hell side. No one from either side could cross over (Luke 16:19-26). When the Lord rose from the dead He brought out with Him from the paradise side of Hades all the faithful souls who were there (Ephesians 4:8; Matthew 27:52, 53), leaving the paradise side of Hades (Sheol) empty (2 Corinthians 12:4; Philippians 1:23)! Those in the hell side of Hades will be raised and judged according to their works (Revelation 20:11-13) and then consigned to everlasting punishment in the lake of fire and brimstone (Revelation 11-15; Matthew 25:41; Luke 8:26-31; Romans 10:7; Revelation 17:8; 21:8; 2 Peter 2:4; Jude 6). Jesus' resurrection marked the defeat of death for His followers (1 Corinthians 15:50-58; 1 Thessalonians 4:14).

Some people lump Christ with Moses, Buddha, Muhammad, and other religious leaders who have appeared on the world scene. But Jesus is not on the same footing as these so-called messiahs and religious leaders. He declared, "I am the way, the truth, and the life; no one comes to the Father, but by me" (John 14:6, RSV). In a vision, John saw "a great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, tribe, people and language, standing before the Lamb [Jesus]...And they cried out in a loud voice: 'Salvation belongs to our God who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb!'" (Revelation 7:9-10). Jonah correctly came to this same conclusion when he said, "Salvation is of the LORD" (2:9). Salvation was God's idea. He initiated it and is completing it in those who will believe in His Son, Jesus, as Lord and Savior. All you have to do to receive God's saving grace is repent and believe in Jesus. That is the gospel in a nutshell.

B. Election of God

Now let's examine a term that has created a lot of controversy in the Christian community in relationship to saving grace, the election of God. Read Ephesians 1:4-14. Paul is talking about the election of God in this passage. There are those who use this passage to justify their belief that God preselected certain people to go to heaven. If you are not one of the elect ("pre-selected" individuals), you are going to hell. Their interpretation of this passage is inaccurate. Wouldn't it be awful to live for Christ all your life, get to the end, and find out you are not one of the chosen few? This belief has no biblical foundation. I don't know how someone can believe that God would be pleased with redeeming *part* of the human race and deliberately sending the rest to hell. The Greek word for election is *eklego*. This Greek word doesn't mean God deliberately selects some to be saved and others to go to hell. It means before the world was created, God chose to treat those who believe in Jesus as holy and blameless in His sight (cross-reference 2 Thessalonians 2:13).

Read Ephesians 1:4-6 again. What confuses some people are the words “beforehand” (verse 4) and “predestined” (verse 5). The Greek word *proorizo*, translated predestined, is a verb that is used six times in the New Testament (Acts 4:28; Romans 8:29, 30; Ephesians 1:5, 9-13; 1 Corinthians 2:7). It means to “decide beforehand; to mark out beforehand; foreordain; to choose beforehand.” What Paul is saying is that before the earth was created, God decided to accept by grace only those who would believe in and accept His Son, Jesus, as Lord and Savior. Romans 8:29 supports this theme: “For those God foreknew He also predestined to be conformed to the likeness of His Son.” “Foreknew” is equivalent to “fore loved” and used in the sense of “to set loving regard on; to choose to bestow love on from eternity” (Exodus 2:25; Psalm 1:6; Hosea 13:5; Matthew 7:23; 1 Corinthians 8:3; 4:9; Galatians 4:9; 1 John 3:1).

The doctrine of election involves three basic truths:

1. Election is *only through the blood of Christ*. Ephesians 1:7, “In him we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins, in accordance with the riches of God’s grace.” Cross-reference 2 Timothy 1:9. Before He had created anything, God knew Adam would sin and determined redemption for the human race would only come through the woman’s seed, Jesus (Genesis 3:15; Romans 5:12-17; 1 Corinthians 2:7-8). You may be thinking, “What about those godly believers who lived before Jesus came?” All atonement’s made in the Old Testament were only effectual by Christ’s sacrificial blood. See Romans 3:25-26. By living a sin-free life, Christ fulfilled all of the requirements of God’s righteousness demanded by the Law and qualified as God’s Lamb, both inwardly and outwardly. Then, He took the place of “all” of humanity and died on the Cross as a penalty for sin.
2. The election occurs *only in union with Jesus Christ*. Just because Christ died for everyone doesn’t mean they are automatically saved. Only in union with Christ do we become members of the elect. A good example is the fact Jesus was crucified between two criminals, but only one went to Paradise with Him. In his final moments, the condemned criminal asked for mercy. Had the man asked for mercy from the people or the government, it would have been declined. Had he asked it of his victims, they would have turned a deaf ear. But it wasn’t to these he turned to for grace. He turned to the bloodied form of the One who hung on the Cross next to him and pleaded, “Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom” (Luke 23:42). I don’t know about you, but that’s not much of a confession for a thief who was about to die. He could have at least admitted he was a terrible sinner and asked for mercy. After all, he was a dying thief about to go out into eternity. Most church leaders of our day would not have ever accepted this man’s weak repentance statement and let him off the hook that easy. Yet, Jesus did! Jesus not only accepted the man as a believer, but assured him he would be in paradise that very day (Luke 23:43). People “look at the outward appearance, but the LORD looks at the heart” (1 Samuel 16:7). That is why one can say all the “right” words, but unless there is *true repentance* and a *change of heart* it means nothing to God. The same principle goes for grace. While Jesus’ blood was shed for the whole

human race, one must truly repent and accept Him as Lord and Savior in order to partake of God's saving grace (John 1:12; Ephesians 1:26).

3. The election through Jesus Christ is also *corporate*. God had the Gentiles in mind when He came up with the plan of salvation. From the giving of the Law at Mt. Sinai until Christ's death on the Cross, ancient Israel was God's elect. After Christ's death and resurrection, God's true Church became a corporate body made up of believing Jews and Gentiles with Christ as the Head (Ephesians 2:21-22; 3:6, 3:10-11; 4:4; Romans 3:9-12; 5:18; 11: 25; Colossians 1:18).

When an individual repents and turns to Jesus for salvation he or she becomes a part of the elect. Before the world was ever created, Father God determined that Jesus would be the sacrificial Lamb and those who believed in Him would have their names recorded in the Lamb's book of life and be accepted into God's spiritual family (John 1:12; 1 John 4:15; 5:1; Revelation 22:17; John 3:16-18; Romans 10:13; 2 Peter 3:9; Ephesians 1:4-5; John 1:29; 13:8; Revelation 3:5; 17:8; 20:15; 21:27).

A question that is often asked is, "Is Israel saved?" Not as a nation. Jews who refuse to believe in Jesus stand on the same footing as other nonbelievers (Romans 11:17-20). It doesn't matter if you are Jew or Gentile; faith in Jesus is the only way to be saved and the *only way* to God (John 14; Ephesians 2:8-9; Titus 3:3-8). However, when Jesus returns, all Jews who survive the Great Tribulation will come to believe in Him and be saved (Romans 11:25-27; Revelation 7; Isaiah 10:21-23; Joel 2:31-32). During Christ's millennial reign on earth, Israel as a nation will come back into prominence. Walking in holiness, this remnant of Israel will be a great blessing to the entire planet (Romans 11:25-27; Revelation 12:14; Zechariah 12:10; 13:1-2; 14:20-21; Ezekiel 36:24-29; 36:23-28; Isaiah 2:2-3; 4:2-4; 25:3; 35:8-10; 58:12; Isaiah 61:1-11; Jeremiah 30:18; 31:38-40). Jerusalem will become the capital of the world (Zechariah 8:3). Abraham's natural descendants (Jews) will possess all the land promised to him (Isaiah 65:22-24).

