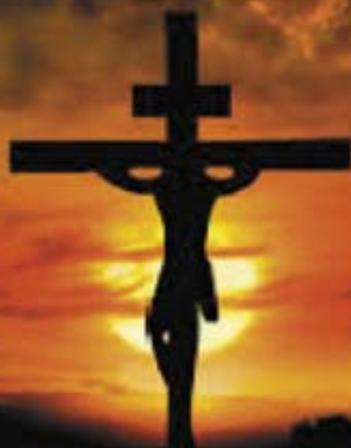


**HIS GRACE**



**OUR FAITH**

**Encountering God  
On A Cross**

**DICKSON**

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# His Grace – Our Faith

Roger E. Dickson

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rdickson@mweb.co.za

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## Preface

This book is a complete revision and reformatted work of the original printing that was first published in 1995. I have almost doubled the size of the book, but also reformatted the text to be easier read on electronic devices, including smart phones.

The original text was written specifically as a textbook for the International Bible Institute. In the rewriting and reformatting of the text, I have sought to revise the material for a reading audience. The text is in a twelve point font, and thus can better be read on the screen of an electronic device.

In rewriting the text, the reader will encounter a great deal of redundancy in reference to the central thought of the subject. This is necessary in textbook material for distance training programs, as was the Institute. But I do not apologize for redundancy, understanding that this is not a Western style of presenting material either in speech or literature. Please keep in mind that the majority of those who studied the material in its original style were not Western residents. And in a non-Western literary society around the world, redundancy is a system of preaching and teaching. For example, after the sermon is preached, another person in the assembly will stand up and go through the entire sermon in order to highlight for the audience the main points. This is a learning process in those societies that have little written material. Therefore, when reading this book, just suppose for a moment that you are sitting in an African audience. And besides this, I am as Peter in that *“I will not be negligent to always remind you of these things, though you know and are established in the present truth”* (2 revised 1:12).

Add to the preceding the fact that few people truly understand the meaning of grace. Since Western citizens live in a social and economic environment wherein legalities are tremendously important, it is sometimes difficult for the Western citizen to comprehend grace. Those societies that are structured and controlled by dictatorial rule, have even a greater difficulty in understanding grace. When “law and order” have been embedded within the minds of citizens from youth, it is difficult to understand that there is a God who offers grace in the midst of “law and order.” This is the God in whom the Christian believes, and the God who sent His only begotten Son into this world in order to demonstrate through grace the very nature of His character.

And in defining the nature of God’s character, we better understand the God who seeks to have a relationship with us. The Son of God was incarnate in the flesh not only for salvational purposes, but also to be a living illustration of God who is reaching out to us through His Son. It is His grace that draws all people unto His Son who was the demonstration of His grace.

Our failure in the past has often been that we have presented to the world a legal system by which we would appeal to unbelievers to obey the law, not respond to grace. In fact, we confused the gospel with law, and thus assumed that if we preached law, revised abiding citizens” would respond to legal statutes. Unknowingly, we preached a gospel of sin and death, and not love and life. And in doing this, we muted the real power of the gospel.

This book is an effort to readjust the focus of our preaching. It is an effort to restore the power of the gospel. And in restoring the power (grace) of the gospel, we can restore to our own lives the true impetus to be transformed into the image of the Son of God. When we consider grace, therefore, we understand that the gospel is more than salvational power. It entails motivational power beyond anything that can be produced by obedience to law. If we can understand this power of grace, it is then that we begin to live in thanksgiving to all that God did for us through the Lord Jesus Christ.

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Roger E. Dickson  
Philadelphia, South Africa

## INTRODUCTION

When one is younger, it may be that he or she does not appreciate fully the grace of God as much as those who are older. When we are older, we often reflect on the “sins of our youth.” At least this was the case in reference to Paul. It was in his old age that he recalled that in his younger years he was a persecutor of the men and women who were disciples of Jesus. He lived as a blasphemer (1 Tm 1:13). He confessed to being the chief of sinners.

When one is older, he, as Paul, remembers many of those mistakes (sins) of his former years. It is for this reason that in our old age we begin to fully appreciate the grace of God. Paul wanted us to remember that regardless of all his past sins, he obtained mercy because of the grace of the Lord (1 Tm 1:13,14). In a quotation from the Old Testament, the Hebrew writer also wanted to remind us of this forgiving nature on the part of God: “*Their sins and their iniquities I will remember no more*” (Hb 8:12). We may remember our sins, but because of grace and mercy, our sins are long gone from the memory of God. Therefore, grace is fully appreciated when one in old age remembers that God no longer remembers. What we cannot forget, He already has. It is by His grace, therefore, that we can move on regardless of not being able to forget the sins of our past.

From the creation of Adam in the beginning to the final coming of Jesus, the grace of God will always exist. It will always exist because we were created free-moral individuals with the ability to choose between right and wrong in reference to the will of God. And since God gave us the right to choose, instructions (law) had to be given in order to give us the opportunity to make choices. Therefore, grace does not eliminate law, neither does law nullify grace. If we would walk with God, then we must walk according to His instructions. Since we cannot walk on our own accord, then we must have faith in the grace of God that when we stumble in our efforts to walk uprightly, He will remain with us (See Jr 10:23). Law, therefore, necessitates grace, for if there were no law, then grace would not be necessary. It is a frivolous

discussion, therefore, to talk about grace while ignoring law.

Our problem is that we seek to do our own thing, whether in the expression of our faith, or in our relationships with our fellow man. In reference to our faith, we often seek to construct our own means of religious behavior by which we would please God, and thus save ourselves through the meritorious performance of our own religiosity. By the first century, the Jews were masters of this behavior. Because they honored the law of God, they established a host of other laws surrounding God's law in order to guarantee that the law of God was obeyed. When Jesus arrived in this world, their religiosity had become so burdened with their religious traditions that they actually rejected the law of God in order to keep their self-imposed religious rites, rituals and ceremonies.

The Holy Spirit was redundant with His instructions in the New Testament in order to keep the legal religiosity of man out of the fellowship of God's people. Galatians was the first document written to deal specifically with the practice of binding religious rites and rituals where God had not bound. The Spirit then inspired Paul to write the document of Romans a few years after Galatians in order to give a detailed description of our relationship with God through grace and law. It is for this reason that we must understand that the gospel of grace is the very core of true Christianity. The subject of grace is so central in reference to our faith that we cannot say enough about this indescribable relationship of God with us as His children. It is simply true that the more we understand grace, the more we understand the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ. And the more we understand Jesus, the more we understand God the Father. It is true as Jesus said, "*He who has seen Me has seen the Father*" (Jn 14:9). The grace of God is so profound in defining the nature of God that it had to have an incarnational illustration before we could truly believe and understand it.

The revelation of God's grace through Jesus separates the gospel from all man-made religions of this world. While the adherents of man-made religions seek favor from their gods through the meritorious performance of self-imposed religiosity, through faith, the Christian enjoys a God who has offered His grace to all who would seek to come

into His presence. God offers His grace, but His offer must be accepted by those who yearn to be in His presence. He asks that we accept through faith His offer for eternal dwelling. It is this faith that moves us to respond to His work of grace on the cross. Jesus' act of grace at the cross is the power of the gospel. This was the central meaning of what Paul wrote in 2 Corinthians 4:15: *“For all things are for your sakes, so that the grace that is reaching many people may cause thanksgiving to abound to the glory of God.”* When one hears the gospel of grace, he is moved to respond. We seek relief from our burden of guilt. The older we are in this life, the more we appreciate the gospel of a God who pleads to us to come to His willingness to forget a lifetime of sin.

Unfortunately, reaction to the meritorious systems of man-made religion has made it difficult to understand the subject of salvation by grace through faith. The negative reaction of people to meritorious religiosity has led some to misunderstand something that is actually not that difficult to understand. But because of the desire of some to live according to their own religious dictates, they too are often tempted to practice and preach the “other gospel” that is contrary to the grace that was revealed at the cross through the sacrificial offering of the incarnate Son of God.

It is simply not possible to establish a legal system of religion in order to answer the questions of those who do not understand grace. Legalists can never understand the position of one another on the subject of grace because both sides of the argument are maintaining their different legal systems of theology that are contrary to the subject under discussion. Two legalists in debate find it very difficult to come to an understanding of grace.

Nevertheless, it is not difficult to understand the simplicity of the grace of God. From the creation of man to the culmination of humanity at the final coming of Jesus, God's offer for deliverance from mortality through grace has always been offered to fallen man. God stands as a just and fair Creator because He has always offered a way to escape mortality. Before the incarnation of the Son of God into this world, those who walked by faith waited in hope for the grace that would be

revealed. After the cross, we have the tremendous opportunity of reading about this grace event in the New Testament. We are moved to offer up ourselves with the One who offered Himself for us. It is as Paul wrote, “*For the love of Christ [at the cross] compels us, because we judge that if one died for all, then all died*” (2 Co 5:14).

Freedom from our problem of sin has always been by grace through faith. There is no other means by which mortal man can possibly be saved from the bondage of his own mortality. Because of our own fallibility, our only chance at eternal life is through the grace of God. Because there is no possible way to save ourselves through obedience of any system of law that God may give us, or to meritoriously atone for one sin through good works, salvation will always be by God’s grace.

Nevertheless, if we delete our obedient faith from the picture, then there can never be any reception of the free gift of grace. If we devise some meritorious system of religion without obedience to the word of God, then we begin to eliminate the conditions that God has placed on everyone who would accept His grace. It is through an obedience of faith, therefore, that we have access into God’s wonderful grace, wherein we stand and have confidence of our salvation. So through faith we thank “*God for His indescribable gift*” (2 Co 9:15).

## **Chapter 1**

### **THE MISUNDERSTOOD SIMPLICITY**

Grace is the love of God that reaches out to all humanity through the gospel. It was revealed through the cross of His incarnate Son. If we delete any part of the gospel mission of the Son of God, then there is no grace. Therefore, if we ignore Jesus, there is no grace. Jesus Christ was Isaiah’s Suffering Servant of God (Is 52:13-15; 53). He was the very illustration of God’s grace toward humanity.

In all the discussions throughout history concerning grace, some seem to have had difficulty in understanding the revelation and demonstration of God’s grace through the incarnation and cross. But if we

obediently respond with faith in the incarnation, crucified and resurrected Son, then we are on our way to understanding the motivating power of the gospel (2 Co 4:15; 5:14).

### **A. Martin Luther and grace:**

In his struggle against the sale of indulgences—that contributions could be made to the Catholic Church in order to buy the right to sin—Martin Luther (1483 - 1546) struggled to harmonize grace and works as they were revealed through Paul and James. Luther had difficulty understanding the concept of an obedience faith in response to the grace of God. In his reaction to the sale of indulgences, he referred to the book of James as “an epistle of straw.” He assumed that James was supposedly promoting meritorious justification by works alone.

Since Luther struggled with justification by faith, he misunderstood Paul’s focus on faith and grace, and thus assumed that justification was totally by faith. He thus sought to ignore the principle of obedient works of faith that was taught by James. Rather than reconciling James’ justification by works with Paul’s justification by faith, Luther came up with the teaching that salvation is by faith alone. In his reaction to the Roman Catholic church selling the right to sin, Luther went to the extreme to teach that faith eliminated all works in reference to one’s salvation, and thus, he affirmed that salvation was by faith alone.

Paul’s emphasis on grace was certainly intended by the Holy Spirit. In his life before the waters of baptism in Damascus, Paul was breathing murderous threats against the disciples (At 9:1). But after his cleansing by the grace of God in the waters of baptism (At 22:16), who else would be the obvious choice to write concerning the wonderful grace of God? If grace could save the chief of sinners, then it could save anyone.

In his teaching on faith and grace, Paul did not support Antinomianism, as many writers have unfortunately become on this subject. Antinomism is the teaching that through faith and grace one is relieved of all responsibility toward law. In his teaching on faith and grace, however, Paul did not teach that grace covers the sin of the saint

to the point that it makes no difference what one believes or how one behaves in reference to law. Therefore, Paul affirmed, we will not sin in order that grace may abound (Rm 6:1). Paul always maintained an inseparable connection between grace and obedience. He always taught that obedience was a manifestation of faith, not a meritorious effort to justify ourselves in response to the cross. As there is no such thing as self-sanctification through meritorious works of law, neither is there any such thing as meritorious self-justification by works in reference to sin.

### **B. Augustine and grace:**

Augustine (354 - 430) promoted one of the most interesting concepts of grace. He believed that all men were born totally depraved, and thus, unable to respond to the will of God. He believed that it was not within the ability of any person to make a free-moral choice to respond to the call of God through His grace. According to Augustine, therefore, salvation came only as a result of God making individual choices as to who would be given unmerited (unearned) grace and who would not. Augustine taught that one does not merit the ability to choose his salvation through obedience. Those who would be saved have already been chosen by God. Such is an insidious teaching that is a direct attack against the very character of God. The teaching assumes that God is fiendish in allowing people to be born into this world who do not have the ability to respond by faith to the love of God. Babies who are not chosen for eternal life are thus condemned to hell, even at the time of their birth.

### **C. John Calvin and grace:**

John Calvin (1509 - 1564) accepted the core of Augustine's belief on the supposed inability of individuals to free-morally respond to the love of God. He thus promoted the teaching that the grace of God was limited to those whom God had chosen individually for eternal life. The chosen were unconditionally elected to be saved. Calvin believed

that before the world was created, God individually elected those who would be saved. Everyone else would be rejected. And since God had already elected those who will go to heaven, then His grace was limited only to these individuals who had been chosen.

Calvin's teaching means that God's grace is not a part of the universal call of God to all men through the gospel. In fact, Calvin's teaching nullifies the great commission and the preaching of the gospel to the world in order that all people respond to the gospel with a penitent heart. Those of this belief—commonly referred to as Calvinism—contend that it is only the responsibility of the evangelist to inform the individually elected in the world that they are already saved. The gospel message of the evangelist is only an announcement of salvation, not a call to repentance through the preaching of the gospel.

Because some could not accept the fact that one was lost if he did not have an opportunity to hear and obey the gospel, another possibility had to be invented in order to get good people into heaven. Therefore, in response to the teaching of Calvin, some came up with the doctrine of universalism. The universalist contends that grace is unconditionally appropriated to all men, and thus all men will be saved, regardless of whether they have the opportunity to hear and obey the gospel. Salvation, therefore, is by grace alone, apart from any conditions of law that God would require on the part of any individual.

#### **D. The gospel and grace:**

We need to understand in as simple terms as possible the events of the gospel. When we use this word, **we are referring to the incarnation, crucifixion, resurrection, ascension, and present kingdom reign of Jesus, the Son of God.** Without going into detail in explaining every event of what Jesus did for us in order that we have the opportunity to join Him in eternity, we suggest that the reader download Book 79, *Gospel Restoration*, from the Biblical Research Library at the following website: [www.africainternational.org](http://www.africainternational.org).

An unfortunate misunderstanding centers around how people have failed to understand the gospel in the context of the New Testament.

To many the word is erroneously used to refer to law. For example, when someone would say, “We must obey the gospel,” what is often meant is that we must obey the law of God. But this understanding is contrary to the gospel itself as it is revealed in the New Testament. The fact that one would use the word “gospel” to refer to a legal system of law **is a denial of the gospel itself.**

Immediately after Jesus returned from His fast in the wilderness, He “*came into Galilee, preaching the **gospel** of God*” (Mk 1:14). Does this mean He started preaching the law of God? Is the gospel just another system of law that must be meritoriously obeyed? If it were, then the Jewish audience to whom Jesus preached would have understood that He was preaching just another system of law, as opposed to the Sinai law under which they sought to justify themselves before God.

The English word “gospel” was used by translators to translate the Greek word *euaggelion*. This word simply means “good news.” But if the word “gospel” refers to law, **then it would not be good news.** Law is not good news simply because no one can keep law perfectly in order to save himself. There are no perfect law-keepers who are saved, no, not one (Rm 3:9,10). In fact, Paul said that he lived before law came into his life: “*For without law, I was once alive. But when the commandment came, sin revived and I died*” (Rm 7:9).

Paul told Peter that because they could not be justified by law-keeping, they fled to Christ (Gl 2:16). In view of the early Jewish Christians’ attempt to be delivered from law, and thus, sin and death, why would the Holy Spirit supposedly use the word “gospel” (“good news”) as a reference to another system of law? If it were another system of law under which one would again be brought into bondage, then it too could not be obeyed perfectly. In other words, in 2 Thessalonians 1:6-9 Paul revealed that Jesus was coming from heaven to destroy from the presence of God all “those who have not obeyed the gospel.” Did he mean that those who had not obeyed every point of law would lose their souls? Did he infer, therefore, that the gospel, if it is law, must be obeyed perfectly in order for one not to suffer destruction from the presence of the Lord? Did Paul teach that there were some who could obey law perfectly, and thus be saved on the merit of

their perfect obedience?

When Jesus began His ministry, He stated the good news (gospel) that He had arrived and was going to the cross in order to reveal the grace of God by which men could be saved. Little by little throughout His earthly ministry He taught the people about the coming grace, though His first disciples did not understand the good news (gospel) of the cross until after the event.

As Paul explained briefly in 1 Corinthians 15:1-4, the gospel was the revelation of the death of the incarnate Son of God for our sins. It was His resurrection for our hope. **This was an act of grace on the part of God, not law.** This all happened in history before one word was written of the New Testament. This was the grace of God that was revealed as an event on a cross outside Jerusalem. Obedience to the gospel does not refer to obedience to another system of law whereby one would seek to justify himself before God. Obedience to the gospel is joining with Jesus on the cross, in the tomb, and in His resurrection (See Rm 6:3-6).

Our obedience to the gospel is a response to the gospel of grace that was revealed at the cross over two thousand years ago (2 Co 4:15; Ti 2:11). The “truth of the gospel” is the offering of Jesus for our sins on the cross (See Gl 2:5,14; Cl 1:5). So hereafter when we speak of “obedience to the gospel,” we are not referring to obedience to another system of law, but to a response to the grace of God that was revealed through the death, burial, resurrection, ascension and reign of the incarnate Son of God. We obey this gospel by our own repentance, burial and resurrection from the grave of water.

Somewhere among the many misunderstandings concerning grace, there must be a simple understanding of God’s grace that is important and central to Christian faith. We would not for a moment believe that what is so important concerning our salvation would be difficult to understand. Because some have developed their own theologies on grace in reaction to legal religiosity, we must caution ourselves when we come to the New Testament in order to study this subject. We must guard our own objectivity by allowing the word of God to speak for itself.

We must assume that understanding the grace of God is not difficult simply because God wants us to be assured of our salvation. Grace should bring comfort, not theological confusion. Grace should bring peace of mind in reference to our relationship with God. We must assume, therefore, that the Holy Spirit's teaching on the subject is so clear that even the novice student of the Bible can understand the truth of the matter.

## Chapter 2 THE UNMERITED FAVOR OF GOD

The Greek word for grace is *charis*. It is a word that was used with various shades of meaning in the New Testament: “*And the Child grew and became strong, filled with wisdom. And the **grace** [charis] of God was upon Him*” (Lk 2:40). “*Now Jesus increased in wisdom and stature, and in **favor** [charis] with God and man*” (Lk 2:52). “*Moreover, brethren, we make known to you the **grace** [charis] of God that has been given to the churches of Macedonia*” (2 Co 8:1). “*And when I come, whomever you may approve by letters, these will I send to carry your **gift** [charis] to Jerusalem*” (1 Co 16:3).

Depending on the context, the word *charis* usually carries with it the meaning of “favor,” “unmerited favor,” or “free gift.” In the context of our salvation, it is God's unmerited favor, or free gift, that He extends to us, which favor comes as a result of our obedient faith. It is a gift that cannot be earned. In other words, one cannot put God in debt to pay one for his obedience to God's law, or his good works (See Rm 4:4).

The use of the word “grace” was illustrated in the actions of the Gentile Christians of Macedonia who sent their “grace” contribution to the Jewish famine victims of Judea (2 Co 8:1-4). Since the Jewish brethren in Judea were suffering from a famine, they could not pay for the “gift” that came their way through the generosity of the Gentile brethren. The gift had to be received without debt.

Historically, the Gentile brethren had every reason to resent the

Jews. The Jews had historically been arrogant toward the “pagan” Gentiles. However, when both Jews and Gentiles came together in Christ, love prevailed and favor (grace) was poured out on the Jewish brethren by the Gentile brethren who were in need during a severe famine in Judea. This is grace. In our time of need in reference to our salvation, God let love prevail, and subsequently grace was extended.

John wrote of grace as a historical event. *“For the [Sinai] law was given through Moses, but grace and truth came through Jesus Christ”* (Jn 1:17). Though the grace of God has existed since the creation of Adam, John’s emphasis was on **the revelation of grace through the sacrificial offering of Jesus on the cross**. This is what Paul explained in Titus 2:11: *“For the grace of God that brings salvation **has appeared to all men.**”* Grace is God’s gift to man that appeared through Jesus Christ. Grace meant that there could never be some system of repayment. Grace was free and unearned. The giving of grace can never incur a debt of repayment that must be paid to the giver of the grace.

It was the event of the appearing of the grace of God that was prophesied by the prophets. *“Of this salvation [by grace],”* Peter wrote, *“the prophets have inquired and searched diligently, **who prophesied of the grace that would come to you,** searching what, or what manner of time the Spirit of Christ who was in them did signify”* (1 Pt 1:10,11). In other words, though God extended His grace to His people who lived before the cross, His grace could never be understood without a demonstration. And that demonstration finally showed up in the manger of a barn in a small village of Bethlehem.

