

# **Grace Part I**

## **God's Empowering Grace (*Revised*)**

(By Boyce A. Teas, MS)

### **Preface**

Except otherwise noted, all scripture is taken from the New International Version (NIV) of the Bible. You are permitted and encouraged to make copies of this study provided you do not sell or alter copies.

### **Acknowledgments**

I would like to express my deep appreciation to my wife, Henrietta, for being patience with me during my many hours of study in preparation for this study.

## **Course Syllabus**

### **Description**

This is a two-part study on God's empowering grace. In part one, after defining grace, the writer discusses (1) common grace; (2) God's unmerited favor for pardoning sin; (3) God's sustaining power of grace; (4) the grace of holiness; and (4) the importance of preparing one's heart for grace. In part two, with his trademark passion and candor, the writer examines the number one grace killer---the dogma of religion. Whether you are going through a valley of distress or reaping a bounty of blessings this grace study is for you.

### **Objectives**

It is more than a cliché to state we stand by faith only by grace. The course objective is to help you discover (or re-discover) the power of God's marvelous grace and give you a fresh perspective concerning your relationship with God--one that transforms every area of life.

**Suggested Reference Materials:** Bible

## Introduction

Although doctrines such as divine healing and spiritual gifts 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. You say, "what about love?" Love is God's motive for doing what He does; grace is His means or method. Love is the why; grace is the how. All grace comes from God (1 Peter 5:10) and given to us through Jesus the Christ, God's Son: "The Word became flesh and made His dwelling among us. We have seen His glory, the glory of the One and only, who came from the Father full of grace and truth" (John 1:14).

## DEFINITIONS

Unfortunately many theologians have narrowed the application of grace down to God's unmerited favor that only occurs at the new birth. This is not a wrong definition as much as it is an incomplete one. Grace has a very broad meaning of divine favor, power, ability, capacity, strength, and influence on the heart. *Grace is all that God is providing all God does for someone who has no right to any of it.* Grace is total pardon to a convicted criminal because the Father of the one he killed dropped the charges. Grace is a beautiful flower that bloomed in the midst of the desert only because God decided to water it. Grace is a thief on a cross on his way to paradise seconds before he should have died. Grace is eleven losers called apostles entrusted with the message of eternity. Grace is green leaves on a once-dead tree. Grace is a prodigal welcomed home with no basis for his welcome but that he came home. Grace is God's doing supernaturally through us what we cannot do naturally, knowing that we do not deserve it, cannot repay or may not appreciate it.

There are four characteristics of grace:

1. Grace is free: it is a gift. If you have to earn something, it's not a gift! Whatever we receive from God, whether it is eternal life or the ability to serve in some capacity in church, comes from God's gift of grace without earning it. And to whatever degree you attempt to earn grace, to that degree you break the heart of God who gives it to you as an expression of His love. Our job is to accept God's grace and live it out in such a way that shows Him we appreciate what He has done for us.
2. Grace is completely, without exception, undeserved. Don't worry about getting more of it than you deserve. You deserve nothing! Zero! We all deserve hell, not one tiny millimeter more. Period. One of Satan's goals is to somehow convince us that God needs us and we deserve to be blessed or to some degree we can share God's glory so God will resist our pride instead of giving the grace He gives only to the humble (1 Peter 5:5-6). Satan's antidote for grace is spiritual pride. Satan cannot grasp grace and his goal is to see that we don't either. To whatever degree you have come to feel you deserve to be saved, you have trampled underfoot the grace of God (John 15:5; 2 Corinthians 10:17-18; 12:9). Paul concluded, "God chose the foolish things of the world [that's us] to shame the wise; God chose the weak things of the world [that's us] to shame the strong...so that no one may boast before Him"

(1 Corinthians 1:27, 29). If grace ceases to be undeserved, it ceases to be grace. That's why grace and humility are so closely connected in Scripture (Ephesians 2:9; 1 Peter 5:5).

3. Grace is sovereign. God gives it to whomever He chooses whenever He chooses and as He chooses. Grace is seldom given the way we would give it were we God. That's because His ways are too much higher than our ways (Isaiah 55:9). Thus, we must never presume upon it, demand it, or program it.
4. Grace is spiritual. Grace is spiritual because only that which is spiritual is eternal. Everything God gives is eternal because He is eternal (Isaiah 57:15).

The Hebrew word for grace in the Old Testament is "chen" (pronounced 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.

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 life, gratitude, favor, and gift. *Charis* is used 101 times in Paul's writings. He 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 come to us through the Lord Jesus Christ. Passages depicting the word "*charisma*" (*grace gift*):

- *Eternal life* is listed as a *charisma* (grace gift) in Romans 3:23. It is Biblically *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).
- 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).

The Greek use of *charis* (grace) started off as a secular greeting. 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.

John 1:16 tell us that grace is a many-faceted gem: “From the fullness of His grace we have all received *one blessing after another*” (my emphasis). Like water which can satisfy one’s thirst and also be used to wash one clean, God’s grace meets different needs. In this study, we shall examine four dimensions or facets of grace: (1) common grace; (2) God’s unmerited favor for pardoning sin; (3) God’s sustaining power of grace to endure hardships in life; (4) the grace of holiness; and (4) the importance of preparing one’s heart for grace.

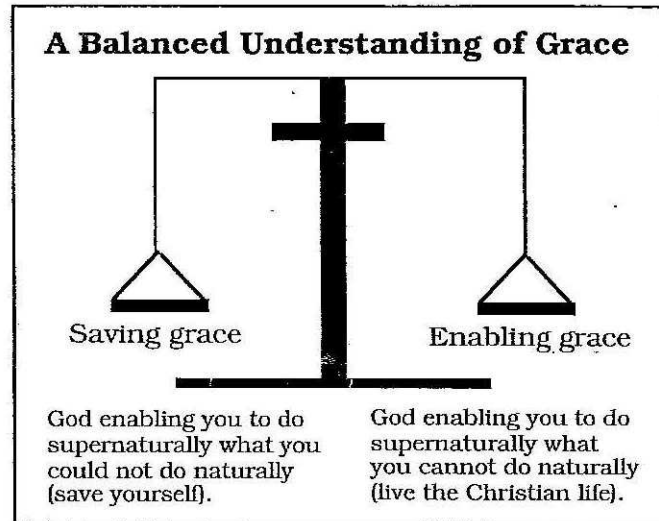
## **COMMON GRACE**

Common grace is God’s unmerited favor for sustaining life on this planet. Again, 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’s allowing him to do so. Does this mean 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.

## SAVING GRACE

While common grace is important, it does not impact our spiritual life like saving grace and enabling grace. Take a moment and examine the following diagram.