The gift of eternal life is based on the merits of Jesus Christ and not the receiver's merits. Referring to Jeffrey Dahmer, a serial killer, Rev. Max Lucado states, "What disturbs me most are not his evil deeds. Dahmer was convicted of 17 murders. Eleven corpses were found in his apartment. He cut off arms and even ate body parts. The thesaurus has 204 synonyms for *vile*, but not one of them can fully describe a man who kept skulls in his refrigerator and hoarded a human heart. He was a brutal murderer! But that's not what troubles me most. Even the way he sat serenely in court, face frozen, motionless, with no sign of remorse or regret doesn't disturb me. The fact he only got life in prison without parole doesn't disturb me, though he should have been sentenced to death. What disturbs me most is that months before an inmate murdered him, Jeffrey Dahmer became a Christian. He said he repented and was profoundly sorry for his sins. He started life all over again by being baptized in water, reading the Bible, reading Christian books and attending chapel. God's grace and mercy is available to anyone, even a cannibal when he or she repents, and by faith, turns to

Jesus for forgiveness and salvation. What really bothers me is there was no justice for this murderer. His sins washed, soul cleansed and past forgiven in a split second! That troubles me. It shouldn't but it does. Maybe you have the same reservations? Maybe you've wrestled with a deathbed conversion of a child molester or rapist. We've sentenced them, maybe not in court, but in our hearts. In our minds we put them behind bars and thrown away the key and say, 'God won't let you off that easy. Not after what you did. God is kind, but He's no wimp. Grace is for average sinners like me, not evil people like him or her. To justify our feelings we turn to Romans 1, where Paul said, 'God's anger is being shown against...' Then Paul lists a host of gross sins: sexual sin, evil, selfishness, hatred, jealousy, murder (verse 26-30). We shout, 'It's about time someone spoke out against sin--go get 'em Paul! String up those perverts and porno peddlers.' Then, in Romans 2:1, Paul turns his torch on the hillside watchdog of the self-righteous and said, 'If you think that leaves you on the high ground where you can point your finger at others, think again. Every time you criticize someone, you condemn yourself. It takes one to know one' (Romans 2:1)." Grace is a unique aspect of Christianity. All other religions teach service by obligation and that a holy God only loves good people or people who believe like they do. What makes Christianity so unique is that it is the only belief that teaches a holy God loves sinful people (Romans 5:8; John 3:16). But the bottom line is this, God is God, and we are not. His ways are not our ways. His grace is for all who receive His Son as Lord and Savior. We may not understand it or even agree with it, but that is God's way. The blood of Jesus covers the multitude of sins and His grace abounds.

SECTION 4 – EMPOWERING GRACE

We now come to the third dimension of grace, and the object of this study, *God's ability in us*. Grace is like a two-sided coin. Saving grace is the heads side; God's sustaining power which flows through us after we are saved is the tail side. Read 2 Corinthians 5:17. You will experience four things when you receive a revelation of the grace of God. First, you will know beyond the shadow of a doubt that you have truly been forgiven and accepted by God. There will be closeness between you and Father God that cannot be expressed in words. Second, you will feel that your past life is irrelevant. It is not that you deny that you did something wrong, there will simply be a lack of connection between your past and the present. Third, you will no longer feel compartmentalized or dead on the inside. You will feel alive on the inside. Fourth, and foremost, you will have the motivation and ability to live for God regardless of what happens to you! When Ira Stamphill entered the ministry, he selected a minister's daughter for his wife. Being musically inclined, he and his wife made a great team for Jesus, writing numerous gospel songs together. Then a spiritual change took place in his wife. She left Ira and their 6-year old son and become a night club singer. Rev. Stamphill traveled alone for many years, perplexed and troubled. It was out of this dark period of his life that he wrote the song "*I Know Who Holds Tomorrow*." The chorus goes like this: "Many things about tomorrow, I don't seem to understand; but, I know who holds tomorrow, and I know who holds my hand." The God who gives us saving grace is there in the dark hours of our lives to provide us with sustaining and enduring grace. He is our refuge

and underneath is His everlasting arms. Saving grace is grace towards us from God; empowering grace is *God's ability* through the Holy Spirit in us to do good works even during unpleasant circumstances. The operational power of grace is God's motivation and ability to do what He commands us to do. Second Corinthians 9:8, "And God is able to make all grace abound to you, so that in all things at all times, having all that you need, you will abound in every good work." Note the words "having all you need." The greatest aspect of the grace of God is not so much the ability to do what you can't do, but the ability to do what you can do, and that is to live holy! Because we are the righteousness of Christ by faith we have all the ability we need to live holy! Wouldn't it be wonderful if we could serve God as easy as we sin? How many of you have found it easy to sin? Let me give you some good news. Under the grace of God, it is easier to serve God than it is to sin. There is a stronger motivation within the Christian to do right than there it is to do wrong. Not only does the person living under grace have an inward desire to do right, he or she is empowered to do so. It would be unfair for God to command us to do something and not enable us to do it. It is God in us that enables us to truly love the unlovable, to bless those who persecute us, and to live above sin. There are those who believe the kingdom is prosperity, success, and to be at the head of everything. These are kingdom benefits, but they are not the kingdom. Yes, God wants us to prosper, have nice things, be healed, etc., but we are not to seek these benefits of the Cross. Instead, we are to seek after the King and His righteousness (Matthew 6:33). Your life is changed forever when you grasp what the kingdom of God is. Although the righteousness of God is imputed and not earned, its completion is manifested in right doing.

The operational power of grace is both the "desire" and "power" to do God's will. Why is grace power? It is power because it is being administered by the Holy Spirit. This side of grace has been largely overlooked by the Church, causing many to remain in a cycle of defeat. Grace is not only God's unmerited favor towards us; it is God's unmerited power through us. Read 1 Timothy 1:12-14. Moffitt's translation renders verse 14 as, "The grace of the Lord Jesus flooded my life." Peter tells us there is sufficient grace available to not only meet each and every need we may have in life, but grace to serve God in *any* capacity (1 Peter 1:3-10; 4:10). Paul states, "For it is God who works in you to will and to act according to His good purpose" (Philippians 2:13). The word "act" or "work" in this passage means "energizing." In other words, it is God who is energizing or strengthening believers in Christ to serve God. God is not working on His people; He is working in and through them! Grace will always bring about change, because it is God in us doing the work. Galatians 2:20: "I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me." Philippians 4:13, "I can do everything through him who gives me strength." New King James: "I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me." The Greek for strength here means regardless of our circumstances we are strengthened from deep inside of us.

The whole human race, from beginning to end, is totally dependent on God's grace (Romans 11:32). Some may be thinking, "What about Paul's statement in Philippians 2:12 where it says 'to work out your salvation with fear and trembling'?" You have to

read verse 13 to understand what Paul meant by that statement. Paul is *not* talking about using our works to justify our salvation. He is talking about *walking in sanctification and living out the grace of God* after we have been justified by faith in Jesus. God's grace is at work in His children to produce in them both the desire and *ability* to do His will. Galatians 5:16, "So, I say, live by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the sinful nature." A man who professed to be a Christian told me one time, "The Spirit gives me permission to go to a bar and get drunk." A spirit may have told him to do that, but not the Holy Spirit of the Bible. We must be careful we don't misunderstand what Paul said and make grace a law and use it as a license (permission or excuse) to sin. See 2 Peter 3:16. Peter was no doubt talking about Paul's gospel of grace. Paul's gospel of grace is not permission to sin as some have wrongly interpreted it to be; it is power not to sin. Christians who have a sin *habit* are doing one of two things: (1) voluntarily remaining behind the bars of bondage because they love their sin habit more than God; or (2) they are being led by the spirit of Satan through the old carnal self and not by God's Spirit through their new nature. Paul states, "What shall we say, then? Shall we go on sinning so that grace may increase? By no means! We died to sin; how can we live in it any longer" (Romans 6:1-2). In other words, how can we who have been made righteous not live righteous lives? Paul seems stunned that an alternative would even exist! The union of sincere believers with Christ in His death and resurrection will result in freedom from the dominion of sin.

I am not saying it is impossible for believers to sin. I am saying it is stupid to do so, especially since God's empowering grace is resident within us. How could grace result in anything but gracious, holy living? The unregenerate live according to the cravings of the sinful nature and the ways of Satan (Ephesians 2:1-3), because they don't know any better (John 8:34; Romans 6:17-20). Not so for followers of Christ. Could you imagine someone saying, "When I lie, it really gives God the glory because my lie shows just how truthful God is?" Foolishness! It would be like a teenager saying, "Mom, I'll keep my room messy so the whole neighborhood can see what a good housekeeper you are?" What supervisor would let an employee get away with, "The reason I'm lazy is to give you an opportunity to display your forgiveness?" No one respects the bums who refuse to work and says, "I'm just giving the government an opportunity to demonstrate benevolence." Should we tolerate such hypocrisy in the natural realm? No! Neither does God when we try to use grace to justify our sin. Read Matthew 11:24. Jesus does something very astonishing in verse 23. He compares Capernaum with the wicked city of Sodom. The inhabitants of Sodom had been destroyed for their evil lifestyle. Sodom is where we get the generic term for homosexuality or the homosexual act of sodomy and perversion. Capernaum had three Levitical schools. Of all those who should have recognized Christ as the Messiah, the inhabitants of Capernaum should have. But their religious hypocrisy kept them from the truth. Jesus is not condoning the sinful lifestyle. He is letting us know that religious hypocrisy is an intolerable sin. America's worst sins are not abortion and homosexuality. Religious hypocrisy is America's number one sin. The Lord said if what He did in Capernaum had been done in the wicked city of Sodom, the evil people of that city would have repented. They didn't. That same principle can be applied to America. Many people are going to end up in hell, not because they are drug users, alcoholics, or sexual perverts, but because of religious hypocrisy. The

remedy, however, is simple. If people would just accept the grace extended to them, an eternity in heaven would await them.