The word “lovingkindness” is used in the Old Testament to refer to grace. “Lovingkindness” is a combination of two words that was used by translators to define the action of grace in the Old Testament. Since God is “loving,” it is only natural that He should extend “kindness” to His creation (See Ps 17:7; 26:3; 36:7,10; 40:10).

Grace is the lovingkindness of God toward man, which grace was prophesied by the prophets and revealed through the gospel event. It is God’s unmerited gift that He continues to extend to man in order to bring us into His fellowship. It is His steadfast love toward His cre-

ation. Under the Sinai law grace was revealed in God's steadfast patience with His people in their rebellious walk away from Him. Though the greater portion of Israel went into apostasy, there was always the remnant of faith who remained committed to God. God's lovingkindness (grace) continued with this remnant of faithful people to the time when a personal revelation of grace could be made known through Jesus.

We must not make the mistake of thinking that the grace of God did not exist from the beginning when the first free-moral individual was created. The intensity of grace was revealed in the advent of the incarnate Son of God on the cross, though God from the beginning of time always worked with those of faith through grace. It is necessary to understand that grace was working in the lives of the Old Testament heroes of faith, for they too could not live without sin before God. God's grace at any time in history was demonstrated at the cross. Since the cross had to be a point in time, grace would extend before and after the cross. This is the thought that was in the mind of Paul when he wrote, "*God has set forth [Jesus] to be an atoning sacrifice by His blood through faith in order to declare His righteousness **for the remission of sins in the past** [before the cross] because of the forbearance of God [of all who lived before the cross]*" (Rm 3:25).

Under the New Testament covenant, we speak of grace as a past event of history. This was Paul's point in the statement of Titus 2:11: "*For the grace of God that brings salvation **has appeared** to all men.*" At the cross in our past, grace appeared. It was the revelation of the favor that God has always had for those who walk by faith. Grace is thus "*the gift of God*" (Ep 2:8). It is as Paul explained in Romans 5:15: "*But the free gift is not as the offense. For if by the offense of one many died, **much more the grace of God and the gift by grace of the one man, Jesus Christ, abounded to many.***" Jesus was the gospel demonstration of God's grace toward man. He was God's free gift of grace for the salvation of all those of all history who came and would come to God through obedient faith.

It was necessity that grace be revealed because of the total inability on the part of man to deliver himself from sin through meritorious religiosity. In other words, there could be no system of religious rites,

rituals or ceremonies that we could perform in order to deliver ourselves from sin. There could be no amount of good works by which we could appease God for our sins, or place God in debt to reward us with eternal life. Romans 4:4 is always true in reference to our problem of sin: “*Now to him who works [meritoriously], the reward [of salvation] is not credited according to grace, but according to debt.*”

Sin moved us so far away from God, that God had to come all the way from heaven to the cross in order to reconcile us unto Himself (See Ph 2:5-11). The event of God’s grace on the cross is magnified by the impossibility of man to reconcile himself unto God through either law keeping or meritorious works.

All have sinned (Rm 3:23). All have been unable to keep law perfectly, and thus we were all lawbreakers (1 Jn 3:4). We were lawbreakers to the point of being in bondage to our own sin (Rm 7:7-20). Before contacting the blood of the crucified Son, we were all sinners by the nature of the ways of this world, and thus we were lost in sin (Ep 2:1-3). But in a state of hopelessness in a world of sin, God intervened with the event of the cross (Ep 2:12). “*But God demonstrates His love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us*” (Rm 5:8).

The only possible way for mankind to be delivered from a state of sin was that God give the free gift of His grace through His incarnate Son. God came into this world through Jesus in order that we might become His righteousness through grace. “*For He has made Him who knew no sin to be sin on behalf of us, so that we might be made the righteousness of God in Him*” (2 Co 5:21). Jesus was the revelation of the grace of God. Through Jesus, God opened the heavenly door in order that we might truly see the opportunity of entering the presence of God (See Rm 3:21-26; 5:12-21). Buddha, Confucius, Muhammad and many other religious leaders were great leaders. However, none of these leaders ever claimed to be a substitutionary offering for sin on our behalf before the God of heaven. Religious leaders have sought to instruct their followers to live more in harmony with their fellow man. However, their function as religious leaders was never to be an offering for the sins of the followers.

Because of grace, we must conclude that God is righteous. Since He is our Creator, He must take responsibility for creating us as free-moral individuals with the ability to make choices. Since no person cannot live without sin, then no one can be saved if God does not step in with His grace. If He had not stepped in on our behalf at the cross, then God would be judged a fiendish God for creating us in the first place. Therefore, our response to His free gift of grace through Jesus reveals that He is a righteous God. We are the signal of His righteousness to the world because we have free-morally responded to His grace.

The glory of grace is that it was revealed through the event of the cross without our expectation, for we were all by nature the children of wrath, and thus, dead in our sins. *“But God demonstrates His love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us”* (Rm 5:8). The event of the cross was a surprise to those who knew that they were lost in sin. Though the Jewish disciples were expecting an earthly king who would redeem them from foreign occupation (At 1:6), the purpose for which Jesus came was to redeem humanity from sin, not from political oppression. The disciples’ deliverance was not from earthly powers, but from the spiritual powers of darkness (See Ep 1:18-22).

When the resurrected Jesus talked with the two men on the road to Emmaus, *“their eyes were restrained so that they would not know Him”* (Lk 24:16). Without recognizing who Jesus was, they spoke with Him of *“things concerning Jesus of Nazareth, who was a prophet mighty in deed and word before God and all the people”* (Lk 24:19). But they said nothing concerning the salvational event of the cross. As the apostles, they too did not associate the event of the cross with the revelation of God’s grace. They understood the cross redemption only when the Holy Spirit eventually revealed to the apostles and all the world that the cross event was the revelation of the grace of God. This did not take place until the outpouring of the Holy Spirit on the apostles in Acts 2.

At first the crucifixion of Jesus was only a historical event that crushed the hopes of the disciples in their king who would possibly deliver them from Roman oppression (Lk 24:21). But when the Spirit

revealed that the cross was the revelation of God's Suffering Servant for the salvation of all mankind, then the significance of the cross became more than a tragedy. It became the hope of the world.

Faith is the response of those who were before their obedience to the gospel, mourning over their sin. Faith caused rejoicing over the grace event of the cross. Our faith is in the Redeemer on the cross, for we believe that His crucifixion was more than the martyrdom of a great religious leader. It was the revelation of God's gift to all men. Since we could not deliver ourselves out of our bondage of sin, God sent the offering of His only begotten Son. Faith in this gospel event will result in our salvation from our death in sin. Obedient faith brings us into the realm of God's grace. *"Therefore, having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom also we have **access by faith into this grace** wherein we stand and rejoice in hope of the glory of God"* (Rm 5:1,2). It is for this reason that faith moves sinners to do all that God would require in order to come into His realm of grace. This was why Paul asked the Christians in Rome, *"Or do you not know that as many of us as were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into His death?"* (Rm 6:3).

The sacrificial death of Jesus on the cross was the advent of God's grace into this world. In order for one to reap the salvational blessings of this gospel event, he or she must be crucified and baptized with Jesus into His death for the remission of sins (At 2:38). Our entrance into the realm of God's grace occurs when we go to the cross and grave with Jesus in baptism, and then come forth to walk in newness of life with Him (Rm 6:3-6).

## Chapter 3

### EXAMPLES OF GRACE

Grace is always accessed by faith because God accepts no meritorious works on our part for the atonement of our sins. And since no one can keep law perfectly in order to demand salvation, salvation must always be based on grace. However, when we say that we access grace

through faith we are referring to an obedience of faith whereby we respond to that which God offers through His grace. We would say that obedient faith is the means by which people have always come into the “graces” of God. When the faith of the faithful is mentioned throughout the entire Bible, we must always understand that reference is made to an obedient faith. Simply believing that God exists has never brought anyone into the favor of God. Only when one acts on his or her faith in obedient response to God, do they receive the blessings and promises of God that are offered by grace.

### A. Noah accessed grace through obedient faith.

In our efforts to define the nature of obedient faith by which we access God’s grace, the text of Genesis 6:5-8 is a good commentary of a time when the grace of God needed to be offered. We are reminded in the New Testament that Noah acted on his faith. *“By faith Noah, being warned by God of things not yet seen, moved with fear, prepared an ark for the saving of his house”* (Hb 11:7). His faith moved him to prepare for an impending judgment that God would bring upon the earth.

In the historical context of Noah’s day, God *“saw that the wickedness of man was great on the earth”* (Gn 6:5). Because the population of the whole world was given over to sin, God said, *“I will destroy man whom I have created from the face of the earth”* (Gn 6:7). But of all humanity, *“Noah found favor in the eyes of the Lord”* (Gn 6:8). *“Noah was a just man and blameless in his time. And Noah walked with God”* (Gn 6:9). Noah found favor in the eyes of the Lord because he obediently walked in the will of the Lord. God’s favor was based on his obedience.

Noah and his family were blessed in that they did not have to suffer the impending destruction that God would bring upon the earth and all humanity. The promise of Noah’s deliverance from the imminent destruction was an offer of grace. The destruction was coming, but Noah could not have delivered himself without walking in the instructions of God. Because he feared God, through his obedience of faith he

prepared the ark. He accessed grace through obedient building.

The historical event of the flood of Noah's day is the first commentary in the Bible that explains how God works through grace and faith. We can apply this example of Noah and the flood with the situation of all those who are in sin. All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God (Rm 3:23). Sin separates everyone from God (Is 59:2). Therefore, in order for God to remain just (righteous) in view of the fact that all have sinned, and are in danger of being eternally separated from Him, there must be a promise of escape from destruction. The promise is totally based on grace.

Because all people exist in a state of condemnation because of sin, there must be an escape from sin through pardon. Sin demands justice and judgment. In order for God to remain just (righteous) in view of the fact that all sin, He offers mercy and grace. However, the condition for accepting God's pardon through grace is contingent on the fact that one believes in God to the point of responding to the offer of grace. In this way, Noah responded by building an ark. This is what Paul meant in Romans 3:25,26. God set forth Christ . . .

*. . . to be an atoning sacrifice by His blood through faith **in order to declare His righteousness** [justice] for the remission of sins in the past because of the forbearance of God, to declare at this time, I say, **His righteousness that He might be just and the justifier of him who believes in Jesus.***

God is declared just (righteous) because through His mercy He offers by grace the opportunity for deliverance from sin to those who are willing "to build an ark" for their salvation. He created us with the ability to make choices, and thus, in order for God to be declared righteous in view of the fact that we all sin, grace had to be offered.

God remained just in destroying the world of sinful humanity in the flood because He offered Noah a way of escape through the command to build an ark. On the other hand, the wicked world persisted in sin, though Noah continued to preach repentance throughout the time he was preparing the ark (1 Pt 3:20; 2 Pt 2:5). Noah's generation that

was destroyed in the flood, therefore, had no excuse for their lack of repentance (See Rm 1:18-23). In contrast to such a disobedient generation, by faith Noah responded to God's warning by building the ark (Hb 11:7). God's offer was salvation through the ark that was built as a result of Noah's faith.

Grace made the means of salvation from the flood possible for Noah and his family. Faith moved him to build. In order for Noah to believe and build, there first had to be the revelation of how Noah could be delivered. The means of how he could be delivered from destruction came through grace. In order for God to remain just, Noah had to be told how he and his family could access the grace (salvation) of God. Saving grace, therefore, must be based on the following conditions:

**1. An announcement must be made.** The impending action on the part of God must be announced to those to whom it will affect. In the case of Noah, God announced, *"The end of all flesh has come before Me, for the earth is filled with violence through them. And behold, I will destroy them with the earth"* (Gn 6:13).

**2. Instructions for deliverance must be given.** Instructions must be given as to how one can access the grace of God. God said to Noah, *"Make for yourself an ark of gopher wood"* (Gn 6:14).

**3. Obedient faith must move the faithful to accept the offer of God's deliverance.** Obedient faith moved Noah to access God's offer. *"Noah found favor in the eyes of the Lord"* (Gn 6:8). However, in order to be delivered from the flood, Noah had to respond by faith to God's graceful offer. *"By faith Noah, being warned by God of things not yet seen, moved with fear, prepared an ark for the saving of his house, by which he condemned the world and became heir of the righteousness that is according to faith"* (Hb 11:7).

Noah's family would never have been saved from the flood if Noah had never acted on his faith. Faith alone would have left him without a prepared ark for the salvation of his family. **The offer of salvation from the flood was through grace, but the acceptance of the offer demanded that Noah obediently prepare the ark.**

**4. Action must be taken on the part of the faithful.** In order to access the grace of God, our faith must respond as Noah's faith responded to the warning of God that destruction was coming upon the wicked. *"Thus Noah did according to all that God commanded him"* (Gn 6:22). This was Paul's "obedience of faith" of which he reminded the Roman Christians (Rm 1:5; 16:26). It is a faith that follows the instructions of God as to how one can access God's grace.

Acceptable faith is not meritorious. That is, faith must be in God, not in our ability to meritoriously perform in reference to law and works to earn God's grace. If Noah were working meritoriously in order to save his family, then he would have had to know that there was a flood coming. He would have had to scheme his own method of deliverance, and thus, build the ark according to his own knowledge and skills in order to deliver himself from the flood waters.

God told Noah how He would bring destruction upon the wicked because of their rejection of His will (Gn 6:17). In God's instructions, all the information Noah needed to know concerning the building of an ark was given in order that he deliver his family from the coming judgment. **This was knowledge that could come only through revelation.** And with the revelation of the coming flood about which Noah knew nothing in reference to its magnitude, **Noah was also given knowledge as to how the ark was to be built.** Through grace God not only reveals judgment that is coming, He also reveals how we can escape the judgment.

If Noah had not obeyed through faith the instructions given by God concerning the construction of the ark, then he could never have saved himself and his family. When God gives instructions concerning how one must access His grace, then we have no choice concerning the instructions that we must follow. We cannot subtract, substitute or ignore God's instructions as to how we can access God's grace.

Religion results from the desire of religiously oriented people to construct their own means by which they will access the grace of God. Through the meritorious performance of religious rites, rituals and ceremonies it is assumed that the adherents of a particular religious group

can earn the grace of God. The faith of the people, therefore, is in their legal performance of their religious rites, rituals and ceremonies. It is not so much in the grace of God who has explained how we are to respond to Him. For example, Jesus explained, “*But the hour is coming and now is when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and in truth, for the Father seeks such to worship Him*” (Jn 4:23). The Father seeks “true worshipers” who worship Him according to how He seeks to be worshiped. In other words, we cannot “build a religion” by which we can assume our religion will save us. Our faith must be in God, not in the fabrication of some religion. Our worship must be according to what God seeks, not according to what we desire. It is for this reason that worship that focuses on entertainment is religious oriented. It is a “worship service” that is focused more on the worshiper, and less on God.

## **B. Israel accessed grace through obedient faith.**

In Numbers 21:4-9 there is a case in the history of Israel that illustrates God’s healing grace. However, the healing of Israel at the time was based on the conditions that God prescribed, not on the desires and religious schemes of Israel.

At the time, the Israelites were in a state of rebellion against the authority and leadership of Moses. The people complained, “*Why have you [Moses] brought us up out of Egypt to die in the wilderness? For there is no bread, nor is there any water; and our soul loathes this miserable bread*” (Nm 21:5). As punishment of the people for their rebellion against God’s sanctioned authority, Moses, “*The Lord sent fiery serpents among the people and they bit the people*” (Nm 21:6). The biting serpents subsequently brought the desired result. The people came to Moses and confessed, “*We have sinned*” (Nm 21:7).

The Lord heard the mournful pleas of the people. He then commanded Moses to “*make a fiery serpent and set it on a pole*” where it could be seen by all the people (Nm 21:8). However, in order for the people to procure healing (grace) from God’s offer, there was a condition: “*And it will come to pass that everyone who is bitten, when he*

**looks on it, he will live**” (Nm 21:8). It was grace that provided the opportunity for healing. However, the condition was that the faith of the people had to move them to look upon the brass serpent for healing. Their faith had to move them to respond to the instructions for healing. If there were no movement toward obedience of the instructions, there would have been no healing.

God’s grace provides the opportunity for forgiveness. His opportunity for healing was communicated to the people. The people must have faith that what is provided by God will accomplish the desired forgiveness. And then, **the people must act on their faith to receive the blessing of the opportunity that has been provided by grace.** As there was no such thing as “faith only” healing of those who were bitten by the serpents in Israel, so there is no “faith only” healing from sin by those today who recognize that they are sinners, but do not respond to the grace of God through obedience. One must follow the instructions of God in order to access the grace of God that is offered by the One who was lifted up on the cross two thousand years ago.

### **C. We access grace through obedient faith.**

Through faith we have access to the atonement of our sins. The offer of atonement comes as a result of grace. But there must be a responsive faith on our part that moves us to “look upon” what God offers through grace in order that we access the blessing that comes through grace. It is for this reason that the Hebrew writer stated, *“But without faith it is impossible to please Him, for he who comes to God must believe that He is and that **He is a rewarder of those who diligently seek Him**”* (Hb 11:6). If the believer makes no effort to come to the source of healing, then there is no reward.

The grace that provided salvation from the flood of Noah’s day was offered to Noah. The offer and acceptance is not unlike the grace that is offered by God today that we be delivered from the coming destruction of all humanity by fire. Those of Noah’s generation *“were disobedient when the longsuffering of God waited patiently in the days of Noah while the ark was being prepared”* (1 Pt 3:20). As God of-

ferred a way of escape to those of faith when the ark was being prepared, He does the same today. Through His grace He offers a way of escape from the coming destruction (See 2 Th 1:7-9).

We must notice what Peter said in applying the situation of Noah's day to our's today: "*The like figure whereunto even baptism does also now save us*" (1 Pt 3:21). As the waters of the flood washed away a sinful generation of Noah's day, so the waters of baptism bring one into a realm of safety from the impending destruction that is coming (See 2 Th 1:7-9; 1 Pt 4:17). The comparison between the two cases is that Noah was saved by grace because of his obedient faith in response to God's instructions concerning the building of the ark. The rebellious Israelites who were bitten by snakes that brought death were healed when they, by faith, were moved to look upon the serpent of brass that was made by Moses.

Sinners today are saved through faith when they obediently look to Jesus and respond to God's instructions to be baptized for the remission of sins (At 2:38). In fact, Jesus used the lifting up of the serpent as an illustration of His own lifting up to be the source of healing for those who would be drawn to Him. "*And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of Man be lifted up, so that whoever believes in Him will have eternal life*" (Jn 3:14,15).

Noah and the Israelites were saved by an obedient faith, just as sinners today can be saved by obedient faith. But because Noah was saved through an obedient faith that moved him to follow the instructions of God to build the ark does not mean that he was meritoriously saved through works. Likewise, sinners today are not saved by meritorious obedience in following the instructions of God as to how one must access the grace of God. **Obediently doing what God tells us to do is not meritorious obedience.** It is an obedient response to the will of God. If such obedience were meritorious, then we could do nothing in following the Bible without it being meritorious obedience. But obeying God's commands is a manifestation of our faith.

In the cases of Noah and Moses, faith and grace were consistently carried out in five simple steps in order to bring the condemned into a reconciled relationship with God. In the same manner, God brings all

those who walk by faith today into a saved relationship with Himself.

1. **God makes an offer to bless.** Through grace, God offers reconciliation and life. God does not bless or condemn without first revealing how one is either blessed or condemned.
2. **The offer is communicated to those whom God seeks to bless.** God communicates His offer to man through words of revelation. We cannot invent our own means by which we would accept God's offer. With the offer also comes the consequential condemnation if one does not accept the offer.
3. **There must be faith in what one will realize as a result of obedience to the offer.** We must have faith in what God has freely offered, for without faith in what God offers through grace, we will not respond to God's offer of deliverance.
4. **One must respond with obedience.** Through obedience that originates from faith one must comply with all that God would require of us to receive the free gift that comes through a grace offer.
5. **Obedience leads to reaping the benefits of the offered blessing.** Upon obedience to the conditions to receive the free gift of grace, we reap the blessings of grace.

In reference to accepting the grace of God, this is the way it has always been since the beginning of time. This is the way it will always be until Jesus comes again. Any theology, therefore, that changes this simple plan as to how God works with man in reference to salvation, distorts the purpose of the cross and brings into question the sufficiency of the grace of God.

## Chapter 4

### THE GRACE INSTRUCTIONAL MANUAL

The statement that we are saved by grace through faith is not the question. It is a fact. However, what must be answered is the question as to how are we saved by grace? Grace through faith means there is a

Divine side (grace) and a human side (faith) of God's plan to deliver us into His eternal arms. What was required on the Divine side in order to save us (the incarnation, crucifixion, resurrection, ascension, and kingdom reign) was revealed to man without any obligation on the part of man. This was the gospel work of God. It was all an action of grace on the part of God.

All we know about the gospel of God's grace is revealed in the Bible. There is absolutely no other source that we can investigate in order to understand how God seeks to bring us into His fellowship for eternity. Therefore, it is conclusive that all religious groups that reject the Bible as the final source and authority on this subject, and subsequently response to God's grace, have simply constructed a religion. They have developed a system of meritorious religiosity by which they assume they can reach beyond this world. Therefore, one cannot begin discussions on the subject of grace with others unless everyone in the discussion accepts the Bible as the only source for understanding the subject.