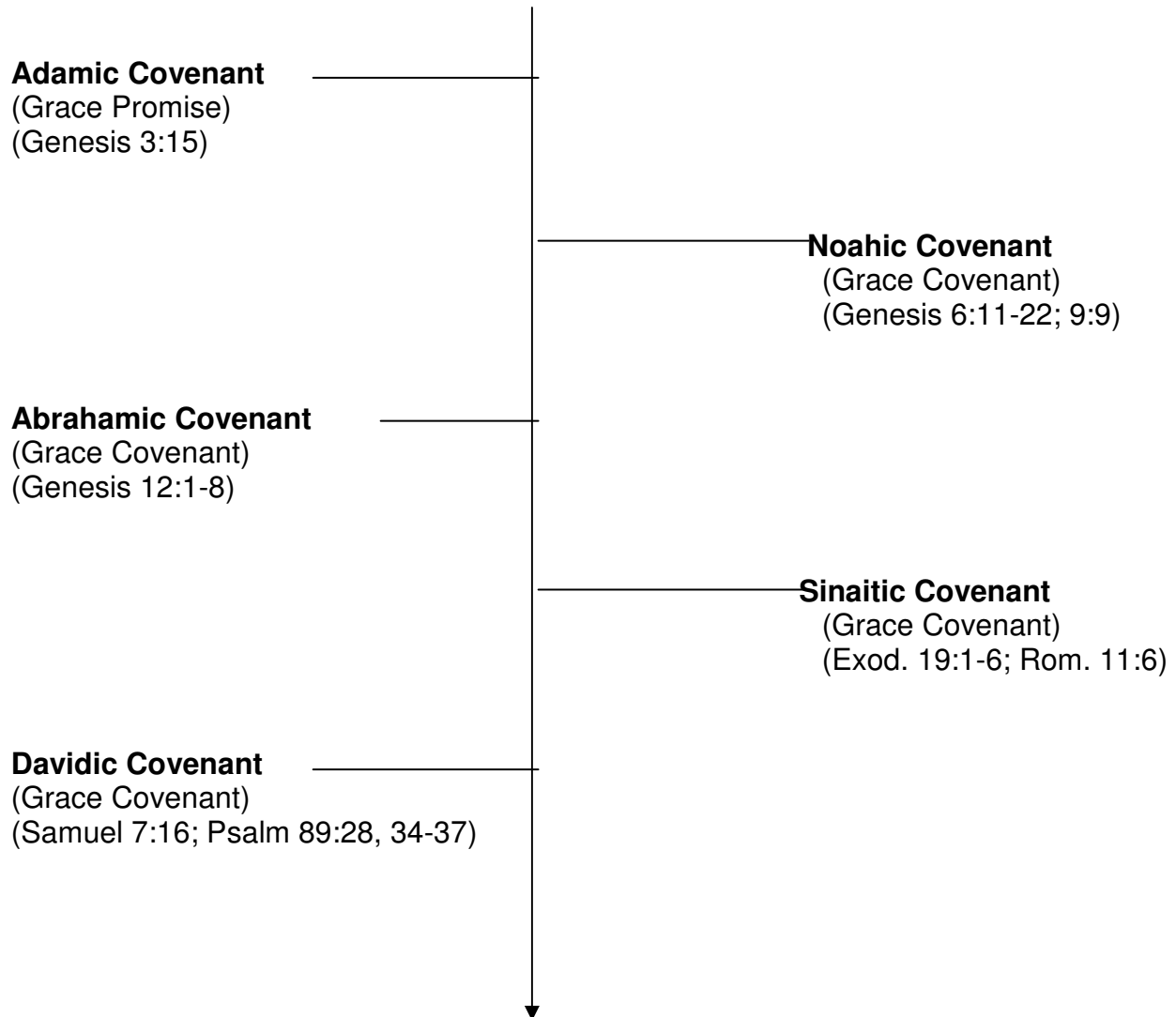


Based on what Christ did on the Cross on our behalf, saving grace is God's unmerited favor for pardoning sin. Saving grace has been often described as "God's Riches at Christ's Expense." How true. Peter said, "He himself bore our sins in His body on the tree, so that we might die to sins, and live for righteousness..." (1 Peter 2:24). The apostle Paul described the effect of the Cross this way: "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). This is the legal concept of imputation and *respondent superior* (let the master answer for the deeds of the servants). Christ's death on the cross involves a transfer wherein God transferred our sins onto Christ and then transferred His righteousness to us. It is saving *grace* not common grace which brings us into a personal and saving relationship with God the Father. Romans 5:1, "Therefore, since we have been justified through faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have gained access by faith into this grace in which we now stand. And we rejoice in the hope of the glory of God."

### Need for Saving Grace

Every single human born into this world needs saving grace. Why? It is because sin is inherited; it's a part of the human gene pool (Romans 3:23). You have to go all the way back to the book of Genesis and examine the *Edenic Covenant* to fully understand the need for saving grace. The word *covenant* meant an arrangement made by one party which the other party involved could accept or reject, but could not alter. The *Edenic Covenant* is the original covenant God made with humanity through Adam before he sinned. After Adam sinned, all covenants between God and humanity were *grace* covenants based on the *Redeemer's works* that were activated by faith:

## Edenic Works Covenant – Genesis 2:8-9, 15-17



## **Christ's Covenant – Righteousness by Faith (Romans 1:17; Romans 3:22; 5:16-21; 1 Corinthians 15:22, 45)**

The Edenic covenant is the only covenant of “works” without Christ, the Redeemer (Genesis 2:8-9, 15-17). It was based on works because the continuation of spiritual life was *conditional upon Adam's obedience* (Genesis 2:16-17).

The Edenic covenant unfolded this way: 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 Adam's being the representative for all of humanity, how he 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 *would never have 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) unto himself.

It is important to acquire 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 choose either 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." 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 but 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). This act foreshadowed Christ's substitutionary atonement for sin on the Cross and the requirement to be clothed with Christ (Galatians 3:27; Hebrews 9:12; Matthew 26:28). While we all have to die physically until Jesus returns, we do not have to die spiritually.

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 the last 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 at that point is to walk over, pick the mouse, 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. 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). God then 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). Does this mean God was responsible for Adam's fall? No. 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 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 was by being pardoned. In our justice system one can be pardoned without having to pay for the crime committed. 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, only 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’s justice works. In God’s system of justice *someone* has to pay for the offense *before the pardon can be issued* (Romans 6:23)! That is where Christ came in. As required by the Edenic Covenant (Genesis 2:8-9, 15-17), as well as the Mosaic Law (Leviticus 22:20), Christ was perfect in every way (Hebrews 4:15; 1 Peter 2:22) and then died on the Cross for all of humanity for all times (1 Peter 1:18-19), making it possible for people to be saved by grace through faith (Romans 3:22; Ephesians 1:4-5; 2:8-9). The death of Jesus is the only means of securing our eternal reconciliation with an infinitely just and holy God (John 14:8; Acts 4:12; 1 Timothy 2:5). When we repent and trust in Christ Jesus for salvation, we become spiritually alive (“born again,” John 3:3), 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).

What happened to the two trees in the Garden? The tree of life survived the judgment of God. It will appear again in God’s future eternal kingdom as a tribute to eternal life Christ purchased for us on the Cross (Revelation 22:2). The tree of good and evil did not survive. It was dealt with by God when Jesus died on the cross. In the end, death, as represented by the tree of knowledge of good and evil, will be cast in the lake of fire along with all whose names are not written down in God’s book of the redeemed (Revelation 20:13-15). The meaning of the tree of life is that one cannot be good enough within himself or herself to enter God’s eternal kingdom. The only way in is to repent and ask Christ to be your Savior and leader of your life (John 4:24; 14:6). What God began with the Edenic covenant through the first Adam in the Garden, He completed by grace through Jesus, the last Adam (1 Corinthians 15:45) on the Cross. The gospel (good news) is that Jesus took Adam’s place as our representative to God, came to earth, and lived without sin to qualify as the Lamb of God. He then died on the Cross to pay the penalty for our sin and then rose from the dead “for our justification” (Romans 4:25).

## **Dealing with Objections**

People will understand less about biblical truths as our society becomes increasingly secularized. The following questions have been formulated to answer many of the unbeliever’s objections that are going around today concerning God, Christ, and the grace He purchased for us on the Cross:

Question #1: “What makes you so sure God exists at all---especially when you can’t see, hear, or touch Him?” Just because we cannot see God does not mean He is not real. Love is not a physical entity, and yet it’s very real. In fact, love can be more real than the world around them for those in love. We can know true love by its evidence. So it is with the existence of God. The Bible tells us that looking at the created world; every person should see abundant evidence of God’s existence and power (Romans 1:18-20). But there is a *second* proof God exists, fulfilled prophecy. There were numerous prophecies concerning Christ hundreds of years before He was ever born. Each prophecy was fulfilled to the letter. The Bible says, “No prophecy of Scripture

came about by the prophets own interpretation. For prophecy never had its origin in the will of man, but man spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit" (2 Peter 1:20-21). But there is still is a *third* proof of the existence of God, my own person experience. It's hard to account for the change that has taken place in my life except for God's saving grace.

Question #2: "If God is good and holy, why did He allow even the possibility or potential for sin to enter the world?" The answer is for the higher good. God decided not to destroy evil but to defeat it through Christ on the cross (Colossians 2:13-15)! If God had not allowed the possibility of evil to exist in the first place He would have destroyed humanity's capability to choose to serve and glorify Him freely out of love. But because God placed Adam and Eve in a perfect environment (Garden of Eden) with the freedom to choose between obedience and righteousness, we have choices today. When Adam chose sin over righteousness, the whole world entered into a state of bondage of corruption (Romans 8:21). But if we are not free to choose between good and evil, then we're not free, and our choice is no "choice" at all. For example, Christ tells us that we prove our love for Him by keeping His commandments (John 14:15). But love is meaningless if we are not free to choose to obey or disobey.

Question #3: "Why doesn't God go ahead and dispose of Satan and do away with evil?" Two reasons: First, if God destroyed evil before it's time He would destroy our freedom to choose Christ over Satan. Secondly, God is waiting for more people to repent and turn to Jesus so they will not be eternally lost (2 Peter 3:9). That's love! God will dispose of Satan and sin in due time when people stop believing in Christ.

Question #4: "I am a good person. Why do I need saving?" Romans 3:10 tells us that we are all in the same sinking boat because "there is no one righteous, not even one." Sin is inherited. In the beginning, God made a perfect man and woman, Adam and Eve, set them into a perfect environment, and gave them the freedom to choose. They chose to disobey God and sin rather than follow righteous instructions. This caused the human race to enter into a state of sin. It also plunged the whole world into bondage of corruption (Romans 8:21). Until we come to Jesus for salvation we are all sinners whether they realize it or not. Additionally, no one can pass God's test of righteousness on his/her own. Because God's standard of holiness is so rigid we have "all sinned and come short of God's glory" (Romans 3:23). In fact, our righteousness (self-efforts to be made right with God) is "as filthy rags" according to Isaiah 64:6. Jesus had to die on the cross; otherwise no one would get to go to heaven.

Question #5: "Why should I be concerned about being saved if God has already preselected certain people to go to heaven and certain individuals to go to hell?" I know there are those who believe that but this belief has no biblical foundation. How God could be pleased with redeeming *part* of the human race and deliberately sending the rest to hell? Those who hold to this view have misunderstood what the Apostle Paul said in Ephesians 1:4-14. Paul is talking about God's plan of redemption for the human race in this passage, not deliberately selects some to be saved and others to go to hell.

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?