Read Romans 6:6-18. Verse 6, "But now, by dying to what once bound us, we have been released from the Law so that we serve in the new way of the Spirit, and not in the old way of the written code." Is Jesus' life a living reality inside of the believer? We can now die to self-effort and experience empowering grace for every need. God's part is to save and empower us through grace. Our part is to be *good stewards* of that grace (1 Corinthians 4:1-2; 1 Peter 4:10). God never intended for His grace to be an excuse for not living the Christian life. In fact, grace is the only way a person can truly live like Jesus. If you try to live the Christian life by a set of rules and regulations (law) you will fail outwardly or inwardly, or both. According to what Jesus said in Matthew 5:28, even if we were able to live an external holy lifestyle without God's help and fail to have internal purity, that external holiness is in vain. Also read 2 Timothy 2:1 and Ephesians 4:17-24. Wouldn't it be unfair for God to demand that you do something that is impossible and then require you to do it through your own efforts? Yes, God demands holiness (1 Peter 1:15-16), but He also provides the needed grace to live holy. Grace doesn't work out of the flesh like law does. It operates out of the believer's new spiritual nature. In Galatians, after presenting a list of the fruit of the Spirit, Paul states, "Against such things there is no law. Those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the sinful nature with its passions and desires" (Galatians 5:23-24). What makes us capable of walking in the Spirit is that there is no longer any law to dictate our every action. Christ not only gives us a desire to be like Him through His resurrection life, He empowers us through the Holy Spirit to do so. Plus, the old sinful nature has been crucified with Christ along with its passions and desires, setting us free to serve God out of *desire* and not for self-justification.

A. The Greater the Need, Greater the Grace

Read 1 Peter 5:7-9. The song writer, John Newton, took the following words from the wall of a slave ship: "Amazing grace, how sweet the sound that saved a wretch like me! I once was lost, but now am found, was blind but now I see. Thro' many dangers, toils and snares, I have already come; 'tis grace hath bro't me safe thus far, and grace will lead me home." These words were no doubt written by a slave on his or her way to a lifetime of slavery.

Read 2 Corinthians 12:7-9. As one who stumbles often, it is encouraging to know one of the writers of the Bible wasn't always on the same page with God. Paul's thorn was no superficial prickle. Phillips' translation says it was a "stabbing pain." There are those who believe, as a single man (1 Corinthians 7:7), Paul was battling the flesh with sexual temptation and asking God to give him the gift of celibacy. I personally don't subscribe to this belief. Others have suggested Paul's problem was his enemies; that a "messenger of Satan" was a person and not a demon. One thing for sure, Paul had plenty of opposition because of his stand on grace and his work for the Kingdom of God. He had scars on his body to prove he had been beaten before. We know from his own words he had received 39 lashes with a whip, had been beaten with rods on three

occasions, and on one occasion was stoned to the point of death (2 Corinthians 11:23-26). Then, there are those who believe Paul's thorn was his lack of public relation skills. For whatever Paul learned at the feet of professor Gamaliel (Acts 5:34; 22:3), he may have dozed off the day "tact" was discussed. For example, Paul wasn't very diplomatic when he confronted Peter at Antioch (Galatians 2:11). There were no gray areas for this man when it came to the grace of God (1 Timothy 1:20). Still others believe a case can be made that the thorn in Paul's flesh was not temptation, opposition, or a lack of diplomacy, but poor eyesight. Is it possible Paul's eyesight was impaired following his encounter with Jesus on the Damascus road (Acts 9:8-12)? Paul stated to the Galatians, "You would have taken out your eyes and given them to me if that were possible" (Galatians 4:15)...See what large letters I use to write this myself?" (Galatians 6:11). Lastly, some believe Paul's problem was he was not a very dynamic speaker. His audience said on one occasion "his speaking is nothing" (2 Corinthians 10:10). Paul didn't argue: "When I came to you, I was weak and fearful and trembling. My teaching and preaching were not with words of wisdom that persuade people but proof of the power that the Spirit gives" (1 Corinthians 1:3-4). Translation: "I was so scared I stuttered, so nervous that I forgot my point, and the fact that you heard anything at all is testimony to God."

While we will never know what Paul's thorn in the flesh was, we do know he was a man who was beaten regularly, opinionated, dim-sighted, and thick-tongued. No wonder some questioned his right to be an apostle. And, no wonder he prayed a lot and talked a lot about grace. Paul said he pleaded "three times" with the Lord to remove this hindrance (2 Corinthians 12:8). Each time God said His grace was sufficient. Why? It is because grace is God's enabling ability. The word three had a particular significance to the Jews. It meant continually. Instead of removing the hindrance, God simply enabled Paul to live with it. Maybe there is a reason why. If God had healed Paul's eyesight, would he have had such insight? While others were watching the world, Paul was seeing visions too great for words (2 Corinthians 12:3-4). As far as public speaking goes, nothing is more deceiving or intoxicating than the approval of a crowd. God may have just been keeping Paul sober. If Paul had a mild temper and an easy-going personality, he would not have stood up to the legalists who violently opposed the gospel of grace. The reason we have the book of Galatians is because Paul couldn't stomach a diluted gospel. We have his letters to the Church at Corinth because he was intolerant of greasy grace (loose living). Paul's honesty and straightforwardness may have prevented him from making new friends, but it sure made many disciples for Christ. So whatever the affliction or thorn Paul had to endure, it was there to keep him from becoming conceited. The God who despises pride loved Paul too much to let him ruin his ministry by being proud! Because he remained humble, Paul continually received grace upon grace from the Father to tell us about the grace of God. Whatever Paul's thorn might have been, God's final word on the subject was, "My grace is sufficient for you" (1 Corinthians 12:9). The most encouraging letter Paul ever wrote, the book of Philippians, was written from a Roman prison, proving that God's grace is sufficient. Although Paul was bound in body, he was free in the Spirit which was more important. Stephen, the first New Testament martyr, is another example of empowering grace. While Stephen was not an apostle, he was full of "God's grace and

power” (Acts 6:8). As the result, the Sanhedrin (Israel’s ruling council) could not stand up against Stephen’s anointed message about Jesus (verse 10). So in a rage, they dragged him to the outskirts of the city and murdered him. Listen to what this grace-filled follower of Christ said as he was being stoned to death: “Lord, do not hold this sin against them” (Acts 7:60). Wow! Verse 15 also speaks of God’s empowering grace: “His face was like the face of an angel.”

B. Eternal Perspective of God’s Empowering Grace

God’s enduring grace not only equals the need, it changes our *outlook* on life. Believers often think, “Why did God let this happen if He truly loved me...If God really loved me, why did my loved one die...If God really loved me, why did I loose my job...If God really loved me, why did my boyfriend or girlfriend reject me... If God really loved me...?” Read Peter 5:10. In reality, facts do not speak for themselves. Facts are interpreted and say different things to different people, depending upon one’s frame of reference, perspective, or way of looking at a situation. Here is a funny story that illustrates this point. There was a man who decided he was dead. His family and friends tried to convince him how silly it was for him to believe he was a dead man. He would not be persuaded otherwise. His family managed to talk him into going to the doctor. The doctor asked the man if he would agree that dead men don’t bleed. “Sure,” said the man, “I’ll agree to that.” The doctor felt a surge of confidence, pricked the man’s finger with a needle and smiled as a drop of blood came from the man’s finger. The man shook his head, smiled, and said, “What do you know? Dead men do bleed.” Although this is a corny story, it makes my point--facts do not speak for themselves. Everything depends on how we interpret what we are experiencing. Is the container half full or half empty? Is an event a tragedy or a triumph? It all depends on one’s perspective. In Luke 13, people questioned Jesus concerning why disasters occurred. One of those unfortunate events occurred when a tower fell in a small village in Galilee killing 18 people. People were saying the reason these people died was because they were worse sinners than all of the other Galileans. Jesus’ reply was, “I tell you, no! But unless you repent, you too will all perish” (Luke 13:3). While that may sound harsh, Jesus was more concerned with the person’s spiritual well-being than merely satisfying intellectual curiosity. He was not dealing with the question of why, but with the question of what. What God is saying in a calamity is more important than why it happens. It is sometimes only through suffering that we consider carefully our priorities in life and make needed adjustments to line up with the Bible.

Read John 9:1-3. Jesus’ perspective concerning the blind man’s situation was very different than that of the disciples. They viewed the man’s affliction of blindness as a result of sin by either himself or his parents. Jesus saw it as an opportunity for God to be glorified. The disciples made the false assumption that suffering and sin are *always* connected. We do the same today. When a devoted saint comes down with a fatal illness and there seems to be no obvious link to sin or evil, we get angry and accuse God of breaking the rules: i.e., “How can you permit a gentle and kind person like this suffer when there are so many wicked people being prosperous and healthy?” It seems to us God isn’t being fair when the righteous suffer and the wicked succeed. That

concept is based on the assumption that sin and suffering are always connected. In John 9, the Lord refutes this false assumption: "Neither this man or his parents sinned, but that the works of God may be revealed in him" (verse 3). There are two important principles found in this passage. First, sin does not always have something to do with one's affliction. There are times when sin is involved, but not in every case (cross-reference Matthew 5:45). Secondly, God intended to use the blind man's affliction for the positive purpose of displaying His mighty power. Jesus was basically telling the disciples, "You are talking about pain as a punishment, but I am saying that pain is a privilege because God uses it for his glory. The man's past has no power over him because God is going to use his affliction for a great purpose, to glorify God." The book of Job demonstrate there have always been those who serve God, not for what they receive from God, but because they desire to give God the highest trust and confidence due Him. It's all about perspective!