While mankind was in the curse of sin, God demonstrated His love for mankind through the revelation of the gospel (Rm 5:8; Ph 2:5-11; Ti 2:11). The revelation of God's grace was not based on the meritorious righteousness of man that put God in debt. The gospel was not God's effort to settle a debt with humanity (See Rm 4:4). Grace was a free gift. Nevertheless, it was a free gift that demanded requirements on the part of those who desired the benefits of grace (our salvation). The free gift was given on the condition that the recipients comply with the conditions that were necessary in order to benefit from the blessing of the gift. These conditions are revealed only in the Bible.

The case of the cleansing (healing) of Naaman of his leprosy in 2 Kings 5 is a good Bible commentary on how God works through His grace that is offered to the world. Naaman's case illustrates the offer of the gift, but also the conditions that are placed on those who would enjoy the rewards of the offered gift.

#### **A. By grace God offered Naaman healing.**

Elisha sent a messenger to Naaman to tell him, "*Go and wash in*

*the Jordan seven times and your flesh will come again to you and you will be clean” (2 Kg 5:10). Naaman’s initial reaction to the instructions for his healing was fury (2 Kg 5:11). He was furious because he did not agree with, or initially understand, God’s condition for his healing. He possibly thought that there should be no conditions to receive the blessing. He possibly thought that if he could be healed, then surely God could simply pronounce him healed. So he complained, “Behold, **I thought** he [Elisha] will surely come out to me and stand, and call on the name of the Lord his God and strike his hand over the place and cure the leprosy” (2 Kg 5:11).*

Thousands of people around the world today believe that they can either self-proclaim their own salvation, or have someone pronounce it for them. But this is not what God requires in order to be blessed with His grace. Both systems of proclamation are deceptive. We cannot self-proclaim our own salvation because such is a subjective pronouncement. If we would make such an arrogant self-proclamation, then it is subject to how we feel at the time we claim ourselves to be saved. Likewise, others cannot proclaim our salvation for us because we would be depending on the pronouncement of another person in order to have confidence in our salvation. Our salvation must be objectively proclaimed, that is, the pronouncement of **our salvation must come directly from an objective reading of such in God’s word**. Only God can proclaim our salvation. And this can be done only when we obey what He requires of us in order to be saved. These instructions as to how we are to obey are found only in the Bible. Therefore, one cannot sidestep the Bible in order to either self-proclaim his or her own salvation or have someone do the same.

Naaman’s pride moved him to reason that there should be no conditions for the free gift of healing. Elijah could supposedly just proclaim him to be healed. From what he said, Naaman wanted to establish his own conditions, which is the mistake many make in reference to God’s offer of grace today. They want the blessing of the grace without following the Bible-defined conditions for the reception of the gift. Some even think they can call on the preacher to call on God for their spiritual healing. But God’s grace is not appropriated in this manner.

In his fury, Naaman then offered an alternative to dipping in the muddy Jordan River. He thought he could change the conditions in order to receive the blessing. He complained to Elisha, “*Are not Abanah and Pharpar, rivers of Damascus, better than all the waters of Israel?*” (2 Kg 5:12). Naaman’s mistake was to think that his cleansing was in the power of the water. He thus tried to change the water and still receive the blessing. But his healing would be given by the grace of God when he obeyed all the conditions for his healing, and not by any supposed power in the water of a convenient river. And if his healing were to be received, then he had to follow the required instructions to use the right water. The water was necessary, but the instructions concerning what water had to be followed. Religion is most often an effort on the part of man to change the conditions by which God’s blessings are to be received. It is for this reason that those who know little about their Bibles find it difficult to be assured that they have received the blessings of God.

When God gives the instructions concerning the reception of His blessings, then we do not have the right to change any of the conditions. God will allow no substitutions. If Naaman had been cleansed by dipping in the “better” waters of the Abanah and Pharpar, then we would assume that we too have the right to substitute the conditions upon which we can receive God’s blessing of grace.

We would also assume that there is some power in the water, as long as it is water. But when Naaman finally dipped in the right water in the right way, according to the instructions of God, it was then that he knew that God means what He says and says what He means in reference to receiving His blessings.

## **B. Naaman was cleansed by grace through faith.**

The cleansing of Naaman was strictly by the grace of God. There was no possible way for Naaman to cleanse himself from leprosy. It was not within his power to bless himself with his own healing. The actual cleansing, therefore, was only by God’s grace. It was a free offer from God. However, Naaman’s faith had to move him to do that which

God required of him to receive the free gift of cleansing. His healing only came by the power of God, **who only can heal**. His healing did not annul the necessity that he had to follow all of God's instructions to access the gift. We must not forget this point.

No one would conclude that Naaman was healed by meritorious works when God told him to go dip seven times in the Jordan River. Neither would we say that he was healed by "faith and works." Rather, **he was healed by faith that worked to fulfill the instructions of God that were necessary in order for him to receive the blessing** (See Gl 5:6). He did not receive the blessing of cleansing until he followed all the instructions (2 Kg 5:14). So until he followed all the instructions, he did not receive the blessing of God's grace.

When Naaman's faith eventually moved him to follow the instructions of God, then the free gift of cleansing was realized. He was thus healed "by grace through faith." His dipping seven times in the Jordan was the expression of his obedient faith in order that he be blessed with the grace of being healed. This is exactly what James meant in James 2:22: "*You see that [Naaman's] faith was working with his works, and by works [to dip in the Jordan River] was faith made perfect.*" In this way "*a man is justified by works and not by faith only*" (Js 2:24).

### C. Naaman's faith went to work.

Salvation is by grace through faith once faith goes to work in obedience to God's instructions. The free gift of our cleansing of sin by God's grace is not appropriated to our benefit until there is an expression of faith on our part.

God's cleansing through grace is His work on our behalf for our salvation. However, in order for His work through grace to have effect in reference to our salvation, it must be brought into effect in our lives through an expression of faith by following God's conditions. **Whatever condition God would give for the appropriation of grace to the salvation of the soul of the sinner must be followed in order for the work of God through grace to be applied.** Following God-required conditions is not meritorious obedience. It is an expression of faith.

Now we must consider when Naaman's faith brought the healing of his leprosy. Naaman's faith in receiving the healing that would come from the grace of God first manifested itself when he heard that there was someone in Samaria who could possibly heal him (2 Kg 5:3). When he heard of the possibility of healing, he took ten talents of silver, 6,000 pieces of gold, and ten changes of clothing, and headed for Samaria. He wrongly assumed that he could purchase a free gift.

Naaman had faith that there was healing in Samaria, **but his faith alone did not heal him**. His faith did not "save" him from his leprosy until it was connected with what God required of him in obedience. **His faith brought him to a knowledge of what would be required of him to receive the grace of healing. The power of the healing was not in his faith, but in the grace of God to heal.** Therefore, his faith would have accomplished nothing toward his healing if he had not obeyed all the instructions that were necessary for his healing. Until there was an "obedience of faith" (Rm 1:5; 16:26), there could be no grace appropriated to the healing of his leprosy.

Since our salvation is by grace through faith, then our faith is of no consequence until it moves us to do all that God requires of us to receive the blessing of His grace. We cannot add to the conditions that God requires, neither can we subtract from them. Our faith must be expressed, demonstrated and manifested through our obedience to the conditions that God requires.

As previously stated, the above is the conclusion that we would derive from the context of James 2:14-26. James' argument is not in reference to salvation by meritorious works. No one can meritoriously work in order to be saved, for no amount of good works can atone for a single sin. And for sure, no one can obey law perfectly in order to save himself. What James is discussing is that we cannot be saved by a faith that does not work. No unexpressed faith is acceptable to God. It is not acceptable **because unexpressed faith repudiates the instructions of God concerning what one must do in order to be saved**. Any conclusion in reference to our salvation by grace through faith that does not honor the will of God, will not move one to obey the instructions of God as to how one must access His grace.

James said, “*Was not Abraham our father justified by works when he offered Isaac his son on the altar? You see that **faith was working with his works, and by works was faith made perfect***” (Js 2:21,22). Paul added, “*For if Abraham was justified by works, he has something about which to boast, but not before God*” (Rm 4:2). Did James and Paul contradict one another? Certainly not! The proposition of **Paul was that he was arguing against meritorious works of law, whereas James was arguing for obedient works that are an expression of faith**. Paul’s argument against the Jews who sought to work meritoriously to save themselves would put God in debt to save. James’ works of faith express our thanksgiving for our salvation (See 2 Co 4:15). **There is a difference between works that express faith and works that seek to merit salvation**. Because many have not recognized this difference, they have had great difficulty in understanding Paul’s letter to the Romans and what James revealed in James 2.

In the context of Naaman’s healing, when Naaman’s faith moved him to do exactly what God told him to do, without any additions, substitutions or subtractions, then his healing by the grace of God was realized. The same principle applies to us today. God offers His grace, but until we comply with all instructions that He requires, we cannot access His saving grace. If He instructs us to “dip” in the waters of baptism, then that is exactly what we must do in order to be cleansed of our sin (See At 22:16). We must be dipped in the water, the water cannot be dipped on us.

## Chapter 5

### GRACE OFFERED — CONDITIONALLY ACCEPTED

If one would seek a brief New Testament explanation of salvation by grace through faith, then the context of Ephesians 2 would be one of the most definitive commentaries on the subject. In this context, Paul truly gave the road map into the grace of God, and once there, what is required of the obedient to remain there. For a moment, therefore, we need to journey with the Ephesians from their “nature” in sin before

their obedience to the gospel, into the revealed saving grace of God in which they stood at the time Paul wrote.

### A. Dead in trespasses and sins:

Paul began his definition of grace by reviewing the state of the Ephesians before they were baptized into Christ. As sinners outside Christ, he reminded them, “*You were dead in trespasses and sins*” (Ep 2:1). They were in a state of condemnation wherein they lived because they, as religious people, were outside the realm of God’s grace. He reminded them that in such a state “*you once walked according to the ways of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, of the spirit that is now working in the sons of disobedience*” (Ep 2:2).

In the preceding text, notice the pronoun “you.” They were personally responsible for their sinful walk. Their sin had nothing to do with the supposed “sin of Adam” that some say was handed down to them as “original sin” from Adam. Neither were they born with a “sinful nature” wherein they were inclined to sin against their own will. Paul clearly wrote that **they were individually responsible for their own sinful walk of life before they obeyed the gospel.**

The Ephesians could not blame Adam. They could not blame God for giving them some “sinful nature.” They could not even blame the devil for supposedly making them sin. They could only blame themselves. They were personally and individually dead in sin because they chose to behave sinfully. Unless one takes ownership of his own sinful behavior, he will not repent. He will not be moved to respond to the grace of God.

We cannot escape our personal responsibility for sin by blaming Adam for some “original sin” that was supposedly passed down to us through birth as a “sinful nature” by which God supposedly cursed our souls. We must stop blaming God for this supposed “sinful nature,” and the Devil for supposedly making us sin. Some theologians have given sinners almost every excuse for not taking ownership of their own sins. Even society does the same by calling some sins—alcoholism—a disease, and thus assuming that the individual does not need, or

cannot, take ownership for his or her own “sinful” disease. But Paul never let the Ephesians off the hook in reference to their past life in sin. They were personally responsible for their own culture of sinful behavior. And because they willingly created their own culture of sin, they had to take ownership for their sin before they would willingly respond to the grace of God .

## B. Life according to the world:

In their former behavior as sinners, the Ephesians individually chose to walk according to the desires of their father, the devil. Jesus explained the state of some in His Jewish audience when He said, “*You are of your father the devil, and the desires of your father you want to do.*” (Jn 8:44). When Jesus made this statement, He was speaking to very religious Jews. In the context of Ephesians 2, Paul was likewise speaking to formerly religious Gentiles. Nevertheless, they too were of their father the devil because they “*behaved in times past in the lusts of our flesh, fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind, and were **by nature** the children of wrath, even as the rest*” (Ep 2:3). The Ephesians lived according to the sensual sins of gratifying the desires of the flesh, filling their minds with all wicked thoughts. They followed after a life-style of pride, envy, covetousness and lusts of the mind as idolaters.

They were “by nature” in the habit of behaving after a lustful life-style. It was not that they were born with a sinful nature. The context of what Paul said in Ephesians 2 is entirely against this conclusion. The Ephesians had made a free-moral decision to live according to the lust of the eyes, flesh and pride of life.

The Greek word that is used here for “nature” refers to a life-style that has been formed after **the habit of doing something over a long period of time**. The Ephesians, therefore, were “dead in trespasses and sins” because they had adopted a life-style of living according to that which was contrary to the will of God. Their conscience was seared because they had no feelings of guilt that their sinful living was wrong. They were thus judged to be dead in trespasses and sins because there

was no hope of eternal life in their state of behavior in their past idolatry. They were separated from God because of their state of condemnation, and thus they could have no hope of eternal life.

The lost state of the Ephesians before their obedience to the gospel confirms the fact that the atoning sacrifice of Jesus **was not universally appropriated to all people without obedience**. They were good religious idolaters, but they were dead in the sin of their own religiosity. We do not assume that the Ephesians were previously atheists, and thus a nonreligious people. Too often Bible interpreters make this mistake concerning their understanding of the religious world into which the gospel was revealed. On the contrary, the Romans and Greeks were religious. However, the religion was idolatry. They possessed a faith in Zeus and the other Roman and Greek gods that were created after the imagination of very religious people (See At 14:12). In fact, when Paul walked into Athens, he complemented the people on their religiosity: *“Men of Athens, I perceive that in all things you are very religious”* (At 17:22).

But religion can save no one. The Ephesians were very religious people, but by nature they were dead in their trespasses and sins (Ep 2:3). They were by nature dead in their relationship with God. We must not be fooled, therefore, with the belief that if one is simply religious and good, he is saved. Without being born again through baptism into the grace of God, one is dead in trespasses and sins.

By the time Paul wrote the letter to the Ephesians in A.D. 61,62, the Ephesians had been delivered from their life of sin in their religious idolatry. But before the gospel came to them through the preaching of Paul, they were without hope. If Jesus’ atoning sacrifice on the cross were unconditional, and thus universal, then they would not have been dead in their trespasses and sins before the coming of Paul and the preaching of the gospel. The biblical interpreter must therefore be careful about assuming that the redemption of the cross applies to all people regardless of their knowledge of God’s grace and conditions that He requires for one to make in order to step into His realm of grace.

### C. The announcement and response to grace:

And now the glorious news. “*But God, who is rich in mercy, for His great love with which He loved us, even when we were dead in trespasses, made us alive with Christ—by grace you have been saved*” (Ep 2:4,5). Paul’s continued commentary of this outpouring of grace was stated in Romans 5:8: “*But God demonstrates His love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.*” It could be nothing else with grace. The outpouring of grace must be nothing short of an outpouring because of mercy, regardless of the state of those to whom it is offered.

Grace was unconditionally offered to humanity, but it is not unconditionally appropriated, or applied to the saving of individual sinners. We must keep in mind that the Ephesians became Christians long after the initial outpouring of grace on the cross in A.D. 30. They were still in a state of condemnation at the time Paul, Aquila and Priscilla came to Ephesus in Acts 18. It was through the ministry of these and others who “*came and preached peace to you [Ephesians] who were far off and to those who were near*” (Ep 2:17). **The offer of grace was preached to the Ephesians while they were dead in trespasses and sins.** They responded. And subsequently, Paul could make the statement, “*By grace you have been saved*” (Ep 2:5). They could be saved by grace only when they heard about the grace of God that was revealed on the cross (Ti 2:11). Grace was appropriated in their lives only when they heard and obeyed the gospel (See At 19). **Grace is neither universally appropriated, nor unconditionally received.**

We must keep in mind that those to whom Paul was writing the letter of Ephesians were dead in sin after the cross and before they heard the gospel. **They did not become alive until they heard and obeyed the gospel.** Therefore, they had not been individually elected and predestined to heaven before the creation of the world. **If they had been so elected and predestined, then why did Paul say that they were all dead in sin before they obeyed the gospel?**

## D. Salvation by grace through faith:

“So then faith comes by hearing and hearing by the word of Christ” (Rm 10:17). When the Ephesians heard the word of Christ (Ep 2:17), their faith in Him was brought to life. The words of Jesus would be appropriate here: “*He who believes and is baptized, will be saved*” (Mk 16:16). The Ephesians were not unconditionally dead in their trespasses and sins. They voluntarily chose a sinful way of life. They adopted such as their culture. Therefore, they could not blame Adam for their sinful behavior as some have supposed. As they were voluntarily and personally accountable for their previous sinful nature, grace came to them voluntarily and personally. Each one who heard the preached gospel, voluntarily and individually responded to the conditions God required to receive the offered gift of His grace. As they voluntarily sinned after their own lusts, they had to respond voluntarily to the preached grace of God. As they individually chose to lead a sinful life, they had to choose individually to respond to the grace of God. Their response to grace, therefore, had to be an obedience that was inspired by their faith (See Rm 1:5; 16:26).

We must not misunderstand Paul’s statement in Ephesians 2:8,9. “*For by grace you are saved through faith, and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God; not of works, lest anyone should boast.*” The grace of God was offered years before while the Ephesians were still in a state of condemnation in their trespasses and sins. It later came to them from those who first heard the gospel on and after the day of Pentecost. It was God’s free gift to all men and a way of escape from a sinful predicament from which one could not deliver himself. The gift, therefore, had to be free.

However, the reception of the gift came with conditions. Simply because the gift is free does not mean there were no conditions for receiving the gift. Titus 2:11 states, “*For the grace of God that brings salvation has appeared to all men.*” The free gift appeared and was announced to the world through preaching. But its reception by sinners came with conditions on the part of those who heard the message of the gospel. If there were no conditions, then salvation would be

universal. If the Ephesians were still dead in their trespasses and sins after the grace of God was revealed through Jesus on the cross, then grace was not universal. Reception and application of the effect of grace is based on the condition of one hearing and obeying the gospel. Since our faith is in the gospel, salvation is by grace through our faith in the gospel.

Salvation by grace through faith is not of ourselves. In other words, no salvational schemes of men will work. If we could be saved through our own systems of salvation, then our salvation would be meritorious. And since religion is always the meritorious performance of rites, rituals and ceremonies, then salvation can never come as a result of one being very religious. This is true because by works of law or religious traditions no one can be saved (See Rm 3:20; Gl 2:16). Salvation is by our faith in the Christ of the gospel, not in the performance of our own religiosity.

When Peter said to the thousands on the day of Pentecost to “*save yourselves from this perverse generation*” (At 2:40), he did not mean that everyone should construct for himself some system of religion by which he could save himself. What he meant was that the people must take the initiative to do what God commanded in order to access His grace in order to save themselves from their own religiosity. And in order to do this, one must “*repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins*” (At 2:38). It was through this obedience that the Ephesians responded to the gospel (See At 19:1-18).

### **E. Faithfulness through works of thanksgiving:**

Paul wanted the Ephesians to know that their initial coming to Christ was not the result of any meritorious efforts on their part, lest they boast to one another concerning their obedience. Their salvation was not by meritorious works, but through an obedient faith in response to the grace of God. Nevertheless, as Christians, their faith had to be perfected through a work of love in response to the grace by which they were saved. “*For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus*

*for good works, which God prepared before that we should walk in them*” (Ep 2:10). If one would want a commentary on this statement, then Paul gives such in 2 Corinthians 4:15: “*For all things are for your sakes, so that the grace that is reaching many people may cause thanksgiving to abound to the glory of God.*” It was this grace that reached the people of Ephesus, and thus, it was this grace that moved them to respond to the love of God through Jesus. It was this love that compelled them to obey the gospel (2 Co 5:14).

Paul had told the Philippians, “*Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling*” (Ph 2:12). The Ephesians had been baptized into Christ (Gl 3:26,27). Now it was time that they too perfect their faith through their works of faith. “*You see that faith was working with his [Abraham] works, and by works was faith made perfect*” (Js 2:22). We are God’s “workmanship” when our faith is made perfect through obedience. When our faith works in response to the salvation that we have in Christ, then it is perfected. His grace causes works of thanksgiving. All that God did through the incarnation, crucifixion, resurrection and ascension of His Son was for our sakes, “*so that the grace that is reaching many people may cause thanksgiving to the glory of God*” (2 Co 4:15). It is an obedient faith in response to the revealed grace of God that brings one into Christ. This faith is perfected when the obedient continue to work out their salvation in thanksgiving for the grace by which they are saved.

## Chapter 6 GRACE THAT TEACHES

Paul personified grace when he made the following statement: “*For the grace of God that brings salvation has appeared to all men, teaching us, that denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live sensibly, righteously and godly in this present age*” (Ti 2:12). There is a vital reality about understanding the grace of God that appeared through the incarnation of the Son of God. Our understanding of this reality instills within us the power of the gospel message. We are taught by

grace to be motivated to live sensibly, righteously and godly in this world. Since grace is our primary motivation to live the godly life, then it becomes our teacher.

We will risk being redundant in this chapter in reference to things that have already been stated. We seek to listen to the “teacher” again in reference to our salvation. We will not apologize for the repetition in our discussion concerning matters of grace. The real problem is that people are not obsessed with grace. Some are afraid to talk too much about a subject that is so precious and indescribable in reference to our behavior.