Read Ephesians 1:4-6. What confuses some people is 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 did God decide beforehand? He decided before the earth was created to accept by grace only those who would believe in Jesus as their personal Savior and treat them as holy and blameless in His sight (cross-reference 2 Thessalonians 2:13). 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 biblical truths:

1: Election is *only through the blood of Jesus*. Ephesians 1:7, "In Him [Christ] we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins, in accordance with the riches of God's grace." Second Timothy 1:9-10, "This grace was given us in Christ Jesus before the beginning of time, but it has now been revealed through the appearing of our Savior, Christ Jesus..." Before He had created anything, God determined redemption for the human race would only come through the blood of His Son, Jesus, the woman's seed (Genesis 3:15; Romans 5:12-17; 1 Corinthians 2:7-8; Hebrews 10:28). Cross-reference 2 Timothy 1:9. Some may be thinking, "What about those godly believers who lived before Jesus came?" All atonements made in the Old Testament were only effectual by Christ's sacrificial blood (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 for all times. What about those who have never heard about the one true God or Jesus Christ" you ask? They will be held accountable for the general knowledge God gave them through His creation. Read Romans 1:20. "Clearly seen" indicates every single person should see abundant evidence of God's existence and power when they look at the creation. Psalms 19:1-3 states, "The heavens declare the glory of God; the skies proclaim the work of His hands. Day after day they pour forth speech; night after night they display knowledge. There is no speech or language where their voice is not heard." People will be held responsible for what they do with that witness! The sinner will also be judged by his/her conscience. Even though the rebellious sinner may not have heard about the one true God or Christ, he/she did not follow the measure of knowledge of right and wrong that he/she did have. Not being able to dispute his or her conscience, he or she will be without excuse (Romans 2:12-16).

2: The election occurs *only in union with Jesus Christ*. Just because Christ died for the human race doesn't mean people are automatically saved. Ephesians 1:11-13, "In Him [Christ] we were also chosen, having been predestined according to the plan of Him

who works out every thing in conformity with the purpose of His will, in order that we [believing Jews], who were the first to hope in Christ, might be for the praise of His glory. And you [Gentiles] also were included in Christ when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation. Having believed you were marked in Him with a seal, the promised Holy Spirit.” The Lord Jesus said to a group of skeptics, “I told you that you would die in your sins, if you do not believe that I am the one I claim to be. You will indeed die in your sins.” John 12:25-26: “Whoever serves me must follow me; and where I am, my servant also will be. My Father will honor the one who serve me” (John 12:25-26). Faith in Jesus involves a personal commitment to follow Him, keep His teachings and be where He is. While the grace of God is not exclusive (i.e. for some people but not for others), many nullify God’s grace by their decisions and actions. For only in union with Christ (saving faith) do we become members of the elect. A good example is found in the fact that 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 also 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 (change of heart)* and true *faith in Jesus*, 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 Savior and leader of their life in order to partake of God’s saving grace.

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).

Question #6: “Isn’t it narrow-minded for Christians to think they’re right and everyone else is wrong?” It’s not if you’ve looked into it and found that Christianity proves itself trustworthy in ways other faiths and viewpoints do not. Wisdom often leads to following a certain course of action over the many other options. For example, when our family doctor prescribes a medication to help us get well, it’s not narrow-minded to accept his/her advice even though we know there are psychic healers and tribal witch doctors that would use a different approach. That principle applies to Christianity. 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. Christ Himself said, "I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me" (John 14:6). I choose to believe that and trust in Jesus over all others. Why? It is because Christ is the only who rose from the grave. Eye witnesses attest to this fact (Matthew 28:1-20; Mark 16:9-18; Luke 24:36-43; Acts 1:3-11). While it was the Lord's death that made it possible for us to be pardoned for our sins, 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 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). Up to then, 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 refers 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. I.e., 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 not only guaranteed salvation for His followers, it marked the defeat of death as well (1 Corinthians 15:50-58; 1 Thessalonians 4:14).

Question #7: "What difference does it make what people believe as long as each person is genuinely sincere?" Sincerely believing in something doesn't make it true! This is true of all areas of life. People who get on an airplane that later crash may be sincere in their belief that they will be safe but their sincerity doesn't change what is actually going to happen. Thinking the speed limit is 65 when it's 25 won't prevent you from getting a ticket if you are stopped for speeding. One's belief no matter how deeply held has no effect on reality. Similarly, strongly holding to your beliefs about God

doesn't make them true. What counts is not the sincerity of our faith, but the *object* of that faith. We need to ask ourselves if what we are trusting in is truly trustworthy. Then, do our homework to find out whether it is or is not. We also need to heed the advice given in 1 Thessalonians 5:21: "Test everything. Hold on to the good." Test it against what? Against what God has said in His Word, the Bible. When you do that, you'll discover that only those who are truly trusting in Jesus as their personal Savior are in true faith in relationship to God.

## Receiving Saving Grace

John 3:16 states, "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 in an effort to be made right with God. But none of these methods work. If we had to do something other than repent and believe in Jesus to be saved, Christ would have told us so in the Bible. All He said was, "Everyone who believes in Him will have eternal life" (John 3:15). 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 if you have come to believe in Jesus as your personal Savior and the leader of your life.

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, however." 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.

Referring to Jeffrey Dahmer, a serial killer, Rev. Max Lucado states, "What disturb 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 throw 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 says, '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 as 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). Though innocent in every way, Christ assume liability of our actions, died on the cross in our place, and then transferred His righteousness over to us. It's called the divine exchange (2 Corinthians 5:21; Galatians 3:13; 1 Peter 2:24; Romans 1:17; 3:22; Philippians 3:9). Read 2 Corinthians 5:17. When you receive a revelation of God's saving grace you will feel alive on the inside. There will be intimacy (closeness) between you and Father God that cannot be expressed in words. You will know beyond a shadow of a doubt that you have truly been forgiven and accepted. You will also 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. Psalms 103:12 summarizes what Christ did on our behalf when He died on the cross: "As far as the east is from the west, so far has He removed our transgressions from us."

Read Ephesians 2:1—10. This passage tells us that we were all once dead in trespasses and sins. We weren't treading water, about to drown, and shouted, "Lord, help me." We were already dead, laying face down at the bottom of the lake in the mire of our sins. By His grace, God reached down and breathed His life into us and we became reborn (John 3:3, 6), a new creation (2 Corinthians 5:17), "created to be like God in true righteousness and holiness" (Ephesians 4:24). At what point does eternal life begin? Like natural birth, it begins at conception. John 1:11-12 tells us the moment

we receive Christ Jesus as Savior we become one of God's adopted children and receive the essential life of God called eternal life. Are we perfect? Far from it! We have simply entered God's sanctification process. Holiness is being set apart for sacred service and duty, sanctification is the process worked out. But, those around us will see an immediate change in our attitude, demeanor, etc.

Let me close this section on saving grace with this story. 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. Christ Jesus is the only parachute for the human soul (John 8:14:6; Ephesians 2:8-9). If you do not believe Jesus is who He said He was (John 8:24) and accept Him as Savior and leader of your life (John 1:12), you do not have God's parachute on and your name is not written down in God's book of the redeemed (Revelation 2:11), the Book of Life. Leaving this life without having your name written down in the Book of Life will result in being separated from God for all of eternity (Revelation 20:15). You sure don't want that to happen.

### **ENABLING GRACE**

Other than saving grace, there is no subject in the Bible more important than God's empowering grace. Yet, it is the most misunderstood. There are those who feel promoting God's grace is promoting sin and reckless living. Such accusations are as old as the gospel itself. Listen to what the Apostle Paul said in Romans 3:8, "And some people even slander us by claiming that we say, 'the more we sin, the better it is!' Those who say such things deserve to be condemned" (NLT). As one can see the accusations against the proponents of grace have been around since the Apostle Paul declared it. In his case, it was often the Judaizer, the legalist, who believed on Jesus but rejected faith-righteousness. They never could grasp the fact grace is more than God transferring our sins over to Christ Jesus and transferring Christ's righteousness over to us; it is God's enabling ability in and through us.

God's enabling grace is defined exactly the same way as saving grace but with one exception, *doing minute by minute supernaturally what we cannot do naturally--live the Christian life*. It is God's empowering grace that transforms character and enables the believer to triumph over the world, the flesh, and the devil. God's righteousness is both forensic and real as we become transformed from the inside out by the power of Holy Spirit. Modern day Christians often limp along with a fundamental understanding of saving grace but not with the power that goes along with it. That is because this second aspect of grace has been largely overlooked by many believers causing them to remain in a cycle of defeat.

Read the entire chapter of 2 Corinthians 11. Paul is responding to false apostles, possibly Jews from Palestine (Acts 6:1; Philippians 3:5), who were leading Christians at Corinth away from Christ (2 Corinthians 11:4) and claiming to be superior to him (2 Corinthians 11:7-11). Paul's craft of tent making (Acts 18:3) was held in low social esteem by many of that day. His financial independence was not intended to embarrass the Corinthians but show how he suffered for the cause of Christ. Paul's personal presence was weak and unimpressive according to his critics (1 Corinthians 10:9-10). His speaking ability was even ridiculed by those who prided themselves on eloquence according to the standards of Greek rhetorical style (1 Corinthians 2:1-5). So Paul boasts, not of his accomplishments, but on suffering for the cause of Christ. The Lord Jesus would not boast in this manner, but Paul feels constrained by the rivals boasting and its affect on the Corinthians (2 Corinthians 11:1).