As the story of the blind man unfolds we know Jesus healed him which caused the man to believe in Jesus as the Son of God. Coming into a saving knowledge of Jesus Christ is more important than being physically healed. Laying aside the historical events of this story, we are challenged to view the hard and difficult events of our lives from the perspective of God's grace. A wonderful transformation will take place in the inner self, should we have the faith to do that. It means to accept God's grace and the forgiveness for your past through Jesus Christ. When you know you're truly forgiven and that the penalty for your sins has already been paid on the Cross by Jesus, you can face your troubles without fear that they are consequences of past sins. Grace brings peace in the midst of pain and provides us with a clear conscience so we know without a doubt that when tragedy strikes it is not punishment from God. To trust in Jesus and live in the power of His grace is to live in the assurance that the past has no power over our present.

Most of us lose it spiritually when we try to view life through our fleshly feelings and emotions. When we do that, it is much like the little boy trying to watch a parade through a knothole in a wooden fence. There is a large wooden fence between him and the parade. He places his eye against the knothole in an effort to see the parade. Can you imagine his view of what's happening? How much can he see? Viewing life from God's perspective is like looking at the same parade from the Goodyear blimp, seeing the whole picture from beginning to end as one event. When we look at people, issues and events through the eyes of the old nature (hole in the fence) we only see bits and pieces of what is happening, but never the whole picture. Grace gives you an eternal perspective, the whole picture, the beginning and ending of whatever you might be experiencing. This not only helps you trust Jesus throughout it all, it helps you understand that anything that happens in this material world is temporal and passing anyway. Grace also helps you shift your perspective so problems become less significant and God's greatness becomes more evident. As comfortable as God wants us to be in life, we aren't ready to face the future until we understand that regardless of what's out there in terms of pain and suffering, God's grace is capable of handling it from within us. That is because grace comes to us in the person of Jesus Christ. If you have Jesus, you have sufficient grace to handle anything Satan and life can throw at

you. Unfortunately, many have let unfortunate events (i.e., broken engagements, the tragedy of divorce, the loss of a custody case, the death of a loved one, etc.) cause them to lose their grip on God's empowering grace. When one's spouse, son, or daughter are more important than Jesus, the individual has made an idol out of that person. Idol worshippers have a predictable end, and it's not good. David said in Psalms 27:10, "Though my father and mother forsake me, the LORD will receive me."

No one can make us feel so bad we leave or forsake God. That decision belongs to us and us alone. The joy of our salvation (Isaiah 12:2-3) and emotional happiness are not the same. Emotional happiness is based on circumstances. Thus, it is fleeting. The inner joy of the Lord's provision comes from His presence that has absolutely nothing to do with one's circumstances (Romans 14:17; 1 Thessalonians 1:6). Thus, it is permanent. There are single people who think, "I am miserable today because I am single, but tomorrow I'll be married." Yea! You know what will you be then? You will be miserably married. Marriage never makes anyone happy. Marriage only intensifies the state in which marriage finds you. If you are miserable before marriage, the most you can possibly hope for after you are married is to be miserably married. There are some sound reasons for this. We talk to another person at the rate of about 250 to 300 words per minute. We talk to ourselves between 3,000 to 4,000 words per minute. If what the other person is saying is interesting, we will make an effort to hear what is being said. But, there is such a dialogue going in our head that we start to take all kinds of side trips (e.g., when is he going to be finished; how can I organize my day tomorrow; can I get everything done I want to accomplish next week, etc.). The other person can only occupy 300 words per minute in our mind which leaves over 2,700 words per minute all to self. The other person is out ten words to one. If your spouse is putting out 3,000 words per minute, which results in him or her feeling miserable, and you can only occupy 300 words per minute, do you want to devote your life to a task where the odds are ten to one against you? No one can make you happy! The wise Christian realizes that his or her happiness is too important an issue to put it into anyone's hands but God's. Even in the darkest trial there is an assurance of God's love, grace, and mercy. Personal happiness must be seen as a by-product of the joy of the Lord, not a goal. Rejoice within each circumstance because of your position in Christ, rather than circumvent life's experiences in search of happiness. If you are able to process the events of your life in a healthy way based on God's grace, you'll bring into marriage a happy person. If you bring a happy person into marriage and you are fortunate enough to marry another happy person, the two of you will manage to make each other far happier than either of you could do alone. But, marriage, or any other event, doesn't make a person happy. Happiness stands or falls on how we mentally, emotionally, and spiritually process the events of our life. Real rational joy in Christ is an unending source of sustenance for believers based on God's grace. In a real sense, each of us is continually rediscovering ourselves. Here are four steps to consider if you are not pleased with the story you have been telling yourself about the facts of your life and past history,

Step one: Recall the most hurtful event of your life. A good time to do this is during your prayer time when you are alone with God. Don't let the enemy deceive you into

thinking you have forgotten it. The event would not come up into your conscious mind if you had forgotten.

Step two: Define the event and let the painful emotions associated with the experience resurface. Express the pain out loud to God. Don't fight back the tears, the anger, or the bitterness. Tell God how you truly feel. It is healthy to let your real feelings flow. You might want to kneel next to your bed because you may become so angry you want to hit something. If you do, hit the mattress. You say, "Isn't that something strange for a Christian to do?" It's better than having a twisted soul where bitterness rules supreme (Hebrews 12:15). Until you deal with the true origin of your pain and anger and get your feelings out in the open, you will have a warped view of reality. There are those who piously say to God, "Lord, you know what so and so did to me. But, I still have love in my heart for my enemies." God knows how phony that is. If you want a good pattern for honest prayer, look at Psalms 58 and 59. David was honest about his feelings. That is one of the things that made him so great. David didn't pray, "Heavenly Father, Thou knowest the charity in my heart for my enemy." David said, "Break the teeth in their mouths... (Psalms 58:6)... "Consume them in wrath, consume them till they are no more" (Psalms 59:13). In other words, "kill them!" Will God do that? Of course not! When you feel that way, you need to say it in the presence of God who loves you and understands, and in whom you can trust with the true feelings of your heart. It's important to empty your soul out before the Lord. The old timers use to say, "Pray until you have prayed through." That means to pray until your soul is cleaned out of fleshly garbage that has gotten stuck there through your emotions. Empty yourself before God; cry until you can't cry anymore. Getting in touch with those explosive feelings in the presence of God not only allows the hurt and pain to escape, it starts the true healing process.

Step three: Meditate and begin worshipping God. There is no better time to fill your soul with God and His goodness than when it is empty. Jesus tells us if we don't fill ourselves with something better after evil spirits have been expelled, they will not only reenter, they will bring in more demons (Luke 11:24-26). I am not saying that everyone who has a hurtful experience is demon possessed. I am only making the point Jesus made, and that is, a person is not full of anything if he or she is not full of something. It is possible to empty your soul of all the hurt and pain and then turn around and let it all back in. Here's the key: fill that void with God after being emptied of bitter emotions!

Step four: Allow the Holy Spirit to show you a new way of interpreting the event, a way that is not only consistent with the facts, but one that will not leave you angry and bitter. God wants to give you a new way of talking to yourself about these things that doesn't hurt when they are recalled. How do you know when you have done that? You will no longer feel anger or bitterness when you recall what happened to you.

SECTION 5 – GRACE STEALERS

Second Peter 3:18, “But grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ...” If not dealt with, here are four things that can steal grace and keep you from growing up in Christ, the author and object of grace:

Fear of the unknown: There are believers who are paralyzed with the fear of what might happen in the future. They accomplished nothing for Jesus because they are shackled to a morbid fatalism. It simply confirms what they see as their destiny of defeat when trouble comes. That is the opposite of God’s grace which has liberated us to live creatively and confidently in the midst of all of life’s circumstances, good and bad, painful and pleasant, without fear (2 Timothy 1:7). While the future is spelled out in the Bible (i.e., Matthew 24; Luke 21; Revelation 17 through 21), mercifully, God has kept the specific details of our lives to Himself. There are those who go to a soothsayer or prophet in an effort to find out what is going to happen in the future. If someone could tell us what the future holds it would take all the surprise out of life. It would also overwhelm most of us. When disaster hits, God sends us His grace to help us see things His way and view that event without fear. Seeing things God’s way means to affirm that in Christ you have hope for the future. I’m told that the number one fear of most men is the fear of losing their hair. The fear of most women is not having enough money.