As the heart of Christianity, we must obsess over the grace that was revealed through the incarnation of the Son of God. In our obsession, we will draw people to that for which they also yearn (See 1 Pt 3:15). So we will be repetitious because of the tremendous misunderstanding that prevails in reference to Paul’s statements in Ephesians 2, and similar passages, that state we are saved by grace through obedience of faith (Ep 2:8). Since grace is the core to Christian thinking, when we focus on this subject we are reaffirming the foundation of our faith, and thus defining ourselves as Christians, as opposed to being religionists.

It is unfortunate that many do not see the similarity between a faith that is obedient to the conditions that God requires for one to initially receive the free gift of grace, and the works that perfect the faith of the Christian who walks in the new and living way. The difference between obedience of faith and meritorious works is the difference between Christianity and religion.

There is also a similarity between meritorious works whereby one might seek to earn His salvation and the same meritorious works that one might perform as a religionists in order to put God in debt. Meritorious works are simply vain efforts on the part of those who do not understand the principle that our understanding of God’s grace toward us moves our faith into obedient action. **There is nothing meritorious about sinners obeying the commands of God in order to be saved and Christians working out their salvation with fear and trembling.**

Because there is so much misunderstanding among many concern-

ing the difference between obedience of faith (Christianity) and meritorious obedience to religion, it would be good here to begin with the our former condition in sin and our responsibility to respond to the offer of God's grace.

### **A. The spiritual condition of sinners:**

As sinners outside Christ, the Ephesians were previously dead in their trespasses and sins (Ep 2:1). They were dead in their religious idolatry. They were behaving according to the sinful culture of the world (Ep 2:2), and thus, they were children upon whom the wrath of God would eventually be revealed (Ep 2:3; 2 Th 1:6-9). However, through the teaching of Paul, Aquila and Priscilla, the mercy and grace of God was revealed to them (See At 18:18,19). They responded by being buried with Christ in baptism in order to be raised to walk in newness of life (Ep 2:4-6). In their obedience to the gospel, they were saved by grace because of their responsive faith (Ep 2:8). God offered the saving grace. Through faith, they responded with obedience to the gospel.

### **B. Saving grace:**

The Ephesians, as well as all men, are offered unearned or unmerited favor that God extends to all sinners through Jesus Christ. No one can devise his own system of salvation, nor can any person keep any system of law perfectly in order to justify one's self before God. Our salvation before God must always be by grace. Anyone who would devise his own system of salvation (religion), must devise a meritorious system of obedience. This is true simply because religious systems of obedience are from man, not God. Therefore, if God reveals "His system of salvation," then **it can never be meritorious, for what God requires of us is not some system of religion. Obedience to the commandments of God is never meritorious because God never works according to the meritorious systems of man's religions.** If we assert that obedience to any command of God that is necessary for

salvation is a meritorious work, **then we have denied obedience to the word of God. We have relegated grace to some system of religion.**

Salvation, therefore, is by grace and not by the meritorious keeping of law or developing one's own system of salvation. John wrote, "*For the [Sinai] law was given through Moses, but grace and truth came through Jesus Christ*" (Jn 1:17). Keeping the Sinai law could not produce salvation, for no one could keep it perfectly. Paul continues to explain this in the following statement: "*I do not nullify the grace of God, for if righteousness comes through law [keeping], then Christ died in vain*" (Gl 2:21). If one could have been saved by keeping the Sinai law, then the cross was a useless effort on the part of the Son of God. Though the Sinai "*law is holy, and the commandment holy and just and good,*" it still could not produce salvation before God because no one could keep it perfectly (Rm 7:12).

If one would seek to be justified by perfect law-keeping, then he lives under the curse of law. "*For as many as are of the [meritorious] works of law are under the curse, for it is written, 'Cursed is everyone who does not continue in all things written in the book of the law to do them'*" (Gl 3:10). The one who seeks to justify himself through perfect law-keeping is cursed with death because the law he seeks to keep perfectly condemns him as a lawbreaker (See Rm 3:23; 6:23). Therefore, "*You have been severed from Christ, you who seek to be justified by law. You have fallen from grace*" (Gl 5:4).

One can never meritoriously earn his salvation by perfect keeping of law. The saved Christian can never maintain his salvation by perfect keeping of law. One's initial salvation results from an obedient faith to what God requires of one to be saved. The Christian's faith continues to respond through love in order to maintain the salvation he enjoys in the grace of God. One is initially saved by grace, and once saved, one continues to be saved by walking in the realm of God's grace (1 Jn 1:7).

### C. Revealed grace:

The grace of God was initially revealed at the cross (Ti 2:11). It

was revealed, not because God was indebted to save man (Rm 5:8), but because God loved His creation (Jn 3:16). Grace was revealed because we had no hope without grace. The cross of grace was made the center of preaching that went out into all the world in the first century because the world then and now is without hope in sin. Paul wrote to the Colossians, “*Even in all the world **this gospel is bringing forth fruit**, just as it does also in you since the day you heard and knew the grace of God in truth*” (Cl 1:6).

The grace of the gospel produces fruit in conversions to Christ, as well as fruit in the lives of those who have believed the gospel. Paul referred to this fruit bearing when he wrote of his desire to go to the Christians in Rome: “*I do not want you to be unaware, brethren, that I often planned to come to you. But I was hindered until the present, so that I might have some fruit among you also, even as I have among the other Gentiles*” (Rm 1:13).

Grace was first revealed by God in a manger in Bethlehem. However, the extent to which incarnation would go through grace was not fully revealed until an incarnate body was nailed to a cross outside Jerusalem. Once the Holy Spirit revealed to the apostles on the day of Pentecost that the cross event was the revelation of the gospel of God’s grace, it was then preached by the early messengers of God as they went forth into all the world.

It was the destiny of Paul “*to testify to the gospel of the grace of God*” (At 20:24). After he had preached the grace of God to the Ephesians, it was to this grace that he commended them. “*And now, brethren, I commend you to God and to the word [message] of His grace that is able to build you up*” (At 20:32). Christians, therefore, must be cautious not to be quickly moved from the grace of Christ (Gl 1:6), and not do despite to the Spirit of grace as some have (Rm 2:4; see 1 Th 5:20).

## **D. Faith and grace:**

God’s part in reference to our salvation is His grace. Man’s part is faith. It is faith that appropriates the grace of God to our souls that are

laden with sin. For this reason, without faith in God's part (grace), it is impossible to be well-pleasing to God (Hb 11:6). Through Christ "*we have received grace and apostleship, for obedience of faith among all the nations*" (Rm 1:5; see 16:26). Our faith, therefore, must be in God's Messenger of grace to this world. God's grace must be accepted through the obedience of our faith in Christ Jesus before it is appropriated, or applied, to our trespasses and sins.

When one responds to the grace of God that was revealed through the incarnate Son of God, it is then that the grace of God is freely activated in our lives. Our obedience is not the invention of our own religious schemes to perform meritorious works. It is the result of our faith responding to the work of God through Christ. It is the command of God that one believe and be baptized for remission of sins (Mk 16:16; At 2:38). If one does not have the faith that gives birth to obedience, then he will not be baptized in order to wash away his sins (At 22:16).

If our salvation were the result of our own schemes, even our own faith, then there would be no need for God to remit sins through His grace. It is for this reason that one's faith must move him to obey the gospel of grace. This is what Jesus meant when He said, "*He who believes and is baptized will be saved*" (Mk 16:16). He who believes in the One through whom grace was revealed, and subsequently obeys by being buried with Christ who died for him, it is then that he will be saved (Rm 6:3-6). Faith in Christ must be linked with what God requires of one to be saved. But if one does not believe, then there will be no obedience in baptism.

If salvation were strictly by faith alone, then there would be no need for grace, for the word "alone" would eliminate everything that is necessary for one's salvation. It is for this reason that those who teach a system of salvation by faith alone have many serious problems with which to deal on this matter. They ignore the work of God on the cross, and count the sacrifice of the Son of God on the cross to have little power to motivate one to obey the gospel (Compare Gl 2:21).

When we are dealing with our eternal relationship with God, there can never be any theology that would suggest that man's salvation is by faith alone. There can be no theology that eliminates what God has

done for us through the cross and what we must do for Him in response to the cross. The Son of God did not remain in heaven and believe that we could be saved by a simple faith that God exists. He acted, and thus, He expects us to act through obedience of that which He acted out through His incarnation, crucifixion and resurrection. His action demands our active response to the cross.

Though Jesus was the Son of God, ***“He learned obedience by the things that He suffered”*** (Hb 5:8). Jesus set the example for all those who would come to Him. He was obedient to the Father by going to the cross for our sins. ***“And having been made perfect, He became the author of eternal salvation to all those who obey Him”*** (Hb 5:9). Jesus led the way in obedience. He thus expects us to follow the example of His obedience.

The only way we can become a disciple of Jesus is through obedience to what He says we must do as disciples. He said, ***“You are My friends, if you do whatever I command you”*** (Jn 15:14). Through obedience of faith we have access into the grace that was revealed through Him. We have access to the grace of God because as a disciple we have done what Jesus commanded: ***“He who believes and is baptized will be saved”*** (Mk 16:16; see Mt 28:19,20). Jesus can be the author of our eternal salvation, therefore, only if we follow Him in obedience to the gospel (See Rm 6:3-6).

When we follow the example of obedience by which our Savior went to the cross, then we will search for those things we must obey in order to follow His example. We can be assured that this is more than “faith alone.” **The one who is truly seeking to be the disciple of Jesus is looking for instructions from Jesus as to how one can connect with Him.** The one who seeks to be a disciple is not looking within himself in order to base his salvation on his own feelings or emotions. He is objectively looking in the word of God for instructions on how one is to come into a saving relationship with God.

By our obedient works, therefore, faith is made perfect (Js 2:22). ***“So then faith comes by hearing and hearing by the word of Christ”*** (Rm 10:17). Faith comes through the teaching of the word of Christ. In this way, when we teach the word of Christ, it is grace teaching us to

follow Christ. The result of teaching the word of Christ (grace) should result in obedience to Christ. Faith is thus made perfect in obedience to the words of Christ when we obey the gospel of Christ. This is why the disciples of Jesus live soberly, righteously and godly in their continual response to the grace of God (See Ti 2:11,12).

### **E. Eternity and grace:**

In Ephesians 2:7 Paul reminded the Ephesians that grace was not only for this present age. Grace was also for “*the ages to come* [so that] *He might show the exceeding riches of His grace in His kindness toward us in Christ Jesus.*” Grace is necessary for our salvation because God created us with the ability to make our own choices concerning right or wrong. Unfortunately, our free moral ability to make choices often leads us to make wrong choices. And because we cannot atone for our wrong choices through meritorious law-keeping or good works, there is no possible way that we can be saved without the grace of God. Therefore, in our walk with Jesus, we must continually walk in the grace of God after our initial obedience to the gospel in baptism.

We must also walk in grace in the “ages to come.” Paul wrote Ephesians 2:7 in this age. We assume, therefore, that in the ages to come after the passing of this age there will also be the need for the grace of God. This would mean that we will not lose our free-moral ability to make choices in the heavenly age to come. Whenever and wherever we as free-moral individuals exist in eternity, the grace of God must also exist in order that we continue in a saved relationship with God. This is logically necessary simply because no one can live perfectly in reference to law.

### **F. Teaching and grace:**

Because we are under grace does not mean that we can choose or invent our own moral laws. In fact, Jude warned that there were “certain men” who “*turn the grace of our God into licentiousness*” (Jd 4). The Hebrew writer cautioned that Christians should be “*looking care-*

*fully lest any man falls short of the grace of God” (Hb 12:15). We are “taught” by the grace of God to live morally correct and faithful to the truth of the gospel. Some have unfortunately taught that grace is a license to immorality, that is, we have freedom to establish our own moral standards by which we can conduct our lives. In the first century, these were those about whom Jude wrote who turned the grace of God into ungodly living.*

Others have believed that grace is a license to doctrinal syncretism, that is, regardless of what we believe and practice, we are saved by grace. Grace supposedly gives us the right to blend our moral values with God’s moral values, and thus come up with mixed moral standards that are diluted with the morals of modern man. Therefore, some believe that homosexuality, for example, is not a moral standard of the Bible. It is only self-deception to believe that one can be a “Christian homosexual.”

There are too many statements in the New Testament that teach we must contend earnestly for the faith that was once delivered to the saints (See Jd 3). Our moral behavior must first be based on the truth of God. It was for this reason that the Scriptures were “*given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness*” (2 Tm 3:16). Elders are given specific instructions to hold “*fast the faithful word*” so that they “*may be able by sound teaching both to exhort and refute those who contradict*” (Ti 1:9).

Grace does not give one the right to establish his own moral behavior, neither does it set aside the truth for any false teaching that is propagated by the religious world. Grace teaches us that we must walk a godly life according to the instructions of the word of God. Grace teaches us to direct our beliefs by the word of God.

Grace is based on one simple statement of Jesus that is echoed throughout the epistles: “*If you love Me you will keep My commandments*” (Jn 14:15). We love God because He first loved us through the giving of His Son (Jn 3:16; 1 Jn 4:19). Grace came to us because God loved us. In return, and in response to the action of His grace, we love and obey Him because we are thankful (2 Co 4:15). Grace, therefore,

teaches us to obey in response to the love of God. The more we learn and appreciate the grace of God, the more we bring our lives into conformity with the word of Christ.

If we truly love Jesus, therefore, we will seek out His commandments in order to obey. Jesus did not say, “If you love Me you will believe My commandments.” What He said is that if we love Him we will **keep** His commandments. There is no love of Jesus unless there is keeping of His commandments. For this reason, John concluded, “***For this is the love of God, that we keep His commandments***” (1 Jn 5:3).

## Chapter 7 THE CURSE OF LAW

At the beginning of His ministry, Jesus wanted to make it clear that there was a change coming. He would not be continuing the religious *status quo* of the Jews, which was the religion of the Jews. He was not coming to reform the Sinai law. Neither was He seeking to revive the statutes and precepts of the Sinai law. He was coming to fulfill the very purpose for which the Sinai law was given (See Mt 5:17,18). And in fulfilling the Sinai law, He was removing the law as a binding law of God.

The fulfillment of the Sinai law meant that it would be nailed to the cross with every other religious legal system that men had and would seek to bind on themselves as a means of salvation. Paul explained that at the cross Jesus wiped “*out the handwriting of ordinances that was against us, which was contrary to us. And He took it out of the way, having nailed it to the cross*” (Cl 2:14).

The revolution that was coming with Jesus would involve not only a change in God’s relationship with man through law, but a new covenant relationship between God and man that was better than the old covenant (See Hb 7:20-22). The new covenant was a concept of reconciliation that was based on the initiative of God to extend favor to man regardless of our inabilities to live according to law. Jesus’ revolution would be a change in how the people of God would be motivated into

service. They would forever be motivated into service through the power of grace, not law. What was coming, therefore, was the “grace revolution.”

John explained the revolution of Jesus by saying, “*For the [Sinai] law was given through Moses, but grace and truth came through Jesus Christ*” (Jn 1:17). This statement is in the past tense, thus revealing that at the time John wrote around the end of the middle of the first century, he was looking back to what Jesus had already accomplished through the cross and the revelation of grace and truth. As he looked back, he wanted us to clearly see the difference between the way it was under the Sinai law and the way it was at the time he wrote. Grace, not law, had become the primary motivation for the people of God, for grace had supplanted the Sinai law.

By the time John wrote the gospel of John, the law had changed from the Sinai law to the New Testament law of liberty. John wanted his readers to know the place of the Sinai law in reference to the Christian. The Old Testament as a whole was a record of events that Christians could research for examples of obedience (See Rm 15:4; 1 Co 10:11). However, it would no longer be a source for establishing laws for Christians to obey. Christians are no longer under the law of animal sacrifices, but the final sacrifice of the Son of God. Christians are not under the Sinai law, but under the grace of a new covenant (Rm 6:14).

## A. Defining law:

According to the dictionary, the word “law” refers to “all the rules of conduct established and endorsed by the authority, legislation of a particular group.” In a theological context, the word refers to “a divine commandment,” or “all divine commandments collectively.” In the Greek text, the English word “law” is used to translate the word *nomos*. This word means a command or dictate. Vine’s *Expository Dictionary of the New Testament Words* defines *nomos* to mean, “usage, custom, and then law, law as prescribed by custom, or by statute.”

In the context of God’s relationship with man, law would refer to commands or dictates given by God for instructions as to how we should

live according to His will. Through law God seeks to direct our behavior in order that we cohabit with one another in an environment of peace. But when we consider man's relationship with God, other things are to be considered, things that identify the impossibility of law to be given as a means by which one can be reconciled with God. In fact, we must conclude that God never gave law to man as a means in and of itself to save man. Law condemns. Therefore, it is given as a standard in order to recognize condemnation. Law was never given as a means by which an individual could work himself into a relationship with God. Where law failed, however, grace abounded.

## **B. The nature of law:**

In reference to man's relationship with God, God's law brings a curse. It is the nature of law to curse, not bless. Paul explained this in Galatians 3:10 by quoting Deuteronomy 27:26: "*For as many as are of the works of law are under the curse, for it is written, 'Cursed is everyone who does not continue **in all things** written in the book of the law to do them.'*"

The emphasis of Paul's statement is on "all things" of the law. This is all the commands, statutes, and rites that make up the law that is given in order to be obeyed. This was the nature of the law of Moses. It required strict adherence to statutes from which there was to be no deviation. Therefore, any violation of any point of law brought the judgment of the law upon the sinner. Paul continued to bring this out in the context of Galatians 3:11: "***But that no one is justified by law in the sight of God is evident.***" The Sinai law was not given as a means by which one could justify himself before God. On the contrary, the law only made it possible for one to recognize that he or she could not keep law perfectly in order to be saved. In this way, the law became a curse, not a blessing in reference to salvation. Law curses one with condemnation because it identifies one as a lawbreaker.

**The curse of law is that no man can possibly keep any system of law perfectly.** And because no one could keep the law of Moses perfectly, the law became a curse to those who sought to maintain a

saved relationship with God through law alone. James was right: “*For whoever will keep the whole law, and yet stumble in one point, he has become guilty of all*” (Js 2:10). One sin against law makes one a sinner. It is the law that condemns because only one sin brings condemnation, not life. Therefore, law is a curse to those who would seek to keep it perfectly in order to be saved. God knows this, and thus, He did not give law in order that it become a means of salvation in and of itself.

For the above reason Paul wrote that sin and death were in the world from Adam to Moses. “*For until [the Sinai] law, sin was in the world, but sin is not credited when there is no law.*” (Rm 5:13). Paul explained, “*For where there is no law, there is no transgression*” (Rm 4:15). Since sin exists when law reveals all the violations of law, then Paul concluded that there was law from Adam to Moses, though it was not the law of Moses (Compare Hb 1:1,2). From Adam to Moses there was law from God in the world because sin reigned (Compare Hb 1:1,2). In fact, it was even during the time before Noah that humanity became so wicked according to law, that except for eight souls, a whole world of wickedness was washed away in the flood of Noah’s day (See Gn 6:5).

When the law of Moses eventually came in order to preserve a segment of society for the coming of the Son of God, it came only to the Jews, for “*to them were committed the oracles of God*” (Rm 3:2). The Gentiles continued under the “law of the conscience” unto themselves until the coming of Christ. Paul explained this thought in Romans 2:14,15: “*For when the Gentiles who do not have [the Sinai] law do by nature the things contained in [the Sinai] law, these having no law, are a law to themselves; who show the work of law written in their hearts, their conscience also bearing witness.*”

Regardless of which system of law mankind was under before the coming of the grace that was revealed at the cross, all men were under the curse of law. Therefore, “*what the law could not do,*” God did through Jesus (Rm 8:3). But until the time when the grace of God was revealed through Jesus (Ti 2:11), all men were under the curse of law, not being able to keep law perfectly in order to justify themselves before God. Thus law was “*the handwriting of ordinances that was*

***against us, which was contrary to us***” (Cl 2:14).

Law demands that we do the commandments, but our “doing” must be perfect in order that it be a blessing in reference to our salvation. We have the command to obey the law, but not the ability to obey flawlessly. Because the law was from God, the Jews understood that *“the law is holy, and the commandment holy and just and good”* (Rm 7:12). But regardless of how good it was, in their efforts to do good, the Jews realized that they could not fulfill all the demands of the law. What was good from God, became a curse to man. What was holy, made man unholy. What was just and fair for God to give, brought judgment and condemnation. It is because of the inability of man to keep law perfectly that makes it impossible for law in and of itself to be a means of salvation.

We must not conclude that those who lived under the law of Moses, or the law unto their conscience, were all lost. It was not possible for anyone to be saved through exclusive obedience of any system of law. The Jews, as we, must be saved by grace and faith. We must remember that the classic statement of Habakkuk 2:4 is an Old Testament verse that is quoted three times in the New Testament: *“But the just will live by his faith”* (See Rm 1:17; Gl 3:11; Hb 10:38). This statement was true when the Jews were under the Sinai law. It is still true today.

## Chapter 8 THE COMING FAITH

Grace is the foundation upon which the whole “law of liberty” is based. At the cross God looked back at the curse of the Sinai law under which His people lived before Christ. *“For this reason He [Christ] is the mediator of the new covenant, so that by means of death for **the redemption of the transgressions committed under the first covenant**, those who have been called might receive the promise of eternal inheritance”* (Hb 9:15). Though the law of Moses was a curse, it was preparatory to bring the Jews to the cross. *“The law was our headmaster to bring us to Christ so that we might be justified by faith”* (Gl 3:24).