Read 2 Corinthians 12:7-10. Here, Paul explains how he endured what he did. Various suggestions have been given over the years as to what it was. There are those who believe that 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 Paul's 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 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 dynamic speaker. His critics said on one occasion "his speaking amounts to nothing" (2 Corinthians 10:10). Paul didn't argue. A paraphrase of what Paul said in 1 Corinthians 2:3-4 is, "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 all of the above explanations have merit, no one knows for sure what Paul's "thorn in the flesh" (2 Corinthians 12:7) was. But we do know it was no superficial prickle. Phillips' translation renders it a "stabbing pain."

While we will never know what Paul's thorn in the flesh was (2 Corinthians 12:7), 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 had pleaded "three times" with the Lord to remove this hindrance (2 Corinthians 12:8). Each time God said His grace was sufficient (2 Corinthians 12:8-9). Why? It is because grace is *God's Spirit 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. We don't like to hear that. We want instant healing, instant justice, etc. But maybe there is a reason why God didn't deliver Paul. 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.

Paul concludes in 2 Corinthians 12:10: "For when I am weak, then I am strong." Why is that? It's because our weaknesses cause Christ's power to rest on us and live within us as we walk through life towards our eternal home in heaven. Grace is God's presence, favor and power. It is a force, a heavenly strength given those believe in Jesus and call on God. Looking back, the writer of the Book of Hebrews makes this statement about the great men and women of the faith: (They) "quenched the fury of the flames, and escaped the edge of the sword; whose weakness was turned to strength..." 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. The God who gives us saving grace is there in the dark hours of our lives providing us with sustaining and enabling grace.

When Ira Stumphill, a gifted song writer, entered the ministry, he selected a minister's daughter who was gifted in music for his wife. 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 became a nightclub singer. Reverend Stumphill 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." That's grace!

From 1813 to 1873, a Scottish medical missionary by the name of David Livingston eagerly accepted the seemingly impossible challenge of advancing the kingdom of God in Africa. After 16 years on the mission field, Livingston was asked to speak at the University of Glasgow. It was the custom of undergraduates to heckle speakers with

pea-shooters, toy trumpets, rattles and noise makers. Livingston walked out onto the platform. Here stood the man who had walked 11,000 miles throughout Africa. His left arm hung limply at his side, having been almost ripped from his body by a lion. His face was a dark leathery brown from being exposed to extreme heat in the African sun. His face was furrowed with innumerable lines from African fever which had racked and emaciated his body. He had been attacked by savages and by Turks who hunted Africans to become slaves. He was half deaf from rheumatic fever and half-blind from a branch that had slapped him in the eyes in the jungle. The students just stared. They knew they were truly in the presence of a man of God.

Not a rattle moved, not a foot shuffled. A hush crept over that vast auditorium as the audience listened as David Livingston told about his journeys and about the tremendous needs of this vast African population. "Shall I tell you," he said, "what sustained me in the midst of all of these toils, hardships and incredible loneliness? It was a promise, the promise of the Lord, 'I am with you always, even unto the end of the world.' It was this promise that Christ would be with me, personally, right next to me every hour of each day that gave me the courage to continue, day after day." What Dr. Livingston didn't tell the audience that day was that before leaving for the mission field he had prayed, "Lord, send me any where; only go with me. Lay any burden on me, only sustain me. Sever any ties but the tie that binds me to your service and to your heart." And Jesus said, "David I am with you always." This prayer was found in David's diary after his death.

Mary, Livingston's dedicated wife, finally came to meet him in Africa. For months she sailed on the ocean and then cruised up the steamy, mosquito swarming rivers. Soon after she arrived at David's location, she contracted African fever. Night after night, day after day, Dr. Livingston sat up with his sick wife and wiped her fevered brow. Slowly she worsened and finally took her last breath. After burying her under a huge tree, Dr. Livingston fell on the mound of dirt and wept. The Lord reminded Livingston of his prayer, "Sever any ties but the tie that binds me to you." God's grace enabled him to go on. Listen to the words he wrote in his diary: "My Jesus my King, my life, my all, I again consecrate my life to you. I shall place no value on anything I possess or on anything I may do, except in relation to the kingdom of Christ." When he arrived back at his base camp he discovered natives had stolen his food, and worst of all, stolen his medical chest with the quinine and the other medicines to alleviate the pain of his African fevers. The loss of these essentials was almost like a death sentence. He cried out, "O God, you promised to be with me." Then he heard a sound. He looked up from his prayer and there stood a white man. It had been five years since he had seen the face of another white man. Behind the man was a whole caravan, and above them, flying in the wind, the American flag. It was Henry Stanley, who uttered those unforgettable words: "Dr. Livingston, I presume?" For four months, Stanley lived in the same hut with Livingston and nursed him back to health. Stanley had been an atheist but after those four months living with Livingston, he became a Christian. Livingston refused to return to civilization with Stanley. Instead, he plunged deeper into Africa. His end, however, was rapidly approaching. He came to the place where his strength was completely spent; his feet were lacerated and ulcerated with boils. He had nothing to eat but hard maize—dried corn—for months. Gradually all of his teeth loosened and fell out. He

was deserted by everyone except three of his closest followers. When it got to the point when Livingston could not walk or stand, he commanded his friends to put him on a stretcher and carry him deeper and deeper into Africa. Then came the day when he couldn't even be moved. It was pouring rain. A small temporary hut was quickly made. He was lying on his cot, in the middle of the night, when the servant boy, lying across the doorway to keep out the wild beasts, heard Livingston stir. The boy got up and saw Livingston agonizingly roll out of his cot onto his knees and fold his hands and begin to pray. After a while, the boy went back to sleep. In the morning when the boy looked in on Livingston he saw him still in prayer. Several people came asking for Livingston, but the boy told them not to disturb him because he was praying. Finally, the boy became concerned, eased into the hut and said to Livingston softly, "Bwana." No answer. "Bwana." Still silence. He crept closer to Livingston and touched his cold cheek. Livingston had died on his knees in prayer. He had lived his life in the presence of Christ and he left this life in the presence of Christ. Jesus said, "I am with you always." Dr. Livingston's life consisted of 39 years traveling 29,000 miles across Africa, bringing "light to darkness." Two million Africans were brought the good news about Jesus. Every mile Livingston walked or was carried, he was strengthened by God's enabling grace and Christ's promise, "I am with you always" (Matthew 28:2). (Story taken from *Issues in Education*, third Quarter 2009). God's grace saves us, transforms us into Christ-like character and then empowers us to love and witness for Jesus. We are not responsible for what others do with that witness. We are only responsible for being that witness!

### **THE GRACE OF HOLINESS**

We now come to where the rubber meets the road---practical holiness, living out grace. Hebrews 12:14 states, "Make every effort to live in peace with all men and to be holy; without holiness no one will see the Lord." How many of you have found it easy to sin? Let me give you some good news. It is easier under grace to serve God than it is to sin. That is because there is a stronger motivation within the Christian to do right than there it is to do wrong. The story is told of a woman who was married to a demanding husband who would leave her a to-do list each morning as he left for work. Each evening when he returned, he looked to see if each item on the list was completed and checked off. If not, he beat her. In the course of time (and the providence of God), this man died. Eventually, the woman remarried, and her second marriage was as good as her first marriage was bad. While rummaging through the attic one day, she came across some of those old to-do lists. Her stomach churned as she looked at them, but as she read the lists, she realized she did all those things for her second husband without being asked. Paul writes in 2 Colossians 2:13-14, "When you were dead in your sins and in the un-circumcision of your sinful nature, God made you alive with Christ. He forgave us all our sins, having cancelled the written code, with its regulations, that was against us and that stood opposed to us; He took it away, nailing it to the cross." There is nothing wrong with the law of God. The problem is that as long as our hearts are "dead in [our] sins," we view the divine to-do list with dread because we cannot keep it. When God made us "alive with Christ," however, He gave us both the desire and increasing ability to do His will. 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.” While Paul is referring to sowing generously, that principle can also apply to the holiness of God. It would be unfair for God to command us to do something and not enable us to do it.

But we must be careful to stay away from identity marker Christianity. Identity marker Christianity is substitute ways (identity markers) of distinguishing ourselves from those who are not Christians rather than identifying ourselves by how Christ lived. Identity marker Christianity is sometimes called boundary-oriented approach to spirituality. There has been a constant struggle throughout the history of Christendom to strike a balance in the issue of holiness. Satan has had a field day at every turn. Both the definition of holiness and the performance of it have been characterized by a pendulum that swings from one extreme to another. On the one hand we are called out by God to be separate and distinct and different, “holy” ones not contaminated by the sin in the world nor drawn to it. On the other hand we are to infiltrate a sinful world and be light and salt and witness for Jesus (Matthew 5:13-14). Jesus, our example of perfect holiness, spent time with sinners yet He never became like them in character. Because He healed people on the wrong day, touched sick people, ate with tax collectors and thieves, and forgave repentant prostitutes and murderers of their sins Christ was considered “unholy” by the religious hierarchy of that day. To the hierarchy, Jesus never grasped the meaning of holiness. To them holiness meant separating yourself from people who were different than you were. Seeing that wounded man by the side of the road meant don’t touch him or you’ll be unclean. Not so with Jesus (Luke 10:30-37). He lived and died for dirty and common folks, many of whom had no place in society at all. He loved lepers and nobody in his right mind loved lepers. He spent the bulk of His time visiting sick people, dying people, outcasts and rejects, people the religious leaders would not so much as have allowed into their supposedly uncontaminated presence. Either Jesus didn’t understand the concept of holiness or the religious leaders didn’t because they were at opposite ends of the spectrum in practice. They had so separated themselves from the real world to the point they never understood the kinds of real needs people had. Furthermore, they did the very things they were condemning in others. Jesus condemned their hypocrisy and called them “play-actors” on the stage of life (Matthew 15:7-9).