The well known speaker, Corrie Ten Boom, related in one of her speeches how she felt when she thought she might be caught by the Nazis during World War II. She said to her father, “I don’t know if I have enough grace to die.” Her father replied, “Oh, sweetheart, don’t worry about dying grace. If I am telling you that I am going to send you to the store tomorrow, do I give you the money for the groceries today?” She said, “No. Tomorrow, just before I go to the store you’ll put the money right in my hand and send me off.” Her father said, “That’s the way God appropriates dying grace.” I agree. If you ever learn to truly trust Jesus you’ll never worry about anything again, including death. When the times comes for us to face death, God will put His hand in ours and off we go to be with the Lord. I’ve stood by the deathbed of many saints over the years of my ministry. Some went out of this life with a demeanor of deep peace; others, fearful and angry. There should be absolutely no fear in death for the believer because Christ has already won the victory over death on our behalf (1 Corinthians 15:55-56). A lot of Christians will die during the Great Tribulation that is coming upon the earth (Revelation 6:9-11; 13:5-10; 20:4)! No matter, Christ is in control. The book of Revelation was written to inspire believers of all generations to remain faithful to Christ even in the face of death (Revelation 14:12-13). Christ states in Revelation 1:18, “I hold the keys of death and Hades.” This is a reference to Christ’s authority and power. What could life possibly confront us with that God’s marvelous grace cannot handle? The answer is absolutely nothing. There is absolutely no situation or need God cannot handle, because God’s grace has no boundaries, no limits, and no parameters.

Matthew 6:34, “Give your entire attention to what God is doing right now, and don’t get worked up about what may or may not happen tomorrow. God will help you deal with

whatever hard things come up when the time comes" (Message). How wise Jesus is in this passage to tell us to take one day at a time. The key to overcoming fear of the future is to tap into God's grace and take one day at a time. When the Israelites were content to get one day of manna at a time, it was always there and sufficient. But when they tried to gather more days of manna than what God had allotted, the manna rotted, produced worms, and stunk (Exodus 16:20). If you want life to go rotten on you in a hurry, just try to draw more than one day's grace at a time. But, if you are willing to trust God one day at a time, you'll receive grace sufficient for that day. The future is a friend of the redeemed. We should anticipate it hopefully, enthusiastically, and joyfully even when it looks bleak. Recall, the blind man's affliction in John 9 was so the work of God might be displayed in his life (John 9:3). His affliction did not make him a victim, rather a vessel and a conduit for God's miraculous display of divine grace and power. Your situation, affliction, or suffering may be the occasion for the miraculous working power to be revealed in you as well. One thing for sure, you will either be shown a way out of your situation according to the will of God, or you'll be given the needed grace to go through it (1 Corinthians 10:13; 12:9). That means that whatever is happening to you is leading to a wonderful goal and purpose that will be fulfilled someday.

Worry: Worry, another grace stealer, is intense emotional strain over a situation which we cannot change or control. Read Matthew 6:30-34 and Philippians 4:6-7. If God's people would put into practice God's "no worry" policy, it would eliminate a lot of stress, depression, phobias, nervous breakdowns and other psychological and physical problems (i.e., worry breaks down our immune system). Usually the thing we are stressed over is not as severe as the emotional turmoil. It has been said that 95% of the stuff we worry about never comes to pass, and the other 5% cannot be changed by worrying.

One of the ways to deal with worry is to eliminate as many of the stressors in our life as possible. We create a lot of our stress by not managing our time and resources wisely. We wait until the last minute to go somewhere and then become stressed out because of time restraints, traffic jams, etc. We buy "stuff" on credit and then don't have enough money to pay the mortgage or electric bill. God can help us deal with impossible situations, but He expects us to deal with the possible ones. One of the errors we have made in Christianity is to treat money as a natural entity. We treat it like a tool to be used for good or bad. When Jesus referred to money He gave it a personality (Matthew 6:24). Not many of us are consciously aware of the kind of grip the spirit behind money has on our lives and how Satan tries to keep us in financial bondage. We need to hold both possessions and relationships loosely. Then, when we lose them we won't be so devastated. Another way to eliminate stress is to prioritize our day and concentrate on the three most important things on our schedule. If the other things get done, fine. If not, don't worry about it. The reason some believers are stressed out is because they are doing things God hasn't asked for. That was the case with Martha in Luke 10:41. Someone has also said, "God has given us all the time we need to do the things He wants us to do."

The best way to deal with stress is to rest in the Lord. Read Hebrews 4:8-9. The cure for worry is to totally trust God with everything. The Greek word *sabbatismos* used in verse 9 means “a Sabbath” or *Sabbath-rest*. David Roper once stated, “The Sabbath is not a day, it’s a disposition, a mind-set of resting every day, all day, for all we have to accomplish, believing that God is at the heart of all our activity.” Jesus makes the case in Matthew 6:30-34 that God is on the job 24 hours a day whether we are or not. God made our planet to spin on its axis so that we spend part of the time in the light of the sun and part in darkness (Genesis 1:14-19). This cycle of light and darkness is called a day. The rising and setting of the sun mark every day. God also made our planet to rotate around the sun. It takes Earth 365 ¼ days to complete one trip around the sun. This we call a year. These natural divisions of time remind us of what life is all about, beginnings and endings. Nothing lasts forever! This is true of the good times and bad times. Although it may seem like night in your life which will never end, it too will pass.

Paul tells us in 2 Corinthians 4:17-18 that the painful passing moments of our life are nothing in comparison to eternity with Jesus. Why should we worry over a \$200 light bill when all of the universe will be ours when we enter God’s eternal kingdom? The pain of the moment won’t even be a grain of sand on the seashore of eternity when you see Jesus face to face. While your situation may not change because you maintain a state of faith and worship, your inner self will. You will acquire a heavenly dimension against the temporal situation and view life from God’s window in heaven. Once you enter into God’s rest, you will experience an indescribable peace over the present as well as the future.

Unbelief: If left unchecked, unbelief will rob you of your faith. There is no grace without faith (Ephesians 2:8). Faith escorts us into the storehouse of God’s blessings. Unbelief is not the total absence of faith; it is not enough faith! Ancient Israel is an example of what unbelief can do to a person. With the exception of Moses, Caleb, Joshua, and their families, the Israelites who came out of Egypt never experienced God’s spiritual rest and joy. Furthermore, they spent 40 unnecessary years in the desert and died there because they didn’t have enough faith to believe God could take care of them when they entered Canaan. Instead of comparing the Canaanites with God as they should have done, they compared them with themselves (Numbers 13:33). They never could grasp the truth that their enemies were mere grasshoppers in comparison to God. Moses tried to turn the hearts of the Israelites back to God by reminding them of God’s parental care in the desert (Deuteronomy 1:29-30). Still, this unbelieving generation could not trust God with the future (Deuteronomy 1:32). One might think Israel’s problem was the sin of rebellion based on Hebrews 3:8. When you read the rest of the chapter, you’ll find that unbelief was driving the rebellion (Hebrews 3:12-19). Except for Joshua and Caleb, this unbelieving generation of Israelites died in the wilderness and never did see the Promised Land (Numbers 14:20-24; Deuteronomy 2:35). The writer of Hebrews gives us this warning: “See to it brothers, that none of you has a sinful, unbelieving heart that turns away from the living God” (Hebrews 3:12). In other words, stick with Jesus; stick with grace.

Legalism: Legalism will definitely steal your faith in Jesus if left unchecked. Read Matthew 15:1-9; Mark 7:6-7. A legalist believes he/she can balance the scales of God's justice by living a certain way or through servitude. What legalists fail to understand is that only Christ's death on the Cross can balance the scales of justice (Romans 5: 6-11, 17-18). In a man-centered theology everything depends on what the individual does. In a grace-centered theology, everything depends on what Christ has *already done* on our behalf and we believe it. God's favor is never our merited portion--never something we deserve, qualify for, or earn because "there is none righteous no, not one" (Romans 3:10). A revelation of the grace of God is the only remedy for legalism. There are pastors who have rejected grace because they are afraid of encouraging Christians to live careless lives. They should realize we always reap more than what we sow in life (Galatians 6:8). But is there to be no end of the harvest? Of course it would have been better not to have done the things we did after conversion, but now we're talking about fleshly perfection, something that not even the great apostle Paul claimed to possess.