While using the law as a headmaster to bring Israel to faith in the redemption that was accomplished at the cross, Christ was “*an atoning sacrifice by His blood through faith in order to declare His righteousness for the remission of sin in the past because of the forbearance of God*” (Rm 3:25). Through grace, God was forbearing with the sins of the faithful before the cross. He was forbearing in view of the coming atoning sacrifice of the cross that was for all men under all law from Adam to the final coming of the second Adam, Jesus Christ.

The benefit of law is that it makes us aware of sin. It makes us aware of the sinful wounds we inflicted upon one another for which there is no balm under law. Law manifests bruises and cuts for which there is no healing. But Jesus came into this world in order to bring a “*new and living way*” (Hb 10:20). This was the way of the cross. “*For by grace you are saved through faith, and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God*” (Ep 2:8). This is the relief that Paul expressed to Peter when he said,

*Knowing that a man is not justified by works of law, but by the faith of Christ Jesus, even we [Jews] have believed in Christ Jesus so that we might be justified by the faith of Christ, and not by works of law, **for by works of law no flesh will be justified** (Gl 2:16).*

We must add to the preceding statement the comforting words of John: “*My little children, these things I write to you so that you do not sin. And if anyone sins, we have a Counselor with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous*” (1 Jn 2:1).

God’s part in our salvation is grace. Man’s part is faith. Our salvation is totally dependent on the grace of God. This is true because **God accepts no meritorious works from man as atonement for sin**. Even when we do all that is necessary in obedience to God’s commands to be saved, our obedience does not put God in debt to save us. He sees our obedience as a signal of love, and because He is love, He accepts us through grace into His fellowship.

On the part of man, salvation is the result of our obedient faith, for we cannot offer any grace on our own behalf for our salvation. Neither

can we offer any good works to atone for just one sin. Our hope for salvation, therefore, is in God because He promised to accept us into His fellowship through grace if we walk in the light of His Son.

### A. **The enlightened walk under grace:**

John made it clear that “*if we walk in the light as He is in the light,*” the blood of Christ through the grace of God continues to cleanse us of sin (1 Jn 1:7). If we confess our sins, He is faithful to forgive us (1 Jn 1:9). But in our walk in the grace of God, we must be careful not to abuse our gift of grace by walking contrary to the will of our Father.

God’s grace did not come to us cheap, for it came at the cost of the incarnation and crucifixion of the Son of God (See Ph 2:5-8). It is not cheap in our lives, for we struggle to walk in the light. “*What then will we say? Will we continue in sin so that grace may abound? **Certainly not! How will we who died to sin live any longer therein?***” (Rm 6:1,2). The fact is that the child of God should never conceive of the idea of taking advantage of God’s grace and continual cleansing by the blood of Christ. We should in no way behave as “*ungodly men who turn the grace of our God into licentiousness*” (Jd 4).

### B. **The grateful walk under grace:**

When one truly understands the wonderful gift of grace, he does not want to walk contrary to the will of God. When we understand the grace of God, we work for God more abundantly (1 Co 15:10). It is this grace that causes us to work in thanksgiving for all that God did for us (2 Co 4:15). God’s unselfish gift to us moves us to give our lives unselfishly for others. **The beautiful thing about understanding the grace of God is that it generates work for God in our lives far beyond what any obedience to law could ever do.** The law of Moses was based on the concept of “do and you will live.” But the grace that was revealed on Calvary cries out, “Because of grace, we will do.” In the realm of grace the Christian works because he is saved, not in order to be saved.

It is by grace that we are new creatures in Christ (2 Co 5:17). We are raised from the waters of baptism to walk “*in newness of life*” (Rm 6:4). It is a new and living way because we are living within the realm of God’s grace. Under grace, we put away our efforts to trust in human accomplishments. Our salvation is not based on human attainment. It is based on a faith that responds to the favor of God toward us through our Lord Jesus Christ. **Grateful disciples always live more abundantly than law-driven disciples.**

### C. The blessed walk under grace:

Understanding Paul’s description of grace enlightens James’ following statement: “*But he who looks into the perfect law of liberty and continues to abide in it, not being a forgetful hearer, but a doer of the work, this man will be blessed in his deed*” (Js 1:25). The blessing comes when people realize that they have been freed from the curse of perfect law-keeping and brought into a realm of grace wherein there is freedom, not only from sin, but also from the demands of law that it be kept perfectly in order to bring salvation.

Our relationship with God is not impersonal and legal. The child of God enjoys a wonderful liberty, having been set free from the bondage of law in order to walk by faith. It is this liberty from the curse of our inability to keep law perfectly that we cry out in thanksgiving to our Father, “Abba, Father.” “*And because you are sons,*” Paul proclaimed, “*God has sent forth the Spirit of His Son into your hearts, crying out, ‘Abba, Father’*” (Gl 4:6; see Rm 6:15-17).

### D. The walk of freedom under grace:

If Christianity were simply another system of law, then there would be no freedom from law. There would be no glorious grace. If Christianity were simply a law system of “do and live,” then we would again have been brought into the bondage of the curse of law. We must never reduce the “law of liberty” to a system of meritorious legalism. Such was what the judaizing teachers were seeking to do with the true gospel

of freedom that Paul preached to the Galatians. But Paul reminded the Galatians, “*But even if we or an angel from heaven preach any other gospel to you than what we have preached to you, let him be accursed*” (Gl 1:8).

We must be careful about relegating Christianity to a system of legal codes. If we ritualize our worship as “acts” and “performances,” or bind a system or number of prayers we must make, or attendances at meetings, or so many Lord Suppers, we will be in danger of subjecting the law of liberty to a “legal gospel,” and thus turn the grace of God into a meritorious system of justification. In doing such we would bring ourselves under the curse of law, and the condemnation that Paul stated, “*Let him be accursed.*” If we legalize the law of liberty, then we will be preaching another gospel other than the gospel of grace (See Gl 1:6-9).

### **E. The imperfect walk under law:**

The preceding infers, therefore, that there is justification from sin only by grace. Justification can never be through works of law, simply because law condemns because it cannot be obeyed perfectly. The purpose of law is to reveal sin. There can never be a system of trading a “good work for a sin.” Therefore, justification by law is impossible because we can never do enough good works to atone for a single sin against law.

Paul wrote, “*For Moses describes the righteousness that is of law, ‘The man who does those things will live by them’*” (Rm 10:5). Now God said to Israel, “*You will therefore keep My statutes and My judgments, by which a man may live if he does them*” (Lv 18:5). God was referring to perfect obedience of His statutes. But if one made just one mistake, then the law condemned him. Law could give life only if one kept it perfectly. But one is under a curse if he would be so arrogant as to attempt saving himself by perfect obedience to law. “*For as many as are of the works of law are under the curse, for it is written, ‘Cursed is everyone who does not continue in all things written in the book of the law to do them’*” (Gl 3:10).

With law comes the curse of not being able to comply with all the requirements of law. Those who would seek to be justified by perfect keeping of law are thus under the curse of law that calls for judgment of lawbreakers. Justification could have been possible exclusively under the Sinai law only if one could have kept it perfectly. This is also true of the law of Christ. However, one would be foolish to seek eternal salvation solely through perfect keeping of law. The attitude of the one who would be so presumptuous as to think he was a good “law keeper,” would disqualify him from being a candidate for heaven. He would be arrogant.

Modern-day legalistic teachers will always magnify the works of man, and subsequently seek to boast because of their good works, or obedience to their system of law that they have orchestrated out of an outline of proof texts. They will magnify the works of man to be meritorious in reference to earning the grace of God. The works of man are often magnified to the point that the grace of God becomes a subpoint in one’s theology, if not altogether forgotten.

Unfortunately, people too often exalt religious rites, rituals and ceremonies over moral living, while promoting orthodoxy to the exclusion of loving relationships. We often blind ourselves with our own glory to the point that we can no longer see the glory of the cross. We thus need a reality check in understanding that Christianity is not a religion. It is not a religion that is based on the observance of man-made rites, rituals and ceremonies. Christianity is defined by grace. Someone was right when he defined the attitude of the true disciple of Jesus with the following words:

**I will not work my soul to save,  
For that my Lord has done;  
But I will work like any slave,  
For love of God’s dear son.**

## Chapter 9

### A NEW COVENANT AND A NEW LAW

One of the common misunderstandings that surrounds the subject of grace is that there are no conditions for receiving its blessing. Founded upon the erroneous concept that God individually predestined individuals before the creation of the world to either heaven or hell, an unfortunate theology was developed that distorts God's offer of grace to all the world. The gospel was thus considered an inconsequential act on the part of God to fulfill His obligation to those He had already predestined. Since people have been supposedly predestined as individuals to hell, then the preaching of the gospel to such people is fruitless. The commission of Jesus to preach the gospel to the world is rendered fruitless because the predestined have already been assigned to their respective destinies.

This erroneous theology assumes that grace was given only to those who were individually elected for eternal dwelling, and thus grace has been unconditionally given to the elect. And if grace was supposedly unconditionally given to the individually predestined, **then there need be no law for the elect**. Since the individually elected were predestined to heaven, then they could break no law that would send them into apostasy and condemnation. For those who promote this theological persuasion, Paul's statement, "we are not under law," means that there are no conditions to appropriate the grace of God to the saved. Grace was irresistibly given to the elect, and thus, no matter what "the chosen" may do in life, they are still saved.

Not only does the preceding theology make God a respecter of persons, it is also contrary to the grace of God (See At 10:34). It makes a mockery of the atonement of the Son of God on the cross. If by the time of the cross, grace had already been given to the elected few, then the cross would have been a senseless demonstration of suffering on the part of the Son of God. Why would the Son of God need to incarnate into the flesh of man, and then suffer in this world, if the saved were already predestined for eternal glory?

But the gospel of the grace of God that was revealed on the cross was not in vain, nor was it a simple public show of God's love. More was at stake at the cross than a manifestation of the love of God. The cross was grace revealed, and grace that was to be accepted upon the condition that if one heard he could respond to the preaching of the gospel. For grace to be grace, it could never have been appropriated to a predestined few who did not need to respond to the cross. It could not have been free to all men if it could be accepted only by those who had already been individually predestined to glory.

Grace is God's favor that He extends to all His creation. And since He has extended it to all men, then all are called to respond in obedience to His will. This means that the free gift can be received by anyone who has the opportunity to hear the gospel. The offer of God's grace was never exclusive. It has always been all-inclusive, that is, it has always been offered to all humanity. It has always been as John wrote, "*For God so loved **the world** that He gave His only begotten Son*" (Jn 3:16). This was not "the world" of a supposedly elected few, but the entire world of humanity.

This brings us to the subject of how anyone throughout the world can accept the free gift of grace. In order to walk in the light of Jesus' way (1 Jn 1:7), there must be instructions. The Bible refers to these instructions as mandates that must be obeyed in order to appropriate the grace of God to one's soul.

We are not afraid to use the word "law" in this context because we know that God did not give those under grace a meritorious system by which they must save themselves apart from the effect of grace. Therefore, we define law through the eyes of grace, not through the ability of ourselves to presumptuously claim that we can save ourselves. Since God knew that we could never obey His laws perfectly in order to save ourselves, He has always given law that is based on grace.

Since there is no such thing as self-sanctification or self-justification taught in the Scriptures, then we assume that there are conditions upon which one must appropriate the grace of God. These conditions can be referred to as law, since they are absolute. In other words, no one can appropriate the grace of God in his life on the condition of his

own works of law. This is true because when law is broken, there is no such thing as meritorious good works that atone for violations of law. In this way, therefore, **the giving of law to man has always necessitated the offer of grace.** The giving of law essentially exalts the grace of God, and thus confirms God to be a God of love.

### A. Prophecy of a new law:

God promised Israel through Isaiah that there would be a new law coming in their history, a law that would originate initially from Jerusalem, but then go into all the world.

*And it will come to pass in the last days that the mountain of the Lord's house will be established on top of the mountains, and will be exalted above the hills. And all nations will flow to it. And many people will go and say, "Come and let us go up to the mountain of the Lord, to the house of the God of Jacob. And He will **teach us His ways** and we will walk in His paths." **For out of Zion will go forth the law and the word of the Lord from Jerusalem** (Is 2:2,3).*

Isaiah's prophecy was given in reference to the coming Messiah. The coming of the Messiah would involve the establishment of a new house of the Lord (See 1 Tm 3:15). The establishment of this new house would involve teaching. In order for one to be taught how to come into the Lord's house, a door had to be opened. Jesus was that door. He said to His disciples, "***I am the door. If anyone enters through Me, he will be saved, and will go in and out and find pasture***" (Jn 10:9). In other words, the gospel door was revealed through Jesus. No one could enter into the sheepfold without going through the gospel of Jesus. So for this reason, Jesus commissioned His disciples before His ascension, "***Go into all the world and preach the gospel [door] to every creature***" (Mk 16:15).

Before His ascension, Jesus pointed the disciples' minds toward the fulfillment of the preceding prophecy of Isaiah 2:2,3. He said to them "***that repentance and remission of sins would be preached in His***

*name among all the nations, beginning at Jerusalem*” (Lk 24:47). When the preaching of remission of sins began (At 2:38), people were given instructions as to how they could enter into the house of God. With the preaching of the gospel of Jesus came also the instructions (law) by which each person who obeys the gospel could enter into the house of God, wherein one could walk in the light (1 Jn 1:7). One is saved in obedience to the gospel of grace, but one must also walk according to the will of God. In this way our faith establishes the law of God in our lives (See Rm 3:27-33). In this way also, we are established as the house of God (1 Tm 3:15).

Throughout His ministry, Jesus made statements as, “*Whoever hears these words of Mine and **does them** .... And everyone who hears these words of Mine and **does not do them** ...*” (Mt 7:24,26). “*For whoever will **do the will of God**, he is My brother and My sister and mother*” (Mk 3:35). “*And why do you call Me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ and **do not do the things that I say?***” (Lk 6:46). The New Testament writers followed these statements with the following general principle: “*For not the hearers of law are just before God, but the **doers of law** will be justified*” (Rm 2:13). “*But be **doers of the word**, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves*” (Js 1:22; see 1 Co 9:21). There are instructions in the word of God as to how one must obey the gospel in order to enter through Jesus into the house of God. There are also instructions concerning how one must walk in the gospel, and thus remain in the house.

The fact that we are under grace does not mean that we are not under any obligation to be obedient to the word of God. One of the greatest deceptions in the theological world today is the teaching that we are saved by grace alone without obedience to any instructions from God as to how we must be born again into the household of God. But this is not the conclusion that we draw from the preceding prophecy of Isaiah 2:2,3. Though the Christian is assured of his or her salvation by the grace of God, there are instructions from the Father that must be obeyed. These are instructions to guard us from doing that which is against the will of our Father. The instructions are given, not as a measure of our salvation, but to reassure us that we are doing the best we can to serve our Father.

Peter said that we have “*been born again, not by perishable seed, but imperishable, by the word of God that lives and abides*” (1 Pt 1:23). This is the word of God that we believe and obey in order to be born again (See Jn 3:3-5). And once we are born again, it continues to live in our hearts as we walk in the light (1 Jn 1:7). It is this same word that directs our lives as we obey it. This is the word by which we are saved. It is as James wrote, “*Receive with meekness the implanted word that is able to save your souls*” (Js 1:21).

## B. Prophecy of a new covenant:

In the following prophecy, Jeremiah spoke of a new covenant that God would establish with the houses of Judah and Israel.

*Behold, the days are coming, says the Lord, that I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah, not according to the covenant that I made with their fathers in the days that I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt, which covenant they broke, although I was a husband to them, says the Lord. But this will be the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, says the Lord, **I will put My law in their inward parts and write it in their hearts** (Jr 31:31-33).*

Through Jesus, Christians are now a part of this new covenant relationship with God (See Mt 26:28; Hb 8:8-12). This covenant relationship with God is different than the old covenant that God made with Israel when He brought them out of Egyptian captivity. Under this new covenant, **people are first taught the law of God**. They then obey the law of God before they come into a covenant relationship with God.

The old covenant with Israel was different than the new that we have with God today. God brought the Israelites out of captivity, and then established a covenant with the nation at Mount Sinai. He then gave them the law of the covenant, **which law they had to be taught because they were already in a covenant relationship with Him**.

But under the new covenant, one already knows the conditions of the covenant before he or she is baptized into a covenant relationship with God. This is exactly what Jesus meant when He said, *“It is written in the prophets, ‘And they will all be taught of God.’ Therefore, everyone who has heard and has learned from the Father comes to Me”* (Jn 6:45).

Israel was brought to God, and then taught the law. But under the new covenant, people are taught the gospel of God’s grace that was revealed at the cross (Ti 2:11-14). They then voluntarily come to Jesus. But in order for one to come into a covenant relationship with God today, he or she must be taught, not only that Jesus is the Son of God, but what is required of one to come into and live in a covenant relationship with God. Therefore, one must first be taught the gospel. *“If you continue in My word”* Jesus said, *“then you are truly My disciples”* (Jn 8:31). Under the new covenant, there are commandments (laws) to be obeyed if one would come into and continue in a covenant relationship with God. *“If you love Me,”* Jesus said, *“you will keep My commandments”* (Jn 14:15; see Jn 14:21,23; 15:10,14).

Walking in the grace of God does not relieve one of the responsibility of walking in the commandments of the Lord (See 2 Pt 3:2; 1 Jn 2:3-5; 5:2,3; 2 Jn 6,9). When one comes into the new covenant with the Father at the point of baptism, the Father does not save one at that point, and then wander off to be a distant God. On the contrary, from the time one is baptized into a relationship with the Father, Son and Holy Spirit (Mt 28:20), the Father remains close through the instructions of His will in order that His children know that they are walking in the light of His Son Jesus Christ (1 Jn 1:7).

## **Chapter 10**

### **CHRISTIANS UNDER LAW**

Prophecies of the new covenant and law teach that Christians are now under law, but not under law as a means to be justified before God, for they are justified through the sacrificial offering of Jesus. This jus-

tification through the grace offering of Jesus, however, does not exclude law. On the contrary, the free gift of God's grace is the opportunity for all men to respond to law. And in responding to grace by faith, we obey the will of our Father.

After Paul successfully argued the case that no one can be justified before God through meritorious law-keeping, he concluded, "*Therefore, by the works of law no flesh will be justified in His sight, for by law is the knowledge of sin*" (Rm 3:20). We must take a closer look at the conclusion of this statement in Romans 3. Paul did not contradict himself when he added, "*Do we then make void law through faith? Certainly not! On the contrary, we establish law*" (Rm 3:31). It is not that God offered a way of escape from law when He freely offered grace that was accessed through obedient faith. Though there is a difference between the law of faith, and a meritorious system of law whereby the Jews sought to justify themselves before God, there is still a law for the Christian that must be identified, explained, and finally, obeyed.

The legalist would argue that one is justified by law on the merit of how one performs law. But Paul argued that because we are justified by faith in the grace of God, we obey law, knowing that our failures in keeping law do not nullify our justification.

### A. The law of the Spirit:

"*For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has freed you from the law of sin and death*" (Rm 8:2). Both Isaiah and Jeremiah prophesied that after their days a new law would come in the history of Israel. Though neither prophet explained this new law in detail, we now know that this was the "law of the Spirit" that now stands in contrast to the Sinai law. The Sinai law in and of itself actually brought spiritual death because no one could keep it perfectly. Paul explained, "*For what the [Sinai] law could not do in that it was weak through the flesh [no one could keep it perfectly], God sending His own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, and for sin, condemned sin in the flesh*" (Rm 8:3).

Law has always been "weak through the flesh." It is weak because

it is impossible for anyone in the flesh to keep law perfectly in order to be justified before God. Outward ceremonial performances of the statutes of the law could not reconcile one to God simply because the Jews' obedience to the statutes was flawed (Rm 3:23). This is the inherent fallacy of religion, for religion is an effort on the part of often sincere people who seek to establish a system of law in order to self-sanctify themselves before God. Since the religionist knows that he or she cannot keep the law of God perfectly, religious rites, rituals and ceremonies are added in order to stand as a means of atonement for the breaking of God's law. The religionist has convinced himself or herself that if one cannot perform perfectly the law of God, then one can find atonement for sin through the meritorious performance of religious mandates. In this way the religionist has deceived himself or herself into thinking that obedience to self-imposed good works will sanctify one of sins against law.

The Hebrew writer explained the problem with the Sinai law of the first covenant that was given specifically to Israel. *“For if that first covenant had been faultless, then no place would have been sought for the second. **For finding fault with them ...**”* (Hb 8:7,8). The fault was not with the law of the first covenant. The fault was “with them.” The fault was with the people to whom the law was given. The fault is never with the law of God, for the law of God is holy, just and good (Rm 7:12). The fault is always with us because there is no law that can be given to us by God that we can keep perfectly in order to save ourselves.

The “law of the Spirit” freed us from our inadequate efforts to be justified by meritorious works of law. Jesus came to condemn the sin that comes from the inabilities of our flesh to perform perfectly the law of God. Through the cross, He has given us freedom by assuring our hearts that we are saved by the grace of God, apart from any necessity for perfect obedience of law. **Our confidence, therefore, is not in our performance of any law, but in His grace that covers our inadequate performance of the law.** Our faith is in God to declare us justified by His grace through the cross. Therefore, we need not be overly concerned with our lack of perfect performance of law. Paul

encouraged, “*I thank God through Jesus Christ our Lord. So then **with the mind** I myself serve the law of God, but with the flesh the law of sin*” (Rm 7:25). We know that we are imperfect law performers. But by trusting in the grace of God, we are assured of our salvation regardless of our lack of performance.