Read Matthew 11:23-24. Jesus does something very astonishing. He compares Capernaum with the wicked city of Sodom. The inhabitants of Sodom had been destroyed for their evil lifestyles. 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 letting us know through this passage that religious hypocrisy is an intolerable sin. America’s worst sins are not abortion and homosexuality, although these are abominations to God. 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. Capernaum 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.

In his book *Life You've Always Wanted*, John Ortberg talks about a grumpy guy he called Hank. Hank was bound by a negative and judgmental outlook on life although he went to church his whole life. He always found something wrong with everything, including the church. There was a period of time when his primary complaints centered on the music in the church. "It's too loud," Hank protested---to the staff, the deacons, the ushers and eventually the innocent visitors to the church. Church officials eventually had to take him aside and explain that complaining to complete strangers was not appropriate and he would have to restrict his laments to a circle of intimate friends. Instead of dropping the matter, he called OSHA (Occupational Safety and Healthy Administration)! Hank, needless to say, was a "thorn in the flesh" of his pastor. The problem was Hank was a cranky young man and he grew up to be a cranky old man. But even more troubling than his lack of change when he made a declaration of faith was the fact that *nobody was surprised by it*. It was as if everyone simply expected that his soul would remain withered and sour year after year. The church staff did have some expectations. They expected that Hank would affirm certain religious beliefs. That is, he would attend services, read the Bible, support the church financially, pray and avoid certain sins. But they didn't expect he would progressively become the way Jesus would be if He were in Hank's place. They didn't anticipate that he was on the way to becoming a source of love and joy to be around. So they were not shocked when it didn't happen. In fact, they would have been surprised if it did. Hank's situation describes many Christians of our day. According to a Gallup poll, nine of ten Americans say they pray daily, and 84 million Americans, almost a third of the population, say they have made a personal commitment to Christ as Savior. Yet most still live like the world.

As we've found, Christ's death on the cross is more than a transfer of guilt and innocence it begins the transformation of our character. If we do not allow ourselves to experience God's transforming character of Christ we will inevitably look for substitute ways (identity markers) of distinguishing ourselves from those who are not Christians. These identity markers are hypocrisy that allowed people to distinguish who is inside the church and who is outside the church. Many times these are matters of vocabulary, dress, style of worship, circumcision, dietary laws, Sabbath keeping, etc. Those who practice a boundary-oriented approach to spirituality are proud and judgmental toward those who do not think as they do (Acts 15:5; 2 Corinthians 11:4-6; Galatians 2:11-16). Not so with the Lord Jesus. Instead of focusing on external boundaries (identity marker Christianity), Jesus focused on the center of a person's being, the heart of spiritual life. When asked to identify what the law is about, Jesus' response was to "love God, love people" (Matthew 22:37-40). He was telling religious leaders that a fundamentally different way of identifying who are the children of God is by their love. This was opposite of what religious leaders did. They used circumcision, dietary laws, and the Sabbath as ways of identifying the people of God. Jesus was threatening their very understanding of themselves as the people of God when He spoke of serving God and others out of a heart of love (Matthew 5:43-47). Those of the early church understood this clearly. The apostle Paul taught that instead of trying to be changed from the

outside by a religious subculture, we are to be transformed from the inside into a “new creation” (2 Corinthians 5:17). Listen to how Paul put it in 1 Corinthians 13:1-2: “If I speak in the tongues of men and of angels, but have not love, I am only a resounding gong or a clanging cymbal. If I have the gift of prophecy and can fathom all mystery and all knowledge, and if I have a faith that can move mountains, but have not love, I am nothing.” The apostle John put it even more bluntly: “Everyone who loves has been born of God and knows God. Whoever does not love does not know God, because God is love” (1 John 4:7-8).

The search for identity markers did not die out in the first century. The church in which I accepted the Lord in was a fine church and I am deeply in its debt. But these folk passed on to me their own set of identity markers. A person could have been unforgiving and consumed with pride and resentment but as long as he/she paid tithes, did not smoke, drink wine and conform to the dress code, etc., he/she was considered to be a good Christian. For the pastor to have a glass of wine would have caused a scandal, not because we were so naïve that we thought that a glass of wine sent a person to hell, but because it would have violated an unspoken boundary marker. It would have threatened one’s sense of identity. Of course many beliefs and values will inevitably divide those who choose to follow Christ from those who don’t. Jesus Himself said He came not “to bring peace, but a sword”. What makes something a boundary marker is its being used by the group as an opportunity to reinforce a false sense of superiority fed by the intent to exclude others. While religious boundary markers change from generation to generation, the key issue is the same: are you inside or outside the group? The remedy for identity marker Christianity is simple. Allow God’s empowering grace set you free from external religion and change you from the inside out by the power of the Holy Spirit.

Then there are those who believe the Kingdom is prosperity and success. But these are kingdom benefits. 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. 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 (Romans 14:17). 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 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 (Romans 6:1-4). I am not saying it is impossible for believers to sin. No one is perfect! I am saying no one has to disobey God’s Word sin and it is stupid to do so. Besides, stepping out of grace and committing a single sin is not the same as

living a lifestyle of sin. How could grace result in anything but gracious and holy living since God's empowering grace is resident within us? The reason the unregenerate live according to the cravings of the sinful nature and the ways of Satan (Galatians 5:19-25; Ephesians 2:1-3) is because they don't know any better (John 8:34; Romans 6:17-20; Ephesians 2:1-4). Not so for followers of Christ (Ephesians 2:5-10). 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) through the old carnal self they are being led by the spirit of Satan 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 (Romans 1:17) not live righteous lives? Paul seems stunned that an alternative would even exist! Sadly, many Christians choose to remain spiritually immature with heavy consequences. When we refuse to grow up, we are in danger of becoming hardened and insensitive to God's leading---or worse, of slipping and sliding away from Christ.

What are the possibilities of genuinely living holy? This intensely practical question comes under the doctrinal topic of *sanctification*. There are three dimensions to sanctification: *positional*, *actual*, and *final holiness*. Positional holiness is where we are declared holy when we repent and accept Jesus as Lord and Savior. Hebrews 10:10 is a declaration by God called *positional holiness*. It is another way of expressing the wonderful doctrine of *justification by faith* (Romans 5:1). Christ's death on the Cross made it possible for a holy God to see us not as we are in and of ourselves but wrapped in the robes of Christ's righteousness (Romans 1:17; 3:21; Philippians 3:9). We are declared holy the moment we repent of our sins and accept Christ as Lord and Savior. In a very real sense, then, we are sanctified at the moment we are saved. For this reason Paul could say, "To the saints in Ephesus, the faithful in Christ Jesus...Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ...For He chose us in Him before the creation of the world to be holy and blameless in His sight..." (Ephesians 1:1-4). Saving faith in Jesus Christ is the only way that can happen (Ephesians 2:8). You may 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. The Pharisees had memorized God's Word (Law) but failed to live up to it. That is because they did not have the internal motivation to do so, God's holiness living within. That is because they refused to believe in Jesus (John 8:24). Justification by faith does not require the works of the Law but a living faith which performs its works. *Works of faith* works can only be done by those who have already been declared righteous (Romans 1:17; 3:22; Philippians 3:9)!

As *regeneration* is the impartation of new life to the new convert (John 3:3, 5), *sanctification* is the development of that spiritual life *already begun*. Sanctification is growing in grace (2 Peter 3:18). It is identifying with the death and resurrection of Christ and allows the Holy Spirit to set us apart and change us into the image of Christ *from the inside out* (Romans 6:1-11, 13; 8:1-2, 13; Galatians 2:20; Philippians 2:12-13). That's sanctification in a nut shell! See also Titus 2:14. Conformity to Christ's divine nature in us is the only way into which we grow progressively. Although we are

declared holy at salvation, there is still much spiritual growth to be experienced. The more we allow God's Spirit to rule in our hearts the closer we are to God and the more practical holiness is experienced. The process has been called "the Christianizing of the Christian." The way to do that is to let Christ live through you. Let's say that you are a pretty good tennis player but you would like to be better. You hear about a tennis professional coming to town and he has offered to give you some lessons. After taking some lessons, you become pretty good but you still make mistakes. However, suppose the tennis pro could enter your body. All you would have to do is to submit to his indwelling presence and you would be as good as he is. His swing would be yours. The only time you made a mistake was when you took over but as long as you totally submitted to his abilities in you, you were as good as he was. That is basically what Paul is saying in 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." It is God in us to love truly the unlovable, to bless those who persecute us, and to live above sin. There is a third dimension to sanctification found in Philippians 3:14. Looking ahead to the time when his journeying in this sphere of probation will end, Paul expresses the desire to reach the *final state* of holiness. This future anticipation of final perfection is called the doctrine of *glorification*. At life's end the believer who has remained true to Christ will be in a permanent relationship with God which will not be subject to failure. He will have a settled eternal character of God's holiness (Romans 8:18).