That being said, grace does not negate our need to deal with strongholds of the flesh. Read 2 Corinthians 10:3-5. When we think of strongholds, we usually think of something out there in the world such as bar rooms, organized crime, liquor, drugs, sexual deviance, etc. While a stronghold includes these things, it is not the label Paul gives. When Paul speaks of a stronghold, he is talking about something that controls us from within. Notice he is writing to Christians in this passage! Sounds like the enemy doesn't it?" Guess what? It is! No doubt some will say, "Now wait a minute, I am saved, filled with the Spirit, and on my way to heaven. There's no stronghold in me!" Fine, but the apostle Paul says if you want to look for strongholds look at yourself! He was writing to Spirit-filled believers with numerous spiritual gifts in operation. While a stronghold can be anything that is hindering one's spiritual walk, it definitely includes an unforgiving spirit, bitterness, worry, unbelief, ungodly lifestyles, etc. These all come from within a person. Placing confidence in the flesh causes a person to lower his or her spiritual guard and opens the door to sin. If not dealt with properly, sin leads to a stronghold. If you are one of those who don't think you are above temptation you've been deceived. For detailed instructions on how to break free of strongholds of the flesh, see my spiritual warfare study, Part I, *Pulling Down Strongholds of the Enemy*. .

SECTION 6 - ACCESSING GRACE DURING TRIBULATIONS

James said, "Consider it pure joy whenever you face trials of mankind" (James 1:2). Oh, yea, sure, right! So what is this tribulation or suffering James is talking about which we can rejoice in? He cannot be talking about sin. Could you imagine James saying, "God, I am so glad I am tempted to commit murder? It is the most joyful thing I have ever experienced?" I don't think so. James is talking about the testing of our *faith* that produces endurance. Paul tells us in Romans 5:3 that we should "rejoice in our sufferings, because we know that suffering produces perseverance."

Read 1 Peter 1:6-7. God rarely removes His people from calamities that come to both believers and unbelievers. Sometimes, the Lord intervenes in a miraculous way and

keeps us from adverse circumstances. Most of the times, however, God simply spreads a table in the presence of our enemies (Psalms 23:5) and gives us the needed grace to endure the hardship in order to bring Him greater glory. Somewhere along life's pathway, you'll likely face circumstances beyond your control, events you never expected or wished to encounter. Therefore, disruptive moments are associated with pain, failure, and humiliation. Not that they have to be, but that seems to be the way life on earth plays out. Few of us ever fully grasp the simple but painful, Biblical truth that the heat of suffering is a refiner's fire, purifying the gold of godly character and wisdom. I don't about you, but I'd rather it be a simpler and more comfortable process. Life simply doesn't always turn out that way. But we can be comforted by the fact nothing--no circumstance, no trouble; no testing--can ever touch you until it has first been approved by God (Romans 8:28-39). Warren Wiersbe once said, "When God permits His children to go through the furnace, He keeps His eye on the clock and His hand on the thermostat. His loving heart knows how much and how long."

Knowing that Jesus is in control and we are in a right standing with the Father regardless of what happens to us, produces endurance. What some believers do when they fail or experience a hardship is question their relationship with God. When we do that, it is easy to fall for one of the many false teachings concerning trials and tribulations. Here are three of them. For example, there are those who say the way to access God's grace during times of trouble is to pray to one of the saints. While we should respect the religious beliefs of others, rituals, or devotion to anyone other than Jesus Christ, cannot help you access God's grace in time of testing. Furthermore, confession followed by absolution by a priest is no substitute for divine forgiveness from God with its witness of the Spirit (Hebrews 10:10, 14).

Another false teaching comes from TV preachers. They tell us the way to access grace when we are in need is to support their ministry; e.g., "If you will "support this ministry God will bless you." While we should do good deeds if at all possible, doing good deeds will not gain you favor with God. Only faith in Jesus can do that (Ephesians 2:8). Then there are those who tell us the way to overcome tribulation is through positive confession. That is when we experience some hardship and need to muster up enough faith to say "I am not experiencing what I am experiencing." When we are sick we are told to say over and over, "I am healed...I am healed..." This false teaching comes from the "faith movement." No where in the Bible are we told to do this. Besides, this causes the person to virtually enter into denial..."I'm not sick...I'm not sick..." All the faith movement did was teach us to do what comes naturally, and that is to say, "This can't be happening to me...I refuse to accept this..." Entering into denial is a natural response to a crisis or extreme trouble. All the faith movement did was to teach us how to do professionally what we were already capable of doing through the flesh, and that is to deny that anything is happening. That's why it was so easy to believe what they said. The apostles taught the opposite. Peter, for example, said to "greatly rejoice" when you experience extreme tribulation (Peter 1:6-7). When the apostles speak of tribulation of faith in their writings they are not talking about tribulation of trials, rather *tribulation of faith*. *Tribulation of faith* is when we experience difficulties and are tempted to come out of "justified by faith" (Romans 5:1) and go back under "justification

by works” as a means of accessing God’s grace. We must never do this. It is an antichrist doctrine to tell a believer in Christ the reason he/she is not healed or does not have some other blessing is because there is some sin in his/her life, or there’s something he/she is not doing good enough, hard enough; or even worse, they don’t have enough faith. You have faith if you have accepted Jesus as Lord and Savior (Hebrews 12:2). The problem is we aren’t using what we have!

Faith is the channel through which we receive the grace of God (Ephesians 2:8). It also brings an inward righteousness that allows us to access God’s grace through the indwelling presence of the Holy Spirit. The way in which we are made righteous is by believing in Jesus Christ (Romans 3:22). Paul taught in the book of Romans and the book of Galatians that when a person believes in Jesus, he/she actually possesses an inward righteousness of God (Romans 1:17; Galatians 3:6). That occurs through the indwelling presence of the Holy Spirit (Galatians 3:14 and Galatians 5:5). Although the Holy Spirit is a promise found in scripture (John 14:16), He is not the promise that brings us into the righteousness of God. That promise is justification by faith when we believe in Jesus, which brings us into a right relationship with the Father (Galatians 3:18; Romans 5:18). This right relationship with the Father gives the Holy Spirit the means to come into our innermost being and impact our thinking (Galatians 3:14; 5:5). Galatians 3:15-18 describes the covenant God made with Abraham. Here we see that the promise of righteousness by faith is fulfilled in Christ and not in the Law. Since no one can make void or cancel a human agreement (verse 15), how much more is this true of a divine agreement (verse 17). In other words, the Law which came 430 years later could not have set aside this earlier agreement with Abraham (verse 17). Galatians 3:16 points out that the promise of justification by faith was not given to all of the descendants of Abraham, but only one, Christ. Thus, God’s promise of justification by faith found its fulfillment in Christ and all who are united with Him. One of the purposes of the Law was to “lead us to Christ that we might be justified by faith. Now that faith has come, we are not longer under the supervision of the Law” (Galatians 3:14-15).

The human mind works like this: if we don’t immediately get a need met from God, we examine ourselves to see what we have done that has pushed God away or what we need to do to get God’s favor. That leads us back into useless methods as a means of trying to access God’s blessings; e.g., “Maybe if I pray an hour each day, etc.” Praying will help your soul but it will not get you any favor with God. God’s favor or blessings are undeserved and unearned. All of God’s blessings come by faith from Jesus and Him alone (John 14:6; Acts 4:12; 1 Timothy 2:5). The moment we start trying to earn God’s favor it becomes a debt from God and not His grace (Romans 4:4). God will not be indebted to anyone! Believing the problem is with us when we don’t have our needs met is what causes us to fall away from grace (Galatians 5:4). What we must realize is that we are saved by “faith through grace” and not by something we have or have not done (Ephesians 2:8). We remain saved the same way! Although we need to repent when we step out of line, a sin does not take a person from underneath God’s grace or away from His love. But, apostasy will. The modern-day doctrine called *eternal security* is the opposite of the original doctrine Calvin and the Puritans taught. Calvin taught

perseverance of the saints. Perseverance of the saints says that a true Christian could not die in sin because God would see to it that he/she had an opportunity to repent and be restored before dying. Calvin never taught that a believer who apostatizes can go to heaven. He taught that perseverance of the saints is persevering grace. There is a vast difference. The Greek term for apostasy (*apostasia*) is a falling away, defection, rebellion, abandonment, withdrawal, or turning from what one has formerly turned to. To be an apostate means to sever one's saving relationship with Christ or to withdraw from vital union with Him in true faith (1 Timothy 1:19; 4:1-2). It is clear from what Jesus said that individual apostasy is possible only for those who have first experienced regeneration through the Holy Spirit (Luke 8:13; Hebrews 6:4-5; Revelation 3:5). One's name *must have been written in* the "Book of Life" to have it *blotted out* (Revelation 3:5)! During John's time, names of Roman citizens were recorded in a register. To have one's name removed was to lose one's Roman citizenship. In the case of Christians, it's a heavenly citizenship (Philippians 3:20). Examples of apostasy can be found through out the Bible: Hebrews 3:7-19; 4:6-11; 6:4-6; 10:26-31; 2 Peter 2:20-22; Acts 1:25; Romans 8:13; Galatians 5:4; 1 Timothy 1:18-20; Exodus 33; 2 Kings 17:7-23; Psalms 106; Isaiah 1:2-4; Jeremiah 2:1-9; Ephesians 5:1-7.