Though Paul was obedient as much as possible to the will of God, he had no confidence in any perfect meritorious performance of law in reference to any self-justification. His faith was in the grace of God, and thus, his, as well as our justification, was/is by faith. This was the “law of the Spirit.” Since our faith comes by hearing the word of Christ (Rm 10:17), then it is by our faith in God’s grace that we live by the word of Christ.

## **B. The law of Christ:**

In Galatians 6:2 Paul wrote, “*Bear one another’s burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ.*” In the New Testament there is the “law of faith” (Rm 3:27), the “law of God” (Rm 7:25), the “law of the Spirit” (Rm 8:2), the “law of liberty” (Js 1:25) and the “royal law” (Js 2:8). All these statements refer to the same law. Therefore, when Paul speaks of “obedience of faith,” his reference was to obedience to what God would require of Christians as conditions of their covenant relationship with Him. This was obedience **in response** to God’s grace, not obedience **in order to access** His grace.

The works of law about which Paul spoke in Romans 4:2,4 and 9:11, however, refer to works of law about which one could boast, and thus, reference was to meritorious works of law, specifically meritorious efforts to keep the Sinai law.

But when Paul referred to “obedience of faith” in reference to law in Romans (Rm 1:5; 16:26), he was speaking concerning obedience to the “law of faith,” “law of the Spirit,” “law of liberty” and “royal law,” which are all references to the same law of Christ. There is no room for boasting in reference to keeping this law since the Christian knows that it is impossible to keep any law perfectly in order to be saved. It is simply self-righteousness to boast in reference to one’s obedience to

the law of Christ. This thought is inferred in the following statement: “*For sin will not have dominion over you, **for you are not under law, but under grace***” (Rm 6:14). And since we are under grace, there is no room for boasting in reference to our law-keeping or good works.

Christians are not under a meritorious system of law that requires perfect obedience. They are under a law of freedom under which they are continually cleansed by the blood of Jesus that manifested the grace of God on the cross, which blood continues to work in the life of each Christian (Ti 2:11; 1 Jn 1:7). Christians, therefore, must be cautious about turning the law of Christ into a meritorious system of law. To do such would be reverting back to the system by which the Jews sought to justify themselves under the law of Moses.

## Chapter 11 THE PURPOSE OF LAW

In 1 Corinthians 9:21 Paul wrote, “*To those who are without law, as without law, though not being without God’s law but under **Christ’s law**, so that I might win those who are without law.*” Some have argued that the Christian is no longer under law because we are under grace. In fact, some have assumed that because we are supposedly not under law that we are under grace alone. But this thinking is contrary to the subject of obedience that saturates the New Testament.

Jesus set forth the principle of obedience in the initial statements of His ministry: “*Not everyone who says to Me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ will enter into the kingdom of heaven, but **he who does the will of My Father who is in heaven***” (Mt 7:21). “*If you love Me you will **keep My commandments***” (Jn 14:15; see Rm 2:4-11; 2 Th 1:6-9; Hb 5:9; 1 Pt 4:17). Christians are under the “law of liberty” (Js 1:25). They will be judged by the law of liberty, that is, by the word of Christ (Js 2:12; see Jn 12:48).

Justification by grace through obedient faith does not mean that we are not under law. “*By the works of law no flesh will be justified in His sight*” does not mean that there is no law of Christ in existence

today (Rm 3:20). Though we are not under a system of law whereby we seek justification, we are under the law of our faith to trust in the grace of God. Now *“do we then make void law through faith? Certainly not! On the contrary, we establish law”* (Rm 3:31). We are not under a law whereby we seek justification through meritorious keeping of law, but under law whereby we receive direction in life in order to express our faith. We have brought ourselves under law in response to the grace of God. As those who have been justified by the grace of God, we seek instructions from God whereby we can know that we are walking in the light (1 Jn 1:7).

### A. Law for the justified:

The justified live under law, but the means by which they were first justified was not by meritorious obedience to law. Neither is it by law that they continue to be justified. Paul said it clearly: *“I do not nullify the grace of God, for if righteousness comes through law, then Christ died in vain”* (Gl 2:21). The righteous are not righteous through any system of law. On the other hand, they are not righteous without law. **However, they can nullify the grace of God by turning the law of Christ into a system of meritorious justification.** This is what Paul meant when he wrote, *“You have been severed from Christ, you who seek to be justified by law. You have fallen from grace”* (Gl 5:4).

Christians are under law (instruction) by which they have assurance that they are following the will of God (See 1 Jn 5:2,15,18-20). If there were no law of God in existence today, then Christians would never know for certain if they were pleasing God. Law brings comfort, freedom and assurance. It brings comfort in knowing that we are the disciples of Jesus by keeping His commandments. Law brings freedom because we guard ourselves from creating laws after our own traditions. We are thus free from ourselves when we submit to the law of God. There is no freedom without law, for it is by the law of God that we understand that we are not walking according to our own meritorious religiosity in order to earn our own salvation.

**1. Moral law:** In 1 Corinthians 6:9-11 Paul defined unrighteousness as fornication, idolatry, covetous, and a host of other violations of God's moral laws. If Christians did not know that fornication was against the will of God, then some would, as the Corinthians, justify fornication without feeling guilty in the fact that they were violating the will of God. Law, therefore, identifies moral sins.

Since it is not in man to direct his own morality (Jr 10:23), then it is imperative that God establish our moral standards. Without law, therefore, there would be no way we could determine if we were walking according to the light of the word of Christ (1 Jn 1:7). Law, therefore, brings reassurance in that we know where we are going because God has given us a road map.

Before the cross, the Gentiles were under a law unto themselves. They had no written laws, and thus they were under laws that were self-evident in reference to the consequences of moral behavior. Reaping the negative response of the violation of moral law was evidence enough that what one committed was wrong. In this way, the conscience became their guide. Paul wrote of this in the following statement:

*For when the Gentiles who do not have [the Sinai] law do by nature the things contained in [the Sinai] law, these having no law, are a law to themselves; who show the work of law written in their hearts, their conscience also bearing witness and their thoughts alternately accusing or else excusing one another (Rm 2:14,15).*

God held the Gentiles accountable to their conscience, which conscience was first instructed by God speaking to the Gentile fathers of the tribal families (Hb 1:1-3). Their self-realization of right and wrong was the law unto themselves, though this law was not written in stone as it was for the Jews who were given the written oracles of God at Mount Sinai (Rm 3:1,2). Because the Gentiles were under law according to their conscience, they were to be held accountable to the God who was revealed to them through the creation.

*For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness*

*and unrighteousness of men who suppress the truth in unrighteousness, because that which is known about God is **manifest within them, for God has shown it to them.** For the invisible things of Him since the creation of the world are clearly seen, **being understood by the things that are made**, even His eternal power and divinity, so that they are without excuse” (Rm 1:18-20).*

The Gentiles who coexisted with Israel were without excuse because they conscientiously knew about God. They witnessed His existence through the things that were made. Nevertheless, they gave up a knowledge of the one true and living God and ran after their own imagined gods and the moral unrighteousness that was supposedly pronounced by these gods.

If there were no New Testament law of Christ today, then there would still exist the moral laws of God by which all people would be judged. Many societies today have given up a knowledge of God. They have become atheistic in reference to the existence of the God of the Bible. However, this does not mean that they will not face condemnation when Jesus returns. Ignorance of God is not a means of justification. Those who refuse to have God in their conscience will be condemned as those before the cross who refused to recognize that God exists, and thus conclude that if He exists, then there must be intervention from Him into the affairs of this world.

**2. Law of worship:** *“God is spirit, and those who worship Him must worship Him in spirit and **in truth**” (Jn 4:23).* If there were no law in reference to worship of God, then we would have the right to worship God according to our own imagination. In our ignorance of God, we would surely establish our own systems of worship, falling under the condemnation that Jesus judged the Pharisees: *“**In vain they worship Me, teaching as doctrines the commandments of men**” (Mk 7:7).* We would be as the Greeks who had no law of God concerning worship of the one true and living God, and thus, **we would likewise worship in ignorance** (At 17:23). Therefore, there must be truth revealed by which we can be assured that we are worshiping God according to His will and not our own will.

The preceding is the problem with religious people who have little knowledge of the word of God. In the performance of their religiosity, they assume that God is pleased with their behavior. However, because of ignorance of the word of God on the part of the worshiper, the worshiper is only making a “wild guess” that his or her worship is that which God seeks. It is for this reason that ignorant worship can never be acceptable to God. Ignorant worship is always based on the religious inclinations of the worshiper and not the word of God.

If there were no laws concerning true worship, then we could make laws for ourselves in reference to worship. We could make laws concerning places of worship, acts of worship, ceremonies of worship, and behavior of worship. The fact that this is true is evidenced by the numerous systems of worship that exist throughout the religious world today. What Paul wrote to the Colossians is certainly true today: “*These things have indeed a show of wisdom in self-made religion and self-abasement and neglect of the body, but not in any value in restraining the indulgence of the flesh*” (Cl 2:23). If we were not restrained in our worship by the law of God, then we would certainly create a worship that would go so far as involvement in the indulgence of the flesh. This was certainly the case with those in Corinth who worshiped through fornication the Greek god of fertility (See 1 Co 6:12-20).

**3. Law of ministry:** “*Pure and undefiled religion before God and the Father is this, to take care of the orphans and widows in their affliction*” (Js 1:27). How would we have known this if it were not revealed by the Holy Spirit? In Jesus’ last statements concerning the final judgment, He enjoined on His disciples that they feed the poor, clothe the naked, and give drink to the thirsty (Mt 25:31-40). But how would we have known this benevolent behavior if it were not spoken with authority by the One of whom we claim to be a disciple?

The point is that if there were no instructions on how we must behave as disciples of Jesus, then we would not know if we were disciples. Discipleship is determined, therefore, because there are clear instructions in the New Testament that explain what we must do in order to respond to the grace of God. Without these instructions, we would be confined to our own imagination as to what we should do in

order to follow Jesus. And if this were the case, then we would always be apprehensive about our own discipleship. We would not know if we were obeying our own religious rites, rituals, and ceremonies, or if we were being obedient to our Father. We must never forget that religious behavior is always filled with doubt, for we doubt whether our obedience is according to our own will or the will of the Father.

Therefore, instruction (law) is given in the New Testament in order to give direction for our behavior and relationships with one another. Law brings with it the blessing of reassurance. Through law we know what is right and wrong. God did not leave us to ourselves to invent our own laws of moral conduct and religious behavior.

To affirm that Christians are not under any law of God is senseless and reckless. We have witnessed too many people who have conducted themselves according to their own moral standards—if indeed they had a consistent standard—and lived licentiously (See Jd 4). To take Paul’s statement that we are not under law out of the context in which he made the statement would lead to all sorts of immoral and unethical conduct.

God did not give man the ability to establish his own moral codes, or the measures and controls by which He would be worshiped. These things must be revealed by God, not invented by man. God gave us law in order to prevent us from establishing our own self-righteousness, and thus think that we can justify ourselves before Him through the meritorious behavior of our own righteousness. This is what the Jews had done by the time the Son of God came into this world.

*For I [Paul] testify of them [the religious Jews] that they have a zeal for God, but not according to knowledge [of the word of God]. For they being ignorant of God’s righteousness, have not submitted themselves to the righteousness of God (Rm 10:2,3; see Hs 4:6).*

## **B. The purpose of law:**

Law was never given to man for the purpose that man, through meritorious obedience of law, could save himself. The fact that law

was never given as a means of salvation is in the fact that God knew that we could never keep any system of law perfectly in order to be declared righteous before Him. It is simply true what Paul said, “**By the works of law no flesh will be justified**” (Rm 3:20; see Gl 2:16). If we can understand this one truth concerning our relationship to law, then we can understand why grace must always come with law. The law of God has always been in the world, but so also has grace. From Adam to ourselves today, law existed, but also the lovingkindness (grace) of God has always existed because no one could keep any law of God in order to save himself.

The fact that God has given law does not assume that He considers law to be the final foundation upon which our salvation depends. The reason law cannot be considered the foundation for salvation in and of itself is in the fact that there would be no need for grace. We must listen to the following conclusion that Paul wrote: “*Now to him who works, the reward is not credited according to grace, **but according to debt***” (Rm 4:4). If law could save, then we would assume that God had to save us because of our law-keeping. We would thus need no grace, for by our obedience to law we would have put God in debt to save us.

But the reward (salvation) can never be based on debt. If it were, then there is no need for grace. Christ would have died in vain if we could have accomplished our salvation on our own. So the fact that God has given law can never nullify grace. And since grace has been revealed, then we need to determine the purpose of law while we are under grace.

The preceding is where the Jews of Jesus’ day misunderstood how they were to relate to the Sinai law that was given to Israel. For example, the religious leaders of Jesus’ day knew that one must keep the Sabbath. Therefore, in order to guarantee the keeping of the Sabbath they established countless religious rules that surrounded the Sabbath law. For example, the “Sabbath day’s journey” was part of this canon of religious rules that had to be obeyed in order to guarantee that one kept the Sabbath. But the “Sabbath day’s journey” is found nowhere in the Sinai law. Nevertheless, if one were to honor all the religious rules that surrounded the Sabbath, then he was guaranteed to have kept the Sabbath.

The scribes and Pharisees were so fanatical about keeping the “Sabbath day’s journey” religious rule that they forgot, or even rejected the purpose for the Sabbath commandment of the Sinai law. They had forgotten that “*the Sabbath was made for man, and not man for the Sabbath*” (Mk 2:28). Jesus therefore reminded them of their error. He said the following in reference to all their added religious rites, rituals and ceremonies surrounding the Sinai laws: “*For laying aside the commandment of God, you hold the [religious] tradition of men*” (Mk 7:8). In fact, their strict religiosity in obedience to their added religious traditions went so far as to lead them to reject the purpose for which the Sabbath law was given, “*All too well you reject the commandment of God so that you may keep your own tradition*” (Mk 7:9).

Nevertheless, the law of God was needed for Israel. It is still needed. But all the religious rules that we perform in order to guarantee our obedience to the law of God are only amendments to the law. Sometimes we are so ardent about keeping our religious amendments that we forget the very purpose why law was given.

**1. *With law comes the knowledge of sin.*** “*For by law is the knowledge of sin*” (Rm 3:20). If there were no law given by God, then we would not know what would be considered right or wrong. Paul wrote, “***I would not have known sin except through law, for I would not have known coveting except the law had said, ‘You will not covet’***” (Rm 7:7). God’s law, therefore, becomes a rule of awareness. Through law we know what is good and what is evil in the eyes of God. Law, therefore, keeps our minds focused on God in our relationships with one another and God.

**2. *Law directs our relationships with other people.*** Law not only sets the pattern for our behavior, but it also provides the principles by which we must conduct our relationships with one another. Paul corrected the Jewish Christians in Galatia who had withdrawn themselves from the Gentile Christians upon the arrival of some Jews from Jerusalem. He wrote of the incident, “*I saw that they [the Galatian Jewish Christians] were not straightforward about the truth of the gospel*” (Gl 2:14). Their conduct was not reflective of the nature of the gospel of God’s grace, for God showed no respect of persons when He offered

Jesus upon the cross (See At 10:34,35). Jesus exercised no respect of persons when He came into this world in the flesh of man (See Ph 2:5-8). Because the gospel is for all people (Jn 3:16), then our behavior in obedience to the gospel must reflect to all people the nature of the gospel.

Through law we are informed that we do not have the right to manifest respect of persons (See Js 2:9-12). Through law we know when we do the will of the Lord (Mt 7:21). Through law we know when we are obeying Jesus (Hb 5:9). In our relational behavior with one another, therefore, we can know that we are fulfilling the law of Christ (Gl 6:1). If there were no law of Christ, then Christians would have no confidence in their behavior because they would not know if they were reflecting the will of Christ in their relationships with one another. But when we walk according to the commandments that we receive from God, then we can walk with confidence because we know we are obeying the will of God (See 2 Jn 4).

We must remember 2 John 6: *“And this is love, **that we walk according to His commandments**. This is the commandment, that as you have heard from the beginning, **you should walk in it**.”* We remember 1 John 2:3: *“And by this we know that we know Him, **if we keep His commandments**.”* In order for us not to be led astray in following after the doctrine of demons, God had to reveal to us His commandments in order that we might know that we are obeying Him, and not following after our own religious inventions (See 1 Tm 4:1-5).

**3. Law is the means by which the Spirit leads us.** The foundation of the truth was revealed by the Holy Spirit through the apostles and prophets (Ep 2:20; 3:5). The result of this revelation was freedom. *“For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus **has freed you from the law of sin and death**”* (Rm 8:2). By the leading of the revealed truth of God, the Spirit directs our lives. *“For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, **these are the sons of God**”* (Rm 8:14).

The sons of God follow the law of God. It is by following the will of God that everyone can determine who the sons of God are. If we were left without law, no one would be able to determine who the sons of God truly were. It is for this reason that our sonship can never be

determined experientially. People of all religious faiths have great emotional experiences. But it is only through the identity that is determined by law that we can know our fellow sons of God.

If we had to determine who the true sons of God were by the emotional experiences we have with people, then we would be left in total confusion as to who was a Christian and who was simply a good person. The confusion would be as great as the confusion of the emotionally misguided who claim to know Jesus, but do not obey His word (See Mt 7:21-23). We can thank the Holy Spirit, therefore, that He inspired instructions for the behavior of the sons of God. *“All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, **for instruction in righteousness, so that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work**”* (2 Tm 3:16,17). This is a very powerful statement. It is powerful in reference to the will of God being revealed through the Holy Spirit in order that the sons of God be led correctly in their daily walk in the truth (See Gl 5:16-25).

The conclusion of any discussion on law in reference to the Christian, is Paul’s following statement:

*Now the purpose of the commandment is love out of a pure heart, and a good conscience and a sincere faith, from which some, having swerved, have turned aside to meaningless discussion, desiring to be teachers of the law, understanding neither what they say, nor what they affirm. **But we know that the law is good, if a man uses it lawfully.** Knowing this, that the law is not made for a righteous man, but for the lawless and disobedient, for the ungodly and for sinners* (See 1 Tm 1:5-9).

## Chapter 12

### WALKING IN GRACE THROUGH ROMANS

There could have been no person more qualified to write for human posterity the two most precious books in the Bible on the subject of grace than the one, who at the time of his death, still confessed that

he was the “chief of sinners” (See 1 Tm 1:12-17). Who else than Paul could the Holy Spirit have chosen to pen the inspiring words of both Romans and Galatians?

In the letter to the Galatians, the Holy Spirit through Paul, wrote against those who were seeking to make Christianity a system of legal performance by which they might attempt to justify themselves before God through law-keeping. Such was the religiosity of Paul while living the Jewish life of Saul under the bondage of the Jews’ religion (Gl 1:13,14). If the letter of Galatians were the first inspired New Testament letter to be written, then it was the Declaration of Independence of Christians from a futile system of justification through law-keeping.

In the letter to the Romans, the Spirit went right to the point to identify the nature of Christianity by contrasting grace with the Jews’ efforts to justify themselves through self-righteous law-keeping. If one understands the theme of Romans, then God has the lifetime dedication of that person. Romans is the defining principle upon which Christianity is built, and thus, the principle that establishes the difference between Christianity and all man-made religions.

Man-made religion is based on a contrived meritorious system of religious behavior by which individuals seek to please the god they have created after their own imagination. Their religion, therefore, is according to the will of man. It is manufactured after self-imposed behavioral rites, rituals and religious ceremonies by which one would meritoriously seek to perform in an effort to sanctify one’s self. And thus, **religion is an effort on the part of man to focus on what he can do for himself, whereas grace focuses on what God has done for man.**

The further away from the word of God a religious person is, the more his or her religion is filled with self-righteous religious performances (See Cl 2:23). Such is the problem with many today who have little knowledge of the gospel of the incarnate Son of God. The religionist, as the Jews in reference to the Sinai law, has constructed his own system of religion, and yet, seeks in some way to hover under the umbrella of Christianity.

But true Christianity is not religion. The principle of Christianity is grace, and thus, if we thoroughly understand the revelation of grace

through the suffering Son on the cross, then we know whom we have believed and is able to keep us until that great day when He is again revealed from heaven (See Rm 8: 28-39; 2 Tm 1:12). Christianity is, therefore, about Christ, and not about the ability of any individual to sanctify himself or herself before God.

We do not mean to present an extensive commentary on the letter to the Roman disciples. In this chapter we simply seek to focus on the theme of the message that Paul sought to reaffirm in reference to the gospel of grace. In order to do this, it is important to focus on some thoughts of those key statements that Paul made in order to build his case that salvation is by grace through faith.

### A. **Romans 1:5; 16:26**

Paul began his letter by saying that through Christ “*we have received grace and apostleship, for **obedience of faith** among all the nations, for His name*” (Rm 1:5). At the end of the letter, he stated, “*But now is manifested, and by the Scriptures of the prophets, according to the commandment of the eternal God, has been made known to all nations for **the obedience of faith***” (Rm 16:26).