Read Colossians 3:1-14. Recall, positional holiness is a declaration of God at the time of conversion; actual holiness is conforming to that declaration by allowing Christ to live out His nature through us. What is declared *positional or legally* about the believer is not necessarily *actual holiness* at the outset of the Christian experience, however. Actual holiness or experimental sanctification is realized as the convert increasingly surrenders to the Holy Spirit's direction in matters of practical conduct (Galatians 5:16; 1 Peter 2:13). The only thing he/she cares about is pleasing the heart of our heavenly Father. What Satan wants us to respond to is "relative" holiness so we will judge what is acceptable by what is "normal" in Christian circles. If we are a "cut above" the unbelieving world, we find ourselves filled with self-righteous pride in our values. May God help us return to standards of biblical holiness that are progressively drawing us nearer and nearer to the heart of God and further and further from the mainstream of moral hypocrisy that so characterizes the world we live in and the church of the twenty-first century (Romans 6:19; 1 Thessalonians 4:4-5). The purpose of the Holy Spirit's indwelling presence in us is to help us duplicate Christ's life within (image).

Grace then is the answer to allowing God's holiness to flow through us. As we humbly draw near unto God and resist the devil, God draws near to us and the devil runs (James 4:6-7). The key is to remain humble and draw close to God. Peter said, "Dear friends, I urge you, as aliens and strangers in the world, to abstain from sinful desires, which war against your soul. Live such good lives among the pagans that though they accuse you of doing wrong, they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day He visits us" (1 Peter 2:11-12). If we were to live in one country and be sent for a few days to another on special assignment, we wouldn't take all our belongings and

mementos with us. Knowing we were only on a brief visit, we would travel light confident that when we got home, everything of value would be waiting for us there. In light of eternity, we are only here for a day. We are on special assignment, and it makes no sense to invest in this foreign soil to which we've been sent. This will all be burned up very soon. Only that which is spiritual and thus eternal will be saved, and it will be waiting for us as treasure when we get home with Jesus. The only thing that matters, then, is that which pertains to the kingdom of God.

Let me put it this way: The issue when we get to heaven won't be on how popular we were. It won't be how well we did in school or how good we were in sports. The issue will be to what degree we have allowed the grace of God to pour the holiness of God in us and through us to a lost and dying and hurting world. How holy are you willing to become? If that's what God desires, what price are you willing to pay? That's the question. Habakkuk 2:20 states, "The Lord is in His holy temple; let all the earth be silent before Him." In the Old Testament, the temple of God was the dwelling place of God. Awe filled your heart as you approached it. Never would it enter your mind to enter that temple with anything less than respect and purity. Never would you take lightly the privilege of entering the once forbidden Holy of Holies. In 2 Corinthians 3:16-17, Paul says that your body is now the temple of God. I know it may be a shock but when you look in the mirror you are looking at the temple rebuilt by God. How dare we carelessly allow anything unholy enter that temple? God alone will be our witness should we defile His temple, be it with lustful thoughts or unbridled anger or bitterness. That would be like trashing the dwelling place of the Most High God. You say, "But I would never do that," but you have if you have in any way hindered God from taking you to the next stage of intimacy. Temples are places where sacrifices take place. Sacrifices represent our acts of worship according to Paul in Romans 12:1. Paul tells us the kind of sacrifices God is looking for is our lives. The Lord doesn't want half-hearted devotion (Luke 9:59-62); He wants our bodies, filled and flooded with holiness. It is the reasonable thing to do (Romans 12:1). Looking at life through God's lens of love, nothing else makes sense.

Ask God to peel one more layer of self (old carnal nature) from your soul. Ask Him to show you sin in your life that you have not seen as sin. Spend enough time with Him for Him to do it. Don't be in a hurry. It won't happen in a hurry. As God convicts your heart of sin, no matter how seemingly insignificant your flesh construes it to be, repent. Make restitution if necessary and be renewed and strengthened by God's Spirit in a way that perhaps you have never experienced before. Don't be afraid to ask God for a miracle. That's the business He's in. Ask Him to transform you by His grace into the likeness of His Son Jesus. You cannot do it on your own but it is yours for the asking!

Read 1 Peter 1:13-19; 2:1-12. Peter is not talking about perfection of the flesh here. He's speaking of an ongoing transformation of the character of Christ that takes place within the heart of the believer. If Jesus' mission was to produce a race of people who never sinned, He failed. He didn't fail. The Lord did not die to make us robots; He died cleanse us from all unrighteousness (1 John 1:9) and give us a righteousness that is outside of the flesh and the Law (Romans 1:17). He came to provide God with the

supreme sacrifice for the sins of all of humanity for all times so He could declare believers in Him righteous before God and then purge the believer's conscience from dead works. Dead works is doing something to try to be right with God. Under grace, the believer is declared righteous before God and then cooperates with the Holy Spirit by removing himself or herself from defilement and living the new life of Christ (2 Corinthians 7:1; Colossians 3:1-14; Hebrews 12:14). Of course, there are failures along the way. The believer is not cast out when he/she stumbles and commits sin because there is cleansing along the way when we repent. That is because the believer has an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ (1 John 1:9). But it is important that you understand that God's grace is at work in His children to produce in them both the desire and *ability* to do His will. 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 the transforming character of Christ (Galatians 5:4). Charles Spurgeon once said, "God's grace is the mother and nurse of holiness, not the excuse for sin." Well stated because grace does not give us the authority to sin, rather the *desire and ability not to sin* (Romans 8:13-14; Galatians 5:16).

Read Hebrews 2:11. The "one who makes men holy" is Christ (see Hebrews 10:10, 14, 29; 13:12), and "those who are made holy" are those who have been redeemed from sin's guilt and power and set apart as God's people. 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; Colossians 3:1-10). A sin habit is only a symptom of a greater spiritual problem and that is one's belief system. We must not abandon our faith union with Christ. If we do we will go back under Law and end up into a disobedient lifestyle (1 Corinthians 6:12-20; Galatians 5:4; 5:21; 1 Timothy 1:5-8-11; Hebrews 3:12-14; 6:4-6).

God knows that except for His grace, it is impossible for you to behave in a holy manner even though you have been declared holy. Naturally you will follow the patterns you have set through the programming of your mind all these years. But *supernaturally* you can become experientially holy. As we've seen *apart from our Lord we would not ever be holy*. Having reached that mindset, you cry out, "Lord, help me to grow up in grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ" (1 Peter 3:18). Then every time the enemy attacks, whisper to God, "Please, Lord, give me the grace to be holy." Something supernatural will begin to happen. The old patterns of human nature on your hard drive will slowly be erased. The motivation to be holy will begin to increase until you cannot believe that your heart is actually longing to be free from the hypocrisy that has characterized your Christian life. The warfare won't go away. Satan will come at you from every direction and that's good. You'll be less likely to forget that it's a spiritual battle which you can't win apart from God's grace. Instead of focusing on becoming holy, the focus will be on God's incredible nature and the life of Christ that is being manifested in and through you. As time goes by God's desires of transparency will be yours which will lead to becoming increasingly holy. It will be a miracle. It will be a joy. It will be all of grace. Yes, there will be a price. The things you have enjoyed and pretended to enjoy will have to go. Your inflated opinion of your own spirituality will also dissolve in an ocean of reality that apart from Christ you are nothing. Yes, the façade

will have to go. But in its place there will a deep peace that settles over you not to mention a desire to be more like Jesus.

Paul wrote, "And having disarmed the powers and authorities, He made a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them by the Cross." In what sense did Christ triumph over them by the Cross? Let me explain it this way. On D-Day (June 6, 1944), the armed forces of the Allies established a successful beachhead against the Nazis at Normandy, France. World War II raged eleven months longer, when the Nazis finally surrendered on V-E Day (May 8, 1945). During that period, the Allies suffered more casualties than during any other period of the war. D-Day didn't end the war immediately, but in retrospect, the war began to end on that day. The cross of Christ is D-Day for the enemy of our souls. The second return of Christ is V-E Day for the Christian. We live in between the times, confident that Christ will prevail, but experiencing the ongoing ravages of the world, the flesh, and the devil.