Apostasy can occur when one goes back under the Old Testament Law or some other means for justification. That is what those in the Church at Galatia did. Paul said to them, "You who are trying to be justified by Law have been alienated from Christ; you have fallen away from grace" (Galatians 5:4). In other words, the way to fall from grace is by apostasy. Committing a single sin is not apostasy. You say, "If a sin does not affect my right standing with God, what about Paul's statement in Galatians 5:21 where he says, 'Those who live like this will not inherit the kingdom of God.'" Paul is not talking about an occasional sin in this passage; he's talking about a lifestyle, a habit which is controlling the individual. Paul is comparing life in the Spirit with the old sinful nature under Law. Pay special attention to verses 16, 18, and 24. If a person is a slave to a sin habit he/she is living under Law, not under grace (verse 16; Romans 6:17-18). Failing to put total confidence in Jesus to carry us through a crisis causes us to come out of grace and go back under the Law. Once we go back under the Law, we become condemned all over again. That is why it is imperative we maintain "saving faith" in Christ Jesus regardless of what comes our way. Only through Christ are we able to access God's saving grace and experience His righteousness and life in the Spirit (Galatians 3:14; 5:5). The major difference between Biblical Christianity and other religions on earth is that every religion, without exception, is a system of works while *Christianity is grace through faith* (Ephesians 2:8). In the human system of works, man is forever attempting to do something to satisfy the religious demands of a holy God and thereby save himself. Under grace, God in Christ has met those demands. Believing that brings unbelievable peace (Romans 5:1).

Read Romans 5:2. To understand the word "access" as Paul uses it in this passage, think of having a computer that requires an access code to get it to start operating. Once we are in the computer we can move around and access the different files and information that can help us. Let's say we work real hard to get into the computer but each time we try a message appears on the screen that says, "Access denied." Then,

we discover the access code is a person's name. So we try using the names of one of the saints (i.e., Saint Mary, Saint Peter, Saint Patrick, etc.). Each time we put in one of these names we get back "access denied." That is because the computer has been programmed to accept only one name. Until we use that specific name, nothing happens. Similarly, accessing the grace of God is through only one name, Christ Jesus. Faith in Jesus is the only access into God's grace (Romans 5:2). Paul said in Romans 1:16, "I am not ashamed of the gospel because it is the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes..." What is this revelation that makes the gospel of Christ so powerful? Verse 17 tells us: "For in the gospel a righteousness from God is revealed, a righteousness that is by faith from first to last, just as it is written: 'The righteous will live by faith.'" Paul did not say the power of God comes to us because we have the gifts of the Spirit in operation, or because we maintain a good lifestyle, etc. He tells us the power of God is manifested in faith pertaining to righteousness. It is the righteousness of God which comes to us when we believe in Jesus. There is no favor with God outside of justification by faith through Jesus Christ. Actually, it is the righteousness of God that gives us access. We cannot have one without the other. A person cannot have grace without God's righteousness. The only way in which we are made righteous is through Jesus Christ (Romans 3:22; 4:3-5). When we receive Jesus we automatically receive God's righteousness (Romans 3:21-26; 5:18; Galatians 3:6). The righteousness of God comes through the divine exchange. The divine exchange is when Jesus took our punishment on the Cross for our sins and in exchange gives us His righteousness when we believe in Him. When we believe in Jesus, everything we were, Jesus became and suffered for. Everything the Lord was before the Father, we became when we believed in Him. Who is eligible for the divine exchange? If you are breathing, you are eligible. If you have repented of your sins and accepted Jesus as Lord and Savior, you already have it! You say, "But you don't know what I have done. No, but I know the power of God and what Jesus has done on your behalf (Romans 5:8).

If you get nothing else from this section of the study, understand the gospel of Christ is not a revelation of promises pertaining to faith, rather "a revelation of God's righteousness pertaining to faith" (Romans 1:17). There is no place in the Bible that tells you to confess promises just so you will be able to receive them. There is no verse, nor context, of any passage which tells you that if you find a promise and start confessing it, God will give it to you. False teachers have become very skilled at taking Bible verses out of context in an effort to try and prove something. We must not weave together a bunch of verses from various sources in order to justify a man-made concept. Paul states in 2 Corinthians 1:20, "No matter how many promises God has made, they are "Yes" in Christ. And so through Him the "Amen" is spoken by us to the glory of God." That is because all of the promises of the Kingdom come from God's undeserved favor through Jesus. The reason we need to teach believers they are righteous is because the righteous get it all! At least that is what Jesus said in Matthew 6:33.

Over the years, we have told people what they must do to get God to work on their behalf and nothing happened. As a result, they were left absolutely devastated. We told sick people to say certain words or phrases to get God to work on their behalf. We

call this a gospel but, it is not a gospel at all. It is a heavy yoke of bondage. When faith teachers teach on faith, they usually teach in relationship to a person's needs. They tell believers how to apply faith in order to get from God what He has already given through Christ Jesus. All this does is subdivide faith. Although they were not consciously aware of what they were teaching, faith teachers were teaching believers to switch to another faith. It is no longer just faith in Christ. It is now faith for health, faith for finances, faith for the Baptism of the Holy Spirit, faith for the gifts of the Spirit, etc. People were taught how to be healed, receive financial blessing, etc., instead of teaching them how righteous they were through Christ. They also taught people to hand back to Satan the only tool he has to rule over people, the Law. When we try to muster up enough faith to believe God for His promises, we automatically fall into self-righteousness and legalism. Self-righteousness is like a yardstick or ruler with pride and guilt at the opposite ends. Pride says, "I am good enough on my own." Guilt says, "I am not good enough even with Jesus." Self-righteousness is what is being measured when we say I am good enough (pride) or I am not good enough (guilt or self-condemnation). It is easy for a person to identify pride, but it is very rare for a Christian to identify self-righteousness that is caused by guilt and self-condemnation. Self-righteousness is when you feel you are better than others when you do well, or less of what God says about you.

The reason the revelation of the righteousness of Christ delivers us from self-righteousness is because we no longer think we are better than someone else or feel we are not as good as others (Romans 3:23-25). When we leave the realm of self-righteousness, we leave the emotions of pride and guilt behind. In his book, *The Legalist*, Jack Steward said, "A legalist only knows two emotions: one is mean and the other one is miserable." I agree. The person is mean when he/she thinks he is right and miserable when he/she finds out he/she is wrong. This carries over into every part of the mental and emotional life of a religious person. He/she is either out sneaking around doing something extremely off the wall or acting like he/she is holier than others. You know what you are going to be like when others do not measure up to your standards? You are going to be bitter, judgmental, and condemning. Some of the meanest people on earth go to church regularly. Some of them stand behind pulpits. You can find kinder people in bars and among prostitutes, because they already know they will never measure up to God's holiness. While self-righteousness causes a person to be mean and miserable, God's righteousness manifests the opposite. God's righteousness brings about the fruit of the Spirit. The spiritual transformation of the Christian character is not evidenced by spiritual gifts, but by the fruit of the Spirit (Galatians 5:22-23). This is the standard by which all Christian character is measured. It is also the means of identifying those who belong to Christ (Luke 6:44-45; Galatians 5:19-24). Loving behavior as demonstrated through the fruit of the Spirit is not an option for a true follower of Christ, it is an *expectation!* Circumstances do not allow the behaviors identified in the fruit of the Spirit to be set aside even temporarily. Even under the most trying circumstances love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control (Galatians 5:22-23) mark the transformed character of a child of God. These behavioral qualities, when combined with Spirit-chosen gifts or competencies, provide the means by which the transformed person contributes to the mission of the Church and the wholeness of the functioning body

(1 Corinthians 12).

Read Romans 4:13-14. Paul said, the reason the gospel of Christ is the power of God is because it reveals “a righteousness that is by faith” (Romans 1:17). That is a righteousness that has nothing to do with good deeds or following a set of rules or commands, but is based solely on the righteousness of Christ. We receive Christ’s righteousness by faith. If what you believe does not reveal a righteousness that comes from God without deeds, it is not the gospel of Christ Jesus. God declares you righteous by what He did through His Son Jesus and not by anything you have done or will ever do. You may also be thinking, “What about what James said about “faith without works being dead” (James 2:17)? James is talking about a faith in Christ that produces works and not works for self-justification. There is a vast difference. *Works of faith* are those done in the spirit of liberty, purely out of love and appreciation for what God has done for us. Righteous faith works can only be done by those who have already been declared righteous (Romans 1:17; 3:22; Philippians 3:9). An ape imitating the actions of a human does not make the ape human. If he became a human, it would undoubtedly be not by virtue of his works by which he imitated man, but by virtue of something else; namely, by an act of God. Having been made a human, he would perform the works of humans in proper fashion. Justification by faith does not require the works of the Law, but a living faith which performs its works. The Pharisees had memorized God’s Law, but failed to live up to it because they did not have the internal motivation to do so. Saving faith in Jesus Christ (Ephesians 2:8) is the only faith that works! A Christian was once asked by a nonbeliever, “How is it you have the audacity to believe you are righteous after believing in Jesus?” The reply was, “I will explain to you why I have the audacity to believe I am righteous without my deeds if you can ever explain to me how Jesus became sin without every sinning (1 Peter 2:22). Did Jesus do anything wrong to be declared a sinner and a curse for us (2 Corinthians 5:21; Galatians 3:13)? The answer is “no.” Jesus was “tempted in every way, just as we are--yet was without sin” (Hebrews 4:15). "God made Him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in Him we might become the righteousness of God" (2 Corinthians 5:21). Galatians 3:13, “Christ redeemed us from the curse of the Law by becoming a curse for us...” Did Jesus do anything wrong to be declared a sinner and a curse? No! Did you do anything to deserve God’s righteousness? No. Have you become righteous? You have if Jesus is your personal Savior. How did you become righteous when you did not do a single thing to become righteous? By your faith in Jesus! How does one remain righteous before God? The same way, by faith in Jesus!