It was as if the Holy Spirit knew there would be those who would misunderstand Paul’s use of the word “faith” throughout this book. Therefore, in order to clarify what He wanted us to understand in His use of the word “faith,” the letter of Romans was started and concluded with the same definition of faith. When we talk about the faith that is pleasing to God, therefore, it is “obedience of faith.” It is not faith alone, neither obedience alone. It is not the dead faith that is unresponsive to the will of God. It is a faith that seeks to obey all that God would require, both from the alien sinner who is seeking redemption, and of the saint who is seeking to walk in the light (1 Jn 1:7).

This is not a meritorious obedience, but a faith that trusts in God’s grace, not in one’s performance of law. When the word “faith” is used by Paul in the context of Romans, we must think about one trusting in God for justification, not in one’s performance of law in order to justify one’s self through law-keeping. Therefore, we must always assume

that Paul's reference to faith is obedience of faith in response to the grace of God. It is a faith that moves one to do all that God would require to be saved.

The works about which James wrote is parallel to the obedience of faith that Paul introduces in the letter to the Romans (See Js 2:14-26). There is no contradiction between Paul and James on this matter. Paul's "works" in Romans are those **meritorious works of law** by which one would seek to justify himself before God. These are those works about which one could boast (See Rm 2:17). The **obedience of faith** that Paul mentions in Romans, which James clarifies, is faith that is perfected by obedience. Paul used the phrase "obedience of faith" in contrast to the works that cancel faith, and thus nullifies grace. The works that perfect or complete faith in the context of James 2 are not the meritorious works of law that cancel faith and nullify the grace about which Paul speaks. The works about which James wrote were the result of true faith.

**The Bible interpreter who cannot distinguish between the meritorious works of law against which Paul wrote in Romans, and the works of faith that James defends, will never understand Paul's theme of the letter of Romans.** Paul speaks of the obedience of faith. It is a faith that is perfected by action. It is a faith that goes to work in the alien sinner who seeks out what God would require of him to be obedient to the gospel. It is a faith that exists and is recognized as pleasing to God only when it goes into action.

We could illustrate this active faith by what was prophesied of Jesus in Luke 2:11. The angel of the Lord said to the shepherds, "*For to you a Savior is born this day in the city of David, who is Christ the Lord.*" Jesus had not accomplished the work of a Savior at the time of His birth. **He was a "Savior" only when He actually went to the cross and paid the price of an atoning sacrifice for our sins.** It was at the cross when He became our Savior and Redeemer from sin.

Can one have faith before it goes into action? Certainly! But it is a faith that is pleasing to God **only when it goes into action.** It is a saving faith only when it is "obedience of faith." A faith that does not go into action is defined by James to be a dead faith (Js 2:26).

Now connect this thought with Hebrews 5:8,9: “*Though He was a Son, He learned obedience by the things that He suffered. And having been made perfect, He became the author of eternal salvation to all those who obey Him.*” Jesus became our Savior only after He obediently suffered as our sacrificial lamb on the cross. **He was perfected as our Savior only after He obediently went to the cross.** And so it is with our faith. Our faith must be perfected by obedience. Before obedience, our faith is simply a mental recognition that God exists and His Son was revealed. But faith must go beyond our mental recognition of what Jesus did for us at the cross. This is why Paul used the phrase “obedience of faith” at the very beginning of his discussions concerning our access into God’s grace. It is why he also concluded his discussion on the matter at the end of the letter to the Romans. It is only when faith has been perfected through obedience does it have an effect in reference to our salvation.

Salvation under grace is a system of faith. From the beginning of time, there has never been salvation outside this principle. The meritorious works of law always lead to sin and death. However, a faith that is not perfected by works cannot save, for in such a faith there is no response, no thanksgiving, no active appreciation for the grace of God that appeared at the cross.

**The faith that does save is active, visible, responsive and perfected by obedience.** But this is not meritorious obedience. For this reason, saving faith can never be a meritorious faith since our salvation is always by grace and not earned by works. Since it is obedience of faith that gives us access to the grace of God, then our faith is perfected by obedience to the gospel. This obedience does not make void the grace of God. It is a faith that acts in response to the grace of God.

Since this point is not easily understood by those who are of the “faith only” or “grace only” persuasion, please allow us to repeat this in different words. One must be careful not to misunderstand Paul when he used the phrase “obedience of faith.” He did not mean “meritorious obedience of faith.” If he had, then he would have cancelled grace. “Obedience of faith” is one’s obedience to all that God would require of us to be saved. And because we seek His salvation through

faith, we are willing to do all that He requires of us to realize that goal.

If Paul had meant “meritorious obedience of faith,” then we would no longer be under grace, but law, for we would seek to obey the statutes of law in order to continue to be saved. Paul’s “obedience of faith” is not meritorious faith by which the alien sinner, or the Christian, seeks to obligate God through meritorious works. It is a faith that moves sinners to be obedient to all that God would require of one to initially obey what is required to be saved, and then, to obediently walk with Jesus according to the will of God. As the Christian lives within the realm of God’s grace, his faith is perfected by his obedient walk in the new and living way.

## **B. Romans 2:28,29**

*For he is not a Jew who is one outwardly, nor is circumcision that which is outward in the flesh. But he is a Jew who is one inwardly, and circumcision is that of the heart in the spirit, **and not in the letter.***

Paul’s first defense and definition of grace is that grace is not defined or applied to anyone because of physical lineage or racial identity. Being a Jew gave no one an advantage into the realm of God’s grace. The true spiritual child of God (“Jew”) is the one who has dedicated himself (“circumcision”) in the heart to walk by faith. Paul wrote of this to the Colossian church: *“In Him you were also circumcised with the circumcision not made with hands, in the removal of the body of the flesh by the circumcision of Christ; having been buried with Him in baptism”* (Cl 2:11,12).

The Jews concluded that they were in a special salvational relationship with God because they were the chosen people. They concluded that they automatically stood in the grace of God because of their Jewish heritage. When Paul discussed subjects concerning grace and faith, therefore, at the beginning of his arguments he cancelled out any advantage of being born of Jewish heritage. Salvation by grace through faith existed before the establishment of God’s special covenant with Israel at Mount Sinai when all humanity, including Abra-

ham, were Gentiles. It continues today after the conclusion of the Sinai covenant and law with Israel at the cross as all humanity is again to be considered Gentiles in the eyes of God (See Rm 7:4). Salvation by grace through faith, therefore, has nothing to do with Jewish heritage, for the gospel of God's grace is to be preached to the world (Mk 16:15).

### C. **Romans 3:28-30:**

*Therefore, we conclude that a man is justified by faith apart from the works of law. Is He the God of the Jews only? Is He not also of the Gentiles? Yes, of the Gentiles also, since it is one God who will justify the circumcision by faith and uncircumcision through faith.*

If one trusts in God's grace to save him, regardless of his imperfect obedience, then he is declared righteous in his fallible obedience. For this reason, both Jews and Gentiles can be justified before God by faith regardless of their heritage or access to the Sinai law.

When we discuss the matter of grace and faith, Paul continues to emphasize that it is a matter of heart, not heritage. In order to understand this point, Paul stated to his fellow Jews that they must step away from their Jewish heritage in order to come to God as individuals, not as Jews. We too must step away from religious heritage in order to appreciate grace.

So Paul reminded the Jews that they could not be justified by the system of law that was given to them on Mount Sinai through Moses. There is no justification in the meritorious keeping of any system of law simply because no one can keep any system of law perfectly in order to demand justification. This is true because "*all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God*" (Rm 3:23).

**The problem with any system of law is that there are no provisions for forgiveness within law.** Law demands justice according to the dictates of the law. Through "*law is the knowledge of sin*" (Rm 3:20). And since no one can keep any system of law without coming short of what the law requires, then "*by works of law no flesh will be justified in His sight*" (Rm 3:20; see Gl 2:16). Because there can be no

justification through the meritorious works of law, then “*apart from the works of law,*” “*God has set forth [Christ] to be an atoning sacrifice by His blood through faith*” (Rm 3:28,25).

Since there can be no justification by any system of meritorious law-keeping, it has always been the plan of God that forgiveness would depend on one’s faith in the grace of God. God thus offered that which we could not accomplish through dedicated efforts of keeping law. And that which He offered was an atoning sacrifice through Jesus Christ in order to justify those who break law. Our faith is not in our meritorious obedience to a system of law in order to justify ourselves, but in the Son of God who worked on our behalf at the cross. We understand, therefore, that our salvation must be based on a system of faith, and not a system of law.

But does this faith set aside law? “*On the contrary,*” Paul concluded. “*We establish law*” (Rm 3:31). Through faith in God to provide justification through the cross, we have affirmed God’s total purpose for giving the law to Israel. The Jews had to understand that they could not save themselves through the Sinai system of law, but through faith in God who would initiate and maintain their justification through the blood of Christ (See 1 Jn 1:7). By faith, therefore, we reaffirm the “*law of faith*” by which we maintain obedience of faith in our lives as we walk in the light of His word. The “*law of works*” demanded perfect obedience. The “*law of faith*” demands a perfect sacrifice at Calvary and a total dependence on the grace of God.

Works focuses on man, whereas faith focuses on the cross. Any system of salvation that turns man’s focus to himself in order to be justified before God can never be true. It cannot because we are all sinners. When we speak of justification before our Creator, therefore, all focus must be on the One who grants eternal existence in His presence through grace.

#### **D. Romans 4:4,5**

*Now to him who works, the reward is not credited according to grace, but according to debt. But to him who does not work, but believes in Him*

*who justifies the ungodly, his faith is credited for righteousness.*

If we meritoriously work for Jesus, then we are seeking to obligate God to pay us for our work. Grace, therefore, is not free if it is a payment of debt. However, if we trust in God to save us regardless of our imperfect obedience, then we are credited righteous because of His grace. Therefore, our salvation must be focused on God, for it is He who grants that which we so earnestly desire. It is not within the working power of man to grant himself eternal life. There is no such thing taught in the Bible that we are either self-sanctified or self-justified. Our eternal life is based on the promise of God, and the promise of God is based on His grace.

One must keep in mind that when the word “works” is used in the context of discussions in Romans in reference to our hope of eternal life, Paul is referring to meritorious works, not works of obedience. When we discuss meritorious works, we are actually identifying man’s focus on himself and his inability to perform flawlessly all that is necessary to be rewarded with heaven.

The Jews assumed the argument that because they received and kept the Sinai law, they were justified before God because of their obedience. Their focus was thus on themselves as Jews who had been gifted with the oracles of God (Rm 3:1,2). Paul’s argument against this logic was that **by meritorious works of any law no one can be justified before God, for such works of law focus on the performer, not the Giver of grace** (Rm 3:20; see Gl 2:16). In the context of Romans 4, therefore, Paul argued against justification by meritorious works. He did so by arguing that we are saved by obedience of faith in the One who alone initiated the covenants and made the promises concerning that which we so desire. Our faith is in God through His Son, not in ourselves and some privilege that we suppose we have with God through law.

In the context of Romans 4, Paul reminded his Jewish readers of the fact that Abraham was accredited to be righteous as a Gentile before he was circumcised (Rm 4:10). Because he walked by faith before circumcision, God chose him to be the father of all those who would

walk by faith. Because he walked by faith, Abraham was granted the privilege of a special covenant with God that was enacted by the sign of circumcision. He did not receive the covenant of circumcision because he earned it through works. On the contrary, through his obedience of faith he was justly awarded a special covenant with God. James emphasized this point when he wrote, “*Was not Abraham our father justified by works [of obedience] ... and by works was faith made perfect*” (Js 2:21,22).

Both Paul and James quoted Genesis 15:6 in reference to the justification of Abraham. The harmony of the two writers is clear in the context in which each wrote. Paul focused on Abraham’s faith that worked. James focused on Abraham’s works that manifested his faith. Paul’s reference to Abraham is in the context of stating that there is no justification by works that is not the response of faith. In other words, just being a good person will not get one to heaven. James’ reference to Abraham is that one cannot be saved by faith without works of obedience. The faith that always avails before God is the faith that is reflected through obedience. But the works that always fail before God are meritorious efforts to put God in debt to save us.

In Romans 4 Paul was specifically stating that the promise given and fulfilled through Abraham was in no way accomplished by any meritorious efforts on the part of Abraham. Because of grace, God established a covenant with Abraham, through which covenant all nations would eventually be blessed (See Gn 12:1-3). The promised blessing would not and could not be worked out by Abraham. Abraham and Sarah made an effort to do this through Hagar, but God did not accept Hagar’s child as the one through whom the promise would be fulfilled (See Gl. 4:21-31). Both the giving of the covenant and the promise to Abraham were God’s work. Because Abraham trusted in the promises of God, he remained true to God through faith, and thus, he was credited righteous before God.

In Romans 3 & 4 Paul established Abraham as our father of faith. We could all agree, therefore, that in being justified by a faith that worked, Abraham was saved. But consider his justification by an obedient faith in view of what Paul stated in Romans 4:4. Did Abraham’s

work of faith, whereby he was justified according to James, **put God in debt to make a covenant with Him**? Paul referred to the answer of this question in Romans 11:6, where he said, “*And if by grace, then it is no more by works, otherwise grace is no more grace.*” Was the promise fulfilled because of meritorious works on the part of Abraham, or by obedience of Abraham’s faith? If the fulfillment were the result of meritorious works, then the fulfillment was a debt that God had to pay.

It is here that we must again make a distinction between works of obedience to what God commands, and meritorious works whereby we assert that we can put God in debt to save us. The works of Abraham had to be the former. As the father of our faith, Abraham did not through his obedient works of faith put God in debt to save him. His works, therefore, could never have been meritorious, for meritorious assumes that something is earned, and thus, the one who grants the award must pay upon the basis of one’s merits. **But God can never be obligated to save us on the basis of our performance in reference to law or good works.** We are only clods of dust in whom He has invested a spirit. Can this clod of dust restrain God in a corner and demand eternal life?

Now we must take this thought one step further. Was Abraham justified before God through his obedient faith alone? If at the time he lived and obediently believed, was Abraham saved by his walk of faith alone? If so, **then why the blessing of the cross that was promised?** Abraham was justified by obedient faith, but his obedient faith did not obligate God to offer redemption through the cross. The cross was in no way a payment of debt to those who were justified by obedient faith before the cross.

In order that his readers not come to an erroneous conclusion in his discussions concerning Abraham’s justification by faith, Paul stated clearly, “*But God demonstrates His love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us*” (Rm 5:8). All mankind, as well as Abraham, was under sin when Jesus died on the cross. Abraham could be justified by faith, therefore, **only in view of the cross that was yet to come.** His obedience did not obligate the incarnation of the

Son of God. His obedience of faith only qualified him to receive the blessings of the cross that were yet to come in the future.

**Abraham was included in the plural pronoun “we” of Romans 5:8.** The problem that we are all sinners includes everyone, including ourselves. We were all sold under sin and unable to free ourselves from the bondage of sin. No matter how many obedient works Abraham accomplished, he was still in the “we,” and thus, under condemnation if there were no cross in the future. His obedient faith could never have put God in debt to save him. If his obedience would have put God in debt to send His Son into the world, then the cross was not the offering of grace, but an obligation on the part of the Son of God to incarnate into the flesh of man.

**Jesus’ sacrifice was never a payment of debt for obedient works of faith by those who lived before and after the cross.** Right in the middle of Paul’s discussions concerning Abraham’s justification by faith, he embedded a very important truth: “... *whom God has set forth to be an atoning sacrifice by His blood through faith in order to declare His righteousness for the remission of sins in the past because of the forbearance of God*” (Rm 3:25).

God could declare Abraham justified because He knew that He would eventually send His Son into the world. It would be then, at the cross, and only then, that all the faith of the fathers would find salvation through the blood of Jesus. The Hebrew writer repeated the meaning of Romans 3:25: “*And for this reason He is the mediator of the new covenant, so that by means of death for the redemption of the transgression committed under the first covenant, those who have been called might receive the promise of eternal inheritance.*”

We must never conclude that we can put God in debt through our obedience, even though our obedience is a response to His law. With our obedience comes the promise that God through His grace. Through our faith we trust that He will eventually deliver us from the confines of this world. Through faith, clods of dirt will be transformed (1 Co 15:35-58). But the transformation will never come as an obligation on the part of God to pay some debt. It will always be through His grace that He will keep His promise. But we must also never forget that it is

a promise and our faith must be in the promise. So we anxiously read again Hebrews 6:13-20.

*For when God made the promise to Abraham, since He could swear by no greater, He swore by Himself, saying, "Surely blessing I will bless you and multiplying I will multiply you." And so, after he had patiently endured, he obtained the promise. For indeed men swear by the greater, and an oath for confirmation is to them an end of all dispute. Therefore, God, desiring even more to show to the heirs of promise the unchangeableness of His counsel, confirmed it by an oath, so that by two unchangeable things in which it is impossible for God to lie, we might have a strong encouragement, who have fled for refuge to lay hold of the hope set before us. This hope we have as an anchor of the soul, both sure and steadfast and which enters within the veil where Jesus, the forerunner, has entered for us, having become a high priest forever after the order of Melchizedek.*

We must be careful, therefore, when we make the statement, "I work in order to please God." What we mean by making this statement may betray our lack of understanding of the grace of God. If we make the statement after a great deal of works, then we must not think that our works will please God to the point that He is obligated to reward us. This is meritorious thinking. In being moved to legally "please God," we have forgotten that God is already pleased with us through His incarnate Son who was offered on the cross.

We work because we realize that God is already pleased with us through Jesus. We do not work in order to be pleasing to Him. One concept is work on the basis of feeling inadequate and outside the pleasure of God. The other is working in thanksgiving for what He has done for us through Jesus (See 2 Co 4:15). Those who are working in order to please God usually never feel good about their salvation, since they are always seeking to work themselves into the "graces of God," a truly demonic concept in reference to the grace of God. Christians can never work themselves into that in which they already have.

Those who pose the preceding meritorious religiosity of "pleasing

God” through their works, often move into another realm of self-sanctification and distortion of the grace of God. Some have refused to partake of the Lord’s Supper on a particular Sunday because they did not “please the Lord” during the preceding week. It is almost ironic that these are those who refuse to partake of that which reminds them of the grace of God. They refuse to partake because they feel that they did not “please the Lord” in the past week because of some sin. This thinking not only reveals a misunderstanding of the grace of God, but it is also a self-righteous effort to sanctify one’s self the following week when he or she **does** partake of the Supper.

If one partakes of the Supper the following week, then one feels “worthy” because of his or her own self-righteous behavior throughout the week. When one partakes of the Supper the following week he has set aside the grace of God. In doing such, one has actually become unworthy with arrogance because he has commended himself because he supposedly led a sinless week. People who are of this persuasion have a lack of understanding of the grace of God. We are not in grace and then out of grace on a weekly basis. We are in, and always in. We are created new creatures in Christ, and the new never gets old from one week to another (See 2 Co 5:17; Ep 2:4-10).

## **E. Romans 4:14,15**

*For if those who are of the [Sinai] law are heirs, faith is made void and the promise has been nullified because the law works wrath, for where there is no law, there is no transgression.*

If one’s Jewish heritage is a guarantee to receive the promise, then both faith in the grace of God and the promise itself are nullified. This is true because the law, even the Sinai law, works condemnation through sin. If one is saved by meritorious good works of any law, then faith is not necessary. One is supposedly saved on the basis of his own self-justification through works of law regardless of his knowledge of or obedience to the law of God.

Meritorious law-keeping produces wrath because law reveals sin

that must be justly punished. Transgression of the law demands justice. And because there is no mercy in law, then those who break the law are considered dead in sin. If there were no law, then there would be no sin. But since men cannot cohabit with one another without law, then law must be given. It cannot be invented by men, for men in their corrupt thinking would devise “Hitler laws” by which they would feel justified to exterminate one another (See Jr 10:23).

Law, therefore, must come from a source other than man himself. It must come from God. But since law is from God, then God demands justice when law is broken, otherwise it would be senseless for Him to give any law. Therefore, if we had to rely solely on law in order to receive the promise, then we would not realize our desire if we had to trust only in our law-keeping, or the atonement of our good works. We must conclude, therefore, **that law within itself was never given by God as a condition upon which the promises of God were guaranteed to be received.** If obedience to law in and of itself were a condition for receiving the promises, then our sin against law would always hinder the fulfillment of the promises.

The fact that God now calls on all men to repent of sin against law (Lk 13:2; 2 Pt 3:9), manifests the truth that law now exists against which all men have sinned. So man is left with futility in reference to receiving the promise. It can never be received through law itself, and thus, must only come as an act of grace on the part of God. Paul’s argument throughout Romans must frustrate those who would strive to meritoriously justify themselves before their Creator, and then, think they can demand the promise. The truly honest person knows that there can be no justification through meritorious law-keeping. There can be no self-sanctification through good works. We are thus driven by faith to the grace of God (See Gl 2:16). We are driven from our own efforts to save ourselves through law-keeping to the One who only has the power to grant the promise through grace, regardless of our futile efforts to keep law perfectly. This is the drawing power of the gospel. If we preach another law order to replace law, then we are diluting the drawing power of the gospel. Our focus must first be on preaching the grace of God.

## F. Romans 4:16

*Therefore, it is of faith that it might be by grace, to the end that the promise might be guaranteed to all to the seed, not only to those who are of the law, but also to those who are of the faith of Abraham, who is the father of us all.*

Since salvation is by faith, then grace is granted to both Jew and Gentile. Since the promise of God is that all men be saved in Christ, then all who come into Christ through obedience to the gospel receive the promise of grace upon their obedience of faith. Therefore, Abraham is the father of all those who would come to God through faith.