One final point: The understanding of holiness for the New Testament church has been complicated by the wrong interpretation of 2 Corinthians 6:14-18 where God tells us to be separate from the world. That doesn't seem, on the surface, to fit with Jesus' lifestyle, but it does when you understand what Paul meant by that statement. It is clear from what Paul said that in God's eyes people ultimately are divided into two categories: those who are in Christ and those who are not. It has to do with two groups of people joining together in a common spiritual goal as equals. We are told by Paul that you cannot join light and darkness and you cannot join the temple of God with the temple of Satan. It is impossible. That is why Israel was told never ever to intermarry with non-Jews (Ezra 9:1-3). The reason was clear. It would be a spiritual union between light and darkness and they would be non-compatible spirits. Therefore, believers must not participate in the sins of unbelievers living around them. Furthermore, they must not be in voluntary partnership or in intimate relationships with unbelievers for such relationships can corrupt their relationship with Christ. This does not mean, however, that we do not infiltrate and become friends with non-believers for the purpose of taking light into darkness and leading the unbeliever to Christ. But, any intimate relationship that creates a union of two people only one of whom is a believer is a distinct contradiction to the will of God. Jesus is our example. He associated with sinners but never partook of worldly things. Here is how Christ put it in His prayer to the Father: "My prayer is not that you take them out of the world but that you protect them from the evil one. They are not of the world, even as I am not of it. Sanctify them by the truth, your Word is truth. As you sent me into the world, I have sent them into the world" (John 17:15-18).

If the world looked at Christians and couldn't differentiate between those who represented royalty and those who didn't, God had a problem. He had placed a seal or emblem of ownership upon His own, the Holy Spirit (Ephesians 1:13). If when the world saw them, they did not see the holiness of God there would be a world of darkness with no lights to lead people out (Matthew 5:14-16). The apostle John put it this way, "Do not love the world or anything in the world" (1 John 2:15). It's that simple! Everything we reach out and touch that does not draw us closer to God's heart of holiness is

violating His desire for us to be separate. While the world is reaching out for things and for thrills, the Christian is to be reaching out to God for strength and for wisdom and for spiritual blessings even at the cost of personal gain.

## PREPARATION FOR GRACE

The process of preparing the human heart for grace is critical, in particular for the relinquishing of our strength. Man was originally designed to operate in God's image. An image simply obeys. Your image in the mirror is a reflection of what its origin does. So by design an image simply reflects the will of its source. God, in love, designed us with a free will. He made us with the ability to look at the source, Christ, the real thing, and decide moment by moment to be a reflection. We were designed to be images, not sorry, inadequate sources, but *images by choice*. Adam made a really bad decision in the Garden of Eden when he concurred with his wife Eve and disobeyed God rather than be an obedient image. They decided, at Satan's beckoning, to become like God instead of simply watching God and allowing His power and His choices to become theirs (Genesis 3). By making their own decisions and utilizing their own power of choice, Adam and Eve decided to make God into some kind of a genie they would call up if all else failed. As the result, they plunged the human race into chaos, confusion and death. That is when they demanded their rights and went out on their own strength; they lost it all for the human race.

Man's arrogance and pride would cause God to create resistance where once there was cooperation and conflict where there was once comfort. There was now an internal war on to see whether man would fight his battles alone or call upon His God and become the image he was created to be. And as sin abounded, the conflict intensified. The natural strength of nature had now turned against man. The power God had built into the universe which was designed to give man the freedom to experience God's energy now became a powerhouse of resistance. Worse yet, God, man's friend, became man's enemy (Genesis 4:10-12). From that point on, man began a long and slow descent into the abyss of self-destruction until at one point God had to destroy all but one family and begin again (Genesis 6 - 7). However, God had a plan, a wonderful plan. He wanted man to be able to appropriate moment by moment the power he had relinquished through sin. He wanted man to be able to allow God's supernatural power to enable him to do the things he once was created to do, to be able to enter again into God's heart and allow God's energy to enter into man's life until the image was clear once again. Once that image was evident, God's plan of evangelism would begin to restore man, one at a time, to His image. Unbelieving man would look at those who had been restored and seeing God's image, would desire Him as well. However, to have that image clearly seen man would have to get out of the way. He would have to stop trying to be anything on his own and let God be God in him. He would have to stop trying to imitate God and let God do supernaturally what man could not do naturally. While it would be called "grace," it would literally be a return to the very process God initiated when He created man. It would be God's power operating in and through an obedient image. The entire Old Testament was a looking glass through which God's

people were able to foresee the process of God's empowering grace through Christ. God allowed certain men and women to experience it, as He allowed the nation of Israel to gather their strength from God when they were willing and to actually watch Him do for them what they could not do for themselves. Israel's national warfare and natural cries led to a demonstration of how God alone could deliver. He had to become their strength. This was a corporate picture of personal truth (Exodus 13:3; 2 Samuel 22:18; Psalms 18:2; 18:32; 27:11; 33:16; 73:26). Israel's spiritual leaders began to explain the principle that God alone is our strength (Exodus 15:2; Deuteronomy 31:6; 2 Chronicles 16:9; Isaiah 40:29-31; Hebrews 13:5).

Thus, grace was locked in the heart of God even before the foundation of the world. It needed one thing to work. It needed man to be nothing more than an image, a reflection that mirrored the will of the One who made Him. As long as man would allow God to be his source of strength, he would be successful, joyful, and peaceful in his endeavors. At any point where man deviated from the role of a responder or an image bearer, God would let him be his own god until through weakness, man came to the end of himself and cried out for God to empower him again and surrender. Each time he did, God stepped in with His grace and man was renewed again. It happened corporately to Israel and individually to the men and women God lifted off the pages of history to demonstrate His mercy but at some point God knew that man would have to see the image and a final price would have to be paid so the image could indwell His people and never leave them. So God came to earth in the person of His Son, Jesus. To show us how it is done, for 33 years, God's Son totally depended upon His Father. Christ was nothing more than the express image of the Father while on earth (Colossians 1:15), full of grace and truth (John 1:16-17):

- John 5:19, "...The Son of Man can do nothing by Himself; He can do only what He sees His Father doing, because whatever the Father does the Son also does."
- John 5:30, "By myself I can do nothing; I judge only as I hear, and my judgment is just, for I seek not to please myself but Him who sent me."
- John 8:28, "...When you have lifted up the Son of Man, then you will know that I am the one I claim to be, and that I do nothing on my own but speak just what the Father has taught me."

Christ would have been considered a weakling by the standards of the world. He sure couldn't put on His resume that He couldn't do anything without His Father's help. That would be considered a weak trait. When was the last time you were asked to prepare a resume? It's not as simple as it used to be. There are people whose job is to do nothing but that. There are computer programs that do it for you, but they have a common factor: they magnify your strength almost to the point of absurdity. It seems you have to be able to do four things to present yourself to a perspective employer, all of which are in violation of Biblical principles. First, you have to ignore your weaknesses. Ignore your weaknesses, they say. No one wants to really know that you apologize for selling your best product because you think it's overpriced or that you break out in a cold sweat every time your are asked to give a proposal. Pretend it doesn't exist. Ignore your weaknesses, they say. It's "creative" salesmanship. God says it's lying. The second thing you have to do when completing a resume is to

exaggerate your strength. You once starred in a play in Junior High School. Put down: *Obvious theatrical abilities. Performs well before large groups.* Never mind that you haven't had the nerve to stand up in front of five people since. You take some obscure incident in your life and blow it out of proportion. That now becomes your strength, and strength is what they are looking for. Also you have to replace specifics with generalities. So you can only understand very simple instructions; complex procedures cause you to panic. Write down: *Especially gifted in performing concise tasks.* It doesn't say anything, but that's to your advantage. Finally you have to create a new vocabulary. If the words don't mean anything, there's no basis for comparison. You are no longer "computer illiterate," you are now "digitally challenged." It's not that you can't spell; you are "creative with words." So you can't keep anything straight? You now possess "*random organization.*" You tend to overlook details? That makes you "*a global visionary.*" Have problems getting to work on time? Call yourself a "*time management designer.*" Can't add two and two? You must be "*a contemporary mathematician.*"

The mood of modern times is we must not say anything bad about ourselves because people want to know how good we are, how strong we are, and how smart we are. So we design new words and ignore real issues until we begin to believe ourselves. We tell ourselves *we are what we think.* After all, the world is looking for strength. Unfortunately, strength is always defined in physical terms. The athlete who wants to succeed does so by injecting steroids into his system until he is big enough to block a street corner. The announcer will say with awe, "He's a 325 pound bundle of strength." Indeed. In the financial world, strength is now measured in buyouts, takeovers, and mergers. It isn't how good your produce is or how good your service is; it's how many of your competitors you can run out of business or buy up until you are in control. Religion has fallen into the "strength" trap as well. No longer do churches measure their success by changed lives but by budget size, building size, attendance ratios and number of ministers on staff and even "satellite churches" which remain tied to the mother church so they are counted as one so they can look good. They are often not even called "churches" but "campuses." We now even judge the value of God's work by its "strength." The mega-church syndrome has captivated even the secular press, who now seek out only large church pastors when they want an opinion on the latest issues. After all, they pastor the biggest churches; they must be "spiritually strong." On and on it goes. Big. Strong. Mighty. It's a sickness. Gone are the criteria of character and integrity.