The root cause of a sin habit is caused by a faulty belief system that causes an individual to end up serving their former nature (Galatians 5:16) and abandoning faith in Christ (Galatians 5:4). Charles Spurgeon once said, “God’s grace is the mother and nurse of holiness, not the excuse for sin.” Grace does not give us the authority to sin, rather the *desire and ability not to sin* (Romans 8:13-14; Galatians 5:16). People who live under God’s grace will not be bound (controlled) by a sinful habit because they are no longer being controlled by their sinful nature (Galatians 5:19-20). A sin habit is only a symptom of a greater spiritual problem, and that is their belief system. They have taken themselves from underneath the grace of God and the righteousness of Christ and gone back under Law. First Corinthians 6:12-20; Galatians 5:4; 5:21 and 1 Timothy

1:5-8-11 supports this viewpoint. The bottom line is we must not abandon our faith union with Christ regardless of what is going on in our life. To do so will plunge us back under Law and into a disobedient lifestyle.

Conclusion

God's grace is truly amazing. But what is more amazing is that in spite of all that God has done to redeem the human race, most people do not accept God's offer of grace through Jesus Christ. There is a bumper sticker that states, "Don't be caught dead without Jesus." That's a good word! Here is a closing illustration that demonstrates why it's imperative we believe in Jesus. There was a seasoned veteran sky diver who had over 800 jumps to his credit. He was also a skilled photographer. He would record sky diving teams as they went through their routines. One day, with great skill, he followed a group of sky divers with his camera up to the time they opened their parachutes. When it came time for him to pull his rip cord, he discovered, with horror, he had forgotten to put on his parachute! Imagine the panic that gripped this man as he plunged to his imminent death, a death that could have so easily been avoided. Imagine the panic of the millions who end up in hell, a death that could have been avoided by simply accepting Jesus as Lord and Savior! Saving grace through faith in Jesus is the only parachute for the human soul. We must not leave this earth without Christ living in our hearts. Leaving this life without God's parachute of saving grace results in being separated from God for all of eternity (Matthew 4:19; 16:24; Luke 9:23-25; John 3:16-18; 10:4, 27; 12:26; Titus 2:11; Revelation 14:4).

May God richly bless you as you walk in His empowering grace!

Questionnaire
GRACE PART 1: EMPOWERING GRACE

In the pursuit of a course of this nature much scripture must be *read*. It is recommended that you read the assigned scripture before reading the explanatory material in the study course. Certainly, the student hardly needs the exhortation to read *prayerfully*. The Bible is a class by itself, different from any other book ever written. That is because the Holy Spirit is its true author (2 Peter 1:21).

It is also recommended that you read through an entire section before answering the questions provided in the workbook. The value of reading with continuity is that we discern the central line of thought, the pivotal idea, which is so essential to the understanding of other scriptures related to it. Questions have been prepared following each section to help you grasp the “meat” of the study. It is important that you completely read through each section before answering these questions.

Section I – Understanding Grace

1. Write down your definition of the grace of God based on the study.

2. According to the writer, “There are three dimensions of God’s grace: common grace; God’s unmerited favor for pardoning sin; and God’s sustaining power of grace.”
___True ___False

Section 2 – Common Grace

1. Which statement is correct?
 - a. Common grace is God’s unmerited favor for pardoning sin.
 - b. Common grace is God’s empowering grace to overcome sin.
 - c. Common grace is God’s unmerited favor for sustaining life on the planet.
 - d. None of the above.

2. Our natural talents come from which dimension of God’s grace?
 - a. Saving grace.
 - b. Common grace.
 - c. Empowering grace.
 - d. The Law.

3. Name one talent God has given you?

How are you using this talent for God?

Section 4 - Empowering Grace

1. Saving grace is grace towards us from God; empowering grace is *God's ability* ___ ___ through the Holy Spirit to do good works.
2. The operational power of God's grace is both the "desire" and "power" to do what?
 - a. To live like we want to.
 - b. To live like the deacons in the Church.
 - c. To do God's will.
 - d. To sit at home and watch TV.
3. Why is grace power?
4. Grace is not only God's unmerited favor towards us; it is God's unmerited power through us. ___True ___False
5. God's part is to save us and empower us through grace. Our part is to be _____ of that grace.
6. What could life possibly confront us with that God's marvelous grace cannot handle? The answer is _____.
7. There is absolutely no situation or need God cannot handle. Why?
8. God's enduring grace not only equals the need, it changes our _____ on life.
9. Read John 9:1-3. What false assumption did the disciples make concerning the blind man's affliction?
10. Explain the difference between the joy of the Lord and emotional happiness?

Section 5 – Grace Stealers

1. The writer presented three "grace stealers" in respect to the unknown. What are they?

2. Matthew 6:34 show us how wise Jesus is when He tell us to take _____
_____.
3. Instead of looking at the people and events in our lives from our fleshly perspective, we need to do what?
- Give up.
 - Go to trust those whom we associate with.
 - Let God give us an eternal perspective.
 - None of the above.
4. The first generation of Israelites spent 40 unnecessary years in the desert and then died there because they didn't have enough faith to believe God could take care of them when they entered Canaan. ___ True ___ False
5. Memory is one of God's great gifts to humanity. Unhealthy and hurtful memories, when biblically processed, recede into forgetfulness, leaving only pleasant memories. ___ True ___ False

Section 6 - Accessing Grace during Tribulations of Faith

1. God rarely removes His people from calamities that come to both believers and unbelievers. ___ True ___ False
2. When the apostles speak of "tribulations," they are not talking about tribulation of trials, rather tribulation of _____.
3. The major difference between biblical Christianity and other religions on earth is that every religion, without exception, is a system of works while Christianity is _____ . (See Ephesians 2:8)
4. The gospel of Christ is not a revelation of promises pertaining to faith, rather a revelation of God's righteousness pertaining to faith. ___ True ___ False
5. According to Romans 4:13-14, if what you believe does not reveal righteousness that comes from God through faith; it is not the gospel of Christ Jesus. ___ True ___ False
6. The root cause of a sin habit is caused by a faulty _____ that causes an individual to end up serving their former nature (Galatians 5:16) and the abandoned faith in Christ.
7. Grace does not give us the authority to sin, rather the desire and ability not to sin. ___ True ___ False



Answers Sheet
GRACE PART 1: EMPOWERING GRACE

Section I – Understanding Grace

1. Grace is “*God’s unmerited favor that is imparted through saving faith in the Lord Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior that causes the heart to rejoice.*”
2. True.

Section 2 – Common Grace

1. c
2. b
3. (Answer is optional).

Section 3 – Saving Grace

1. a
2. T
3. a
4. Adam was a free moral agent to choose. God placed the tree of knowledge of good and evil and the tree of life in the Garden (Genesis 2:9), not to entrap, but so that man could choose between life and death (Genesis 2:17). There can be no obedience from the heart unless there is the freedom to disobey!
5. Jesus.
6. d
7. Sinful.

Section 4 - Empowering Grace

1. in us.
2. c
3. Because it is being administered by the Holy Spirit.
4. T
5. Good stewards.
6. Absolutely nothing.
7. Because God’s grace has no boundaries, no limits, and no parameters.
8. Outlook.
9. The disciples made the false assumption that suffering and sin is *always* connected. Jesus made it clear they are not!

10. Emotional happiness is based on circumstances; thus it is fleeting. The inner joy of the Lord's provision comes from the Holy Spirit that has absolutely nothing to do with one's circumstances (Romans 14:17; 1 Thessalonians 1:6). Thus, it is permanent.

Section 5 – Grace Stealers

1. Fear, anxiety, and unbelief.
2. One day at a time.
3. c
4. T
5. T

Section 6 - Accessing Grace during Tribulations of Faith

1. T
2. faith.
3. grace through faith.
4. T
5. T
6. belief system.
7. T