Grace and law are in harmony with one another on this matter. Some have assumed that grace eliminates all law and works, and thus there is no harmony between grace and law. The conclusion to this unfortunate reasoning is that it is believed that there can be absolutely no obedience on the part of the alien sinner in reference to his salvation. As a consequence, many sinners are left just outside the door that leads to a lifetime of walking in God's grace. They are left outside Christ believing that their faith alone has warranted them the right to declare their own salvation apart from obedience to the gospel in baptism. But they have missed a very important point.

**Our salvation can never be self-declared. It must always be declared by God,** and this declaration is written in the New Testament. In other words, we are not saved until God says we are saved. And the only way we can discover when one is saved is by reading such in the word of God. This is the foundation upon which Jesus made the statement, *“He who believes and is baptized will be saved”* (Mk 16:16).

If faith and grace exclude obedience, then they as well exclude all faith. Jesus said, *“This is the work of God, that you believe in Him whom He has sent”* (Jn 6:29). If believing is obeying, as Jesus stated, then the claim that grace excludes obedience also excludes faith. Grace, faith and obedience must always be considered together in reference to our salvation. If we insert the words “alone” or “only” in reference to any one of these three necessities for our salvation, then we must ex-

clude the other two. For example, if we are saved by grace alone, then neither faith nor obedience is required. This would be the doctrine of Calvinism. If we are saved by faith alone, then neither grace nor obedience are required. If we are saved by obedience alone, then our salvation is meritorious, and thus there is no need for either grace or faith.

If there is no obedience of faith, then one is left with one of two conclusions: either all will be saved, or God is made a respecter of persons in that He unconditionally chose certain individuals upon whom He would shower His grace. But at the same time, He individually destined to hell those who are not given His grace. This conclusion is diabolical in the sense that God is conceived to be an unjust and fiendish god. He would be unjust to allow Hitler into eternal glory together with the persecuted Christian. He would be fiendish by predestining some to hell apart from their own choices.

It is the work of God that we believe. Faith is the highest form of work, for it involves the total commitment, the total life of the believer. Through faith one gives his entire life for the One who gave all of Himself for us through incarnation and the cross. We are certainly saved by faith. We are saved by faith if our faith involves the giving of our lives as a total sacrifice for God (See Rm 12:1,2). This was in the mind of Paul when he referred the Philippians to the incarnate offering of the Son of God on our behalf: *“Let this mind be in you that was also in Christ Jesus, who, being in the form of God, did not consider it robbery to be equal with God. But He made Himself of no reputation”* (Ph 2:5-7).

Paul wrote, *“For the grace of God that brings salvation has appeared to all men, teaching us, **that denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live sensibly, righteously and godly in this present age**”* (Ti 2:11,12). The grace of God **teaches us** the sacrificial life. If there is no law or obedience connected with grace, then grace is worthless in directing us to live sensibly, righteously and godly. Therefore, **all those who are saved by grace are taught by the example of God’s grace on the cross to live according to the will of God.**

Paul instructed, *“Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling”* (Ph 2:12). We are inspired do this through the grace of God that

causes thanksgiving within our spirit. Paul explained: “*For it is God who works in you both to will and to work for His good pleasure*” (Ph 2:13). Here is the personal commentary of Paul: “***But by the grace of God I am what I am. And His grace toward me was not in vain, but I labored more abundantly than they all, yet not I, but the grace of God that was with me***” (1 Co 15:10; see 2 Co 4:15). It cannot be clearer than this. God’s grace “teaches” by being the empowering motive in our hearts to go to work for Him because of what He did for us.

Those who would extract obedience from grace have cut the heart out of the gospel. They have destroyed the true motivation for discipleship. They have revealed their ungrateful hearts and indifferent attitude toward the cross. If God’s grace does not move one to work more abundantly, then he has no right to claim that he is saved by grace apart from obedience in appreciation and thanksgiving for the cross.

Those who have realized the tremendous gift of grace on the cross, are always “*zealous of good works*” (Ti 2:14; see 2 Co 4:15). And because they have been energized by grace, their works will follow them right into eternal glory. It will be as revealed through John. “*Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord from now on.*” ‘Yes,’ says the Spirit, ‘so that they may rest from their labors, for their works follow them’” (Rv 14:13)

## G. Romans 6:14

*For sin will not have dominion over you, for you are not under law, but under grace.*

Sin does not reign in the life of the Christian because the Christian is not under a system of faith by which he must keep law perfectly in order to maintain his justification before God. Though the Christian may sin, through the grace of God he is continually cleansed of sin by the blood of Jesus. The Christian is now under a “system” of faith by which there is continual cleansing by the blood.

The Christian is not under a system of justification through meritorious law-keeping. He is saved by the grace of God that is accessed

through the obedience of faith (Rm 1:5; 16:26). Throughout Romans 6 Paul emphasized that Christians must live righteously because they have in baptism obeyed the gospel of the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus (Rm 6:3-6). They are now walking in newness of life, and should have no reason to go back to self-sanctifying religiosity in an effort to be justified by a meritorious system of law-keeping. Since they are no longer under such a system that brought only death in sin, they should be encouraged to move on under grace.

This does not mean that the Christian will not sin. Since he has been raised from the waters of baptism to walk in newness of life, he walks in the light. And *“if we walk in the light as He is in the light ... the blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanses us from all sin”* (1 Jn 1:7). When one comes forth from the waters of baptism, he is in Christ and not under the bondage of sin against law, and subsequently spiritual death (Rm 6:6). Paul reminded the Roman Christians *“that our old man was crucified,”* therefore, *“consider yourselves to be dead indeed to sin, but alive to God through Jesus Christ our Lord”* (Rm 6:11). The conclusion would be: *“Therefore, do not let sin reign in your mortal body so that you should obey the lusts of the body”* (Rm 6:12).

Sin does not have dominion over the disciple of Christ because he has been baptized into Christ, and thus by the grace of God, he is in constant contact with the cleansing blood of Jesus. Since he is in Christ, the faithful disciple seeks to walk obediently in the light of God’s word. The Christian’s walk is by faith in the grace of God, not by faith in his own performance of law or meritorious deeds. As a result, the statement, *“sin will not have dominion over you,”* (Rm 6:14) is defined by the statement, *“we should no longer be bondservants to sin”* (Rm 6:6).

Paul clearly explained that sin would no longer have dominion over us because we have chosen to be the slaves of Jesus. Those to whom he was writing were those who had been baptized into Christ. They were no longer under a system of law whereby justification was demanded through the perfect keeping of law. They were now under grace, and though they could not live without committing sins, the continual cleansing of the blood of Jesus in their lives kept them cleansed of sin (1 Jn 1:7). The obedience of their faith kept them in the grace of

God (Rm 1:5). If they sought to go back under a system of law-keeping in order to seek self-justification, then they would have come under the judgment of Galatians 5:4: “*You have been severed from Christ, you who seek to be justified by law. **You have fallen from grace.***”

## H. Romans 6:17,18

*But God be thanked that though you were the bondservants of sin, yet you have **obeyed from the heart that form of teaching that was delivered to you.** And having been freed from sin, you became the bondservants of righteousness.*

Before coming to Jesus, we were bondservants of sin because of our efforts to justify ourselves through our own ability to keep law. Our deliverance was a matter of the heart. When we submitted in our hearts to the teaching of the gospel of grace, we were freed from sin by being freed from the necessity of perfect performance of law. We were thus declared righteous before God through faith in His grace. His declaration of our righteousness now moves us in heart to be His bondservants (2 Co 4:15).

The obedience of faith by which Paul introduced and concluded Romans is here explained as obedience to a “form of teaching” that was delivered to all those who would walk by faith (See Rm 1:5; 16:26). This is the “*obedience to righteousness*” (Rm 6:16). There is no question that our salvation is by grace. But we must keep in mind that grace is that which is provided by God. Faith is our part. But our faith must be demonstrated in obedience to the “form of teaching” that comes from God (See Jn 12:48). Obedience is a required demonstration that we have faith in God’s grace. Through the cross, God has offered the grace that saves. It is the responsibility of man to respond to His grace through obedience of the gospel in order to walk in His righteousness (See Rm 6:3-6).

It is an unfortunate mistake to think that God offers the free gift of grace without any obligations on the part of man. When Paul said that our justification “*is of faith that it might be by grace,*” he meant that

our obedience of faith is required in order to access the grace (Rm 4:16). Any lack of faith on the part of man will lead to a futile effort to access the grace of God. *“For he who comes to God must believe that He is and that He is a rewarder of those who diligently seek Him”* (Hb 11:6). It is faith that moves us to seek the reward of grace. Without faith, there is no seeking of the reward. It was in reference to this “seeking faith” that Paul proclaimed to those of Antioch of Pisidia, *“And by Him all who believe are justified from all things from which you could not be justified by the law of Moses”* (At 13:39).

We cannot be saved by works of law simply because law proves that we are lawbreakers. Through good works we cannot atone for our failures in reference to law. But we can be saved by those conditions the Lord has prescribed that we follow in order to manifest our faith in His saving grace. And in doing this, Jesus becomes *“the author of eternal salvation to all those who obey Him”* (Hb 5:9). We must frequently remind ourselves that Paul began his discussion of Romans by stating precisely how one begins his walk of faith into obedience of the good news of Jesus’ death for our sins and His resurrection for our hope (Rm 6:3-6).

## I. Romans 7:4

*Therefore, my brethren, you also became dead to the law through the body of Christ, so that you should be married to another, even to Him who is raised from the dead, so that we should bring forth fruit to God.*

Those who have been crucified with the body of Christ on the cross, are dead to the Sinai law, as well as the necessity to keep law perfectly in order to be self-justified. Jesus was crucified in order to make all those who come to Him dead to meritorious obedience. In our obedience to the gospel (Rm 6:3-6), therefore, we were made dead to the bondage of law in order to be set free at the time we are resurrected with Christ from the waters of baptism.

Because those who have obeyed the gospel in baptism are now under grace, they are no longer under the necessity of keeping law per-

fectly in order to justify themselves by works of law. The statement Paul makes here in Romans 7:4 is a continuation of the thought of Romans 6:14: “*For you are not under law, but under grace.*” The Christian came under grace at the time he was raised with Christ from the waters of baptism. The Sinai law functioned to bring the Jews to the cross. But now that the Sinai law has been made inactive, Christians are dead to it as a binding law (Rm 7:1-4). “*Therefore, the [Sinai] law was our headmaster to bring us [the Jews] to Christ so that we might be justified by faith. But now that faith has come, we are no longer under a headmaster*” (Gl 3:24,25).

If one would bring forth fruit to God, he cannot go back under a meritorious system of law. When those Jews who were once under such a system were joined with Christ through their obedience to the gospel in baptism, they were made dead to all meritorious systems of law. If a Christian would seek to turn the law of Christ into such a meritorious system, then he too is severed from Christ (Gl 5:4). He cannot bring forth fruit to God because he has been cut off from Christ.

It is for the preceding reason that Christians must be very cautious about formulating a system of law out of the “perfect law of liberty.” If we reconstruct the law of Christ into a meritorious system of law that must be kept perfectly, then we too, as the legalistic Jews of Galatia, will be cut off from Christ. We will be cut off because we would not be able to keep perfectly our self-imposed legal system of law.

## **J. Romans 8:1**

*There is now, therefore, no condemnation to those who are in Christ.*

The obedient believer has been baptized into Christ, wherein he is not in a state of condemnation that was brought on by his former failure to perform law perfectly. His walk in the light of God’s grace keeps him cleansed of his inability to perform perfectly (1 Jn 1:7).

If one would choose to walk by law alone, then he walks under condemnation, for under law sin abounds. Law manifests sin. As a meritorious system of law, the Sinai law was a law of sin and death in

and of itself. There is no provision for forgiveness under law. James explained the problem: “*For whoever will keep the whole law, **and yet stumble in one point**, he has become guilty of all*” (Js 2:10). The same curse is true of those who would turn the law of Christ into a meritorious system of law. One might deceive himself into believing that he has kept perfectly his meritorious system of law, but if he offends in one point of the system, he is a lawbreaker, and thus condemned by the very law he seeks to perform perfectly.

One sin makes one a lawbreaker, and thus, condemned by law. But under the law of faith and grace, there is mercy that is manifested through grace. Christians do not walk in a state of condemnation because at the waters of baptism they have connected with the cleansing blood of Jesus (At 22:16). They continue to walk in the cleansing blood in their Christian life (1 Jn 1:7). This is exactly what Paul meant in Romans 8:2: “*For the law of the Spirit of life **in Christ Jesus** has freed you from the law of sin and death.*” Because the Roman disciples had been baptized into Christ (Rm 6:3,4), they were set free from a system of law that pronounced and condemned all men to be sinners. And thus they were freed from the death that is demanded by law.

## **K. Romans 10:6-10; 11:5,6**

*But the righteousness that is of faith thus speaks, “Say not in your heart, ‘who will ascend into heaven?’” (that is, to bring Christ down), or “Who will descend into the abyss?” (that is, to bring up Christ from the dead). But what does it say? “The word is near you, even in your mouth and in your heart”—that is, the word of faith that we preach; that if you will confess with your mouth the Lord Jesus and will believe in your heart that God has raised Him from the dead, you will be saved. For with the heart man **believes unto righteousness**, and with the mouth **confession is made to salvation** (Rm 10:6-10).*

*Even so then, at this present time there is also **a remnant** according to the election of grace. And if by grace, then it is no more by works, otherwise grace is no more grace (Rm 11:5,6).*

Notice carefully that in Romans 10:6-10 the statement is “*believe unto righteousness*” and “*confession is made to salvation.*” In both statements it **does not** say “believe and confess **for** righteousness and salvation.” We must keep in mind that Paul wrote the statement of Romans 10:6-10 on the background of the argument that he had already settled throughout the letter to the Romans, that salvation is by grace through obedient faith. Therefore, he reveals in Romans 10 that one must **believe** in God as the provider of righteousness through His grace. We as individuals, and before we were baptized into Christ (Rm 6:3), **confessed** that we could be saved only by grace that was revealed through the sacrificial Son of God. And because we confessed that we could not be saved apart from grace, we were obedient to the gospel.

By believing in saving grace, and confessing our own inability to keep law perfectly, we confess the ability of Jesus to save us perfectly through His offering. It is as He had said, “*You are to be perfect even as your Father in heaven is perfect*” (Mt 5:48). Our baptism, therefore, is our confession that we are putting our faith in Him. It is at the point of baptism that salvation is realized, for it is there that we contact the saving blood of Jesus. Therefore, before the point of baptism, every response on our part was “unto.” It was our obedience of faith that took us to the cross, grave and resurrection with Jesus in baptism (Rm 6:3-6). When we came out of the waters of baptism, therefore, it was then that we were saved.

The word “remnant” in Romans 11:5 is from the Old Testament. A remnant of Israel was delivered out of Babylonian captivity and returned to the land of promise. Paul metaphorically used the word in the context of Romans 11 to refer to the remnant of the Jews who had come out of the captivity of the Sinai law in order to believe and confess unto the salvation that is in Christ. By faith, the sons of Abraham chose to be delivered from the futility of a meritorious system of law-keeping (See Gl 2:16). It was not that they meritoriously submitted to another system of law. Their obedience of faith moved them to submit to all that God required of them to come into a new covenant relationship with Him (See Jr 31:31-34). They were given access to this covenant of grace, and therefore, they responded by faith to what God re-

quired of them to establish a covenant with Him.

In the contexts of Romans 10:6-10 and 11:5,6, Paul contrasted two possible means by which one would seek to be saved: (1) There is the possibility of salvation by perfect law-keeping. (2) There is salvation by grace. There are only these two means by which the remnant could have chosen to be saved. Paul had already argued in Romans with the obvious conclusion that “*by the works of law no flesh will be justified in His sight*” (Rm 3:20; see Gl 2:16). Therefore, the first option would not justify one of sin before God.

We are therefore left with the second option, that is, justification by grace. The first option is salvation by meritorious works without the grace of God. The second option is salvation by imperfect obedience under the grace of God. Our only option is to believe unto the righteousness of God through grace, and confess our inability to save ourselves. We do this by confessing our dependence on the ability of Christ on the cross.

Salvation has always been by grace from the beginning of time. Enoch was saved by grace through faith (Hb 11:5; see Gn 5:22). However, he obediently “walked with God” (Compare 2 Jn 4). Noah was saved by grace, but he built an ark in obedience to the will of God for the salvation of himself and his family (Gn 6:22). Abraham was saved by grace through his faith because he obeyed to offer up His Son (Hb 11:17). Only by the grace of God was he saved. The fact is that there has never been any salvation apart from the grace of God.

## Epilogue

Paul stated to some arrogant Corinthians who were comparing their works with his, “*Your boasting is not good*” (1 Co 5:6). In his second letter to the Corinthians he wrote, “*For our boasting is this: the testimony of our conscience that in holiness and godly sincerity, not with fleshly wisdom, but by the grace of God, we have conducted ourselves in the world, and especially toward you*” (2 Co 1:12).

Some in Corinth evidently tried to validate themselves as “spiritual” leaders because of their works. To those who would do the same, we must kindly remind them that our works are always insufficient in

reference to the reward that we desire. Simple faith in and of itself is no guarantee of salvation. No matter how strongly one might believe, even to the point of dying for our faith, we cannot reap salvation by faith alone. Our faith must be manifested through our works, but our works in reference to our salvation are always insufficient.

We are inundated by those who use their faith as a testimony that God is working in their lives. Bookshelves are stacked with testimonies of those who have used their faith as a validation that God was working in their lives. We are sometimes reminded of Paul's statement in 2 Corinthians 11:12,13:

*But what I do I will continue to do so that I may cut off opportunity from those who desire an opportunity to be regarded just as we are in the matter about which they are boasting. For such are false apostles, deceitful workers, masquerading themselves as apostles of Christ.*

We have throughout this book referred to baptism into Christ by which one comes into the realm of God's grace. Some would consider such obedience to the gospel to be a meritorious work. We believe that such thinking has been sufficiently refuted in the fact that obedience to what God requires of men to do to be saved **is never a meritorious work. It is not legalistic to do what God commands us to do.**

But here is an important point by which we would conclude. We have never heard of anyone who has boasted of his or her baptism. We have heard many boast of their faith, but no one is boasting of their obedience to the gospel as if their salvation was meritoriously acquired through their baptism. When Paul made the statement, "*Be not arrogant, but fear*" (Rm 11:20), he certainly did not mean such in reference to one's baptism in obedience to the gospel. He did not because baptism was in response to the gospel in order to be born again into Christ. One cannot boast of that which God requires of us to be saved. How can one boast of baptism when baptism comes from God, not man?

We would conclude, therefore, that our boast is in Christ, into whom we have come through obedience of the gospel. It may have been a struggle of faith to bring us to the point of obedience to the gospel, but

our boast is not in our faith. Our boast is in the marvelous grace of God by which we are saved and sustained through the blood of Jesus. The conclusion of the matter is Paul's thanksgiving: "*Thanks be to God for His indescribable gift*" (2 Co 9:15). We do not, therefore, self-righteously boast of our salvation because of our faith. Our faith always seems to be inadequate. Therefore, we choose to boast in God's declaration of our salvation through His Son who said, "*He who believes and is baptized will be saved*" (Mk 16:16).

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## ABBREVIATIONS

### OLD TESTAMENT

Genesis - **Gn**, Exodus - **Ex**, Leviticus - **Lv**, Numbers - **Nm**, Deuteronomy - **Dt**, Joshua - **Ja**, Judges - **Jg**, Ruth - **Rt**, 1 Samuel - **1 Sm**, 2 Samuel - **2 Sm**, 1 Kings - **1 Kg**, 2 Kings - **2 Kg**, 1 Chronicles - **1 Ch**, 2 Chronicles - **2 Ch**, Ezra - **Er**, Nehemiah - **Ne**, Esther - **Et**, Job - **Jb**, Psalms - **Ps**, Proverbs - **Pv**, Ecclesiastes - **Ec**, Song of Solomon - **Ss**, Isaiah - **Is**, Jeremiah - **Jr**, Lamentations - **Lm**, Ezekiel - **Ez**, Daniel - **Dn**, Hosea - **Hs**, Joel - **Jl**, Amos - **Am**, Obadiah - **Ob**, Jonah - **Jh**, Micah - **Mc**, Nahum - **Nh**, Habakkuk - **Hk**, Zephaniah - **Zp**, Haggai - **Hg**, Zechariah - **Zc**, Malachi - **Ml**

### NEW TESTAMENT

Matthew - **Mt**, Mark - **Mk**, Luke - **Lk**, John - **Jn**, Acts - **At**, Romans - **Rm**, 1 Corinthians - **1 Co**, 2 Corinthians - **2 Co**, Galatians - **Gl**, Ephesians - **Ep**, Philippians - **Ph**, Colossians - **Cl**, 1 Thessalonians - **1 Th**, 2 Thessalonians - **2 Th**, 1 Timothy - **1 Tm**, 2 Timothy - **2 Tm**, Titus - **Ti**, Philemon - **Pl**, Hebrews - **Hb**, James - **Js**, 1 Peter - **1 Pt**, 2 Peter - **2 Pt**, 1 John - **1 Jn**, 2 John - **2 Jn**, 3 John - **3 Jn**, Jude - **Jd**, Revelation - **Rv**