What is our obsession with strength and size? What has gone wrong? It goes back to the Garden of Eden when Satan began tempting Eve by taunting her to "not settle for less than it all." "Can't you eat of that tree? Why not? What right does God have to keep something from you? If you're going to be the best, you deserve it all." So she went for it all and lost it all (Genesis 3:1-7). God's plan is so different than man's. Man sees strength as external; God sees strength as *internal*. God sees power as *spiritual* (1 Corinthians 1:25-31; 2:1-4). Humanity sees it as monetary, physical and political. God looks at the size of a person's heart. Man looks at the size of his bank account. God had to do something to bring life back into perspective, so He came up with

something called “grace.” Grace was a way back to a personal weakness, rather than one’s strength. It only begins to function when ours can’t. It only did what man couldn’t do. It only worked when man knew he was without strength (1 Corinthians 1:25-31). *The stronger a person thought themselves to be or the more they thought they deserved it, the less grace they were able to receive.* No small wonder some 2,000 years have come and gone and man is still mystified by this thing called “grace.” We can accept that God used it to save us because we have experienced it (Ephesians 2:8-9), but we chafe and even rebel as we begin to realize that apart from God we can do nothing. The deeper waters of God’s transforming and enabling power is far too foreign to the natural mind. Unfortunately, as society rushes towards Armageddon, human strength has become the measuring stick of success in virtually every walk of life. We who call ourselves Christians seem to have more and more difficulty grasping the concept of a Spirit-empowered grace life than the men and women whose lives paved the way for us in generations past. In today’s Christian bookstores is an ocean of “how to” books that focus on man’s problem and on man’s methods rather than on God’s nature and His enabling grace. Even when you do find material on what to do, so often there is lacking that precious seed of humility that speaks of the awesomeness of God’s incredible provisions that only are released when we get out of the way. God does not need us to build His kingdom. The Kingdom is His to build, not ours. The context of Ephesians 2:10 is that God had the good works He wanted you to do in mind before you were ever born. You don’t have to think them up. You don’t have to craft a vision paper. You don’t have to try a bunch of stuff to see what works---you just have to listen to God. Until we grasp that the “kingdom of God is about righteousness, peace and joy in the Holy Spirit” (Romans 14:17), we will labor relentlessly trying to build man-made houses for God to dwell in, man-made programs for Him to work through and man-made glory for Him to share. He will have none of it!

It is that precious commodity of God called “grace” that makes the difference. We should know this. We’ve already found trying to change people from the outside through legalism doesn’t work. We told them what to wear and how to look holy. All we did was make hypocrites out of people. But God’s Spirit empowering grace working from the inside out will change people. Proof that grace works is the very fact that in eternity past God demonstrated it by choosing the likes of us, adopting us, accepting us and paying the total cost to transform us into spiritual beings in the likeness of His precious Son (Ephesians 1:3-14; Colossians 1:13-14). The more we see of what God did and how He did it, the more in awe we should be of His free, undeserved, sovereign and enabling grace. Old Testament saints could only dream of what we New Covenant saints experience---life in the Spirit. Unfortunately many Christians never experience the sheer joy of letting Christ live out His grace-filled life through them. He often has to allow into our lives certain kinds of needs so we will be more likely to cry out for grace. His desire, however, is that we enter into that rest which He has prepared for us (Hebrews 4).

How does God go about providing grace when we need it? How does that provision become the beacon that shines through us and leads others to Christ? Grace is initiated at our most vulnerable place, where we are the *weakest*. For no matter the

circumstance that cries out for grace, as long as we think we have even one tiny fragment of the strength to meet that need apart from God, we quench the Spirit's desire to pour out grace upon us. It is the *acknowledgement of human weakness which releases divine strength!* Yet we will justify our inadequacies in a thousand ways. We even use words that indicate we know we're the ones who can't all the while enter into the process *as though we can*. However, God looks on the heart and it is that state of total despair and complete surrender that He waits for. For some of us, it takes so very much to get us out of the way.

Compare Philippians 2:13 with Read 1 Timothy 1:12-14. God is not working on His people; He is working in and through them! The key has always been acknowledging our weakness and total dependency on God. We are in deep trouble the moment we think we can live the Christian life without God's help. Not only does spiritual pride quench the Spirit, it cancels out God's enabling grace. Eliminate God's enabling grace and you are no different than the world!

### **Conclusion**

Jonah correctly stated, "Salvation is of the LORD" (2:9). Salvation was God's idea. Furthermore, our heavenly Father has done everything possible to save us. He sent His Son, Jesus, to this planet to die for us so He could take away our sins and transfer His righteousness to us. But Christ's death on the cross involves more than a transfer of guilt and innocence; it involves transformation of character and the power of the Holy Spirit to live the Christian life. The question is, you are willing to let God use the canvas of your life to paint a portrait of His enabling grace. Or, do you have preconceived limits to which you plan to hold God? That's your privilege, of course. You can draw the lines anywhere you choose. The only problem is you are limiting the grace of God. However, should you decide to tap into God's Spirit enabling ability, you can expect to experience Isaiah 40:30-31, "...but those who hope in the LORD will renew their strength. They will soar on wings like eagles; they will run and not grow weary, they will walk and not faint." How can that be? It is called grace. It is God waiting to do supernaturally what you cannot do naturally. You have two choices: you can chafe at your weaknesses, trials and hardships and cry out to be delivered or you can quietly submit to the Master Artist as He paints on the canvas of your life a brand new, much deeper image of Himself. What will you ask Him for? Will you ask for deliverance from the storms? Or will you ask for grace to endure through the storms of life in order to bring Him glory? The choice is yours. It is possible that God will give you what you ask for. Either way, it is that precious commodity of God called "grace" that makes the difference.

Closing Prayer: "Our Father and our God, may we take a deep breath and put down the paint brush. May we stop picking the colors and choosing the scenery and begin being grateful for the privilege of just being the canvas. Father, you do the drawing, and may it be so transparent that the grace which flows into it turns around and reflects back the image of your Son, Jesus Christ, so that a lost and hurting world will look at it—at us—and see your image. In Jesus' name, Amen."

## Questionnaire

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.

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
  
3. 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.
  
4. Our natural talents come from which dimension of God’s grace?
  - a. Saving grace.
  - b. Common grace.
  - c. Empowering grace.
  
5. Which statement is correct?
  - a. It is saving *grace*, not common grace, which brings us into a personal relationship with God and qualifies us for eternal life.
  - b. There is no such thing as saving grace.
  - c. Both a and b above are correct.
  
6. The way to enter into the saving grace of God is by believing in Jesus.  
\_\_True \_\_False

7. Why does every individual need saving grace?

- a. Because we are all sinners.
- b. Because we live in the USA.
- c. Because we are Gentile believers.
- d. No one knows.

8. The writer states, "In addition to trapping 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)." Does this mean God is responsible for man's fall? No! Why not?

9. What God began with the Edenic covenant through the first Adam in the Garden, He completes by grace through \_\_\_\_\_, the Second Adam (1 Corinthians 15:45) on the Cross.

10. The term "election of God" refers to God's choice in Christ of a people in order that they should be treated as holy and blameless in His sight. Which is correct in regards to the election of God?

- a. The "election of God" is only through the blood of Christ.
- b. The election occurs *only in union with Jesus Christ*.
- c. The election through Jesus Christ is also *corporate*.
- d. All of the above.

11. 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 as they do. What makes Christianity so unique is that it is the only belief which teaches that a holy God loves \_\_\_\_\_ people.

12. Saving grace is grace towards us from God; empowering grace is *God's ability* \_\_\_\_\_ through the Holy Spirit to do good works.

13. 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.

14. Why is grace power?

15. Grace is not only God's unmerited favor towards us but it is also God's unmerited power through us.  True  False

16. God's part is to save us and empower us through grace. Our part is to be \_\_\_\_\_ of that grace.

17. What could life possibly confront us with that God's marvelous grace cannot handle? The answer is \_\_\_\_\_.

18. There is absolutely no situation or need God cannot handle. Why?

19. What is the preparation for grace?

20. Read John 9:1-3. What false assumption did the disciples make concerning the blind man's affliction?

21. Define enabling grace:

22. What is the difference between regeneration and sanctification?

23. What is identity marker spirituality that we are to stay away from?

24. 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)

25. 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

26. 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

27. 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 then abandoning faith in Christ.

28. Grace does not give us the authority to sin, rather the desire and ability not to sin.  
 True  False



### Answer Sheet

1. *Grace is all that God is providing all God does for someone who has no right to any of it. 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.
3. c
4. b
5. a
6. T
7. a
8. 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 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!
9. Jesus.
10. d
11. Sinful.
12. in us.
13. c
14. Because it is being administered by the Holy Spirit.
15. T
16. Good stewards.
17. Absolutely nothing.
18. Because God's grace has no boundaries, no limits, and no parameters.
19. Humility and total dependency on God. The stronger a person thought themselves to be the less grace they were able to receive. The more they thought they deserved it the less they would be able to appropriate.
20. The disciples made the false assumption that suffering and sin are *always* connected. Jesus made it clear they are not!
21. God's enabling grace is defined exactly the same way as saving grace but with one exception: *doing minute by minute supernaturally what we cannot do naturally--- live the Christian life.*
22. *Regeneration* is the impartation of new life to the new convert (John 3:3, 5), *sanctification* is the development of that spiritual life *already begun.*
23. These identity markers are highly visible and relatively superficial practices that allowed people to distinguish who is inside the church and who is outside the church.
24. grace through faith.
25. T
26. T
27. belief system.

28. T